Philosophy and the Mind/Body Problem

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Abstract
The thesis of the paper is that it is an illusion to think that the mind/body problem is one that philosophy can expect to solve. The basic reason is that the problem is one of determining the real nature of conscious states, and philosophy lacks the tools to work this out. It is argued that anti-materialist arguments in philosophy tend to rely on modal intuitions which lack any support. It is then argued that pro-materialist arguments, such as those of Smart and of Papineau, are dubious because they either yield a conclusion that is too conditional on what other types of research might discover, or rely on premises that anyone who is not already a materialist can simply query. Even if these points are correct the main thesis remains fairly speculative, but at least some support for it is presented.

In this paper I wish to propose, and try to provide support for, a conjecture about the mind/body problem. The conjecture has two sides. (1) Despite the mind/body problem having been a focus of massive attention in post-war philosophy, indeed, having received as much attention as any problem has, no good grounds of a philosophical kind have been adduced or discovered for favouring a particular answer to the problem. We might call this the 'No Progress Report'. (2) The basic explanation for this failure is that the problem, when correctly conceived, is a scientific one, an empirical one, rather than a philosophical one. Philosophers do not have the right tools to settle that sort of question.

This conjecture reflects the opinion that the basic choice in the mind/body problem is between affirming a materialist (or physicalist) view, and affirming a denial of that view. This has not always been regarded as the fundamental question, but in what I am calling the 'conjecture' the claim is that there have been no good reasons for preferring one of these options to the other. Thus, the first part of the overall conjecture can itself be regarded as a conjunction of two claims; (A) there are no good reasons of a philosophical kind to say that materialism is false and (B) there are no good reasons of a philosophical kind to say that materialism is true.

My view is that conjecture (A) is somewhat easier to support than conjecture (B). The reason is that objections to materialism frequently have the following structure. The first premise in the argument

doi:10.1017/S1358246115000120 ©The Royal Institute of Philosophy and the contributors 2015

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246115000120 Published online by Cambridge University Press

claims that something or other, which I shall call, C is an implication of materialism. The second premise in the argument claims that C is false; i.e. not C. Taken together the falsity of materialism follows. But as I hope to make a case for saying, philosophers have tended to locate a value for C in this recurring pattern that might be called 'modal'; they tend to claim that if materialism is true then so and so must at least be *possible*, or, perhaps, *impossible*, and then the suggestion is that the modal implication is false. The suspicion that the conjecture reflects is that the final affirmative modal premises in these types of anti-materialist arguments are not properly supported. The attitude is that even in the absence of a theory about the epistemology of modality it is reasonable to be suspicious of such modal claims.

By contrast the arguments in support of materialism do not have a recurring structure or content; they can be any assemblage of premises that together imply materialism is true. There is no limitation in advance to their content. At this point I retreat somewhat to the following claim; the actual arguments that in fact have been presented are not sound, with no good reason being contained in them for supposing that materialism must be true. However, I do have one reason of a general sort to defend this speculation. The fundamental question that is being asked in the mind/body problem is – what is the *real nature* of mental processes? Principally, do such processes or states have a real nature that is exhausted by elements or features that count as physical? A good analogous question is; what is the real nature of *water*? If that comparison is correct then surely it seems likely that the only route to an answer is via the hard work of analysing as far as one can what is really, actually, present when such processes or features are present. This seems to be an empirical or more generally a scientific question. If that progression of thoughts looks cogent then there is a general reason to be suspicious of philosophy as the discipline that can reveal the truth about this issue.

In fact, the two conjectures that I have separated can be regarded as flowing from the same basic idea; the idea that we want to know what the *real* nature of mental states and processes is. The modal based criticism of materialism fail because the basis for the modal judgements is too flimsy to reveal anything about the real nature of things; and the failure of philosophy to support materialism reflects the fact that philosophy has no proper method for revealing truths about real natures of spatio-temporal processes.

Such a conjecture is, actually, one that many people would accept; it is accepted, for example, by lots of scientists, who are sceptical of the pretensions of philosophy in this area. The weakness in their dismissal of philosophy is that they tend not to know what kinds of

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considerations philosophers have actually adduced, since they do not read much, if any, philosophy. This ignorance of philosophy means that they make their criticisms from a position of weakness. I am trying to support the same claim on the basis of a more informed consideration of what philosophers do actually say.

