Philosophy of Mental Health

Time and Place

Physical Venue:

Tuesdays 13:30-16:00

Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen,

South Campus, Karen Blixens Plads 16, Room 8B.0.16

Online Platform:

https://ucph-ku.zoom.us/j/2188071867 (https://ucph-ku.zoom.us/j/2188071867)

Course Description

Mental illness is an increasing problem involving dramatic personal and socioeconomic costs. Developments in genetics, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience over the last two decades have made it obvious for psychiatrists and psychologists alike that the question 'what is mental illness?' is still an open question that requires interdisciplinary resources. Philosophy of mental health is an attempt to develop a solid conceptual framework for the interdisciplinary exploration of mental illness. This course is an introduction to the burgeoning field of philosophy of psychiatry. Against a solid historical background, the course sets out to present, examine, and discuss concepts fundamental to our understanding of mental illness (mind, body, self, person, rationality, emotion, normality/disorder), the meaning of psychopathology, the relationship between biology (genetics, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience in particular) and subjectivity, and the question of therapy (the values and norms of well-being).

Learning Objectives

This course will introduce the student to some of basic philosophical dimensions of mental health. This introduction will enable the student to understand and evaluate critically the problems involved in the growing challenges to mental health. Besides getting a solid understanding of the historical background of contemporary philosophy of mental health, the student can expect to learn about the strengths and limits of scientific explanations of mental illness; the complex relationship of biological, psychological, and social factors involved in mental illness; the question of psychopathology and phenomenology in a scientific culture; the problem of health care; the issue of medicalization; and the scope and aim of therapy.

Faculty

René Rosfort, PhD & MA (University of Copenhagen, 2008 & 2003). Associate Professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion (Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen). For more information, see **here** (http://teol.ku.dk/skc/english/staff/?pure=en/persons/77458)

Office Hours by Appointment

Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen

South Campus, Karen Blixens Plads 16, Room 6B.1.19

Textbooks (all available digitally via The Royal Library)

- George Graham. *The Disordered Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Mental Illness*, 3rd edition London: Routledge 2021.
- Richard J. McNally. *What is Mental Illness?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2011.
- Roy Porter. *Madness: A Brief History of Mental Illness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002.

Expectations of the students

The students are expected to have prepared themselves carefully for each class, that is, to have done the required reading and to think about issues, problems, and questions to be discussed in class. Moreover, the students are expected to engage in the discussions as well as the group work, and to make use of both the theoretical tools and the historical background when discussing the issues in question. According to UCPH policy, all students must be present 75% of the time to receive a grade.

Requirements for DIS-students

For undergraduate students (bachelor students):

Active attendance (at least attendance in 75% of the sessions documented by protocol). The syllabus volume and content are determined by the teacher, and two papers are to be submitted on Absalon of 4-5 pages each, as well as a final major assignment, which has a size of 19,200-24,000 characters, i.e. 8-10 pages, and based on 400-500 pages of literature.

Requirements for KU-students (both Danish students and Exchange students)

For undergraduate students (bachelor students):

Active attendance (at least attendance in 75% of the sessions documented by protocol). A final major assignment, which has a size of 24.000-28.800 characters, i.e. 10-12 pages, and based on 400-500 pages literature in agreement with the teacher. The assignments is assessed by the teacher and a grade is given in accordance with the 7-point grading scale. If participation takes place via streaming for more than 25% of the sessions, the following is required to pass the course: A final assignment assignment that has a scope of 36,000-48,000

characters, i.e. 15-20 pages, and based on 1,200 to 1,500 pages of literature. The teacher must approve the subject and literature.

For graduate students (kandidat/master students):

Active attendance (at least attendance in 75% of the sessions documented by protocol). A final paper of 36.000-48-000 characters, i.e. 15-20 pages, and based on 800-1000 pages of literature in agreement with the teacher. The assignment is assessed by the teacher, and a grade is given in accordance with the 7-point grading scale. If participation takes place via streaming for more than 25% of the sessions, the following is required to pass the course: An assignment of 60,000-72,000 characters, i.e. 25-30 pages, and based on approx. 1,500 pages of literature. The teacher must approve the subject and literature.

