

What do we mean by ‘mind’?¹

What are you? I mean, what is it to be you? What kind of thing is a human being? What makes a person a person? People have given surprisingly different answers to these questions. You might think, in light of evolutionary theory, that the answer is that we are animals. But sometimes, when someone is an irrecoverable coma or brain-dead, we say that they no longer exist, that they’ve ‘gone’. But the body lying there is still the same animal. So our minds seem particularly important to who or what we are. Without a mind, I am not a person at all and I’m not ‘me’.

But what do we mean by ‘mind’? Many philosophers think that the mind has two important features, ‘thought’ and ‘consciousness’. These terms pick out the two most important aspects of what we mean by ‘having a mind’. We can talk about ‘minds’ or about ‘mental properties’, to include mental states, like beliefs, and mental events, like thinking a thought or feeling a pain. What distinguishes things that have minds or mental properties from things that don’t is that things with minds have a ‘point of view’, a ‘perspective’, on the world. Things with a point of view experience the world, there is a ‘subjectivity’ to their existence, they are not just objects. And this involves ideas of being conscious and of being able to experience and think about things, to have beliefs and desires.

INTENTIONALITY

Thoughts are ‘about’ something, objects or events in the world. For example, I might have a belief *about Paris*, a desire *for chocolate*, be angry *at the government*, or intend *to go to the pub*. In all these cases, my state of mind is ‘directed’ towards an ‘object’, the thing I’m thinking about (Paris, chocolate, the government, going to the pub). This idea of ‘directedness’ is known as ‘Intentionality’.

Intentionality is not about intentions (to mark the difference, I shall use a capital ‘I’ for ‘Intentionality’). If I have an intention, I am ‘aiming at’ *doing* something. With Intentionality, it is the thought or mental state which ‘aims at’ its object, what it is about, and no ‘doing’ needs to be involved. Beliefs, desires, emotions all have Intentionality; they are all about or concern some object or other. They are all ‘Intentional mental states’.

Whenever we think of, have a belief about, or desire something, we always conceive of it in a certain way, under a particular description. For example, in Sophocles’ famous play *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother. He doesn’t want to do this. But he doesn’t know who his (biological) parents are. On his journeys, he meets an old man in the road who gets in his way.

¹ This handout is based on material from Lacewing, M. (2017) *Philosophy for A Level: Metaphysics of God and Metaphysics of Mind* (London: Routledge), Ch. 3, pp. 170-5

Oedipus becomes very angry, and kills the old man. In fact, the man was his father, Laius. Oedipus was angry at the old man. Was he angry at his father? From his point of view, he wasn't - he didn't think of the old man as his father. So Intentional states represent the world in particular and partial ways. It's like seeing something - a desk, say - from a particular aspect; you can see it, but not all of it.

What Intentional states represent - Paris, chocolate, the government, going to the pub, Laius - is called the 'Intentional object'. The way they represent that object we can call the 'aspectual shape' of the object. The Intentional object + the aspectual shape comprise the Intentional content of a mental state. The Intentional content of a mental state is the answer to 'what are you thinking (about)?' The way the person answers the question will also tell us how they are thinking about it, e.g. 'I'm angry at the old man'.

We can now say that an Intentional mental state is a mental state with Intentional content. But we can add to this. We can have different mental states with the same Intentional content if we take different 'attitudes' to that content. For example, I can believe I'm arriving late; I can want to be arriving late; I can fear I'm arriving late; I can be pleased I'm arriving late. An Intentional state, then, comprises a particular 'attitude' or 'mode' towards a particular Intentional content. (Many philosophers call these mental states 'propositional attitudes', because the Intentional content is (usually) expressed as a proposition.)

It is a debate in the philosophy of mind whether *all* mental states have Intentionality and whether there are *other* mental properties besides the properties of Intentionality. One aspect of that debate concerns how we should best understand the second feature of the mind, consciousness.

