

Philosophy 260: Philosophy of Mind and Consciousness.

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Course Meets: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 11-11:50 a.m., Buckman 334

Introduction.

As human beings we are uniquely endowed with a power we call consciousness, which allows us to *be aware* of what happens to us and to have a point of view on it. But what fundamentally is consciousness? What causes it? What is the relationship between conscious awareness and other aspects of reality, such as the laws of nature or especially our own bodies? We will begin the class by acquainting ourselves with the range of phenomena that fall within the domain of mind and consciousness, and then we will turn to the difficult task of defining consciousness in precise philosophical terms, and assessing the implications of our definitions. We will be led through our study to identify a range of philosophical problems to which the fact of consciousness gives rise: is the mind identical with the brain? is consciousness a private affair? do we need the concept of consciousness at all, or is it some sort of philosophical mistake? A consideration of these questions will take us through some of the most influential philosophical positions in classical and contemporary philosophy of mind. As well as allowing us to develop greater insight into these specific questions, our study will also lead us to consider what difference a proper understanding of consciousness can (or should) make to how we live our lives. Our approach to consciousness will begin with the classic debate regarding mind-body dualism vs. reductionism, and our investigations will lead us from there into a broad range of considerations concerning the nature of meaning, of knowledge, of personal identity, and ultimately of mental health, of social and political life, and more.

Tentative Schedule of Readings: Please note that this schedule is subject to change.

You should refer to the schedule of readings and the schedule of themes regularly in order to keep track of what readings you are responsible for, and where we are in the course.

Week of:

Reading:

Aug. 23	Introduction to the course
	Ackerman, <u>An Alchemy of Mind</u> , Ch. 1
W Aug 25	What is Consciousness?
F Aug 27	Ackerman, Ch. 1
	--"mind" vs. "brain"
Aug. 30	Ackerman, <u>An Alchemy of Mind</u> , Chs. 2-5
M Aug 30	Ackerman, Chs. 2

- evolution
- W Sept 1 Ackerman, Chs. 3, 5
- mental process: reasoning, unconscious
- F Sept 3 Ackerman, Chs. 4
- philosophy of mind

I. Classic Positions: Rationalist Dualism and Empiricist Reductive Materialism.

- Sept. 6 Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditations 1 and 2
- M Sept 6--labor day, no class
- W Sept 8 Descartes Meditation 1
- the nature of consciousness and systematic doubt
- F Sept 10 Descartes Meditation 2
- the cogito argument

- Sept. 13 Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditations 2 and 6
- M Sept 13 Descartes, Meditation 2
- difference of mind and body, wax
- W Sept 15 Descartes, Meditation 2
- the wax argument, other minds
- F Sept 17 Descartes, Meditation 6
- mind/body dualism

- Sept. 20 Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation 6
- Place, "Is Consciousness a Process in the Brain?" (found in Chalmers, Philosophy of Mind, pp.55-69)
- M Sept 20 Descartes, Meditation 6:
- overview and problems of dualism
- W Sept 22 **In-class test on Descartes**
- F Sept 24 Place, "Is Consciousness a Process in the Brain?"
- introduction to materialism
- "is of composition" vs. "is of definition"

- Sept. 27 Place, "Is Consciousness a Process in the Brain?"
- Ackerman, An Alchemy of Mind, Chs. 6 and 7 (pp 37-46)
- M Sept 27 Place, "Is Consciousness a Process in the Brain?"
- establishing sameness of event
- W Sept 29 Place, "Is Consciousness a Process in the Brain?"
- explaining away phenomenality
- implications for philosophy of mind
- F Oct 1 Ackerman, Chs. 6 and 7 (pp 37-46)
- Is Place's view of the brain realistic?

- Oct. 4 Kripke, "Naming and Necessity" (Chalmers reader, pp. 329-333)
- M Oct 4 Kripke, "Naming and Necessity"

- mind-brain identity theories
- "type" vs. "token" identity
- W Oct 6 Kripke, "Naming and Necessity"
- problems with the materialist response to dualism
- F Oct 8 In-class test on "dualism" and "mind-brain identity theory"

III. Challenges to the Classical Views: Analytic Philosophy.

- Oct. 11 Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" (Chalmers reader, pp. 219-225)
- M Oct 11 Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?"
 - first-person perspective
- W Oct 13 Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?"
 - irreducibility of the subjective to the objective
- F Oct 15 Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?"
 - what philosophy of mind must account for

- Oct. 18 Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia" (Chalmers reader, pp. 273-280)
- M Oct 18--no class, Fall break
- W Oct 20 Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"
 - qualia
- F Oct 22 Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"
 - problems in other positions

- Oct. 25 Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"
- Ben-Ze'ev, "Making Mental Properties More Natural" (handout)
- M Oct 25 Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"
 - what Mary didn't know
- W Oct 27 Ben-Ze'ev, "Making Mental Properties More Natural" (handout)
 - reconceiving the body as dynamic
- F Oct 29 Ben-Ze'ev, "Making Mental Properties More Natural" (handout)
 - higher order organizations; emergent realities

