

Re: The Identity Theory of Mind

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From: Paul Bramscher (*brams006_nospam_at_tc.umn.edu*)

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JPL Verhey wrote:

> "Paul Bramscher" <*brams006_nospam@tc.umn.edu*> wrote in message
> *news:cj1c5j\$lhc\$1@lenny.tc.umn.edu...*

>

>>JPL Verhey wrote:

>>

>>

>>>First you mention that processes are usually understood and described
>>>in terms of repeatable methodes "between input and output". I think
>>>you mean that a system with an initial state S1 goes through a
>>>process leading up to a state S2 of the system. So the process is a
>>>sequence of tranformations that changes the system from S1 to S2. We
>>>can know of such a process, identify it, only because it can be
>>>repeated. We can start with a raw egg (S1), boil it (the process) and
>>>after 10 minutes you have a hard boiled egg (S2). We can repeat this
>>>procedure, the same process, and boil sequentially 10 eggs. Thusly we
>>>have identified a process and name it "boiling an egg".

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>>Your analogy of boiling an egg is an excellent example of a process,
>>but maps poorly to what neuroscience seems to be pointing toward with
>>regard to neural networks. The granularity (biochemical, electrical,
>>hormonal, the whole chemical/physical/physiological mix) is
>>sufficiently granular that we might question whether or not the state
>>we describe as experience/thought/consciousness X is ever repeatable
>>as X. When it "comes around" again the next time, it may be more like
>>a spiral than a circle.

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>

> Yes we agree. What you clipped of my writing and what you say above
> pretty much fits.

>

> Even so, all granularities can be seen as processes themselves. Hence I
> don't see how that "maps poorly to what neuroscience seems to be
> pointing toward with regard to neural networks" – how the 'spiral' like
> feature of processes in general, no matter how granular they are, would
> contradict with anything. It even fits experience.

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>
>>*That is, it comes around to general proximity, but it's "off" somewhat,*
>>*it misses itself, never reconnects or maps precisely to a previous*
>>*state and bears no resemblance to the expected input/output result last*
>>*time they were examined with one another in similar circumstances.*
>>
>>*Viewing this as a process is still possible, probably, but probably*
>>*only valid if one fudges or blurs the spiral (roughly repeatable) into*
>>*a circle (perfectly so, as in gears which never break down and enjoy a*
>>*perfect lubricant).*
>
>
> *I don't think so. A process IS, indeed, 'spiraling', cycles just being*
> *"similar enough" for us to call it a process. Untill it "spiralled out*
> *of control" so to speak, and changes into a another pattern, or*
> *dissolves into other patterns to a degree where the similarity is lost*
> *for us to speak of the same process anymore. The solar system is a good*
> *example. We can call it a process.. a pattern that persists over time..*
> *but it is un unstable pattern... changin continuously and ultimately*
> *spiralling out of control.*
>
>
>>*This process is accomplished semantically by loosening the scope of*
>>*what constitutes experience X, rejecting a degree of granularity, and*
>>*avoiding the endpoints (birth, death, dreamless sleep, coma, etc.) in*
>>*terms of explaining consciousness.*
>
>
> *But I think nobody is trying to do this.*

But you just used the term "similar enough" above — which is what I call "rejecting a degree of granularity". So, indeed, people are doing this (yourself, for example).

You might be able to do this in hindsight, or from a generalized scope.

But rejection of granularity isn't something that the grains themselves can afford to do, if you take my meaning. And, hence, there's an explanatory gap you leave in your wake.

>>*Process, system, and state are mechanistic metaphors, and they carry*
>>*along with them baggage of repeatability, solidness, discreteness, and*
>>*finite aspects to states that seem to poorly describe analog and*
>>*dynamically-changing NN situations.*
>
>
> *Even in die-hard physics it is understood, not denied (as far as I can*
> *tell), that "explaining" something with a theory that describes and*
> *successfully predicts, it [that theory] is *only valid in a limited*
> *domain*. So is classical physics. So is quantum physics. Nothing has*
> *all-explanatory power. Poetically – only the total of existence*

