



## Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction

*John Heil*

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*Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction* is a comprehensive and accessible survey of main themes, positions and debates in philosophy of mind. John Heil introduces and discusses the major topics in succinct, user-friendly, self-contained chapters:

- \* Cartesian dualism
- \* Descartes's legacy
- \* non-Cartesian dualism
- \* behaviorism
- \* the identity theory
- \* functionalism
- \* the representational theory of mind
- \* qualia
- \* radical interpretation
- \* the intentional stance
- \* eliminativism
- \* property dualism
- \* mind and metaphysics
- \* the mind's place in nature

This revised and updated edition includes expanded chapters on eliminativism, qualia, and the representational theory of mind, and an entirely new chapter on property dualism. There are annotated suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter, updated to include recent material and internet resources.

## Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction Details

Date : Published July 3rd 2004 by Routledge (first published May 28th 1998)

ISBN : 9780415283564

Author : John Heil

Format : Paperback 262 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Nonfiction, Psychology



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### XYX says

This is a great introduction to philosophy of mind. Heil covers a lot of ground, outlining several historically prominent perspectives, but does not sacrifice thoroughness. Explanations are clear, and the book is well organized.

My only complaint is that the book goes off the rails a bit in the last two chapters, which are spent explicating his own views. Although his theory incorporates some points of established theories, these final chapters are muddled and out of place. The book would have benefited if they had been omitted and replaced by a more objective synthesis and outlook for the future of philosophy of mind.

Don't let this small gripe deter you. I recommend this book to anyone seeking a brief introduction to the subject.

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### Rachael says

Heil does an admirable job of presenting in a fairly clear fashion the major schools of thought in the philosophy of mind. Beware that he does have his own views and presents them unapologetically in the last two chapters (a view I disagree with, actually) but he gives fair warning at the beginning of the book. He takes a lot of time to discuss why neuroscience alone cannot be the final arbiter of the important questions, particularly when it comes to understanding the basic nature of consciousness and I appreciated that discussion in the book. After the the usual presentation of substance dualism, representationalism, functionalism, eliminativism, interpretation theory and property dualism he takes through an ontological detour to present an interesting case study about how theories of mind are formed. He argues for a nominalist view which incorporates a theory of properties treating them as both having dispositions and qualities simultaneously. From there he argues how it is possible to reduce mental events to relevant physical ones without emptying contents (qualities) as he sees functionalism do (he argues they have an ontology of properties which sees them in terms of their dispositions only) and without arguing that there are special irreducible mental properties. The latter he argues becomes unnecessary with his move to nominalism and a 'similar enough' (not identical to) view of complex properties such as pain. Multiple realizability, taking seriously the qualitative features of mental happenings and a preservation of physicalism are all preserved.

The nice thing about these last couple of chapters as taking them as a case study is that they make use of all of the concepts touched on earlier in the book. I also think it's incredibly useful to get a sketch about how these ideas are developed and which issues are seen as especially problematic. The motivation to avoid 'spooky' or 'kooky' elements, along with a desire for parsimony informs a strong drive to preserve physicalism. So whether or not the reader agrees with Heil at the end it is a useful illustration about how philosophy of mind is done in contemporary circles.

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### Matt says

It was fine. Definitely useful, but maybe trying too hard to push metaphysics on the situation. However, I know many appreciate that about Heil.

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### **Alexander says**

The emphasis on ontology makes for tough going at times, but it seems to me, at least, that Heil is right to insist on its importance for doing philosophy of mind. A very lucid guide to a very interesting subject.

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### **Adam says**

Can't say I was too much of a fan of Heil's approach or his own theory he presents in the final two chapters. He's just not a very good writer, and much of this book seems sort of dry. It's a somewhat useful book for those looking for a very short introductory text, but I think that Phil of Mind unlike, say, Ethics, works best with a historical introduction. The problem here is that Heil essentially works by telling us about theories and their proponents, and then briefly the major pros and cons [according to him]. To me, this is somewhat pointless without the presence of the actual texts. Heil also slyly puts spins on things in ways that don't seem entirely intellectually honest to me.

Of course, this is not a bad book, nor is Heil a poor philosopher [I do not mean to imply that at all]. I just don't find his approach here very useful.

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### **Richard Newton says**

This book is a very good introduction to philosophy of mind, in parts. As a general introduction it is very good. There are parts which explain things more clearly than any other similar textbook I have read (e.g. Kim's philosophy of mind). But it is not as deep as Kim's book and the coverage is not as thorough - for example I found nothing on anomalous monism, which I would have thought was a fairly central part of contemporary philosophy of mind. Additionally, the last two chapters, which whilst being interesting, seemed out of place. Whilst chapters 1-11 are a general unbiased introduction, chapters 12-13 are Heil's own views on philosophy of mind. I suspect this is just a personal view, but I prefer philosophy books to either contain a specific argument from the writer or to be a reference source of both sides of the main arguments in any specific area - combining the two in one book does not work for me. But you could do far worse than this book if you want a reasonably deep, yet relatively easy to get into introduction to philosophy of mind.

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### **Dave says**

This one was a textbook. Nevertheless, it's the best introduction to philosophy of mind out there.

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### **Ron says**

This book provided me with exactly what I was looking for- a detailed introduction to the various theories of mind which are circulating among contemporary philosophers. Heil provides his opinion of the strengths and weaknesses of each theory and more importantly provides an extensive suggested reading list at the end of each chapter. The book is not light reading but I would have been disappointed if it was. This is not "fast food" philosophy the content requires thought and some familiarity with philosophical writing. The last two chapters are the authors own theory of mind but one could skip this entirely without losing anything; unless of course you are interested in the author's theory. The book is a good starting point for continued study of the philosophy of mind.

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### **Tony says**

A good introduction that sets out the different philosophical schools of thought about the nature of Mind - Can be easily read by a non-specialist.

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