

Mind as socially constituted

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I want to argue that the findings of shared intentionality call for a different philosophy of mind. One that is not individualistic and recognizes how social interactions are constitutive of the mind. The mind is not just what the brain does, it is what emerges from being immersed in interactions with others.

Most contemporary philosophy of mind claims that brains cause or are minds. This position is too narrow, because it only connects mind to the subpersonal level. I will posit that the brain, as the subpersonal level, together with the social environment, as the supra-personal level, jointly form mind. Mind is thus derivative from culture and organism, rather than an independent substance, place or realm.

To support this alternative philosophy of mind I will look at two proponents of a social conception of mind: Vygotsky and Wittgenstein. Vygotsky established cultural-historical psychology which argues that higher mental processes have their origin in social processes and are acquired through internalization. Wittgenstein, in Schatzki's account, sees the mind as conditions of life expressed by the body. Mind is how things stand and are going for someone. For both Wittgenstein and Vygotsky actions and practices are crucial aspects. This is in contrast to the classical picture of the mind as an information processing device.

After establishing this alternative view on mind I want to consider consequences for philosophy of mind. Firstly the concept of a mental state, which plays a fundamental but rarely questioned role in philosophy of mind, is confused because it presumes discreteness. The mind-body problem is incorrectly formulated because it ignores the role of life conditions, and because the mind is not causal. Finally I think a social conception of mind provides an account of where meaning comes from, namely cultural transmission.

References

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