

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.

Jaegwon Kim (2011): *Philosophy of Mind*, ch.3.

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.

Paul Churchland (2013): *Matter and Consciousness* 73-86, 191-260.

*Riccardo Manzotti, Paolo Moderato (2014): 'Neuroscience: dualism in disguise', in A. Lavazza and H. Robinson (eds), *Contemporary Dualism*.

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'.

*Thomas W. Polger (2011): 'Are sensations still brain processes?', *Philosophical Psychology*, 24, 1–21.

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.

Gerald Vision (2017): 'Emergentism', in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, ch.24.

*Tim Crane (2010): 'Cosmic hermeneutics vs. emergence: the challenge of the explanatory gap', in C. Macdonald and G. Macdonald (eds), *Emergence in Mind*.

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.

William Jaworski (2016): *Structure and the Metaphysics of Mind*, ch.13.

*Matthew Owen (2018): 'Aristotelian causation and neural correlates of consciousness', *Topoi*.

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?

David Chalmers (2010): 'The two-dimensional argument against materialism', in his *The Character of Consciousness*.

*Jonathan Schaffer (2017): 'The ground between the gaps', *Philosopher's Imprint*.

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?

Torin Alter (2017): 'Physicalism and the Knowledge Argument', in S. Schneider, M. Velmans (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, ch.29.

*Torin Alter (2016): 'The structure and dynamics argument against materialism', *Noûs* 50: 794–815.

WEEK 6

Substance dualism

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

Richard Swinburne (2014): 'What makes me me? A defense of substance dualism', in A. Lavazza and H. Robinson (eds), *Contemporary Dualism*.

*Roderick Chisholm (1991): 'On the simplicity of the soul', *Philosophical Perspectives*.

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)

Bertrand Russell: selections from *The Analysis of Matter*, *Human Knowledge*, *Portraits from Memory*, and *My Philosophical Development*, in T. Alter & Y. Nagasawa (eds), *Consciousness in the Physical World*.

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.

Daniel Stoljar (2001): 'Two conceptions of the physical', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

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.

Galen Strawson (2006): 'Realistic monism: why physicalism entails panpsychism', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*.

*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.

Yujin Nagasawa and Khai Wager (2017): 'Panpsychism and priority cosmopsychism', in G. Brüntrup, L. Jaskolla (eds), *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*.

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.

Howard Robinson (2009): 'Idealism', in B.P. McLaughlin, A. Beckerman, S. Walter (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*.

*Alexander Bird (2007): 'The regress of pure powers', *The Philosophical Quarterly*.

Idealism: space

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

John Foster (2008): *A World for Us*, ch.4.

*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.

Andy Clark (2007): Soft selves and ecological control. In Ross et al. (ed): *Distributed Cognition and the Will*.

*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.

Eugene Wigner (1967): 'Remarks on the mind-body question', in his *Symmetries and Reflections*.

*Hans Halvorson (2011): 'The measure of all things: quantum mechanics and the soul', in M.C. Baker, S. Goetz (eds), *The Soul Hypothesis*.

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.

McGinn, Colin (1989): 'Can we solve the mind-body problem?', *Mind* 98: 349-66.

*Daniel Stoljar (2006): *Ignorance and Imagination*, introduction + ch.5.

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.

Matti Eklund: 'Carnap and ontological pluralism', in D. Chalmers, J. Hawthorne, T. Sider (eds), *Metametaphysics*.

*Rudolf Carnap (1967): 'Pseudoproblems in philosophy', in his *The Logical Construction of the World*.

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.