‘The time has come,’ the Walrus said, ‘To talk of many things: Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax— Of cabbages—and kings— And why the sea is boiling hot— And whether pigs have wings.’

Carroll (2008)

Figure 1: ‘Talk’, like some mental states and unlike diabetes, has intentionality.

Discussion: Thesis & Terminology

• In a group, discuss questions 1–5 (thesis or theses and terminology).

Mental states differ from non-mental states, Arpaly argues, in at least two ways:

1. they may be warranted or unwarranted, and not just desirable or undesirable;

2. their content may be causally efficacious i.e. the causal effects of the state may depend on what that state is about.

Some mental states have what philosophers call intentionality. Despite the similarity, this does not mean that they are deliberate or voluntary, as opposed to being non-voluntary or involuntary.

• To say that a mental state has intentionality is not to say that it is intentional.

It is, rather, to say that it has content: it is about something.

e.g. beliefs are about things such as moons, green cheese and last week’s vote on Syria. That is, beliefs, like ‘talk’, have content (figure 1).

Not all mental states are like this.

e.g. Pain lacks intentionality because it is not about anything. It has no content.

This idea of content is closely related to the distinction Arpaly draws between three ways in which mental states may be caused (figure 2). Note, however, that the distinction is not, as Arpaly acknowledges, always a straightforward one in practice. Moreover, the same event may cause different mental states so that the causal route is dependent on content in one case but not the other.

e.g. The content of Deadly Dodos plays no role in causing either the pain or the fear of books. But the content of something plays a role in causing the fear — it is not just chance that it is fear of books, rather than arachnids or baked beans, which results. That is, the content of a belief or memory or judgement, perhaps, is causally efficacious.

Discussion: The Argument

Please discuss the sub-argument assigned to your group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counter</th>
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<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Meaningfulness</td>
<td>(290–4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Moral Imagination</td>
<td>(294–8)</td>
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• What is Arpaly’s sub-argument?
  • A sub-argument is an argument which is also part of a larger argument e.g. a sub-argument might have as its conclusion a claim which is then used by in the overall argument as a premise in support of a further conclusion. The conclusion of a sub-argument is a sub-conclusion of the overall argument.

• Clarify the sub-conclusion.
  • The sub-conclusion is the claim that the sub-argument is trying to persuade you of.

• What are the premises of this sub-argument?
  • Premises are claims which an argument relies on i.e. the points it starts from.

• What role does this sub-argument play in Arpaly’s overall argument for her main conclusion?

If you are happy with your group’s understanding of the sub-argument, please discuss question 6.
Figure 2: The three types of causation identified by Arpaly, illustrated by three ways in which books may cause mental states. (i) The content of *Deadly Dodos* plays no role in causing the pain, even though *Deadly Dodos* does cause it. (ii) The content of *Ghosts & Ghouls KILL!!* plays a role in causing the fear of spirits, but this fear is not responsive to reasons because there is no reason to believe the book, and every reason to doubt the truth of its claims. (iii) The content of *Child Arsonists* plays a role in causing the parent’s concern about her child, as do her observations of her child. If the book is a reputable one and it confirms that the parent’s worries are not an over-reaction — an obsession with lighting fuses and continual attempts to light the cat not constituting a normal developmental phase through which all healthy toddlers must pass — the content of *Child Arsonists* causes a reason-responsive concern.
• What is Arpaly’s overall argument?

• Clarify the conclusion.
  • The conclusion is the claim that the author is trying to persuade you of.

• What are the premises of Arpaly’s main argument?
  • Premises are claims which an argument relies on i.e. the points it starts from.

Discussion: Evaluation

• In a group, please discuss questions 12–14. Is Arpaly’s argument a good one?

• Is the argument valid?
  • An argument is valid if, and only if, the conclusion follows logically from the premises so that the premises could not possibly be true without the conclusion being true as well.

• Is the argument sound?
  • An argument is sound if, and only if, two conditions are satisfied. First, the argument must be valid. Second, all of the premises must be true. It follows that the conclusion of a sound argument is true.

Reflection

• Assuming that somebody suffering from antisocial personality disorder (APD) can no more ‘snap out of it’ than somebody suffering from schizophrenia or depression or diabetes, what should our response be to the former?

• Arpaly’s choice of diabetes — as opposed to Crohn’s disease or congenital blindness — is an interesting one since diabetes is not, in fact, all of a kind.

• While Type 1 diabetes appears to be a matter of genetic inheritance, Type 2 depends to a considerable extent on lifestyle choices. (Of course, some people may have a genetic make-up which puts them at higher risk — perhaps they cannot ‘get away’ with as much as those who are luckier in the allocation of genes.) Obesity and poor dietary choices greatly increase the chances of developing Type 2 diabetes. (Until recently, this type of diabetes was virtually unknown in children.)

Does this make any difference to the plausibility of Arpaly’s argument? Why or why not?

References