I need to stress that I do not think that I can prove or strongly substantiate the conjecture here. I want, rather, to propose it and to assemble some considerations in its favour.

1. The Mind/Body Problem and the Self/Body Problem

It is helpful, I think, to begin by making a comparison between two problems. The first is what I am calling the mind/body problem; the second is what I like to call the self/body problem. These are not the same problem, but they are linked, and comparing the styles of argument that philosophers have employed to settle them will, I hope, turn out to be valuable.

The mind/body problem asks what the relation is between what the word 'mind' stands for here and what the word 'body' stands for here. The word 'mind' stands for certain aspects or features of the world, what we might label the 'mental features'. No definition of that label needs to be given; we give examples of what the label covers and people catch on to what is meant; examples of mental features are the occurrence of experiences, such as having a pain or seeing a table, and the presence of psychological features such as having a belief or a desire or an intention. These are not the only examples that are normally used – but for present purposes they are enough. The word 'body' here stands for physical occurrences and aspects of the world – again, the label is anchored by examples. Examples would be neurons firing in a certain region of the brain, or weighing a certain amount, and so on. What we want to know is; what is the relation between the former features and the latter sort of features?

Now, I want to stress that this question is about what we can call the REAL nature of these mental features. It is obvious to us that the physical is widespread in the world and that physical things can be and are present in the absence of any mental features; the focus of the question is – what is the nature of the mental features, in particular, do they have a real nature that involves in their being present nothing more than a conglomeration of physical features, or does their presence require or involve more than that?

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It is quite natural to reach for explications of the problem along lines such as; are mental features anything over and above physical features; are they nothing but physical features? Do they come down to physical features? Or, perhaps, is their presence constituted by the presence of physical features? These all seem natural, suggestive and non-technical forms of words for fixing the kind of relation that we want to inquire about. Philosophers have also introduced technical or semi-technical expressions for the relevant relation. They talk about the mental being supervenient on the physical, and of the mental being reducible to the physical.

I want to note that materialism in the philosophy of mind is not the thesis that everything is physical – we should not link materialism with such issues as whether God exists and is not physical – nor is it a question about whether it is possible for there to be non-physical mental states, nor whether perhaps there are some non-physical mental states somewhere – it is a question about the real nature of the mental states that we have and are familiar with.

These remarks have been by way of an introduction to the mind/body problem. I want, though, to compare that problem with what I am calling the self/body problem. What problem is that?

In the self/body problem, if posed about me, the relata are myself, that is whatever object the word 'I' picks out when used by me, and that object we call 'my body'. What is the relation between those things? This is of course the central question that Descartes asks about himself. Now, the simplest candidate relation is that of identity. Descartes in fact wishes to claim something much stronger than the thesis that I and my body are not identical, but he certainly needs to claim at least that. So we can ask; how well does he support this weaker non-identity claim? He argues for the non-identity by selecting supposed property differences between myself and my body. In his famous argument in Meditation VI one supposed difference is that my body is essentially extended but that I am not. Another supposed difference is that I am essentially a thinking thing, but my body is not. Now, what surely strikes us, as we stare at these contrasting claims, is that the modal claims Descartes implies (or makes) about me have no obvious justification. Why is Descartes entitled to say that I am not essentially extended? Descartes' reason to think he is not essentially extended is that when he thinks about himself he cannot there and then discern a reason for thinking that he must be extended. The reply to this, more or less immediately provided by Arnauld in his masterly Fourth Set of Objections, was, in nuce, that this failure to find a reason cannot be transformed into a positive reason to deny that he is essentially extended. It is quite simply and

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solely the absence of a positive reason. Why does Descartes affirm that he is essentially thinking? That rests on a confusion of an epistemic claim that he (obviously) must be thinking (since he is considering a problem) with the metaphysical thesis that must think at all times he exists. Once that confusion is set aside we simply need to accumulate evidence as to whether we do always think, and as Locke pointed out we do not seem to! He noticed that we fall asleep! Neither modal claim is secure enough to play the role of premises in an argument determining our nature.

