Contemporary Philosophy

Hendley Philosophy 250
Office: 322 Humanities Center Fall 2017
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REQUIRED TEXTS:
Selected Readings Booklet.

TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS: (subject to change)

W. A. 23 Introduction to the class

I. Explaining Consciousness: The Hard Problem

M. A. 28 What is the Hard Problem? (Explaining Consciousness (henceforth, EC), 9-16: Begin Chalmers’ “Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness”)

W. A. 30 Chalmers’ Naturalistic Dualism (EC, 16-28: Finish Chalmers’ essay)

M. S. 4 Labor Day - Classes Cancelled

W. S. 6 What Hard Problem?? (EC, 33-43: Dennett’s “Facing Backwards on the Problem of Consciousness and Churchland’s “The Hornswoggle Problem”)

M. S. 11 Chalmers’ Response to Dennett and Churchland (EC, 379-387: From Chalmers’ “Moving Forward on the Problem of Consciousness” and EC, 46-47: Begin Clark’s “Function and Phenomenology”)

W. S. 13 The Identity Hypothesis (EC, 48-59: Finish Clark’s essay”)

M. S. 18 Chalmers’ Response to Clark (387-393: From Chalmers’ “Moving Forward on the Problem of Consciousness”)

W. S. 20 Finish Chalmers’ Response to Clark

M. S. 25 Exam on Explaining Consciousness

II. Freedom and Determinism

W. S. 27 Causality and the Mind-Brain Determinism Thesis (Honderich’s How Free Are You? (henceforth, HFAY), 2-41: Chs. 1-3 and begin Ch. 4)

M. O. 2 Free Will (HFAY, 41-64: Finish Ch. 4)
Paper Proposal #1 Due

W. O. 4 Determinism: Scientific Evidence For and Against (HFAY, 65-80: Ch. 6 & 91-95: Begin Ch. 8)

Th. O. 5 - F. O. 6 Fall Break
COURSE GOALS:

You will learn how to critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of philosophical arguments presented in different texts by different authors. This will principally require you to develop a capacity to attend to the formal elements of those arguments that make a difference with respect to their validity. But it will also require you to be sensitive to different textual modes of expression and how that can affect the substantive content of the arguments being considered.
More specifically, you will learn to think critically about arguments concerning questions related to the nature of consciousness and its relation to the brain, determinism and its compatibility or incompatibility with free will, the nature and ethics of belief, whether it can be a responsible thing to do to believe something without good evidence for thinking it true, whether that is something that we can even do, the nature of faith, and whether our pursuit of justification for our beliefs must come to an end in beliefs we cannot justify but also cannot reasonably doubt.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) Attendance. Read all assigned texts and attend class. If you need to miss a class you should discuss it with me ahead of time. Excessive absence will be taken into account in your grade.

2) Exams. There will be three exams, the first two on the preliminary dates scheduled on the course syllabus (which, if changed, will be announced in class) and the last, covering the remainder of the material on which you have not been examined, on the date scheduled for the Final Exam for this class. You are required to take these on the dates scheduled.

3) Quizzes. There will be several very short quizzes on the readings given randomly throughout the course at the beginning of class. These quizzes will be designed simply to determine if you are doing the readings. As such, I will typically ask one very factual question about the text, something I believe anyone should have been able to get from their reading (in other words, nothing involving a careful understanding of difficult ideas - that’s the sort of thing we’ll be working through in class).

Ali together, the quizzes will count toward 15% of your grade. Everyone will start with a grade of 100 and retain that grade for each question correctly answered or lose 10 points for each question incorrectly answered (or missed because of absence or tardiness the day the quiz was given). I will, however, allow you to write a 4 page summary of the readings for class on a day in which you may have missed a quiz (either by incorrectly answering it or absence or tardiness) for any reason that will enable you to redeem the 10 lost points for two quizzes. In addition to this, you are always welcome to make up any quiz missed because of absence due to illness or some sort of personal emergency in the same manner. In order to redeem a missed quiz, the summary should be turned in by the next class period or, if this should be impossible (due to illness, perhaps) at the earliest possible time to be arranged with me. But, in the latter case, such arrangements should be made with me as soon as possible after the missed quiz, at the latest by the day of your return to class (in the case of absence due to illness).

4) Paper Proposals: You will need to turn in proposals for each of your papers on the dates noted on the syllabus at the beginning of class for that day. The purpose of the proposal is twofold: 1) to give me a chance to give you some feedback on your ideas before you get substantially underway and 2) to make sure you have some idea as to what you might want to do a couple of weeks before it is due.

I will need to see the following information in your paper proposals: 1) a statement of your thesis, 2) an overview of the argument you plan to make to support your thesis and 3) a bibliography of the literature you plan on using explaining how you plan on using it in your paper. Though the paper proposals will not be graded (that is beside the point, its the final papers that should be evaluated, not your initial ideas!) they are required. If you fail to turn one in or turn in an inadequate one I will deduct up to one letter grade from the grade assigned to your final paper.

