

Summary of *Elements of Mind*

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Elements of Mind (EM) has two themes, one major and one minor. The major theme is intentionality, the mind's direction upon its objects; the other is the mind-body problem. I treat these themes separately: chapters 1, and 3-5 are concerned with intentionality, while chapter 2 is about the mind-body problem. In this summary I will first describe my view of the mind-body problem, and then describe the book's main theme.

Like many philosophers, I see the mind-body problem as containing two sub-problems: the problem of mental causation and the problem of consciousness. I see these problems forming the two horns of a dilemma. Just as the problem of mental causation pushes us towards physicalism, so the problem of consciousness pushes us away from it. Each problem reveals the inadequacy of the solution to the other. Essentially the problem of mental causation is the conflict between (i) the apparent fact that mental states and events have effects in the physical world and (ii) a general principle about the causal nature of the physical world, which is sometimes called the 'causal closure' or the 'causal completeness' of the physical world. This principle says that all physical effects have physical causes which are enough to bring them about. The problem then is simple: how can a mental cause have a physical effect if that effect also has a physical cause which is enough to bring it about? Barring massive overdetermination of our actions by independent causes, it seems that the best answer is to identify the mental and the physical causes. And this is traditionally how physicalists have argued for their identity theory of mind and body.

However, many physicalists reject the identity theory, and therefore they have to solve the mental causation problem in some other way. At present, there is no consensus among physicalists on which of the currently proposed solutions is correct. In chapter 2 of EM I propose an alternative, which I call ‘emergentism’. Inspired by the rejection of the identity theory, Emergentism is the idea that mental properties are genuinely novel or distinctive features of reality, with their own causal powers. (Sometimes emergentism is defined in terms of the unpredictability or inexplicability of mental properties or states from knowledge of the physical states on which they supervene. I once expressed things this way; but I now prefer to define the doctrine to be formulated in purely metaphysical terms.) The question then is whether emergentism is compatible with the causal closure of the physical; this depends on what the causal closure thesis is, and in section 18 of EM I discuss one form in which the thesis might be denied.

The problem of consciousness is the other horn of the dilemma which constitutes today’s mind-body problem. Consciousness is a problem in at least two ways for physicalism. First, it presents an explanatory challenge: how can physicalists explain what it is for something to be conscious in purely physical terms? This is the famous ‘explanatory gap’ problem. Second, it presents an ontological challenge: if physicalism is true then there has to be a necessary connection between mental and physical entities. But it seems conceivable that mental and physical entities could exist separately; therefore physicalism is false. This line of thought is sometimes expressed today as the famous ‘zombie’ argument. The response to these arguments given in sections 26-29 of EM is, in effect, to accept them and show why they are not problematic on an emergentist conception of mental phenomena. An emergentist can accept that there are limits to the

physical explicability of mental phenomena, and indeed I argue that a physicalist should accept this too: this is the proper lesson of the ‘knowledge argument’ against physicalism. But an emergentist, unlike a physicalist, can also accept the conclusion of the zombie argument too, since part of the point of emergentism is that the dependence of the mental upon the physical is a matter of lawlike dependence rather than metaphysical necessity. Emergentism, although undeniably controversial, provides a consistent solution to the problem of mental causation and the problem of consciousness.

One of the lessons of chapter 3 of EM is that settling the debate between physicalists and non-physicalists settles very few other problems in the philosophy of mind. We understand very little about thought, consciousness, perception and action even if we have established – for example, by the general kind of causal argument discussed in chapter 2 – that they must be physical. Hence there is more to the philosophy of mind than the debate over physicalism. The rest of EM is concerned with this; and this brings us to its major theme, intentionality.

I claim that intentionality is the mark of the mental, by which I mean that all mental phenomena exhibit intentionality. (In EM I do not defend the converse claim, that only mental phenomena exhibit intentionality, even though I do believe it.) Intentionality is the same thing as a state of mind’s having an intentional object: something on which it is directed. It is crucial that ‘object’ is not interpreted as meaning ‘thing’ or ‘entity’. An intentional object is not an entity of a certain kind. It cannot be, since some intentional objects do not exist. Yet all entities exist. In other words, to talk about intentional objects is to talk about that on which one’s mind is directed, whether or not it exists. I take it for granted that our minds can be directed on the non-existent, although this is what gives

rise to some of the hardest problems of intentionality. A conclusion I draw from this fact is that intentional states cannot, in general, be relations to their objects.

