

PHIL 453: Philosophy of Psychology: (Ir)rationality
UNC Chapel Hill, Philosophy, Spring 2017
Syllabus

Instructor: Alex Worsnip

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Class Meetings: Tuesdays, 4-6:30pm, Caldwell Hall (CW) 213

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:30-3:30pm and Thursdays, 11am-12pm, Caldwell Hall (CW) 202A

Course Description

This class is about the philosophical psychology of (ir)rationality. We will look at phenomena such as akrasia (weakness of will), self-deception, mental fragmentation, and motivated belief – asking how to theorize these phenomena, why some philosophers have found them puzzling, and what constraints they put on our broader philosophical psychology. We will also consider some related theoretical issues that are more general: do we need to assume that an agent is rational to attribute mental states to her? Are our own mental states in any good sense “transparent” to us? Should we theorize human rationality as “bounded”, and what would that mean? We will read relevant works from both philosophy and psychology, as well as interdisciplinary work that bridges the two fields.

Enrollment/Prerequisites

This class is designed to be appropriate for graduate students, and undergraduate enrollment is by permission only. Undergraduates should have taken several prior courses in philosophy, preferably including at least one of the following: PHIL 335, PHIL 340, PHIL 353, PHIL 440. The class is capped at 20 students taking the class for credit. Graduate student auditors are welcome, but are expected to keep up with the readings.

Requirements/Assessment

- **Participation.** Including attendance of all classes (having done adequate preparation) and participation in discussions. *10% of grade*
- **In-class presentation.** Beginning in the second week of class, each week one (or sometimes two) student(s) will give a short (roughly 15-minute) presentation giving a brief overview of one of the readings (or an aspect of one of the readings) and concluding with some critical comments and/or questions for class discussion. You are welcome to meet with me to discuss the material ahead of your presentation. We will figure out the schedule for presentations in or shortly after our first meeting. *10% of grade*
 - Note: I recommend using a handout for your presentation. If you are doing this (or using any other visual aid such as a powerpoint), please email me the file by 12 noon on the day of class. This is important to making the class fully accessible to all students. Please also bring copies of the handout with you.
- **Reading responses.** You will take turns writing short reading responses (500-750 words each) on that day’s reading. Each student will write three reading responses over the course of the

semester. The reading responses should highlight and explain an aspect of that day's reading that you found interesting, and critically respond to it. Soon after the start of the semester, I will distribute a schedule for the responses. Reading responses are due at 8pm on the day before class.

10% of grade per response

- **Term paper.** You will write one extended term paper for the class (length for undergraduates: 3000-5000 words; graduate students may (but need not) exceed 5000 words if they wish). This paper will be on a topic of your choice. Since this is an extended piece of work, we'll follow a multi-step process for writing it:
 - Initial meeting to discuss ideas. *To be completed by **Thurs, 4/6 at the latest.*** I will meet with each of you one-on-one to discuss your ideas for a possible topic for your term paper. Please come to the meeting having thought carefully about what you might like to write about. (Though this initial meeting is the only required meeting in the process, you are welcome to meet with me again at any point later in the process.)
 - NB: if you want to write on a topic that we're covering at the end of the semester but haven't reached yet by 4/6, that is possible. If there's a forthcoming topic that catches your eye, have a look at the readings for it before our meeting.
 - One paragraph paper proposal. *Due **Fri, 4/7, 8pm.*** You will write up a proposal for the topic of your paper, explaining the issue(s) you plan to discuss and (if you know) what you (tentatively) plan to argue. The proposal should be clear, should propose a well-defined, manageable and tractable topic, and should be clearly related to the themes of the class. I will write back to you either approving the proposal as it is or asking you to make modifications.
 - Full draft. *Due **Wed, 4/19, 8pm.*** You will write a full, complete draft of the paper. I will send you detailed comments on your draft by Wed, 4/26 (this is the main set of comments you will receive from me on your paper).
 - Final submission. *Due **Mon, 5/1, 8pm.*** Finally, you will have an opportunity to revise the paper in light of my comments (and your own further reading/thinking etc), before submitting the final version. I will send you your grade with some briefer comments by the end of that week.

