

## WHY I AM NOT A DUALIST<sup>1</sup>

Karen Bennett  
Princeton University  
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Dualists think that not all the facts are physical facts. They think that there are facts about phenomenal consciousness<sup>2</sup> that cannot be explained in purely physical terms—facts about what it's like to see red, what it's like to feel sandpaper, what it's like to run 9 miles when it's 15° F out, etc. Some dualists think that there is a special kind of nonphysical substance; more common these days are dualists who only think that there are nonphysical properties, and that is the only form of dualism that I'll be concerned with here. Now, the property dualist does not propose to ignore the evidence from neuroscience. He does not think that phenomenal properties float utterly free of physical properties; he thinks they are connected to physical properties in important ways. Crucially, though, he thinks the connections are merely contingent. They are on a par with the laws of science, not those of logic or metaphysics. They are breakable, unlike the connection between, say, being a cat and being a mammal, or that between the existence of some atoms standing in certain complex relations to each other, and the existence of a composite object like a table.<sup>3</sup> Phenomenal properties emerge from their physical bases in some causal or quasi-causal fashion. That is how the property dualist both maintains a reasonable respect for the physical sciences, while simultaneously claiming that phenomenal properties are genuinely new additions to the world.

As the title suggests, I am not a dualist. Why am I not a dualist? One way to answer that question would be to lay out what I take to be the problems with the arguments for dualism—in particular, the knowledge argument and the conceivability argument. Much of the recent discussion in this area has been about where exactly those arguments go awry, and this has yielded a lot of fruitful work on the relationship between conceivability and possibility, on the

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<sup>1</sup> Apologies, of course, to Bertrand Russell.

<sup>2</sup> See Block 1995 on the distinction between what he calls 'access consciousness' and 'phenomenal consciousness'. I will often just say 'consciousness', but it is the latter I have in mind.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, not everyone believes in composite objects. But *everyone*, including compositional nihilists (van Inwagen 1990, Merricks 2001, Dorr xx), denies that the principles that link simples arranged in certain ways to composite objects are contingent. Nihilists think such principles are not just false but *necessarily* false. So *no one* thinks that the atoms standing in those relations come with a table in the actual world, but fail to in some other world. No one, on any side of the debate, believes in what I hereby dub 'compie worlds'.

nature of phenomenal concepts, and the like. However, I want to stick with the question of what is wrong with dualism *itself*. Instead of explaining why I am not convinced by the arguments for dualism, I want to discuss why I am committed to finding fault with them in the first place.

Why, then, am I not a dualist?

A preliminary reason is the argument from Ockham's razor. We should not multiply entities beyond necessity; we should make do with as little as possible. But of course this is not a particularly good reason, because dualists will quite justifiably claim that they *are* making do with as little as possible. They think that making sense of the world requires postulating irreducible phenomenal properties. So the first *real* reason why I am not a dualist is what might be called the argument from optimistic meta-induction.<sup>4</sup> Science has always managed to make do without before. That is, science has never before needed to postulate irreducible nonphysical properties to solve tricky, long-lasting problems, so why here, in this one isolated instance? (citesxx). A second reason why I am not a dualist is the argument from causal exclusion. If the mental is truly distinct from the physical, how can it have nonoverdeterministic causal power without violating the completeness of physics? Some would say that the nonreductive physicalist has just as much trouble answering this question as the dualist does (e.g. Kim 1989, 1993, 1998; Crane 2001), but they are wrong (see my forthcoming).

These are both good reasons, and they have been explored in great detail elsewhere. What I want to do in this short piece is explore a different line of thought against dualism. I want to consider the claim that *dualism is not exactly a view at all*. More precisely, and less tendentiously, I want to consider the claim that dualism cannot tell us anything of interest about the relation between consciousness and the physical world—but it *should* be able to. Dualists should, and do, take that question seriously. Dualism claims to offer explanations where it cannot.

Let me sneak up on the point I want to make by considering one of dualism's cousins in a different area of philosophy—the appeal to agent causation in response to concerns about freedom of the will.<sup>5</sup> Note that I call this a 'cousin'. Although agent causation certainly forms a natural package with *substance* dualism, I am not claiming that a mere *property* dualist is committed to it; I am only exploiting an analogy here. Those who believe in agent causation

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<sup>4</sup> I owe the punning label to David Baker.

