PHILOSOPHY 131 (FORMERLY PHIL 39):
PHILOSOPHY OF MIND
Professor Jerry Samet
Brandeis University
Spring 2019

SYLLABUS
DRAFT 110509

CLASS HOURS: Tues & Fri 1:40 – 3 ROOM TBA
Office hours: Tues 3:15-4:45 and by appointment
Rabb 305 x62783 samet@brandeis.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Our main focus will be on the central issue in the philosophy of mind: the mind-body problem. This is the ongoing attempt to understand the relation between our minds—our thought, perception, feeling, etc.—and our bodies—especially brains. Some of the questions we will discuss: Is the mind a non-physical thing or is it just a complex configuration of brain matter, understandable by the same principles we use to understand other physical things? Can computers think? Does the mind stand to the brain as a computer program stands to the hardware? Can I know whether my experiences—say, when I taste a banana—are the same (or similar to) yours? Can consciousness be given a scientific explanation? Do animals have minds? We will begin with the ‘dualist position’ developed by Descartes in the 17th century, but all of our readings after that will be from contemporary sources. (There are no prerequisites for this course.)

TEXTS
[1] David Chalmers, editor, Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings, Oxford University Press, 2002, paperback. This is a very extensive anthology of primary sources (enough for two courses). A warning: the papers in it are by philosophers and written for a professional audience, so you may sometimes not always understand what you’re reading. My advice: don’t get discouraged - keep reading. You will find that things will begin to fall into place. A good number of selections will be assigned, but I encourage you to explore further in areas that interest you (if you ever want advice about what else to read, just ask me in person or by email). PLEASE BRING THIS BOOK TO CLASS.

[2] Jaegwon Kim, Philosophy of Mind, Westview Press, 2nd edition, 2006, paperback. Kim provides a sophisticated but still accessible introduction to the main areas of interest in the contemporary philosophy of mind. He covers the same material as Chalmers, but instead of different voices defending opposing points of view, you get to read one important philosopher of mind presenting the whole field. Unlike [1] above, this book is written for philosophy students, and Kim will
often be helpful when you can’t make heads or tails of the primary sources, or when you’re not sure how the various positions and points of view represented in [1] are connected.

[3] I will also be assigning and recommending other materials which will be available through the course LATTE site.

HOW TO APPROACH THE ASSIGNED READINGS

There will be a reading assignment for every meeting—usually a paper or two from [1] above and a short discussion of the material in [2].

Philosophical writings require close study; they are typically not the sort of thing you can skim through and 'get the general idea'. Expect to often need to read things more than once. One good strategy: read carefully before coming to class, take notes (keep track of what you don’t get), ask questions, and then read them again after class. For good advice on how to read a philosophy paper, see “Good Advice on How to Read a Philosophy Paper (Pryor)” on the LATTE site.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED. You are allowed up to 4 unexcused absences; any more will affect your grade. There will be a class roster passed around in each class and you will need to sign in. (If you miss more than 2 classes during the shopping period, you will still have 2 excused absences remaining.) The success of this class will depend very much on your being there, being prepared, and actively participating. It is nearly impossible to learn this material by just reading it (especially reading it at 3AM just before the final). You need to hear these issues talked through, and to be part of the discussion. You don’t need to say something brilliant or original to do your part as a participant. You do need to be in class, be prepared, be attentive, and stay involved. The quality and quantity of your class participation will count towards your grade. The class is fairly large, and this increases the chances that many will think: “… (obviously) people know more about this stuff than I do; I’ll just listen”. Force this thought out of your mind—everyone will be better off if there is broad participation.

COMMENTS

You will be asked to post a one-page COMMENT of 200-300 words on the assigned reading on the course LATTE site by midnight before class—you will get full-credit for this part of the course if you post 18 comments in total. More details about comments will be posted on the LATTE site. (BTW: If you ‘underparticipate’ in class, make it your business to overparticipate on the LATTE comment site.)

