Metaphysics of Mind

PHIL11077

Course lecturer: Dr. Jane Suilin Lavelle
Course organizer: Dr. Matthew Nudds
Semester One 2011
Metaphysics of Mind
PHIL110077/11066

Course description
This course examines some central questions at the intersection of Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind: questions that concern the fundamental kind of thing that minds are; how they fit into a physical world; and difficulties that face the empirical study of mental phenomena. The first few weeks will deal with general issues pertaining to physicalism and the mental, before we progress to investigate contemporary approaches to particular features of the mind, such as consciousness, the self, and the nature of cognition.

Contact
The formal organiser for this course is Matthew Nudds (matthew.nudds@ed.ac.uk). However, your first point of contact should be the lecturer for this course, who is Suilin Lavelle (j.s.lavelle@ed.ac.uk).

Seminars
Tuesdays 16.10-18.00, Dugald Stewart Building, room G.06.

Office hours
My office hours are Wednesday 10 – 12. This is a good time for you to come and discuss ideas for your essays. Please don’t think you need a ‘problem’ to come to office hours; I am always willing to use this time to chat through any thoughts you may be having about topics covered in the course. If you would like a meeting but cannot manage office hours, then please email me to arrange some other time.

Class Readings
Several of the class readings will be taken from Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind (Ed’s Brian McLaughlin & Jonathan Cohen, Blackwells, 2007). We will also make extensive use of the Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind on reserve in the main library. Both of these books are available in Blackwells on South Bridge. I will also arrange for those readings that are not available online to be made available in the Psychology library, 7 George Square.

Assessment
This course is assessed by two essays.

1st Essay (1,500 words) 40%; due Thursday October 27th 2011, by 4pm.
Choose your essay questions from the list given below. **You may not do the same question twice. I will be checking for this.**

**Essay Questions**

Can mental states be reduced to their physical realisers?

Can non-reductive materialism escape the accusation of epiphenomenalism?

Is the problem of overdetermination a conclusive one for the autonomy of the mental?

Is it the case, as stated by Block (1978), that ‘functionalism is guilty of liberalism?’

Does the extended mind hypothesis constitute a *reductio* of functionalism?

How does Chalmers’ 2-dimensional semantics purport to support the claim that ‘If zombies are metaphysically conceivable, then they are possible?’ How, in turn, does this contribute to his argument against materialism?

How do *a priori* and *a posteriori* physicalism affect the conceivability argument against materialism?

Is consciousness an emergent property of the physical?

Can phenomenal consciousness go beyond cognitive accessibility?

Should we be perdurantists or endurantists about personal identity?

How does Strawson argue that a self is not identical to a whole human being, whilst maintaining that physicalism is true? Is his argument a strong one?
Syllabus

Week 1: Introduction.
We will begin with a quick overview of the central topics to be covered in the course, and discuss class structure and assessment. We will also review some of the main positions that have been defended in the philosophical literature on the metaphysics of mind e.g. Dualism, Identity Theory, and Functionalism.

Useful background Reading
Tim Crane *The Elements of Mind*, (OUP 2001, ch.2)

Week 2: Nonreductive Physicalism
Non-reductive physicalists defend the *token* (as opposed to type) identity of the mental and the physical. Token identity is normally analysed in terms of supervenience. We will introduce the position and explore some of the arguments that have been given in support of it.

Class readings:
- Louise Anthony, “Everybody has got it: a defence of non-reductive materialism.”
- Paul Churchland, “The Evolving Fortunes of Eliminative Materialism.”
Both can be found in *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy of Mind* (Brian McLaughlin & Jonathan Cohen (Ed.’s) Blackwell, 2007.

Week 3: Mental Causation
One of the main problems for the nonreductive physicalist is making room for the possibility of mental causation. Jaegwon Kim has developed persuasive arguments that nonreductive physicalism risks collapse into epiphenomenalism, the view that the mental lacks causal efficacy. We’ll explore Kim’s argument and some possible responses.

Class Readings:
- Jaegwon Kim “Causation and Mental Causation.”
- Barry Loewer “Mental Causation, or Something Near Enough.”
Both can be found in *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy of Mind* (Brian McLaughlin & Jonathan Cohen (Ed.’s) Blackwell, 2007.

Week 4: Varieties of Functionalism
We can find structure and organisation in reality at many distinct levels of complexity. Functionalists argue that mental states and processes can be identified with higher-order causal properties. In this seminar we will explore some of the varieties of functionalism that have been proposed, and some objections that have been leveled against functionalism, focusing in particular on Ned Block’s classic paper.

Class Readings:

- Ned Block “Troubles with Functionalism”
Both can be found as ch.’s 5 & 7 in Lycan & Prinz (Ed.’s) *Mind and Cognition: an Anthology*. (3d Edition, Blackwell Philosophy Anthologies, 2008). The version of the Block paper is abridged. If you have time you might look to read the full version which can be found at:
http://w3.uniroma1.it/cordeschi/Articoli/block.htm

Week 5 The Extended Mind
Clark and Chalmers have famously argued that cognitive and mental processes can include as proper parts, elements that are located in an organism’s external environment. We will show how their argument for extended cognition is based on a particular version of functionalism, and outline and assess a recent argument Mark Sprevak has made that the extended mind may constitute a reductio of functionalism.

