

The Mind-Body Problem

- Consciousness ('the mind') and brain states ('the body') can seem to be two very different things. Your consciousness has some particular feel (i.e., phenomenal properties). But your brain states seem not to. Similarly, your brain is located in some region of spacetime. But where exactly, one might ask, is the bearer of consciousness?
- On the other hand, consciousness and brain states clearly have something to do with each other! If you get hit in the head, so that your brain states change, then you will feel dizzy. And if you form the conscious desire to take notes, your brain will send impulses to your arm, leading to its movement. There is clearly a correlation between the two phenomena.
- The problem is to explain the correlation. This is said to be hard -- and is sometimes called the 'hard problem' -- because it is hard to envisage a satisfying answer -- *given that we cannot just identify bridge laws between physical and phenomenal properties*.
 - *Question*: Does this concede too much? Whether there is an 'explanatory gap' between different sets of facts depends on what bridge laws one is allowed to take as brute. If conceptual necessities (analyticities) are taken as brute, there is no gap between the fact that Joe is a bachelor and the fact that Joe is an unmarried male. If they are not, then there is. If classical logical laws are taken as brute, then there is no gap between any fact and that snow is white or it isn't. If they are not, then there is. What bridge laws can be taken as brute, and why those?
- *Block*: "Consider [the] theory of P[henomenal] consciousness...that a synchronized 35-75 hertz neural oscillation in the sensory areas of the cortex is at the heart of phenomenal consciousness ...[Even if true] no one has produced the concepts that would allow us to explain why such oscillations are the neural basis of one phenomenally conscious state rather than another or why the oscillations are the neural basis of a phenomenally conscious state rather than a phenomenally unconscious one...[H]ow does it explain what it is like...(207-8, my emphasis)?"
- *Van Gulick*: "[O]ne might be concerned...with whether the phenomenal...properties of a conscious creature's mind can be a priori deduced from a description of the neural properties of its brain processes."

- *Example:* Apparently, one could know *all* of the physiological facts about color vision while failing to know *anything* about what it is like to see various colors.
- The problem can be formulated *a la* Descartes' *cogito*, as an argument for dualism.
 - (1) For any physical state, *s*, and physical property, *P* (neurological, functional, or whatever), it is conceivable that *s* is *P* though *s* is not phenomenally conscious.
 - (2) If (1), then it is metaphysically possible that *s* is *P* but *s* is not phenomenally conscious.
 - (3) If (2), then phenomenal consciousness \neq *P*, for any physical property, *P*.
 - (4) Hence, phenomenal consciousness is not identical to a physical property.
 - *Churchland:* “[W]e can conceive of a person, like us in all the...easy-to-explain capacities, but lacking qualia. This person would be *exactly* like us, save that he would be a Zombie...Since the scenario is conceivable, it is possible, and since it is possible, then whatever consciousness is, it is...independent (404).”
- Let us grant (1). What is the content of (2)? Metaphysical possibility is supposed to be more restrictive than conceptual possibility, but less restrictive than physical possibility. It is, however, supposed to be the most inclusive way the world really could have been. It is conceptually possible that Hesperus \neq Phosphorus (the Greeks thought that this was actually the case). But given that Hesperus = Phosphorus, the world could not really have been otherwise. (Of course, Hesperus might not been *called* “Phosphorus”.) On the other hand, though it is physically necessary that nothing accelerates faster than light, presumably the world could really have had different laws. Everyone thought it *did* until a series of experiments forced upon us the conclusion that the universe has a speed limit.
- Finally, (3) follows via the so-called Necessity of Identity (NI), $\forall x \forall y [x = y \rightarrow \Box(x = y)]$.
- *Question:* The above formulation of the argument assumes realism about universals, which non-dualists are free to deny. Could the argument be reformulated to avoid this?

Conceivability and Possibility

- *Objection (Churchland):* Argument (1) -- (4) fails because premise (2) is false.
 - *Churchland:* “That someone can *imagine* the possibility is not evidence for the real possibility. It is only evidence that somebody or other *believes* it to be a

possibility.... [T]he danger [that argument (1) -- (4) poses is that of] inventing a...chasm where there really exists just a broad field of ignorance (403 and 405).”

