

Chapter 14, The Mind and Mental Events

The problem of consciousness

I. Consciousness:

- a) = that there is something that it is like to be a bat, beetle or bird
- b) ≠ just physical or psychological factors = necessary ≠ sufficient
- c) Consciousness = mental act + an object of consciousness (intentional object)
 - our processing is influenced by complex background of factors – intentions, purposes, feelings, desires, etc.
- d) Claim: consciousness = particular type of awareness – being aware of the relation between the perceiving individual and the object of consciousness:
 - (i) Not conscious of every mental event therefore consciousness only applies to those we are
 - (ii) Animals have mental states but not conscious – don't attribute their mental states to themselves
 - (iii) But this asks for too much – self-consciousness – we can be conscious without being self-conscious
 - (iv) Self-consciousness involves some notion of the self, which makes these experiences 'mine'
 - Problem = Descartes' assumption that mind = self revealed through an act of introspection
- e) Cartesian claim: Mind = distinct and set apart from physical because it is conscious
 - (i) Humans = distinct because possess reason = necessary to have minds
 - but today computers can do many things = used to be regarded as evidence of reason therefore reason alone ≠ enough
 - (ii) We accept that mind = part of the physical world, otherwise we couldn't explain person's behaviour by reference to her mental state
 - (iii) Arguments for separateness = incorrigibility of mental states = cornerstone of Cartesian a/c – can be known immediately and unproblematically because privileged access.
 - But:
 - I. Are all mental events self-confirming?
 - e.g. Pain statements ≠ self-confirming as the cogito is – even if I doubt that I think in doubting it I confirm it
 - II. Unconscious mental events:
 - Descartes: the self and the mind = one, because all mental states = conscious by definition
 - But:
 - Leibniz 'petit perceptions'
 - Freud – thoughts, desires, feelings, beliefs = before the mind about which we're not conscious – different levels: conscious, pre-conscious, unconscious therefore consciousness may not be necessary condition of the mental
 - Ryle – beliefs, abilities, qualities of mind – not accompanied by inner states of consciousness

Chapter 14, The Mind and Mental Events continued

2. Privacy of mental events:

– privileged access and problem of our knowl of other minds:

- But a) **your pain = behavioural patterns we associate with pain**
But problem = we mean much more than this
- b) **if I can't know you are in pain I should give up making such claims**
But interprets concept of knowledge too narrowly, excluding many things we normally say we 'know' e.g. gravity
- c) **resolute sceptic = even tho you can point to all the scientific evidence still don't know this correlates to the experience of pain in others** – only in your own case
- (i) but **sets the standard of evidence too high** – we accept much less and still call it knowledge e.g. quarks – our knowledge = inferential
 - (ii) even so this = only an **argument from analogy** based on evidence of just one case – my own
 - (iii) but it's based like every scientific enquiry on **mass of evidence of uniformity of behaviour** – the more times the hypothesis that others have consciousness like mine passes the test the more confidence we have in it
 - (iv) Consider **two things**:
 - I. **Language = public** – based on commonly accepted rules – cld learn certain words and the rules that gov. their use w/o ever having the experience they stand for
 - II. **Existentialist argument**: consciousness of others = as evident as our own – it is definitive of our sense of self

3. Materialism and the Reductive Fallacy:

– Monistic response

- a) **Idealism**:
 - everything = mental
 - but physical events do affect mental behaviour e.g. drugs
- b) **Materialism**:
 - inner causes of our behaviour found in physical and chemical characteristics of human brain and nervous system
- (i) **Reductive fallacy**:
 - use words in restricted way to deny the existence of something
 - conscious states depend on certain conditions in the brain, but these don't define them
- (ii) **Defn of materialism**:
 - I. **In strict sense = self-refuting** – it would mean that you 'think' there are no 'thoughts' – materialist theory itself = a mental event in somebody's life – we would have to explain how one set of physical events should be taken seriously and another not
 - II. **Broader sense – doesn't deny existence of mental phenomena** – instead reduce it to material phenomena (e.g. Hobbes)
 - But 'physical' = having a spatial location and publicly observable
 - v. mental events = neither of these ≠ just a set of physical events – even tho they might be the cause of mental events they are still distinct and distinguishable

Chapter 14, The Mind and Mental Events continued

III. Therefore **consistent materialist** must:

1. successfully deny existence of mental events
2. show there is no need to suppose a dualism and interaction i.e. it must be a mistake to talk about mental events which are really physical
3. avoid self-refutation or show why one physical event should be taken as the truth as opposed to another

4. Husserl, holism and intentionality:

a) **Are we trapped by our own Cartesian metaphors and problems?**

e.g. Consciousness as a container

b) **Husserl – consciousness as 'intentionality'** – always 'about' something – not self-contained to be found in the mind as some kind of container – involves 2 things:

- (i) mental act – act of consciousness – 'intentional act'
- (ii) objects of these acts – 'the intentional object'

(i) cannot exist without (ii) – it is always about something
v. atomistic theory of perception – re. Locke – primary and secondary qualities only combined by the mind once they had entered simple and unmixed – therefore perception of something = the sum of the perception of its parts

c) **Gestalt psychology:**

- (i) Gestalt = **greater than or different from the sum of its parts**
– cannot be explained by analysing it into its elementary parts
- (ii) **All perceptual experience includes structure and meaning**
– we bring meaning to it which points beyond
- (iii) **Intentional object only has characteristics the mind ascribes to it** + these are dependent on the way the mind describes it

d) **Husserl on Berkeley:**

Argues that B's problems with solipsism for which he needs God for an escape route = the result of **confusing the act of experiencing with the object experienced** – many of the attributes of an act don't apply to the object
e.g. Object = public/ act = private

B assumes they = the same therefore I can only know the existence of ideas + when they're not in my mind they cannot exist
therefore B needs God to explain how things do continue to exist