

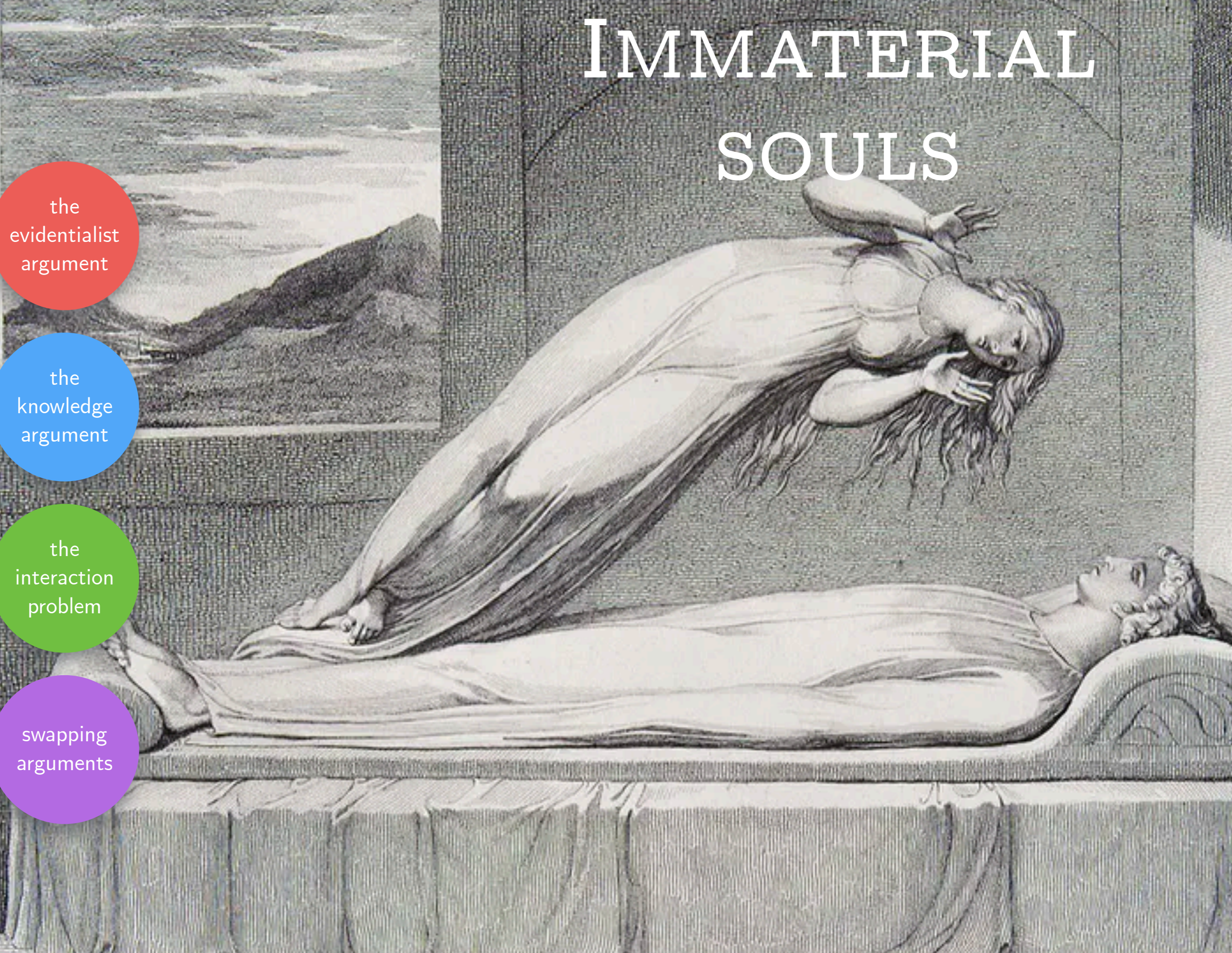
IMMATERIAL SOULS

the
evidentialist
argument

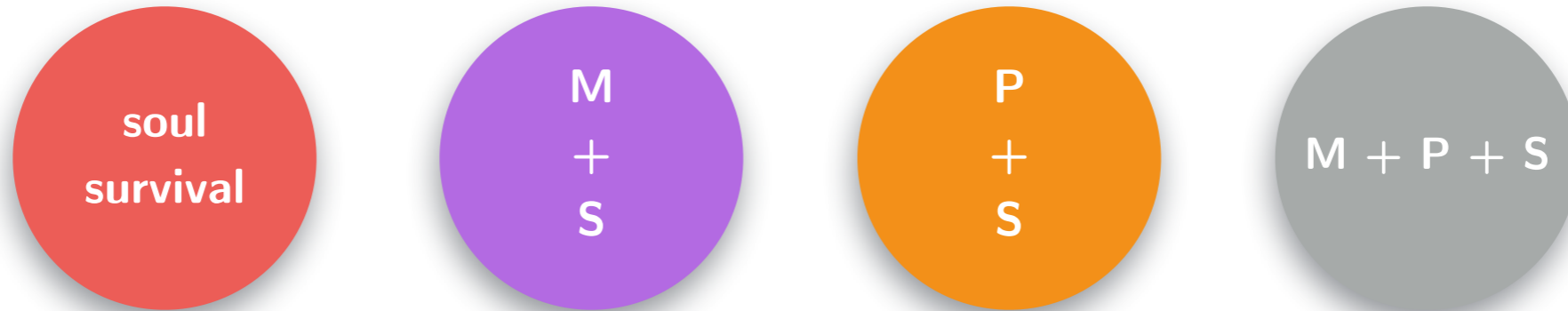
the
knowledge
argument

the
interaction
problem

swapping
arguments



Our topic today is the class of answers to the survival question which make reference to immaterial souls. There were four of these:



These theories are importantly different. But they have one thing in common: all are false if there are no such things as immaterial souls.

Are there?

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Most of us don't believe in fairies, there being no good evidence for their existence. Why should souls be any different?

We can turn this into an argument against believing in immaterial souls. Consider the following points:

We have no sensory experience of immaterial souls.

It is not self-evident that there are immaterial souls.

We have no good argument for the existence of immaterial souls.

But the following principle looks plausible:

If P is not self-evident and your senses don't tell you that P and you don't have a good argument for P, you should not believe P.

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You should not believe in the existence of immaterial souls.

THE EVIDENTIALIST ARGUMENT AGAINST BELIEF IN IMMATERIAL SOULS

1. We have no sensory experience of immaterial souls.
2. It is not self-evident that there are immaterial souls.
3. We have no good argument for the existence of immaterial souls.
4. If P is not self-evident and your senses don't tell you that P and you don't have a good argument for P, you should not believe P.

C. You should not believe in the existence of immaterial souls.
(1,2,3,4)

This might be called the 'evidentialist' argument against belief in immaterial souls, since it is based on the idea that we have no **evidence** for the existence of immaterial souls.

When we turn to the question of how we should determine what to believe, we'll ask whether 'rules of belief' like premise (4) are true. But the premise looks at least initially plausible; so it puts some pressure on the believer in immaterial souls to respond to the argument by rejecting premise (3).

But then we need an argument for the existence of immaterial souls.

The argument we are going to look at turns on the idea that immaterial souls are needed to explain the nature of **consciousness**.

Properties related to conscious experience include the property of feeling an itch or a pain, or the sensation of seeing red or hearing a loud noise. These properties are sometimes called **phenomenal properties**.

Human beings (obviously) have phenomenal properties — we experience all kinds of sensations.

Suppose that we were wholly physical things (as both the organism view and the brain view say). What would that imply about the nature of our phenomenal properties?

The following principle seems plausible:

Wholly physical things have only physical properties.

