

The Epistemic Value of Conscious Acquaintance:

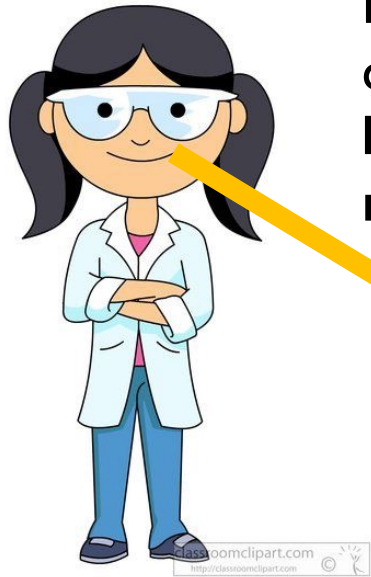
A Problem for Reductive Physicalism

Adam Pautz

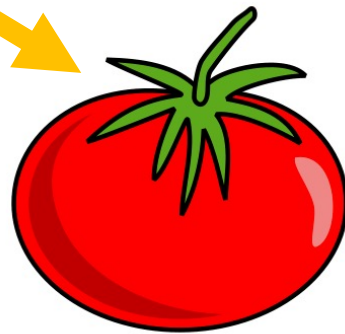
Notre Dame Conference on Value of Consciousness

This talk is based on my paper “The Significance Argument for the Irreducibility of Consciousness”, *Philosophical Perspectives* 2017

Conscious acquaintance has value to us, in part, because of its epistemic significance

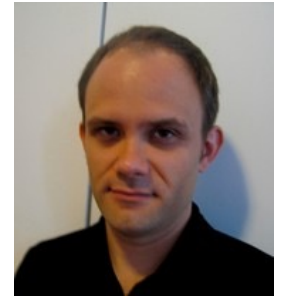


Frank Jackson's Mary comes out of her **black and white room**



Mary now knows what red is like!

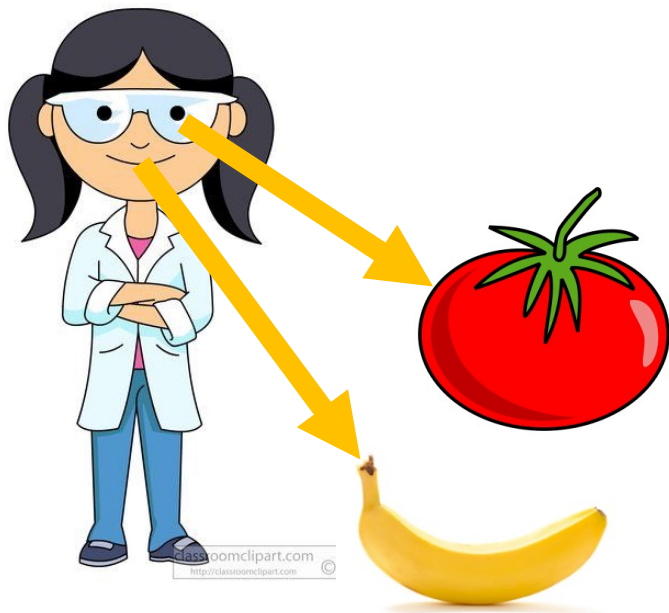
Mary now has a special immediate reason to believe red thing is there.



- *Goal:* reductive physicalists face a deep problem concerning epistemic value – “*problem of multiplicity*”. Connects up with Geoff and Brian.
- I begin with preliminaries.

I. Preliminaries

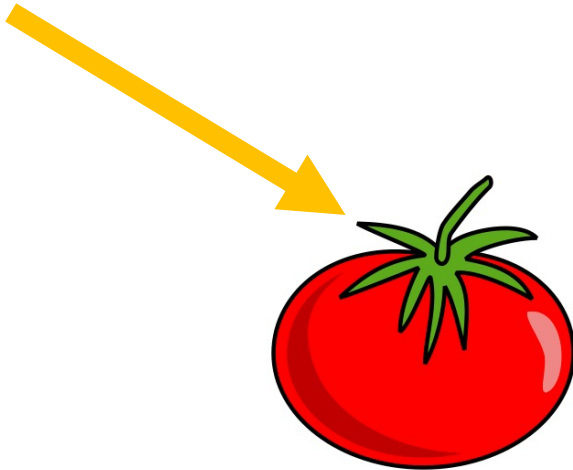
Consciousness has relational structure – “*acquaintance*”



- For Mary to have tomato-like experience = for her to stand in “**conscious-of relation**” to *ostensible* state red&round
- Necessary connection between phenomenology and what properties she’s **conscious of**.

This relationship is kind of spooky!

You



You stand in **this very special relationship** to the red quality, unlike anything else in nature.

Can this relationship be explained in physical terms?

Reductive physicalists say “Yes”

The red “quale” JUST IS some super-complex physical property, characterizable in austere physical language.

The conscious of relation JUST IS a physical relation, characterizable in austere physical language.

In general, *all reduces to austere physical facts*. **Lewis, Sider, Dorr, Lee, Dretske, Tye**. Beautifully simple vision. But I am going to argue: it just doesn't work.

My target is only **reductive** physicalism, not physicalism in general.

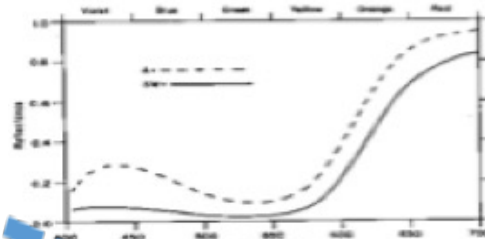
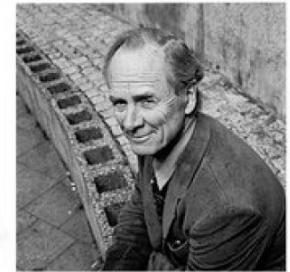


Grounding ↑ relationship

Physical properties

In fact, one response is to reject reductive physicalism and move to “non-reductive” grounding physicalism (Schaffer).

