

Physicalism and mental causation (Part I)

Debate by Death Monkey (Philosophy Forum)

[Quote by Minty]I read that the original motivation for materialism was a need to explain the place of mental causation in the physical world. So if a decision is identical to some process in the brain, then mental causation can be said to exist. This would seem to relate to reductive materialism.

But what about *non*-reductive materialism? If our decisions are conceptually distinct from the physical processes occurring in the brain wouldn't our decisions thereby be causally inefficacious? Basically I cannot understand the difference between non-reductive materialism and epiphenomalism. Surely any non-reductive materialist position is necessarily epiphenomenalistic? Or is there something I am not understanding here?

I suppose it could be some sort of supernatural materialism. It kind of depends on what is meant by "reductionism".

For example, a supernatural materialism could be ontologically reductionistic, in that it holds that everything is made up of the same metaphysical substance (matter), but epistemologically non-reductive, in that it holds that the mind could not be scientifically understood by observing physical activity.

Isn't your own philosophy both non-reductive and monistic? If so, I really don't see why you should have any problem with non-reductive materialism, other than that it holds that the substance is material, rather than mental (whatever that is supposed to mean). Either way, the non-reductive aspect just refers to the inability to understand the mind in terms of the not-mind, or vice-versa.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

[Quote by TechnoTut]Ontological non-reductionists, such as myself, are stuck in choosing between epiphenomenalism and interactionism. Although I do not know which of these two positions is the lesser evil, I do know that it does not make sense at all to speak of mental properties in terms of physical properties.

I guess that depends on what you mean by "physical properties". I strongly suspect that you mean something very different by the phrase than any physical reductionist does.

I ask: does it make sense to say that my belief that Bush is the American President, is two inches long, or three ounces heavy? I do not even know how to make sense of such a claim and I do not think anyone else does either.

Of course such claims make no sense. Neither does asking how much computation being done in my computer weighs, or how many inches long the viscosity of a particular fluid is.

Also, if mental properties are physical things, then why is it they they are unobservable in a public sense?

They aren't. They are every bit as observable as any other physical phenomena that are not directly observable, which includes the vast majority of physical things which we know exist.

If a physical thing is observable at all, then it is publicly observable; e.g., electrons are not observable at all, but if they were, they'd be publicly observable because they are physical. But no one can observe , e.g., a bat's experiences.

Electrons are not observable? I am baffled by this. This line of reasoning also seems to be incoherent. Apparently

you believe that both electrons and a bat's experiences are unobservable. You also appear to believe that this is a good reason to think that the bat's experiences are non-physical, but nevertheless accept that electrons are physical. Why the inconsistency?

The reply that the experiences are observable only if a subject actually experiences simply states exactly what a mental property is: a property only observable by the subject itself, thus a privately, rather than a publicly, observable property.

But experiences *aren't* only observable by actually experiencing them. That is just the point. They are also observable by observing their interactions with other things, just as electrons are, and just as the rest of the physical world is.

[Quote by Minty]Sorry DM, I'm basically baffled by your post. I have a problem with non-reductive materialism because it seems to deny mental causation as much as epiphenomenalism.

Only if it is referring to *ontological* reductionism, in which case it must be epiphenomenalism, as I already said. If that is the case, then I agree with you. This is trivial. Metaphysical Materialism is a monism, so there is only one substance. To say that mind is not *ontologically* reducible to matter (the one substance), is to either say that mind is not reducible to any substance at all (epiphenomenalism), or that it is composed of some non-matter substance, in which case you've got dualism.

The entire point of my previous post was that I do not think that the people who endorse non-reductive materialism (other than epiphenomenalists), are referring to ontological reductionism. They are talking about epistemological reductionism. They are, in fact, essentially claiming that the mind is something supernatural. They would claim that it is material in nature (as is everything under materialism), but that it cannot be explained in terms of other physical phenomena.

