



PHIL451: Philosophy of Mind

Aaron Henry, PhD
University of British Columbia
Winter 2024-2025, Term 2

Plan

Overview of the syllabus

Introduction to the themes of the course

Contact



Instructor: Dr. Aaron Henry

Lecture: LASR 104 (Lectures are also livestreamed and recorded via Panopto)

Lecture Times: Tues & Thurs 11am-12:30pm

Zoom Office: <https://ubc.zoom.us/j/67721810069?pwd=xxkBZldXMSKfyv8qRLPhLMFCICyNQl.1>

Office Hours: Mon 10-11am; Thurs 1:30-2:30pm (or via appointment)

Email: aaron.henry@ubc.ca

E-mail policy: Emails should be sent from your UBC e-mail address and include the course code (PHIL451) in the subject line. (Otherwise, I may miss it). E-mails are for administrative purposes only. Questions about course material will be addressed in class and office hours. I normally reply to e-mails within one or two business days. Please don't hesitate to follow up with a reminder if you have not heard from me within that time frame.

Contact



Teaching Assistant: Tyeson Davies Barton

Email: tdaviesb@mail.ubc.ca

READINGS

All readings will be available electronically through our course website on Canvas.

If you do not find one of the assigned readings on the course site, please don't hesitate to email me, letting me know.

ASSESSMENT

Reading responses*

10% of final grade

Monthly

Short paper

25% of final grade

Feb 14th 11:59pm

Long paper

35% of final grade

Apr 8th 11:59pm

Final exam

30% of final grade

TBD

*Short reading responses are low stakes written reflections on assigned readings. They are graded on a pass/fail basis and should not exceed 500 words. Whereas your essays should be polished and organized systematically, these can be more exploratory: you are writing in order to think through an issue you found challenging. You must complete 3 responses to receive full marks and are due monthly. (So, the first reflection is due at the end of September; the second, at the end of October; and the third, at the end of November.)



POLICIES

COURSE WEBSITE

All announcements and course documents will be posted on Canvas. To access this site, go to <https://canvas.ubc.ca/> and login with your CWLid and password. PHIL451H will appear under the “courses” portion of the welcome page, on the left hand side. Click on the link to access our site. You should check this site regularly for updates.

All papers are to be submitted (and will be returned) via Canvas. You should upload your written assignment as an attachment on the submission page using .doc or .docx format.

LATE WORK

Assignments will be penalized 1/3 a letter grade for each day that they are late.

Extensions may be granted under special circumstances, but students should contact me to request an extension before the due date. Assignments more than 5 days late will not be accepted.

