

Lecture Six

Part Two:

Possibility, Conceivability,
Supervenience, and Zombies

Plan

- POSSIBILITY (logical, physical, biological)
- CONCEIVABILITY (seems possible to me for all I know - epistemic possibility)
- SUPERVENIENCE (baldness supervenes on hair distribution)
- ZOMBIES (intended to show that consciousness does not supervene on material states)

Possibility

- Think of 'possibility' as a space (the space of possibility)
- Different possible worlds (located within that space) are different ways the world might be
- E.g., there is a possible world in which Bush won the last US election
- The actual world is the world we inhabit - @

Possibility

- Sometimes people talk about different kinds of possibility
 - Logical possibility
 - Physical possibility (or metaphysical possibility)
 - Biological possibility
- Each of these notions places different constraints on how we are to limit the space / the worlds within that space

Logical Possibility

- Logical possibility sets the outer limits on what is possible
- Contradictions are necessarily false or logically impossible which is just to say they are false in all possible worlds
- Tautologies are necessarily true or logically necessary which is just to say they are true in all possible worlds
 - Logical / mathematical truths are thought to be tautologies (e.g., $1+1=2$ or $p \vee \sim p$)

Physical Possibility

- Physical possibility is a subset of logical possibility because it has an additional constraint:
- Not only are contradictions ruled out... But worlds that are inconsistent with the laws of physics at @ are ruled out
- So while it is logically possible that there are worlds with laws of physics that are different from ours (there is no contradiction in that)...
- It is not physically possible that there are worlds with laws of physics that are different from ours

Possibility and Conceivability

- Goldbach's conjecture is a conjecture about mathematics (though don't ask me what it says!)
- The conjecture is either true or it is false
 - If it is true it is necessarily true (there are no worlds in which it is false)
 - If it is false it is necessarily false (it is false in all worlds)
- However, from my point of view it seems to me (in some sense) that it is 'possible' that it be true and also 'possible' that it be false as I could conceive of the math turning out either way

Conceivability / Epistemic Possibility

- What 'seems possible to me given the state of my knowledge' is what is conceivable to me, or what is epistemically possible for me given what I know
- Conceivability has to do with what finite minds like ours can imagine (or think we can imagine)
- Conceivability seems to be SUBJECTIVE in the sense that different people could conceive or fail to conceive of different things

Possibility

- Possibility has to do with what does or does not follow given certain constraints (e.g., non-contradiction or the laws of physics)
- Possibility is objective. What is and is not possible is independent of what any of us think is possible (e.g., 'Goldbach's conjecture is true' is either necessary or impossible). It is not possible that it turn out either way

Creation Analogy

- Let us suppose that one day 1 God does two (and only two) things
 - God fixes the laws of fundamental physics
 - God fixes the nature and distribution of the fundamental units of the fundamental physics

Creation Analogy

- On day 2 does God have to fix the laws, nature and distribution of the fundamental units of chemistry?
- Or do they just 'fall out' of the physics so that God has no more work to do?

Supervenience

- To say that A supervenes on B is to say: There cannot be a change in A without a change in B
 - E.g., To say ‘baldness supervenes on hair distribution’ is to say if two people are alike in hair distribution then they are alike in baldness
- It is important that supervenience is a-symmetric. To say A supervenes on B does not rule out a change in B without a change in A
 - E.g., To say ‘baldness supervenes on hair distribution’ does not rule out two people being alike in their baldness but different in the way their hair is distributed (people go bald in different places on their scalp)

Supervenience and the Physical Sciences

- To say ‘chemistry supervenes on physics’ is to say that two worlds cannot be alike in physics without being alike in chemistry
 - So after day 1 God was done and could rest
- It is NOT to rule out the possibility of two worlds that are alike in chemistry but different in physics
 - (Remember multiple realizability - this is similar)

Zombies (Finally!)

- Imagine a world that is a complete physical duplicate of this world (the actual world, @)
- On this world you have a counter-part (a molecule for molecule duplicate of you!)
- Your counter-part says the things you say and does the things you do...
 - Seems to be an a-consciousness duplicate of you

Zombies

- Zombies are defined as physical duplicates of @ people that lack p-consciousness
- The possibility of zombies would mean that p-consciousness does not supervene on physics

Zombies

- The possibility of zombies would show dualism to be true of p-consciousness
- Materialists counter that while we may think zombies are possible they aren't possible they are merely conceivable and one can't infer possibility from conceivability (e.g., in the case of Goldbach's conjecture)
- Or... They say they don't believe in p-consciousness (eliminativism)

- NEXT WEEK:
- More on consciousness :-)