

Philosophy 132
Philosophy of Mind
Handout 4
Friday, 7 September 2007

IF YOU ARE READING THIS YOU SHOULD BE IN 160 KROEBER – IF NOT HOW DID YOU GET HOLD OF THE HANDOUT???

1. *The Traditional Problem of Other Minds*

I conclude that other human beings have feelings like me, because, first, they have bodies like me, which I know, in my own case, to be the antecedent condition of feelings; and because, secondly, they exhibit the acts, and other outward signs, which in my own case I know by experience to be caused by feelings. I am conscious in myself of a series of facts connected by an uniform sequence, of which the beginning is modifications of my body, the middle is feelings, the end is outward demeanor. In the case of other human beings I have the evidence of my senses for the first and last links of the series, but not for the intermediate link. I find, however, that the sequence between the first and last is as regular and constant in those other cases as it is in mine. In my own case I know that the first link produces the last through the intermediate link, and could not produce it without. Experience, therefore, obliges me to conclude that there must be an intermediate link; which must either be the same in others as in myself, or a different one: I must either believe them to be alive, or to be automaton: and by believing them to be alive, that is, by supposing the link to be of the same nature as in the case of which I have experience, and which is in all other respects similar, I bring other human beings, as phenomena, under the same generalizations which I know by experience to be the true theory of my own existence. (J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, 6th edition (London, 1889)) pp. 243-244.

Some sceptical scenarios:

ROBOTS: unbeknownst to you, you are the last surviving human, but to make your life comfortable you have been surrounded by robots since birth to provide you with the simulacrum that you live within a normal Western community sharing feelings and values with those around you.

INVERSION: for some aspect of phenomenal experience, say your visual experience of red, or your feelings of pain, there is someone just like you who has a corresponding experience, say one of green, or a feeling of intense tickling, in response to corresponding causes and yet reacts just as you do. How could you know that you don't see or feel things in the same way?

(One of the first mentions of the idea of such inversion of feelings is found in Locke's *Essay*, though Locke does not raise any sceptical concern about it:

Neither would it carry any Imputation of *Falshood* to our simple *Ideas*, if by the different Structure of our Organs, it were so ordered, That *the same Object should produce in several Men's Minds different Ideas* at the same time; *v.g.* if the *Idea*, that a *Violet* produced in one Man's Mind by his Eyes, were the same that a *Marigold* produces in another Man's, and *vice versâ*. For since this could never be known: because one Man's Mind could not pass into another Man's Body, to perceive, what Appearances were produced by those Organs; neither the *Ideas* hereby, nor the Names, would be at all confounded, or any *Falshood* be in either. For all Things, that had the Texture of a *Violet*, producing constantly the *Idea*, which he called *Blue*, and those which had the Texture of a *Marigold*, producing constantly the *Idea*, which he as constantly called *Yellow*, whatever those Appearances were in his Mind; he would be able as regularly to distinguish Things for his Use by those Appearances, and understand, and signify those distinctions, marked by the Names *Blue* and *Yellow*, as if the Appearances, or *Ideas* in his Mind, received from those two Flowers, were exactly the same, with the *Ideas* in other Men's Minds. (John Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding*, 1689/1975, II, xxxii, 15))

DECEPTIVE ACTORS: you have been brought up as in the *Truman Show*, you are surrounded by people who seem to have interesting inner lives and suffer great turmoil; in fact they are incredibly skilled actors who are nonetheless dull and boring in their ordinary lives; few if any of the feelings and thoughts they appear to you to have correspond to what they are really feeling.

Each of these seems *conceivable*. (We might say: for each scenario we do not know that it is not a possible way the world could have been.)

In none of these scenarios would your beliefs about other's minds be correct, on the whole. If you would be so mistaken in those circumstances, what is it about how things actually are which make you better placed to know the minds of others?

2. *The Import of the Problem of Other Minds*

- (A) A form of sceptical reasoning; it invites us, with slightly different kinds of example, to explain how we avoid the conclusion that we don't know many of the things that we supposed that we did.
- (B) It asks us to explore the coherence of the position we end up in if we do not satisfactorily answer this question: is solipsism coherent? Is it livable?
- (C) It is a form of general challenge – *how* do you know about other people's minds? It asks us what the means for finding out about people's minds are. (Note in this case, the presupposition is that there is something interestingly in common about the different things we can know about others' minds such that there is a general story to be told.)
- (D) It is a question about the concepts we possess or can possess: how is it possible to apply the same concept to your *own* pain, which you know of introspectively, to the pain of *another*, where you seem to know of it only through their outward behaviour?
- (E) It is a question which tests our assumptions about the nature of mind: if a theory of what mental states are is incompatible with the knowledge we have of each other's mind does that show that the theory is wrong? (For example, if the qualitative character of one's mental states has no impact on one's actions, could one reasonably infer that everyone had qualitatively similar experiences just from how they behave? If not, is that a reason to reject epiphenomenalism about the qualitative aspects of mind?)
- (F) It is a practical question about how to live our lives: how do you come to know enough about other people to trust them or not?
- (G) It is a live question in developmental psychology: when and how do human infants begin to understand the ways in which there are other agents in the world around them? (Infants between 9-18 months start developing joint attention behaviours with adults – looking where they look; engaging in social referencing. Young children aged 3 generally fail the 'false belief' test – where answering a question correctly about where someone will look requires sensitivity to what that person falsely believes about the situation – yet can pass it aged four.)

3. *General Solutions*

(1) Broadly Inductive: a.) Argument from Analogy:

One knows in one's own case the correlation of behaviour and psychological state, one can then infer on the basis of a reasoned regularity in the constitution of human beings that this will be replicated in other humans;

b.) Inference to Best Explanation:

One has a broad conception of psychological states as the upshot of causal impinging of the world on us and as the initiators of various kinds of behaviour. Given the regular patterns of behaviour in human kind around us, the best explanation of them so acting is that they possess the relevant psychological structures to bring about this pattern of behaviour.

(2) Criteria, Simulation, Perception or What?

Earlier critics of the inductive approach claimed that the approach fails to take into account *the conceptual problem*. How can I know about my own mental states and how they are to be correlated with my publicly observable patterns of behaviour, if I cannot ascribe mental states to others? A proper account of how I am able to employ mental state concepts in relation to myself, they claim, shows how to answer the sceptical problem.

Followers of Wittgenstein's later writings often talk at this point of criteria for the application of the concept of 'pain'.

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