PAPERS

There will be two (2) papers, each should be about 2000 words (5+ pages). The papers will give you an opportunity to explore the topics covered in greater depth, or to take your understanding of (or mystification about) the mind-body problem and bring it to bear on a closely connected problem. I will give you guidelines and suggestions about paper topics and instructions well in advance of the due dates, but I encourage you to make notes of topics you’d like to pursue on your own. There is a second excellent piece on the LATTE site to help you with this: “Good Advice on How to Write a Philosophy Paper (Pryor)”. Also keep in mind that the Writing Center has consultants that help students to focus ideas, define topics, prepare well-organized outlines, revise rough drafts, improve stylistic elements, and master related writing skills. Services are available on a drop-in basis.

FINAL

There will be a 3-hour final during the final period.

GRADING
Attendance and comments/participation (10-20%), papers (50-60%), final (20-25%)

LATTE

The class LATTE site will include all the course materials, supplementary readings, a place to post comments that will allow discussions to continue outside of class, pointers to philosophical resources on the web, and so on.

OFFICE HOURS

Take advantage of my office hours. If you can’t make it to my posted office hours (Tues 3:15-4:45), email me and we can make another appointment. If you have to miss an appointment, please email me asap—it might save me a trip. If you have any questions about the readings or class discussions and you don’t want to wait for office hours, email me.

TEACHING ASSISTANT

It is likely that there will be a Teaching Assistant for the course, who will have grading responsibilities, hold periodic review/discussion sections, and will be available to meet with you to talk to you about your papers.

PLAGIARISM AND COLLABORATION

You are encouraged to discuss the readings, classes, paper assignments, etc. with each other. However, submitting joint work is not allowed. Cases of suspected plagiarism and academic dishonesty will be referred to the appropriate administrative offices (University policy).

DISABILITIES

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please let me know as soon as possible.
**Assignment Schedule #1**

**Introduction: Starting Points**
Philosophical thinking about mind and body has to start somewhere—what does common sense tell us about the relation? What does our best scientific theorizing say? Do we have built-in biases that affect our thinking about this issue?

**Cartesian Substance Dualism**
Are there two kinds of substances/things in the natural world: physical things in space, and non-physical things (minds) that are themselves non-spatial but interact with physical things in space? The 17th century French philosopher Descartes famously argued that this is the right view of things, and that we can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is right.

*Descartes in Chalmers, pp. 1-2, chs 1 & 2*

**Cartesian Substance Dualism: the central argument(s) continued**
Descartes defense of dualism is among the most influential arguments in the history of philosophy, and modern up-dated versions—which we will get to later—continue to trouble anti-dualist positions. But it is a challenge to figure out what exactly are the steps of the Meditations argument(s).

*Kim ch 1*

**Epiphenomenalism and Other Varieties of Dualism: Can we reshape the core idea of dualism so that it fits better into our scientific-philosophical conception of the world?**
Many of Descartes’ contemporaries agreed with his dualism but believed that he had the wrong view about how the physical and the mental substances are related, and offered alternative ways of understanding the mind-body connection.

*Huxley in Chalmers, ch 3*

*Kim ch 2, pp. 29-40*

**Problems with Dualism: does dualism—in every form—face insurmountable objections?**
Most philosophers nowadays think that there are powerful arguments against dualism—some challenge the internal coherence of the theory, others focus on the incompatibility of the theory with our best understanding of how the world really works.

