

1. *General Solutions I*

Broadly one might think that one's source of knowledge of the empirical world around one is based either directly in what one can perceive, or in what one can infer from that by use of deductive or non-deductive modes of reasoning.

The *special* problem of other minds, one might then claim, is that our ordinary capacities for finding out about the world could be entirely intact and yet not provide us with the relevant evidence for whether we are surrounded by other minds. Why so?

A. We don't *perceive* others' minds.

We have an *introspective* access to our own feelings – each knows how things are with him or herself from the inside in a way no one else does (cf. whether you are now sitting; whether you have an itch in your left knee); but we don't have such access to others' feelings. How could that which one introspects in one's own case also be what one perceives in the case of others?

B. The *evidence* we have from what perception gives us does not provide a sound evidential base to judge that people's feelings are one way rather than any other.

Perception tells us about the external physical form of other human beings and about their physical movements. The very same form and the very same movements could be correlated with very different inner feelings. If one *only* ever has perceptual access to the external, physical aspects of other human beings, how does one ever get evidence of specific correlations between physical behaviour and feeling?

Solutions often focus on questioning either (A) or (B)

Questioning B

(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.

Questioning A

(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'.

2. *The Inductive Strategy in Focus: Mill's Solution*

What is the strategy Mill recommends?

Sometimes interpreted as ‘an argument from analogy’ we seek inductive support on the basis of a single instance.

- (1) JSM is in pain when pricked
- (2) JSM cries out when in pain
- (3) All humans if pricked and then crying out are in pain

Enumerative induction is supposedly a method of confirming generalizations based on positive instances. (But compare discussions of Goodman’s ‘grue’, and Hempel’s paradox of confirmation – do we ever really employ simple enumerative induction?)

One finds a series of cases:

$Fa \wedge Ga, Fb \wedge Gb, Fc \wedge Gc\dots$

And as one finds more positive instances, so one gains greater confirmation of the universal generalization

$\forall x [Fx \wedge Gx]$.

In Mill’s case he only ever has *one* positive instance (himself) on which to base the universal hypothesis, and he derives his beliefs about others on the basis of this hypothesis. How can he be warranted in this?

Compare: Mill finds a mole under his left armpit, and so concludes that everyone has a mole under his or her left armpit.

3. Natural Kinds & Inference to the Best Explanation

First overlooked element in Mill: Mill notes that *he* is a human being and he infers from this something about the nature of other human beings.

Human beings are a natural kind – members of this kind share certain features in virtue of being that kind of thing. If Mill is a representative member of that kind, then if he can identify those features he himself possesses just from being that kind of thing, then he can also reasonably assume that other representative samples of that kind will possess the same property.

Cf. discovering a single fossil of a bird-like species from pre-historic times: one has some evidence on which to infer properties of the species as a whole.

Second overlooked element in Mill: Mill reasons from the effects in common between his own case and that of other human beings to a common cause.

That is, Mill is not supposing that there is a logically necessary or analytic connection between certain behaviours and feelings. Rather, Mill supposes that, given what we know, this is the best explanation of the observed similarities in behaviour between himself and others.

Putnam, too, stresses that we can think of our general attitudes towards the psychological states of others as approximating that of a scientific theory which can count as the best explanation of the observed data, people’s behaviour, because it is the only detailed serious hypothesis which offers an explanation of this.

Note that in Putnam’s discussion, unlike Mill’s, there is no emphasis on distinctive knowledge only of one’s own case.

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