



# **MIND & METAPHYSICS**

## MIND & METAPHYSICS

### GLOSSARY

**aboutness** A distinctive characteristic of thoughts, desires, words, pictures and the like, also called 'intentionality'. Such things seem to point beyond themselves. A word is directed towards or about something other than the ink on the page. A rock isn't about anything.

**behaviourism** A family of views that reduces talk of mental things (such as dreams, hopes and beliefs), or even the mental things themselves to behaviour, i.e. the observable activities or movements of bodies.

**conceivability** A state of affairs is conceivable if you can think of it without contradiction. Importantly, conceivability is thought to be a guide to possibility – whatever is conceivable is possible. Maybe there's no contradiction in thinking of kangaroos without tails, so such things are possible, but a four-sided triangle is inconceivable and, therefore, not possible. Similar thoughts might have large implications for the philosophy of mind.

**consciousness** The aspect of our mental lives variously described as wakefulness, awareness or our experience of the world. Thomas Nagel famously argues that there is something it is like to be a conscious creature, something it is like for that creature. The 'something it is like' is consciousness.

**determinism** The view that every event, without exception, is fully caused by its antecedent conditions, i.e. the events leading up to it. Rewind the Universe back to 2001 and run it forwards again and everything will happen exactly as it did before. What seem like free choices and actions are thought to be determined, too.

**dualism** A metaphysical view which holds that, ultimately, the Universe is made of just two types of stuff: physical stuff and mental stuff.

**epiphenomenalism** A view of the mind-body relation that holds that all, or almost all, mental phenomena are merely the by-products (epiphenomena) of physical interactions. In this view, mental events might cause other mental events, but mental phenomena have no physical effects.

**free will** The organ of origination, the part of us that allegedly makes free choices, somehow not bound by causal laws. Those who hold that the will is free claim, contrary to determinists, that we sometimes have the power to twist ourselves free of the causal web and just choose what course of action to take.

**metaphysics** The branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of reality.

**monism** The view that, ultimately, reality is made up of just one kind of thing.

**natural languages** Languages like English and German, as opposed to 'artificial languages' such as computer-programming languages and, if Jerry Fodor is right, something else – the language of thought, which is prior to all other languages.

**paradox** In general, paradoxes involve a certain sort of conflict or tension between two claims that seem obviously true. The trouble often comes when conflicting claims seem to follow logically from something thought to be true.

**personal identity** Whatever it is that makes you the same you over time. The main candidates are the continuity of your body over time, and the continuity of your mind over time.

**raw feels** The peculiar way some mental states strike us: e.g. the pangs of hunger, the sting of jealousy, the sharpness of the taste of a green apple, the hurtfulness of pain and the goofy twinge of a tickle.

# DESCARTES' MIND-BODY PROBLEM

the 30-second philosophy

## 3-SECOND THRASH

Is your mind a non-physical, ghostly kind of thing that controls your body, is it your brain or is it something else entirely?

## 3-MINUTE THOUGHT

Descartes thought that the laws of physics leave room for minds to affect the motions of the pineal gland (and the body). But as physics has advanced, many philosophers have become convinced that all the motions of physical bodies are governed by the laws of physics. This makes it especially difficult to understand how the mind can affect the body, unless it is itself physical.

In his *Meditations*, René Descartes formulated the mind-body problem. The problem is understanding how consciousness, minds, thoughts and free choice are related to the material world described by science. Descartes argued that mind and body are distinct substances, with very different essential features. Mind, he said, is essentially thinking, non-spatial and can initiate free choice. Body is essentially extended in space, non-thinking and governed by the laws of motion. Descartes' own view, dualist interactionism, is that in a living person mind and body are united, and each is constantly influencing the other. But how can mind affect body if the latter is governed by the laws of nature? Descartes' answer was that mind and body interact in a human being at a point inside the pineal gland (a small gland located at the base of the brain). This answer didn't satisfy subsequent philosophers, who have come up with many alternative theories. Among these are: physicalism, the view that mind and body are not really distinct, and mind is really physical; idealism, which holds that body is really an illusion, and only mind exists; monism, which says that reality has both mental and physical aspects; and epiphenomenalism, the view that body can affect mind, but mind cannot affect body.

## RELATED PHILOSOPHIES

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BRENTANO'S INTENTIONALITY  
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LAPLACE'S DEMON,  
DETERMINISM, & FREE WILL  
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RYLE'S GHOST IN THE MACHINE  
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## 3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

RENÉ DESCARTES  
1596–1650

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER  
1788–1860

## 30-SECOND TEXT

Kati Balog

*The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer called the mind-body problem, 'The World Knot'. It has yet to be untied.*

# BRENTANO'S INTENTIONALITY

## the 30-second philosophy

### 3-SECOND THRASH

Being about things is what mind is about.