- *Response 1:* One can distinguish uncertainty from conceivability. Conceiving that p requires imagining a positive counterfactual scenario that verifies p. We are uncertain whether the Twin Primes Conjecture is true or false. But we cannot imagine a world in which it is false, if it is actually true (not to be confused with a world in which the experts mistakenly announce that it is false!). However, we can imagine a world with zombies.
- *Rejoinder:* The notion of a positive scenario is very slippery! Does it suffice to specify a model? If so, then we can imagine a scenario in which the Twin Primes Conjecture is false, because its negation is (first-order) consistent! If not, what more is required?
- *Response 2:* You have misdescribed the case. It is not an argument from a psychological premise that someone can imagine something. It is that this is conceptually possible.
 - *Compare:* We conclude that “There are at least 14 things” is *logically possible* by conceiving of a situation verifying it (and that “there are exactly 14 things and it is not the case that there are” is *not* by trying and failing to). The fact that we (fail to) conceive is not a premise in our argument. We cannot infer facts about logical possibility *merely* from psychological facts -- since we would have to use logic in order to make the inference! Modality is epistemically prior to psychology.
- *Rejoinder:* Even so, it is mysterious how conceptual possibility could be evidence for metaphysical possibility. That p is so possible is certainly not empirical evidence!
- *Response 3:* What is special about the case of phenomenal consciousness is that we cannot give an error theory for the appearance of possibility along familiar lines. Water is whatever actually gives rise to our watery sensations -- an empirical question. But phenomenal consciousness is the sensations. There is no distance between us and it.
 - *Kripke:* “[I]n the case of mental phenomena there is no “appearance” beyond the mental phenomenon itself (1980, 154).”
- *Rejoinder:* If that argument were good, then we could equally conclude that it must be metaphysically possible that particles arranged table-wise fail to compose a table (since there are mereological nihilists whose view does not turn on outstanding empirical conjectures), or that standard logical laws could have failed (because there are heretic logicians whose view does not so turn -- in any sense that doesn’t end up circular)!

- *Pluralist Critique*: Even if premise (2) were granted, (1) -- (4) has a lesser known vulnerability. Premise (3) is dubious. There are counterfactual notions of possibility for which the Necessity of Identity (NI) fails. So, the worlds in which consciousness and P fail to co-occur may lie outside the class of worlds for which NI is true.

The Incoherence of Illusionism

- The above considerations tend to undermine the argument for dualism. But what if (1) -- (4) were sound? This would still not be enough to establish the existence of irreducible phenomenal properties. It would only establish the conditional premise that if there are phenomenal properties, then they are not reducible. But maybe there are none!
- Illusionists say that there are no phenomenal properties. It is often dismissed as incoherent.
 - Searle: “[W]here [phenomenal] consciousness is concerned the existence of the appearance is the reality. If it seems to me exactly as if I am having conscious experiences, then I am having conscious experiences (original italics, 1997, 112).”
- One way to understand this objection is with reference to Descartes. Descartes (on one reading) thought that, if we were careful to distinguish the claim that, *there is a hand before me*, from the claim that *it appears or looks like there is a hand before me*, counting only the latter as experiential, then experiential beliefs are infallible. One cannot believe that it looks like there is a hand before her if it does not really look that way to her.
- *Problem (Theory-Ladenness of Experience)*: There appears to be no principled way to state the content of allegedly infallible experiential beliefs so that they turn out infallible.
- *Warmup (Churchland)*: “Before Copernicus’ views...almost any human who ventured out at night could look up at *the starry sphere of the heavens*, and if he stayed...he could also see that it *turned*, around an axis through Polaris....[H]ardly anyone doubted the existence of what everyone could observe with their own eyes.... Witches provide another example. Psychosis is a fairly common affliction among humans, and in earlier centuries its victims were standardly seen as cases of demonic possession....That witches exist was not a matter of any controversy. One would occasionally see them....But observable or not, we eventually decided that witches simply do not exist (1988, 44).”

- It might be thought that such examples are irrelevant. The belief that Descartes claims are infallible is that it looks like the heavens turn, or whatever -- not that this is really so.
- What though is the important difference between the cases? The claim that something looks a certain way is stated in a language that carries with it philosophical commitments. These commitments, however commonsensical, always appear open to coherent dispute. This is so whether the objects of the attitude are physical objects or objects of the mind.
- *Example*: Suppose it looks as if there is a hand just in case there is a sense datum which represents a hand. Just as there could fail to be hands, there could fail to be sense data (in some counterfactual sense). But had there failed to be, our belief that it looks as if there is a hand would have been false or vacuous, as there would be no object to make it true!
- *Rejoinder*: What is infallible is the belief that it looks as if there is a hand, under some construal or another. The philosophical back-and-forth just concerns how to construe this.
- *Response*: Every (first-order) consistent sentence is true under some construal by the Completeness Theorem! Surely our non-logical consistent beliefs are not all infallible!
- *Caveat*: “We have no everyday procedure for correcting...experience reports, and we treat them as authoritative. But it does not follow that this authority is epistemic (Frankish).”
 - *Example (Dennett)*: Experience seems to be continuous. But “[o]ne of the most striking features of consciousness is its *discontinuity* -- as revealed in the blind spot, and the saccadic gaps, to take the simplest examples. The discontinuity is striking because of the *apparent* continuity of consciousness (1991, 356).”
- *Objection*: Any example you might suggest must appeal to (false) beliefs. However, belief is phenomenally involved, and already presupposes the existence of consciousness.
- *Response*: Whatever the natural language semantics of ‘belief’, we can stipulatively introduce ‘quasi-belief’ for a disposition to make a judgment, understood functionally.
- *Illusionist Critique*: Phenomenal properties are characterized as any or all of: ineffable, intrinsic, private, immediate, in addition to infallible. But nothing seems to answer to these specifications! So, it is claimed that there is something ‘feely’ or ‘sense-y’ that lacks precise criteria. Such dubiously intelligible properties cry out to be eliminated (‘Quined’), *a la* Mackie’s ‘intrinsically motivating and action-guiding’ moral properties.