

Philosophical Perspectives on Mental Illness

HCOL 185L, Fall 2018

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Class meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8:30 – 9:45, University Heights North 016
Office hours: By appointment

Description: Can the mind be ill? According to many estimates, upward of a quarter of all people will at some point in their lives experience mental illness. That is a staggering figure, but what does it mean? The significance – with respect to public health and to individual wellbeing – of psychiatric disorders is increasingly acknowledged, if not breathlessly promoted. But without a serious effort at philosophical analysis, understandings of the nature and implications of mental illness are likely to be inadequate or simply wrong.

This course will address a number of important conceptual problems entailed in the disciplines of psychiatry and clinical psychology and their intersections with the rest of society. It will challenge intuitive or culturally normative notions about the realm of the “mental”; about what constitutes “illness”; about personal identity, agency, freedom, and responsibility; about the role of the legal system in regulating behavior; and about our capacities to grasp, categorize, and explain the experiences of others. Participants in this seminar will learn that the question “What is mental illness?” is as complicated and controversial as it is intriguing.

Along the way, students will come to understand that the diversity of human experience manifests, among other ways, in a remarkably broad range of emotion, cognition, and behavior. They will examine their own formulations and preconceptions about mental illness and those deemed mentally ill. Students will thereby augment their capacities to recognize, and suggest remedies for, the effects of prevalent beliefs and practices on a significant proportion of the population whose stigmatization and consequent marginalization are problematic in a pluralistic society.

Required texts:

- Richard J. McNally, *What is Mental Illness?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).
- Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).
- All other assigned readings are posted to the Blackboard course site.

Reference resources (among others):

- K.W.M. Fulford, Tim Thornton, and George Graham, eds., *Oxford Textbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). This is on reserve at Bailey/Howe Library.

- K.W.M. Fulford et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). This is on reserve at Bailey/Howe Library.
- Christian Perring, "Mental Illness," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/mental-illness>.
- Dominic Murphy, "Philosophy of Psychiatry," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/psychiatry>.
- *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* (Johns Hopkins University Press). This is the official journal of the Association for the Advancement of Philosophy and Psychiatry. It is published quarterly and, over the years, has included a wide range of relevant articles.
- Several potentially useful resources can be found on the web site of the Association for the Advancement of Philosophy and Psychiatry (<https://philosophyandpsychiatry.org/>), including but not limited to some past issues of the organization's *Bulletin*.

Learning objectives: By the end of this seminar students will:

- Develop an awareness of the wide range of human emotion, cognition, and behavior.
- Describe how contemporary psychiatry employs the constructs of mental, physical, symptom, diagnosis/illness, and explanation/cause in its approach to mental illness and the mentally ill.
- Analyze the philosophical questions raised by contemporary psychiatric theory and practice.
- Develop an awareness of how one's attitudes, beliefs, values, and assumptions influence interactions with and views about those who are considered mentally ill.
- Critique the assumptions inherent in the approaches commonly taken by the professional community and by members of the society at large to mental illness and the mentally ill.
- Cultivate an understanding of the origins of the stigma attached to those considered mentally ill and of the manifestations, and implications for justice, of their marginalization in our society.
- Analyze information critically and develop and defend a coherent set of recommendations to address one aspect of the complex problem of understanding and addressing mental illness and the mentally ill in the context of a pluralistic society.
- Synthesize philosophical and scientific ideas from academic texts and communicate about them effectively in oral and written forms.

Requirements:

- Regular attendance and active participation in class discussions, giving evidence of having completed and considered thoughtfully the assigned readings
- An oral introduction to the topic and reading(s) for one particular class meeting
- A short essay on the topic discussed during the week of the oral presentation noted above
- A research and writing project that will yield an oral presentation and a seminar paper

Expectations:

- Attendance: Success in this seminar requires attendance by all students at all class meetings. If you need to miss a class meeting due to illness or other reason you must notify the instructor prior to the class meeting you will miss.