For concreteness, I will focus on single version of reductive physicalism: “tracking reductionism” about consciousness



- (1) Color qualia are external. = reflectances.
- (2) Conscious-of relation is a mere “**causal-tracking relation**”
- (3) Radically externalist!

In more detail, by “tracking relation”, I mean
Neander, Fodor, Dretske



For you to be conscious of the quality red
JUST IS

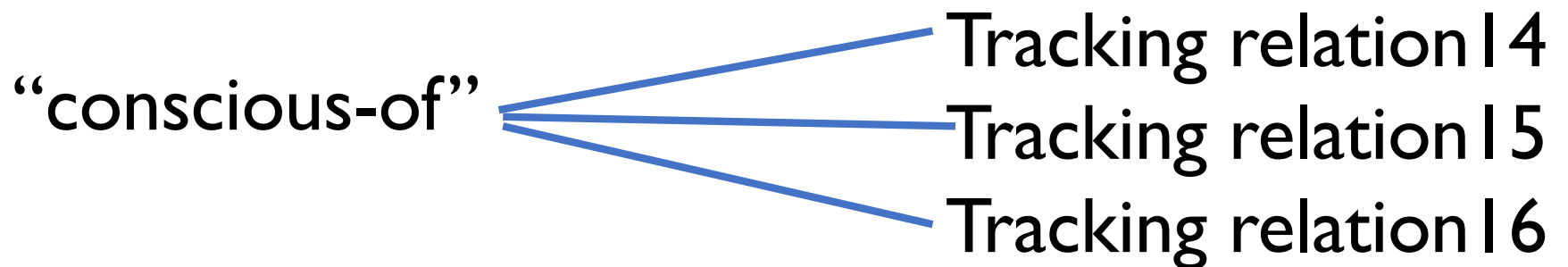
for you to be in some internal state or that that
has the **function of tracking** that color
(understood as reflectance) and for that state to
be poised influence your cognitive system.

The problem I'll develop for reductive physicalists is general

- I will focus on reductive externalist “tracking theory” about consciousness.
- But the problem carries over to “internalist” forms of reductive physicalism.

Plan for rest of talk:

*Initial: **many** variant tracking relations that have slightly different definitions. All good candidates to be conscious-of.*



Then question for reductive physicalists: **which** tracking relation is conscious-of, **which has special epistemic value?**

“Indeterminacy View”

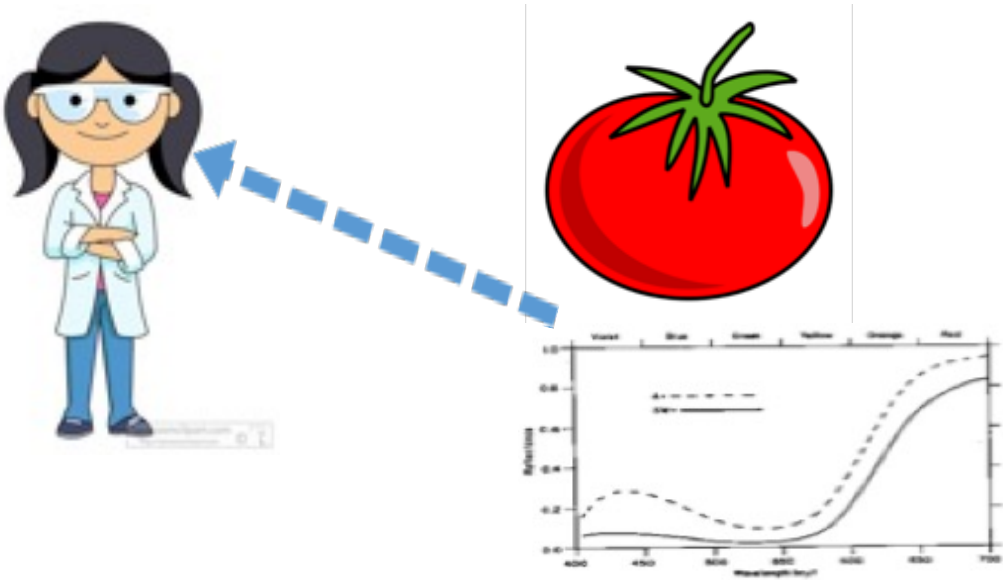
Immediately rule out

“Arbitrary Identities View”

Epistemic Value

2. Initial point: multiplicity of “tracking relations” that are good candidates to be conscious-of relation

For example, consider Mary viewing tomato



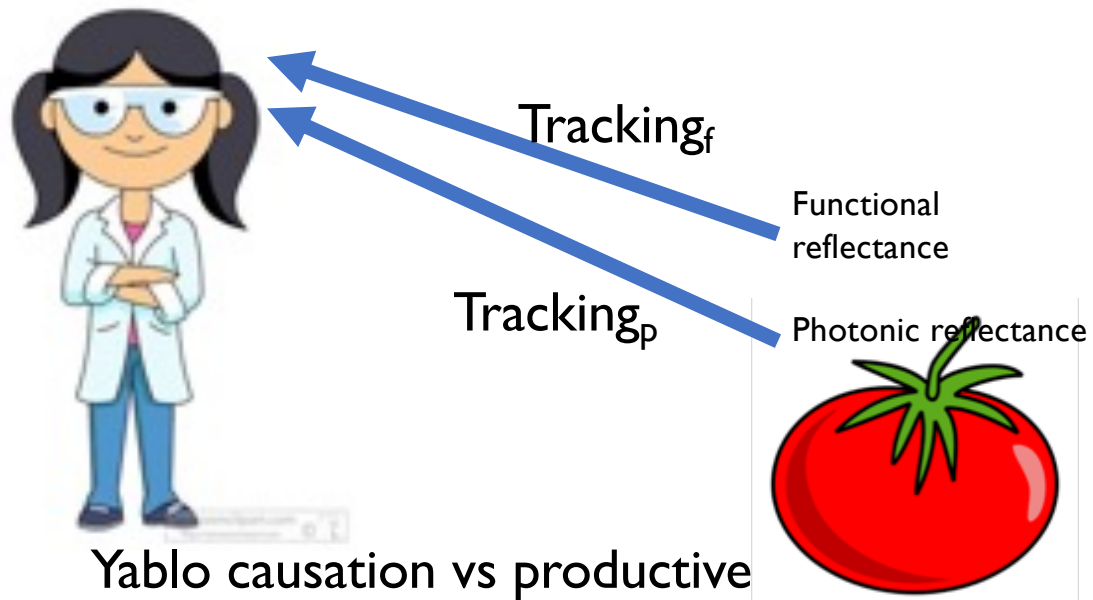
Tracking reductionism holds:
The red *quality* = a reflectance.

