Philosophy 315: The Philosophy of Mind

Contact Information

Professor Brandon N. Towl
Email: btowl@artsci.wustl.edu
Phone: (314) 276-6500
Office hours: After class, or by appointment
Office: Wilson Hall rm 109

TA Jan Plate
Email: jplate@artsci.wustl.edu
Phone: (314) 783-7964
Office hours: T 3-5
Office: Wilson Hall rm 116

Overview

This course is an introduction to contemporary debates in the philosophy of mind, focusing on questions such as the following: What is a mind? Is the mind just the brain? Or are minds products of brains? Could an artificial device—a computing machine or a robot—have a mind? How can mental events have physical consequences?

Basic Requirements

- All students should have a WashU email account and should check email regularly for updates and announcements. Some papers might be made available through Telesis, so students should be familiar with it as well.

- Students should obtain a copy of the texts for this class: *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* by K.T. Maslin and *Mind and Cognition* by William Lycan and Jesse Prinz.

Evaluation

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Participation: 10%. Attendance will be taken each class period. When discussions are held, we will take note of who participates (and who does not). I also reserve the right to issue pop-quizzes during a class. A pop-quiz counts towards you participation grade and is equivalent to one class attended. In order to get credit, one only need pass the quiz; pop-quizzes are not otherwise graded.

Journals: 10%. As you tackle the readings for this class, we will ask you to answer a series of questions that will require you to engage the readings and think deeper about certain topics. Journals will be collected periodically to ensure that you are doing this.
Exams: 50% -- Midterm 25%, Final exam 25%. If there is substantial improvement between the midterm and final exam, I will take this into consideration when determining final grades (in most cases, I will simply weight the final exam more heavily).

Long paper w/ peer commentary: 30%. Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to write a longer term paper (typically 15 or so pages long). A draft of this paper will be due earlier in the semester to allow for blind peer review, as would be done at a professional journal. Everyone who hands in a paper will also be a reviewer for two other papers, and in return receive two sets of comments/feedback on their own paper. You will be asked to revise the paper in light of the comments received before handing it in.

Working Calendar, Unit I: Metaphysics of Mind

Week 1 (Sept. 1, 3): What’s the Problem? And what are we talking about?
Read: Maslin Ch. 1; Introduction (pp. 3-10) in L&P

Week 2 (Sept. 8, 10): Dualism
Read: Maslin Ch. 2

Week 3 (Sept. 13, 15, 17): Mind-Brain Identity
Read: Maslin Ch. 3; Place “Is Consciousness a Brain Process?” (L&P); Armstrong “The Causal Theory of Mind” (L&P); Towl “Mind-Brain Correlations, Identity, and Neuroscience” (Telesis)

Week 4 (Sept. 20, 22, 24): Behaviorism and mental vocabulary
Read: Maslin Ch. 4; Skinner “About Behaviorism” (L&P)
Due: Journals on September 24th

Week 5 (Sept. 27, 29, Oct. 1): Machine Functionalism and AI
Read: Maslin Ch. 5; Putnam “The Nature of Mental States” (L&P), Haugeland “Semantic Engines” (L&P)
Complete: Handout on Turing Machines
Week 6 (Oct. 4, 6, 8): Reactions to Functionalism and AI, part I
Read: Block “Troubles with Functionalism” (L&P), Searle “Can Computers Think?” (L&P), Lycan, “The Continuity of the Levels of Nature” (L&P)

Week 7 (Oct. 11, 13): Reactions to Functionalism and AI, part II
Read: Churchland and Sejnowksi “Neural Representations and Neural Computation” (L&P), Van Gelder, “What Might Cognition Be, If Not Computation?” (L&P), Brooks “Intelligence without Representations” (L&P)
Fall Break October 15—No class

Week 8 (Oct. 18, 20, 22): Mental Causation
Read: Maslin Ch.7, Kim “Mental Causation” (L&P), McLaughlin “Type Epiphenomenalism” (L&P)
Due: Journals on October 18th
Midterm Exam tentatively scheduled for October 22nd

Working Calendar, Unit II: Consciousness

Week 9 (Oct. 25, 27, 29): The Problem of Consciousness
Read: Introduction (pp. 567-572) (L&P), Block “How Not to Find the Neural Correlates of Consciousness” (L&P), Chalmers “Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness” (Telesis)

Week 10 (Nov. 1, 3, 5): Qualia and “What it’s Like”
Read: VanGulick, “Understanding the Phenomenal Mind” (L&P), Dennett “Quining Qualia” (Telesis)

Week 11 (Nov. 8, 10, 12): Other Minds
Read: Maslin Ch. 9, other readings TBA
Due: Journals on November 10th; Paper drafts for peer review on November 12th
Working Calendar, Unit III: Intentionality

Week 13 (Nov. 15, 17, 19): Psychosemantics
Read: Haugeland, "The Intentionality All-Stars" (Telesis), Fodor "Information and Representation" (L&P), Millikan "Biosemantics" (L&P), Loewer "A Guide to Naturalizing Semantics" (L&P)

Week 14 (Nov. 22): Eliminativism
Read: Churchland, "Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes"

Week 15 (Nov. 29, Dec. 1, 3): Instrumentalism
Read: Dennett, "True Believers" (L&P), Stich "Dennett on Intentional Systems" (L&P), Dennett "Real Patterns" (L&P)
Due: Peer comments (Nov. 29)

Week 16 (Dec. 6, 8, 10): Catch-up and review
Due: Journals on December 6th
We will use this week to "catch-up", in case we are behind in the syllabus. Time permitting, we can also go over some final tips for the paper, review for the final, and touch upon some other topics.

Final Papers are due December 10th.
Final Exam is scheduled for Friday, December 17, 8:00 - 10:00 AM.