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MATTERS OF THE MIND

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PREFACE

The conference ‘Matters of the Mind’ was held at the University of Missouri-St. Louis October 28–30, 1981. Supported by a grant from the University’s Weldon Spring Fund, the conference brought together ten philosophers to discuss present-day theories of the mind and their ramifications for other areas of our culture. This special issue of Synthese contains the papers read at that meeting.

In the first session Daniel Dennett and Douglas Hofstadter considered how consciousness might be constructed and how we might study it empirically. Dennett used an analogy with literary criticism to characterize an investigating strategy which he dubbed heterophenomenology, while Hofstadter’s dialogue invoked a variety of metaphors, ranging from English garden mazes to “symm”ball machines, to show how a physical system could gain such ‘mental’ attributes as perception and thought, self-control and a soul.

While Dennett’s and Hofstadter’s papers showed how consciousness can be made a respectable object of study, the speakers on the second day addressed ethical implications of one or another picture of the mind. Derek Parfit argued that on the proper view of personal identity, classical prudence is indefensible. He speculated that morality must step in to fill this gap by rewarding paternalistic behavior. Harry Frankfurt offered an account of caring, claiming that a theory of what we care about must supplement philosophy’s traditional concern with what we know (epistemology) and what we do (morality). Finally, Alasdair MacIntyre explored the relationship between changing notions of the self and changing theories of moral responsibility. He argued that Reid and Kant’s moral theories could not appear without a new notion of choice as one entirely free of causal antecedents.

These discussions of mind and self, freedom and responsibility set the stage for the final paper on day three. Richard Rorty applied his magisterial overview of the philosophic art to the special case of philosophy of mind. He suggested that Dennett’s brand of homuncular functionalism blends all that was best in logical behaviorism and
central state materialism. Dennett replied that this was about 0.742 correct; readers are left to draw their own conclusions.

We hope that readers of this issue derive as much pleasure and stimulation from the papers as we derived from the actual Conference sessions. We thank all our conferees who – both as speakers and discussants – helped to make 'Matters of the Mind' a success.

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