### 3-MINUTE THOUGHT

The traditional way of distinguishing mind and matter is to think of them as two distinct kinds of substance: physical stuff is solid, and has mass and extension; mental stuff has no weight or dimensions, but is a thing nonetheless. Dividing reality up into two radically different kinds of substance is problematic for many reasons (e.g. how do they interact?). Distinguishing the mental from the physical by means of intentionality, making no assumptions about substance, is therefore a tantalizing alternative.

What distinguishes the mental from the physical? According to Franz Brentano, the mark of the mental is that it is always directed at something other than itself, whereas physical things just are. Thoughts are *about* something, perceptions are *of* things, we make judgments about things, and loving or hating involves adopting an attitude towards the object of our emotions. For example, your thought that London is east of New York is about the two cities. Brentano said that physical things are never *about* or *of* things in this way: a rock isn't about anything, it just exists. It is true that expressions in a language, paintings, maps and so on can be about other things, but this kind of aboutness is something that is mind-created and mind-dependent, so it too is ultimately mental. This *aboutness* of the mental Brentano called 'intentionality'. There do seem to be some exceptions, what we might call 'raw feels'. For instance, a pain is surely not about or of anything, it just is. But for Brentano, pain still has an intentional aspect: pains represent damaged areas of the body. Most contemporary philosophers accept that intentionality is a mark of the mental, and that it is ultimately based in the brain and its activities. Exactly how this works is the 64-billion-dollar philosophical question.

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### 3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

FRANZ BRENTANO  
1838–1917

### 30-SECOND TEXT

Julian Baggini

***Unintentional it may be, but thinking too hard about intentionality can make your brain hurt – or is it actually your mind that is sore?***

# FODOR'S LANGUAGE OF THOUGHT

the 30-second philosophy

The philosopher Jerry Fodor developed a controversial theory of the mind. He theorizes that there is an innate language of thought that he calls 'Mentalese'. He posited Mentalese in order to explain the nature of thinking (and other mental abilities), and to account for the learning of natural languages. Perceptions, memories and intentions all involve tokens of Mentalese sentences. So, when you think the thought that Kermit is green, a Mentalese sentence that means 'Kermit is green' occurs in your brain. Thoughts can be about objects (e.g. Kermit), and can be true or false because sentences are the kinds of things that can be about objects and be true or false. Mentalese sentences are like natural language sentences, in that they have grammatical structure, but they are different in that they are not used to communicate, but to think. Mentalese occurs prior to natural language. According to Fodor, learning a natural language such as English presupposes an existing ability to think in Mentalese. When we learn the meaning of a word, we learn to associate it with a Mentalese word. Mentalese is itself innate, although the ability to employ a Mentalese term may be triggered by having certain experiences. Fodor goes on to liken both conscious and unconscious mental activities to the operations of a computer. Thinking, perceiving and the rest involve computations with Mentalese sentences.

### 3-SECOND THRASH

Unbeknown to most of us we are expert users (though not speakers) of the language Mentalese.

### 3-MINUTE THOUGHT

Recent research on the psychology of infants has made a compelling case for the view that newborns come into the world already equipped with a lot of innate knowledge. For example, they know the difference between living and non-living things. Can it be that an infant already has the term in Mentalese that means 'elephant', before he ever sees an elephant? Fodor merely claims that there are words of Mentalese that are primed to refer to elephants when appropriate conditions are satisfied, and these conditions might involve seeing elephants or pictures of elephants.

### RELATED PHILOSOPHIES

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### 3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

JERRY FODOR  
1935-

### 30-SECOND TEXT

Kati Balog

*She doesn't know what those animals are called in English – she hasn't learned that yet – but she's always known what they are in Mentalese.*

# PARFIT'S PERSONS

## the 30-second philosophy

The contemporary philosopher Derek Parfit asked the question, 'What makes a person the same person over time?' The question has also been asked by John Locke, who imagined a prince and a pauper exchanging memories, desires and other mental attributes. Locke said that the person who up till then had inhabited the prince's body would now inhabit the pauper's body, and the pauper-person would inhabit the prince's body. His view is that a person at one time and a person at a later time are the same person by virtue of the later person having the memories of and being mentally continuous with the earlier person. The police use fingerprints to identify a person, but if Locke is right this might be a mistake. Parfit continues Locke's discussion by imagining a person, say Captain Kirk, who steps into a faulty teleporter and is beamed to Earth where two Captains emerge, each with Kirk's memories, desires etc. Both of these have equal claim to be identical to Kirk, but are clearly not identical to each other. Parfit concludes that identity doesn't consist in memories and mental continuity. But he goes on to claim that this doesn't matter, since what we really care about is surviving, and survival consists in mental continuity.

