PHIL 153A: Neurophilosophy

Fall 2015
Tzofit Ofengenden
Class Meetings: T, F 11:00 - 12:20
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Office Hours: T, F 12:30- 2:00 and by appointment

Course Description

This course introduces major problems and key concepts at the intersection between philosophy and neuroscience. We will explore important developments in neuroscience and neurotechnology, and address the philosophical, and ethical problems that such advancements generate. We will start by exploring the way philosophers and neuroscientists approach brain, mind, consciousness, embodiment, conceptions of self, and memory. Though neuroscientific and psychological theories are pertinent to philosophical discussions, we will not be able to present in-depth scientific views. Then we will discuss contemporary issues in neuroethics such as free will, responsibility and enhancement. We will tackle questions such as: what is the function of consciousness? How does the brain create awareness of one’s self? To what extent does the body affect the mind? How does memory work? How do we come to decisions, and are those decisions free? What does neuroscience tell us about free will? Should drugs be used to enhance memory, attention, and concentration? Finally, we will consider the opportunities and limitations of neuroscientific methods for philosophical inquiry, and discuss emerging and future directions in this area.

Course Materials:
All reading materials will be either posted on the course website, available online or through the library database.

Learning Objectives:
Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Develop a critical understanding of the argument presented in the assigned readings and class discussion
2. Equip students with a rudimentary understanding of neuroscience that is applicable to philosophical and ethical debates in the philosophy of mind and neuroethics.
3. Critically reflect upon how neuroscience may affect philosophical and ethical issues pertaining to the relation between brain and the mind, consciousness, self, free will, and others.
Course Requirements

Reading:
You will read the material assigned for class prior to our meeting. We shall spend most of our class time going over the assigned readings in an effort to analyze them, and to delineate their core arguments. Therefore always bring the assigned reading with you.

Attendance and Participation:
I place great stress on coming to class, having read the relevant material, responding to Latte web site and active participation, all of which will be noted. If anything prevents you from coming to class or doing the assignments, please see me.

Latte Assignments and Informational Postings
This course will have a Latte web site. An updated syllabus and reading materials will be posted there.

Response papers
You will be asked to send me responses to study questions for the reading assigned every week. Each response should be about a one page. Your responses will be due by midnight on Mondays. These assignments will not be graded but receive credit/no credit grade. In your response paper I expect you to demonstrate your comprehension of the material and your ability to think critically about it. Discuss your thoughts about the writer’s argument and explain your position.

In-class Debate
There will be 5 class debates on philosophical issues we will discuss in class. I will provide the subject for the debate a few days in advance. This will enable you to prepare beforehand. On the day of the debate we will divide the class to groups of four or five (depending on the size of the class). Each group will be assigned with an argument to defend. After 15 minutes each group will present their position. Since the class will be divided randomly into "pro" and "con" teams, and you cannot know what position you will need to defend, it would be wise to prepare for both positions. After the first presentation the groups will have a few more minutes to reconsider their argument and prepare to reply to the arguments presented by the opposite side in order to defend their position.

Papers
I will assign four writing assignments over the course of the semester. Students will write three take home essays of 5-7 pages each and a term paper of 10-15 pages. Three weeks before the first paper is due, we will have a class in which I will provide the students with guidance on how to write a philosophical paper.

Papers will proceed through a series of guided stages:
Midterm Papers
1. Paper topics will be distributed, though students will be able to develop your own.
2. They will have to meet and discuss the topics they chose with me.
3. Students will send me a draft of their papers 10 days before the deadline and will do a rewrite for each of the three papers before submitting it for grading.

**Term paper:** The term paper is intended to provide you with an opportunity to develop their own thoughts in greater detail and may be an extension of one of your shorter writing assignments.

The final paper will proceed through a series of guided stages:

1. Topics will be distributed 5 weeks before the end of semester. However, you can set your own question for the term paper, as long as your paper addresses a research problem discussed in class.
2. You should make an appointment to meet with me to discuss an abstract of the intended term paper no later than four weeks before the paper is due. Please prepare a ½ - 1 page proposal. This proposal should state the subject of your paper (what debate or question will you be looking at), a rough version of your thesis (what position will you be arguing for), and a preliminary list of sources that you will be consulting.
3. You will submit your draft for feedback and corrections two weeks before the deadline. I will return the drafts with comments a week before the deadline. Final versions should then be submitted for grading (by email attachment) by December 8.

All writing should be sent to my email address and you should expect a confirmation that I have received the paper. If you have not received such confirmation, contact me.

**First paper will be due on Friday, September 18th before the start of class.**
**Second paper will be due on Tuesday, October 13th before the start of the class.**
**Third paper will be due on Tuesday, November 3rd before the start of the class.**
**Term Paper draft is due on Tuesday, November 24th before the start of the class.**
**Term paper will be due on Tuesday, December 8th before the start of the class.**

**Grading:**
Class participation based on reading, debates, and response papers: 25%
First Paper 15%
Second Paper 15%
Third Paper 15%
Term Paper 30%
Disabilities:
Please see me at the beginning of the course if you have any disabilities, which would require special academic consideration.

Academic Integrity
You are accepted to be familiar with, and to follow, the University’s policies on academic integrity. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures. All policies related to academic integrity apply to in-class and take home projects, assignments, exams, and quizzes. Students may only collaborate on assignments with permission from the instructor. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for Academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university.

Schedule of Topics and Readings:

The following course schedule is tentative and subject to change. Such changes, if any, will be announced in class and on the course website.

Week 1
Understanding the problem of consciousness

8/28
Introduction: what is Neurophilosophy?

Week 2

9/1

9/4

Week 3
How the brain gives rise to consciousness

9/8
Instructions how to write a philosophical paper
Week 4

9/15 Holiday - no class

9/18


**NOTE:** First paper is due on Friday, September 18th at the start of class.

Week 5

9/22

9/25

Week 6

**Situated Cognition**

9/29,

10/2

Week 7

**The embodied Mind**

10/6
10/9

Week 8

NOTE: second paper is due on Friday, October 13th at the start of class.

10/16
The extended mind


Week 9
Self and Self-Knowledge

10/20

10/23

Week 10

10/27

10/30

Week 11

11/3
Note: third paper is due on Tuesday, November 3rd before the start of the class.
Memory

Week 12

11/10

11/13

Week 13

11/17

11/20
Ethics of Neuroscience and Neuroscience of Ethics

Week 14
Free Will
11/24

Note: Term Paper draft is due November 24th.

11/27 No Class Thanksgiving

Week 15
Ethical issues related to neurocognitive Enhancement

12/1

12/4

**Week 16**

12/8

**Term paper is due on Tuesday, December 8th before the start of the class.**