

A Possible Solution to Rescue Type Identity

The problem of mental causation (how it is that mental states interact causally with physical states) seems most simply solved by accepting type identity. This is the physicalist doctrine that holds all mental states to be ontologically reducible to physical states. This is not an eliminativist theory as it does not claim that mental states do not exist, because they clearly do, but only that these mental states are actually physical states. As the mental is reducible in this way, there is nothing problematic or mystical about mental causation, as all there is is physical causation.

A consequence of identity theory is that it appears to conflict with the multiple realizability thesis; this holds that a mental state is multiply realizable by a variety of physical states. Putnam argued that in order for identity theory to be correct, all beings exemplifying a certain mental state, e.g. pain, must all exhibit the same physical state, 'it must be nomologically certain that it will also be a state of the brain of any extraterrestrial life that may be found that will be capable of feeling pain before we can even entertain the supposition that it may *be* pain' (Putnam; 1967). As it is not possible for both me and an octopus to exhibit the same physical state, it must be equally impossible, according to Putnam, that we can share the same mental state; therefore identity theory must be false.

I wish to object to Putnam's claim that pain cannot be equated with a physical state, for I see no reason to accept that pains, and certain other sensations, are multiply realizable in the way he believes them committed to being. Part of this confusion is in the way the word "pain" is being used.

Putman's error is seeing "pain" as a specific state as opposed to a general term or kind and thinking that because there is one word for pain, there should only be one exhibited physical state. If x is in a certain physical state p_1 , at a time t_1 , and reports pain sensation, then at time t_2 he is in quite a different physical state p_2 which x also describes as pain sensation, we cannot conclude that a physical state is distinct from a mental state, as it only logically follows that *one* general term cannot be equated with *one* physical state, which says nothing about whether the mental is reducible to the physical.

"Pain" exists only in grammar to generalize about a broad range of sensations; it cannot be given a physical specification as its generality covers an almost infinite number of possible physical states. In an ideal language there may be a different word for each sensation, but as each sensation is arguably different from any other, this would entail an infinitude of words, making communication impossible

It is now clear how a type identity theory of consciousness can accommodate the octopus's pain: its mental state, which is ontologically reducible to its physical state, is not logically restricted to one physical state determined by the term "pain", as "pain" is merely a grammatical operator which describes those sensations we bracket together on account of their similarity. It is from the nature of this 'similarity' that I will propose a possible defence of identity theory.

The phenomenal character of sense sensation is often explained in terms of qualia: when I have a pain in my foot it is because my foot is related to a certain quale. Only

if qualia can be ontologically reduced will it be possible to offer an identity theory of consciousness that appeals to phenomenal content.

A thought experiment that is often pitched against the identity theorist who attempts to reduce qualia to the purely physical is the conceivability of the philosophical zombie. 'A philosophical zombie is a molecule by molecule duplicate of a sentient creature..., but who differs from that creature in lacking any phenomenal content' (Tye: 22). My zombie twin would live a parallel life to me except when I eat food or bang my head, there is nothing it is like for my zombie twin to have those sensations. The argument runs: (i) zombies are conceivable, (ii) whatever is conceivable is possible; (iii) zombies are possible. And so qualia are not metaphysically reducible to the physical.

Wittgenstein viewed the notion of qualia as deriving from a confused idea of consciousness engrained in a mistaken picture of language in which the meaning of a word is the object it stands for, each connection between word and referent being learnt ostensively. Just as I use the word "chair" to pick out a piece of furniture in the world, I say (1) 'I am in pain' to pick out an object, that of pain, and ascribe it to myself. Sentences like (1) he considered avowels as they aren't used to report some private mental entity, but are mere expressions of attitudes or emotions.

Wittgenstein objects to this idea that the words of a language refer to private sensations by noting that if this was the case, this language would only be understood by the private linguist. As qualia are essentially private, it follows that they are incommunicable (PI: §243). But sentences like 'this beer tastes sweet' or 'I am in

pain' are coherent, so their meanings cannot be essentially private. As first personal experience is not some private removable entity, the notion of a creature without it is equally nonsensical. Wittgenstein shows the idea of zombies as part of the Cartesian myth of consciousness, that we are spectators who watch our thoughts, to be a mistaken illusion. Although Wittgenstein's ideas are not without their objectors, anyone rejecting the notion of a non-private language will need to answer the concerns regarding how it is talk of sensations is communicable.

Chalmers' argument for premise (ii), that zombies are metaphysically possible, is grounded in the assertion that their conceivability implies no contradiction. But I think such an argument is grounded again in the Cartesian myth of consciousness; whether or not there is contradiction depends on what framework is in place for the possibility of zombies to contradict. Only if this Cartesian dualist ontology or epiphenomenalism is presupposed, does the conceivability of zombies appear not to imply contradiction, however if I posit a reductive physicalist framework, then there does appear to be contradiction. So what must be revealed before it is decided whether or not zombies imply a contradiction, is what framework in place for it to contradict. But there is no ontological framework in place to contradict, the zombie argument was meant to disprove type identity, yet the crux of its first premise rests on the presupposition of a hidden dualist ontology. This seems a case of the cart before the horse. Although zombies may be imaginable, Chalmers has not shown them to be a metaphysical possibility.

The zombie argument has not satisfactorily succeeded in refuting the reduction of phenomenal content to the physical, lending the possibility for a positive theory of naturalised phenomenal content.

Lewis views qualia as ‘the concept of properties of experience apt for causing abilities to recognise and to imagine experiences of the same type’ (Lewis; 1995). When we have new experiences we gain mental abilities such as the ability to recognise similar experiences and the ability to imagine an experience when we are not having it.