The determinable qualitative type
COLOR QUALITY = the determinable physical type
REFLECTANCE.

The tomato has multiple types of reflectance properties candidates to be red quality

- To have a photonic reflectance is to reflect **PHOTONS** in certain proportions.
- To have a functional reflectance is to reflect, in certain proportions, **some particles or other playing certain functional roles**. This is a broader reflectance property is realizable in other worlds where the physics of light is somewhat different.

So, two reflectance properties (candidates). Also two corresponding tracking relations (candidates).



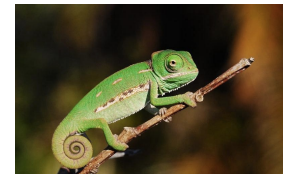
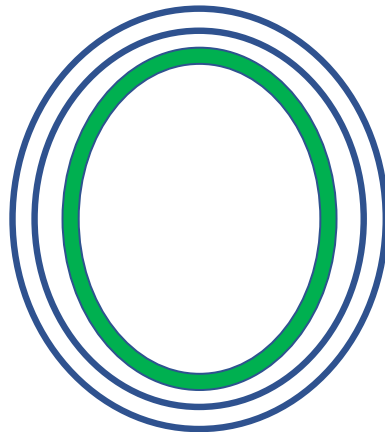
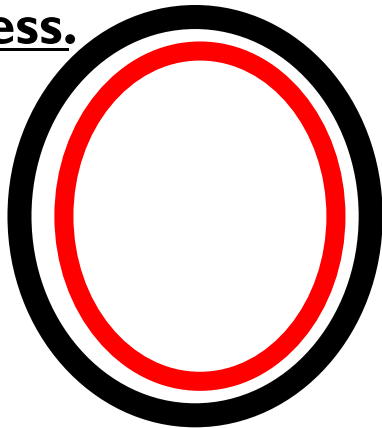
Yablo causation vs productive causation

Reductive physicalists face the question: is the more liberal functionalist theory right, or is the restrictive “photonic” view right?

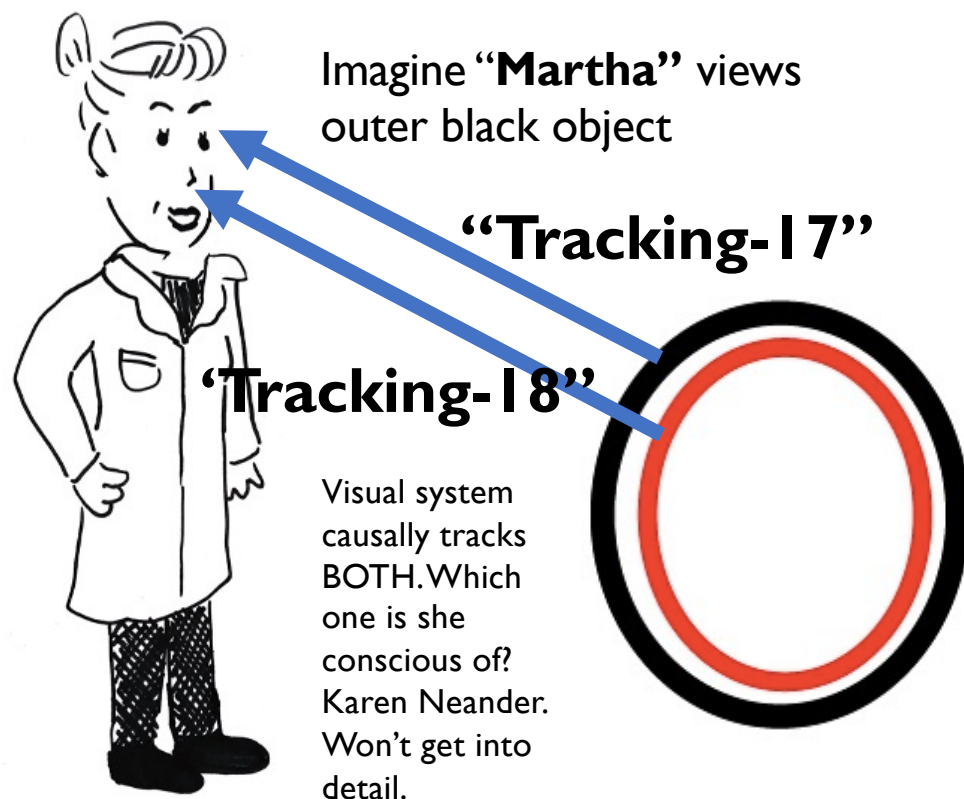
Radically different verdicts about what kinds of experiences our counterparts have in other “possible worlds” where the physics of light is different.

Second Illustration of Multiplicity: “Double Earth”.

- Every object is impenetrable but contains an object within it (like Russian doll).
- Assume that color qualia in the word. Every “outer” object is black/white. Every outer black object contains a red inner object. Every white outer object contains a green inner object...
- The color of inner object and that of the outer object are causally yoked together by way of a natural, super-fast chemical process.



Multiple tracking relations candidates to be conscious-of



Tracking I7: Only ever conscious of B&W – just like Frank Jackson’s Mary. She’s never R&Q just below the surface, even though her visual system tracks them.

Tracking I8: Martha is conscious of inner red. Outer black object just part of causal process, like her retina. If tracking reductionists like Neander’s “**distality principle**”, which favors most distal element.

