Philosophy of Mind A–Z

Marina Rakova

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND A–Z

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In memory of Galina Alexeevna Makashova,
teacher and friend

Contents

Series Editor's Preface

The philosophy of mind is one of those areas of philosophy that has a close connection with science. The precise nature of that connection is unclear, though, and we tend to think that abstract issues in philosophy are independent of scientific developments and discoveries. Yet the progress that takes place in the understanding of the nature of the mind on a scientific level clearly has an impact on the philosophical discussion, not in the sense of coming down on one rather than on another side of an argument, but because science continues to frame the arguments in different ways. The familiar problems such as how the body and the mind are connected, and what is meant by consciousness, for example, are often now articulated in terms of contemporary scientific understandings of the mind and action. The very modern issue of how far we can talk of machines thinking is a good example of how the nature of the mind and what it means to be a thinking thing resonates through the centuries to become particularly acute in an age that is familiar with artificial intelligence. Almost all the major philosophers had something, usually a great deal, to say on the philosophy of mind, and their positions have been briefly but accurately outlined in this book. Philosophy of mind has today become one of the most difficult areas of philosophy with a technical vocabulary of its own, perhaps due to its links with

the science of the mind, and Marina Rakova has done us all a service in providing a clear and comprehensive guide to the terminology.

Oliver Leaman

Introduction

In one form or another, philosophy of mind has always been a major area of philosophical inquiry, although it is only in the last century, when the so-called mind–body problem began to be tackled head on, that it achieved the spectacular prominence it continues to enjoy today. This special placement of philosophy of mind in our intellectual endeavours is not surprising: there invariably comes a point when understanding the nature of the outer reality requires turning an inquiring eye to the nature of the mind. One could argue that this trend marks all the major periods in the history of philosophy, but it will be sufficient to note how much it has resurfaced in recent years. Other disciplines within philosophy, such as epistemology, metaphysics or ethics, are becoming more and more closely concerned with mental properties, and scientific publications no longer shun the problem of consciousness or that of the evolution of mentality as of merely speculative interest.

This makes it all the more difficult to outline the exact province of the philosophy of mind and select only those entries for inclusion in a dictionary that properly belong to it. My approach was to reflect in as much detail as possible the main issues occupying today the community of mind and cognition researchers and provide the historical background essential for understanding them (like the unwaning influence of Descartes on modern thought or the present relevance of the medieval problem of universals). However, I also judged it necessary to go beyond what may be seen as properly philosophical

problem areas and include in this dictionary some crucial empirical terms and issues of which anyone interested in the philosophy of mind should be aware (such as the landmarks of vision research, scientific explanations of consciousness or discussions surrounding the neuron doctrine).

Overall, what I wanted to produce was the kind of dictionary that I would myself have enjoyed having at my side when first making inroads into the philosophy of mind. Thus I have included here some high-currency phrases which one invariably comes across in the literature but which are often left unexplained to the puzzlement of readers new to the area (for example, 'Cartesian theatre' or 'exaptation'). However, I thought it would be wrong to merely provide their definitions without placing them into the broad contexts where they make their appearance, which is why entries for such terms refer the reader for their explanation to other articles (for the examples given these are, respectively, 'self, the' and 'evolution').

I also placed special emphasis on explaining the ambiguity present in some important and frequent terms (for example, 'representationalism', 'property dualism' or even 'functionalism'). There is an opinion that such ambiguity is endemic to philosophy. Be that as it may, it is certainly baffling to someone who is new to the philosophy of mind. All such considerations added up to form the main principle behind the choice of entries for this dictionary: to help the student or any interested layperson to get a quick grasp of some unfamiliar territory and become 'unbaffled'. Finally, as regards the structuring of the entries themselves, I made a special point of not only providing their precise definitions and answering the question 'what it is' but of also answering the question 'why it matters', which is one of the first questions an inquisitive person asks when confronted with a new problem area.

I realise only too well that some readers are bound to question my choice of entries, either doubting the appropriateness of some of them in a philosophy of mind dictionary or

lamenting the absence of their favourite thinkers. Making the final decision on what potential entries can be omitted, given the space limitations, was in itself a task of soul-tearing proportions, but that decision had to be made. I have stated here some of the criteria that determined the ultimate selection of entries for this dictionary and I hope that the reader will find this volume helpful and easy to use.

