

# PHI 6326- Seminar in Philosophy of Mind

Fall 2024

## Instructor:

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Office: Griffin-Floyd 302

Office hours: M, W 10:45 AM – 11:45 AM, or by appointment

## Course Time and Location:

Thursdays, 3-6 PM, Griffin-Floyd 200

## Course Description

In this seminar we will work through John McDowell's 1994 book *Mind and World*, arguably one of the most significant books of late twentieth century philosophy. The book is, as its title suggests, concerned primarily with the relationship between our minds and the world. The central question is this: How can our thoughts be genuinely about the world at all? McDowell's answer to this question will take us through some central issues in contemporary analytic philosophy, including external world skepticism, the nature and content of perceptual experience, and the relationship between reasons and causes. Central to McDowell's treatment of these issues is the work of (among others) W.V.O. Quine, Wilfred Sellars, and Donald Davidson. We will read selected papers by these and other relevant figures over the course of the semester

## Course Objectives

- The primary goal is to have students critically engage with the main issues in John McDowell's *Mind and World* and have them situate those issues in broader debates within both early and contemporary analytic philosophy.
- Students should also be able to effectively demonstrate their knowledge of the course material in a written final paper, with the goal of fulfilling one of the philosophy department graduate requirements for the MA.
- Students will practice philosophical thinking and writing through class discussion, presentations, and papers.

## Required Materials

- A print copy of John McDowell's (1994) *Mind and World*. This can be purchased easily both new and second-hand from online retailers.
- All other materials will be available on Canvas

## Requirements and Grading:

In addition to completing weekly readings and contributing to seminar discussion, you will be expected to lead discussion once during the semester, to write a final paper, to do a presentation of your final paper to the class. A breakdown of the course grading is as follows:

1. Participation (in class discussion) 15%
2. Lead Discussion 15%
3. Presentation of Final Paper 10%
4. Final paper 60%

### **Participation (15%)**

Graduate seminars run on discussion, so you will need to attend each week and participate actively. Each student is expected to come to class having read the readings for the week and having taken notes on them. You should come to class prepared to ask questions about things you didn't fully understand, things you found interesting, etc. Please contact me as soon as possible if you need to miss class so that we can discuss whether it will be excused (and what sort of documentation would be appropriate).

### **Lead Discussion (15%)**

In the first class we will organize a schedule for each student to lead discussion on the week's reading. The aim is not for you to deliver a lecture, but for you to take the reins of leading the class in discussion of the text.

This will involve writing a short (approximately 2-4 page) handout on the week's reading to present in class. The purpose is to give a kind of "critical *precis*" of the readings for the week. The presentation and handout should do two main things:

- (i) Provide a brief overview of the main arguments, and the main claims being presented. This may involve reconstructing arguments from the text that aren't explicitly laid out.
- (ii) Critically engage with the reading. This might involve by highlighting where we might want to resist some of authors claims and arguments, considering opposing arguments and alternative approaches to the questions at hand.

Please make copies of your handout for each of your classmates so that everyone can follow along/make comments during class.

### **Presentation of Final Paper (10%)**

In the final few classes, students will present a draft of their final paper. The paper you give need not be the final *version* of the final paper, but it should be polished enough that your classmates can follow the basic argument well enough to discuss it with you. I suggest preparing a handout for this presentation as well.

Presentations should be about 30 mins to allow for Q&A and discussion.

### **Final Paper (60%)**

A final paper will be due at the end of the semester. It should be about 5000-6000 words, on a topic that engages closely with the topics and readings covered in the seminar. You should discuss your final paper project with me before you give your presentation on the paper in class. Final papers are due Thursday November 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **Some Final Comments:**

#### **Academic Honesty**

See <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentrights.php> and <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/students.html#honesty>. You should expect the minimum penalty for academic dishonesty to be a grade of F for the class (not just the assignment). All incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs. Repeat offenders may be penalized by suspension or expulsion from the university.

All sources and assistance used in preparing your papers and presentations must be precisely and explicitly acknowledged. The web creates special risks here. Cutting and pasting even a few words from a web page or paraphrasing material without a reference constitutes plagiarism. If you are not sure how to refer to something you find on the internet, you can always give the URL.

#### **Students with Disabilities**

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation. If you do have any special requirements because of a disability, please inform me at the beginning of the course if possible, and I'll do my best to accommodate your needs.

## Schedule and Readings

### Week 1 (August 22)

*No reading*

### Week 2 (August 29)

- M&W *Introduction*
- M&W Lecture I. *Concepts and Intuitions*

### Week 3 (September 5)

- Donald Davidson (1986): *A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge*

### Week 4 (September 12)

- M&W Lecture II. *The Unboundedness of the Conceptual*
- M&W Afterword, Part I. *Davidson in Context*

### Week 5 (September 19)

- Wilfred Sellars *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (excerpts)

### Week 6 (September 26)

- M&W Lecture III. *Nonconceptual Content*
- M&W Afterword Part II. *Postscript to Lecture III*

### Week 7 (October 3)

- Charles Travis (2004) *The Silence of the Senses*

### Week 8 (October 10)

- M&W Lecture IV. *Reason and Nature*

### Week 9 (October 17)

- M&W Lecture V. *Action, Meaning and the Self*
- M&W Afterword Part III. *Postscript to Lecture V*

### Week 10 (October 24)

- M&W Lecture VI. *Rational and Other Animals*
- M&W Afterword Part IV. *Postscript to Lecture VI*

### Week 11 (October 31)

- McDowell (1983) “Criteria Defeasibility and Knowledge”

- McDowell (1995) “Knowledge and the Internal”

**Week 12** (November 7)

*Class presentations*

**Week 13** (November 14)

*Class presentations*

**Week 14** (November 21)

*Class presentations*