PHIL 110A Week 9: What is Mind? Paul Thagard

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

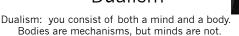
- 1. Idealism: only mind exists.
- 2. Dualism (Descartes): people have both a body and a mind (soul).
- 3. Behaviorism: there is no mind, just behavior patterns.
- 4. Mind-brain identity: minds are brains.
- Functionalism: minds are functions that connect inputs and outputs; software not hardware.



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Descartes

Dualism



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

Minds make people better than animals.

Minds have morality.

Problem: need evidence, not wishful thinking.



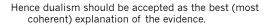
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Super argument for Dualism

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.



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Discussion Question

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

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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Skinner

Behaviorism

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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Chomsky



Reject Behaviorism

- 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

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