Mind and Self: Modern Conceptions, Spring 2011

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Course Description

The question of what makes us tick as human beings has been at the forefront of philosophical research from Plato and Aristotle until present days. Ancient philosophy is credited with first arguing that humans are animals, but of a special sort, namely animals endowed with reason. Our capacity for carrying out complicated inferences was thought by Aristotle, for instance, to set us apart from the other animals living alongside us. But what is the nature of this capacity? And why is it credited with constituting our essence? These questions, in one form or another, have been taken up by philosophers of the Medieval Period, and of the Early Modern Period.

We begin this class in the Early Modern period. The advent of the scientific revolution in the 17th century has deeply influenced the way of thinking about humanity. What is the place of a human being, in a clockwork universe, that functions according to deterministic natural laws? What is a human being: just another automaton, with each organ part of a system of pulleys and levers? Or is there something more to the notion: e.g. feelings, and morality? Is a human being just a body, or is it also a mind? Is it just a mind? What is the basis for thinking that one human being is identical or distinct from another? What is a person, and how does this notion play into how we think about ourselves? Is there anything special regarding the idea of self-knowledge? Different philosophers have offered different answers to questions like these. We will be studying some of the most inspiring ones, critically, and historically, starting with the Early Modern period and ending with the twentieth century.

Course Objectives

We will be studying primary texts written by major figures of Western Philosophy, who helped shape not only the development of philosophy, but also of some other academic disciplines, such as psychology and cognitive science. We will also be looking at these issues from a contemporary perspective, by reading texts written by leading figures in the twentieth century analytic philosophy. By completing this course, students will have been exposed to and have gained an understanding of some major issues regarding the nature of mind, and the relation between mind and body. They will also have an appreciation of the bearing of these issues on the question of the nature of persons and personal identity, and whether there is something special about the thoughts we have about ourselves.

By completing the written assignments, students will have enhanced their critical thinking skills, which include, among other things, an ability to closely read a difficult text, and to analyze and reconstruct the arguments advanced in such a text.
Course Requirements and Grading Policy

Students are expected to attend all lectures and sections. The following constitute the grade components:

- Regular attendance and participation in lectures and discussions. This will represent 10% of your final grade.

- Three short papers (2-3 pages), analyzing an argument from one of the reading assignments. Each counts 15% towards the final grade. These essays are due at the beginning of class, on the following dates:
  
  February 8th (first essay)
  April 7th (second essay)
  May 3rd (third essay)

- One in-class mid-term examination, which will count 15% of the final grade, on March 3rd.

- Final in-class examination, which will count 30% of the final grade, on May 12th.

Required Books


Course Topics

The following schedule of topics may be changed if necessary. You will be notified of any changes, and the new syllabus will be posted online – on Blackboard and on my webpage.

I. MIND

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<th>Week 1</th>
<th>1/11</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>1/13</td>
<td>The limits of knowledge: skepticism vs. the Cogito</td>
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<td>Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy: Letter, Preface, Synopsis, Meditations I &amp; II, in Cottingham, pp. 1-23</td>
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Week 2  1/18  **Proof for the existence of God and the limits of scientific knowledge**  
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations III, IV, & V, in Cottingham, pp. 24-49

Week 2  1/20  **Cartesian Dualism and the existence of an external world**  
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation VI, in Cottingham, pp. 50-62  
*Objections and Replies*: On Meditation II, in Cottingham, pp. 68-77; On Meditation V, in Cottingham, pp. 95-106  
from the *Letter to Elizabeth*, 28 June 1643, in Rosenthal, p. 33

Week 3  1/25  **Modern Materialism I: Topic-neutral language**  
J. C. C. Smart, ‘Sensations and Brain Processes’ in Rosenthal, pp. 169-76  
Jerome Shaffer, ‘Mental Events and the Brain’ in Rosenthal, pp. 177-80

Week 3  1/27  **Modern Materialism II: Central state materialism**  
Keith Campbell, from ‘Central State Materialism’ in Rosenthal, pp. 189-96

Week 4  2/1  **Modern Materialism III: Eliminative materialism**  
W. V. Quine, ‘States of Mind’ in Rosenthal, pp. 287-8  
Paul M. Churchland, ‘Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes’ in Rosenthal, pp. 601-12

Week 4  2/3  **Modern Materialism IV: Davidson’s anomalous monism**  
Donald Davidson, ‘Mental Events’ in Rosenthal, pp. 247-56

Week 5  2/8  **FIRST PAPER DUE**  
*Behaviorism and objections to behaviorism: Ryle vs. Putnam*  
Gilbert Ryle, ‘Descartes’s Myth’ in Rosenthal, pp.51-7  
Hilary Putnam, ‘Brains and Behavior’ in Rosenthal, pp. 151-9

