

9: It is possible to know about minds (e.g., one's own mind) without knowing that brains exist. Given that this is true, how could mental states be physical states?

Introduction:

Some hold that mental states are physical states, henceforth, the MaP thesis. Critics question this by suggesting the possibility of knowing about minds without awareness of the existence of brains. However, multiple interpretations of the MaP thesis exist. This paper will introduce and analyze three interpretations, address the flaws in the objection within the predicative interpretation, and present reasons against the other two interpretations.

Interpretation of "Being":

The concept of "being" in the MaP thesis can be interpreted in three ways: existential, veridical, and predicative. As our comprehension of the term "are" is pivotal in effectively addressing objections, the following section aims to present interpretations for each of these three forms of "being."

1) Veridical Interpretation (Rejected)

According to the veridical interpretation, the MaP thesis asserts the identity between mental states and their corresponding physical states. As a rough illustration, the mental state of happiness is nothing but the production of dopamine.

This veridical interpretation is rejected for two reasons. Firstly, it must address the challenge that certain mental states, like consciousness, cannot be entirely explained by physical processes. Secondly, even if they can be explained in physical terms, further demonstration is needed to justify the complete substitution of subjective experiences with physical mechanisms.

2) Existential Interpretation (Rejected)

The existential interpretation suggests that mental states are included within the category of physical states. Unlike the veridical interpretation, it acknowledges subjective experiences as individual perspectives of mental states but still categorizes them as physical. For example, it would consider the emotion of "happiness" as a physical phenomenon.

However, this interpretation is also problematic because it does not provide a clear criterion for defining what qualifies as "physical." It lacks a distinct boundary or set of standards to determine what can be categorized as a "physical" state.

3) Predicative Interpretation (Adopted)

According to a predicative interpretation, the phrase "A is B" signifies an equivalence between A and B in relation to their properties, i.e., A exhibits the properties associated with B. For instance, the sentence "John is a doctor" implies that John possesses the properties commonly attributed to doctors.

Evidently, A can possess multiple properties that extend beyond a specific category, allowing for simultaneous identification as B, C, and so forth. For example, the event "heating copper in a flame" can be interpreted both in physical terms as the excitation of electrons, absorption of energy, and emission of photons and in a phenomenological perspective as the flame turning blue.

Applying it to our case, the MaP thesis conveys the belief that mental states exhibit physical properties. Due to the potential for them to encompass multiple properties, it is unwarranted to equate them with their physical manifestations.

This rejection of ontological identity entails their mutual epistemological independence. The lack of knowledge regarding the physical perspective of the mind (i.e., the brain) does not undermine the comprehension of other perspectives. Therefore, since the phrase "know about" does not imply complete knowledge, it remains possible to know about minds without knowing that brains exist.

Conclusion:

This paper presents three interpretations of the MaP thesis - existential, veridical, and predicative. It advocates for the predicative interpretation and defends the possibility of knowing about minds without knowing that brains exist though mental states are physical states.