

Everyday Folk Psychology Lecture 2

I. IE as Everyday Psychology

A. Three Explanations

- Last time we review three ways of explaining the behavior of alarm clocks or human beings:
 - **Physical Explanation:** Explanation of the behavior of a system by reference to what the system is made up of (physical components or biological system)
 - **Design Explanation:** Explanation of the behavior of a system by reference to the design or function of the system (ring at set times or survive, learn, etc.)
 - **Intentional Explanation:** Explanation of the behavior of a system by reference to the system's mental states (want to wake us up or beliefs & desires)

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B. Nature of IE Explanations

- Intentional explanations (IEs) may sound dumb, but are more popular than you think.
 - IEs are the basis for Folk Psychology -- how we account for our own and others behavior.
 - To make the argument, I need to complicate the definition of IEs a little.
 - Explanations of the behavior of the system by reference to mental states ***that make the system seem rational***
 - Mental states: Mental verbs: Believing, knowing, hoping, wanting, desiring, imagining, feeling
 - Rationality: Behavior **logically follows from** the mental states.

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C. Everyday uses of IE Explanations

- IE account of a why a person looks for a soda can under his chair, when it is on the table.
 - To make this behavior rational (as following logically from mental states) we must **assume**:
 - The person did not see the can on the table.
 - The person thinks or believes that the soda can is under the chair.
 - When asked, "What are you doing?" the person may say, "I'm looking for my soda can."
- While the person will never find the soda can, she is **acting logically with respect to her mental states** and so is being RATIONAL

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C. Everyday uses of IE Explanations

- Other examples...
- Explain why someone looks for keys on the desk, when they are in the drawer?
 - The person falsely believes that the keys are on the desk.
- Explain why someone eats a peanut butter sandwich when he's deathly allergic to peanuts?
 - He doesn't know that the sandwich has peanuts.
- Explain why someone hits himself with a stick
 - He wants attention and believes that this is the best way to get it.

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C. Everyday uses of IE Explanations

- Behavior is explained using IE by figuring out the mental states from which the behavior logically follows
 - **We explain ourselves and others by choosing the mental states which allow use to say that the person is acting rationally.**
 - We typically do not explain people as:
 - being influenced by the moon or other forces.
 - acting randomly or without any goals or intention
 - being stupid, crazy, or unable to control themselves.
 - **We give people mental states (beliefs, desires) which make their behavior appear RATIONAL.**

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C. Everyday uses of IE Explanations

- More examples...
- Why does a friend suddenly start avoiding you?
 - The friend **wants** to end the friendship
- Why does a child look sad when getting a gift?
 - The child **hoped** to get a better gift
- Why does someone eat a peanut butter sandwich when he is deathly allergic to peanuts?
 - He doesn't **know** that the sandwich has peanuts.
- Why does someone hit himself with a stick
 - He **believes** that it will get him attention.
- Why does a student (not) volunteer in class?
 - student **wants** to leave a good (avoid a bad) impression.

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D. When Are IEs used in Everyday life?

- Rate these explanations for reasonableness
 1. **Alarm Clock ringing:** It wants to wake you up
 2. **Rock rolling downhill:** It wants to be downhill.
 3. **Plant growing towards the sun:** It wants sun.
 4. **Why does my cat never come when I call:** It wants to assert its independence.
 5. **Chess playing computer takes your pawn:** It wants to control the center of the board and knows that pawns are key.
 6. **A newborn grasping her mom's finger:** She wants to tell her mommy that she loves her.

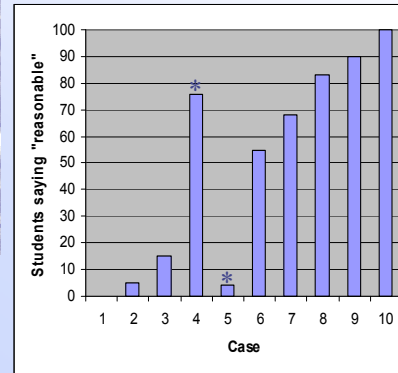
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D. When Are IEs used in Everyday life?

