

PHI 3453: Philosophy of Psychology
University of North Florida

Course Description

From the course catalog: "This course examines the philosophical and ethical issues raised by the theory and practice of psychology. Questions to be considered are: What philosophical and ethical problems are raised by the very idea of mental health? In what sense do different approaches to psychological care embody different underlying philosophical assumptions? What different philosophical reasons are there for thinking that psychological treatment should be aimed at the mind, the brain, behavior, the self, the soul, or the whole person?"

This course is divided into four sections. Section 1 [Contextualizing Psychology] discusses the emergence of psychology as a discipline distinct from philosophy and also introduces some early psychological theories, culminating in a discussion of the widespread acceptance of cognitivism. Section 2 [Modeling Minds] introduces four categories of contemporary models of mind, including functionalist, connectionist, embodied cognition, and evolutionary models. Section 3 [Considering Neurodiverse Minds] introduces debates about how to characterize 'mental illnesses' or instances of 'neurodiversity.' We'll discuss the medical model, mixed models, and skeptical views, as well as consider related ethical problems. Finally, Section 4 [Theorizing about Some Specific Psychological Phenomena] allows us to zoom in on some more particular phenomena including consciousness, personal identity, development/learning, memory, confabulation, and moral judgment. We'll conclude this section and the course with a discussion of how leaving behind Western notions about personhood, in favor of a Buddhist conception, has interesting consequences for philosophical psychology.

The primary objectives of this course are that [1] students leave with a general competency in the philosophy of psychology, as well as the ability to engage with contemporary debates in the field; [2] students appreciate interdisciplinary work and are able to understand, synthesize, and respond to texts; [3] students are better able to engage with ongoing debates in both philosophy and psychology, demonstrating the ability to read carefully and represent charitably positions with which they agree or disagree; and [4] students develop an awareness of and appreciation for the relationship between theory and application.