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philosophy of mind glossary

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this glossary was originally prepared for my first and second year philosophy of mind courses, and lists the technical terms that i used and introduced in those courses. i put it on here because i thought it might be a nice resource for students and other instructors. if you spot any howlers, please email me. if you have accessed this page directly (i.e., without going via my home pages), then click here to see what other resources are at my site.

analytic statement—a statement is analytic if its truth or falsity depends only on the meanings of the words from which it is composed. for example, "all bachelors are unmarried men" is an analytic statement. the truth of that statement does not depend upon any further facts about the way men happen to be. if one understands the meaning of the word "bachelor", one knows that the statement is true. (see also, synthetic statement.)

aphasia (or dysphasia)—a disorder of spoken language in patients brain-damaged as adults (normally as the result of a stroke), and not always or necessarily accompanied by loss of other linguistic capacities such as reading (dyslexia) or writing (dysgraphia). such disorders are normally classified into two major groups: non-fluent (or broca's) and fluent (wernicke's). in the former, the sufferer has difficulty finding words, and her syntax is normally faulty. in the latter, the sufferer tends to emit a stream of words, often perfectly intoned and syntactically well-formed, but utterly meaningless. interestingly, the different disorders appear to be closely tied to damage to specific parts of the brain: broca's aphasia to the anterior part of the left cerebral hemisphere, and wernicke's aphasia to the posterior part of the left cerebral hemisphere.

behaviourism—generally, the idea that what it is to be in a mental state is to be disposed to behave in certain ways. (see eliminative behaviourism, logical behaviourism, methodological behaviourism and ontological behaviourism.)

cartesian dualism—see substance dualism.

causal theory of mind (or analytical functionalism)—the concept of a mental state is the concept of a state apt for being caused in certain ways by stimuli plus other mental states and apt for combining with certain other mental states to jointly cause certain behaviour.

causation—a relation between two events, a cause and an effect, the cause preceding or occurring simultaneously with the effect. minimally, "a caused b" entails both the counterfactual conditional "all else being equal, if a had not occurred, b would not have occurred", and the subjunctive conditional "all else being equal, if (another) a were to occur, (another) b would occur". "a caused b" is an extensional context.

central state materialism (or mind-brain identity theory or type identity theory)—the theory that takes seriously the causal theory of mind's claim that mental states are those states which are the causes of behaviour, but goes on to point out that as in fact states of our brains and central nervous systems are revealed by science to be the causes of behaviour, then it must be the case that mental states and states of the brain and central nervous system are one and the same thing. mental states, this theory claims, are type identical with states of the nervous system and brain.

clinical neurology—that branch of medicine dealing with the nervous system and the pathology thereof.

concepts—are here understood to be the constituents of intentional contents. the content "the cat is on the mat" has as constituents three concepts: "the cat", "the mat", and "being on". concepts refer, or fail to refer ("unicorn" for example), to objects, properties or relations, but they are not individuated by their referents: "temperature" and "mean molecular kinetic energy" refer to the same property but are distinct concepts.

consciousness—an entity is conscious if there is something it feels like, something it is like to be that entity. a mental state, event or process is said to be a conscious one if there is something it is like for one to be in that state or for that event or process to occur in one. (see qualia.)

counterfactual conditional—a conditional statement (i.e. a statement of the form "if a, then b") where a and b are contrary to fact, that is, where a and b are not the case. for example, speaking of a struck match which lit, "if that match had not been struck, then it would not have lit".

disposition—to say that something has a disposition is simply to say that certain subjunctive conditional statements are true of it. in other words, dispositional statements, such as "sugar is soluble", are equivalent to subjunctive conditional statements, such as "if sugar is placed in water, it will dissolve". typically, but not necessarily, predicates in english ascribing a dispositional property end in "-ble", such as "irritable", "soluble", "inflammable".

dualism—in the philosophy of mind the theory that not only are mental phenomena not reducible to physical phenomena, they are wholly distinct, making up two distinct realms of being. (see reductionism, property dualism and substance dualism.)

eliminative behaviourism—whilst methodological behaviourism does not entail any ontological theses, a great many of its exponents at one time or another flirted with eliminative behaviourism. eliminative behaviourism is to be contrasted with ontological behaviourism: rather than claiming that mental states are nothing more than behavioural dispositions, the eliminative behaviourist repudiates all or most of our common-sense psychological ontology altogether, claiming that there simply are no such things as beliefs, desires, experiences, etc. (see eliminativism.)

