mind & medicine

We will deal with philosophical problems in medicine and psychiatry. We will consider questions such as: What's health, what's disease? Is disability a purely biological concept or is it normative, i.e., does it involve value judgments? Should it? What biases do medical practitioners fall prey to? Why do patients—and event doctors— often misinterpret positive results of tests?

Learning outcomes: know different theories presented, their virtues and shortcomings, and how to apply them • analyze arguments (both philosophical and non-philosophical) and evaluate them • develop and defend philosophical arguments • present such arguments in writing • know biases that might influence your reasoning and the tools to counteract them.

Class: Tuesdays, 6-8^{30}pm, room: **306 CL**.

Instructor: Tom Wysocki, writeyourpapersearly@gmail.com.

Office hours: grad offices at the **11th floor** CL **by appointment**; will gladly zoom. **Mailbox:** 1101CL

1. Policies

1. You might not love me for this—too bad for me—but there's a **no-laptop/phone policy** (if you really need to use one, meet me in my office hours to state your reasons). You can have an e-book reader with you though; tentatively, tablets are OK too, but I reserve the right to change my mind on that. Why such cruelty? Here's why:

https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/

2. Some people have great ideas but don't think they are great, and so keep them to themselves. Others are just shy. That's why I often **call on people** at random and thus **don't grade participation**. This will also keep you more alert throughout the class.

3. I'm fully vaccinated against covid-19; so should you be. For what it's worth, I haven't grown extra arms, nor do I care if Bill Gates can track my location—I'm mostly at home working on papers anyway.

2. On grading.

1. I'll grade you for: **weekly responses**, other **homework**, which I'll assign every so often, a **midterm exam**, a **final exam**, and a **paper**. There will be a total of 100 points to get in the semester. The distribution is as follows:

weekly responses	other homework	exam 1	paper	exam 2
10	10	20	35	25

I'll then convert your points to a grade per the usual mapping:

A+ [97-100]	A [93-97)	A- [90-93)	B+ [87-90)	B [83-87)	B- [80-83)	C+ [77-80)	C [73-77)	C- [70-73)
D+ [67-70)	D [65-67)	F (-∞, 65)						

2. Also, sign all graded work with your **PeopleSoft number** only. There's lots of research out there showing that people—and that includes instructors—evaluate others' work and competencies partially based on irrelevant factors. Of course, I think I harbor no biases toward anyone and am perfectly fair; research shows that people who think they harbor no biases are the most biased. So, please, make the world a little more just and identify yourself by your PeopleSoft number only.

3. Please **read the feedback I give you** on your assignments. This is how you can do better next time, if you think you didn't do well enough.

4. Every so often, there I'll assign **extra credit** tasks that you may but need not to do. The points will just add to the points you already have.

5. Since I cold call people, it may turn out that from a conversation with you that you **haven't read the texts** assigned for that day. If so—i.e., if I ascertain you haven't read them, or you have at most skimmed them—I'll be forced, by the natural law governing the universe, to give you negative points: **-2p** for each day that you come unprepared. (However, if it's clear that you did read the papers but just didn't understand the argument, that's alright. It's perfectly OK to be confused by some of the stuff we'll read.)

3. The plan of the semester

If the discussion in one meeting spills over to the following meeting, the plan will be adjusted accordingly. The canvas will always contain the current version of the syllabus, and so: please, on **Thursday morning** (or anytime after that when you decide to do the readings) always **check** Canvas for the newest version of **the syllabus**.

Please, **read all non-optional readings** that I ask you to read (and read the optional ones if you can). **Weekly responses** will show whether you read the readings; you'll upload them to Canvas. In the weekly response, I'll *often* ask you:

  (a) to state the thesis or theses of the papers (i.e., what's the main point the author is trying to make?);
  (b) to recount the argument(s) the author makes for this thesis;
  (c) *and* to think of some objections against the argument or further considerations supporting the argument.

This all should be rather brief. The deadline for these will be **Monday before class**.

Also, every week in class we'll do a mock quiz: I'll give you two questions from anything from the past meetings, you'll respond to them in writing, and then we'll discuss answers in class. This won't be graded, though I'll ask random people to read their responses. There's no penalty for getting it wrong—it's just a learning opportunity. The aim is for you to practice before the exams—**being tested in low-stress conditions facilitates learning** (see experiments by Henry Roediger, *psychnet.wustl.edu/memory/people/henry-l-roediger-iii/*).

As for readings: sometimes it might feel like a lot. But remember we meet for 2.5h—it wouldn't seem much if we were meeting twice a week.

1 • August 31   Conceptual analysis (online)
No readings (*duh!*)
2 • September 7   The concept of health: descriptivism (also online)
Reading 1. Boorse (1972). Health as a Theoretical Concept. **Reading 2**. Kingma (2007). What is it to be healthy? **Optional 1**. Murphy. Concepts of Disease and Health. In Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (it's online).
3 • September 14   The concept of health: normativism.
Reading 1. Margolis (1976). The concept of disease.

