

Causal Theory of Intention

Phil 255

David Armstrong



- Armstrong begins with some meta-philosophy:
- Logical positivists generated a crisis in philosophy:
 - Wittgenstein: role for philosophy was to clarify problems
 - Ryle: philosophers were to perform conceptual analysis
 - Both views make philosophy secondary to science.
- Armstrong saw this changing in the 80s because
 - 1) those who supposed that they did not rely on substantive matters, in fact did (e.g. Watson, positivists, etc.)
 - 2) improved view of the scientific investigation (i.e. appreciate theory and reasoning)
- The tools of philosophy should be used in combination with the results of science to make claims about the world.

Identity theory

- Takes it that there is a physicochemical account of behavior
- Differences between people and other objects by simply in the extreme complexity found in living systems
- Suggests “the state of our brain completely determines the state of our consciousness and our mental state generally” (p. 178).
 - This is statement of at least token identity theory.
- Wants to argue for something stronger, but is aware of the various problems with type identity
- Thinks these can be avoided with the correct analysis of mental states
- Is using the tools of philosophy to make strong scientific claims

Causal analysis

- The concept of a mental states is the concept of a state that is “apt to be the cause of certain effects or apt to be the effect of certain causes” (p. 179; recall functionalism)
- Analogy to poison:
 - something that causes an organism to sicken or die when it is introduced (biologically)
 - is defined as being that which produces certain effects
 - could be supplied long before we had any idea how poisons actually worked
 - science can subsequently fill in the physical details for specific poisons

Causal analysis

- Hypothesis: mental states will turn out to be physical states of the brain (as poisons are physical states of chemical substances)
- Effects will be behaviors and the causes will be objects and events in the environment
- E.g. of 'purposes'
 - purposes are often defined teleologically, and thus seem to be a cause of the goal when the goal is successfully reached
 - but, the logical structure of mental concepts is much more sophisticated than that of causal concepts like poison
 - E.g., a purpose is an "information sensitive cause" i.e., a cause sensitive to the beliefs and perceptions of the system
 - Need a causal analysis of "belief" and "perception"(mapping?)

Causal analysis

- Armstrong notes (like Dennett and Davidson) that all of the corresponding mental concepts must be introduced together
- As a result, analysis of mental concepts will turn out to be an extremely complex undertaking
- This is an undertaking Armstrong began in his most famous work "A materialist theory of mind" (1968).
- He notes that the concepts of introspective awareness and mental imagery demand particularly complex analyses

Advantages

- Two clear advantages:
- Explication of the “shadowy” nature of the mental realm
 - not being aware of the causes that give rise to behaviour caused dualists to posit another realm
 - however, this gap is only a result of our unfamiliarity with the microstructure, which can be removed (e.g., like poisons)
- Explains intentionality (Brentano-style; pointing)
 - This relation is mysterious because one of the relata need not exist
 - Poisons point to their usual effects, which need not exist
 - intentionality of mental states is no more mysterious than “the death that lurks in the poison”

Intentionality

- E.g., a homing rocket points towards its target
 - it may never reach its target, but the states of the rocket are about the target (like perception)
- Objection: this is derived intentionality, not true intentionality
- Armstrong replies that such homing rockets might have been natural products, like a cell (e.g. magnetosome)
- Concludes that the causal analysis “explain(s) both the transparency and the intentionality of mental states” (p. 184).
- Has ignored some pressing issues, e.g.:
 - How can a causal theory account for misrepresentation? Will analyses be in terms of causes and effects? If not, how do we know which to use? If so, how do we know how much of each to use?

Secondary qualities

- The primary/secondary quality distinction is an old one particularly discussed by Locke:
 - Primary qualities: mass, extent, momentum
 - Secondary qualities: color, smell, texture
- Recall the qualia problem for functionalism
 - Armstrong faces the same issue
- Solution:
 - Distinguished the perception from what is perceived
 - Qualities are of the object, not the state

Secondary qualities

- Does this solution work?
 - Recall perception & intention are different
 - Assigning 'qualities' to physical objects threatens Materialism
- Recall such properties are physical properties
- Armstrong suggests that, with enough science, this will be remedied
 - I.e. physically respectable properties will be identified (e.g., wavelength -- though this doesn't work!)
- But now, how do we analyze these properties?
 - I.e., say what it is about those properties that produces sensations in us

Secondary qualities

- Armstrong suggests that this means such qualities appear to be unanalyzable
 - I.e. can't explain redness without appeal to redness
- Some suggest this eliminates the possibility of finding those physical properties Armstrong wants
 - Suggests unanalyzability is an epistemological (not ontological) result
 - I.e. we can't grasp the complexity/analysis in perception
 - Nevertheless, this purely theoretical analysis is plausible on scientific grounds

Discussion

- Has Armstrong avoided the central difficulty of type identity?
- What kind of identity theory does he seem to be arguing for given the poison analogy?
- Has he done away with the problem of secondary qualities?

Comparison

	Fodor	Dennett	Davidson	Armstrong
Reify mental states	yes	no	yes?	yes
Mental states are reducible to physical states	no	yes	no	yes
Mental states are physical states	yes	yes	yes	yes
Scientific laws govern mental states	yes	no	no	yes
Some laws govern mental states	yes	yes	yes	yes

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- Explain why anomalous monism is both.