Week 5  2/10  **Functionalism I: Functionalism vs. materialism**  
Ned Block, ‘Troubles with Functionalism’ in Rosenthal, pp. 211-15  
Hilary Putnam, ‘The Nature of Mental States’ in Rosenthal, pp. 197-203

Week 6  2/15  **Functionalism II: Functionalist materialism**  
David Lewis, ‘Psychophysical and Theoretical Identifications’ in Rosenthal, pp. 204-10

Week 6  2/17  **Functionalism III: Objections to functionalism**  
Ned Block, ‘Troubles with Functionalism’ in Rosenthal, pp. 215-227

Week 7  2/22  **Functionalism IV: Functionalism defended**  
David Lewis, ‘Mad Pain and Martian Pain’ in Rosenthal, pp. 229-35

Week 7  2/24  **Subjectivity of consciousness as a stumbling-block for reductionism**  
Thomas Nagel, ‘What Is It Like to be a Bat?’ in Rosenthal, pp. 422-428  
Frank Jackson, ‘What Mary Didn’t Know’ in Rosenthal, pp. 392-394

Week 8  3/1  **Computational mind and AI: Searle’s Chinese Room**  
John Searle, ‘Minds, Brains, and Programs’ in Rosenthal, pp. 509-19  
J. A. Fodor, ‘Searle on What Only Brains Can Do’ in Rosenthal, pp. 520-21

Week 8  3/3  **MIDTERM EXAMINATION**
II. SELF: Personal Identity and Self-knowledge

Week 9  3/8  **Locke’s theory of identity: persons and substances**  
‘Of Identity and Diversity’ (An Essay concerning Human Understanding, Book II, chapter 27, sections 1-15) in Perry, pp. 33-44

Week 9  3/10  **Locke on the identity of persons**  
‘Of Identity and Diversity’ (An Essay concerning Human Understanding, Book II, chapter 27, sections 16-29) in Perry, pp. 45-52  
Selections from the Correspondence with Stillingfleet (photocopy distributed in class)

**SPRING RECESS: 3/14–3/19**
Week 10  3/22  Classic objections to Locke’s theory
Joseph Butler, ‘Of Personal Identity’; Thomas Reid, ‘Of Identity’ and ‘Of Mr. Locke’s Account of Our Personal Identity’ in Perry, pp. 99-118

Week 10  3/24  A contemporary version of the memory theory
Sydney Shoemaker, ‘Persons and their Pasts’ in Perry, pp. 249-282

Week 11  3/29  Hume and the bundle theory of personal identity
David Hume, ‘Of Personal Identity’ and ‘Second Thoughts’ (from Treatise of Human Nature) in Perry, pp. 161-176

Week 11  3/31  First-person and third-person judgments about personal identity
Bernard Williams, ‘The Self and the Future’ in Perry, pp. 179-198

Week 12  4/5  Personal identity without identity
Derek Parfit, ‘Personal Identity’ in Perry, pp. 199-223

Week 12  4/7  SECOND PAPER DUE
On the Concept of Self

Week 13  4/12  Two uses of ‘I’
Wittgenstein, from The Blue and Brown Books (photocopy to be distributed in class)

Week 13  4/14  Self-knowledge I
Gilbert Ryle, from ‘Self-knowledge’ in Rosenthal, pp. 429-431

Week 14  4/19  Self-knowledge II
Donald Davidson, ‘Knowing One’s Own Mind’ in Cassam

Week 14  4/21  Introspection
D. M. Armstrong, ‘Introspection’ in Cassam
Sydney Shoemaker, ‘Introspection and the Self’ in Cassam

Week 15  4/26  On the incorrigibility of introspective knowledge
Sydney Shoemaker, from ‘How Is Self-Knowledge Possible?’ in Rosenthal, pp. 116-125

Week 15  4/28  Closing remarks.

THIRD PAPER DUE: TUE, MAY 3RD, BY 5:00 PM.

FINAL EXAMINATION: THURSDAY, MAY 12, FROM 2:00 p.m. TO 4:00 p.m. Note: the date and time of the final examination are set by the Registrar’s office according to the days and times of the class meeting; I have no say in exam scheduling. Please do not ask to take the exam
early; if you know now that you will have commitments that require you to leave campus prior to the time of the exam, do not enroll in this class.

Other Policies

**Plagiarism**: Each student is expected to know the University policy on plagiarism as it is stated in SCampus: [http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/universityconductcode/](http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/universityconductcode/) especially the sections under “11.00 Behavior Violating University Standards and Appropriate Sanctions”. Students caught plagiarizing on a paper, exam, or any assignment, will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and will be failed for the course. Proper citations are an easy way of avoiding this problem. If you are unsure about how to cite in your paper, please see me.

**Academic Accommodations**: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DPS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DPS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DPS is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30 am. to 5:00 pm., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DPS is (213)-740-0776.