

Philosophy 1320: Theories of the Mind, Stern College - Yeshiva University, Spring 2007
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Lecture Notes, March 21

I. Kripke's objection to identity theory, redux

Last week, we looked at Kripke's argument against identity theory

1. The identification of mental states and brain states must be either contingent or necessary.
2. Since mental states and brain states refer rigidly, the identification can not be contingent.
3. Since it is possible that mental states are not states of the brain, the identification can not be necessary.

Thus, mental states and brain states must not be identical.

I mentioned my doubts about the second premise.

If 'water', 'lightning', and 'heat' are not rigid designators, then maybe 'pain' is not rigid either.

Kripke claims that we would say that heat exists, even if there are no people to feel it.

If we say, instead, that fires do not heat up the air, but that they transfer molecular motion only, then Kripke's claim that heat rigidly designates is unsupported.

Note that this criticism is just using the old primary-secondary distinction.

Kripke's claim against the identity theorist anticipates criticisms from functionalists, to which we will return in the next section of the course.

Here, let us explore the question of whether they have different actual properties.

Then, we can worry about possible properties.

Perhaps the solution is to find a relation, weaker than strict identity, to describe the connection between bodies and minds.

Smart considers other objections, in his article.

Objections 1-7 come from the dualist.

Objection 8 comes from the behaviorist.

II. Identity theory and behaviorism

Smart anticipates that his real opponent is the dualist, though he also argues against the behaviorist.

In particular, he identifies the behaviorist with the Wittgensteinian eliminativist: mental state terms are shorthand for behavior.

Rather than report or be caused by internal states, behaviors replace them.

Recall that Wittgenstein argues that language is essentially public; there can be no private language.

Reports of private phenomena, terms which refer to mental states, are misleading and deviant.

We should be wary of claims about private mental states, since there are no public criteria for verifying them.

Consider the man who tries to write a note every time he feels a particular sensation.

How can he know when he is having the same sensation?

Wittgenstein wants us to believe that there is no difference between seeming to sense and really sensing. If seeming to sense and sensing collapse, then the whole edifice of private mental states should collapse, as well.

The advantage of behaviorism over dualism was, remember, Ockhamist: the behaviorist did not posit an independent, immaterial realm.

The identity theory wants the same advantage over dualism.

But, in arguing against the behaviorist, Smart appeals to the feeling of mental states, which the dualist makes central.

Smart argues that reports of how we feel (terms which refer to mental states) are related to reports of observable phenomena in the same way as seeming is related to being, p 240.

For example, we know how to distinguish optical illusions from real phenomena.

When we are experiencing an illusion, we talk about our inner experiences, in contrast to the observable ones, the real ones.

But, by emphasizing sensations against the behaviorist, Smart seems to bring us back to dualism.

The mind is back.

We saw very early in this course that materialists have trouble explaining qualia, or raw feels.

Descartes, in *Le Monde*, pointed out that we don't hear motion, p 60.

Hobbes insisted that sound really is just motion, but his account seems to omit the way that sound appears to us.

Descartes' solution was to posit an immaterial mind/soul which is the seat of these qualia.

Kripke acknowledges that his argument against identity theory is essentially dualistic.

See fn 19, for a description of Descartes' argument in contemporary parlance.

Against the behaviorist, Smart aligns with the dualist in emphasizing the feelings of our mental states.

But, he must be careful not to fall into a dualist trap.

III. Nomological danglers, mental properties, and topic neutrality

Smart's first argument against the dualist is that sensations would be nomological danglers, p 234.

'Nomological' refers to the laws of science.

As natural science proceeds, it subsumes increasingly many phenomena under its laws.

To claim that something is not amenable to scientific explanation is to leave a nomological dangler.

Smart alleges that he has eliminated nomological danglers by avoiding the dualist's posit of an immaterial substance, and its mental states.

First, note that since Smart supposes brain states to be contingently identical to mental states, they need not share all properties.

This point is in Smart's favor, since mental properties seem quite different from physical properties.

The property of appearing red is not the same as the property of a set of neuron firings which correspond with that appearance, even if there is only one event in question.

The fact that I see yellow, instead of say black, when I look at a banana, will figure causally in the explanation of why I ate the banana instead of throwing it away.

But, if mental properties and physical properties are distinct, then even if Smart eliminates mental states in favor of brain states, he has not eliminated mental properties of those brain states.

