

Philosophy 132  
Philosophy of Mind  
Handout 1  
Monday, 27 August 2007

### 1. *What is Philosophy of Mind?*

Discussions in the philosophy of mind usually start off by assuming that everybody has always known how to divide the world into the mental and the physical – that this distinction is common-sensical and intuitive, even if that between two sorts of “stuff”, material and immaterial, is philosophical and baffling. (Richard Rorty, ‘The Invention of Mind’, Ch.1 of *Philosophy & the Mirror of Nature*, (Princeton, 1979), p.17.)

Like the philosophy of time or the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind focuses on a specific phenomenon in the world and raises philosophical concerns about it – its nature, our knowledge of it. (What is the connection between the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of psychology?)

But what is the mind?

### 2. *Minds & Mental Phenomena*

Is a mind a *thing*?

Well you can lose your mind, but then no one else can find it.

Minds don’t seem to be like kidneys or hearts – proper discrete parts of you that can be removed and replaced.

The contrast between mind and body does not seem to be a contrast between two distinct things that you have, but between two different kinds of way that you are.

What are examples of being minded?

But what do these all have in common?

But what, then, am I? A thinking thing, it has been said. But what is a thinking thing? It is a thing that doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses; that imagines also, and perceives. (Descartes, *Meditations*, II)

But is feeling pain, or being overcome by joy an example of *thinking*?

The obvious objection to defining the mental as the intentional is that pains are not intentional – they do not represent, they are not *about* anything. The obvious objection to defining the mental as “the phenomenal” is that beliefs don’t feel like anything – they don’t have phenomenal properties, and a person’s real beliefs are not always what they appear to be. The attempt to hitch pains and beliefs together seems ad hoc – they don’t seem to have anything in common except our refusal to call them “physical”. (Richard Rorty, ‘The Invention of the Mind’, Ch. 1 *Philosophy & the Mirror of Nature*, p.22)

What is the ‘Philosophy of Mind’?

### 3. *Our propensity to Distinguish Physical Objects and Minds*

The present results suggest that while 5-month-old infants apply the principle of continuous motion to inanimate objects, they do not readily apply it to humans. There is evidence from prior studies that infants differentiate between animate and inanimate objects in appropriate ways (Poulin-Dubois et al., 1996; Spelke, Phillips, et al., 1995). However, the present study represents a situation in which they mistakenly differentiate between the two, suggesting that at 5 months, infants do not readily view humans as material objects. (Valerie A. Kuhlmeier, Paul Bloom, Karen Wynn, ‘Do 5-month-old infants see humans as material objects?’, *Cognition*, 2004, 94, 95-103, p.101.)

There is some empirical evidence that the contrast between animate and inanimate objects is fairly fundamental to human cognition. Why should it matter that we have the category of the animate, or of agents, or of humans? What impact does that have on how we think about ourselves and of others?

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Habituation

Test

Continuous  
Motion

or

Discontinuous  
Motion

One Box

Two Boxes



