

Philosophy of Mind

A Contemporary Introduction

Third Edition

John Heil



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Philosophy of Mind

When first published, John Heil's introduction quickly became a widely used guide for students with little or no background in philosophy to central issues of philosophy of mind. Heil provided an introduction free of formalisms, technical trappings, and specialized terminology. He offered clear arguments and explanations, focusing on the ontological basis of mentality and its place in the material world. The book concluded with a systematic discussion of questions the book raises – and a sketch of a unified metaphysics of mind – thus inviting scholarly attention while providing a book very well suited for an introductory course.

This Third Edition builds on these strengths, and incorporates new material on theories of consciousness, computationalism, the Language of Thought, and animal minds as well as other emerging areas of research. With an updated reading list at the end of each chapter and a revised bibliography, this new edition will again make it the indispensable primer for anyone seeking better understanding of the central metaphysical issues in philosophy of mind.

John Heil is Professor of Philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis. His previous publications include *The Universe as We Find It* (2012) and *From an Ontological Point of View* (2003).

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This innovative, well-structured series is for students who have already done an introductory course in philosophy. Each book introduces a core general subject in contemporary philosophy and offers students an accessible but substantial transition from introductory to higher-level college work in that subject. The series is accessible to non-specialists and each book clearly motivates and expounds the problems and positions introduced. An orientating chapter briefly introduces its topic and reminds readers of any crucial material they need to have retained from a typical introductory course. Considerable attention is given to explaining the central philosophical problems of a subject and the main competing solutions and arguments for those solutions. The primary aim is to educate students in the main problems, positions and arguments of contemporary philosophy rather than to convince students of a single position.

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For Mark, Gus, and Lilian

Preface to the Third Edition

Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction appeared in 1998 followed, six years later, by a second edition. That second edition included numerous changes, corrections and additions, some in response to philosophical developments in the intervening years, some based on my own experiences in using the book as a text in my own classes. This third edition reflects those two factors, but it reflects as well valuable suggestions from others who have used the book with their own students. I have taken those suggestions to heart. This was not always easy to do because in some cases I received conflicting advice.

The book always aimed at illuminating issues in the philosophy of mind for readers not steeped in the literature. Because philosophy nowadays is conducted in an excessively technical idiom intelligible only to other card-carrying philosophers, this is not an easy task. Over the years, I have come more and more to believe that if you can't explain something clearly without recourse to an esoteric vocabulary, you don't really understand it. Philosophers who lace their writing with jargon and flaunt technicalities intimidating to all but a select group of readers seem, too often, incapable of plain speech. Is this because plain speech would not do justice to the subtle theses being advanced, or is it because all the hard philosophical work is being done by the jargon? A technical term can serve as a useful shorthand for a complex idea. At the same time technical terms encode substantive philosophical theses. The use of jargon masks the extent to which the important moves are occurring behind the scenes, obscured by a specialized vocabulary, familiarity with which is taken for granted.

In my own teaching, I have found myself pulled in two, often incompatible, directions. First, I would like my students to cultivate a clear view of the territory and thereby improve their capacity to evaluate competing ways of thinking about the mind. Second, I would like to familiarize students with the going conceptions and arguments that support them. I have, with dispiriting frequency, felt pangs of guilt in trying to spell out and motivate views that I am convinced are, at best, shallow, and, at worst, incoherent. These views survive and continue to find supporters because smart philosophers are adept at defending almost any idea. I want my students to be familiar

with the space of positions in the philosophy of mind, but there are places I cannot bring myself to take them.

I have, in this third edition, made additions, corrections, and changes on every page of every chapter, but four changes deserve special mention.

Chapter 4 of the second edition, 'Non-Cartesian Dualism', was a chapter many readers elected to skip, in part because the position discussed was a difficult and unfamiliar one. Its very unfamiliarity was what led me to include the chapter in the first place. Too much of the philosophy of mind is a rehash of familiar, well-worn, hence comfortable, views. Sometimes it is useful to find inspiration elsewhere. In composing this third edition, I reworked the discussion with an eye toward clarifying the argument and making it more accessible. In the end, however, I decided to eliminate the chapter, mostly in the interest of keeping the book to a manageable length. I have heard from many readers who appreciated the chapter's inclusion. If you are one of those readers, I encourage you not to discard or recycle the second edition.

Much the same could be said about the second edition's Chapter 9, 'Radical Interpretation', which provided an account of Davidson's theory of propositional attitude ascription, a topic that some readers found fascinating, others daunting, and still others hopeless. The chapter does not appear in the third edition.

The second edition's Chapter 13, 'Property Dualism', has been reconceived and appears in the third edition as Chapter 11, 'Non-Reductive Physicalism'.

Chapter 10, 'Consciousness' is almost completely new. The chapter replaces Chapter 9 in the second edition which was more narrowly focused on *qualia*. I discuss various accounts of consciousness and the qualities of conscious experience that previously were either mentioned only in passing or not discussed at all.

Chapters 14 and 15 of the second edition survive, much revised, in the third edition as Chapters 12 and 13. I do not expect instructors who use this book as an introductory textbook in philosophy of mind to assign these chapters. But it seems to me that anyone who takes the trouble to read through some or all of my discussion of various positions is owed an account of how the author himself thinks about the topics under discussion. If nothing else, my putting my cards on the table allows curious readers to factor out inevitable authorial biases. These chapters are meant to be self-contained. They can be read without extensive knowledge of material taken up earlier in the book. One result is that some themes and arguments that appear earlier appear again in modified form.

Once again, I am grateful to all those who took the trouble to pass along corrections and suggestions for improving the first and second editions. This third edition has benefited from the collective wisdom of many philosophers and many of their students. It has benefited, as well, from support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and from Washington University in St Louis.

John Heil
St. Louis
May, 2012

Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction* appeared in 1998. Since that time, I have had occasion to rethink topics addressed in that volume, to discuss my approach to those topics with many people, and to hear from numerous readers. The result is this second edition.

One aim of the first edition was to make difficult issues intelligible to novices without unduly watering them down. My impression is that the effort was, on the whole, successful. This edition incorporates changes of two sorts. First I have added or supplemented discussions of topics ignored or treated lightly in the first edition. My discussion of eliminativism, of *qualia*, and the Representational Theory of Mind have been expanded, and I have added a chapter on property dualism. Second, I have divided the book into shorter, more self-contained chapters. In so doing, my hope was that this would allow more flexibility for instructors using the book in courses in the philosophy of mind. Chapters, too, have been divided into bite-sized sections. I believe the new divisions make the book more attractive and easier on the reader.

As before, each chapter concludes with a listing of suggested readings. These listings have been expanded and updated (to include, for instance, Internet resources). I have also instituted an author/date citation scheme keyed to a comprehensive bibliography at the end of the volume. Readers' annoyance at having to turn to a separate bibliography to track down references might be offset by the absence of footnotes and endnotes. The first edition contained a handful of footnotes. I came to believe, however, that a book of this kind could, and should, be written without such textual intrusions.

I am grateful to readers who took the trouble to pass along corrections and suggestions for improving the first edition. I hope that the resulting changes have resulted in a better all round book.

Many of the themes taken up in Chapters 14 and 15 (Chapter 6 in the first edition) were subsequently developed in detail in *From an Ontological Point of View* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), written during a year as a guest of Monash University. Revisions and additions distinguishing this second edition from its predecessor were also undertaken at Monash during two subsequent visits. I am grateful to the University, to the School of Philosophy

and Bioethics, and to my magnificent colleagues at Monash for support and encouragement. I am grateful as well to Davidson College for its generous support, material and otherwise.

John Heil
Melbourne
July, 2003

Preface to the First Edition

One aim of this book is to introduce readers with little or no background in philosophy to central issues in the philosophy of mind, and to do so in a way that highlights those issues' metaphysical dimensions. In this regard, my approach differs from approaches that emphasize connections between the philosophy of mind and various empirical domains: psychology, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence, for instance. It is not that I regard empirical work as irrelevant to the philosophy of mind. After years of skepticism, however, I have become convinced that the fundamental philosophical questions concerning the mind remain metaphysical questions – where metaphysics is understood as something more than the a priori pursuit of eternal verities: metaphysics, as I see it, takes the sciences at their word. More particularly, the fundamental questions are questions of ontology – our best accounting of what, in the most general terms, there is.