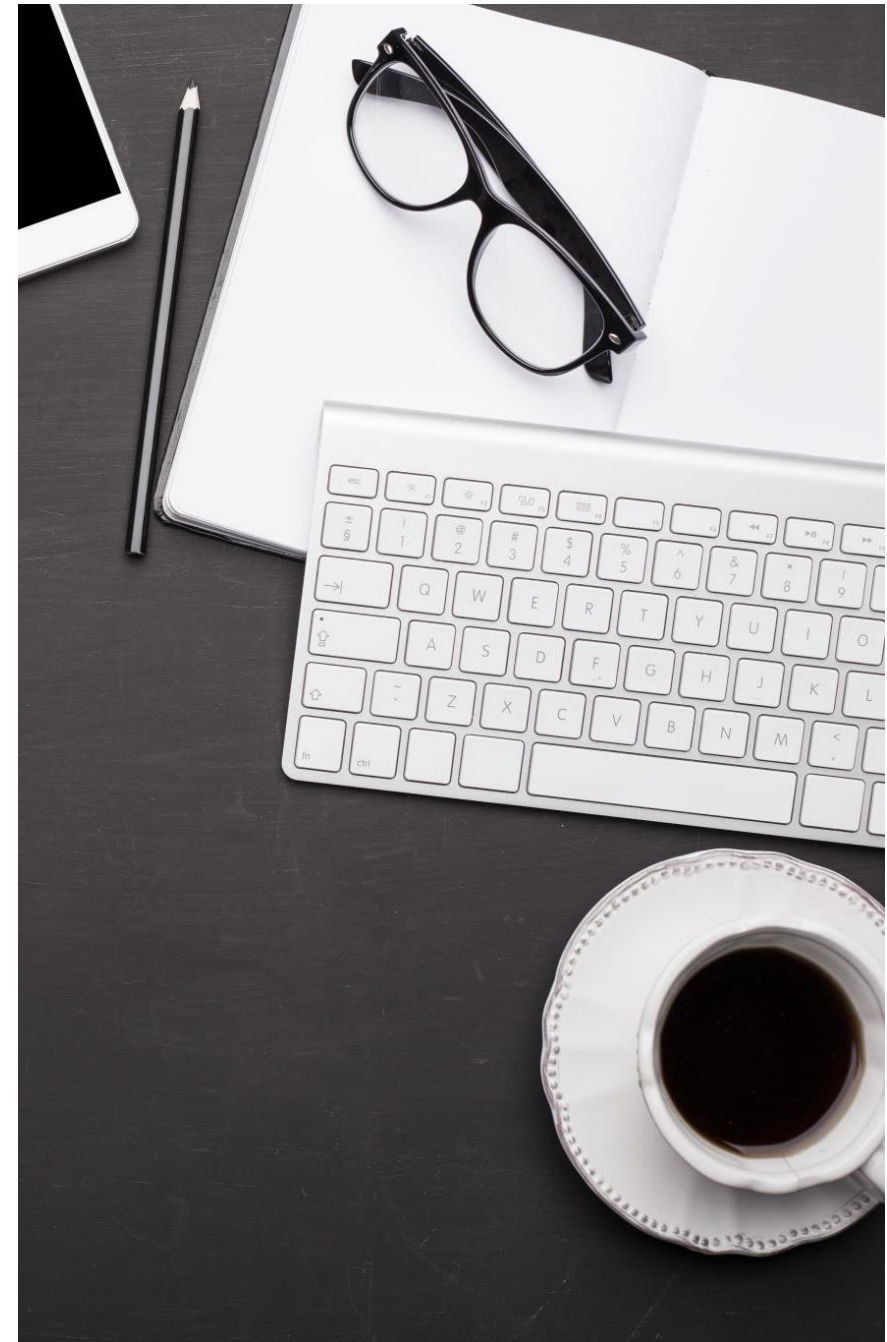
Academic Integrity



Academic Integrity

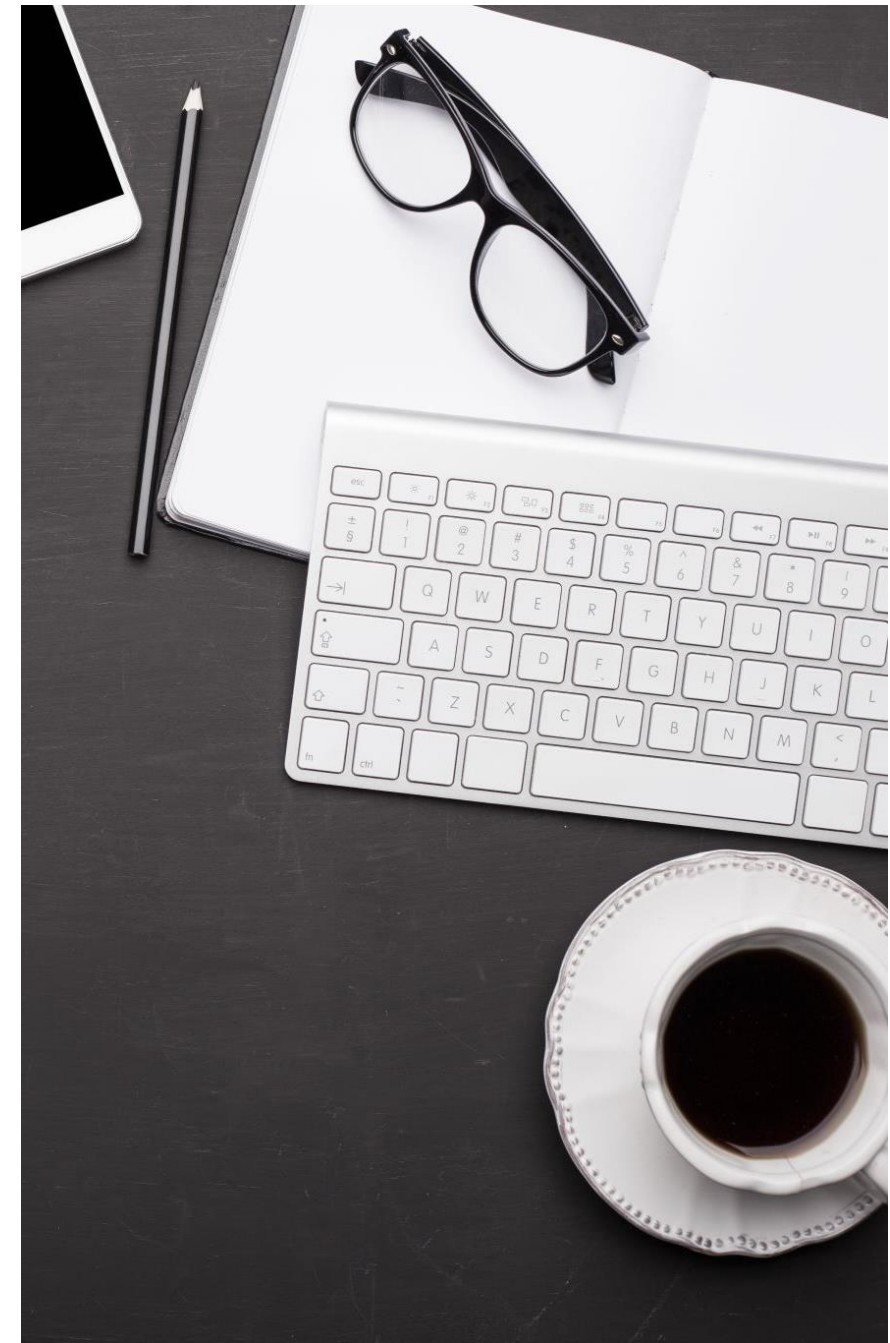
Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of British Columbia is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. Accordingly, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments. A link about Academic Misconduct:

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959>



Generative AI tools

- If you choose to use Generative AI tools (ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Gemini, etc.) when preparing an assignment for this class, all uses must be documented in an appendix to your assignment submission that identifies the following information:
 - what tool(s) were used
 - how they were used
 - how the results from the AI were incorporated into the submitted work (including all prompts and responses used)
- Guidance on how to cite Generative AI tools in various academic citation styles can be found here: <https://guides.library.ubc.ca/GenAI/cite>
- Important notes: Generative AI should *not* be relied upon as an authoritative source for information, interpretation, or analysis. Failure to adequately document Generative AI use and failure to cite Generative AI sources will be treated as an academic offense.
- If you have any questions about this policy, please feel free to speak to me in class or in office hours.



ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

The University of British Columbia is committed to accessibility. If you have a disability that may interfere with your ability to successfully take this course, then please email me in the first few weeks. You must also register with Access and Diversity, so that they can help provide support (grant extra time on exam, note taker, etc.): <https://students.ubc.ca/about-student-services/access-diversity> Also, note that I only get the information that UBC provides me with.

Please also contact me if you want to be addressed using a different name or gender than the one indicated by UBC.

Course overview

This course provides an advanced introduction to contemporary work on the ‘mind-body problem.’ This is the problem of understanding the metaphysical relationship between the mental and the physical. Our discussion will be organized around the thesis of ‘physicalism’: the thesis that, in a sense to be made precise, everything is physical. We will begin by asking how best to formulate the thesis of physicalism, focusing on what the physicalist means by ‘everything’ and what they mean by ‘physical.’ Having done so, we will turn to the topic of *mental causation*. According to many physicalists, the reality of mental causation provides a powerful source of support for their position. Our goal will be to understand why they have thought this and assess whether they are right. After considering debates about mental causation, we’ll turn to questions about *mental content*, i.e., the ‘aboutness’ of mental states. We will consider some influential physicalist attempts to explain mental content as well as the principal challenges that have dogged physicalist accounts of mental content. From content, we turn finally to *consciousness*. Here, we’ll consider the arguments that contemporary ‘dualists’ have offered for believing that the existence of consciousness is inconsistent with physicalism, as well as the main ways physicalists have attempted to rebut these dualist arguments. In the time that we have left, we’ll examine some historically neglected views of the mind-body relationship that have been receiving increased attention recently. We’ll discuss: ‘mysterianism’ (the view that the relation between consciousness and the physical lies forever beyond the cognitive grasp of humans); ‘illusionism’ (the view that consciousness is illusory); ‘panpsychism’ (the view that mind or consciousness is somehow woven into the physical fabric of the cosmos); and even some varieties of ‘idealism’ (the view that everything, including the physical cosmos, is a mental construction).

