

Epiphenomenalism is the idea that all mental events are caused by physical events in the brain, but that mental events alone have no casual power. In more general words, epiphenomenalism is the idea that mental or conscious events don't cause anything physical to happen. Frank Jackson, in his essay "Epiphenomenal Qualia," further differentiates epiphenomenalist thinking by stating that there are really two epiphenomenalist views. The stronger version of the idea is "that the mental is totally casually inefficacious," in which mental events cannot cause either physical events or other mental events. The weaker version of the idea is "that mental states are inefficacious with respect to the physical world," which allows for mental events to cause other mental events (Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia").

While Jackson argues that epiphenomenalism (for him: "the idea that qualia are causally impotent with respect to the physical world") is an acceptable position, Kim, Fodor, and other philosophers have found it important to deny epiphenomenalism (Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"). Their biggest fear is that epiphenomenalism and the removal of mental causation fundamentally challenges our view of the world, both scientifically and in relation to common sense. Fodor expresses this concern in an extreme sense: if we accept epiphenomenalism, "then practically everything I believe about anything is false and it's the end of the world" (Kim). In other words, without mental cause and effect our understanding of things seems to fall apart. If it's not the case that my will is responsible for my actions or that my thinking is responsible for my typing then it seems that we lose everything; we no longer have any free will, or any intentional or conscious effect on the world around us.

Epiphenomenalism can also be seen as an attack on the sciences. If we lose causation between mental events and the physical world, we also lose some of our empirical knowledge. In particular, the explaining power of the social sciences seems to fall apart. How can we continue

to explain human phenomena within economics and psychology when human mental activity is in not causally responsible for behavior? We are forced to concede that our knowledge in these sciences is based purely on correlations between observed physical behavior and mental activity. The thoughts, beliefs, and intentions of humans have a purely correlational relationship to their behavior and any casual explanation of this behavior using mental talk is fundamentally wrong. Additionally, we are left with the issue of trying to explain exactly what qualia are. If they are outside the realm of causation and science, then how do we even go about developing an understanding of qualia? Jackson argues that matters of qualia simply lie outside of the limits of our understanding, and that our brains are merely not able to properly understand how qualia fit into the world. Opponents of epiphenomenalism see these conclusions, among others, as unacceptable. At its core, mental causation seems like a necessary component of our general understanding of the world. If we want to keep this general understanding then many believe that we must deny epiphenomenalism.

Kim raises similar concerns about epiphenomenalism. If we somehow come to the conclusion that mental activity has no causal force on the physical world, Kim notes that we must also give up our ideas of agents and actions because now no one can act for reasons that can be explained in terms of the reasons for their actions. That is to say, my reason for eating lunch because I felt hungry can no longer be understood on the basis of my hunger. Without my hunger, we lose the ability to explain my action in any useful sense and therefore we lose agents and actions all together. Kim also challenged epiphenomenalism on the grounds that it is mutually exclusive with the existence of human knowledge. Human knowledge, Kim claims, requires mental to physical and mental to mental causation which is definitively prohibited by epiphenomenalism. Therefore both ideas cannot exist together. Thus if we truly accept

epiphenomenalist arguments, we must also potentially give up any hope of having real human knowledge. Kim states that if we want to keep anything close to a common sense view of the world, we must deny epiphenomenalism.

Jackson disagrees with Kim and Fodor by asserting that qualia epiphenomenalism is an acceptable theory. When Jackson discusses qualia epiphenomenalism, he is talking about all of the facts unexplained by a physical account of the world; the hurtfulness of pains or the characteristic experience of tasting a lemon (i.e. qualia), and their inability to cause. The distinction between qualia and run-of-the-mill epiphenomenalism is the specific subject that is unable to cause. For Jackson, qualia epiphenomenalism is only “that certain properties of certain mental states, namely those I’ve called qualia, are such that their possession or absence makes no difference to the physical world” (Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia”). This is even weaker than the weaker version of epiphenomenalism described at the beginning of this essay, for within this idea at least *some* properties of *some* mental states not related to qualia could make a difference in the physical world. In other words, some mental events could cause some physical events under Jacksons’ view.

Jackson’s stance on qualia epiphenomenalism is very much a result of his idea of qualia. By accepting the existence of qualia, or properties and facts that are ‘over and above’ any physicalist explanation while also rejecting any sort of dualism, Jackson is forced (and willing) to conclude that qualia have no causal role with respect to the physical world, including the brain. To not do so, Jackson states, is to sound “like someone who believes in fairies” (Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia”). When Jackson defends his position, it is against arguments that attempt to show that qualia must be causally efficacious in the physical world. These arguments boil down to not being against epiphenomenalism per se, but instead attacks on the idea of non-

physical quale itself; objections to Jackson's qualia epiphenomenalism have more to do with defining the existence of truly mental (non-physical) qualia than with the idea that these qualia interact with the world (for how could something non-physical interact with the physical realm? The answer that 'they do not' does not help us in determining if these qualia exist in the first place). That is to say, if one could show that qualia are indeed explainable in a purely physical sense, then Jackson's stance on qualia epiphenomenalism would fall apart. It turns out that this is not an easy task, and the attack on Jackson is taken up by Kim in his attempt at physical reduction of qualia.

