

Philosophy of Psychology

Week 6

- ⇒ The essay
- ⇒ Summary of last week
 - General issue: folk psychology vs scientific psychology
 - Nagel on split brains
 - More comments on Nagel
- ⇒ Wilkes, “More brain lesions”
- ⇒ Team exercise
- ⇒ Results from test 1

About the essay

- ⇒ The essay is worth 35% of the final mark.
- ⇒ The length is 2500 to 3000 words.
- ⇒ The deadline is the last lecture of the term.
- ⇒ The questions will be announced on the website by 5pm this Wednesday.
- ⇒ There will also be a simple structure you must follow.
- ⇒ You are expected to show evidence of original thinking about the topic.
- ⇒ You may, but are not required to, make use of external sources, some of which will be suggested.
- ⇒ More details on the website on Wednesday.

Science vs folk psychology (recap)

- ⇒ FP is the totality of common sense assumptions we make about the mind - the theory of mind we use in our everyday dealings with others.
- ⇒ Science can challenge FP in two main ways:
 - By uncovering facts which refute it or show it to be inconsistent.
 - By providing competing explanations

Science vs folk psychology (recap)

- ⇒ The outcome of such challenges may be more or less bad:
 - We might have to reject only unimportant parts of FP.
 - But we might also have to reject core parts of FP. Relatedly, we might find out that the entities posited by FP don't exist, e.g. beliefs, perceptions, and desires.

Nagel on split brains (recap)

- ➔ Nagel suggests that SB cases challenge our ordinary conception of persons or minds as whole entities we can count.
 - SB subjects don't have zero or more than two minds. Either they have one or they have two.
 - They don't seem to have just one, because (among other reasons) their two “half brains” function independently as quasi normal brains. Each does everything a mind should do.
 - But they don't seem to have two minds, because it seems appropriate to ascribe them unified mental states as if they only had one.

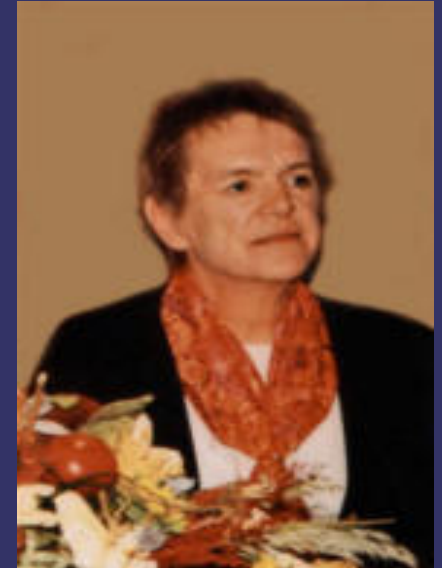
Nagel on split brains (recap)

⇒ Objections

- The reason Nagel gives for ascribing only one mind to SB subjects seems weak. Even if we naturally ascribe them unified mental states and people who know them treat them as having only one mind, we could all be wrong.
- Also, Nagel neglects the possibility that the concept of mind or person is merely *vague*.
 - Perhaps minds are like clouds. Clouds can be counted, but there are cases where it is unclear whether there are two clouds or one. The reason is that the term “cloud” is vague.

Summary of Wilkes

- ➔ According to Wilkes, we should treat folk psychology as a useful fiction.
- ➔ She argues for this claim on the basis of findings about localized brain lesions.



Problems and cases

- ⇒ Problem 1: FP makes false predictions and fails to explain certain things
 - We will label cases / findings which illustrate this problem “type 1”.
 - Two kinds of type 1:
 - Unexpected dissociations between cognitive functions
 - Unexpected associations between cognitive functions
- ⇒ Problem 2: the vocabulary of FP seems to be inapplicable to certain cases
 - We will label cases / findings which illustrate this problem “type 2”.
 - Note that most type 2 cases are also type 1 cases.

Problem 1: dissociations

- ⇒ Language-specific alexia:
 - unable to read English (even though used to)
 - able to read other languages (French and latin)
- ⇒ FP predicts otherwise and cannot explain this fact.

Problem 1: dissociations

- ⇒ Auditory aphasia
 - normal hearing but
 - unable to understand speech
- ⇒ FP predicts otherwise and cannot explain this fact.

Problem 1: dissociations

- ⇒ A peculiar impairment of action
 - able to perform complex actions on request, e.g. “take the stance of a boxer”
 - but unable to perform even related simple actions on request, e.g. “clench your fist”
- ⇒ Again, FP predicts otherwise and cannot explain this fact.

Problem 1: associations

- ⇒ Gertsman's syndrome (due to damage to the left parieto-occipital area)
 - Agraphia (can't write) or dysgraphia (bad at writing)
 - Acalculia (can't calculate) or dyscalculia (bad at calculating)
 - finger agnosia (can't identify their own fingers)
 - left-right disorientation
- ⇒ FP cannot explain this fact.

Problem 1: associations

- ⇒ A lesion to the parieto-temporal area can cause confusion with relations of all kinds:
 - spatial (e.g. above and below)
 - temporal (e.g., before and after)
 - grammatical (e.g. the difference between “brother's father” and “father's brother”)
 - conceptual (e.g., horses are *a kind of* animal)
 - mathematical
- ⇒ Again, FP cannot explain.

