

**Name of Course: MENTAL CAUSATION**  
**Semester: Fall 2018**

**Lecturer:** Tim Crane

**Teaching Assistant:** Isik Sarihan

**Time:** Tuesdays, 9am — 10.40am

**Course Level and Value:** MA: 2 Credits; PhD students

**Tim Crane's Office Hours:** TBC

**Brief introduction to the course**

This course will introduce the contemporary problem of mental causation — the problem of how the mind makes things happen in the rest of the world — first by tracing its historical origins in early modern philosophy, and then by examining how this frames the recent debates in the philosophy of mind. Mental causation has been seen to be a problem for dualist views of the mind and for physicalist views. We will discuss the problem of mind-body interaction as it arose for Descartes's dualism, and the treatments of the problem by Leibniz, Malebranche and others. We will then examine the mental causation as a problem for contemporary non-reductive physicalism, and at the various physicalist solutions to this problem. On the way we will look at the relationship between the doctrine of externalism and mental causation, as well as at non-causal views of the mind. The guiding assumption of the course is that mental causation is not just a marginal technical issue, but a problem that lies at the heart of the metaphysics of mind.

**The goal of the course**

The goal of the course is to provide an overview of the problem of mental causation and its significance in the philosophy of mind.

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of this course, students who have done the required work will:

- understand the main historical background of the contemporary mental causation debate;
- understand the main positions in the contemporary debate;
- understand the significance of the debate for the philosophy of mind as a whole.

**Course requirements**

All students must attend the classes and are required to produce regular brief reflections on their reading, via the moodle site.

**Assessment**

All other students taking the class for credit must submit a 2,500 word final paper on a topic agreed in advance with the instructor. The grade for the class will be the grade earned for the final paper, though in exceptional cases extra credit may be awarded for participation throughout the term.

The final paper will be due on: **DATE TO BE CONFIRMED**

### **Week by week breakdown with readings**

There is **one** compulsory reading per week; all students will be expected to have done this reading. Questions will be asked about the reading in the class. Students cannot expect to get a good grade in the class without showing knowledge of the compulsory reading. The other readings listed are optional.

#### **Week 1 (18 September) Historical background 1: Descartes**

Descartes held that minds and matter were distinct substances. This view was famously and insightfully criticised by Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia.

**Reading:** Correspondence between René Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, May — July 1643; in Michael Moriarty (translator and editor) *The Passions of the Soul and Other Late Philosophical Writings* (OUP), pp.1-12.

**Other reading:** Robert C. Richardson, R. C., 1982, "The 'Scandal' of Cartesian Interactionism", *Mind*, 91: 20–37.

#### **Week 2 (25 September) Historical background 2: Leibniz**

Leibniz and Malebranche criticised Cartesian interactionism, and ended up with very different and radical theories; of interest here is Leibniz's appeal to the laws of nature (physics).

**Reading:** Roger Woolhouse, "Leibniz's Objection to Cartesian Interaction" Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society

**Other reading:** Daniel Garber, "Mind, Body and the Laws of Nature in Descartes and Leibniz" *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 8 (1):105-133 (1983)

#### **Week 3 (2 October) Non-causal views of action and mind**

In the 20th century, one influential reaction to the Cartesian predicament was that the relationship between the mind and body (mental states and physical states/events) is not causal at all.

**Reading:** A.I. Melden, *Free Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1961)

**Other reading** G.E.M. Anscombe, "The Causation of Behaviour" in Carl Ginet and Sydney Shoemaker (eds.) *Knowledge and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983)

#### **Week 4 (9 October) Causal views of the mind**

From the 1960s, a number of philosophers began to defend causal views of the relationship between mind and body.

**Reading** Donald Davidson, 'Actions, Reasons and Causes' *Journal of Philosophy* 1963

**Other reading** Tim Crane, *The Mechanical Mind* (3rd edition) chapter 4.3-4.4

#### **Week 5 (16 October) The mind-brain identity theory**

Physicalists used the fact of mental causation as a premise in their argument for an identity theory between mind and body.

**Reading:** David Lewis, 'An Argument for the Identity Theory' *Journal of Philosophy* 1967; reprinted in Lewis, *Philosophical Papers* volume 1 (OUP 1983)

**Other reading** David Papineau, "Why Supervenience?" *Analysis* 1990

#### **Week 6 (23 October) Non-reductive materialism (physicalism)**

The identity theory is a reductive view; but many materialists (physicalists) argued that materialism does not actually require reduction: 'non-reductive materialism' is the alternative.

**Reading:** Jerry Fodor, "Special Sciences" *Synthese* 1974

**Other reading:** Ned Block, "Anti-Reductionism Slaps Back" *Philosophical Perspectives* 1997

#### **Week 7 (30 October) the problem for non-reductive materialism**

The identity theory solved the problem of mental causation for materialists; but denying identity might seem to raise the problem again for the non-reductive version of materialism.

**Reading:** Jaegwon Kim, 'The Non-Reductivist's Trouble with Mental Causation' in John Heil and Al Mele (eds.) *Mental Causation* (OUP 1993). Also in Kim, *Supervenience and Mind* (CUP 1993).

**Other reading:** Tim Crane, "The Mental Causation Debate" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 1995.

### **Week 8 (6 November) Anomalous monism**

The problem of mental causation for non-reductive materialism was originally raised in the context of the critique of Davidson's anomalous monism. Davidson has rejected that his theory is subject to this criticism.

**Reading:** Donald Davidson, "Thinking Causes" in John Heil and Al Mele (eds.) *Mental Causation* (OUP 1993)

**Other reading** Essays by Kim and McLaughlin in Part One of John Heil and Al Mele (eds.) *Mental Causation* (OUP 1993)

### **Week 9 (13 November) Externalism and mental causation**

Some philosophers believe that a special problem arises because of the doctrine of 'externalism' about mental content: that the content of one's thoughts are essentially determined by things outside oneself.

(Isik Sarahan will take this class)

**Reading** Pierre Jacob, "Externalism and Mental Causation" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1992

**Other reading:** Jackson, F. and P. Pettit, "Functionalism and Broad Content", *Mind* 97: 381–400.

### **Week 10 (20 November) The general form of a solution**

What is the general form of the problem of mental causation for physicalists? What are the most general principles that give rise to the problem?

**Reading** Karen Bennett, "Why the exclusion problem seems intractable and how, just maybe, to tract it" *Noûs* 37 (3): 471-97.

**Other Reading** Steinvör Arnadóttir and Tim Crane, "There is no exclusion problem" in *Mental Causation and Ontology*, edited by S.C. Gibb, E.J. Lowe, & R.D. Ingthorsson (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013) 248-66

### **Week 11 (27 November) More metaphysical solutions**

How much metaphysical commitments should a physicalist take on when attempting to solve the problem? Some philosophers have argued that we need substantial theories of causation and/or properties.

**Reading:** Stephen Yablo, "Mental Causation" *Philosophical Review* 1992

**Other reading** Sophie Gibb, "The Problem of Mental Causation and the Nature of Properties", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, (2004) 82: 464–76.

### **Week 12 (4 December) Less metaphysical solutions**

Can the problem be solved on less weighty metaphysical assumptions? Are there more 'minimalist' solutions to the problem for physicalists?

**Reading** Barry Loewer, "Mental Causation, or Something Near Enough", in McLaughlin and Cohen 2007, McLaughlin, B. P. and J. Cohen (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 243–64.

**Other reading** Amie Thomasson, 1998, "A Nonreductivist Solution to Mental Causation", *Philosophical Studies*, 89: 181–95.