

A Romp Through the Philosophy of Mind

**Session Three:
If Physicalism Won't Work What Is The Alternative?**

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So we have seen that Reductive Physicalism (Identity Theory) is probably false.

And we have seen that Non-reductive Physicalism (Functionalism and Anomalous Monism) both face serious difficulties.

So what should we think about the relationship between the physical and the mental?

One possibility is that we should simply accept that mental states exist but that they are neither physical nor causally efficacious.

Another possibility is that we should eliminate mental states from our ontologies.

Let's look at both possibilities in this order

Epiphenomenalism is the view that mental states exist...

...but without being either physical...

...or causally efficacious

We saw earlier that the biggest problem for a Dualist is the question of causality.

So long as we adhere to the view that physics is causally closed the only states that can causally interact with physical states are themselves physical.

This means that if mental states are *not* physical then they cannot causally interact with physical states.

This is usually deemed a problem (as we saw when we looked briefly at Cartesian Dualism).

The Epiphenomenalists do not see it as a problem.

Epiphenomenalists have three arguments for the view that mental states are not physical:

- 1. The Knowledge Argument**
- 2. The Modal Argument**
- 3. The ‘What Is It Like To Be’ Argument**

The Knowledge Argument

Mary, a scientist who knows all there is to know about the physical world but who, since birth, has been living in a monochrome room. When released from her room and shown a red tomato, she learns what it is actually *like* to experience red.

To the extent this is knowledge that is *new* to her it is not physical knowledge.

The Modal Argument

We considered earlier the possibility that there might be a robot who is physically identical to, and behaves exactly like, you, but who lacks consciousness. If we think there really could be such a world then we believe that everything physical about this world can be duplicated, but without the mental being duplicated

To the extent preserving the physical isn't enough to preserve the mental the mental cannot *be* physical

The 'What Is It Like To Be' Argument

We may know everything physical there is to know about bats *without* knowing what it is like to *be* a bat. Indeed we could know everything physical there is to know about you without knowing what it is like to *be* you.

To the extent there is something it is like to be something, and that falls outside the physical facts about that thing, what it is like to be something isn't physical.

According to the Epiphenomenalist even when *all* the physical information is in, we still won't know about 'the awfulness of pains, the itchiness of itches, the pang of jealousy' etc.

So the Epiphenomenalist thinks the mental is real, and that it isn't physical.

And the Epiphenomenalist thinks that the mental is caused by the physical.

But the Epiphenomenalist denies that mental states themselves cause *anything*.

Mental states are causally inert: they are simply the upshot of complex physical systems.

Mental states are undetectable by anything other than introspection; they make no difference at all to anything in the physical realm.

Q: why shouldn't mental states cause other mental states?

Three objections to the Epiphenomenalist claim:

- Surely we do what we do because we believe what we believe and feel what we feel?
- If qualia have evolved then they must be adaptive and how can they be adaptive without being causally efficacious?
- How can behaviour provide us with evidence for qualia if qualia are not causally implicated in the production of behaviour?

Surely we do what we do because we believe what we believe and feel what we feel?

How do we know that our actions and our mental states are not both the effect of some common cause? If this is possible they would be correlated just as they are (so giving us reason to think they are causally connected), but without the latter causing the former.

If qualia have evolved then they must be adaptive and how can they be adaptive without being causally efficacious?

Properties can evolve as by-products of something that is adaptive without themselves being adaptive. E.g. the *heavy* coat of the polar bear is a non-adaptive by-product of the *thick* coat of the polar bear (which is adaptive).

How can behaviour provide us with evidence for qualia if qualia are not causally implicated in the production of behaviour?

Because qualia and behaviour are correlated in virtue of being the effect of a common cause

(So my reading in The Times that Spurs won, is evidence for believing that The Telegraph will also be reporting that Spurs won, but not because The Times was caused to write what it did by The Telegraph's writing what it did!)

It is undoubtedly the case, however, that Epiphenomenalism is hugely counterintuitive.

Many people think that if we must accept that mental states are causally inert then why don't we just eliminate them from our ontologies.

The next view we are going to examine does just that.

The Eliminativists believe that mental states are *not* real

Like the Functionalist the Eliminativist believes that mental states are theoretical states, states drawn from Folk Psychological Theory

Unlike the Functionalist, however, The Eliminativist believes that Folk Psychological Theory is a *false* theory.

According to the Eliminativist Folk Psychology should be eliminated along with all its theoretical states just like every other false theories with *their* theoretical states.

It is certainly the case that if, with the Epiphenomenalists, we believe that mental states are causally inert, then we must accept that Folk Psychology is a false theory.

Folk Psychology would certainly be wrong in thinking that our actions are distinguished from our other behaviours in virtue of the fact there are mental states causally implicated in their production.

That we do eliminate theories that turn out to be wrong is also true...

...consider a simple theory of woodlouse behaviour...

So, the Eliminativists are saying that Folk Psychology is as wrong about *our* behaviour as it was about the behaviour of the woodlouse.

We, in fact, are no more rational than the woodlouse because nothing we do is, in fact, done for reasons, all our behaviour is *caused* by physical states, none of which are mental.

If this is right then just as we eliminate Folk Psychological concepts from our explanations of woodlouse behaviour so we should eliminate them from explanations of our behaviour.

But then they are redundant, and as such should be eliminated altogether.

A major argument used by the Eliminativists is an inductive argument.

They believe that the whole history of science has been a process of eliminating Folk Psychological explanations.

They believe that science will continue to eliminate Folk Psychological Explanations until it is clear that Folk Psychology is completely useless.

You may find the idea of our eventually being able to explain all our behaviour...

...without any appeal to a reason explanations hugely counter-intuitive...

...but the Eliminativists would say that's because you are a sentimental old softie!

From the arguments we have examined it seems very difficult to show that the mental is scientifically respectable...

...but most people would have trouble with the idea of eliminating the mental even if it is scientifically redundant...

...the only alternative is that there is something – the mental – that is real but that is simply not visible, even in principle, to science.

References:

Heil, J: **Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction chapter 12**

Chalmers, D: **Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings (2002 Oxford University Press) papers by Thomas Nagel (p. 219), Frank Jackson (p273), Paul Churchland (p. 568)**

Podcast: Patricia Churchland on Eliminative Materialism

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzT0jHJdq7Q&feature=related>

Podcast Ned Block on Consciousness as an Illusion:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6SbPPL8tOI&feature=related>