Current Controversies in Cognitive Science:  
The Philosophy of Psychopathology

Course Syllabus

Location: Wilson 212  
Times: Tuesday & Thursday, 10am-11:30am.  
Instructor: Peter Langland-Hassan  
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Office: Wilson 101  
Office Hours: Tuesday, 1-2pm, and by appointment

Course Description:
The dissociations among cognitive abilities revealed by mental disorders provide important litmus tests for theories of cognition. At the same time, they often create a need for richer, more fine-grained understandings of psychological concepts and modes of taxonomy. This course will engage in both projects through an analysis and comparison of rival accounts of psychopathologies in the current cognitive science literature. Topics include: content-specific delusions (e.g., the Cotard and Capgras delusions), "mindblindness" and impairments in empathy (as in autism spectrum disorders), schizophrenic delusions and hallucinations, obsessive compulsive disorder, and Williams Syndrome. The issues discussed will often connect to wider disputes in philosophy and cognitive science, such as the simulation versus theory theory debate, the nature of the mechanisms governing the sense of agency in perception and action, the question of nonconceptual content, and the nature of one's access to one's own mind.

Assessment:
Assessment will be broken into three main assignments.

Critical Review (25% of Grade): Toward the beginning of the semester each student, in consultation with me, will select two readings from the course syllabus (undergraduates choose one). You will be responsible for presenting this reading, along with your critical analysis of it, to the class. You will hand in to me a summary of the text's main arguments, together with your analysis of them. You are asked to bring to bear—either as support or as challenge—at least two papers from the empirical literature on the subject that are not discussed by the author (you will have to provide relevant summaries of these studies). These assignments should not exceed 4000 words.

Research Paper (50% of grade): The topic of the Research Paper is of your own choosing, but it must pertain to the course and be approved by me. The research paper will be broken into three stages:
1) A one page abstract describing the planned paper will be due October 27.
2) A rough draft (to be given a mock grade) is due November 19.
3) The final paper is due December 8, and should be between 6000 and 8000 words.

Note: the Critical Review and Research Paper should address different issues.

Discussions (25% of Grade): For many of the readings three students respectively will be assigned the roles of Summarizer, Antagonist, and Apologist. The Summarizer will be responsible for summarizing, for the class, the basic points of the paper. The Antagonist is responsible for raising a quibble with the paper's arguments. And the Apologist is responsible for either defending the paper against the Antagonist, or giving a point in the argument's favor that the paper itself does not provide. Sincere and reasonably informed attempts at role-fulfillment will be given an A (this component is essentially Pass/Fail).
5 and 5 (ungraded): Everyone will write in an off-the-cuff, stream of consciousness manner for the last five minutes of the class. The topic of this writing can be any of the following: what was interesting, confusing, or aggravating in the day's class; a comment that you didn't get to make in discussion; a summary of what was discussed. This writing is handed in to me but not graded. It serves two main purposes: it gives me feedback about your response to what's going on, and it allows you to develop and clarify your own thinking through the process of writing. At the beginning of each class (the other '5') I will (anonymously) read one of the submissions from the last class as a means of beginning discussion, or simply for entertainment's sake.

READINGS

All readings are available as downloads from Telesis, organized by first author's last name.

Underlined readings are required
*Starred* readings are recommended

First Meeting: Introduction to course and a brief history of the DSM


Week 1: What is a mental disorder? Classification and Taxonomy


Week 2: Schizophrenia – foundations of the DSM approach


**Week 3: Schizophrenia and Cognitive Neuropsychology**


**Week 4: Explaining Delusions, continued**


**Week 5: Delusions and Imagination**


**Week 6: Disorders of Agency and the Comparator Hypothesis**


Sperry (1950) / von Holst (1950) – (selections)


Week 7: Disorders of Agency Continued


Week 8: Autism Spectrum Disorders

Tuesday 10/20: *The DSM IV on Autism: state of current research* (Reading TBD)

Thursday 10/22: Baron-Cohen et al. (1985) "Does the Autistic Child have a 'Theory of Mind'?" *Cognition.*

Week 9: Autism and the Theory of Mind Debate


Week 10: Autism and Modularity of Mind


Week 11: Appeals to Psychopathologies in Support of Broader Theses


Week 12: Psychiatric Genetics and Modularity: reflections on Williams Syndrome


Week 13: Irony, Metaphor, and Theory of Mind


Week 14: Class Choice

Tuesday 12/1

Thursday 12/3