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Philosophy of Mind in Australasia

What explains the nature of our conscious minds, and what is the relation between minds and the physical world? These questions are prompted by the sense that what goes on in minds and what goes on in nature are irreconcilably different. Yet, science tells us that the universe is causally closed, and governed by a single set of laws, and minds and physical bodies seem subject to these laws; they interact, and the neurosciences do not discover anomalies in the physical laws governing brain processes. The history of the central debate in the philosophy of mind is the attempt to reconcile a *seemingly* impossible difference between the mental and the physical. The contribution to this debate through philosophical work done in Australasia, and by Australasian philosophers, has been striking, to say the least. It has been striking for its influence, its originality, and its variety, especially given its "per capita" philosophical resources.

One well known strand of thought, dubbed *Australian materialism*, properly begins in the mid 1950s with U.T. Place and J.J.C. Smart. It continues to resonate today. The last forty years have been equally famous for the influence of a non-materialist suite of positions characterised early on by the epiphenomenalism of Keith Campbell and (the early) Frank Jackson, and more recently by David Chalmers' denial that materialist theories really address what's at the core of the problem of the nature of human minds.

The work of Place, Smart and Armstrong emerges from the realist and empiricist stirrings in Australasian philosophy in the early part of the twentieth century. Samuel Alexander was an Australian philosopher who, after studying at the University of Melbourne in 1875, moved to Britain, taking up a scholarship at Oxford. His career culminated in the publication of *Space, Time and Deity* in 1920, earlier presented as the Gifford Lectures in Glasgow. It was a work of speculative metaphysics, yet, set against the predominantly idealist trend at the time it was, he thought, part of a widely spread movement towards realism in philosophy. Alexander represented an early antecedent of realist and materialist thinking in Australia, and almost certainly came to influence Sydney's John Anderson, who had attended the Gifford Lectures, and made transcriptions of them. Clearly Anderson had internalised some of this material, later giving lectures on Alexander. Anderson's realism was so thoroughgoing that Ralph Blake (1928, 623), commenting on a paper by Anderson, said he was "...determined to be a realist until it hurts." This certainly had a bearing on Armstrong's approach, as did Anderson's advice to 'have a position'. Of Anderson's influence in regard to questions of the mind, Armstrong notes that "[m]ental pluralism...the struggle of different desires and tendencies in the one mind, has remained permanently with me" (Jobling and Runcie, 324).

In 1950, J.J.C. Smart, a student of Ryle's in Oxford, took up the Chair in philosophy at Adelaide University. He appointed U.T. Place and C.B. Martin; the former also had come under the influence of Ryle, but was unsatisfied with Ryle's scepticism about the inner causes of our mental life. Martin's influence cannot be underestimated here.

For Martin is credited with the truthmaker principle: a statement requires the existence of some fact, event, or property in order that it should be true. This clearly sits ill with Rylean behaviourist analyses of mental concepts, for statements explaining mental goings-on in physical terms are conceptually ruled out – that would be a ‘category mistake’ according to Ryle – and so such statements, it turns out, are really just ways of speaking about dispositions to behave or patterns of behaviour. The Adelaide philosophers wanted a theory that de-bunked the Cartesian myth; they wanted a theory that was scientifically respectable; and they wanted a theory that, *contra* Ryle, acknowledged the reality of inner causes. Place was the first one out of the blocks. In 1954 he published “The Concept of Heed”, which was a refutation of the dispositional account. The final sentences of the article included the following, for-the-time, fabulously tantalizing and veiled promissory note. It read:

‘What are these curious occurrences within ourselves on which we can give a running commentary as they occur?’ Lack of space precludes any discussion of this fascinating problem here. It is my belief, however, that the logical objections to the statement ‘consciousness is a process in the brain’ are no greater than the logical objections which might be raised to the statement ‘lightning is a motion of electrical charges’.

Place then published, in 1956, ‘Is Consciousness a Brain Process?’. The view put forward there, as with the 1954 article, accepted *some* Rylean analyses of cognitive and conative states, but the great advance was the suggestion that notions like consciousness, experience, sensation and mental imagery had to involve internal processes. The sticking point was finding a way of explaining the identification of something like a mental image with a neural state that did not sound instantly absurd. Cartesians in particular, wedded to the idea that such mental items as these are always fully transparent, could hardly take on board the identification. Am I aware of a brain process when aware of a mental image? Place thought that this assumption would constitute what he called a phenomenological fallacy.