The possibility of qualia epiphenomenalism is a real threat to Kim. As described previously, Kim has every desire to refute qualia epiphenomenalism because he believes it leads to unacceptable conclusions. The challenge, then, according to Kim, is "if mental causation is to be saved, the mental must be... physically reduced" (Kim). Kim's solution is to attempt to physically reduce qualia with functionalism, identities, and representationalism. Functional reduction is resisted by Jackson's Marry argument as well as modal arguments such as spectrum inversion. Identity reduction might be established using the casual argument but it too must face the issues of physical reduction or face qualia epiphenomenalism. Representationalism reduction provides the most promising solution to the problem, such that if we could reduce qualia to intentional-representational states, we could in turn functionalize these states such as to avoid the issues in Jackson's Marry argument and the modal arguments. The outcome of these three inquiries leads Kim to conclude that the small residue of qualia may indeed lie outside the limits of physicalism.

In his attempt at establishing mental causation, Kim also discusses the possibility of the existence of psychophysical laws. The general idea is that if we can establish psychophysical

laws that govern physical behavior (at least in the rough sense), we might be able to also secure mental causality. If we can reduce the high-level laws of psychology to the low-level laws of physics, then issues involving mental causality would be explainable using our new-found laws. Fodor established two conditions for the existence of reducible high-level (psychophysical) laws: (1) the reduction types (e.g., functional, identity, representational) that figure into the high-level law must also be reducible to the low-level law and (2) the low-level laws that the high-level laws were reduced to must also be connected by low-level laws. With such strict conditions on law reduction, it comes into question whether psychophysical laws are even possible. Davidson argues that they are not. He argues that the mental domain is limited by rationality and coherence but that the physical domain has no such restrictions. Thus psychophysical laws cannot exist because they would require us to attribute beliefs and desires independently from their rationality. Kim points out that Davidson's position requires us to adopt a kind of "mental property epiphenomenalism" which is subject to the same concerns as traditional epiphenomenalism (Kim). Additionally, Kim argues that we can establish weaker or more generally psychophysical laws, or lawful regularities, without necessarily committing ourselves such strictness, thus allowing us to avoid some of the related issues.

Even if we are able to satisfy these conditions and obtain psychophysical laws, Kim still strongly believes that there is a major issue for physicalism in accounting for mental causation. Through the exclusion argument, Kim claims that we must choose between qualia epiphenomenalism and reductionism. In order to understand the exclusion argument we must first establish four relevant principles: (1) the causal closure of the physical domain, or that all physical events have a sufficient and complete physical cause, or that all physical events have a wholly physical cause, (2) overdetermination, or the idea that one effect has multiple potential

and sufficient causes, (3) the exclusion principle, or the idea that no event has two or more distinct and sufficient causes, unless it is *actually* overdetermined, and (4) supervenience, or the dependency relationship between, in this case, mental causation and physical causation.

The exclusion argument goes as follows: consider a possible cause of mental to physical causation in which (1) mental state M is a cause of physical state P. If we accept the causal closure of the physical domain, then (2) there must exist some physical state P* that is the wholly physical cause of P. In virtue of being a mental state, mental state M is also 'over and above' physical state P such that (3) M is not P. If this is not an actual case of overdetermination, then (4) there is only one distinct and sufficient cause of physical state P. Therefore either (1) or (2) (or (3) or (4)) must be false. If (1) is false, then mental state M is not a cause of physical state P and we have arrived at epiphenomenalism. If (2) is false, then we have violated the principle of causal closure of the physical domain. Additionally, if we accept the principle of supervenience and also concede mental to physical causation then we must also concede mental to mental causation. This would force us to accept either the stronger version of epiphenomenalism, namely that mental events can cause nothing at all, including physical and mental events, or physical reductionism ($M=P^*$).

Before discussing any objections to Kim's exclusion argument, I think that it is worthwhile to assume the argument is valid and discuss its conclusions. While we are supposed to be shocked at the extremity of our only options, I find that strong physicalism and reductionism isn't necessarily a bad place to be. In fact, out of our two options I firmly see it as the stronger choice. I would much rather attempt to explain how mental state M is not a cause of physical state P than attempt to explain any violation of the principle of causal closure of physical domains. Mental state M being a cause of physical state P is only a common sense

intuition that we (want) to hold, whereas the causal closure of the physical domain, or, more generally, the law of conservation of energy, is a fact of physics. While issues involving the validity of cause and effect are not easy to navigate (e.g. Hume), the empirical evidence available supporting the physical law of conservation of energy dominates the intuitive evidence supporting mental causation. The biggest drawback to accepting such a strong physicalist view is that we lose many of the things we cherish most and experience most clearly about our minds, such as any sort of free will and causal, intentional consciousness.

The best objection to Kim's exclusion argument is exactly the one described in class, namely that overdetermination does not imply that wholly physical cause P^* , not including M , causes P . We agree with Kim that this is not a case of actual overdetermination, but put forward the possibility that both M and P^* could not have caused P in the absence of one another. That is to say, M is causally sufficient for P and that P^* is causally sufficient for P . This is great because it solves all three of our issues: (1) we remove the threat of overdetermination because both M and P^* could not have caused P by themselves, (2) we do not violate the principle of the causal closure of the physical domain because P is still described by wholly physical cause P^* , and (3) we avoid reductionism because $M=P^*$ is not a necessary truth or law. This leaves us with mental causation and no reductionism.