To sum up: when you view tomato & are conscious of red, multiple tracking relations



“conscious-of”

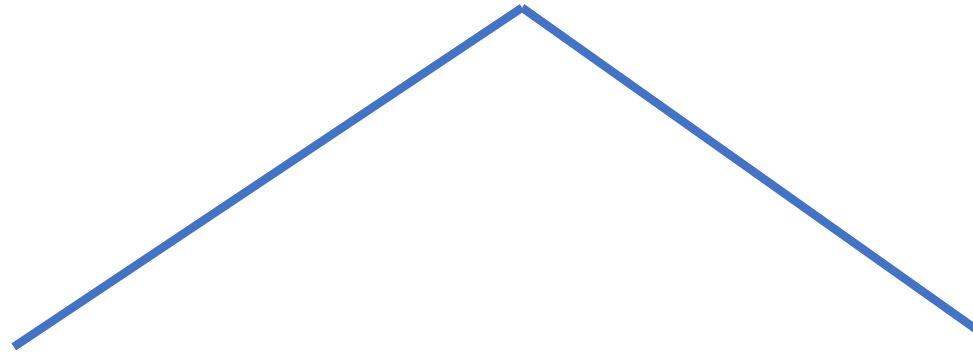
Tracking $l7_p$

Tracking $l7_f$

Tracking $l8_p$

Tracking $l8_f$

How should reductive physicalists respond to multiplicity?



“Radical Indeterminacy View”

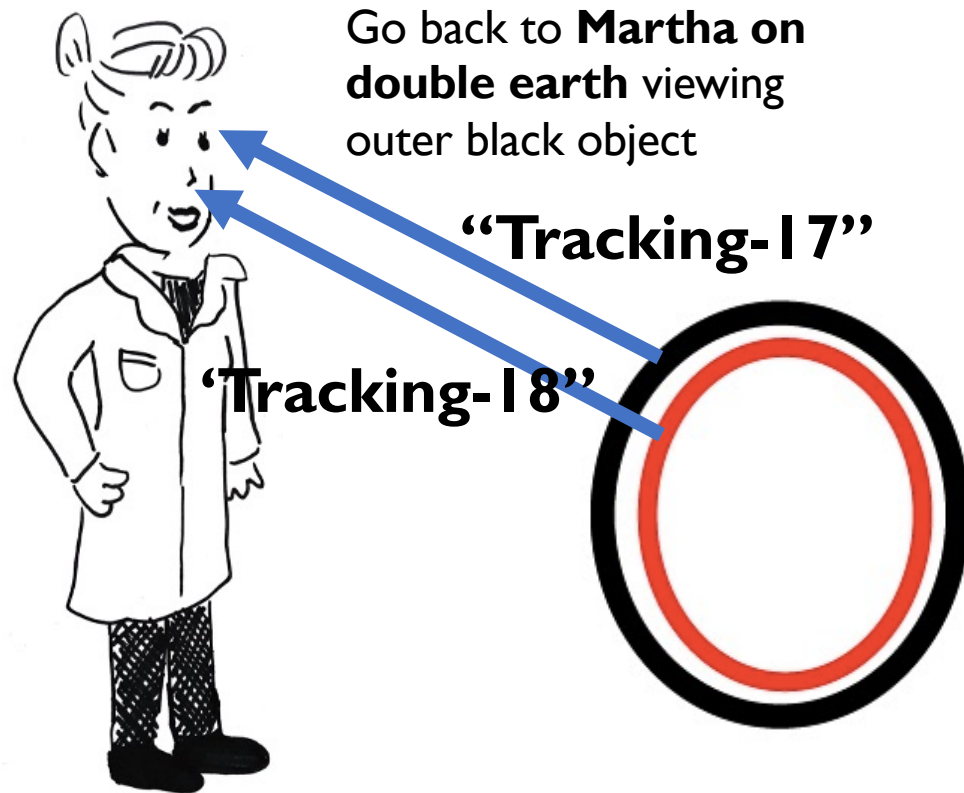
Immediately rule out

“Arbitrary Identities View”

Epistemic Value

3. Could Reductive Physicalists Respond to Multiplicity by Accepting Radical Indeterminacy?

To explain this view, assume familiar “supervaluationist” approach to indeterminacy.



In our mouths and Martha’s, “conscious-of” is “indeterminate in reference” between tracking17 and tracking18.

This means it’s super-true that Mary is conscious of *black or red*, but it’s *indeterminate* which one.

This in turn means phenomenology radically indeterminate. You cannot imagine her situation! *Superposition!*

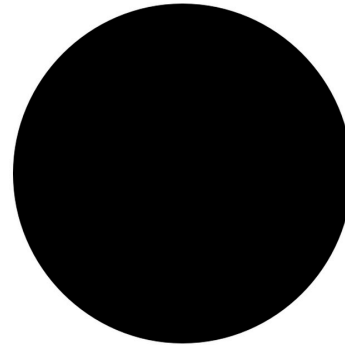
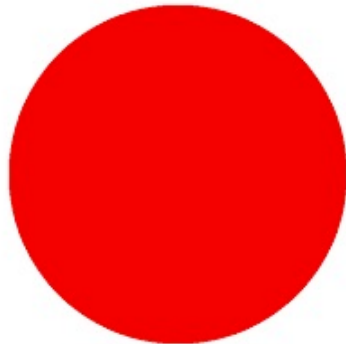
Ted Sider (2001): reductive physicalists **committed** to such radical indeterminacy in other cases - personal identity.

Roughly: reductive physicalists think Martha and Mary and you and I are just like robots: austere physical facts are all the facts – atoms in the void.

So imagine knowing all such facts and trying to “radically interpret” their use of “conscious of”, “that quality”

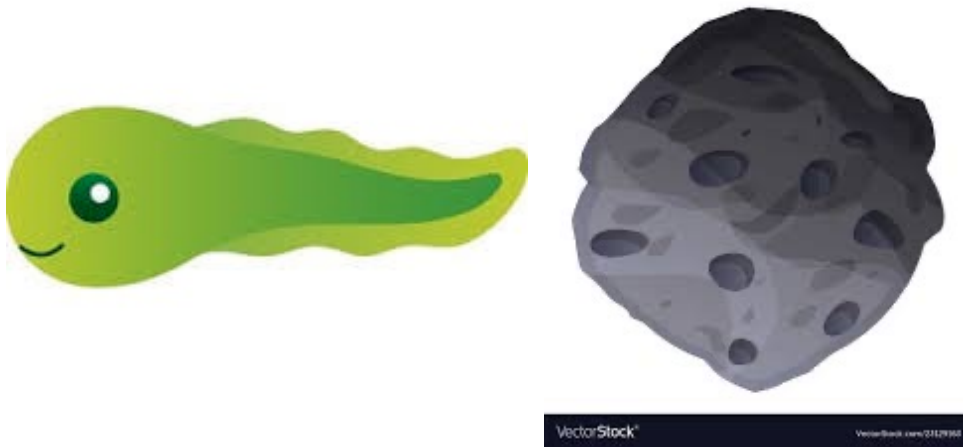
Nothing in their use that could **uniquely select** or “**point to**” one of the multiple candidates rather than all the others as the referent of such expressions.

