

Addendum, 2000

VIII. SOME SECOND THOUGHTS

Mind-body materialism is at its most inviting in the context of trying to give a unified treatment of the natural world. And the principal challenge it faces is to do justice to the distinguishing features of mental phenomena, which set them off from nonmental, physical reality. This challenge is not easy to meet. In 1971 I suggested that the difficulty in meeting it makes especially appealing the eliminative materialism of Feyerabend and Rorty. If adopting the materialist view that mental phenomena are physical in nature prevents us from giving a satisfactory account of what is distinctive about the mental, perhaps the trouble is not with materialism but with the mental. If we can describe and explain everything about the world in physical terms but cannot give a satisfactory account of the distinctively mental, why not conclude that there simply are no mental states and events? Physical terms would then suffice to describe and explain the phenomena we now classify as mental. Even if describing and explaining these things physically is not a practical option, the possibility of doing so would underwrite the eliminative materialist position.

I no longer accept this argument.² Eliminativists such as Rorty and Feyerabend hold that, on our commonsense, folk-psychological conception of the mind, the mental is automatically nonphysical; commonsense folk psychology is incompatible with mind-body materialism. So identifying mental states with a particular range of physical states inevitably loses part of what is distinctively mental about those states. Since mental states are nonphysical, either materialism is wrong or nothing mental exists.

But these are not the only alternatives. Instead of concluding that noth-

²See Rosenthal, "Keeping Matter in Mind." See the Selective Update section of the Bibliography for this and other references below.

ing is mental because common sense conceives of the mental as nonphysical, we could simply deny that common sense does actually conceive of the mental as automatically nonphysical. If commonsense folk psychology were to conceive of the mental in that way, denying the conception would to that extent be eliminativist. But it is far from obvious that folk psychology actually embraces that conception.

Suppose we established somehow that the states we now describe in mental terms were actually physical states. The eliminativist insists that this would show that these states are not, after all, mental, since being mental is incompatible with being physical. But if people continued in commonsense contexts to refer to the relevant states as distinctively mental, we could take that to show that common sense does not, after all, regard mental states as nonphysical. This would help undermine the view, shared by antimaterialists and eliminativists, that mental phenomena are in some way automatically nonphysical. And it would sustain the position of standard, noneliminative materialists, such as Smart, Lewis, and others, that the mental, distinctively so described, is a special case of the physical.

Recall the central objection to the IT that Smart raises in his classic article, which to many still seems to pose the most telling difficulty for mind-body materialism. On this objection, even if we suppose that every mental state is identical with some physical state, picking a state out as mental is different from picking it out as physical. Indeed, if we did not pick these states out in different ways, as mental and as physical, it would be wholly trivial to say they are identical, somewhat like saying that London is identical with London. But, the objection concludes, if picking out a state as mental is distinct from picking it out as physical, mental states must have properties in virtue of which they count as distinctively mental, and these distinguishing properties must be nonphysical.

Smart's solution was to hold that descriptions of states as mental are topic neutral, that is, neutral in respect of the kind of state they are; describing a state topic neutrally is noncommittal as to whether that state is physical or nonphysical. So, if mental descriptions are topic neutral, they do not imply that mental states are nonphysical.

But putting the merits of this reply to one side, the objection it addresses rests on a mistake. Picking out a state as distinctively mental need not involve picking it out in respect of any nonphysical properties. Suppose, again, that mental states are identical with physical states. That general identity covers many specific identities between particular kinds of mental state and particular kinds of physical state, for example, neural states of some sort. We will have two independent ways of picking out the states, one in distinctively mental terms and the other not, but for all this tells us, the mental way and the other way might both be special cases of picking things out physically. Identifying states in distinctively mental terms does not by itself imply that mental states have some nonphysical aspect.

Despite this, it might still seem that mental properties and descriptions are nonphysical because they are so strikingly different from any standard cases of physical properties and descriptions. But this is unconvincing as well. Living things exemplify properties unlike those found outside living systems, but those properties have no nonphysical aspect; living things are simply special cases of physical systems. The same may well be so for the mental.

Other traditional reasons for insisting that the mental is nonphysical are also unpersuasive. Mental states are not spatially extended, but neither are all bodily states, such as having some particular weight. We do have special access to our own mental states, but the kind of access we have to things is often an unreliable guide to their nature. We cannot now give a complete explanation of mental phenomena in bodily terms, but the same was true not so long ago for biological phenomena, and even chemical interactions. Without argument, the assumption that being mental excludes being physical simply begs the question against mind-body materialism.

Smart's idea that mental descriptions are topic neutral is compatible with the view that the mental is a special case of the physical, since topic-neutral descriptions do not preclude something's being physical. But topic neutrality greatly overshoots the mark. If a description is topic neutral, it is neutral not only as to whether the thing described is physical or not physical, but also as to whether or not that thing is mental. But describing something in distinctively mental terms cannot be noncommittal as to whether that thing is mental. So topic-neutral descriptions cannot do justice to the distinctively mental.³ Still, though mental descriptions are not topic neutral, they may well, as Lewis urges, be neutral as between various theories about the mind, including materialism and its denial.

