

## **Philosophy of mind (focus on human nature)**

Sample syllabus

Fall 2010

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### **Course description**

This course will deal with three questions central to our view of human nature: What is the relationship between the mind and the body? Are human choices produced inexorably by their environment or genetics, or do people have power over their lives? And: What is a person, and what does it mean to be the same person through time?

As we shall discover, these questions are reciprocally related. Whether or not the mind reduces to the body determines whether it is plausible to think of the mind as exercising autonomy over its decisions. The more plausible libertarian theories of the will usually describe free action as action that is produced *by the self*, a view which means little unless there is a self that acts. Likewise, some of the most interesting (Kantian) theories about personal identity suggest that it is active choice that makes it possible for us to retain identity over time in the first place.

As we examine these questions, we will pay secondary attention to the methodology philosophers use to answer controversial metaphysical questions. Do they rely on armchair conceptual analysis, or naturalistic empirical investigation to produce their definitions and ontological claims? We will find that philosophers who use one method to answer one question often rely on the same method for others.

### **Texts**

- Course pack

### **Lecture and reading schedule**

#### ***The mind-body problem***

##### *Early modern figures*

- Rene Descartes, dualism, from the *Meditations*
- Thomas Hobbes, materialism, from *Leviathan*
- Baruch d' Spinoza, dual-aspect theory, from *Ethics*
- George Berkeley, idealism, from the *Treatise*

##### *Twentieth century anti-dualists*

- Gilbert Ryle, logical behaviorism, "Descartes' Myth"
- J.J.C. Smart, identity theory, "Sensations and Brain Processes"
- Jerry Fodor, functionalism, "The Mind-Body Problem"
- Paul Churchland, eliminativism, "Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes"

##### *Twentieth century responses to anti-dualism*

- John Searle, biological naturalism, "Minds, Brains and Programs"
- David Chalmers, anti-supervenience of qualia, "Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness"

#### ***Free will and determinism***

##### *Early modern figures*

- Rene Descartes, libertarianism, selections from the *Meditations*
- Baron d'Holbach, materialist determinism, from *The System of Nature*
- Baruch d' Spinoza, idealist determinism, from *Ethics*
- David Hume, early compatibilism, from *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*
- Thomas Reid, early agency theory, from *Essay on the Active Powers of Man*

*Nineteenth century figures (?)*

- Arthur Schopenhauer, determinism, “Essay on Freedom of the Will”
- William James, indeterminism, “Determinism’s Dilemma”

*Twentieth century determinists*

- A.J. Ayer, compatibilism, “Freedom and Necessity”
- Peter van Inwagen, incompatibilist determinism, “The Mystery of Metaphysical Freedom”
- Daniel Dennett, pragmatic control without metaphysical freedom, Selections from *Elbow Room*

*Twentieth century responses to determinism*

- Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialist radical freedom of the will, from *Being and Nothingness*
- Timothy O’Connor, incompatibilist agent-causal libertarianism, “The Agent as Cause”
- Harry Binswanger, cognitive control agent-causal libertarianism, “Volition as cognitive self-regulation”

***Personal identity***

*Early modern figures*

- John Locke, the self as an enduring consciousness, “Of Identity and diversity,” from *Essay concerning Human Understanding*
- David Hume, the self as a bundle of perceptions, “Our Idea of Identity,” from *Treatise on Human Nature*
- Thomas Reid, agency theory of the self, from *Essay on the Active Powers of Man*
- Immanuel Kant, selections from *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Practical Reason*

*Twentieth century views*

- Sydney Shoemaker, neo-Lockeanism, “Persons and their Pasts”
- Derek Parfit, reductionism about the self and its irrelevance, “Personal Identity”
- David Wiggins, the somatic/animalistic approach, from *Sameness and Substance*
- Roderick Chisholm, neo-Reidian anticriterialism, from *Person and Object*
- Christine Korsgaard, neo-Kantian self-constitution theory, “Personal Identity and Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit”