

## **ANTH 450: Brains, Consciousness, Personhood**

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### Course Overview

The problem of consciousness has motivated thinkers since at least the pre-Socratic philosophers of Ancient Greece – and continues to pose new problems for thinkers in the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and arts. What does it mean to think? Is there a difference between sentience and consciousness? Is consciousness integral to being human? What does it take to learn? And is there only one way for consciousness to be experienced? In this course, we address these questions by considering a diverse body of interdisciplinary material – philosophy, science, ethnography, literature, and film.

Throughout the Enlightenment, emerging scientific and medical understandings of the brain added to earlier, pre-scientific conceptions of consciousness; more recently, neuroscience has added even further to understandings of consciousness. In each case, these scientific developments are being developed in philosophical and cultural matrices. As a result, we might reasonably ask: how do cultural expectations of what it means to be human shape these scientific and philosophical pursuits? To this end, this course takes a largely historical approach, situating the study of consciousness as a problem in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as social scientists began to uncover non-Western modes of relation, subjectivity, and being in the world.

This course takes an interdisciplinary social science approach to the contemporary interest in the brain, and, in so doing, draws on material from psychology, anthropology, sociology, and history. In addition, it integrates important thinkers -- Descartes, Spinoza, Kant -- from philosophy, as they have significantly shaped social scientific understandings of the brain and consciousness. Across this diverse literature, students will be exposed to a variety of methods that social scientists have employed to understand the relationship between the material nervous system, human behavior and interactions, and socio-technical environments. In so doing, this course provides students with a robust comparative examination of how the social sciences operate in the world, and the effects they have in popular debates about the brain, consciousness, and personhood.

Students will be expected to develop writing projects that integrate approaches across the arts, sciences, and humanities, and which draw upon the historical and cross-cultural record. Students should complete the course with a significant piece of writing that builds upon their expertise developed in the course.

## Learning Outcomes

Students in C courses will

1. Demonstrate understanding of course content through formal academic writing;
2. Construct effective prose that demonstrates critical thinking and advances sound conclusions, appropriate to the course and discipline; and
3. Demonstrate the ability to revise and improve their writing in both form and content.

Students in N courses will demonstrate:

1. Knowledge of major concepts, models, and issues (and their interrelationships) of at least one of the social sciences: anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, or sociology.
2. An understanding of the methods used by social scientists to explore social phenomena, including, when appropriate to the discipline, observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and analysis by mathematics or other interpretive frameworks.

Students in O courses will demonstrate

1. Proficiency in oral presentations.
2. The ability to improve oral presentations in response to critiques.
3. Skill in listening to and critiquing oral presentations.

Reading List:

Books are available at the campus bookstore. All other readings are available through Blackboard.

Bateson, Gregory. Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1972].

Eisenberg, Jon. The Right vs. the Right to Die: Lessons from the Terri Schiavo Case and How to Stop It From Happening Again. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

Grandin, Temple. Thinking in pictures: My life with autism. New York: Random House, 2006 [1995].

Shaviro, Steve. Discognition. London: Repeater, 2016.

Metzl, Jonathan. The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease. Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.

Montagu, Ashley. The elephant man : A study in human dignity. Lafayette, LA: Acadian House, 2001 [1971].

Pitts-Taylor, Victoria. The Brain's Body: Neuroscience and Corporeal Politics. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

Rose, Nikolas and Joelle Abi-Rached. Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.

## Grading & Assignments:

Reading Guides (25%) – Students are required to complete at least 1 reading guide each week, and a total of 20 reading guides over the course of the semester (there are more readings [29] than required Reading Guides, so students have some latitude in which readings they submit Reading Guides for). Reading Guides must be turned in to the instructor at the beginning of class in which the reading is discussed. Late Reading Guides will not be accepted for credit. Reading Guides cannot be submitted for readings during the first week of class.

Oral Presentations (2 @ 5% and 10%, respectively) – Students will initially present on their identified problem (see below) and the resources they intend to draw on to address that problem. These presentations will be short (2 written pages, ~5 minutes), and students will receive written feedback from the instructor and peers. During the last two weeks of class, students will give longer presentations (4-5 written pages, ~10 minutes) summarizing the argument of their final paper, the evidence that they have drawn upon, and the conclusions they have reached. Again, students will receive written feedback from the instructor and peers. In both cases, students will be graded on their effectiveness in communicating their ideas, the coherence of the presentation, and their ability to engage the audience. Presentations cannot be rescheduled; if you miss your presentation, you will receive a failing grade in the course.

## 20-Page Final Paper, broken into these components (60% total):

*Identify a Problem (5%)* – Based on the readings during the first month of class, identify a contemporary problem related to how people think about brains, consciousness, and personhood. This might be a problem you identify from your everyday life, one associated with a specific person you know, one you can identify in popular media, historical literature, or modern science. In 300 words, what is the problem, and why is it a problem? That is, whom does this problem affect? How does the problem relate to the course content?

*Identify Resources (5%)* – What kinds of research are you going to conduct to explore the history and contemporary ramifications of the problem you have identified? We'll discuss a number of methods in course (ethnography, textual analysis, historiography), and you'll need to choose one or two to frame your research. In each case, you'll need to identify the resources that will lead to the successful completion of your research project: are there experts you can talk to? books and academic journals you can consult? archives that you can access? In 300 words, you'll need to discuss your proposed methods in completing your research project's data collection, what secondary and primary sources you can consult, and how these sources will inform your research.

*Thesis & Argumentation (5%)* – In a paragraph (~200 words), make an argument about your research findings. Are you making an historical argument? an ethnographic one? a cross-cultural one? How does the argument relate to the resources you will be drawing upon to make your argument? In another paragraph, discuss the contrary positions to your argument; that is, argue against yourself. What are the weaknesses in your argument? How might other people read the same evidence differently than you propose to? How have other people argued about similar evidence in the past?

*First Five Pages (10%)* – Write the first five pages of your research paper (~1500 words). In these pages, you should have a compelling introduction (provide an empirical example that helps pose your problem), as well as the statement of your thesis, and a discussion of your research methods. In addition, you should provide a map of your paper – what are the sections and how are they organized? how does each section relate to your argument? Discuss each section in a paragraph or more. What do you imagine your conclusion discussing?

*Rough Draft (10%)* – Building on your First Five Pages, you will complete a full rough draft of your paper. Each section needs to be fully written, including the presentation of evidence, your discussion and interpretation of the evidence, and an articulation of how the evidence relates to your overall argument and fits into the structure of the paper. You will also complete a draft of your conclusion, in which you will discuss the implications for the problem that you have identified, and, possibly, solutions for how the problem might be addressed. Each section should be at least five pages long, and the conclusion should be at least two pages long. The Rough Draft will be read and commented upon by the instructor.

*Final Rough Draft (5%)* – The Final Rough Draft must incorporate the comments of the instructor from your Rough Draft, and represent the final version of your paper. The paper should be complete for all intents and purposes, including completed introductions, sections, and conclusion, and full citations and bibliography.

*Peer Reviews (2 @ 5% each)* – First read this, on the ‘elements of productive peer review’: <http://bit.ly/2htngrT>. You will be randomly assigned two papers to read, and you are required to turn in a peer review for two of your peers. Each peer review should be 500-700 words long, and discuss the author’s argument, use of evidence, persuasiveness, and coherence. Additionally, you may choose to identify issues in your peers’ writing style. Late peer reviews will not be accepted for credit, but must be turned in.

*Final Paper & Response to Peer Reviews (10%)* – In no less than 300 words, you should prepare a document that outlines how you have chosen to address (or not address) each of the concerns raised by the peer reviewers. You may either complete this in one or two documents. Your Final Paper should incorporate these changes as well, and you should address how you have included the critiques into your paper.