IX. TOKEN MATERIALISM AND ANOMALOUS MONISM

To be defensible, standard, noneliminative materialism must not prevent us from describing mental states in terms of their distinctively mental characteristics. So we cannot properly evaluate mind-body materialism without first becoming clear about just what these distinguishing mental characteristics are. The selections in Part Six focus on various issues having to do with these distinguishing mental characteristics.

Most discussions of mind-body materialism from Smart to Rorty focus on bodily sensations, such as pains, and perceptual sensations, such as visual sensations of red and auditory sensations of a trumpet. But there is another broad class of mental phenomena, often called *intentional states*, which includes such states as thinking, desiring, expecting, doubting, and wonder-

³See Rosenthal, "Mentality and Neutrality."

ing. Unlike bodily and perceptual sensations, which we characterize in qualitative terms, the main distinguishing feature of intentional states is their propositional or sentential content. We describe a person's thoughts, desires, and doubts by saying what the person thinks, desires, or doubts, and we specify that by providing some sentence or the grammatical equivalent that captures the content of the person's thought, desire, or doubt.

Many discussions of mind-body materialism, such as the functionalist theories as those put forth by Fodor, Putnam, and Lewis, apply indifferently to both intentional states and sensations. But there are special characteristics of intentional states that form the basis of an important and widely discussed materialist argument developed by Davidson.

It is generally agreed that mental events both cause and are caused by bodily events. And, according to Davidson, causal connections occur only when there are strict laws of nature that describe the events as causally connected, laws that allow for no exceptions. But Davidson argues that no strict laws link events described in mental terms with events described in physical terms; strict, exceptionless laws invariably describe events physically. But, if mental events can enter into causal connections only if they figure in strict laws and strict laws always describe events physically, how can mental events cause and be caused by physical events?

Davidson's answer is that the mental events that cause and are caused by physical events must, themselves, be describable in physical terms. The very same events we describe as mental when we talk about them in commonsense terms must be identical with physical events that strict laws refer to as being physical. It follows that mental events are a special case of physical events.

This argument recalls Hobbes's argument for mind-body materialism. Mental events, he notes, sometimes cause and are caused by bodily motions. But, since only bodily motions can cause other bodily motions, mental events must themselves be bodily motions. To sustain this argument, Hobbes must establish that only bodily motions can cause other bodily motions, an assumption an opponent of materialism would find question begging. Davidson, by contrast, must show both that causal connections require backing by strict laws and that no strict laws connect events described as mental with events described as physical. Though not question begging, these claims may not be easy to establish.

The absence of strict laws that link events described as mental with events described physically would have consequences for how we type mental events. Suppose that some way of typing events mentally corresponds to some taxonomy of events in physical terms, so that the events that fall under each mental description also fall under some physical description. Perhaps, then, there are, after all, strict laws linking events described mentally with events described physically, since we would be able to construct a path from the mental types to physical types that figure in strict laws.

Jackson describes Mary's new knowledge as knowing *what it's like* to experience color. This suggests one reason to think that her new knowledge is not a matter of knowing any fact. Suppose you know that the red object is in the room. You can describe your knowledge by saying that you know *where* the red object is or *what* is in the room or *what color* the object is. You can describe your knowledge, that is, by saying what question it would provide the answer to. But if your knowledge is factual, you must be able to say not only what question your knowledge would answer, but also what that answer is; you must be able to say that you know *that* the red object is in the room.

On this test, Mary's knowledge is not factual. When Mary comes to know *what it's like* to experience color, what can she say to specify that knowledge any further? What answer can she give to the question, "What is it like to experience color?" At best, it seems, she could simply point to something red and say that it's like what she experiences when she sees that thing. This inability to specify Mary's new knowledge in factual terms is striking. When somebody knows something factual, it also makes sense to say that the person believes that thing; but it makes no sense to describe Mary as believing *what it's like to experience color*. So it is likely that Mary's new knowledge is not factual knowledge at all, but just her being acquainted with a new experience.

Churchland addresses several antimaterialist arguments other than the knowledge argument. It is sometimes urged that, since we cannot deduce anything about qualitative properties from neurophysiological knowledge alone, qualitative properties must have some nonphysical aspect. But, as Churchland points out, we often reduce one body of knowledge to another without there being any deductive connection between the two bodies of knowledge. So the absence of deductive connections cannot, by itself, show that qualitative properties are not reducible to the neurophysiological. Moreover, if reduction does not require deductive, conceptual connections, thinking about the nature of qualitative properties is not by itself enough to tell whether those properties are physical.

It is also sometimes argued that the introspective access we have to our own qualitative states undermines materialism, since we do not introspect our qualitative states as being in any way physical. But Churchland argues that how we introspect our mental states depends on how we conceive of those states. Indeed, he urges, if we conceived of what we now call mental states in neurophysiological terms, we could in principle introspect those states in such terms, and doing so might well afford richer introspective discriminations than those of folk psychology. It is worth noting that the variability of introspection is independent of introspecting in neurophysiological terms; a richer folk-psychological taxonomy would also result in more fine-grained introspective discriminations. In any case, if we did in-

trospect our states as being somehow nonphysical, that might be due simply to our conceiving of those states in terms of an incorrect folk theory.

