Course Description

A survey of selected topics in contemporary philosophy of mind, including:

1. The Mind-Body Problem: What is a mind? How do we explain the existence of minds in nature? How are our minds related to our bodies? Are “folk psychological” concepts such as belief, desire, and emotion just part of a false, unscientific theory of mind? In the future, will we talk only about brain states instead?

2. Consciousness: Can science explain consciousness? Can a physical theory explain “what it’s like” to have an experience? Couldn’t a robot perform all the psychological functions described by such a theory but still lack conscious awareness?

3. Self-knowledge and other minds: How do we know the content of our own thoughts? Do we really understand our own thoughts better than other people, and why? How do we know that other people really have thoughts? How do I know you aren’t a zombie?

Assessment: Class participation (15%), class debate presentation (15%), take-home final examination (70%). The exam paper may be written in Chinese or English.

Main References (on library reserve)


Note: PMC and Heil should be available at Swindon’s bookstore on campus.

Reading: Everyone should read at least the first item listed under each topic. You should also try to read all items marked with an asterisk (“*”). Other readings are optional.

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Introduction: What is a Mind? (4/1)

I. The Mind-Body Problem

Introduction and Dualism (4/1)

Reading:

- *R. Descartes, selections from Meditations and Passions of the Soul, PM, 10–23 [Locus classicus for Descartes’ dualist view of mind and body]
Behaviorism and the Identity Theory (11/1)

Reading:
- *PMC, 29–40, 91–101
- G. Ryle, “Descartes’ Myth,” NM, 51–57, or PM, 32–38 [Ryle’s attack on Cartesianism]
- R. Carnap, “Psychology in Physical Language,” PM, 39–44 [Concise statement of behaviorist program]
- J. J. C. Smart, “Sensations and Brain Processes,” NM, 169–176, or PM, 60–67 [The Identity Theory, refined and developed from the work of U. T. Place]
- H. Putnam, “The Nature of Mental States,” MC, 27–33, or NM, 197–203, or PM, 73–79 [Proposes “machine functionalism” and uses it to criticize both identity theory and behaviorism]

Functionalism (18/1, 25/1)

Reading:
- *PMC, 41–58, 104–20 (optional: 78–87)
- *E. Sober, “Putting the Function Back into Functionalism,” MC, 63–70 [Links functionalism with the philosophy of evolutionary biology]
- *J. Searle, “Can Computers Think?” PM, 669–75 [Concise statement of Searle’s attack on computational or functional models of the mind]
- N. Block, “Troubles with Functionalism,” MC, 435–40, or PM, 94–98 [Important critique of functionalism]
- J. Searle, “Minds, Brains, and Programs,” responses by J. Fodor, and replies by Searle, NM, 509–26 [More detailed presentation of the ideas in the previous item, followed by two exchanges with Jerry Fodor, an important critic]

Instrumentalism (1/2) (1st debate today, after lecture)

Reading:
- *S. Stich, “Dennett on Intentional Systems,” MC, 87–100 [Critiques Dennett’s view]
- D. Dennett, “True Believers,” MC, 75–87; NM, 339–50; or PM 556–68 [Presents Dennett’s basic notion of the “intentional stance”]
- J. Heil, Philosophy of Mind, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2004), 155–69 [Sympathetic overview of Dennett’s work]
- PMC, 144–57 [Much less sympathetic account of Dennett’s approach]
- D. Dennett, “Postscript: Reflections: Real Patterns, Deeper Facts, and Empty Questions,” NM 350–53 (see also “Real Patterns,” MC, 100–14); “Three Kinds of Intentional Psychology,” NM, 613–26; “Reflections: Instrumentalism Reconsidered,” NM, 626–33 [Refine and clarify Dennett’s position]

Eliminative Materialism (15/2)

Reading:
- *PMC, 239–54
- *P. Churchland, “Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes,” MC, 120–29,
or PM, 568–80
- *T. Horgan and J. Woodward, “Folk Psychology is Here to Stay,” MC, 271–74

Anomalous Monism (22/2) (2nd debate, after lecture) (8/2 Chinese New Year holiday)

