

Philosophy 132
Philosophy of Mind
Handout 2
Wednesday, 29 August 2007

1. *Mental Phenomena*

We can think of having a mind as a matter of being certain ways which are mental ways. A stone warmed in the sun is various physical ways – it is smooth, it is warm, it is grey – but it is not thinking or feeling. You or I are both certain ways physically – we are a certain height or weight, a certain shape – and various ways mentally, thinking, dreaming and so on.

Can we list the various ways of being minded?

2. *The Essence of the Mental*

But what do all of the ways that a creature with a mind can be, ways which are mental ways of being, 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*?

Brentano claimed that *intentionality* or *aboutness* are the mark of the mental.

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. (Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, Book 2 Ch. 1, p. 88 in current Routledge translation.)

(What is it for something to have aboutness?)

US magazine reports the activities of Lindsay Lohan – it contains photographs *of* her and articles *about* her. When you read those articles, your thoughts are *of* *about* Lindsay Lohan – they are *directed on* her. In Brentano's terms, Lindsay Lohan has intentional inexistence in your thoughts.)

Supposed examples of non-intentional mental states:

(1) Bodily sensations—e.g. pains, tickles, orgasms;

Bodily sensations do not have an intentional object in the way perceptual experiences do... we distinguish between a visual experience and what it is a visual experience of; but we do not make this distinction in respect of pains. (Colin McGinn, *The Character of Mind*, p.8)

But contrast David Armstrong, *Bodily Sensations* and Michael Tye, *Ten Problems about Consciousness*, Ch. 4

(2) ‘Undirected’ emotions and moods—e.g. depression, anxiety

Undirected anxiety, depression, and elation are not Intentional, the directed cases are Intentional. (John Searle, *Intentionality*, p.2.)

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)

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

Infants are sensitive to various aspects of physical objects: for example, the kinematic principles which govern their movements.

Infants are sensitive to the contrast between animate and inanimate objects from very early on.

For example:

- a.) infants will copy the expression of humans but not inanimate objects;
- b.) at 6 months infants have expectations about the goal-directed activity of humans but not of inanimate objects (they interpret adult movements as failed attempts to grasp an object; but do not so interpret the movement of a rod);
- c.) they have different expectations about how animate objects should move:

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?

michael.martin@ucl.ac.uk

Habituation

Test

Continuous
Motion

or

Discontinuous
Motion

One Box

Two Boxes