As in the case of any other systematic pursuit, ontology is constrained formally: ontological theses must be internally coherent. Ontological theses ought, in addition, to be reconcilable with established scientific lore. When we consider every imaginable ontology that is consistent, both internally and with pronouncements of the sciences, however, we can see that the field remains wide open. Something more is required if our evaluation of competing approaches is to be anything more than a bare expression of preference. That something more lies in the relative power of alternative schemes. An ontology that not only strikes us as plausible (in the sense that it is both internally coherent and consistent with science and common experience) but at the same time offers solutions to a wide range of problems in a way that makes those solutions appear inevitable, is to be preferred to an ontology that provides only piecemeal solutions to a narrow range of problems.

At the present time, the field is dominated by David Lewis's ontology of possible worlds. Lewis postulates, in addition to the actual world, an infinity of real, but non-actual, *alternative* worlds. (Lewis calls these alternative worlds 'possible worlds', but the worlds he has in mind are not mere possibilities; they are fully fledged worlds on a par with ours. The 'actual world' differs from the others only in containing us.) Each world differs in some respect from the actual world and from every other possible world. By

appealing to features of these worlds, Lewis lays claim to offering explanations of important truths holding in the actual world.

The Lewis ontology of alternative worlds strikes many philosophers (and all non-philosophers) as mad. Nevertheless, many of these same philosophers persist in resorting to alternative worlds to explicate important concepts: the concept of causation, for instance, the concept of a causal power or disposition, the concept of necessity. If you reject the ontology of alternative worlds, however, it is unclear what is supposed to ground such appeals. For Lewis, the truthmakers for claims about alternative worlds are the alternative worlds. If you disdain alternative worlds, however, yet appeal to them in explicating, say, causation, what makes your assertions true or false? If alternative worlds do not exist, then presumably your claims are grounded in features – intrinsic features – of the actual world. But then why not appeal directly to these features? What use is it to invoke imaginary entities?

I believe we have a right to be suspicious of anyone who embraces the formal apparatus of alternative worlds while rejecting the ontology. Indeed, I think we might be more suspicious of formal techniques generally, when these are deployed to answer substantive questions in metaphysics and the philosophy of mind. So long as we remain at a formal level of discourse, it is easy to lose interest in what might ground our claims. And this, I think, has led to the kind of technical sterility characteristic of so much contemporary, analytical philosophy.

I do not deny that formal techniques have their place. I want only to suggest that it is a mistake to imagine that these techniques can be relied upon to reveal hidden ontological details of our world. A good example of the detrimental effects of ungrounded formalism can be found in the tendency to conflate (if not officially, then in practice) *predicates* – linguistic entities – and *properties*. This can lead to specious puzzles. Are there disjunctive properties? Well of course, some reply: if P is a property and Q is a property, then $P \vee Q$ (P or Q) is a property.

True enough, if P and Q are predicates denoting properties, then you can construct a disjunctive predicate, ' $P \vee Q$ '. What is less clear is whether this gives us any right whatever to suppose that ' $P \vee Q$ ' designates a *property*. The notion of a disjunctive property makes sense, I suspect, only so long as you imagine that a property is whatever answers to a predicate. But this is the linguistic tail wagging the ontological dog.

I mention all this by way of calling attention to the absence of formal devices, appeals to purely modal notions like supervenience, and invocations of alternative worlds in the chapters that follow. If it accomplishes nothing else, my decision to omit such technical trappings will certainly make the book more accessible to non-specialist readers. In any case, the philosophy of mind, indeed metaphysics generally, is not – or ought not to be – a technical exercise. Philosophical theses should be expressible without reliance on specialized terminology. I have tried my best to say what I have to say without resorting to such terminology. This strikes me as an important

exercise for every philosopher. Too much can be smuggled in, too much left unexplained when we allow ourselves to fall back on philosophical jargon.