To say that all states of mind must have an intentional object, then, is just to say that it is impossible for there to be a state of mind which is not *about* something, which is not directed on something. There are however different ways in which a state of mind may be directed on something: wanting something, disliking it and merely contemplating it are all intentional states. The way in which they differ is not in their object, but in what I call the intentional *mode*. (The intentional mode is what Husserl in the *Logical Investigations* called the intentional *quality*; other philosophers, who think that all intentional states are propositional attitudes, would call it the *attitude*.)

Intentional states can, however, be identical in mode and intentional object, but nonetheless differ. This is because they may differ in the way in which they present their object – or, as I shall say, in the *aspect* under which they present it. This kind of difference in intentionality I describe as a difference in intentional *content*. For a state to have intentional content is for it to have an (existing or non-existing) intentional object presented under a certain aspect. Since it is impossible, I argue, for an intentional state to have an object without presenting it under some aspect, then it follows that all intentional states have intentional content. I do not say that the intentional content of a state of mind is the way the world is represented as being, since some intentional states (e.g. desires, hopes) do not represent the world as actually *being* a certain way, but rather represent a non-actual condition of the world. Nor do I say that all content is propositional – that is, assessable as true or false – since there are many states of mind (notably object-directed

emotions like love and hate) which do not have propositional contents. Many intentional states do have propositional content – these are the propositional attitudes.

I therefore understand intentionality in terms of the three central ideas of intentional object (where object is not understood as *thing* or *entity*), intentional mode (belief, desire, hope, fear etc.) and intentional content (that which characterises that on which the state is directed, and the aspectual shape of that presentation). Chapters 3, 4 and 5 apply these ideas to the paradigm mental phenomena of consciousness, thought and perception.

Those who reject intentionalism sometimes do so because they think that there are paradigmatic mental states which are not intentional. The two supposed types of example are bodily sensations like pains, and so-called ‘undirected’ emotions or moods. In chapter 3 of EM I discuss the case of sensations. (I do not yet have a developed view on the nature of emotions and moods, but I hope to be able to say something useful about them in the future.) I reject the view that bodily sensations are ‘pure qualia’ – properties of a person which altogether lack intentionality. My reason for this is that sensations have a necessary felt location within the body, and this is a form of directedness. The location in the body is the intentional object of the state or event of feeling the sensation. Some intentionalists claim that pains represent damage to the body; I reject this as a phenomenological claim – a headache, for example, need not connote damage to the body in any sense – and argue instead that the phenomenology of pains and other sensations are characterised by their mode and their content, and the latter is their location in the body apprehended under a certain aspect.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the intentionality of thought: that is, of the propositional attitudes and conscious episodes of thinking. I argue that beliefs are never conscious, though we can become conscious of what it is that we believe, and that not all intentional mental states are propositional attitudes. The bulk of the chapter is concerned to defend the coherence of an internalist account of thought and the attitudes, contrary to the prevailing externalist orthodoxy. I am persuaded to defend internalism partly because I see the possible non-existence of objects of thoughts as a central and characterising feature of intentionality, partly because I believe in the coherence (though of course not the truth) of sceptical hypotheses like the brain-in-a-vat, and partly because I am unpersuaded by the positive arguments for externalism. I distinguish the question of externalism from the question of '*de re*' thought. Although there are *de re* ascriptions of thoughts, the idea of *de re* thought as such is incompatible with one of the core claims about intentionality expounded in chapter 1: that every intentional state has an aspectual shape. But externalism need not be the thesis that there are *de re* thoughts in this sense. In its most plausible version, it is rather the thesis that there are fully intentional states of mind – with aspectual shape – which essentially depend on the existence of their objects. I do not argue directly for internalism, but instead dispute the most influential 'Twin Earth' style of argument for externalism, and provide a sketch of an internalist account of demonstrative thought.

The final part of EM's investigation of intentionality concerns perception. Chapter 5 concentrates on two main areas of the philosophy of perception: (i) the traditional problem of perception – posed by the 'argument from illusion' – and how an intentional conception of perception is the solution to this problem; and (ii) the

phenomenal character of perception, in particular the question of whether perception involves the awareness of qualia (understood as ‘pure qualia’ in the sense defined above). I deny that there are any qualia in perception, and hold that the phenomenal character of perception can be fully explained in terms of intentional mode and content. The content of perception has, however, a special character: it is *nonconceptual*, in the sense that being in states with that content does not require possession of the concepts which are required for having other attitudes with that content. This special character is part of what explains the phenomenal character of perception.

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