

# Philosophy of Mind

Philosophy 218  
Winter 2020

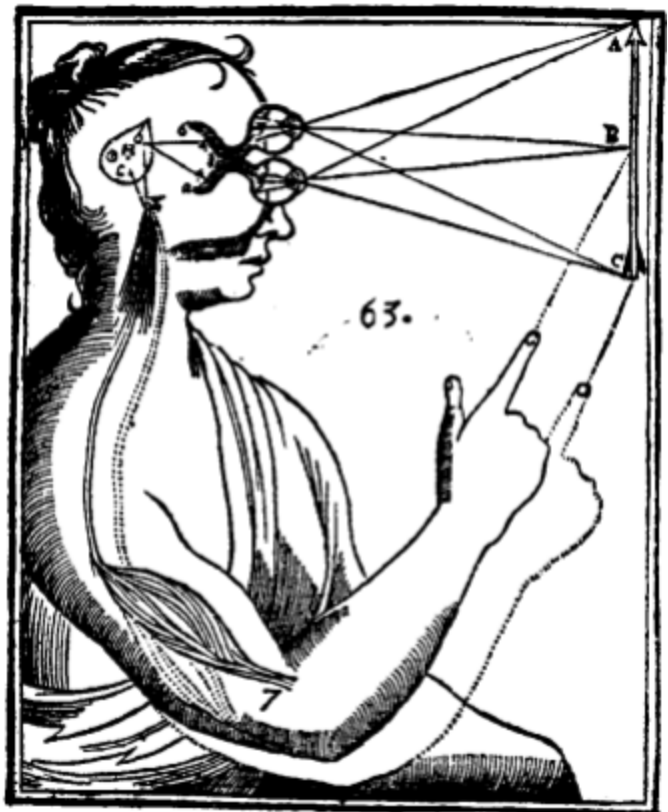
## Meeting Time and Location

MWF 12:00–1:10 p.m.  
Wilson House

## Professor: Dr. Brandon Polite

Office: Old Main 304  
Phone extension: 7240  
email: [bpolite@knox.edu](mailto:bpolite@knox.edu)

**Office Hours** Tuesdays, 12:00-3:00,  
& by appointment



Cartesian Vision (woodcut, 1644)

## Course Description

Whereas psychology and neuroscience study the way the mind operates, the philosophy of mind tries to understand just what the mind and consciousness are—what are their natures? How do they relate to the brain? How do they fit into a scientific picture of the world? This course provides an overview of attempts to answer these and other questions, as well as the problems these attempts run into. We also consider ways that technology could extend and enhance our mental capacities in the future,

and the troubling implications this might have for who we are as persons.

### By the end of the term, you should be able to...

- **Articulate** some of the leading theories in the philosophy of mind.
- **Articulate** salient objections to some of the leading theories in the philosophy of mind.
- **Defend** your own view on a significant philosophical issue.

**Website:** Accessible via <https://classroom.google.com>

## Course details

**Readings:** Most readings are available as PDFs. (See page 3 below for how to access them.)

**Classroom Courtesy:** Cell phones should be turned off for the duration of the class. Because of their tendency to distract other students, I would also prefer that you take notes by hand rather than with a laptop or tablet. If you have a special reason to use a laptop or tablet for note-taking, please see me and I will try to accommodate you.

## Course Requirements

**Attendance & Participation (14%)** You are required to read assigned material carefully and to attend class and participate regularly. Attendance and participation comprise an important part of your grade. Comments and questions should be voiced as they arise during our discussions.

**Short Papers (40%)** You will write four short expository papers of roughly 400–500 words (worth 10% each). In each, you will explain one argument an author makes in support of their position and one argument another author makes against it.

**Term Paper (30%)** You will develop ideas from your short papers and on-line discussions into a term paper of roughly 2400–2700 words (roughly 8-9 pages).

### Online Discussion (16%)

For each of our first four units, you must:

1. Provide a discussion Prompt on Classroom within three days of our finishing with that unit. Your prompt will run 200-300 words in length, and will be readable by me and by your classmates.
2. Respond to two of the Prompts posted by your classmates within five days of our finishing with that unit.

Each **Prompt** is worth 3% and each **Response** is worth 0.5% of your final grade.

For complete instructions, click the following [link](#).



**René Descartes (1596–1650)** is known as the father of modern western philosophy. (He was also an important mathematician and scientist.) He advocated **Mind-Body Dualism**, the view that the mind and the body causally interact despite being ontologically distinct substances.



### Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia (1618–1680)

was the first person to pose what we now call the **Mind-Body Problem**: the problem of how something that is supposedly immaterial (the mind) could interact with something material (the body). She posed it as a direct challenge to Descartes in a letter she wrote to him (dated 6 May 1643) after having heard him speak in The Hague. We will read this letter, and the correspondence it immediately elicited, early this term.

### accommodations

If you have a disability that may impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, such as extended deadlines for assignments, please see me and [Stephanie Grimes](#) in the Office of Disability Support Services so that appropriate arrangements can be made in a timely way.

### Attendance Policy

Philosophy is essentially a conversation that has been ongoing for more than two millennia. To succeed in this or any philosophy class, one must be engaged with and a contributor to the conversation. At a bare minimum, this requires showing up to class. Excessive absences will thus be penalized by taking what I consider to be an appropriate number of points off of your final grade. How many points I take off is entirely up to me, but will increase with each additional absence. It will also depend, in part, on your level of engagement with the course. That is, the more engaged you seem to be, as demonstrated by the quality of your contributions to class discussions, the level of thought you put into your written work, conversations with me during office hours or over email, and the like, the less impact an absence will have on your final grade. Of course, extenuating circumstances (serious illness, death in the family) sometimes arise that may lead you to miss several class meetings. If this is the case, please be in touch so that we can work to determine how you can still succeed in the course.

### Online Discussion Prompt Due Dates

- Saturday, Jan. 18
- Monday, Jan. 27
- Monday, Feb. 10
- Monday, Feb. 24

Responses are due two days after the prompts.

## Grades

Attendance and Participation	14%
Online Discussion	16%
Short Papers (4)	40%
Term Paper	30%

## grading scale

A+	100 – 97.7	C+	79.9 – 77.7	F	59 – 0
A	97.6 – 93	C	77.6 – 73.4		
A-	93.3 – 90	C-	73.3 – 70		
B+	89.9 – 87.7	D+	69.9 – 67.7		
B	87.6 – 83.4	D	67.6 – 63.4		
B-	83.3 – 80	D-	63.3 – 60		

## Syllabus

(Adapted, with permission, from [Michel-Antoine Xhignesse](#))

## Readings

Most readings are available as PDFs and can be accessed by clicking the links embedded in the M's, W's, and F's on the syllabus. You can also find them on Google Classroom under "Readings" on the "Classwork" page: <https://classroom.google.com>.

**Note.** You can only access the readings if you are logged in to your Knox email account, which you can access via <https://my.knox.edu>.

## submitting papers

You will submit all of your papers on Google Classroom. For each assignment, a new Google Doc will be created for you. You can choose either to type directly into it or to copy and paste your work from another word processor, such as Microsoft Word or Pages for Mac.

### 1a. Dualism I

*Are mind and body different things?*

1/6 **M** Terry Bisson, "They're Made Out of Meat" (short story)

1/8 **W** Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meds. II, VI

### 1b. Dualism II

*Problems with the Cartesian view*

1/10 **E** Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, Letters to Descartes (selections)

1/13 **M** Gilbert Ryle, "Descartes' Myth"

1/15 **W** Further discussion | **Short Paper 1 due**

### 2a. The Identity Theory

*The "mind" is identical to the brain (and its processes)*

1/17 **E** J. J. C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes"

1/20 **M** Fanny L. Epstein, "The Metaphysics of Mind-Body Identity Theories"

### 2b. The Problem of Qualia

*Are some experiences non-reductive?*

1/22 **W** Frank Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know"  
Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"

1/24 **E** Patricia Churchland, "The Hornswoggle Problem" | **Short Paper 2 due**

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## Honor Code

This course, as any other at Knox, operates within the parameters set by the Honor Code. Please note, in the everyday business of this course, students are encouraged to talk through all course material with one another and to function as interlocutors for one another. This extends to preparing to write your papers. However, each student is required to write their own work, to cite all sources fully, and to give explicit credit where particular formulations of claims, arguments, and examples are the product of cooperative work.

