The Limits of the Epystemology of Physicalism

By jaoman

Back to regular version

jaoman
On the Road...

Joined: Mar 13, 2004
Location: Vancouver, Canada

Topics: 59
Posts: 1,108

Posted Nov 27, 2006 - 02:55 PM: #1

Subject: **The Limits of the Epystemology of Physicalism**

Can the mind ever be reconciled with physicalism?

While the issue is hotly disputed by many who are attracted by the elegance of a purely physical explanation, a close examination of the problem reveals that the mind is fundamentally incompatible with a physical account. I will demonstrate this presently by considering what sorts of things are considered a part of the physical universe and why. Then, I shall explain why mental states are incompatible with this category.

Ironically, the origin of the physical universe can be found in the mind. Our concept of what is physical derives from our sense perception. After all, it is our only source of information about the outside world. What makes it uniquely useful is that it is a very consistent source. Because of this, we have been able to use empiricism to good effect. Through observation and experiment, scientists have constructed a coherent model to explain the patterns in experience. However, despite the exactitude and intimidating complexity of this model today, it is crucial to realize that it is fundamentally based around our sense organs. The principles around which our most intricate mathematics and causal theories were built, and that which confirms their efficacy still, are the circumstances of experience. If at least some underlying properties of a hypothesis cannot be demonstrated to the observer, it will never graduate to being accepted as a legitimate scientific theory. Considering this, the fact that we have used the vocabulary of our two most relied upon senses (i.e. touch and sight) to construct our coherent model is both completely unsurprising and somewhat ominous. The basic building blocks of the everything, as we have been led to imagine by scientific explanation, are represented in the mind as tiny touchable dots. That these dots are really invisible and can pass through our bodies without us or them noticing is completely irrelevant because we cannot form a concept of them without the analogy. And, of course, they assemble to form touchable, visible structures. In fact, as far as we are concerned, that is their primary purpose. Essentially, our idea of the physical is that which has a use toward stimulating our sense organs.

By contrast, wherein our sense experience is the thing perceived, the mind is the mode of perception. Unlike everything else, mental states do not arrive through the sense organs. They are what happens afterwards. Most simply put, mental states are us noticing that we notice things. Thomas Nagel perhaps describes them best in calling them “something it is like”. Consequentially, mental states must be said to be self-defining. Pain is pain, sight is sight, want is want; these experiences simply do not lend themselves to being described by means of our sense experiences, which is our only vocabulary of description. Of course, sight can be said to be sight, but it is nonsense to say that we see what we are seeing. That would imply that we somehow see twice, which is not the case.

This quality makes mental states incompatible with our concept of the physical. If the necessary criteria of physicalist explanations are that the phenomenon they describe be traced back to sense experience, the mind does not qualify. In turn, if the mind cannot be described by the physicalist model, we cannot say that it is a part of the physical universe. Our ideas of the physical and the mental are simply different. Therefore, it is impossible to reconcile the mind with physicalism.

So, physicalism needs to be reconsidered.

Afterward: if a passing moderator would kindly correct my typo in the thread description, I would by very pleased to tip my hat at the competency of the philosophyforums staff. It should read "from" instead of "for". Thanks. 

Edited by jaoman on Nov 27, 2006 - 03:49 PM

_____
Excess on occasion is exhilarating. It prevents moderation from acquiring the deadening effect of a habit.
- W. Somerset Maugham

Any community's arm of force - military, police, security - needs people in it who can do necessary evil, and yet not be made evil by it. To do only the necessary and no more. To constantly question the assumptions, to stop the slide into atrocity."
- Lois McMaster Bujold

Death Monkey
Tenured Poster

Joined: Sep 18, 2003
Location: Aachen, Germany

Topics: 4
Posts: 1,631

Posted Nov 28, 2006 - 07:50 AM: #2

Your comments in no way undermine physicalism. At best, they call into question our ability to describe our mental experiences to each other. But that is a limitation of our ability to convey and interpret information, and has nothing at all to do with whether or not our minds are physical processes.

DM

_____
Pseudoscience makes Baby Jesus cry.

jaoman
On the Road...

Joined: Mar 13, 2004
Location: Vancouver, Canada

Topics: 59
Posts: 1,108

Posted Nov 28, 2006 - 10:22 AM: #3

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> Your comments in no way undermine physicalism. At best, they call into question our ability to describe our mental experiences to each other. But that is a limitation of our ability to convey and interpret information, and has nothing at all to do with whether or not our minds are physical processes.

I disagree.

It is an essential quality of a universal theory, that physicalism claims to be, that it be universally applicable. For all the hoopla about objectivity, physicalism is not a completely uninvolved interpretation. It is reliant on and limited by our sense experience. Therefore, as a theory, physicalism is humanly, or maybe homo-experientially, subjective. Furthermore, physicalism is not a thing; it is a set of rules for creating consistent descriptions. However, because of the subjective nature of physicalism, the rules are not universal. They are dependent on certain preconditions which must be met. These preconditions are the concepts of experience. If, hypothetically, something does not fit into these preconditions, physicalist rules for description do not work on it. If physicalist description is proven inadequate, physicalist rules are not universal descriptives and physicalism does not work as a universal theory. Mental states do not fit into the preconditions for physical rules. Because of this, physical explanations have never worked on the mind. Therefore, physicalism is not a universal theory.

Edited by jaoman on Nov 28, 2006 - 10:27 AM

_____
Excess on occasion is exhilarating. It prevents moderation from acquiring the deadening effect of a habit.
- W. Somerset Maugham

Any community's arm of force - military, police, security - needs people in it who can do necessary evil, and yet not be made evil by it. To do only the necessary and no more. To constantly question the assumptions, to stop the slide into atrocity."
- Lois McMaster Bujold

Death Monkey

Posted Nov 28, 2006 - 01:06 PM: #4

Tenured Poster

Joined: Sep 18, 2003
Location: Aachen, Germany

Topics: 4
Posts: 1,631

jaoman,

> I disagree.
>
> It is an essential quality of a universal theory, that physicalism claims to be, that it be universally applicable.

Physicalism is not a theory. Physicalism does not explain or describe anything. It is simply a paradigm within which theories can be constructed. All scientific theories lie within the physicalist paradigm.

That said, your prior post does not in any way indicate that mental experiences cannot be scientifically explained. It just indicates that one person cannot express to another person what his own experiences are like in any way other than to compare them to other experiences which he presumes that the other person has also had, in which case all that is being conveyed is similarities between experiences which he figures will also hold for the other person.

> For all the hoopla about objectivity, physicalism is not a completely uninvolved interpretation. It is reliant on and limited by our sense experience.

Yes, and this is something which proponents of physicalism, and science, are well aware of.

> Therefore, as a theory, physicalism is humanly, or maybe homo-experientially, subjective. Furthermore, physicalism is not a thing; it is a set of rules for creating consistent descriptions.

Again, you seem to be mixing up physicalism and science.

> However, because of the subjective nature of physicalism, the rules are not universal. They are dependent on certain preconditions which must be met.

All epistemological systems are dependent on preconditions. This is unavoidable, and certainly nothing specific to science.

> These preconditions are the concepts of experience. If, hypothetically, something does not fit into these preconditions, physicalist rules for description do not work on it.

That is clear. If physicalism is wrong, then there is no reason to expect mental states to be understandable scientifically. Or anything else, for that matter. The fact that science is actually proving quite successful at improving our understanding of the mind, suggests to me that it just may be the correct approach.

> If physicalist description is proven inadequate, physicalist rules are not universal descriptives and physicalism does not work as a universal theory.

Agreed. So far this has not been demonstrated to be the case. Indeed, just the opposite seems to be obtaining. Everyday science teaches us new things about how the mind works.

> Mental states do not fit into the preconditions for physical rules. Because of this, physical explanations have never worked on the mind. Therefore, physicalism is not a universal theory.

You have not, in any way, shown that mental states do not fit into the preconditions for physical rules. That was my whole point. All you have done is rule out the ability of people to convey information to other people about their experiences in a certain way.

To give you an idea of what I am talking about, imagine the following scenario:

A room exists with 10 beings in it. Each of these beings is a conscious sentient being. However, they are all completely different beings. Their mental states are nothing alike, and the physical implementation of their minds is completely different from one to the next.

Now clearly in this scenario, it will be impossible for one of them to convey what its own experiences are like to any of the others, because no frame of reference exists for establishing the communication. But that doesn't mean that there is anything non-physical going on. Indeed, it would clearly be the case even if there were nothing non-physical involved at all.

DM

_____
Pseudoscience makes Baby Jesus cry.

jaoman
On the Road...

Joined: Mar 13, 2004
Location: Vancouver, Canada

Topics: 59
Posts: 1,108

Posted Nov 29, 2006 - 02:32 PM: #5

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> Physicalism is not a theory. Physicalism does not explain or describe anything. It is simply a paradigm within which theories can be constructed. All scientific theories lie within the physicalist paradigm.

I stand corrected. The key question, however, is not what single word we use to describe it, but what the criteria of that paradigm are. As the cliche goes, the devil is in the details.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> That said, your prior post does not in any way indicate that mental experiences cannot be scientifically explained. It just indicates that one person cannot express to another person what his own experiences are like in any way other than to compare them to other experiences which he presumes that the other person has also had, in which case all that is being conveyed is similarities between experiences which he figures will also hold for the other person.

So, mental experiences can be scientifically explained, but, all the same, they can only be explained through comparison to other mental experiences? That doesn't seem to work. The nature of the physicalist paradigm is that it uses sensory concepts to create description. However, as you agree, mental experiences cannot be described using that framework. The physicalist vocabulary or model does not allow anything of this sort within it. But if this is so, how would you suggest that mental experiences be explained through physicalist science?

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> That is clear. If physicalism is wrong, then there is no reason to expect mental states to be understandable scientifically. Or anything else, for that matter. The fact that science is actually proving quite successful at improving our understanding of the mind, suggests to me that it just may be the correct approach.

Now you seem to be the one confusing science and physicalism.

How is physicalist science proving successful at improving our understanding of the mind? As far as I know, physicalist science has scant all to say about the mind. Physical theories are only contributing to the understanding of the mind's physical representative, the brain. However, it is also the case that, while mental states do seem to be connected to brain states, there isn't any physically apparent connections between the two. The connection is only concluded through empirical methodology, another component of science, independent of physicalism.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> You have not, in any way, shown that mental states do not fit into the preconditions for physical rules. That was my whole point. All you have done is rule out the ability of people to convey information to other people about their experiences in a certain way.

If that certain way happens to correspond with the physicalist model, which is what I'm arguing, then I have indeed made my case. If not, you need to explain to me how I'm misinterpreted the content/structure of the physicalist model.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> To give you an idea of what I am talking about, imagine the following scenario:
>
> A room exists with 10 beings in it. Each of these beings is a conscious sentient being. However, they are all completely different beings. Their mental states are nothing alike, and the physical implementation of their minds is completely different from one to the next.
>
> Now clearly in this scenario, it will be impossible for one of them to convey what its own experiences are like to any of the others, because no frame of reference exists for establishing the communication. But that doesn't mean that there is anything non-physical going on. Indeed, it would clearly be the case even if there were nothing non-physical involved at all.

First of all, your example is circular. You assume a physical implementation from the very beginning, which is what our discussion is all about.

Secondly, that aside, you're almost making my point for me. While they will not have the frame of reference to compare mental states, they will be able to compare other knowledge. A frame of reference for mathematics, for example, can be devised between them, by catering to the sense experiences of the different species. This is how the basics of language are established. And this does work within the physicalist framework. However, though they would be able to agree on mathematical definitions or gravitational effects, they would never be able to come up with anything but an approximate guess at each other's mental experiences. What is the difference if not that the former knowledge uses the physicalist paradigm and the latter doesn't?

Edited by jaoman on Nov 29, 2006 - 08:30 PM

_____
Excess on occasion is exhilarating. It prevents moderation from acquiring the deadening effect of a habit.
- W. Somerset Maugham

Any community's arm of force - military, police, security - needs people in it who can do necessary evil, and yet not be made evil by it. To do only the necessary and no more. To constantly question the assumptions, to stop the slide into atrocity."
- Lois McMaster Bujold

Death Monkey
Tenured Poster

Joined: Sep 18, 2003
Location: Aachen, Germany

Topics: 4
Posts: 1,631

Posted Nov 30, 2006 - 02:23 AM: #6

jaoman,

> That said, your prior post does not in any way indicate that mental experiences cannot be scientifically explained. It just indicates that one person cannot express to another person what his own experiences are like in any way other than to compare them to other experiences which he presumes that the other person has also had, in which case all that is being conveyed is similarities between experiences which he figures will also hold for the other person.

> So, mental experiences can be scientifically explained, but, all the same, they can only be explained through comparison to other mental experiences? That doesn't seem to work. The nature of the physicalist paradigm is that it uses sensory concepts to create description. However, as you agree, mental experiences cannot be described using that framework. The physicalist vocabulary or model does not allow anything of this sort within it. But if this is so, how would you suggest that mental experiences be explained through physicalist science?

There is a very important difference between explaining what your experience is *like* to another person, and providing a scientific explanation and description of what an experience *is*, and how it *works*.

Keep in mind that under the physicalist paradigm, the entire notion of "what the experience is like" being some sort of property of the experience which could potentially be *described* to somebody, is inherently flawed. The experience is a physical process being performed by your brain. Your conception of what that experience is like is, itself, another experience. The experience of remembering having had the original experience.

It comes down to the difference between knowing what an experience is like, and knowing information about the experience. A physicalist would argue that the former is not an example of the latter. Physicalism requires us to reject many of our intuitive preconceptions about experiences, but with very good reason.

> That is clear. If physicalism is wrong, then there is no reason to expect mental states to be understandable scientifically. Or anything else, for that matter. The fact that science is actually proving quite successful at improving our understanding of the mind, suggests to me that it just may be the correct approach.
>
> Now you seem to be the one confusing science and physicalism.

I am not confusing them. They are distinct, but related.

> How is physicalist science proving successful at improving our understanding of the mind? As far as I know, physicalist science has scant all to say about the mind. Physical theories are only contributing to the understanding of the mind's physical representative, the brain.

There are two problems with this assertion. The first is that it begs the question that the mind has some sort of "physical representation", as opposed to actually being something physical. One of the arguments in favor of physicalism is that we don't actually have any *valid* reasons to think that there *is* anything more to the mind than what you are calling the "physical representation" of it. Second, even if some sort of dualism is correct, and brain activity is only somehow correlated with the mind, instead of being the mind, this doesn't change the fact that science has tought us all sorts of important information *about the mind*.

> However, it is also the case that, while mental states do seem to be connected to brain states, there isn't any physically apparent connections between the two.

Incorrect. There are some very *obvious* physical connections between the two. The mind isn't some non-interacting black box, you know. Even if there is more to the mind than just brain activity, there is no question that it at least *physically interacts* with brain activity.

> The connection is only concluded through empirical methodology, another component of science, independent of physicalism.

All physical facts about the world, including the so-called "physical connections" between any set of phenomena, are concluded through empirical methodology. So I really don't see your point here. As for it being independent of physicalism, keep in mind that what physicalism

claims is the consciousness should be understandable using science. Science only studies physical phenomena. Thus consciousness must be physical. The whole brain thing is a specific scientific theory. The mind could involve much more than just the brain without violating physicalism, as long as whatever is involved is also physical.

> To give you an idea of what I am talking about, imagine the following scenario:
>
> A room exists with 10 beings in it. Each of these beings is a conscious sentient being. However, they are all completely different beings. Their mental states are nothing alike, and the physical implementation of their minds is completely different from one to the next.
>
> Now clearly in this scenario, it will be impossible for one of them to convey what its own experiences are like to any of the others, because no frame of reference exists for establishing the communication. But that doesn't mean that there is anything non-physical going on. Indeed, it would clearly be the case even if there were nothing non-physical involved at all.
>
> First of all, your example is circular. You assume a physical implementation from the very beginning, which is what our discussion is all about.

