

Reading Guide #4 - The Nature of Mind

Rene Descartes, "On the Nature of Mind"

Second Meditation

1. Why is Descartes engaged in systematic doubt? What is his goal?
2. What is the first thing that Descartes claims he can not doubt? Why can't he doubt it?
3. How does Descartes proceed to determine what is essential to himself?
4. What were Descartes's previous thoughts about bodies and souls? Which did he think he knew better?
5. Does Descartes's argument that he exists prove the existence of his body? Explain.
6. Why can't the soul be a wind, or fire, which permeates our bodies?
7. What is imagining? Why is it irrelevant to our knowledge of ourselves?
8. According to Descartes, what is the self? Describe the self and its faculties, especially sensing.
9. What is the difference between seeming to sense and sensing?
10. Why can't we learn about the wax on the basis of its sensory features? How do we learn about it?
11. How does any knowledge of physical objects reinforce our knowledge of ourselves?

Sixth Meditation

12. What is the difference between the imagination and pure understanding? (Consider the difference between the triangle and the chiliagon.)
 13. What reasons did Descartes have for believing there were physical objects? Why does he say they did not seem to come from himself?
 14. Why might one think that everything in the intellect must first come through the senses?
 15. What three considerations undermined Descartes's confidence in the beliefs based on his senses?
 16. "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..." (AT 78). Explain. What does this mean about the relationship between the mind and the body?
 17. Distinguish our ability to exist without our bodies from our ability to exist without our imagination.
 18. Why is the relationship between our selves and our bodies not like that between a sailor and his ship?
 19. How is the sensation of pain a confused mode of thinking?
 20. What can we tell about bodies from our different sensations? What can we not conclude about them?
 21. How does the example of the star support Descartes's argument that true knowledge of external things belongs to the mind alone, and not to the composite of mind and body? What does this argument say about the information we get from our senses?
 22. How does the divisibility of the body show it to be distinct from the mind?
 23. How does Descartes account for the body's ability to provide misleading sensations to the mind?
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Arnauld and Descartes on the Mind, from *Objections and Replies*

24. How does Arnauld's triangle example undermine Descartes's argument that the mind is distinct from the body?
25. How does the difference between an object and a property help Descartes respond to Arnauld's triangle objection?
26. Does Descartes agree that we can clearly understand a right-angled triangle without understanding that the Pythagorean property holds of the triangle? Explain.
27. How does the fact that some relationship must hold among the lengths of the side of a triangle serve as a response to Arnauld?

B.F. Skinner, from *Science and Human Behavior*

28. How do people using ordinary language refer erroneously to inner explanations of behavior? How do physiological psychologists make similar errors?
 29. Why are neurological explanations of behavior unlikely to be useful?
 30. How do Freudian explanations of behavior refer erroneously to an inner man?
 31. "Any mental event which is unconscious is necessarily inferential and the explanation is therefore not based upon independent observations of a valid cause" (161). Explain.
 32. Why are explanations which refer to minds and ideas spurious? What additional reason does Skinner provide for rejecting them?
 33. Why is, "He eats because he is hungry," a redundant description?
 34. What kinds of variables are legitimate to consider in describing and predicting behavior?
 35. Why do descriptions of inner states fail to serve as explanations?
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Carl Hempel, "The Logical Analysis of Psychology"

36. What were the tools used by philosophers in the Vienna Circle (logical positivists)?
 37. How are psychology and physics supposed to differ?
 38. How does the behaviorist attempt to link psychology and physics?
 39. Why does Hempel consider the relation between physical statements and psychological statements?
 40. Why do we translate technical terms, like 'temperature', into longer statements? What do these longer statements look like?
 41. According to Hempel, how can we determine the meaning of a psychological sentence, like, 'Paul has a toothache'?
 42. Why does Hempel call psychology physicalistic?
 43. How does Hempel respond to the criticism that behavioral manifestations of mental processes are merely symptoms?
 44. Why does Hempel call the claim that a person could lack a mental state but pretend to have it a contradiction?
 45. Explain Hempel's analogy between a watch's running and psychological states. How does the analogy show the mind-body problem to be a pseudo-problem?
 46. How does Hempel's logical behaviorism differ from psychological behaviorism?
 47. What is the thesis of the unity of science? What differences among the science are there?
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Armstrong, "The Nature of Mind"

48. How do molecular biology and neurophysiology change the prospects for a complete definition of mind?
49. What is scientism? How does Armstrong defend scientism? Consider the Harvey case.
50. How is behaviorism a materialist theory of mind?
51. How does Armstrong criticize the crude version of behaviorism?
52. How does appeal to dispositions help the behaviorist account for internal states? Does it solve the problem?
53. Is the view of mental states as logically tied to behavior compatible with a physicalist view of mind? Explain.
54. Describe the two lines of thought that Armstrong describes as pushing him to the claim that mental states are states of a person apt for producing behavior.

55. Distinguish an other-person account of mind from a first-person account. Why might the physicalist theory be better for the former than for the latter? Consider the absent-minded driving case.
 56. How is perception like acquiring a key to a door?
 57. How is consciousness perception of our own mind?
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Fodor, "The Mind-Body Problem"

58. What is the chief drawback of dualism?
 59. What is the strongest argument against radical behaviorism?
 60. How are the answers to the previous two questions similar?
 61. How does logical behaviorism improve on radical behaviorism? Why is logical behaviorism unsatisfactory?
 62. What is identity theory? What is its chief advantage?
 63. Distinguish token physicalism from type physicalism. Why is type physicalism implausible?
 64. Why does Fodor favor an abstract relational account of mental properties?
 65. Why are mental states identified by their causal roles? How does functionalism employ causal roles in defining mental states?
 66. Is functionalism compatible with physicalism? Explain.
 67. How does functionalism capture the best features of materialism?
 68. Describe the coke-machine analogy for functionalism.
 69. What is the qualitative content of mental states? How is it a problem for functionalism? Consider the inverted-spectrum case.
 70. What is intentional content? How do functionalist theories of mind treat intentional content? Consider, "There is no computation without representation" (458a).
 71. What are the three types of causal relations among mental states? How does the functionalist accommodate them?
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Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"

72. What is a qualia freak? How do qualia freaks argue against physicalism?
73. What does Fred know that we don't know? How does this show physicalism to be false?
74. What does Mary know about color when she is locked in her black and white room? What does she learn when she leaves?
75. What is the modal argument against physicalism? How is it disputed?
76. What two omissions of physicalism does the "what is it like to be" argument show? Why is Jackson concerned with only the first?
77. Describe Jackson's epiphenomenalism, and how it differs from other, perhaps traditional, versions of epiphenomenalism.
78. How do considerations of common causes undermine the claim that pains (and other mental states) are causally efficacious (the Hume argument)?
79. What is the Darwinian defense of the causal efficacy of qualia? How does Jackson argue that the argument fails?
80. What is the argument from other minds for the causal efficacy of qualia? Why does this argument fail?
81. How do the epiphenomenalist's qualia soothe the intuitions of dualists? Why do scientists abhor them?
82. Will evolution explain everything about human beings? Explain.