Immediately rule out radical indeterminacy view!
For Martha, it's determinate either, but
indeterminate which.



*If reductive physicalist cannot respond to multiplicity
by accepting radical experiential indeterminacy, they
need another response.*

How rule out phenomenal indeterminacy? Spooky scanner for detecting modal truths (Geoff)?



My answer: we similarly know can't be indeterminate whether tadpole or meteorite like that. No spooky faculty required there!

4. Second option for Reductive
Physicalists: Responding to Multiplicity by
Accepting “Arbitrary Identities”

Analogy.



All people
“is bald”

Has less than 1016 hairs

Has less than 1017 hairs

Has less than 1018 hairs

Has less than 1019 hairs

Has less than 1020 hairs

There is a precise hair condition such that “is bald” in all of our mouths refers to it and it alone. Even though nothing about use uniquely “points to” it.

Somewhat like Williamson, reductive physicalist might respond to multiplicity with arbitrary identities



“conscious-of”

Tracking I7_p

Tracking I7_f

Tracking I8_p

Tracking I8_f

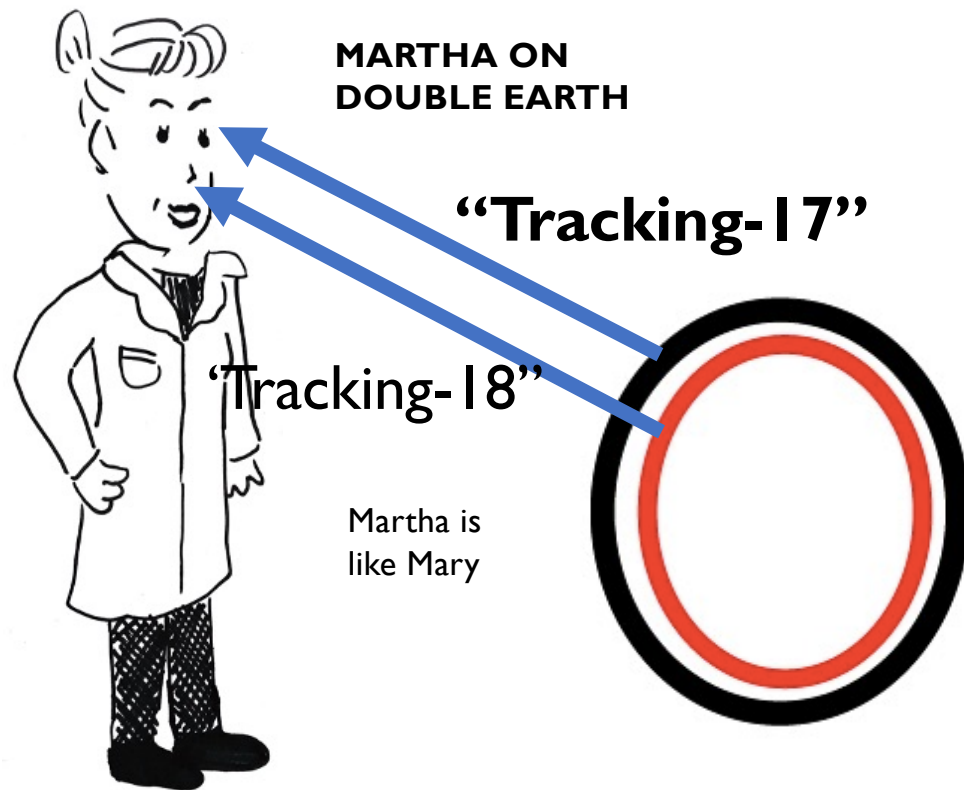
“red quality”

Functional reflectance

Photonic reflectance

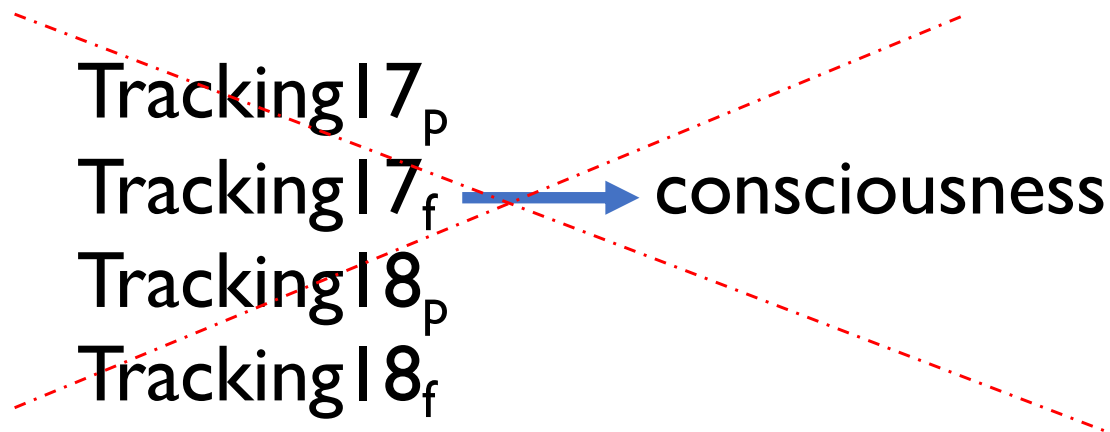
There is a precise tracking relation such that all of uses ‘conscious of’ to refer to it and it alone. Even though nothing about use unique “points to” it.

