Philosophy 3, Nature of Mind, Summer 2008 (1st session) - James Stazicker

This course is an introduction to philosophical problems about the mind. In the first three weeks, we will focus on the relationship between the mind and the physical world. We will pursue the following questions: What is a mind? What are mental states such as beliefs, desires, feelings and experiences? Are they states of the brain? Are they a matter of how one behaves? Could a computer have a mind?

In the second three weeks, we will look in detail at some more specific issues raised by our discussion of the questions above: What is the connection between consciousness and the capacity to represent the world around us (to have mental states which are about the world)? Are mental states in the head? In what ways do mental states depend on the world around us? How do we know about other people’s minds?

We will read work by philosophers including Hilary Putnam, John Searle and Thomas Nagel. Students taking the course will be expected to read this work closely and carefully. They will also be required to write two papers and sit a final exam.

Schedule:

Week 1: Dualism and Materialism

Introduction to the course - subject-matter, philosophical approach, requirements.
Descartes’ Substance Dualism and criticisms.
Smart’s Materialism and criticisms.
Jackson’s ‘knowledge argument’.

Readings: Smart, ‘Sensations and Brain Processes’
Kim, Philosophy of Mind, Ch.3; extracts from Ch.5
Jackson, ‘What Mary Didn’t Know’

Week 2: Ryle, Behaviorism and Functionalism

Ryle on the category mistake in Cartesian thinking.
Behaviorism and criticisms.
Functionalism, computers and artificial intelligence.

Readings: Ryle, ‘Descartes’ Myth’
Putnam, ‘Brains and Behavior’
Putnam, ‘The Nature of Mental States’

Week 3: Consciousness and criticisms of Functionalism; the ‘divide and conquer’ strategy

Nagel on consciousness; how Nagel’s argument bears on the theories we’ve seen so far.
Consciousness and Block’s criticism of functionalism.
Consciousness and intentionality; Block’s strategy of accounting for them separately.
Searle on Functionalism; Searle on the relationship between consciousness and intentionality.

Readings: Nagel, ‘What is it Like to be a Bat?’
Block, ‘Troubles with Functionalism’
Searle, ‘Minds, Brains, and Programs’; extracts from Intentionality

--- 1st paper due

Week 4: Deeper into intentionality and consciousness

Dennett and interpretationism.
Wollheim on the emotions, and on the distinction between occurrent and standing mental states.
The idea that experience is nothing more than representation.

Readings: Dennett, ‘True Believers’
Wollheim, ‘The Emotions and their Philosophy of Mind’
Dretske, Naturalizing the Mind, Ch.1
Week 5: The boundaries of the mind

Perception: problems with the causal theory; the disjunctivist alternative.  
Externalism: Putnam on the meanings of words; Burge’s extension of the idea to mental states.  
The extended mind: how this proposal differs from both of the above.

Readings:  
Snowdon, ‘Perception, Vision and Causation’  
Putnam, ‘Meaning and Reference’  
Clark and Chalmers: ‘The Extended Mind’

Week 6: Knowledge of Other Minds

The different questions about how we could know others’ minds.  
The argument from analogy and Malcolm’s criticisms; Cartesians and behaviorists again. 
Does Strawson offer a satisfying solution? 
Review.

Readings:  
Russell, ‘Analogy’  
Malcolm, ‘Knowledge of Other Minds’  
Strawson ‘Persons’

--- 2nd paper due

--- Final Exam