

Lecture 9

Part Two:

The Intentional Stance, Real
Patterns, Indeterminacy, True
Believers

Plan

- The Intentional Stance
 - A special case of the design stance
- Real Patterns in behavior
 - The 'realist' aspect to Dennett
- Indeterminacy
- True Believers
 - What kinds of things really have intentional states (beliefs etc)?

The Intentional Stance

- The design stance involves our seeing objects that persist and move through time and space
 - Insofar as we didn't view the lifeworld from the design stance we were missing something that was really there
- The design stance works well for artifacts
 - Clocks and thermometers behave how they are designed to behave
- The intentional stance involves viewing the behavior of objects as the rational product of mental states
 - Look to where the 'light is' (behavior)

The Intentional Stance

- The intentional stance
 - An intentional object will act so as to satisfy their strongest desire on the assumption their beliefs are true
 - An intentional object is motivated to revise their beliefs towards truth
 - An intentional object is happy when they get what they desire
 - We use platitudes like these to predict and explain behavior from the intentional stance

The Intentional Stance

- It works other things being equal
 - Fails for neurological breakdowns, quirky environments etc
 - Similar to the ‘provided that nothing encroaches’ clause
- Dennett thinks these generalizations work fairly well for people because evolution eliminated those who weren’t rational

Real Patterns

- In his early works many thought that he was a ‘fictionalist’ about mental states
 - They are strictly speaking fictions
- Or an ‘instrumentalist’ about mental states
 - They are useful tools but there isn’t really any such things
- Or an ‘irrealist’ about mental states
 - They don’t really exist

Real Patterns

- In 'Real Patterns' (one of his later works) he tries to focus on the realist aspects of his view
 - Utility of abstract objects (including patterns)
 - Mind-independence of patterns (if we don't see them we are missing something that is really there)
- Many think that his 'mild realism' is unstable
 - That it lapses back into one of the previous views

Real Patterns

- Bar code
 - Same pattern, different noise ratios
- Patterns are objective
 - ‘Pattern’ is defined in terms of compressibility of the description
 - Someone can fail to see a pattern that is really there
 - We probably fail to see patterns that are apparent to other organisms

Indeterminacy

- He does think that there could be a case where two different people see two different patterns:
 - 60% pattern, 40% noise
 - 70% pattern, 30% noise
 - If both play the odds properly both will get rich
- In this case there is no further fact of the matter as to which pattern is real or even 'most real'
- Similarly there may be no further fact of the matter whether a person 'really believes' p or whether they 'really believe' q instead

Indeterminacy

- There can be indeterminacy in concrete objects too, though
 - How many grains of sand are a heap?
 - When is a person bald?
 - When does a hill become a mountain?
- So if it can be indeterminate whether someone really believes p or whether they really believe q instead that doesn't undermine the reality of belief

True Believers

- What makes it true that an object has the belief that p ?
- When we adopt the intentional stance towards the object (view it as a rational agent with beliefs and desires)
- There is predictive leverage to be had in ascribing the belief that p to it

True Believers

- There is a concern that the theory is too promiscuous in what gets to count as having mental states
 - What about the chair staying still because it feels like it?
 - What about the thermostat having beliefs and desires about room temperature?
 - What about the chess playing computer that desires to get its queen out early?

Indeterminacy of True Believers

- There may be indeterminacy whether an object really is an intentional object
 - Continuum (in some sense) between us and animals
 - Continuum in our evolutionary history
 - Continuum in our individual development
 - Continuum in AI programs
- But that doesn't undermine the reality of belief

Predictive Leverage

- One might think that a fix for the promiscuity objection would be that we are ONLY justified in adopting the intentional stance when there is predictive leverage to be had by NO OTHER METHOD
- But problems with the pattern / noise trade-off
- Maybe it is okay that there is a degree of indeterminacy in who the true believers are or in what an intentional object believes?

Summary:

- So in 'Real Patterns' he attempts to focus on the reality (objectivity, mind-independence) of patterns (in terms of compressibility)
- Two different patterns can be equally 'real' (insofar as both get rich playing the odds)
- Real patterns (in behavior) emerge when we adopt the 'intentional stance' (just like how real objects emerge in the life world when we adopt the 'design stance')
- True believers are objects whose behavior is successfully predicted from the intentional stance
- The predictive leverage is that had by 'no other method' (by adopting no other stance)