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396-01 Sport, Expertise, and Action

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Sport, Expertise, and Action

(Phil 396)

One of the intractable philosophical problems Descartes passed down to us is the mind-body problem. The mind-body problem concerns the relationship between the mind and the body, and, in particular, whether the mind is distinct from the body, reducible to the body (or brain), or inseparable from the body. Philosophers and scientists have attempted to resolve the mind-body problem by reducing the mind to the brain, and in doing so, some have argued that the brain is nothing more than a very sophisticated computer that processes incoming information and outputs certain commands that control the body’s functioning. The input-output model of the mind that considers the mind a sophisticated computer is called cognitivism. A number of important challenges to cognitivism can be raised if we consider athletic action and skill, which, on the surface, do not appear amenable to cognitivist explanations. By examining athletic action and the nature of skill, we will investigate alternative solutions to the mind-body problem. While the mind-body problem will be the driving philosophical problem of the course, we will engage it by dealing with a number of important and related philosophical questions: What is embodiment? What are skills? What is expertise? Does reflection and attention interrupt the flow of expert action? Is there a distinction between knowledge of facts and knowing how to perform an action, between knowing that Xavier is in Ohio and knowing how to ride a bicycle? In the course, we will tackle the mind-body problem, and these related questions, by examining the work of Aristotle, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, in addition to the contemporary work of analytic philosophers, sport psychologists, and cognitive scientists. The basic thought of the course is that by examining the nature of athletic experience and expert action, we can develop an alternative, embodied conception of the mind that overcomes the mind-body problem.

Required Texts: All readings will be distributed as PDFs through Canvas.

Online resources: There are few reliable online resources for philosophy, but I do recommend the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html), which is reliable, clear, and scholarly. This is the only online source you are permitted to use, and if you do reference or quote it in a paper, it must be cited appropriately.

Course Requirements:
20% Participation and informal writing
20% Reading Quizzes
20% Paper 1: Causal Theory of Action
20% Paper 2: Historical Paper (Aristotle, Heidegger, or Merleau-Ponty)
20% Paper 3: Debate Research Paper (10 Pages)

All three papers must be completed to pass the course.

Participation: Participation is required. Participation can take place in a number of ways: asking questions, responding to questions, raising objections, and making points. I strongly encourage students to speak up in class. I do recognize that for some students talking in class and discussing philosophy can be intimidating. Discussing the philosophical content of the readings or class discussion by email or during office hours will count toward your participation grade. Participation is not an automatic 20%—you actually have to take part, and I am very aware of who is doing so.
Quizzes: If you miss a quiz because of an unexcused absence, then you cannot make it up. If the absence is excused, then I will assign you a writing project or quiz that will be graded and carry the same weight as the missed quiz. Unannounced, or pop quizzes, are a possibility.

Papers: You will write three papers. For each paper I will provide a handout detailing the assignment and my expectations. All papers are due at the beginning of class. A late paper will be lowered for each class it is late a +/-1. If your paper deserves an A- and you turn it in one class late, then your grade for the paper will be a B+. If your paper deserves a B+ and you turn it in three classes late, then your grade for the paper will be a C+. Papers must be submitted through Turnitin. *All papers should be double spaced in Times New Roman (12pt font).

Writing Center: Everyone needs help with their writing. Even great authors need an editor or second pair of eyes. I strongly suggest that you visit the writing center before you turn in each paper. Your grammar will improve, your prose will become crisper, and your argument stronger. Overall, your writing skills and course grade will very likely increase. There is really nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

For more information:
http://www.xavier.edu/writing_center

Where: Conaton Learning Commons, Room 400
Phone: 745-2875

When: Monday-Wednesday: 9:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.
      Friday: 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
      Sunday 1:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism will result in the failing of the assignment, and it may result in the failing of the course. The following statement on plagiarism is from Xavier University's website on plagiarism, where you can take a tutorial about how to avoid plagiarism:

http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism/index.cfm

- Plagiarism is using the work of another as if it were your own, without enclosing the words of others in quotations.
- Plagiarism is copying from the Internet, from a web page, or from another person without giving credit.
- Plagiarism is using ideas which are not your own without citing those ideas.
- Plagiarism can be applied to ideas, research, art, music, graphs, diagrams, websites, data, books, newspapers, magazines, plays, movies, photos, and speeches.

Attendance: You are allowed two unexcused absences. More than two unexcused absences will have a serious effect on your grade. Each unexcused absence after two will result in a lowering of your final grade by a +/-1. If your final grade is an A- and you have 4 absences, then your grade for the course will be a B+. If your final grade is a B+ and you have 6 absences, then your grade for the course will be a C+. This policy will be strictly followed. Excused absences require an official note from a doctor or student affairs. If you have more than six absences, whether excused or unexcused, then you will fail the course. If you do miss a class I strongly suggest that you get notes from another student and that you ask me for
handouts I might have distributed and instructions for the next class. If you are absent, do not assume that you know where we are in the readings, since we will not always follow the syllabus exactly.

**Students must keep their cell phones off during class, not on vibrate or silence. No texting at all!!

Tentative Schedule

**Introduction**
1/14 Descartes, “Sixth Meditation”
Gould, “The Brain of Brawn”
Montero, “The Myth of ‘Just Do it’”
Stanley, “The Practical and the Theoretical”
1/16 Dreyfus, “Five Steps from Novice to Expert”

**The Causal Theory of Action**
1/21 Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, Causes”
1/23 Frankfurt, “The Problem of Action”
1/28 Clarke, “Skilled Activity and the Causal Theory of Action”
1/30 Debating the Causal Theory of Action

**Aristotle on Action and Practical Wisdom**
2/4 Aristotle, Selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*
2/6 Aristotle, Selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*

**Heidegger on Coping**
2/11 Heidegger, Selections from *Being and Time*
2/13 Heidegger, Selections from *Being and Time*

**Merleau-Ponty on the Body**
2/18 Merleau-Ponty, Selections from *Phenomenology of Perception*
2/20 Kelly, “Merleau-Ponty on the Body”
Kelly, “Grasping at Straws: Motor Intentionality and the Cognitive Science of Skilled Behavior”

**The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate**
2/25 McDowell, “Conceptual Capacities in Perception”
2/27 Dreyfus, “Overcoming the Myth of the Mental”
3/4 Spring Break
3/6 Spring Break

3/13 Dreyfus, “Return of the Myth of the Mental”
3/18 McDowell, “Reply to Dreyfus”
Dreyfus, “Reply to McDowell”
Gottlieb, “Unreflective Action and the Argument from Speed”
3/20 Sutton, “Applying Intelligence to the Reflexes: Embodied Skills and Habits between Dreyfus and Descartes”
The Know-How Debate
3/25 Ryle, “Knowing How and Knowing That”
3/27 Stanley, “Ryle on Knowing How”
4/3 Stanley, “Is the ‘Dumb Jock’ Really a Nerd?”
Stanley and Krakauer, “Motor Skill Depends on Facts of Knowledge”

The Choking Debate
4/8 Beilock, “Choking Under Pressure: From the Green to the Stage”
4/10 Bargh and Chartrand, “The Unbearable Automaticity of Being”
4/15 Masters, “Knowledge, Knerves, and Know-how”
Lewicki, “Unconscious Acquisition of Procedural Knowledge”

4/17 Easter Holiday

4/22 Beilock and Carr, “On the Fragility of Skilled Performance”
4/24 Wulf, “Attentional Focus and Motor Learning”
4/29 Smith, et. al., “The Yips in Golf”
5/1 Gottlieb, “Know-How, Procedural Knowledge, and the Choking Effect”

Final Paper due Tuesday, May 6