But either the world is physically closed or it is not. If it is not then that means consciousness is supernatural;

You are mixing completely different definitions of the term "physical" here. The above statement is only true for a specific *epistemological* definition of physical, which is that something is physical if and only if it can be explained in terms of natural laws. Physical closure, in this sense, is quite compatible with interactive dualism, as long as both matter and mind, and their interactions with each other, function according to natural laws.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

[Quote by Minty]Theoretic reduction of the mental to the physical, so that for example psychology can be reduced to physics, certainly can't entertain the notion of mental causation. I don't know why you're introducing these irrelevant distinctions anyway.

Huh? How are they irrelevant?

Look, what I am saying is simply this: It is possible to believe that everything is composed of one ontological substance (matter), including things like thoughts, beliefs, and so on, but also to believe that some of these things function according to natural laws (everything except mental stuff), and that others do not (mental stuff). I think that this is what the non-reductive materialists have in mind. I'm not saying that I agree with it, or that I think it makes sense. I am just trying to answer the original question you asked, which was how non-reductive materialism could differ from epiphenomenalism.

It seems to me that a reductionist materialist thinks that the mental can both be ontologically reduced and theoretically reduced to physical processes.

Yeah, that's what I said. I was talking about *non-reductive* materialists when I said that they think it is ontologically reducible, but not theoretically reducible.

And why are you talking about material substance when both of us think such a concept is nonsensical??

Because you *asked* about it!?!?!?

You asked a question about non-reductive materialism vs reductive materialism vs epiphenomenalism. These are all metaphysical positions which hold that there is a single ontological substance, which is matter. I never said that I agree with any of them. I do not. I think that the entire notion of ontological substances, material or otherwise, is incoherent.

There's no such thing as epistemological reduction. I take it you mean theoretic reduction. But regarding your point, obviously they still think of the mind as being material.

Epistemological reduction simply means reducing our knowledge about one thing to our knowledge about another. It means essentially the same thing as theoretical reduction.

And yes, clearly if they are materialists and not epiphenomenalists, then they think that the mind is material. That is why the only possible way they could be non-reductionists is if they are talking about epistemological, or theoretical reduction.

Where as you can of course explain the mind by simply saying it's the same thing as physical processes i.e you simply define it away.

No, I do not.

I agree with you about non-reductive materialism though.

Great. So what do my own beliefs have to do with any of this?

And what am I mixing this definition with? Neither of us subscribe to the concept of material substance. What else is meant by the physical apart from its causal role in the world?

Well, you made the above statement with respect to interactive dualism's claim that the mental interacts with the physical. But when interactive dualists say that, they are talking about two different metaphysical substances (material and mental) interacting with each other. Sure, neither you nor I believe in a material substance, but *they do*. That is the definitions you were mixing. Under the scientific definition of physical (which is the one which would render interaction between the physical and non-physical supernatural), an interactive dualist who is also a naturalist would claim that both the material and mental substances are physical. That is, they both interact with themselves, and with each other, according to some set of natural laws.

I do not know what you mean by natural laws. Do you mean physical laws?

I mean logical rules which things function according to. Using the scientific definition of the term "physical", yes, they are also physical laws.

I'll assume you do. To interact necessarily means that consciousness is affecting the physical world. Now if it is affecting the physical world, then the processes in the physical world are doing something different than they would do if it were not for this consciousness. Therefore you cannot claim that if consciousness interacts with the physical world, that the physical world will nevertheless still comply with physical laws! (although see my comments about quantum mechanics).

Again you are mixing up definitions.

It may be helpful to use the term "material" when referring to the material substance that materialists and dualists believe in, and the word "physical" when referring to things which function according to logical rules which can, in principle, be inferred from observations using science.

In that case, we have the following:

- 1) Reductive Materialists (or natural materialists): Claim that only one substance exists (matter) and that it is physical (functions according to natural laws). The mind is ontologically reducible to physical processes in this matter, and can also be understood in terms of matter.
- 2) Reductive Idealists (or natural idealists): Claim that only one substance exists (mind) and that it is physical (functions according to natural laws). The material world is ontologically reducible to mind, and can (in principle) both can be understood in terms of physical laws.
- 3) Reductive Dualists (or natural dualists): Claim that two substances exist (mind and matter) and that both are physical. The material world and mental world are not ontologically reducible to each other, but both can be understood in terms of physical laws, as can their interactions with each other.
- 4) Non-reductive Materialists (Supernatural materialists): Claim that only one substance exists (matter), but that only some aspects of it (what we commonly think of as the material world) are physical. The mind is also material, but does not function according to natural laws. It is therefore not physical, even though it is material.
- 5) Non-reductive Idealists (Supernatural idealists): Claim that only one substance exists (mind), but that only some aspects of it (what we commonly think of as the material world) are physical. The mind does not function according to natural laws. It is therefore not physical.
- 6) Non-reductive Dualists (Supernatural Dualists): Claim that two substances exist (mind and matter). The material substance is physical, and the mind substance is not. Mind does not function according to natural laws, and the interactions between mind and matter do not either.