- Punctuality: In addition to attending each class meeting, you are expected and required to arrive on time.
- Communication: The official means of communication outside of class are e-mail and Blackboard. It is an absolute requirement that you check them and respond to your UVM e-mail on a daily basis.
- Assignments: Timely completion of all assignments – reading, writing, preparation for class discussions – is expected and required. Writing assignments submitted after due dates will have 10% of the available points deducted for each day beyond the due dates.
- Participation: Participation in class discussions is a major method of learning in the seminar and is therefore expected and required. Meaningful participation necessitates preparation and thus assigned reading must be completed prior to each class meeting. All discussions must be civil and the viewpoints of all students must be treated respectfully.
- Confidentiality: Some of the subject matter addressed in this seminar is, by its nature, sensitive, and some of what you will hear, including the life experiences of the guests who will be joining us from time to time, must be treated with respect and confidentiality. We will discuss this in more detail as the seminar progresses.
- University-wide policies: All UVM policies, including but not limited to those referring to academic dishonesty and plagiarism, are applicable in this seminar.

Grading: The final grade will be based on the following components and weightings:

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| ▪ Participation in class discussions | 25% |
| ▪ Oral introduction of one topic and readings | 10% |
| ▪ Short essay (3-4 pages) | 15% |
| ▪ Research presentation | 10% |
| ▪ Seminar paper (12-15 pages) | 40% |

ASSIGNMENTS

Oral introduction of topic and readings:

- Each of you will be assigned one class meeting for which you will introduce the topic and reading(s) for that day.
- You will give a summary and preliminary analysis of approximately 10 minutes' duration which will serve as a point of departure for the ensuing class-wide discussion.

Short essay:

- You will produce a short essay (3-4 pages), reflecting on the topic, readings, and class discussion you introduced.
- Your essay will be due 2 weeks following the class meeting whose topic and readings you introduced.

Research presentation and seminar paper:

- Each of you, in consultation with the instructor, will select a topic relevant to the philosophy of psychiatry about which you will conduct literature-based research culminating in an oral presentation to the class and a seminar paper to be submitted to the instructor.

- From the 5th week of the seminar onward, time will periodically be set aside for discussions in class regarding expectations and benchmarks for completion of the project, choice of topics, identification of relevant sources, writing and citation styles, and revision and editing strategies.
- The instructor will meet with each of you individually for these purposes as well.
- Two library liaisons will also work with and make themselves available to you regarding your research: Dan DeSanto (Daniel.DeSanto@uvm.edu, Bailey/Howe Library, philosophy and psychology) and Gary Atwood (Gary.Atwood@uvm.edu, Dana Medical Library, psychiatry). Refer to their Research Guide on the Bailey/Howe Library web site.
- By the 8th week of the seminar you will submit your topic and brief (1 paragraph) prospectus to the instructor.
- During the 10th or 11th week of the seminar you will deliver an oral presentation to the class of 10-15 minutes' duration, reflecting the state of your research to date and the problems and quandaries encountered in conducting it.
- Presentation formats are left to your discretion and may include PowerPoint slides, handouts, or any other aids or methods you find useful.
- During the 12th or 13th week of the seminar you will submit for review by the instructor a presentable (i.e., not "rough") draft of your seminar paper (12-15 pages).
- The final version of the seminar paper will be due on the final day of the seminar.

Style for written assignments:

- Include your name, the course title, and the date.
- Give your paper a title.
- Use Times New Roman 12-point font.
- Double space the body of the paper.
- Use 1-inch margins (left, right, top, and bottom).
- Number all pages after the first one.
- Indent the first line of each new paragraph.
- Proofread and spellcheck your writing for errors.

Process for submitting written assignments:

1. All documents must be saved as Word documents (.docx) and be titled according to the following format: Your Last Name_Assignment Name.docx. If it is the first draft of the assignment, please mark it as Draft1, following the assignment name. (Examples: Trump_ShortEssay.docx or Putin_SeminarPaperDraft1.docx)
2. Please submit all written work to the instructor using the UVM File Transfer Service (rather than e-mail). The File Transfer Service address is: <https://filetransfer.uvm.edu>. You will receive an automatic confirmation e-mail from the system when the documents you post there have been downloaded.
3. It is your responsibility to maintain a virus-free computer and to send documents that can be opened successfully and safely. Corrupted files will be considered as not having met the assignment deadline.

- Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness*, 3-8, 36-40, 41-48, 67-68, 78-80, 90-92, 193-195, 210-216, 217-219; more if interested (T)
- McNally, Chapter 7 (T)
- Zachar, “Four Conceptual Abstractions” (rec.)

Guest Team Leader, START (Stabilization, Treatment, and Recovery Team), Howard Center (R)

Week 5: September 25 and 27

Topics Explanations: What causes mental illnesses?
What is “mental” about mental illnesses?

