

# **The Moral and the Mental: Explanatory Gaps**

Umeå University

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## Course Description

Both the moral and the mental pose an explanatory challenge for naturalistic outlooks on reality. Science is incredibly successful at describing and explaining everything from the movements of smallest particles to the history of the entire cosmos, but somehow these explanations do not appear to reach issues such as the nature of goodness, justice and fairness, or what it is like to drink your first cup of coffee after a bad night's sleep. Supposing such moral and mental properties are in fact real, how do we account for their existence without resorting to an anti-scientific mysticism?

The philosophical literature has treated these difficulties with the moral and the mental more or less in isolation. This course introduces students to the central issues in both debates and focuses on the remarkable similarities and dissimilarities in them. In both cases, the driving issue seems to be a remarkable explanatory gap between scientific world views and seemingly obvious features of our everyday lives. By comparing these debates we will aim to figure out whether they can learn something from one another. Ideally, such lessons will render both the moral and the mental less mysterious. (But I make no promises.)

## Class Set-Up

The class is divided into five themes. The treatment of each theme starts with an introductory lecture. For themes II-IV these lectures will be followed by student presentations on the literature and group discussions centred around the student presentations.

More details on the class set-up will be shared in the introductory lecture, **September 2nd 15.15 at filosofen**.

## Examination

Examination consists of two main parts: participation (U–G) and a final essay (U–VG). You need a G on both parts to get a G course grade. The VG course grade requires a G for participation and a VG for the essay.

The participation component is broken down into four components as follows:

1. *Statement of convictions*

Write a short text summarizing your current views on how the moral and mental relate to the non-moral and non-mental. More precise instructions are found on the assignment page. Deadline: **Sept 7th 23.55**

2. *Presentations*

Each student will give one presentation for Theme II-IV. The timing of these will be settled during the first week of class. The

3. *Discussion questions*

For each text you present, you must post discussion questions online **the day before the presentation**

#### 4. Seminar Participation

Aside from your own presentation, you must participate in the post-presentation discussions in the seminar. These discussions will be guided by the discussion questions posted online by the presenter.

A passing grade for participation requires that you perform all four tasks as per the instructions.

The final essay will be around 4-5.000 words and can focus on any topic pertaining to the connection between the moral and non-moral, or the mental and non-mental (or both). For a passing grade, the following criteria must be met:

- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the relevant course material
- Develop an independent line of argument on the course content
- Precise referencing to the literature, including exact page numbers
- Writing of academic quality

For VG, all of these criteria need to be met to a significantly high degree. Precise instructions for writing the assignment will be posted on Canvas in due time.

## Course Schedule with Reading Instructions

Readings marked with \* are available via Canvas. All others are available through the university library online service. There are hyperlinks to the relevant webpages in the bibliography below. If you click on the titles of the texts, you will be redirected to the online repository of the University Library.

Each theme starts with a 'framing' lecture that serves to orient the reading. These will be held on Mondays.

For themes II-IV, students will post a video presentation and comment on each other's presentation. Video presentations are due at the end of the first week of a theme-cycle. Comments are due the final day of the theme cycle. An overview of the deadlines is provided below, as well as in the theme summaries here.

### Theme I: Introduction — Explanatory Gaps (Sept 1–7)

#### DEADLINES

*Sun Sept 7th*: Statement of convictions due.

#### I.a The gap between the mental and the physical

- \*Kripke, S., (1980) *Naming and Necessity*, Harvard University Press, pp. 144–155.
- Jackson, F., (1982) "Epiphenomenal Qualia," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 32(127): 127–136.

**I.b The gap between moral and the descriptive**

- Hume, D., (1739) *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London: John Noon. Book III, Part I, Section I, selected paragraph
- Wittgenstein, L., (1965) "I: A Lecture on Ethics." *The Philosophical Review*, Vol 74, No 1, p. 3–12
- \*Enoch, D., (2017) "Non-Naturalistic Realism in Metaethics," in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, ed. T. McPherson & D. Plunkett, New York: Routledge, pp. 29–42.

**I.c An observation about the difference**

- Stoljar, D., (2006) *Ignorance and Imagination: The Epistemic Origin of the Problem of Consciousness*, Oxford University Press. Section 2.6.4.1.

**Theme II: Supervenience? (Sept 8–21)**

DEADLINES

TBA

**II.a Nomic Supervenience for the Dualist**

- Chalmers, D. J., (1995) "Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2(3): 200–219.

**II.b Metaphysical Supervenience for the Non-Naturalist?**

- Hattiangadi, A., (2018) "Moral Supervenience," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 48(3–4): 592–615.
- Macpherson, T., (2012) "Ethical Non-Naturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 7
- Streumer, B., (2024) "Standing Up for Supervenience," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 109(1): 138–154.
- Rosen, G., (2021) "The Modal Status of Moral Principles," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 16, pp. 257–279.

