

1. *The Import of the Problem of Other Minds*

Epistemological

- (A) A form of sceptical reasoning; it invites us, with slightly different kinds of example, to explain how we avoid the conclusion that we don't know many of the things that we supposed that we did.
- (B) It asks us to explore the coherence of the position we end up in if we do not satisfactorily answer this question: is *solipsism* coherent? Is it livable?
- (C) It is a form of general challenge – *how* do you know about other people's minds? It asks us what the means for finding out about people's minds are. (Note in this case, the presupposition is that there is something interestingly in common about the different things we can know about others' minds such that there is a general story to be told.)

Conceptual

- (D) It is a question about the concepts we possess or can possess: how is it possible to apply the same concept to your *own* pain, which you know of introspectively, to the pain of *another*, where you seem to know of it only through their outward behaviour?
- (E) It is a question which tests our assumptions about the nature of mind: if a theory of what mental states are is incompatible with the knowledge we have of each other's mind does that show that the theory is wrong? (For example, if the qualitative character of one's mental states has no impact on one's actions, could one reasonably infer that everyone had qualitatively similar experiences just from how they behave? If not, is that a reason to reject epiphenomenalism about the qualitative aspects of mind?)

Other

- (F) It is a practical question about how to live our lives: how do you come to know enough about other people to trust them or not?
- (G) It is a live question in developmental psychology: when and how do human infants begin to understand the ways in which there are other agents in the world around them? (Infants between 9-18 months start developing joint attention behaviours with adults – looking where they look; engaging in social referencing. Young children aged 3 generally fail the 'false belief' test – where answering a question correctly about where someone will look requires sensitivity to what that person falsely believes about the situation – yet can pass it aged four.)

2. *General Solutions I*

Broadly one might think that one's source of knowledge of the empirical world around one is based either directly in what one can perceive, or in what one can infer from that by use of deductive or non-deductive modes of reasoning.

The *special* problem of other minds, one might then claim, is that our ordinary capacities for finding out about the world could be entirely intact and yet not provide us with the relevant evidence for whether we are surrounded by other minds. Why so?

A. We don't *perceive* others' minds.

We have an *introspective* access to our own feelings – each knows how things are with him or herself from the inside in a way no one else does (cf. whether you are now sitting; whether you have an itch in your left knee); but we don't have such access to others' feelings. How could what one introspects in one's own case also be what one perceives in the case of others.

B. The *evidence* we have from what perception gives us does not provide a sound evidential base to judge that people's feelings are one way rather than any other.

Perception tells us about the external physical form of other human beings and about their physical movements. The very same form and the very same movements could be correlated with very different inner feelings. If one *only* ever has perceptual access to the external, physical aspects of other human beings, how does one ever get evidence of specific correlations between physical behaviour and feeling?

Solutions often focus on questioning either (A) or (B)

Questioning B

(1) Broadly Inductive: a.) Argument from Analogy:

One knows in one's own case the correlation of behaviour and psychological state, one can then infer on the basis of a reasoned regularity in the constitution of human beings that this will be replicated in other humans;

b.) Inference to Best Explanation:

One has a broad conception of psychological states as the upshot of causal impinging of the world on us and as the initiators of various kinds of behaviour. Given the regular patterns of behaviour in human kind around us, the best explanation of them so acting is that they possess the relevant psychological structures to bring about this pattern of behaviour.

Questioning A

(2) Criteria, Simulation, Perception or What?

Earlier critics of the inductive approach claimed that the approach fails to take into account *the conceptual problem*. How can I know about my own mental states and how they are to be correlated with my publicly observable patterns of behaviour, if I cannot ascribe mental states to others? A proper account of how I am able to employ mental state concepts in relation to myself, they claim, shows how to answer the sceptical problem.

Followers of Wittgenstein's later writings often talk at this point of criteria for the application of the concept of 'pain'.

3. *The Inductive Strategy in Focus: Mill's Solution*

What is the strategy Mill recommends?

Sometimes interpreted as 'an argument from analogy' we seek inductive support on the basis of a single instance.

- (1) JSM is in pain when pricked
- (2) JSM cries out when in pain
- (3) All humans if pricked and then crying out are in pain

Enumerative induction is supposedly a method of confirming generalizations based on positive instances (but compare discussions of Goodman's grue, and Hempel's paradox of confirmation – do we ever employ simple enumerative induction).

One finds a series of cases:

$Fa \wedge Ga, Fb \wedge Gb, Fc \wedge Gc...$

And as one finds more positive instances, so one gains greater confirmation of the universal generalization

$\forall x [Fx \wedge Gx]$.

In Mill's case he only ever has *one* positive instance (himself) on which to base the universal hypothesis, and he derives his beliefs about others on the basis of this hypothesis. How can he be warranted in this?

Compare: Mill finds a mole under his left armpit, and so concludes that everyone has a mole under his or her left armpit.

michael.martin@ucl.ac.uk
mgfmartin@berkeley.edu