



## Part II Paper 2 “Philosophy of Mind”

### *Subtopics I teach*

#### A. Epistemology of Mind

- i. Knowledge of one’s own mind: first-person thought
- ii. Knowledge of one’s own mind: first-person authority
- iii. Knowledge of other minds
- iv. Knowledge of other minds: Do we have a distinct capacity for empathy?

#### B. Consciousness

- i. Varieties of consciousness
- ii. The explanatory gap
- iii. Unity of consciousness
- iv. Intentional theories of consciousness: Higher order intentionalist theories

#### C. Intentionality and Mental Representation

- i. Theories of content
- ii. Externalism and internalism
- iii. Perception and belief

#### D. Mental Faculties

- i. Intention and will
- ii. Imagination
- iii. Desire

*Rules and advice adapted from Dr Krishnan (you probably know this already)*

Your essays should be between 2'000 and 3'000 words in length. It must be on one question in one of the subtopics marked **in green** above. Also, as this is the central work here, start with the first question and then choose at least two questions from the *Philosophical Investigations* (from section A.b.). Submit the essay at least 24 hours before our supervision. The secondary literature is my recommendation of a selection of the literature on the faculty reading-list (here). Of course, there's more there and you're free to use other sources too. Yet, keep in mind that I'm most familiar with the literature on this syllabus.

Essays need to be typeset in a serif font (e.g. Garamond, Baskerville, Book Antiqua; not Calibri, Arial, Helvetica) – unless you have a particular disability that requires the latter sort of font. See guidance [here](#). The text should be justified (as should the arguments); ideally, you should use wide side margins, left and right, of 3.5 cm or more (in Word, click on Format, then Document). For more advice on attractive presentation, see [this](#) and [this](#) document. Add your name and the date to the header. The footer should have page numbers. I'd suggest making a template so that you don't have to do all this every week. I strongly encourage you to reference fully (with any consistent citation system) and add a bibliography at the end. If you don't know what these things mean, look them up, or ask me. Give the full name of any author on first mention ('John Rawls'); on subsequent mentions, surname only ('Rawls').

Do not use the word 'therefore' unless you mean to say there's a logical connection between what comes before the therefore and what comes after. Distinguish, consciously, between an argument that proves a thesis and one that merely supports it; similarly, distinguish between an argument that refutes a thesis and one that merely calls it into question. 'Knockdown' arguments for and against any interesting thesis are exceedingly rare in philosophy and if you think you have one, you're likelier than not to be wrong. You don't have to overstate what you've achieved in an essay; being honest about what you have and haven't shown is a sign of strength, not of weakness. Don't be afraid of pointing out the flaws in your own argument; if you don't, I probably will.

It's often a good idea to state your argument in a premise-premise-conclusion form. But if you do this, think carefully about whether the argument is actually valid.

There are many good ways of structuring an essay. But there are three things that are essential: begin your essay with analysis of the question, *i.e.*, a very brief summary of any basic background necessary to understand the question and a restatement of what the question is asking you to do. It's often good to address the question of what's at stake in the question: why does it matter how one answers it? Then very briefly give some indication of where the essay is going (don't overdo this – ask yourself what information the reader actually needs to help him understand the direction of your essay). In your conclusion, go briefly over your argument, but also add a line or two explaining the significance of your answer. The only person who reads your essay may well be me, but you shouldn't write with me in mind. Instead, imagine a clever reader who knows a little bit about philosophy and has read the relevant set text a long time ago, but needs to be reminded about what the text says. That's a good way to test how much basic exposition you need to do before you dive into the substance of the essay. It's also a good test of whether you can take knowledge of some technical term for granted or whether you need to say how you're defining it. But don't worry too much about all this – you'll get better at it as you go along.

If you haven't done so already, I also strongly encourage you to have a look at [this](#) essay writing guide and [those](#) guidelines from Dr Borcharding. Also Dr Fraser's tips are really good, to be found [here](#).

## *Essay Questions*

### **B.ii. Consciousness: The Explanatory Gap**

This is the most classic topic in contemporary philosophy of mind. Kim does a good job at introducing the matter. He argues that rejecting physicalism for qualia-related reasons threatens mental causation and thus our very concept of action. Nagel and Jackson are the *loci classici* for introducing the idea that qualia exist and are non-physical. Dennett, Harman and Lewis raise doubts about whether we actually understand what qualia are. Robinson and Hellie reply to some of their worries.

The best skeptical take, in my opinion, is a piece not on the reading list: a paper by P.M.S. Hacker from 2002 called “Is There Anything It Is like to Be a Bat?”. Hacker advances what are essentially Wittgensteinian points against the very concept of qualia. For a more recent similar take see Erlend Owesen “What-it’s-like talk is technical talk” from 2023. In general, if you are also doing Paper 9 ‘Wittgenstein and his Successors’, there will be many fruitful points of contact thorough the module.

*Question:* EITHER Are there good reasons to believe that phenomenal properties are nonphysical? OR What makes the hard problem of consciousness hard? Should we expect it to have a solution?

