

Class 7 - Qualia II

I. Epiphenomenalism

Jackson's article has two parts.

In the first part, Jackson opposes physicalism, as Nagel does.

(Note that Jackson starts his article with at least a sketch of what 'physicalism' means.)

Jackson thinks that Nagel's argument shows that physicalism effectively omits two kinds of knowledge.

First, physicalism omits the qualia.

Second, physicalism omits the first-person perspective.

Nagel is right that the first-person perspective is missing.

But, every one's problem is no one's problem.

That is, there doesn't seem to be an objection to physicalism in the problem of imagining what it is like to be a bat, or any such alien creature.

The problem is just in the omission of the experience.

Jackson distinguishes his argument from Nagel's, by denying that the real problem with physicalism has to do with the omission of the subjective point of view.

The problem, says Jackson, is not that physicalism omits the what-it-is-like.

The problem is that physicalism misses some facts, p 132.

Nagel's argument is mainly negative, against physicalism.

If physicalism is wrong, something must replace it.

In the second part of his article, Jackson defends epiphenomenalism by considering three arguments for the falsity of physicalism, based on the reality of qualia.

Epiphenomenalism is a dualist claim that allows causal efficacy only from the physical to the mental.

The traditional epiphenomenalist claims that physical states affect mental states, but mental states do not effect physical states.

Traditional epiphenomenalists may claim that mental states are completely non-efficacious.

Jackson's epiphenomenalism differs from the traditional version in two ways.

First, remains agnostic whether mental states can affect, or cause, other mental states.

Second, Jackson's version of epiphenomenalism concerns mental properties, not mental states.

He argues that there are irreducibly mental properties of physical (brain) states, but not that there are non-corporeal minds.

That is, Jackson is defending a version of property dualism, not a version of substance dualism.

Consider physical theories of ordinary objects.

When we explain physical phenomena, like the falling of an object to the earth, we ignore the color of the object.

We reduce color to reflections of light.

But, as Berkeley emphasized, light waves are not colors, sound waves are not sounds.

On the one hand, we have what is often called the phenomenological (or, better, phenomenal) character of our experience.

On the other hand, we have objective physical properties.

With Locke, we say that sounds and colors (and all the conscious phenomenal characteristics) are just the secondary properties, their effects on us.

Only the primary qualities, the real qualities, matter to physical theory.

So, the primary/secondary distinction allows us to keep the phenomena, like color, by saying that there are terms in our physical theory for which our ordinary terms are shorthand.

In the case of qualia, though, recourse to the primary/secondary distinction will not help.

For, the sounds and colors, as qualia, are exactly what we need to explain about consciousness.

II. The modal and knowledge arguments

Jackson insists that any theory of the mind must find a role for the qualities of our immediate experience.

He calls himself a qualia freak.

He considers two distinct arguments for the legitimacy of qualia.

His modal argument is that zombies are possible, p 130-1.

My zombie is an organism just like me, except that it has no conscious experience.

If zombies are possible, then it is possible for the same physical structure (or functional organization) to correspond both to a conscious person and to a zombie.

Thus, consciousness could not be explained by any physical properties of an organism (or functional structure.)

Jackson points out that there is a disputed modal intuition at the core of the zombie question.

Some of us believe that zombies are possible; others (perhaps Matt) don't.

Jackson says that no amount of physical information logically entails that another person is conscious.

Lots of ink has been spilled in recent years on the possibility of zombies.

See, for examples: [Zombies](#) [Zombies](#). Also: [Zombies](#).

If you don't believe that zombies are possible, then you might prefer the knowledge argument.

The knowledge argument has spawned a virtual industry of discussion, especially of Mary.

Fred can discriminate between two different reds, which look exactly the same to the rest of the normal-sighted world.

We can verify that he has this ability by looking at the physical facts on the ground; he discriminates consistently between objects which reflect different wavelengths of light.

But we can not see the difference that he sees.

And all the physical facts won't tell us what that experience is, what the new colors are like.

It seems that physicalism leaves something out, p 129.

The Fred case, like the zombie case, is science fiction.

We can argue about their plausibility.

Though, the H.G. Wells story, "[The Country of the Blind](#)", to which Jackson refers, makes the Fred case much more plausible.

The blind people in those stories stubbornly refuse to admit that there are facts about the world, about how it looks, that are unavailable to them.

We do not want to commit the same sort of error.

Still, the Mary case seems even more plausible.

Mary knows all the physical facts about color, while living in a completely black-and-white world.

When she leaves her room, she seems to learn something.

We can have all the scientific knowledge that there is to have, and still learn something about qualia.

III. Qualia and causal efficacy

If we establish that qualia are real, then we seem led to the position that they are causally efficacious. Then, we seem led to a Cartesian-style dualism, which Jackson wishes to avoid in order not to sound like a person who believes in fairies, p 128.

So, Jackson has to find room for a position on which qualia are real, but not causally efficacious. He develops this position in response to arguments for the dualist claim that the reality of qualia entail their causal efficacy.

It seems, to the Cartesian, substance dualist, that the feeling of pain, when a piano drops on my foot, causes me to say that I am in pain, hop about, and bark.

