# How to Teach Philosophy of Mind

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*Abstract*: The most notable contributions to contemporary philosophy of mind have been written by philosophers of mind for philosophers of mind. Without a good understanding of the historical framework, the technical terminology, the philosophical methodology, and the nature of the philosophical problems themselves, not only do undergraduate students face a difficult challenge when taking a first course in philosophy of mind, but instructors lacking specialized knowledge in this field might be put off from teaching the course. This paper is intended to provide a framework for instructors with little background in this area of philosophy to develop a course in philosophy of mind. This course, aimed at the advanced undergraduate student, provides students with the tools necessary for understanding some of the key readings in contemporary philosophy of mind and offers unique benefits to both majors and non-majors. The course described here focuses on just two of the main problems in philosophy of mind—the mind-body problem and the problem of phenomenal consciousness—and briefly touches on other issues one might address. Finally, several solutions to common challenges that arise in an advanced philosophy course are discussed.

Philosophy of mind is what Russell (1946) would describe as “philosophy for philosophers” in that it is a highly specialized field with no obvious practical value. Still, it is a core area of philosophical inquiry that is fascinating for its own sake, and it provides students the opportunity to do more advanced work in philosophy. Moreover, students from other fields, such as psychology and the arts, will find that coming to understand issues in philosophy of mind complements their understanding of empirical findings related to the mind and cognition, cultivates their intellectual imaginations, and allows them to develop both their analytical and creative skills. This paper will describe an upper-division, undergraduate course in philosophy of mind for readers who are less familiar with this area of philosophy. Students completing this course gain a very good understanding of two of the central problems in philosophy of mind—the mind-body problem and the problem of phenomenal consciousness—as well as the major theories of the mind offered in response to these problems. Moreover, students will learn important technical terms, developments, and methods employed by contemporary analytic philosophers.

This paper begins with a brief discussion of how a course in philosophy of mind can be beneficial to both philosophy major and non-majors, and then it provides an introduction to philosophy of mind including the central problems or questions in this area of philosophy, an overview of how philosophy of mind relates to other fields outside of philosophy, and a brief account of its relationship to other areas in philosophy. It goes on to introduce the mind-body problem and the main theories of the mind offered in response to this problem, and then it introduces the problem of consciousness and several specific issues related to this problem that could be addressed in the course. Alternative topics one might cover are briefly described; and finally, recommendations for overcoming common challenges are discussed.

## Why study philosophy of mind?

Philosophy of mind is a central area of academic philosophy, one that confronts questions about our minds and mental states that lie at the heart of understanding our own natures. For these reasons alone, there is value for undergraduates in in studying philosophy of mind. But philosophical questions about the mind and mental states also permeate other areas of philosophy, and this explains Searle’s (1999) claim that philosophy of mind is at the forefront of contemporary philosophy. For example, in ethics we discuss empathy, intention, sentience, and rationality and in epistemology we are concerned with the nature perception, belief, and knowledge. Thus students engaged in other areas of philosophy will benefit from understanding the main questions and theories in philosophy of mind because of how intertwined philosophy of mind is with these other areas of philosophy they will encounter.

A course in philosophy of mind is also valuable to students studying science, especially those with interests in psychology, cognitive science, computer science, and biology. Carefully reading and analyzing challenging texts, as well as coming to appreciate the philosophical questions that underlie related fields, is an important and rewarding undertaking. As progress continues to be made in cognitive neuroscience, philosophical questions about the mind and cognition are actively in play—as new ways of understanding the mind are discovered, new questions arise. Having a background in the central problems in philosophy of mind will prepare students whose academic interests tend towards scientific study of cognition to be sensitive to the philosophical issues that arise in more empirical domains. Moreover, future scientists who appreciate philosophy’s role in solving problems and seeking knowledge may be inclined to be supportive rather than dismissive of their sister discipline, philosophy.

Finally, students interested in the arts—creative writing, theater, film, and visual arts—can benefit from exploring the possibilities raised by philosophical questions and thought experiments. Film and fiction often venture into territory covered in philosophical thought experiments—the inverted spectrum, artificial intelligence, thinking aliens, and mind reading, for example. Philosophy of mind provides a unique opportunity for both developing analytic skills and engaging in creative and imaginative thinking.

In my own experience, I have known more than a few philosophy majors who came to philosophy from the sciences, especially from biology and psychology, because they felt the sciences failed to address important philosophical assumptions or implications in their work. These students appreciate how the topics discussed in philosophy of mind complement empirical work related to mind and cognition. A theater major was inspired to write a play around topics we addressed in philosophy of mind. Two art majors—a photographer and a painter—especially appreciated issues related to subjective experience, secondary qualities, and perception and reported that this helped them creatively. Student evaluations of the course each time that I teach it show that students believe they leave this class having had a significant learning experience and gain the confidence to engage with more advanced philosophical material.

## What is Philosophy of Mind?

So as not to lose sight of the central learning objectives, each section of the course is prefaced by several guiding questions. The introduction to this course should prepare students to answer these questions:

1. What is philosophy and how does it differ from science?
2. What is philosophy of mind and under what general area of philosophy does it fall?
3. What are some of the main questions in philosophy of mind?

### Introducing Philosophy of Mind

Even if students enrolled in this upper-level course are philosophy majors and generally familiar with philosophy and philosophical method, reminding students of philosophy’s goals, methods, and issues provides a framework for moving forward. In this course it is important to compare philosophy to science, since philosophy of mind is closely related to several research areas in science, and to locate questions specific to philosophy of mind in the broader categories of philosophy—metaphysics and epistemology—in which they lie. Searle (1999) provides an overview of philosophy—its relation to science, its major developments, and its central problems, including the importance of questions about the mind in contemporary philosophy.

Philosophy of mind primarily falls under the area of philosophy called metaphysics. Metaphysics is concerned with questions about the nature of reality, about what exists, and about what the nature of existence is. The central questions in philosophy of mind concern the nature of the mind and mental states thus philosophy of mind is primarily a special topic in metaphysics. Of course, there are questions relating to philosophy of mind that are epistemological, or related to knowledge, such as the question of whether we can know anything about other people’s minds. And, issues that arise in other areas of philosophy, such as in aesthetics and ethics, might relate back to philosophy of mind, such as issues concerning the nature of aesthetic experience or that of psychological conditions sufficient for personhood. Some of the core questions in philosophy of mind are these:

* The Mind-Body Problem: What is the nature of the mind?
* The Hard Problem: What is the nature of phenomenal consciousness?
* The Problem of Mental Causation: What is the causal relation between the mind and the body and between mental states themselves?
* The Problem of Intentionality: In virtue of what are mental states contentful? What is the relationship between mental states and what they are about?
* The Epistemic Access Problem: What is our epistemic access to our own minds?
* The Problem of Other Minds: How do we know others have conscious experiences like we do?
* The Problem of the Self: What is the nature of the self (the subject of mental states)?

