

# Philosophy 491

## Philosophy of mind and cognitive science

**Professor:** Bryce Huebner

**Office:** 234 New North

**Office hours:** M 12:00-13:30, and by appointment

**Course meets:**

Monday & Wednesday 9:30-10:15

Location: TBA

*One of the reasons cognitive science is such a land of plenty for philosophers is that so many of its questions—not just the grand bird’s-eye view questions but quite proximal, in-the-lab-now questions—are still ill thought out, prematurely precipitated into forms that deserve critical reevaluation. If philosophy is, as my bumper sticker slogan has it, what you’re doing until you figure out just what questions to ask, then there is a lot of philosophy to be done by cognitive scientists these days. (Dennett 2009)*

**Course Overview:** In this course, we will examine some of the key issues that trouble people in the philosophy of mind, psychology, and cognitive science. Specifically, we’ll be focusing on questions of agency and the amount of control that we have over our ongoing behavior; and at each point, we’ll be trying to figure out when and how research in cognitive sciences can help to address such issues, and when and where we need tools from philosophy to address these issues. We will be addressing the following sorts of questions: **What are beliefs? Do they guide behavior? How is imagination related to belief? How are delusions, related to beliefs? How important are our expectations and predictions? Does language change the way we think? What are emotions, and how do they guide behavior? Does attention improve conscious control? Are there things we cannot plan for? Is conscious agency an illusion? Can we control our future behavior? Can we control future behavior socially? Do we shape how others think?** And, **Can we remember and plan together?** In addressing these questions, I hope to make it clear why philosophy must play a central role in the study of the mind.

### Requirements:

- This is a small, discussion-oriented class, and you will be expected to make consistent contributions to the class discussion (**10% of your grade**).
- To enhance the quality of discussion, you must submit a brief reading response every Friday (**30% of your grade**). At the beginning of each class, I will provide you with a question that I would like you to address from the reading, and you must provide a 500-750-word response to that question based on the reading as well as our in-class discussion. And one of our primary goals in each class will be to *work through* these questions together, with the aim of collectively trying to get a better handle on the issues that have been raised (or have been ignored) in each of the readings.
- You will also write a brief final paper, modeled on the submission of a commentary for Behavioral and Brain Sciences (BBS). You will first submit a commentary proposal (**15 March; 10% of your grade**); and the final draft of your commentary will be submitted during the final course period (**28 April, 30% of your grade**).
  - Your commentary can address any article from Behavioral and Brain Sciences, and you should choose an article that suits your own interests since you may have to do additional research to write a strong commentary. (Graduate students *may* have the

opportunity to write a response to a new BBS paper with me, depending on the options that arise over the course of the semester, and depending on their interests).

- On **15 March** you will submit a pdf of the article that you would like to comment on, as well as a brief commentary proposal, which will explain what issues you intend to discuss. This proposal should be between 300-500 words long, and it should clearly state which aspect of the target article you intend to address.
- During the final exam period, you will submit a commentary that includes your an informative commentary title, a 60 word abstract, 1000-words of main text (with no footnotes or endnotes), and an alphabetical reference list.
- Finally, at the end of the semester, you will re-submit your weekly writing assignments, along with a brief narrative assessment of what you have learned in the class, and what questions you feel have been left unresolved (and why). Details will be provided in due course (due on **X May; 20% of your grade**)

**Grading Criteria:** *In general*, 'B+' papers will 1) clearly articulate the claims being defended, 2) be well organized, 3) will rely on strong evidence and arguments, and 4) will be stylistically clear—thereby presenting a competent argument. An 'A' grade will only be awarded to a paper that *excels* in each category, thereby exhibiting a clear capacity for *doing philosophy*. A 'B' grade will be awarded for a paper that is weaker in one of these areas—but still satisfactory—and an 'A-' will be awarded to a paper that excels in one of these areas. A 'C' grade will be awarded to a paper that is weak in one or two of these categories; a 'D' grade will be awarded to a paper that is weak in 3 or 4 categories or omits one altogether (e.g., by lacking a thesis or lacking arguments for a thesis).

**Paper deadlines:** The deadlines for assignments are firm. Extensions will only be given where evidence of illness or a family emergency is submitted prior to the due date. Unless an extension is granted, assignments will automatically be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc.) for each day they are late.

**Appealing a grade:** You can appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent the work you have done. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your paper is returned, and must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade. A re-evaluation is no guarantee of a better grade, and it can even result in a lower grade if you do not offer a compelling case for raising your grade.

**Accommodations and diversity:** One finds a great deal of diversity in teaching and learning styles in a modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of this course, and to accommodate the learning styles people have to the best of my abilities. So please feel free to talk to me in office hours. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of the services provided by the university. Finally, if you find over the course of the semester that additional accommodations are necessary, please let me know.

**The honor code:** The Georgetown University Honor pledge requires you to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with the letter and the spirit of this pledge; and, I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

**Mind your manners:** Philosophy is best done collectively and collaboratively; however, some of the questions we will be discussing may generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing philosophy is all about. In discussing, disagreeing, criticizing, and arguing with one another, we must make an effort to remain courteous and respectful. I promise to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. But I will only be able to do this if each of you helps to create an atmosphere where we can develop ideas in a friendly and welcoming environment where we all learn from one another. Perhaps more importantly, if you want to disagree with someone, or if you want to offer a criticism of their viewpoint, be sure to offer reasons for the approach that you are suggesting. If we reason through things together, we are sure to have a great semester!