eliminativism—the view that our common-sense conception of the mind (sometimes called folk psychology) is fundamentally mistaken. the claim is that because what we take to be characteristic about the mind is in fact recalcitrant to integration into our scientific conception of the world, and that because we have every reason to believe the latter to be largely true, the former is likely to be largely false.

epistemological problem—epistemology is that branch of philosophy which is concerned with knowledge. in the philosophy of mind the epistemological problem is “what are the differences between first-person and third-person knowledge of mental processes?” or “how can we account for the curiously direct knowledge one has of one’s own mental states versus the worryingly indirect knowledge one has of other’s mental states?”

extensional context—see intensional/extensional contexts.

folk psychology—the idea that our common-sense understanding of minds consists of a set of concepts, for instance belief, desire, pain, pleasure, love, hate, intention, perception, and a set of attributive, predictive and explanatory practices using those concepts. for instance we attribute beliefs and desires to people, and explain and predict their behaviour on the basis of those attributions. this in itself is quite a weak claim, although some philosophers dispute its accuracy, claiming that even this is a distortion of our everyday use of such concepts. however, sometimes a much stronger claim is intended: that is that our everyday common-sense understanding of the mind is literally a proto-scientific theory, and as such open to the same kind of assessment as any other scientific theory. critically, just as any scientific theory can turn out to be radically false, and the entities it posits turn out not to exist, on this stronger conception the same fate may await folk psychology.

functionalism (or ontological functionalism)—functionalism is that theory of the mind which identifies mental states by their function. like the causal theory of mind, mental states are defined by their causal role. unlike central state materialism however, functionalism does not identify mental states with the physical states which implement that causal role. rather the physical instantiation of the mental state is taken to be irrelevant (mental states are taken to be token identical, but not type identical to physical states). an analogy with computers is often drawn: the mind is to the brain as a computer program is to a computer (or as software is to hardware). the physical states of the computer are not relevant to understanding what program the computer is running.

identity—see qualitative identity and numeric identity. also see token identity theory, and type identity theory.

inconsistent tetrad—four propositions, the truth of any three of which entails the falsity of the four

th.

indication—see information.

information (or indication)—one thing is said to carry information about another (in this technical use of the term) if the former is normally caused by the latter. for instance, footprints in the sand are said to carry the information (or, alternatively, have the informational content) that someone had recently walked in the sand because footprints are normally caused in that way. similarly, smoke may be said to indicate fire, or carry information about fire, because fire is what normally causes smoke. an indicator causally covaries with what it indicates.

intensional/extensional contexts (or referentially opaque / referentially transparent contexts)—this is primarily a distinction between types of sentences. a sentence is said to constitute an extensional context if the following two conditions hold: (a) co-referring expressions can be substituted for one another in the sentence without changing its truth value (e.g. if "mary loves john's best friend" is true, and john's best friend is fred, then "mary loves fred" is true)—the technical term for this criterion is intersubstitutivity salva veritate; and (b) the sentence entails the existence of the entities it mentions (e.g. if "mary loves fred" is true then "fred exists" is true)—the technical term for this criterion is that such sentences support existential generalisation. conversely, a sentence is said to constitute an intensional context if both these criteria fail of it (e.g. "mary believes that father christmas lives in the north pole" does not entail that "mary believes that santa claus lives in the north pole" (for mary may not know that father christmas and santa claus are meant to be one and the same) and nor does it entail that "father christmas exists"). importantly, sentences describing propositional attitudes form intensional contexts. whilst they are related, it is important not to confuse intensional-with-a-"t" and intensional-with-an-"s".

intensional fallacy—the fallacy of treating an intensional context as an extensional context in the course of an argument, i.e. by substituting co-referring expressions or by inferring the existence of the entities mentioned. (see intensional/extensional contexts.)

intentional content (or representational content)—a representation of a state of affairs, event or process. it is what is expressed by what follows the "that"-clause in a description of a propositional attitude. the mental state referred to by the expression "sees that the cat is on the mat" has intentional content "the cat is on the mat".

intentionality—that property of mind by which it is directed at, about, or of objects and states of affairs in the world.

leibniz' law—the indiscernability of identicals. if a and b are identical, then whatever is true of a is also true of b. which entails, if f is true of a but not true of b, then a and b are distinct.

