

## Acknowledgements

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This book is an introduction to the philosophy of mind. It is primarily intended for undergraduates, but it may also be of value to graduate students seeking a quick overview of the key issues.

Philosophers of mind ask very general questions about the mind. Examples include: What are mental states? Are they states of the physical brain or of a nonphysical 'soul'? What is consciousness? How can states of mind be about (or 'represent') things outside the mind?

Psychologists also study the mind. Very often they perform experiments on human and animal subjects, and build substantial theories about the mind on the basis of experimental results. Philosophers of mind do not, as a rule, do experiments. Rather, many philosophers engage with issues which are sometimes described as 'conceptual'. For example, they seek to clarify what terms like 'consciousness' mean; they look for logical flaws in arguments about the nature of the mind; and they consider the ways in which claims about the mind fit—or fail to fit—with other claims we are inclined to accept as true. A number of examples of conceptual issues in the philosophy of mind are discussed in this book.

Many philosophers have, however, refused to limit themselves to these sorts of conceptual questions. The great French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650), for example, advanced substantial claims about the mind. (We will examine some of Descartes' claims in Chapter 1.) Increasingly, contemporary philosophers are advancing substantial claims about the mind based in part on experiments undertaken by psychologists. In fact, it's sometimes a bit hard these days to tell where the philosophy stops and the psychology begins. So don't be surprised by the occasional mention of topics which traditionally would have been discussed by scientists rather than philosophers.

The first Part of this book addresses the question, 'What are mental states?' The mental states include *perceptions* like seeing, smelling, and hearing; *sensations* like hunger, thirst, and pain; *emotions* like anger, love, and grief; and what we might broadly call *thoughts* like beliefs, desires, and decisions. So Part I examines various attempts to explain what sorts of states perceptions, sensations, emotions, and thoughts *are*. Are they states of a nonphysical 'soul'? Are they states of the brain? Do they exist at all?

Before we begin to address the question, 'What are mental states?', it will be useful to have before us a list of the most significant features of mental states. Such

a list will help us assess theories of mental states by determining the extent to which a theory explains the existence of these features. In general, a theory of mental states which makes sense of these features is to be preferred to a theory which does not.

Here's my list of general features of mental states.

1. *Some mental states are caused by states of the world.* For example, Bloggs's pain (mental state) is caused by a pin sticking in his foot (state of the world). Again, Bloggs's belief that there is a cup of coffee in front of him (mental state) is caused by there being a cup of coffee in front of him (state of the world).
  2. *Some mental states cause actions.* For example, Bloggs's desire for a coffee (mental state) together with his belief that there is coffee in the kitchen (mental state), caused him to go into the kitchen (action). Again, Bloggs's fear of the dentist (mental state) caused him to run away (action).
  3. *Some mental states cause other mental states.* For example, the pain Bloggs experienced when he last had a filling (mental state) caused him to be afraid of dentists (mental state). Another example: Bloggs's belief that today is Friday (mental state), together with his belief that Friday is payday (mental state), caused him to believe that today is payday (mental state).
- The second example illustrates a very important feature of causation between mental states. Notice that Bloggs's belief that today is Friday, together with his belief that Friday is payday, give him *good reason* to believe that today is payday. The causal relations between some mental states respect the *logical* or *evidential* relations between them. Another way to make this point is to say that very often our thought process is *rational*. We will return to the rationality of our thought processes in Part 2.
4. *Some mental states are conscious.* Exactly what it means for a mental state to be conscious is an issue we will take up in Part 4. For the moment we can simply note that some mental states have a subjective 'feel' or 'quality'. Perhaps the easiest way to grasp the idea that some mental states have a subjective feel or quality is to contrast the mental life of a person with normal color vision with that of a person who is colorblind. When they stand together looking at a sunset, the visual experiences of the person with normal color vision are quite different from those of the colorblind person. The former's experiences have a feel or quality which the latter's lack.
  5. *Some mental states are about things in the world.* That is, they represent the world as being a certain way. For example, Bloggs's belief that Mt Everest is 8,848 meters tall is *about* Mt Everest and *represents* it as being 8,848 meters tall. Philosophers sometimes say that the *content* of Bloggs's belief is 'Mt Everest

is 8,848 meters tall'. Theories of content attempt to explain how thoughts have the content they have. (We take a look at some theories of content in Chapter 9.)

6. *Some kinds of mental states are systematically correlated with certain kinds of brain states.* With advances in neuroscience, it's becoming increasingly clear that there are correlations between mental states and brain states. For example, in the 1950s Wilder Penfield showed that by stimulating parts of the brain with a tiny electrical current, it was possible to elicit certain memories in the subject. When the electrode was shifted slightly to a different area of the brain, a different memory was elicited. There is thus a correlation between particular memories and particular parts of the brain. (For a description of these experiments see Penfield and Rasmussen 1968.)