Reading:
- *J. Heil, Philosophy of Mind (Routledge, 1998), 131–54 [Sympathetic overview of Davidson’s work]
- D. Davidson, “Mental Events,” MC, 35–45, or PM, 116–25 [Main statement of anomalous monism]

Further reading on anomalous monism:
- J. Kim, “Can Supervenience and ‘Non-Strict’ Laws Save Anomalous Monism?” in Heil and Mele, Mental Causation, 19–26
- E. Sosa, “Davidson’s Thinking Causes,” in Heil and Mele, 41–50

Further reading on mental causation:
- B. McLaughlin, “Type Epiphenomenalism, Type Dualism, and the Causal Priority of the Physical,” MC, 336–49
- S. Yablo, “Mental Causation,” PM, 179–96

II. Consciousness

Consciousness and Arguments Against Physicalism (1/3)

Reading:
- *PMC, 122–42
- *R. Van Gulick, “Understanding the Phenomenal Mind: Are We All Just Armadillos?” MC, 461–67 [Defends functionalism against the Knowledge Argument and other objections]
- Janet Levin, “Could Love Be Like a Heatwave?” MC 1st ed. (1990), 478–90 [One version of the “ability reply” to the Knowledge Argument]
- J. Copeland, Artificial Intelligence: A Philosophical Introduction (Blackwell, 1993), 163–79 [Another answer to the Knowledge Argument]
- B. Loar, “Phenomenal States,” PM, 295–311 [Claims the Knowledge Argument identifies a gap only between physical and phenomenal concepts, not physical and phenomenal properties]

Qualia Nihilism and the “Explanatory Gap” (8/3) (3rd debate today)

Reading:
- *C. McGinn, “Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?” PM, 394–405 [Argues that human cognitive resources may be too limited to ever explain consciousness]
- D. Dennett, “Quining Qualia,” PM, 226–246 [Argues that ‘qualia’ is a confused concept and in fact qualia do not exist]
- T. Nagel, “What is It Like to be a Bat?” PM, 219–26 [Seminal argument that since
consciousness is subjective, it may not be explicable in objective, scientific terms.

- P. Churchland, “The Rediscovery of Light,” PM, 362–70 [Physical theory will one day explain consciousness, just as it long ago filled an explanatory gap to solve the mystery of light]
- Articles on physicalism by T. Horgan and T. Crane and on qualia by N. Block in S. Guttenplan, ed., A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind

Nonreductive Physicalism and Neutral Monism (15/3) (4th debate today)

Reading:
- *J. Heil, Philosophy of Mind* (1998), 190–242, especially 222–30 and 238–41 [Remedies weaknesses of functionalism by advocating a form of neutral monism]
- D. Chalmers, “Consciousness and Its Place in Nature,” PM, 247–72 [Useful survey of pros and cons of a range of views on consciousness]
- D. Stoljar, “Two Conceptions of the Physical,” PM, 311–28 [Responds to the Knowledge Argument by advocating a view similar to neutral monism]

III. Self-Knowledge and Other Minds

Cartesian and Behaviorist Approaches (22/3)

Readings:
- *N. Malcolm, “Knowledge of Other Minds,”* NM, 92–97 [Critiques the argument from analogy and presents a Wittgensteinian view]
- A. Avramides, *Other Minds* (Routledge, 2001), 217–48 [An overview of Strawson’s and Davidson’s “conceptual” approaches to the problem of other minds]
- P. Strawson, “Persons,” NM, 104–15 [Argues that knowledge of other minds is a part of our concept of a ‘person’, so no epistemological problem of other minds arises]
- K. Maslin, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (Polity, 2001), 210–40 [Overview of important positions on other minds]

Mind, Communication, and Explanation (29/3, 12/4) (5/4 holiday) (5th debate on 12/4)

Readings:
- *J. Heil, “Privileged Access,”* in MC, 395–403, especially 400–03 [Davidsonian explanation of first-person authority]
- B. Stroud, J. McDowell, T. Burge, D. Davidson, symposium in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67.3 (2003), 667–99 [Much discussion of Davidson’s claim that interaction with other minds is a precondition of having a mind]


Website: The course website is at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PHI7350/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PHI7350/). Announcements will be made via the website listserv, and handouts and lecture notes will be available in the “Files” section (see the menu on the left side of the website).