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But then it seems to follow from the fact that we have phenomenal properties that

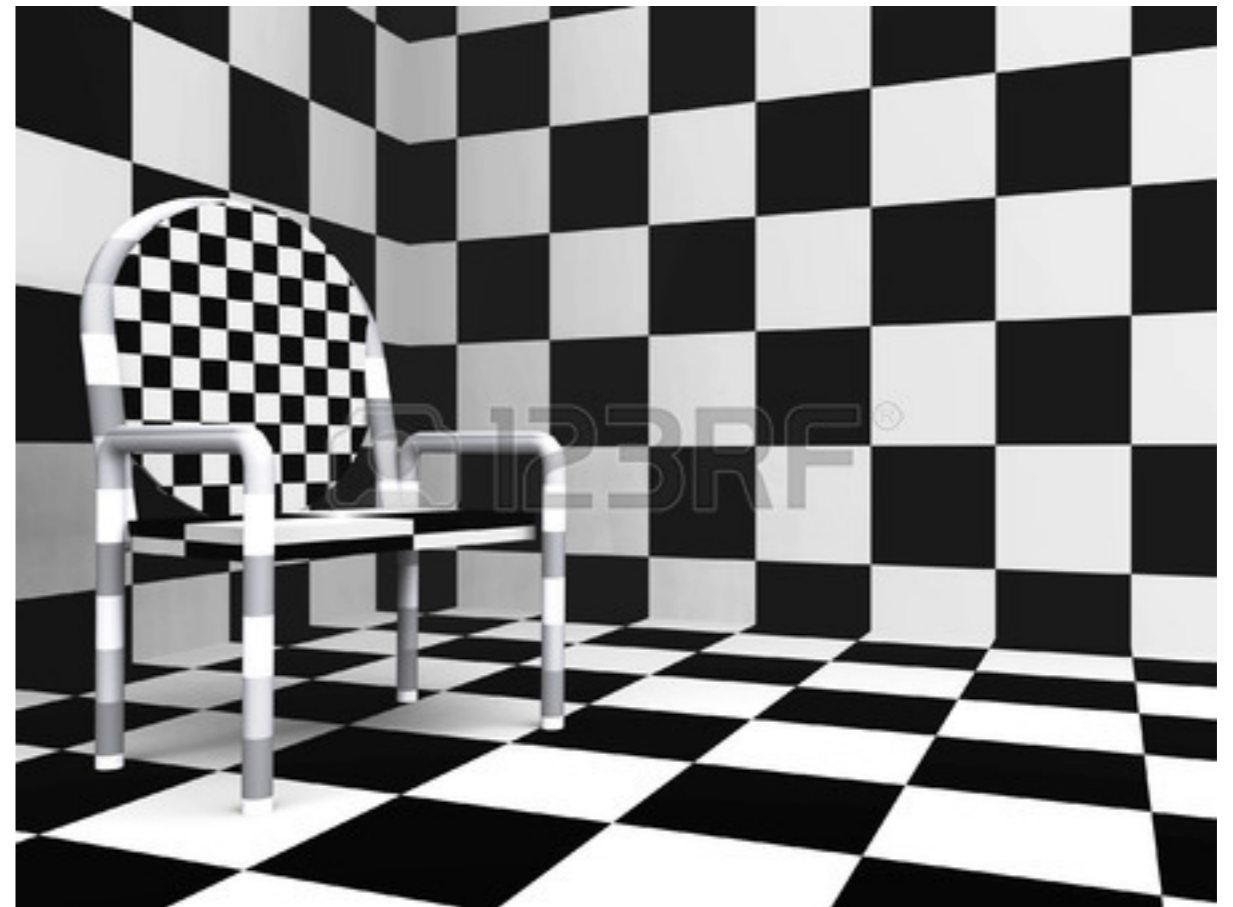
If we are wholly physical things, then phenomenal properties are physical properties.