Note that epistemologically, the three natural metaphysics are equivalent, as are the three supernatural ones. That is, no observation could ever allow us to distinguish between any of the three naturalistic metaphysics, nor between the three supernaturalistic ones. They only differ in their claims of the ontological nature of the world.

The of course there are the non-interactive ones (epiphenomenalism and non-interactive dualism), which are nonsensical because they define the mind to be something which does not interact in any way with anything else. Since it clearly does, there is no point in discussing them any further.

Anyway, I don't think that it is possible to understand or discuss these various positions without clearly understanding the distinction between metaphysical notions of "physicality" or "matter", and the epistemological ones. They are not equivalent, and only supernatural interactive substance dualism claims that they are. This makes discussion of any of the other positions impossible without clearly defining which terms refer to ontological substances, and which terms refer to epistemological issues.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

Minty wrote:

Just to cast some light on this knowledge argument business.

What Paul is saying is that to know what it is like to experience colour your brain must be in a particular physical state. This physical state can only be achieved by actually seeing a colour (or maybe by poking around in the brain).

Now, all scientific knowlege equates to all possible information about the world. All possible information could be put down in a book (indeed in a string of 0's and 1's). But Paul's point here is that reading a book could not possibly

put you into the required brain state where you experience or remember colour.

But of course *what it is like* to experience redness must be contained in the book (otherwise materialism is false). So presumably Paul's position must be that Mary wouldn't be able to understand *all* of the book.

You need to be precise in what you mean by "what it is like to experience redness". Why do you think this is something that the book must contain? Is it information about the experience of seeing red? If so, then she will know it. If it is something else, such as the memory of having seen red, or the experience of actually seeing red, then it most definitely should not be in the book.

My position is that even if she could totally understand what the book says, she still wouldn't know what it is like to actually experience *anything at all!*

Again, you need to be specific about what you are claiming. Are you saying she will not remember having had those experiences? Or are you saying that there will be information about those experiences which she does not know? Or are you saying something else entirely?

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

[By Minty] I agree that materialism is silly. Under materialism all knowledge must equate to all information. But a book can contain all possible information. Thus if you read that book and understand it, then necessarily you will know what the experience of red is like.

This is false. Knowledge of what an experience is like is not information about something. It is a memory. Reading all of the information about an experience is not going to cause you to remember having had the experience, nor does materialism in any way claim that it should. If, on the other hand, by "knowing what the experience of red is like" you just mean knowing all of the information about the experience, but not necessarily having memories of having had the experience, then that is a different story entirely. Now all you have to do is demonstrate that there actually is information about the experience that could not be written down in a book. Until you do that, you have nothing but an assertion.

It should be possible under materialism to create a conscious robot/android and for it to know about all possible experiences without ever having any experiences. Otherwise materialism is refuted.

This is, in principle, possible under materialism. Likewise we could surgically modify Mary's brain to give her the memory of having had the experience. Would you agree that after such surgery she would know what it is like to have the experience, even though she never actually had it? If not, can you provide some sort of evidence that she would not? If not, then again you have nothing but an assertion.

[Quote by DM] You need to be precise in what you mean by "what it is like to experience redness".

I mean to have knowledge of the experience of redness.

Then your argument is clearly defeated. You said

What Paul is saying is that to know what it is like to experience colour your brain must be in a particular physical state.