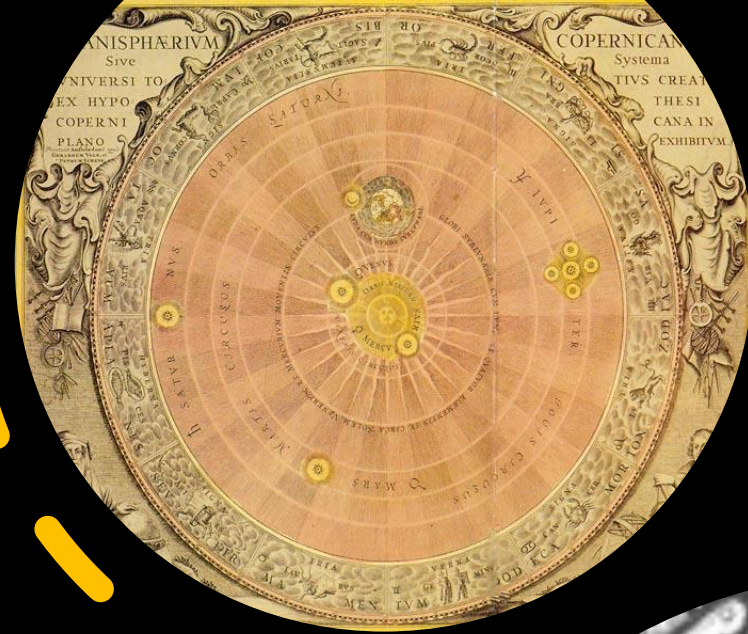


WHY IS THERE A ‘MIND-BODY PROBLEM’?

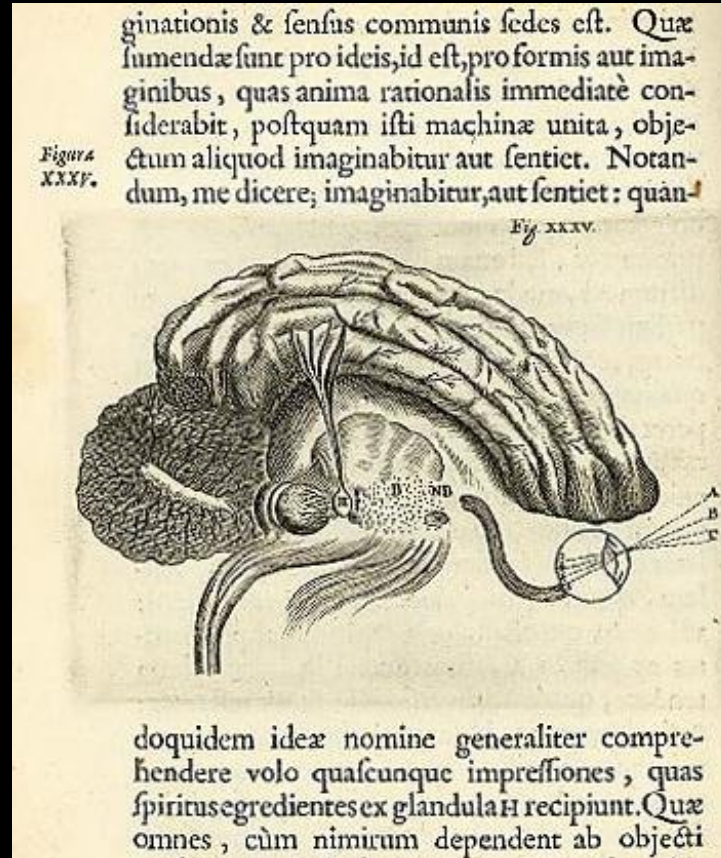
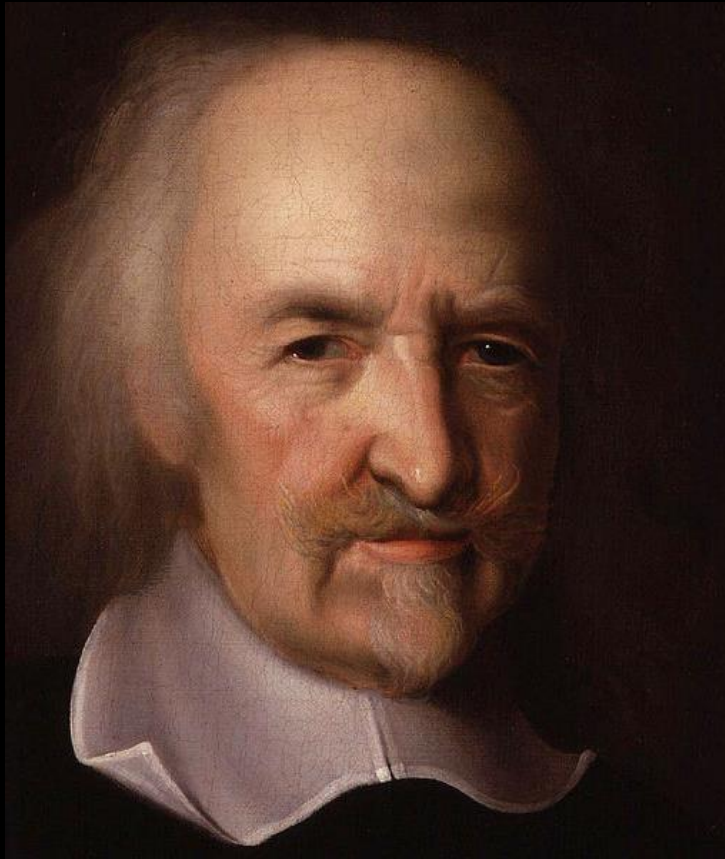