Policies:

**No exceptions to policies will be made for students who add the class late.**

**There is no extra credit available.**

**No late work will be accepted for credit.**

**Students taking the course Pass/Fail must earn a C to receive a Pass.**

Workload: This course is a 4-credit course, which means that in addition to the scheduled lectures, students are expected to do at least 9.5 hours of course-related work each week during the semester. This includes things like: completing assigned readings, participating in lab sessions, studying for tests and examinations, preparing written assignments, completing internship or clinical placement requirements, and other tasks that must be completed to earn credit in the course.<sup>1</sup> I assume that undergraduate students can read 1 page of academic writing in 3 minutes; 100 pages of reading should require about 300 minutes, or 5 hours. You may need to read some of the texts more than once to fully understand them. In most cases, you should expect to be reading about 75-100 pages per week (approximately 4 hours) in addition to other course requirements.

Disability-related Equal Access Accommodations: Students wishing to request academic accommodations to insure their equitable access and participation in this course should notify the instructor as soon as they are aware of their need for such arrangements. Authorizations from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) are generally required. We encourage you to contact SSD at 607-777-2686 to schedule an appointment with the Director or Learning Disabilities Specialist. The SSD website ([www.binghamton.edu/ssd](http://www.binghamton.edu/ssd)) includes information regarding their Disability Documentation Guidelines. The office is located in UU-119.

Attendance: Students who miss section during the first week of class will be administratively dropped from the course and under no circumstances will be given a permission code to add the course.

Academic Integrity – Academic misconduct of any sort will not be tolerated. Evidence of academic misconduct – which is not limited to plagiarism and cheating – will result in an immediate failing grade in the course and actions as dictated by university policy regarding academic integrity for undergraduate students.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.binghamton.edu/academics/provost/documents/syllabus-credit-hours-0314.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.binghamton.edu:8080/exist9/rest/Bulletin2014-15/xq/2\\_academic\\_policies\\_and\\_procedures\\_all\\_students.xq?\\_xsl=/db/Bulletin2014-15/xsl/MasterCompose.xsl](http://www.binghamton.edu:8080/exist9/rest/Bulletin2014-15/xq/2_academic_policies_and_procedures_all_students.xq?_xsl=/db/Bulletin2014-15/xsl/MasterCompose.xsl)

Contacting Me: I only check my email between 9-11 AM on weekday mornings and during my office hours. I will always respond to emails within 24 hours, except for emails received on Fridays, which will be responded to on the following Monday. If you plan to stop by my office hours, please contact me ahead of time, either by email (mwolfmey@binghamton.edu) or in person before or after class.

Correspondence with instructors: Only correspondence that follows professional conventions of correspondence will be replied to by me. For example, your email should begin 'Dear Professor Wolf-Meyer,...' and end with your signature. Beginning an email without a salutation, a 'Hey' or other informal forms of address will ensure your email will not be responded to. If the answer to your question is clearly stated in the syllabus or assignment guidelines, instructors may not respond to your email.

Style Matters: All written work should be double-spaced, 12 point font, in Times New Roman, with 1 inch margins on all sides, and page numbers. Citation should look like this: (Author Year: Page), e.g. (Wolf-Meyer 2009: 408). Failure to meet these standards will result in a reduced grade.

## **Week 1: What's the Problem of Consciousness?**

January 17<sup>th</sup> – Introduction to the Course; Syllabus overview

Egan, Greg. 'Learning to Be Me' *In* Axiomatic. London: Gollancz, 1998.

McHugh, Maureen. The Kingdom of the Blind. *In* After the Apocalypse. Easthampton, MA: Small Bear, 2011.

Swanwick, Michael. Wild Minds *In* Tales of Old Earth. Berkeley, CA: Frog Books, 2001.

