

Philosophy of Psychology

Week 4

- ⇒ Questions about the exam?
- ⇒ Review
 - Recap of Flanagan
 - Last week's team exercise
- ⇒ This week's material
 - The argument from causal closure
 - Jackson's knowledge argument
 - Jackson on epiphenomenalism
- ⇒ Team exercise

Evolution and the function of consciousness

- ➔ Flanagan grants that the mere fact that consciousness evolved doesn't show it performs a function.
- ➔ Still, Flanagan claims there might be good reasons to think that consciousness performs a function:
 1. It was “reinvented” independently a number of times throughout evolution (maybe).
 2. Its links with other “brain modules” suggest an important function.
 3. The fact that it is a global process in the brain makes it likely that it plays some role.

The Libet experiment

- ➔ The Libet experiment shows that actions may be initiated by unconscious brain processes *prior* to one being consciously aware of wanting to perform them.
- ➔ Flanagan argues that this does not speak for epiphenomenalism:
 1. It might still be that consciousness plays a key role in the causal chain from unconscious processes to actions.
 2. It could be that consciousness is what triggers the unconscious processes in the first place.

Blindsight

- ➔ Some subjects who cannot be visually conscious of objects on one side of their visual field can be shown to possess visual information about these objects. For example, they can answer questions about them fairly reliably.
- ➔ Flanagan points out that “blindsighters” are nevertheless not as reliable as normally sighted people. He takes this fact to indicate that consciousness plays a causal role in normal vision.

Block's response

- ➔ Block doesn't think that blindsight shows consciousness is efficacious.
- ➔ The reason is that blindsighters lack both phenomenal consciousness (what we normally call “consciousness”) and access consciousness. It could be that blindsighters' deficits are due to a lack of access consciousness.
- ➔ Access consciousness is having access conscious states. An access conscious state is one that is available for reasoning, action planning, and reporting.

Last week's team exercise

⇒ Question:

- Can Block's distinction between access consciousness and phenomenal consciousness be used to undermine Flanagan's general arguments against EPM (found in the third section of the article)? Explain.

⇒ Flanagan's arguments were:

1. Consciousness was “reinvented” independently a number of times throughout evolution.
2. Its links with other “brain modules” suggest an important function.
3. The fact that it is a global process in the brain makes it likely that it plays some role.

A good answer

- ➔ Block's distinction (to some extent) undermines all three of Flanagan's arguments because it raises the possibility that consciousness is a by-product of access consciousness.

A good answer

- ⇒ Multiple evolution
 - Can be explained by the fact that consciousness is a by-product of a-consciousness, which is useful.
- ⇒ Links with memory and the senses
 - Can be explained by the fact that a module which integrates these sources of information should be access conscious.
- ⇒ Consciousness as a global brain process
 - It could be that it's a-conscious states which integrate information from different parts of the brain, not p-conscious states.

The argument from dualism and causal closure

1. Consciousness is not physical (i.e. dualism is true)
2. Every physical event is lawfully determined by a prior physical event (the causal closure of the physical)
3. Therefore, consciousness does not affect the physical

Closure

- ⇒ The inference from (1) and (2) to (3):
 - Take any conscious state C and physical event P1.
 - By (2), we know that P1 was lawfully determined by another event P0.
 - By (1), we know that P0 and C are distinct.
 - Given that P0 determines P1 and is distinct from C, it is reasonable to conclude that P1 would have happened even if C had not happened (P1 would have been brought about by P0).
 - So it is reasonable to suppose that C is not causally efficacious.
 - Compare: the credit crisis would have happened even if John Howard had been re-elected, so his not being re-elected did not cause the crisis.

Jackson on dualism and epiphenomenalism

- ⇒ “Qualia” (plural of “quale”)
 - Jackson defines qualia as features of bodily sensations and perceptual experiences which “no amount of physical information includes”.
 - This is non-standard terminology. Normally, “qualia” are defined to be either a) simply states of consciousness or b) intrinsic properties of conscious states.
- ⇒ Jackson's argument can be reformulated without talking about qualia.



Jackson's Knowledge Argument

- ⇒ Mary (before her release) knows all the physical facts.
- ⇒ Mary (before her release) does not know all the facts about consciousness.
 - (This is brought out by the fact that she learns something new upon being released.)
- ⇒ Therefore, some facts about consciousness are not physical facts.
 - In other words, there are facts (and presumably properties or states) which are not physical.

