

Humans, Animals and Machines

Exploring the philosophy of mind

**ESSAY 2: DOES THE NOTION OF INFERENCE TO THE BEST EXPLANATION PROVIDE
THE BEST APPROACH TO JUSTIFYING OUR BELIEFS ABOUT OTHER MINDS?**

Many philosophers have wondered about the existence of two worlds, the one outside us and the one inside us. According to Kant, there is an exterior, a material world, which can be determinable in time and space and can be perceived through our senses (phenomena). As for the inner world, it is rather the 'things in themselves' (noumena).^[1] Inspired by Kant's theory, Arthur Schopenhauer interprets it and insists that 'every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world'. In contrast to his fellow, Arthur Schopenhauer believes that the phenomena and noumena are not two different realities or worlds. These two realities are the same world, but experienced differently. The philosopher Schopenhauer takes the example of the body which we experience in two ways. Firstly, we perceive it as an object or thing and secondly we experience it from the inside by our mind.

Through the views of these two philosophers, we can understand that there is the knowledge of the existence of one's own mind and the perception of the outside world. But what about the knowledge of the existence of the mind of others? If we can understand that the knowledge of the existence of one's own mind is possible because we experience it, it may seem impossible to experience the existence of another's mind. How can we know that other people have a mind? This inquiry is called 'the problem of other minds'.

To answer this question, the most widespread view is epistemological one, which revolves around how do we know that someone other than ourselves has a mind? It is therefore a critical study of the assumptions and conclusions in order to determine their logical origin, value and scientific and philosophical significance. The task is seen as discovering the justification for our beliefs about minds.

In an attempt to explain the problem of other minds, I will focus on the following issue: **Does the notion of inference to the best explanation provide the best approach to justifying our beliefs about other minds?**

To answer it, we are going to tend first toward an analogical answer which provides an inferential reasoning. Then we are going to observe the limits of this view. Finally, to question ourselves around a non-inferential explanation to justify our beliefs about other minds.

To try to justify the beliefs that other human beings have thoughts, feelings and other mental attributes we can rely on the analogical hypothesis. Analogy is a reasoning based on the inference. The aim is to find out by what evidence others possess a mind in the outside world.

If we know the existence of our mind it is because we have a direct link with our body and mind. We do not need to develop a reasoning based on the inference to assume that we are in pain when we touch fire. The burn gives us a very acute, targeted sensation at the place in contact with the fire. We do not have to observe symptoms such as redness, heat or anything else to certify that we are in pain. Feelings such as pain are obvious, that is why we talk about a direct connection with ourselves. But this certainty of knowledge is not present when we focus on others, that is why we use our perception to observe their behaviour and knowledge. This asymmetry between self-knowledge and knowledge of other people's minds is at the root of the 'problem of other minds', from an analogical point of view. So how can we assume that others have a mind?

The purpose of analogy is to justify the hypothesis that others possess a mind. The starting point from this assumption is the physical resemblance between myself and other, in addition the belonging to the same species. This leads us to deduce that others

have a mind just like mine. Then the analogical justification begins with our own case to deduce the mental state of others through what I can observe, that is their behaviours. Our past experiences have allowed us to assimilate behaviours that derive from mental states. We can use these knowledges to develop hypotheses about other people's thoughts and feelings that I cannot observe. Indeed, when a person displays his or her actions and external signs, it appeals to behaviours that have taken place in my own case through my experience. However, it is important to stress that the conclusion of the mental state in which the other person is in, derives only from the hypothesis and arguments observed by my perception of the other person's behaviour. Therefore, the hypothesis here cannot be verified.