It would be very difficult to address all of these questions in a meaningful way in a single course; therefore, the course described here will focus in some detail on the first two problems—the mind-body problem and the so-called “hard problem” since these problems are fundamental to understanding other issues in philosophy of mind. A subsequent section will briefly describe other topics that might be addressed in a course in philosophy of mind.

It has been said that where philosophy is concerned, there is no shallow end of the pool. This is particularly true of philosophy of mind. Moreover, most of the papers written in such specialized areas of philosophy are written for other philosophers and not for students. This can make the readings very challenging. Still, much can be learned from reading this “philosophy for philosophers,” including a deeper understanding of the philosophical method, the goals of philosophy, and the evolution of ideas pertaining to particular philosophical problems. No doubt questions about our minds, mental states, and experiences are particularly intriguing since any understanding we come to have about these things is ultimately a type of self-discovery. Our minds, that is our collection of beliefs, desires, experiences, and memories, after all, is what makes us who we are; they seem to define our very nature as thinking beings.

### Philosophy of Mind and the Special Sciences

Philosophy of mind is closely related to a number of scientific fields, such as neuroscience (the scientific study of the brain and central nervous system), psychology (the empirical study of the mind and behavior), and cognitive science (the interdisciplinary study of cognition and perception). The topics and readings in this course fall under what might be called the *metaphysics of mind*; they will focus on confronting questions about first the nature of mental states, and second about the nature of consciousness. At different times over the last 50 years or so, this has not been the primary way of understanding the mind. There have been times when philosophers only sought to understand how we talk about the mind and mental states (notably the theories of philosophical behaviorism and perhaps also philosophical psychology).

It is important to recognize the role science can play in answering questions about the mind, but at the same time, it is essential to recognize the philosophical dimension of uncovering the nature of the mind and consciousness. Again, Searle (1999) provides a good introduction to this topic suggesting that one way to divide up the tasks between science and philosophy is to distinguish empirical questions from conceptual questions. With the exception of fields like theoretical physics, science is primarily empirical. This says something about the nature of scientific method itself; it is primarily based on observation. Whether it is in a lab or in the field, scientists test hypothesis using empirical means. They take measurements, look for changes, observe characteristics, and compare data. On the other hand, philosophers rely primarily on reason rather than observation. They attempt to understand ideas, analyze concepts, and formulate and evaluate arguments. It is one thing to learn about the functions of some particular part of the brain through scientific means, but it would be quite another thing to claim to have learned anything about the nature of thinking on this basis alone. In the introduction, Heil (1998) explains that a central job of philosophy is to give an overall conception of the nature of things, and of philosophy of mind, in particular, to give an account of nature of our inner, private, subjective mental lives. It may well be that someday the pressing questions we have about the nature of the mind and consciousness will be answered by science, but we are a far cry from conceding that the philosophical work is done. For example, whereas cognitive psychologists have made considerable progress modeling how attention, working memory, and judgment work (for example, see Kahneman 2011); questions remain about the nature of perceptual experience, the relationship between our memories and the things we remember, and the nature of consciousness.

## The Mind-Body Problem

Any course in philosophy of mind should have at its core some attention to the mind-body problem since it is this problem that generates the other problems in the field as we will see later. Faculty familiar with contemporary issues in philosophy of mind might think that the mind-body problem is outdated compared to what’s going on now in the field; however, it is especially important for undergraduates taking a first course in philosophy of mind to understand how today’s issues evolved over time from attempts to solve the mind-body problem. Consequently, this main section of the course should prepare students to answer these questions about the mind-body problem and the main attempts to solve the problem:

1. What do we mean when we talk about *minds* and *mental states*?
2. What is the mind-body problem?
3. What are some of the unique characteristics of the mind?
4. When presented as a logical inconsistency, what are some of the solutions to the mind-body problem?
5. How does each of the theories characterize the mind?
6. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each theory?
7. How does the mind-body problem itself evolve or change?

### Motivating the Problem

A challenging task in philosophy of mind is “motivating the problem.” It is essential to take time to do this thoughtfully and carefully and to return to the issues raised in these early discussions from time to time during the course. A preliminary exercise, modeled on Smith and Earl (2005), is helpful in bringing out some of the issues at the heart of the mind-body problem. Students are given a short quiz asking questions such as, “Is it possible to be in pain and not know it?” and “Do you know that other people have the same sort of experiences you have when they see green or when they taste lemonade?” which is then used to facilitate a discussion about the some of the problems concerned in the nature of mind and mental states.[[1]](#endnote-1)

It is also essential to be clear by what we mean when we talk about *minds* and *mental states*. Students can be asked to make lists of mental states, and the class can work together to find similarities or groupings among the examples they provide. Students might consider a scenario like this:

As I sit here typing this, I am *thinking* about what I want to say, and I *notice* that I have made a mistake in my typing and not *wanting* there to be any mistakes, I back up to fix it. I *gaze* out the window, and I am *aware* that it is sunny outside; and I *hope* that it does not rain this afternoon so I can take my daughter swimming at a friend’s pool later. I can *hear* the muffled tweeting of the birds that I *believe* have nested in the fern hanging on the porch. I can *smell* that the toast I put in the toaster is now burning and *wanting* to prevent the smoke detector from going off, I run into the kitchen to get the toast and wince as I burn my fingers on the toaster and it *hurts*. I *remember* that I have a dentist appointment this week and check my calendar to *see* exactly what time the appointment is.

The foregoing account, of course, just barely scrapes the surface of all of the mental activity—both conscious and unconscious—that is going on at any given moment. It is a description of my mental life in terms from what has been called *folk psychology*. This is just the commonsense way we talk about our mental lives and those of others. We attribute to ourselves and to others, beliefs, desires, experiences, thoughts, memories, hopes, dreams, understanding, attitudes, and feelings. In the most straightforward sense, philosophy of mind is an attempt to understand what all of these things are, how they are related to each other, how they come about, and how they are related to the world outside of our minds.

Often students have a hard time recognizing the problem. “My feelings are just that, feelings,” they might say; or “my mind is just my brain.” If the problem is not apparent, they can be asked to try thinking about thoughts and beliefs and desires like they would think about other things they are familiar with, such as books, catsup, wine, spoons, fingers, or ears. If students were asked what these things are, what their nature is, they would have some idea of what to say. They might tell you what a spoon does, or what it is good for; and they would tell you what it is made of, taking note of its shape and size, and how it differs from a fork. Try doing this with belief, joy, or that particular quality of itches caused by mosquito bites, or of toothaches, or tickles. It is not so easy, and here lies the problem.