J.J.C. Smart, in “Sensations and Brain Processes”, carrying further this line of thought, said we needed a distinction between what we *mean* by statements involving, e.g., reports of sensations, and the facts lying behind such identities. Here we encounter the famous and controversial idea of contingent identity statements. The strategy was to point to other examples of natural identities, as Place had intimated in 1954. The task was then to offer a positive account of how the identities could be explained. Smart famously interpreted the seeing of a certain orange after-image as “...something going on which is like what is going on when I have my eyes open, am awake, and there is an orange illuminated in good light in front of me...” (p.149). A feature of this analysis, important for what lay ahead as *central state materialism*, is the topic neutrality given by the description. What is going on is neural activity; but what might have been going on was some other kind of activity, or causal pattern, associated with the same mental phenomena; or so it is argued by causal theorists of the mind.

Smart had argued for the view that, as a matter of contingent fact, sensations were strictly identical to brain processes, and in the acknowledgements to *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* Armstrong cites Smart as the person who converted him to this view. He goes on, “...for the most part I conceive myself only to be filling out a step

in the argument to which [Smart and Place] devoted little attention: the *account* of the concept of mind” (p. xi). This modesty, however, disguises what in Armstrong was a more ambitious program. Although both Smart and Armstrong were keen in their philosophical analysis on topic-neutral specifications of what was to play the empirical role in that analysis, Armstrong diverged in two ways from his predecessor. First, he wanted to move away from Rylean behaviourism which featured in the analysis, at least in limited form. Second, he wanted a more general account of mental states, not one focused on a subset of the mental such as sensations.

Armstrong thanks C.B. Martin for making him aware of the importance of the role of *causality* in the characterisation of mental concepts. At this point in the history of the philosophy of mind a shift was taking place away from dualistic ontologies, and simultaneously away from behaviourist accounts of the analysis of mental terms. 1959 was an important year, for it spawned two important works. One was Smart’s account of sensations as brain processes. The other was Chomsky’s famous review of B.F. Skinner’s *Verbal Behaviour*, in which he attacked scientific behaviourism. The move “inside the head”, ironically, was now going to make understanding the nature of mind simultaneously more and less comfortable for the dualist. More, since analyses of mental concepts could now eschew the restrictions of behaviourism; less, since identifying the mental with physical brain states squeezes the ghost out of the machine.

Armstrong took his brief, then, to be an analysis of mental concepts in which it was assumed mental states were identical with brain states; hence the name *central state materialism*. Armstrong’s main argument has two steps. First, he offers a “logical or conceptual analysis of the mental concepts”, as he likes to put it. This is a causal analysis to the effect that mental states are states apt for producing a range of behaviour and states apt for being the outcome of a range of stimuli. Second, the question arises as to what in fact plays the causal roles assigned within this functional analysis, and that is a matter of empirical discovery. Armstrong’s view, then, can be taken as an early expression of what is sometimes called multiple realisability. (David Lewis, had almost simultaneously (1966) arrived at the same conclusion.) For as a philosophical treatment of the mind-body problem it retains elements of the topic-neutrality evident in Place and Smart, since, in theory, causal realisers besides brain states would also be apt to play the mental functional roles.

Armstrong qualified various aspects of his view. He emphasised the contingency built into the account: physical descriptors of mental states are non-rigid designators of those states. This led him away from a type-type identity theory to a view in which mental types are correlated with a disjunction of physical types. The view thereby avoids what is regarded as an implausible humanistic chauvinism. He softened the philosophical account by downgrading its *a priori* status preferring it perhaps as a “theory of the mental” rather than a set of conceptual truths. Also, he made clear his theoretical priorities, claiming in 1992 that were he ever to have doubts about his materialism he would then be drawn, reluctantly, to dualism, as opposed to eliminativism. The existence of pains, beliefs etc., he thought too much a part of bedrock, Moorean commonsense.

Epiphenomenalism is a kind of dualism, but one which tries to accommodate the dualist intuitions while retaining a largely scientific view of a causally closed

universe. It denies that aspects of consciousness are causally efficacious. My feeling itchy does not cause me to scratch; rather, my scratching and the feeling are distinct outcomes of a single physical cause, presumably some neural event. The trouble is: it sure doesn't seem like the itchiness is causally impotent; it looks like the clearly obvious candidate for the cause of my scratching. Keith Campbell, writing in 1970, recognised the problem, distinguishing between mental states and mental properties. The mind-brain events implicated in the causal nexus between the mosquito's biting me and my scratching remain, just as the best scientific accounts would have them. However, riding above the fray is a certain quality given off at the neural stage – the quality of its feeling itchy. Campbell's *new epiphenomenalism* required the efficacy of mental states, and so the state of pain (a brain state) had a causal role. One could take what one wanted from the central state materialism of Armstrong, and add in phenomenal properties. Campbell appears to get the best of both the scientific and dualistic worlds. Pain states cause and are caused; pain qualities cause nothing but are caused. We seem to have a nice reconciliation between science and intuition.