Different experiences confer different abilities according to certain properties these experiences have. For Lewis, qualia are nothing over and above that of the causal process that occurs when we have a pain, see something red, taste beer for the first time, etc. ‘So if the state pain is C-firing, to take a toy example, then the distinctive quale of pains would be the property: being an event of C-firing’ (Lewis; 1995).

When I have a certain sensation for the first time, my physical state is also arranged in a particular way for the first time, this is what creates an illusion of qualia. So when Mary emerges from her black and white room and sees red for the first time, it is that her physical state is arranged in such a way for the first time that makes it seem as if there is something else her mental state must be exemplifying. By Lewis’s account the “what it is likeness” of sensation endorses identity theory in that only the causal interaction of physical components is appealed to.

The causal relevance of these physical components must be described to explain how it is mental processes effect our actions that won’t require appeal to supervenience or the “supernatural”. Some form of functionalism is commonly proposed to account for this causal relevance, and also for the similarity of mental states across species. There

are various types of functionalism, but a generic metaphysical functionalism would hold that talk of mental states is entirely reducible to talk of functional roles. So we could predicate pain P of x when x is in mental state M , if M fulfils a certain functional role. In this way the octopus can be in pain if its mental state fulfils an appropriate functional role, without the requirement that its physical state must mirror mine when I'm in pain. Functionalism has faced many problems, despite that a form of it seems intuitively correct. One objection is that it grants far too many phenomenon mental status; Block's mind of China being a prime example. What is required is not metaphysical functionalism, but a means to explain the causal relevance of physical components.

A version of functionalism called 'mechanism' is discussed by Polger, this explains causal relevance by appealing to a multi-level system, without reducing such explanation to a purely functional analysis. At a characteristic level (level 0), a system's "input – output" relationship is explained in causal terms, as in what effects a system brings about with relevance to particular causes. Above this is the "contextual" mechanism (level +1) which explains how it is the original level fits into a larger picture. Below is the "constitutive" mechanism (level -1) which explains the inner workings of the original level that cause it to produce the effects it does. This is not restricted to a three level explanation, for level one can be constitutively explained down to level $-n$, and contextually explained up to level $+n$. Although mechanism could be confused with functionalism, its fundamental difference is that functional analysis, which would explain causation at the basic level, and possibly the contextual level, makes up only part of the mechanism multilevel analysis. 'A functional analysis of a car might include the role specification of "the air fuel mixer" that must take

certain inputs. But that functional entity – the air-fuel mixer – is a black box about which no more can be said’ (Polger; 2006: 200). This rather dull example shows that where as functionalism relies on metaphysical reduction, mechanistic talk of levels is entirely epistemic, which are entirely relative to which causal level is being discussed, there being no set level that is “level 0”.

The mechanism model is ontologically neutral allowing compatibility with type identity on which it bestows the explanatory power it previously lacked. ‘Mechanistic explanation involves the organisation of entities and activities across the levels’ (Polger: 198). Instead of a blanket functional concept being thrown over certain instances to explain those sensations as “pain”, the mechanism model explains the causal relevance of a system on its “functional” level, its constitutive level, down to level $-n$, and its contextual level, up to level $+n$. It’s this multi-level analysis that helps mechanism avoid the problems faced by functionalism. Where functionalism would have to allow the population of China communicating via walky-talkies as exhibiting consciousness, mechanism would then analyze the constituent parts that make up the particular system to explain their individual causal relevance to the system. This defeats the multiple realizability problem as “pain” can be attributed to both the octopus and myself due to the causal relevance of each of the levels that constitutes our sensations, and those levels which our sensations and reactions have contextual relevance; it paints a more “holistic” causal picture than functionalism.

Mechanism allows a reduction of sensations down to a chemical and biological level, allowing a causal analysis of type identity. To avoid the multiple realizability problem

once more, what is needed is a means of justifying each attribution of a sensation to those states that are physically and phenomenally distinct.

I think it is an uncontroversial claim that we can attribute pain in other creatures due to their behavioural habits. This is not endorsing behaviourism, which is the claim that talk about mental phenomena is actually talk about behavioural disposition. But it seems commonsensical to say of an octopus that is behaving in a way we identify with pain behaviour, we can suppose he is in pain.

It could be said that inter-species pain behaviour is so diverse that similarities would be so rare that we could only ever accurately attribute pain behaviour to those creatures that were socially and physically like us, e.g. chimps. I think Wittgenstein's discussion of family resemblance lends a solution to this point. His most famous example is of trying to determine a description for game that encompasses all those activities we associate with being a game (PI §65-67). With each description there is always a case that eludes definition. The point of Wittgenstein's discussion should not be read that there is no resemblance between games, this would be absurd, but that there is no one sentence that can provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for all the uses of a term (BB p87). Other examples are "art" and "music", and "good". So when we exhibit pain behaviour, or see it in others, there is no one description of what pain behaviour involves that must be satisfied by all instances. Wittgenstein's argument also allows the move that completely distinct phenomenal experiences or physical states can be bracketed under one concept without the need of there being one defining similarity, or even cluster of similarities, that must exist between them.

I have sketched a possible response to the multiple realizability problem that involves a rejection of Putman's use of concepts such as "pain". Type identity was posited and a mechanistic analysis was considered as a means of explaining causal relevance of physical components. From there I explored possible means of how diverse physical states could be considered as instantiations of a concept term such as "pain"; these included phenomenal and behavioural similarity. Wittgenstein's observations showed that a complete analysis that would provide a concept with the necessary and sufficient conditions for its use cannot be given, and thus providing the justification for applying a term to such varied instances. In demonstrating how type identity can be rescued, the problem of mental causation is no longer a problem and can be explained as simply physical causation.

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