## **Week 2: A Partial Genealogy of Consciousness, Part One**

January 24<sup>th</sup>

Descartes, Renee. Discourse on method and the meditations. F.E. Sutcliffe, transl. New York: Penguin Classics, 1968 [1637]. **Selections**

Spinoza, Baruch. Ethics. E. Curley, transl. New York: Penguin Classics, 2005 [1677]. **Selections**

## **Week 3: A Partial Genealogy of Consciousness, Part Two**

January 31<sup>st</sup>

DuBois, W. E. B. The souls of black folk. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1994 [1903]. **Selections**

Freud, Sigmund. The interpretation of dreams. J. Crick, transl. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1901]. **Selections**

Kant, Immanuel. Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view. M.J. Gregor, transl. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1996 [1974].

Whorf, Benjamin. L. Grammatical categories. *In* Language, thought, and reality. J.B. Carroll, ed. Pp. 87–101. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1956.

## **Week 4: Two Exemplary Cases**

February 7<sup>th</sup>

*Identify a Problem Due*

Macmillan, Malcolm. An odd kind of fame: Stories of Phineas Gage. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002. **Selections**

Montagu, Ashley. The elephant man: A study in human dignity. Lafayette, LA: Acadian House, 2001 [1971].

**Week 5: Self and Society, Part One: Consciousness as a Problem of Modernity**

February 14<sup>th</sup>

*Identify Resources Due*

Bateson, Gregory. *Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1972]. Pages 61-87, 107-127, 405-476.

**Week 6: Schizophrenia as Pathological Consciousness**

February 21<sup>st</sup>

Student Presentations of Problems

Bateson, Gregory. *Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1972]. Pages 194-342.

**Week 7: A Case Study in Schizophrenia and Race**

February 28<sup>th</sup>

*Thesis & Outline Due*

Metzl, Jonathan. *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2011. **Parts 1-6.**

**Week 8:** March 7<sup>th</sup> – Winter Break

**Week 9: Conceptualizing the Person**

March 14<sup>th</sup>

*First Five Pages Due*

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. B. Brewster, transl. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. **Selections**

Foucault, Michel. *Technologies of the self*. In *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth*. P. Rabinow, ed. Pp. 223-252. *Essential works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984*. New York: New Press, 1998 [1982].

Gell, Alfred. *Art and agency: An anthropological theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. **Selections**

Strathern, Marilyn. *Reproducing the future: Anthropology, kinship, and the new reproductive technologies*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

**Week 10: The Neuro- Era**

March 21<sup>st</sup>

Rose, Nikolas and Joelle Abi-Rached. *Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.

**Introduction, Chapters 1-7, Conclusion**

**Week 11: Two More Exemplary Cases**

March 28<sup>th</sup>

Goddard, Peyton, Diane Goddard, and Carol Cujec. *I am intelligent: From heartbreak to healing -- a mother and daughter's journey through autism*. Augusta, GA: Skirt, 2012.

**Selections**

Grandin, Temple. *Thinking in pictures: My life with autism*. New York: Random House, 2006 [1995].

**Week 12: Beyond the Brain Proper**

April 4<sup>th</sup>

*Rough Draft Due*

Pitts-Taylor, Victoria. *The Brain's Body: Neuroscience and Corporeal Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. **Introduction, Chapters 1-4,**

**Conclusion**

**Week 13: No Classes – Spring Break (4/8-4/17)**

**Week 14: One Last Exemplary Case**

April 18<sup>th</sup>

*Final Rough Draft Due*

Eisenberg, Jon. *The Right vs. the Right to Die: Lessons from the Terri Schiavo Case and How to Stop It From Happening Again*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

**Parts One & Two**

**Week 15: Intelligence, Sentience, Consciousness**

April 25<sup>th</sup>

*Peer Reviews Due in Class*

Shaviro, Steve. *Discognition*. London: Repeater, 2016. **Introduction, Chapters 1-7, Afterword**

**Week 16:**

May 2<sup>nd</sup>

Student Presentations

**Week 17:**

May 9<sup>th</sup>

Student Presentations

**Final Exam Week**

Final paper due on final exam date, to be determined in February