It would only be circular if the conclusion of the example was that physicalism is correct, which is not the point of the example at all.

The point of the example is to show that the inability for two conscious beings to express to each other what their experiences are *like*, does not in any way imply that there is anything non-physical about their minds. It is a proof by contradiction. If their inability to describe what their experiences are like to each other *did* imply that there was something non-physical involved, then this would mean that if there *was not* anything non-physical involved, then they *would* be able to describe what there experiences are like to each other.

By showing that it is quite easy to imagine scenarios in which *completely physical* beings are incapable of expressing what their experiences are like to each other, we show also that one cannot conclude from *our* inability to express what our experiences are like to each other, that anything non-physical is involved.

Put simply, the point of the example is to address an argument against physicalism, not to show that physicalism is true.

> Secondly, that aside, you're almost making my point for me. While they will not have the frame of reference to compare mental states, they will be able to compare other knowledge.

So can we. We do it all the time. In fact, that is *exactly* what we are doing when we describe our experiences to each other by comparing them to other experiences which we have both had. We know that the experiences being compared to were not identical, but we are able to infer all sorts of information about those experiences based on known similarities, based on knowledge about how we interact with our environments.

When you tell me you see blue, I have no idea what the experience you are describing is "like", but I *do* know that there are *similarities* between the experience you are having now, and other experiences of seeing blue objects. I infer this knowledge from the similarities in my own experiences of seeing blue things.

Your experience of seeing blue does not have to be very much like my own for this two work, as long as the functional relationships between your experiences, your sensory input, and your behavioral output, are similar to my own.

> A frame of reference for mathematics, for example, can be devised between them, by catering to the sense experiences of the different species. This is how the basics of language are established. And this does work within the physicalist framework.

> However, though they would be able to agree on mathematical definitions or gravitational effects, they would never be able to come up with anything but an approximate guess at each other's mental experiences.

And **that** is the whole point! If you agree that these *entirely physical beings* will be limited in this way, then how can you possibly present the fact that *we* are limited in this way as evidence that *we* are not entirely physical?

> What is the difference if not that the former knowledge uses the physicalist paradigm and the latter doesn't?

I don't understand the question. Are you suggesting that there is something non-physical about the experiences of the purely physical beings in my example? Because if there is not, then there is no knowledge they can possibly have about anything which does not "use the physicalist paradigm".

Again, you have to remember that if the physicalists are right, then "knowing what your experience is like" is not actual *knowledge* at all. It is nothing more than remembering having had the experience.

DM

_____
Pseudoscience makes Baby Jesus cry.

jaoman
On the Road...

Joined: Mar 13, 2004
Location: Vancouver, Canada

Topics: 59
Posts: 1,108

Posted Dec 1, 2006 - 10:47 AM: #7

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> There is a very important difference between explaining what your experience is like to another person, and providing a scientific explanation and description of what an experience is, and how it works.
>
> Keep in mind that under the physicalist paradigm, the entire notion of "what the experience is like" being some sort of property of the experience which could potentially be described to somebody, is inherently flawed. The experience is a physical process being performed by your brain. Your conception of what that experience is like is, itself, another experience. The experience of remembering having had the original experience.

There are some troubling presumptions here. First of all, science does not explain “how it works”. Science presumes “how” in the form of causal laws. In actuality, science only explains “when it works”, under what circumstances. This can in no way explain “what an experience is” because the issue is too straightforward to be explainable. First and foremost, things are themselves. They cannot be something else without contradiction. At this point, science steps in with a when and provides a model of the conditions under which we experience, say, a rock. This model by no means gives us anything truly unique; it only analyzes and formulates our sense experience into a coherent schema.

Furthermore, it is important to observe that the model in question relies on touch and visual concepts for fundamental elements. This is what physicalist brings to the fold. But this means that we are analyzing and reformulating our experience using concepts derived from sense experience. Therein lies the problem. Regardless what physicalist wants to be, when it describes the external world, physicalist science necessarily describes what an experience is like. It follows exactly from the model you previously presented: the qualities of an experience are described using common concepts found in other experiences...

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> ...one person cannot express to another person what his own experiences are like in any way other than to compare them to other experiences which he presumes that the other person has also had, in which case all that is being conveyed is similarities

> between experiences which he figures will also hold for the other person.

This works fine so long as we describe sensory experience, because the concepts are related. Sense experience remains sense experience throughout the account. However, when we describe pain, that relationship is no longer maintained. We are no longer describing something that is sight or texture, yet what we are describing exists on the same level as both. You cannot explain what an experience is like using unrelated concepts, because that requires it to become something else. For example, bananas don't tingle or ache or hurt. It is incomprehensible to say so (except that touching a banana may do so, but that's a different relation of words and ideas). Why then should we suppose that pain looks like something? Logically, we shouldn't. And empirically we seem to observe contrary patterns, so we have far more reason to reject the supposition; hence, reject physicalism.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> Physicalism requires us to reject many of our intuitive preconceptions about experiences, but with very good reason.

Much like religion. Which is fine, but then should be reclassified. Or do its good reasons redeem it? If so, what are they and how do they combine to such grandeur?

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> There are two problems with this assertion. The first is that it begs the question that the mind has some sort of "physical representation", as opposed to actually being something physical. One of the arguments in favor of physicalism is that we don't actually have any valid reasons to think that there is anything more to the mind than what you are calling the "physical representation" of it.

If the mind is a gray, icky thing, why do I not experience that instead of the mind? You draw a lot of conclusions, but you don't back them up.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> Even if there is more to the mind than just brain activity, there is no question that it at least physically interacts with brain activity.

Again, on what grounds do you say so? I haven't heard of any string of particles being detected or anything of the sort. As far as I know, all the energy going into the brain is accounted for there. Where is this unquestionable physical interaction? I want to *see* it.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> All physical facts about the world, including the so-called "physical connections" between any set of phenomena, are concluded through empirical methodology. So I really don't see your point here.

I suppose the crucial point is that empiricism works independently and, in fact, above physicalism. When we reject physicalism, we do not reject empiricism. And we can draw empirical conclusions without any obvious physical link observable. This is important to note because most of our beliefs are acquired through empiricism, as opposed to another method.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> As for it being independent of physicalism, keep in mind that what physicalism claims is the consciousness **should** be understandable using science. Science only studies physical phenomena. Thus consciousness **must** be physical. The whole brain thing is a specific scientific theory. The mind could involve much more than just the brain without violating physicalism, as long as whatever is involved is also physical.

Observe the words I've highlighted. Somehow, you skip from “should” to “must”, from an uncertain premise to bold conclusion. The argument is valid, but it is not sound. Consciousness must not need to be physical in general; it only must be physical for physicalism to work. Everything else is speculation on your part. Very dubious speculation, given that physicalism is made up of a limited set of mental concepts to start with. Wanting that limited set to account for all mental concepts seems a little like wanting water to equal wine. I do not see you leaping that gap without divine intervention.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> It would only be circular if the conclusion of the example was that physicalism is correct, which is not the point of the example at all.

True. My error.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> The point of the example is to show that the inability for two conscious beings to express to each other what their experiences are like, does not in any way imply that there is anything non-physical about their minds. It is a proof by contradiction. If their inability to describe what their experiences are like to each other did imply that there was something non-physical involved, then this would mean that if there was not anything non-physical involved, then they would be able to describe what there experiences are like to each other.

As I point out above, they are describing what their experiences are like. Only they are limited to the limited intersections of sense that are shared between them.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> So can we. We do it all the time. In fact, that is exactly what we are doing when we describe our experiences to each other by comparing them to other experiences which we have both had. We know that the experiences being compared to were not identical, but we are able to infer all sorts of information about those experiences based on known similarities, based on knowledge about how we interact with our environments.
>
> When you tell me you see blue, I have no idea what the experience you are describing is "like", but I do know that there are similarities between the experience you are having now, and other experiences of seeing blue objects. I infer this knowledge from the similarities in my own experiences of seeing blue things.
>
> Your experience of seeing blue does not have to be very much like my own for this two work, as long as the functional relationships between your experiences, your sensory input, and your behavioral output, are similar to my own.

All these are empirically arrived at conclusions. They have nothing to do with physicalism.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> And that is the whole point! If you agree that these entirely physical beings will be limited in this way, then how can you possibly present the fact that we are limited in this way as evidence that we are not entirely physical?

When did I agree that they were entirely physical? If they were entirely physical, it wouldn't be a limitation.

_____

Excess on occasion is exhilarating. It prevents moderation from acquiring the deadening effect of a habit.

- W. Somerset Maugham

Any community's arm of force - military, police, security - needs people in it who can do necessary evil, and yet not be made evil by it. To do only the necessary and no more. To constantly question the assumptions, to stop the slide into atrocity."
- Lois McMaster Bujold

Death Monkey
Tenured Poster

Joined: Sep 18, 2003
Location: Aachen, Germany

Topics: 4
Posts: 1,631

Posted Dec 1, 2006 - 02:38 PM: #8

jaoman,

> Keep in mind that under the physicalist paradigm, the entire notion of "what the experience is like" being some sort of property of the experience which could potentially be described to somebody, is inherently flawed. The experience is a physical process being performed by your brain. Your conception of what that experience is like is, itself, another experience. The experience of remembering having had the original experience.

There are some troubling presumptions here. First of all, science does not explain “how it works”. Science presumes “how” in the form of causal laws.

Actually, scientific laws need not be causal. Indeed, it is well known that the brain is an extremely stochastic system. That said, presuming some form of natural laws really amounts to nothing more than presuming that there *is* a "how".

> In actuality, science only explains “when it works”, under what circumstances. This can in no way explain “what an experience is” because the issue is too straightforward to be explainable. First and foremost, things are themselves. They cannot be something else without contradiction. At this point, science steps in with a when and provides a model of the conditions under which we experience, say, a rock. This model by no means gives us anything truly unique; it only analyzes and formulates our sense experience into a coherent schema.

By this reasoning, science cannot tell us that water is H2O, or that light is electromagnetic radiation.

> Furthermore, it is important to observe that the model in question relies on touch and visual concepts for fundamental elements. This is what physicalist brings to the fold. But this means that we are analyzing and reformulating our experience using concepts derived from sense experience. Therein lies the problem. Regardless what physicalist wants to be, when it describes the external world, physicalist science necessarily describes what an experience is like. It follows exactly from the model you previously presented: the qualities of an experience are described using common concepts found in other experiences...

That is not describing what an experience is like. It is describing the functional roles of the experience.

> This works fine so long as we describe sensory experience, because the concepts are related. Sense experience remains sense experience throughout the account. However, when we describe pain, that relationship is no longer maintained. We are no longer describing something that is sight or texture, yet what we are describing exists on the same level as both. You cannot explain what an experience is like using unrelated concepts, because that requires it to become something else. For example, bananas don't tingle or ache or hurt. It is incomprehensible to say so (except that touching a banana may do so, but that's a different relation of words and ideas). Why then should we suppose that pain looks like something? Logically, we shouldn't. And empirically we seem to observe contrary patterns, so we have far more reason to reject the supposition; hence, reject physicalism.

I don't follow what you are trying to say here at all.

> Physicalism requires us to reject many of our intuitive preconceptions about experiences, but with very good reason.
>
> Much like religion.

Except for the whole "with very good reason" part.

> Which is fine, but then should be reclassified. Or do its good reasons redeem it? If so, what are they and how do they combine to such grandeur?

Epirical evidence. The scientific evidence strongly indicates that many of our intuitive preconceptions about experiences *are* false. That is a good reason to reject them.

> If the mind is a gray, icky thing, why do I not experience that instead of the mind? You draw a lot of conclusions, but you don't back them up.

First of all, the mind is not the brain. It is a process. Anyway, I suggest you look into the issue of Cartesian dualism and the Cartesian demon, because the argument you seem to be trying to present here is essentially an appeal to the Cartesian demon.

> Even if there is more to the mind than just brain activity, there is no question that it at least physically interacts with brain activity.
>
> Again, on what grounds do you say so? I haven't heard of any string of particles being detected or anything of the sort. As far as I know, all the energy going into the brain is accounted for there. Where is this unquestionable physical interaction? I want to see it.

Consider this. Your eyes responded physically to physical light coming from your monitor. Your physical brain did some sort of physical processing on this sensory information. Somehow this processed information made it to your mind, for you to be aware of it. Your mind then decided to type a response, and then somehow that information got into your physical motor cortex to cause your physical hands to type out your response on your physical keyboard.

This isn't rocket science here. Clearly the physical world is influencing your mind, and your mind is in turn influencing the physical world. I happen to think that your mind is just part of the physical world, but even if it is not, the interaction cannot be denied.

> All physical facts about the world, including the so-called "physical connections" between any set of phenomena, are concluded through empirical methodology. So I really don't see your point here.
>
> I suppose the crucial point is that empiricism works independently and, in fact, above physicalism. When we reject physicalism, we do not reject empiricism. And we can draw empirical conclusions without any obvious physical link observable. This is important to note because most of our beliefs are acquired through empiricism, as opposed to another method.

Physicalism (or at least the metaphysical version of it which you are referring to here) is a metaphysical framework in which empiricism is often presented.

I personally reject all metaphysics, including this type of physicalism, as being essentially incoherent. But that is beside the point here, since we are specifically talking about the epistemology of physicalism, which *is* empiricism. More specifically, the epistemology of physicalism is scientific empiricism.

> > As for it being independent of physicalism, keep in mind that what physicalism claims is the consciousness should be understandable using science. Science only studies physical phenomena. Thus consciousness must be physical. The whole brain thing is a specific scientific theory. The mind could involve much more than just the brain without violating physicalism, as long as whatever is involved is also physical.
>
> Observe the words I've highlighted. Somehow, you skip from “should” to “must”, from an uncertain premise to bold conclusion. The argument is valid, but it is not sound.

It was not a formal logical argument either, so nitpicking the specific wording kind of misses the point.

Let me rephrase. According to physicalism, all observable phenomena can be understood using science. Consciousness is an observable phenomena. Science only studies physical phenomena. Therefore if physicalism is true, then consciousness is physical.

> Consciousness must not need to be physical in general; it only must be physical for physicalism to work.

That was exactly what I said. The point was that since science only studies physical phenomena, the claim that consciousness can be understood using science amounts to claiming that it is physical, which is what physicalism claims.

> All these are empirically arrived at conclusions. They have nothing to do with physicalism.

They have a lot to do with the epistemology of physicalism, which is scientific empiricism.

If your point is that the metaphysical claims commonly associated with physicalism are superfluous to this, then I agree. This is a fundamental truth about the relationship between epistemology and metaphysics. Any epistemology can be associated with an infinite number of different metaphysics.

> > And that is the whole point! If you agree that these entirely physical beings will be limited in this way, then how can you possibly present the fact that we are limited in this way as evidence that we are not entirely physical?
>
> When did I agree that they were entirely physical? If they were entirely physical, it wouldn't be a limitation.

Their being entirely physical was a premise of my example, so you don't get to disagree with it. Not unless you want to assert that it is not *possible* for them to be entirely physical and still have experiences. But then *you* are just using circular reasoning. You present an argument against physicalism, and when I refute that argument, your response to my refutation is premised on the assumption that physicalism is impossible.

Put another way, if the validity of your argument requires us to assume that physicalism is impossible, then your argument has no validity as an argument against physicalism.

DM

_____
Pseudoscience makes Baby Jesus cry.

jaoman
On the Road...

Joined: Mar 13, 2004
Location: Vancouver, Canada

Topics: 59
Posts: 1,108

Posted Dec 2, 2006 - 11:55 AM: #9

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> By this reasoning, science cannot tell us that water is H2O, or that light is electromagnetic radiation.

Why so? There is no reason that a coherent model of experience needs to be superficial. And I never said anything to that end. Talking about water as H2O and light as electromagnetic waves works as a global means of classification that can be used to produce sensual reactions according to therein derived specifications. But note, both H2O and electromagnetic waves have never been observed as their own entities. They cannot be, by definition, except as water and light. They are exactly what I said, reformulations of experience in such a way that they fit into a coherent model. New names with new connotations.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> That is not describing what an experience is like. It is describing the functional roles of the experience.

