

A Romp Through the Philosophy of Mind

Session Two: Non-reductive Physicalisms And The Problems They Face

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Session Two: Non-reductive Physicalisms And The Problems They Face:

- **What is ‘Non-reductive Physicalism’?**
- **Why is NRP attractive?**
- **Why isn’t everyone a NRP?**

What is Non-reductive Physicalism?

We'll discuss two versions of Non-reductive Physicalism (NRP):

- **Functionalism**
- **Anomalous Monism**

Both versions of NRP reject reductionism...

...i.e. they deny that we'll ever find bridge laws...

... because they deny that mental state *types*...

...are numerically identical to ...

...*types* of physical state...

Functionalism is the view that mental states...

...are *theoretical or functional* states....

...states that are the states they are because...

...they play a particular role in a given theory

**The theory that generates our ontological
commitment to mental states...**

**...according to the functionalist is the theory of
Folk Psychology...**

**...the everyday theory to which we appeal in
explanation of behaviour**

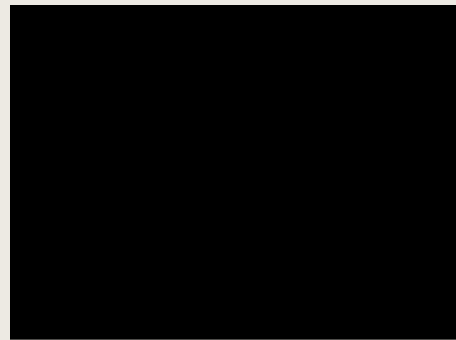
In our everyday interactions we attribute mental states...

...on the basis of observations of people's behaviour...

...and we think of the mental states we attribute...

...as *internal* states that are causally implicated in the production of that behaviour

**Input
(Environmental
Stimuli)**



**Output
(Behaviour)**

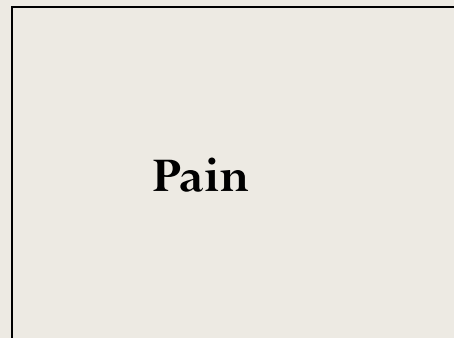
So pains, for example, are internal states....

...that are caused by tissue damage...

...and that cause exclamations and cries of pain...

... and limb withdrawal

**Input
(Tissue
Damage)**



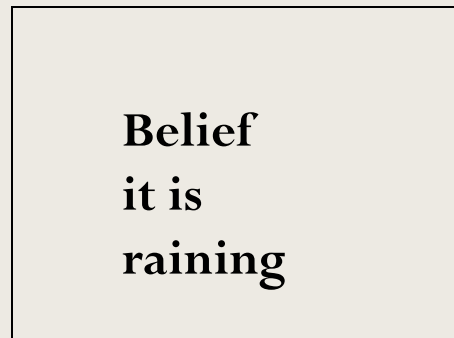
**Output
(Avoidance
Behaviour)**

Beliefs that it is raining are internal states...

...that are caused by perceptions of rain...

...and that cause umbrella raisings

**Input
(Perception
of Rain)**



**Output
(Umbrella
Raising)**

So for the Functionalist mental states are functional states...

...but this does not make the Functionalist a *Physicalist*...

....because the claim that mental states are functional states...

...is consistent with Dualism....

...the claim that mental states are *not* physical states

Functionalism is *physicalist* insofar as it insists...

...that only physical states can play (or *realise*)...

...the functional role of mental states

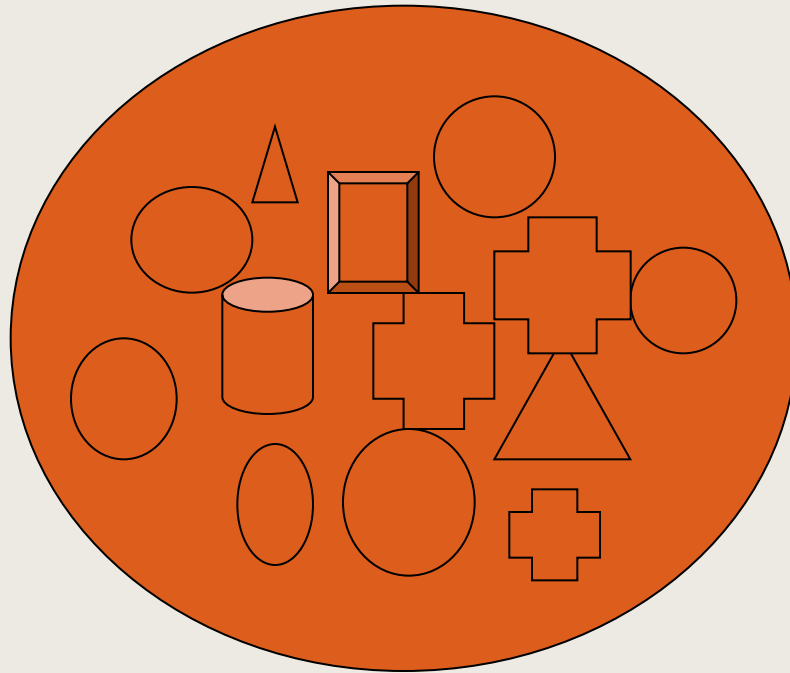
Functionalism is *non-reductive* insofar as...

...it permits multiple realisability...

...so one and the same mental state type...

...can be realised by *different* physical states

**The class of pains multiply realised by
different physical states**



**By such means the Functionalist avoids
Kripke's argument**

**So one way of being a Non-reductive
Physicalist is to be a Functionalist...**

**...the other way is to be an Anomalous
Monist...**

The Anomalous Monist believes that mental states...

... causally interact with physical states...

...that causal interaction depends on law...

...and that all causal laws are physical...

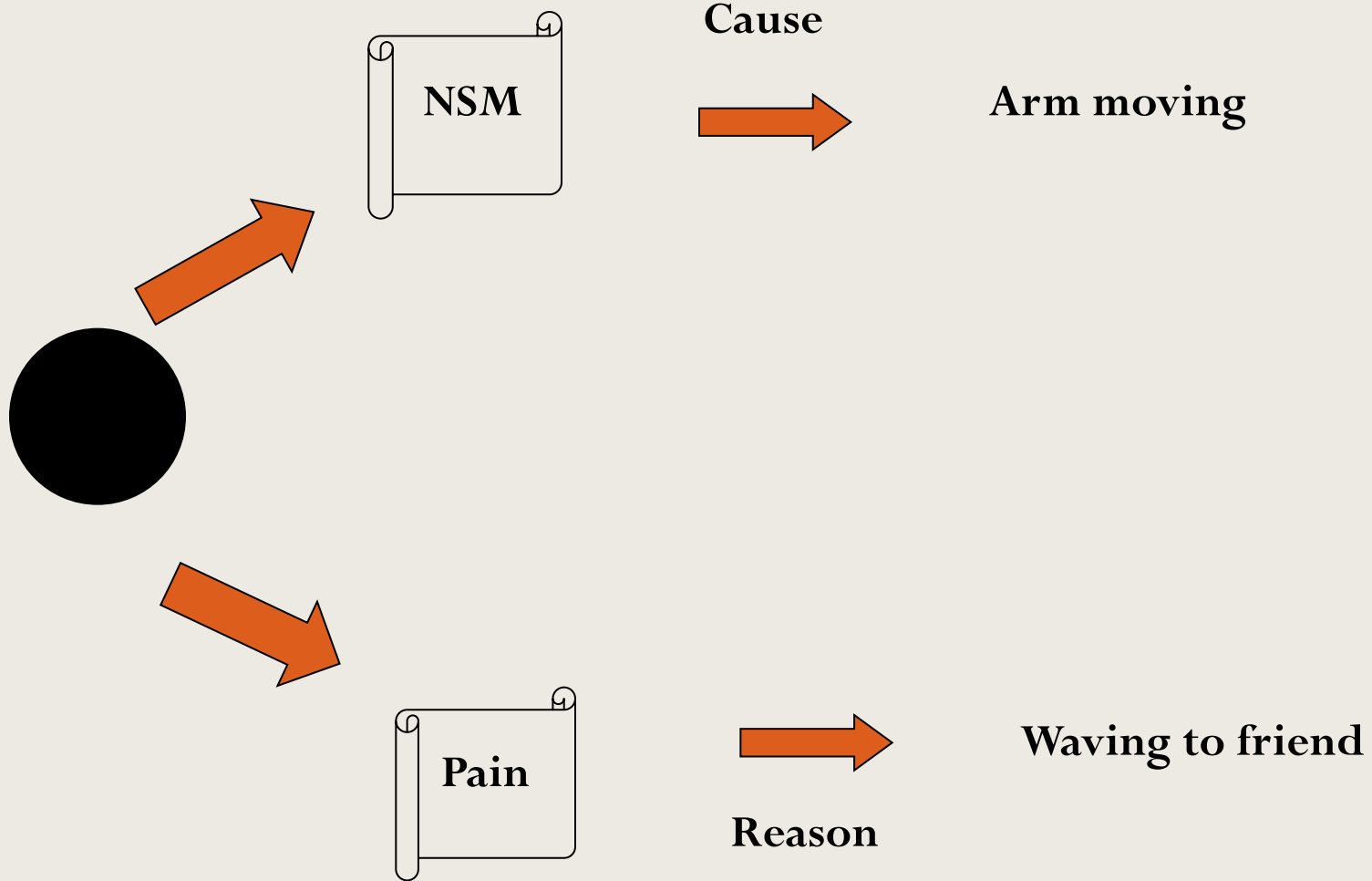
...so all mental states *must* have a physical description

**In virtue of the physical description of the states,
according to AM...**

...the state is governed by a physical law...

...whilst in virtue of its mental description...

**...the state can underwrite reason explanations of
behaviour**



Anomalous Monism is *physicalist* insofar as it insists...

...that every causally efficacious mental state token...

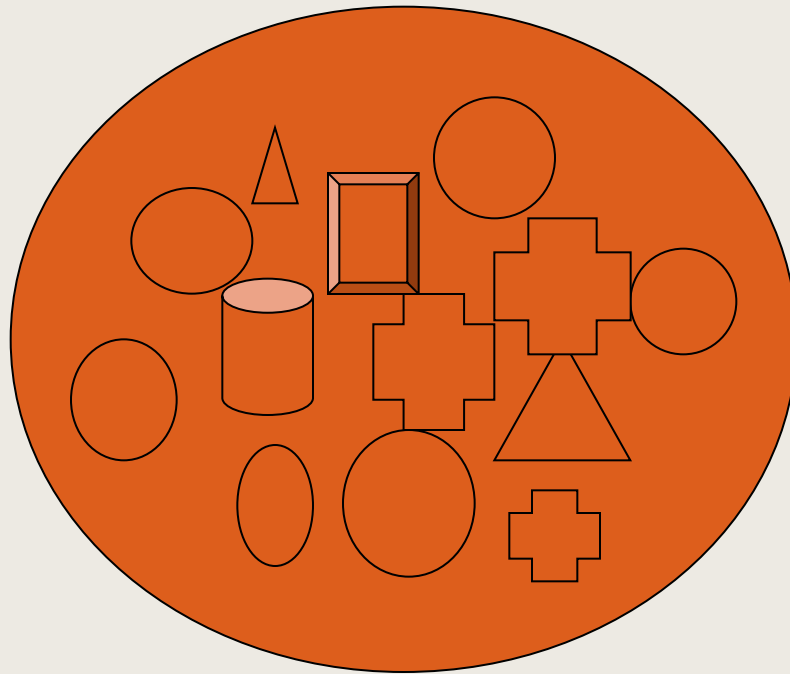
...has a physical description

Anomalous Monism is *non-reductive* insofar
as...

...each token of a mental state type...

...might have a *different* physical
description

**The class of pains multiply realised by
different physical states**



Anomalous Monism is realist about the mental...

...in that it believes mental properties are real properties...

...that cannot be reduced to properties of other types

Functionalism is reductionist about the mental...

...in that it thinks that mental properties are real...

...but that they are in fact *functional* properties

**It is easy to say why Non-reductive
Physicalism is attractive...**

...so let's look at what is wrong with it

According to the Functionalist mental states are functional states...

...this means that so long as a thing has inside it...

...a state that is playing the functional role characteristic of a given mental state...

...that thing enjoys that mental state according to Functionalism

But is this right?

Can we imagine something that is enjoying a given mental state but that *hasn't* got inside it a state that is playing the functional role characteristic of that mental state?

Can we imagine something that has inside it something that is playing the functional role characteristic of a mental state but that *isn't* enjoying that mental state?

We can certainly imagine the former...

...for example a person may be in pain...

...yet *not* have inside him a state...

... playing the functional role characteristic of pain...

...think of the 'actor' or the 'stoic'

But the Functionalist can easily respond to this objection...

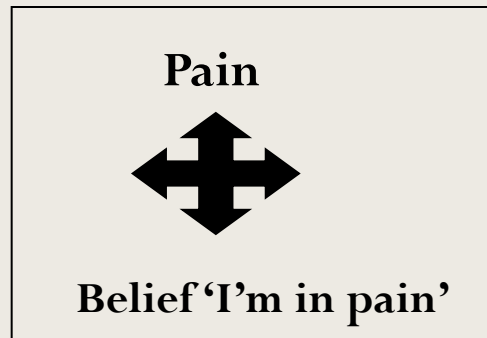
...by insisting that physical states that are playing the role of mental states...

..interact with each other in such a way as to produce *uncharacteristic* behaviours...

...what matters to the Functionalist is the *disposition* to behave in ways characteristic of given mental states...

...not that a person is actually exhibiting that behaviour

Input



Output

But it is not so obvious the Functionalist can respond to the second question:

- **the robot who is functionally equivalent to you**
- **the Chinese room**
- **the population of China**

In all these cases we are supposing that a thing has inside it ...

... something that functions in the way a mental state supposedly functions...

... but that that is *not* sufficient for its enjoying a given mental state

Input



State playing causal
role but *not* one with
the properties
characteristic of the
mental



Output

If something can have inside it something that is playing the functional role...

... assigned by Functionalism to a given mental state...

...yet we can still doubt that that thing is enjoying the mental state in question...

...Functionalism might be false

A way to get around this:

Insist that anything that has inside it something playing the functional role of a given mental state IS enjoying that mental state even if it *does* lack the properties usually believed to be essential to the mental

Perhaps the Functionalist could say...

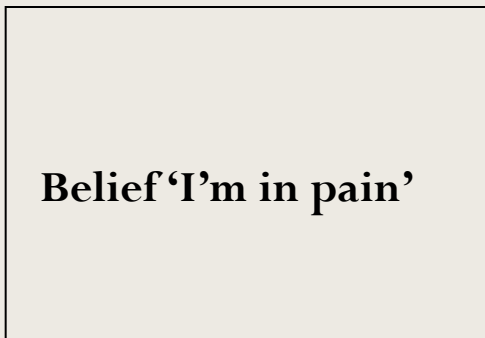
... that any state that causes a state of *believing that one is in pain* ...

...is a pain state...

...i.e. that pains do not essentially have qualia...

...instead they essentially cause beliefs about qualia
(beliefs that may be false?)

Input



Output

On this story the Functionalist is reducing all talk of qualia...

...to talk of beliefs...

...which means that the Functionalist story about belief...

....becomes very important

But at this point we might want to ask whether...

...there really *are* functional roles that are characteristic of beliefs...

....let's look again at the belief that it is raining...

The belief that it is raining may be caused by the perception of rain...

...but it may be caused by almost anything else too...

....and it may cause umbrella raising...

...but it may cause almost any other behaviour

The thing about beliefs is that they are *reasons* for acting...

...and reasons are holistic...

...almost *any* belief can be a reason for any other belief given the right context...

...so why should we think there is any such thing as...

...THE functional role characteristic of a belief?

Functionalism faces major problems...but are the problems conclusive?

Not, it would seem if we are prepared to countenance the non-existence of qualia

But are we?

Anomalous Monism also faces problems...

...the key one being the problem of causal exclusion

The causal exclusion argument points to the fact that the Anomalous Monist...

...acknowledges that all causally efficacious mental events...

...have physical properties in virtue of which they are subsumed by physical laws...

...and asks him how, in that case, he can maintain his claim that mental properties are causally efficacious?

If a hand withdrawal is caused by the activation of an event that is both a pain and a CFF..

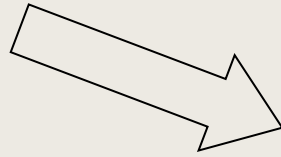
....and CFF and hand-withdrawals are correlated by some causal law...

...then unless pains and CFF are related by some bridge law (unless they are identical)...

...the pain has *no causal role* to play in causing the hand-withdrawal

CFF

Causal Law

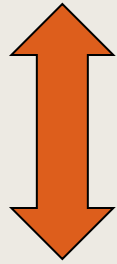


**Hand-
Withdraw
al**

Pain

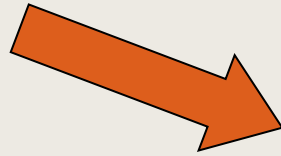
???

CFF



Pain

Causal Law



**Hand-
Withdrawal**

???

If the causal exclusion argument is right, then even if the mental is real...

... on Anomalous Monism...

...it has no causal role to play and is epiphenomenal...

...because Anomalous Monism denies the existence of bridge laws

The causal exclusion argument can be rejected...

...by rejecting the account of causation on which it is based...

...an account of causation on which it is *properties of events* that are causally efficacious...

...not the events themselves

If instead we claim that causation is a relation between *token events*...

...and the belief that it is *properties* that are causally efficacious...

...is a function of the fact that it is *laws* we are interested in...

...because it is laws that enable us to predict, explain and manipulate events...

....we can reject the causal exclusion argument

**On this story events that are both mental and physical
cause other events...**

**...thereby making true both causal claims backed by
laws...**

...and reason explanations that are not law-governed

On this story we must recognise two sorts of property...

...the mental and the physical...

...and two sorts of explanation...

...the causal and the rational

Like Functionalism then, Anomalous Monism faces serious problems....but are they conclusive?

Not, it would seem if we are prepared to countenance the idea that the relata of the causal relation are not properties but events.

But are we?

So where are we on Physicalism?

- **Reductive Physicalism is scuppered by Kripke**
- **Functionalism seems to involve eliminating qualia from our ontology**
- **Anomalous Monism seems to involve embracing an unusual theory of causation**

Perhaps Physicalism in all its forms is simply *wrong?*

But dualism *also* seems simply wrong (so long as we continue to insist on the causal closure of physics)

So what do we do now?

After dinner we'll look at a couple of suggestions

References:

Heil, J: Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction chapters 7-11 and 13

Chalmers, D: Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings (2002 Oxford University Press) Section 1D, and paper by Donald Davidson (p. 116), and Jaegwon Kim (p. 170)

Podcast: Rorty's Discussion with Donald Davidson (6 part series, this is number one):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjWTuF35GtY>

Podcast: Putnam on Mental States:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izqKc1SIFJQ>