Consideration of Descartes' treatment of the Self/Body problem suggests two morals. The first is that we should be very careful about assenting to modal judgements which are supposed to lead to substantial metaphysical conclusions. Second, when assessing such modal claims we have no vantage point to determine their truth prior to investigating in some more ordinary way the actual nature of the things we are dealing with. These are morals which I hope to apply, in the next section, to some standard anti-materialist arguments.

2. Anti-Materialist Arguments

As well as providing us with some morals that I hope will guide our engagement with some anti-materialist arguments , the brief analysis above of Descartes' famous arguments, supposedly supporting his conclusion that we are distinct from our bodies , and that, therefore, our mental processes involve non-bodily elements, has also turned those anti-materialist arguments aside. There are, of course, other famous anti-materialist arguments (or lines of thought) associated with, for example, Sellars, Nagel, and Jackson (to name but a few) but I want in this present paper to focus on a style of argument that originates with Kripke,[1] and which in a modified form is also central to David Chalmer's approach. I think that it is this style of argument that has had most influence recently, leading to a popularity for anti-materialism. I propose however to formulate what I see as the central inference in my own terms, and to discuss it without looking in detail at the text of these formidable writers. I am doing that because it seems to me that the grounds for suspicion about them can be brought out in a fairly direct way. Anyway, that is what I shall try to do here.

[1] In Kripke, S, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1982)

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The background to the sort of argument I am considering is the idea, shared by philosophers responsible for the revival of materialism in the 1950's, is that the materialist identities are contingently true. It was assumed this followed from the idea that claims in favour of these identities will be empirically supported. They held too that the identities that science had already endorsed – say that heat is molecular motion – are contingent, and such identities provided the model for what materialists took themselves to be postulating. For many people this shared conception was overturned by Kripke who persuaded many of us that identity judgements, flanked by rigid designators, are not contingent, but are, rather, if true necessarily true, and if false necessarily false. Armed with this logical result linking identity and necessity Kripke devised a type of objection to the identities central to materialism.

If, say, it is proposed that pain (or having a pain) is identical to C-fibre firing, then, given the character of the designator involved, it is a claim that implies that necessarily pain is C-fibre stimulation. But it seems that it is possible for there to be C-fibre firings without pain being felt. Why is that? The possibility claim is based, at root, on our capacity to imagine or conceive of it happening – an exercise of imagination that seems quite simple and easy. All I need to do is to imagine a subject with firing C-fibres but feeling no pain. It could be myself or another.

This all seems very simple, but anyone attempting to refute the suggested materialist identity in this way seems to have armed themselves with a pattern of argument with which they can give philosophical refutations of current chemistry and physics. If water is H2O then necessarily water is H2O, but it seems as easy to imagine that there is water without H2O, as it is to imagine C-fibre firings without pain. In the blink of an eyelid a massive chemical insight has been achieved, and the nature of water has been rendered totally mysterious.

Sadly, no-one would take such philosophical chemistry seriously. On one interpretation of his view Kripke's highly ingenious response to what is in effect this problem is to attempt to draw a contrast between the water/H2O case and the pain/C-fibre firing case. He proposed that what we are counting as imagining water without H2O is really not that at all. We are, rather, imagining a substance which is phenomenally like water, which appears like water, without H2O, and of course that is a possibility, whereas when we imagine C-fibre firing without pain that is precisely what we are doing. In this way the objection to the materialist identity survives, without current chemistry being cast into the flames. This,

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however, does not quite have the ring of truth. For one thing, it seems that if I were to imagine water in my basement I would generate precisely the same imagery that I do when I apparently imagine water without H2O. How can that be imagining water in one case but not the other? But further, what, we might ask, are we doing when we imagine C-fibre firing without pain? The answer is we simply imagine no pain, painlessness, and, as it were, imaginatively say to, or represent to, ourselves – (and) the body's C-fibres are not firing. If that is an accurate account of what such imagining is one has to ask how being able to do that can ground a rejection of a substantial proposal about the nature of pain and its physical basis.