4 • September 21	Normal function. Formalizing arguments.	

Reading 1. Amundson (2000). Against normal function.
Reading 2. https://theoatmeal.com/comics/believe

5 • September 28	Actuarial methods.

Reading 1. Dawes, Faust, Meehl (1989). Clinical versus actuarial judgment.
Reading 2. Dawes (2002). The ethics of using or not using statistical prediction rules […].
Reading 3. https://neurosciencenews.com/ai-clinical-decisions-19296/ Feel free to read the paper they are writing about too; it's linked after the post: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/jaba.863

6 • October 5	Biases.

Reading 1. Redelmeier (2005). The Cognitive Psychology of Missed Diagnoses.
Reading 2. FitzGerald & Hurst (2017). Implicit bias in healthcare professionals: a systematic review.

7 • October 12	Exam 1

It will consist mostly of questions like the ones we practice in class. The material includes everything covered before October 12.

8 • October 19	Criteria of disease

Reading 1. Caplan (2004). The Unnaturalness of Aging.
Reading 2. Aronowitz (2001). When Do Symptoms Become a Disease?

9 • October 26	Mental illness

Reading 1. Szasz (1960). The myth of mental illness.
Reading 2. Pickard (2009). Mental illness is indeed a myth.
Reading 3. Cartwright (1851). Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race.

10 • November 2	Wellbeing

Reading 1. Wren-Lewis & Alexandrova (2019). Mental health without wellbeing.
Reading 2. Edwards (2013). The anomalous wellbeing of disabled people: a reply.

11 • November 9	Disability

Reading 1. Abberley (2007). The concept of oppression and the development of a social theory of disability.
Reading 2. Anastasiou & Kauffman (2013). The social model of disability.

12 • November 16	Empathy and medical training

Reading 1. Wilkes & Hoffman (2002). Toward more empathic medical students.
Reading 2. Bellini & Shea (2005). Mood change and empathy decline persist […]

13 • November 23	No class: give your thanks to the tofurky.
November 27	Paper deadline
14 • November 30	Wrap-up session

Or maybe some extra topic of your choosing. We'll see. Or maybe a make-up session, if we miss one of the classes because of a natural disaster. (It has happened to me before.)

15 • December 7	Exam 2

The format will be similar to the first exam. Questions will cover the whole semester, though I'll put emphasis on the material from the second half (i.e., after the first exam).

4. Other policies & suggestions

Writing Center. Effective written communication is critical to philosophy and to academic discourse. You are strongly encouraged to trade drafts of your papers with your classmates for editing and to make use of the Writing Center: 412.624.6556, 317B O'Hara Student Center, *www.writingcenter.pitt.edu*.

Support. Statistics from 2018: 63% of US college students felt overwhelming anxiety in the past year; 23% reported being diagnosed or treated by a mental health professional for anxiety. The statistic for depression looks similar. You pay a crazy amount of money in tuition, so please, please, utilize the resources the university has for you, if you feel—like one fourth of your peers—that you need support. If you find yourself struggling, please consider reaching out to the University Counseling Center (UCC) at Pitt: call 412-648-7930 or walk into the Wellness Center

(*https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/cc/frequently-asked-questions/*), located on the second floor of Nordenberg Hall. They operate Monday through Friday, 8³⁰am to 5pm.

Statement of inclusivity and accessibility. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for adapting lectures, activities, and assignments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. This includes discussing whether some topics are difficult or potentially triggering, and how that might be accommodated.

If you have a disability, you are strongly encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 216 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Plagiarism. Plagiarism hurts other students, but it also hurts you—you are here to learn, feedback is a part of the learning process (ask any behaviorist!), and the feedback on your progress will be useless to you if it's based on plagiarized work. Therefore, I take plagiarism cases seriously. Any student engaged in cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic dishonesty would be subject to disciplinary action, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity (*http://www.provost.pitt.edu/faculty/academic-integrity-freedom/academic-integrity-guidelines*). If there's evidence of plagiarism, the case goes directly to the Assistant Dean. Plagiarism will also seriously affect your grade. If you have any questions about how to properly use, cite, or paraphrase sources, just approach me.

Statement on classroom recording. To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

Your questions from the first meeting:

Q: For the paper, will it be on a reading or a general topic of our choice that is related to the course or something else? **A:** Related to the readings unless we agree on a different topic beforehand.

Q: How long will it be given that it is worth a huge portion of our grade? **A:** You'll be able to start working on it as early as six weeks before the deadline.

Q: Will we do round(s) of revision before submitting the final version? **A:** You will discuss your outlines with your peers in class and with me in the office hours. You can see me with a draft of the paper, and I'll give you feedback.

Q: Is there a concrete page limit or word limit for the weekly responses? **A:** Not really, no. They can be rather short.

Q: What type of questions will the exams consist of? (e.g. essay questions, short responses, multiple choice). **A:** The kind of questions we practice at the beginning of every class.