

## **PHIL 32091/Honors 20722: Philosophy and Autism**

Fall 2009

M 5:30-8:15 pm

Bowman 315

Professor: Dr. Deborah Barnbaum  
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Office Hours: M and W 12:15-2:45, and by appointment

**Course Description** This course examines some of the philosophical implications of autism. After a short discussion of the psychological aspects of autism, we will explore the ways in which autism leads to unique philosophical questions. These questions include questions in philosophy of mind, questions about the nature of a good human life, and questions about what makes certain actions morally right or morally wrong. The course will conclude with a consideration of some of the interesting implied ethical questions that emerge from autism, including questions about the use of genetic technologies and autism, and the use of persons with autism as human research subjects.

The course will be conducted in a seminar setting, in keeping with an upper-division philosophy course. Students will be expected to engage in informed discussion about readings, give at least two brief presentations on an assigned reading, and write a term paper for the course. Students will be required to purchase a course packet and the following three books:

1. Barnbaum, Deborah, *The Ethics of Autism: Among Them But Not of Them*, Indiana University Press, 2008
2. Baron-Cohen, Simon, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*, MIT University Press, 1997
3. Goldman, Alvin, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading*, Oxford University Press, 2006

Course Packet Available at Wordsmith's in Kent: (330) 677-9673 (call first)

**Course Requirements:** Everyone attending this course is expected to participate in well-informed class discussion. Well-informed class discussion requires reading the assigned material prior to class and regular class attendance. In addition to the above requirements, students enrolled in the class are expected to:

1. Give two brief in-class presentations on one of the philosophical arguments forwarded in one of the weekly readings
2. Submit a 2-page prospectus in advance of the research paper
3. Write one research paper (12-15 pages)
4. Submit an annotated bibliography that accompanies your paper

Over-all class performance will be determined by each student's performance in all of the above required tasks.

**Schedule of Topics and Readings** (subject to change during the course of the semester, with appropriate notice from the professor). Book readings designated by chapter numbers; readings without chapter numbers are from course packet.

**Week #1: Introduction to Philosophy and Autism**

1. Barnbaum: Introduction, chpt 1 pp. 17-32
2. Kathy Swackhamer, "Ashes in Eyes"

**Week#2: No Classes; Labor Day**

**Week #3: Introduction to Mindreading and Mindblindness**

1. Baron-Cohen chpts. 1-3, 5
2. Goldman, chpt 1

**Week #4: Alternatives to the TOM Model**

1. Baron-Cohen chpts. 4, 6
2. Kamawar, Deepthi; Garfield, Jay L.; deVilliers, Jill, "Coherence as an Explanation for Theory of Mind Task Failure in Autism"
3. Thagard, Paul and O'Loughlin, Claire, "False Photos, False Beliefs, and Coherence: A Response to Kamawar *et al.*"
4. O'Loughlin, Claire and Thagard, Paul, "Autism and Coherence: A Computational Model"

**Week #5: TOM and Theory Theory**

1. Barnbaum, chpt. 1, 32-39
2. Goldman, chpts. 4, 5

**Week #6: TOM and Simulation Theory**

1. Goldman, chpt 2, chpt 7

**Week #7: Autism and Self-Consciousness**

1. Barnbaum, chpt. 1, 39-47
2. Firth, Uta and Happé, Francesca, "Theory of Mind and Self-Consciousness: What is it Like to be Autistic?"
3. Raffman, Diana, "What Autism May Tell Us about Self-Consciousness: A Commentary on Firth and Happé"

**Week #8: More on Autism and Self-Consciousness**

1. Goldman, chpt 9

**Week #9: Autism and Moral Agency**

1. Barnbaum, chpt 2, pp. 71-93
2. Goldman, chpt 11

**Week #10: More on Autism and Moral Agency**

1. Barnbaum, chpt 2, pp. 93-104
2. Benn, Piers, “Freedom, Resentment, and the Psychopath”
3. Shoemaker, “Moral Address, Moral Community, and the Boundaries of the Moral Community”

**Week #11: Autism and Moral Normative Theories**

1. Barnbaum, chpt 3 pp. 109-130
2. Kennett, Jeanette, “Autism, Empathy and Moral Agency”
3. Krahn, Timothy and Fenton, Andrew, “Autism, Empathy, and Questions of Moral Agency”
4. Hume, selections from the *Treatise*
5. Kant, selections from the *Groundwork*

**Paper Prospectus Due – November 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Week #12: More on Autism and Moral Normative Theories**

1. Barnbaum, chpt 3, pp. 130-140
2. Goldman, chpt. 8
3. Ross, selections from *The Right and the Good*

**Week #13: Autism and Genetics: Parental Autonomy, the Expressivist Argument**

1. Barnbaum, chpt 4 pp. 145-161
2. Davis, “The Parental Investment Factor and the Child’s Right to an Open Future”

**Week #14: More on Autism and Genetics: Open Futures and Sex Selection**

1. Barnbaum, chpt 4 pp. 161-175
2. Davis, “Sex Selection”

**Week #15: Medical Research and Autism: Research Ethics, Substituted Judgments & Best Interests**

1. Barnbaum, chpt 5
2. Brown, Barry, “Proxy Consent for Research on the Incompetent Elderly”

**Finals Week:**

**Final Papers Due**

Students with Disabilities:

University policy 3342-3-18 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Disability

Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit [www.kent.edu/sds](http://www.kent.edu/sds) for more information on registration procedures).

#### Academic Complaints:

The Philosophy Department Grievance Procedure for handling student grievances is in conformity with the Student Academic Complaint Policy and Procedures set down as University Policy 3342-16 in the University Policy Register. For information concerning the details of the grievance procedure, please see the departmental chairperson.

#### Academic Dishonesty:

In accordance with University Policy 3342-3-07 in the University Policy Register, cheating and plagiarism are punishable by several possible sanctions, including (but not limited to) refusal to accept course work for credit, assigning a grade of “F” or zero to an assignment, assigning a grade of “F” in a course, or the revoking of a degree (diploma). It is recommended that students familiarize themselves with this policy.