As you say:

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> That said, presuming some form of natural laws really amounts to nothing more than presuming that there is a "how".

We have not unlocked “how”; we have presumed it. The experience, then, cannot have a functional role except in the broadest sense, because we do not have a notion of exactly how it might function. Something else does the functions we assign to it – the natural laws – but it's not the experience.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> I don't follow what you are trying to say here at all.
>
> Let me rephrase. According to physicalism, all observable phenomena can be understood using science. Consciousness is an observable phenomena. Science only studies physical phenomena. Therefore if physicalism is true, then consciousness is physical.

What I've basically been getting at throughout the whole thread is that the underpinnings of the system are faulty. I want to ask “What is a physical phenomenon?” From there I move down a step to this questions: “What is the origin of our notion of the physical?” The answer to this question is the external world. But going down the same ladder, “What is the origin of our notion of the external world,” I'm unable to avoid concluding that it is sense experience. Well then, these notions have not noticeably shifted their foundation since their origins, I arrive back to rephrase my original question to, “What is a sense experience phenomenon?” Maybe you can do better, but the answer I get is something that creates sensual experiences.

But now we have a problem, in that all experiences are mental states. So, what your argument seems to be saying is that, if physicalism is true, consciousness (all mental states) are or can be explained by sensual mental states. More abstractly, if physicalism is true, we necessarily need to explain something with something else that is on the same existential level but is qualitatively different. Like explaining chairs with rocks or blue with orange.

However, scientific methodology does not function like this. Thing are broken down until they are qualitatively similar and only then explained. Yet, the limitations of science, inherent in your own definition, do not permit this approach to the problem because it does not break down the universe beyond sensual mental states. So, science cannot exercise its power here. Thus, physicalism is caught in a contradiction, by virtue of the definition of science.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> Consider this. Your eyes responded physically to physical light coming from your monitor. Your physical brain did some sort of physical processing on this sensory information. Somehow this processed information made it to your mind, for you to be aware of it. Your mind then decided to type a response, and then somehow that information got into your physical motor cortex to cause your physical hands to type out your response on your physical keyboard.
>
> This isn't rocket science here. Clearly the physical world is influencing your mind, and your mind is in turn influencing the physical world. I happen to think that your mind is just part of the physical world, but even if it is not, the interaction cannot be denied.

But you are not proving what I'm disputing. I'm not by any means disputing a connection between the mind and the brain. I'm only questioning that the connection is necessarily of a physical nature, of the nature of concepts that are currently studied by science. If other concepts enter the arena, this may change, but the definitions will change with them. As it stands now, however, the physical aspect of this connection has not been demonstrated.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> Physicalism (or at least the metaphysical version of it which you are referring to here) is a metaphysical framework in which empiricism is often presented.
>
> I personally reject all metaphysics, including this type of physicalism, as being essentially incoherent. But that is beside the point here, since we are specifically talking about the epistemology of physicalism, which is empiricism. More specifically, the epistemology of physicalism is scientific empiricism.

Well, there we go: scientific empiricism not empiricism.

However, if you will, we can change the title from epistemology to ontology and move along with that.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> Their being entirely physical was a premise of my example, so you don't get to disagree with it. Not unless you want to assert that it is not possible for them to be entirely physical and still have experiences. But then you are just using circular reasoning. You present an argument against physicalism, and when I refute that argument, your response to my refutation is premised on the assumption that physicalism is impossible.
>
> Put another way, if the validity of your argument requires us to assume that physicalism is impossible, then your argument has no validity as an argument against physicalism.

Er, what? The impossibility of physicalism was never a part of my argument or my refutation. It was concluded in both. One the other hand, the entirely physical aspect was added to your argument later on in an attempt to refute my refutation. I quote the original:

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> A room exists with 10 beings in it. Each of these beings is a conscious sentient being. However, they are all completely different beings. Their mental states are nothing alike, and the physical implementation of their minds is completely different from one to the next.
>
> Now clearly in this scenario, it will be impossible for one of them to convey what its own experiences are like to any of the others, because no frame of reference exists for

> establishing the communication. But that doesn't mean that there is anything non-physical going on. Indeed, it would clearly be the case even if there were nothing non-physical involved at all.

That they are entirely physical is not in this argument. In fact, it would be the same contradiction you accuse me of if it was, since you conclude that it is possible for them to in this limiting scenario whether they are entirely physical or not.

In return, I argued that they would not be so limited if they were entirely physical. Which is when you started claiming that it is an essential premise of the scenario that they are entirely physical. Fine. Jolly. I take it all back and admit confusion, only show me that is a necessary premise first.

Edited by jaoman on Dec 2, 2006 - 12:09 PM

_____

Excess on occasion is exhilarating. It prevents moderation from acquiring the deadening effect of a habit.
- W. Somerset Maugham

Any community's arm of force - military, police, security - needs people in it who can do necessary evil, and yet not be made evil by it. To do only the necessary and no more. To constantly question the assumptions, to stop the slide into atrocity."
- Lois McMaster Bujold

Death Monkey
Tenured Poster

Joined: Sep 18, 2003
Location: Aachen, Germany

Topics: 4
Posts: 1,631

Posted Dec 4, 2006 - 06:28 AM: #10

jaoman,

> Why so? There is no reason that a coherent model of experience needs to be superficial. And I never said anything to that end. Talking about water as H2O and light as electromagnetic waves works as a global means of classification that can be used to produce sensual reactions according to therein derived specifications. But note, both H2O and electromagnetic waves have never been observed as their own entities. They cannot be, by definition, except as water and light. They are exactly what I said, reformulations of experience in such a way that they fit into a coherent model. New names with new connotations.

How is mind science any different? Ultimately it just amounts to explaining the observed relationships between our first-person experiences and the models of our sensory input which we have built up. It all still just boils down to modeling our experiences.

> We have not unlocked “how”; we have presumed it. The experience, then, cannot have a functional role except in the broadest sense, because we do not have a notion of exactly how it might function. Something else does the functions we assign to it – the natural laws – but it's not the experience.

I don't follow you here. Natural laws don't do anything. They do not have any functions. They simply describe how things work.

> What I've basically been getting at throughout the whole thread is that the underpinnings of the system are faulty. I want to ask “What is a physical phenomenon?” From there I move down a step to this questions: “What is the origin of our notion of the physical?” The answer to this question is the external world. But going down the same ladder, “What is the origin of our notion of the external world,” I'm unable to avoid concluding that it is sense experience. Well then, these notions have not noticeably shifted their foundation since their origins, I arrive back to rephrase my original question to, “What is a sense experience phenomenon?” Maybe you can do better, but the answer I get is something that creates sensual experiences.
>
> But now we have a problem, in that all experiences are mental states. So, what your

> argument seems to be saying is that, if physicalism is true, consciousness (all mental states) are or can be explained by sensual mental states.

That's one way to put it. Another way to put it would be that by analyzing our sensory input, we can formulate a coherent understanding of how our own minds actually work.

> More abstractly, if physicalism is true, we necessarily need to explain something with something else that is on the same existential level but is qualitatively different.

I am not sure what you mean by "existential level" here. That sounds rather metaphysical, and really has no relevance to the question of descriptions and epistemological models.

> Like explaining chairs with rocks or blue with orange. However, scientific methodology does not function like this. Thing are broken down until they are qualitatively similar and only then explained. Yet, the limitations of science, inherent in your own definition, do not permit this approach to the problem because it does not break down the universe beyond sensual mental states.

I don't see the problem here. The idea is to explain describe the mind in terms of our physical models, which are themselves described in terms of sensory experiences. In this way we essentially come full-circle, by formulating a coherent model of everything which we are aware of, including our own minds.

> But you are not proving what I'm disputing. I'm not by any means disputing a connection between the mind and the brain. I'm only questioning that the connection is necessarily of a physical nature, of the nature of concepts that are currently studied by science. If other concepts enter the arena, this may change, but the definitions will change with them. As it stands now, however, the physical aspect of this connection has not been demonstrated.

I'm not sure what you mean by "physical". The above statement seems to indicate that you mean physical in the sense that science means it, but then your statement is not correct. In science, all the only criteria for a phenomenon to qualify as being physical, is that it be able to have observable effects on something else. By definition, these are physical effects. put simply, if the connection between mind and brain *wasn't* physical, then this connection could not play any role in the physical behavior of the brain. But it clearly does.

One could speculate that there is *also* a non-physical component to the relationship, but then you essentially get epiphenomenalism, which does not appear to be a tenable position.

> Er, what? The impossibility of physicalism was never a part of my argument or my refutation. It was concluded in both. One the other hand, the entirely physical aspect was added to your argument later on in an attempt to refute my refutation. I quote the original:
>
> > Death Monkey wrote:
> > A room exists with 10 beings in it. Each of these beings is a conscious sentient being. However, they are all completely different beings. Their mental states are nothing alike, and the **physical implementation of their minds** is completely different from one to the next.
> >
> > Now clearly in this scenario, it will be impossible for one of them to convey what its own experiences are like to any of the others, because no frame of reference exists for establishing the communication. But that doesn't mean that there is anything non-physical going on. Indeed, it would clearly be the case even if there were nothing non-physical involved at all.
>
> That they are entirely physical is not in this argument.

I thought that the reference to the *physical implementation of their minds* made this clear. It would not make sense to talk about the physical implementation of their minds if their minds were not completely physical, because if this were the case, their minds would not *be* physically implemented at all.

I apologize if this was unclear.

> In fact, it would be the same contradiction you accuse me of if it was, since you conclude that it is possible for them to in this limiting scenario whether they are entirely physical or not.

I don't follow you here.

> In return, I argued that they would not be so limited if they were entirely physical. Which is when you started claiming that it is an essential premise of the scenario that they are entirely physical. Fine. Jolly. I take it all back and admit confusion, only show me that is a necessary premise first.

I am not sure what you mean by "necessary premise".

Allow me to rephrase things a bit. The point of my example is that it is no problem to come up with scenarios in which *entirely physical* conscious beings would be unable to express what their experiences are like to each other. Therefore, we cannot conclude from our own inability to do this that we are not entirely physical. The only way we could conclude from our inability to express what our experiences are like to each other, that we are not entirely physical beings, would be if we could somehow prove that *any* entirely physical being would *necessarily* be able to express what its experiences are like to another entirely physical being. The example I gave was just an attempt to point out that not only is there no reason to think that this should be the case, but that it is quite clear that it would not generally be the case.

DM

_____
Pseudoscience makes Baby Jesus cry.

TecnoTut
Tenured Poster

Joined: Jul 9, 2002
Location: Florida

Topics: 166
Posts: 3,754

Posted Dec 11, 2006 - 12:01 PM: #11

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
>
> That is clear. If physicalism is wrong, then there is no reason to expect mental states to be understandable scientifically.

Not really. It just means that mental states cannot be understood physically. That does *not* mean that mental states cannot be understood as natural events, however, thus they can be understood scientifically. The physical is a subset of the natural, and science studies the natural.

> **joaman** wrote:
>
> Mental states do not fit into the preconditions for physical rules. Because of this, physical explanations have never worked on the mind. Therefore, physicalism is not a universal theory.

One can be a dualist and believe, e.g., that the mental depends on physical pheonomena. So if there's brain damage, then one's consciousness will be affected. This is correlation.

Yet the issue of dependence and correlation is a separate issue from identity and distinctness: a dualist can believe mental states lawfully (through natural laws) correlare and depend on functional-physical (pf) states, but they must believe that mental states, at least the qualia aspect of a mental states, is distinct from the pf state.

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
>
> Now clearly in this scenario, it will be impossible for one of them to convey what its own experiences are like to any of the others, because no frame of reference exists for establishing the communication. But that doesn't mean that there is anything non-physical going on.

It shows a lot. Dualists can argue that experiences are ineffable because they are are subjective facts. A physicalist could respond by saying that the ineffability is due to there being certain objective (not subjective) physical properties and objects not describable in a physical language (Owen Flannagen makes a distinction between linguistic physicalism and metaphysical physicalism -- saying that the ineffability only makes linguistic physicalism false, but not metaphysical physicalism).

Yet, I do't see how that fixes the problem since that is exactly what a subjective non-physical experience is: a property, event, or object that cannot be described in physical terms. It's also too *ad hoc* of a response, by making qualia the only physical property/fact/event that cannot be fully described using a physical language. But what is a physical property/object other than a property, object or fact that can be described in physical terminology?

Edited by TecnoTut on Dec 11, 2006 - 06:44 PM

He that dies pays all debts - Shakespeare's Stephano from *The Tempest*

Truth is its own measure - Spinoza (*contra* Protagoras)

Those who deny [Aristotle's] first principle should be flogged or burned until they admit that it is not the same thing to be burned and not burned, or whipped and not whipped – Ibn Sina (Avicenna)

Kali Yuga
Tokyo Two-Stepper

Joined: Jan 30, 2005
Location: Monster Island

Topics: 9
Posts: 347

Posted Dec 11, 2006 - 06:32 PM: #12

A few items to add here, hopefully it won't roll the debate back too far... 

First, let's keep in mind (pun unavoidable) that scientific approaches to the human brain are, for many excellent reasons, far behind other forms of inquiry. Primarily for ethical reasons, and partially for technical reasons, it's difficult and/or unacceptable to treat an active and living human brain the same way we do many other organic and inorganic objects.

Even with those limitations, over the last decade or two we have improved our means of prying into the human mind (e.g fMRI scans), and capitalized upon the unfortunate opportunities afforded by accidents and damage, to get a better idea of how the mind works. For example, we now have excellent hypotheses about empathy and learning due *not* to an appeal to dualism, but to the rudimentary knowledge we have gathered about mirror neurons. We also hypothesize that while much information is dynamically distributed throughout the cortex, our recall of a small set of specific individuals is focused in single neurons (known as "grandmother neurons.")

No dualistic theory that I know of can account for the ways in which we, as an "observer of our selves," cannot tell whether the recall of a specific individual comes from dynamic / distributed memory or from a grandmother neuron, or why we would need something like a mirror neuron.

So: when we acknowledge that there is a great deal of ignorance still present in both the theory and mechanics of brains, it should not be surprising that a full account of subjective phenomena is incomplete. This may very well be the case for a long time.

But! That does not alter the fact that interactive and substance dualisms would need to be a total violation of the laws of physics as we currently articulate them. Nor can I/S dualisms account for child-to-adult stages of cognitive development, or the impact of evolution and gene structures on cognition.

The inability to present a complete picture based upon the premises of physicalism is not, in and of itself, evidence that "physicalism doesn't work." For example, since I/S dualisms violate numerous other physical laws, we know they are wrong and cannot work without invoking a logical fallacy like special pleading -- e.g. "out of all the molecules in the universe, only the ones in neurons are allowed to move electrons irregardless of the various conservation laws of physics."

Last but not least, there is at least one physicalist who accepts the subjective mind and qualia, and casts them in strictly physical and neurological terms: Gerald Edelman. I'm still working my way through Second Nature so I'm not sure I agree with him yet. But at a minimum it seems like *he* doesn't have a problem with treating qualia and subjectivity as "fair game" for scientific scrutiny....

_____
"Our life is the creation of our mind."
- a stale Fortune Cookie

TecnoTut
Tenured Poster

Joined: Jul 9, 2002
Location: Florida

Topics: 166
Posts: 3,754

Posted Dec 11, 2006 - 07:53 PM: #13

> **Kali Yuga** wrote:
> A few items to add here, hopefully it won't roll the debate back too far...
>
> First, let's keep in mind (pun unavoidable) that scientific approaches to the human brain are, for many excellent reasons, far behind other forms of inquiry. Primarily for ethical reasons, and partially for technical reasons, it's difficult and/or unacceptable to treat an active and living human brain the same way we do many other organic and inorganic objects.
>
> Even with those limitations, over the last decade or two we have improved our means of prying into the human mind (e.g fMRI scans), and capitalized upon the unfortunate opportunities afforded by accidents and damage, to get a better idea of how the mind works. For example, we now have excellent hypotheses about empathy and learning due *not* to an appeal to dualism, but to the rudimentary knowledge we have gathered about mirror neurons. We also hypothesize that while much information is dynamically distributed throughout the cortex, our recall of a small set of specific individuals is focused in single neurons (known as "grandmother neurons.")
>
> No dualistic theory that I know of can account for the ways in which we, as an "observer of our selves," cannot tell whether the recall of a specific individual comes from dynamic / distributed memory or from a grandmother neuron, or why we would need something like a mirror neuron.
>
> So: when we acknowledge that there is a great deal of ignorance still present in both the theory and mechanics of brains, it should not be surprising that a full account of subjective phenomena is incomplete. This may very well be the case for a long time.