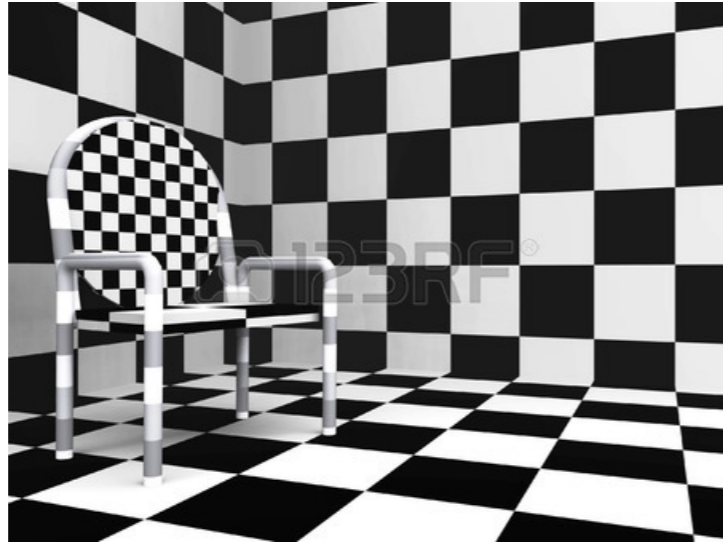
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This argument is due to the philosopher Frank Jackson, and is based on his example of Mary and the black-and-white room.

Mary is a brilliant scientist who has been confined her entire life to an environment in which everything is colored white or black.



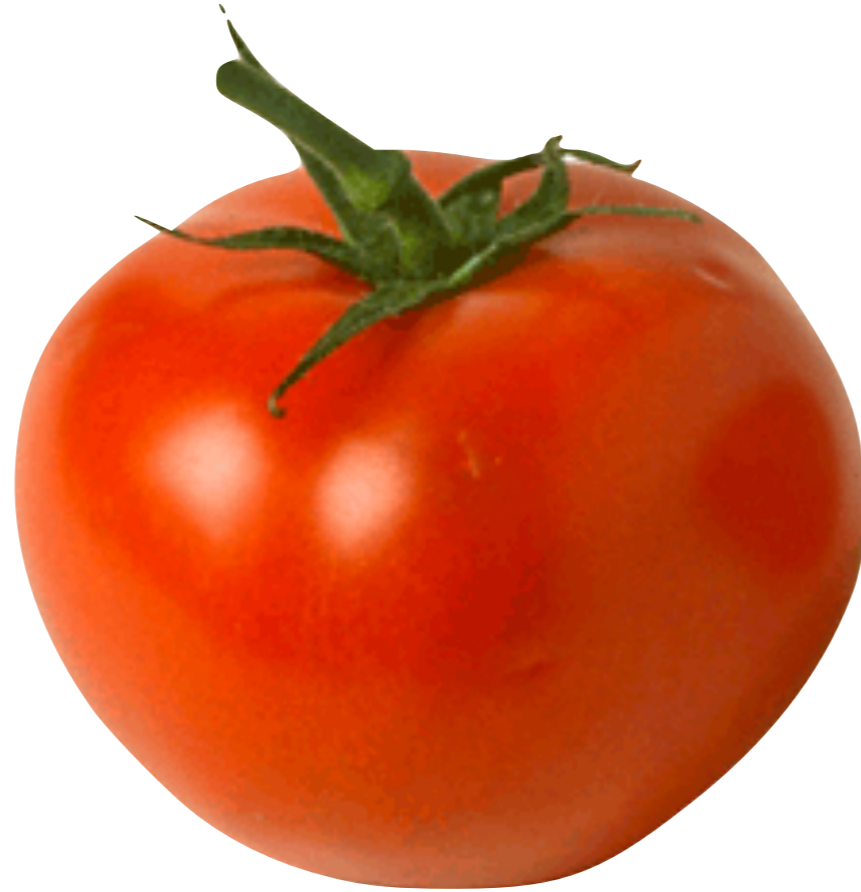


Mary is a brilliant scientist who has been confined her entire life to an environment in which everything is colored white or black.

