

Philosophy 1320: Theories of the Mind, Stern College - Yeshiva University, Spring 2007
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Lecture Notes, March 5

I. Berkeley recapitulation

The big question for Berkeley is whether we can get out of our mental states to refer to, or understand, the world, even if it is not a physical world.

The story about peering into the mind of God, even if taken literally, does not solve the problem.

Notice, the same problem about experiencing sensations and not causes arises whether we take the causes of our ideas to be physical objects or whether we take them to be ideas in the mind of God.

The solipsistic picture of Descartes returns.

We are back to the cogito, and stuck inside our mental states.

II. The death of Cartesian dualism

Despite dissent from various philosophers, not merely Hobbes, Locke, and Berkeley, from Descartes' time, in the early seventeenth century, through the nineteenth century, Cartesian dualism, and the pre-eminence of consciousness as definitive of the mental, dominated philosophical thought.

The most influential philosopher of the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant, agreed with Descartes that the ability to reason distinguished humans from other animals, that minds were different in kind from bodies, and that our understanding of ourselves must be rooted in our conscious experience.

Developments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries started to erode the Cartesian view.

By 1980s, there were at least four major alternatives to Cartesian dualism, and many minor variations. Substance dualism is mostly regarded as dead.

The role of consciousness as the distinguishing mark of the mental is also dying, but persists.

The first sustained 20th century attack on Descartes' dualism came from a variety of sources (logical positivists, psychological behaviorists, linguistic philosophers) which we can loosely group together as behaviorists.

The positivists and the psychological behaviorists were united in their desire to dispense with metaphysical speculation in favor of concrete, observable scientific evidence.

The linguistic philosophers agreed that appeals to obscure internal processes were dispensable, and that we should explain behavior in terms of what is observable.

III. Psychology and science

The methods of psychology, until the time of the positivists, relied almost exclusively on introspection. Freud, Adler, Jung, and William James all agreed with the Cartesian view that we have what Ryle calls privileged access to our mental states.

Introspective psychologists believe that we can know about our own minds best by reflection, and the only way to know about the minds of others is by their reports of their own mental states; see Ryle 190-1. Of course, the increasing importance of unconscious mental states to psychological explanation eroded

the Cartesian notion that the essence of mental states is their consciousness.

Ryle calls these channels tributary to the stream of consciousness, p 190.

The introspective psychologist can maintain his focus on consciousness by noting that even unconscious mental states may eventually become conscious.

Further, the way that psychologists tried to access the unconscious mental states was through introspection.

More threatening to introspective psychology is that there is no way to test or verify what someone says about their own mental states.

So, the Cartesian view resists proper scientific treatment.

Furthermore, the Cartesian, immaterialist view of humans was opposed by Darwin's work.

For the Cartesian, human beings are markedly distinct from other animals by virtue of their distinct ability to reason.

Darwin's work evoked an understanding of human beings as no different in kind from, as contiguous with, other animals.

We have more advanced faculties than lower animals, but our ability to reason can be explained according to evolutionary principles.

Darwin's work thus marked a return to an Aristotelian view of the place of human beings in the world.

Thus, from the point of view of science, including scientific psychology, in addition to the problem of mind/body interaction, the Cartesian view is unsatisfactory because it allows for no testable hypotheses and no observational access to the mind.

IV. Hempel and positivism

Hempel was a member of the Vienna Circle, a group of scientists and philosophers whose members became known as logical positivists.

The positivists were inspired by an early work of Wittgenstein, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The *Tractatus* promoted a program of constructing representations of the world out of its basic facts using logical tools.

Wittgenstein eventually disavowed the *Tractatus* and abandoned the positivist movement, though the positivists continued without him.

A central claim of the positivists was that the meaning of a statement consists in just the methods we use to verify the statement.

So, 'John has a toothache' means that John holds his mouth, and cries, and has swollen gums, etc.

It does not mean that there is some inner sensation, pain.

Note that the positivists are concerned with the meaning of psychological terms.

The focus on language was a central element of most twentieth-century philosophy.

That is, they wondered what 'pain' meant, rather than what pain is.

The positivists focused on the meanings of words because they were determined to rid philosophy of unscientific doctrines.

Certain words and sentences that look meaningful are in fact meaningless.

Their criterion for meaningfulness is verifiability.

Any term that is not verifiable is unscientific, and should be dismissed.

Instead of trying to determine the nature of mental states, or whether the mind is material, the positivists

thought that these questions were pseudo-questions.

The positivists, while inspired directly by Wittgenstein, were also clearly indebted to Hume. Hume had argued that since everything we believe originates in sensation, that to determine if a term or sentence, or doctrine, is meaningful, we should be able to trace it back to original sense impressions. Hume, in turn, owed a debt to Locke's program. For Hume, terms like 'God' and 'soul' were meaningless, since they correspond to no sense impression. For the positivists, such philosophical terms are meaningless because sentences which contain them have no hope of being verified.

By ascribing verifiable, behavioral meanings to sentences referring to mental states, the positivists turned such sentences into legitimate scientific hypotheses. But, they eliminated any introspective aspect of mental state vocabulary.

V. Behaviorism and positivism

The behaviorist approach to psychology, endorsed by the positivists, rejected introspection in favor of behavioral analysis. The positivists interpreted terms which referred to mental states as shorthand for behavior. The psychological behaviorists worked to describe and predict behavior. Thus, Skinner writes that behavior is a function of environmental history. If we knew all of a person's antecedent experiences we could predict with certainty his or her behavior. Since we can not know all of a person's antecedent experiences, we can only predict with probability. Still, in theory all that we need to know to predict a person's behavior is what happens to that person, and not what his or her inner, mental life is like. Thus, for both the positivist and the behaviorist, psychology can be a legitimate science. We can have observational access to people's minds, since mental states are just behaviors and we can watch people behaving. We can test specific psychological hypotheses, since they are hypotheses about behavior.

Hempel agrees that what is left of psychology after introspection is eliminated according to positivist, verificationist, principles, is a physicalistic science. Terms of psychology really just mean their behavioral manifestations. Behavioral manifestations are physical. So, psychology is a physical science.

VI. The redundancy of introspective explanation

Hempel uses Neurath's analogy of a watch to argue that introspective explanations are eliminable, p 169. When we say that a watch is running well, we use that statement as a shorthand for a much longer statement about the correspondence between the movement of the watch and the rotation of the Earth and its revolution around the sun. Further, Hempel argues that when we use psychological terms, we use them as shorthand for complicated statements about people's behavior. Just as we don't look for something called the running of the watch, of which its running is just a

symptom, and we don't look for some ineffable basis for the temperature of a gas, we should not look for something ineffable inside us when we attribute to ourselves mental states.

Our mental states are just their physical manifestations.

Skinner considers, "He eats because he is hungry."

He calls this sentence a redundant explanation, p 162.

Skinner claims that there is one set of facts, and that it is not the case that a private inner state is a cause of a separate, observable action.