What really caught my eye is when you mentioned the scientific progress in the "mechnics of brains," partuclarly in "empathy and learning" without "appealing to dualism." What strikes me odd is your last phrase -- that part about not appealing to dualism. From what I understand of contemporary dualism, they believe everything supervenes on the physical, even *all mental functions*, such as learning, memory, perceptual discrmination, verbal reports, etc. That is, one can explain all these psychological functions by appealing to physical terms. So a dualist would not want scientists to "appeal to dualism" when it comes to explaining things like learning, because they can be defined behaviorally. The dualists simply says intrinsic subjective raw reelings (qualia) *cannot* be explained by appealing simply to functional roles.

> But! That does not alter the fact that interactive and substance dualisms would need to be a total violation of the laws of physics as we currently articulate them.

Which law would that be? If you think the Law of Conservation, then I seriously suggest that you read Averill and Keating's 'Does Interactionism Violate a Law of Physics?': http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-4423%281981...

> Nor can I/S dualisms account for child-to-adult stages of cognitive development, or the impact of evolution and gene structures on cognition.

You are correct, and that's why we use physical models to explain those functions. Yet by the flip side, evolutioon, gene structure, and cognitive development do not explain qualia.

> The inability to present a complete picture based upon the premises of physicalism is not, in and of itself, evidence that "physicalism doesn't work." For example, since I/S dualisms violate numerous other physical laws, we know they are wrong and cannot work without invoking a logical fallacy like special pleading -- e.g. "out of all the molecules in the universe, only the ones in neurons are allowed to move electrons irregardless of the various conservation laws of physics."

Well, dualists don't say "physicalism doesn't work." They say physicalism works for everything except one thing: the phenomenal aspects of consciousness (qualia). A dualist would concede that physicalism works perfectly fine for the functional aspects of consciousness (e.g. discrminating, rocgnizing, learning, etc.).

> Last but not least, there is at least one physicalist who accepts the subjective mind and qualia, and casts them in strictly physical and neurological terms: Gerald Edelman. I'm still working my way through Second Nature so I'm not sure I agree with him yet. But at a minimum it seems like *he* doesn't have a problem with treating qualia and subjectivity as "fair game" for scientific scrutiny....

Despite Edelman's claim about taking qualia seriously, he's a reductionist, and his theory of qualia isn't really a theory of qualia (e.g. his theory is about about perception, language, awareness or the mapping out of color-space -- all of which aren't the same thing as the problem of qualia, but of neurobiological functions, instead). His is a theory of correlation, not logical supervenience. Correlation does not give a physical explanation, however. Afterall, dualists believe in correlation as well. Edelman's scheme for "higer-order consciosness" in his *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire* merely picks out the physical processes that underlie or correlate with consciousness, but doesn't explain why qualia should accompany those processes at all. Logical supervenience explains why consciousness accompanies those physical processes, yet no one yet has shown us why qulaia logically supervenes on the physical processes that Edelman mentions.

It should be noted that dualists have many options. One can be an epiphenomenalist. Granted, one has to bite the bullet with regard to mental to physical causation, but I don't think that's too worriesome. Two objections to epiphenomenalism are that if qualia are epiphenomenal, then how come we know about them? One can reply that epiphenomenalism doesn't deny mental to mental causation, thus qualia (mental property) can cause knowledge of qualua (another mental property). Then there's the objection that if the qualia weren't there, then we would still speak and make judgments about them. This is a problem because usually we say one's knowledge of one's qualia is usually the cause of one's statements about qualia. But we talk about things that do not exist all the time -- suchs as UFOs, gods and witches. So why make a special exception for qualia? And if we can

give a functional explanation of why we say the things we say, then the problem dissolves.

There is one last option fo dualists. One can hold that physics deals only with the relational properties of objects, not their intrinisic properties. Relational properties are mass, charge, size, momentum, velocitiy, etc. Pheomenal properties, on the other hand, can be considered the intrinisc properties of physical objects which physics does not deal with. This is totally separate from interactionism, and does not entail epiphenomenalism -- it's more like a type of neutral monism except the one substance is a physical substance.

Edited by TecnoTut on Dec 11, 2006 - 08:37 PM

_____

He that dies pays all debts - Shakespeare's Stephano from *The Tempest*

Truth is its own measure - Spinoza (*contra* Protagoras)

Those who deny [Aristotle's] first principle should be flogged or burned until they admit that it is not the same thing to be burned and not burned, or whipped and not whipped – Ibn Sina (Avicenna)

Death Monkey
Tenured Poster

Joined: Sep 18, 2003
Location: Aachen, Germany

Topics: 4
Posts: 1,631

Posted Dec 12, 2006 - 06:04 AM: #14

TecnoTut,

> That is clear. If physicalism is wrong, then there is no reason to expect mental states to be understandable scientifically.

Not really. It just means that mental states cannot be understood physically. That does not mean that mental states cannot be understood as natural events, however, thus they can be understood scientifically. The physical is a subset of the natural, and science studies the natural.

First of all, this distinction you are making is meaningless. I don't know what outdated conception of "physical" you have in mind here, but the modern physicalist definition of "physical" is such that anything which science can study (natural phenomena whose workings can be understood through empirical investigation), necessarily qualifies.

Second, I did not say that if physicalism is wrong then mental states could not be understood scientifically. I said that if physicalism is wrong then there is no *reason* to *expect* that mental states could be understood scientifically. There is a very big difference.

> Now clearly in this scenario, it will be impossible for one of them to convey what its own experiences are like to any of the others, because no frame of reference exists for establishing the communication. But that doesn't mean that there is anything non-physical going on.

It shows a lot.

Absolutely. It tells us a lot about how we access information about the world, and how we communicate information to each other.

> Dualists can argue that experiences are ineffable because they are are subjective facts.

Not really. They can *assert* that, but they cannot back up this assertion with any kind of actual evidence.

> A physicalist could respond by saying that the ineffability is due to there being certain objective (not subjective) physical properties and objects not describable in a physical language (Owen Flannagen makes a distinction between linguistic physicalism and metaphysical physicalism -- saying that the ineffability only makes linguistic physicalism false, but not metaphysical physicalism).

That isn't how physicalists respond. There are no properties there which cannot be described in physical language. What the physicalist would say is that the dualist is mistaken in his characterization of "what the experience is like" as being an actual property of something in the first place. The physicalist would claim that he is making a category mistake, and that the apparent ineffability of subjectivity is a result of this mistake.

> Yet, I do't see how that fixes the problem since that is exactly what a subjective non-physical experience is: a property, event, or object that cannot be described in physical terms. It's also too ad hoc of a response, by making qualia the only physical property/fact/event that cannot be fully described using a physical language. But what is a physical property/object other than a property, object or fact that can be described in physical terminology?

It doesn't fix the problem, nor is it how physicalists claim the problem should be fixed. Again, the problem is one of misconceptions about mental phenomena, and not about there being properties which are impossible to describe physically.

DM

_____
Pseudoscience makes Baby Jesus cry.

TecnoTut
Tenured Poster

Joined: Jul 9, 2002
Location: Florida

Topics: 166
Posts: 3,754

Posted Dec 12, 2006 - 08:33 AM: #15

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> First of all, this distinction you are making is meaningless. I don't know what outdated conception of "physical" you have in mind here, but the modern physicalist definition of "physical" is such that anything which science can study (natural phenomena whose workings can be understood through empirical investigation), necessarily qualifies.
>
> Second, I did not say that if physicalism is wrong then mental states could not be understood scientifically. I said that if physicalism is wrong then there is no reason to expect that mental states could be understood scientifically. There is a very big difference.

Why is the distinction between the natural and the physical meaningless? Perhaps it is, but show me why. Not that it matters a lot, however, since you're defining science as the empirical method of investigating natural phenomena. Since dualists believe phenomenal properties are properties that are subsumed under *natural* (psychophysical) laws[/i] (e.g. if a certain brain state occurs, then that phenomenal property will occur), then there *is* a reason to expect phenomenal properties to be understood scientifically. I also want to refrain from using the term "mental states" when discussing the non-reduction because most aspects of mental states are reducible to psychological functions. The only aspect not (for argument's sake) psychologically reducible are the phenomenal aspects, viz. qualia.

> Not really. They can assert that, but they cannot back up this assertion with any kind of actual evidence.

The ineffiablity of qualia *is* very strong actual evidence that qualia are not physical, and there hasn't been any adequate response (by "adequate" I mean responses that don't beg the question) from the physicalist on this other than saying"dualists are still wrong even if qualia are still ineffable". At least Flannagen tries to give a reason why dualists are still wrong, by making a distinction between linguistic physicalism and metaphysical physicalism. There's only one paper that I know that tackled the problem of ineffability head on: Dan Dennett's 'Quining Qualia': I'm not convinced by his argument, but check out the part where he first starts talking about osprey calls:
http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/quinqual.htm

> That isn't how physicalists respond. There are no properties there which cannot be described in physical language.

Well, I just gave you a response from a physicalist that responds in that way, so it is the case that some physicalists respond that way. You must understand physicalists respond differently to anti-physicalist arguments, and this happens to be one of the many different responses. But like yourself, I do think this particular response from some physicalists (like Flannagen) is wrong. Like yourself again, I do believe there is no physical property not expressible in a physical language (although you said "there are no properties" implying *any* properties, that still implies physical properties). The old saying is that if it behaves like a duck, then it's a duck. Similarly, if something has the characteristics of a non-physical property, then it's a non-physical property. Another different argument other than Flannagen's must be made then to account for the ineffability.

> What the physicalist would say is that the dualist is mistaken in his characterization of "what the experience is like" as being an actual property of something in the first place. The physicalist would claim that he is making a category mistake, and that the apparent ineffability of subjectivity is a result of this mistake.

But what is the physicalist's argument that the dualist is making a "category mistake"? How is it a category mistake, also, when the properties seem to fit in different categories (subjective v. objective), hence the ineffability of qualia? This seems to be just a question begging response from you with no arguments to back it up. Where is your response, here, other than saying "dualists are still misconceiving qualia even if qualia are ineffable"? Okay, but *why* is that the case? Can you provide a reason, like Dennett's attempt in 'Quining Qualia'?

_____
He that dies pays all debts - Shakespeare's Stephano from *The Tempest*

Truth is its own measure - Spinoza (*contra* Protagoras)

Those who deny [Aristotle's] first principle should be flogged or burned until they admit that it is not the same thing to be burned and not burned, or whipped and not whipped – Ibn Sina (Avicenna)

Death Monkey
Tenured Poster

Joined: Sep 18, 2003
Location: Aachen, Germany

Topics: 4
Posts: 1,631

Posted Dec 12, 2006 - 09:14 AM: #16

TecnoTut,

> Why is the distinction between the natural and the physical meaningless? Perhaps it is, but show me why.

Because ever since we were forced to discard our naive metaphysical preconceptions about a pre-relativity, pre-quantum mechanics world, physicalists have defined what they mean by "physical" *in terms of* science. How does an electron qualify as being "physical" any more than anything else which can be described in terms of natural laws by studying empirically detectable effects? How does anything we currently call "physical" qualify for being "physical" any more than anything else meeting these simple scientific criteria, would?

This is what scientists *mean* by the word physical. And modern physicalism is really not much more than the claim that there isn't anything which doesn't qualify. It is not really anything more than empiricism and naturalism.

> Not that it matters a lot, however, since you’re defining science as the empirical method of investigating natural phenomena. Since dualists believe phenomenal properties are properties that are subsumed under natural (psychophysical) laws[/i] (e.g. if a certain brain state occurs, then that phenomenal property will occur), then there is a reason to expect phenomenal properties to be understood scientifically.

Are they accessable by empirical methods?

If so, then it's physical, and your so-called dualism is really nothing more than physicalism plus the claim that there is a problem with the current physical laws. Inventing some arbitrary distinction between one set of empirically accessable natural phenomena, and another, doesn't add anything meaningful to the model.

If not, then they cannot be understood scientifically.

> > Not really. They can assert that, but they cannot back up this assertion with any kind of actual evidence.
>
> The ineffiablity of qualia is very strong actual evidence that qualia are not physical,

Only if you use a rather strained notion of "supporting evidence". I have always understood "supporting evidence" to be information which increases the conditional probability of a hypothesis being true. Now I can only assume from the context of you statement that when you said

"Dualists can argue that experiences are ineffable because they are are subjective facts.",

that by this you mean that they are facts which cannot be accessed by any objective means. The dualists have not presented any evidence that supports the claim that such facts exist. What's more, the absurdity of citing the ineffability of experiences as supporting evidence for this, should be clear. You are saying that X is supporting evidence for the claim that the reason X obtains is Y. This is clearly circular reasoning. If the reason dualists think that experiences are ineffable is because they are objectively inaccessable, then they cannot cite the fact that experiences are ineffable as supporting evidence for the claim that this is the reason why they are. That is simply nonsensical.

It would be like me saying that the sky is blue because of light scattering in the atmosphere, and then citing as supporting evidence for this the fact that the sky is blue.

> and there hasn’t been any adequate response (by “adequate” I mean responses that don’t beg the question) from the physicalist on this other than saying”dualists are still wrong even if qualia are still ineffable”.

Since when does the burden of proof lie with anybody other than the claiment? Even if physicalism is dead wrong, that still doesn't mean that the dualistic claim you cited is correct. Nor would constitute evidence that dualism is correct.

> > That isn't how physicalists respond. There are no properties there which cannot be described in physical language.
>
> Well, I just gave you a response from a physicalist that responds in that way, so it is the case that some physicalists respond that way.

Which one are you referring to? Dennet? Flannagen? I cannot access the link you posted.If you mean Flannagen, I am not directly familiar with his work.

> You must understand physicalists respond differently to anti-physicalist arguments, and this happens to be one of the many different responses.

Of course. I meant that they do not generally respond that way.

> But like yourself, I do think this particular response from some physicalists (like Flannagen) is wrong. Like yourself again, I do believe there is no physical property not expressible in a physical language (although you said “there are no properties” implying any properties, that still implies physical properties).

Exactly. My view is that many of the things which dualists call "properties" are not actually properties at all.

> The old saying is that if it behaves like a duck, then it’s a duck. Similarly, if something has the characteristics of a non-physical property, then it’s a non-physical property.

The thing is, I cannot think of anything with such characteristics. Certainly no property which I am aware of actually having, has such characteristics. After all, every property of my mind which I am aware of is physically causally efficacious. Therefore, the only way it could have characteristics of a non-physical property, would be if it were somehow supernatural. I haven't seen any evidence to suggest this.

> Another different argument other than Flannagen’s must be made then to account for the ineffability.

I don't see why that should even be an issue. As my example of the purely physical beings earlier in this thread shows, there is absolutely no reason to think that purely physical beings *should* be able to verbally express everything about their experiences to each other in the first place. So why should our inability to do this be something which physicalists "need to account for"?

It would be like me demanding that dualists account for the fact artificial neural networks can detect patterns. They don't need to, because nothing about dualism in any way indicates that they *shouldn't* be able to.

> But what is the physicalist’s argument that the dualist is making a “category mistake”? How is it a category mistake, also, when the properties seem to fit in different categories (subjective v. objective), hence the ineffability of qualia?