Acknowledgements

Philosophy of Mind A–Z

A

Abduction: the notion introduced by **Peirce** to classify syllo-
gisms of the type: (1) As are Bs; (2) Cs are Bs; (3) therefore,
Cs are As. Although this form of reasoning is formally
fallacious, Peirce viewed it as pertaining to scientific dis-
covery. Abductive reasoning is also characteristic of our
everyday reasoning as inference to the best explanation
on the basis of limited evidence. Being non-algorithmic,
which is not easily formalisable through the application
of a set of rules, sensitive to context and one's overall
knowledge, it presents problems for the **computational
theory of mind**.

Ability Hypothesis see **Knowledge-how**

Absent *Qualia:* an argument against **functionalism** originated
by Ned Block. If there can be a system identical to humans
in functional organisation but lacking subjective experi-
ence, then the nature of *qualia* is not functional. The
China-body system ('Chinese nation', 'Chinese gym'),
where a billion people send radio commands to each other
and an artificial body realising your functional organisa-
tion, is one such example. A possible response is that

it is logically impossible for a state without **phenomenal** character to be functionally identical to a state possessing such character (they will differ with respect to phenomenal beliefs they give rise to).

Access Consciousness (a-consciousness)**:** a kind of **consciousness** distinguished by Ned Block from **phenomenal consciousness** (p-consciousness) or experience. A **representation** is a-conscious if it is available for free use in reasoning and rational control of behaviour (including verbal reports). The distinction is motivated by the need to accommodate **consciousness** within the **computational theory of mind**. Thus, a-consciousness is a functional or **information**-processing correlate of p-consciousness (which requires a biological solution). To show that they are distinct kinds Block considers cases where they come apart. P-consciousness without a-consciousness is present when, for example, involved in a conversation you keep raising your voice without realising that you do so because of some loud noise outside: you are p-conscious, but not a-conscious of the noise. And an example of a-consciousness without p-consciousness would be obtained if **blindsight** subjects could prompt themselves to identify objects presented to them. A-consciousness without p-consciousness is characteristic of **zombies,** and to avoid their possibility Block admits that a-consciousness must be parasitic on p-consciousness. Block's approach, shared by several philosophers, is called the *bifurcated view*: it considers **phenomenal** states as functional but also defends **realism** about *qualia*.

Further reading: Block (1995a)

Accidental Property (contingent property)**:** a property which an individual or kind could have failed to have without

ceasing to be what it essentially is (for example, 'being a student').

Acquaintance see **Russell, Bertrand**

Action: that which an agent does rather than a mere physical rearrangement of one's body parts. Actions are carried out with certain **intentions**, and this links the notions of action and **agency** to those of **rationality** and **intentionality**. According to the *causal theory of action*, associated with **Hume** but already found in **Aristotle**, *intentional action* needs desire to provide goals and belief as a means of potentially achieving them. However, there arises the problem of **mental causation** (*reasons and causes*): it seems that as we act for reasons, action must be explained in terms of reasons, which is not a kind of causal explanation. This approach, characteristic of Wittgensteinean theories of action such as **Anscombe**'s, was questioned by **Davidson** who argued that reasons must have physical bases, and thus be efficacious in causing action (for otherwise one should not think of them as reasons at all). But if one holds that an action must be explained in terms of its immediate cause, one may miss important generalisations. This is the idea of *basic action*: although one phones one's parents by dialling their number and does that by hitting buttons on the telephone and so on, all the subsequent descriptions seem inadequate to explain one's action (the problem of action **individuation**). A similar point was made by Christopher Peacocke and Timothy Williamson against those versions of **internalism** which view actions as bodily movements caused by internal states individuated without reference to the agent's environment. **Intentional states** guiding even such simple actions as crossing a road cannot be factorised into internal

and external components because many actions involve deliberation (are not instantaneous) and require constant feedback from the environment. The notion of action was also recently employed to question the classical notion of mental **representation** (see **embedded cognition**).

Further reading: Davidson (1980); Mele (1997)

Adaptation: a characteristic of an organism which arose through **evolution** by natural selection.