> "explains itself".
> So, I think, we only need to humbly "blurr" our knowledge at the edges
> and just be aware of the fact that our explanatory models are
> incomplete, but can succesfully describe bits and pieces and some of the
> mechanics involved. In other words, we just need to hold on loosely to
> our assumptions.
>
>
>>>Buddhism considers conscious experience as an "emptyness of form" so
>>>there is nothing to repeat. But is it [the form] dependent on the
>>>process nevertheless? Does the shape of the form depend on the type
>>>of process? Doesn't the form change with the process that 'goes with
>>>it'? What is an empty form to begin with?
>>
>>It depends on who you read, but Thich Nhat Hanh's "Heart of the
>>Buddha's Teaching" is an amazingly accessible book to Buddhist
>>psychology, with some diagrams to help.
>>
>>He likes to use a water/wave metaphor (used as a pedagogical device,
>>and not to imply duality). People view their conscious ego as a wave,
>>whereas the true identity is the underlying and everpresent water. So
>>probably neither form nor process are recognized, but rather a single
>>underlying sublime from which dualism (which they reject) and other
>>things emerge as an empty artifact of ego. They can be spoken of,
>>perhaps, only as abstractions -- but enjoy no independent existence of
>>their own.
>
>
> I can live with that metaphor :-)
>
>
>>>>Our of curiosity, do you view yourself as an identity theorist? Why
>>>>the great defense of it?
>>>
>>>
>>>Yes I can consider myself an "identity theorist", but Identity Theory
>>>is only half of the story – the first half in my thinking. The second
>>>half is the most interesting part: how to "reconcile" the monism of
>>>Identity Theory with the so powerful experience of mind–matter
>>>dualism. This sense of duality exists already since human beings are
>>>able to report
>>
>>Ah... This is where we break down.
>
>
> I'm afraid I put you on the wrong leg with talking about
> "reconsiliation". But I put it between brackets for a reason. It's not
> that I try to reconcile the unreconcilable.. rather try to explain the
> sense of duality itself. I do that on my website. I mention that what is
> proposed there is analogous to understanding cross–eyed vision.
>

>
>
>>*I hate to wrap an ism around myself,*
>
>
> *I shouldn't do it. I also tried it, and came up with (probably*
> *non-existing) "organic philosophy".*
>
>
>>*but I'd describe myself as a constructive materialist. When I read of*
>>*the theory "eliminative materialist" I thought that it was written by*
>>*a dualist. That it, automatically, implied that there was something*
>>*to eliminate in the first place, or should be viewed as something*
>>*against which it rejects.*
>>
>>*I subscribe to no form of dualism, since it's plain to me that the*
>>*harder you draw a line in the sand, the more difficult it becomes to*
>>*reconcile the sides.*
>
>
> *Agreed.*
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>
>>*Rather, I reject anything without a physical basis. However, I*
>>*believe the physical world to be sufficiently complex to accomodate*
>>*for all of the things we take to be physical, capable of being*
>>*experienced, or at least represented symbolically (abstractions,*
>>*mathematics, paradox, religion, consciousness itself).*
>
>
> *But do you consider the physical "being experienced", which sounds like*
> *dualism, or "experience being a physical process"? ("physical" and*
> *"process" with the connotations we mentioned)*

We just need to allow logical room for multiple things to exist which aren't pairs of opposites, opposed in some exclusive (and unbridgeable when abstract) ways. We can speak of experiencing the mind like holding a mirror to a light source. The light "experiences" its own reflection, but it's a misnomer to speak of it as an independent source. There need be no non-scientific mystery in nature experiencing things. I view an individual mind as an imprint of nature in a similar way. Nature storing and processing a part of itself.

Perhaps the greater mystery is why we don't experience more. Look at a clock. At precisely any moment in time, freeze your thoughts. Write down everything you were thinking about or aware of at that particular instant. I'm going to argue that it's not much at all (not because you're you, but for myself also). Of the billions of neurons and countless NN states, we seem to enjoy very little at any given point in time. In fact, I'm rather disappointed with what we call consciousness.

Its limits are what perplexes me more than its mysteries.

- >
- > *Btw.. what I find always is missing is what "physical" is referred to.*
- > *Basically there are two. The first being the experiential one – like a*
- > *chair we see, a brain we observe etc.. and second the*
- > *experience–independent..the moon, that chair... that brain when we don't*
- > *observe them..or died. It makes a whooooole lot of difference which one*
- > *we use if we would want to understand consciousness in "physical" terms.*
- >
- >
- >
- >> *These are represented symbolically in physical NN terms, but enjoy no*
- >> *independent existence. All things are represented symbolically in NN*
- >> *terms, it just turns out that some of them actually do point toward*
- >> *physical objects (a desk, a chair, "sampled input"), whereas others do*
- >> *not (imaginary numbers), and others point toward one another*
- >> *(associations, semantics). The sum total we call consciousness.*
- >
- >
- > *Yes, conscious experience is quite a rich landscape. And ever changing.*

To me, the big mystery is how you go from symbols (syntax) to semantics.

