

2021-2022 PSYCHIATRY ELECTIVE

Director:

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Seminar Dates:

The following 3 Tuesdays:

1/18/22 – Psychiatric Metaphysics

2/15/22 – Thought Experiments

3/15/22 – The Sociopolitical Meta-Problem

Seminar Times:

From 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM

Seminar Location:

via Zoom

Maximum Number of Participants:

20

Recommended Participants:

Yale University

Graduate/Medical Students, Residents, Fellows, Faculty

Oxford University

Graduate/Medical Students, Residents/Specialist Registrars, Fellows, Faculty

AAPP Members

INPP Members

Course Title:

Psychiatry and the Hard Problem of Consciousness

Course Description:

The Nobel Prize winning behavioral neuroscientist and psychiatrist, Eric Kandel, asserted in his 2018 book, *The Disordered Mind: What Unusual Brains Tell Us About Ourselves*, that “the biological approach to mind is beginning to unravel the mysteries of...consciousness.” Yet such apparent incrementalist faith in the power of scientific research to approach asymptotically a future understanding of causal relations between brain mechanisms and human sentience may be misplaced.

The philosopher David Chalmers has identified as the singularly “Hard Problem of Consciousness” pursuit of a still elusive explanatory link between the quantitative batch processing of objective, publicly accessible scientific facts and

the qualitative nature of subjective, private experience. Professor Chalmers has contrasted this “Hard Problem” with so-called “easy problems,” whose solutions bypass explanatory considerations of causality and merely correlate particular neural events and specific conscious perceptions empirically.

Contemporary psychiatry’s errant soul is turning away from recognition of the Hard Problem and is instead settling increasingly for engagement with only “easy problems” via objective epistemology. Today’s psychiatric agendas are flattening George Engel’s laudably expansive biopsychosocial model into a myopic, biologically reductionistic theoretical paradigm, signaled in clinical practice by assembly-line “med checks” and fueled ideologically in the academy by a coalescence of factors: parallel distributive computational technology evoking analogies in neural networks; availability of functional imaging and molecular brain assays; digitized interfaces between patients and providers; economic pressure to curtail costly labor-intensive modes of personal humanistic care.

This seminar series will explore the implications of Chalmers’ Hard Problem for psychiatry. A survey of germane philosophical perspectives, both historically seminal and currently relevant, will touch upon substance and property dualism, parallelist monadology, subjective and objective idealism, neutral monism, supervenience, logical behaviorism, biological naturalism, eliminative materialism, the central state, computational functionalism, epiphenomenalism, emergentism, panprotopsychism, orchestrated objective reduction, the global workspace, integrated information theory, CAS processing, representational phenomenology, self-awareness, multiple drafts, higher order thought, neural Darwinism, attention schemata, Orch OR, and mysterianism. Applicable thought experiments, including Frank Jackson’s example of Mary’s color vision, Herbert Feigl’s hypothetical autocerebroscope, John Searle’s Chinese Room, and the notorious modal “zombie” argument, will be reviewed. Sociopolitical contexts that might bias the metaphysical perspectives of psychiatrists will be identified.

Pertinence of all these topics to possible reconceptualizations of psychiatry as a discipline straddling the demonstrably working brain and the irreducibly conscious mind will be explored.

Reading Sources:

- 1) Chalmers, D. [1995] Facing up to the problem of consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* **2:3**, 200-219.
- 2) Chalmers, D. [1996] *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 3) Chalmers, D. [2018] The meta-problem of consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* **25:9-10**, 6-61.
- 4) Churchland, P. [1986] *Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of the Mind-Brain*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

- 5) Engel, G. [April 8, 1977] The need for a new medical model: a challenge for biomedicine. *Science* **196:4286**,129-36.
- 6) Feigl, H. [1967] *The 'Mental' and the 'Physical.'* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 7) Jackson, F. [1982] Epiphenomenal qualia. *Philosophical Quarterly* **32**, 127–136.
- 8) Kandel, E. [2018] *The Disordered Mind: What Unusual Brains Tell Us About Ourselves.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- 9) Levine, J. [1983] On leaving out what it's like. In Davies, M. & Humphreys, G. (eds.) *Consciousness: Psychological and Philosophical Essays.* Oxford: Blackwell.
- 10) Mender, D. [1994] *The Myth Of Neuropsychiatry.* New York: Plenum.
- 11) Mender, D. [July 6 2015] Is the human brain like a computer? *The New York Times* A16.
- 12) Nagel, T. (1974) What is it like to be a bat? *Philosophical Review* **83:4**, 435–450.
- 13) Priest, S. [1991] *Theories of Mind.* New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- 14) Searle, J. [January 1990] Is the brain's mind a computer program? *Scientific American* **252:1**, 25-31.
- 15) Westphal, J. [2016] *The Mind Body Problem.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Educational Goals and Objectives:

At the end of this elective, attendees will be able to:

- 1) describe the major schools of mind-brain metaphysics.
- 2) characterize the strengths and weaknesses, including culture-bound ideological biases, of biological psychiatry.
- 3) discuss arguments for and against a subjective first-person orientation in framing healthy and disordered consciousness.
- 4) suggest novel thought experiments, incorporating recognition of the Hard Problem and pointing toward possible alternative directions for future psychiatric research.