

Reading Guide #4 - Philosophy of Mind

These questions are provided to assist you in your reading. I encourage you first to read the material through, then go back to answer the questions. You are not expected to hand in written answers. You are expected to have responses ready for class discussion. References are to pages in Steven M. Cahn, ed., *Philosophy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," pp 432-38.

1. What is imagination? What is the difference between the imagination and pure understanding? (Consider the difference between the triangle and the chiliagon.)
2. Why is imagination not essential to our selves? How does the imagination work? (Consider the metaphors of turning toward the self and the body.)
3. "I do not yet see how the distinct idea of corporeal nature which I find in my imagination can provide any basis for a necessary inference that some body exists" (433). Explain.
4. What reasons did Descartes have for believing there were physical objects? Why does he say the ideas of objects did not seem to come from himself?
5. "Since the sole source of my knowledge of these things was the ideas themselves, the supposition that the things resembled the ideas was bound to occur to me" (433). Explain.
6. Why might one think that everything in the intellect must first come through the senses?
7. For what three reasons do our bodies seem closer than other physical objects to us?
8. "For there is absolutely no connection...between the tugging sensation and the decision to take food... (p 434)" Explain.
9. What three considerations undermined Descartes' confidence in the beliefs based on his senses? Why does Descartes now relax those doubts?
10. "The fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct..." (434). Explain. What does this mean about the relationship between the mind and the body?
11. How does Descartes argue that extension and motion, in contrast to understanding and sensation, are properties of bodies, rather than minds?
12. How does Descartes argue that the world is not Berkeleyan?
13. Why is the relationship between our selves and our bodies not like that between a sailor and his ship?
14. How is the sensation of pain a confused mode of thinking?
15. What can we tell about bodies from our different sensations? What can we not conclude about them?
16. How are the senses fallible? Why is their fallibility a problem for Descartes?
17. How does the divisibility of the body show it to be distinct from the mind?
18. How does Descartes account for the body's ability to provide misleading sensations to the mind?
19. How does Descartes argue that misleading sensations show no defect in God?
20. How does Descartes argue that we can distinguish dreams from waking experience?

B. F. Skinner, "The Causes of Behavior," pp 438-43.

1. What roles do our feelings tend to play in explanations of behavior?
  2. How is the connection between the non-physical mind and body a metaphysical problem? How is it a practical problem?
  3. How can we avoid references to feelings in explanations of behavior?
  4. What is epiphenomenalism? How does epiphenomenalism accommodate mental states?
  5. What is psychophysical parallelism? How does parallelism accommodate mental states?
  6. What is the difference between methodological behaviorism and radical behaviorism?
  7. How does the radical behaviorist assess claims about mental states, like, "I am hungry"?
  8. For which sensations might it be plausible that we have inner copies? For which sensations is it less plausible?
  9. What problem (Theophrastus's problem) arises from the notion of an inner copy?
  10. How, according to Skinner, should we understand the mental state of thinking about Venice? How does Skinner's interpretation differ from the traditional interpretation?
  11. "Dreaming is perceptual behavior..." (442). Explain.
  12. Why does seeing not require a thing seen? How does Skinner's assertion support his behaviorism?
- 

J. J. C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes," pp 443-50.

1. What is the Wittgensteinian interpretation of pain, or color perceptions?
2. What is the interpretation of pain, or color perceptions, that Smart wishes to resist? What is the role of parsimony in his defense?
3. Describe the physicalistic picture of the world. How is consciousness often seen as an exception?
4. What is a nomological dangler? How would sensations be nomological danglers?
5. Why does Smart call the Wittgensteinian account "expressive"? What problem does he find with the expressive account?
6. How does Smart think we should understand sensations?
7. Is Smart's claim linguistic? Is it logical? Explain.
8. How does Smart's claim invoke strict identity?
9. Describe the illiterate-peasant objection. How does Smart reply? Consider the lightning example.
10. Why can't a report of a sensation mean that the brain is in a particular state? Why does the difference in meaning not entail that the sensation is not a brain state?
11. What is the difference between mental processes and mental properties? How might the distinction support an objection to the identity theory?
12. How does the topic neutrality of mental state reports allow the identity theorist to accommodate mental state properties?
13. How does the distinction between an after-image and an experience of an after-image help avoid two objections?
14. "The ordinary man when he reports an experience is reporting that something is going on, but he leaves it open as to what sort of thing is going on..." (448). Explain.
15. Would the infallibility of introspection support an objection to the identity theory?
16. Can I imagine having mental states without a brain? Explain the objection implicit in this question.
17. How does Smart argue, against the Wittgensteinian, that descriptions of mental experiences are real reports?
18. In what sense is the identity thesis a scientific hypothesis? Why can we not decide between materialism and epiphenomenalism on an experimental basis?
19. What is the Gosse hypothesis? Why should scientists reject it?
20. Why should scientists favor the identity theory even if dualism accounts for our mental lives just as well as materialism?