Adaptationism (Neo-Darwinism)**:** the view that natural selection is the main driving force of **evolution**. However, the term is often reserved for the controversial view that most characteristics of organisms are **adaptations** that enhance organisms' survival and can be explained in terms of genes' tendency to proliferation. For this reason, adaptationist explanations are sometimes pejoratively labelled 'just so stories' and 'the Panglossian paradigm', evoking, respectively, Rudyard Kipling's children's stories and Voltaire's Dr Pangloss (*Candide*) who believed that ours is the best of all possible worlds. Adaptationism is particularly controversial as an explanation of the evolution of human **cognition** in that it commits the **teleological** fallacy of holding that every psychological feature is an optimal solution to some design problem posed by an organism's environment, and tends to assume step-by-step continuity between features of increasing complexity (**evolutionary psychology**). The **teleological theory of content** explores the role of natural selection in establishing representational **content** of **intentional states** (beliefs, desires). **Dennett,** who holds that the **intentional stance** applies to organisms only when they reach a certain level of complexity, argues that all intentionality can be derived from the intentionality of natural selection (the notion of 'selection for'). But this view is problematic because it

imbues natural selection with sensitivity to **intensional** distinctions and the capacity to be directed toward non-existent entities, which cannot be properties of natural selection understood as a purely physical phenomenon.

Further reading: Dennett (1995)

Adverbialism: a theory of **perception** (primarily **vision**) which appeared in the mid-1940s as a reaction against the **sense-datum theory**. It holds that there are only modifications of our experience which, to avoid the error of **reification** (positing **sense-data**), should be described with the help of adverbial modifiers, saying, for example, that one is appeared to green-squarely instead of saying that one sees a green square. However, such descriptions are problematic for more complex visual scenes, and the nature of modified states cannot be understood without reference to objects of experience. Today, adverbialism is popular among proponents of subjectivism about **colour** because it allows one to say that mental colours are identical with or supervenient on neural states while avoiding commitment to **mental objects**. Adverbial analyses are also applied to **propositional attitudes** to avoid commitment to propositions as peculiar objects in one's **ontology**.

Further reading: Chisholm (1957); Tye (1989)

Affordance see **Direct Perception**

Agency: being in control of or responsible for one's **actions**.

Analytic Functionalism (conceptual, common-sense, causal role functionalism)**:** the variety of **functionalism** which stems from **Lewis**'s analysis of psychological terms. Unlike **machine functionalism**, analytic functionalism supports *type* **physicalism** holding that a **mental state** can be analysed into a *role state* (its role in the explanation of

behaviour) and a *realiser state* (the underlying physical state which accounts for its causal properties). Analytic functionalists also accept Lewis's approach to mental **representation** inspired by Ramsey's view of beliefs as 'maps by which we steer'. It opposes the **language of thought** hypothesis by holding that mental representation is like representation in geographical maps: structured, systematic, containing a finite amount of **information**, but continuous. This follows from the **holism** of the mental: because beliefs and desires are attributed to subjects *en masse* on the basis of their behavioural **dispositions** and considerations of **rationality**, the whole system of beliefs is the fundamental unit of **content**, and the content of individual beliefs can be stated only approximately. However, it is not clear whether representation in maps is non-discrete and whether the approach can meet the **compositionality** constraint. Besides, it needs to address the problems of content holism, **indeterminacy** and belief under **entailment**.

Further reading: Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson (1996)

Ancient Philosophy (approximately 600 BC – AD 400)**:** emerging as an inquiry about the natural world, pre-Socratic philosophy tied the question of what distinguishes appearance from reality (**ontology**) to that of the nature of **knowledge**. Thus Parmenides of Elea (*c*.510–451 BC) held that true Being is unchanging and can be grasped only by reason, concluding that sensible appearances do not exist. In Athens, Anaxagoras (*c*.500–428 BC) resolved Parmenides' puzzle about the impossibility of change by viewing matter as a flow of qualities rather than some extended stuff supporting them and originated the conception of cosmic *Nous* (reason, intellect) which sets matter in motion and of which humans have the largest share (arguably the first version of **dualism**). Democritus of Abdera (*c*.460–370 BC) first raised the question about the

relationship between sense-**perception** and reason, concluding that only reason can deliver knowledge of the essence of reality. He was also the first defender of **materialism**, holding that, like everything else, human *psyche* is made of atom combinations (*psyche*, translated as 'soul', did not mean 'the conscious **self**' but rather 'life-principle', necessary but not sufficient for **consciousness** and thought). **Plato** and **Aristotle** then defined the subsequent development of much Western philosophy. Of interest are also the three schools that appeared after Aristotle's death: Stoicism with its theory of *phantasia kataleptike* (apprehensive perception delivering knowledge of reality) and the first **cognitive** theory of **emotions** (Chrysippus, *c*.280–207 BC), Epicureanism with its combination of atomism and subjectivism about secondary qualities like **colour**, and **Scepticism**.