If Conscious of = Tracking I 7f, avoid radical experiential indeterminacy



It's determinate that, in a “Newton world” where objects reflect corpuscles instead of photons, our counterparts are conscious of same color qualia – differently realized.

Guard against mistaken understanding of arbitrary identities reductive physicalism!!



Rather, the view is that there are all these tracking relations that are barely different in their definitions. None stands out. Martian. It just so happens that one of them is what we are talking about when we talk about consciousness.

Arbitrary identities reductive physicalism faces *many* problems.*

I'll develop a problem about how it might accommodate the the **Intrinsic Epistemic Value of consciousness.**

(*For “is bald”, Williamson defends **extreme “semantic instability”**. But I'm assuming “arbitrary identities” reductive physicalist instead accepts semantic stability for consciousness-related vocabulary, because here instability totally implausible. It's hard to see how this might be explained – looks lucky. Many other problems.)

To begin with, what I mean by “intrinsic epistemic value”?



- *For example:* It's **in nature of** the conscious-of relation that, if you bear it to ostensible state of something being red and round – if it seems to be **RIGHT THERE** - then you have a **reason** to believe it obtains.
(*Reliabilism fails!*)
- We **just know** this, just like we **just know** that in nature of pain to give us a reason to desire it stop.
- **Geoff Lee: How** do we know? My answer: We know some “synthetic” truths a priori. We know that experience of red *necessarily* resembles experience of reddish orange.

Suppose we combine intrinsic epistemic value with arbitrary identities reductive physicalism

We accept: **conscious-of relation** has intrinsic epistemic value.

We also accept: conscious of = TrackingI7_f.

Then we must also accept: Lo and behold, **TrackingI7_f** has intrinsic epistemic value. *E. g.*

Here now is the problem for arbitrary identities
from reductive physicalism

*There are multiple
tracking relations.
Nearly identical.*

Tracking I7_p

Tracking I7_f “conscious”

Tracking I8_p

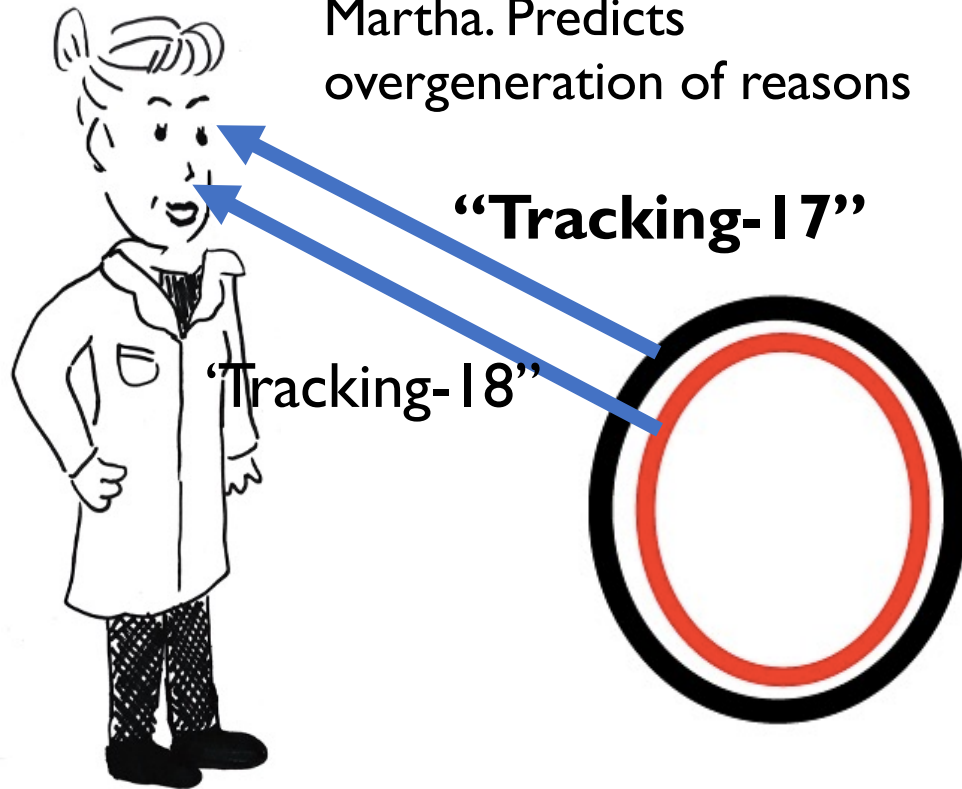
Tracking I8_f

*If one of them has intrinsic epistemic value, do the others have
intrinsic epistemic value too?*

Suppose first “Yes” answer. **“Deflationary pluralism”**

(Geoff)

To see why problematic,
Martha. Predicts
overgeneration of reasons



By virtue of tracking-17 outer black but not inner red, Martha is conscious of black and not red, and has an immediate reason to believe black thing there.

By virtue of tracking 18 the inner red – even though she doesn’t know it and isn’t conscious of red – she has equal immediate reason to believe an inner red object is there.

That is a false prediction

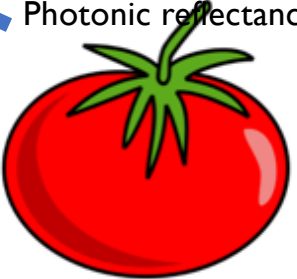
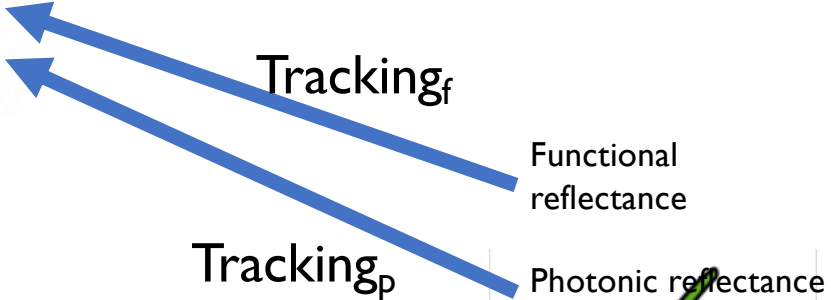


If this is really what it is like for Martha, and if she is not and has never been conscious of red, she has **NO** immediate reason to believe a red thing is there!!!!

