PHIL 110A
Week 9: What is Mind?
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Mind introduction

Dualism

Behaviorism

Please turn off and put away all electronics.

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Questions about Mind

1. What is mind?
2. How do we know minds?
3. Do people have free will?
4. Are people responsible for their actions?

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Theories of Mind

1. Idealism: only mind exists.
2. Dualism (Descartes): people have both a body and a mind (soul).
3. Behaviorism: there is no mind, just behavior patterns.
4. Mind-brain identity: minds are brains.
5. Functionalism: minds are functions that connect inputs and outputs; software not hardware.

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Descartes

Dualism

Dualism: you consist of both a mind and a body. Bodies are mechanisms, but minds are not.

Descartes' doubt argument: You can doubt that you have a body, but not that you have mind. So you are essentially a mind, not a body.

Descartes's divisibility argument: Bodies are divisible, but minds are not, so minds are not physical.

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Appeal of Dualism

Minds can be immortal; fit with religion.

Minds can have free will, independent of physical laws.

Minds make people better than animals.

Minds have morality.

Problem: need evidence, not wishful thinking.

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Super argument for Dualism

Dualism can explain:
1. Life after death experiences
2. Sense of freedom
3. Sense of morality
4. Consciousness
5. Parapsychology

Science cannot explain 1-5.

Hence dualism should be accepted as the best (most coherent) explanation of the evidence.

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Discussion Question

What are the best reasons for believing dualism? Are they good reasons?

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de La Mettrie

Critique of Dualism

Science can explain:
1. Life after death experiences: brain process/wishful thinking
2. Sense of freedom: ignorance of brain processes
3. Sense of morality: emotions
4. Consciousness: complex brain process
5. Parapsychology: fraud, incompetence

Dualism cannot explain how a non-physical mind and a physical body interact.

Simplicity: only matter/energy exists, not spirit.

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Behaviorism

Skinner

Behaviorism: reject mentalism, the idea that minds have inner states. Instead focus on observable behavior.

Logical behaviorism (philosophy): Define mental states as dispositions to behave, rather than as inner states which are unknowable by others.

Methodological behaviorism (psychology): Stick to observation of behavior (empiricism) and avoid hypotheses about mental states.

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Reject Behaviorism

Chomsky

1. Logical behaviorism captures poorly the meaning of mental terms. Dispositions result from underlying mechanisms.

2. Psychological behaviorism failed to explain behavior of rats and pigeons, e. g. navigation.

3. Cognitive psychology (since 1960s): need to hypothesize mental representations and processes to explain language, problem solving, learning, etc.

4. Cognitive neuroscience (since 1980s) shows how complex thinking can result from brain processes.

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Other Minds

You know your own mind by personal experience, but how do you know other minds?

Possible answer: argument from analogy. Your behavior is similar to mine, so you have a mind like me.

Better answer: because your behavior is like mine, and you have a brain much like mine, the best explanation of your behavior is that you have mental states like mine.

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Discussion Question

How successful are people at understanding the minds of others? Can you really understand people who differ from you with respect to gender or culture?

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Other Minds: Theory

Psychological problem: How do we understand the minds of other people? What inferences to the best explanation can I reliably make about your mind?

Theory of mind: people have an unscientific but sometimes useful theory of why people act the way they do. E.g. desires + beliefs -> actions.

Questions: How accurate is human's theory of mind? Do other animals have a theory of mind?

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Other Minds: Simulation

Psychological problem: How do we understand the minds of other people?

Simulation: you don't need to theorize about other minds, because you can emulate them.

Mirror neurons: my patterns of brain firing copy yours.

Emotional contagion: my facial expressions copy yours.

Action: put myself in your situation and imagine my actions. Imagery, not verbal inferences. Empathy.

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