I think you misunderstand me. The physicalist claims that experiences have physical properties (all of which are, of course, objective), and that what the dualists *call* "subjective properties", are a combination of physical properties, and things which are not properties at all, but rather processes themselves, and memories of those processes (which are physical structures).

> This seems to be just a question begging response from you with no arguments to back it up. Where is your response, here, other than saying “dualists are still misconceiving qualia even if qualia are ineffable”? Okay, but why is that the case? Can you provide a reason, like Dennett’s attempt in ‘Quining Qualia’?

From what I know of Dennett's work, he is saying much the same thing as I am. The idea is that if we *define* qualia to be *properties* of the experience which play no causal role in the physical world whatsoever, then qualia do not exist, and what people commonly think of as being "qualia", are not, but are instead a combination of physical properties, and things which are not "properties" at all.

DM

_____
Pseudoscience makes Baby Jesus cry.

TecnoTut
Tenured Poster

Joined: Jul 9, 2002
Location: Florida

Topics: 166
Posts: 3,754

Posted Dec 12, 2006 - 02:02 PM: #17

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
> Because ever since we were forced to discard our naive metaphysical preconceptions about a pre-relativity, pre-quantum mechanics world, physicalists have defined what they mean by "physical" in terms of science. How does an electron qualify as being "physical" any more than anything else which can be described in terms of natural laws by studying empirically detectable effects? How does anything we currently call "physical" qualify for being "physical" any more than anything else meeting these simple scientific criteria, would?
>
> This is what scientists mean by the word physical. And modern physicalism is really not much more than the claim that there isn't anything which doesn't qualify. It is not really anything more than empiricism and naturalism.

That's fine, and I don' think there's anything wrong with that per se. But I do believe there's a distinction between empiricism and naturalism. The opposite of naturalism, I think, is supernaturalism. The a priori sciences, like mathematics and formal logic, are not empirical, but they are natural (they're not supernatural). I'm arguing in a similar fashion with respect to the physical and the natural – that the physical simply means the elementary properties of physics (e.g. charge, mass, etc.) and that a property doesn't have to have be the properties of physics, yet be natural in the sense that it can be studied rigorously and follows natural laws. Take the example of being odd-numbered. It is not a physical property (it lacks any of the properties picked out by physics), but it's a natural property.

> Are they accessable by empirical methods?
> If so, then it's physical, and your so-called dualism is really nothing more than physicalism plus the claim that there is a problem with the current physical laws. Inventing some arbitrary distinction between one set of empirically accessable natural phenomena, and another, doesn't add anything meaningful to the model.
>
> If not, then they cannot be understood scientifically.

I guess it depends on what we mean by "accessible". They are *directly* accessible in a subjective, first-person sense, and indirectly accessible in a third-person sense. If you want to call them "physical", then so be it, but physicalism is against any subjective facts. So if by "accessible" we mean -first-person access, then qualia are not accessible in that sense. But that doesn't mean we cannot study them in a *natural* scientific manner – was, after all, rely on behavior, verbal reports and our phenomenology at the same time.

> Only if you use a rather strained notion of "supporting evidence". I have always understood "supporting evidence" to be information which increases the conditional probability of a hypothesis being true. Now I can only assume from the context of you statement that when you said
>
> "Dualists can argue that experiences are ineffable because they are are subjective facts.",
>
> that by this you mean that they are facts which cannot be accessed by any objective means. The dualists have not presented any evidence that supports the claim that such facts exist. What's more, the absurdity of citing the ineffability of experiences as

> supporting evidence for this, should be clear. You are saying that X is supporting evidence for the claim that the reason X obtains is Y. This is clearly circular reasoning. If the reason dualists think that experiences are ineffable is because they are objectively inaccessable, then they cannot cite the fact that experiences are ineffable as supporting evidence for the claim that this is the reason why they are. That is simply nonsensical.
>
> It would be like me saying that the sky is blue because of light scattering in the atmosphere, and then citing as supporting evidence for this the fact that the sky is blue.

But I don't see it as a circular argument. If dualists said "subjective facts are subjective because physicalism is wrong," then that would be circular, and question-begging. But saying that subjective facts are subjective because they're *ineffable* (and there's arguments showing that they're ineffable), then it is not circular (it might be false, but I'd like to know why). Denying that the properties of these experiences, which are not expressible in a physical language, are properties at all is a good thing. There's something new being introduced, as evidenced by the knowledge arguments.

> Since when does the burden of proof lie with anybody other than the claiment? Even if physicalism is dead wrong, that still doesn't mean that the dualistic claim you cited is correct. Nor would constitute evidence that dualism is correct.

But isn't the physicalist the claimant? Isn't s/he the one saying "all things, including phenomenal properties, objective and physical." Dualists also hold that if physicalism is wrong, then dualism is right by default. Why Because there're only two options here: either the phenomenal properties are physical, or they're not. If not, then they're some other substance.

> The thing is, I cannot think of anything with such characteristics. Certainly no property which I am aware of actually having, has such characteristics. After all, every property of my mind which I am aware of is physically causally efficacious. Therefore, the only way it could have characteristics of a non-physical property, would be if it were somehow supernatural. I haven't seen any evidence to suggest this.

Well, one can deny the physical efficacy of qualia, and I haven't seen any knock-down arguments against epiphenomenalism. But for argument's sake, let's say epiphenomenalism is wrong. Nevertheless, the dualist criterion for whether something is physical or not is not based on whether it has causal efficacy on the physical or not. No, it's based on many things, among which include being ineffable in a physical language (which is what the knowledge arguments show, or try to show) and/or if they're logically entailed by physical processes (which is what the conceivability arguments show, or try to show).

> I don't see why that should even be an issue. As my example of the purely physical beings earlier in this thread shows, there is absolutely no reason to think that purely physical beings should be able to verbally express everything about their experiences to each other in the first place. So why should our inability to do this be something which physicalists "need to account for"?
>
> It would be like me demanding that dualists account for the fact artificial neural networks can detect patterns. They don't need to, because nothing about dualism in any way indicates that they shouldn't be able to.

But why shouldn't physical beings be able to express everything about their experiences, especially if the experiences are physical? Also, I'm not sure why the ontological makeup of the beings even comes into play. Why couldn't, for example, a being made up of ectoplasm describe everything about experiences of another physical being in a physical language,

especially if the experience is itself physical?

> I think you misunderstand me. The physicalist claims that experiences have physical properties (all of which are, of course, objective), and that what the dualists call "subjective properties", are a combination of physical properties, and things which are not properties at all, but rather processes themselves, and memories of those processes (which are physical structures).

If I misunderstood you, then I apologize. But I think I did understand you. Let me rephrase my question based on your most recent reply: I haven't seen any arguments, yet, from physicalists showing that dualists are misdescribing the objective physical processes as subjective without simply begging the question. The physicalist arguments that don't beg the question (like Flannagen's), simply don't succeed to do what they aim or claim to do.

Edited by TecnoTut on Dec 12, 2006 - 02:33 PM

_____

He that dies pays all debts - Shakespeare's Stephano from *The Tempest*

Truth is its own measure - Spinoza (*contra* Protagoras)

Those who deny [Aristotle's] first principle should be flogged or burned until they admit that it is not the same thing to be burned and not burned, or whipped and not whipped – Ibn Sina (Avicenna)

Death Monkey
Tenured Poster

Joined: Sep 18, 2003
Location: Aachen, Germany

Topics: 4
Posts: 1,631

Posted Dec 13, 2006 - 01:38 AM: #18

TecnoTut,

> That's fine, and I don' think there's anything wrong with that per se. But I do believe there's a distinction between empiricism and naturalism.

Of course. That's why I said that physicalism is the *combination* of the two.

> The opposite of naturalism, I think, is supernaturalism. The a priori sciences, like mathematics and formal logic, are not empirical, but they are natural (they're not supernatural).

I don't really see how they could be considered to be either, but I guess that depends on what you mean by "natural". I don't see how that concept can even be applied to formal logic. It is what we have defined it to be. Nothing more and nothing less. How can something be said to function according to natural laws, when that something doesn't "function" at all. Logic doesn't *do* anything.

> I'm arguing in a similar fashion with respect to the physical and the natural – that the physical simply means the elementary properties of physics (e.g. charge, mass, etc.) and that a property doesn't have to have be the properties of physics, yet be natural in the sense that it can be studied rigorously and follows natural laws.

That is physicalism. There is absolutely nothing dualistic about that. It is just physicalism plus the claim that our *current* physical laws are not correct. Consider that we now know that what we *used* to consider to be the "elementary properties of physics" around 100 years ago, are incorrect. That did not suddenly render everything non-physical. It just meant we were mistaken about the properties of physical things.

> Take the example of being odd-numbered. It is not a physical property (it lacks any of the properties picked out by physics), but it's a natural property.

In what sense? I would say that it is a mathematical property. I don't see how naturalism even enters into it.

> I guess it depends on what we mean by “accessible”.

As I said, I mean *empirically* accessible.

> They are directly accessible in a subjective, first-person sense, and indirectly accessible in a third-person sense. If you want to call them “physical”, then so be it, but physicalism is against any subjective facts.

What I want doesn't enter into it. If they are indirectly third-person accessible, then they are physical. After all, *everything* which is third-person accessible, is only indirectly third-person accessable.

> So if by "accessible" we mean -first-person access, then qualia are not accessible in that sense.

Did you mean "third-person" above? Otherwise, this doesn't seem to make any sense.

> But that doesn’t mean we cannot study them in a natural scientific manner – was, after all, rely on behavior, verbal reports and our phenomenology at the same time.

Then they are empirically accessable. They are physical. At least, they qualify every bit as much for being "physical" as anything else we call "physical" does, so any definition of physical which excludes them is doing so arbitrarily.

> But I don’t see it as a circular argument. If dualists said “subjective facts are subjective because physicalism is wrong,” then that would be circular, and question-begging. But saying that subjective facts are subjective because they’re ineffable (and there’s arguments showing that they’re ineffable), then it is not circular (it might be false, but I’d like to know why).

If they are saying "qualia are ineffible because they are non-objective", and then justifying the claim that they are non-objective with the fact that they are ineffible, then this *is* circular reasoning, as I explained above.

Note that using "subjective" in this way is rather misleading. Being subjective does not have to imply anything dualistic or non-physical. Subjective just means that it is person to you. For example, my liking chocolate is subjective. But the *fact* that I like chocolate is still an objective fact. The simple fact that not everybody is going to agree with me about chocolate tasting good, does not imply that there is anything non-physical about me liking chocolate.

> Denying that the properties of these experiences, which are not expressible in a physical language, are properties at all is a good thing. There’s something new being introduced, as evidenced by the knowledge arguments.

I don't follow you.

> > Since when does the burden of proof lie with anybody other than the claiment? Even if physicalism is dead wrong, that still doesn't mean that the dualistic claim you cited is correct. Nor would constitute evidence that dualism is correct.
>
> But isn’t the physicalist the claimant?

The claim I am referring to is the dualist claim you cited that the reason why experiences are ineffible is because they are subjective. This claim may contradict physicalism (depending on exactly what you mean by "subjective"), but it is still a claim being made, and the person making that claim is the one who needs to justify it. Furthermore, if that claim is going to be used in some sort of argument to either defend a position or refute one, then the claiment needs to justify the claim in order for that argument to carry any weight.

> Isn't s/he the one saying "all things, including phenomenal properties, objective and physical."

Did you mean "*are* objective and physical."? If so, then yes. But again, this is not the claim I was referring to. Dualists make claims to. I absolutely agree that physicalists need to justify their claims. So do dualists. And if dualists are going to make arguments against physicalism, then they need to justify the claims those arguments are based on. It is not the burden of the physicalist to refute unjustified claims made against their position.

> Dualists also hold that if physicalism is wrong, then dualism is right by default.

And as any Idealist will tell you, this is pure bunk. They can both be wrong.

> Why Because there're only two options here: either the phenomenal properties are physical, or they're not. If not, then they're some other substance.

That does not logically follow. There are many other options. Maybe nothing is physical? Maybe everything is one substance, but it isn't a physical substance. Maybe the entire notion of ontological substances is complete gibberish?

> > The thing is, I cannot think of anything with such characteristics. Certainly no property which I am aware of actually having, has such characteristics. After all, every property of my mind which I am aware of is physically causally efficacious. Therefore, the only way it could have characteristics of a non-physical property, would be if it were somehow supernatural. I haven't seen any evidence to suggest this.
>
> Well, one can deny the physical efficacy of qualia, and I haven't seen any knock-down arguments against epiphenomenalism.

The above *is* a knock-down argument against it. I know for a *fact* that epiphenomenalism isn't true *for me*. Maybe it is for other people. But if it is, then clearly their minds work much differently than mine, in which case there is clearly no reason I should believe that they have these mysterious causally inefficacious properties at all. I can't infer that they do from any observations I could make, nor can I infer that they do from the assumption that their minds work like mine.

> But for argument's sake, let's say epiphenomenalism is wrong. Nevertheless, the dualist criterion for whether something is physical or not is not based on whether it has causal efficacy on the physical or not. No, it's based on many things, among which include being ineffable in a physical language (which is what the knowledge arguments show, or try to show) and/or if they're logically entailed by physical processes (which is what the conceivability arguments show, or try to show).

Same thing. If they could actually show that there are any actual *facts* about the world which are not physical facts, then that would contradict physicalism. This is what both of the above types of arguments attempt to show. They have never succeeded. Nor *can* they succeed, because the question of whether such non-physical facts exist or not is a synthetic one. It cannot be determined through logical proofs and thought experiments. What they need, is *evidence*.

The knowledge arguments beg the question. They assert that if the experiment were performed, that what would happen is not what physicalism says would happen. The concievability argument is trivially flawed, because it is trivially easy to prove that concievibility (in the sence that p-zombies are concievable) does not imply logical possibility.

> But why shouldn't physical beings be able to express everything about their experiences, especially if the experiences are physical?

Why *should* they? Why should they be able to express anything about their experiences *at all*? This is clearly a question about the specific capabilities and functionality of the being in question, and not a question about the nature of reality. You may as well ask why physical beings shouldn't be able to plug a USB cable into their brain and thought-control their computer.

> Also, I'm not sure why the ontological makeup of the beings even comes into play. Why couldn't, for example, a being made up of ectoplasm describe everything about experiences of another physical being in a physical language, especially if the experience is itself physical?

Why should it be able to?

Don't you see the problem here? You want to assert that our inability to do something somehow contradicts physicalism. Before you can use this as a valid argument, you need to do three things:

1) You must specify, clearly, exactly what it is you are claiming we cannot do.
2) You must provide reliable evidence that we really cannot do it.
3) You must show that physicalism implies that we *should* be able to do it.

I have yet to see any of these three criteria met. The arguments are always extremely vague about what they so-called "properties" which we cannot express actually are. When physicalists point out that what is being referred to isn't actually a property at all, but rather a process, the dualist points out that this isn't what he is referring to, but is always unable to clarify. And without that first step, the other steps are impossible.

All I can say is that I am unaware of anything which I am unable to do which physicalism somehow implies I should be able to do. And so far nobody has managed to coherently explain to me what I can't do that physicalism claims I should be able to do.

> > I think you misunderstand me. The physicalist claims that experiences have physical properties (all of which are, of course, objective), and that what the dualists call "subjective properties", are a combination of physical properties, and things which are not properties at all, but rather processes themselves, and memories of those processes (which are physical structures).
>
> If I misunderstood you, then I apologize. But I think I did understand you. Let me rephrase my question based on your most recent reply: I haven't seen any arguments, yet, from physicalists showing that dualists are misdescribing the objective physical processes as subjective without simply begging the question.

Question begging doesn't enter into it. Not unless the physicalist in question is attempting to *prove* that the dualists are wrong.

If the dualist says "physicalism is wrong because X is a non-physical property", then the physicalist only needs to respond to this if the dualist can demonstrate that X is, in fact, a non-physical property. The burden of proof is on the claiment. If the physicalist says "I don't think it is a non-physical property", then he is not question begging. He is just stating what he thinks the situation to be.

