

Module Syllabus

Consciousness and the Physical World

Semester	Winter, 2016-17
Number of Credits	2
Time and Location	Wednesday and Thursday, 1:30-3:10, Nador 13, 223
Instructor	Philip Goff
Contact	goffp@ceu.edu
Office	Nador 13, 207
Office hours	TBC

Description

Mind and matter don't seem to fit in the same world; this is the essence of the mind-body problem. Space-filling solid stuff doesn't seem to belong with invisible inner-experiencing. The neural processing of the brain is best known through third-person scientific investigation; whilst the subjective first-person perspective of the mind is arguably best captured in literature. How are we to make sense of these seemingly incongruous things being unified aspects of a single reality? In this course we consider in detail two options:

- *Physicalism*: The view that fundamental reality is wholly physical, and that consciousness is grounded in physical processes.
- *Panpsychism*: Matter is in its fundamental nature consciousness-involving. The complex consciousness of humans and animals arises from the more simple consciousness of inanimate physical entities.

Course Goals

The aims of this module are twofold: first, to provide an understanding of the various metaphysical theories of the relationship between consciousness and the physical world (especially physicalism and panpsychism), and second, to develop the knowledge and philosophical skills required to critically assess the arguments for/against each position.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students will gain:

- an understanding of various metaphysical theories of the relationship between consciousness and the physical world, including and with a special focus on physicalism and panpsychism.
- the ability to deploy the philosophical techniques and argumentative strategies that can be used to discuss those problems
- the ability to explain the strengths and weaknesses of different positions in this area of philosophy of mind
- the transferable skill of formulating and evaluating arguments for and against various philosophical positions, both orally and in writing

Weekly schedule and compulsory readings

There will be no class in week, as I will be on paternity leave.

The first reading for each week will be from my book *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*, which is forthcoming with Oxford University Press and available on my website www.philipgoffphilosophy.com.

PART I – PHYSICALISM

1. Week 2: Intro
 - (a) Chapter 1 – The reality of consciousness
 - (b) Stoljar, D. 2016. 'The Semantics of "What It's Like" and the Nature of Consciousness,' *Mind* 125: 500.
2. Week 3: The Nature of Physicalism
 - (a) Chapter 2 – What is physicalism?
 - (b) Tiehen, J. 2016. 'Physicalism Requires Functionalism: A New Formulation and Defense of the Via Negativa,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 93: 1.
3. Week 4: The Knowledge Argument
 - (a) Chapter 3 – The knowledge argument
 - (b) Pelczar, M. 2009. 'The knowledge argument, the open question argument, and the moral problem,' *Synthese* 171: 1.
4. Week 5: The Conceivability Argument
 - (a) Chapter 4 – The conceivability argument
 - (b) Taylor, H. Forthcoming. 'Powerful Qualities, the Conceivability Argument and the Nature of the Physical,' *Philosophical Studies*.
5. Week 6: Revelation and the Transparency Argument
 - (a) Chapter 5 – Revelation and the transparency argument
 - (b) Diaz-Leon, E. Forthcoming. 'Phenomenal Concepts: Neither Circular nor Opaque,' *Philosophical Psychology*.
6. Week 7: Mind and Metaethics
 - (a) Boyd, R. 1988 'How to be a moral realist,' in Sayre-McCord, G. (Ed.) 1988. *Essays on Moral Realism*, Cornell University Press.
 - (b) Brink, D. O. 2001. 'Realism, naturalism, and moral semantics,' *Social Philosophy and Policy* 18: 2.

PART II - PANPSYCHISM

7. Week 8: Russellian Monism
 - (a) Chapter 6 – The elegant solution
 - (b) Howell, R. 2015. 'The Russellian Monist's Problems with Mental Causation,' *The Philosophical Quarterly* 65: 258.
8. Week 9: Panpsychism versus Protropsychism and the Subject-Summing Problem
 - (a) Chapter 7 – Panpsychism versus and protopsychism and the subject-summing problem.

- (b) Roelofs, L. 2016. 'The Unity of Consciousness, Within Subjects and Between Subjects,' *Philosophical Studies* 173: 12.
- 9. Week 10: Top-down combination problems
 - (a) Chapter 8 – Top-down combination problems
 - (b) Roelofs, L. 2014. 'Phenomenal Blending and the Palette Problem,' *Thought* 3: 1.
- 10. Week 11: Cosmopsychism
 - (a) Chapter 9 – A conscious universe
 - (b) Albahari, M. 'Beyond cosmopsychism and the great I am: How the world might be grounded in universal "advaitic" consciousness,' in W. Seager (Ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism*.
- 11. Week 12: The Nature of Metaphysics
 - (a) Chapter 10 – Analytic phenomenology: A metaphysical manifesto
 - (b) Dasgupta, S. 2016. 'Metaphysical rationalism,' *Noûs* 50: 2.

Requirements

Regular attendance, carefully completing the assigned readings before class, and active participation in discussions will be expected from all students, whether registered for audit or taking the class for credit.

The second session of each week will begin with a presentation by a student. This will be strictly timed at 15-20 minutes. If the student takes longer than 20 minutes they will be simply cut off. The aim of the presentation is not to tell the class what was said in the reading, as the other students will have already read this. Rather the presenter will tell the class *what they thought* of the reading, and/or of the topic of the week more generally. The presenter must prepare either a handout or a powerpoint presentation (or both). After the presentation, the presenter will field questions on her/his opinion for 5-10 minutes.

Each student must submit a half page (if it's more than one page resubmission will be requested) essay plan by the end of week 9, explaining what they will argue for in their essay assignment.

Assessment

For students taking the class for credit there will be an essay assignment of **4,000 words** due at the end of the semester. Students are to formulate their own essay questions based on anything relevant to the topics covered in the module.

Though the class grade is based on the final paper, all course requirements must be completed in a satisfactory manner in order to earn a grade for the class. Should the final essay receive a borderline mark, the student's overall mark will be adjusted in light of the student's in-class performance and participation.

Grading criteria for final papers

Quantity:

Avoid going 10% over or under the required length. Writing clearly and succinctly within a word limit is an important philosophical skill. Grades will thus be partly determined in light of the student's ability to stick closely to the word limit. The word count should include all references and footnotes (if any), but exclude the bibliography.

Quality:

To earn a B+, the paper must clearly and concisely address the question and must be written in good academic English. Insofar as these are relevant, the paper must demonstrate a solid understanding of the arguments from readings in the course as well as in-class presentations and discussions. Important principles and concepts should be clearly explained. The views of others should, where necessary, be accurately, charitably, clearly and succinctly reconstructed, and properly cited with a bibliography. The paper must show that you have analyzed and independently organized the material yourself in response to the question, rather than simply following the organization of in-class presentations or parts of the literature.

To earn an A-, the assignment must demonstrate all the above plus evidence of genuine progress as a result of your own independent thinking, such as your own substantive evaluation and critique of the validity and soundness of the arguments of others, or your own original positive argument. If there are any problems with the exposition or arguments in the paper, these will be minor. Any obvious objections to your argument will have been anticipated and answered.

Papers that earn an A will demonstrate all the above virtues to the extent that they are nearly flawless in writing style, organization, exposition and soundness of arguments. While remaining entirely relevant to the question, such a paper will be relatively ambitious in scope and will demonstrate an exceptional degree of understanding and of the topic.