

## The Mechanical Mind

### *Lecture 2: Minds*

1. In the first lecture we got a bit clearer about what computers are. In this lecture we get a bit clearer about what *minds* are.
2. Minds are more elusive than computers, it seems. But we do know quite a lot about them. I know a lot about *my* mind. I know that I believe that today is Monday, and that I desire to give this lecture well. So I know that my mind is in these two states. I know a lot about *your* minds as well. I know that you believe that this is a SLP148 lecture, and that you desire to sit during the lecture. So I know that your minds are in those two states.
3. How do I know these things? In the case of *my* mind, by introspection (a kind of observation). In the case of *your* minds, not by introspection – I can't directly observe your mind, in the way that I can mine. All that I can observe is your *behaviour*. (Compare: my knowledge of whether my legs are crossed, and of whether your legs are crossed.)
4. How does observation of your behaviour give me knowledge of your mind?
5. According to *behaviourism*, your behaviour *is* your mind: to have a mind just *is* to behave in a certain way. So, I *can* observe your mind, by observing your behaviour. For example, to believe that this is a SLP148 lecture is to behave in a certain way, and if I observe you behaving in that way then I observe your belief, your mental state. I get knowledge of my mind in the same way – by observing my behaviour.
  - a. Objection: it is possible for one's thoughts to change without one's behaviour changing (e.g. I might come to believe that Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria, without there being any change in my behaviour). So thoughts cannot just be behaviour.
  - b. Response: Ok, so to have a mind is to be *disposed* to behave in a certain way. If I come to believe that Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria then my actual behaviour might not change, but my *dispositions* to behave do change: I am now disposed to say that Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria, for example.
  - c. Challenge to response: To believe that Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria is to be disposed to behave *which* way?
  - d. Objection to response: How does observation of your behaviour give me knowledge of your *dispositions* to behave?

We shall take it that behaviourism is false.

6. The *theory theory* agrees that we cannot directly observe other people's minds. Instead, we gain knowledge of their minds in much the same way that scientists gain knowledge of phenomena that they cannot directly observe (e.g. fundamental particles): by developing theories that best explain what we *do* observe, and reading-off what our theories tell us about we do *not* observe. I know that you believe that this is a SLP148 lecture, because that's what my (best) theory of your behaviour tells me – your having that belief is part of the best explanation of your behaviour.
  - a. Objection: if we appeal to mental states to explain behaviour, then we must also appeal to general principles (generalizations) that connect those mental states with behaviour (just as scientists must appeal to general physical principles that connect fundamental particles to the observable phenomena they are used to explain). If we appeal to such principles then we ought to be able to say what they are. But we can't – the principles we give are either false or

trivial. (It is *false* that anyone who desires to sit down will sit down; it is *trivial* that people generally try to achieve the objects of their desires.)

- b. Response: The principles we give merely *seem* trivial, because they are so familiar to us. But that does not mean they are not powerful (compare the seemingly trivial but powerful principles of folk physics).
- c. Another response: It might be that we *tacitly* appeal to general principles, and hence are not good at *explicitly* formulating them.

We shall take it that the theory theory is correct.

- 7. Call our theories *common sense psychological*. Are our common sense psychological theories *good* theories? Because if they are not then perhaps they do not give us knowledge of minds.
- 8. Some say they are not, and that *scientific* psychology will falsify them (just like chemistry has falsified alchemy). Crane (pp. 75-6) lists three reasons that have been given:
  - a. They leave lots of phenomena unexplained (mental illness, creativity, sleep).
  - b. They are stagnant.
  - c. There seems little hope of making them scientifically respectable by reducing beliefs and desires to physical categories.

But these are not very persuasive reasons.

- 9. Another view is that scientific psychology will *vindicate* common-sense psychology – it will explain how or why our common-sense psychological theories are true (in the way that scientific physics vindicates much of common sense physics). We shall take this view.
- 10. We shall take it, then, that we get knowledge of minds by developing (good) common sense theories to explain the behaviour that we observe – mental states are whatever our theories tell us they are.
- 11. What do they tell us about mental states? Not only that our mental states can be *effected by* behaviour (taking drugs caused me to believe I had wings), but also that they can *cause* behaviour (my love for you caused me to act irrationally). It is part of our theory that mental states are *causally efficacious*, and so that is something that we know about mental states.
- 12. Donald Davidson has made the point as follows. Suppose Boleslav killed his brother because he was jealous of him. What do we mean by this? It cannot be that Boleslav killed his brother, and that Boleslav was jealous of him, because that might be the case and yet it be false that he killed his brother because he was jealous of him (he might have accidentally killed him in a bar brawl). We mean that his jealousy was a *cause* of his killing him. So when we give explanations like this we take it that mental states can be *causes* of behaviour.
- 13. Here is an ideological reason for thinking that we are right about this: physical, chemical, and biological phenomena all fit into the causal picture of the world, so why should mental phenomena be any different?
- 14. So we can now be a bit clearer about minds: we have thoughts in virtue of having a mind that can be in various states; these mental states are representational states (at least some of them) that are causally connected with our behaviour – they are causally effected by our behaviour, and they also causally effect our behaviour.