### 3-SECOND THRASH

If you step into a teleporter and two of you come out, which one is you?

### 3-MINUTE THOUGHT

It may strike you that examples having to do with body-swapping princes and paupers, and multiple Captain Kirks are too fanciful to worry about. Philosophers are interested in these imaginary stories because they can help us understand our concept of a person. There may also be consequences for practical questions about punishment, particularly if an individual committed a crime in his youth, but has no memories of his earlier life and who, perhaps, is no longer the same person at all.

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### 3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

DEREK PARFIT  
1942-2017  
JOHN LOCKE  
1632-1704

### 30-SECOND TEXT

Kati Balog

*A person is the sum of his or her hopes, fears and past memories; nothing else really matters – but try telling that to the pauper.*

# RENÉ DESCARTES

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It is perhaps an oversimplification to say that there were two major currents that shaped Descartes' life and work – the emergence of modern science as exemplified in the work of Copernicus and Galileo; and his realization that the Jesuit schooling he had received, which had promised so much, had delivered so little in terms of reliable knowledge. Nevertheless, it is the case that both these things were tremendously important in leading Descartes to develop the scientific and philosophical ideas that, in a sense, ushered in the modern world.

René Descartes was born in 1596 in La Haye, France, entered Jesuit College at the age of 11 and then studied Law at the University of Poitiers. However, rather than taking up a law career, Descartes went travelling and joined the army, which led to a chance meeting with the Dutch philosopher and scientist, Isaac Beeckman, which changed the course of his life. Their friendship sparked Descartes' interest in the sciences and set him on the path that eventually would make him the first great modern philosopher.

His major philosophical works were written in a 20-year period beginning in 1629. In *Discourse on Method*, published in 1637, originally as the preface to works on geometry, optics and meteorology, Descartes laid down the foundations of his epistemology and metaphysics. He followed this up in 1641 with the publication of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in which he articulated his famous method of doubt as a technique to establish the foundations of indubitable knowledge.

By the time of Descartes' death in 1650, his reputation for brilliance was well established. His ideas were being taught in Dutch universities; his *Meditations* had included critical contributions from luminaries such as John Locke; and he was well established in the finest intellectual circles of Europe. His legacy, though, has surpassed even these auspicious beginnings. It is fair to say that it is Descartes' work, more than that of any other philosopher, that has shaped the course of philosophy in the modern era.



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1596

Born in La Haye, near  
Tours, France

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1616

Graduates in Law,  
University of Poitiers

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1628

Leaves for Holland,  
which is to be his home  
until 1649

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1637

Publishes *Discourse on  
Method, with Optics,  
Meteorology and  
Geometry*

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1641

*Meditations on First  
Philosophy* is published  
together with the first  
six sets of *Objections  
and Replies*

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1644

*The Principles of  
Philosophy* is published

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1650

Dies in Stockholm,  
Sweden, probably from  
pneumonia



# CHALMERS' ZOMBIES

## the 30-second philosophy

David Chalmers recently revived arguments for dualism of mind and body by arguing that zombies are metaphysically possible. By 'zombie' he means beings that physically resemble conscious people but who are, nevertheless, not at all conscious. Since zombies are physically like conscious humans, they behave just like conscious humans. When your zombie twin steps on a nail it shouts 'Ouch!', but it feels nothing at all. Chalmers' argument for dualism begins with the thought that a zombie universe is conceivable. There is no contradiction in the scenario in which there is a universe that is physically just like ours in all respects, except that the creatures in it are completely devoid of consciousness. If this is correct, then consciousness is quite different from other biological phenomena, since there is a contradiction in thinking of a universe physically like ours where your zombie twin doesn't breathe, digest, reproduce and so on, exactly as you do. It follows from the conceivability of the zombie scenario, claims Chalmers, that zombies are a genuine metaphysical possibility. If zombies are metaphysically possible, and we are conscious, then there is more in our Universe than physical entities, and things composed entirely of physical entities, and certain arrangements. There is also non-physical consciousness.

### 3-SECOND THRASH

No matter how much you know about the physical composition of the person sitting next to you, he or she may be a zombie.

