

Minding the gap: exploring new approaches to the brain-mind relation

Start date 10 February 2023 **End date** 12 February 2023

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge
CB23 8AQ

Tutor Dr Amna Whiston **Course code** 2223NRX021

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Tutor biography

Dr Amna Whiston is a philosopher specialising in moral philosophy and the philosophy of mind with a range of philosophical interests, research and teaching experiences that include Kant's moral philosophy, philosophy of the emotions, Cartesian dualism, Plato, Aristotle, Locke, and Marx. Empirically orientated, she is receptive to interdisciplinarity, and she believes that an effective teaching involves effort to weigh up not only what is important for students to know from a disciplinary perspective, but also how the ideas which are the focus of a study can be situated in real-world phenomena.

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the Terrace Bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 – 22:00 Introduction to the mind-body problem: a tribute to Descartes

22:00 Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30 Breakfast (for residents only)

09:00 – 10:30 Cartesian v property dualism

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 Physicalism and the problem with consciousness

13:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 Free time

16:00 Tea

16:30 – 18:00 Free will and responsibility: scientific challenges

18:00 – 18:30 Free time

18:30 Dinner

20:00 – 21:30 Neuroscience and ethics: utilitarianism, deontology, and runaway trolleys

21:30 Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30 Breakfast (for residents only)

09:00 – 10:30 The role of emotion: bridging the mind-brain gap with Damasio

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 AI and consciousness: metaphysical and ethical reflections

12:45 Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

The course will allow you to:

1. Gain an understanding of dualistic and monistic philosophical theories of the mind-brain relation.
2. Learn about philosophical as well as scientific efforts to solve the mind-brain gap.
3. Participate in focused critical discussion about ethical challenges created by IT and the sciences of the brain.

Content:

Indicative topics

Topics covered in the course will include the following: Cartesian dualism, property dualists and physicalists theories of the mind, the problem with interactionism, mental causation, advantages and disadvantages of identity theories and functionalism. Are mental states identical with brain states? Or are they best understood with reference to their functional roles? What is qualia? What is consciousness? Could eliminative materialists be right that mental states, such as beliefs, desires and emotions, do not exist? If physicalism is true, can it be reconciled with our intuitions about free will and responsibility? We will also learn about neuroscientific discoveries and their impact on theoretical and conceptual accounts of the relationship between reason and emotion. Finally, we will engage with recent developments of AI and biotechnologies and the related metaphysical and ethical implications. Can humanoid robots become conscious? Is moral bioenhancement a real possibility?

Presentation of the course:

Each session will contain a seminar style talk with PowerPoint presentation. There will be plenty opportunities for the participants to raise questions, participate in class discussion and offer their personal insights and reflections.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. Appreciate the theoretical as well as practical significance of the mind-brain gap.
2. Critically assess advantages and disadvantages of various philosophical and scientific accounts of the mind-brain relation.
3. Engage in a debate about ethical challenges and opportunities created by IT and the sciences of the brain.

Reading and resources list

Materials marked with an asterisk (*) are compulsory reading in preparation for the course, all other materials are suggested reading

Compulsory pre-course reading

* Chalmers, D. (2002). *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press.

* Damasio, A. R. (1994). *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Suggested reading

Cottingham, J. (2021). Swinburne's Hyper-Cartesian Dualism, *Annals of Philosophy*, Vol. 69, No. 1, Book symposium: Are we bodies or souls? (2021), 23-32.

Damasio, A. (1994). Descartes' Error and the Future of Human Life, *Scientific American*, Vol. 271, No. 4, 144.

Damasio, A. (1999). *The Feeling of what Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*. London: Heinemann.

Descartes, R. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, meditations 2 and 6. (Any scholarly edition.)

Greene, Joshua et. al. (2001). An fMRI investigation of emotional engagement in moral judgment. *Science* Vol. 293 No. 5537 , 2105-2108.

Harris, J. (2011), Moral enhancement and freedom. *Bioethics*. 22(2): 102-111.

Hills, T. T. (2019). Neurocognitive free will. *Proceedings: Biological Sciences*, Vol. 286, No. 1908 (31), pp. 1-9.

Jackson, F. (1986) What Mary Didn't Know, *Journal of Philosophy*, 83: 291–295.

Kamm, F.M. (2009). Neuroscience and Moral Reasoning: A Note on Recent Research, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 330-345.

Mele, A. (2012). Another Scientific Threat to Free Will?, *The Monist*, Vol. 95, No. 3, pp. 422-440.

Persson, I, Savulescu J. (2013). Getting moral enhancement right: the desirability of moral bioenhancement. *Bioethics* 23(3): 124-131.

Searle, J. R. (2001). Free Will as a Problem in Neurobiology. *Philosophy*, Vol. 76, No. 298, pp. 491-514.