5) Papers: You will need to write two short papers, at least 5 full pages in length (for a definition of “5 full pages” see “technical specifications” below), on some issue of interest to you raised by the authors we have been reading. The first should be on an issue raised by our readings from Explaining Consciousness and will be due in class on the date noted on the syllabus. The second should be on an issue raised by our readings from the last two sections of the course.

Content of Essays. Both essays should be attempts to extend our consideration of issues raised by the
readings by exploring some question or criticism of the readings in the light of additional readings we have not discussed in class which comment on that reading or topic. Your additional readings could involve a piece of “secondary literature” which is concerned specifically with commenting on the text you are dealing with (though also see “A Warning About the Use of Secondary Texts” below) or a work which deals with a related topic in a way you believe is relevant to a consideration of the text you are dealing with. But, in any event, it should provide another voice which helps you to deal critically with your text - to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s claims. And your paper should make a substantive use of the additional literature you find. This means more than quoting from it once or twice. It means carefully elaborating and critically working with some key argument(s) advanced in the text. It should also be a scholarly piece of literature from an academic journal or book (not a magazine or newspaper article) written by someone with an advanced degree in the area being discussed. You will need to clear any literature you use through me and I’ll let you know, if you have any questions, whether a piece of literature is appropriate.

The essay should be expositional and critical.

**Exposition:** The expositional dimension of your essay should present and clarify a claim made by the author with which you are dealing and, especially, his or her arguments for that claim.

**Criticism:** The critical dimension of your essay should evaluate the validity of that claim through an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the author's arguments for it. This is where you would want to especially make use of your secondary text - in helping you to elaborate these critical concerns. What you should be working toward is 1) the formulation of your own position with respect to the issues you deal with in your paper and 2) a defense of that position on the basis of your critical assessment of the author's arguments for the claims he or she makes on that issue. Your position should, in other words, emerge as an implication of your critical assessment of the author's work. It should not emerge from thin air.

In your critical assessment, you need not disagree with your author. But even then you should not simply reproduce his or her work on an issue. There are always weaknesses to an author's work that need to be considered even if you are otherwise in complete agreement with an author's position. Conversely, if your disagree with your author there are always strengths to an author's work that need to be considered and taken into account in your own contrasting position. Look for your secondary texts to help you identify the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments you are considering.

**Hints:** An essay in Philosophy is not that different from any other sort of essay, except you deal primarily with ideas and arguments rather than facts, characters, or plots. Rules which apply to writing any other essay apply here as well. For example,

1) When presenting your position, remember that no one is interested in what you think for its own sake. Your reader wants to know why we should accept your position, why it is the most reasonable position to take on the issue you are dealing with. In other words, your essay should not be divided into two parts - 1) What the author believes and 2) What I believe - with no real connection between the two except, perhaps, that they both refer to the same issue. Your position should emerge as a reasoned response to the strengths and weaknesses of the claims and arguments of your author.

2) Document all references to your author's work with appropriate citations. Brief quotations will enhance your essay by allowing you to more accurately present your author's position on an issue. But because the essay is short any quotations should be kept brief. The essay should present your understanding (in your own words) of your author's positions and leave plenty of room for your assessment of their validity and formulation of your own position in response to that assessment.

3) Make sure your writing style is clear. Don't introduce ideas without elaboration. Make sure your sentences make sense. Proofread your paper before handing it in.

A Warning about the Use of “Secondary” Texts: A secondary text is any text which presents the claims and arguments of someone else, either with an eye toward helping us understand that author’s ideas better or as a
prelude to a critical assessment of that author’s ideas. Secondary texts can be very useful in helping you to understand aspects of an author’s work you are working with that you might find difficult and I would encourage you to seek out such works for this reason. But you should never rely exclusively on what a secondary text says about someone’s ideas. You should always turn back to the author whose work is being discussed to verify that what the secondary text says is correct. In particular, you should never attribute a specific claim or argument to an author and then cite a secondary source as your only reference (though you may also want to cite a secondary author whose understanding of an argument or idea has helped you with the presentation of it if you are making in your paper). Any ideas attributed to an author need to be documented with a reference to that author’s own work.

Technical Specifications for Papers: Your papers should be typewritten, double-spaced, using a standard 10 or 12 sized font, allowing you to get at least 23 lines of text per page. Your margins are to be no more than 1.25 inches on the left and right, and 1 inch on the top and bottom (default settings for Microsoft Office 2003). This is what I mean in speaking of “full pages.” A paper of 5 full pages will consist of 5 pages of the sort just specified. In addition, you should place your name and title of the paper on a separate title page that is not counted in the length of the paper. You should use endnotes for any substantial notes (beyond very brief bibliographical citations for quotations which may be in the body of the text) that are also not to be counted in the length of the paper. Citations may be of any form as long as they are clear enough to easily lead the reader to the source of the citation. You should refrain from using headers or footers that would prevent you from having at least 23 lines of text per page.