**Theme III: Moral and Mental Causation (Sept 22–Oct 5)**

DEADLINES

TBA

**III.a Mental Causation**

- Bennett, K., (2008) "Exclusion Again," in *Being Reduced: New Essays on Reduction, Explanation, and Causation*, ed. J. Hohwy & J. Kallestrup, Oxford University Press, pp. 280–307.

- Kroedel, T., (2015) "Dualist Mental Causation and the Exclusion Problem," *Noûs*, 49(2): 357–375.
- Vaassen, B., (2024) "Mental Causation for Standard Dualists," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 102(4): 978–998.

### III.b Moral Causation

- \*Harman, G., (1977) *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, Oxford University Press.
- \*Thomson, J. J., (1996) "Moral Explanations and Moral Beliefs," in *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*, G. Harman & J. J. Thomson, Blackwell.
- Powers, A., (forthcoming) "Non-Naturalist Moral Causation," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*.

## Theme IV: Phenomenal Concepts, and other explanations (Oct 6–19)

DEADLINES

TBA

### IV.a Phenomenal Concepts and the Mind

- Sundström, P., (2011) "Phenomenal Concepts," *Philosophy Compass*, 6(4): 267–281.
- Sundström, P., (2018) "How Physicalists Can—and Cannot—Explain the Seemingly 'Absurdity' of Physicalism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 97(3): 681–703.
- Mehta, N., (2017) "Phenomenal, Normative, and Other Explanatory Gaps: A General Diagnosis," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 98(3): 567–591.

### IV.b Similar strategies for the moral

- Yetter-Chappell, H. & Chappell, R. Y., (2013) "Mind–Body Meets Metaethics: A Moral Concept Strategy," *Philosophical Studies*, 165(3): 865–878.
- Copp, D., (2025) "Ethical Naturalism and the Problem of Normativity," online edition: Oxford Academic (20 February 2025), §9.1–9.3 & 9.6.

## Theme V: The Connective Tissue (Oct 20–26)

No DEADLINES: do the reading and prep your exam essay.

### V.a Connecting the Mind and the Body

- Bennett, K., (2021) "Why I Am Not a Dualist," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Mind*, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, pp. 208–231.
- Schaffer, J., (forthcoming) "Naturalistic Dualism and the Problem of the Physical Correlate," in *Grounding and Consciousness*, ed. G. O. Rabin, Oxford University Press.

### V.b Connecting the Moral and the Descriptive

- Leary, S., (2017) "Non-Naturalism and Normative Necessities," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 12, Oxford University Press, pp. 76–105.
- Rosen, G., (2018) "Metaphysical Relations in Metaethics," in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, ed. T. McPherson & D. Plunkett, New York: Routledge, p. 151–170

## Deadlines Overview

Most deadlines will be determined during our first meeting **Tuesday Sept 2nd 15.00**. For now, we have

- Statement of convictions **Sun Sept 7th**
- **!!! Essay deadline: Fri Oct 31 !!!**

## Academic Policy

- *Doing Philosophy Together*

The aim of the course is to get better at philosophy together. This requires us to commend others when they are doing well and when they deliver solid work, but it also requires us to criticize other people's views and arguments where we consider them to be lacking. This must be done in a respectful and kind manner at all times. I borrow the following passage from Sarah Bernstein's syllabus *Metaphysics of the Social World* (of which I am only moderately jealous):

Academic philosophy has a reputation as a blood sport. It need not be so. We're all in the Truth Trenches together. Philosophical interaction can be friendly and collaborative while still being constructive and rigorous. Please contribute to class in ways that aim at discovering the truth rather than establishing intellectual dominance.

- *Academic Integrity:*

Cheating and plagiarism are reported immediately. The universities' policy regarding cheating and plagiarism can be found here: <https://www.umu.se/student/vi-hjalper-dig/om-nagot-handert/fusk-och-plagiat/>

- *LLM's and Chatbot use:*

Current availability of chatbots like ChatpGPT, Claude, and CoPilot create many grey area cases for cheating. Precise guidelines for how (not) to use them are posted on the canvas side. Let me just reiterate here that your assignments must be of your own creation and having chatbots write them for you constitutes cheating as much having someone else write your exams. This course provides you with exercises in philosophical writing and thinking. Having someone or something else do the writing for you would defeat the purpose of the course entirely.

- *Late essays or submissions:*

I do not accept late essays or submissions of required participation work on Canvas. There are re-examinations and makeup exams for those who cannot meet the deadlines. Exceptions are of course made for those with valid grounds for the delay.

- *Access:*

All relevant information will be available on the Canvas page. If, for any reason, the information or course literature is not available to you, you may contact the responsible teacher and/or the subject's study advisor for assistance.

## **Contact Information**

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