Likewise, if the dualist just states that he believes X is a non-physical property, then that is fine. But if he wants to cite this as an argument against physicalism, then he needs to back it up.

That said, I have no problem at all demonstrating that any property whose existence you can actually justify claiming, is physical. See my prior arguments about causal efficacy.

Again I think it is important to note that we are basically dealing with three ways in which qualia are being claimed to be "non-physical" here.

1) Epiphenomenalism: The claim that qualia are causally inefficacious. This position is not even tenable, much less justifiable. There is no need to for physicalists to provide any evidence against this position, because there is no evidence for it in the first place. Nor could there ever possibly be any.

2) Supernaturalism: The claim that qualia are supernatural. They affect the physical world, but in ways which either do not function according to natural laws, or in which those natural laws cannot be inferred through empiricism.

3) Naturalistic dualism: The claim that qualia do interact with the physical world according to natural laws which can be inferred through empiricism, but that they are somehow still not physical. This amounts to nothing more than saying that our current physical laws are wrong. The dualistic aspect of it (the claim of more than one ontological substance), is totally arbitrary and utterly vacuous.

Would you agree with the above? If not, why not? Note that I am not saying that the above exhaust all possible dualistic positions, nor am I saying that the rejection of all three of the above would somehow mean that physicalism is correct. What I am saying is that these are the three types of arguments against physicalism which I have seen. The first is, by its very nature, completely unjustifiable. The third is just a *currently* unjustified scientific claim, coupled with a meaningless metaphysical assertion, and the second is something for which there is zero supporting evidence.

Are you aware of another type of argument against physicalism? Or do you disagree with my characterization of the three types of arguments against it which I have cited?

DM

_____
Pseudoscience makes Baby Jesus cry.

TecnoTut
Tenured Poster

Joined: Jul 9, 2002
Location: Florida

Topics: 166
Posts: 3,754

Posted Dec 13, 2006 - 08:43 PM: #19

> **Death Monkey** wrote:
>
> I don't really see how they could be considered to be either, but I guess that depends on what you mean by "natural". I don't see how that concept can even be applied to formal logic. It is what we have defined it to be. Nothing more and nothing less. How can something be said to function according to natural laws, when that something doesn't "function" at all. Logic doesn't do anything.

Perhaps calling the laws of logic and other absrtact objects “natural” is a misnomer, and a bad example. But we can amend the name to non-supernatural. With respect to the mental as a distinct from the physical, dualists would say that they’re not just non-supernatural and non-physical, but natural in the sense that they are subsumed under psychophysical laws. These psychophysical laws are the laws that natural entail mental properties to physical ones – they are the laws that are absent in a zombie world.

> That is physicalism. There is absolutely nothing dualistic about that. It is just

> physicalism plus the claim that our current physical laws are not correct. Consider that we now know that what we used to consider to be the "elementary properties of physics" around 100 years ago, are incorrect. That did not suddenly render everything non-physical. It just meant we were mistaken about the properties of physical things.

I think the safest way to answer the question of what is physical is by saying that all the elementary properties in physics, whether from the physics of the past, present, or future, are all properties that objective, effable in a physical language, and logically entailed by any those properties, whereas mental properties are noneof the above. But their similarities is that both are subsumed under natural laws.

> Did you mean "third-person" above? Otherwise, this doesn't seem to make any sense.

Well, I was asked if qualia are empirically accessible for purposes of knowing whether they can be understood scientifically. I said, in reply, that in one sense they are, in another sense, they're not. They are accessible in a first person sense, but I wouldn't say they're indirectly empirically accessible. But I wouldn't go so far as say they're physical simply because we can study them indirectly through verbal reports, physical behavior and neurophysiology. They're still the only properties that are accessible from a first-person point, and that's why we call them non-physical.

> If they are saying "qualia are ineffible because they are non-objective", and then justifying the claim that they are non-objective with the fact that they are ineffible, then this is circular reasoning, as I explained above.

I still don't see the circular reasoning. Let's put it in a syllogistic form:
1. Qualia are ineffable
2. Ineffability implies ontological subjectivity
3. Ontological subjectivity implies non-physicality
4. Therefore, Qualia are non-physical

This is clearly valid, and it follows the hypothetical syllogism form of:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypothetical_syllogi...

Now, we can argue whether the premises are true, but the argument clearly is valid becuase it's not circular.

> Note that using "subjective" in this way is rather misleading. Being subjective does not have to imply anything dualistic or non-physical. Subjective just means that it is person to you. For example, my liking chocolate is subjective. But the fact that I like chocolate is still an objective fact. The simple fact that not everybody is going to agree with me about chocolate tasting good, does not imply that there is anything non-physical about me liking chocolate.

I think we need to make a distinction between epistemological subjectivity and ontological subjectivity. The fact that you like chocolate is an objective fact. But the statement "Chocolate tastes good" is an opinion, which is neither true, nor false – it's, epistemologically speaking, a subjective statement. Ontological subjective statements, however, can be true. If I'm in pain, and I say "peen feels like *this*[insert the feelingof pain]," then it's true. What makes it subjective is that that I'm the only person privy to a certain fact or property, viz. what pain feels like. This property or concept can only be known if I'm in that state (hence it's ineffability to others), whereas that's not the case for physical properties.

> The claim I am referring to is the dualist claim you cited that the reason why experiences are ineffible is because they are subjective. This claim may contradict physicalism (depending on exactly what you mean by "subjective"), but it is still a claim

> being made, and the person making that claim is the one who needs to justify it. Furthermore, if that claim is going to be used in some sort of argument to either defend a position or refute one, then the claiment needs to justify the claim in order for that argument to carry any weight.

It sounds like you're saying who ever states their position *first*, inherits the burden of proof. Whoever inherits the burden of proof must provide empirical evidence, and not just thought experiments. Well, I think both sides are the claimants, and neither side has provided empirical evidence (although, the following paper states there have been actual cases of inverted qualia: http://cognet.mit.edu/posters/TUCSON3/Rumelin.htm...).

Assuming there isn't any empirical evidence (e.g. no actual cases of inverted qualia), then I think the demand for empirical evidence is misguided. Take the logicaly possibility of p-zombies. Dualists admit that they are *naturally impossible* – that they are purely hypothetical creatures – they do not really exist. How can a dualist provide evidence of something that doesn't exist in reality? But physicalism is false if zombies are *logically possible*. So the evidence of zombies lies within logical thought experiments, not with *empirical* evidence. The point of the thought experiments, rather than controlled physical experiments, is that they determine, or try to determine, whether the idea of a zombie is even logically coherent, even if it is unintuitive.

Now, I must admit that the thought-experiments on the dualists side have not been shown to be logically incoherent. Granted, some of them are indeed counterintuitive, but then again, some of them are very intuitive. But counterintuitive isn't the same thing as logically incoherent. I have not seen a physicalist thought experiment showing, e.g., that the knowledge or conceivability arguments are incoherent.

> And as any Idealist will tell you, this is pure bunk. They can both be wrong.

If we take idealism seriously, then I guess you're correct. So let me amend my statement to "if physicalism is wrong, then non-physical reductionism is right by default."

> The above is a knock-down argument against it. I know for a fact that epiphenomenalism isn't true for me. Maybe it is for other people. But if it is, then clearly their minds work much differently than mine, in which case there is clearly no reason I should believe that they have these mysterious causally inefficacious properties at all. I can't infer that they do from any observations I could make, nor can I infer that they do from the assumption that their minds work like mine.

But I don't think it is a knock-down argument. I do think what you say is intuitively correct: it does seem like the sensation pain caused be to say "ouch". But it also seems to be the case that the Sun revolves around the Earth. As a scientists, you know very well that our most successful scientific theories (QM, Relativity, Natural Selection) are very counter-intuitive. Some cite Libet's experiment as empirical proof of epiphenomenalism, but I have my doubts. Nevertheless, there aren't any empirical proofs showing epiphenomenalism is false, and no thought experiment showing epipehnomenalism is incoherent (I'll grant it everyone that it's counter-intuitive).

> Why should they? Why should they be able to express anything about their experiences at all? This is clearly a question about the specific capabilities and functionality of the being in question, and not a question about the nature of reality. You may as well ask why physical beings shouldn't be able to plug a USB cable into their brain and thought-control their computer.

I'm not so sure about that. If it is the case that qualia are subjective, then we should expect

other beings, regardless of their constitutional make-up, to not be able to express qualia in a physical language. So the problem arises for the because the physicalist says that the experience *is* just a physical state. Yet we have no problems imagining or expressing the physical state, which is allegedly *is* the experience. So why is it that our imagining and expressing the physical aspect is not impossible, but the expressing the phenomenal expect is impossible? Because we can understand one half of the equation, but not the other half, we're infer that is has nothing to do with our imaginative capabilities.

> Don't you see the problem here? You want to assert that our inability to do something somehow contradicts physicalism. Before you can use this as a valid argument, you need to do three things:
>
> 1) You must specify, clearly, exactly what it is you are claiming we cannot do.
> 2) You must provide reliable evidence that we really cannot do it.
> 3) You must show that physicalism implies that we should be able to do it.

Okay.
1) We cannot express physical properties in a physical language (which is irrelevant to what out constitutional make-up is).
2) As noted earlier, thought experiments can count as evidence and our inability to do 1) does counts too.
3) The knowledge arguments show this:

Premise P1 Mary has complete physical knowledge about human color vision before her release.

Therefore
Consequence C1 Mary knows all the physical facts about human color vision before her release.
Premise P2 There is some (kind of) knowledge concerning facts about human color vision that Mary does not have before her release.

Therefore (from (P2)):
Consequence C2 There are some facts about human color vision that Mary does not know before her release.

Therefore (from (C1) and (C2)):
Consequence C3 There are non-physical facts about human color vision.

Jackson's knowledge argument shows why an inability implies something about the world.

I won't quote the rest of your posts because I think they have been addressed with these latest replies.

Edited by TecnoTut on Dec 14, 2006 - 06:05 AM

_____
He that dies pays all debts - Shakespeare's Stephano from *The Tempest*

Truth is its own measure - Spinoza (*contra* Protagoras)

Those who deny [Aristotle's] first principle should be flogged or burned until they admit that it is not the same thing to be burned and not burned, or whipped and not whipped – Ibn Sina (Avicenna)

Death Monkey
Tenured Poster

Joined: Sep 18, 2003
Location: Aachen,

Posted Dec 19, 2006 - 08:17 AM: #20

TecnoTut,

> Perhaps calling the laws of logic and other absrtact objects "natural" is a misnomer,

Germany

Topics: 4
Posts: 1,631

> and a bad example. But we can amend the name to non-supernatural.

How does that convey anything meaningful? If descriptors like "natural" and "supernatural" cannot be applied to something, then what is the point of saying it is "non-natural" or "non-supernatural"? It is like saying that since the property of color cannot be attributed to a number, that the number is "non-red". Sure, the number isn't red, but what point is there in saying it is "non-red" as though that were some sort of property of it, or as though saying that actually conveyed any relevant information about it at all?

> With respect to the mental as a distinct from the physical, dualists would say that they're not just non-supernatural and non-physical, but natural in the sense that they are subsumed under psychophysical laws. These psychophysical laws are the laws that natural entail mental properties to physical ones – they are the laws that are absent in a zombie world.

That's fine. If these laws can be infered empirically, then they are physical laws and you don't have any sort of dualism. If they cannot, then you can say that there is a distinction between this and supernaturalism, but since there would be no possible way to determine which is the case (non-empirical naturalism vs supernaturalism), the distinction would not be a very useful one.

> > That is physicalism. There is absolutely nothing dualistic about that. It is just physicalism plus the claim that our current physical laws are not correct. Consider that we now know that what we used to consider to be the "elementary properties of physics" around 100 years ago, are incorrect. That did not suddenly render everything non-physical. It just meant we were mistaken about the properties of physical things.
>
> I think the safest way to answer the question of what is physical is by saying that all the elementary properties in physics, whether from the physics of the past, present, or future, are all properties that objective, effable in a physical language, and logically entailed by any those properties,

In other words, they function according to natural laws which can be inferred empirically.

> whereas mental properties are noneof the above. But their similarities is that both are subsumed under natural laws.

How do you know? Note that I am asking this question with respect to both sentances. First, how do you know that mental properties are none of the above? Certainly we *have* learned a great deal about mental properties through science, so at least *some* of them are "physical". I can only assume that you are excluding these, and referring only to some aspect of mental phenomena which we currently cannot infer anything about empirically. If so, which aspects are you referring to? And why don't you think that we can infer anything about them empirically?

And as for the second sentence, if such properties do exist, how could you ever know whether they are natural or supernatural? What possible reason could you ever have for believing that they are one rather than the other?

> Well, I was asked if qualia are empirically accessible for purposes of knowing whether they can be understood scientifically. I said, in reply, that in one sense they are, in another sense, they're not. They are accessible in a first person sense, but I wouldn't say they're indirectly empirically accessible. But I wouldn't go so far as say they're physical simply because we can study them indirectly through verbal reports, physical behavior and neurophysiology. They're still the only properties that are accessible from a first-person point, and that's why we call them non-physical.

I am puzzled. Can you give an example of *anything* that is directly accessable in anything other than a first-person sense? All physical properties are inferred indirectly from observations. Why should mental properties be any different? The fact that they are *also* directly accessable from a first-person perspective, doesn't make them non-physical. It just means that they are *also* mental properties.

> If they are saying "qualia are ineffible because they are non-objective", and then justifying the claim that they are non-objective with the fact that they are ineffible, then this is circular reasoning, as I explained above.

I still don't see the circular reasoning. Let's put it in a syllogistic form:
1. Qualia are ineffable
2. Ineffability implies ontological subjectivity
3. Ontological subjectivity implies non-physicality
4. Therefore, Qualia are non-physical

Well, that is a *very* different argument. Please justify number 2. I would remind you now of the example I gave before. It is not at all difficult to imagine how beings which are *completely physical* could be unable to express what their experiences are like to each other simply because of *physical* limitations on how their brains work. So how can you assert that ineffability implies ontological subjectivity.

Indeed, this appears to be a clear category mistake. Ineffabilitiy is an epistemological issue. Nothing about it could possibly imply anything metaphysical. Put simply, no ontological fact can be implied by epistemological facts.

> I think we need to make a distinction between epistemological subjectivity and ontological subjectivity. The fact that you like chocolate is an objective fact. But the statement "Chocolate tastes good" is an opinion, which is neither true, nor false – it's, epistemologically speaking, a subjective statement. Ontological subjective statements, however, can be true. If I'm in pain, and I say "peen feels like this[insert the feelingof pain]," then it's true. What makes it subjective is that that I'm the only person privy to a certain fact or property, viz. what pain feels like.

I disagree. First of all, no matter what that [insert the feeling of pain] variable is (let's call it X), the *fact* that your experience of pain feels like X *to you* is every bit as much an objective fact as the fact that I like chocolate. Indeed, even the epiphenomenolists would agree that this fact is completely implied by physical brain activity. It must be, since it is your brain which caused you to say that.

What you are talking about here are relationships between experiences. These are objective facts. For example, if I knew absolutely everything about your brain activity, I could deduce exactly how you would find different experiences to be similar or disimilar. I would know whether or not you find experience A to be like experience B, and in what what ways you find them to be alike. What I would not have is the experiences themselves.

> This property or concept can only be known if I'm in that state (hence it's ineffability to others), whereas that's not the case for physical properties.

But this is simply wrong. These kinds of properties *are* knowable to others. You can argue that nobody else can know what your experience is "like", but not in this sense. Not unless you wish to claim that your brain does not function according to empirically inferrable natural laws (in other words, that the brain is supernatural).

> It sounds like you're saying who ever states their position first, inherits the burden of proof.

No, that is not what I am saying. Whoever makes a claim must justify that claim. As a physicalist I need to justify the claims I make. I do not deny that. But when somebody says

"physicalism is wrong because A is true", and then does not justify the claim that A is true, I do *not* need to justify the claim that A is *not* true. That person needs to justify the claim that A *is* true. If he cannot provide any such justification, then he has not presented any sort of argument against physicalism. He has simply made an assertion.

