Graduate Seminar: Physicalism  
Spring 2007  
Professor Karen Bennett  
Wednesdays, 7-10 PM  

What is physicalism? Should we believe it? Why?

The seminar divides into 3 parts, of which the first and third will be the most central. We will begin by thinking about what the doctrine of physicalism is supposed to be. Something in the ballpark of ‘everything is physical’ or ‘the physical facts determine all the facts’ might do as a rough approximation, but….

• What is the scope of the doctrine? Is it supposed to rule out the existence of abstract objects?
• Many people think that physicalism is at best contingently true—that even physicalists should believe that disembodied minds are possible. Is that right? Does accommodating this constraint raise further puzzles?
• What is ‘physical’ supposed to mean? Is the dispute between the physicalist and the dualist not as substantive as it might appear?
• What is ‘determined by’ supposed to mean? It has become increasingly popular to suggest that physicalism should be characterized by means of realization rather than supervenience. But what is the realization relation? Does such a move really make any progress?
• Whatever exactly the proper determination relation is, the truth of physicalism presumably requires that it hold necessarily. But what is its epistemic status? Does the truth of physicalism require that all the facts be a priori deducible from the basic physical facts?

We will spend the first few weeks thinking about such questions.

Second, we will spend a couple of sessions thinking about a few recent responses to some of the familiar arguments for dualism that have gotten a lot of attention in the past 10 years. This part of the seminar is not intended to be comprehensive, and indeed will be totally idiosyncratic. Although I will situate the responses we discuss with respect to others that we will not, the guiding theme of this part of the seminar is basically: here are a couple of papers that a) offer unusual takes on the problems, and b) I want to read. Note that we will not be explicitly spending much time on the pro-dualist arguments themselves. Some background knowledge about them will be assumed.

We enter the third part of the seminar by turning away from the brief interlude about what might be wrong with the dualist arguments, and focus instead on what is wrong with dualism itself. This question has received much less attention in the literature, and turns out to be surprisingly difficult. Most of the arguments against dualism are really not very good. I am a committed physicalist, but I am also intellectually honest, and I am not happy with this state of play. We will discuss appeals to simplicity and explanatory power, as well as various ill-fated attempts to claim that dualists cannot account for mental causation. We will also spend some time thinking about the differences between property and substance dualism, and whether the substance dualist is really any worse off than the property dualist.
Readings: Most of them are from journals that are readily available electronically. Enter the title into Google Scholar from a University computer (or at least through the proxy server), and click ‘find it PUL’. I will place book chapters and articles that are not so readily available in Marx library.

Credit: I will award a unit either via a seminar paper or a presentation plus a 24-hour take-home exam.

Tentative Schedule

**Characterizing Physicalism**

2/7  *Various Bits of Set-Up, and Characterizing the Physical*

Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics* (1998), pp. 1-23


Dowell, “The Physical: Empirical, not Metaphysical” (2006), §1, 2, 4, 5.11, 5.12 (rest optional)


Crane and Mellor, “There is no Question of Physicalism” (1990)

Stoljar, “Two Conceptions of the Physical” (2001)


relevant sections of Stephan Leuenberger’s dissertation (2007)

2/14  *Characterizing the Determination Relation*

Melnyk, *A Physicalist Manifesto* (2003), chapters 1 and 2 (you can probably skip this, and get the gist from the two papers below.)


Witmer, “Realization, Higher Order Properties, and Explanatory Import” (ms)

Optional: Shoemaker, “Realization and Mental Causation”

Wilson, “Supervenience-Based Characterizations of Physicalism”

2/21  *The Epistemic Status of the Determination Relation*

Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics* (1998), pp. 46-52 and chapter 3

Byrne, “Cosmic Hermeneutics” (1999)


Jackson, “Physicalism is not a Dual Attribute Theory” (2006)

2/28  continued

**Idiosyncratic Interlude**

3/7  Pereboom, “Consciousness and Introspective Inaccuracy” (ms)

Optional: Adams, “Flavors, Colors, and God”


*Spring Break*

*No class 4/4 (Pacific APA)*

**Arguing Against Dualism**

4/11  *From Mental Causation? Part I: Interaction and the Pairing Problem*
Kim, *Physicalism or Something Near Enough* (2005), chapter 3
Bennett, “Mental Causation” (2007), §§ 1, 2, 3, 5
*Optional:* Garber, “Understanding Interaction: What Descartes Should Have Told Elisabeth”
Loeb, *From Descartes to Hume*, pp. xx

4/18  *From Mental Causation? Part II: The Exclusion Problem*
Bennett, “Exclusion Again,” (2007), § 1 (rest is optional)
Papineau, “The History of the Completeness of Physics” (the appendix to *Thinking about Consciousness* (2002))
A few pages from Paul Audi’s dissertation
*Optional:* Kim, *Physicalism or Something Near Enough* (2005), chapter 2
various of the papers collected in *Supervenience and Mind*

4/25  *From Simplicity etc.?*
Smart, last 2 pages of “Sensations and Brain Processes” (1959)
Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (1968), ch 4
Hill, *Sensations: A Defense of Type Materialism* (1991), chapter 2
Kim, *Physicalism or Something Near Enough* (2005), chapter 5
*Optional:* Pautz, “Is Physicalism Simpler than Dualism?” (ms)

5/2  continued
Bennett, “Why I am Not a Dualist” (ms)