She is so brilliant, in fact, that she has learned every fact that there is to learn about the physical world. In particular, she has learned all of the facts about the neurophysiology of color vision, and has studied extensively everything that happens to the brain when subjects are experiencing color.

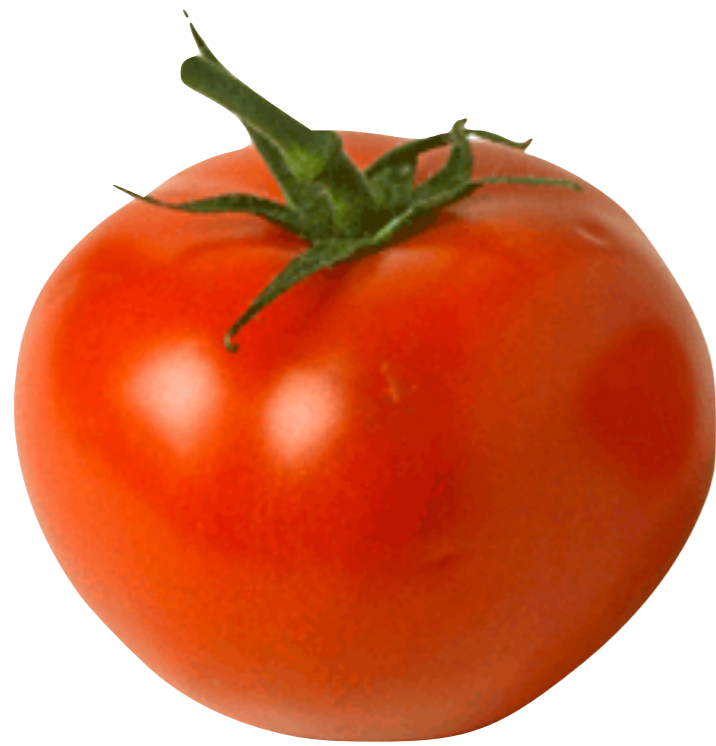
So she knows all of the physical properties that brains have when the person whose brain it is is experiencing color. It seems like this should be possible; people who are color blind can still learn physics.

One day, someone brings a new object into Mary's room:



Does Mary learn anything new when she sees the tomato?

Intuitively, yes: she learns **what it is like** to experience red things. It seems that she learns something about the phenomenal property of sensing redness.



But this seems to show that phenomenal properties are not physical properties.

Here is one way in which the argument, which is sometimes called the **knowledge argument**, can be laid out.

Upon seeing the tomato, Mary learns a new fact about conscious experiences.

Before seeing the tomato, Mary knows all the physical facts about conscious experiences.

There are non-physical facts about conscious experience.

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Before seeing the tomato, Mary knows all the physical facts about conscious experiences.

There are non-physical facts about conscious experience.

If we are wholly physical things, then phenomenal properties are physical properties.

Phenomenal properties are not physical properties.

We are not wholly physical things.

If we are not wholly physical things then immaterial souls exist.

Immaterial souls exist.

THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. Before seeing the tomato, Mary knows all the physical facts about conscious experiences.
2. Upon seeing the tomato, Mary learns a new fact about conscious experiences.
3. There are non-physical facts about conscious experience. (1,2)
4. Phenomenal properties are not physical properties. (3)
5. If we are wholly physical things, then phenomenal properties are physical properties.
6. We are not wholly physical things. (4,5)
7. If we are not wholly physical things then immaterial souls exist.

C. Immaterial souls exist. (6,7)

If we are not wholly physical things, then presumably we are (at least in part) immaterial souls. So, if the knowledge argument is sound, there are immaterial souls. And if there are immaterial souls, it seems plausible that they would play a role in answering the survival question.

THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. Before seeing the tomato, Mary knows all the physical facts about conscious experiences.
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One of the most popular responses to the knowledge argument from materialists involves denying that (2) is true.

Here's one way to make this seem plausible. Consider Lois Lane. She knows that Superman can fly; and she knows who Clark Kent is. But she does not know that Clark Kent is Superman.

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Suppose that one day she sees Clark don the Superman costume and fly away. She is surprised — just like Mary is surprised.

If you asked her why she is surprised, she might say, "I did not know that Clark could fly!"

But of course in a way she did. She knew that Superman could fly. And Clark = Superman. So isn't the fact that Superman can fly just the same as the fact that Clark can fly?

It looks like Lois is surprised, not because there is some new fact that she learns, but because (in some sense) she learns a new way of thinking about a fact she already knew.

Could the materialist say that, similarly, Mary does not learn a new fact, but instead learns a new way of thinking about a physical fact she already knew?

Let's turn now to the case **against** immaterial souls. The historically most influential argument against the view that there are immaterial souls is one originally raised by Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia.

Elisabeth was one of the leading intellectuals of the 17th century. She worked in mathematics and physics as well as philosophy, and was active in German politics. She was known by her siblings as 'The Greek' because she mastered ancient Greek at such a young age.

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Elisabeth pointed out that, if the view that there are immaterial souls is true, then it must happen quite often that the body causes effects in the soul, and that the soul causes effects in the body.

What might be some examples of your body causing effects in your soul?

How about examples of your soul causing effects in your body?

Consideration of examples show that, if the view that there are immaterial souls is true, then interactions between soul and body must happen all of the time. But Elisabeth argued that these kinds of causal interactions were entirely mysterious.



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If you think about it, the idea that an immaterial soul is constantly interacting with your physical body is kind of weird. Could it really be true that every sensation you feel and every action you undertake involves an interaction between your body and some non-spatial immaterial thing?

If you think not, that would appear to provide a simple argument against the existence of immaterial souls.



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THE INTERACTION ARGUMENT

1. If there are immaterial souls, they causally interact with material bodies.
 2. Immaterial things can't causally interact with material things.
-
- C. There are no immaterial souls.

Attention naturally focuses on premise (2). Sure, interaction between physical and non-physical things seems a little weird; but is there any way for the defender of the interaction argument to show that it never happens?



Elisabeth gave one defense of this premise:

“it seems every determination of movement happens from the impulsion of a thing moved, according to the manner in which it is pushed by that which moves it ... Contact is required for [this]. ... contact seems to me incompatible with the idea of an immaterial thing.”



What's her argument here?

Elisabeth here is considering a special case of causation: putting something in motion. For something to push something else, it seems that the two things must be in contact; and for two things to be in contact, both must occupy space (since being in contact is just a matter of occupying adjacent spaces). Since immaterial minds don't occupy space, it seems that they can't set things in motion — so, for example, my mind's desire for coffee can't be what sends my body down the hallway in search of some.

Elisabeth here is considering a special case of causation: putting something in motion. For something to push something else, it seems that the two things must be in contact; and for two things to be in contact, both must occupy space (since being in contact is just a matter of occupying adjacent spaces). Since immaterial minds don't occupy space, it seems that they can't set things in motion — so, for example, my mind's desire for coffee can't be what sends my body down the hallway in search of some.

1. Causal interaction requires contact.
 2. Immaterial things can't contact material things.
-
- C. Immaterial things can't causally interact with material things.

Descartes replied that while some causation does work through contact, not all does. He gives the example of gravity. The earth interacts with the moon via its gravitational force. But this interaction does not require contact — so why, in general, should we think that contact is required for causal interaction?

Elisabeth was skeptical about the idea that the example of gravity could provide a model for the interaction between mind and body. And many philosophers since have been on Elisabeth's side. Let's consider two ways of developing her argument further.

