

# Philosophy of Mind

Philosophy 435 – Spring Term 2018 – Purdue University

Instructor: Daniel Kelly

## Paper Assignment #1

- The assignment is to choose one of the following topics and write a paper on that topic. It should be no less than 6 pages (not including bibliography), double spaced, with reasonable margins (1 inch is standard) and in a reasonable font (12 pt Times New Roman or Garamond is standard). If you have questions about the particular topics, or about the paper in general, please bring them up in class or office hours, or send me an email.
- Papers are due by the end of lecture, **Thursday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>**. Any papers not given, in person, to the instructor by that time will be considered late. Electronic submissions will be considered late. As stated in the syllabus, there is a 7-point per day late penalty on all papers – no excuses will be accepted.
- Be sure to write your name and the topic you have chosen on the first page of your paper. Also be sure to staple the pages of your paper together.
  - **ProTip 1:** leave out whatever version of the “Since the dawn of time humans have wondered...” sentence that, judging from my past experiences grading papers, you may be feeling a very strong urge to start your paper off with. It doesn’t add anything, and it puts professors in a bad state of mind right when they begin reading your paper, largely because it’s über-clichéd but also because it feels like padding.
  - **ProTip 2:** In general, avoid asking rhetorical questions; when tempted to ask one, instead write out what you take to be the obviously correct answer in the form of a declarative statement and explicitly state the reasons you think that statement is obviously correct. Rhetorical questions themselves don’t make good or convincing arguments, and when you are in a philosophical debate the answer you take to be obviously correct will often be rejected by those arguing the other side of the issue.
- **Mandatory Reminder:** Cite your sources in a separate bibliography page at the end of the paper. Make sure Wikipedia does **not** appear in that bibliography. Drawing on outside source material is fine, just be sure to properly cite them; this means that any phrases that are taken verbatim from any source should be in quotation marks, and the in text citation should include a page number. Materials and ideas borrowed (which includes paraphrasing) from a source that is **not** properly cited are plagiarized. Plagiarism will result in an automatic F for the course, and the plagiarizer’s name will be given to the Purdue administration.
  - Please use **proper in text citation**, and citation conventions. If you do not know how to do this, it’s time to learn. You may follow the guidelines in the APA Style Citation Format (<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~drkelly/APAStyleGuide2004.pdf>).
- Make sure your paper, ideally in your introductory and concluding paragraph, contains a clear statement of **your thesis**, the claim or position **you** will defend in your paper. It should be a clearly identifiable sentence, some like “In this paper I will argue that ...” or “The main thesis I will defend is that ...” where the “...” is replaced by that thesis. (Do not be afraid to use the 1<sup>st</sup> person voice to state your thesis.) Your thesis can be positive or critical, but ideally it will be stated in an introductory paragraph (that also lays out the basic shape of the paper to come), in the body of the paper, where you offer the reasons you think your thesis is correct, and then again in a concluding paragraph (as per Aristotle’s advice, paraphrased: “tell 'em what you're gonna tell 'em; tell 'em; then tell 'em what you told 'em.”). For more on how to do good writing, read this and reflect the advice expressed therein: <https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/11/05/david-foster-wallace-dictionary-writing/>

## Topics:

1. This paper will largely unpack a thought experiment and assess its dialectic success. As mentioned in class, functionalism and the idea that the mind can be understood as a complicated computer program is seen by many philosophers to be one of, if not the single most, fundamental commitment of the cognitive sciences. Some philosophers also think that functionalism offers, at best, an *incomplete* solution to the mind/body problem, because it cannot account for two of the most distinctive properties of the mind, namely intentionality and consciousness.

In the cases of Searle's Chinese Room, and Block's Chinese Nation, respectively, we have one thought experiment designed to show functionalism fails on the score of intentionality, and another thought experiment designed to show it fails on the score of qualitative consciousness. Your job in this paper is to provide the following:

- a. A concise description of functionalism, including its characteristic claims about mental concepts, the relationship between mental states and physical states, and its alleged virtues, advantages over other positions, and so on.
  - b. A description of the property in question:
    - i. Intentionality, if you are writing on Searle
    - ii. Consciousness or qualia, if you are writing on Block
  - c. A detailed description of the relevant thought experiment, including any background assumptions it might make.
  - d. A description of what the thought experiment is supposed to *show*, how it is supposed to provide an *objection* to functionalism.
  - e. A formulation (or translation, as the case may be) of the line of thought behind the thought experiment into an argument, in premise/conclusion form.
  - f. Consider one of the following objections:
    - i. If you're writing on Searle, describe Clark's "microfunctionalist" response to the Chinese room (on the website under Comments on Searle's Chinese Room), and why he thinks it saves functionalism from Searle's objection.
    - ii. If you're writing on Block, describe Lycan's response to the Chinese nation (in his paper 'The Continuity of Levels of Nature', also see lecture notes), and why he thinks it saves functionalism from Block's objection.
  - g. Finally assess the standoff – who do you think is right, and why? Provide reasons in support of your position.
2. In "Patterns, Contents, Causes," Clark discusses a debate whose main players are Fodor, Churchland, and Dennett, and whose positions form what he calls a "golden triangle". Write a paper about this debate, in which you:
    - a. Explain what the debate is about (this should include a explanation of what folk psychology is)
    - b. Give a detailed description of each of the positions in the debate
      - i. How each construes folk psychology itself
      - ii. How each sees folk psychology as related to the sciences of the mind
      - iii. How the positions differ from each other
    - c. Pick which of these positions you think is the correct one
      - i. Explain and provide reasons why you are convinced by this position
      - ii. Explain and provide reasons why you think the others are wrong
  3. This paper will give you a chance to assess a debate. The main focal point will be Dennett's Intentional stance.
    - a. Give a detailed explanation of Dennett's theory of the intentional stance

- i. What it's supposed to be accounting for
    - ii. How it accounts for it
    - iii. Illustrate how the view works by walking through a concrete example
  - b. Next you need to articulate the main objection to Dennett's theory, that it makes having beliefs "stance dependent"
    - i. What is the objection?
    - ii. Why do those who make this objection think that "stance dependence" is a problem?
  - c. What is the best response of the defender of the Dennett/Clark view to this objection?
    - i. You might consider what a proponent of the Dennett/Clark view would say about some of these example cases:
      - 1. Deep Blue
      - 2. The Chinese Room
      - 3. Dennett's Demon – a entity that was omniscient w/r/t what Dennett calls "the physical stance", but which can not adopt "the intentional stance"
    - ii. On this response, do propositional attitudes and other intentional states **cause** behaviors? Why or why not?
  - d. Which case is more convincing – the Dennett/Clark case, or the case of their skeptical objection? Why?
- 4. This will be a largely *critical* paper. If any particular article we have read thus far in the semester simply infuriates you, or seems misguided or confused to you, write a critical paper that addresses it. If you choose this topic, your paper should include the following:
  - a. A careful, detailed formulation of the main argument of the paper in question, especially the premises and conclusion
  - b. A sketch of any relevant background, and discussion of any presumptions or principles tacitly assumed by the author, used to support his premises
  - c. A careful, detailed formulation of your objection to the argument, which should state
    - i. Where you think the argument goes wrong (Is one of the premises false? If so, which one, and why? Does the conclusion not follow from the premises? Why not?)
    - ii. Making a case that your objection is plausible, fleshing it out and giving reasons in support of it.
    - iii. Imagine what the author of the article would say to your objection, (what his or her best response would be) and say why you do not find that convincing, what is wrong with it or how you would reply.