Although this book is written with the non-specialist in view, it is intended to be more than a mere survey of going theories. I take up a number of issues that could be of interest to hardened philosophers of mind and to non-philosophers with a professional interest in minds and their nature. If nothing else, I am hopeful that my approach will encourage others to delve more deeply into the ontological basis of mentality.

Some readers will be surprised at my including certain views, and disappointed at my downplaying or ignoring others. In a book of this sort, however, you must be selective: it is impossible to do justice to every position. I have, then, chosen what seem to me to be central issues and points of view in the philosophy of mind, and concentrated on these. Ultimately I hope to lead open-minded readers to what amounts to a new perspective on the territory.

On a more practical note: I expect instructors who use this book as part of a course in the philosophy of mind to supplement it with readings of original materials. With that in mind, I have included, at the end of each chapter, a list of suggested readings. If nothing else, these readings can be used to fill perceived gaps and to compensate for infelicities in my exposition.

The inspiration for this book came to me as I was completing an earlier volume, *The Nature of True Minds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). The centerpiece of that volume is an elaborate discussion of the problem of mental causation: if mental properties depend on, but are not identical with, material properties, how could mental properties affect behavior? As I struggled with details of my account of mental causation (an account that owed much to the work of my colleague, Alfred Mele), it gradually dawned on me that any solution to the problem would require a prolonged excursion into ontology. More generally, I began to see that attempts to answer questions in the philosophy of mind that ignored ontology, or depended (as mine did) on ad hoc ontological assumptions, were bound to prove unsatisfying. The upshot was something akin to a religious conversion.

My route to 'ontological seriousness' was occasioned by conversations (pitched battles, really) with C. B. Martin. The first result was a book-length manuscript on metaphysics and the philosophy of mind completed during a sabbatical leave in Berkeley in 1993/94. The book before you is a distant relative of that manuscript. I am grateful to Davidson College and to the National Endowment for the Humanities for their generous support, and to the Department of Psychology, the University of California, Berkeley, for hosting me. I owe a particular debt to Lynne Davison and Carolyn Scott for their administrative support and to the Berkeley Presbyterian Missionary Homes for providing accommodation for my family.

Countless people have contributed to my thinking on the topics covered here. Martin is foremost among these. My most fervent hope is that readers whose interest is stirred by the ideas discussed in Chapter 6 will take the trouble to track down those ideas' sources in Martin's writings.

I have benefited immeasurably from discussions with John Carroll, Randolph Clarke, Güven Güzeldere, Michael Lockwood, E. J. Lowe, David Robb, Dan Ryder, Amie Thomasson, Peter Unger, and Peter Vallentyne, all of whom provided astute comments on portions of the manuscript. I am especially indebted to participants in my 1996 NEH Summer Seminar on Metaphysics of Mind at Cornell, including (in addition to Clarke and Thomasson) Leonard Clapp, Anthony Dardis, James Garson, Heather Gert, Muhammad Ali Khalidi, David Pitt, Eric Sidel, Stephen Schwartz, Nigel J. T. Thomas, and Michael Watkins. Many of the ideas found in the pages that follow emerged in seminar discussions. I cannot imagine a more congenial, philosophically discerning, and, yes, ontologically serious group anywhere.

A number of people have, in discussion or correspondence, influenced my thinking on particular issues addressed here. David Armstrong, Richard Boyd, Jaegwon Kim, Brian McLaughlin, Alfred Mele, Brendan O'Sullivan, David Robb, and Sydney Shoemaker deserve special mention. Fred Dretskey and Kim Sterelny provided useful comments on a penultimate draft of the manuscript. I am especially indebted to E. J. Lowe for detailed and searching criticisms of every chapter. Lowe is, to my mind, one of a handful of contemporary philosophers whose views on minds and their place in nature reflect a deep appreciation of ontology. Finally, and most importantly, the book would not have been possible without the unwavering support – intellectual, moral, and otherwise – of Harrison Hagan Heil.

The manuscript was completed during a fellowship year at the National Humanities Center (1996/97) and was supported by the Center, by a Davidson College Faculty Grant, and by the National Endowment for the Humanities. I owe these institutions more than I can say.

John Heil
National Humanities Center
Research Triangle Park, N. C.
Spring, 1997

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