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0521652855 - An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind

E. J. Lowe

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In this book Jonathan Lowe offers a lucid and wide-ranging introduction to the philosophy of mind. Using a problem-centred approach designed to stimulate as well as instruct, he begins with a general examination of the mind-body problem and moves on to detailed examination of more specific philosophical issues concerning sensation, perception, thought and language, rationality, artificial intelligence, action, personal identity and self-knowledge. His discussion is notably broad in scope, and distinctive in giving equal attention to deep metaphysical questions concerning the mind and to the discoveries and theories of modern scientific psychology. It will be of interest to any reader with a basic grounding in modern philosophy.

E. J. Lowe is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Durham. His publications include *Kinds of Being* (1989), *Locke on Human Understanding* (1995), *Subjects of Experience* (1996) and *The Possibility of Metaphysics* (1998).

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Preface

At a time when many introductory books on the philosophy of mind are available, it would be fair to ask me why I have written another one. I have at least two answers to this question. One is that some of the more recent introductions to this subject have been rather narrow in their focus, tending to concentrate upon the many different ‘isms’ that have emerged of late – reductionism, functionalism, eliminativism, instrumentalism, non-reductive physicalism and so forth, all of them divisible into further sub-varieties. Another is that I am disturbed by the growing tendency to present the subject in a quasi-scientific way, as though the only proper role for philosophers of mind is to act as junior partners within the wider community of ‘cognitive scientists’. It may be true that philosophers of an earlier generation were unduly dismissive – and, indeed, ignorant – of empirical psychology and neuroscience, but now there is a danger that the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction.

Perhaps it will be thought that my two answers are in conflict with one another, inasmuch as the current obsession with the different ‘isms’ does at least appear to indicate an interest in the *metaphysics* of mind, a distinctly philosophical enterprise. But there is no real conflict here, because much of the so-called ‘metaphysics’ in contemporary philosophy of mind is really rather lightweight, often having only a tenuous relation to serious foundational work in ontology. In fact, most of the current ‘isms’ in the philosophy of mind are generated by the need felt by their advocates to propound and justify a broadly *physicalist* account of the mind and its capa-

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cities, on the questionable assumption that this alone can render talk about the mind scientifically respectable. Many of the esoteric disputes between philosophers united by this common assumption have arisen simply because it is very unclear just what 'physicalism' in the philosophy of mind really entails. In the chapters that follow, I shall try not to let that relatively sterile issue dominate and distort our philosophical inquiries.

This book is aimed primarily at readers who have already benefited from a basic grounding in philosophical argument and analysis and are beginning to concentrate in more detail upon specific areas of philosophy, in this case the philosophy of mind. The coverage of the subject is broad but at the same time, I hope, sharply focused and systematic. A start is made with a look at some fundamental metaphysical problems of mind and body, with arguments for and against dualism providing the focus of attention. Then some general theories of the nature of mental states are explained and criticised, the emphasis here being upon the strengths and weaknesses of functionalist approaches. Next we turn to problems concerning the 'content' of intentional states of mind, such as the question of whether content can be assigned to mental states independently of the wider physical environments of the subjects whose states they are. In the remaining chapters of the book, attention is focused successively upon more specific aspects of mind and personality: sensation, perception, thought and language, reasoning and intelligence, action and intention, and finally personal identity and self-knowledge. The order in which these topics are covered has been deliberately chosen so as to enable the reader to build upon the understanding gained from earlier chapters in getting to grips with the topics of later chapters. Rather than include separate guides to further reading for the topics covered by the book, I have avoided unnecessary duplication by constructing the notes for each chapter in such a way that they serve this purpose as well as providing references.

The book is not partisan, in the sense of espousing an exclusive approach to questions about the mind in general –

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such as any particular form of physicalism or dualism – but at the same time it does not remain blandly neutral on more specific issues. Developments in empirical psychology are taken into account, but are not allowed to overshadow genuinely philosophical problems. Indeed, my approach is a problem-oriented one, raising questions and possible answers, rather than aiming to be purely instructive. I have tried to write the book in a simple and non-technical style, with a view to making it accessible to as wide a readership as possible. At the same time, I hope that professional philosophers specialising in the philosophy of mind will find it of interest more than just as a teaching aid.

I am grateful to a number of anonymous referees who provided valuable suggestions and advice at various stages in the preparation of this book. I only regret that limitations of space have prevented me from adopting all of their suggestions. I am also very grateful to Hilary Gaskin of Cambridge University Press for her encouragement and help throughout the process of planning and writing the book.