Smart seems consigned to irreducibly mental properties, p 237.

So, the identity theorist seems committed to nomological danglers, too.

A theory which admits irreducibly mental properties, while denying that there are mental substances, is called property dualism.

Since Smart wants to avoid any kind of dualism, he must explain mental properties without appeal to irreducible mental qualities.

To avoid commitment to irreducible mental qualities, Smart says that to say that something appears orange is just to say that it makes me feel as if I am seeing an orange, that I am having an experience which is like other experiences, p 238.

Smart makes no presumption that this experience is an irreducibly mental experience.

Smart calls it a topic-neutral experience.

That is, Smart wants to avoid the irreducibility of mental states by appealing to the material (behavioral) connections among the mental states.

Mental states are defined by their role in my perceptual experience, not by their (irreducibly) conscious qualities.

Smart also must extend the topic-neutral response to other mental states, though he does not go into detail.

The identity of mental states with brain states is much more plausible for occurrent mental states, for sensations, than it is for beliefs, or other representational states.

What state of the brain could count as representing my belief that tigers are dangerous animals?

Is there some state of the brain, identical in all of our brains, that could stand for this belief?

For non-occurrent mental states, Armstrong comes to Smart's rescue.

Armstrong points out that we can correlate mental states with the behaviors they produce.

Armstrong's appeal to behaviors also avoids reference to conscious qualities.

He agrees that mental states are internal (brain) states, but they are picked out, distinguished or sorted, by behaviors that they cause.

Armstrong's solution to the problem of mental properties continues to be topic-neutral, and plausibly physicalistic.

VI. Identity theory, evaluated

The point of the identity theory is to provide level ground with the dualist.

At the end of his article, Smart compares materialism with dualism in the form of epiphenomenalism.

Remember, epiphenomenalism says that there are irreducibly mental states, but they do not affect physical ones.

That is, there are mental states, but the direction of causation goes just from the physical to the mental.

Epiphenomenalism is thus a weak form of substance dualism.

Smart's argument for materialism against the dualist is thus:

1. Materialism and dualism can account for our mental lives equally well.
2. Given two equally likely theories, we should decide between them on the basis of simplicity and parsimony.

Thus, materialism is preferable to dualism.

Smart defends his argument by applying it to the Gosse hypothesis, p 241.
Consider the following two hypotheses:

H1: Space-time is curved.

H2: Space-time is flat, though all the evidence will make it appear curved.

Or, consider:

H3: There are no ghosts.

H4: There are ghosts, but they can never appear to us.

Or, consider:

H5: Evolution is correct.

H6: Creation is correct, though the evidence supports evolution.

The question of whether to accept H1 or H2, or H3 or H4, or H5 or H6, is not empirical.
We resolve such questions by appealing to the methods of science, including parsimony, and the desire to unify theories.

The question of whether the mind is the brain or the heart is empirical.

But, the question between dualism and materialism is not empirical.

It is, like the choices between H1 and H2, or between H2 and H4, methodological, or conceptual.

Armstrong defends methodological scientism by the fact that science can answer questions.

Science is a domain of settled facts which replace speculation.

Scientists make errors, of course, but consensus leads to progress.

So, we should at least try to settle some facts about the mind by seeing what science says.

As a methodological principle, Armstrong's defense of scientism is unobjectionable.

More importantly, Armstrong notes that the identity theorist shares a problem with the behaviorist.

Both the materialist and the behaviorist seem to lack an account of consciousness, of the way our mental states feel to us.

Hobbes was vulnerable to this criticism, which we can trace back, at least for sensations, to the primary/secondary distinction of Galileo and Locke.

Note that Armstrong provides an account of the missing elements of the materialist's theory, in a way that Hobbes did not.

He considers actions that we perform absent-mindedly, like driving a car while not thinking about it, or walking.

Armstrong says that the missing elements of the materialist's theory are just like the experiences we neglect when not paying attention to walking or driving.

Our conscious awareness, in those cases, is missing.

But all that comes to is that we are not thinking about what we are doing.

If Armstrong is right about both the analogy and his account of the absent-minded activity (that it lacks only a thought) then consciousness is just thinking about thinking.

And the missing elements of the materialist's theory are just some kinds of thoughts.

We will return to the problem of consciousness and qualia at the end of the term.