logical behaviourism (or analytic behaviourism)—logical behaviourism is the view that the meanings of our psychological concepts such as "belief", "desire", "experience" are to be explained in terms of beh

avioural dispositions. as such, it is a response to the semantical problem of mind.

machine functionalism—a version of functionalism, developed by putnam, in which mental states are explained by analogy to the states of a turing machine.

materialism (or physicalism)—the family of doctrines known as materialism (or, equivalently, physicalism) holds that all that exists is matter, or material objects and their (material) properties.

methodological behaviourism (or psychological behaviourism or empirical behaviourism)—a claim concerning the correct methodology of a scientific psychology, its most famous exponents being the psychologists j. b. watson and b. f. skinner. it was a reaction against the introspective psychology of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. according to the introspectionists, consciousness was the subject matter of psychology and introspection its proper methodology. the methodological behaviourists rejected this as being subjective, unquantifiable and unscientific. instead they sought to make psychology scientifically respectable by concerning themselves only with what was objectively observable, namely behaviour. as such, methodological behaviourism is a response to the methodological problem of mind, and does not entail any specific response to the mind/body problem.

methodological problem—the methodological problem in the philosophy of mind is concerned with what should be thought to be the correct methodology for a science of the mind. should such a science draw on introspective evidence, on the evidence only of behaviour, or of neurophysiological evidence, or all of these or none of these?

nomological—concerning the laws of nature.

numeric identity—see qualitative identity and numeric identity.

ontological behaviourism (or synthetic behaviourism)—the claim that there are no facts about mental states over and above facts about behavioural dispositions. mental states such as believing and desiring are nothing more than being disposed to behave in a certain way. an extreme version holds that it must be possible to specify behaviour in such a way that it does not involve the use of any of our psychological vocabulary (including terms referring to intentional actions)—such terms must be capable of being translated into physical descriptions of bodily movements.

ontological problem—ontology is that branch of philosophy which is concerned with what things really exist, and what their fundamental, essential nature is. in the philosophy of mind the ontological problem is "what are the essential natures of minds and mental processes?", and "how many distinct kinds of entities do we need to posit the existence of in order to explain mental phenomena?"

phenomenological fallacy—the fallacy involved in inferring that appearances are themselves entities. when macbeth imagines that he sees a bloody dagger in front of him, it does not follow that there is some entity—the appearance of a bloody dagger—which he sees. rather he sees nothing, but is in that mental state normally caused by seeing a bloody dagger.

property dualism—the doctrine that whilst there is only one kind of substance, or one kind of object, there are two distinct categories of properties: mental properties and physical properties. these mental properties are radically distinct to physical properties—they cannot be explained in terms of, or identified with, physical properties. substance dualism entails property dualism, but not vice-versa. one may be a property dualist without being a substance dualist: according to such a view, a person is a single entity having both physical properties such as a certain mass and size, and mental properties such as certain beliefs, desires, perceptions and sensations.

propositional attitude—a mental state referred to by an english expression consisting of a psychological verb (“believes”, “hopes”, “fears”, “desires”, “knows” etc.) plus a “that”-clause, the complement of which is an indicative sentence (e.g., “believes that it is raining”, “hopes that manchester united will not win the league”, “fears that aliens are in her television set”, “knows that smith and jones are patronising”). some propositional attitudes can only be rendered in this canonical form with a little awkwardness, but that they can be so is what is significant: e.g. “desiring an ice cream” can be equivalently expressed as “desiring that one has an ice cream”. propositional attitudes are individuated by both the kind of attitude involved (believing that it is raining is therefore distinct to hoping that it is raining) and their intentional content (believing that it is raining is therefore distinct to believing that it is not raining).

qualia (singular: quale)—are “raw feels”, the way things seem to us—they are the experiential properties of mental states, events and processes. “qualia” is a superordinate term for the qualitative or phenomenological properties of subjective experience.

qualitative identity and numeric identity—two distinct objects are qualitatively identical if they are exactly similar in all respects bar spatio-temporal location. when, however, we say that clark kent and superman are identical we are asserting numeric identity. we are saying that they are one and the same man.

reductionism—the idea that certain things might be shown to be nothing but certain other sorts of things. for instance, water is nothing but h₂o molecules. we say that statements about water are reducible to statements about collections of h₂o molecules.

representation—a representation is a representation of something, it is something that possesses intentionality. concepts represent objects, properties and relations. intentional contents represent states of affairs, events and processes. concepts can refer or fail to refer. intentional contents can represent truly or falsely. in this sense representation is unlike indication—clouds indicate rain, but do not represent rain.