We haven't figured this out with AI, but the mind has. Is it merely sufficient complexity, a maze of interrelations, constant feedback to external stimuli, and a rapid state of interprocess (internally via neurons and externally via re-enforcing stimuli) communication from which consciousness emerges?

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- >
- >>> *experiences to themselves and each other. From soul in body, to*
- >>> *ghost–in–machine, to empty form, to epiphenomenon, to an illusion or*
- >>> *delusion, to non–existent..to "only the physical, brains are real",*
- >>> *to "only the mind is real and the physical an illusion", to "the*
- >>> *universe is a dream of a cosmic consciousness", "mind and matter are*
- >>> *dual aspects of the same substance" .. etc.*
- >>>
- >>> *My interest in all this became the question – can this mental–mess be*
- >>> *understood, what causes it? Not the question of David Chalmers "how*
- >>> *to solve the hard problem" – which is IMO just a rephrasing of the*
- >>> *same old conundrum – but what *causes* us to *have* a hard problem*
- >>> *with mind–and–matter to begin with? Why doesn't nature have any "hard*
- >>> *problems" with "matter" nor with "mind"?*
- >>
- >> *I dismiss the mind–body problem as an artifact of Western classical*
- >> *and religious thinking for two millenia.*
- >
- >
- > *I think this is not the case: if it is an artifact, it is one that*
- > *resides in all cultures and is of all times. It is organic in it's*
- > *origin IMHO. With organic I mean: the sense of duality naturally results*
- > *from our experiential reality being 'super imposed' on the world out*

> *there, but it is such a convincing "internal show" that the internal*
> *show and the reality on which it is superimposed *naturally create* this*
> *sense of duality. The glove (experiential) and the hand (the real world*
> *out there) form such a match that it becomes hard to realise which one*
> *is which.*

>

>

>> *The only way out is to dismiss, from the beginning, dualism as an*
>> *abstract problem without a real (or even abstract) exit, if 2–3*
>> *millenia offer any hint.*

>

>

> *I found an "exit" that works quite well for me :-)*

>

>

>> *We're a fragmented culture because we've adopted an illusory*
>> *fragmentation as real. I say the best way to overcome the mind–body*
>> *problem is to reject dualism, start with consciousness or*
>> *materialism --*
>> *it doesn't matter, and build it to accomodate the other.*

>>

>> *Note that I'm being careful here not to "eliminate" consciousness or*
>> *mental, rather I'm eliminating dualism -- the split -- between the*
>> *two, and suggesting immediately that (whether or not they exist as two*
>> *subjects), they are sufficiently intertwined and dependent on one*
>> *another, perhaps one is a subset of the other, that to speak of them*
>> *as opposing pairs of opposites or camps is a ghost in reasoning --*
>> *moreso than a ghost in a machine.*

>

>

> *We are in agreement here. But in addition my remarks about the sense of*
> *dualism.. which really is not the sole experience of Westerners who*
> *subsequently smoked very long and big philosophical pipes about it for*
> *already 2–3 thousand years.., but *a natural, organic consequence that*
> *can be understood why it is there*.. just as one can understand*
> *cross-eyed vision. Imagine all people were always born cross-eyed..*
> *seeing things double. Yet other sense information, and/or reasoning,*
> *and/or a strong compelling intuition telling them there really is only*
> *one chair..why do we perceive of two all the time? You have to explain*
> *it backwards so to speak.*

I believe there is a larger problem than the mind–body problem, and I'll call it the problem of composition. For example, I believe the mind (and body) will both be one day viewed as colonial organisms. I heard on NPR's Science Friday today a sketch about how cells may store memories. I was immediately struck with the image of sea coral or a Portuguese Man of War. These are not single individuals, but rather specialized and multiple individuals performing different tasks — sometimes independently which can be viewed as affecting the "composite organism" above, and sometimes results of the composite organism can affect individuals below it. And there is a level of complexity and

dynamism proper to the individual, and one proper to the composite organism.

So I don't see this as simple dualism, or pairs of opposites. But rather as how a subset dances with the larger set and vice-versa. I believe the consciousness and the mind to be a collective effort.

For example, neuroscience might be telling us that ideas are stored in some fashion (physically) by neurons. When people communicate to each other, they are (physically) programming one another at minute levels. So it's interesting how neuron states replicate one another. Sort of like a modem (modulate–demodulate). Electrochemistry (speaker) → sound waves (speech) → electrochemistry (listener).

None of this really requires an abstract duality.