PHENOMENAL PROPERTIES/QUALIA

Consciousness, especially the sort of consciousness involved in perception, sensation and emotion, has a 'feel' to it, a distinctive 'experiential quality'. The phrase often used to try to capture this experiential quality is 'what it is like'. There is something it is like to taste beer, to see a red rose, to feel sad.

'What it is like' here isn't meant to compare the experience to other experiences, it is meant to pick out how the experience is for the subject. When we make comparisons between experiences (e.g. 'Seeing a red rose is like seeing a ripe tomato'), we do so *in virtue of* what it is like to see a red rose in the sense meant here. It is the experience of redness that allows us to compare roses and tomatoes; and there is something it is like to experience redness. Similarly, there is something it is like to feel sad. I don't mean by this that feeling sad is like feeling some other emotion. I mean that there is a distinctive 'feeling' to sadness.

We can call the properties of an experience which give it its distinctive experiential quality 'phenomenal properties'. We are aware of these properties through consciousness and introspection, by turning our attention to our conscious experiences themselves.

Some philosophers call phenomenal properties 'qualia'. However, to do this usually means that the philosopher has a particular *theory* of phenomenal properties in mind. Phenomenal properties are only qualia if they are *intrinsic, non-Intentional* properties of experience. What does this mean?

An intrinsic property is one that its possessor (in this case, the experience) has in and of its own, not in virtue of its relations to anything else. Think of the smell of coffee. It is the smell 'of coffee' because of its relation to the substance of coffee. That it is 'of coffee' is not an intrinsic property. But consider: something else could cause the *same* smell as the smell caused by coffee. So, someone who believes in qualia would argue, what makes that smell the smell that it is, is not the fact that it is caused by coffee. How that smell smells is an intrinsic property, because it would be that smell even if it wasn't caused by coffee. The smell can't be analysed just in terms of what causes it. Another example: pain wouldn't be pain if it didn't *feel* painful, whatever it is or isn't caused by. Phenomenal properties of experience, then, are intrinsic, and their identity is fixed not by what causes the experience (or what the experience causes) but by how the experience is in itself. Or so people who believe in qualia argue.

Intentional properties, we saw above, are properties of a mental state that enable it to be 'about' something, to represent what it does. So Intentional properties are a matter of how the mental state 'hooks up' to the world. So they are relational rather than intrinsic properties. That a belief is about Paris is a property it has in virtue of its relation to Paris; that a desire is for chocolate is a property it has in virtue to chocolate; and so on. So qualia, because they are intrinsic properties, are non-Intentional properties.

Some philosophers also argue that qualia are, by definition, 'introspectively accessible'. Introspection is just turning your attention to your own mind. Because qualia are properties of consciousness, they are properties we are consciously aware of. What it is like to smell coffee something that we can know by being conscious of the smell of coffee. So we can 'access' qualia through introspection, by consciously turning our attention to our own conscious experiences.

But do qualia, in this more specific sense, exist? Or put another way, are phenomenal properties of consciousness qualia? Are they intrinsic and non-Intentional, or can they be analysed in terms of their Intentionality? For example, isn't the smell caused by coffee the smell *of* coffee? Doesn't this smell represent, isn't it 'about', coffee? People who believe in qualia would argue that it isn't. The smell that is caused by coffee isn't - in and of itself - *about* coffee, because exactly the same smell could be caused by something else. When we say that it is the smell *of* coffee, we add to the experience itself a thought about what caused the smell - and it is this thought, not the smell itself, that has Intentional content that links the smell to coffee. Our conscious experiences have an element of Intentional content, they also have an element - qualia - that is non-Intentional and intrinsic. We cannot, for instance, understand and explain how red looks to us or what it is like to feel pain just in terms of what these mental states are about, how they are related to the world.

This claim about the relationship between phenomenal properties and Intentional content is controversial. And that is why the debate over whether phenomenal properties are qualia - i.e. whether phenomenal properties are intrinsic, non-Intentional properties, or whether they are properties of Intentional content - continues.