<sup>5</sup> I suspect something similar can be said about the 'same soul' view of personal identity, but matters get a bit complicated.

think that there is room between the horns of the dilemma of determinism. They claim that human actions are neither causally determined by preceding events, nor uncaused matters of chance, but are instead non-deterministically caused directly by the agent herself.<sup>6</sup> *I raise my hand.* This causal relation between me and my hand's rising is different than that between two billiard balls colliding on a pool table, or the prowling of a cat and the smashing of a vase. On this view, agents bring about their actions in a different way than events do, and the relation is neither deterministic nor chancy.

The problem, though, is that it is rather difficult to hear the appeal to agent causation as anything other than an insistence that “no, really, we *do* have free will.” ‘Agent causation’ is just a label for precisely what would be needed for us to have free will, if determinism is true and compatibilism is false. It does not provide a substantive and independently plausible account of how exactly we *manage* to cause our actions in this special non-necessitating way. The issue is not advanced at all by *naming* the space between the horns.<sup>7</sup>

Now, presumably more can be said to defend agent causation, and it is unquestionable that more care would be required to do proper justice to the actual positions held by contemporary proponents of the view. But hopefully what I have said suffices to illustrate the kind of concern in play, because I think exactly the same kind of concern arises for dualism about phenomenal consciousness.

Start by noticing that the dualist's main arguments for her position—the knowledge argument, the conceivability of zombies, the explanatory gap generally—are all negative. They are, in the first instance, arguments against physicalism, not for any fleshed out view. The dualist position is essentially that the physicalist cannot explain consciousness, not a positive claim about how consciousness *is* to be explained. And that is the core of the problem. How are *they* going to explain consciousness? How are dualists going to answer the questions they claim physicalists cannot answer?

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<sup>6</sup> Here is Chisholm's classic statement:

we must not say that every event involved in the act is caused by some other event; and we must not say that the act is something that is not caused at all. The possibility that remains, therefore, is this: we should say that at least one of the events involved in the act is caused, not by other events, but by something else instead. And this something else can only be the agent—the man (1961, 30).

<sup>7</sup> Watson makes the same point: “To say that we achieve self-determination in an indeterministic world by exercising agent causation seems unhelpfully close to saying that we are self-determining in virtue of determining our actions” (2003, 10).

To make this vivid, recall that both Churchland and Lewis have pointed out that dualists face their own version of the knowledge argument. It is far from clear that any amount of information about astral bodies, the psionic field, ectoplasm, parapsychology, or psychophysics will help Mary learn what it's like to see red before she leaves her room (Churchland 1985; Lewis 1988).<sup>8</sup> Now, while that list of lecture topics—taken directly from Lewis (280-281)—is good fun, obviously only the last is relevant to the contemporary property dualist, who does not believe in ectoplasm or astral bodies any more than the physicalist does. The fact remains, however, that no number of dualist lectures about psychophysical laws will help Mary at all. Instead of defending this point in the context of the knowledge argument, though, I want to turn to the general issue that lies in the background—namely, the explanatory gap.

Both the knowledge argument and the conceivability argument are driven by the fact that we don't seem to have any idea how the massively complicated pattern of electrochemical activity in my brain could possibly account for what it's like to see red, or feel sandpaper, etc. As Levine puts it, “there seems to be no discernible connection between the physical description and the mental one, and thus no explanation of the latter in terms of the former” (2001, 77). Tell us all the neuroscience you like; it's still a mystery why *that* is what red looks like. Suppose for the moment that that is correct. How, exactly, is dualism supposed to help here?

Perhaps it looks odd to even ask this question. The explanatory gap is a gap between the physical and the phenomenal. The physicalist thinks that physical facts explain phenomenal facts, and thus should be taken to task when they (at least apparently) fail to do so. But the dualist precisely *doesn't* think that phenomenal facts can be explained in physical terms, and takes the very existence of the explanatory gap as evidence for her view. The way dualism is supposed to help, then, is simply by claiming that we should never have been looking for a physical explanation in the first place. So it looks as though it's a mistake to think that the dualist faces any kind of problem with the explanatory gap.

Well, that depends upon what one has in mind by ‘the explanatory gap’. The dualist does indeed have a straightforward answer to the question, “how do the physical facts entail/guarantee the phenomenal ones?”—namely, “they don't”. But that is clearly not the only question in the

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<sup>8</sup> Jackson rejected the ‘parity of reasons’ concern by claiming that although a physicalist has to say that Mary could learn all there is to know about qualia by means of books and black-and-white television, a dualist does not. But I do not see the reason for this unless it is question-beggingly assumed that a dualist can help themselves to subjectivity in a way that no physicalist can (1986, 295).

ballpark. Another important one is “how do the physical facts *causally generate* or *otherwise give rise to* the phenomenal facts?” That is, the dualist does think that there is some interesting non-necessitation relation R that systematically holds between the physical and the phenomenal.<sup>9</sup> Whatever exactly R is, we can ask how and why the phenomenal facts are connected to the physical facts by R. This, of course, is precisely the question of how consciousness arises from the physical—what Chalmers has called ‘the hard problem’ (1995, 1996).

Dualism—at least Chalmers’ dualism—very much *is* supposed to help answer the hard problem. He claims that the impossibility of providing a physical explanation of phenomenal consciousness does *not* mean that we should give up on the hard problem completely, or conclude that “conscious experience lies outside the domain of scientific theory altogether” (1995, 19). Those are not the right reactions. The *right* reaction, he says, is to look for a different kind of explanation of consciousness. In particular, the right reaction is to accept that answering the hard problem requires going beyond the physical. It requires an ‘extra ingredient’:

Once we accept that materialism is false, it becomes clear that... we have to look for a “Y-factor,” something *additional* to the physical facts that will help explain consciousness. We find such a Y-factor in the postulation of irreducible psychophysical laws (1996, 245).

A physical theory gives a theory of physical processes, and a psychophysical theory tells us how those processes give rise to experience. We know that experience depends on physical processes, but we also know that this dependence cannot be derived from physical laws alone. The new basic principles postulated by a nonreductive theory give us the extra ingredient that we need to build an explanatory bridge.... Nothing in this approach contradicts anything in the physical theory; we simply need to add further *bridging* principles to explain how consciousness arises from physical processes (1995, 20).

The extra explanation-allowing ingredient, then, is the psychophysical laws themselves.

This is the point at which I lose track of what is supposed to be going on. How can postulating bridge principles answer the hard problem? Postulating the bridging principles does not in itself tell us *how* consciousness arises from the physical; it just tells us *that* it does. Calling them ‘bridging principles’ or ‘psychophysical laws’ does not do any explanatory work. It just names the connection. Thus far, then, the property dualist looks like the believer in agent causation. He is simply labeling the relation between the mental and the physical without saying

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<sup>9</sup> I say ‘interesting’ and ‘systematic’ because there are lots of very boring relations that hold between physical and phenomenal facts, such as ‘coexistence’.

anything about how it works, just as the believer in agent causation simply labels the putatively special kind of causal relation that holds between an agent and her actions without explaining what it is.

Here the dualist will surely object that I am not being fair. He will either claim that I am asking too much, or else that I am granting him too little. Let me start with the latter. First, then, the dualist might say that he can too say something more substantive about the nature of the psychophysical laws. He might say that it's hardly fair to pick on him because he hasn't actually *got* the psychophysical laws yet. Give him time; let him do some science! Sorting out how consciousness arises from the physical requires sorting out neuroscience. The more we learn about, say, neural binding or 40hz neural oscillations, the more we will understand how those processes contingently give rise to experience.

This, I take it, is just not on the table for the dualist. Certainly, he will eventually be able to state more specific bridge principles. But he will never say that his understanding of the physical world tells him anything about how phenomenal consciousness arises. To say that would undermine his appeal to the explanatory gap, whether in the guise of the conceivability argument or otherwise.

So the dualist will presumably respond the second way, and claim that I am asking for too much. He might say that he is happy to just name the connection between the physical and the phenomenal. All he wants is *that* it holds, not an account of how or why. The connections are just brute; psychophysical laws are fundamental laws. Chalmers says:

it might be objected that [the appeal to psychophysical laws] does not tell us what the connection is, or *how* a physical configuration gives rise to experience. But the search for such a connection is misguided. Even with fundamental physical laws, we cannot find a 'connection' that does the work. Things simply happen in accordance with the law; beyond a certain point, there is no asking 'how' (1996, 170; see also 213-215).

I agree that this is the better way for the dualist to go; it is at least genuinely dualist. However, it comes at a price.

I will start by making the point as more or less an *ad hominem* against Chalmers. Despite this claim that the laws are brute and explanation runs out, in the passages quoted earlier (and elsewhere) he *does* ask for precisely what he here says is misguided. He does ask for an explanation of consciousness, for an account of why and how it arises from the physical. But if the psychophysical connections are just brute, *there is no such account to be had*. Not only will

brute psychophysical laws not tell you why the world contains consciousness at all, they also will not tell you why some particular conscious creature is conscious, nor why it is in the particular phenomenal state it is in (contra 1996, 214). The laws will not explain consciousness; they will at best *predict* it. Scientists can look around the world and draw up complex and sophisticated correlations between the physical and the phenomenal. They can do MRI scans and lesion studies and so forth, and conclude that some physical process P is always accompanied by experience E. But for a brute-law dualist, these are mere correlations. They will enable us to inductively predict that the next person who is in brain state P will probably also have experience E. But they will not at all tell us why or how.

