

## Philosophy of Mind

Since the advent of Cartesian dualism – namely, the distinction between an immaterial mind and material body – philosophers have either attempted to provide a plausible account of how an immaterial mind can interact with a material body, or tried to develop different accounts that avoid this problem. On the whole, philosophers have chosen the latter option with the accounts of immaterial minds (or souls) generally being left to theologians.

### Recent Theories of Mind

A number of theories of mind have been developed which try to avoid the Cartesian immaterial mind hypothesis. The main three are **Behaviourism** (developed by the Logical Positivists and Gilbert Ryle), **Type Identity Theory** (developed by J.C.C Smart) and **Functionalism** (developed by Hilary Putnam). I shall sketch these in chronological order.

**Behaviourism** Rejects the existence of an inner mind altogether. The behaviourist considers mental states to be non-existent and merely a shorthand way of describing our behavioural qualities and propensities in certain ways. Thus a person is only actually in pain when they exhibit the outward signs such as screaming, or writhing around on the floor etc, or they are only angry when they shout and stamp their feet. Behaviourists claim that the mind/body problem is not legitimate; rather than solve it, they claim to have abolished it. Put another way: our psychological adjectives such as 'pain' and 'seeing' are applied according to behavioural criteria; there is nothing other than such criteria to go on.

**Problems with Behaviourism:** Behaviourism does not allow a distinction to be made between someone genuinely in pain and someone pretending to be, and although a behaviourist might point out that it is possible to tell the difference between fake and authentic behaviour, there are numerous cases of people being fooled. I could be in a very bad mood this evening but my professionalism obliges me to conceal it; thus, there appears to be the possibility of

inner mental states that are not observable in behaviour.

Behaviourism also fails to take into account what it actually feels like to be in a specific mental state. A behaviourist ignores *qualia* (what 'it' is like).

Moreover, what of those individuals who are completely paralysed? According to the behaviourist they could not have any mental experience at all – since they could not exhibit any outward signs, they would be unable to feel pain. Yet evidence suggests that those who have been paralysed and have recovered to a certain extent are certainly capable of feeling pain, and in many cases they also have an intense mental life.

**Type Identity Theory:** Is a version of physicalism that asserts that mental states of a specific type are physical (brain) states of a specific type. For example, this theory would suggest that a thought about astronomy is a specific state of the brain – in other words a mental state and a brain (physical) state are exactly the same thing. To be more specific: one has a particular thought about an aspect of astronomy such as the "Andromeda Galaxy". A type-identity theorist would allege that this thought purely represents a specific brain state. Expressing one's pain would also be representative of a specific brain state.

**Problems with Type Identity Theory:** Consider the following example. There are two people gazing at the "Andromeda Galaxy". Person X is a professional astronomer, and person Y has only a fleeting interest in the heavens. They are both looking at, and thinking about the galaxy and therefore (according to Smart and type-identity theorists in general) their mental states and brain states would be identical. However, surely the superior knowledge of person X would mean that he perceived the galaxy in a different way to person Y e.g. Person X considers the scientific attributes of the galaxy, such as that it is 2 million light years away etc, while person Y merely appreciates its aesthetic qualities. Thus (assuming for the sake of argument that the same part of the brain is stimulated in both cases), their brain states would be the same,

but (due to their different perceptions) surely their mental states would be different.

Moreover, the thought must be in the same location as the brain state. However, thoughts do not appear to have exact settings in this sense, and Type-Identity Theory also fails to deal with the problems of consciousness i.e. the personal qualities of our own experiences.

**Functionalism**: A comparatively recent theory succeeding *Type-Identity Theory*. Functionalism is causal in that it suggests mental states (inner states) initiate behaviour. Put another way: Functionalism relies on the notions of input, process and output. **Hilary Putnam** was a great exponent of Functionalism likening the brain to an organic automated machine. **Von Eckhart's** computer metaphor clarifies Functionalism well: The brain resembles the hardware of a computer; the software which enables the hardware to carry out actions are mental states / thoughts, in turn, the functions that the computer as a whole performs, are the direct result of commands from an external operator – in the case of humans, this is the environment with which we interact.

***Problems with Functionalism***: If Functionalism is accurate then it would seem to ascribe mental states to things that are not conscious, e.g. a university operates in a functionalist capacity in that it interacts with the external environment in certain ways as a result of inputs and outputs, however one cannot reasonably suggest that a university is conscious i.e. that it has purely subjective experiences.

Neither Functionalism nor Type-Identity Theory adequately explain the problem of consciousness (unique experience), in fact they can only be successful if it is missing.

At present no physicalist account of consciousness exists (i.e. proven scientific explanation), and for physicalism to ultimately succeed, an explanation is necessary.