Exam Dates (final paper)

DIS-students: May 14, 2026 at midnight (that is, 23.59)
KU- and Exchange-students: May 28, 2026 at noon (that is, 11.59)

Grading (only for DIS-students)

2 short assignments of 4-5 pages (each counting for 20% of the final grade)	40%
A final paper of 8-10 pages	45%
Engaged participation	15%

GAI (Generative Artificial Intelligence)

UCPH permits the use of GAI (Generative Artificial Intelligence) in written assignments. You are required to follow the UCPH rules for the use of GAI and include an GAI declaration with the final paper. You can find the GAI rules, the template for the GAI declaration, and guidelines for completing the template **here (https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/90454/pages/ucph-rules-for-the-use-of-gai)**. If you do not include an GAI declaration with the final paper, you will fail the class.

Plagiarism Policy

In accordance with UCPH rules for academic ethics, there will be a no tolerance policy towards cheating and plagiarism. The submission of any paper which is not your own work will result in an automatic fail and may have severe consequences for your future studies

Fagets læseplan

Spring til i dag | Rediger

Læseplan-siden viser en tabel-orienteret visning af fagets program og basis for fagets karaktergivning. Du kan tilføje alle andre kommentarer, noter, eller tanker, du har om fagets struktur, politik eller andet.

For at tilføje kommentarer, klik "Rediger" linket øverst.

Oversigt over fag:

Dato	Nærmere oplysninger	Forfalder
tirs 27. Jan 2026	Session 1. Introduction: What Is Mental Health and Why Does Our Mind Suffer? (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228672&include_contexts=course_90454)	13.30 til 16:00
tirs 10. Feb 2026	Session 2. A Brief History of Suffering I: From Humoralism to Nerves (500 BCE—1800 CE) (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228673&include_contexts=course_90454)	13.30 til 16:00
tirs 17. Feb 2026	Session 3. A Brief History of Suffering II: From Pinel Over Freud to DSM-5 (1800—2013) (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228680&include_contexts=course_90454)	13.30 til 16:00
tirs 24. Feb 2026	Session 4. A Suffering Mind —A Disturbing Society—A Broken Brain: The Encounter of Three Cultures (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228678&include_contexts=course_90454)	13.30 til 16:00
man 2. Mar 2026	1st Short Assignment (only for DIS-students, that is, not for KU-and Exchange students) (https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/90454/assignments/256304)	forfalder 23.59
tirs 3. Mar 2026	Session 5. An Impersonal Disease: Evolution, Genes, and Neuroscience	13.30 til 16:00

Dato	Nærmere oplysninger	Forfalder
	(https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228679&include_contexts=course_90454)	
tirs 10. Mar 2026	Session 6. A Societal Problem: Antipsychiatry, Scientific Constructions, and Society (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228674&include_contexts=course_90454)	13.30 til 16:00
tirs 7. Apr 2026	Session 7. Being a Self: Phenomenology and the First-Person Perspective (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228681&include_contexts=course_90454)	13.30 til 16:00
tirs 14. Apr 2026	Session 8. A Personal Illness: Psychopathology (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228676&include_contexts=course_90454)	13.30 til 16:00
man 27. Apr 2026	2nd Short Assignment (only for DIS-students, that is, not for KU-and Exchange students) (https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/90454/assignments/256305)	forfalder 23.59
tirs 28. Apr 2026	Session 9. Being a Person: Well-Being over Time (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228677&include_contexts=course_90454)	13.30 til 16:00
tirs 5. Maj 2026	Session 10. Dealing with Suffering: Therapy and Medicine (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228682&include_contexts=course_90454)	13.30 til 16:00
tirs 12. Maj 2026	Session 11. Living with Fragility: A Life-Long Challenge (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=228675&include_contexts=course_90454)	13.30 til 15:00
tors 14. Maj 2026	Final Paper (https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/90454/assignments/256306)	forfalder 23.59