The first begins with the thought that, if there are such things as souls, and those souls have phenomenal properties, then there must be some laws of nature which connect what happens in brains with the phenomenal properties of souls. Let's call these laws of nature **psychophysical laws**.

It seems that, if you believe in immaterial souls, you have to believe in the existence of psychophysical laws.

The problem is that it seems that these laws would be quite different from any other fundamental laws of nature with which we are acquainted.

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Laws of nature typically relate fundamental physical properties to other fundamental physical properties. Consider, for example, Newton's equation

$$F=ma$$

This law relates force, mass, and acceleration — all quite fundamental physical properties. But what would our psychophysical laws look like?

Consider the psychophysical law governing having a reddish sensation. It will presumably be of the form

RED. If x has physical property P , then x 's soul has a reddish sensation

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But what is physical property P ? It is not going to be any remotely natural physical property. It is going to be a massively complex physical property involving the more than 100 million neurons in the human visual cortex.

This already makes "laws" like RED way different than the kinds of laws we typically seek in physics.

The above statement does not look like a fundamental law. It looks more like a generalization which needs to be explained by more fundamental laws. In this sense it looks more like the equations which predict the movement of the tides. Precisely because those equations are about massively complex physical systems, we think that they must be explained by more basic laws.

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The problem is that it is hard to see how the believer in immaterial souls can try to explain RED in more basic terms.

And note that the believer in immaterial souls won't have to just accept one or two weird laws of nature like RED. Humans can discriminate about 10 million different colors; so it looks like we will need 10 million different fundamental laws of nature, one corresponding to each type of sensation. And that's just the beginning. We will also need fundamental laws for all of tastes, smells, itches, pains, and other sensations we are capable of feeling.

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We might turn this into an argument, as follows:

1. If immaterial souls causally interact with the material world, generalizations like RED are fundamental laws of nature.
 2. Generalizations like RED are not fundamental laws of nature.
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- C. Immaterial souls don't causally interact with material things.

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By contrast, the non-believer in immaterial souls can say that phenomenal properties just **are** complex physical properties. There's thus no need for fundamental psychophysical laws.

For the non-believer in immaterial souls, the only relevant laws are laws about light hitting the retina causing various events in the visual cortex. And these events are presumably governed by the ordinary laws of physics.

This seems to show that the believer in immaterial souls is committed to a much more complicated view of the laws of nature than the materialist.

But we regularly think that simpler theories are to be preferred over less-simple theories. So this seems to be a strike against the believer in immaterial souls.

Let's consider one last way of developing the interaction problem.

This is based on the idea that the believer in immaterial souls is committed to the violation of certain fundamental physical laws, such as the **law of the conservation of energy**. This law says that the total energy of a closed physical system is constant; that the total energy of such a system may be neither increased nor decreased, but only transformed.

It seems, at first glance, that the interactionist dualist should be committed to denying this fundamental principle of physics. For consider a case in which an immaterial soul causes a change in the physical world - say, a case in which an immaterial soul causes a neuron to fire in the brain.

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Now consider the physical system of which the brain is a part, at time 1 and then at time 2. Won't those two physical systems differ in their total energy? After all, everything is the same in those physical systems other than the activity of this neuron; and if it fires at one time but not the other, mustn't this involve a change in energy?

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We can turn this into an argument, as follows:

If immaterial souls causally interact with the physical universe, then the total energy of the universe is not constant.

2. The total energy of the universe is constant.

C. Immaterial souls don't causally interact with material things.

How should the believer in immaterial souls respond?

If immaterial souls causally interact with the physical universe, then the total energy of the universe is not constant.

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C. Immaterial souls don't causally interact with material things.

How should the believer in immaterial souls respond?

It is worth noting a connection here between questions about the interaction of immaterial souls with the physical world and questions about determinism that arose in the context of our discussion of free will.

If determinism is false, then there are some events which are undetermined by the prior state of the world + the laws of nature. Could these events be a way to make sense of the soul's interaction with the physical world?

