

Course Outline: PHIL 5200 (Fall 2021)

Iris Murdoch and Behaviourism in the Philosophy of Mind

Class Time: Tuesdays, 11:35 A.M. to 2:35 P.M., online

Instructor: Lesley Jamieson

Office Hours: Virtual, available by appointment

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Department: Philosophy

Course Description:

In postwar Britain, the philosophy of mind was dominated by linguistic philosophy and a position we can broadly label as behaviourism: the view that the meaning of our mental concepts (e.g., understands, intends, imagines, sees, thinks) is determined by public, behavioural criteria. On this view, our mental concepts do not refer to private, mental entities that others can only make inferences about. Rather, our mental states are manifest in what we say, do, or how we move. While this was an important shift in the discussion about the knowability of other minds, it also led to the devaluation of the inner life. Iris Murdoch is not typically read as a philosopher of mind, and yet her work from this period offers a distinctive challenge to behaviourism. In this seminar, we'll examine three aspects of Murdoch's challenge: her recounting of inner life experiences that her contemporaries either neglected or denied the reality of; her discussion of the individuality of the mind; the connections she draws between behaviourism and literature; and her argument that behaviourist assumptions about meaning and interiority have shaped analytic moral philosophy in objectionable ways. As we shall see, how philosophers regard the mind has ramifications for how we understand moral agency and the value of literature.

Delivery:

This class will be taught remotely; in addition to weekly readings, the course will be comprised of synchronous seminar sessions conducted over Zoom on Tuesdays, from 11:35am to 2:35pm.

Required Text (Available at Carleton Bookstore):

Iris Murdoch 1998. *Existentialists and Mystics* (Penguin).

(Please don't use a kindle edition—having shared page numbers will be helpful during our seminar discussions)

Gilbert Ryle 1949. *The Concept of Mind* (University of Chicago Press)

(You may choose to source your own used or online copies of this text—I am not concerned about the use of different editions)

In addition to these texts, we will be consulting a variety of articles made available to you through the library's Ares e-reserve system and shared on the course Brightspace website. The reading schedule is listed here, and each week will have a tab on Brightspace with required readings listed (or, where relevant, linked or attached for download).

Evaluation:

Assignments must be submitted electronically via Brightspace. Late assignments will be penalized by a deduction of one grade per day (e.g., 1 day late, A becomes A-; 3 days late, A becomes B)

1. Three Comment Sheets (15% each, 45% total)

Each week, excluding the first week of the semester (which will be purely introductory), you will have the opportunity to write a comment sheet about one of the assigned readings for that week. The aim of these assignments is not to merely summarize the material, but rather to respond critically to, interrogate, or explore a implications or fruitful insights afforded by the material. It is up to you to choose which weeks to complete your comment sheets, but you must submit a total of 3 by the final week of the class (December 7th). Comment sheets will be accepted until 7pm on Friday of the week in question (via Brightspace). Comment sheets should be no longer than one page, single spaced. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Assessment: These comment sheets will be assessed for: 1) quality, clarity, and relevance of exposition; 2) quality of critical or interrogative commentary, with attention paid to how your comments are motivated, supported, and developed.

2. Participation (10%)

Each week, excluding the first week of the semester (which will be purely introductory), you will be expected to submit a sheet of 3 questions about the text(s) assigned for that week. These can include clarificatory or critical questions, but should be motivated by a sentence or two (e.g., to provide context, to disclose an ambiguity, or to draw out a potential problem in the text). Question sheets will be accepted until 11:30am Tuesday, prior to that week's class. They are meant to be a tool to facilitate class discussion.

Assessment: These question sheets will not be graded; if you complete them each week, you will get 10/10; if you miss a week, 1/10 will be deducted each time.

3. Term Essay (45%)—Due by December 10th

You will write a term paper of 12-18 double-spaced pages on a topic of your choosing.

Weekly Schedule:

Lectures and Readings (September 8th to December 10th):

Week 1 (September 14th) Course Introduction

Reading:

- Marije Altorf "Iris Murdoch, or What it Means to be a Serious Philosopher"

Week 2 (Sept. 21st) Ayer's Verificationism and Behaviourism

- A. J. Ayer, *Language Truth and Logic*, Chapter 1: The Elimination of Metaphysics
- Ayer, *Language Truth and Logic*, Chapter 7: The Self and the Common World

Week 3 (Sept. 28st) Ryle's Ordinary Language Behaviourism

- Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Chapter 1: Descartes' Myth
- Ryle, Chapter 2: Knowing How and Knowing That

Week 4 (October 5th) Ryle, continued

- Ryle, Chapter 6: Self-Knowledge
- Ryle, Chapter 10: Psychology

Week 5 (Oct. 12th) Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument

- Selections from Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*
- Norman Malcolm, "Other Minds"

Week 6 (Oct. 19th) Murdoch on Interiority

- Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*: "Thinking and Language" (text)

Week 7 (Oct. 26th) No Class or Readings, Fall Break

Week 8 (November 2nd) Murdoch and Interiority

- Murdoch, "Nostalgia for the Particular"
- H. H. Price, "Image Thinking"

Week 9 (Nov. 9th) Analytic Philosophy of Art

- Stuart Hampshire "Logic and Appreciation"
- Arnold Isenberg "Critical Communication"

Week 10 (Nov. 16th) Murdoch on Art, Mind, and the Moral Life

- Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited"
- Murdoch, "Against Dryness"

Week 11 (Nov. 23rd) Murdoch on Moral Philosophy

- Hare, *Freedom and Reason*, Chapter 1: Introduction; Chapter 2: Descriptive Meaning; Chapter 3: Principles
- Peter Singer, "R.M. Hare's Achievements in Moral Philosophy"

Week 12 (Nov. 30th) Murdoch on Moral Philosophy

- Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality"
- Murdoch, "Metaphysics and Ethics"

Week 13 (December 7th) Behaviourism and Moral Philosophy

- Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection"

Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After

requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. For more details, visit the [Paul Menton Centre website](#).

Accommodation for Survivors of Sexual Violence:

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit the [Equity and Inclusive Communities website](#).

Accommodation for Student Activities:

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, see the [Senate Policy on Accommodation for Student Activities \(PDF, 25KB\)](#).

Accommodation for Pregnancy or religious obligation:

Write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the EDC website.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than three working days of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than three working days after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar). Visit the Registrar's Office for further information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. (Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations)