

## **Property dualism and emergence**

### **REDUCTION, PHYSICALISM, AND PROPERTY DUALISM**

Property dualism is the view that, although there is just one kind of substance – that identified by physics – there are two different kinds of property, mental and physical. Mental properties depend on physical properties and substance to exist; but at least some mental properties cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of physical (or functional) properties. For this reason, property dualism challenges physicalism. The previous section raised the possibility that phenomenal properties are an example. In this section, we expand the argument to consciousness generally.

#### The explanatory gap

Anyone who claims that the mind is just the brain, that mental states are just brain states, faces a very difficult challenge. How could conscious experience have arisen in the brain? Consciousness involves a ‘point of view’, and there is something it is like, for a conscious creature, to be that creature. Consciousness is available to us first-personally, ‘from the inside’. This ‘first-personal’ view onto the world doesn’t fit into a scientific account of the brain of how the brain works, because that account is entirely ‘third-personal’. To say that experience is a brain process is completely puzzling: how could it be, given that conscious experience and brain processes can only be described from different points of view? When we describe a brain process scientifically, we remove all reference to the first-personal. But consciousness is first-personal. So we can’t be talking about consciousness when giving a scientific description.

This is known as the ‘explanatory gap’. We cannot explain the phenomena of consciousness, especially phenomenal properties, using the terms available to us from science. This is an epistemological argument, about explanation and understanding.

#### Zombies

A famous thought experiment puts the argument metaphysically, claiming that the properties of consciousness cannot be physical properties.

A ‘zombie’, in the philosophical sense, is a physical replica of a person – you, for instance – but without any experiential consciousness. It therefore has identical physical properties to you, but different mental properties. Of course, zombies are not physically possible, i.e. given the physical laws of the universe as it is, any being that has identical physical properties to you will also have consciousness. But it seems that zombies are at least conceivable (I’ve just described them), and some philosophers argue that they are therefore metaphysically possible.

Now if consciousness were identical with physical properties, it would be impossible for a creature to have the same physical properties as you but not have consciousness. If A is identical to B – if A is B – then you can’t have A without B or vice-versa; they are the same thing. So if zombies are possible – if a creature could be physically identical to you but not have consciousness – then consciousness is not identical to any physical properties. This is property dualism.

The standard physicalist response is that, although zombies are conceivable, they aren't in fact possible. What we are able to imagine as conceivable is not always a reliable guide to questions of identity and what is possible. For example, it is imaginable that water is not H<sub>2</sub>O; however, given that water is H<sub>2</sub>O, it's not in fact possible that water isn't H<sub>2</sub>O. Of course, there could be something just like water that isn't H<sub>2</sub>O (it falls as rain, is transparent, drinkable, etc.), but if it isn't H<sub>2</sub>O, it just isn't water. So it's not possible for water not to be H<sub>2</sub>O. Likewise, we might argue that if zombies are physical replicas of people with mental properties, they cannot lack mental properties themselves. We are, in fact, imagining people.

However, this analogy doesn't work. In the case of water, what we are imagining is just like water. That's why we get confused and think that it is water, when it isn't. But when we imagine zombies, we are not imagining something just like a person. Zombies lack consciousness, and a creature without consciousness is nothing like a creature with consciousness. For example, to be in pain is nothing like not being in pain.

Furthermore, we can explain how it is that water is H<sub>2</sub>O; there is nothing puzzling here. Water is precisely the kind of thing that would have a chemical formula. But, as we saw above, we cannot explain how it is that any physical property could be consciousness. Consciousness is not the kind of thing that could be identical with a physical property. Perhaps it is really the explanatory gap, rather than what we can or can't conceive of as possible, that supports the argument for property dualism.

## **EMERGENCE**

Property dualism is often thought to challenge physicalism, though philosophers do not agree on whether the challenge can be met or not. So some property dualists call themselves non-reductive physicalists, while others reject physicalism. There are also non-reductive physicalists that reject property dualism. For instance, functionalism is not usually considered a form of property dualism, because, as we have just seen, it tries to explain the supervenience relationship. Mental properties are realized, in any particular occurrence, by physical properties playing a particular causal role.

We can try to understand the relation between mental and physical properties further in terms of emergence. That mental properties 'emerged' from physical ones would both account for why they are not identical to them, but also why they supervene on them. The difficulty with the suggestion is that emergence is very poorly understood, and the criteria for a property being 'emergent' are very unclear. The fundamental idea is that emergent properties are 'genuinely novel'. But if they are too novel, we might end up accepting a form of property dualism that denies physicalism. On the other hand, if they are not sufficiently novel, it isn't clear that emergentism is the right way to describe them.

One criterion for an emergent property is whether it features, irreducibly, in causal explanations. A property is only a distinct property if it has distinct causal powers. If this is the right theory of emergence, then emergence is incompatible with physicalism. Physicalism claims that all physical events have a complete physical cause. If mental properties have distinct causal powers, then some physical events, e.g. movements of your body, have a distinct mental cause, and any physical cause is incomplete.

Many philosophers have felt that this position is at odds with science, that science is somehow committed to physicalism. Physicalists believe that there must be a successful

explanation of mental properties, including their causal powers, usually in terms of neuroscience.

## **WHETHER ANOMALOUS MONISM OR BIOLOGICAL NATURALISM ARE VERSIONS OF PROPERTY DUALISM**

This part of the handout follows the handouts on 'Biological naturalism' and 'Anomalous monism'. You should read those handouts first.

### **Biological naturalism**

Searle's biological naturalism argues for the reduction of the causal powers of mental properties to those of physical properties. However, he argues that mental properties are unique, quite distinct from physical properties, because they are related to the first-personal point of view. In this sense, consciousness is irreducible. Other philosophers who make the same point have argued that, because mental properties are ineradicably subjective, while scientific explanations are always objective, we cannot give a complete scientific explanation of the world. We have to mention mental properties in addition, and separately.

Searle, however, denies that the subjectivity of mental properties has any metaphysical consequences. The irreducibility of mental properties is more an epistemological fact than a metaphysical one. Once we understand how our explanations are guided by particular interests we have in what we wish to explain, we will not conclude that the inability of science to explain consciousness implies anything strange about the world. Consciousness, he argues, is a systemic biological property, and there are, in science, many examples of this kind of property. Therefore, he denies that biological naturalism is a form of property dualism.

However, we can object that this underplays the difference between consciousness and other systemic, biological properties: consciousness is unique in having subjectivity. If we can argue that this fact is not merely epistemological, but metaphysical, then Searle is wrong, and his theory is a form of property dualism.

### **Anomalous monism**

Davidson's anomalous monism is equally difficult to place, because Davidson rejects the metaphysics of properties that is often used to discuss non-reductive physicalism! However, he clearly states that mental predicates and physical predicates are quite different ways of identifying events, and are even governed by different standards of explanation. For Davidson, there is no possible account of mental concepts such as 'belief', 'desire' and so on in terms of physical concepts. Mental concepts have a different logic.

However (as with Searle), this is about our explanations, an epistemological point rather than a metaphysical one. To say that anomalous monism is a form of property dualism, we must argue (as many philosophers have) that predicates pick out properties. The different logic of mental concepts is a result of the different nature of mental properties.