What’s more is that science does not seem well-suited to help. While a chemist could explain what wine is made of, explain why it causes intoxication, and discover what causes it to go bad, he could not tell us anything about *what it is like* for us to taste wine, or the *feeling* of intoxication, or the *belief* that it was a mistake to have had so much wine. He cannot account for why the same wine tastes good to me and not to you. No microscope, telescope, or otoscope can reveal what or where one’s mental states are, what they are like, how they are caused, or how they are related to one’s body and other things in the world. It is this gap between explaining things like spoons, wine, and ears on the one hand and feelings of anxiety, hopes for the future, and memories of the past on the other, that generates the mind-body problem. For while we feel quite certain that *feeling* hungry causes us to fix something to eat, we cannot say with any certainty what these mental states are or explain how they are related to each other, to our behaviors and actions, or to everyday things in the world. At the same time, careful examination of the brain will not reveal thoughts, feelings, or experiences. At best, one might see activity in the brain that is correlated with mental activity, but facts about the brain seem to leave out the essential characteristics of one’s mental states. This is the mind-body problem.

### Formalizing Mind-Body Problem

It was in light of the sorts of considerations above that René Descartes (1596-1650) went so far as to say that minds and mental states were a completely different sort of substance than other things in the world. He thought that the mind must be an immaterial or non-physical substance, and this explains why we cannot give a scientific account of it in the way we can of spoons, wine, or brains. This theory of the mind is called Substance or Cartesian Dualism. While ancient philosophers were also interested in questions concerning the mind, Descartes is usually cited with identifying the mind-body problem in the way we understand it today. He is usually credited with being the father of philosophy of mind in virtue of having proposed this early solution to the problem.

Unfortunately, Descartes’ solution is less than plausible precisely because it is inconsistent with our contemporary understanding of the world, namely the world described by physics. For the most part, scientists and philosophers as well as laypeople in modern society have adopted a naturalistic worldview. This is a commitment to the idea that ultimately the things that exist in the universe are physical things governed by physical laws (or the laws of nature). This view is called materialism or physicalism. Ironically, this was mostly Descartes’ view as well. As a scientist, mathematician, and philosopher, he put great stock in that which was derivable from or provable by the laws of mathematical reasoning and the principles of physics. This in part led him to draw the conclusion that the mind, that is, our thoughts and experiences, is an altogether different kind of thing. However, if the mind is an immaterial substance and the body is a material substance, then given the laws of the conservation of mass and energy, they could not causally interact. But surely they do interact: being bitten by a mosquito *causes* me to feel an itch; and feeling an itch *causes* me to scratch. This is called the interaction problem, and it is a central problem in philosophy of mind.

The mind-body problem can now be stated more formally as a logical inconsistency. While there is *prima facie* reason for thinking each of the following claims is true, they cannot be true together.

1. The body is a physical thing.
2. The mind is a non-physical thing.
3. The mind and body causally interact.
4. The physical and non-physical do not casually interact.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The body has size and shape; it is located in space. It can be seen and measured. The mind, on the other hand, does not have any of these characteristics. We cannot see itches or beliefs; we cannot weigh or measure them. And yet it seems reasonable to think that our mental and bodily states causally interact—my being dehydrated causes me to feel thirsty and that feeling causes me to get up and go get some water. And yet, if all that is true, it could not be true that the physical and non-physical do not interact. Concerning the fourth claim, one might think that if non-physical bodies are not located in space they cannot be causally efficacious with respect to physical bodies without violating the law of conservation of mass and energy; however, one might argue that mental entities are in space, but they lack physical properties. For this reason, they cannot interact with physical bodies in order to cause behavior (Crane 2001, 42). What’s at the heart of the fourth claim is what Crane (2001) calls a commitment to “the completeness of physics,” with is the thesis at the heart of physicalism, namely that “every physical event has a physical cause which is enough to bring it about, given the laws of physics” (p. 45). Thus physical behavior has a physical cause such that, if the cause had not been present, then the behavior would not have come about. Another way to put his is to say that the physical world is causally closed. It is sufficient here to point out that there are two factors that come to play in generating the mind-body problem. One is that the mind and body have different characteristics, and the other is that there is some problematic causal relationship between the mind and the body.

### Solutions to the Problem

Solutions to the mind-body problem invoke particular ontologies. One might be a monist, that is one might think there is only one sort of stuff in the world. If one thinks that there is only physical stuff in the world then one is a physicalist. If one thinks there is only non-physical stuff (minds or souls) then one is an idealist (e.g., Berkeley). Physicalism is the predominant view in contemporary philosophy; however, there are a number of competing versions of physicalism—including behaviorism, identity theory (also known as “reductive materialism”), several varieties of functionalism, as well as theories consistent with physicalism—eliminativism and fictionalism. One the other hand, one might think there is both physical and non-physical stuff in the world; if so, then one is a dualist. There are two main sorts of dualism—substance dualism holds that we are made up of two distinct substances, mental and physical, and property dualism holds that we are physical things but that we have both physical and non-physical properties. There are a variety of “sub-positions” or variations within each view that are meant to circumvent particular problems. Some of these more fine-grained distinctions come up as the course progresses.

### The Major Theories of the Mind

Each of the major theories of the mind can be presented as an attempt to resolve the mind-body problem and be evaluated in terms of how well it fits our intuitions about the nature of the mind and how well it reconciles Cartesian mental properties with a naturalistic world view (Shoemaker 1994a). We can also track the evolution of the problem by keeping in mind how each attempt to solve the problem improves on previous attempts.

Descartes thought that the essential property of mental states was thinking or consciousness. It seems that consciousness is entirely subjective (you cannot feel my pain), private (you cannot observe my pain), ineffable (I cannot describe the painfulness of my pains, the ‘what it is like’ to have pain), and transparent (my pains are immediately available to me). Moreover, it seems as if the access one has to one’s own mental states (via introspection) is infallible (if I believe that I am in pain, then it is true that I am), self-intimating (if I am in pain, then I know that I am), and first-person authoritative (my belief that I am in pain cannot be corrected by others).

A substance dualist, Hart (2007) defends dualism following Descartes’ reasoning by claiming that it is conceivable that that mind could exist disembodied. The mind and body, he argues, are not only different but they are distinct existences. Papineau (2007), a materialist, on the other hand, argues that substance dualism is not only inconsistent with science, but it conflicts with our common conception of causation and everything we know about the physical laws that govern the universe, which is the major drawback of this theory. As we saw above, this is what is known as the *interaction problem* or *the problem of mental causation*—while it seems plausible to suppose that there is causal interaction between the mind and body, if substance dualism were true, then it is inconsistent with what we understand as the causal closure of the physical world.

Logical behaviorists, for example Hempel (1949), Carnap (1932), and Ryle (1949), try to state the conditions under which the language we use to attribute mental states could be meaningful; and following the logical positivists of the time, they conclude that statements are meaningful only when they can be confirmed or denied on the basis of observation. In order for ‘Jill is thirsty’ to be meaningful, we must be able to observe that something is true of her, for example, that she engages in certain behavior such as accepting a glass of water if offered one. While the emphasis is on the meaning of language we use to describe mental states, there are ontological implications as well. With the rise of empirical science, if we replace talk of minds and mental states with that of behaviors, we could have a science of the mind, namely, behavior psychology. While this solution to the mind-body problem avoids the problems substance dualism faces, it encounters a whole host of problems of its own. As Putnam (1965) argues, it is conceivable that a creature could be in a certain mental state even though the requisite circumstances or behaviors are not satisfied. More importantly, it seems as if behaviorists overlook an essential aspect of our mental lives, namely, the phenomenal feels of certain mental states. To say that my itch is just my disposition to scratch overlooks that there is *something that it is like* to have an itch. And, it is that something that causes me to scratch.