You seemed to agree that this is what materialism claims. If so, then clearly "what it is like to experience redness" is (according to materialism) not information about the experience which should be found in the book, but instead a brain state. That brain state is clearly going to be *described* in the book, but simply reading that description is not going to cause you to have that brain state.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

[Quote by Minty]But under materialism, to comprehend something is one and the same thing as being in a particular brain state. So if this brain state cannot be brought about by reading information, she hasn't understood it by definition.

The brain state that constitutes understanding all information there is to know about the experience of seeing red, and the brain state that constitutes remembering having seen red, are two very different things. One is a set of memories of having read the book, and within those memories is encoded the information from the book. The other is a set of memories of having seen red. These are two completely different sets of memories. The former contains (among other things) a complete description of the latter, but does not actually contain the latter.

Within the context of the thought experiment, we have assumed that Mary can obtain the first brain state by reading the book. But that does not provide the second brain state at all. Likewise, one could obtain the second brain state (by seeing red), without having any understanding of what is going on at all.

Basically, the book contains a complete description of what Mary's brain state would be if she had experienced seeing red. She could read this description, and understand every bit of it, but she still would not *have* the brain state described therein. Surgery could potentially provide it to her, and an android could be designed to modify its own "brain" to take on the new state described in the book, but human beings simply aren't built that way. This says nothing about materialism, but rather about how the human brain works. Materialism in no way implies that the human brain must work in such a way as to allow people to deliberately alter their brain states as they see fit.

Here's a thought experiment for you. If I take a person who has never seen red, and surgically modify her brain so that it includes everything it would if she had seen red (the memories of seeing red, then necessary neural patterns in the visual cortex, and so on), would you agree that she then knows what it is like to see red?

Would you agree that when she does see red for the first time, she will not feel like it is the first time she has seen it?

Likewise, if I take a person who has seen red, and surgically modify their brain to remove all memories of having seen red, and essentially render her brain into the state it would be if she had never seen red, would you agree that she no longer knows what it is like to see red?

If your answer to these questions is yes, then you should agree with the materialists about the knowledge thought experiment. Mary gains no new information, only memories of having an experience.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

[Quote by Minty]It's not a meaningless contradiction, at most one can claim it's unattainable. But that's altogether irrelevant.

No, actually it's a logical impossibility. No physical system can possibly encode all information about itself. But this is what is required by the thought experiment. Mary's brain must know all there is to know about itself, and more.

Philosophers, and even scientists, often use thought experiments to try and understand something, or to reveal inherent contradictions in a position. Einstein did it and look how fruitful these thought experiments were for him!

But his thought experiments did not begin by assuming something that it logically impossible.

But all physics does is describe the world. But what about its substantiality?

Physics says nothing about "substantiality".

Hmmm . . . I would say its substantiality (the stuff of the world) is nothing but perceptual qualia i.e precisely that which materialism cannot embrace.

Say it all you want. That has nothing to do with physics, or materialism.

Of course you have the option of "material substance" (i.e that which the physical properties belong to, so to speak), but scarcely anyone subscribes to this notion anymore.

That is because the entire notion of "substances" is incoherent nonsense. Physicists have rejected the "material substance" notion because they recognized it to be vacuous. Idealists and Dualists seem to be about the only people around who still pretend that metaphysics is anything more than fantasy and word-games.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

[Minty wrote]But under materialism, to comprehend something *is one and the same thing as being in a particular brain state*. So if this brain state cannot be brought about by reading information, she hasn't understood it by definition.

The problem with the "What Mary Knows" thought experiment is that it is practically impossible for us humans to imagine what it would be like to actually know everything there is to know about something. It's simply a failure of our intuitive abilities. Like trying to comprehend geologic time scales. Our brains just aren't evolved for it. As Dennett says:

"And so, one day, Mary's captors decided it was time for her to see colors. As a trick, they prepared a bright blue banana to present as her first color experience ever. Mary took one look at it and said 'Hey! You tried to trick me! Bananas are yellow, but this one is blue!' Her captors were dumfounded. How did she do it? 'Simple,' she replied. 'You have to remember that I know everything—absolutely everything—that could ever be known about the physical causes and effects of color vision. So of course before you brought the banana in, I had already written down, in exquisite detail, exactly what physical impression a yellow object or a blue object (or a green object, etc.) would make on my nervous system.

