

# Consciousness #16



# **NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND**

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE



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[newdirectionsproject.com](http://newdirectionsproject.com)

# Seminar 16

1. Recap: the story so far
2. What, then, is a non-physicalist conception of the mind?

# **1. Recap: the story so far**

- (a) The general idea of physicalism
- (b) Scepticism about physicalism
- (c) Consciousness and qualia
- (d) Conscious thought

## **(a) The general idea of physicalism**

Everything is physical

Everything can be explained in physical terms

Everything supervenes on the physical

# The ‘physical’

The subject-matter of physics

# **Non-starters and unexamined ideas**

Eliminative physicalism/materialism?

‘Type’ versus ‘token’ physicalism?

Non-reductive physicalism?

# **Ontological and explanatory reduction**

Ontological reduction: identifying (e.g.) the class of mental things as belonging to the class of physical things

Explanatory reduction: explaining why one theory is true in terms of the truth of another



# **All physicalism is reductive**

A genuinely physicalist view must be either ontologically reductive or explanatorily reductive or both

(NB a controversial claim!)

# Physicalism or emergence?

Necessary supervenience without explanatory reduction — is this physicalism or emergence?

Why does this matter?

## **(b) scepticism about physicalism**

Why believe in physicalism at all?

I claimed: the causal argument

(We may return to this next week)

# **Some bad other reasons**

‘No spooks!’

Science is ‘the measure of all things’

Physicalist ‘intuitions’

## **(c) Consciousness and qualia**

Two ways of using the word 'qualia':

(1) conscious properties

(2) non-intentional, intrinsic (etc.) properties

# Against qualia

I reject the claim that the second notion of qualia should play any role in the understanding of consciousness

## **(d) Conscious thought**

How should we understand conscious thought?

Thought vs belief

States and events

# **Intentionality and consciousness**

Cognitive phenomenology: there is a phenomenology of cognition

Phenomenal intentionality: some intentionality is explained in terms of an independently understood notion of phenomenal consciousness



# **Intentional object, mode and content**

Object: what it is the mind is directed on when in an intentional state

Modes: the general categories into which mental states fall (e.g. belief, imagination, visual perception etc.)

Content: the way in which the object is represented, in a given mode

# Lessons

Content is not just propositional content

We are not obliged to understand the content of a conscious thought or perception solely in terms of the idea of a proposition

Propositions should be thought of as models

Some attributions (models) are better at describing how the subject's conscious mind is configured (what Frege called the subject's **ideas**)

The facts about how the subject's conscious mind is configured are facts about what I call **phenomenal content**

# Content and ‘vehicle’

For semantic content, there is a distinction between the content (how the world is represented) and the vehicle of the content

# **The message and the medium**

The same content can be represented in different vehicles (e.g. sentences and pictures)

The same content in the same vehicle can be realised in different media (e.g. brain and computer)

# Conscious content: a hypothesis

For a conscious mental episode, there is no distinction between the vehicle and the content

Words going through your mind, images, associations etc. are part of the content

## **2. what, then, is a non-physicalist conception of the mind?**

Two approaches:

- (i) take the traditional materialism/dualism distinction and defend the dualist side
- (ii) reject the traditional materialism/dualism distinction

# **The traditional distinction**

Remember substance:

Aristotle: natural unities

Descartes: that which is capable of independent existence

Leibniz: simples (no parts)



# **Dualism, materialism, idealism**

Materialism: there is only material substance

Dualism: there is material substance and there are mental substances

Idealism: there is only mental substance

# What this presupposes

Substance

**But do we formulate our ontology in terms of substance?**

Which notion of substance?

If you do not employ the concept of substance, then how can you formulate the traditional distinction?

# **My claim**

If you reject substance dualism because you reject substance, then you should reject materialism (physicalism) too

**NB this has little to do with ‘matter’**

Is everything made of matter?

Not according to physics!

(Spacetime, forces, fields, anti-matter etc.)

# **Are there other formulations?**

All objects are physical objects?

All properties are physical properties?

All processes, events, tropes (etc.) are physical?

# **Why believe any of these claims?**

We should not base our understanding of the mind on half-understood generalisations from contemporary physics

Many of those who defend physicalism appeal to physics with a looseness that they would not tolerate in the rest of their philosophical endeavours

# Lesson

Forget about trying to investigate the mind by  
philosophising about physics

Back to the things themselves!



To be continued...

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