Identity theory avoids some of the problems encountered by behaviorism by identifying mental types of states with types of brain states (or more precisely with physical states of the central nervous system) (Place 1956, Smart 1959). What it is to have an itch, to believe that snow is white, or to want some pizza, just is to be in a certain type of brain state. Like other physicalist theories of the mind, this theory avoids the interaction problem. And, it gives a plausible account of the relationship between a person’s environmental circumstances and the person’s behavior. However, the view has been charged with being “chauvinistic” (Block 1978)—it withholds attribution of mental states from things that could plausibly have them. It is conceivable that some creature whose physiology is quite unlike ours could still feel pain, have beliefs and desires, etc. That is, the identity theorist’s identification of mental state types with types of brain states is only contingently true. This is problematic since what we want is an analysis of mental states—what want to know what pains, beliefs, and desires are, not what they could be—and analyses must be expressed as necessary truths (Kripke 1971).

The functionalist takes seriously the possibility that mental states are multiply realizable—that one and the same type of mental state could be realize in very different physical stuff. In this way, mental states could be contingently identical to states of the central nervous system and necessarily identical to functional states. Functionalists characterize mental states in terms of the causal roles they play in relation to environmental inputs, behavioral outputs, and other mental states. What it is to be some particular type of mental state is to be in a state caused in a certain way, in certain circumstances, which in turn causes other mental states (that are similarly characterized), and to cause certain behavior. So long as something in a creature fulfills this causal role, then that creature is said to have the mental state in question. Mental states then, are defined in terms of their functional role, not what they are made of, but what what we are made of does. Lewis (1966), Putnam (1967), and Armstrong (1999) defend versions of functionalism. There are many nuanced versions that could be covered in a more advanced course and explored in Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson (2006).

While functionalism is the predominant view of the mind today (and it should again be noted that there are many varieties of functionalism), it is not without its problems. Searle’s (1980) Chinese Room objection is meant to illustrate that there is more to understanding (more to certain mental states) than satisfying a certain functional role. Block’s (1978) Blockhead and China Brain thought experiments are meant to illustrate the same point. The idea is that since we can conceive of something functionally isomorphic to us (satisfying at least some of the functional roles we do) but that lacks a mental life of any kind, there is more to the mental than satisfying certain functional roles (Putnam 1967). What the subjects in these thought experiments—the Chinese Room, Blockhead, and China Brain—all seem to lack is consciousness.

A different kind of response to the mind-body problem comes from Churchland (1981), an eliministivist. He argues that these attempts to provide a theory of our folk psychology in order to solve the mind-body problem are misguided. Folk psychology is a fundamentally flawed theory that cannot be reduced, so it should instead be eliminated. Instead of employing concepts of a folk theory—like ‘belief’, ‘thought’, and ‘pain’, we should instead be focused on the discoveries of neuroscience. In a similar vein, Dennett (1981) argues that our folk psychological concepts are nothing more than useful fictions; therefore, we need not feel compelled to provide an ontology of minds and mental states.[[3]](#endnote-3)

This first section of the course provides students with the background knowledge necessary for understanding the other central problems in philosophy of mind. It sheds light on the tension between objective/scientific accounts of the mind and the subjective/familiar aspect of our mental lives. Each attempt to solve the mind-body problem either fails to account to those unique mental qualities that are so familiar to us, or it conflicts with our scientific world-view. Here lies a natural transition to focusing on any one of the other central problems in philosophy of mind—the problem of consciousness, the problem of mental causation, the epistemic access problems, and the problem of other minds. The next section will describes the first of these in some detail, and the subsequent section will briefly describe the others.

## The Problem of Consciousness

At the core of the mind-body problem is the idea that minds and mental states are fundamentally different that bodily states, and at the heart of this problem is consciousness—something both utterly familiar and completely mysterious. This section of the course should prepare students to answer these questions about the problem of consciousness:

1. What is phenomenal consciousness?
2. What sorts of problems does consciousness raise?
3. What are the main thought experiments and what are they meant to show?
4. What are the main positions with respect to the nature of phenomenal consciousness?

### Kinds of Consciousness

There are a number of different things that could be meant by “consciousness”; so it is essential to distinguish between different senses of the term. Block (1994) for example, distinguishes between *phenomenal consciousness*, the quality of there being something that it is like to be in certain mental states, and *access consciousness*, the states that are readily accessible to us, or that are reportable. Rosenthal (1997) identifies *creature consciousness* as the state of being awake (as opposed to be unconscious), *state consciousness* as occurrent mental states (opposed to non-occurrant or latent states), and *transitive consciousness* which is the state of being aware of something. Tye (2003) also distinguishes between *creature* and *state consciousness*—the former includes *introspective consciousness*, *discriminatory consciousness*, and *response consciousness*, while the latter is reserved for the sort of *phenomenal consciousness* that is at the heart of the problem of consciousness addressed in this half of the course.

Phenomenal consciousness as a special class of psychological property in virtue of which certain mental states—notably sensory, perceptual, and emotional states—are such that there is *something that it is like* to be in those states (Nagel 1974). It is this feature of our mental lives that is at the heart of the problem of consciousness, or what Chalmers (1996) has coined “the hard problem.”

### Motivating the Problem

Whereas the mind-body problem can be seen as the problem of reconciling the unique characteristics of mental states with a naturalistic worldview (Shoemaker 1994a), here the focus is on certain unique properties of mental states—the properties phenomenal consciousness—or what are called “qualia.” Jackson (1982) provides a description of qualia:

I am what is sometimes known as a ‘qualia freak.’ I think that there are certain features of the bodily sensations especially, but also of certain perceptual experiences, which no amount of physical information includes. Tell me everything physical there is to tell about what is going on in the living brain…and you won’t have told me about the hurtfulness of pains, the itchiness of itches, the pangs of jealously, smelling a rose, hearing a loud noise, or seeing the sky.

These properties of mental states seem to be especially problematic for any physicalist solution to the mind-body problem. Jackson argues that one can know all the physical facts about the experience of seeing red, for example, and yet not know *what it is like* to have that experience. Thus it seems that there is more the experience than just the physical facts.

