

**** Philosophical Themata and the Science of the Mind ****

1. Themata.

We can see the proposals for a science of the mind offered by Descartes, James, Freud, Skinner, and Piaget as reconfigurations of thematic tensions derived from the philosophy of mind, more or less as follows.

(a) Like Plato, Descartes holds out for both metaphysical dualism (Plato’s “pilot on the ship” parallels Descartes’ “real distinction” between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*) and metaphysical realism about abstract entities (Plato’s *eide* parallel Cartesian clear and distinct ideas).

(b) Like Aristotle, James designs a hylomorphic functionalism that avoids ontological reductionism while at the same time preserving naturalistic explanations of the mind.

(c) Freud revives post-Cartesian rationalism as a form of transcendental realism about mental phenomena: scientific psychology can transcend the appearances of things and reveal the “true” (i.e., real) nature of the human psyche.

(d) Skinner revives the empirical idealism of Berkeley and Hume: the elimination of mental events is like the elimination of innate ideas: all psychological phenomena are to be explained in terms of sensory inputs and behavioral outputs.

(e) Piaget revives Kant’s transcendental idealism: concepts without intuitions are empty and intuitions without concepts are blind; for Piaget the mind is a developmental version of Kant’s “transcendental machinery.”

2. Schematic Overview.

	Metaphysical Presuppositions	Methodological Practice	Substantive Claims
Descartes	Dualism	None.	Freedom, anti-mechanism along with the view that mind is a separate substance.
James	Naturalism	Phenomenology (for description) Functional Determinism (for prediction).	CML is a functional result of mind-world interactions. Mind is purposive, changing, and personal.
Freud	Materialism	Psychoanalysis.	Tripartite mind, unconscious mentality, and the autonomy thesis.
Skinner	Behaviorism	Operational definitions, behavioral observations, classical and operant conditioning.	Operant conditioning explains novelty and purposiveness as well as the good life.
Piaget	Developmentalism	Hypotheses are constructed and tested by assigning cognitive tasks to children at various stages.	Constructionist equilibration.