Sypa- Hempel’s Dilemma -Draft 2

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Physicalism claims everything can be exhaustively explained by physics. This is not true. An argument against physicalism is (1) Physicalists must define physics either relative to a preliminary stage of its development or relative to the final, ideal stage of its development; (2) If physicalists define physics relative to a preliminary stage of its development, then physicalism is false; (3) If physicalists define physics relative to the final, ideal stage of its development, then physicalism is lacking in content (we do not even know what it is saying);(4) Therefore, either physicalism is false, or else physicalism is lacking in content. This argument is Hempel’s Dilemma.

The argument that supports premise 1 is: (1a) Sciences, including physics, develop in two stages: a preliminary stage when theories are advanced, falsified, and replaced by more accurate theories, and a final, ideal stage when the most accurate, unrevisable theory has been achieved; (1b) If sciences progress in two stages, then physicalists must define ‘physics’ relative to one stage or the other; (1c) Therefore, physicalists must define physics either relative to a preliminary stage of its development or relative to the final, ideal stage of its development. This subargument is based on the idea that science is always changing. There are two stages of physics, the stage in which physics is still be advanced and the stage in which physics is ideal and most accurate. The argument that supports physicalism does not specify which stage physics is in. The argument is unclear as it stands and, therefore, it needs to specify one stage or the other.

Premise 2 is supported by the argument that says: (2a) If physicalists define physics relative to a preliminary stage of its development, then physicalism is the claim that everything can be exhaustively described and explained by that preliminary stage of physics; (2b) Not everything can be exhaustively described and explained by a preliminary stage of physics; (2c) Therefore, if physicalism is argued using a preliminary stage of physics, then it cannot be true false. If physicalism defines physics in a stage in which theories are still being advanced and perfected, then physicalism cannot be true. It cannot be true because not everything can be explained by a science that doesn’t even know what everything is.

Premise 3 is endorsed by the argument that claims: (3a) If physicalists define physics relative to the final, ideal stage of its development, then physicalism is the claim that everything can be exhaustively described and explained by the final, ideal stage of physics; (3b) We do not know what the final, ideal stage of physics says; (3c) We do not know what physicalism says because the claim lacks content. According to this subargument, we don’t know what the ideal stage of physics is yet. Therefore, we have no way of knowing exactly what the final stage of physics would be. Arguing physicalism using the ideal and final stage of the study of physics to explain everything is unclear because we don’t know what the ideal stage of physics is so it would lack content. Since the premises of the argument and subarguments are true, then physicalism is either false or is lacking in content.