Likewise deflationary pluralism implies



Yablo causation vs productive causation



Mary is conscious of only of functional reflectance, but she also has equal reason to believe photonic reflectance out there (not under that MOP).

False prediction!

At this point, arbitrary identities reductive physicalist might move “anti-pluralist” view.



Tracking I 7_p

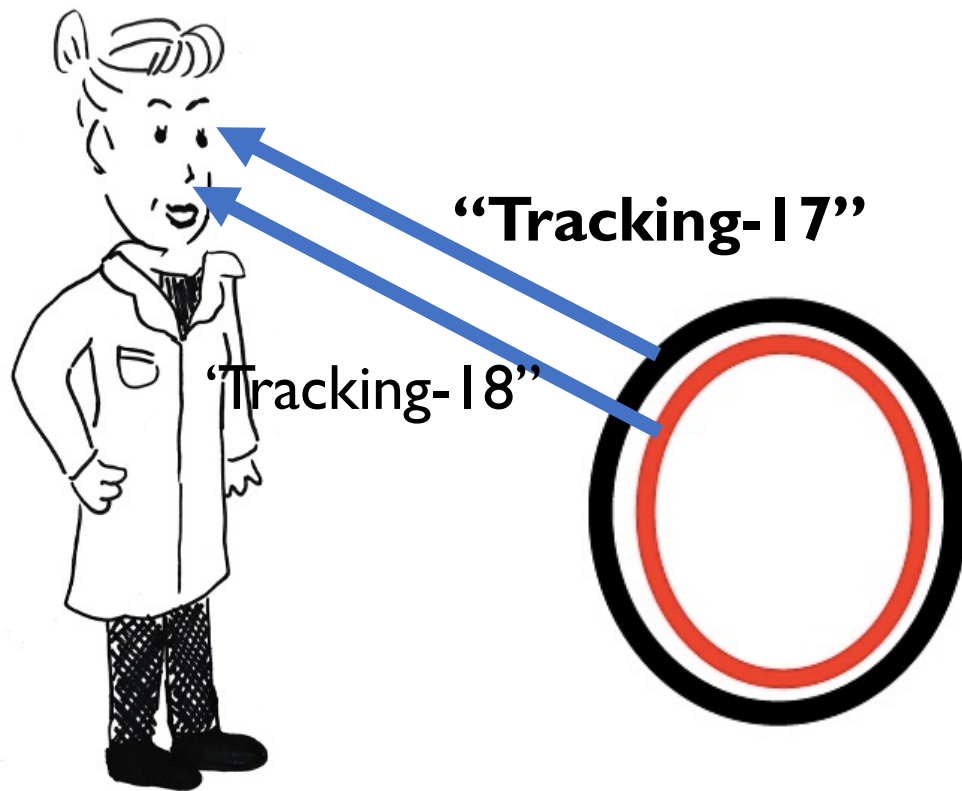
Tracking I 7_f → reasons for belief

Tracking I 8_p

Tracking I 8_f

There are all these very similar tracking relations – determinates. The conscious of relation is identical with only one of them. And is it **ONLY** that relation that has intrinsic epistemic value. The rest are **epistemic garbage**. “**The normative singularity view.**”

The normative singularity view avoids over-generation of reasons



By virtue of tracking-17 outer black but not inner red, Martha is conscious of black and not red, and has an immediate reason to believe black thing there.

Mary also tracks 18 the inner red. But since tracking 18 has no epistemic value at all, Mary has no reason to believe a red thing is there.

Although avoids overgeneration of reasons,
normative singularity view faces another problem:
normative singularities are *a priori* objectionable.

Imagine analogous
“normative
singularity” view
about pain.

PAIN₁₆ → No Reasons

PAIN₁₇ → Reasons

PAIN₁₈ → No Reasons

PAIN₁₉ → No Reasons

Another Example (Pautz 2017, Hawthorne forthcoming)

- Imagine a sorites sequence involving baldness: one hair at a time.
- Imagine following view: everything is OK, until the precise moment you only have 1017 hairs left.
- At this point, there's a normative singularity. Having 1016 hairs left is ok. But having 1017 left provides you with a giant reason to be depressed.
- Suddenly your life is over and nothing matters anymore.

The normative singularity view about tracking relations is analogous

Tracking | 7_p
Tracking | 7_f → reasons for belief
Tracking | 8_p
Tracking | 8_f

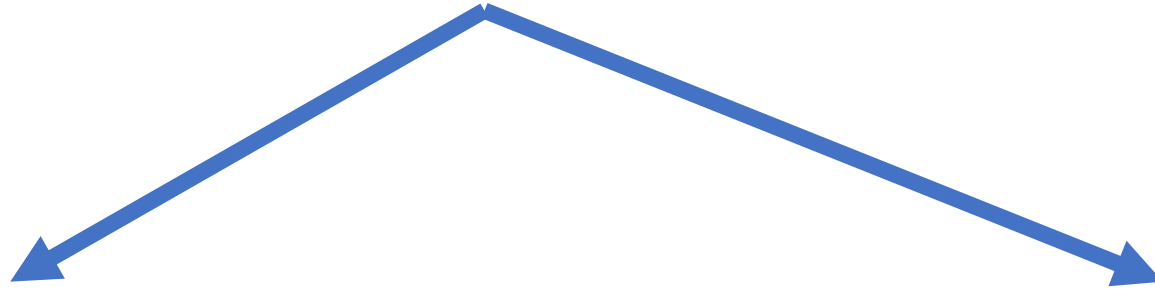
If we reject normative singularities in these other cases, doesn't consistency demand we reject it here?

If you like principles, problem is normative singularity view violates:

Small Difference Principle: *If properties F and G are intrinsically extremely similar determinates of a common determinable, then it can't be that F necessarily grounds **Strong Reasons** and G grounds **None At All**.*

(You might think sorites sequences make a problem. I disagree. See Hawthorne "Moral Vagueness and Epistemicism".)