If I say that dualism is false because physicalism is true, clearly that does not put the burden of proof on dualists to show that physicalism is false. If I am going to use this as an actual *argument* against dualism, *I* need to present evidence supporting the claim that physicalism is true. Likewise, if dualists are going to present, as an argument against physicalism, the claim that experiences are ineffable because they are subjective (in this ontological sense), then they need to justify that claim. As a physicalist, I do not need to prove the claim false. I only need to refute any evidence which is presented to support the claim. If no such evidence is presented, then I have nothing to do. It is just an unsupported assertion.

> Assuming there isn't any empirical evidence (e.g. no actual cases of inverted qualia), then I think the demand for empirical evidence is misguided. Take the logicaly possibility of p-zombies. Dualists admit that they are naturally impossible – that they are purely hypothetical creatures – they do not really exist. How can a dualist provide evidence of something that doesn't exist in reality?

That's their problem. If they want to use the claim that zombies are logically possible in an argument, then they need to justify the claim that they are. They cannot do so.

> But physicalism is false if zombies are logically possible. So the evidence of zombies lies within logical thought experiments, not with empirical evidence.

The distinction is not so clear. The logical possibility of zombies is still a synthetic claim. They are *defined* in terms of *physical* facts about *this* world. As a result, whether or not they are logically possible *depends* on physical facts about this world. More specifically, zombies are only logically possible if *all* physical facts about this world are logically consistent with their existence. This is not known. And to know this, we would need to know physical facts about this world which simply are not known yet. Therefore the claim that zombies are logically possible, is simply not justified.

> The point of the thought experiments, rather than controlled physical experiments, is that they determine, or try to determine, whether the idea of a zombie is even logically coherent, even if it is unintuitive.

Yes, I know. That is not the problem. The problem is that thought experiments can only tell you what a particular theory says should happen in a given set of conditions. It cannot possibly tell you whether that theory is right or not.

> > And as any Idealist will tell you, this is pure bunk. They can both be wrong.
>
> If we take idealism seriously, then I guess you're correct.

Even if we don't. Idealism is just one counter-example. The point is that there are many options.

> So let me amend my statement to "if physicalism is wrong, then non-physical reductionism is right by default."

Which is nothing more than a trivial tautology. You might is well say "physicalism is wrong, then non-physicalism is right by default". But that isn't a theory. It is simply the rejection of one.

> The above is a knock-down argument against it. I know for a fact that epiphenomenalism isn't true for me. Maybe it is for other people. But if it is, then clearly their minds work much differently than mine, in which case there is clearly no reason I should believe that they have these mysterious causally inefficacious properties at all. I can't infer that they do from any observations I could make, nor can I infer that they do from the assumption that their minds work like mine.

But I don't think it is a knock-down argument. I do think what you say is intuitively correct: it does seem like the sensation pain caused be to say "ouch". But it also seems to be the case that the Sun revolves around the Earth. As a scientists, you know very well that our most successful scientific theories (QM, Relativity, Natural Selection) are very counter-intuitive.

It goes much deeper than that. If I were limited to the technology and knowledge of a century or more ago, I suppose I could imagine that my mental states only *seem* to affect the physical world. But I know better. I know that in order for me to even *be able* to remember that I had a particular mental state a tiny fraction of a second ago, that *everything* about that mental state that I remember had to be encoded physically in my brain. So put quite simply, if there is anything about my mental experiences that *isn't* physically causally efficacious, I don't know about it. So in what sense can it be considered to be a part of the phenomenal experience? It can't.

> Some cite Libet's experiment as empirical proof of epiphenomenalism, but I have my doubts.

Only people who don't understand epiphenomenalism. By definition, there cannot possibly be supporting empirical evidence for epiphenomenalism. After all, for there to be empirical evidence for a theory, the theory must predict that different observations would be made if the theory was true than if the null-hypothesis theory were true. By definition, epiphenomenalism does not.

> Nevertheless, there aren't any empirical proofs showing epiphenomenalism is false, and no thought experiment showing epipehnomenalism is incoherent (I'll grant it everyone that it's counter-intuitive).

There is evidence that it is false, as I mentioned above. One could argue that this isn't proof, because the claim that everything we remember has to be stored physically in the brain, could be wrong. But that goes for all scientific evidence for any claim.

> Why should they? Why should they be able to express anything about their experiences at all? This is clearly a question about the specific capabilities and functionality of the being in question, and not a question about the nature of reality. You may as well ask why physical beings shouldn't be able to plug a USB cable into their brain and thought-control their computer.

I'm not so sure about that. If it is the case that qualia are subjective, then we should expect other beings, regardless of their constitutional make-up, to not be able to express qualia in a physical language. So the problem arises for the because the physicalist says that the experience is just a physical state. Yet we have no problems imagining or expressing the physical state, which is allegedly is the experience. So why is it that our imagining and expressing the physical aspect is not impossible, but the expressing the phenomenal expect is impossible? Because we can understand one half of the equation, but not the other half, we're infer that is has nothing to do with our imaginative capabilities.

I am sorry, but I cannot figure out what you are trying to say here.

> Don't you see the problem here? You want to assert that our inability to do something somehow contradicts physicalism. Before you can use this as a valid argument, you need to do three things:
>
> 1) You must specify, clearly, exactly what it is you are claiming we cannot do.
> 2) You must provide reliable evidence that we really cannot do it.
> 3) You must show that physicalism implies that we should be able to do it.

Okay.
1) We cannot express physical properties in a physical language (which is irrelevant to what out constitutional make-up is).

What? Is that a typo? Did you mean "non-physical properties"?

> 2) As noted earlier, thought experiments can count as evidence and our inability to do 1) does counts too.

Evidence that we can't do what, specifically?

> 3) The knowledge arguments show this:
>
> Premise P1 Mary has complete physical knowledge about human color vision before her release.
>
> Therefore
> Consequence C1 Mary knows all the physical facts about human color vision before her release.
> Premise P2 There is some (kind of) knowledge concerning facts about human color vision that Mary does not have before her release.

OK, we can stop right here. No physicalist will agree with this premise. Indeed, physicalism would imply that this premise is false. So this thought experiment is utterly useless as an attempt to provide evidence that there is something which we cannot do which we should be able to do if physicalism is true, because the experiment takes as a premise that physicalism is false.

Now, if you could provide evidence to support the claim that this premise is true, you might have something. But you can't. Instead, all you have is a premise which physicalism says is false leading to a conclusion which physicalism says is also false.

DM

_____
Pseudoscience makes Baby Jesus cry.

TecnoTut
Tenured Poster

Joined: Jul 9, 2002
Location: Florida

Topics: 166
Posts: 3,754

Posted Dec 21, 2006 - 05:11 AM: #21

> How does that convey anything meaningful? If descriptors like "natural" and "supernatural" cannot be applied to something, then what is the point of saying it is "non-natural" or "non-supernatural"? It is like saying that since the property of color cannot be attributed to a number, that the number is "non-red". Sure, the number isn't red, but what point is there in saying it is "non-red" as though that were some sort of property of it, or as though saying that actually conveyed any relevant information about it at all?

Well, I believe practically anything can be anything can be described as a non-x, and still be quite meaningful. Perhaps it's not *specific* enough in telling us *what it is*, but there's something informative being conveyed in telling what it is not.

> That's fine. If these laws can be infered empirically, then they are physical laws and you don't have any sort of dualism. If they cannot, then you can say that there is a distinction between this and supernaturalism, but since there would be no possible way to determine which is the case (non-empirical naturalism vs supernaturalism), the distinction would not be a very useful one.

In the case of animals, I do not know they can be inferred empirically at all. As humans, we can rely on our verbal reports and physical similarity as indicative of the presence of qualia and of what that qualia is like. But what about simpler animals, like snails or spiders? There're no verbal reports and their physical structure is very different from ours. We won't always know whether they have qualia at all, much less what their qualia are like. We will always know much more about the physical-functional aspects than the phenomenal aspects. If we're totally in the dark as to animal qualia, then they're not empirically inferable.

On the psychophysical laws that can be sometimes indirectly inferred empirically (like human qualia), I still wouldn't go so far to say that they're physical. Why? Because they are not laws that describe the behavior physical objects, i.e. the structure and function of physical things). In fact, they cannot even describe any behavior of anything, physical or not. It wouldn't make sense to even say they would describe the "behavior" of qualia, e.g., because the intrinsic feelings of mental states (qualia) are not behaviors/functions – they're just a certain kind of feeling, so the non-reductionist would hold.

So why even posit their existence if they don't even bother explaining the behavior of anything? Because their existence would be necessary to postulate if one believes that zombie worlds are possible. If zombie worlds are possible, then we have to explain why there are no zombies in this world, i.e. why our brains are accompanied with qualia. We can then say that the zombie world has all the physical properties and laws of this world, yet lack psychophysical laws, and hence, mental properties. The psychophysical laws are what naturally (not logically) entail qualia in the actual world with our brain states, and hence, zombies become a naturally impossiblity. So psychophysical laws are not used to predict behavior of qualia (because qualia cannot be defined in terms of behavior), but rather, the are used to invoke the *existence* of qualia.

See, the problem here are the different criteria for "physical". A physicalist's criteria is that something is physical if it has causal efficacy and whether it's empirically inferable. A non-physicalist's criteria is whether it's ontologically subjective or objective, whether it's expressible in a physical language or not, and whether it's logically entailed by microphysical facts or not, regardless of whether it has causal efficacy and regardless of whether it's empirically inferable.

> And as for the second sentence, if such properties do exist, how could you ever know whether they are natural or supernatural? What possible reason could you ever have for believing that they are one rather than the other?

Well, I think a good definition of natural laws is that if it follows regulatory principles. So if qualia are naturally entailed by psychophysical laws when certain physical processes occur, then qualia must occur every time those physical processes occur. A supernatural event would be one that violates these regulatory principles. So e.g., if there is an occurrence of water not boiling at 99.97 Celsius, then that particular occurrence at that time and that place is supernatural. Similarly, if there's an occurrence wherein qualia doesn't occur given a certain physical process occurs, then that occurrence would be supernatural. Since we know that all qualia occurrences occur when the right physical processes occur, then we know that all those occurrences are natural.

> I am puzzled. Can you give an example of anything that is directly accessable in anything other than a first-person sense? All physical properties are inferred indirectly from observations. Why should mental properties be any different? The fact that they are also directly accessable from a first-person perspective, doesn't make them non-physical. It just means that they are also mental properties.

I think we're reaching different conclusions as to whether qualia are physical or not because we're using a different criteria for physical. You're saying that mental properties are a subset of physical because they're inferable from both a first and third person perspective. I'm saying that one of the reasons why they're not physical is because they're inferable from a first and third person perspective (whereas physical is inferable only from a third person perspective), and sometimes, not inferable at all from a third person perspective in the case of simpler animals.

> Well, that is a very different argument.

It is a different argument because it's been put to a syllogistic form, but the logic behind it remains the same, and as seen, it's not circular, thus it's *valid*. We can argue whether the premises are true or not, however. But that would just mean it might not be sound. But that's the case with any argument.

> Please justify number 2. I would remind you now of the example I gave before. It is not at all difficult to imagine how beings which are completely physical could be unable to express what their experiences are like to each other simply because of physical limitations on how their brains work. So how can you assert that ineffability implies ontological subjectivity.
>
> Indeed, this appears to be a clear category mistake. Ineffabilitiy is an epistemological issue. Nothing about it could possibly imply anything metaphysical. Put simply, no ontological fact can be implied by epistemological facts.

The argument that no ontological fact can be implied by epistemologival facts is very reasonable and most physicalists I know make this argument. But I don't think the line between epistemology and ontology is as sharp as they think. There is a connection between knowledge (and epistemological concept) and facts (and ontological concept). The knowledge argument (KA) of Mary's complete physical knowledge implies complete knowledge of physical facts. You, on the other hand, do not think Mary is capable of accomplishing such a feat (it's naturally impossible, I believe your reaction would be). But it is a thought experiment, and it's not logically incoherent, which is the point. Those who think it's logically incoherent will complain that Mary will not learn anything new, as Dennett and the Churchlands say, or that at most she gains an ability of seeing an old fact in a new way (Lewis). But most physicalist do not deny the logical coherence of the thought experiment, and concede that Mary *learns* something new – they just still deny the KA proves physicalism false.

> I disagree. First of all, no matter what that [insert the feeling of pain] variable is (let's call it X), the fact that your experience of pain feels like X to you is every bit as much an objective fact as the fact that I like chocolate. Indeed, even the epiphenomenolists would agree that this fact is completely implied by physical brain activity. It must be, since it is your brain which caused you to say that.

I agree that pain feels like X to me is a fact just as my liking of chocolate. I just don't call that fact "objective". I call it subjective because only *I* can know what the X is like – whereas many people can know that I like chocolate. That first persona access is what makes it ontologically subjective.

> No, that is not what I am saying. Whoever makes a claim must justify that claim. As a physicalist I need to justify the claims I make. I do not deny that. But when somebody says "physicalism is wrong because A is true", and then does not justify the claim that A is true, I do not need to justify the claim that A is not true. That person needs to justify the claim that A is true. If he cannot provide any such justification, then he has not presented any sort of argument against physicalism. He has simply made an assertion.
>
> If I say that dualism is false because physicalism is true, clearly that does not put the burden of proof on dualists to show that physicalism is false. If I am going to use this as an actual argument against dualism, I need to present evidence supporting the claim that physicalism is true. Likewise, if dualists are going to present, as an argument against physicalism, the claim that experiences are ineffable because they are subjective (in this ontological sense), then they need to justify that claim. As a physicalist, I do not need to prove the claim false. I only need to refute any evidence which is presented to support the claim. If no such evidence is presented, then I have nothing to do. It is just an unsupported assertion.

I agree with you that whomever makes a claim first must then justify that claim. That's also exactly what I say when I mean "inheriting the burden of proof" – the burden of proving or justifying the claim or position stated. Here's the situation, however: both sides make claims simultaneously, and both sides use thought experiments to *falsify* the other side.

> That's their problem. If they want to use the claim that zombies are logically possible in an argument, then they need to justify the claim that they are. They cannot do so.

But non-reductionists do make conceivability argument to justify or try to justify their arguments. Perhaps the conceivability arguments are false (I've yet to see any counter-examples, however). The point, nevertheless is that search for empirical proof for something that naturally doesn't empirically exist is misguided because the zombie argument doesn't need a standard that high. The mere logical possibility of zombies, if true, would be sufficient. This is a matter of conceptual analysis, not empirical testing.

> The distinction is not so clear. The logical possibility of zombies is still a synthetic claim. They are defined in terms of physical facts about this world. As a result, whether or not they are logically possible depends on physical facts about this world. More specifically, zombies are only logically possible if all physical facts about this world are logically consistent with their existence. This is not known. And to know this, we would need to know physical facts about this world which simply are not known yet. Therefore the claim that zombies are logically possible, is simply not justified.

Some Physicalists, like van Gulick, Lycan and Tye state that there is a deep epistemic gap between the physical and the mental, yet the gap is closable in principle. They say Zombies are prima facie conceivable now, but ideally (under idealized rational reflection) inconceivable once we get to know all the physical facts. Yet, knowledge of physical facts entails knowledge of the structure and function of the physical world. Knowledge of phenomenal facts has nothing to do with structure and function, but of the intrinsic nature of the "raw feels" (knowing what it's like). I don't see how gaining more knowledge of structure and function of the physical world will somehow make zombies ideally inconceivable.

> Which is nothing more than a trivial tautology. You might is well say "physicalism is wrong, then non-physicalism is right by default". But that isn't a theory. It is simply the rejection of one.

Non-reductionism may not be a scientific theory *per se*, but it implies a bunch of non-reductive *philosophical* theories.

> Only people who don't understand epiphenomenalism. By definition, there cannot possibly be supporting empirical evidence for epiphenomenalism. After all, for there to be empirical evidence for a theory, the theory must predict that different observations would be made if the theory was true than if the null-hypothesis theory were true. By definition, epiphenomenalism does not.