Problem 1

- ⇒ Wilkes suggests that cases of this kind pose a challenge to FP.
- ⇒ What is the challenge?
 - FP makes false predictions? (dissociation cases)
 - Maybe not. Maybe the principles of FP are restricted to normal cases. For example, perhaps FP only says that, normally, someone who can read a foreign language can read their native language.
 - FP explains less than scientific psychology
 - This is true. But are its shortcomings important enough for us to reject it?
 - Wilkes herself suggests that FP is still the best source of explanations of people's behaviour in particular contexts.

Problem 2

- ⇒ Problem 2: inapplicability of the vocabulary of FP
- ⇒ Pure alexia:
 - unable to read (using the eyes)
 - able to write, copy words, understand spoken language, speak, and read from tactile information.
 - sometimes: able to read numbers
- ⇒ Can the subject *read*? Neither “yes” nor “no” seems like a satisfactory answer.

Problem 2

- ⇒ Visual agnosia (dorsal simultanagnosia)
 - can see the individual features of ordinary objects (chairs, tables, cars etc)
 - but cannot say what they are without guessing. cannot perceive objects as wholes, visualize them, or draw them.
 - the subject must guess based on his identification of individual features.
- ⇒ Can the subject see ordinary objects?

Problem 2

- ⇒ Blindsight (not in Wilkes)
 - can discriminate visual stimuli if suitably prompted (asked to guess)
 - but cannot spontaneously use the information in a normal way and seem to lack relevant states of phenomenal consciousness.
- ⇒ Can blindsighters see objects in their blind areas?

Problem 2

- ⇒ Deep dyslexia (not in Wilkes)
 - Mr. Ward appears to be able to read the words “mile”, “flood”, “yacht”, “borough”, “cough”, “wigwam” and many more.
 - But, presented with the word “duel”:
 - Ward: Er, er, sword, or spear, or, er, sword
 - Dr: Is it sword?
 - Ward: Raper, raper, er, rapier
 - Dr: Rapier, is it that?
 - Ward: Rapier
 - Dr: OK
 - Ward seems to get the concepts (imperfectly) without being able to say what the words are.
- ⇒ Can ward *read*?

Problem 2

- ⇒ The problem may be summarized as follows, where “F” is either the property “can read” or “can see”:
 - In type 2 cases, we can no more say that the subject has F than that he doesn't. So either we say that *he has F and lacks F* or we say that *he neither has F nor lacks F*.
 - *He has F and lacks F*
 - This violates the logical law of non-contradiction (it is never the case that x is F *and* x is not F).
 - *He neither has F nor lacks F*
 - This violates the logical law of excluded middle (for any x and F, either x has F or x does not have F).
 - Either way, we violate a logical law. What to do?

Problem 2

⇒ Wilkes discusses three possibilities

1. Maintain that FP terminology is as good as any other bit of everyday language (“table”, “full”, “heavy”, etc)
 - The discovery that everything is made of atoms (and 99.9% empty space) didn't challenge our conception of everyday objects as whole and solid
 - Similarly, type 2 cases should not be taken to challenge our use of terms like “can read” and “can see”.
 - Wilkes notes that there seems to be an important difference: physics doesn't lead to violations of logical laws in “folk physics”

▣ *Problem 2*

2. Accept that FP vocabulary is flawed, and replace it with more precise terminology (perhaps drawn from scientific psychology)
 - But Wilkes suggests that we cannot make do without expressions like “can read” and “can see”.

Problem 2

3. “Retreat from realism” about the mental reality described by FP. We should treat FP as a *useful fiction* (useful for certain explanatory purposes).
 - This is the approach Wilkes prefers.
 - Contrary to option 2, we keep using FP terminology.
 - However, we do this knowing that FP is false.

Problem 2

- ⇒ Objection: option 2 is not so bad
 - It seems that we merely need to distinguish between:
 - “reading through vision” and “reading through touch” (for pure alexia)
 - “seeing whole objects” and “seeing features of objects” (for visual agnosia)
 - “seeing with consciousness (a and p)” and “seeing without consciousness (a and p)” (for blindsight)
 - “reading conceptually” and “reading literally” (for deep dyslexia)
 - Wherever “see” or “read” is used, it should be obvious how to make the language more precise if needed. We don't really need the unqualified predicates “can read” and “can see”.

Problem 2

- ⇒ Objection: there is a fourth option: deny the law of excluded middle (either x is F or x is not F)
 - Excluded middle does not seem to apply to *heaps* and other vague terms.
 - Perhaps “can see” and “can read” are also vague terms, in which case excluded middle would not apply to them.
 - We can say simply that it is *indeterminate* whether the subjects can see / read because the meaning of “see” and “read” is not precise enough. There is no problem for FP at all (aside from related versions of problem 1).

Problem 2

- ⇒ Objection: option 3 goes farther than necessary
 - At most, problem 2 shows that the parts of FP which have to do with what people “can see” or “can read” are false or confused.
 - Most of FP appears to be untouched by this problem.
 - (Unless of course similar issues arise with many other terms of FP.)

Team exercise

- ⇒ Compare Nagel's and Wilkes' challenges to folk psychology in the following respects:
 - a) The nature of their targets
 - b) The form of the arguments
 - c) How plausible they are
 - d) The importance of their implications

Test results

Distribution of results for test #1