In order to isolate the kind of property of mental states that is at the heart of the problem of consciousness, it is useful to distinguish categories of mental states in terms of their exhibiting the property of being intentional (or contentful) and/or being phenomenal (having qualia). On the face of it, cognitive mental states, such as thinking and believing, are intentional states in that there is something that one thinks or believes: one’s beliefs and thoughts have content. However, it is not obvious that these states have any phenomenal properties. The act of believing that squares are four-sided is not qualitatively different from that of knowing that cats are animals.[[4]](#endnote-4) On the other hand, perceptual states, such as seeing or hearing, are both contentful and phenomenal. Not only is there something that I see, for instance a bird, but there is something that it is like to see that bird. Emotional mental states clearly exhibit phenomenal properties. Being elated, sad, or afraid are very much characterized by what it is to have certain phenomenal experiences. Emotional states, at least *prima facie*, may or may not be contentful. One can have a feeling of sadness, for example, without being sad about something in particular. Finally, sensory states are the exemplars of phenomenal states. Pains and itches, for example, are states that are phenomenally conscious. There are of course other problems lurking just below the surface—how are we to characterize non-veridical perception, for instance. Still, this way of classifying mental states helps students narrow in on the specific mental properties that come to bear on the problem of consciousness.

### The Problem of Consciousness

Once we start thinking about consciousness as a property of mental states, a number of problems arise. An obvious problem is how to reconcile consciousness (or qualia) with physicalism. This is the so-called hard problem (Chalmers 1995). It is an extension of the mind-body problem, and it is the one that begins to surface in the objections to behaviorism, identity theory, and functionalism. For instance, in the inverted qualia or absent qualia objection, we can imagine two people who are functionally the same but whose experiences are phenomenally different. These theories seem to leave out that essential component of our mental lives—consciousness. It seems that no amount of physical information can account for phenomenal consciousness.

More narrowly, there are (at least) three distinct questions that must be answered for us to understand the nature of the phenomenal character of experience, and for each of these question there are well-known thought experiments, arguments; and the positions offered illuminate very subtle distinctions and problems:

* Is phenomenal character a physical or a non-physical property of experience? (The Knowledge Argument (Jackson 1982), The Bat Argument (Nagel 1970))
* Is phenomenal character a functional or a non-functional property? (Inverted Spectrum Arguments (Shoemaker 1982, Harman 1990, Block 1990 and 1995))
* Is phenomenal character an intentional or a non-intentional property? (The Transparency Problem (Shoemaker 1994b, Tye 1992, Byrne 2001))

### Theories of Consciousness

There are a number of different positions with respect to the nature of phenomenal consciousness that can be addressed in this section of the course. The first four of these positions can be seen as more recent responses to the mind-body problem since they make ontological claims about mental states and properties; however, since they arise in light problems earlier theories had accounting for consciousness, they will here be treated as responses to the problem of consciousness in particular. Some of the central positions, and the readings most often associated with them are these:

* Anti-Materialism: Qualia are non-physical properties of experience (Jackson 1982, Nagel 1970).
* Explanatory Dualism: We cannot provide a physicalist explanation of qualia (Chalmers 1995).
* Mysterianism and the Explanatory Gap: The dualist arguments show that we cannot understand the mystery of consciousness (Nagel 1970, McGinn 1999).
* Qualia Realism: Phenomenal consciousness is an *intrinsic property* (qualia) of certain mental states (Shoemaker 1994b, Block 2003).
* Representationalism (or Intentionalism): Phenomenal consciousness is a representational (intentional) property of mental states (Harman 1990, Tye 2000, Dretske 2000, Byrne 2001).
* Higher-Order Theories: Mental states are conscious when they are the object (content) of another mental state (Armstrong 1968, Lycan 1997, Rosenthal 1997, Dretske 2000)

### Specific Issues and Debates

In my own class I focus on just the four issues described in more detail here. By focusing on just a few problems students can not only come to understand these important debates in philosophy of mind, but they can see that philosophers engage with each other through their writing. With careful attention, one can find jabs and inside jokes, often in the footnotes that show that these are real people, who knew each other, and who were engaged in an ongoing dialog about central issues in the field.

#### Nagel’s (1970) What-its-like-to-be-a-Bat Argument and Jackson’s (1982) Knowledge Argument

These two arguments represent anti-materialist accounts of phenomenal consciousness. They both support a contemporary type of dualism called *property dualism*. The properties of experience that seem difficult to reconcile with a physicalist theory of the mental are what philosophers call *qualia*. The difficulty arises from the fact that these properties are essentially subjective whereas physical properties are objective. Churchland (1989) and Van Gulick (1993) raise objections to the knowledge argument. Jackson (1997) responds (even though he later concedes).

#### Intentionalizing Qualia: The Harman-Block Debate

One view of qualia is *intrinsic physicalism*. This is the view that qualia are intrinsic (or *non-relational*, or *non-representational*, or *non-intentional*) physical properties of experience. Block (1990) holds that qualia are intrinsic physical properties of experience. Harman (1990) rejects this view. In this pair of papers, Harman lays the groundwork for a representational theory of phenomenal character (or qualia), and Block responds. It should be noted that the debate over the intentionality of phenomenal character is distinct from the debate over physicalism.

#### Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness

Higher-order theories of consciousness focus on state consciousness rather than phenomenal consciousness. They hold that what makes a state a conscious state is that it is the object (or content) of some higher-order (HO) state. There are two main varieties of HO theories—higher-order perceptual theories (HOP) and higher-order thought (HOT) theories. Armstrong (1980), Lycan (1997), and Rosenthal (1997) each offer some version of an HO theory. Dretske (2000) rejects these theories of consciousness. He argues that what makes a state conscious is not that we are conscious *of* it but that we are conscious *with* it. He lays the groundwork for a representational theory of phenomenal character and a belief model of introspection.

#### The Problem of Transparency

Finally, we consider the problem of transparency which has both epistemological and metaphysical implications in philosophy of mind. Harman (1990), Tye (1992) and Shoemaker (1994b) describe the phenomenology of introspection as one in which qualia are transparent. When we try to introspectively access this particular property of mental states, we are redirected to the content or objects of our first-order experiences. For example, if one were to introspect on one’s experience of seeing a red fire hydrant and were to try to attend specifically to the qualitative aspect of this experience apart from any intentional or representational feature of the experience, namely that is it an experience of a red fire hydrant, then one is left with nothing to introspect. Qualia seem to be transparent to introspection. One response to this phenomenon is to defend a representational view of phenomenal character. In short, if introspection is an awareness of facts and it reveals facts about the world rather than facts about mental states, the phenomenal character of experience cannot be an intrinsic property of experience. Instead, it is an intentional property of experience. This view is promising because it looks like a way of reconciling consciousness a functionalist account of the mind which can, in turn, be reconciled with a physicalist view of the mental.

## Other Problems in Philosophy of Mind

The course described so far focuses on just the mind-body problem and the problem of consciousness. The former is essential to any philosophy of mind course because it lays the groundwork for generating the other problems in the field, and the latter students find both accessible and appealing, in my experience. However, one might chose to cover more than just these two problems in philosophy of mind though in less detail or to emphasize one or more of these topics in lieu of the problem of consciousness. As you will recall, the other problems include the problem of mental causation, the problem of intentionality, the epistemic access problem, and the problem of other minds. I will briefly describe each of these in turn and suggest alternative ways of designing a course in philosophy of mind around these problems.

