

Alternatives to materialism

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Last time we discussed Chalmers' breakdown of three different versions of materialism. He provides a similar way of dividing the space of non-materialist views into three main camps.

1 Type D dualism

The first of these is interactionist dualism. On this view, conscious states are not identical to any physical property; but, nonetheless, these states are involved in the causal order of the world. They are caused by physical events, and cause other physical events.

Chalmers discusses two main objection to this view:

- Conscious states can't cause physical states, because they don't come into contact.
- Conscious states can't cause physical states, because if they did this would violate the causal closure of the physical world.

Chalmers replies to the first in a way reminiscent of Descartes' reply to Elisabeth: science has already shown us that causal relations don't require contact, or anything like it.

Chalmers replies to the second by suggesting that the interactionist should deny the causal closure of the physical. Perhaps no experiments have shown that the physical world is not causally closed; but no experiments rule out the possibility that some physical events have mental rather than physical causes.

He further provides one possible model for this kind of causation: the possibility that consciousness causes collapse of superposed states.

2 Type E dualism

The second possible view is also one we have already discussed: epiphenomenalist dualism. On this view conscious states are non-physical, and are caused by physical events, but have no physical effects.

The main advantage of this view: it is consistent with the causal closure of the physical world.

Chalmers considers a few arguments against this view:

- It really seems as though conscious states sometimes cause physical effects. Chalmers' reply: how would things seem if epiphenomenalism were true?
- I know that I am conscious, and make utterances describing my conscious states. Further, I sometimes make utterances describing my conscious states *because* I am in a certain conscious state. But this is incompatible with epiphenomenalism.
- Related to the last argument: my zombie twin also says 'I am conscious.' But when he says this, he speaks falsely, and is not justified in his claim. But his utterance is caused in exactly the same way mine is; so mine is unjustified too. But this is absurd.

3 Type F monism

The last main view he discusses is one which we have not discussed so far. This is a monist rather than a dualist view. In this respect it is similar to materialism. But it is very different than standard varieties of materialism.

This view begins with the observation that physics tells us things about the relations and dispositions of fundamental particles, but does not tell us about the intrinsic nature of those particles. Properties like mass, charge, and velocity all describe ways in which these particles relate to each other. But ordinarily we think that dispositional and relational properties of some things must eventually be explained in terms of how those things are in themselves. If this is right, then the description of the physical world that we get from physics is radically incomplete.

The type F monist says that the key to explaining consciousness lies in the intrinsic natures of the fundamental particles.

Why is this supposed to be better than traditional materialism? Because, the monist says, if we did know the intrinsic natures of these particles, we could see how they give rise to consciousness. If Mary knew all of the facts about the intrinsic natures of these particles, she would have already known what it was like to see red.

What could these intrinsic natures be? There are two main options:

- The first option is panpsychism: electrons, quarks, and other fundamental properties are themselves conscious.
- The second option is that these particles have some 'proto-phenomenal' properties. These are properties which are not phenomenal properties, but are such that we could deduce our phenomenal properties from knowledge of them. What could these be? It is not easy to say.

Why this view is in one way like materialist views, and in one way quite unlike them.