WHY IS THERE A 'MIND-BODY PROBLEM'?

The mind-body problem, in its contemporary form, dates to the scientific revolution of the 17th century, when people began to explain apparently different phenomena as manifestations of the same observation-based, mathematically formulated, laws (e.g., Newton's laws of mechanics).



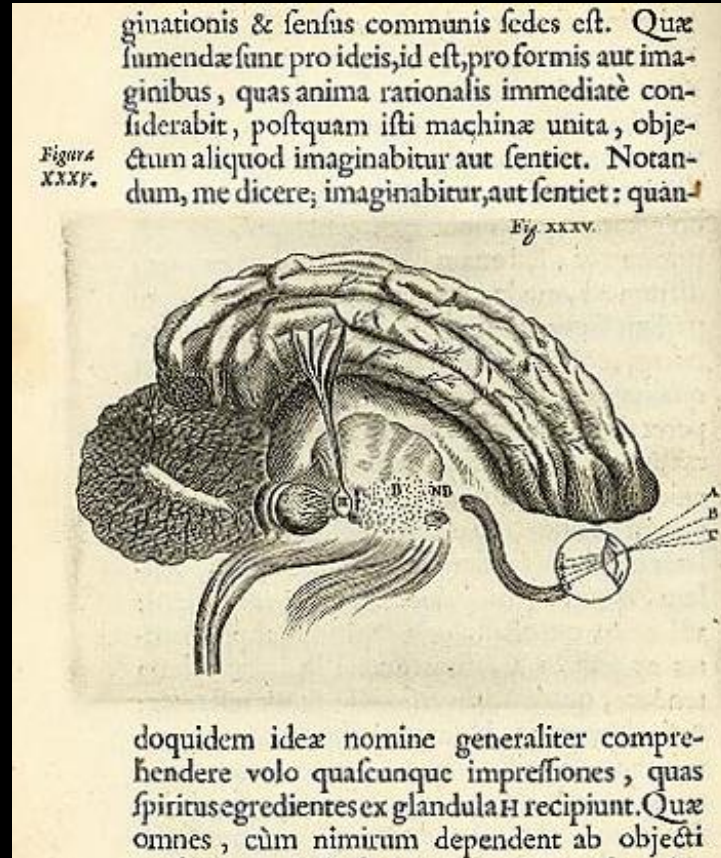
Why is there a 'Mind Body Problem'?



Some philosophers concluded that *all* natural phenomena could be unified in this way: that *everything* is physical.

Call this position **physicalism** (*a.k.a.* **materialism**)

Why is there a 'Mind Body Problem'?