It is therefore important to be careful not to use invalid principles in an analogical reasoning that similar effects (behaviours) have similar causes (the mind). Instead, we should appeal to valid principles in inferential reasoning that causes have similar effects. What we can observe in our own case leads us to the assumption that our mental states are caused by the physical states of our body. We can argue that our physical states resemble the physical states of others that will cause the same mental states. This is what the psychologist James Hervey Hyslop calls the principle of the uniformity of nature. [2] This resource is frequently used in science as it appeals to a high degree of objectivity. In the case of analogy the perception is not enough, inference is necessary to analyse and guide us towards conclusions. This mechanism is similar that used by mentalism. We often think that mentalists read our thoughts, instead they make connections by observing our behaviour, and they deduce tendencies by their intuition. Moreover, it is all the more admissible that behaviour is a means of accessing the mind of others, if we consider the mind connected to the brain. Then there may be a way to have a readability of the mind of others.

Finally, this process of analogy based on deduction logically favours the fact that other people have experiences, like us. This belief about other people's minds leads us to see this as a valid explanation for other people's behaviour. But can we consider it the best one? Are there gaps in this analogical view?

Although analogical inferential reasoning provides arguments based on our observations for the existence of another's mind, we can point out some problems with this reasoning. The form of the analogical reasoning is problematic since it takes a situation and links the elements together logically. This leads to sometimes premature conclusions which generalise a single case and make them fatally imperfect. In the case of the existence of another's mind, this means that our mind would be the representation of many mind or minds in general. Furthermore, to use the analogy, in our own case we would have to have an exact knowledge of our mental states and be able to classify each of our behaviours according to the state we are in which we find ourselves in order to apply it to others. However, this can lead to transposing one's own experiences and feelings onto others and thus not recognising the existence of the other's mind but one's own. For example, if we try to imagine someone else's pain on the model of our own pain it means that I have to imagine the pain, which I cannot feel on the model of the pain I feel. This possibly leads us to a kind of primitiveness of a person's concept. We can therefore understand that analogy allows us to believe that others possess a mind but the analogical inferential reasoning does not allow us with certainty to know another's mind.

Then, through physical resemblances and belonging to the same species, the analogy accepts that others have a mind since they are our fellow men. But in epistemology,

Cartesian thinking about the mind of the other does not accept that others have a mind similar to mine. This emphasises the doubt of possible knowledge in relation to the mind of another. This doubt, which stems from a more general doubt, is raised by Descartes. It concerns our knowledge of the outside world. Indeed, if the analogy is based on our observations and our perception of others, Descartes insists on the idea that our senses sometimes deceive us. Moreover, it is possible that we find ourselves in an extended dream and what we perceive is only the fruit of our imagination. Finally, Descartes tells us about an evil demon who would deceive us into thinking that there is a world beyond how things appear. Maybe this demon has created the image of people who are similar to himself and maybe they are zombies in the philosophical sense. They would be non-thinking, no-feeling things that move similarly to us. This would make it impossible for others to possess a mind. So our beliefs about knowing the mind of another could not be justified by the notion of inference since it would be unobservable. However, if we follow this Cartesian reasoning, we run the risk of falling into scepticism as well as solipsism. Indeed, these risks may lead to the thought that I am alone in the universe. Perhaps this is what the analogy tries to avoid by using deduction to explain our own beliefs in the minds of others.

The deductive reasoning used by the analogy is valid, but there are some problems. Is it possible to ensure the best approach to justifying our beliefs about the minds of others? For this we will look at a non-inferential view.

So far we have been interested in deduction to justify our beliefs about other minds. But as we have seen, with the use of inference the conclusions are not verifiable and there is a real risk of generalising one's own case. But when is it not knowledge of the minds of others through non-deduction? The best resource for knowing the minds of others would be telepathy, however this resource is not open to the human being. Moreover, the problem with this resource is that if we capture the thoughts and experiences of the person opposite, then they become mine and are no longer his. This leads us to reflect on how can we know the mind of another person without the use of deduction and without the ability to telepathise?

