

The Nature of Consciousness
Handout [22]
Joseph Levine: *On Leaving Out What It's Like*

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§ The Goals:

- 1. To clarify the anti-physicalist charge of "leaving out" qualia, distinguishing between a metaphysical and an epistemological reading of the objection.**
- 2. To argue that standard anti-physicalist conceivability arguments fail to show that physicalist theories "leave out" qualia in the metaphysical sense.**
- 3. To argue that these conceivability arguments do serve to establish that physicalist theories "leave out" qualia in the epistemological sense, because they reveal our inability to explain qualitative character in terms of the physical properties of sensory states.**

§ The Metaphysical Reading of "Leaving Something Out"

*** "to leave out" in the metaphysical sense**

___ to say that a theory leaves out a certain phenomenon is to say that there are objects, events or properties to which the descriptive apparatus of the theory cannot refer.

*** Kripke's Argument:**

- ___ 1. If the identity statements between two rigid designators are true, they are necessarily true.**
- ___ 2. For any necessarily true identity statement ($x = y$), we cannot possibly conceive having x without having y ; or vice versa.**
- ___ 3. But we can coherently imagine feeling pain without having C-fibers firing.**
- ___ 4. Therefore, pain is not identical with the firing of C-fibers.**

*** Levine's response to Kripke's argument:**

___ Suppose he's right that we can coherently imagine feeling pain without having C-fibers firing.... Still, what is imaginable is an *epistemological* matter, and therefore what imagining pain without C-fibers does is establish the *epistemological* possibility that pain is not identical with the firing of C-fibers.

___ It takes another argument to get from the epistemological possibility that pain is not the firing of C-fibers to the metaphysical possibility, which is what you need to show that pain isn't in fact identical to the firing of C-fibers.

[Question]: Is Levine right that what Kripke's argument accomplishes is merely an epistemological gap?

§ The Epistemological Reading of "Leaving Something Out"

* 'to leave out' in the epistemological sense

___ to say that a theory leaves out a certain phenomenon is to say that the theory fails to provide an explanation for this sort of phenomenon.

* [Note: from Levine: *Materialism and Qualia: The Explanatory Gap*]

___ "explanation" [= to make a phenomenon intelligible]

___ What we need is an account of what it is for a phenomenon to be made *intelligible*, along with rules which determine when the demand for further intelligibility is inappropriate.

___ To make a phenomenon intelligible is to offer an explanatory reductionism between this phenomenon and something else that is already fully explained within the theory.

§ Levine's Strategy:

___ Instead of arguing that mental properties \neq physical properties, he tries to argue that there is an explanatory gap between knowing mental properties and knowing physical properties.

[Assumption 1]:

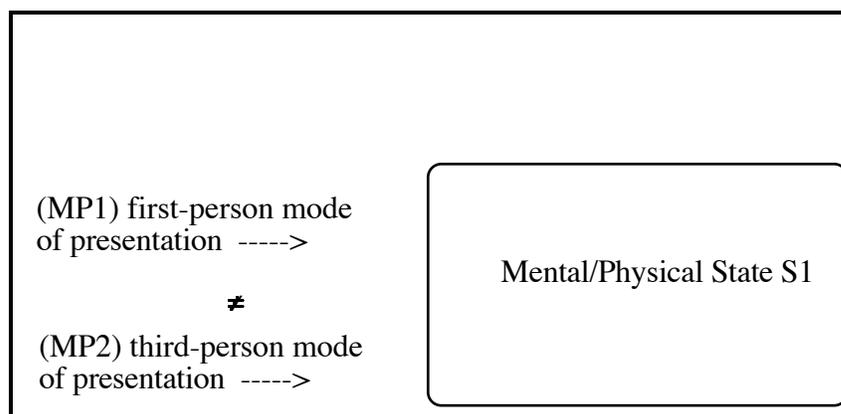
___ In order to account for the fact that it is epistemologically possible [*conceivable*] for someone to experience qualitative character without having the relevant physico-functional properties, there must be two properties of the one state, providing two epistemic paths by which the subject conceives of that state.

[Assumption 2]:

___ These two epistemic paths can be viewed as two modes of presentation" under which we apprehend this one state. Let us call them the "first-person mode of presentation" and the "third-person mode of presentation."

[Assumption 3]:

___ Explanation = showing how the explanandum follows from the explanans.



*** Levine's Argument for the Explanatory Gap**

1. Two epistemic paths can merge as one only when one of them is reducible from the other.
2. The way we tell whether reduction has been accomplished is to see whether the phenomenon to be reduced is epistemologically necessitated by the reducing phenomenon.
3. But no matter how rich the information processing or the neurophysiological story gets, it still seems quite coherent to imagine that all that should be going on without there being anything it's like to undergo the states in question.
4. Therefore, pain cannot be reduced to any physical/functional property.
5. Therefore, the property of pain and the physical/functional property are two distinct epistemic paths.
6. When there are two distinct epistemic paths, there is an explanatory gap.
7. Therefore, the physical/functional story cannot fully explain qualia like pain.

§ Explanation and Reduction

1. Theoretical reduction is justified principally on the basis of its explanatory power.
2. Explanation is supposed to involve a deductive relation between explanans and explanandum.
3. The problem is that the reducing theory and the reduced theory don't have the same vocabulary, so somewhere one is going to have to introduce bridge principles.
4. The obvious way to obtain the requisite bridge principles is to provide theoretical reductions of these properties as well.
5. What seems to be responsible for the explanatory gap, then, is the fact that our concepts of qualitative character do not represent, at least in terms of their psychological contents, causal roles.
6. Reduction is explanatory when by reducing an object or property we reveal the mechanism by which the causal role constitutive of that object or property is realized. Moreover, this seems to be the only way that a reduction could be explanatory.
7. Thus, to the extent that there is an element in our concept of qualitative character that is not captured by features of its causal role, to that extent it will escape the explanatory net of a physicalistic reduction.

[Question]: Is Levine saying that qualia are "epiphenomenal"?

§ Conclusion

Since the problem of qualitative character turns out to be primarily epistemological, the source of our cognitive representations of qualitative character, a theory of intentional content ought to explain what makes these representations so uniquely resistant to incorporation into the explanatory net of physical science.