What I want to suggest here is that we should conclude that there cannot really be any legitimate basis for affirming a real possibility for either water or for pain in the imaginative capacities we have in relation to the phenomena involved. With both water and pain the order of investigation has to be to discern the nature of the thing in question, thereby grounding, if possible, identities and necessities, and on the basis of that assign reality to any suggested possibilities. We have no route to determining the possibilities by any exercise of armchair conceivings thereby settling claims about the real nature of anything. Such imaginings are amongst the easiest things we can do, and they cannot ground any insights into reality. These are simply the morals we learnt from Descartes' arguments.

The same pattern of argument is possessed by an objection to materialism that has gripped people recently. The argument is that materialism entails that zombies are impossible, but, obviously, they are possible, so materialism is false. David Chalmers has presented this case very powerfully, though he embeds it within a somewhat more complex framework than the one I am employing.[2] Now, a zombie is a creature that is physically exactly like one of us but which lacks conscious experience. It seems to me quite reasonable to say that if materialism gives a correct account of the real nature of conscious states then zombies are impossible. Since the physical states that zombies possess are the states which according to the theory are conscious states they cannot have the physical states without having the mental states.

Again, though, the question this argument faces is why in advance of considering the tenability of the theoretical proposal we are entitled to affirm that zombies are possible. The answer is that we can imagine that they are, or that we cannot rule them out from out

[2] See Chalmers, D., *The Conscious Mind* (Oxford University Press, 1996), ch. 3.

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armchairs in any way. But imagining a zombie is child's play; we simply imagine a body being physically identical to say my body now, and that is to do nothing more than visualising a body and, so to speak, saying to oneself its exactly like mine now, and imagine it insensate. That is easy, but it is surely obvious that such a simple exercise cannot yield any insight into the nature of the phenomenon in question. And an inability to locate an impossibility in the idea of a zombie by simply thinking about it with great intensity for any length of time cannot be turned into a demonstration of possibility. That confusion is the one exposed by Arnauld in relation to Descartes.[3]

My suggestion is that this style of argument is transparently weak. But in effect if philosophers are to argue against materialism arguments of this general style are what they most (and must) usually offer. It is plain though that there is no lever here to oppose a serious theory of the nature of conscious states. It is time for philosophers to acknowledge that they cannot offer any serious reasons to acknowledge the falsity of materialism.[4]

3. Pro-materialist Arguments

Making a case for thinking that there are no good pro-materialist arguments is, for a reason given earlier, not easy. But in an abbreviated form the way I want to propose to think about them is that either the premises are too far away from the core of the issue to give significant weight to favour materialism, or they are too near to materialism itself and are such that no one who is not already a materialist should believe them.

In the space available here I shall restrict myself to two arguments, one of both sorts, or so I shall argue.[5]

The first one comes from Smart's justly famous early paper 'Sensations and Brain Processes' published in 1959.[6] Smart's paper

[3] My argument is, in a compressed form, in agreement with the sort of verdict that Robert Kirk ultimately proposes about this sort of case, which in fact he invented and analysed thoroughly.

[4] Another confusion in some philosophical opposition to materialism is that of confusing providing a metaphysically coherent alternative to materialism with actually assembling evidence that their alternative is true and materialism is false.

[5] I may of course be wrong in how I classify the two pro-materialist arguments I consider, but that would not be a fatal error.

[6] Smart, J.J.C. 'Sensations and Brain Processes' in the *Philosophical Review* **68** (1959), 141–56

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is one of a number that appeared about the same time and which succeeded in revising the way people thought about the mind/body problem. Prior to the movement which brought the psycho-physical identity theory to prominence amongst philosophers it had been assumed, first, that the basic choice in the philosophy of mind was between Cartesian dualism and its denial, and, second, that conceptual and a priori considerations of some sort could be adduced to reject dualism. This was the attitude of Ryle, Strawson, and, perhaps, something like if fits what Wittgenstein supposed.[7] The movement that Smart belonged to had the effect of persuading people that the basic choice is between physicalism and its denial, and that that choice is not decidable on a priori grounds. I am in agreement with those two claims, and I hold that Smart is one of the people who should be credited with persuading people that they are true.