### 3a. Functionalism

*Mental states just are their functional roles*

1/27 **M** Janet Levin, "Functionalism" (SEP entry)

1/29 **W** David Lewis, "Mad Pain and Martian Pain"

### 3b. Problems for Functionalism

*Mental states are not just their functional roles*

1/31 **E** Ned Block, "Troubles with Functionalism" (excerpt)

2/3 **M** Carrie Figdor, "Neuroscience and the Multiple Realization of Cognitive Functions," pp. 419–437

2/5 **W** Carrie Figdor, pp. 437–end

2/7 **F** Further discussion | **Short Paper 3 due**

### 4a. Dualism Reconsidered

*Maybe we just got it wrong the first time around?*

2/10 **M** Annette C. Baier, "Cartesian Persons"

2/12 **W** Brie Gertler, "In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism"

2/14 **F** Further discussion

### 4b. Mental Causation

*Can mental things 'cause' physical things?*

2/17 **M** Jaegwon Kim, "The Many Problems of Mental Causation" (excerpt)

2/19 **W** Amie Thomasson, "A Nonreductivist Solution to Mental Causation"

2/21 **F** Further discussion | **Short Paper 4 due**

### 5. Technology and Identity

*The future of the mind and its implications for our identities*

2/24 **M** Daniel C. Dennett, "Where Am I?"

2/26 **W** Amy Kind, "The Future of the Mind"

2/28 **F** Further discussion

## Participation

Daily participation will be graded on the following scale:

- 5 You arrive on time and participate voluntarily. You ask questions of your professor or classmates that are relevant to the topic being discussed or provide thoughtful and detailed comments on the readings, ideas, and issues raised during our discussion.
- 4 You arrive on time and participate voluntarily, asking questions or offering comments that are relevant to the issues raised during our discussion.
- 3 You might be late for class. Or you are on time, but your comments or questions may be irrelevant to the topic discussed. Or, while you might not voluntarily offer information, you nonetheless seem to be engaged with the discussion.
- ≤2 You might be very late to class. Or you seem disengaged or make irrelevant or distracting comments that do not enrich the discussion.
- 0 You are absent, disrespectful, or fall asleep.

## Advice

Do you often find it difficult to speak up in class? If so, I have written a document in which I offer suggestions in response to the main reasons students have given me for their difficulties. You can read it [here](#).

... Continued on the next page ...

## writing tutors

Writing tutors are available in the CTL, often on a walk-in (first come, first served) basis, Monday through Friday, from 10 am to 4 pm. You should also avail yourselves of the Red Room writing tutors, who are always available on a walk-in basis, Tuesday through Thursday, from 7 to 9 pm, in Seymour Library.

Term Paper		
3/2	M	Term Paper Thesis Workshop
3/4	W	Term Paper discussions (no class)
3/6	F	Term Paper discussions (no class)
3/9	M	Term Paper discussions (no class)
TBD	?	Term Paper due

### Additional Resources

The texts and ideas we deal with in this course are often quite difficult. As such, two helpful resources are:

- **Intermediate:** *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ([IEP](#))
- **Advanced:** *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ([SEP](#))

### Late Papers

{adapted, with permission, from [Katia Vavova](#)}

Three principles guide my late policy:

1. Work should be assessed on its quality and whether it demonstrates learning.
2. Each assignment has a purpose; that purpose can only be fulfilled within a certain time frame.
3. Deadlines allow us to organize our time and learning and to meet our goals.

In light of these, **late papers will only be accepted up until the moment I return them to those who submitted them on time. After that, they will not be accepted for credit.** (This moment won't be announced in advance, and it will vary, but it will typically be within a week.) **Further, barring extraordinary circumstances, I will not grant extensions. Instead, all late papers submitted before I return the others will be docked by one full letter grade.** (Note: students with academic accommodations can have slightly later deadlines, so long as they negotiate them with me in advance.) This is not about punishing you for getting in late work. It's about enabling me to schedule my time.

Getting your assignments in on time allows us to stay together as a class—to discuss assignments after everyone has finished and well before the next assignment is due (so you have time to reflect and improve). We all have so many demands on our time, and we need to be able to plan ahead. If people complete assignments late, they fall behind, cannot contribute to class discussions, and can hold us back during assignment-based in class activities. Worse yet, they hurt their own learning.

Meeting deadlines is thus an opportunity to show respect: respect for yourself, your time, and your learning; respect for your classmates' time and learning; and respect for my time and my teaching.

Finally, keep in mind that I am here to help. Get in touch with me if you're worried about anything.



What is mind? No matter. What is matter? Never mind. What is the soul? It is immaterial.

~ Thomas Hood