

The Classical Analogical Inference to Other Minds

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Knowledge Problem

- Traditional philosophers question
- How do we know other minds exist?
- Emphasis on our knowledge about other minds
- Thus known as “Knowledge problem”

Meaning Problem

- Philosophy during the last thirty years was some form of linguistic analysis
- These philosophers were inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein
- The problem is not a knowledge problem.
- How can we meaningfully talk about other-minds?
- Emphasis on the meaningfulness of our statements about other-minds
- Thus it is a “Meaning problem”
- Ex: Norman Malcom

Analogical Argument to the knowledge problem

If

- a phenomenon A is associated with B
- C is similar to A
- D is similar to B

Then it is very likely that

- C is associated with D. (Encyclopedia of Philosophy by Paul Edwards)

Now, A is my mental states (feelings, thoughts in my mind)

B is my physical states of my body (characteristic bodily behaviour)

- I know that my physical states are associated with my mental states
- I also notice bodies similar to mine which behave like mine
- So by analogy it is very likely that there are mental states in other-minds which are associated with the physical states of other-bodies.
- i.e, Other-minds exist
- Example: I cry if I feel pain. So when I see another person crying then it is reasonable to suppose that he is in pain.
- Historically most important solution to the other minds problem.

Analogical argument in Classical philosophy

1) **Rene Descartes**

- Human beings use speech and signs to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Birds and machines can also be taught to utter words but they cannot speak to express their feelings and they cannot act from knowledge.
- So there is no mind in lower animals and machines.
- Others who use speech and act from knowledge can be considered to have minds.
- So Descartes would also support the analogical argument. (implicitly)

2) John Locke

- Sensation and reflection are the only sources of ideas or knowledge.
- This arises the knowledge problem of other minds.
- Somethings in nature cannot be proved by human senses and analogy is the only help we have in such cases.
- Humans mental states are one such thing. One's thoughts are in his breast, invisible and hidden from others.
- There are minds in other men as well because they use words and act with a reason.

3) David Hume

- Knowledge from experience.
- Induction arising from Analogy
- To conclude if B is caused by A, we should have experienced in all our past experiences that A has lead to B.
- The more the resemblance of present situation to our past experiences the higher the probability.
- He used analogy between us and lower animals to say that “beasts are endowed with thoughts and reason” as well as men.
- So the same analogy can be used to solve the knowledge problem of other-minds.

J.S.Mill

- Mind is only a common name for the states of knowing, willing, feeling, desiring etc.,
- Nothing prevents me from believing that there are **“other succession of feelings besides those of which I am conscious and that these are as real as my own”**.
- **“By what evidence do I know that the walking and speaking figures which I see and hear, have sensations and thoughts”**
- Bodily modifications ---> Feelings ---> Bodily actions (In my case)
- Bodily modifications ---> ---> Bodily actions (In others)

J.S.Mill (cont.)

- **“Experience, therefore obliges me to conclude that there must be an intermediate state; which must be the same in others as in myself, or a different one : I must either believe them to be alive, or to be automation; and I believe them to be alive, i.e., the link to be same in others as in me.”**
- The author calls this a specific problem of other-minds.
- Since Mill uses mind interchangeably with mental states.

Norman Malcom's objections to Mill

1. Objection against Mill's formulation of the problem.
 - a. What does he mean by **walking and speaking figures**? If he means people or persons then the other-minds problem doesn't make any sense because the concept of "people" or "persons" itself implies that they have thoughts and feelings. If he means bodies of humans beings then again the problem is invalid.
 - b. What does Mill mean **other human beings are alive or automations**? Walking and speaking human beings must be alive , no corpses. By automations did he mean human beings are artifacts or are filled with machinery?
2. Objection against analogical argument as solution to the problem of other-minds
 - a. The number of cases in which I don't perceive any feeling or thought is much more than the number of cases in which I do.
 - b. Also animals bodies resemble with my body in various respects.

Nahar's arguments against Malcom's objections.

- Mill purposively calls them figures to make clear the nature of starting point where the analogical argument starts out. Starting with the **figures** it seeks to reach out to **human beings** due to the similarities with me.
- Mill believes that the human beings are alive. Malcom just ignored this fact and argues if the human beings are corpses.
- Analogical argument, as its name suggests, depends on analogy or similarity. It does not depend on the number of cases we find similarity but rather the points of similarities count much.