Recall that the causal efficacy of mental states constituted a central criticism of behaviorism, and a central motivation for both identity theory and functionalism.

If mental states are just physical states, as any token physicalist has it, then causal efficacy is welcome. But, if mental properties are non-physical, their causal efficacy is suspicious.

Jackson argues that qualia are the (causally inert) byproducts of causal interactions.

All causation appears at the physical level, and the epiphenomenalist's mental properties just come along for the ride.

Jackson provides three arguments against the causal efficacy of epiphenomenal mental properties: 1. The Hume Argument; 2. The Darwin Argument; 3. The Other Minds Argument.

IV. The Hume argument

Hume argues that we posit causal connections on the basis of our experiences of conjunctions of events. For example, every time I let go of my keys, they fall to the ground.

We posit some underlying cause of the phenomenon of the constant conjunction: gravity.

Now, consider the fact that every time my watch says the time, my cell phone says that it is the same time.

We have a reliable conjunction of events.

But, we do not posit a causal relation between my watch and my cell phone.

Rather, we find common underlying causes.

It is not that my watch makes my cell phone say that it is a particular time, or vice versa.

It is just that the laws of physics work reliably in both cases.

Applying this lesson, if there were some underlying cause of both my pain and my hopping about, we could eliminate the belief that qualia were causally efficacious.

Jackson's movie example, p 133, is supposed to show that we can avoid admitting the causal efficacy of qualia on the basis of examples like that of the piano.

It appears that there is a causal link between the image of Lee Marvin's fist and the image of John Wayne's head.

But, the causal link is not properly located in the images, but in some underlying causes of these images.

V. The Darwin argument

One might present an evolutionary argument for the causal efficacy of qualia:

1. We have qualia.
 2. Lower animals, earlier forms of life, do not.
 3. So, qualia appeared at some point in evolution.
 4. Thus, qualia must have some evolutionary role.
- Thus, qualia must be causally efficacious.

Jackson points out that evolutionary explanations such as this are invalid, since some traits which are not conducive to survival may persist, as long as they do not hinder survival too much.

He uses the example of the heavy coat of a polar bear.

Thus, all we can conclude is that qualia are either causally efficacious, or by-products of something that is causally efficacious.

Just as in the Hume argument, causal efficacy need not be ascribed directly to the qualia.

Jackson adds that evolutionary theory is not going to explain everything, p 135.

VI. The other minds argument

The argument from other minds that we should attribute causal efficacy to qualia runs as follows:

1. We infer know that other people have minds because, at least in part, of their behavior.
 2. But, in my own case, it seems that my qualia cause my behavior.
 3. It is reasonable to posit that the same causal relation holds in the cases of other people.
- So, we should attribute causal efficacy to the qualia.

Again, Jackson argues that the causal efficacy should be attributed to whatever causes the qualia, and not to the qualia themselves.

We can attribute qualia to other people just because they have behavior which correlates with qualia in my case.

But, we need not think that the qualia cause anything, even in our own case.

Qualia may be caused by something casually efficacious, but they need not be themselves involved.

VII. Two paths

We are at a fork in the road.

One path accepts the reality of qualia, but denies the sufficiency of physicalism.

The other path takes physicalism as brute, but omits aspects of conscious experience.

On the qualia path, we accommodate phenomenal facts.

Then, the insufficiency of physicalism seems to infect all kinds of reductive definitions.

For example, we reduce color to wavelength of reflected light.

But descriptions of the wavelength of light omit facts about its effects on perceivers.

If we are looking for a scientific theory, which includes explanations of consciousness and conscious experience, we can not dismiss these facts.

So, the qualia path not only forces us toward some kind of dualism, but it also undermines all kinds of physical reductions.

On the physicalist path, we have gotten stuck looking for appropriate type-identities for mental states. Type-identity statements (what it is to be a thing of a certain type) must be made with reference to the appropriate regularities.

Type-identity of elementary particles will be made in terms of charge, because, presumably, charge is an element of the basic physical laws.

Type-identity of species will be made in terms of genetic constitution.

Type-identity of water will be made in terms of molecular constitution.

Similarly, it seems that type-identity of mental states must be made in terms of psychological laws.

That is the essence of Fodor's criticism of the identity theorist for lacking a relational account of mental states.

We have been considering attempts to define the mind by looking for acceptable type-identity statements in which one side corresponds to our ordinary psychological states, to the terms of folk psychology.

The Cartesian sorts mental states in the right way, according to psychological regularities which hold among our mental states.

But, since we lack third-person access to the dualist's mental states, the Cartesian lacks key elements of a scientifically legitimate theory: verifiability, replicability, etc.

The behaviorist seeks type-identities in terms of observable behavior, but they have problems sorting mental states, since they do so according to observable criteria, which do not do justice to the internal states.

The identity theorist sorts mental states in terms of brain states, which leads to chauvinism.

Functionalists seem to have an advantage over these other positions, because they sort mental states according to their causal roles, in terms of functional states of a probabilistic automaton.

But functionalism appears too liberal.

Given the successive failures of each program, perhaps a new approach is appropriate.

That is, anyway, the moral that the eliminative materialist takes.