

**MIND AND BRAIN (PH 4711-01)**  
**Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology**

**MEETING INFORMATION**

Zoom Meeting ID: To be provided by the instructor  
Thursdays: 8.10-9.30  
Instructor: Marga Vega, email: [mvega@dspt.edu](mailto:mvega@dspt.edu)  
Office Hours: By appointment.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

As physicalism attempts an exhaustive explanation of the world, and neuroscience hopes to map the brain, it seems that the way to find out who we are, what we are capable of, and how we should behave in the world, is contained in the three pounds of gray matter inside our skull.

This course addresses how we can make sense of the relation between our brain and our mental life. How can the mind, supposedly an immaterial entity, have any causal influence in the body and our environment? Is there a mind and body interaction, or can we safely assume that all there is for having mental life is neurological processes?

In the first part of the course, we will review the main solutions to the mind-body interaction (dualism, behaviorism, identity theory, functionalism, computer functionalism, eliminativism, anomalous monism, supervenience, biological naturalism among others), their merits and difficulties. Hylomorphism will be presented as an alternative to the problems of reductive physicalism and dualism while acknowledging their intuitions.

Secondly, we will explore specific mental experiences and their underlying neurological basis: free will, personal identity, the self, religious experience, the computational theory of the mind, the unconscious, and the naturalization of intentionality. Some of the questions we will examine are: Does our brain make decisions for us? Does the brain create the conditions for religious experience and our sense of selfhood and personal identity? Does it create the world that we naively believe to perceive directly? Does the brain work mostly unconsciously, rendering superfluous our experience of consciousness? Could we say that our brain runs its processes computationally so that the analogy between brains and hardware, and minds and software should be taken literally? Can intentionality and consciousness then be naturalized and further modelled through algorithmic representations regardless of their material implementation? Will this lead to the possibility of “uploading” our mind in the hopes of a future download? Does our biological makeup matter when it comes to our mental life, or can the mind be instantiated in any physical basis, including computers? Are our cognition and experience constrained by the brain or by our whole body?

The course combines the methodology employed in the philosophy of mind, with the information provided by the sciences that study the brain and model cognition. Methodologically, we will examine the assumptions behind some research carried by neuroscientists and cognitive scientists from a philosophical standpoint. Additionally, we will turn to the History of Philosophy,

more specifically to Aristotle and Aquinas, to present a non-dualist, non-reductionist model for the relation between the mind and its brain.

## **COURSE FORMAT**

This course consists in an online seminar with two sessions:

- Session 1, asynchronous: The student will follow a PowerPoint presentation or video on the assigned topic.
- Session 2, synchronous: Weekly zoom meetings will allow for discussions and presentations on the assigned readings.

## **COURSE GOALS**

Following DSPT institutional goals of 1. Deep learning (integrative thinking, intellectual humility, and self-direction), 2. Effective leadership, the student will have an opportunity to:

1. Acquire systematic knowledge of the main problems in the Philosophy of Mind. The instructor's lectures will summarize different solutions to the mind-body problem, and present topics of perception, intentionality, personal identity, embodiment, and free will.
2. Develop critical thinking on the assumptions behind Neuroscientific research's popularization and on different philosophical theories that address the relation between the mind and the brain.
3. Integrate the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition with the current scholarship in the philosophy of mind and the philosophical assumptions behind the popularization of neuroscientific results.
4. Bring together diverse philosophical traditions and approaches that may shed new light on the topics discussed. The instructor will provide an integrative method to the question by contrasting current contemporary approaches with different paradigms in the history of philosophy.

## **COURSE OUTCOMES**

With the course contents, by the end of the semester, the student will be able to:

1. Understand the dualist and physicalist theories of the mind and the challenges that these theories face, and present possible alternatives to dualism and reductionism. Compare the metaphysical assumptions on causation that underlie different conceptions on the mind.
2. Evaluate some of the arguments against physicalism: Kripke (Modal Argument), Leibniz's Law, Nagel (What is it like to be a bat), Putnam's supespartans (against behaviorism), Searle (Chinese Room against functionalism), and Jackson (What Mary didn't know), among others.
3. Articulate the main features of mental phenomena like intentionality, the qualitative and conscious aspects of mental states, the irreducibility to physical processes, the relation between consciousness and intentionality, and the role of the unconscious.

