

## **Philosophy 4410: Philosophy of Mind: USU, Fall 2014**

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Office hours W 1-3 p.m. and by app.'t

This course is about the problem of accounting for the existence of minds in the universe. To explain minds, do we need to add a special dimension to our current theories? Or can we understand minds as emerging in some natural way from the universe as we currently conceive it? We will study a textbook on the topic (Jaworski's *Philosophy of Mind*), along with some thought-provoking essays collected in *The Mind's I*, and we will study in greater detail Daniel Dennett's theory, as given in his *Consciousness Explained*.

Beyond teaching you the content in this subfield within philosophy, this course aims to develop your ability to understand and explain difficult ideas with clarity and fairness. **Attendance and participation are essential.** Two class absences will be tolerated without penalty; every absence beyond that will affect your grade adversely. You need to be in class, and you need to have studied and to be prepared to answer and ask questions and engage in dialogue. If there is reason to think this won't be possible, you should reconsider taking the course.

The **final paper** will be 15-20 pages long, and it will display your understanding of the course: what the central questions are, the various possible answers, the arguments for each view, and the problems each view faces. Basically, your paper will be evidence that you have understood the material of the course; that you have thought deeply about it; and that you can explain the material to others. Someone who hasn't taken the course should be able to gain a judicious overview of the material by reading your paper. Moreover, the paper should be not merely a summary of the material. It should also present *your own view* of the material, supported with reasons and objections to alternative views. Think of it as your own 15-20 page book on the philosophy of mind.

In preparation for that final paper, three **shorter papers** (roughly 3 pages each) will be assigned on smaller topics during the semester. These are meant to test your understanding as well as to help you gain a clearer idea of what I'm looking for in papers. The shorter papers are *required*, but they will not factor into your final grade.

Participation and the final paper **count equally** to the final grade in the course.

**On special considerations, lateness, excuses, etc.:** The default assumption is that you will attend every class, participate, and turn everything in on time. If something unexpected comes up, or you need a little extra time for an assignment, **discuss it with me.** I am flexible - *but only to the point at which an accommodation for you compromises being fair to other students.*

**The books are required, in the print editions,** because we will be discussing them in class and focusing on particular passages. William Jaworski, *Philosophy of Mind* (Wiley-Balckwell); Hofstadter & Dennett, eds., *The Mind's I* (Basic Books); Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Back Bay).

## Syllabus

**Introduction to the course:** a general sense of the problems and questions, assignments, grading, policies, etc. *Requirements:* participation, plus a final paper on the topic; shorter assignments will be given in passing, which will help to prepare students for their final papers. (1 class period)

**1. Introduction to the philosophy of mind:** Jaworski, chapters 1 and 2. What is at issue? What are the problems in accounting for consciousness? What is the range of possible solutions? (3-4 class periods)

**2. Substance dualism:** Jaworski, chapter 3. Why think something new must be introduced to account for the mind? What problems will such new additions face? Also Smullyan, "An Unfortunate Dualist" in *The Mind's I*. (4 class periods)

**3. Physicalism, both reductive and nonreductive:** Jaworski, chapters 4, 5, and 6; and also, from *The Mind's I* -

- Turing, "Computer Machinery and Intelligence"
- Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs"
- Dennett, "Where am I?"
- Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?"
- Hofstadter, "A Conversation with Einstein's Brain"

What are the various ways in which a physicalist might try to account for mental phenomena? And what reasons are there for thinking a physicalist account will be inadequate (5-6 class periods)

**4. Dennett's account of consciousness:** Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*. This is a physicalist's account of consciousness which aims to get around the various problems physicalism faces by reconceiving the nature of our own consciousness. Main question: does Dennett explain consciousness - or merely explain it away?

And for further reflection - links will also be made available on Canvas -

- <http://www.simonsfoundation.org/quanta/20140403-a-fundamental-theory-to-model-the-mind/>
- <http://aeon.co/magazine/being-human/why-solitary-confinement-degrades-us-all/>
- <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/philosophy/is-there-such-a-thing-as-the-self>
- [http://www.salon.com/2014/05/11/heaven\\_is\\_for\\_neuroscience\\_how\\_the\\_brain\\_creates\\_visions\\_of\\_god/?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=socialflow](http://www.salon.com/2014/05/11/heaven_is_for_neuroscience_how_the_brain_creates_visions_of_god/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=socialflow)

(7-8 class periods)

**5. Other theories,** that are neither substance dualism nor physicalism: Jaworski, chapters 8 and 9 (2 class periods)

**6. Hylo-morphism:** Jaworski, chapter 10 and 11 (3 class periods)