So I already knew exactly what thoughts I would have (because, after all, the 'mere disposition' to think about this or that is not one of your famous qualia, is it?). I was not in the slightest surprised by my experience of blue (what surprised me was that you would try such a second-rate trick on me). I realize it is hard for you to imagine that I could know so much about my reactive dispositions that the way blue affected me came as no surprise. Of course it's hard for you to imagine. It's hard for anyone to imagine the consequences of someone knowing absolutely everything physical about anything!'"

From:

<http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/RoboMaryfinal.htm>

By Probeman (John Donovan)

[Quote by Death Monkey] Within the context of the thought experiment, it is assumed that Mary is not a "spiritual being", but rather a brain performing physical processes. The thought experiment requires that Mary's brain, which is an organic machine, be able to physically encode all information about itself. This is logically impossible. If you want to claim that Mary can know everything about the brain because she is a magical spirit, go right ahead, but you are no longer operating within the context of the thought experiment. In fact, since such a claim contradicts materialism, it defeats the entire purpose of the thought experiment. If you are right, then materialism is trivially false, and the thought experiment serves no purpose.

[Quote by Minty] Even if it were logically impossible, this is wholly irrelevant to the thought experiment.

No, it's not. The thought experiment begins with premises which contradict each other. This renders the entire thing incoherent and meaningless.

Physics says nothing about "substantiality".

I know; so what does your philosophy tell you about its substantiality?

Absolutely nothing. I consider the entire notion of "metaphysical substantiality" to be incoherent and essentially meaningless.

You have a problem here though. What does reality actually consist of?

I don't know. Neither do you. Nobody does.

Physics only describes the world rather than telling us what it is. You cannot say qualia constitute the world (like I can).

Sure I could. I would just be deceiving myself if I actually believed it to be true, as you are. The fact is that we do not know, and have no way of knowing. If you want to pretend you know, then go ahead and cling to your idealism fantasies. I have no need of such fantasies. I am comfortable with admitting that I don't know, and focusing on trying to learn what I *can* know.

So what is reality in your philosophy??

My philosophies are Scientific Epistemology and Secular Humanism. I have no metaphysical philosophies, if that is what you are asking.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

[Paul C. Anagnostopoulos wrote:] Interesting article there, Probeman. Here's another:
<http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/Beaton2.htm>

"Spelt out in more detail, I accept that a sufficiently able robot can necessarily use its 'perfect' understanding of itself to create a bona fide functional state of knowing what it is like. This is because (under a strongly functionalist position with which I am not arguing) such a robot is necessarily able to create an internal model of itself which can be in such a state. But the state is a state of the model, not a state of the agent in which the model runs. There is a genuine distinction here precisely because there is a genuine, objective, functional fact of the matter about what the subjective state of knowing what it is like consists in."

I disagree that the state of a robot's "internal model" is somehow distinct from our "state of the agent". This is once again the argument from intuition and simply an unsupported assertion.

Numerous findings from cognitive science are consistent with the idea that our "experiences" are the "state of the model" our brains have that occurs when we perceive something. Which itself is just the activation of the relevant neurons in our brains which we don't have direct (or for that matter incorrigible) access to during these processes.

Ask yourself at what point you stop being self aware of your "experiences" as each neuron in your brain is replaced one by one with a silicon chip that performs the same functionality. A premise which Beaton already concurs with.
By Probeman (John Donovan)

[Quote by TechnoTut]Only I can directly observe my mental states, thus they are not "as observable as any other physical phenomena."

This is false. I can indirectly observe your mental states, by observing the effects they have on other things, just as I can indirectly observe any of the other things which, while not directly observable, we know exist (such as electrons).

Yes, electrons and bat experiences are unobservable in the direct sense. Their existence and properties, nevertheless, can be inferred. But there's a difference between the former and the latter: no one can directly observe electrons because of their size, i.e. they're too small. With respect to a bat's experience, only the bat observes its experiences for reasons having nothing to do with the "size" of the experience.

Again, this is false. I can indirectly observe the bat's experiences, just as I indirectly observe the electron. The only difference is that the bat can directly observe its own experiences. But this does not in any way make the bat's experiences non-physical, and I have no idea why you would think it does.