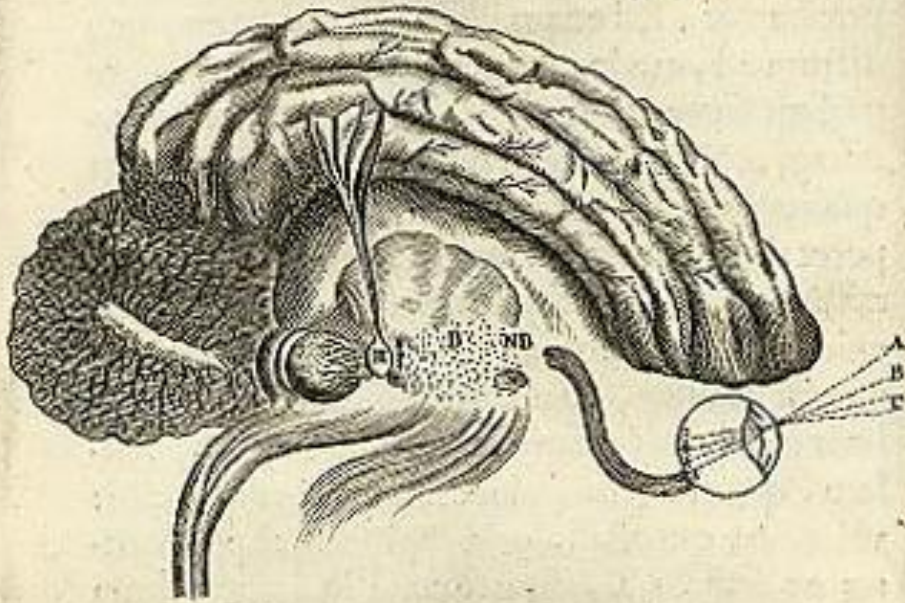
Other philosophers immediately objected that *we ourselves* – the ones making the observations and formulating the theories – cannot be understood in the same way. We (who do science) seem to systematically elude physical explanation.

We can call this position **anti-physicalism**, the most prominent version of which is **dualism**.

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 ginibus, quas anima rationalis immediatè con-
 siderabit, postquam isti machinæ unita, obje-
 ctum aliquod imaginabitur aut sentiet. Notan-
 dum, me dicere; imaginabitur, aut sentiet: quan-

Figura
 XXXV.

Fig. XXXV.



doquidem ideæ nomine generaliter compre-
 hendere volo quascunque impressiones, quas
 spiritus egredientes ex glandula H recipiunt. Quæ
 omnes, cum nimirum dependent ab objecti
 presentia, ad sensum communem referendæ.
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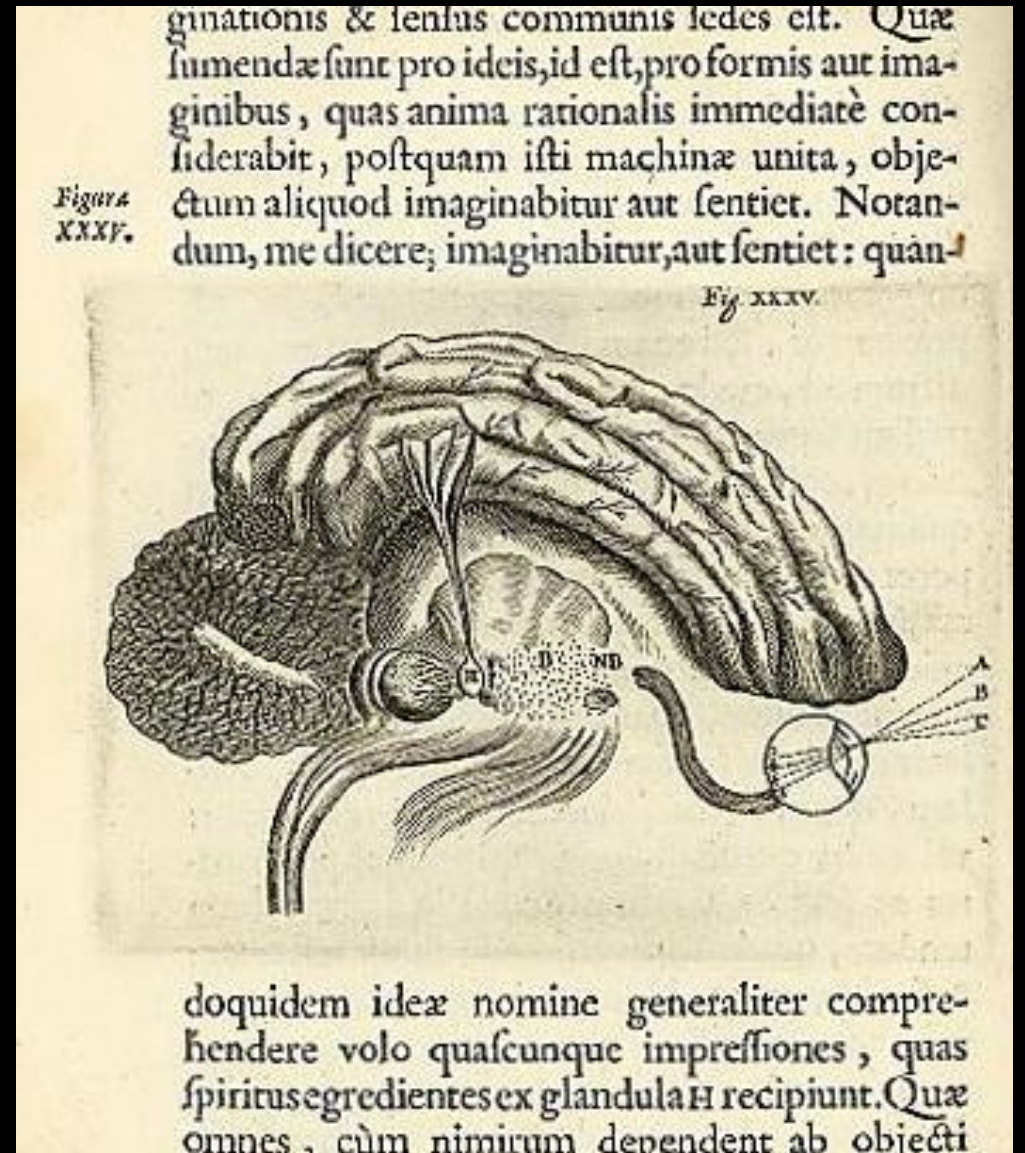
Why is there a 'Mind Body Problem'?

