

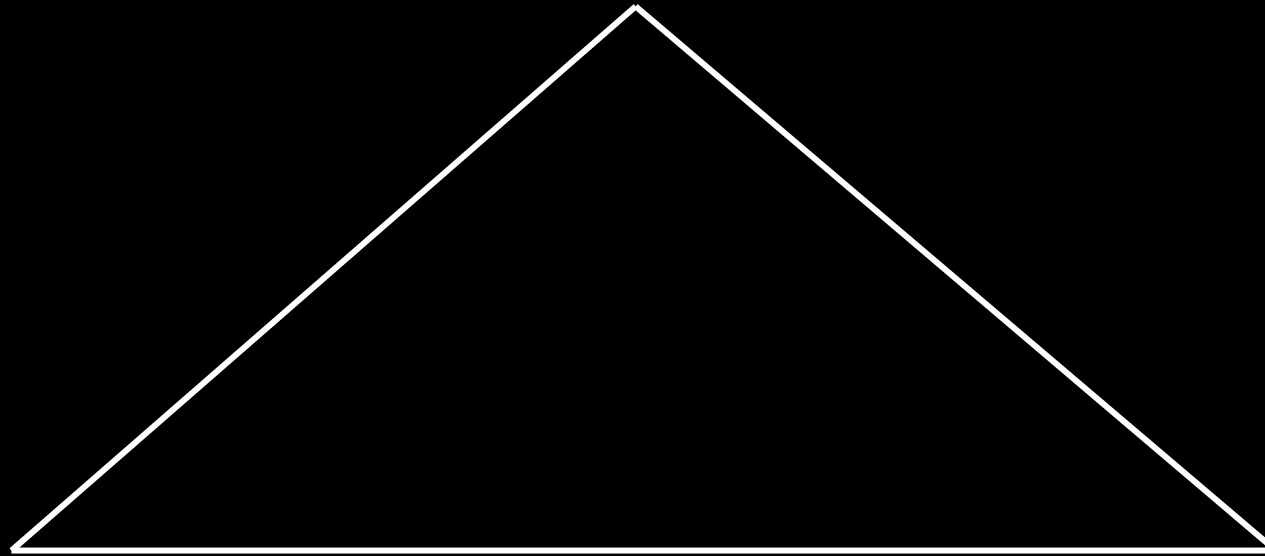
Philosophy of mind — what
is it?

A triangle

Philosophy of mind (late 19th cent.)
(Philosophy 4th century BC)

Naïve psychology
(born 100.000 years ago)

Cognitive science
(born 1950's AC)



Philosophy of mind, common sense and cognitive science

- The very idea that the philosophy of mind inherits its characteristic questions from naïve psychology derives from the cognitive scientific investigation of naïve psychology as one of the fundamental human cognitive capacities;
- Cognitive science was born in the mid 1950's;
- Arguably, philosophy goes back to 4th century BC (Plato-Aristotle) and the philosophy of mind to Brentano (1874).
- Arguably, human naïve psychology is intrinsic to human cognition (like naïve physics and the language faculty); it's not a cultural construction, but a precondition of human culture. If so, then it predates the invention of agriculture and a fortiori the beginnings of the philosophy of mind!

Why am I here?

- Suppose you ask me: Why did you walk so early in the streets this morning?
- Answer:
 - - because when I woke up up earlier today, I was in my aptmt and I *knew* it;
 - - I *wanted* or *intended* to be at ENS at 9:00 AM;
 - - I *thought* or *believed* that the best way to do this was to walk in the streets early in the morning.

Things taken for granted

- I have beliefs, desires and intentions;
- My beliefs, desires and intentions can make me do certain things, for example, they can make me move all the way from my place to 45, rue d'Ulm.
- By uttering French! sentences, I can express the contents of my relevant beliefs, desires and intentions.
- By listening to me while I speak, you can understand and form beliefs about the contents of my utterances and you can thereby form beliefs about the contents of my expressed beliefs, desires and intentions.
- *In short, we take it for granted that you and I have minds!*

Typical questions in phil of mind

- What *are* minds? What is the *nature* of minds? What is it to *think*? What are thoughts? What is it like to be conscious? What are the relations between an individual's thought, her mind, her body, her brain, her non-social environment and her social environment? Which creatures think? Which creatures are conscious? Do non-human animals think? Do monkeys, dogs, dolphins, eagles, bees, spiders and butterflies think? Does a 10-week human fetus think and have a mind? If they do, what do they think? How can we know about it? Is the ability to speak a language a necessary condition for thinking or having a mind? Are non-linguistic creatures conscious?

Typical questions cont.