Arbitrary Identities Reductive Physicalism Faces a Puzzle about Epistemic Value



Deflationary Pluralism
Overgeneration of Reasons

Normative Singularities

Final problem for arbitrary identities reductive physicalism.
Consider BIG DIFFERENCE claim:

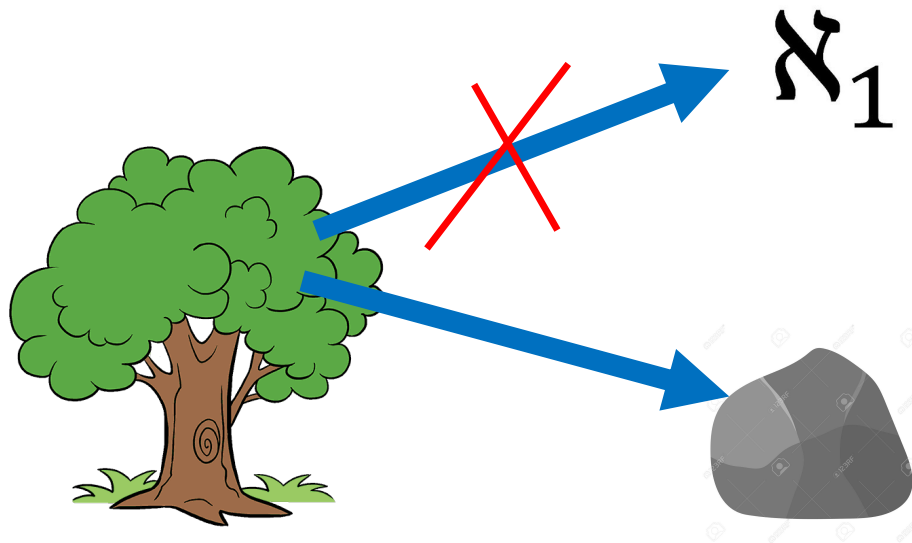
IF

someone is ***conscious of*** black but she's
NEVER been conscious of red (or even heard
about it)

Then

her *relation* to black is very different from her
relation to red

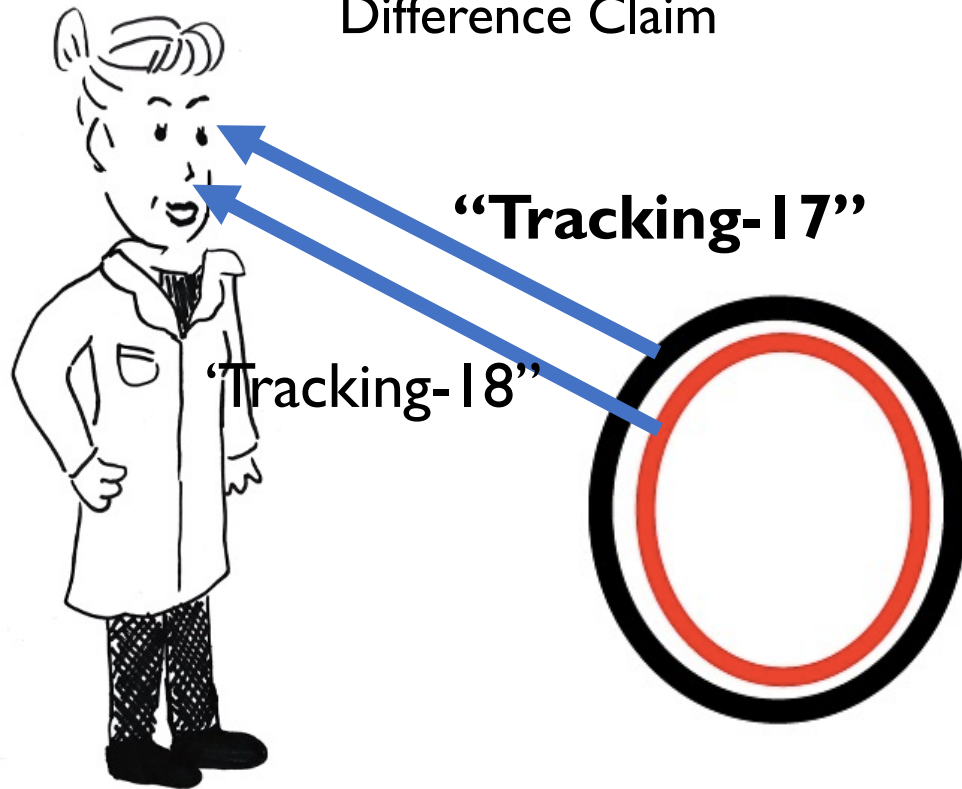
Geoff Lee questions, but similar things about **non-mental** things



We also know nothing is at all similar to a color but another color.

So there's a big difference between colors and noncolors.

Arbitrary identities
reductive physicalism
violates the Big
Difference Claim



*“While Martha is conscious of the color black, she stands in a nearly identical relation to the color red – even though she is **not** conscious of red.”*
Conscious-of = tracking-17. And that nearly = tracking18.

Absurd. First-person!!! Imagine **you = Martha**.



“You are conscious of the color black. You are not at all conscious of the color red. *Still, while you are conscious of the color black, you stand in a nearly identical relation to the color red.*”

You just know this speech to be false by introspection. All the difference in the world!!!

5. Conclusion

Sum up: In response to multiple candidates
problem, reductive physicalists about
consciousness:

Radical Experiential Indeterminacy
Immediately rule out

Arbitrary Identities
Problem about Epistemic value

Overgeneration of reasons

Normative singularity

What's the right moral? Reject reductive physicalism

- The argument for it isn't all that strong: given “causal closure”, it's the simplest view.
- Faces many problems – not just the ones in this talk.
- When the problems for a view really pile up, at *some* point it becomes reasonable to reject it.
- And there's an alternative.

My alternative view



- Follow Russell: conscious-of relation is an “irreducible”, primitive relation.
- Not identical with some specific crappy tracking relation, where there are lots of similar relations in the vicinity.
- *This allows us to say that it is RADICALLY DIFFERENT from all other relations nature.*
- *Accept UNIQUE EPISTEMIC VALUE in a way that’s in line with the Small Difference Principle!!!*
- **Compatible with grounding physicalism.**