Despite the widespread influence the knowledge argument has had, Jackson no longer accepts it. He now holds that the qualitative properties of sensations are just relational and functional properties of those states and that Mary learns something new about those properties when she comes to see colors. Jackson explains the temptation to hold that qualitative properties are not relational and functional as the result of our coming to know about them in the quick, automatic way in which we usually come to know only about the intrinsic, nonrelational properties of things. And, since we feel sure that whatever physical properties sensations might have are not intrinsic or nonrelational, if we think qualitative properties are intrinsic and nonrelational, it will then seem to us that they cannot be physical. But this conclusion rests on the mistaken belief that qualitative properties must be intrinsic and nonrelational.

Descartes held that we are conscious in some special, automatic way of all our mental states, and many still believe this, especially for the case of qualitative states. The view that qualitative states are automatically conscious is a strong source of antimaterialist belief, partly because we seem not to be automatically conscious of anything physical. Our being conscious of our own mental states is a matter of how those states appear to us, and it may seem obvious that, if there is no distinction between one's mental states and the way they appear to one, those states cannot be physical.⁵

But if, as Jackson urges, our access to qualitative states may mislead us about their nature, there may after all be no necessary tie between qualitative states and our consciousness of them. And Churchland's argument that our introspective access to mental states depends on how we conceptualize those states suggests that the way we are conscious of our qualitative states is independent of the states themselves. So both arguments help clear the way for a satisfactory materialist theory.⁶

Like Churchland, Lewis denies that the knowledge Mary comes to have about color experiences is factual knowledge; her new knowledge, he argues, is rather an ability to recognize and imagine experiences of certain types. So qualitative properties, often called *qualia* (singular '*qualé*'), are properties that tend to cause this ability to recognize and imagine experiences of particular types. And insofar as we define qualitative properties in terms of the typical causal roles, such properties will result in no difficulty for materialism.

⁵This concern is essential, e.g., to Kripke's argument against the IT in *Naming and Necessity*, pp. 134–155, and "Identity and Necessity," pp. 161–164.

⁶See also Rosenthal, "Two Concepts of Consciousness" and "Sensory Quality and the Relocation Story."

Lewis argues that this conception of qualitative properties belongs to our commonsense, folk-psychological view of qualitative states. But, according to Lewis, folk psychology also embraces a second view about qualia, which conflicts with materialism. He believes that folk psychology also holds that being in a state that exemplifies a particular quale is, by itself, enough to reveal the essence of that quale. If so, qualia cannot be identical with neural properties, since we cannot get neurophysiological knowledge simply by being in qualitative states. Moreover, since qualia appear to us to be simple, nonrelational properties, if just having a quale reveals its essence, qualia actually are simple and nonrelational.

Lewis accordingly recommends rejecting the folk-psychological doctrine that having a quale reveals its essence, while retaining the rest that folk psychology tells us about qualitative states. So doing, he urges, would be eliminativist with respect to the folk-psychological conception of qualia in only a relatively minor, unimportant way.

But there is another way to save materialism. One can instead question whether folk psychology is actually committed to the view that having a quale reveals its essence. Lewis believes that it is so committed because so many philosophers think it is. But philosophers' judgments often reflect controversial theoretical commitments, which go well beyond generally shared commonsense beliefs such as those which constitute folk psychology. It is likely that the view that having a quale is enough to reveal its essence is just such a questionable theoretical commitment, since the notion of essence is relatively abstruse and folk theories seldom if ever say much about essences or how they are revealed. Indeed, folk theories are usually neutral about controversial theoretical issues, at least those issues which do not result from conceptual innovations. And if folk psychology does not contain the view that having a quale reveals its essence, qualitative properties may well present no objection to the truth of standard, noneliminative materialism.

part one
CLASSICAL MATERIALISM

RENÉ DESCARTES

Selections

from *DISCOURSE ON THE METHOD*

of rightly directing one's Reason

and of seeking Truth in the Sciences

Part V

I specially dwelt on showing that if there were machines with the organs and appearance of a monkey, or some other irrational animal, we should have no means of telling that they were not altogether of the same nature as those animals; whereas if there were machines resembling our bodies, and imitating our actions as far as is morally possible, we should still have two means of telling that, all the same, they were not real men. First, they could never use words or other constructed signs, as we do to declare our thoughts to others. It is quite conceivable that a machine should be so made as to utter words, and even utter them in connexion with physical events that cause a change in one of its organs; so that e.g. if it is touched in one part, it asks what you want to say to it, and if touched in another, it cries out that it is hurt; but not that it should be so made as to arrange words variously in response to the meaning of what is said in its presence, as even the dumbest men can do. Secondly, while they might do many things as well as any of us or better, they would infallibly fail in others, revealing that they acted not from knowledge but only from

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**MATERIALISM
AND
THE MIND-BODY
PROBLEM**

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