- What creatures have an inner life, a subjective perspective or a standpoint on the world? Do plants think? Is a creature unable to move (or deprived of a motor system) conscious? Can a machine think? Which conditions must a machine satisfy to be able to think? Can a computer think? Can a creature deprived of sense organs think? Can a creature deprived of a memory system think? Do current robots think? Will tomorrow's robots think? How do I know that I think and that I am conscious? How do I know that you are conscious? How can I know what you think? Can a man know what a woman's experience is like? Can a woman know what a man's experience is like?

First distinction: ontological vs. epistemological questions

- Some questions (e.g. ‘What *are* minds?’, ‘What *is* a thought?’, ‘*Are there* non-human minds?’, ‘If so, which ones?’, ‘What *are* the relations between an individual’s mind and her environment?’) are *ontological* questions, i.e. questions about what kinds of mental or psychological things, entities, objects, individuals, properties, states of affairs *exist*.
- Other questions (e.g. ‘How can I *know* what I think?’, ‘How can I *know* what you think?’, ‘Can a man *know* what it is like to be woman?’, ‘Can a woman *know* what it is like to be a man?’) are *epistemological* questions, i.e. questions about what and how one can *know* about one’s own or another’s mind.

A couple of paradigmatic questions

- I. Two paradigmatic ontological questions
 - 1. The *mind-body* problem: what is the relation between an individual's mind and his/her brain and body? (Identity?)
 - 2. The *mind-world* problem: is the content of an individual's psychological states completely independent from his/her environment? (Internalism vs. externalism)
- II. Two paradigmatic epistemological questions
 - 1. The problem of *other minds*: how can I know that others have a mind?
 - 2. The problem of *introspection*: how can I know the content of my own mind?

Second distinction: scientific vs. normative questions

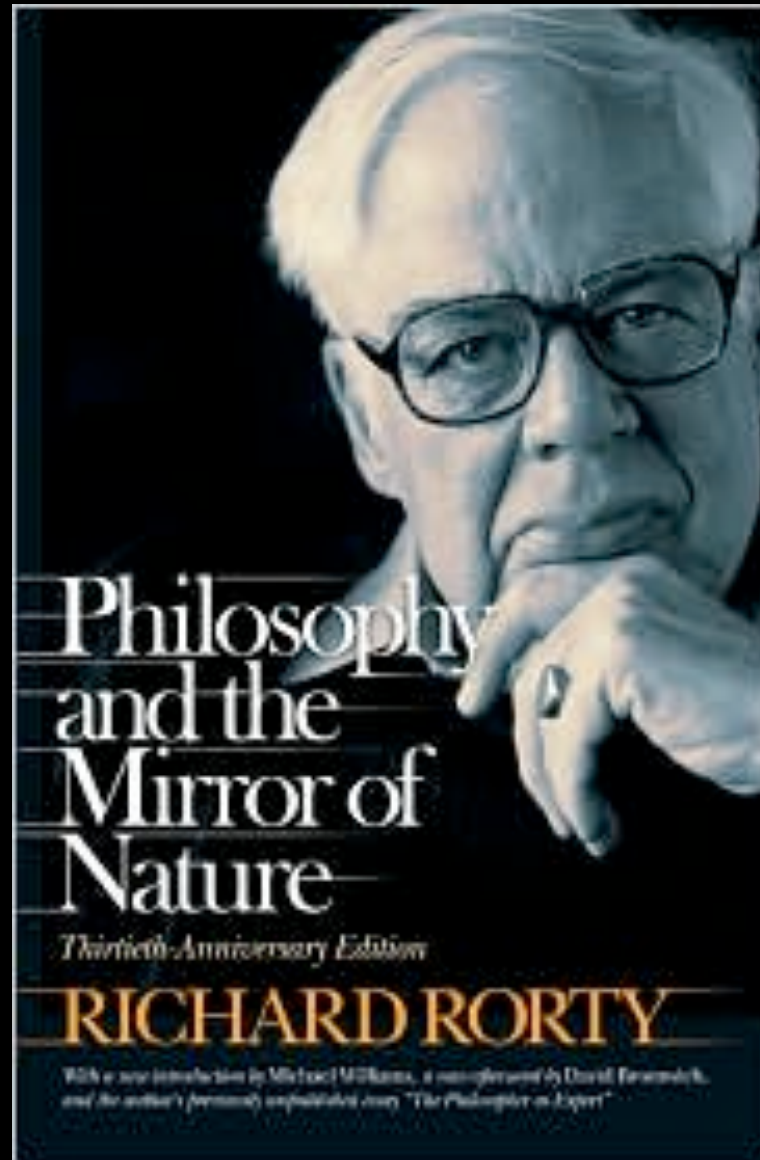
- 1. Scientific questions
- Science has discovered the hidden (or deep) nature of such phenomena as electricity, magnetism, heredity. Can science aspire to discovering the deep nature of minds or mental phenomena? Does it make sense?
- 2. Normative questions
- As the intensity of the abortion debate testifies, it makes a difference about how we morally consider a creature whether we think that it has a mind — whether it *minds*, is minded or mindful.
- Both kinds of question seem to presuppose that mental phenomena have some common underlying nature!