### The Problem of Mental Causation

On one formulation, the mind-body problem just is the problem of how mental states causally interact—with the world, with other mental states, and with our bodies and behaviors. Common sense tells us that mental states are causally connected to the world and to behavior. For instance, physical injury causes one to feel pain, and that feeling of pain causes one to flinch and to believe that one is in pain. Given the causal closure of the physical world, a substance dualist is hard pressed to account for these causal relations and thus faces the interaction problem. The idea that a non-physical mental state can causally affect a physical body violates very basic laws of physics. This turns out to be one of the central arguments for physicalism (e.g., see Papineau 2007 and Crane 2002), namely to avoid the interaction problem and have a theory of the mind that is consistent with physicalism.

Property dualists might concede that certain mental properties are epiphenomenal, that its, while they are the causal byproduct of physical states of the body, they are not themselves causally efficacious (Jackson 1982). However, letting go of the idea that our itches cause us to scratch and the tasting of chocolate ice cream causes us to eat more is letting go of too much. Again, one might be inclined to turn towards physicalism precisely because what seem like insurmountable casual problems faced by various forms of dualism. However, the problem of mental causation is not reserved for dualist theories of the mind. Even physicalism faces a serious problem of mental causation.

Kim (1998) describes the exclusion argument, which undermines the leading theory of the mind—nonreductive or supervenient physicalism. According to this view, mental states are identical not to their physical realizers but to their functional role, which supervenes on some physical realizer. If all of the causal work is done by the physical realizer, then the mental states are superfluous to the causal process; however, it is counter-intuitive to deny that mental states cause other mental states, for example to deny that being in pain causes one to believe that one in pain. This problem might lead one to identify mental states with their physical realizers, but then familiar problems about multiple realizability arise as we saw above. Alternatively, one might question the assumption that gives rise to this problem (Baker 1993).

There are a number of problems that fall under the heading of mental causation that are better suited for a more advanced course in philosophy mind. It is sufficient to note that any adequate solution to the mind-body problem must provide some account of the causal efficacy of mental states, or it would have to explain how our intuitions about these causal relations are misguided. Moreover, an account of mental causation is at the heart of any account of human agency and thus fundamental to accounts of moral responsibility. Thus this problem has wide-reaching implications.

### The Problem of Intentionality

Like consciousness, intentionality is a special feature of mental states. In this context, “intentional” means *contentful* and not *purposeful*. A mental state is intentional when it is object-direct, it is about something, or it has content. For example, if Jane believes that there is a book on the table, then she has mental state, namely a belief, and her belief has as its content the proposition ‘there is a book on the table’. This proposition in some way represents or reflects some state of affairs distinct from Jane, namely, that of there being a book on the table. Mental states whose content is expressed by propositions are called *propositional attitudes*; however, these are not the only mental states that have intentional content. Jamal might be smelling burning toast, so there is *something* that he smells, even if he does not recognize *that* it is burning toast that he smells.

The problem of intentionality primarily concerns propositional attitudes. For instance, the following all express propositional attitudes with their content italicized:

Amy sees that *the water is boiling*.

Barney believes that *Kim is his cousin*.

Cara knows that *the capitol of Arkansas is Little Rock*.

How is it that content of these mental states relates to or connects to things in or facts about the world? One possibility is that certain facts in the world *cause* mental states to have the content they do. So the fact that the water is boiling causes Amy’s belief to have that the content it does. Dretske (1986) might say that belief, when functioning properly, just is the mental state that tracks certain facts (or carries information) about the world and those facts, or states of affairs, cause belief to have a certain content. In a somewhat similar vein, functional accounts (or teleological accounts, see Millikan 1984) draw on the place the content of mental states holds in the broader functional-biological role that defines that state.

Both causal and functional accounts seem promising for some set of mental states, but in other cases it is much less clear that the causal account will work. Suppose, for example, that Kim is not Barney’s cousin, or that it is tea that is boiling and not water. Whatever story I tell about the content of mental states must also explain false beliefs, non-veridical perception, and the like. Moreover, we can imagine someone believing things about unicorns and fairies, but what could be the cause of those beliefs? How we deal with these problems has repercussions for how we understand truth, meaning, and knowledge.

### The Epistemic Access Problem

Sometimes referred to as the problem of self-knowledge, the epistemic access problem concerns the access we have to our own mental states.[[5]](#endnote-5) Once again, this problem stems from the mind-body problem in that it brings attention to a unique feature of our mental states—namely, that we enjoy a privileged access to them. For example, only I can have immediate, direct knowledge about my beliefs, experiences, feelings, memories, and experiences. The problem arises when we try to account for this special sort of knowledge because it is very different from other types of knowledge both in its content and in it justification.

Descartes thought that our minds are transparent, or accessible, to us upon introspection, but he also thought that our knowledge of our own mental states was infallible—one’s belief about one’s mental states must be true. One might also think that mental states are self-intimating—if one is in a particular mental state, then one knows one is. Moreover, when it comes to my mental states, it seems as if each of us has first-person authority with respect to our own mental states: that is, if I honestly report that I am in pain, no one can overturn my report. However, cases can be generated that raise questions about first-person authority, infallibility, and self-intimation as well as whether this access is sufficiently analogous to the sort of justification required for knowledge. For example, Armstrong (1980, 55-67) describes the familiar case of absent-mindedly driving home. On some level were are aware of our surroundings, stopping for red lights and following the correct route, but we may not realize until later that we were not aware that we were aware of our surroundings as we drove. So simply being in a mental state does not entail that we know that we are; that is, mental states are not self-intimating. A survey of the problems related to self-knowledge and self-awareness can be found in Gertler (2011).

While this problem is epistemological, it is closely related to the problem of transparency described above. The special access we have to our own mental states is intricately bound to the nature of those mental states. Thus, a central issue here is the nature of introspection since it provides the means by which we come to know our own mental states.

### The Problem of Other Minds

Finally, the problem of other minds is also generally considered an epistemological problem: how can we know that others have minds or mental states? Given that subjects enjoy a first-person, privileged access to their minds alone, and we cannot directly observes others’ mental states, a central problem is justifying a belief that others have minds at all. To do so, one might appeal to analogical reasoning or inference to the best explanation. However, this does not guarantee that these attributions of mental lives are true. Strawson (1959) has argued that there is not a genuine problem of other minds since if we can meaningfully apply the concept of mind to ourselves, then we can do so for others. In a similar vein, Russell (1948) argued that we can reason from analogy that others, like ourselves, have minds.

Again, this problem has its roots in the mind-body problem. If minds and mental states are essentially private and subjective, how are we to have a public and objective account of them? Like the epistemic access problem, the problem of other minds, is closely connected to metaphysical questions about the nature of minds and mental states. Whether or not we can know if others have minds or mental states depends on what sorts of things minds are. These issues have important implications when we think about attributing mental states not only to other humans but to non-human animals and machines.