Class readings
- Mark Sprevak “Extended Cognition and Functionalism.” *Journal of Philosophy* 106.9 (2009), 503-27:

Week 6 Chalmers’ argument against Materialism
Chalmers is well known for his defence of the use of conceivability arguments to argue against materialism, and for the possibility of zombie worlds. (“Philosophical zombies” are creatures that are physically identical to us but completely unconscious). In this session we will take a close look at the relationship between conceivability and possibility, and Chalmers argument that we can infer possibility from conceivability. Such an argumentative move has played a key role in the history of philosophy in arguments for dualism.

- David Chalmers “The Two-Dimensional Argument Against Materialism.” We will use the abridged version that appears in McLaughlin, Beckermann and Walter (Eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, but a longer version can be found at:
http://consc.net/papers/2dargument.html

Week 7 A Priori Physicalism
Some philosophers believe they can deduce the truth (and in the case of Chalmers, the falsity) of physicalism using *a priori* metaphysical arguments based on a particular semantic framework, that of two-dimensional semantics. Others have argued that physicalism can only be defended on *a posteriori* grounds. If you want to be a physicalist should you be an *a priori* or an *a posteriori* physicalist?

Class Reading:
- Frank Jackson “A Priori Physicalism.”
- Brian P. McLaughlin “On the Limits of A Priori Physicalism.”

**Week 8 Is Consciousness an Emergent Property of the Physical?**
According to emergentists, conscious individuals are biological organisms but consciousness is a “novel” property that cannot be reduced to, or identified with, any physical property. Consciousness is a “novel” property in the sense that it confers on an organism, causal properties that the organism would lack in the absence of consciousness. In this session we will critically examine the arguments for and against emergentism about consciousness.

**Class Readings:**
- Martine Nida-Rümelin “Dualist Emergentism”
- David Braddon-Mitchell “Against Ontologically Emergent Consciousness.”
Both can be found in *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy of Mind* (Brian McLaughlin & Jonathan Cohen (Ed.’s) Blackwell, 2007.

**Week 9 Consciousness and the Brain**
Is there a single kind of consciousness or does consciousness fragment into different kinds? Ned Block has for some time been arguing for a distinction between phenomenal and access consciousness. Recently he has adduced very interesting data from neuroscience and psychology in support of this distinction. We will explore some of his arguments for distinguishing access from phenomenal consciousness. We will also see how his arguments could be used to support a physicalist account of consciousness.

**Class Readings:**
  http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/courses/consciousness/papers/Burge_Reflections.pdf

**Week 10 Personal Identity**
What makes you the same person over time? This is the question that underlies the metaphysical problem of personal identity, and philosophers have brought to bear very sophisticated accounts of the metaphysics of identity in delivering an answer to this question. In this session we will explore that debate between perdurantist and endurantist accounts of identity and consider their implications for our understanding of persons.

**Class Readings:**
- Tamar Gendler “Personal Identity and Metaphysics” In B. McLaughlin, A. Beckermann, and S. Walter *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind* (OUP, 2009)
- J. David Velleman “So it goes.” *The Amherst Lecture in Philosophy*, 2006:

**Week 11 The Self**
Is the self a substance-like object, or is it more like a process? Galen Strawson has recently defended the latter view in great detail and we will take a look at his arguments in this final session and assess Eric Olson’s critique of Strawson.

Extensions

Students are expected to monitor their workload, be aware of all deadlines and be able to organise themselves accordingly.

Extension requests should be submitted before the submission deadline. They must be submitted to the Teaching Office for approval, and must include details of the assessment(s) affected and length of extension requested, together with supporting evidence if required.

Other than in exceptional circumstances, extensions will only be granted in cases of illness or family emergency. If students are seeking extensions for more than one week, they must provide medical evidence and/or discuss the request with the Student Support Officer. Extension requests due to time mismanagement, personal computing/printing problems or ignorance of deadline will not be accepted.

The Teaching Office will email the student to tell them whether the extension has been granted. The decision conveyed in this email is final; if students feel that they have been unfairly denied an extension they should make a case to the special circumstances committee for the removal of late submission penalties at the examination board.

Retrospective extensions will not be granted. However, late submission penalties may be waived if a student requests an extension on the day of the submission deadline but cannot get medical evidence until some days later.

Extensions include weekends and University holidays. If an extended deadline falls on a weekend, the work should be submitted by 9:30am on the next working day (i.e., work which would be due at 4pm on Saturday due to an extension should be submitted by 9:30am on the following Monday).

Students with Adjustment Schedules

Extension requests from students with adjustment schedules that allow 'short notice extensions' will be treated sympathetically where possible. Students should however be prepared to give a reason for the extension request; simply citing an adjustment schedule is not an adequate reason. If students are seeking extensions for more than one week, they must provide medical evidence and/or discuss the request with the Student Support Officer.

Special Circumstances

Students may apply for consideration of special circumstances if they feel that events out with their control have resulted in poor exam performance in comparison to their previous coursework record or even missing an exam. These circumstances most commonly include illness or bereavement but can be submitted for a variety of issues. It is the student’s responsibility to complete a Special Circumstances form giving as much detail as possible and providing supporting evidence. All submissions must be accompanied by medical or other documentation.

PLEASE NOTE THAT WEEK 6, SEMESTER 2, IS INNOVATIVE LEARNING WEEK.