- Nov. 1 Clark and Chalmers, "The Extended Mind" (Chalmers reader, pp. 643-652)
- M Nov 1 Chalmers, "The Extended Mind"
 - cognition as coupling
- W Nov 3 Chalmers, "The Extended Mind"
 - environmental embeddedness
- F Nov 5 Chalmers, "The Extended Mind"
 - "externalist" philosophy of mind

IV. Challenges to the Classical View: Continental Philosophy.

- Nov. 8 Ackerman, An Alchemy of Mind, Chs. 20-22 (pp 121-150)

- Russon, Human Experience, Chapter 1
- M Nov 8 Ackerman Chs. 20-22 (pp 121-150)
--the breadth of mind: personality
- W Nov 10 Russon, Chapter 1
--interpretation
- F Nov 12 Russon, Chapter 1
--situatedness
- Nov. 15 Russon, Human Experience, Chapters 2-3
- M Nov 15 Russon, Chapter 2
--the intentional body
- W Nov 17 Russon, Chapter 2
--habituation
- F Nov 19 Russon, Chapter 2
--reconceiving the relation of mind and body
- Nov. 22 Russon, Human Experience, Chapter 3
Ackerman, An Alchemy of Mind, Chs. 13-14 (pp 75-83), 18-19 (105-118)
- M Nov 22 Russon, Chapter 3, Ackerman, Chs. 13-14, 18-19
--emotion, memory, objects
- W Nov 24--Thanksgiving Break--no class
- F Nov 26--Thanksgiving Break--no class
- Nov. 29 Russon, Human Experience, Chapter 4, Chapter 5 "Neurotic Situations"
- M Nov 29 Russon, Chapter 4
--how we know others
- W Dec 1 Russon, Chapter 4
--the self: familial, social, and personal
- F Dec 3 Russon, Chapter 5, "Neurotic Situations"
--the meaning of bodily practices I: walking, sleeping,
eating, excreting
- Dec 6 Russon, Human Experience, Chapter 5, "Neurotic Situations"
- M Dec 6 Russon, Chapter 5, "Neurotic Situations"
--the meaning of bodily practices II: sex and language
- W Dec 8--last class

Course Texts:

Ackerman, Diane, An Alchemy of Mind
 Descartes, Rene, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, (Hackett).
 Chalmers, David, Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings, (Oxford).
 Russon, John, Human Experience: Philosophy, Neurosis and the Elements of Everyday Life, (State University of New York Press).

Course Objectives:

This list of objectives will give you some idea of what you should be aiming to accomplish through study of this course, as well as giving you an idea of some of the important principles behind my evaluation of your work in the class. (You should note that some of these objectives pertain to the specific content of the course whereas others pertain to larger issues of philosophical and intellectual development in general).

- To become acquainted with several of the major philosophers who work in the Philosophy of Mind and to understand their positions on key issues.
- To be able to evaluate the philosophical systems and theories of the Philosophers of Mind fairly but critically.
- To be able to see the relevance of these philosophical debates to concrete issues, experiences and practices in human life.
- To develop more fully the ability to understand sympathetically an argument or a position that is not one's own.
- To improve one's ability to communicate one's own views and arguments accurately and without prejudice.
- To develop the ability to analyze and criticize arguments and theses--including one's own.
- To develop skill in summarizing and explaining the philosophical positions of others in one's own terms.
- To develop the ability to formulate for oneself a view that is logically sound and based on a careful assessment of the relevant evidence.

Assignments and Expectations:

Your success in this course will be largely dependent upon how actively you engage with the readings, assignments, lectures and discussions. I expect you to attend and to participate in every class, and more importantly to have prepared in advance for our class meetings. The class will be geared toward the student who has really spent time with the readings before coming to class, and this means not just having read through the texts but having thought about them and developed an active relationship to them. Learning is not primarily a matter of passive reception, but is a dialogue of question and answer. To put this another way, learning happens when the material you encounter answers questions that you are asking independently. *For this reason, the class is aimed in particular at the student who has read carefully and meditated on the reading in order to develop his or her own thoughts, questions and ideas about them before coming to class.* I will be expecting you to develop such a dialogue of question and answer with the material we deal with in this course. In addition, the course will involve periodic on-going homework assignments, as well as 4 major assignments. The grade will be broken down as follows:

Two In-class tests (15% each = 30 % total):

Wednesday Sept 22: in class test on Descartes

Friday Oct 8: in-class test on dualism and mind-brain identity theory.

5-page paper on Analytic Challenges to the Classical Debate (25 %):

Due November 15.