We seem able to distinguish physical and mental phenomena pretty easily, and they seem to have very little in common. But what does this tell us?

- Are minds really a different category thing, outside the physical world?
- Are minds at bottom physical and if so how can that be?
- Are minds irredeemably mysterious?
- Are minds perhaps an illusion?
- Might something even weirder be true?

Why is there a 'Mind Body Problem'?

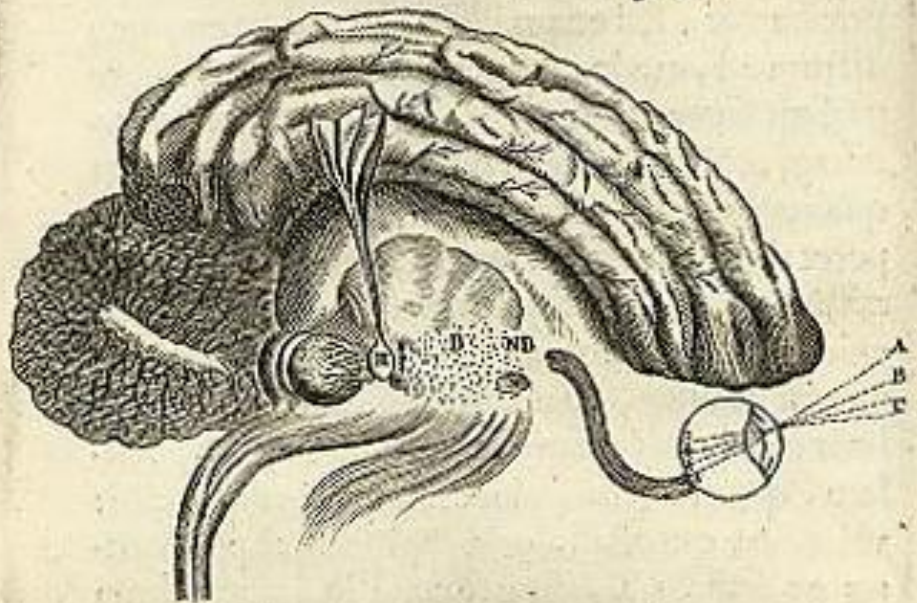
What philosophers call 'the mind-body problem' is simply the succession of competing analyses, theories, and arguments that have arisen in an attempt to get clear on these questions.



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Fig. XXXV.