#### Reading:

1. Introductory read Kim 2011: Chs. 7, 9 & 10
2. Nagel 1974
3. Jackson 1982 (see also his “Postscript on Qualia”)
4. Dennett 1988 (other sceptics are Harman 1990 and Lewis 1999)
5. Robinson 1993 (reply to Dennett)
6. Hellie 2004
7. If more time for sceptics see Hacker 2002; Owesen 2023

Note that the debate represented in those readings is very much a stand-off between philosophers who claim that qualia are non-physical and philosophers who object that we don't understand well enough what qualia are to make such a claim. A different debate exists between those who claim that qualia are non-physical and philosophers who *accept* the notion of qualia but think they can be explained in a physical way. If you are interested in this latter debate, do follow points 1.-3. but then have a look at Dretske's *Naturalizing the Mind* (ch. 5 may be skipped). A good introduction to recent representational theories on consciousness is Jessie Munton's review in the *Times Literary Supplement* found [here](#). (Email me if you don't have access.)

#### **A.ii. Epistemology of Mind: Knowledge of one's own mind: first-person authority**

Part of the concept of qualia is the idea that we have privileged access to them. We can directly and immediately (and maybe infallibly) say how something *feels* to us. Many philosophers from Descartes to Russell and Ayer thought that we have this access to the contents of our experience. Moreover, these philosophers took qualia as the starting point for building up a foundationalist epistemology. But, do we really have this kind of access to the contents of our experience? And does it matter what kind of mental state we are introspecting on?

Quassim Cassam's anthology is a classic introduction to the topic of self-knowledge. Reading his introduction and some of the papers collected in there should give you a good grasp on the nature of the debate. Ryle famously denies privileged access and Armstrong tries to square self-knowledge with a materialist account of the mind. Schwitzgebel is a more recent argument to the effect that phenomenologically it's simply not true that we always have infallible access to our own mind. This may make it sound like the idea of privileged access was really a mistake. Shoemaker, Burge and Heal argue that that's also too quick. They think that there is an important relation between our rational capacities and first-person authority that needs spelling out. If this interests you, consider having a look at Richard Moran's seminal book from 2001. For recent position in the debate see Sophie Keeling's paper called "Knowing your Reasons" from 2021.

*Question:* Do we have privileged access to our own mental states?

Reading:

1. Smithies and Stoljar 2012: Introduction (read sections 1–4, skip 5 and 6)
2. For a ‘no’-take: Ryle, Armstrong (both in Cassam 1994), Schwitzgebel 2008; if more time: Cassam 2013.
3. For a ‘yes’-take: Shoemaker’s “Introspection and the Self” (1986, reprinted in Cassam 1994), Burge 1996, Heal 2002; if more time: Moran 2001 (shorter version Moran 2012).

### **C.ii. Intentionality and Mental Representation: Externalism and Internalism**

The question of the nature of thought has surfaced a couple of times so far. Last week we saw some discussion of the reference of first-personal thoughts. The week before, Howard Robinson argued that if physicalism fails for qualia, then it also fails for thoughts more generally. The philosopher Jerry A. Fodor (1935–2017) very influentially defended the idea of a language of thought in the framework of a computational theory of mind. This week we’ll look at a central question in his work: whether the meaning of these thoughts can be explained within a computational framework. Looking at this question is also of interest to a broader problem at the intersection of the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language: how do thoughts get their contents?

*Question:* ‘Cut the pie anyway you like, “meanings” just ain’t in the head!’ (PUTNAM)  
Should we agree?

1. For introduction read Kim 1994: ch. 8, Crane 2001
2. Read these two classic positions in favour of externalism: Putnam 1975 and Burge 1979 (the second one is a hard and long paper, if you’re pressed for time, only read sections I, IIa, IIb, IV and V).

3. Then, read this influential defence of internalism: Fodor 1980, including the comments by Rey, Dreyfus and Geach and Fodor’s replies (read them in that order).
4. Next read Fodor’s attempt to deal with the problems raised by Burge: Fodor 1987: ch. 2. And this is Burge’s reply to the idea behind Fodor’s attempt: Burge 1982.
5. A different line of attack on externalism focusses on self-knowledge: see McKinsey 1991 and Farkas 2003.
6. What’s interesting about this last debate is that it uncovers a relationship between externalism and transcendental solutions to Cartesian scepticism. For an overview over this larger connection see McDowell 1986 (again, long and hard, only read §§5-8).

#### **D. Mental Faculties**

As we saw two weeks ago, the type of mental state we’re introspecting might matter a great deal in whether we have any form of special access to it. In this last week, we’ll talk a bit more about different things the mind can do. The faculty of imagination was quite important for some of the positions discussed previously (e.g. Heal, Hellie). Intention and desire belong to “Theory of Action” which is its own topic in the philosophy of mind.

EITHER (Intention and the Will)

*Question:* Can one intend to do something whilst believing one won’t do it?

Reading:

1. Introduction: Holton 2009: Chs. 1 & 2.
2. On the point of rationality Kavka 1983; Broome 2001
3. The main proponents of the yes-camp: Anscombe 1957: §§51-52 (if more time Thalberg 1972).

4. The main proponents of the no-camp [not on the reading list]: Grice 1971 “Intention and Uncertainty”, Seitya 2008 “Practical Knowledge”, Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2014 (esp. chp. 12), Beddor and Pavese 2021 “Practical Knowledge Without Luminosity”.

OR (Imagination)

*Question:* I have never skated, but I can imagine I am a fantastic figure skater. What, if anything, can I learn from this about my figure-skating abilities?

Reading:

1. For background on a functionalist on cognitive architecture behind imagination see Nichols and Stich 2003
2. Good introduction to the meaning of “imagination” Kind 2011
3. Directly relevant for the question: Langland-Hassan, Kind, Spaulding, Williamson (all in Kind and Kung 2016).
4. If more time: Miyazono and Tooming 2023 “Imagination as a generative source of justification”