This will be a critical essay in which you will (i) clearly, accurately and with proper textual citation explain the positions of either Descartes or Place and one of the philosophers studied in Section II (Nagel, Jackson, Ben-Ze'ev, or Clark and Chalmers) (ii) explain the similarities and differences between the two positions, and (iii) come to your own critical judgment about which one is right, giving reasons to justify your conclusion. The work you submit must be your own, and any use of other books or websites must be properly documented.

8-page paper on Russon (30 %):

Due December 8.

This will be a critical essay, to be written in the same form as the 5-page critical essay, above. You will write a critical philosophical analysis of one of the following themes in Russon's book Human Experience in a way that is illuminated by comparison with another philosopher or philosophers we have studied in the course. You will write on one of the following themes: (1) the relation of mind and body, (2) the experience of others, or (3) personal identity.

Attendance and Participation (15%):

Please note: satisfactory participation requires completion of all written assignments. In addition, I have explained below my further expectations concerning your attendance and participation:

The participation grade is a qualitative assessment of your engagement in this class in three areas: attendance and level of preparation for individual class meetings, active participation in class discussion, and satisfactory completion of assignments (including periodic homework assignments). The following information addresses each of these three areas in specific detail and should be read very carefully, because it is essentially a guide for how you can do well in this class. *If you have any questions about how to go about meeting these expectations, or if like many students, you are apprehensive about class participation, I will be glad to talk with you during office hours and offer specific suggestions and advice. Your participation grade is in your hands: take initiative in thinking about and acting on these guidelines!*

“A” Range:

- Consistently demonstrates mastery of content and context of readings through careful preparation and analysis

- Connects daily readings to recurring themes of the course by contrasting and comparing them with past readings; makes and adequately defends judgments about texts and ideas; consistently raises questions and highlights issues of importance connected to the readings
- Initiates discussion; listens respectfully to the ideas and opinions of others and responds in a way that benefits the discussion rather than dominates it.
- Has no more than three unexcused absences in the semester; comes to class on time.

“B” Range

- Frequently demonstrates attention to content and context of readings by raising good questions about texts and ideas
- Shows improvement over the semester in understanding texts and their significance and connecting daily assignments to past readings; makes and adequately defends judgments about texts and ideas; often raises questions and highlights issues of importance connected to the readings
- Listens respectfully to the ideas and opinions of others and responds in a way that benefits the discussion rather than dominates it.
- Has no more than three unexcused absences in the semester; generally comes to class on time.

“C” Range

- Does not always complete assigned readings prior to class; is unable or unwilling to engage in discussions and/or respond to questions or raise questions related to the readings.
 - Makes connections between texts rarely and with difficulty; makes judgments about texts and ideas based solely on opinion or feeling; demonstrates little grasp of the overall significance of the readings and makes little effort to investigate further their significance.
 - Waits for others to initiate discussion and usually speaks only when called upon.
- OR**
- Has three to four unexcused absences in the semester and/or a pattern of arriving late for class.

“D” Range

- Is minimally prepared for class, having only scanned the reading assignments if at all; consistently fails to bring assigned materials to class or to complete written assignments and shows no sign of engagement with the texts prior to class.
- Makes indefensible connections between reading and/or judgments about the readings that are free from thoughtful analysis; is uninterested in the significance of the readings apart from passing the course.
- Is passive in class; shows little respect or interest in the points raised by peers and the professor.

OR

- Misses five to seven classes in a semester and/or often comes late to class.

“F” Range

- Everything in the “D” range but with more than seven unexcused absences.

Some remarks concerning paper-writing:

For some of you, this may be your first time writing a critical philosophy essay. Here are a few things to bear in mind as you undertake this work.

Grammar, spelling, and punctuation are important. Some students feel that these matters are mere trivialities, and that it is somehow unfair for professors to deduct points from a paper for mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. In fact, however, these matters are integral to your ability to communicate clearly and accurately. Your mastery of language and communicative skills is a significant part of your assignment, and it is your responsibility to learn and to employ proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Revision is essential to good writing, and so it is important that you begin work on assigned papers as soon as possible to allow adequate time for proofreading and revision. If you want your paper to be something you will feel proud of when it is finished, and if you want to receive a good grade, you need to ensure that you have time to do your best.

Your primary task in the papers you write for this course is to reconstruct and demonstrate your understanding of some of the most significant arguments advanced by contemporary philosophers of the period. Your task is not to write a pure "research paper" that consolidates and presents other people's ideas. Rather, you will be writing interpretive and critical essays in which you defend your own interpretations of the texts, justifying your interpretations with arguments and references to those texts.

You will find it difficult (impossible, actually) to write a first-rate paper for this course without some quotations or textual references. All quotations and references (direct or oblique) to the ideas of someone other than yourself must be accompanied by a citation and a bibliographical acknowledgment. You may use any of the standard formats for bibliographical citations and references, provided they clearly identify the sources you are using, and allow the reader sufficient information to find the source in order to compare what you have said with the source you have cited.

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services as soon as possible.