### 3-MINUTE THOUGHT

Chalmers' view is a kind of dualism, since it says that consciousness is not physical. But unlike René Descartes, Chalmers doesn't think that there are mental substances. His view, rather, is that consciousness is a non-physical feature of certain physical things, and, in particular, of human brains. Most philosophers who uphold physicalism disagree with Chalmers, and claim that although the zombie scenario is non-contradictory, it doesn't follow that zombies are metaphysically possible.

### RELATED PHILOSOPHIES

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### 3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

DAVID CHALMERS  
1966–

### 30-SECOND TEXT

Kati Balog

*One thinks, therefore he exists, while the other cannot think, but he exists as well. What's the difference between them exactly?*

# ZENO'S PARADOXES

## the 30-second philosophy

The ancient Greek philosopher, Zeno of Elea, conceived of many paradoxes of time and motion. For instance, logically it can be argued that if Achilles gives a tortoise a head start in a race, then he could never overtake it, as long as the tortoise keeps moving. This is because in order to first overtake it, he must reach where the tortoise is, but by the time he gets there, the tortoise will have moved on. So, Achilles must then reach where the tortoise has moved on to, but once he gets there, the tortoise has already gone and so on, *ad infinitum*. Another paradox states that an arrow can never move, since in any given moment of time, the arrow had to completely occupy a certain space. Like a photograph, at any given moment, the arrow is where it is and not somewhere else. Hence it is stationary. But if time is no more than a series of moments, and if the arrow is stationary at every particular moment, it never moves. Yet we know that arrows do move, and that Achilles can overtake the tortoise. So what is flawed – our view of reality, or the logic of the paradoxes?

### 3-SECOND THRASH

It may not be better to travel than to arrive, but at least it's possible.

### 3-MINUTE THOUGHT

The key to solving the paradoxes is to look at what they assume: that time is a series of static moments (the arrow), or that space and time can be divided up into ever smaller chunks (the tortoise). In order to generate the puzzles, we have to assume certain things about the nature of time and space. Zeno's paradoxes draw out these assumptions, and make us question them.

### 3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

ZENO

490–30 BCE

### 30-SECOND TEXT

Julian Baggini

***Zeno's motion paradoxes had the ancient world running hard just to stay still. But, without the questions posed by the paradoxes, physicists would not have gotten the modern world on the move by explaining the nature of space, time and matter.***

# KANT'S LEFT HAND

## the 30-second philosophy

### 3-SECOND THRASH

Newton said: 'Space is absolute'; Leibniz said: 'There are only spatial relations'; and Kant handed the victory to Newton.

### 3-MINUTE THOUGHT

The debate between absolutists and relationists about space continues to this day. Relationists reply to Kant that his thought experiment is misleading. He is really imagining a universe with more than a left (or right) hand in it. He is imagining himself in the universe looking at the hand, and that is enough for the relationist to find distance relations that distinguish left from right. Some physicists claim that the laws of nature themselves require an absolute distinction between left and right to account for the decays of certain particles.

Immanuel Kant thought long and hard about a dispute between Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz. Newton claimed that space was a kind of theatre (he called it 'God's sensorium') in which locations are absolute. It followed that, had God placed all the particles in the Universe 160 kilometres (100 miles) from their present locations while keeping their distances the same, he would have made a different Universe. Leibniz thought this was absurd. He said that God would have no reason to put the particles in one place rather than another. Instead, he said that space is not a place, but rather that space consists of relations of distance between particles. Kant thought he could prove Newton right and Leibniz wrong with a thought experiment. He imagined a universe in which there existed nothing but a left hand, and a different universe in which there was nothing but a right hand. All of the relations between all of the particles that made up the hand were exactly the same in the two cases. They were mirror images (look at the picture!). Kant argued that since the two situations were obviously different, space was more than distance relations between particles. Leibniz is wrong, and Newton is right.

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### 3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

IMMANUEL KANT  
1724–1804

### 30-SECOND TEXT

Barry Loewer

*Everyone who agrees with Kant please raise your hand? Left or right, it doesn't matter – or does it?*

# THESEUS' SHIP

## the 30-second philosophy

Theseus' ship is put into dry dock. Bit by bit, each part of it is replaced.

As one old board is torn out, a new one is put in. Eventually, the work is complete, and the ship sets sail. However, someone has been collecting all the old bits and has put them back together again, and this ship too goes to sea. So, which of these two vessels is the real ship of Theseus? The one made of the original material, you might say. But that's not what Theseus thinks: he believes his ship has been renovated, not replaced. Nor is it the case that we always think that ownership is a matter of a particular physical thing: When Paddington Bear went to the bank to withdraw five pounds and reported, stunned, that the note he was given was not his one, he misunderstood the nature of money. This problem, set by Thomas Hobbes, might seem very abstract, but consider for a moment that every cell in your body changes over time. So, are people particular lumps of matter, or a continuous way of organizing matter that is always changing? Are we like banknotes, or monetary value?