After all, nobody without eyes can directly observe the stars, but people with eyes can. Does the fact that only some people have the hardware necessary to directly observe something somehow bestow a special metaphysical status to that thing? The bat is the only organism in the world with the *physical hardware* necessary to directly observe its own experiences. So what?
By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

[Quote by Minty]No, the thought experiment does not require the brain to physically encode everything about itself; it merely requires that she knows absolutely everything about colour vision.

The thought experiment starts with the premise that materialism is true, which means that any information she knows is information physically encoded in her brain (this right here rules out your claim of Mary being a spiritual being as having any relevance to the thought experiment). Furthermore, what we know scientifically about how vision works, implies that she would need to know how her entire brain works, in order to know "absolutely everything about color vision".

So yes, for the thought experiment to work, her brain would have to know all the physical facts about itself, which is logically impossible.

So far as I am able to ascertain there are no premises which contradict each other. What are you talking about??

The premise that materialism is true contradicts the premise that Mary could possibly know all information about how her brain would experience seeing red. If materialism is true, then it is physically impossible that she could know the required information.

I'm asking what reality is. You cannot say it is meaningless because this equates to saying it doesn't exist.

This is false. I am not claiming that reality does not exist. That would be self-contradictory, since reality is, by definition, everything that exists.

What I am saying is that I consider the *concept* of metaphysical substances to be an incoherent one, and therefore consider the *question* "what is reality" to be essentially meaningless. I am sorry if you do not understand the difference.

That option is not available to you since you deny reality is simply constituted by qualia. You are contradicting yourself.

I do not deny it. I simply don't claim to have any idea either way. The question is, why do you claim to know that it is, when it is trivially easy to demonstrate that you do not?

You need to get your metaphysic sorted out.

I have no metaphysic. You need to figure out why you claim to know that which is, by construction, unknowable.

What does physicalism say?

Which brand of physicalism? The version of physicalism I subscribe to says absolutely nothing about it, because it is an epistemological philosophy, not a metaphysical one. I won't presume to speak for versions of physicalism that I do not subscribe to.

Physics only describes the world rather than telling us what it is. You cannot say qualia constitute the world (like I can).

Sure I could. I would just be deceiving myself if I actually believed it to be true, as you are.

Ah, so the notion that the world is constituted by qualia you know is wrong.

That is not what I said. On the contrary, I just clearly stated that I don't know, and neither do you.

Yet anything which lies beyond qualia, or gives to rise to qualia is meaningless, and hence doesn't exist.

That is not what I said either. In fact, that is nothing even remotely like anything I have said. You need to go back and read what I said more carefully, because you obviously did not get it.

Electrons are exhausted by the causal role they play. Consciousness is not touched by it, nevermind exhausted.

I am not interested in your unsupported assertions. Present your evidence that consciousness is not exhausted by the causal role it plays, or admit that you simply don't know whether it is or not.

I agree you observe electrons, but this is because their reality is constituted by all possible observations. Contrast this with consciousness.

I see no contrast at all. There is certainly no aspect of consciousness which I know exists (or indeed *could* know exists) which is not constituted by all possible observations. You can speculate that such aspects exist, just as I could speculate that such aspects of electrons exist, but to do so is nothing more than mental masturbation.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

[Quote=Minty]Well, so you claim. I would have thought this unlikely. Surely not the entirety of the brain deals with colour vision?

Certainly the entire portion of the brain which is concerned with cognition is, which is what we are talking about here. You have to remember that the brain is an extremely complex interconnected system. The visual cortex interfaces with many other parts of the brain, which in turn interface with many more. By the time you go from the initial processing of the visual signal from the optic nerve, to your final conscious experience of seeing something, yes, pretty much your entire brain has been, at least to some extent, involved in the process.

So yes, for the thought experiment to work, her brain would have to know all the physical facts about itself, which is logically impossible.

Why wouldn't knowing all the physical facts about some other human brain suffice?

First of all, because every human brain is different. But aside from this, since other human brains are equally complex, it would also be impossible for her to know all of the physical facts about another human brain.

And let suppose a rock is conscious (or at least one rolling down a hill). Why wouldn't that rock be capable of knowing all physical facts about itself? What physical facts would it be logically impossible for it to know? Its mass perhaps?