4. Relate presuppositions on the relation between the mind and the brain with anthropological and ethical problems as they apply to Libet's experiments on the nature of free will, the question of personal identity, and religious experience.
5. Show familiarity with some neuroscientific research as it relates to philosophical questions related to the mind and personhood.

Concerning student academic and professional skills, the primary learning objectives are:

1. To develop analytical skills orally and in writing.
2. To improve argumentative skills in Philosophy through class participation and assignments.
3. To acquire research skills. The student will prepare a Powerpoint presentation lecture and learn about the bibliography and authors on that topic. S/he will become familiar with bibliography databases like *The Philosophers Index*, and other research resources.
4. To share insights with others through class participation.
5. To think critically about the possible solution to the problems around the mind-brain relation.
6. To show proficiency in the academic literature on the topic.
7. To acquire familiarity with teaching tools that can facilitate online learning.

The student is encouraged to participate in class and engage in philosophical conversation to develop these skills.

## ASSIGNMENTS

- **Guided Discussions:** Each week, students will submit a précis of one of the assigned readings (100-250 words) and share it during our weekly discussions.
- **Reverse Quizzes:** Students will submit weekly questions for a mock test based on the materials offered in the asynchronous portion of the course.
- **PowerPoint Presentation at the end of the semester:** The student will prepare a PowerPoint presentation on one of the selected topics: free will and neurobiology, the self in neuroscience, embodiment, or religious experience. Due on December 17th.

The grade breakdown for the course will be 25% for readings, 25% for reverse quizzes, 50% for PowerPoint.

## ASSIGNED READINGS

Loose, Jonathan J., Angus John Louis Menuge, and J. P. Moreland. *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*. Oxford, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018. ISBN-10: 1119375266/ISBN-13: 978-1119375265

If the student has difficulty in finding or purchasing a copy of the text above, please contact the instructor. Other assigned readings in the schedule of classes will be provided electronically.

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

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### SEP 10<sup>th</sup> – WEEK 1

#### **THE MIND AS A PROBLEM IN A PHYSICALIST WORLDVIEW**

##### **Contents**

- Physicalist assumptions
- Assumptions in Neuroscience and Artificial Intelligence
- The human brain amidst other animal brains
- The human species as a symbolic and social species

**Readings. No readings due at the time of the meeting. Start on readings and lecture for next week.**

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### SEP 17<sup>th</sup> – WEEK 2

#### **REDUCING THE MIND TO THE BRAIN: REDUCTIVE AND ELIMINATIVE PHYSICALISM. OBJECTIONS.**

##### **Contents:**

- Reductive: Behaviorism. Identity Theory. Eliminativism.
- Objections: Leibnitz's Law. Kripke's modal argument.

##### **Learning materials:**

- PowerPoint Lectures
- Reading:
  - “Substance Dualism and Its Physicalist Rivals” and “Redressing Substance Dualism” from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 1-22.
  - “Articulating Substance Dualism”. A defense of substance dualism, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism* 43-60.
  - Debating Cartesian Dualism, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 132-182.

### SEP 24<sup>th</sup> – WEEK 3

#### **FUNCTIONALISM AND COMPUTER FUNCTIONALISM. QUALIA**

##### **Contents:**

- Functionalism and computer functionalism
- Objections on qualia:
  - What is it like to be a bat, Zombies, Chinese Nation, Disembodiment, What Mary Didn't Know, Inverted Qualia.

##### **Learning materials:**

- PowerPoint Lectures

- Reading:
  - “Functionalism” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).
  - Nagel, Thomas. 1974. “What Is It Like To Be a Bat?” *Philosophical Review* 83: 435–450.

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**OCT 1<sup>st</sup> – WEEK 4****FURTHER OBJECTIONS TO COMPUTER FUNCTIONALISM AND PHYSICAL REDUCTIVISM.****Contents:** Objections to computer functionalism

- Semantics: Chinese Room
- Naturalizing Intentionality
- The Background versus the Cognitive Unconscious

**Learning materials:**

- PowerPoint Lecture
- Video
- Readings
  - Searle, John R. 1980. “Minds, brains, and programs.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3 (3): 417-457.
  - Searle, John R. “How Artificial Intelligence Fails.” Unpublished
  - Searle, John R. 1989. “Consciousness, Unconsciousness, and Intentionality.” *Philosophical Topics* 17 (1):193-209, and *Philosophical Issues*, Vol. 1, Consciousness (1991), pp. 45-66

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**OCT 8<sup>th</sup> – WEEK 5****REDUCING THE MIND TO THE BRAIN: NON-REDUCTIVE PHYSICALISM****Contents:**

- Non-Reductive: Anomalous monism, Biological Naturalism, Neutral Monism, Mind-Body Pessimism.