Jerry A. Fodor, "The Mind-Body Problem," pp 451-9.

1. How are behaviorism and identity theory similar approaches to understanding psychology? How do they differ?
2. How does functionalism provide an abstract account of cognitive states?
3. How does dualism fail to account for mental causation?
4. What does radical behaviorism say about mental causation? How has radical behaviorism proved to be sterile?
5. How did logical behaviorism (not radical behaviorism) solve the problem of mental causation? Why did it have a problem explaining event-event causation?
6. How does identity theory account for mental causation?
7. Distinguish token physicalism from type physicalism.
8. Why is type physicalism implausible?
9. What is a relational interpretation of mental properties? How does the behaviorist provide a relational interpretation of mental properties?
10. How does the functionalist define particular mental states?
11. What is a reductionist theory of the mind? Is functionalism reductionist?
12. Is functionalism compatible with token physicalism? Is it compatible with type physicalism? Explain.
13. Distinguish the mentalistic Coke machine from the behaviorist Coke machine. How do the examples illustrate functionalism's acceptance of mentalistic descriptions?
14. Why might the functionalist have trouble characterizing the mental?
15. Distinguish qualitative content from intentional content.
16. How does functionalism have a problem with qualitative content? Consider the inverted spectrum.
17. How does intentional content involve semantic properties? How do symbols have semantic properties?
18. How are the semantic properties of mental states related to the semantic properties of language, according to the functionalist?
19. Why does the computational model of the mind entail a representational account?
20. Describe the five points of Hume's representational theory of mind.
21. What problem arises for the resemblance theory?
22. How are the representational theory and functionalism related?
23. How does the functionalist define intentional states according to their causal roles?

Alan Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," pp 460-75.

Note: Because of advances in computing in over fifty years since Turing wrote his article, some of his discussion of computers is obscure or needlessly pedantic.

1. Describe the game that Turing proposes (the Turing test) to consider the question of whether machines think?  
What kinds of machines does Turing consider, to answer the question?
  2. What is a human computer? How does a human computer decide how to act?
  3. What is a machine table? What are discrete state machines? Given a discrete state machine and a machine table, what can we predict?
  4. Why are digital computers (Turing machines) universal machines?
  5. How does Turing respond to the theological objection to the possibility of thinking machines?
  6. Describe the result that forms the foundation of the mathematical objection. How does Turing argue that the mathematical result does not show that machines can not think?
  7. How is the argument from consciousness a denial of the validity of the Turing test? How may the argument from consciousness be solipsistic?
  8. How are many of the criticisms of the hypothesis that machines can think founded on false inductions?
  9. Describe the Lady Lovelace objection. How does Turing respond?
  10. For Turing, why is the difference between a continuous nervous system and a discrete-state computer not relevant to the question of whether machines can think?
  11. Is the informality of human behavior evidence that we do not behave in lawlike fashion?
  12. Why does Turing suggest attempting to program an imitation of a child's mind, instead of an adult's mind?  
How would he generate a machine to imitate an adult's mind?
- 

John Searle, "Can Computers Think?" pp 475-81.

1. What is strong AI? How does it contrast with Searle's commonsense characterization of mental processes?
2. How does strong AI deny that human biology is important to intelligence?
3. How are the rules for a computer formal and syntactic?
4. "The mind has more than a syntax, it has a semantics" (477). Explain.
5. How does the Chinese room experiment show that computers do not have mental states?
6. Does the whole system of the Chinese room have mental states? Explain.
7. How does Searle argue that a robot can not have mental states?
8. How can we understand the claims that machines think, and that we could, in principle, make a machine that thinks so that they are true? Why are they trivially true?
9. Does Searle's claim depend on the state of computer technology? Assess Searle's response.
10. How does strong AI confuse a simulation with the real thing?
11. How does the Chinese room defeat behaviorism?
12. How do proponents of dualism express a residual dualism?
13. Describe Searle's argument that computers can not have mental states.
14. What can we infer from the fact that computers can not have mental states and that brains cause minds?  
What does this conclusion (Conclusion 2) say about functionalism?
15. Does Searle's argument rule out alien minds?
16. What conditions would an artefact have to meet in order to be considered a mind?