

Department of Philosophy
Philosophy 306 Philosophy of Mind Fall 2019

Instructor: Prof. David Davies
Office: 941 Leacock
Office Hours: TBA
Course Time: MWF 10:35 – 11:25
Room: STBIO N2/2

Course description

"But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions". Descartes' characterisation of his own nature, as a 'thing that thinks', established the terms of reference for philosophical reflection on the nature of the mind, and thereby defined a set of puzzles with which philosophers have been wrestling ever since. The most general puzzle is to explain how 'things that think', capable of exercising the powers listed by Descartes, are related to those things in the universe that (presumably) **don't** think. Descartes' own solution to this puzzle was that those whom we identify as 'thinkers' possess 'minds' that are fundamentally different in kind from, and only contingently related to, their physical bodies. This view, known as 'Cartesian dualism', is perhaps the most famous solution to what is termed the 'mind-body problem'. Dualism claims to provide us with the only viable account of our mental powers. The dualist argues that no merely material or physical object, such as the human brain or central nervous system, could be conscious, or have experiences with a particular qualitative 'feel', or exercise free will, or act rationally, or converse intelligently in a natural language. The challenge confronting those philosophers who have opposed dualism is to explain how a purely materialist or physicalist conception of things can accommodate such mental phenomena.

In this course, we shall examine both dualism and various non-dualist alternatives, such as 'logical behaviourism', the 'mind-brain identity theory', 'functionalism', and 'eliminative materialism'. In considering the arguments that have been offered for and against these views, we shall look more closely at the nature of the 'mental phenomena' for which an adequate philosophical theory of the mind must account. In the latter part of the course, we shall consider one important thing which is at stake in the debates between competing theories of the nature of mind, namely, the status of our ordinary practices of 'intentional explanation', that is, of explaining the behaviour of agents by attributing to them such mental states as beliefs, desires, purposes, emotions, and perceptions.

Required Texts

The text for this course is **The Nature of Mind**, ed. David Rosenthal, available in Paragraph bookstore. Supplementary material will be available on MyCourses.

Course Requirements

- i/ A short paper on an assigned topic (approx. 6 pages typed double-spaced), due October 11th, worth 25% of total grade.
- ii/ A paper (approx. 8 pages typed double spaced), due December 4th, worth 35% of total grade.
- iii/ A final examination, worth 40% of total grade.

According to Senate regulations, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams. Please consult the calendar, section 4.7.2.1, General University Information and Regulations at www.mcgill.ca .

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity/ for more information).