

Materialism and Qualitative Experience

I. Recap

(Substance) Dualism: A person, such as you or me, is a complex entity composed of a spiritual thing and a material thing as parts. Our mental states are states of the spiritual thing; our physical states are states of the material thing.

Materialism: There are only material things; in particular, persons are wholly material things.

Idealism: There are only spiritual things, so persons are wholly spiritual.

Concerns about Dualism (specifically, concerns about spiritual things):

- i. *Knowledge of Other Spiritual Things/Other Minds:* If minds are non-physical, then what evidence do we have that other human beings have minds?
- ii. *Where is the spiritual thing located?* The spiritual part of me is supposed to lack all physical properties, including spatial properties (at least on some accounts). But then how can it exert causal influence on any particular point in the brain? Likewise, how is the mind supposed to be influenced by what goes on at that very point? Wouldn't it have to *be* at that point to exert or suffer influence there?
- iii. *Individuation:* How do we individuate things that are not located in space and time? Consider twins who are mentally alike, how many spiritual things are there? Moreover, if spiritual things are not located, how are they associated with a particular body? What makes one spiritual thing "mine", i.e., part of the complex thing that is me?
- iv. *Physical system is causally closed:* Science tells us that the physical universe is causally closed. So for every physical event e there is a prior physical event e' given which e could not have failed to occur (or which necessitated e). But if the prior *physical* event was sufficient for my arm's going up, what is the role for the mental event? How could my intention be the cause?
- v. *Mystery of interaction:* It is mysterious how something non-physical could affect something physical. How could a desire affect the movement of an electron? But if the mental cannot affect electrons, how can it affect my body?
- vi. *Evolution.* When did spiritual things get tacked on to bodies? What natural mechanism could explain how they emerged?
- vii. *Dispensability:* Even if we want to allow that there are mental states and mental events, why think they must be attributable to spiritual *things*? Why not say that mental phenomena are properties of bodies?

Property dualism: There are only material things, but some material things have both physical and mental/spiritual properties (or states).

II. Non-reductive Materialism: The Identity Theory

Non-reductive materialism claims that "all mental states and events are in fact physical states and events" (RR, 277); however, it is non-reductive insofar as it allows that mental terms *cannot* "be analyzed or defined in terms of descriptions of brain processes." (RR, 277) *Reductive* materialism, in contrast, holds that mental states and events are all physical, but also attempts to analyze or define mental terms in physical terms.

An argument for the identity thesis (Carruthers, RR 277):

- 1) Some conscious states and events are causally necessary for the occurrence of some physical ones.
- 2) In a complicated neuro-physiological science there will be no need to advert to anything other than physical-physical causality.
- C) So some conscious states and events are (are identical with) physical (brain) states and events.

Problems with this argument:

- A. Certainty
- B. Privacy
- C. Value
- D. Color
- E. Felt Quality
- F. Complete Knowledge (see also Frank Jackson's essay in RR, 267-270))

Arguments (A-E) alluded to above have the following form:

- 1) At least some mental states/events have property P.
- 2) No purely physical state/event has property P.
- 3) Necessarily, if $x = y$, then any property of x is a property of y , and any property of y is a property of x . (Also known as Leibniz's Law)
- 4) Not all mental states/events are physical states.

Two strategies for avoiding the objection:

- Deny that the mental state really has property P.
- Deny that the physical state lacks property P.

III. The Knowledge Argument

Problem (F) listed above is best captured by Frank Jackson's example of Mary:

Mary Jones is the world's greatest color scientist. Trouble is, she's been locked up since birth in a black and white room. She knows everything that there is to know about the physics and physiology of color: about light waves, surface reflectancy, the structure of the eye, and what goes on in normal brains when the person who houses that brain has the experience of a ripe lemon. Only difference is, she's never had the experience herself. Then one day she leaves the room, sets her eyes on a ripe lemon, and has the experience of yellow. Surely she has *learned* something at this point, what it is like to see yellow! But then we have the following argument against materialism:

- (1) Before her release, Mary knows all the physical facts.
- (2) Then Mary learns a *new* fact: what yellow experience is like.
- (3) Facts about what experience is like are not physical facts.

Now there are two main ways that the materialist might try to oppose this argument: attack the first premise or the second. Is it really true that Mary knows *all* the physical facts before her release? I'll let you think about that. But consider the second premise. Is it so clear that Mary

learns a new fact on emerging from the room? Another interpretation is that she encounters an *old* fact, a purely physical fact, but conceives that fact in a new manner.

Remember the lesson of Oedipus: the same object or fact can be understood in different ways. So, the fact that Oedipus is married to HER (imagine me pointing at a certain woman) can be conceived either as his being married to Jocasta -- the name he knows her by -- or as his being married to Mom -- the name he knows his mother by. These are two ways of conceiving a fact, someone might argue, but the fact conceived *is the same* in both cases. Now let's apply this to black and white Mary. Even before she leaves the room, she knows the following fact:

People exposed to ripe lemons go into physical state P.

And the claim is that after emerging from the room, she learns a new fact:

People exposed to ripe lemons go into mental state R

where R is the experience of yellowness. According to the identity theorist, though, physical state P *is* mental state R; so the new fact is none other than the old; so what Mary has learned is not a new fact but a new way of conceiving an old fact. Now when she thinks this fact about people's reaction to ripe lemons, she conceives of the reaction "from the inside" as it were. But this is not to acquire new information; it's to acquire a new ability, the ability to conceive the old information the way other people do.

Is the analogy a good one though? When Oedipus learns that he's married to Mom he surely *does* acquire information; does learn a new fact. Problem becomes, how do you tell when you've got different information, how when you've got the same wrapped up in a different linguistic package? Must there always be a truth of the matter about this or is it partly a matter of convention? On the first option we have to figure out whether the above sentences state the same information or not. On the second it seems that the prospects for materialism is in our hands: it's a matter of how we choose to divide up pieces of information. Say that we've got two different pieces of information, as in the Oedipus case, and materialism is refuted. Say that we've got the same piece of information, and it lives on to fight another day.