In general, no physical system can physically encode all of the information required to physically describe that system. This is difficult to clearly explain if you don't know how information is physically encoded. Basically this is because the amount of information required to describe a physical system depends directly on its complexity, and the amount of information that a physical system can encode is also limited by its complexity. The latter will always be less than the former.

You appear to be confused between the notion that it is non-answerable and meaninglessness.

Read what I said again. If, as I claim, the concept of metaphysical substances is incoherent, then questions *about* metaphysical substances are not just unanswerable, they are meaningless. In order for a question (or any string of text) to be meaningful, all of the terms in the expression must be coherently defined.

First of all I do not claim to know. I simply see no reason to suppose that the "physical" world consists in anything more than qualia.

If you do not claim to know, then why do you assert that it is so? Why do you take a position on an issue which you don't know the answer to? And moreover, why do you insist that others do so as well? Why call yourself an Idealist, when you do not know whether Idealism is true or not?

But if it is trivially easy to demonstrate there is more to the world than qualia (even though you have claimed it is a meaningless task to speculate on this question), then go ahead and demonstrate this.

I never said that I could demonstrate that there is more to the world than qualia. What I said is that it is trivially easy to demonstrate that *you do not know* whether there is more to the world than qualia.

I know I experience qualia, so saying that the external world is constituted by qualia is not going beyond my bare experiences, and hence is not metaphysical.

It does not necessarily *have* to be. For example, you could construct such a view in a purely epistemological

framework, just as the view that our experiences constitute an interaction between us and the rest of the world, can be. But you have made it quite clear that you believe in metaphysical Idealism.

As to your statement that you do not *know* that idealism is true, you clearly *believe* that it is true, and knowledge is just a justified belief, so you are essentially saying that you recognize that your belief is unjustified. If this is the case, then why do you hold the belief?

I do not have any evidence, nor is any needed. We know immediately that we are conscious, and this consciousness does not equate to a disposition to behave. In other words we know we are not mere robots.

Again, this is mere assertion. Where is your evidence that the consciousness we immediately experience is not exhausted by the causal role that it plays? Indeed, if you limit the scope of the term "consciousness" to refer *only* to that which we immediately experience, it follows that it *must* be exhausted by the causal role that it plays, because any aspect of it which is not, would be something which, being causally inefficacious, we would be unable to reflect upon, and thus unable to know that we had the immediate experience of.

If you are an unconscious robot as you claim, then nothing I can say will convince you.

Simply asserting that a physical system cannot be conscious, does not constitute support for an argument that we are not just physical systems. I am not an unconscious robot, nor do I claim to be. I claim to be a conscious biological machine.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

[Quote by Minty]So you say questions pertaining to what reality is per se are meaningless, but that you do not merely mean unanswerable. In fact your assertion is that, in fact, there does exist such a reality.

No. I define the term "reality" epistemologically. Within such a context, questions about reality, and what is or is not a part of reality, can be meaningful. I do not consider *metaphysical* definitions of reality to be coherent, and those are the types of definitions being referred to when you ask things like "what *is* reality", or "what is reality composed of". I do not consider such questions to be meaningful, because the terms being referred to in the context of those questions, are not coherently defined.

I suggest all this taken together is paradoxical. If reality exists and is not equated with our qualia, then you cannot say that any speculations about such a reality is meaningless. How could you possibly know they are meaningless??

This very argument is incoherent. Again, an expression can only be meaningful if all of the terms within that expression are coherently defined. You seem to think that the question could be meaningful, in spite of the fact that the terms used are not coherently defined, because there is some coherent definition of the terms out there which I don't know. That is not how it works. The person making the statement (or asking the question) must have coherent definitions for those terms in order for the statement or question to be meaningful.

I have never heard anything even remotely close to a coherent definition of any metaphysical concept. Therefore I consider any statements or questions which incorporate such terms to be meaningless. Now *you* may consider some of those definitions to be coherent, and thus consider statements and questions using those terms to be meaningful. That's fine, but that has no bearing on my own philosophy, which can only be based on what I know and understand.

