

Philosophy 355: Contemporary Philosophy
Fall 2008
Tuesdays and Thursdays: 9am - 10:15am
Benedict 201

Hamilton College
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Syllabus

Course Description and Overview:

Last spring, I sent an email to the students enrolled in this course, asking you to choose three of a selection of ten recent articles in top philosophy journals. The two articles most often chosen were:

“The Philosophy and Neuroscience Movement,” by Pete Mandik and Andrew Brook; and
“What is the Significance of the Intuition that Laws of Nature Govern?” by Susan Schneider.

This course will mainly focus on those two articles. These were apt choices, since they are in areas of philosophy that are currently quite popular. For the first article, we will focus on the problem of consciousness. The second article discusses the status and interpretation of laws of nature, as well as the role of intuitions in contemporary philosophy.

Our two main articles presume a familiarity with the current literature in philosophy of mind and cognitive neuroscience, on the one hand, and in philosophy of science, on the other. Much of our work will consist of background reading in those areas to facilitate a better understanding of the chosen articles. The background readings are mostly recent, as well.

At the end of the term, we will spend two classes on some amusing logic puzzles, including the ones in another article from the original list of ten:

“A Simple Solution to the Hardest Logic Puzzle Ever,” by Brian Rabern and Landon Rabern.

Texts

Churchland, Paul M. *Matter and Consciousness*, revised edition. MIT Press, 1988.

Articles available on ereserve or on the course website. (See below for the schedule of readings and see the course bibliography for full citations.)

On-Line Resources

The website for this course is:

www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Contemporary/Course_Home.htm

The course website includes an html syllabus, many of our readings, a course bibliography, class notes, assignments, other handouts, and links to websites specifically selected for this course. Only limited material, other than your grades, will be available on the Blackboard course pages. The Blackboard page will contain a link to the course website.

Assignments and Grading:

Your responsibilities for this course include the following, with their contributions to your grade calculation in parentheses:

Attendance and Participation

Two presentations (20%; 10% each)

Two four-to-six-page papers (40%; 20% each)

Midterm (20%)

Final (20%)

Attendance and participation: Classes are for your edification. You are responsible for any material presented in class, and any announcements made in class. If you miss a class, you should make sure find out what you have missed. Repeated missed classes may result in a re-structuring of your grade calculation.

Presentations: Each student's presentation will introduce a reading or readings to the class. Some classes will have more than one presentation. Students whose presentations are on the same day may work together. Presentations should last at least ten minutes, but may last as long as a full class period. More information about presentations, including a sign-up sheet, will be distributed in class.

Papers: You may write your papers on the topics you present, but this is not a requirement. Papers generally consist of a thesis, defending or criticizing work we are reading. These are not research papers, but some reading beyond the articles on the syllabus is likely to be useful and generally will be expected. More information about the paper assignments will be distributed in class. **The first paper is due on Tuesday, October 14. The second paper is due on Tuesday, December 9.**

Midterm and Final: The two exams will encourage breadth, in contrast to the papers and presentations, which encourage depth. The exams will be based straightforwardly on the readings and class discussions. Sample questions will be distributed before the exams.

Schedule:

Note: The number in parentheses following the day's topic indicate slots for student presentations.

Part I: Consciousness and Neuroscience

| Date | Topic | Readings to be Completed <i>Before Class</i> |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Thursday, 8/28 | Introduction Dualism and Behaviorism | |
| Tuesday, 9/2 | Dualism and Behaviorism | Descartes, from <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> Skinner, from <i>Science and Human Behavior</i> Hempel, "The Logical Analysis of Psychology" Churchland, pp 7-25 |
| Thursday, 9/4 | Reductionism and the Identity Theory (1) | Place, "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?" Churchland, pp 26-35 |
| Tuesday, 9/9 | Functionalism and the Multiple Realizability Objection (2) | Putnam, "The Nature of Mental States" Fodor, from "Something on the State of the Art" Churchland, pp 36-38 |
| Thursday, 9/11 | Troubles with Functionalism (2) | Block, "Troubles with Functionalism" Churchland, pp 38-42 |
| Tuesday, 9/16 | Qualia I (1) | Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" |
| Thursday, 9/18 | Qualia II (2) | Locke, "On Inverted Spectra" Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia" |
| Tuesday, 9/23 | Against Qualia (2) | Dennett, "Quining Qualia" |
| Thursday, 9/25 | Eliminativism and Folk Psychology (2) | Rorty, from <i>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</i> Churchland, pp 43-49 Churchland, pp 56-62 |
| Tuesday, 9/30 | The Hard Problem (1) | Chalmers, "Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness" |
| Thursday, 10/2 | Neuroscience (1) | Churchland, Chapter 7 |
| Tuesday, 10/7 | Inattention Blindness Blind Sight (2) | Mack and Rock, "Inattentional Blindness: An Overview" Weiskrantz, "The Case of Blindsight" |
| Thursday, 10/9 | Philosophy, Neuroscience, and Consciousness | Brook and Mandik, "The Philosophy and Neuroscience Movement" |
| Tuesday, 10/14 | Catch-up/Review | First Paper Due |
| Tuesday, 10/21 | Methods | Kripke, from <i>Naming and Necessity</i> |
| Thursday, 10/23 | Midterm | |

Part II: Laws of Nature and Their Governance

| Date | Topic | Readings to be Completed <i>Before</i> Class |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Tuesday, 10/28 | Intuition and Reflective Equilibrium (2) | Daniels, "Reflective Equilibrium" Stich, "Reflective Equilibrium, Analytic Epistemology, and the Problem of Cognitive Diversity" |
| Thursday, 10/30 | Modalities (2) | Nolt, "Modal Logics" |
| Tuesday, 11/4 | Laws and the D-N model (2) | Hempel, "Laws and Their Role in Scientific Explanation" |
| Thursday, 11/6 | Humean Supervenience and MRL (2) | Hume on Laws of Nature Lewis, "Introduction" Lewis, "Humean Supervenience Debugged" |
| Tuesday, 11/11 | Why Be a Humean? (2) | Maudlin, "Why be a Humean?" |
| Thursday, 11/13 | Carroll and the Mirror (2) | Carroll, "The Humean Tradition" Carroll, from <i>Laws of Nature</i> |
| Tuesday, 11/18 | Governance I (2) | Beebe, "The Non-Governing Conception of Laws of Nature" |
| Thursday, 11/20 | Governance II (2) | Loewer, "Humean Supervenience" |
| Tuesday, 12/2 | Schneider on Carroll | Schneider, "What is the Significance of the Intuition that Laws of Nature Govern?" |
| Thursday, 12/4 | Schneider on Governance | |

Part III: Logic Puzzles

| Date | Topic | Readings to be Completed <i>Before</i> Class |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Tuesday, 12/9 | Knights and Knaves (3) | Smullyan, "Knights and Knaves" Second Paper Due |
| Thursday, 12/11 | The Hardest Logic Puzzle Ever (1) | Rabern and Rabern, "A Simple Solution to the Hardest Logic Puzzle Ever" |

Final Exam: Thursday, December 18, 7pm - 10pm