A common response

- ➔ A common response to Jackson is that the Mary thought experiment exploits an illusion:
 - in fact, Mary would know everything about consciousness before being released.
 - it *seems* like she would be ignorant of some facts because...
 - she learns them in a *new way* through experience
OR
 - she acquires new abilities through experience, e.g. the ability to visualize colors
OR
 - ... [there are other responses]

Jackson on epiphenomenalism

- ⇒ Jackson assumes that dualism commits him to epiphenomenalism. The reason, which he does not make explicit, is the argument from causal closure.
- ⇒ He addresses four objections to EPM:
 - The “it's manifestly false” objection
 - The evolutionary argument against EPM
 - The argument from knowledge of other minds
 - The “total mystery” argument

The “it's manifestly false” objection

- ➔ The objection is that we can just see that consciousness affects behaviour all the time.
- ➔ Jackson responds that we could be under an illusion. Maybe the “constant conjunction” (as Hume would say) of consciousness and behaviour misled us to think that one causes the other.

The evolutionary argument against EPM

- ⇒ The argument, which we discussed previously (with James and Flanagan), is that
 - Conscious evolved
 - If conscious evolved, it performs a function
 - Therefore, consciousness performs a function (which means it is causally efficacious)
- ⇒ Like Flanagan, Jackson points out that the second premise can be challenged on the ground that some traits have evolved without having been selected for.

The argument from knowledge of other minds

- ⇒ The argument goes:
 1. If EPM is true, then consciousness does not affect behaviour
 - That is true by definition
 2. But if consciousness does not affect behaviour, we have no way of knowing other people's mental states based on their behaviour
 3. We can know other people's conscious states based on their behaviour
 4. Therefore, EPM must be false.

Other minds

- ⇒ Jackson's response:
 - Jackson rejects premise 2.
 - People's behaviour is indicative of their conscious states for the same reason that sport results in one newspaper are indicative of sport results in another: they have a common cause.

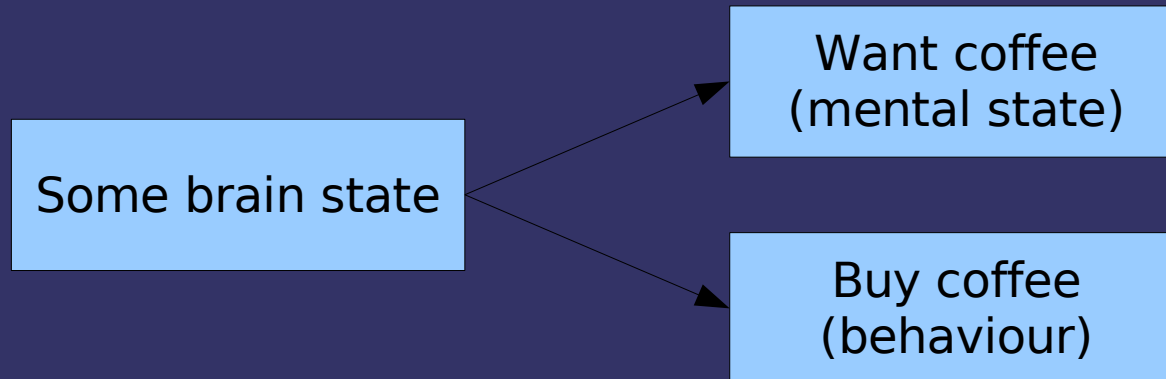
Other minds

⇒ The standard (non-EPM) model goes:



Other minds

- ➔ The model which Jackson favors (and seems required by EPM) goes:



Other minds

- ⇒ On the standard model, knowledge that a certain mental state causes a certain kind of behaviour can be used to infer one's mental states from one's behaviour.
- ⇒ You cannot do this if EPM is true.
- ⇒ But you can still know that certain kinds of behaviour are caused by the same states as some mental states and infer mental states from behaviour on this ground.

The “total mystery” objection

- ⇒ Jackson's imaginary objector:
 - “we do not and cannot understand the how and why of [epiphenomenal consciousness]”
- ⇒ Jackson responds that this only confirms the fact that there are lots of things we cannot understand.

Team exercise

- ➔ We are in 2045. Computers capable of replacing brains are now available. Anyone with enough money can exchange their brains for one of those. The operation is painless and one's behaviour is not affected by the change, except that one gains new abilities (e.g., perfect arithmetic skills and visual memory). Computer brains are provably more durable than organic brains and offer the possibility of endless life (they can easily be repaired or transplanted). Would you do it? Explain why.