<b>14 January: What are we studying?</b>
<b>No reading</b>
<b>19-21 January: What are beliefs?</b>
<b>Peter Railton</b> , "Reliance, trust, and belief" <b>Neil Levy &amp; Eric Mandelbaum</b> , "The powers that bind" (Optional) <b>Kate Nolfi</b> , "Why is epistemic evaluation prescriptive?"
<b>26-28 January: Do beliefs guide behavior?</b>
<b>Tamar Gendler</b> , "Aliefs and beliefs" <b>Keith Frankish</b> , "Playing double: Implicit bias, dual levels, and self-control." (Optional) <b>Eric Schwitzgebel</b> , "Acting contrary to our professed beliefs"
<b>2-4 February: How is imagination related to belief?</b>
<b>Susanna Schellenberg</b> , "Belief and Desire in Imagination and Immersion" <b>Shen-yi Liao &amp; Tyler Doggett</b> , "The Imagination Box" (Optional) <b>Deena Weisberg</b> , "Pretend play"
<b>9-11 February: How are delusions, related to beliefs?</b>
<b>Lisa Bortolotti</b> , "The epistemic innocence of motivated delusions" <b>Lisa Bortolotti &amp; Kengo Miyazono</b> , "Recent Work on the Nature and Development of Delusions" (Optional) <b>Emma Sullivan-Bissett</b> , "Implicit bias, confabulation, and epistemic innocence."
<b>16-18 February: How important are our expectations and predictions?</b>
<b>Martin Seligman et al</b> , "Navigating Into the Future or Driven by the Past" <b>Dan Dennett</b> , "Why and how does consciousness seem the way it seems?" (Optional) <b>Lisa Feldman Barrett &amp; Jolie Wormwood</b> , "When a gun is not a gun"
<b>23-25 February: Does language change the way we think?</b>
<b>Gary Lupyan &amp; Andy Clark</b> "Words and the world"

<p><b>Lila Gleitman &amp; Anna Papafragou</b>, "Relations between language and thought"  (Optional) <b>Nicholas Shea et al.</b>, "Suprapersonal cognitive control and metacognition"</p>
<p><b>1-3 March: What are emotions, and how do they guide behavior?</b></p>
<p><b>Lisa Feldman Barrett</b>, "The conceptual act theory: A précis"  <b>Lauren Lebois, et al.</b>, "A shift in perspective: Decentering through mindful attention"  (Optional) <b>Bryce Huebner &amp; Trip Glazer</b>, "Can emotions serves as signals for social recalibration?"</p>
<p><b>8-10 March: Spring Break</b></p>
<p><b>15-17 March: Does attention improve conscious control?</b></p>
<p><b>Evan Thompson</b>, "Contemplative neuroscience as an approach to volitional consciousness"  <b>Rebecca Todd et al.</b>, "Affect-biased attention as emotion regulation"  (Optional) <b>Jake Davis &amp; Evan Thompson</b>, "Developing attention and decreasing affective bias"</p>
<p><b>22 March: Are there things we cannot plan for?</b></p>
<p><b>Laurie Paul</b>, "What you can't expect when you're expecting"  (Optional) <b>Elizabeth Harman</b>, "Transformative Experiences and Reliance on Moral Testimony"</p>
<p><b>24 March: Easter break</b></p>
<p><b>29-31 March: Is conscious agency an illusion?</b></p>
<p><b>Dan Wegner &amp; Thalia Wheatley</b>, "Apparent mental causation"  <b>Elisabeth Pacherie</b>, "Can conscious agency be saved?"  (Optional) <b>Tim Bayne</b>, "The phenomenology of agency"</p>
<p><b>5-7 April Can we control our future behavior?</b></p>
<p><b>Peter Gollwitzer</b>, "Weakness of the will: Is a quick fix possible?"  <b>Julia Haas</b>, "Multiple decision systems and the problem of weakness of will"  (Optional) <b>Molly Crockett et al.</b>, "Restricting temptations: neural mechanisms of precommitment."</p>
<p><b>12-14 April: Can we control future behavior socially?</b></p>
<p><b>Andy Clark</b>, "Soft selves &amp; ecological control"  <b>Hagop Sarkissian</b>, "Minor tweaks, Major Payoffs"  (Optional) <b>Jules Holroyd &amp; Dan Kelly</b>, "Implicit Bias, Character, &amp; Control"</p>
<p><b>19-21 April: Do we shape how others think?</b></p>
<p><b>Victoria McGeer</b>, "The regulative dimensions of folk psychology"  <b>Ryan Preston-Roedder</b>, "Faith in humanity"  (Optional) <b>Cecilia Heyes &amp; Chris Frith</b>, "The cultural evolution of mindreading"</p>
<p><b>26-28 April: Can we remember and plan together?</b></p>
<p><b>Deborah Tollefsen et al.</b>, "Alignment, transactive memory, and collective cognitive systems."  <b>Julia Landsiedel &amp; Sam Gilbert</b>, "Creating external reminders for delayed intentions"  (optional) <b>Felipe de Brigard &amp; Bryce Gessell</b>, "Time is not of the essence"</p>