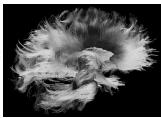PHIL 255
Philosophy of Mind
Paul Thagard

Please turn off and put away all electronics.

Please avoid the last 3 rows.

What philosophical questions about the mind interest you?

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What is Philosophy?

Philosophy: The search for answers to fundamental questions about the nature of knowledge, reality, morality, and the meaning of life.

Epistemology: The philosophical study of the nature of knowledge, e.g. other minds.

Metaphysics: The philosophical study of the fundamental nature of what exists, e.g. mind.

Ethics: The philosophical study of the basis of right and wrong, e.g. conscience.

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Approaches to Philosophy

1. Religious: what fits with doctrines?

2. Historical: what have philosophers said?

3. Analytical: use language & logic to analyze concepts.

4. Phenomenology: study subjective experience and consciousness.

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Approaches to Philosophy

5. Natural: use sciences to reach conclusions about knowledge & reality.

But philosophy is not the same as science:

More general: all knowledge, all existence.

More normative: how things *should* be, not just how they *are*.

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How to Philosophize

1. Identify important questions, e.g. what is the relation between mind and body?

2. Identify plausible answers, e.g.
   a) Dualism: person = mind + body
   b) Materialism: mind = brain
   c) Panpsychism: everything is mind

3. Choose the answer that fits best with all the available evidence.

Discussion Question

What philosophical questions about the mind are you most interested in?

What methods can be used to answer these questions?

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Argument & Inference

Belief: something you think is true.

Inference: reaching a conclusion.

Argument:

Premises: statements already believed.

Conclusion: belief inferred.

Examples: what inferences have you made recently? Were they based on arguments?

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Sources of Belief

Perception

Testimony

Argument

Inference not based on argument:

Coherence, emotion, motivation.

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Good Arguments

Arguments should:

1. Have true premises.

2. Have a conclusion that follows from the premises.

Kinds of argument: deductive, inductive, abductive (inference to the best explanation).

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Deductive Arguments

Deductively valid argument: If the premises are true, then the conclusion has to be true.

1. If there is life after death, then materialism is false.
2. There is life after death.
3. Therefore, materialism is false.

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Inductive Argument

Introduces uncertainty: True premises can lead to false conclusion. Inductive generalization.

Example:
1. Everyone who has ever lived has died.
2. Therefore, everyone eventually dies.

No guarantee, but inductive arguments can be strong if they have a large and representative set of examples.

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Inference to the best explanation

Example:
   You arrive at class, but no one is there? Why?

Procedure:

1. Gather relevant evidence.

2. Generate alternative explanatory hypotheses.

3. Accept the hypothesis that best explains the evidence.

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Explanatory Argument

Evidence: result of perceptual observation.

Hypothesis: guess (conjecture) that might explain evidence.

Unlike induction generalization, inference to the best explanation can go beyond what is observed.

No guarantee, but explanatory arguments can be strong if consider alternative hypotheses and all the relevant evidence.

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Explanatory Argument

Domains:

Interpersonal: behavior -> mental state

Health: symptoms -> diagnosis

Law: evidence -> suspect

Machines: problems -> defect

Science: experiments -> theory

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Questions in the Philosophy of Mind

1. What is the relation between mind and body?

2. Can machines think?

3. How do thoughts cause actions?

4. How do perception and imagery work?

5. Do people have free will?

6. What is consciousness?

7. What is the self?

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Discussion Question

What inferences to the best explanation have you made recently about minds?

Were your inferences based on good reasoning that took into account lots of evidence and alternative hypotheses?

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