This may be possible by redefining the way we perceive others. For the moment with the analogy, we have considered an indirect link with oneself and others because by this reasoning to have a direct link is to have complete readability without the need to guess. With an analogical look, we can judge the knowledge of ourselves to be absolute. But could the knowledge of the mind of others be immediate, that is to say without barriers? This would not mean that our knowledge is complete or that there are no difficulties that prevent us from reaching this knowledge. According to John Henry McDowell, a contemporary philosopher, there are two crucial sections in the knowledge of the mind of the other. Firstly, the understanding of experience and then the understanding of behaviour. He does not refute the possibility of error, he accepts it, but insists that fallibility comes from our perceptual abilities and not from our experience. When the experience is true, we can accept it to give us knowledge of the world.

The philosopher Frederick Irwin Dretske goes even further, arguing that the mind of others is observable. We come to know what others think and feel. For example, we can see the fact that another person is happy or angry because we would not perceive it if the person in front of us was not. In the analogy, there is a fairly strict form of observing behaviour in order to deduce a mental state. But is subjectivity to be denied? The body and behaviour of others becomes a canvas on which one's experiences and feelings are displayed. Do not consider behaviour as a field of expression that we can perceive and interpret in order to understand it.

But does knowledge of the minds of others come only from perception? According to the philosopher and nun Edith Stein, empathy would be direct as opposed to perception, which is more controversial. This allows us to experience foreign consciousness. Although this experience is always imperfect because of the distance between what we are aware of when we feel empathy for the other and what the other feels, it does not prevent us from having access to the other's mind. Incomplete understanding is also important, because if we were to feel perfectly the perception of the other's world view, then we would be the other. His experience would become ours. Merleau-Ponty quotes that 'the grief and anger of another have never quite the same significance for him as they have for me. For him these situations are lived though for me, they are displayed'.

Finally, in order to know another's mind, it is necessary to define which mind we are talking about. Until now, we have been mentioning mind in the Cartesian sense that is the faculty of feeling and thinking, but isn't the mind more than that? For centuries the notion of mind and soul have been intertwined, through the mind we can hear something much greater, sometimes even supernatural. So if we look at the 'problem of other minds' from a Cartesian perspective, deduction is a valuable, though not perfect, resource. But this view does not explain everything. How is it that some minds communicate and understand each other more? Apart from being one mind and one body, Man is an entity that has its own identity and connects with others. When mind or souls choose each other then there is no need to guess the behaviour of the other, it becomes obvious. The knowledge of the existence of the other can be direct although sometimes there are uncertainties, but as in the reading of one's own mind. Our feelings, thoughts, gestures are not always of immediate clarity, we may think that this is what happens when we wish to know the existence of the other's mind.

To conclude, the notion of inference in the analogy is a resource based on observing the behaviour of others through the experience of one's own case. In a way, this allows one to know indirectly the mind of others in an objective way. However, we can see several problems such as the generalisation of my own existence, which can lead to no longer observing the mind of the other but one's own. However, the inference could be that the best explanation of the 'other mind problem' would be if one were able to bypass all criticisms standardly brought to bear against the argument from analogy. To consider the human being as an entity that has an internal state would make it possible to avoid any generalisation. However, non-inferential explanations that use a direct and incomplete link between oneself and others are also admissible to justify the minds of others. But for this, it is preferable to consider the mind not only as a brain but as an entity in its own right within oneself. 'A complete response to the problem of other minds seems obliged to incorporate more than one approach, and may have to incorporate several' of Andrew Melnyk.

bibliography

BOOK

'[The philosophy book](#)' ; Published by DK ;

ARTICLES

Anita Avramides ; 'other mind' ; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy ; First published Thursday May 2, 2019 ; available on :
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/other-minds/>

Alec Hyslop ; '[Other Minds](#)' ; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy ; First published Thursday October 6, 2005 ; substantive revision Monday November 23, 2009 ; available on :
<https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/archives/fall2010/entries/other-minds/>

LESSON

Lesson 7: The Problem of Other Minds ; DR REBEKAH HUMPHREYS ; Tuesday 3 November