

**Philosophy 98hf: Sellars's *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*
Harvard University, Fall 2007**

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Office hours: Thu., 1–3pm, or by appointment

Course Description:

Wilfrid Sellars's *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (1956) is a seminal work of mid-twentieth-century analytic philosophy by one of the most important—and influential—American philosophers we have ever had. The book is most famous for Sellars's anti-foundationalist attack on the “myth of the given,” but it is brimming with other important and exciting ideas in metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of science, including the first functionalist treatment of thought, Sellars's intriguing proposal that private experiences are theoretical posits, his nuanced account of the relation between the “manifest image” of our place in the world provided by common sense and the “scientific image” provided by the natural sciences, and Sellars's famous claim that to ascribe knowledge to someone is to place that person in the “logical space of reasons.” But despite its slim size (a little over 100 pages in the edition we will be reading), the book is also notoriously difficult—so difficult, indeed, that there now exist two separate section-by-section reading guides to the book. With the aid of these guides, our goal in this tutorial will be to come to grips with the provocative and subtle arguments put forward by Sellars through an extremely slow and careful reading of this classic book.

Time and Place: Mondays, 4–5:30pm, in Robinson 208

Required Texts:

The following books are available for purchase in the textbook section of the Coop:

Sellars, Wilfrid. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind (With an Introduction by Richard Rorty and a Study Guide by Robert Brandom)*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

deVries, Willem A., and Timm Triplett. *Knowledge, Mind, and the Given: Reading Wilfrid Sellars's “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind.”* Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000.

Requirements:

Reading, discussing, and writing about the assigned readings will be the central activities of this course. There is a reading assignment for each meeting of the tutorial. Each of these reading assignments consists of a short portion from *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (usually only about 9–10 pages) that is required reading, together with selections from the deVries & Triplett and Brandom study guides that are recommended reading. It is *absolutely essential* that you carefully read the relevant portions of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* before each meeting, as our discussions will presuppose familiarity with the assigned material in that text. The reading guides are less essential, but during the more difficult portions of the book you will probably find them helpful (especially the deVries & Triplett guide).

The breakdown of grades will be as follows:

35% *Attendance and participation.*

Evaluation will be based on attendance, preparation, and contributions to discussion during tutorial meetings.

15% *Response papers.*

Each week you will be given a set of study questions for the next week's reading. You are to pick one of those questions and write a 1- to 2-paragraph reply to the question. (The reply should be *at most* one double-spaced page in length.) Response papers are due by email 24 hours before each week's meeting. Also, everyone gets one "get out of jail free" card: you are allowed to skip one response paper (your pick which week).

20% *4-page paper.*

There will be 4-page paper due during week 5. Paper topics will be distributed in advance and will ask students to analyze and discuss material from Sellars's text. *This paper must be rewritten in light of the teaching instructor's comments and resubmitted during week 7.* The final grade for this paper will be an average of the grades for the two versions. (Note that revised papers are held to a higher standard.)

30% *6-page paper.*

A final 6-page paper will be due by 5pm on December 18th. As before, paper topics will be distributed in advance.

Late work will be penalized 1/3rd of a letter grade per day (e.g., from a B+ to a B). Extensions will be granted only under exceptional circumstances, and only if an extension is requested *before* the due date of the assignment.

A note on plagiarism: Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. If you have any doubts about what counts as plagiarism, or about how to properly reference a source, consult the course instructor.

Reading Schedule

NOTE: Readings in brackets are recommended but not required. Page numbers for *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind (EPM)* refer to the Harvard University Press reprint (not the version found at the end of the deVries & Triplett study guide).

- Mon., Oct. 1:* deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 1–7 [background on sense-datum theories]
 Sellars, *EPM*, Part I, §§1–6 (pp. 13–21)
 [deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 7–14]
 [Brandom study guide, pp. 119–130]
- Thu., Oct. 11:* Sellars, *EPM*, Part I, §7, and Part II (pp. 21–32)
 [deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 14–18]
 [Brandom study guide, pp. 130–134]
- Mon., Oct. 15:* Sellars, *EPM*, Part III (pp. 32–46)
 [deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 19–33]
 [Brandom study guide, pp. 134–147]
- Mon., Oct. 22:* Sellars, *EPM*, Parts IV and V (pp. 46–57)
 [deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 34–51]
 [Brandom study guide, pp. 147–149]
- Mon., Oct. 29:* Sellars, *EPM*, Parts VI and VII (pp. 57–68)
 [deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 52–66]
 [Brandom study guide, pp. 149–152]
- Mon., Nov. 5:* Sellars, *EPM*, Part VIII (pp. 68–79)
 [deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 67–107]
 [Brandom study guide, pp. 152–162]
- Mon., Nov. 19:* Sellars, *EPM*, Parts IX and X (pp. 79–88)
 [deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 108–122]
 [Brandom study guide, pp. 162–170]
- Mon., Nov. 26:* Sellars, *EPM*, Parts XI, XII, and XIII (pp. 88–98)
 [deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 123–135]
 [Brandom study guide, pp. 170–173]
- Mon., Dec. 3:* Sellars, *EPM*, Parts XIV and XV (pp. 98–107)
 [deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 136–157]
 [Brandom study guide, pp. 174–177]
- Mon., Dec. 10:* Sellars, *EPM*, Part XVI (pp. 107–117)
 [deVries & Triplett study guide, pp. 158–178]
 [Brandom study guide, pp. 177–181]
- Mon., Dec. 17:* SLACK