

Introduction to Philosophy/Philosophy of Mind

The philosophy of mind is about the form and content of our thoughts, and how and why we come to think them. Understanding the philosophy of mind gives us some fairly universally applicable rules to understand ourselves, other people, animals and even computers.

Philosophy of mind covers similar domains to psychology and psychiatry, and helps us look at these disciplines within a specifically philosophical context.

You can either look at things in a hermetic (closed) or empirical (open) way.

Philosophy of mind is closely connected to cognitive psychology. It is connected also to neuroscience, which is still attempting to sort out (once and for all) whether our minds and our brains are separate.

Questions one may ask are: 'What is the difference between reality and illusion?', 'How is the mind related to the body, or to physical things in general?', 'How do I know that other minds exist?' In studying these questions one might start with Descartes' Meditations, then go on to study George Berkeley, Edmund Husserl and Gilbert Ryle, to mention just one or two.

Further questions include: 'What, if anything, is the "subconscious"?' If this cannot be put on a sound footing, how do we talk about 'self deception'? 'What, if anything, is "mental illness"?'

Another area of philosophy of mind that grew during the second half of the 20th Century is artificial intelligence. The Turing test challenges us to say whether we are talking to a human being or to a computer. People have been developing computers to the point where these tools could be said to have minds. Perhaps they will think autonomously.

Philosophy of mind can be expressed as 'thoughts about thoughts'.