Guidelines for Internet Research: Anyone can publish anything at all on the internet. As such, the most prudent attitude to take toward the documents you find there is to assume they are worthless unless you have good reason to believe otherwise. For this class, there are two types of acceptable literature to use in writing your papers that you may be able to find on the internet: 1) a document that is merely an electronic version of an article published in a scholarly publication such as an academic journal. In this case, you should provide a citation to the textual publication just as you would if you had found it in the library. If the web version does not provide page numbers which correspond with the original text enabling you to cite specific pages, you should find the original text in the library or through inter-library loan. 2) Documents that have been posted by someone with expertise in the topic of the document. Say, for example, you find an essay on a topic of interest that has been posted by a scholar teaching at a University. It should be a relatively easy matter to document the author’s position at her/his institution and, in this way, document her/his expertise in the matter. Any citation of an internet reference that is not an electronic duplication of an article which has already appeared in a scholarly publication should have a brief list of the author’s credentials, sufficient to document her/his expertise in the matter. It might look something like this: James Harrison, “Explaining the Explanatory Gap,” http://www.harvard.edu/~jharrison/explain.pdf. Harrison is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University. This is a paper he presented at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, December, 2010.

6) Course Grade: Your final course grade will be determined as follows: 15% for each exam, 15% for Quizzes and 20% for each paper (though if your second paper is a higher grade than your first, the first will count 10% of your final grade and the second 30% - this, of course, presupposes you wrote and turned in a first paper; only an actually written paper, actually turned in, can “earn” a grade). I use a 100 point scale for grades with 90-100 for As, 80-89 for Bs, 70-79 for Cs, 60-69 for Ds and 0-59 for F. Pluses and minuses (as in B+, B, B-) will be given in the following way: minuses for a score in the bottom 3 points for that grade (e.g., 80-82 = B-), an unqualified grade for a score in the middle 4 points for that grade (e.g., 83-86 = B), pluses for a score in the top 3 points for that grade (e.g., 87-89 = B+).

7) Turning in Assignments: All assignments are to be turned in personally by the student at the time it is due. Unless prior arrangements have been made I will not accept any assignments turned in by e-mail. If circumstances prevent you from turning in an assignment personally and e-mail is the only feasible way to do it, you must contact me ahead of time and seek permission to do so. If I approve, the student her/himself is responsible for insuring that I have received it. You can verify my receipt of your assignment by looking for a reply from me informing you that I have received it. You should save this reply to verify my receipt of the assignment in case there is any question about it. If you do not receive such a reply, I did not receive it and it is
the student’s responsibility to determine what the problem is and rectify it. Any student who has not successfully turned in an assignment and when informed of this exclaims, “But I e-mailed that to you!” will be immediately placed in stocks and publically humiliated for using the high tech version of “the dog ate my homework” excuse (seriously, if I claim I didn’t get it and you don’t have a copy of my e-mail verifying receipt, then the assignment was never turned in and you will not receive any credit for it).

8) Late or Missed Assignments: All work should be done by the time and date specified in class or on the syllabus. I will not give unpenalized extensions except in the case of illness or some sort of personal emergency. To inquire about an unpenalized extension for these sorts of circumstances, you should speak with me ahead of the time the work is due or, in the case of emergencies, as soon as possible (if you have a wreck on the way to an exam, call me right after you call the police!). In the case of papers which are turned in late without an unpenalized extension, the grade will be penalized 10 points if it is turned in less than 1 day (to be precise, 24 hours) late, 10 more points if it is turned in more than 1 day but less than 2 days late, 10 more points if it is turned in more than 2 days but less than 3 days late, 10 more points if it is more than 3 days but less than 4 days late, 10 more points if it is more than 4 days but less than 5 days late. A paper turned in more than 5 days late will receive a grade of zero. Late paper proposals will follow an analogous pattern. I will take one point off your grade for the corresponding paper for a proposal that is less than 1 day late, 2 points off for a proposal that is more than 1 day late, but less than 2 days late, etc. A proposal turned in more than 5 days late will receive a grade of zero. It is the student’s responsibility to make appropriate arrangements for turning in late papers. You should discuss your plans with me ASAP to make sure I approve of it. If you do not discuss your plans with me and, for instance, simply slip a late paper under the door of my office, I will count it as turned in on the date and time I find it in my office, not the date and time you turned it in. Exams must be taken at the time designated (unless, of course, you have received an unpenalized extension because of the sorts of circumstances mentioned above). There will be no opportunity to remake an exam that is missed without an unpenalized extension.

9) Messages: When I am not in my office, I can be contacted by e-mailing me at shendley@bsc.edu. Though you are also welcome to call my office phone and leave me a message, you should know that I am much more compulsive about checking my email than my voice messages. As such, an email you send to me will typically get a response within a few hours, at most. With voice messages, it’s hard to say when you’ll hear back from me. Bottom line: use email to contact me.

10) Accommodations. If you are registered for accommodations, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss accommodations that may be necessary. During this discussion, you are not expected to disclose any details concerning your disability though you may discuss these details at your discretion. If you have a disability but have not contacted Jason Peevy, the Disability Accommodations Coordinator at BSC, please call 226-4717 or visit Counseling & Health Services on the second floor of Norton Center, next door to Student Development. You may also contact the Coordinator at jpeevy@bsc.edu if you have any questions or need more information.

10) Honor Code: The honor code applies to all work done in this course. A violation of the honor code on any work done for this class will result in a grade of F for the course.