ANTHROPOLOGY 196I
Fall 2013
D. Linger

Hard Problems

This senior seminar explores a set of interrelated, long-standing, difficult problems in human theory. At one level, we will be trying to understand why they are important and what it is that makes each of them so forbidding. At another, we will be thinking about what it is that makes a problem “hard,” and whether hard problems come in different varieties or strengths. The seminar is exploratory. Because the problems are so basic, the readings range far outside conventional anthropology, into areas where your expertise, as well as mine, is limited. Expect to struggle and to be confused. Confusion is our starting point; it will sharpen and deepen, not vanish, by the course’s end.

Why should we bother entering this swamp? Because the problems are fundamental and how we approach them is consequential for the theory and practice of anthropology.

We begin with a consideration of what the philosopher David Chalmers has called “the hard problem of consciousness,” which is, if not necessarily the hardest problem, certainly an excellent example of one that will scramble your mind. The remainder of the course will draw upon readings that bear on issues of mind, self, agency, experience, objectivity, subjectivity, context, emergence, patterns, explanation, nonlinearities, systems, and limits to human understanding. These are not the only hard problems in anthropology, but they are really significant ones, and their linkages provide the seminar with an overarching coherence.

Of necessity the course has a linear structure, but one of my aims is to jolt you out of linear thinking. As our discussions proceed, think about the ways the topics interconnect and turn back on one another. The work of Gregory Bateson, who once taught in this department, anchors our approach. Heed Bateson’s advice to attend to patterns, contexts, levels, and relationships. We will not solve these hard problems, but we will try to clarify what it is we are so confused about and why the confusions matter.

I may make some changes in or additions to this syllabus as the quarter progresses.

Required texts


N.b. Because the Bateson books have been reissued various times, page numbers listed below may differ from those in the edition you acquire.

**And at least one ethnography from among the following (for week 5):**


**Recommended texts**


**ASSIGNMENTS**

Active, informed participation in seminars is mandatory. On a rotating basis students will lead seminar discussions. For weeks when you are not assigned to lead such discussions, please submit a brief (two-page) paper that responds concisely and thoughtfully to the readings. This should not be a formal essay but it should be well
written and carefully considered. The main written assignment is a 20-page paper on the relevance of issues addressed in this course to theory and practice in anthropology.

Your grade will be determined as follows: response papers 10%, seminar presentations 10%, final paper 80%. I may also take contributions to class discussions into account when determining your final grade.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (9/26) Introduction


Week 2 (10/3) Thinking with Bateson

Bateson, Steps
Part I, Metalogues, pp. 3-58.
Culture Contact and Schismogenesis, pp. 61-72.
Experiments in Thinking about Observed Ethnographic Material, pp. 73-87.
Morale and National Character, pp. 88-106.
A Theory of Play and Fantasy, pp. 177-193.

Week 3 (10/10) What Links Material and Mind – If Anything?

Blackmore, Conversations
Ned Block, pp. 24-35.
David Chalmers, pp. 36-49.
Patricia and Paul Churchland, pp. 50-67.

Recommended:

Blackmore, Conversations. Browse at will.

Week 4 (10/17) Can We See Inside from Outside? Or Vice Versa?

Nagel, View
   Introduction, pp. 3-12.
   Knowledge, pp. 67-89.

Recommended:

Nagel, View
   Mind, pp. 13-27.
   Mind and Body, pp. 28-53.
   The Objective Self, pp. 54-66.

Week 5 (10/24) Can You Write Experience?

Choose one or more from the list of ethnographies. (Do not choose an ethnography you have read before or are now reading for another class.)

Week 6 (10/31) How Can You Tell the Dancer from the Dance?

Blackmore, Conversations
   Susan Greenfield, pp. 92-103.
   John Searle, pp. 198-212.
Daniel Wegner, pp. 245-257.
Bateson, Steps

Recommended:

(Chapter 1, Introduction, pp. 1-18; Ch. 7, Freedom of the Will, pp. 154-187.)
Nagel, View
Freedom, pp. 110-137.

Week 7 (11/7) How Can You Ever Learn Anything New?

Bateson, Steps
Social Planning and the Concept of Deutero-Learning, pp. 159-176.
The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication, pp. 279-308.
Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia, pp. 201-227.
Minimal Requirements for a Theory of Schizophrenia, pp. 244-270.

Week 8 (11/14) What Can’t You Know?

(Chapter 3, Solving the Philosophical Mind-Body Problem, pp. 56-76; Chapter 8, The Problem of Philosophy, pp. 169-195.)
Bateson, Steps
Style, Grace, and Information in Primitive Art, pp. 128-152.
Effects of Conscious Purpose on Human Adaptation, pp. 446-453.
Form, Substance, and Difference, pp. 454-471.
Pathologies of Epistemology, pp. 486-495.

Recommended:

Nagel, View
Thought and Reality, pp. 90-109.

Week 9 (11/21) How Far Out Does It Go?

The World of Mental Process, pp. 16-30.
Let Not Thy Left Hand Know, pp. 69-81.
The Unmocked God, pp. 135-144.

Recommended:

Bateson, Mind and Nature. Browse at will.
Bateson and Bateson, Angels Fear.

Week 10 (12/5): Discussion of papers

***FINAL PAPERS DUE 12/5***