

17 May 2013

"Mind and Evolution"- from Warburton: Locke, Darwin, Freud, Turing and Simon Blackburn  
Big Questions "Am I a Ghost in a Machine?"

We started on Darwin and discussed the meaning of "Survival of the Fittest". Individual or species? Does evolution have a goal? We also noted the difference evolution made to thinking: man is a development from other creatures, not specially and differently created to have dominion over nature. So Mind and Consciousness have evolved too.

We discussed dualism and monism: are Mind and Body two different things, or is Mind inextricably linked to matter? Could we possibly make any valid analogy between humans and computers: The Mind is the brain loaded with software?

Computers have a long way to go to approach having some consciousness, and it is very difficult to get the concepts even to consider whether this is ever going to be possible. It was argued that Locke's assertion that it is the continuity of memory that gives us our identity needs to add in continuity of body: If we could transfer the "software" of a mind to another brain, then doesn't that demand a dualistic theory? Are we not transferring "the ghost in the machine"?

We also examined Locke's assertion that the mind of a child is "a blank slate" – i.e. that knowledge is empirical. Perhaps that can be modified: We are born with some inherent abilities. (Hume would argue that knowledge of matters of fact must be empirical, and that seems right.)

We discussed Freud and the influence of the subconscious mind on our actions and we touched on the point that his theories are "Unfalsifiable" – a term we will return to when we read about Karl Popper.

This summary hardly does justice to a discussion that also wondered whether you could "think like a bat", and there is a lot left in the topic of the philosophy of mind.