50% of grade. Note: provided that you complete the first three steps of the paper-writing process in full and by the due dates specified above, your grade for your paper will be determined solely by the fourth step, i.e. by the final submission. Thus, the other stages of the process represent a risk-free way to try out your ideas and to get feedback on them before making the final submission.

Honor Code

As should go without saying in a class at this level, UNC's honor code, available at honor.unc.edu, applies to all class assignments.

Commitments & Accessibility

- I am very happy to meet with you at any time to discuss assignments or simply to talk more about the topics of the class. Please come to my office hours, or if those times don't work, email me to set up an appointment.

- I am committed to making class fully accessible regardless of disabilities. If I can do anything to help make the class more accessible to you, please do let me know, or (if you would prefer) have the Accessibility Office contact me on your behalf.
- I am also committed to making the class a safe learning environment for everyone irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, religion, or other individual or group identity. As should go without saying, personal attacks or discriminatory treatment of others on any of these bases will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Course Materials

There are no required books for this class. All readings will be posted on Sakai.

Schedule of Readings

- 1/17 Introduction: dual process theory and pessimistic psychology**
 Keith Stanovich, *Rationality and the Reflective Mind*, pp. 3-25
 Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, pp. 19-70
- 1/24 Critiques of pessimistic psychology**
 Evans, Over & Manktelow, “Reasoning, Decision Making and Rationality”
 L. Jonathan Cohen, “Can Human Irrationality Be Experimentally Demonstrated?”
- 1/31 Bounded rationality**
 Gerd Gigerenzer, *Rationality for Mortals*, ch. 1
 Jennifer Morton, “Reasoning Under Scarcity”
- 2/7 Rationality as a precondition of interpretation**
 Daniel Dennett, “Intentional Systems”
 Donald Davidson, “Psychology as Philosophy”
 Donald Davidson, “Representation and Interpretation”
- 2/14 Rationality as a precondition of interpretation, cont.: some notes of caution**
 Christopher Cherniak, “Minimal Rationality”
 Stephen Stich, *The Fragmentation of Reason*, ch. 2
- 2/21 Challenges to our knowledge of our own mental states**
 Timothy Wilson, *Strangers to Ourselves*, chs. 5-6
 Eric Schwitzgebel, “Self-Ignorance”
 Timothy Williamson, “Cognitive Homelessness” (up to the end of section V)
- (2/28) No class – I am away giving a talk**

- 3/7 **Fragmentation**
 Donald Davidson, “Paradoxes of Irrationality”
 Daniel Greco, “Iteration and Fragmentation”
- 3/14 *No class – Spring break*
- 3/21 **Fragmentation, cont.**
 Andy Egan, “Seeing and Believing”
 Aaron Norby, “Against Fragmentation”
- 3/28 **Weakness of Will/Akasia**
 Donald Davidson, “How Is Weakness of Will Possible?”
 Gary Watson, “Skepticism about Weakness of Will”
 Roy Baumeister, *Evil*, ch. 2
Optional: Richard Holton, “Intention and Weakness of Will”
- 4/4 **Akasia in Belief?**
 Amelie Rorty, “Akratic Believers”
 Susan Hurley, *Natural Reasons*, selections
 Jonathan Adler, “Akratic Believing?”
- 4/11 **Motivated Belief/Wishful Thinking**
 Ziva Kunda, “The Case for Motivated Reasoning”
 David Pears, *Motivated Irrationality*, ch. 4
- 4/18 **Self-Deception**
 Amelie Rorty, “The Deceptive Self: Liars, Layers and Lairs”
 Alfred Mele, “Real Self-Deception”
Recommended: Donald Davidson, “Deception and Division”
- 4/25 **Self-Deception, cont.**
 Ariela Lazar, “Deceiving Oneself or Self-Deceived?”
 Tamar Gendler, “Self-Deception as Pretense”
Optional: Richard Holton, “What Is The Role of the Self in Self-Deception?”