The Metaphysics of the Mind

Karen Bennett & Jonathan Schaffer

Spring 2021, Tues 9:50-12:50

**Topic:** various questions in the metaphysics of mind, including how best to characterize physicalism, and whether (and why) we should think it is true. Along the way we will read some older classic papers as well as more recent material.

We will open with the following topic. Currently, at least in a lot of circles, the standard narrative about physicalism is that while people used to characterize it in terms of supervenience, now we all know that doing so is stupid—it should instead be characterized in terms of grounding or dependence or something. We will look back at how we got here, wonder how much progress has really been made, and investigate whether new problems arise or important distinctions got lost along the way.

We will then have a brief interlude to revisit an important debate about the status of special science kinds and laws. Then we will turn to the question of whether we should believe physicalism or dualism. Frequently, physicalism is treated as a default position, with dualism the position that requires argument—witness all the discussion, especially in the 90’s and 00’s, about the knowledge argument, the zombie argument, the conceivability argument…. We will instead look for arguments *for* physicalism and *against* dualism.

**Requirements:** The primary tasks of a professional researcher center on conferences and journal articles. This class is designed to train you for these tasks. So we will have two seven week units, each of which begins with four weeks of instructor-led discussion to give you the needed background on the issues, and then culminates in three weeks of student-led presentations which will be structured like APA style colloquia:

* You will write a paper that is no longer than 3,000 words (excluding footnotes and bibliography)
* You will present that paper to the class in no more than 20 minutes and then field a 30 minute q&a
* At the end of semester you will expand one of your two 3,000 word papers into a 5,000 word paper

Each 3,000 word paper will be worth 15% of your grade, and each presentation will be worth 15% of your grade, for a total of 60% of your grade. Your 5,000 word paper will be worth the remaining 40% of your grade. We reserve the right to adjust grades upwards (but not downwards) as we see fit.

**Due dates**: The first of the two 3,000 word papers is due Friday March 12, 5pm. The second 3,000 word paper is due Friday May 7, 5pm. The final 5,000 word paper is due Friday September 3, 5pm.

**Readings:** Readings will consist of various book chapters and journal articles, made available on the Canvas page for the course.

**Schedule:** Here is our current schedule, updated as needed on Canvas. Please note that we will not be meeting on Jan 19, but will instead add a class on May 4. We will meet over Zoom, which is integrated into Canvas.

Jan 26 Introductory material; old-school materialism and some problems

 Lewis, “Reduction of Mind,” Part I (pp. 291-308)

 Jackson, “Finding the Mind in the Natural World”

Stoljar, “Physicalism,” §§3, 4, 9, 10.3

*Optional further background*: *Chalmers, “Consciousness and its Place in Nature;” Hawthorne, “Blocking Definitions of Materialism;” Leuenberger, “Ceteris Absentibus Physicalism;”*

Feb 2 From supervenience to grounding (and back again?)

 Schaffer, “The Ground between the Gaps,” Part 4 (pp. 14-21)

Rabin, “Fundamentality Physicalism” §§3.2 and 3.3

Bennett and McLaughlin, “Supervenience”, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, §§1, 3.5, 3.8 (or all of §3), §5.4. Also at least skim §4.3.

Schaffer, “On What Grounds What,” §§1–2.2

Feb 9 Challenges for grounding characterizations of physicalism I

Rabin, “Fundamentality Physicalism,” §4

 Wilson, “Grounding-Based Formulations of Physicalism”

*Optional further background: Dasgupta, “The Possibility of Physicalism,” especially §§ 1 and 2*

Feb 16 Challenges for grounding characterizations of physicalism II

 Shumener, “Is Ground Fine-Grained Enough for Physicalism?”

 Shumener, “Infinite Descent and Grounding Physicalism”

Feb 23 Student presentations

Mar 2 Student presentations

Mar 9 Student presentations [*1st paper due Fri Mar 12, 5pm*]

Mar 16 *No class, Spring Break*

Mar 23 Interlude: the status of special science laws and kinds

 Kim, “Multiple Realization and the Metaphysics of Reduction”

 Fodor, “Special Sciences: Still Autonomous After All These Years”

 *Optional further background: Fodor, “Special Sciences (Or, the Disunity of Science as a Working Hypothesis)”*

Mar 30 The manifestability argument for physicalism

 Papineau, “Arguments for Supervenience and Physical Realization”

 Witmer, “What is Wrong with the Manifestability Argument for Supervenience”

 *Optional further background: Loewer, “An Argument for Strong Supervenience”*

Apr 6 Why Karen is not a dualist

 Bennett, “Why I Am Not a Dualist”

Apr 13 How else to explain the correlations?

 Schaffer, “Naturalistic Dualism and the Problem of the Physical Correlate”

 Pautz, “How to Achieve the Physicalist Dream Theory of Consciousness: Identity or

 Grounding?

Apr 20 Student presentations

Apr 27 Student presentations

May 4 Student presentations [*2nd paper due Fri May 7, 5pm*]

 [*Final paper due Fri Sep 3, 5pm*]