Reading McNally, Chapters 5 and 6 (T)
 Graham, *The Disordered Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Mental Illness*, Chapters 2 and 4 (R)

Project Introduction and overview of expectations

Week 6: October 2 and 4

Topics Interventions: What do psychiatric drugs do?
How do clinicians interact with psychiatric patients and families?

Reading Valenstein, *Blaming the Brain: The Truth about Drugs and Mental Health*, Chapter 3 (T) and Chapter 4 (R)

Project Choosing topics and formulating questions

Guests Research workshop with library liaisons Dan DeSanto and Gary Atwood (T)
(Review their on-line tutorials before class and bring your laptops to class)
Medical Director, Community Support Program, Howard Center (R)

Week 7: October 9 and 11

Topics Complications: What are the drawbacks of psychiatric treatment?
What are the alternatives to conventional psychiatric care?

Reading Tekin, “Self-concept through the Diagnostic Looking Glass” (T)
 Bracken and Thomas, “Challenges to the Modernist Identity of Psychiatry” (R)
 Thomas, “What is Critical Psychiatry?”
(<https://www.madinamerica.com/2013/01/what-is-critical-psychiatry/>) (R)

Project Writing prospectuses

Guest Chief Medical Officer, Howard Center (R)

Week 8: October 16 and 18

Topics Rights: When (if ever) is it permissible to coerce people into treatment?
When (if ever) is it permissible to hospitalize people involuntarily?

Reading Chodoff, “Involuntary Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill as a Moral Issue” (T)
 Aviv, “God Knows Where I Am” (T)

Project Topics and brief prospectuses due (R)
Individual meetings with instructor outside of class time

Guest Director, Mental Health Law Project, Vermont Legal Aid (R)

Week 9: October 23 and 25

Topics Experiences: Who are the “experts” on mental illnesses?
Whose interests does contemporary psychiatry serve?

Reading Lewis, “Democracy in Psychiatry,” and Moncrief, “Neoliberalism and Psychiatry,” in Cohen and Timimi, eds., Chapters 4 and 12 (T)
 Crichton et al., “Epistemic Injustice in Psychiatry” (R)
 White, Keynote Address, Alternatives 2018, Washington
(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1r8kpb-uf8iAdRvQXDQ3pQd9BCgMYZMo/view?usp=sharing>)
(R)

Project Individual meetings with instructor outside of class time (continued)

Guest Consultant, Vermont Psychiatric Survivors (R)

Week 10: October 30 and November 1

Project Student research presentations

Week 11: November 6 and 8

Project Student research presentations (continued)

Week 12: November 13 and 15

- Topics* Freedom & Responsibility: Does illness mitigate freedom and responsibility?
What is “addiction”?
- Reading* Wilson and Adshead, “Criminal Responsibility” (T)
 Morse, “Addiction and Criminal Responsibility” to p. 175 (T)
 Foddy and Savulescu, “A Liberal Account of Addiction” (R)
 Flanagan, “What Is It Like to Be an Addict?” (R)
- Project* Presentable draft due (first half of class) (R)
Revising and editing
- Guest* Clinician, Chittenden County Treatment Court, Howard Center (R)

Thanksgiving Break: November 19 – 23

Week 13: November 27 and 29

- Topics* Reactions: To what can the stigma of mental illness be attributed?
How can (or should) the stigma of mental illness be eliminated?
- Reading* Corrigan and Watson, “At Issue: Stop the Stigma: Call Mental Illness a
Brain Disease” (T)
 Jorm and Griffiths, “The Public’s Stigmatizing Attitudes towards People
with Mental Disorders: How Important are Biomedical Conceptualizations?”
(T)
 Pescosolido et al., “‘A Disease Like Any Other?’ A Decade of Change in
Public Reactions to Schizophrenia, Depression, and Alcohol Dependence” (T)
- Project* Presentable draft due (second half of class) (R)
- Guests* Founders and Music and Executive Directors, Me2/ Orchestra (R)

Week 14: December 4 and 6

- Topics* Conclusions: Is psychiatry’s conceptual approach to mental illness valid?
Is psychiatry’s clinical approach to the mentally ill humane?
- Reading* Aftab, “Social Misuse of Disorder Designation” (T)
- Project* Paper due (R)