Normative questions continued

- As abortion disputes show, X's having *moral rights* depends on whether it *minds*, i.e. whether it is conscious, there is something it is like for it to suffer or enjoy its experience of the world;
- *We don't merely mind, we also care (for ourselves and others)*: we are not merely conscious; we also believe that we are conscious, i.e. we are aware of being conscious;
- If creatures who *mind* (are conscious) have moral rights, then arguably creatures who are aware of being conscious not only have moral rights, but they have also *moral obligations*;
- They have moral obligations towards both other creatures who mind and who care.

R. Rorty's challenge

- « We are not entitled to begin talking about the mind-body problem, or about the possible identity or necessary non-identity of mental and physical states, without first asking what we mean by “mental.” [...] Our so-called intuition about what is mental may be merely our readiness to fall in with a specifically philosophical language-game [...] This so-called intuition is no more than the ability to command a certain technical vocabulary — one which has no use in daily life, empirical science, morals, or religion [...] The attempt to hitch pains and beliefs together seems ad hoc — they don't seem to have anything in common except our refusal to call them “physical” » (R. Rorty, 1979, p. 22)



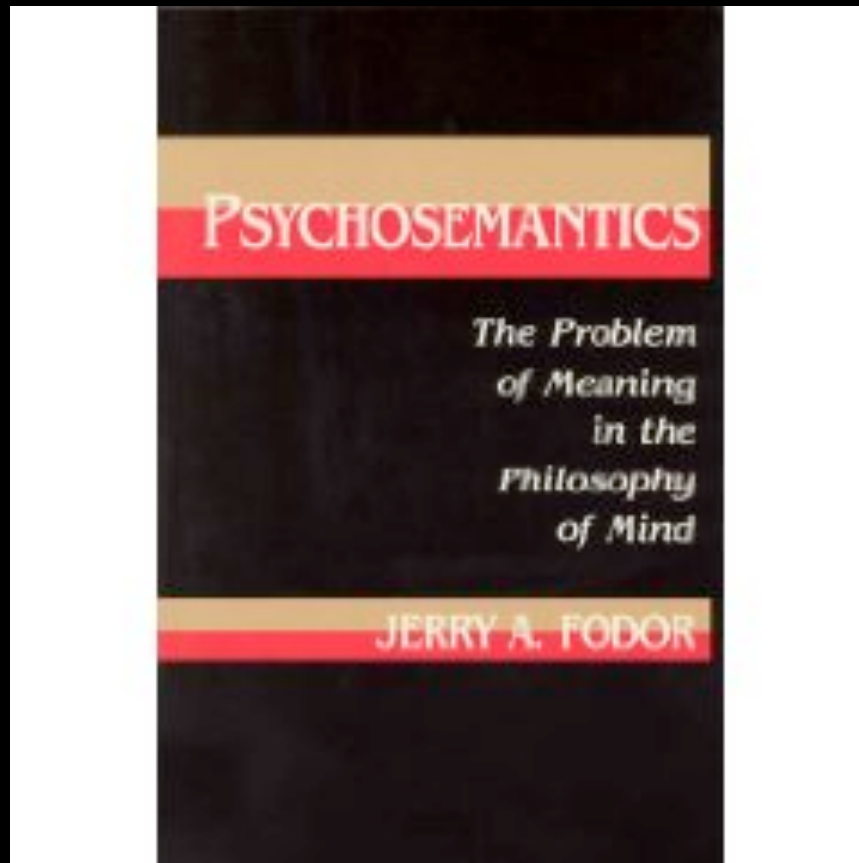
1931-2007

Rorty's social constructionist view

- If Rorty is right, then our allegedly intuitive picture of mental phenomena (as sharing a common underlying nature) is entirely driven by a language-game (the mastery of a useless academic technical vocabulary);
- If so, then our intuitive understanding of mental phenomena fails to pick out some underlying natural kind having some deep nature;
- If so, then as Rorty emphasizes, the prospect of a scientific understanding of the nature of minds and mental phenomena is misplaced;
- And whether a creature is credited with a mind is devoid of moral import.

An alternative to Rorty's view

- In different cultures, at different times in human history, humans have had general intuitions about what is mental, which derive from, or reflect, *naïve* (or *commonsense*) *belief/desire psychology*:
- « Knowledge of commonsense Homo sapiens psychology [is] innate [...] (1) Acceptance of some form of intentional explanation appears as a cultural universal. (2) [...] much of the apparatus of mentalistic explanation is apparently operative quite early [...] The more we learn about how to ask the questions, the more of the answers infants seem to know. (3) I take the lack of a rival hypothesis to be a kind of empirical evidence; and there are, thus far, no suggestions about how a child might acquire the apparatus of intentional explanation 'from experience' » (Fodor, 1987, p. 133).



