

Course	PHIL60272
Title	Issues in the Philosophy of Mind: Mental Causation
Tutor	Prof Helen Beebee

Content:

The course examines an interrelated set of problems that arise in philosophy of mind that are central to understanding the place of mind in a physical world. These problems focus on the question whether, and how, mental states – such as your belief that the train leaves in ten minutes, or your being in pain, or your desire for a cup of coffee – can get to play a causal role in what happens, given the assumption that your being in a given mental state is (in some sense) merely a matter of your being in some physical state. If the physical state is causing subsequent events, such as your running to the station or taking an aspirin or buying a coffee, how can the mental state *also* be causing it? How, in other words, can the mental be anything other than causally redundant?

After the first introductory meeting, which sets the general context by explaining some central concepts in the philosophy of mind, the seminars will consist largely in extended student-led discussion of a range of texts, which you will have read and thought a bit about in advance. The aim of the course is not merely to deliver a thorough understanding of the issues and to help you develop and articulate your own arguments and positions; it is also to help you mature as a philosopher by enhancing your ability to engage in and sustain fruitful collaborative philosophical discussion with your peers.

We will study and discuss texts by, amongst others, Donald Davidson, Jaegwon Kim, Amie Thomasson, Karen Bennett, and Frank Jackson.

The course assumes no prior knowledge of philosophy of mind; however, since we are focussing on a specific topic, students who have previously taken a philosophy of mind course should find that they are quickly engaging with new material and considering the topic in much greater depth than they have before.

Teaching and learning methods:

The course will be taught on the basis of eight 1 hour 50 minute seminars. The primary focus will be on student-led discussion of set texts, which students will have read and answered questions about in preparation for the class; however students will normally also be expected to give one presentation during the course.

Students will be encouraged to discuss essay plans and develop their views and arguments with the convenor outside of class time.

Aims:

The course unit aims to:

- provide students with an advanced understanding of problems surrounding mental causation and their place in the overall context of contemporary philosophy of mind;
- equip students with the advanced research skills needed for dissertation writing, collaborative philosophical discussion, and doctoral research.

Learning Outcomes:

On completion of this unit successful students will be able to demonstrate:

- a critical understanding of issues surrounding problems of mental causation;
- a thorough knowledge of some of the recent work in the area;
- an ability to understand, critically assess, and respond to advanced philosophical writing;
- an ability to engage in and sustain collaborative philosophical discussion;
- an ability to conduct independent research, with guidance from the course convenor.

Key Transferable Skills:

On successful completion of this course unit, participants should have developed:

- Problem solving skills.
- Analytic and critical skills.
- The ability to argue from evidence.
- The ability to communicate ideas effectively.
- The ability to set appropriate goals and to work independently and cooperatively.

Assessment:

One essay of 5000 words: 100%

Preliminary reading:

Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, any edition (3rd edition: Westview Press, 2010)

David Braddon-Mitchell & Frank Jackson, *Philosophy of Mind and Cognition: An Introduction*, any edition (2nd edition: Blackwell, 2007).