*Kim, ch 2, pp. 40-52*

*Smullyan in Chalmers, ch 4*

**Behaviorism: Ryle & the ghost in the machine**
If dualism is wrong, then what is a mind? Ryle (a mid-20th century British philosopher) blames Descartes for putting us on the wrong track by assuming that the mind is a thing. Ryle’s main idea: the mind-body problem dissolves once we realize that our mental concepts/language really pick out distinctive patterns of human behavior, not properties of
some mysterious non-physical entity.
**Ryle in Chalmers, p. 3 & ch 5**
*Kim, ch 3, pp. 55-63*

**Behaviorism: what's wrong with it**
But there are powerful arguments against the behaviorist proposal that having a mind is at bottom simply a matter of our having certain behavioral capacities and dispositions.
**Putnam in Chalmers, ch 7**
*Kim, ch 3, pp. 63-78*

**The Mind-Brain Identity Theory: defending the obvious?**
It's now common to see references to the ‘mind-brain’. But what is the relation between the two terms? Is the mind identical to the brain? A part of the brain? An 'aspect' or property of the brain? Perhaps caused by the brain? Seeing the promise of modern neuroscience, UT Place and JJC Smart (two Australian philosophers writing in the 1950's) tried to articulate the connection more precisely, and to clear away philosophical resistance to the idea that (roughly speaking) the mind *is* the brain.
**Place and Smart in Chalmers, p. 4 & ch 8-9 (optional: 10)**
*Kim, ch 4, pp. 81-106*

**MIDTERM RECESS – NO CLASSES**

**Problems with the Identity Theory**
Virtually all contemporary philosophers accept the centrality of brain to mind, but there is a widespread view that the neurosciences cannot in and of themselves explain everything about the mind; that no matter how sophisticated, a brain-centered account of what goes on inside us leaves out something crucial.
**Kim, ch 4, pp. 101-114**
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<th>Assignment Schedule #2</th>
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| **Machine Functionalism: is the mind a computer**  
One widely-held view is that the neurological account gives us a physical description of the brain, but doesn’t tell us what the brain is doing. A popular version of this idea sees the mind, roughly, as a computer built out of neurons. To understand mentality we need to grasp not its physical nature, but its computational character.  
*Chalmers, p. 5 & chs 11-12
K, ch 5, pp. 115-137* |
| **Functionalism and Its Discontents**  
Although functionalism captures a critical aspect of what it is to be a thinking thing, the initial statement(s) of the view seem in some respects too narrowly focused (does a thinking thing have to have a program *just like ours*?), and in other respects too broad (is instantiating a program *enough* for mentality?)  
*Chalmers, ch 14
PAPER #1 ASSIGNMENT AVAILABLE ON LATTE* |
| **Against the Computer Model of Mind: Searle’s Chinese Room Argument**  
A much-discussed argument for the conclusion that computation can not *to any degree* account for ‘intentionality’ (the ‘aboutness of the mental’)—starkly put: the fact that humans have minds has nothing to do with the fact that human brains execute computations.  
*Chalmers, ch 63
Kim, ch 5 pp. 137-150* |
| **Eliminative Materialism: The Denial of Mind**  
Is the attempt to reduce the mental to the physical a waste of effort? Is it like trying to give a scientific account of failed or outmoded folk-concepts that is best discarded (like the medieval medical theory of the four humours: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_medicine)? Churchland argues that it is.  
*Chalmers, ch 53* |
| **Challenging Physicalism/Materialism 1: The Problem of Consciousness**  
Thomas Nagel claims that “consciousness is what makes the mind-body problem really intractable.” Many philosophers agree, and Nagel tries to pinpoint the reason why in his discussion of incompatibilities between the subjectivity of experience and the objectivity of scientific reduction  
*Chalmers, ch 25
Kim, ch 8, pp. 205-216* |
| **The Problem of Consciousness (continued)**  
*Kim, ch 8, pp. 216-229
PAPER #1 DUE* |
| **Challenging Physicalism/Materialism 2: The Modal Argument**  
Kripke’s resuscitates the Cartesian argument against physicalism by recasting it in terms of his theory of rigid designation, and a new understanding of the status of the sorts of identity statements physicalists want to defend.  
*Chalmers, ch 32
Kim, ch 8, pp. 229-238* |
| **The Modal Argument (continued)**  
*Chalmers, chs 33-4* |
**Assignment Schedule #3**