1987



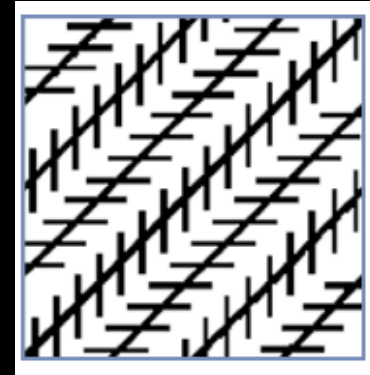
1935-

The paradox of free will

- One of the hallmarks of naïve psychology is the belief in *free will*.
- By subscribing to naïve psychology, human beings believe that, unlike inanimate creatures, they think and they are conscious. Because they think of themselves and their conspecifics as conscious thinking beings, they also think of themselves as endowed with *free will*, i.e. the freedom of *choosing* between alternative courses of action.
- However, they are *not* free to think that they and their conspecifics are free, because they are not free to subscribe to naïve psychology. It's part of human cognitive capacities (with naïve physics and the language faculty).

The explanatory scope of naïve psychology

- As its name suggests, naïve psychology is *naïve* and vague: its explanatory scope is highly limited. For example, it cannot explain why humans are susceptible to visual illusions (e.g. Zöllner's illusion):



- It cannot explain either why humans find it easier to recognize a friend's face than to perform multiplications on numerical representations involving five digits. Nor can it explain why humans are likely to respond more quickly to the first than to the second question: "Is 9 greater than 1?" vs. "Is 5 greater than 4?"

The task of the philosophy of mind

- Naïve psychology is vague because it's hybrid; it's hybrid because it fulfills at once a *descriptive* and a *normative* function:
 - - descriptive function to explain and predict human actions;
 - - normative function to stipulate the moral rights of conscious creatures and the moral obligations of creatures who are aware of being conscious vis-à-vis conscious creatures.
- The task of the philosophy of mind is to clarify and sharpen the contents of naïve psychological concepts, e.g. the difference between representing a *fact* or an *actual state of affairs* and a *norm* (obligation), i.e. *not* what there is, there has been or there will be, but what *ought* to be done (whether or not it will be done).

Brentano's thesis

- Brentano's (1874) offered puzzling definition of **intentionality**;
- His thesis that **intentionality** is the mark of the mental anticipated Rorty's challenge
- (1) It is exemplified by *all* mental states
- (2) It is exemplified *only* by mental states
- Brentano's definition of intentionality gave rise to both Phenomenology (Husserl, etc.) and analytic philosophy (Frege/Russell against Meinong)
- Furthermore, B's thesis shaped all analytic philosophy of mind in the 20th century.

Two goals of analytic philosophy

- Explanatory reductive goal
 - Define, reduce (chemical analysis) complex term or concept into simpler constituents. Ex: 'odd number' =df 'number divisible by two'
- Therapeutic goal
- - Dissolve pseudo-problems

Russell's theory of definite descriptions

- Logical form of proposition expressed by 'the F is G'?
- $(\exists x)(\forall y) \{Fx \ \& \ [Fy \longrightarrow (y = x)] \ \& \ Gx\}$
- (i) There is at least one individual who is F;
- (ii) There is at most one;
- (iii) This unique individual is also G.
- Consider an utterance of 'The king of France is bald' in 1905 (when there is no king of France).
- Is it true, false or neither true nor false?
- On Russell's theory of descriptions, it is false since the first conjunct is false. What about 'The king of France is *not* bald'?

Thought experiments

- ‘bachelor’=_{df} ‘non-married’ + ‘person’
- Mastery of specialized scientific concepts (‘quark’, ‘DNA’, etc.) involves knowing scientific theory. Most natural kind concepts (‘tiger’, ‘water’) and philosophically significant concepts (‘knowledge’, ‘truth’) are not exhaustively definable.
- So philosophers of mind have turned to thought-experiments
- Galileo: the principle of the relativity of motion
- Twin-Earth, brain in a vat, Mary, Chinese room, etc.

Topics for CO1

- 1. What is intentionality?
- 2. Monist physicalism and Cartesian substance dualism
- 3. What is logical behaviorism?
- 4. The problems of non-reductive materialism
- 5. Functionalism
- 6. Anomalous monism
- 5. Naturalizing intentionality
- 6. Assessing the computational theory of the mind
- 7. Mental causation
- 8. Intentionality and consciousness