

# Philosophy of Psychology

[300- to 400-level]

## Course Description

This course is an advanced introduction to the philosophy of psychology. The philosophy of psychology is a growing and vibrant area of study concerned with drawing out the implications of the empirical findings of psychology for traditional philosophical problems, especially those in the philosophy of mind. In this course, we will study three of the most active questions in the philosophy of psychology. First, we will consider one of the most longstanding issues with psychology: How is an empirical science of the mind possible? Second, we will consider what work in the psychology of judgement and decision making means for our conception of rationality, or of humans as being ‘rational animals’. Finally, we will consider the role of intentional states—broadly speaking, mental events that are about the world in some way—in cognitive psychology, and whether we can reconcile the existence of intentional states with a naturalistic worldview.

## Required Course Texts

1. Brentano, Franz. *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. (Routledge; 2014 edition)
2. Damasio, Antonio. *Descartes' Error*. (Penguin; 2005 reprint edition)
3. Various readings, as indicated.

## Summary of Course Requirements

Requirement	Description	Weight	Date
Engagement	Ongoing engagement with the course material.	15%	See description
Midterm	One in-class midterm examination on the first unit.	20%	Week 04
Argumentative Papers	Two medium-length papers.	35%	Weeks 09 and 14
Final Examination	One sit-down examination	30%	TBA

## Primary Learning Outcomes

- Knowledge:** Students will be able to identify three of the central issues in the philosophy of psychology: the possibility of an empirical science of the mind; the nature and limits of rationality, and its connection to our practical goals; and, the problem of naturalizing our conceptions of mental states, especially those considered intentional.
- Skills:** Students will develop the ability to take a stance on a topic and support it with reasons in a well-argued piece of academic writing.
- Values:** Students will acquire an appreciation for the complexity of the central problems of the philosophy of psychology, and how continued pursuit of these questions can enrich our understanding of the field of psychology and how it fits within our broader scientific framework.

## Description of Course Requirements

### 1. Engagement (15%)

Success in this course requires engagement with the course material, with your fellow students, and with the Professor. There are a variety of ways in which you may demonstrate that you are engaging with the course:

- A. Most Fridays, I will post one or two questions about the following week's material, along with instructions for answering them. You may complete a maximum of three of these short assignments, with the following caveats: you may not complete assignments in consecutive weeks; you may not complete more than two in the same unit; and, you may not write on the same author twice.
- B. Each class, there will be ample opportunity for participation. Frequent and meaningful contributions—with stress on the meaningful part—will be rewarded. This will be assessed in **Week 06** and reassessed in **Week 13**; only the final assessment counts.
- C. Each month, you will be asked to fill in a self-assessment form which will ask you to reflect on your participation and identify any potential barriers for more effective participation. You will also suggest a mark out of five that you believe reflects your contribution in the past month, and justify that mark. Your justification is what is graded.

All elements of the assessment component follow the NUSE rubric. Elements A and B have the following values attached: **Not assessable** (0 pts); **Unsatisfactory** (1.5 pts); **Satisfactory** (2.5 pts); **Excellent** (4 pts). Element C has the following values: **Not assessable** (0 pts); **Unsatisfactory** (0.5 pts); **Satisfactory** (1 pt); **Excellent** (2 pts). The astute may note that it is possible to earn more than fifteen points. You keep what you earn!

### 2. Midterm (20%)

The first midterm examination will be held in the second class of **Week 05**, and will test your competency with the material from Unit One. It is worth **20%** of your final grade in the course. It will be a mixture of multiple choice, short answer, and similar types of questions, and will follow a typical percentile rubric.

### 3. Argumentative Paper (2x17.5%)

You will write two 1750-word papers with topics drawn from a supplied list. These papers are full-blown argumentative papers: You are expected to develop central thesis statements and support them with reasons and sound arguments. These papers will be due **Week 09** and **Week 14**. They will be graded according to the NUSE rubric; consult the chart [contained in full syllabus] for details. Note that you may submit the same essay twice, but that it automatically engages Hard Mode.

### 4. Final Examination (30%)

Who doesn't love an opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency with the material under a time constraint? I mean, three months of material in two hours! Love or hate this adrenaline- and caffeine-fueled frenzy of academic wizardry, it will be held on a date, at a time, and at a location **to be determined** by the helpful folks at the Registrar. You should expect standard fare: multiple choice, short answer, and the like.

## Sample Course Schedule

*All information subject to change with notice.*

Week	Featured Topic	Featured Authors
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### Whither Psychology?

01	Is Psychology possible?	Comte; Brentano. [PES: 2]
02	What is psychology's object?	James; Titchener.
03	How can the mind be known?	Skinner; Chomsky.
04	[Flex Day & Midterm]	[Midterm]

### Rationality and Akrasia

05	Humans are rational animals...	Aristotle; Descartes. [DE: 1]*
06	...except when we aren't	Plous; Kahneman.
07	Beyond mere reason	Prinz; Damasio. [DE: 7, 8]
08		
09	When reasons collide	Davidson; Holton.

### Brentano's Thesis

10	The mark of the mental	Brentano again! [PES: 1, 3]
11	Naturalizing intentionality	Chisolm; Quine.
12	Three accounts of intentionality	Dretske; Fodor; Block.
13		

### Legend

DE     Damasio, *Descartes' Error*.

PES    Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*