However, in his famous paper Smart presents a general argument in favour of accepting the physicalist view. The overall argument is, as I read it, based on an appeal to Ockham's 'razor', which we can count as saying that other things being equal we should accept simpler theories. The main aim of the Smart's paper is to show that other things are equal, and that materialism is the simpler theory. It is hard not to agree with Smart that materialism is simpler than its denial; in effect materialism reduces mental features to physical ones, whereas its denial involves saying there are physical features and also distinct mental ones. It is also hard not to agree with Ockham's principle. The basic problem with Smart's argument lies in the claim that we are in a position to affirm that other things *are* equal. Smart's strategy to show that other things are equal is to take what he considers to be the difficulties with materialism and to provide answers to them. His actual discussion, I want to suggest, suffers from two deficiencies. The first is that he does not select all the difficulties, and so whatever the accuracy of what he does say about the ones he confronts, he is not in a position to say that other things are equal. The second is that he obviously does not reply adequately to some of the difficulties he does discuss. So, again, we

[7] There is an interesting historical issue here; the description I have given of the background approach to the issue applies to the period around the Second World War and after it. It is not at all clear that the same assumptions applied to the treatment of the mind/body problem before that. If they did not it is interesting to ask what the earlier assumptions were, and why different ones came to dominate philosophical practice at about the time of the Second World War.

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cannot derive from his paper the conclusion that 'other things are equal'.[8] There is though a further and serious issue which Smart's method raises. Smart's approach assumes that the context of discussion he is in will acquaint him with the difficulties that need answering. That, however, represents a massive assumption, which has no obvious justification. Smart is assuming that materialism is a philosophical proposal, and so the context of discussion is philosophy. It seems closer to the truth to say it is a highly general empirical theory, and so Smart is simply not in a position to feel confident as to what the difficulties are. He is in no position to feel he can say with confidence that other things really are equal. We can say that Smart is too far away from the sort of issue that it is to be able to say anything that leaves us confident as to what is actually true.

The second pro-materialist argument I wish to focus on is one that Professor Papineau calls the 'Causal Argument'. He has expounded this argument on numerous occasions but I wish to concentrate on the account he presents in his book *Thinking About Consciousness*.[9] In that book he describes the argument as the 'one definitive argument for materialism'.[10] This sounds as if he thinks that the argument is unanswerable, but he does say later that 'the argument may not be conclusive', so it is probably accurate to summarise his attitude as thinking that it is, at least, a very strong argument.[11] The argument rests on three premises, which I shall initially formulate in Papineau's words.

[8] I do not here have the space to support this verdict on Smart's discussion, but I assume that most people would agree with what I say. But one example where his discussion is on the wrong tracks would be the topic-neutral analyses he proposed for psychological reports, which should strike anyone as unacceptable.

[9] Papineau, D. *Thinking about Consciousness* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002). My reason for choosing Papineau's version for discussion is not that the line of thought embodied in the argument is his sole invention, but, rather, that he provides an especially clear and thoroughly considered version of the argument. The advantage of focussing on Papineau is the thoroughness with which he presents the argument. There is, though, one disadvantage. Others expound arguments of more or less the same structure but they do not necessarily build in all the assumptions that Papineau does, some of which I shall base criticisms on, so there is a degree of loss of generality in the present discussion.

[10] Papineau, *Thinking about Consciousness*, 15.

[11] Ibid., 16.

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(1) Conscious mental occurrences have physical effects.
(2) All physical effects are fully caused by purely physical prior histories.
(3) The physical effects of conscious causes aren't always overdetermined by distinct causes.

The conclusion of the argument is that materialism is true, which Papineau explains as meaning that 'the conscious occurrences mentioned in (1) must be identical with some part of the physical causes mentioned in (2)'.[12]

Filling the premises out a little bit will help to convey the force of the argument, though I am aware that many reading this will be able to do this filling out for themselves. Claim (1) rests on such standard examples as someone's feeling thirsty, which is a conscious mental occurrence, leading to, or bringing it about that, he or she moves towards the fridge to get a beer. That movement is a physical effect of a conscious mental occurrence. It is obviously reasonable to think of this claim as being what we would call 'common sense'. Premise (2) is Papineau's formulation of what he calls the 'Completeness of Physics'. This represents, according to him, a finding of current physical science. It has therefore the status of a claim that philosophers must simply accept and cannot challenge. (2) then adds a scientific finding to the common sense of (1). What (3) adds is an apparently reasonable claim about causation. Papineau's view is that there can be overdetermination of effects by causes, but that it can hardly be true that whenever a conscious mental event causes a physical movement there is an over-determined effect – brought about by the physical causal chain but also by another causal chain initiated by the conscious mental occurrence. Again, there is a strong inclination to agree with that.