While questions about phenomenal consciousness, content, and causation are primarily questions about the metaphysics of mind, the epistemic access problem and the problem of other minds are primarily epistemological questions. Thus, one might design a course emphasizing one or the other of these sets of problems. In my own experience, focusing on just the mind-body problem and the problem of consciousness provides an essential introduction to the field and is both accessible and interesting to students. While instructors working in philosophy of mind might believe that there are more recent debates that deserve attention, for a first course in philosophy of mind, familiarity with the mind-body problem and the problem of consciousness is requisite background knowledge for exploring other issues.

## Some Challenges and Solutions

### Selecting a Text

Probably the most important consideration about the books available for undergraduate courses is this: providing students with a textbook but no primary readings does students a disservice, but providing primary readings without the tools they need to understand them is no better. The articles anthologized in all of the readers on the market were written for philosophers and not for undergraduates. Moreover, on their own most students would find these readings quite challenging. On the other hand, the textbooks and monographs offer summaries of major positions, theories, and arguments without guiding students through specific philosophical papers. Thus most instructors should be looking for a balance between a textbook or monograph and an anthology.

There are a number of very good monographs in philosophy of mind available to the academic philosopher—too many to list here—and while they sometimes include an overview of the major theories covered in this reader— such as dualism, behaviorism, and the identity theory—they usually do so only in a cursory way in order to get to the author’s main line of argument. Very rarely would a topic-specific monograph be used in an undergraduate course in philosophy of mind. Instead, these books are geared towards graduate students and specialists.

More accessible to the introductory student, what can be thought of as textbooks usually provide a guide to the major theories, figures, arguments, and objections. In my experience, the most accessible of these are Ian Ravenscroft’s *Philosophy of Mind: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford, 2005) and John Heil’s *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction* (Rutledge, 1998). Others include the following[[6]](#endnote-6):

David Braddon-Mitchell and Frank Jackson, *Philosophy of Mind and Cognition* (Blackwell, 1996)

Neil Campbell, *A Brief Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (Broadview, 2005)

Tim Crane, *Elements of Mind* (Oxford, 2001)

Jack Crumley, *A Brief Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006)

Barbara Montero, *On Philosophy of Mind* (Wadsworth, 2009)

John Searle, *Mind: A Brief Introduction* (Oxford 2005)

Each of these books has its own merits, but what is common to them all is that they do not stand alone in a course in philosophy of mind. Each one only provides an overview of the arguments and positions, some with more detail than others, and some at a more introductory level than others; but any full-semester course would need to supplement this sort of book with an anthology of readings. In a course that does not emphasize reading the original papers, it might be sufficient to summarize the major arguments such as Dennett’s intentional stance, Block’s “China Brain” objection to functionalism, or Jackson’s Knowledge Argument; however, since the course described here emphasizes the original works of philosophers, it is essential for students to read Dennett, Block, and Jackson (et al.) themselves.

Therefore, most courses in philosophy of mind require an anthologyof some kind in lieu of or in addition to a textbook. There are a handful of very good anthologies available, for example:

David Chalmers, *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford, 2002)

Jack Crumley, *Problems in Mind: Readings in Contemporary Philosophy of Mind* (Mayfield, 2000)

Brie Gertler and Lawrence Shapiro, *Arguing about the Mind* (Routledge 2007)

John Heil, *Philosophy of Mind: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford, 2004)

Bill Lycan and Jess Prinz, *Mind and Cognition, 3rd ed.*  (Rutledge, 2008)

Timothy O’Connor and David Robb, *Philosophy of Mind: Contemporary Readings* (Rutledge, 2003)

Peter Morton, *A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (Broadview Press 2010)

With the exception of the O’Connor-Robb anthology which has just 28 readings, each of these has between 50 and 70 articles and varies from having no pedagogical material (e.g., reading questions, summaries, background information, and glossaries) to having only a minimal amount of this sort of material.[[7]](#endnote-7) Moreover, these books contain many more readings than an undergraduate course could cover in a single semester. Thus, while an introductory course in philosophy of mind would need to supplement a reader with a textbook, it would most likely never get to most of the readings contained in the reader. This may be why a number of instructors make their own course packs instead of ordering a reader much of which they will not use.[[8]](#endnote-8)

### Facilitating Understanding

Philosophy of mind is notoriously technical and complex. This can be intimidating not only for students but for instructors whose background lies in other areas of philosophy. It is important to discuss with students how to read philosophy and to model for them the way that experienced readers approach a text including how to mark up a text, see the overall structure of the reading, and take note of definitions, arguments, and objections. Concepción (2004) provides a framework for helping students develop these skills, and I have found it useful to introduce students to using this approach with the very first assigned reading. Additionally, providing students with reading questions helps them focus on the main ideas in the text without being overwhelmed by the technical details. For example, while reading Shoemaker (1994a), students can answer these questions:

1. How does Shoemaker understand the Mind-Body Problem?
2. What are the distinctive features of the mind?
3. What is he talking about when he talks about “Cartesian intuitions”?
4. How does his functionalist account accommodate these Cartesian intuitions?
5. How is his proposal non-reductive?
6. What, according to Shoemaker, are the two options for dealing with these Cartesian intuitions and which does he prefer?
7. What are some of the other problems central to philosophy of mind?
8. What are qualia?
9. How have different theories accounted for qualia?
10. What is Shoemaker’s view of qualia?

Answering reading questions also helps students state or summarize main points in writing, and their responses can be the basis for class discussion since they will have all been looking for the same material. After some shared understanding of the readings, students can attempt critical analysis of the positions, arguments, examples, etc. together. My students report that using the reading questions I provide helps them understand the material and gives them a sense of accomplishment having extracted main lines of reasoning from challenging readings.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Another means of clarifying difficult topics is the judicious use of PowerPoint or similar presentation software. Slides can be used to illustrate cases, motivate problems, and chart and compare theories.[[10]](#endnote-10) For example, a slide (in color) like following can be used to explain spectrum inversion cases.

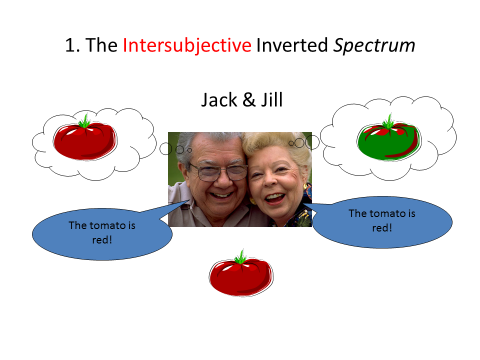


Figure A PowerPoint Slide Illustrating Intersubjective Spectrum Inversion

In my own class, I regularly supplement presentations with images and video clips of the contemporary philosophers whose papers have been assigned. Additionally, a number of philosophers of mind, including John Searle, David Chalmers, and Ned Block, have short video clips discussing topics related to the course that can easily be found online.[[11]](#endnote-11) Finally, handouts summarizing arguments, outlining readings, and introducing technical terms can be used to support learning.

