

of mistake. He supports this appeal by arguing that one cannot falsify the claim, "If I find mistake in believing that p unthinkable, then I am not mistaken in believing that p " (p. 150). Falsifying the consequent involves taking mistake to be thinkable, and that falsifies the antecedent too. This ploy does not really help, since finding beliefs for which mistake is unthinkable is the problem.

When it comes to right action, Butchvarov finds no comparable grounds for knowing. The arguments depend upon accepting that "an action is right if and only if it is optimizing" (p. 21). The reference to consequences requires that knowledge of right action must utilize a legitimate form of nondemonstrative evidence. But Butchvarov argues that every attempt to formulate such a form of evidence fails by detaching the concept of evidence from that of truth. Such philosophical skepticism with respect to right is less moving than the actual practical problems in predicting consequences which he describes. Using examples from public policy as well as personal lives, he makes a convincing case for "empirical scepticism." He also accepts the practical anomalies which result: "One of the theses of the true ethical theory may well be that it would be (instrumentally) better that agents be motivated by . . . beliefs that contradict the theses of the theory" (p. 24). This is puzzling since it seems to be the very sort of claim to which empirical skepticism applies.

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Dennett, Daniel C. *The Intentional Stance*.
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A common theme in science fiction is the development of a technology that enables a society to clone its most creative and valuable people. If such a technology were available, Dennett would have to be high on the list of philosophers to be cloned. For the last two decades, his graceful, imaginative, thought-provoking essays have played a central role in making the philosophy of mind one of the most lively and interesting domains in philosophy.

The current volume contains ten of those essays, three of which appear here for the first time. The remaining seven have appeared elsewhere between 1981 and 1987. To six of the seven reprinted essays, Dennett has appended "Reflections" that amplify or modify, sometimes filling in background and sometimes drawing connections between the original essay and the work of other authors.

There is a treasure trove of ideas in these essays. No brief review could begin to do them justice. As I read them, five interrelated themes are central. The first is a neo-Rylean doctrine on the relation between the states and processes spoken of in commonsense psychology and those that will play a role in a mature science of the mind. It might be thought that beliefs, wants, hopes, and the rest of the posits of commonsense psychology correspond to actual internal states of the organism—states that are stored in memory, used in guiding action, and manipulated in reasoning, inference, planning, etc. However, on Dennett's view this sort of Realism (with a capital *R*) about beliefs and the rest is a fundamental mistake. We should not expect to find physical or functional states corresponding to beliefs or wants. Rather, and this is Dennett's second central theme, beliefs and wants are states we attribute to organisms in order to rationalize their behavior.

When we adopt the “intentional stance” toward an organism, we attribute to it the beliefs and desires it “*ought to have*” (p. 49) given its needs and its environment, and we predict that it will perform “those acts that *it would be rational* for an agent with those beliefs and desires to perform” (p. 49). If the predictions are generally correct, then the “stance” is vindicated, and its claims about the intentional states of the organism are true.

We can, of course, adopt the intentional stance to artifacts as well as to organisms. The behavior of robots, chess-playing computers, and even vending machines can often be usefully predicted by adopting the intentional stance. Many philosophers would draw a sharp distinction between the sort of “derived” intentional states that we attribute to robots and the “intrinsic” or “original” intentionality that people and other animals have. A third theme in Dennett is the rejection of this distinction. According to Dennett, there is no such thing as “original” or “intrinsic” intentionality. Whenever anything, be it an organism or an artifact, can truly be said to have intentional states, it is because we find it predictively useful to attribute intentional states to it. If this is “derived” intentionality, then all intentionality is derived.

A fourth central theme in these essays is that there is a deep parallel between the intentional stance and the stance we take toward biological systems when we attribute functions to them. Both the attribution of intentional states and the attribution of functions require a set of rationality or optimality assumptions. Only systems that are rationally designed can have either functions or intentional states. Indeed, in Dennett’s view, there is more than a parallel here. Deep down, intentional ascription and functional ascription are identical.

It is a curious fact that beyond a certain point it often seems impossible to answer questions about function. Consider a perceptual state that leads a hungry frog to flick its tongue in a certain direction. Is it the function of this state to indicate that there is a fly there? Or that there is a bit of food there? Or perhaps just that there is some reasonable probability that there is a bit of food there? It is hard to think of anything that might answer the question. The reason for this, according to Dennett, is that there is no answer. Beyond a certain point, functional attribution is indeterminate. There just is no fact to the matter. Moreover, what is true of functional attribution is true of intentional attribution as well. The idea that there is a single, precise specification of the intentional content of a person’s belief or desire is a philosopher’s myth. The indeterminacy of function and intentionality is the fifth central theme in Dennett’s book.

There is a great deal that might be said in opposition to these five doctrines. Indeed, there is a great deal that has been said. And this is as it should be, since whether one agrees or disagrees, there can be little doubt that Dennett has provided one of the truly important and original perspectives in contemporary philosophy of mind.

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