Philosophy Workshop Essay Topic 10

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In this essay, a version of a functionalist theory of the nature of mind will be contrasted with three other theories. Those three theories are versions of 1) logical behaviorism, 2) dualism, and 3) the strong AI thesis. The version of functionalism to be presented is *functionalism with consciousness:*

> FWC (*functionalism with consciousness*): Mental states and mental processes are identified by the roles they play within any physical system complex enough to have a first-person-like perspective on its own internal states as well as on the external world.

The first alternative theory to be considered is *logical behaviorism*. A logical behaviorist theory of mind might say

> LB (*logical behaviorism*): Mental states and processes are identical to sets of dispositions to behave in certain ways.

One objection to LB is this: the internal mental life of creatures like humans should not be ignored. Subjective auditory experiences (e.g., listening music) and visual experiences (e.g., viewing works of art) do not reduce to ways we react, in terms of outwardly observable behavior. Call this the *impoverished subjective life* objection.

The FWC avoids this objection by explicitly requiring a first-person-like perspective on internal states for any system which qualifies as having mental states and processes. The FWC, however, does not require minds to be the minds of human persons. The respect in which such a perspective is first-person-like is just that it distinguishes between its own physical system, with its own internal states, on the one hand, and the rest of the physical world, on the other.

The second alternative theory of mind is dualism. The *modern dualist* says:

MD (*modern dualism*): At least some mental states (e.g., sensations) could exist independent of any physical body [Gertler, 306].

One objection to this view is that it is incapable of scientific confirmation. Mental states which are neither physical objects, nor properties of physical objects, cannot be observed using the senses or measuring instruments. Thus there is no way to study such things, and no way to confirm their existence scientifically. They would be, as J.J.C. Smart said, odd "nomological danglers" – existing outside the realm of physical law [Smart, 143]. Call this the *nomological dangler* objection.

FWC avoids the *nomological dangler* objection by making mental states and processes the states and processes of certain physical systems. A great variety of physical systems may have the required complexity – humans, animals, computers, or aliens, for example. But all of them are physical systems, capable of being scientifically studied, and their mental states and processes are identified by the roles they play in those physical systems.

The last alternative theory to be considered is the *strong AI* thesis which says

SAI (*strong AI*): A computer program which passes the Turing test is capable of creating mental states (thoughts) in any working implementation of that program. [Searle, 26].

This is offered as a sufficient condition for mental states, not a necessary condition. John Searle's *Chinese room objection* asks us to imagine a room containing a person who does not know Chinese, together with a rule book for associating strings of Chinese characters given to the person (input) with other strings of characters the person returns (output) during a Turing test. Searle claims that this is essentially what a computer program is – a set of rules for generating output based on input. Neither the rule book, nor the person using it, are thinking

about the questions being asked, or about how to reply. According to Searle, this kind of simple mindless symbol manipulation is the only thing a computer program can accomplish.

If this is true, then the FWC theory, which requires a physical system to attain a first-person-like perspective on its own internal states, and on the external world, would judge that implementations of such computer programs to not have mental states. Thus, the FWC would avoid the *Chinese room objection.* However, it should be noted that the *Chinese room objection* involves the fallacy of composition. The fact that the rulebook is not thinking about the Turing test questions, and that the non-Chinese speaking person using the rulebook is not engaged in thought about the questions, does not show that the *whole* consisting of the rulebook and the person is not engaged in thought.

The theory which has been defended, the theory of *functionalism with consciousness*, avoids the *impoverished subjective life* objection which may be made against the theory of logical behaviorism. The FWC theory also avoids the *nomological dangler* objection which may be raised against the *modern dualist* theory. Finally, FWC is also immune to the *Chinese room* objection which has (perhaps incorrectly) been made against the *strong AI* thesis.