As Campbell still acknowledges, his choice to go epiphenomenal was in a sense forced upon him, for on the one hand a commitment to a causally complete physics seems unavoidable, on the other, the attempted reductions of sensations and emotions were unconvincing. This time there just isn't enough room for safe passage between Scylla and Charybdis. But the forced alternative path is epiphenomenalism, "with all its problems", as Campbell still recognises. Woodhouse (1974: 166) writing at the time noted: "...to insist that pains are causally efficacious generates the appearance of an advantage only if the same sense of 'pain' is at issue [as state and as quality]." If so, contradiction looms, since our evidence of pains points to a single phenomenon, not split phenomena in which one aspect occupies the physical universe, the other does not. How, for example, are pains with the second aspect known, and how are judgements regarding their quality made and reported?

In 1982 Frank Jackson published 'Epiphenomenal Qualia'. His central argument is that the existence of qualia – the qualitative aspects of certain experiences – remains as items that a complete physical science cannot capture. No amount of physical information furnishes an individual with complete information about the mind. In Jackson's words (p. 127),

Tell me everything physical there is to tell about what is going on in a living brain, the kind of states, their functional role, their relation to what goes on at other times and in other brains, and so on and so forth, and be I as clever as can be in fitting it all together, you won't have told me about the hurtfulness of pains, the itchiness of itches, pangs of jealousy, or about the characteristic experience of tasting a lemon, smelling a rose, hearing a loud noise or seeing the sky.

This position was motivated by what has become one of the most well known arguments in analytic philosophy of mind in the twentieth century, the so-called Knowledge Argument. Jackson's central rhetorical devices are the characters Fred and Mary. Fred experiences a color the rest of us do not; yet no amount of physical information can give us his experience. Mary sits in a black and white room and comes to know all the physical information there is to know explaining the human

experience of seeing red; yet only upon leaving the room and experiencing for herself the quality of a red tomato does she complete her knowledge of seeing red.

Jackson's argument has been influential and persuasive, and has formed part of a suite of arguments resisting physicalist positions by appeal to phenomenological irreducibility. The paper contains a focus on the incompleteness of physicalism given such irreducibility vis-à-vis qualia. Yet Jackson, like Campbell, was acutely aware of the need to defend the epiphenomenalism built into the position, arguing that certain properties of mental states, the qualia themselves, and only the qualia, are caused but inefficacious.

Jackson is no longer persuaded by the view set out in 1982, abandoning the position in 1998. In a recent article he wrote:

Although I once dissented from the majority [by going against science] I have capitulated and now see the interesting issue as being where the arguments from the intuitions against physicalism...go wrong (2003, 251).

Jackson now thinks there is a "pervasive illusion" involved in thinking about what it is like to have a color experience. He now argues that once we have a full understanding of a representational state's content – such as the state Mary finds herself in after her release from the black and white room – "we get the phenomenology for free" (2003, 265). Mary's problem is to confuse "seeing red", an intensional property, with an instantiated property, regarding the former as absent from the inventory of physical properties that fully characterise the world. But this is an illusion. Mary does not learn any new proposition about how things are; rather, by representing to herself the state of seeing red she acquires a procedure for the recognition, memory, or imagination of that very state. Thus, Jackson now accepts a well known response to the knowledge argument based on the distinction between knowledge-that and knowledge-how, but it is accepted via the more complicated route of representationalism.

David Chalmers (1996) proposed a challenge to those offering physical or functional explanations of consciousness, or conscious experience. He claimed that virtually all attempts to explain consciousness failed because they were aimed at a different problem, the problem of awareness, which included such notions as discrimination, integration of cognitive information, reportability of mental states and so on. A typical paper on consciousness might imply it was tackling the very difficult issue of how experience seems to the subject, but turn out to supply a mechanism constituting a function related to, e.g., reports of the self-concept. The problem he thinks is there has been a consistent error resulting in a gap between the *explanandum* – conscious experience – and the *explanans*.

Chalmers is not impressed by those who deny there is a problem of consciousness, and he suggests those who think our minds too limited to understand a solution to the problem have given up too soon. Chalmers' *naturalistic dualism* is motivated by the thought that we are not facing up to what is centrally puzzling about conscious experience. Using three strategies – arguments from conceivability, epistemology and analysis – the case is made against reducibility. A well known centrepiece of the

strategy is the thought that a physically identical world to ours might have contained my zombie twin, someone bereft of phenomenal feel.

Is Chalmers' dualistic stance a rejection of the sciences of the mind? Not for a second; his point is simply that the current resources of science are ill-equipped to account for conscious experience.

The Australasian contribution to the world debate in the philosophy of mind really cannot be overstated. Open almost any reputable collection in the field and it will contain articles from the authors discussed here. Of course these contributions arise also from institutional support, a rich intellectual tradition, and many philosophers whose names are far too numerous to list here. I originally thought I might finish this entry with such a list but the impractical nature of that idea quickly became obvious after assembling over thirty names. That in itself says something about philosophy's strength in Australasia on questions about the nature of mind.

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