The list of general features of mental states just given is important because it facilitates the assessment of theories of mental states. Other things being equal, a theory which explains lots of these features is better than a theory which explains few of them. But we should admit that mental states might turn out to be somewhat different from how we commonly conceive them to be. In particular, we have to accept that mental states might lack some of the listed features. In that case, our list of general features would have to be revised.

This kind of revision is not uncommon. Here's an example. A few hundred years ago it was widely assumed that whales were fish. That is, one of the general features ascribed to whales was that they are fish. Subsequent investigations revealed that whales aren't fish at all—they're mammals. In fact, whales have a lot more in common with cows than with cod. Consequently, no list of general features of whales drawn up today would say that they are fish. Similarly, it was once widely accepted that all mental states are conscious. More recent investigations suggest that this is not true: you might, for example, have an unconscious desire or even an unconscious belief. If these more recent investigations are on the right track, it isn't true that all mental states share the feature of being conscious. (Notice that feature 4 on the list given above claims only that *some* mental states are conscious.)

I have suggested that the list of features of mental states I have given might have to be revised. What value, then, does the list have? Simply this: the elements of the list are plausible claims about the nature of mental states. In any investigation we can only begin with what, given our current evidence, are plausible claims about the subject matter. (Where else should we begin our investigation? With *implausible* claims?) Subsequent research may reveal that some (or even all) of our initial claims about the mind are false, and at that point rationality requires that we revise our ideas.

Part 1 is the longest part of this book. It sets the stage for subsequent chapters in two ways. First, it introduces concepts, arguments, and terminology which play a

role in the later parts. Second, it presents us with many issues which are taken up in subsequent parts. Thus Part 2 addresses the idea that thinking is, in important respects, a kind of computation; Part 3 addresses issues about physicalism, mental content, and mental causation; and Part 4 takes up the vexed issue of consciousness.

One of my aims in writing this book is to make the vast literature on the philosophy of mind somewhat more accessible to undergraduate philosophy students. At the end of every chapter is a list of reading materials you should find useful in furthering your understanding of the issues discussed in the chapter. The reading lists are 'annotated'; that is, I very briefly describe the contents, approach, and strengths (or weaknesses) of each item on the list. There is also, towards the end of the book, a list of resources (including online resources) which you may find helpful when studying the philosophy of mind. Sometimes I refer in the main body of the text to a book or paper which is an especially important source for the idea being discussed. I have adopted the author/date reference system. For example, when discussing some aspects of the problem of consciousness, I refer in the text to 'Jackson 1982'. In the References list at the back of the book you will find the entry:

Jackson, F. (1982). 'Epiphenomenal qualia'. *Philosophical Quarterly* 32: 127–36. Reprinted in Lycan 1990.

The entry tells you the title of Jackson's paper ('Epiphenomenal qualia'); the title of the journal in which it's published (*Philosophical Quarterly*); the volume number of the journal (32); and the page numbers (127–36). The date after the author's name indicates the year of publication. Jackson's article has been conveniently reprinted in Lycan 1990, which has its own entry in the References list.

The References list is arranged alphabetically by the author's surname. If an author has more than one entry, the entries are arranged by date (earliest first). Very occasionally I refer to two or more publications by the same author in the same year. In that case I distinguish the publications by adding a letter to the date. Thus the References list includes both Lewis 1983a and Lewis 1983b.

A few more pointers. First, at the end of each chapter you will find a list of 'tutorial questions' which you can use to deepen your understanding of the issues. Trying to explain a philosophical issue to someone else is one of the best ways to enhance your own understanding of it. If you're an undergraduate philosophy student, why not form your own discussion group with other members of your class?.

Second, at the back of the book you will find a glossary which explains a variety of philosophical terminology. If a term is in the glossary it's printed in **bold** the first time it's used in the text (occasionally terms are printed in bold more than once).

Third, I have included a few brief tips on writing a philosophy paper (or 'essay'). They are not intended to be a complete guide to writing a philosophy paper, nor are they intended to challenge your philosophy instructor's advice. Rather, they're a few pointers based on my having read and assessed over a thousand undergraduate philosophy papers. (In the Resources section you will find references to a couple of guides to writing a philosophy paper which are much more comprehensive than my brief notes on the subject.)

Finally, I have included both an index and a fair amount of cross-referencing. My aim throughout has been to make the book as 'user friendly' as possible.

I hope you enjoy the book.