Philosophy 308: Metaphysics and Mind

Class meets Monday, Wednesday and Friday 2:40 to 3:55 PM in...

Your host: Prof. Michael P. Wolf
Office: 201 Humphrey House
Phone: 7-7077
E-mail: wolf@kzoo.edu

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 9:00-11:00 and by appointment

Required Texts
Bill Lycan, Mind and Cognition: An Anthology.
Westphal and Levenson, Time.

What Is This Course About?
My aim in this course, as in every course I teach, is to make you do some philosophy. Just what it means to "do some philosophy" is a matter of some debate, though. If you asked twenty philosophers what it means to do philosophy, you would get somewhere between twenty-five and thirty answers. Just which questions are important, and just how we ought to pursue answers for them are not matters on which philosophers agree. The one element that seems to be common to all these conceptions of philosophy seems to be that we must give and ask for reasons for what we believe. We may judge that some reasons are better than others, and so some views may be more plausible to us. Giving and asking for reasons is a practice that belongs to all rational animals - Earthly or extraterrestrial, human or not - and this is what we will focus our attention on this course. The goal of this course is not to provide you with information (names, dates, and famous quotes) that you can recite at cocktail parties in the future, although in many cases, knowing those details is an important part of taking part in the class. Rather, my goal here is to teach you (or improve upon) a certain kind of skill: the skill of giving and asking for reasons, and evaluating the reasons other may give.

In more specific terms, our class is divided into two rough halves, a section devoted to the metaphysics of time and another to the metaphysics of mind. 'Metaphysics' as we are studying it here does not have the spiritualist or occult implications that it may carry in colloquial usage; here we use the term to denote the study of objects and phenomena as they are in themselves, as opposed to how we might perceive or conceive of them. The term is actually something of a historical accident. Translators compiling the fragments of Aristotle's work found a book of unusually speculative and abstract questions and arguments about the nature of reality. Lacking an obvious place to put it in Aristotle's corpus, they simply inserted it after his books on physics - "meta" being Latin for "after." Our concerns with time will be twofold; first we will ask whether our sense of the structure of time as a linear progression is intelligible and what the structure of such a dimension might be; second, we will consider McTaggart's paradox about the structure of time and whether time can be real in light of it. Our look at the philosophy of mind will begin with a look at classic and contemporary accounts of what the mind actually is and progress on to recent work in artificial intelligence and computational accounts of cognition.

Assessment
Class participation is an important issue to me, especially in a small class like this. I expect you to come to class with the readings done and ready to discuss them. In order to get you involved in these ways and as an exercise in immersing yourself in the debates and details of real developments in the philosophy of language, each student in this class will take part in a scheduled presentation. The presentation will involve offering an account of the emergence of a new theory or portion of a theory, or an explanation of the parameters of an actual debate in the recent literature. You will be expected to provide notes on what you expect to present a week in advance so that it may be evaluated in advance. The amount of preparation expected here is roughly
the same as a five-page paper. Details of the format and topics will be made available as we progress. This will count for **20% of your final grade**.

There will be two major paper assignments, each about 3000-3500 words (8-10 pages), due at roughly the mid- and endpoints of the semester. Each of these is worth **40% of your final grade**. We will discuss topics and the way in which you should approach this assignment as the semester progresses.

I should mention a few things in closing. First, you are of course bound by the honor code here and any form of plagiarism will be severely punished. (Speak to me if you are unsure what counts as plagiarism.) This does not mean that you cannot use another source, or discuss and consult with your classmates about your assignments. I permit you to do the former and strongly encourage you to do the latter, so long as all the sources and classmates in question are properly cited in your paper. Finally, be forewarned that I reserve the right to lower the grades of papers given to me whose grammar and spelling do not meet college-level standards.

A Tentative Syllabus

**Class 1. January 2:** Introduction

**Part 1: The Metaphysics of Time**

**Class 2. January 4:** Zeno's Paradoxes of Time
Read Class Handouts

**Class 3. January 7:** Augustine
Read Augustine

**Class 4. January 9:** Augustine
Read Augustine

**Class 5. January 11:** Nominalism, Realism and the Continuum
Read Class Handouts

**Class 6. January 16:** Nominalism, Realism and the Continuum
Read Class Handouts

**Class 7. January 18:** Nominalism, Realism and the Continuum
Read Class Handouts

**Class 8. January 21:** Nominalism, Realism and the Continuum
Read Class Handouts

**Class 9. January 23:** PRESENTATIONS

**Class 10. January 25:** Is Time Real?
Read McTaggart

**Class 11. January 28:** Is Time Real?
Read McTaggart

**Class 12. January 30:** The A-Series
Read Gale handout
Class 13. February 1: The A-Series
Read Gale handout

Class 14. February 4: The B-Series
Read Williams

Class 15. February 6: The B-Series
Read Williams

Class 16. February 8: PRESENTATIONS

Part 2: Metaphysics and Mind

Class 17. February 11: Dualism and Identity Theories
Read Place and Jackson

Class 18. February 13: Functionalism
Read Putnam

Class 19. February 15: Functionalism
Read Putnam

Class 20. February 18: Eliminativism and Folk Psychology
Read Churchland

Class 21. February 20: Eliminativism and Folk Psychology
Read Churchland

Class 22. February 22: Eliminativism and Folk Psychology
Read Horgan and Woodward

Class 23. February 25: PRESENTATIONS

Class 24. February 27: Computation and the Mind
Read Churchland and Sjenowksi

Class 25. March 1: Computation and the Mind
Read Churchland and Sjenowksi

Class 26. March 4: Connectionism
Read Bechtel

Class 27. March 6: Connectionism
Read Bechtel

Class 28. March 8: PRESENTATIONS

Second Paper Due March 13