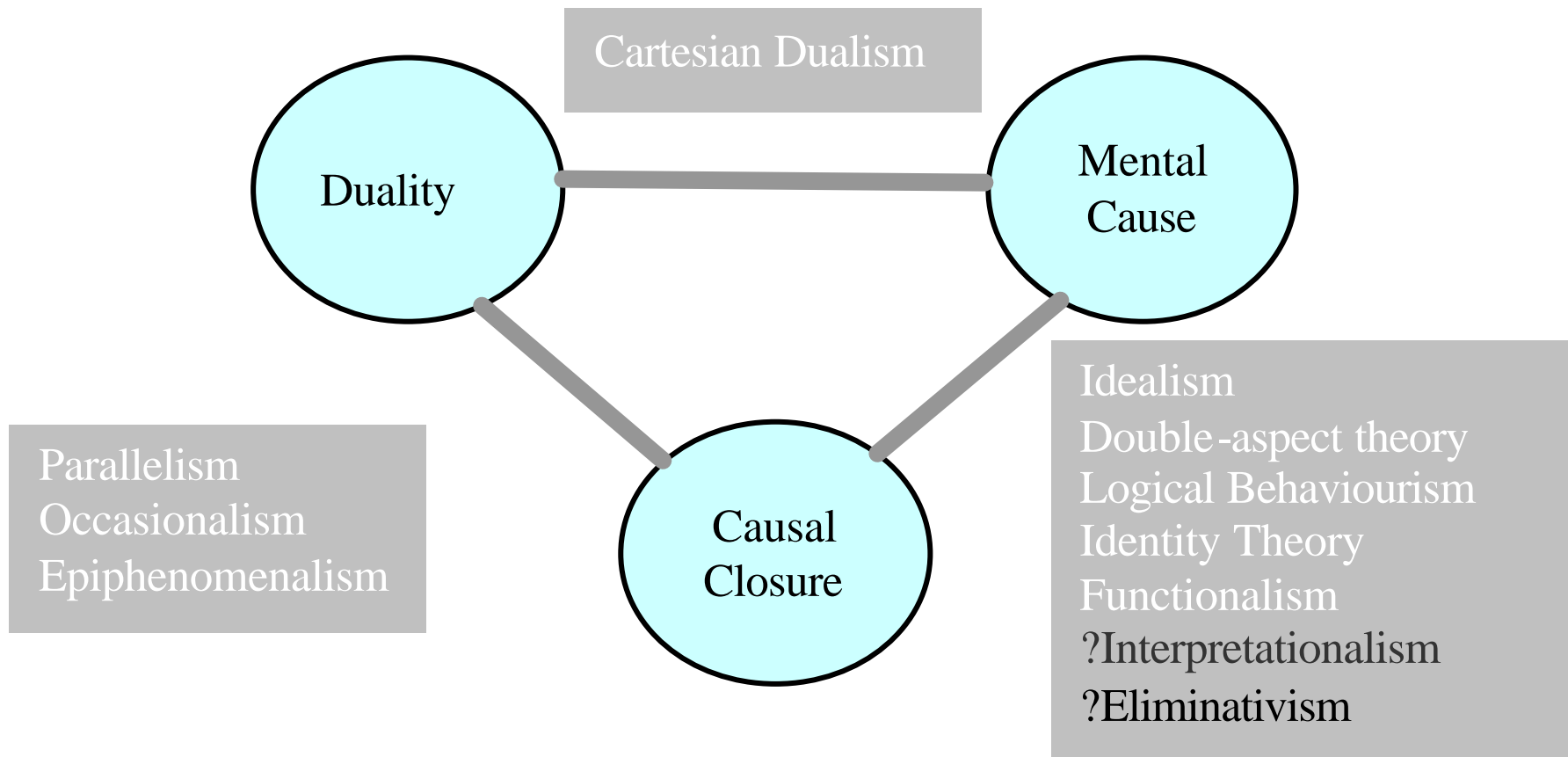


Mind & Body Interpretationalism



Realistic and interpretational approaches to the philosophy of mind

- **Realistic approaches** assume that minds and their content are real features of the world.
- **Interpretational approaches** assume that minds are constructs and need a pre-existing mind to construct it.
 - Donald Davidson: See the first part of chapter 5 in *Heil's Philosophy of Mind*
 - Daniel Dennett: The intentional stance (1987), cf. the second part of chapter 5 in *Heil's Philosophy of Mind*

In discussing the interpretational view, let us ignore the regress of minds that is obvious here for the moment!

Dennet's intentional stance

A creature's having a mind is an *observer-dependent* property: We may decide to treat the creature as "one of us" and ascribe her mental abilities. Moreover, we can correctly and legitimately ascribe *propositional attitudes* to any system whose behaviour could be construed as rational.

Intentional Stance

Our way of seeing things when we try to explain behaviour by referring to beliefs, desires, and other propositional attitudes.

If we can make sense of the behaviour of an individual by taking the *intentional stance* toward its activities, then the individual does indeed have beliefs and desires, hence reasons for what it does.

Hence, having a propositional attitude is a matter of ascribing it. This construes the propositional attitudes **instrumentally**.

Some examples (Heil, p. 155ff)

Why is the octopus emitting a black inky substance?

Because the octopus believes it has been spotted by a predator, wants to protect itself, believes it can do so by placing a dark cloud between it and the predator, and believing that by emitting an inky fluid, it will cause a dark cloud to come between it and the predator.

Why is this white blood cell enveloping that microbe?

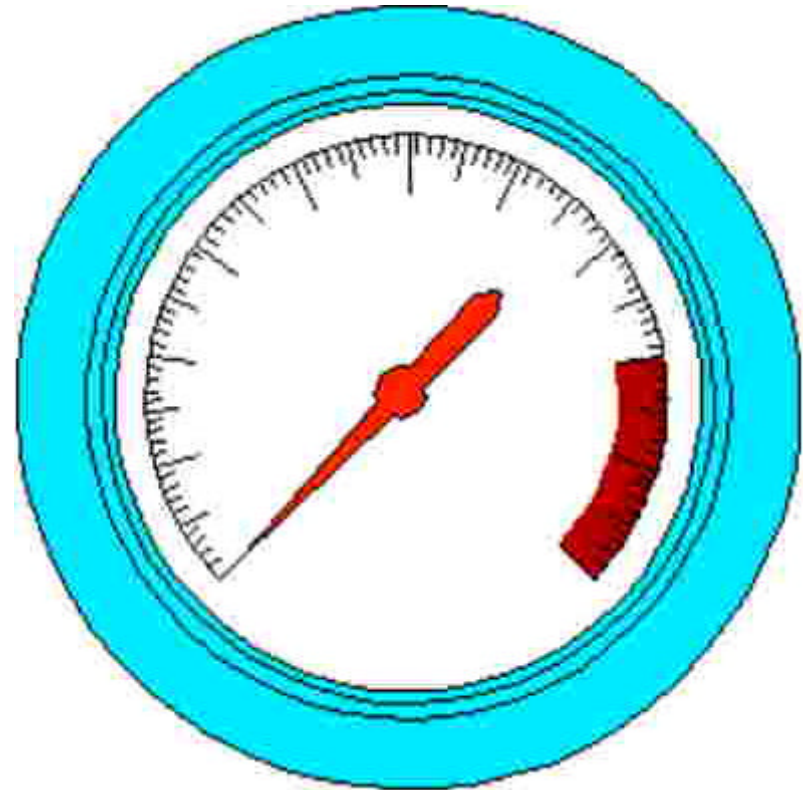
Because the cell wants to destroy the invaders, believes the microbe is an invader, and so wants to destroy it.

Why does the thermostat turn on the heater?

Because the thermostat believes that the room temperature has dropped below 21 °C, and it wants to increase the temperature to at least 21 °C.

Three stances

1. Intentional stance: using propositional attitudes for explaining behaviour
2. Design stance: using the design of the different parts of the (complex) object and their function in order to explain its behaviour. The design stance may help to justify the claims of the intentional stance.
3. Physical stance: Description of the objects from the point of view of their physics and, perhaps, chemistry. This may help to justify the claims of the design stance.



Kinds of minds

Although we can ascribe most objects prepositional attitudes, there are differences in the way this attitudes are organized and used.

Darwinian minds	Hard-wired to respond in an efficient way to their environment	(blood) cells, thermostats, counters, etc.
Skinnerian minds	Ability to learn via operant conditioning (trial and error)	Worms, primitive insects, etc.
Popperian minds	Ability to learn by anticipating experience.	Rats, dogs, cats etc.
Gregorian minds	Ability to learn and to represent self-consciously, capable of self-reflection.	Chimpanzees, Humans.

Skinnerian and Popperian creatures

“Skinnerian creatures ask themselves, ‘what should I do next?’ and haven’t a clue how to answer until they have taken some hard knocks. Popperian creatures make a big advance by asking themselves, ‘What should I think about next?’ before they ask themselves, ‘What should I do next?’ (It should be emphasized that neither Skinnerian nor Popperian creatures actually need to talk to themselves or think these thoughts. They are simply designed to operate as if they had asked themselves these questions)”

Dennett: *Kinds of Minds* (1996), p.100.

My conclusion

- The ascription of propositional attitudes (beliefs, desires) is just a way to make sense of complex systems.
- If we want to understand exactly how these systems operate, we must abandon the intentional stance, move to the design/physical stance.
- The intentional stance may be useful (1) for hunters and (2) for people in conventional talk of minds (folk psychology). However, a serious science of the mind doesn't need the intentional stance. It simply is not helpful for solving old puzzles and creating new insights.