

Mind and Action

PHIL 350MA
Mount Holyoke College
Spring 2017

GENERAL INFORMATION

- * Instructor: Arden Ali
- * Office location: Skinner 213A
- * Office phone: (413) 538-2725
- * Office hours: Wednesday, 9:00am-11:00am
- * Email: ardenali@mtholyoke.edu

- * Class times: Tuesday & Thursday, 2:40pm-3:55pm
- * Class location: Skinner 210

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our minds can direct and control our bodies. See for yourself: if you decide to lift your arm, and try to do it, your arm will probably go up! This course is about the relationship between our minds, bodies, and behavior. What is the mind? How did it make your arm go up? How is lifting your arm different from an involuntary muscle spasm? The answers are not as straightforward as you might think. We confront powerful arguments that the mind is not reducible to the brain or any part of the body. We explore how philosophers and neuroscientists think about the difference between intentional behaviors, like lifting your arm, and unintentional movements, like tics, twitches, and yawns.

TEXT

- * There is no required textbook for this course. All readings will be posted on Moodle. Please bring a copy of the relevant assigned readings to class each day.

REQUIREMENTS

- * Attendance and Participation: You are required to attend every class session. You are also required to participate during discussion by asking questions, explaining material, helping other students, or simply voicing your confusion. Repeated failures to attend class or participate will impact your final grade.
- * Written Work: Three essays; one 2-3 page paper and two 5-6 page papers
- * Online Reading Responses: You are required to post a comment on the course Moodle forum once per week. If your comment concerns Tuesday's reading, it should be posted by 8:00am on Tuesday. If it concerns Thursday's reading, it should be posted by 8:00am on Thursday. These posts should be at least one paragraph and show critical engagement with the text. You will be given feedback about your posts at scheduled intervals throughout the semester.
- * Presentation: Each student will give at least one presentation during the semester. You will be assigned one of the readings and asked to explain the argument or the author's position. You *do*

not need to post an online reading response on the week you are scheduled to give a presentation.

- + Examination: There is no final examination for this course.

COURSE POLICIES

- + Class preparation: You should complete all of the week's readings before our class session. You should bring a copy of any papers assigned for that day.
- + Communication: I send course updates via email. Please check your Mount Holyoke email account regularly. Email is also the best way to contact me outside of class.
- + Electronics policy: Please do not use laptops, cell phones, tablets, or other electronic devices during class, unless you are running software for an approved classroom accommodation or using the device to refer to course readings.
- + Submission of work: Essay prompts will be posted on Moodle. Please submit a hardcopy of your essay at the beginning of the class session on the specified due date. (The final paper may be placed in my department mailbox in Skinner 217.)
- + Extension: One 24-hour extension on a written assignment will be granted 'no-questions-asked.' To use this extension, email me before due date/time to inform me that you need an extension. The assignment must be turned in 24-hours later in my department mailbox (located in Skinner 217.)
- + Late/Missing Work: In general, essays will not be accepted after their due date/time unless an arrangement has been made before the due date. Talk to me if you fall behind, preferably long before the paper is due. No credit will be awarded for late online reading responses.
- + Accommodations: To request accommodations for a disability, contact AccessAbility Services, located in Wilder Hall B4, at (413) 538-2646 or accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu. If you are eligible, they will give you an accommodation letter, which you should give to me as soon as possible. We will work together to make sure all of the course content is accessible to you.

GRADING

- + Attendance and Participation: 15%
- + Reading Responses/Presentation: 15%
- + Essay 1 (short): 15%
- + Essay 2: 25%
- + Essay 3: 30%

GETTING HELP

- + If you are having any difficulties in the course, talk to me! Come to office hours (no appointment needed) or send me an email to set up a different time to talk.
- + The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program provides support for students whose first language is not English. For more information, visit <http://mtholyoke.edu/esol>.

- The Counseling Service (<http://mtholyoke.edu/counseling>) offers safe and confidential support for mental health concerns. Don't struggle alone; reach out for help when you need it.

ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

- Pages 34–37 of the *Student Handbook* describe the College's policies with regard to academic honesty. It is your responsibility to review and adhere to these guidelines.
- It is also your responsibility to complete *The Proper Use of Sources Tutorial* provided by the Dean of the College: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/>
- Academic dishonesty, e.g. plagiarism or cheating, may result in a failed mark on assignments, failure in the course as a whole, or more serious disciplinary measures.

SCHEDULE. The most up-to-date schedule is posted on Moodle. All readings posted on Moodle as well.

Week 1 Introducing the course

January 24th: No class

January 26th: No assigned reading

WHAT IS THE MIND?

Week 2 The mind is an immaterial substance.

January 31st: Read Descartes *Meditations* (selection)

February 2nd: Read Elisabeth of Bohemia, *Letters to Descartes* (selection)

Week 3 The mind is just the brain.

February 7th: No class

February 9th: Snow day

Week 4 The mind is the just the brain, continued.

February 14th: Read Smart, 'Sensations...' & Place, 'Is Consciousness...'

February 16th: Read Kripke, 'Identity and Necessity'

Week 5 The mind is just behaviour.

February 21st: Read Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (selection)

February 23rd: Read Putnam, 'Brains and Behaviour'

Week 6 The mind is a computing machine.

February 28th: Read Putnam, 'The Nature of Mental...'

March 2nd: Reread Putnam, 'The Nature of Mental States' [**Essay 1 due**]

Week 7 The mind is a computing machine, continued.

March 7th: Read Searle, 'Minds, Brains, and Programs'

March 9th: Read Block, 'Troubles with Functionalism'

Week 8 Spring Break

March 14th: No class

March 16th: No class

WHAT IS INTENTIONAL ACTION?

- Week 9** Anscombe's observations
- March 21st: No new reading
 March 23rd: Read Anscombe, *Intention* (selections)
- Week 10** The causal theory of action
- March 28th: Read Davidson, 'Reasons, Actions, and Causes'
 March 30th: Read Stout, 'Deviant causal chains and causal processes'
- Week 11** Problems for the causal theory of action, continued
- April 4th: Read Velleman 'What Happens When Someone Acts?'
 April 6th: Read Hornsby, 'Agents and Actions' & 'Trying to Act'
- Week 12** Alternatives to the causal theory
- April 11th: No reading [Bring draft of essay 2 to class]
 April 13th: Read Alverez, 'The Causalist/Anti-causalist debate' [**Essay 2 due**]
- Week 13** Alternatives to the causal theory/Practical knowledge
- April 18th: Read O'Conner, 'Agent Causation'
 April 20th: Review O'Conner. Read Donnellan, "Knowing What I am Doing"
- Week 14** Practical knowledge
- April 25th: Review Donnellan. Read Langton, 'Intention as Faith'
 April 27th: Review Langton, 'Intention as Faith'
- May 4th: No class [**Essay 3 due in my mailbox**]