Before I start analysing this line of thought I want to cast some gentle aspersions on one feature of Papineau's general understanding of the issue that emerges in his discussion before he sets out the causal argument.[13] The feature is that Papineau says that what makes

[12] These quotations come from Papineau, *Thinking about Consciousness*, 17–18.

[13] Another feature of his discussion that I shall consider only in a footnote is that Papineau envisages a critic of materialism saying that it is evidence that the popularity of the position is, in some sense, merely a matter of fashion, that is has become popular only in the second half of the twentieth century. Papineau's response to this worry is to say that this fact has an historical explanation, which is that the position rests on the scientific principles of the completeness of physics, which is a scientific finding that has only emerged in that period. I am inclined to respond to this by remarking 1] that

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consciousness so 'philosophically interesting' is that 'having a conscious experience is like something'.[14] This is an insight that he credits to Nagel, and one remarkable feature of current philosophical discussion of the mind/body problem is how many philosophers share this view. I am sceptical about two components of this remark. The first thing that strikes me as odd here is that if it is true that talking about 'being like something' captures a very important feature of consciousness, (which is the so-called Nagelian insight), why describe that as something that makes consciousness *'philosophically interesting'*? If it is the crucial property of consciousness then it is presumably a feature that anyone theorising about it – whether a philosopher or not – needs to take note of. To think that this important feature makes the phenomenon 'philosophically' interesting is, in effect, to think that the question as to its status is a philosophical question, an attitude that this essay is dedicated to undermining. The second reservation that I wish to advance is that it seems to me not at all likely that the Nagelian slogan does highlight the most important feature of consciousness. All I can do here is to make a start at generating a doubt. One question is; what does the slogan actually mean? One use of 'like' is to record similarities or resemblances – as in, 'She is like her elder sister'. But it cannot be a deep point about consciousness that it resembles something, since everything resembles something, or if there can be things which do not resemble anything, then there can be experiences which do not resemble anything. Another use of 'like' is simply to report the way something is. Thus when we ask 'What is her boyfriend like?' all we are requesting is to be told how the boyfriend is – is he, say, kind or witty, or handsome? We are not asking to be told that he resembles someone. Relative to this use to be told that consciousness is like something is to be told that it is some way – say painful – and, of course, conscious experiences have to be some way. Again, however, everything is some way! There is, therefore, the suspicion that the slogan really picks out nothing of special interest about consciousness at all.[15]

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the fact that a view becomes popular rather late in our intellectual history is in itself no evidence at all that its acceptance is merely a matter of fashion, and so that is not a charge that needs answering, and 2] that it probably is not true that what leads philosophers to accept materialism is anything quite so general as the 'completeness of physics'.

[14] Papineau, *Thinking about Consciousness*, 13.

[15] I try to substantiate this scepticism in Snowdon 'On the What-it-is-like-ness of Experience' in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* Vol **48** No. 1 (2010), 8–27

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I want now to engage with the causal argument itself. Before doing so, I need to stress that I do not think that the points I shall make amount to the last words about it. There are evidently responses to the points that I have not anticipated, and there are aspects to the argument I have not properly understood yet. However, the first point that I wish to make is that it is not clear that the argument as presented leads to the materialist conclusion. What is that conclusion? As Papineau puts it at one point it is the claim that 'conscious states must be …identical to brain states, or something similar'.[16] Clearly by this Papineau means at least that *all* human conscious states must be physical states of the sort he picks out. Does the argument get to that conclusion? There are two problems. Are we in a position to affirm premise (1)? Many of us would be inclined to assent to the (type of) example that Papineau gives, but are we in a position to say that every conscious state causes a physical state? It would not be unreasonable to suppose that we do not know that that is true. But that immediately means that any consequence derived by this argument will only apply to conscious states that fall under (1), and we cannot confidently affirm that is all conscious states. There is a second restriction. The argument works by deriving a consequence from a problem with a certain sort of over-determination – expressed in premise (3). However, when Papineau expresses the denial of over-determination he merely says that 'the physical effects of conscious causes aren't always over-determined by distinct causes'. This means that the consequences of the need to rule out over-determination only applies to some cases. We have no idea how many is 'some'. If, therefore, the materialist conclusion does follow for some of the cases the general conclusion is more or less this – of those conscious states in us which have physical effects, (which we may not be able to say is even most of the) at least some of them are identical to physical states. As it stands this conclusion is not materialism.

