



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



John
Templeton
Foundation

newdirectionsproject.com

The final seminar for 2015-16

The final countdown!

The *finale*!

The *dénouement*!

The *coup de grace*!

Seminar 17

1. Approaches to the mind-body question
2. Causation and the mind
3. The non-physicalist vision

1. Approaches to the mind-body question

(A) Accept the traditional categories in terms of which the debate is formulated: dualism, materialism (physicalism), substance, property etc.

Take a stand on one of the traditional positions and defend it

Or....

(B) Critically examine the categories in terms of which the traditional question is posed the hope of pulling the problem apart:

substance in the Cartesian sense

‘property dualism’

the ‘material’, or matter

the ‘physical’

the ‘mental’?

These categories

Are they clear?

Are they empirically acceptable or are they the relics of an outmoded metaphysics and/or science?

Should we accept any/all of them?

And then...

The next stage is to ask what remains of the mind-body question once we have dispensed with (some of) these categories

For example: false contrasts

What is the alternative to physicalism?

Immortal souls?

‘Mind-stuff’? (‘Ectoplasm’)

‘Fairies’!

But why?

Why should you be committed to any of this just because you deny:

‘Any minimal physical duplicate of the actual world is a duplicate *simpliciter*’ ?

The first step

How is the traditional mind-body problem posed, and which of its categories are problematic?

Some traditional aspects of the mind-body problem

If the mind is not spatial, how can it interact with the body?

Does everything supervene on the physical?

How can the mind fit into the world described by science/physics?

Other questions

How can we explain consciousness?

What is the place of the 'subjective' in an 'objective' world?

What's the connection?

The questions seem concerned with very different things:

- the causal role of the mental
- the explanation of consciousness

What have they got to do with each other?

The mind-body problem as a dilemma

First horn: if the mind is not physical, how can it affect the body and the physical world?

Second horn: if the mind is physical, how can we explain consciousness?

(2) Causation and the mind

Is there a quite general 'interaction problem'?

Because Descartes had an interaction problem, does that mean we do?

False starts

‘If the mind is not spatial, how can it interact with the body?’

Who says the mind is not spatial and why should anyone accept that?

What is the problem with mental-physical interaction?

Mental things cause physical things

Is this because of something about the **mental**?

Or something about **causation**?

Or something about the **physical**?

The mental?

What is it in the very idea of the mental that gives rise to a mental causation problem?

It's not like the case of numbers, for example

Causation?

Theories of causation:

regularity: Hume, Mackie

counterfactual dependence: Lewis

probabilistic: Mellor

interventionist: Woodward

agency theories: Price

(energy transfer: Dowe)

The physical?

The **only** plausible source of the causal problem is the idea that it is an empirical fact about the physical world that it is, in some sense, 'causally closed'

If the physical world is 'causally closed', then how can the mental get in there to make a difference?

The causal closure of the physical

Not: everything can be explained by physics (too strong)

Nor: every physical effect has a physical cause (too weak)

But: every physical effect has a sufficient physical cause

Sufficient causes

All sufficient causes are only 'sufficient in the circumstances'

Why believe the causal closure of the physical?

We should not base our understanding of the mind on half-understood generalisations about contemporary physics

Many of those who defend physicalism appeal to physics with a looseness that they would not tolerate in the rest of their philosophical endeavours

3. The non-physicalist alternative

Forget about trying to investigate the mind by philosophising about physics

Back to the things themselves!

The things themselves

The organism

The organism's capacities

The exercises of these capacities

Some of these capacities are mental

The mind-body question

How are our mental capacities embodied in our brains, bodies and lives?

Mental capacities

What makes a capacity (mode) mental?

My answer: intentionality

That's next year's subject!

To be continued...

www.newdirectionsproject.com



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



John
Templeton
Foundation

newdirectionsproject.com