Further reading: Annas (1992)

Animal Cognition: the way non-human animals process **information** about their natural environments studied by **cognitive ethology**. Interest in animal **cognition** has always been marked by the dichotomy of continuity and discontinuity in cognitive capacities of human and non-human animals and the search for distinguishing human characteristics (such as possession of reason according to **Aristotle** or **Kant**). Many recent discussions were marked by differing stands on the **Cartesian** view of animals as automata to whom the ascription of **minds** or **consciousness** is unnecessary. Because animals exhibit no flexibility in response to novel situations, voluntary **action** or creative use of language, **Descartes** thought that their behaviour can be given a purely mechanistic explanation. This view is especially pronounced in a common equation of **thought** with **language** possession which provoked many investigations aiming to prove that linguistic capacities of non-human animals are continuous with those of

humans. Such studies often explicitly opposed **Chomsky**'s views on the uniqueness of the human faculty of language (FL), but more recently, in collaboration with cognitive ethologists, Chomsky proposed that FL characterised by **recursive** syntax has a predecessor in 'the faculty of language in the broad sense' which includes a conceptual-intentional system and the computational mechanisms of recursion evolved for dealing with navigation and social relations. Recognising our continuity with non-human animals provides new perspectives on the problems of **representation** (their capacity to correct perceptual errors), orders of **intentionality** (**theory of mind**), **phenomenal consciousness** in its relation with intentionality (thus multimodal integration is present in mammals but is absent in the reptilian line) and **self-consciousness**.

Further reading: Savage-Rumbaugh et al. (1998); Hauser et al. (2002)

Animalism see **Personal identity**

Anomalous Monism: the position advocated by **Davidson** that although all events are physical events (hence **monism**), **mental properties** cannot be identified with physical properties. To allow for **mental causation** Davidson accepts the identity of **mental events** with physical events (causal relations exist only between events that enter into **causal laws**) and the dependence (**supervenience**) of the mental on the physical. However, he holds that there are no strict laws to connect mental and physical events. The ascription of **mental states** to a person is **holistic** (a whole bunch of mental states must be ascribed to someone in order to explain a piece of their behaviour) and guided by considerations of **normativity** and **rationality**. And although an event may have a physical and a mental description, because of the radically different natures of our mental and physical predicates (holistic versus

discrete) it is a priori impossible to formulate laws connecting them. **Mental concepts** are 'unsuited' to laws, and only ontological but not conceptual **reduction** is possible. Davidson was charged with **epiphenomenalism** because having a mental description does not seem to affect the causal powers of an event. His reply was that for causal powers, unlike for laws, the nature of descriptions is irrelevant, but it remains unclear whether this explains the causal efficacy of the mental qua mental.

Further reading: Davidson (1970)

Anscombe, G. Elizabeth M. (1919–2001): British philosopher, an authority on **Wittgenstein**. Anscombe anticipated many current ideas about **action, intentionality** and **perception**. She also criticised the **Cartesian** way of thinking about the first-person pronoun as referring to the immutable **self**.

Further reading: Anscombe (1957)

Apperception see **Self-consciousness**

Aquinas, St Thomas (1225–74)**:** Dominican theologian and philosopher. Aquinas sought to reconcile faith and reason through **Aristotle**'s solution to the problem of **universals**. From him **Brentano** got the notion of **intentionality** as 'in-existence': a cloud you saw a few minutes ago may not exist any more, but you can have it in your **mind** because you have the **concept** (*intentio*) of cloud. Aquinas also developed Aristotle's views on the soul, holding that being a **person** requires the unity of the soul with the body, because otherwise the images on which personal **memory** depends would be lost. He defended genuine human **agency** against Augustinianism and **occasionalism,** and denied **privileged access** holding that **knowledge** of our own **mental states** is the result of abstraction.

Further reading: Aquinas (2001)

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