Is there a reply to this problem? It seems to me that if there are no other problems with the argument then it can be said that it gives the conclusion that some conscious states are physical states. But is there a way to get from that to the general conclusion that materialism is true? One suggestion would be that it would simply be reasonable to generalise to such a conclusion. If some conscious mental states are physical states then all are. Now, that is certainly a proposal that has something to be said for it, but assessing it raises issues not often faced up to. Are we entitled or obliged to hold in advance that

[16] Papineau, *Thinking about Consciousness*, 14.

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conscious experiences have basically a uniform nature? It is an assumption of philosophical debate about the mind/body problem that a uniform universal account will be true, but once that assumption has been queried it does not seem to be unquestionable.

A supplementary response though that could be made is that if the argument shows that some conscious mental states are physical states then it also shows that there are no sound arguments showing that that conscious states cannot be physical states. That would mean that anti-materialists have no arguments and so there cannot be any block to generalising to materialism. It would be a matter of some significance to have discredited standard anti-materialist arguments, but this response simply assumes that any problems for materialism must consist in highly general philosophical arguments, that if sound, apply to every case. That assumption is not legitimate once the assumption is no longer being made that the appropriate method here is simply philosophical argumentation. My feeling then is that there is a not obviously repairable gap in the argument, even if each premise is accepted.

I want next to suggest that a second problem (or gap) arises even if we accept all the main premises. The reason to adopt the property identification that is central to physicalism (for the purposes of engaging with the present argument) is that it is the way to avoid over-determination. The conscious mental property doing the work is the physical property doing the work; so the work is not being done twice over. But the movement of reasoning here is not obviously correct. The assumption is that only identity between properties avoids the threat of over-determination. How, though, have we been persuaded to think that there are no other possible relations between properties which can also avoid the over-determination threat? Thus, in the domain of objects, it is quite popular to think that there can be constitution relations between non-identicals – say the lump of clay and the statue – without that generating problems of causality. Maybe the same is possible for properties. I do not here want to develop such an account, nor am I affirming some such alternative is actually possible. The point is simply that the transition to identity is not obviously correct.

I want to suggest, though, that there are other problematic aspects to the argument. I want to engage next with premise (3) – the over-determination premise. Papineau's view is that over-determination is possible, but, he says that not every case where a conscious mental state causes a physical effect can be a case of over-determination. Now, it is not doubt true that as we approach this argument we would tend to be sceptical that causation by mental states could always be cases

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246115000120 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of over-determination. In fact, many of us would be rather amazed if it could ever be a case of over-determination. However, Papineau's own position is more problematic. He allows that there is nothing problematic in a general way about over-determination, and so for him the problem resides in the idea that it could always be over-determination. This, though, faces the following question; if most of the cases could be cases of over-determination, why could not all cases be so? One might add; what investigations should convince us that not all cases are cases of over-determination? It cannot, surely, be correct to simply base the central argument for materialism on a conviction which is based on no investigation or special argument.

Now, I want to make a general remark about premise (2) – the completeness of physics. Many important questions could be raised here, some suggested by what can be described as a bravura study that Papineau presents of the emergence of this idea, in the Appendix to his book. A viewpoint which seems reasonable to me, in the light of that Appendix, (though I may have missed part of its point), is that if anyone is seriously of a mind to think that conscious mental states are causally efficacious in the physical world without there being over-determination, he or she would simply not accept the claim which is what is understood as the completeness of physics. They would resist it by thinking that the empirical research which leads people to hold the view has overlooked something. It is not clear quite how specific one would have to be to react in this way. This sort of possible response is what leads me to say that this premise is one that one would be likely to endorse only if one is more or less already a physicalist.[17]

Finally, I want finally to pick out and express some scepticism about what seems to be Papineau's attitude towards the argument under investigation in two respects. First, Papineau points out, quite correctly, that the abstract claim which is the conclusion of the causal argument does not say what physical property any given conscious mental property is identical with. Science on the other hand can, by correlational research, 'establish specific pairings' but cannot, by itself, establish that the paired properties are actually identical. So, according to him, the abstract conclusion of the causal argument is 'needed' to 'licence the move from the' correlations to the 'identifications'.[18] Two things seem questionable about this attitude.

