

# The Nature of Mind

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- The best clue we have to the nature of mind is through modern science.
- **Why?** Because “it is only as a result of scientific investigation that we ever seem to reach an intellectual consensus about controversial matters” (295).
- Modern science says that “we can give a complete account of man in purely physico-chemical terms” (295).
- Called **materialism, physicalism** or **identity theory**; the identity theory claims that sensations and other mental states are brain processes  
→ However, while we can know about our mental states this does not mean that we know about our brain states (Marcus).

## ● **Behaviorism**

- Considered a Materialistic view. If mental processes are connected to their outward expressions, then humans are simply physico-chemical mechanisms.
- The mind is not an “inner arena” of *spiritual substance* as Descartes claimed, but rather an “outward act” (297).
- A **problem with Behaviorism** is that there can be mental processes going on even if no behavior is shown. (People may think, but not say or do.)

# Solution?

## Dispositions



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- Armstrong defines the notion of “a disposition to behave” as a tendency of a person to behave in a certain way under certain circumstances (297).
- Provides example: Glass does not shatter, but it is still brittle.
- Gilbert Ryle: Although a person does not show behavior, he or she still had a disposition to behave.
- “He thinks although he does not speak or act because at that time he was disposed to speak or act in a certain way” (297).
- Relies on situational factors and **temporary** dispositions.

## Still problems...

- Ryle's account of behaviorism denies that there is something going on in a person to constitute thought.
- Therefore, it is an unsatisfactory account of the nature of the mind.
- However, not all parts are wrong:  
  
“Behaviorists are wrong in identifying...mental occurrences with behavior, but perhaps they are right in thinking that our notion of a mind... is logically tied to behavior” (298).
- Mind not behavior, but the inner cause of behavior.

- This line of thought of mental states being logically tied to behavior is compatible with a physicalist view of mind:

Mental states are nothing but the cause of behavior and, therefore, we can identify them with **physical states** of the **central nervous system**.



# Mental States as Logically Tied to Behavior

- A mental state = a state of a person apt for producing certain ranges of behavior (299).

## Two lines of thought:

-The **mind brings about our behavior**, it is not behavior itself.

-The Behaviorist's **dispositions** are states that underlie and **bring about behavior**.

- However, this view shares a weakness with Behaviorism.

# Problems with this account of the mind...

- Behaviorism may be a satisfactory account of the mind from an other-person point of view, but **not as a first-person account.**
- If we are only considering other people, Behaviorism works as we are able to observe others' behaviors. Physicalist's view: the mind is the central nervous system of the body observed.
- In our own case, we are aware of more than just our behavior.
- Consciousness: simply something going on within us apt for causing certain sorts of behavior?  
**No, therefore account of the mind fails to do justice to the first-person case.**

## ◆◆◆ Absent-minded driving case

- Armstrong tries to “provide an account of the missing elements of the materialist’s theory.” He says that “the missing elements of the materialist’s theory are just like the experiences we neglect when not paying attention to walking or driving” (Marcus).
- Driving without being aware of what one is doing.
  - ⇒ Something mental is lacking.
- “It is conceded that an account of mental processes as states of the person apt for the production of certain sorts of behavior may very possibly be adequate to deal with such cases as that of automatic driving....But...it cannot deal with the consciousness that we normally enjoy” (300).

# Perceptions

- Perceptions are inner states defined by the behavior they enable the perceiver to show, if impelled (301).
- To perceive is like acquiring a key to a door:  
You do not need to use the key, but if you want to open the door, then the key may be necessary.

# How is perception related to consciousness of experience?

- Consciousness is perception or awareness of the state of our own mind.
- The absent-minded driver perceives the road, but is not conscious of his experience (he is not conscious of his awareness of the road).
- He is not conscious of what is going on in his mind.

## **In conclusion...**

- Armstrong argues that consciousness of our own mental state is perception of our own mental state.
- It is, therefore, an inner state giving a capacity for selective behavior towards our own mental state.
- Consciousness of our own mental state is the scanning of one part of our central nervous system by another.  
→ Physicalist theory of mind is possible!

# References

- Armstrong, David M. *The Nature of Mind*.
- Marcus, Russell. Lecture Notes: Materialism. Hamilton College. 8 April 2011.