**Learning materials:**

- PowerPoint Lectures
- Readings:
  - Debating non-reductive Physicalism, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 316-339.
  - Debating constitutionalism, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 340-367.
  - “Why Should a Christian Embrace Materialism (About Human Persons)”, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 283-295.

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**OCT 15<sup>th</sup> – WEEK 6**

**THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF THE MIND TO THE BRAIN**

**Contents:**

- Substance Dualism and Idealism.
- Epiphenomenalism, emergentism and panpsychism.

**Learning materials:**

- PowerPoint Lectures
- Reading:
  - Debating Emergent Dualism, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 61-86.
  - Debating Emergent Individualism, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 368-410.

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**OCT 22<sup>nd</sup> – WEEK 7**

**HYLOMORPHISM**

**Contents:**

- Hylomorphism and the mind body problem, mental causation, the concept of matter. Organic basis of cognitive capacities. Embodiment.

**Learning materials:**

- PowerPoint Lecture
- Readings:
  - Debating Thomistic Dualism, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 87-130.
  - Debating Animalism, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 296-315.

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**OCT 29<sup>th</sup> – WEEK 8 READING WEEK**

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**NOV. 5<sup>th</sup> – WEEK 9**

**DOES OUR BRAIN CREATE THE REALITY WE PERCEIVE?**

**Contents:**

- The case of perception

**Learning materials:**

- Video Lecture: [Intentionality of Perception](#)
- Reading:
  - Debating the Unity of Consciousness, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 183-225.

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**NOV. 12<sup>th</sup> – WEEK 10****IS OUR SENSE OF FREE WILL BIOLOGICALLY DETERMINED?****Contents:**

- Free will and neurobiological determinism.
- Free Will and Libet type experiments

**Learning materials:**

- Video Lecture: [Free Will](#)
- Readings:
  - Brass, Marcel, Ariel Furstenberg, and Alfred R. Mele. “Why Neuroscience Does Not Disprove Free Will.” *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 102 (July 1, 2019): 251–63.
  - Searle, John R. 2001. “Free Will as a Problem in Neurobiology.” *Philosophy* 76 (298):491-514.

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**NOVEMBER 19<sup>th</sup> – WEEK 11****IS OUR PERSONAL IDENTITY REDUCIBLE TO OUR PHYSICAL IDENTITY?**

**Contents:** Personhood. Personal Identity. The Self.

**Learning materials:**

- PowerPoint Lecture
- Readings:
  - Debating Biblical Anthropology, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 412-438.
  - Debating Near Death Experiences, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 226-268.

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**NOVEMBER 26<sup>th</sup> - WEEK 12- THANKSGIVING**

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**DECEMBER 3<sup>rd</sup> – WEEK 13****RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND THE BRAIN****Contents:**

- Religiosity and Neuroscience.
- Aristotle on the Agent Intellect and arguments for the immortality of the human soul.

**Learning materials:**

- Video: [Neuroscience and Religious experience](#)
- Readings:

- Debating the Incarnation, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 439-468.
- Debating the Resurrection, from *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, pages 469-500.

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**DECEMBER 10<sup>th</sup>– WEEK 14**  
**POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS**

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**DECEMBER 17<sup>th</sup>– WEEK 15**  
**LAST ASSIGNMENT DUE**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**General Introductions and Background Readings**

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- Feser. E. *Philosophy of Mind*. One World Publications. 2006.
- Koch, C. *The Quest for Consciousness: A Neurobiological Approach*. Englewood, CO: Roberts and Company, 2004.
- McLaughlin Brian P. and Jonathan Cohen, *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*, Blackwell, 2007.
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- Tomasello, Michael & Rakoczy, Hannes. 2003. "What makes human cognition unique? From individual to shared to collective intentionality." *Mind and Language* 18 (2):121-147.

**Hylomorphism: Aristotle and Aquinas**

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### Physicalism

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