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<tr>
<th>Responses to Kripke’s Modal Argument: Hill and Maxwell</th>
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<td>Kripke argues that Physicalism cannot explain why it seems obvious to us that mental states like pain are only contingently connected to physical-functional states. We consider here two physicalist replies: Hill’s view that this is no more than a quirk of our imagination and not of any ontological significance, and Maxwell’s more radical view that physical concepts—like c-fiber stimulation—are not what we think they are.</td>
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<td>Chalmers, chs 33-4</td>
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<th>Challenging Materialism/Physicalism 3: Jackson's Knowledge Argument</th>
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<td>Jackson argues that even if we at some point worked out a complete physical theory of the mind (our own, not bat-minds), there would still be things about the mind that we might not know. So: there must be more to the mind than is dreamt of in Physicalism.</td>
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<td>Chalmers, ch 28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommended: M Nida-Rümelin, “Qualia: The Knowledge Argument”, parts 1-3 - (Stanford On-Line Encyclopedia of Philosophy)</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/entries/panpsychism/">http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/entries/panpsychism/</a></td>
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<th>Replies to the Knowledge Argument: Lewis</th>
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<td>David Lewis has defended Physicalism by arguing that Jackson’s Knowledge Argument does not show that there are non-physical facts about the mind, only that there are different ways of ‘knowing’ the physical facts.</td>
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<td>PM, ch 29 &amp; optional: ch 30</td>
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<td>Recommended: M Nida-Rümelin: “Qualia: The Knowledge Argument”, parts 4-end - (Stanford On-Line Encyclopedia of Philosophy)</td>
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<th>Panpsychism: The La(te)st Frontier?</th>
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<td>Most philosophers agree that we have a deep problem grasping how mentality-consciousness arises from non-mental physical elements. But what if all physical reality—all the way down to the fundamental physical particles—is imbued with mentality? This is the position Panpsychists defend: that mentality is a fundamental feature of the universe, not something that only emerges in the evolved human brain.</td>
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| PASSOVER BREAK - NO BRANDEIS CLASSES |

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<th>Reductionism: Emergentism and Mental Causation</th>
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<td>What if the world is set up in such a way that certain properties ‘emerge’ from complex systems but cannot in principle be reduced to, deduced from, or explained in terms of, the systems from which they emerge? A hundred years ago it was more of an open question whether some chemical and biological properties were emergent, in this sense, but it is not</td>
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a serious contender nowadays. Nevertheless, many are still tempted by emergence as an account of *mental* properties.

**Chalmers, ch 16**

**Kim, pp 290-306**

### Mental Causation: Have we solved Princess Elizabeth's problem?
It is natural to think that once Cartesian dualism is abandoned, the problem of how the mind can causally influence the world is pretty much solved. Kim argues that this is not so; that Physicalist accounts still have to face a number of difficulties.

**Chalmers, ch 22**

### Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?: In Defense of Defeatism
McGinn, picking up on some ideas of Chomsky, defends the view that the relation between mind and body is not an inherently mysterious matter—it's a simple matter of understanding the x-factor that binds them together. The fault is rather in us: we have evolved without any concept of this x-factor, and there is good reason to think that conceptual progress will *never* get us to the relevant concept. (So: we might as well drop the matter and stop obsessing about the mind-body problem.)

**Chalmers, ch 38**

**recommended: CH Whiteley, "McGinn on the Mind Body Problem" (one-page long!)
http://www.jstor.org/view/00264423/di985555/98p0294e/0**

### THE WHOLE SHEBANG: A PRO’S ROAD MAP TO THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM
Chalmers provides an abstract map of different types of metaphysical theories of consciousness (challenging but very worthwhile)—if you work your way through this paper, you will have a framework for most of what we’ve covered in this class.

**Chalmers, ch 27**

### FINAL EXAM