So though the dualist who wants to embrace the bruteness of the psychophysical connections should change his rhetoric, and give up his talk of solving the hard problem and providing a ‘theory of consciousness’. He should instead acknowledge that the only aim of neuroscience can be to find neural *correlates* of consciousness, and then, at best, make inductive *predictions* about the occurrence of experience. Yet Chalmers does not do this, and continues to claim that the psychophysical laws can themselves do explanatory work. Indeed, he explicitly says that finding correlates is not enough: “we need to know more than *which* processes give rise to experience; we need an account of why and how. A full theory of consciousness must build an explanatory bridge” (1995, 16)—an explanatory bridge that, as we have seen, is to consist of psychophysical laws. I just do not understand this. I do not see how you get an account of why and how process P gives rise to experience E by saying that there is a contingent, brute generalization to the effect that P-type processes give rise to E-type experiences. That would be like saying that the existence of a brute law to the effect that boiling water generates steam tells you why and how boiling water generates steam. Again, brute psychophysical laws will tell you *that* there is a connection; they will not do anything to explain it.

I initially characterized this concern as an *ad hominem* against Chalmers’ version of dualism, but that is not quite right. I have defended the point with reference to Chalmers because his version of dualism takes seriously the fact that science *can* teach us about experience, and takes seriously the fact that there *does* seem to be a legitimate demand for an explanation of consciousness. However, there is a real tension between the desire to explain how consciousness arises from the physical, and the claim that the psychophysical laws are just brute. Chalmers seems to have struggled with this tension, which is why it can be nicely illustrated with quotes

from his work. But it is a tension for *any* dualist. They need to either accept that they cannot say anything of interest about how consciousness arises from the physical, or else give up their dualism. The fact that even dualists seem to think that the question, ‘how does consciousness arise from the physical?’ is a legitimate question to be given a substantive answer suggests that they should do the latter.

I have obviously not given a substantive answer myself. But physicalism, unlike dualism, is at least in a position to provide it. It may be hard to see how consciousness could be accounted for in purely physical terms, but at least it is clear that the type of explanation that physicalists are groping for is really a type of explanation. Set aside the mental and the physical, and consider the structure of their answers. I understand how the fact that B gives rise to A can be explained by appeal to facts about the nature and workings of B. I do not understand how the fact that B gives rise to A can be explained by appeal to the fact that there is a brute B  $\square$  A connection.

Consequently, it seems to me that the explanatory gap looks *worse*, or anyway at least as bad, for a dualist as for a physicalist. It is at least as hard to see how the dualist can answer his questions with his tools as to see how the physicalist can answer her questions with hers. I do not know the physicalist solution to the hard problem. I cannot yet see how the neurophysiological facts explain conscious experience. But I can at least see how I *could* someday see.

So what should we do for now, in the absence of a positive answer to the question of how consciousness either arises from or is explained by the physical? I suggest that physicalism should be the default position, not just in the sense that we should be physicalists until someone asks us a hard question, but in the stronger sense that we should be physicalists until *there is an alternate view available*. We should be physicalists until someone actually provides a nonphysicalist way of explaining the relation between the physical and the phenomenal. We should be physicalists until someone shows us that there is a nonphysicalist way of informatively addressing the question of how consciousness arises from the physical. We should not approach the puzzle cases—about zombies, about Mary in her black and white room—empty-handed, and walk away with whatever view they suggest to us. Instead, we should approach the puzzle cases

armed with the only positive view available, and respond as well as we can given the constraints of that view.<sup>10</sup>

I have obviously not argued that the explanatory gap is closeable, nor provided a physicalistically acceptable story about why it is not—e.g., a story about how and why our conceptual apparatus leaves us susceptible to it. I have also not tried to diagnose the error in the zombie or Mary arguments. I certainly have not offered a physicalist theory of consciousness. But it's one thing to actually provide those answers, and another thing to provide a reason for thinking that some answer or other must be forthcoming. I hope to have done the latter. That is, I hope to have provided a new motivation for defending physicalism against the challenges that face it, rather than giving into those challenges and accepting dualism.

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<sup>10</sup> This last point echoes Johnston's criticism of the method of cases as used in the personal identity literature (1987). He argues that we should start with an independently motivated view about what a person is, and *then* see what we are committed to saying in response to puzzle cases involving transporters, fission, and the like. We should not *start* with the puzzle cases, and then tailor our account of personal identity to satisfy all our intuitive judgments about them.

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