- Rate these explanations for reasonableness
- 7. **5 month-old baby crying when her diaper is wet:** She knows its wet, she feels uncomfortable, and wants it changed.
- 8. **10 month-old baby crying when her mom leaves the room:** He thinks that her mother is not coming back.
- 9. **A 30-month-old human child combing his hair with a banana:** She's pretending that the banana is a comb.
- 10. **A 18 year-old going to college for 4 years:** She knows that it will expand her horizons.

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D. When Are IEs used in Everyday life?



C.1 Complexity!

We use IEs to explain multifaceted behavior of complex entities (human beings, and maybe cats #4).

But, to explain the restricted behaviors of simple inanimate or animate entities (rocks, plants & computers #5) we use Design or Physical Explanations.

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D. When Are IEs used in Everyday life?

- **C.2 Other Behavior**
- IEs can be used to explain behavior even when there are other types of explanations available.
- Why did the car not start this morning?
 - The car knew that I was in a rush to get to school and wanted to frustrate me!
- Why did the dog scratching a door?
 - The dog wants to go outside to pee and knows that you will open it when he scratches.
- Why did my computer crash?
 - It wants me to be late on my psychology assignment.

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D. When Are IEs used in Everyday life?

- There are design or physical explanations of the car's, dog's and computer's behavior
 - The car has a broken timing belt.
 - There is no assumption that cars have *desires* to frustrate, only that the car is mechanically impaired.
 - The dog has learned to associate a full bladder and door scratching to avoid punishment.
 - There is no assumption that dogs have *wants* or *beliefs*, only that dogs are designed to learn from experience and behave on the basis of that learning.
 - The computer programming is inoperative.
 - There is no assumption that computers have *wants*, only that they are designed to run according to their software.

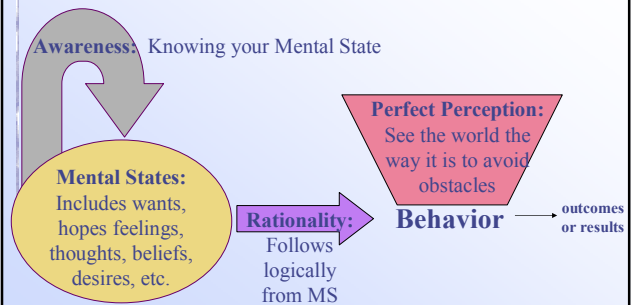
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E. Assumptions of everyday IEs

1. **Assumption of mental states:** Mental states are central in explanations of behavior.
2. **Assumption of Awareness:** Mental states are private experiences immediately known to the person experiencing them.
3. **Assumption of Rationality:** People will tend to act logically with respect to their mental states.
4. **Assumption of Perfect Perception:** People perceive the world directly and only what is really there (so they can act rationally)!

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E. Assumptions of everyday IEs



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E. Assumptions of everyday IEs

- Violating any IE assumption undermines the folk explanation of behavior.
 - **Violating Perfect Perception:** Johnny is taken to seeing things that are not there. Why is he crying,?
 - **Violating Rationality:** David is irrational. Why he is crawling on his hands and knees?
 - **Violating Awareness:** Susan has no idea what she thinks, feels or wants. Why is she is eating a orange?
 - **Violating Mental States:** Brad has no beliefs or desires. Why does he cross the street?

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F. Assignment 1

- Ask someone you know to explain their behavior or use your own explanation for why you did or did not raise your hand.
 - Describe the explanation – word-for-word.
 - Identify the explanation as an intentional one.
 - Apply the four assumptions to the explanation.
 1. Mental states.
 2. Awareness.
 3. Rationality.
 4. Perfect perception.
 - Check out assignment 1 by [clicking here](#)