

Philosophy of the Human Person

Lecture #22

the proponent of the thesis that organisms (or at least some organisms) and machines differ in kind must state what feature or behavior it is that makes them different in kind

two possibilities stand out

mental states in general (or consciousness)

thought

1. Chalmers on Consciousness

two aspects of consciousness

the “objective” aspect—physiological processes

the “subjective” aspect—the conscious experience itself

not all physiological processes have this aspect (e.g., metabolism does not)

but some clearly do

Jackson’s argument that these are really different (a thought experience)

“Mary” knows everything about the brain processes associated with color

[on the hypothesis of the thought experiment, she is an expert scientist]

“Mary” does not know what it is like to see a color

So, some people who know everything about the brain processes associated with color do not know what it is like to see a color

If that is possible, then there are facts about what it is like to see colors [i.e., about the conscious experience] that are not deducible from facts about brain states

Chalmers insists on the importance of discussion of the conscious experience itself

but rejects both reductionism—the claim that consciousness can be completely explained by appeal to neuroscience and psychology

and “mysterianism”—the claim that no understanding of consciousness is possible

the two kinds of problem associated with consciousness

the easy problems—questions about the objective mechanisms of the cognitive system

the details may be difficult to work out, but the principles by which such investigations must be conducted are well-established

Crick and Koch focus exclusively on this physiological aspect

the hard problem—how the physiological processes give rise to subjective experience

there is an “explanatory gap” between the physiological and the conscious
the significance of this distinction

solution of the easy problems contributes nothing to solution of the hard problem

solving the easy problems only shows how some physiological states are connected to other physiological states

solving the hard problem requires showing how some physiological states are connected to conscious (or mental) states

what is needed for solution of the hard problem

perhaps recognition of some aspects of consciousness as fundamental aspects of the world

caused by, but not reducible to, physiology

these states would be fundamental, but they would not have any causal role in affecting what happens in the physical world

the laws of physics would be sufficient to account for that

hence, Chalmers’ view is a kind of epiphenomenalism

[question from KWK—what is the reason for thinking that conscious states play no causal role in the world?]

2. Searle on Mental States

the problem

a conflict between two pictures of the world

The Scientific Picture of the World	The Common Sense Picture of Ourselves
everything is made up of mindless, meaningless, physical particles	we are conscious, free, mindful, rational agents

or between two theses

naïve physicalism—everything that exists in the world is made up of physical particles with their properties & relations

we know that this is true because the power of the physical model of reality is so great that it is hard to see how we can seriously challenge naïve physicalism

naïve mentalism—mental phenomena really exist

= some things have mental properties

four features of mental phenomena

(NB: each cause lack of fit into our scientific conception of the world)

(1) consciousness

(2) intentionality

i.e., they are about the world

(3) subjectivity

i.e., only the person who has them is directly aware of them

(4) mental causation

i.e., they cause physical events to happen

not all of these are necessary

there are unconscious mental states (according to Freud)

there are non-intentional ones (e.g., sensations)

not all are causes of physical actions

apparently all are subjective

we know that this is true because of our experience of ourselves

from these two theses, it follows that

some things that have mental properties are made up of physical particles

with their properties & relations

but that seems paradoxical, since it seems clear that

nothing made up of mindless, meaningless physical particles is a

conscious, free, mindful, rational agent

Problem #2: Can a composite whole have properties that its parts do not have?

[NB: Searle is not as explicit about this]

we are composed of mindless particles but we have minds

so, some things that are made up of mindless particles have minds

is that possible?

the key concept

global features—features caused by components, but realized in a system

examples—transparency, solidity, liquidity

these properties are caused by the components of the transparent object

though the components are not themselves transparent

transparency only emerges at the level of the compound object

argument

transparent things made up of components not themselves transparent are possible

mind-possessing things made up of components not themselves mind-possessing are like transparent things made up of components not themselves transparent

So, mind-possessing things made up of components not themselves mind-possessing are possible
are mental phenomena like transparency?