The Metaphysics of Mind
Syllabus
Central European University, Fall term 2019

1. Name of Course: The Metaphysics of Mind

2. Lecturer: Daniel Kodaj

3. No. of Credits and no. of ECTS credits: 4 (8 ECTS)

4. Semester: Fall 2019

5. Any other required elements of the departments: none

6. Course Level: MA (elective), PhD

7. Brief introduction to the course outlining its primary theme, objective and briefly the place of the course in the overall programme of study.

The course is a detailed overview of contemporary responses to the mind/body problem, including functionalism, nonreductive physicalism, neo-Aristotelianism, substance and property dualism, panpsychism, and idealism. It covers historically significant texts as well as some of the latest literature.

8. The goals of the course

The course provides a detailed overview of contemporary solutions to the mind/body problem, starting from the starkest forms of physicalism and moving on, via milder alternatives like emergentism and neo-Aristotelianism, to panpsychism and idealism. We'll cover the two celebrated arguments in this area (concerning zombies and Mary the colour scientist, respectively), as well as less mainstream but intriguing anti-materialist arguments concerning quantum mechanics, abstract objects, and material composition. We'll also look at the representation of minds in science fiction, and we'll consider the view that the mind/body problem is unsolvable and the view that it is a pseudo-problem.

9. The learning outcomes of the course

Students who complete the course will be familiar with the recent history of the mind/body problem, they will be able to reconstruct and evaluate the main arguments for and against the main views on offer, and hopefully, they'll also formulate or refine their own views on the matter.

10. Week by week breakdown

* = optional reading

WEEK 1

Introduction

We'll discuss the concept of materialism/physicalism and the basic motivations for and against it. We'll also discuss assessment and the structure for the course (roughly: 1 month physicalism, 1 month antiphysicalism, then a series of special topics).

no reading
**Behaviourism**

We’ll discuss the view that mental states are dispositions to produce bodily movements, verbal noises etc. This idea cropped up in both psychology and philosophy in the early 20th century.


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**WEEK 2**

**Eliminativism**

According to eliminativists, mentalistic concepts like "private sensations", "inner theatre", "sense data", "volitions" etc. belong to an obsolete “folk” theory of the mind that ought to be discarded and replaced with neuroscience. The main champions of this idea are ‘the Churchlands’, Patricia and Paul Churchland.


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**The identity theory**

According to the identity theory, the mind is the brain: each mental state is identical to a brain state. The main challenge for identity theorists is to explain why our "folk" descriptions of our mental life are so very different from biological descriptions of our brain.

J.J.C. Smart (1959): 'Sensations and brain processes'.


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**WEEK 3**

**Functionalism**

Functionalists believe that something is a mental state iff it performs a certain ("mental-ish") causal role (for example, C-fiber firing is a mental state because it makes you do things like looking for painkillers). Functionalism makes it easier to attribute mental states to entities belonging to different species: cats and robots can also be in pain, even though their pain-states are realized in a different way -- the causal role can be the same.

Hilary Putnam (1967): 'The nature of mental states'.

*Eric Schwitzgebel (2015): 'If materialism is true, the United States is probably conscious', *Philosophical Studies* 172: 1697–1721.
Anomalous monism

Anomalous monism (the brain child of Donald Davidson) is the view that even though the mind is wholly physical, there are no natural laws linking mental states to brain states. This theory has been advertised as a plausible alternative to functionalism.

Donald Davidson (1970): 'Mental events', in L. Foster & J. W. Swanson (eds), Essays on Actions and Events.

*Howard Robinson (2016): From the Knowledge Argument to Mental Substance, ch.6.

WEEK 4

Emergentism

Emergentism is a family of fairly liberal physicalist theories. Emergentists believe that the mind, even though it depends on atoms and molecules for its existence, has a certain autonomy with respect to brute physics.


Neo-Aristotelianism

Neo-Aristotelians seek to revive the Aristotelian idea that the mind is the form of the body. The mind (= the Aristotelian soul) is taken to be a governing principle that is not reducible to matter. Aristotelianism is an interesting mixture of emergentism and substance dualism.


WEEK 5

Zombies

"We can conceive of beings who are biologically indistinguishable from us but have no inner mental lives, no first-person experiences." If this is true (if there is an "explanatory gap" between biology and subjective experience), has physicalism been refuted?


The Knowledge Argument

“It is obvious that a man who can see knows things which a blind man cannot know; but a blind man can know the whole of physics. Thus the knowledge which other men have and he has not is not part of physics.” (Bertrand Russell, 1927)

Does this refute physicalism?


WEEK 6

Substance dualism

Substance dualists think that the mind or soul is a separate entity that is metaphysically independent of the body.


WEEK 7

Russell's neutral monism

“The stuff of which the world of our experience is composed is, in my belief, neither mind nor matter, but something more primitive than either. Both mind and matter seem to be composite, and the stuff of which they are compounded lies in a sense between the two, in a sense above them both, like a common ancestor.” (Russell: The Analysis of Matter, 1927)


Contemporary neutral monism

Recently, Russell's neutral monism has been taken up both by dualists and by physicalists. We’ll first look at an influential physicalist-friendly version.

WEEK 8

Panpsychism

Panpsychism is the view that physical properties have a phenomenal or "proto-phenomenal" aspect. Many people believe that panpsychism can cure all the explanatory deficits of traditional physicalism.


*Philip Goff (2017): Consciousness and Fundamental Reality, ch.7.

Cosmopsychism

Cosmopsychists think that the cosmos as a whole is conscious and our experiences are somehow 'aspects' of its experience.


WEEK 9

Idealism: matter

According to idealists, it is the physical that supervenes on the mental, not the other way around. In our first session on contemporary idealism, we’ll look at Howard Robinson's argument against the reality of matter.


Idealism: space

We’ll look at John Foster's ingenious thought experiments against the reality of space.


*John Foster (1982): The Case for Idealism, parts III and IV.

WEEK 10

Material composition

We’ll examine Howard Robinson's recent claim that the best solution to the problem of material composition ("When do physical objects compose a bigger physical object?") also provides an argument for dualism.

Howard Robinson (2012): "Are there any Fs?": how we should understand this question', Hungarian Philosophical Review.
The extended mind

The extended mind hypothesis is an interesting and unusual theory about the nature of mind. Roughly, the idea is that the mind is spatially extended beyond the boundaries of the body: parts of the environment (say, a notebook or some other device that helps one remember things) can count as parts (or realizers) of one's mind.


*Clark / Chalmers (1998): The extended mind. Analysis

WEEK 11
Quantum mechanics

Some people think that quantum mechanics provides reasons for thinking that our minds are not physical. We'll look at an influential argument for dualism from an actual quantum physicist.


Animal minds

“For after the error of those who deny God, there is none that leads weak minds further from the straight path of virtue than that of imagining that the souls of the beasts are of the same nature as ours.”(Descartes: Discourse on the Method)

Was Descartes right?

Peter Harrison (1991): 'Do animals feel pain?' Philosophy

*Joshua Shepherd (2015): 'Consciousness, free will, and moral responsibility: Taking the folk seriously'. Philosophical Psychology

WEEK 12
Mysterianism

Mysterianism is a form of scepticism. Its proponents think that the relation between mind and body is by its very nature unintelligible for us.


Deflationism

According to deflationists, the mind/body problem is largely not a substantive issue. It is largely a verbal debate and it can be 'solved' by stipulating that (e.g.) we will speak a physicalistic (as opposed to dualistic or idealist) language.


11. **Assessment:**
20% in-class presentation of one of the readings
80% essay(s)
Students may submit one (cca. 4000 words) or two (cca. 2000 words each) essays.