Philosophy 1320: Theories of the Mind, Stern College - Yeshiva University, Spring 2007
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Lecture Notes, January 17

A couple of quick business things.
My office is in 215 Lex, Room 228.
I will be there for office hours on Wednesdays from noon until class.
I will also be available after classes on Wednesdays.
Also, I neglected to mention the deadlines for the papers.
The first paper is due, tentatively, on February 21.
This means that you won't have any grades from me until the end of February, which seems unfortunate.
If you want to know how you are doing, you should work on the reading guides.
If you can answer the reading guide questions correctly, you should be doing fine.
Feel free to come see me if you want to go over some of the reading guide questions, or ask about them in class.
The second paper will be due on March 26, tentatively.
I will provide a detailed assignment for the first paper in a couple of weeks.
On to the philosophy...

I. The unity of science

We started the course discussing a few general points to which we will return repeatedly throughout the class.
I want to make one or two more points about the methodology used in philosophy of mind.
Philosophers, especially contemporary philosophers, see philosophy in the service of science.
The methodology of philosophy is essentially scientific.
We propose theories, and test them against experience.
We choose among theories on the basis of how well they fit the data, and also how elegant they are.
One of the conditions of elegance is unity; a related condition is parsimony.
A caution: though the philosophical methodology is scientific, there is no presupposition of physicalism.
The philosopher is free to demand that theories explain non-physical evidence, as well as physical evidence.
Among the non-physical evidence might be the raw data of sensation, qualia.
Some people might also include evidence about the soul.

To see how unity isimportant, consider that according to Ptolemy, there are two kinds of motion.
Celestial motion is inherently circular, which ex7plains the revolution of the stars around the Earth.
Terrestrial motion is inherently linear, which explains why objects drop to the Earth in straight lines.
The Ptolemaic world view was aligned with Aristotle's, and dominated medieval thought.
Gravitational theory was adopted during the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because it unified two disparate kinds of explanation.
We can understand both terrestrial and celestial motion with a single law, instead of as two separate laws.
Our understanding of the world, has been unified.
Not only have our beliefs been unified, but we see the world itself as more unified.

For some time, it was hoped that interactions of minute particles could be explained mechanistically, i.e. by the same kinds of laws that explained the motions of ordinary bodies.
But, the phenomena were uncooperative.
Gravity does not account for strong nuclear force, for example, or magnetism.
So, despite the desire for unification, science remains, in places, disjoint.

The moral is that the desire to unify explanation is in tension with the need to account for all of the phenomena.
Applying this moral to the philosophy of mind, we are pulled in two directions.
Since we have very successful physical theories, which have progressed and unified, we should seek a physical scientific explanation of mental phenomena.
On the other hand, mental phenomena seem to elude physical explanation.

Related to unification, science also seeks to limit its commitments.
For example, for a while in the eighteenth century, some scientists thought that heat was a substance, called caloric.
Bodies were thought to hold caloric in the way that sponges hold water.
Caloric theories were replaced by theories which explained temperature in terms of the familiar notion of energy.
The new theories were favored because they explained the phenomena with fewer things.

The idea that we should try to explain our experiences by positing the fewest objects necessary is called Okham's razor.
It is a basic principle of parsimony.
William of Ockham was a 14th century philosopher, who wrote that plurality ought never be posed without necessity.

Perhaps Ockham's razor is best seen at work in Einstein's rejection of the aether.
Einstein constructed a theory of the propagation of light which did not require an aether.
A simpler instance is when we explain the banging of the door by the wind, rather than ghosts.
While Ockham's razor is a basic methodological principle, we also need to account for the phenomena.
One can not ignore phenomena, in order to make one's theory more parsimonious.

This discussion has twice ended up with the same moral: scientists, and philosophers, want to explain as much as they can, as simply as possible.

II. Plato, and the independence of the soul from the body

In *The Phaedo*, Socrates has been condemned to death.
He argues that death is no problem for him, since the death of the body does not entail the death of the soul.
His friends, of course, are upset, and he is trying to calm them.

Our concern, of course, is with the nature of the mind/soul.
Mostly in this class we will talk about the nature of mind.
Plato's concern, as that of many historical figures, is with the soul.

There are essentially two aspects of platonic souls.
1. They are the seat of knowledge, performing the functions that we attribute to minds.
2. They are the bringers of life; having a soul distinguishes living things from non-living things.
We need not fret about the difference, I think, but we can see if problems arise.

Cebes, at 70a, likens the soul to a breath or smoke, which presumably is infused within our bodies.
When the body dies, Cebes says, it could disperses in the air.
This is a popular, or folk, view of the mind: the mind is a ghostly substance that inhabits living bodies.
If the soul disperses, Cebes worries, then it dies with the body.

Socrates argues for immortality of soul, in order to allay fears that the ghostly substance disperses.
We will look at two of his arguments, though mostly what concerns us is the nature of the soul.
The immortality of the soul would entail that the mind is independent, in some sense, from the body.
By looking at the arguments for the immortality of the soul, we can also get a sense of Plato's view of the contents of the mind.
As I have mentioned, one might want to define the mind in terms of its states both sensory states and representational ones, which I called intentional states.

First, in order to understand Plato's arguments, we need a little bit of context.
Plato thinks that true knowledge is of what we call the forms.
Plato makes much use of the forms, throughout his work.
For one, he uses them as causes of the qualities of things.
Forms are universals: 'x is blue' means <u>x participates in the form of blueness</u>.
Consider any two blue things.
That they both participate in blueness explains their commonality.

If we are to have any knowledge, it must be stable.
Particulars in our world are inconstant and unreliable.
For example, the material constitution of any object is constantly changing.
My physical constitution now is different than it was yesterday, or when I was a child.
Yet, I am the same person.
The same point arises for any natural thing, like a tree, or a river.
Even rocks erode.

The physical world also admits of many paradoxes, like the sorites, or the paradoxes of motion.
According to the sorites paradox, there can be no heaps.
One grain of sand is not a heap.
And, the addition of any one grain of sand to a small pile will never turn it into a heap.
So, there can be no heaps.
Sorites arguments can be run for just about any property.

The forms, unlike physical objects, are perfect, unchanging realities.
We can not have any knowledge of the constantly changing and paradoxical physical world.
For, what we thought we knew would suddenly change.
But, if some things were stable and perfect, then we could have knowledge of them.
Knowledge is thus always of forms.
There are forms of beauty, and justice, and many other things.