### 3-SECOND THRASH

Have you changed, or have you been changed for someone else?

### 3-MINUTE THOUGHT

Think of the puzzle in terms of types and tokens. Tokens are particular physical objects, whereas types are forms of objects that may be instantiated in different tokens. So, for example, it doesn't matter what tokens (particular notes) your money comes in, as long as the type (value) is the same. Would it matter if your spouse was replaced by an identical token? If so, why? Do you love those particular atoms?

### RELATED PHILOSOPHIES

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### 3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

THOMAS HOBBS  
1588–1679

### 30-SECOND TEXT

Julian Baggini

*Ownership is nine tenths of the law – but 100 percent of the material in Theseus' ship has been replaced. Is it still his ship? You do the maths.*

# LAPLACE'S DEMON, DETERMINISM & FREE WILL

the 30-second philosophy

## 3-SECOND THRASH

Laplace's demon calculates the way your body will move tomorrow from the positions of particles in the past, thereby depriving you of free will.

## 3-MINUTE THOUGHT

It is commonly thought that current physics tells us that the fundamental laws of quantum mechanics are not deterministic but just tell us probabilities. Some philosophers think that this solves the problem of free will. But it is controversial to say that quantum mechanics is not deterministic, and even if its laws are probabilistic, they might not allow for free will.

Pierre-Simon Laplace supposed that everything is composed of atoms and that the motions of atoms are governed by the laws that Isaac Newton discovered in the seventeenth century. Laplace imagined a super intelligent and mathematically gifted demon, who knows the positions and velocities of all particles in the Universe at a particular time, along with all the laws of nature. He claimed that this demon could compute the positions and velocities of all particles at every other time. The demon could predict where your body would be, and how it would be moving next year from its knowledge of the positions and velocities of the particles in the Universe a million years ago. Laplace's argument depends on the fact that Newton's laws are deterministic. Many philosophers have concluded that determinism is incompatible with free will. For, if the motions of your body are determined by what happened a million years ago, how can it be 'up to you' whether you, say, raise your left hand? They conclude that either determinism is false, or free will is an illusion. Other philosophers claim that to have free will it is sufficient to have intentional control over whether you raise your left hand and that, such control is compatible with determinism.

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## 3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

PIERRE-SIMON LAPLACE  
1749–1827

## 30-SECOND TEXT

Kati Balog

*Does free will exist? If not, can we have such things as justice or morals? We could ask Laplace's demon, but he might be just as uncertain about it as we are.*

# RYLE'S GHOST IN THE MACHINE

the 30-second philosophy

## 3-SECOND THRASH

The way to solve the mind-body problem is to exorcise the ghost in the machine.

## 3-MINUTE THOUGHT

Ryle's view of the mind is a sophisticated version of behaviourism. His idea is that a sentence attributing a mental state or process to a person really means that this person behaves or is disposed to behave in certain ways. While this may have some plausibility for certain sentences, such as 'She is inquisitive', it is very implausible for sentences such as 'She is thinking about philosophy', and 'She is feeling a cool breeze on her cheeks'.

The twentieth-century philosopher Gilbert Ryle said that philosophers (and ordinary folk) who think of the mind as a kind of thing that causes the body to move are making a bad mistake. He called this view of the mind 'the ghost in the machine', and he attributed it to René Descartes. He called this type of mistake a 'category mistake'. Someone who, having been taken around all of Oxford's buildings said, 'I see all these buildings, but where is Oxford?' would be making a category mistake, the mistake of thinking that Oxford is in the same category as the other buildings. He doesn't understand that the buildings are parts of Oxford. Ryle claimed that those who think of the mind as a thing in addition to the body are missing the point that the body and its activities comprise the mind. Ryle's view is that when we say that Hillary has an inquisitive mind, we are not saying that there is some thing associated with Hillary's body, namely, her mind, which is inquisitive and causes to make her inquisitive remarks. Instead, we mean that Hillary behaves in inquisitive ways. The mind is not a ghost in the machine, but rather a way of describing the machine's activities.

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## 3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

GILBERT RYLE  
1900-76

## 30-SECOND TEXT

Kati Balog

*According to  
Gilbert Ryle, he  
thinks, therefore he  
is, but all he is, is the  
manifestation of  
an unconscious,  
physical process.*