

Philosophy 132  
Philosophy of Mind  
Handout 18  
Wednesday November 14 2007

### 1. *The Context of the Problem of Other Minds*

We were confronted with three kinds of scenario – ROBOTS, INVERSION and DECEPTIVE ACTORS which raised the question for us how do we know that we are surrounded by other minded creatures, what puts us in a better position than the victim of each of these stories?

Mill and Putnam differ in their responses:

Mill assumes that there is something that he knows only in his own case, that he has feelings and that his feelings are some specific way on some occasion. The question is what justifies assuming that others have feelings like this.

Putnam's response involves no special appeal just to his own case. Putnam assumes that the evidence we have gives the best explanation of why those around us do what they do.

What is the significance of this contrast between Mill's response and Putnam's?

### 2. *Behaviour*

Suppose you take yourself to be certain that there are other minds around you, what could be the grounds for that certainty? You might suppose that what you can observe about the objects around you must give you sufficient evidence to suppose that they have minds like you.

#### *Behaviourism:*

(B) If two individuals *o* and *o'* are the same in respect of *behavioural* facts (facts concerning how they are disposed to behave in any given circumstance) then they do not differ in *psychological* facts (facts about their beliefs, desires and feelings)

(B) is true because the behavioural facts *determine* the psychological facts. (The psychological facts are nothing over and above the behavioural facts.)

What could be the motivation for accepting behaviourism?

Starts with a claim about evidence:

How do you go about finding out that your roommate has a secret passion for the *Tyra Banks Show*? How would you determine whether someone thinks that jellyfish are poisonous to the touch?

Evidence that one uses seems to concern how people do behave, and hypotheses about how they would behave were circumstances slightly different.

On the other hand, you don't bother to open up your roommate's skull to check what is going on in there.

So behaviour does provide evidence for our psychological attributions, while we are unconcerned to confirm other hypotheses, about the interior workings of someone when making such an attribution.

Behaviourism justifies such an evidential strategy with the supposition that this is all that there can be to having a mind.

### 3. *Problems formulating behaviourism:*

a.) What is behaviour? When do two creatures count as behaving, or being disposed to behave in the same way?

Note that our ordinary descriptions of behaviour are in terms of the mental states that we take such behaviour to express.

b.) Can we explain particular psychological states by reference to specific courses of action? Is there some particular way of acting which indicates the presence of a belief that the time for beer is now?

This is the problem of *mental holism*: beliefs and desires give rise to actions only in the context of other beliefs and desires.

Is either of these concerns sufficient to show that (B) must be false?

### 4. *Behaviourism & ROBOTS*

We may not be sensitive to certain facts about the inner workings of other's heads, but that does not mean that we are insensitive to all such facts.

Suppose we clone Josh's body and remove the brain but insert a transmitter device which makes Josh's clone move just like Josh does. Imagine we place Josh's clone in a setting just like Berkeley. Then Josh's clone is disposed to behave just as Josh does behave. Is Josh's clone a thinking, living, human being?

You may think that what this shows is that behaviour isn't all that counts: what matters is how that behaviour has come about. There must be the right kind of causal antecedents for behaviour.

### 5. *Morals of the Story?*

The evidential rationale for behaviourism gets one thing right – the evidence we use for other's mental states is the difference these make to someone's behaviour. But this is not all that we are interested in: we assume that people's mental states are responsible for their behaviour and hence must have the kind of causal complexity to explain that behaviour.

Consistent with that one may be indifferent to the way in which that causal structure is implemented: creatures with very different physiologies might nonetheless exhibit the same psychological features: i.e. they commit to MULTIPLE REALIZABILITY.

Don't we think that there could be intelligent life forms which were not human?

We can imagine that other Earth animals could have thought or felt as we do – say higher primates, dolphins.

There seems to be no inconsistency in supposing that creatures from other worlds, made of very different elements from us might also have hopes and fears and a love of knowledge just as humans do.

Our commitment to this might be through supposing that the thinking/feeling aspect of creatures is something distinct or over and above their physical or organic nature. Or we might suppose that it is an element which can be in common between different physical or organic natures. Compare: a vending machine for *Sprite* could as easily be made out of wood as of iron as long as it could do the same thing.

How then do we pick out what different creatures have in common in virtue of which they are the same psychologically?

*Functionalists* suggest that we can isolate the causal potential of an individual's psychological states – two creatures who are the same with respect to their causal powers will be the same with respect to their psychological states. But how do we isolate out the causal powers?

#### 6. *Function & Folk-Psychology*

Write down all of the 'platitudes' that we know about how people act: *folk psychology*.

(Input1) When you see a red box in normal daylight, and you do not think that conditions are abnormal, then you believe that there is a red box before you.

(Input2) When you stub your toe, you feel pain.

(Reason1) When you think that Running Bear is the fastest horse on the track, and you believe that race conditions are good, then you believe that Running Bear will win the race

(Reason2) When you think that Running Bear is the fastest horse on the track, and you believe that race conditions are good and you believe that Running Bear has just been doped, then you don't believe that Running Bear will win the race.

(Reason 3) When you want to get a good grade in the course, and you believe that the only way to get a good grade is to give the teacher an apple, and you are not opposed to handing over apples to State employees, then you want to give the teacher an apple.

(Output) When you believe that it is going to rain, and desire not to get wet, then you pick up an umbrella

If we can get a complete list for all possible input conditions, output conditions and how mental states interrelate with each other then we would have specified how someone might interact with the world in virtue of having a mind.

Question: If there are an infinite number of things that you might believe, or an infinite number of things that you might want, how would one write down the contents of the folk psychological theory?

The folk psychological theory describes what an individual does or would do in terms of the various mental states that he or she possesses. But it does so in terms of mental states or properties.

If the functionalist is correct, however, then we can capture the import of these claims without having explicitly to mention the mental at all. For each mental state is picked out by its causal potential with respect to input, output conditions and other mental states.

We can express this idea by considering the formulation of folk psychology with a *variable* used in place of each of the specifications of a believing, desiring or feeling.

E.g. consider (Reason3): you might put this as follows:

There is some way of being  $F_1$  such that, if you are that way ( $F_1$ ) and you believe only way to get a good grade is to give the teacher an apple, and you are not opposed to handing over apples to State employees, then you want to give the teacher an apple.

There is some way of being  $F_1$  and some other way of being  $F_2$  such that, if you are the first way ( $F_1$ ) and you are the second way ( $F_2$ ), and you are not opposed to handing over apples to State employees, then you want to give the teacher an apple.

There is some way of being  $F_1$  and some other way of being  $F_2$  and some further way of being  $F_3$  such that, if you are the first way ( $F_1$ ) and you are the second way ( $F_2$ ), and you are the third way ( $F_3$ ), then you want to give the teacher an apple.

There is some way of being  $F_1$  and some other way of being  $F_2$  and some further way of being  $F_3$  and yet some further way of being  $F_4$  such that, if you are the first way ( $F_1$ ) and you are the second way ( $F_2$ ), and you are the third way ( $F_3$ ), then you are in the fourth way ( $F_4$ ).

Eventually we have replaced each mention of any given mental state but specified the way in which it interacts with each other mental state. If all that there is to being minded in a certain way is having a certain causal complexity then we have specified what it is for Josh, say, to be minded in a certain way without explicitly mentioning any mental states.

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