

The Hard Problem of the Self for NWPC

It's not easy to know what is puzzling philosophers when they discuss the existence of the self. Things can become terminological pretty fast. I wish here to outline at least one problem that seems important and non-trivial.

To find what I'm calling the hard problem of the self, we ought, I think, to go back to Descartes and the response to him by Wittgenstein. One of the upshots of the cogito seems to be that I can come to know, even in grave Cartesian doubt, that there is a thing that thinks and that this thing is me. Thus the existence of a self seems to be proven by the cogito.

But the story doesn't end here. Just because (I am thinking) is true does not necessarily mean that there is a thing that is thinking. In particular, the (I) in (I am thinking) might be a sort of a non-referential pronoun that plays some other function.^{*} According to Wittgenstein, in the context of doubt there is no justification for concluding (I am) from (I am thinking) because there is only justification for saying (There is thinking.) Just as during a storm we say (It is lightning) without committing ourselves to something that is doing the lightning, so we should not commit ourselves to a self, or

* See DeRose / 012 3 ch.

an (I) when noting the fact that (There is thinking.)

+s it turns out, this self-less view is not plausible. - suppose that our conception of thoughts did not require a thinker.¹ In such a case there must be an impersonal way of reporting thought contents along the lines of (There is a thought x). So as long as solipsism isn't a necessary truth, it is possible that there are other thinkers, and it is further possible that their thoughts differ. In our normal way of expressing things, we might say that David thinks correctly (I am feeling no pain) while 'im thinks correctly (I feel nothing but pain.) We furthermore believe that these two claims could both be true. But translated into the impersonal, David would have to be thinking (There is no pain) while 'im thinks (There is nothing but pain). These statements clearly contradict one another, however, so the translation does not succeed. So translation will succeed, in fact, unless the thought contents are relativized appropriately. That is, David must be saying (There is no pain here) or something of the like, and the same for 'im. The best move for the Cartesian is to maintain that the only appropriate version of (here) is (I.) The self is the relativization point; selves are the places for thought.

It is this very thin notion of a self that interests me, and taken thinly enough we do have excellent reason to believe there are such things. And so far, there is no commitment to what these things could or could not be be% brains, bundles, substances

¹ My argument here is a version of that offered by Tholme 1972, and Williams 1980. A clearer version is in appendix # of *Leve* 1992.

or souls. Whatever these thin selves are, however, they must be able to play the role of a

Against Sufficiency: Possession and Split Brains

It certainly seems conceivable that there be a brain that supports two radically different mental lives. The most obvious actual case is that of (split brain) patients, or patients who have had a commissurotomy in which their corpus callosum, which binds the hemispheres of the brain together, is severed. After the surgery everything seems to be fine, until Robert Sperry enters with his brilliant selective stimulation experiments. >

between the hemispheres. -till, there is no denying how peculiar the case seems. #n at least one obvious interpretation of the data there seem to be two mental (spaces) in one

remembering. Beliefs are in brains, but that's a contingent fact, and states outside of my brain play something like the belief role now. I am pretty dependent on my iPhone to remember all sorts of things% appointments, phone numbers, and the addresses of conference hotels. It the fact that I hold it in my hand a reason to say it is not part of my mind= Could we feel any better if Steve Jobs announced a Brain Lock for iPhones so that my iPhone could reside in my head, and could be operated by thought= More argument is needed, but it seems to me that the reasons for denying that external devices are, or at least could be, legitimate parts of the mind are hard to come by. Thus it seems there could be mental states supported by such machines, outside of the brain, that nonetheless were part of the same mind. Thus, being in the same brain is not necessary for occupying the same mental space.

The brain theory should probably respond that one shouldn't count brains by counting lumps of matter, and one shouldn't limit brains to things composed of organic tissue. (Brain) on this view is a functional term, and something that is functionally integrated so completely with a brain, such as a bit of extra memory in an implanted chip, should be considered part of the brain, and isolated tissue in the head should not be.

These responses on behalf of the brain theory are pretty persuasive. &ut notice

connected enough= #ne suspects that vagueness abounds hereabouts and that there will not be one answer to whether or not two thoughts occupy the same space.^F

+s long as we are focused on functional integration, or some sort of inferential or computational connectedness, I think it is likely that we are going to run into selves with

vague place for thoughts with the fact that spaces for thoughts seem to be functionally defined, admitting of degrees of integration= The Cartesian should probably insist that defining selves in terms of functional integration is not the way to go, and that when you leave the occurrently conscious, or even the phenomenally conscious states, one is letting vagueness in the door, but not earlier. There is a relation \neq , that does not come in degrees, and that is not vague% the relation two conscious states have to one another when they are co-conscious. The asymmetry between this relation and the

for a subject to have all the members of the set at once, and if this phenomenology subsumes the phenomenology of the individual states.⁰

-o what makes it true to say there are two selves in the 'im and ave horse is that the pain and the conscious thought there is no pain, say, are not co-conscious. There is no one state that includes both of them such that there is something that it is like to have that state, and that if one has that state one also has each of the states that make it up.

This suggests the following notion of the self⁹

Phenomenal Self⁹ The self is the space of co-conscious phenomenal states.

Phenomenal states that are co-conscious are states of a single self, and

phenomenal states that are not co-conscious are states of different selves.

To me this view has some plausibility, in part because we are directly aware, even acquainted, one might say, with the states that are supposed to be in the relation at hand, and it seems difficult to imagine counterexamples to the phenomenal unity thesis.

It is difficult to know what exactly it is like to be a commissurotomy patient. It could of course be that when it comes to the information in their right hemispheres they are like super blind-sighters% they have access to the information, but there is no phenomenal consciousness that accompanies it. They do not have phenomenally conscious states that correspond to what is flashed to the left part of their visual fields.

⁰ .&ayne and \$halmers 1DD>2

If that is how it is, then this phenomenal view would hold there is only one self, with unconscious information controlling behavior elsewhere. It is perhaps more natural, though, to guess that there is phenomenal consciousness that accompanies both pieces of information, but that those phenomenal states are not co-conscious, or, to put it another way, that there is not a single phenomenal state of which they are both a part. In this case, it would be correct to say that there are really two selves there in this sense.

The extended mind cases do not obviously present any trouble for this either. Whether my iPhone is part of my mind or not, it is certainly not a source of occurrent psychological states or phenomenal states. But, if in the future there is a way to extend the parts of the brain that underlie consciousness, there is still nothing in principle problematic. If the states in this outer device are co-conscious with all of the other states, there is one self there. Otherwise, not.

IV.

The title of this paper is an homage to what David Chalmers called (The Card Problem of Consciousness.)¹ At this point the connection to the consciousness puzzle is pretty clear. In both the case of consciousness and the self, if one focuses upon cognitive states alone, it is hard to get at the puzzle. The puzzles in these areas only

¹ Chalmers 2000, 2

really become pressing from the point of view of the subject% from the bearer of consciousness. There is, in other words, a sense in which we have a difficult time finding the self in an objective theory% that is, a theory that can be fully apprehended without occupying any particular point of view. From the outside, the world does not seem to break up into discrete loci of consciousness because from the outside the relation of co-consciousness does not seem to appear as a distinct, or at least an

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