semantical problem—semantics is that branch of philosophy concerned with the analysis of the meanings of problematic concepts. in the philosophy of mind the semantical problems are such things as “what does it mean to say that a mental state is a conscious one? is ‘conscious’ used in the same way always (and therefore picks out a unitary phenomena), or is it used in bewilderingly differing kinds of ways (and therefore is unlikely to pick out any single property in the world)?”

subjectivity—the subjectivity of mental phenomena consists in there being a single point-of-view from which these phenomena are apprehended. (see consciousness and qualia.)

subjunctive conditional—a statement of the form “if a, then b”, where a and b are sentences whose verb is in the subjunctive mood. for example, “if i were him, then i wouldn’t have done it like that”, or “if the student grant were increased, then students would all be happier”.

substance dualism (or cartesian dualism)—the doctrine that we need to posit two distinct kinds of entities: immaterial minds (mental substances) and physical things (material substances). associated with these two domains of entities are two families of properties, one consisting of mental properties (such as having beliefs, desires, sensations), and one consisting of physical properties (such as having a certain size and shape), which characterise the entities of the two domains, minds and bodies, respectively. substance dualism therefore entails property dualism. for interactionist versions of substance dualism (the only sort we will consider) minds and material objects can nevertheless causally interact. a person is composed of two entities—a mind and a body—and a person’s behaviour is understood as the causal interaction of those two things.

synthetic statement—a statement is synthetic if its truth or falsity depends upon the way the world is. for example, “leeds is to the west of york” is a synthetic statement. even if one knew which cities the names “leeds” and “york” referred to, and understood the concept of “being to the west of” one would not know whether the statement was true or not without finding out some further fact, perhaps, for instance, by consulting a map. (see analytic statement.)

token identity theory—the theory that every mental state is identical with a physical state of some type or other. the various types of mental states need not correspond to types of physical state: tokens of the same type of mental state might be identical with tokens of distinct physical types. mental phenomena are not reducible to physical phenomena, but are not anything over-and-above physical phenomena. (see type/token distinction.)

turing machine— a turing machine is an immensely simple device (see figure below). it consists of a long tape, which passes through a reader. on the tape are printed symbols from a finite alphabet. the reader views one region at a time, and may carry out the following operations:

it may erase the symbol on the region it is viewing and replace it with another;

it may move the tape one region left or right.

a particular turing machine is fully described by specifying its machine table. such a table specifies what happens, given the machine’s current state and its input, by specifying its output and next state. an example of a machine table is given in table 1 below.

table 1: a turing machine table s1 s2 s3

x y, left, s2 halt y, right, s2





y x, left, s3 z, right, s1 z, right, s1
z x, right, s2 z, left, s1 x, left, s2

the above table specifies what the machine will do given the state that it is in (the columns of the table) and some particular symbol being read off the tape (the rows of the table). for instance, if the machine is in state s1, and reads symbol x off the tape (its input), it will write symbol y on to the tape, replacing symbol x, then move left one region (these two being its output), and go into state s2. this particular turing machine can only ever be in one of three states (s1, s2, or s3), and the symbols which may occur on its tape are x, y or z. the mathematician alan m. turing demonstrated that any function which could be mechanically carried out at all could be carried out by some turing machine. physical systems which perform some such function are said to instantiate, or realise, some turing machine. turing machines therefore provide a highly abstract, formal, characterisation of function, and this fact was exploited by hilary putnam in his early articulation of functionalism. psychological theories, he argued, should resemble turing machine tables, in being a wholly abstract characterisation of the functional roles of psychological states.

type identity theory—the theory that every mental state type is identical with a physical state type. that is, that every token of a particular type of mental state is identical with a token of a particular type of physical state.

type/token distinction—a distinction between sorts of things and individual things. consider an example. how many letters are there in the word "philosophy"? well if the question means how many token letters, then there are ten—"p", "h", "i", "l", "o", "s", "o", "p", "h", and "y". but if the question means how many letter types, then there are seven—"p"s, "h"s, "i"s, "l"s, "o"s, "s"es, and "y"s. we say that the two "p"s in "philosophy" are two tokens of the same type. notice that one thing can simultaneously be a token of more than one type: the letter "p" is a token of the type "consonant", and a token of the type "letter from the second half of the alphabet", and a token of the type "letter in the word 'philosophy'".

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