

Laird Addis

Mind:
Ontology and Explanation

Collected Papers 1981-2005



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INTRODUCTION

The papers of this book were originally published over a period of about a quarter century. For better or worse, my views throughout these years as reflected in these papers have remained virtually unchanged. Besides saving me the trouble of having to explain why I changed my mind about this or that, it also makes it easier to summarize what I do believe about the nature of mind. I have divided the papers into two groups, the one focusing primarily on the ontology of mental phenomena, the other on the role of mind in the explanation of behavior, especially but not only in explanations by way of dispositional mental states. Within each group, the papers appear in their order of original publication. The theses that dominate my views on the ontology of mind are these:

(1) There is a distinct realm of mental properties that are not, in any relevant ontological sense, reducible to physical properties of the brain or body, to behavioral properties, to functional properties or causal connections, or to anything else; thus a dualism of properties is true.

(2) Mental phenomena are usefully understood as falling under the three categories of (a) awarenesses (also called occurrent mental states or mental acts) which, for reasons argued at length, I characterize as the *primary mental entities*; (b) sensations such as pains and itches, emotions, moods, images and afterimages, which I characterize as the *secondary mental entities*; and (c) dispositional mental states, which I characterize as the *tertiary mental entities*.

(3) Every awareness has a property that by its very nature grounds what the awareness is an awareness of, and so is what I call a *natural sign*; thus, there is (internal) mental content.

(4) Consciousness just is intentionality; to be in a conscious state is to be in an intentional state. This thesis, important though it be, is never argued for directly. But it follows, more or less, from my argued-for theses that all of the primary mental entities are

intentional states, that the secondary mental entities occur only as the objects of intentional states, and that dispositional mental states are not, ontologically speaking, intentional states.

The main theses regarding dispositions and dispositional explanations of behavior are these:

(1) Dispositions necessarily involve grounds and laws; it is ontologically impossible for something to have a disposition without there being a ground of that disposition that enters into some relevant law or laws with respect to the behavior that is the, or a, manifestation of the disposition.

(2) Dispositional *mental* states are not, ontologically speaking, intentional states although, just as dissolving is involved in the definition of solubility without being a constituent of it, intentional states are involved in the definition of dispositional mental states without being constituents of them.

(3) Explanations of behavior by dispositional mental states (including explanations by reasons) are legitimate even though they are not causal explanations.

(4) But even though they are not causal, every dispositional explanation of behavior presupposes the possibility (by way of knowing the ground of the disposition and the relevant law) of a causal explanation of that behavior.

Underlying my development of these theses is the belief, argued for sporadically, that they are, without exception, consistent with the scientific worldview. By the scientific worldview I mean, roughly, the theses that everything that happens, including all mental phenomena, has a purely physical explanation (that is, that what I call *scientific materialism* is true), that *methodological* behaviorism (as contrasted with logical behaviorism) is the proper approach to the scientific study of behavior, and that only evolutionary biology can give us whatever understanding is possible of how mental phenomena came to exist. My commitment to the scientific worldview is deeper than any particular view I have of the nature of the ontology of mind and its role in explaining behavior; and should any of the

latter views be shown to be inconsistent with the scientific worldview, I would take that as a conclusive reason for rejecting that particular view. But, putting my view negatively and in very broad strokes, I believe that the widely-held beliefs among both philosophers and scientists that everything *is* physical (that is, that what I call *absolute materialism* is true), and that only absolute materialism is consistent with the scientific worldview, are both false. Indeed, I suggest that an uninhibited empiricism (also part of the scientific worldview) leads one to that ontologically distinct realm of mental properties.

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L.A.

Iowa City, Iowa, USA
January 2008

ONTOLOGY

MIND, STRUCTURE, AND TIME

In his *The Idea of History*, R. G. Collingwood writes the following intriguing words:

In the case of a machine, we distinguish structure from function, and think of the latter as depending on the former. But we can do this only because the machine is equally perceptible to us in motion or at rest, and we can therefore study it in either state indifferently. But any study of mind is a study of its activities; if we try to think of a mind absolutely at rest, we are compelled to admit that if it existed at all (which is more than doubtful) at least we should be quite unable to study it. . . . Hume was therefore right to maintain that there is no such thing as 'spiritual substance', nothing that a mind is, distinct from and underlying what it does. (1966, 221-222)

In the sentences I have omitted from this passage, Collingwood appears to suggest that the distinction between structure and function is merely contextual. In the final sentence of it, however, he affirms the manifestly ontological proposition that *the mind has no structure*. The meaning and the implications of this crucial distinction and crucial proposition constitute the main theme of this essay around which many subthemes will also be developed. I shall proceed as follows: first, I shall sketch a certain view of the ontology of the mind; second, I shall develop an ontological basis for the crucial distinction and make a first application of it to conscious mental states; third, I shall investigate further the meaning and plausibility of the crucial proposition with special attention to the allegation that the crucial proposition implies the impossibility of the scientific explanation of mental life; fourth, I shall set out an account of dispositional mental states to which the crucial distinction will also be applied; and fifth, I shall engage in some closing reflections concerning the connection of mind and time.

I

What is a mind? There are many different contexts in which this question may be raised. For the present purpose, however, an appropriate kind of

answer and also, I believe, the correct answer is that a mind consists of (1) conscious mental states, (2) dispositional mental states, and (3) those intentional objects, if there are any, that exist only when they are intended in a certain way. A sudden remembering, a feeling of pain, the hearing of a sound are all examples of conscious mental states. Conscious mental states constitute the “stream of consciousness,” bringing something at any moment at which one is conscious “before” the mind. Conscious mental states, however analyzed philosophically, constitute *mind in the primary sense*: a being who did not have any conscious mental states is a being with no mind at all.

Examples of dispositional mental states are: holding that kicking dogs is wrong, desiring world peace, and knowing that light travels at 300,000 km/sec. A dispositional mental state is a mental state only because of its being a disposition to have certain conscious mental states as well as to engage in certain kinds of behavior. Probable examples of intentional objects that exist only when they are intended in a certain way are: a pain in one’s toe (as distinguished from the *feeling* of pain in one’s toe), a tickle in the middle of one’s back, images, and afterimages. Even more than those of the other two categories, the idea of this one presupposes certain philosophical judgments. But what justification I shall give for it in this essay will come only at the end of this section.¹

Consider the conscious mental state of imagining that Winston Churchill is president of the United States. (As you read these lines you yourself are in that very state.) Suppose that it is my own imagining. Then the essentials of an adequate analysis of this imagining must derive from the following two considerations: (1) *I* know, directly and with certainty as long as my imagining lasts, first that I am imagining and not, say, doubting or perceiving or remembering; and second, that it is Churchill’s being president of the United States I am imagining and not, say, that $e=mc^2$ or that the moon is made of green cheese. (2) *We* know, not from any single conscious mental state but from a number of them, that a person can imagine (or doubt or remember or, as in dreams and hallucinations,

¹ One should not suppose that I am here speaking of what some call “intentional existence” or “inexistence” or the like: unicorns are not mental because they only have inexistence, that is, can be thought about. Unicorns do not exist at all and so are not dependent for their existence on conscious mental states.