Let's turn to a second class of arguments against soul-based survival theories, which I will call **swapping arguments**.

Let's suppose that the view that there are immaterial souls is true. Then your roommate is (either wholly or in part) an immaterial soul.

Here is something that seems possible: last night, the soul connected to your roommate's body could have been swapped out for a different one which has exactly the same apparent memories and personality.

You would, it seems, have no way of telling whether this happened. So you have no evidence that it did not happen. So, you do not know whether you have the same roommate as you did yesterday.

But of course you **do** know this. So soul-based theories of survival must be false.

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More dramatically, the soul attached to your own body could have been swapped out last night. It seems that you would have no way of knowing whether this happened. After all, the new soul (which you are) could have been given the same personality and apparent memories as the old soul.

So you do not know whether you have been attached to this body for more than a day. But of course you do know that you have been attached to this body for more than a day. So, the view that there are immaterial souls must be false.

Call this the **argument from soul-swapping**. Let's lay out the roommate version.

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THE SOUL-SWAPPING ARGUMENT

1. If there are immaterial souls, then it is possible that your roommate's body was attached to a different soul this morning than it was last night.
 2. You have no evidence which rules out the possibility that the soul attached to your roommate's body was swapped out last night.
 3. If there are immaterial souls, you have no evidence which rules out the possibility that your roommate this morning was a different person than yesterday. (1,2)
 4. If you have no evidence which rules something out, you should not believe its opposite.
 5. If there are immaterial souls, you should not believe that your roommate this morning was the same person as yesterday. (3,4)
 6. You should believe that your roommate this morning was the same person as yesterday.
-
- C. There are no immaterial souls. (5,6)

Here is a somewhat related argument.

Psychology-swapping

Ferdinand is a combination of a soul and a body. Suppose that Ferdinand suffers an accident which entirely changes his psychology. He has none of his former memories, and none of his former personality traits. He used to be very selfish; he's now very generous. He used to be best friends with Jane; now he finds Jane annoying, and prefers to spend time with Maria.

Let's call Ferdinand before the accident "Ferdinand-" and Ferdinand after the accident "Ferdinand+".

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Let's call Ferdinand before the accident "Ferdinand-" and Ferdinand after the accident "Ferdinand+".

Suppose that Ferdinand- used to occasionally take some cash from your wallet. Ferdinand+ would never do this. Would you be right to blame Ferdinand+ for the actions of Ferdinand-?

It seems plausible that you would not blame Ferdinand+ for these actions. Remember: he has complete amnesia, and his behavior and attitudes now are entirely different.

Suppose that Ferdinand- used to occasionally take some cash from your wallet. Ferdinand+ would never do this. Would you be right to blame Ferdinand+ for the actions of Ferdinand-?

It seems plausible that you would not blame Ferdinand+ for these actions. Remember: he has complete amnesia, and his behavior and attitudes now are entirely different.

But if you would not hold Ferdinand+ responsible for the actions of Ferdinand-, that suggests that you are treating Ferdinand+ as a different person than Ferdinand-.

But if they are different people, it looks like soul survival and M + S are incorrect. For there is no obvious reason why the numerically same soul could not be attached to Ferdinand's body throughout this process.

Call this the **psychology-swapping argument** against the view that there are immaterial souls.

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THE PSYCHOLOGY-SWAPPING ARGUMENT

1. You should not hold Ferdinand+ responsible for the actions of Ferdinand-.
2. If you should not hold A responsible for any of the same actions as B, then A and B are different people.
3. Ferdinand+ is not the same person as Ferdinand-. (1,2)
4. It is possible that Ferdinand+ and Ferdinand- have the same soul and the same body.

C. Soul survival, materialist survival, and M+S are false. (3,4)

This argument relies on the idea that sufficient differences in psychology are enough to make for a difference in personal identity. Note that while this also rules out M+S, it does not rule out P+S.