Problems in Consciousness I.

RYLE & LOGICAL BEHAVIORISM
TO SMART & THE IDENTITY THEORY
Gilbert Ryle argued that Descartes made two major mistakes:

- First, he made a kind of “category mistake” when he separated the mind from the brain – as one unfamiliar with the words might separate the college from the students, teachers, administrators, staff, buildings, grounds and the way in which these various entities are organized.

- Secondly, he created a kind of ghostly substance to explain the workings of the brain because he so ill understood the brain – just as one unfamiliar with a GPS system might invoke a demon or ghost to explain how it tells us to “turn left at the next intersection.” For Ryle, once we understand the system, we don’t need the “ghost in the machine” just as once we understand the brain, we won’t need the mind.
The Base Assumptions:

- We’re conscious – we have thoughts, beliefs, ideas, awareness of sensations, etc.
- We’re capable of conscious behavior.
- Mental states are non-identical to neural states – i.e. neural and synaptic activity.
- The soul, if we have one, is not responsible for consciousness – Cartesian Substance Dualism cannot account for conscious behavior.
- The mind is not an immaterial substance.
More questionable claims:

- Mental states cause behavior.
- Our mental states are intentional – that is they are about something meaningful and are representational – for example my idea or thought of a dog represents the dog I’m perceiving.
- In order to fully account for consciousness, a theory must include these intentional and representational properties of mental states.
So...What’s the problem?

- We still need to explain why the brain, a wholly material substance can produce not only neuronal/synaptic activity which is publicly accessible (under the right circumstances and with the right equipment) and brain state claims are corrigible but it also appears to produce mental states which are privileged and statements about thoughts, beliefs, sensations, etc. are incorrigible. In other words...how can the brain be conscious if it is composed of wholly unconscious matter?
Three Basic Strategies

1) Compatibilist/Non-Reductive:
   - Mental state language and brain state language are two very different ways looking at and describing activities and properties of one and the same substance; there is only the brain and central nervous system and events within the Central Nervous System (CNS) can be described subjectively (mental) or objectively (neural), depending on one’s perspective.

2) Reductive:
   - There is no mind: Mental events can be reduced to behavioral output or a systems description of how the CNS works.

3) Eliminative:
   - There is no mind and mental states are not causally irrelevant – at best they are epiphenomenal – functioning as after- or side-effects of the CNS. Only the CNS causes behavior.
First Attempt: Ryle and “Logical Behaviorism”

- Ryle presented an early attempt to explain consciousness in a reductive and objectively verifiable manner which is called “Logical Behaviorism”
- This theory reduces mental states to behavioral states – for example, pain (a mental state) is reduced to pain behavior - an observable state e.g. grimacing, hopping around, cursing, etc. (radical) or a pattern of behavior or disposition to exhibit pain behavior if not overridden by some other dispositional state (logical).
2 Problems with Logical Behaviorism:

- **The First Problem:**
  - If there is no behavior then we must assume there is no mental state – e.g., Super Spartans or Monty Python’s “Black Knight”

- **The Second Problem:**
  - We do not have to observe ourselves in a mirror in order to figure out what mental state we’re in – we just know. This theory accounts for how we may ascribe mental states to others but it cannot account for how we ascribe mental states to ourselves.
J.J.C. Smart & the Identity Theory

- Smart rejected Ryle’s original approach and argued instead for a non-reductive, compatibilist approach called the “identity theory.”
- Smart argues that the mind and brain are just two different ways of looking at and describing events in the CNS.
“(The thesis) is that, in so far as ‘after-image,’ or ‘ache,’ is a report of a process, it is a report of a process that happens to be a brain process. It follows that the thesis does not claim that sensations can be translated into statements about brain processes. Nor does it claim that the logic of a sensation statement is the same as that of a brain-process statement. All it claims in so far as a sensation statement is a report of something, that something is in fact a brain process.” (p.498)
Example: nations are nothing over and above citizens – but “this does not prevent the logic of nation statements being very different from the logic of citizen statements.” (p.498)

So... mental statements are nothing over and above brain events – but the logic (privileged access, incorrigibility) and language (pains, thoughts, beliefs, interests, desires, etc.) of mental state claims is not the same as and cannot be translated to the logic (publicly accessible) and language (neurons, synapses, lobes, etc.) or brain-state claims.
A Metaphor for the Compatibilist Approach:

- The properties & description of the exterior of a house...
- cannot be translated to or conflated with the properties and description of the interior of that house.
Three Advantages of the Compatibilist Approach:

1. It entirely avoids Descartes’ problem with causal interaction: there are not two distinct substances with two distinct events but only one substance with two distinct sets of properties or descriptions (this is *property* dualism *not* substance dualism)

2. It explains why the language and logic are so different and are not translatable – when we use a mental description we are looking “inwards,” subjectively describing “what it is like” to have a certain experience and when we use neural language we are objectively describing what is happening physically – at the level of the CNS.

3. It conflates very nicely with our intuitive accounts of our own experiences.
Three Problems with the Compatibilist Approach:

1. Jerome Shaffer argued that no amount of research can show that mental events and neural events have the same properties and if, as Smart has claimed that mental events are empirically identical to neural events then they must have “all the same properties.” (p.505)

2. If there is no one-to-one match up with neural states and mental states then there is no way to disprove or prove the theory. If a theory cannot be falsified then it cannot be verified. (Karl Popper claimed that for any hypothesis to have credence, it must be inherently disprovable before it can become accepted scientific proof.)

3. If mental language describes purely subjective experiences and are non-translatable to objectively verifiable states then mental state claims are essentially meaningless and are a private language – shared by no one else except only in the most pragmatic and superficial sense. When you say you have a headache and I say I have a headache how could we ever verify if we were describing the same sort of experience? Even if we attempt to detail what it is like to have a headache, we’re still relying on using language to describe experiences that by their very nature cannot be compared or shared.