### Assignments

Since the central goal in this class is to facilitate understanding of difficult readings and positions in philosophy, in addition to reading questions, students prepare outlines or summaries of the readings that they sometimes share with their classmates. Take-home, long-form midterms and finals ask students to select 10 questions to answer and requires that they carefully explain major arguments, distinctions, or thought experiments. For example, on a midterm exam, students might choose the following questions, each one from a set of questions on a particular reading or topic:

1. Explain the relationship between philosophy and science especially with regard to issues relating to the mind. What direction does Searle see philosophy of mind going?
2. What is the “imaginability entails possibility” argument and what objection can be raised to it?
3. What is the “belt and braces” view and what is Papineau’s objection to it?
4. How does Hempel answer the question, “Is psychology science?” What is his account of minds/mental states?
5. What is Kripke’s argument that ‘pain is such and such a brain state’, if true, is a necessary truth.
6. What is multiple realizability and what role does it play in the functionalist’s account of the mind? Is it intuitively plausible that mental states would be multiply realizable? Why or why not?
7. How does Block characterize physicalism and why does he describe it as *chauvinistic*?
8. What is the difference between the intentional stance, design stance, and the physical stance and how is this relevant to understanding minds?
9. What is the “self-refuting” objection to eliminative materialism? How might the eliminative materialist respond?
10. What is the Chinese Room thought experiment (briefly describe it) and what is it meant to show?

Questions like these allow student to practice summarizing arguments or thought experiments in their own words paying careful attention to the main points in each. Students are given the option of developing exam questions into an essay if they prefer to focus on a single topic. Students have also prepared poster presentations for the readings that include a response the presented papers. Giving options like this helps accommodate students from different disciplines and at different stages of their undergraduate careers, and they nearly unanimously report feeling a sense of accomplishment and a depth of learning upon completing the course.

### Another Approach

The course described here emphasizes approaching philosophical problems using primary sources—articles written by and for philosophers; so this is a challenging course for more advanced students. In this respect, it is a more traditional approach to teaching philosophy, and one that emphasizes developing critical reading skills and knowledge of the theories and arguments central to the field. An alternative approach might be better suited for beginning college students and is one I have used teaching a high school course in philosophy of mind. This approach is to start with the thought experiments and allow students the space to discover solutions on their own and to minimize the importance and number of readings from philosophy. For example, one might generate philosophical exploration using brief videos of the Chinese Room or the Turing Test found on the web, short stories like H.G. Well’s *Country of the Blind* or Smullyan’s “An Unfortunate Dualist,” and films like *Vanilla Sky* and *A.I.* A more advanced course could include some of this material to supplement the traditional readings.

As with any course one teaches, deciding what to teach and how to teach it depends on one’s goals for student learning and one’s confidence in one’s own preparation and ability for successfully teaching it. While philosophy mind is a very specialized and challenging subfield of philosophy, it is one that students and instructors can benefit from exploring together. The problems, positions, and topics described here are too many for a single course in philosophy of mind, but they provide instructors with some guidance in selecting topics and readings they think will be best suited for their students and their learning goals for the class. In my experience, when given the appropriate pedagogical support—such as reading question, notes, presentations, summaries, and focused assignments—students’ make remarkable gains in their ability and in their confidence to tackle more advanced philosophy work.

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1. ## Notes

   This paper was considerably improved by the thoughtful comments and recommendations of the editor, Michael Cholbi, and my colleague, Casey Woodling. I inherited an enthusiasm for teaching philosophy of mind from my mentor, Daniel Stojar, at the University of Colorado Boulder, many years ago. That enthusiasm has been encouraged by many hardworking and engaged students at Coastal Carolina University. Students’ thoughtful feedback on surveys, course evaluations, and in conversation have helped me to find ways to make very challenging material accessible and engaging for undergraduates.

   Additional true or false questions could be: (1) When you were a child, you disliked the taste of \_\_\_\_\_ (beer, spinach, coffee, etc.) and now you like it. Your experience of \_\_\_\_\_ has changed. (2) It is possible to for one to falsely believe that one is in pain. (3) With the advancement of science, someday there will be computers (robots) that literally think, perceive, believe, etc. (4) It is conceivable that there could be a creature that behaves exactly as we do but that has no mental states. (5) Suppose that technology develops such that I could create an exact physical duplicate of you. Would that creature have exactly similar mental states? (6) It is possible that someone could have the sort of experience when seeing red things that normal perceivers have when they are seeing green things (even though, this person has learned to call such things “red”). (7) You know that other people in this room have minds. (8) Some part of you will survive the death of your body. (9) Given enough physical information, someone could know what it is like to see red having never seen red before. (10) It is impossible to know what the experiences of others is like. (11) If you were to go to bed with a headache, sleep for several hours, when you wake up with a headache is it the same headache or a new one? [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. I encountered this way of formulating the problem in a course taught by Graham Oddie at the University of Colorado Boulder in the 1990s. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Other responses to the mind-body problem include varieties of property dualism, which can be explored in the following section as an attempt to account for phenomenal consciousness or qualia (see Nagel 1974, Jackson 1986, and Davidson 1970), new mysterianism (McGinn 1989 and 1999), and Searle’s biological naturalism (Searle 1980). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The possibility of “cognitive qualia” is a distinct issue that will not be explored here. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Questions about the nature of and our knowledge of the self, or the unifying subject of our mental lives, is a somewhat different problem—one closely related to the problem of personal identity. Hume noted that the self seems to be transparent to introspection, and yet as the subject of our mental states their does seem to be a unified point of view. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Additionally, there are books focused specifically on one of the problems in philosophy of mind, for example David Chalmer’s *The Character of Consciousness* (2010) and Susa Blackmore’s *Consciousness: An Introduction* (Oxford 2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. An exception is Morton (2010), which has a considerable amount of introductory material for each of the sections, including good summaries of the readings and short discussions of important philosophical terms; and it offers “study questions” but only at the end of each of the three major sections. It also has a glossary. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. In my course, I assign Ian Ravenscroft, *Philosophy of Mind: A Beginner’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and John Heil, *Philosophy of Mind: A Guide and Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) and supplemented with additional readings. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Reading questions for most the readings I assign can be found on my webpage: <https://sites.google.com/site/doctorenee/home/courses/phil-309-philosophy-of-mind/reading-questions> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Samples of the presentations I use in my course can be found on my webpage: <https://sites.google.com/site/doctorenee/home/courses/phil-309-philosophy-of-mind/phil-309-powerpoint-presentations> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. For example, “Ned Block on Consciousness as an Illusion.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6SbPPL8tOI>; David Chalmers, “Why is Consciousness so Mysterious?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTIk9MN3T6w>; and Daniel Dennett, “Can Brain Explain Mind?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPGvu8lT8HY>.

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