I agree. Epiphenomenalism is not a *scientific* theory because it does not lead to differences in observations, but it is a *philosophical* theory. Thus, there can't be empirical evidence for it.

> I know that in order for me to even be able to remember that I had a particular mental state a tiny fraction of a second ago, that everything about that mental state that I remember had to be encoded physically in my brain. So put quite simply, if there is anything about my mental experiences that isn't physically causally efficacious, I don't know about it. So in what sense can it be considered to be a part of the phenomenal experience? It can't.

I don’t think anyone has to accept the premise that to know what something is like then one must be able to remember it. In fact, one can make the argument that a memory of an experience is derivative of experiences – in order to remember what an experience is like, one must have an experience first, whether a remembered experience or not. This causal theory of memories simply isn’t set in stone.

> I am sorry, but I cannot figure out what you are trying to say here.

Simply this: water is H20. We have no problems knowing both sides of the equation when analyzing water, regardless of whether we’re physical or not (isn’t it conceivable that ghosts can know what water is?). But in “bat pains = brain process X” , we cannot know the right side of the equation is like. So why does it our physical make up play a role in preventing us from knowing the left side of the equation? I just don’t see the connection between our physical make up and our inability to know what the left side of the equation is like. We have no problems with water, then why with bat pains? This leads me to conclude something about the nature of bat pains, not cognitive limitations.

Edited by TecnoTut on Dec 21, 2006 - 06:45 AM

_____

He that dies pays all debts - Shakespeare's Stephano from *The Tempest*

Truth is its own measure - Spinoza (*contra* Protagoras)

Those who deny [Aristotle’s] first principle should be flogged or burned until they admit that it is not the same thing to be burned and not burned, or whipped and not whipped – Ibn Sina (Avicenna)

Death Monkey
Tenured Poster

Joined: Sep 18, 2003

Posted Dec 22, 2006 - 03:36 AM: #22

TecnoTut,

>

Location: Aachen, Germany

Topics: 4
Posts: 1,631

> That's fine. If these laws can be infered empirically, then they are physical laws and you don't have any sort of dualism. If they cannot, then you can say that there is a distinction between this and supernaturalism, but since there would be no possible way to determine which is the case (non-empirical naturalism vs supernaturalism), the distinction would not be a very useful one.

In the case of animals, I do not know they can be inferred empirically at all. As humans, we can rely on our verbal reports and physical similarity as indicative of the presence of qualia and of what that qualia is like. But what about simpler animals, like snails or spiders? There're no verbal reports and their physical structure is very different from ours. We won't always know whether they have qualia at all, much less what their qualia are like. We will always know much more about the physical-functional aspects than the phenomenal aspects. If we're totally in the dark as to animal qualia, then they're not empirically inferable.

Verbal reports are just behavior. It may be more difficult with animals, but consider this. Speach, like all behavior, is controlled by brain activity. So if we accept that our verbal reports have *anything at all* to do with our qualia, that implies that we have already assumed that our qualia (at least) affect our brain activity in some physical way. So what is to stop us from eventually being able to directly study those physical effects (once technology advances to that level)? And if we can do that, then we can do it to animals as well. If it turns out that there is some non-brain component to consciousness, then when we can observe its affects on the brain we can begin to study it directly. We can also then determine which animals do or do not have such external effects on their brain.

Indeed, at this point it just becomes another physical phenomenon. Maybe we will need new physical laws to understand and describe it, but it is still just as physical as things like atoms and electrons.

> On the psychophysical laws that can be sometimes indirectly inferred empirically (like human qualia), I still wouldn't go so far to say that they're physical. Why? Because they are not laws that describe the behavior physical objects, i.e. the structure and function of physical things). In fact, they cannot even describe any behavior of anything, physical or not. It wouldn't make sense to even say they would describe the "behavior" of qualia, e.g., because the intrinsic feelings of mental states (qualia) are not behaviors/functions – they're just a certain kind of feeling, so the non-reductionist would hold.

I don't follow you here. A natural law is a set of rules which accurately describe the behavior of something. What exactly do you think these "phychophysical" laws *are*, if not descriptions of how the mental and physical interact?

> So why even posit their existence if they don't even bother explaining the behavior of anything? Because their existence would be necessary to postulate if one believes that zombie worlds are possible. If zombie worlds are possible, then we have to explain why there are no zombies in this world, i.e. why our brains are accompanied with qualia.

This is, of course, not true. If zombie worlds are possible, then for all any of us know, there *could be* zombies in this world. Everybody could be a zombie except you! Of course, zombies are not logically possible, so the point is rather irrelevent.

> We can then say that the zombie world has all the physical properties and laws of this world, yet lack psychophysical laws, and hence, mental properties. The psychophysical laws are what naturally (not logically) entail qualia in the actual world with our brain states, and hence, zombies become a naturally impossiblity. So psychophysical laws are not used to predict behavior of qualia (because qualia cannot be defined in terms of behavior), but rather, the are used to invoke the existence of qualia.

If qualia have any effect whatsoever on anything physical, then zombie worlds are logically

impossible *by definition*. If they do not, then there are no so-called "psychophysical laws", and nothing about mental properties can possibly be inferred from things like verbal reports.

> See, the problem here are the different criteria for “physical”. A physicalist’s criteria is that something is physical if it has causal efficacy and whether it’s empirically inferable. A non-physicalist’s criteria is whether it’s ontologically subjective or objective,

Which is fundamentally impossible to determine...

> whether it’s expressible in a physical language or not,

Which it can only be if it is physical according to the physicalist's definition...

> and whether it’s logically entailed by microphysical facts or not, regardless of whether it has causal efficacy and regardless of whether it’s empirically inferable.

Which it can also only be if it is physical according to the physicalist's definition. The only additional criteria you are bringing to the table here is ontological status, which is impossible to determine. In other words, you can argue that the mind may not be physical because it could be ontologically different from other physical things, but I could say the same thing about my cat. Of course, I have no good reason to think that my cat is ontologically different from other physical things. But then, I have no good reason to think that my mind is either.

> Please justify number 2. I would remind you now of the example I gave before. It is not at all difficult to imagine how beings which are completely physical could be unable to express what their experiences are like to each other simply because of physical limitations on how their brains work. So how can you assert that ineffability implies ontological subjectivity.
>
> Indeed, this appears to be a clear category mistake. Ineffabilitiy is an epistemological issue. Nothing about it could possibly imply anything metaphysical. Put simply, no ontological fact can be implied by epistemological facts.
>
> The argument that no ontological fact can be implied by epistemologival facts is very reasonable and most physicalists I know make this argument. But I don’t think the line between epistemology and ontology is as sharp as they think. There is a connection between knowledge (and epistemological concept) and facts (and ontological concept).

There is a connection, to be sure. But the connection is not one which allows ontological facts to be inferred from epistemological knowledge.

> The knowledge argument (KA) of Mary’s complete physical knowledge implies complete knowledge of physical facts. You, on the other hand, do not think Mary is capable of accomplishing such a feat (it’s naturally impossible, I believe your reaction would be). But it is a thought experiment, and it’s not logically incoherent, which is the point.

I agree. Like I said, my problem with the argument is that the second premise is something which contradicts physicalism. If your argument assumes that physicalism is false in its premises, then clearly it is circular for it to then conclude that physicalism is false.

> Those who think it’s logically incoherent will complain that Mary will not learn anything new, as Dennett and the Churchlands say, or that at most she gains an ability of seeing an old fact in a new way (Lewis). But most physicalist do not deny the logical coherence of the thought experiment, and concede that Mary learns something new –

> they just still deny the KA proves physicalism false.

Do they concede that Mary learns any new facts about color vision? And anyway, since premise 2 contradicts physicalism, the argument *can't* prove physicalism false. That would be begging the question.

> agree that pain feels like X to me is a fact just as my liking of chocolate. I just don't call that fact "objective". I call it subjective because only I can know what the X is like – whereas many people can know that I like chocolate.

Then what the X is like, is what is subjective, not the fact that you like chocolate.

But what exactly is this "what X is like"? Is there anything more to it than a collection of objective facts about your experience, such as whether you find it pleasent or not, or similarities to other experiences? If there is something more to it, then what is that something extra? Does it contain any "facts" at all?

I do not think it does. More importantly, nobody has ever presented any compelling reason to think that it does. I see no reason to think that there is anything more to what an experience is "like", than a combination of objective facts about the experience (which are all physical facts), and the actual memory of having had the experience itself (which is not a fact at all, but a physical process in the brain).

> I agree with you that whomever makes a claim first must then justify that claim. That's also exactly what I say when I mean "inheriting the burden of proof" – the burden of proving or justifying the claim or position stated. Here's the situation, however: both sides make claims simultaneously, and both sides use thought experiments to falsify the other side.

But we are *talking* about a *specific* argument here. If you want me to present arguments *for* physicalism, I can do that. And I agree that the burden would then be on me to support any claims included in my argument. But *you* have presented an argument *against* physicalism. So you need support any claims made in that argument. If there are any claims which that argument is based on which you cannot provide support for, then I do not need to refute the claim, or the argument. There is nothing there to refute.

> > That's their problem. If they want to use the claim that zombies are logically possible in an argument, then they need to justify the claim that they are. They cannot do so.
>
> But non-reductionists do make conceivability argument to justify or try to justify their arguments.

An argument which is trivially demonstrably false.

> Perhaps the conceivability arguments are false (I've yet to see any counter-examples, however).

Really? Such examples are simple. For example, until recently Fermat's last theorem was not proven. It was then concievable (and still is, for anybody not convinced by the proof), that the theorem was false. But it was *never* logically possible for the theorem to be false.

Concievability clearly does not imply logical possibility. Not unless your criteria for concievability of X include the ability to form a formal logical proof that X is not self-contradictory. This is, by the way, quite easy to prove, because if concievability of X *does* imply logical possibility of X, then concievability of X implies that X is not self-contradictory.

Now, if the epiphenomenalists could *prove* that zombie worlds are not self-contradictory

(specifically, if they could prove that the physical facts about this world are consistent with the non-existence of phenomenal consciousness), then they would'nt *need* any concievability argument, or even a zombie thought experiment. That proof alone would clearly demonstrate physicalism to be false. But they *can't* prove that. So clearly their concievibility is *not* sufficient to imply logical possibility!

> The point, nevertheless is that search for empirical proof for something that naturally doesn't empirically exist is misguided because the zombie argument doesn't need a standard that high. The mere logical possibility of zombies, if true, would be sufficient. This is a matter of conceptual analysis, not empirical testing.

What you seem to be missing is that the zombie argument is *constructed* in such a way as to make it a claim about the physical facts of this world. Therefore if that claim about the physical facts of this world is *false*, then zombies are not logically possible.

Specifically, it claims that the physical facts about this world are compatible with phenomenal consciousness not existing. Now I would assert that it is obvious that this cannot be true unless you define "phenomenal consciousness" to be something which cannot possibly affect anything physical in any way, and the epiphenomenalists agree with this. But that is beside the point. Anybody who wishes to assert that zombies are logically possible needs to support that claim by showing that the physical facts about this world *are*, in fact, compatible with phenomenal consciousness not existing. Nobody has ever done this, and the concievability argument does not even come close to accomplishing this.

> Some Physicalists, like van Gulick, Lycan and Tye state that there is a deep epistemic gap between the physical and the mental, yet the gap is closable in principle. They say Zombies are prima facie conceivable now, but ideally (under idealized rational reflection) inconceivable once we get to know all the physical facts.

Yet another reason why concievability does not imply logical possibility.

> Yet, knowledge of physical facts entails knowledge of the structure and function of the physical world. Knowledge of phenomenal facts has nothing to do with structure and function, but of the intrinsic nature of the "raw feels" (knowing what it's like).

So you assert (without supporting evidence, I might add). Clearly physicalists like the ones you mention above do not agree with this assertion. Neither do I.

> I don't see how gaining more knowledge of structure and function of the physical world will somehow make zombies ideally inconceivable.

That is quite irrelevent. Whether or not you can concieve of how it could work, has absolutely no relevance to whether it is true or not. I do not have any such difficultly in seeing how such knowledge of structure and function could render zombies inconcievable, though. In fact, I can easily describe such a scenario.

First, our knowledge of structure and function of the physical world already tells us that every aspect of our own minds that we can possibly be aware of. So let's imagine that in the future we have complete knowledge about how the brain works. We understand, in terms of physical laws, everything that it does. Let's also imagine that we then know that there are no external influences on its behavior (other than, of course, standard physical influences). In this case, zombies would be inconcievable. Why? Because the only way phenomenal consciousness could possibly have any non-brain component, would be if there was something other than the brain interacting with it. But that would have been disproven. Therefore we would have rock-solid evidence that phenomenal consciousness is purely a brain process.

In such a case zombies would clearly not be concievible. In fact, the only way they are concievable now is by either imagining that there are influences on the brain which don't function according to any physical laws, or ignoring the fact that any aspects of phenomenal

consciousness which did not affect your brain would be unknowable to you, and thus by definition could not be aspects of phenomenal consciousness.

> Which is nothing more than a trivial tautology. You might is well say "physicalism is wrong, then non-physicalism is right by default". But that isn't a theory. It is simply the rejection of one.

Non-reductionism may not be a scientific theory per se, but it implies a bunch of non-reductive philosophical theories.

This is clearly not true. How could it imply a bunch of theories which are not consistent with each other? I think what you meant to say is that it implies that the correct theory must be a non-reductive one. But that is what I just said. It certainly does *not* imply that any of the various non-reductive theories people have dreamed up, are correct.

All it would do is rule out one specific class of theory. Everything else is still there.

> I know that in order for me to even be able to remember that I had a particular mental state a tiny fraction of a second ago, that everything about that mental state that I remember had to be encoded physically in my brain. So put quite simply, if there is anything about my mental experiences that isn't physically causally efficacious, I don't know about it. So in what sense can it be considered to be a part of the phenomenal experience? It can't.

I don’t think anyone has to accept the premise that to know what something is like then one must be able to remember it.

It's not a premise. It is a demonstrable fact. Nobody has to accept it. But it is true whether you accept it or not. Some people don't accept that the world is more than 6000 years old, either. That is their problem.

> In fact, one can make the argument that a memory of an experience is derivative of experiences – in order to remember what an experience is like, one must have an experience first, whether a remembered experience or not. This causal theory of memories simply isn’t set in stone.

Nothing is set in stone. It is still reliable scientific knowledge. If I throw away everything I know about how the mind and brain work, I can imagine all sorts of cool scenarios. But I am not going to do that. I am going to limit the possibilities to which I give any serious consideration, to those which are actually compatible with what we currently know.

> I am sorry, but I cannot figure out what you are trying to say here.

Simply this: water is H20. We have no problems knowing both sides of the equation when analyzing water, regardless of whether we’re physical or not (isn’t it conceivable that ghosts can know what water is?). But in “bat pains = brain process X” , we cannot know the right side of the equation is like.

What does that mean? See the change you made here? In the first example, we know what the right side of the equation *is*. In the second example, you say that we don't know what the right side of the equation is *like*? What do you mean by that? Be specific. Are you talking about just facts here, or something else? If the latter, then in what sense is it "knowledge"?

> So why does it our physical make up play a role in preventing us from knowing the left

> side of the equation? I just don't see the connection between our physical make up and our inability to know what the left side of the equation is like.

It's really quite simple. You're not a bat. If "knowing what the bat's pain is like" includes having the bat's memory of having had that experience, then you can't know what it is like simply because your brain is not physically capable of having the bat's memory stored in it.

If, on the other hand, you are only talking about knowledge of *facts* here, then I see no reason to think that it is *not* possible to know all of those facts.

Again, I think that the problem here is that you are thinking of something which is more than just a collection of facts, as being simply a collection of facts. The problem is not that non-physical facts are included in this collection. The problem is that non-facts are incuded in the collection.

DM

_____
Pseudoscience makes Baby Jesus cry.