If you think such metaphysical questions are meaningful, then by all means feel free to provide coherent formal definitions for the terms used in them. I will agree that they are meaningful when, and only when, I am able to actually extract some meaning from them.

Reality is something, therefore it cannot be the case that all conceivable speculations by a sentient being (no matter how intelligent) regarding this reality is meaningless. That is patently preposterous!

I agree. It is also not anything even remotely like what I said.

I never said I did know! You said: "I would just be deceiving myself if I actually believed it (ie that qualia constitutes the world) to be true, as you do". So the argument is about my belief, not any claim of knowledge on my part

So you acknowledge that your belief is unjustified? If so, then why do you believe it? That is irrational.

And your assertion that you would be deceiving yourself if you believed that qualia constitute the world is in need of justification.

The justification is quite simple. If I believe something, but know perfectly well that my belief is not justified, then I am only deceiving myself with that belief. It does not make any difference whether the belief is true or not. If I have no justification for believing it is true, then I am just deceiving myself by choosing to believe that it is true anyway. It is irrational, and intellectually dishonest.

But you are saying you cannot provide such justification! So why say things which you cannot justify in any shape or form??

I can, and just did justify it. You are the one making claims you cannot justify, and apparently holding beliefs which you know to be unjustifiable. Not me.

As to your statement that you do not know that idealism is true, you clearly believe that it is true, and knowledge is just a justified belief, so you are essentially saying that you recognize that your belief is unjustified.

Not at all. My belief is justified.

If your belief is justified, then it is, by definition, knowledge. That is what knowledge is, a justified belief. Do you know that idealism is true, or not?

What is not justified is your claim that I am wrong.

I never claimed that your belief is wrong. I claimed that your belief cannot possibly be justified, and I most certainly can justify that claim.

What is especially amusing is that you say that I am wrong, and then claim it is meaningless to say the world consists in anything more than qualia!! This conversation is a waste of time.

That is because you clearly are not conversing with me, but instead some imaginary friend, because pretty much everything you have claimed that I have said, is something which I simply never said. Either your reading comprehension is extremely bad, or you are not carefully reading what I am saying. Whichever the case may be, I am inclined to agree that this conversation is a waste of time, simply because you are either unwilling or unable to participate coherently in it.

Where is your evidence that the consciousness we immediately experience is not exhausted by the causal role that it plays?

Our immediate experience.

This response makes absolutely no sense.

Indeed, if you limit the scope of the term "consciousness" to refer only to that which we immediately experience, it follows that it must be exhausted by the causal role that it plays, because any aspect of it which is not, would be something which, being causally inefficacious, we would be unable to reflect upon, and thus unable to know that we had the immediate experience of.

Not at all. First of all my implicit awareness of my own consciousness might not be accompanied by any physical events in the brain.

If it in any way, however slight, influences your behavior, then it affects the physical world, and is thus causally efficacious. If it does not in any way affect your behavior, then it is not anything which you are in any way aware of, because everything which you are aware of has an effect on your behavior. You are essentially arguing for a type of epiphenomenalism (odd in itself, since you claim not to be an epiphenomenalist).

But secondly, it is simply a logical fallacy to suppose that simply because certain physical events are required to take place before I can be aware of my own consciousness, that therefore my consciousness is exhausted by its causal powers which are able to bring about these appropriate events.

That is not an argument I have made. None of this even has anything to do with models of consciousness in terms of brain activity. Even if I accept the idea that there is more to consciousness than brain activity, it is still trivially obvious that any aspects of consciousness whose existence I am capable of knowing about, are not causally inefficacious.

Of course if my consciousness were merely to follow such appropriate physical events, rather than cause them (in other words if physical causality exists, but mental causality doesn't) then I would be equally convinced of my own consciousness, whether I am conscious or not. But since there cannot be any distinction -- from my 1st person perspective -- between really having consciousness, and only apparently having consciousness, the notion that mental causality does not exist is incoherent.

I agree, which is just the point. What you are calling mental causality is still causality. And since it is physical things which are being affected by your consciousness, it is, by definition, physical causality. The mind may not be composed of some mysterious material "substance" (whatever that means), but it is clearly a part of the physical world.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)