[17] Perhaps I should say – only if one is already not any sort of dualist. Clearly eliminativists, who are not physicalists in the sense meant here, can endorse this premise.

[18] All quotes here are from Papineau, *Thinking about Consciousness*, 21.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246115000120 Published online by Cambridge University Press

First, an established correlation between mental state (type) M1 and physical state (type) P1 in itself does not yield an identity. Maybe they are simply instantiated together without being identical. No philosophical argument or principle can validate the inference to identity from correlation since such an inference is not safe. More significantly, though, the attitude seems to be that empirical research, which is to say science, needs an abstract philosophical argument to support claims about specific property identities. This seems highly unlikely. Surely scientific research can accumulate evidence of property identities given its own resources. It is not necessary to explain here how that is possible. All that is required is to acknowledge it obviously is possible. Further, unless this were possible it is hard to see how the general philosophical argument itself could work, since it depends on the general claim that physics is complete, which presumably rests on property identifications prior to the general philosophical argument. Second, Papineau says (on page 23) that 'there remains the possibility that the anti-materialist arguments to be examined later will show that conscious mind and brain cannot be identical. If this is so, then one of the premises of the causal argument must be false, And in that case premise 1 seems a likely a candidate as any.' This however seems to pitch us back to a point made above about Smart. First, Papineau evidently assumes that should any difficulty emerge it will be from philosophical arguments of the kind he is about to consider. But that is unjustified, unless we suppose that the problem is a philosophical issue. Second, it confers upon the argument a character rather different to how it seems to be presented. Initially it seemed to be an argument that should convince us that there are no difficulties with materialism, since it shows us that it is true. Now it becomes an argument that subsequent investigation – of whatever sort – might undermine. It becomes like Smart's argument a ceteris paribus argument, and the idea that it is a definitive argument has been adandoned.

I have tried to generate a sense that both the arguments of Smart and of Papineau are not as powerful as their proponents think, and thereby to at least raise the question whether philosophers have convincingly supported materialism.

4. Conclusion

In a short paper like this it is impossible to present a strong case in favour of the major cultural shift that is needed if its central claim about the limitations of philosophy are correct. Its assessment of

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each argument it deals with will no doubt be met by the counter-claim that these assessments are defective and overlook something. Or the overall argument will be met by the claim that there is a powerful but overlooked argument for or against materialism. This is inevitable. On the other side we can say a few things. 1] If the central idea in this paper is worth some time of day its defence has to start somewhere, with all these inevitable limitations. 2] I hope that the negative evaluation of the typical arguments offered by both sides is not obviously flawed, and if that is granted my general claim receives some support. 3] There is, it seems to me, the strong general point that the debate about the nature of conscious mental states is a debate about the real nature of processes that we undergo, and are familiar with in their relatively superficial aspects, and investigations into such matters seems, in a broad sense, scientific and empirical. I hope these considerations make the proposal worth thinking about. I do not propose though to try to think through here what the cultural consequences of acceptance of this idea would be, beyond remarking that the consequences would relate both to the conduct by philosophers of the mind/body debate, but also to the way philosophers discuss serious ontological questions generally.[19]

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[19] I am very grateful to Anthony O'Hear for the invitation to take part in the lecture series out of which this volume grew, and also to Adam Ferner for help both with the actual talk and with the paper. I also wish to thank Lucy O'Brien, Rory Madden, Penelope Rowlatt, and others who took part in a seminar at UCL at which the paper was read, and to a number of people in the audience at the talk in Royal Institute. Many thanks too to Joel Yurdin and the seniors at Haverford College for discussion of the issues raised here.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246115000120 Published online by Cambridge University Press