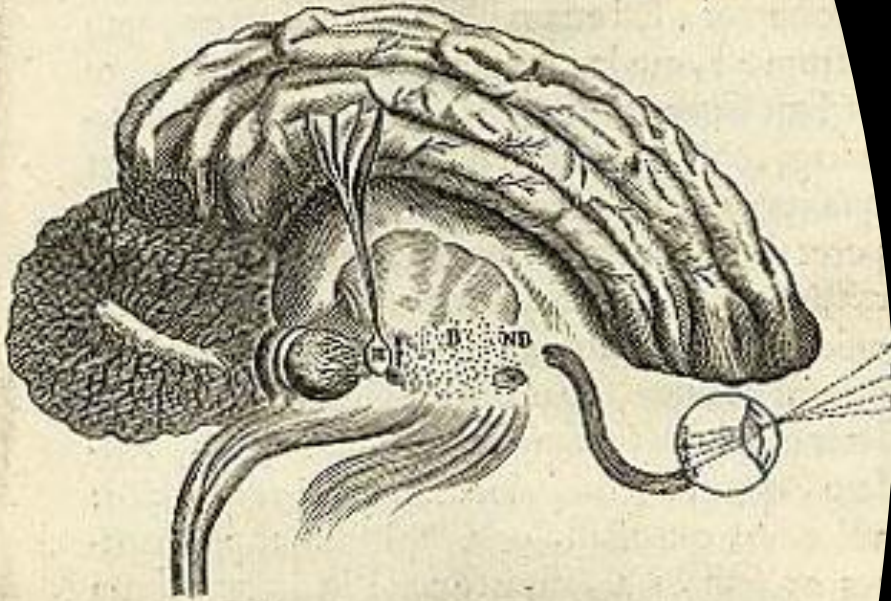
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Sed

Some recurring trends ...

82 RENATUS DES CART
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physicalist strategies

An influential physicalist strategy appeals to considerations about *causation* ...


... we have strong empirical evidence that physical events are causally governed by invariant physical laws. If the mind is a source of causal influence (as it seems to be), its causal role must cohere with what we know about the physical causal order.

On this basis, physicalists will try to show that if minds make a causal difference to behaviour, minds must be, at bottom, physical.



anti-physicalist strategies

A recurring strategy of anti-physicalists is to seize upon some aspect of mental life that appears to elude explanation in physical, mechanistic terms.



anti-physicalist strategies

Two traditional candidates:

Content ('intentionality', 'mental representation'): - many mental state *represent* (i.e., are *of* or *about*) things other than themselves.

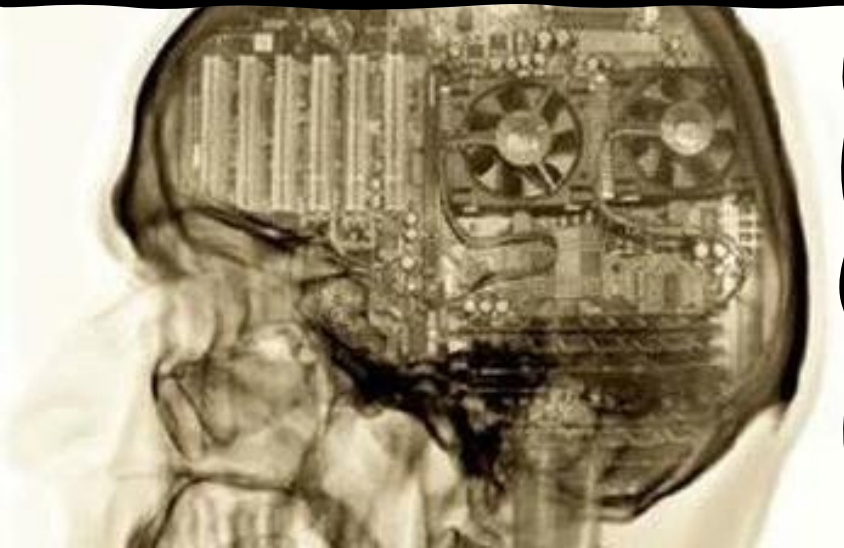
Consciousness: many mental states have a distinctive 'subjective quality' or 'phenomenology': something about them that we can *feel* and introspectively recognise but cannot easily put into words ('what it's like').



A changing intellectual landscape

In the 20th century, important intellectual breakthroughs in cognitive science and adjacent fields led many philosophers to feel hopeful that one or another of these mental features might surrender to physical explanation, thereby vindicating physicalism.

In reply, anti-physicalists use many of the same theoretical resources to refine their arguments for the claim that mentality stubbornly resists physical explanation and is best seen as fundamentally nonphysical.



The plan for the course



What is “physicalism”?



The problem of mental causation



From mental causation to content.



From content to consciousness.



Arguing against physicalism: The ‘hard problem’ of consciousness



Contemporary alternatives to physicalism and dualism: panpsychism and idealism.

What is 'physicalism'?

Physicalists claim that *everything is physical*.

But what exactly does this mean?

In particular, we can ask:

- 1) The Completeness Question: What does it mean to say that everything is physical?
- 2) The Condition Question: What does it mean to say that everything is physical?

We will begin by considering the *former* question.