



2008

Physicalism and Phenomenal Experience

Nicholas Timme '08
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/phil_honproj



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Timme '08, Nicholas, "Physicalism and Phenomenal Experience" (2008). *Honors Projects*. 14.

https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/phil_honproj/14

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Physicalism and Phenomenal Experience

An Investigation of Phenomenal Experience Using the Mereological Structure of Events

Nicholas Timme
210 E. Beecher St.
Bloomington, IL 61701
Illinois Wesleyan University
ntimme@iwu.edu

Within this paper a physicalist account of phenomenal experience is presented in a roughly four part process. First, Levine's "explanatory gap" and Kripke's argument against type-identity physicalism are presented as examples of anti-physicalist arguments to be countered. Kripke's arguments request an explanation for the felt contingency of the statement 'pain is C-fiber firing.' Levine's explanatory gap is the inability of statements like 'pain is C-fiber firing' to explain within physicalist theories why C-fiber firing feels like pain. In the second part a physicalist account of phenomenal experience is presented. This account relies upon a formalization of the mereological structure of events. A relation between events called the 'observation relation' is introduced and used to formalize observations made in everyday life. In the third step this account of events is used to defeat Kripke's argument and Levine's explanatory gap. Kripke's argument is overcome by providing an explanation for the felt contingency of the statement 'pain is C-fiber firing.' Levine's explanatory gap is defeated by clarifying the question "Why do C-fiber firings feel like pain?" and showing that asking this question is essentially inappropriate. Thus, the physicalist's inability to explain why C-fiber firings feel like pain is not a failing of physicalism. In the fourth part the physicalist theory of phenomenal experience is compared to some classic views of phenomenal experience from Rosenthal, Nagel, and Dennett.

Physicalism and Phenomenal Experience

Phenomenal experience has long been considered a problem for physicalist theories of mind. Phenomenal experiences are, roughly speaking, the sort of experiences that have a certain feel or a certain ‘what it is like to be’-ness. For instance, the archetypal example considered within this paper is pain. (I take the word ‘pain’ to refer to the type of sensation I have when I stub my toe and the type of sensation you have when you stub your toe.) Supposedly, pain has a certain feeling such that one must have been in pain to know what pain is.¹ Physicalist theories of mind are those theories that hold that all mental states just *are* certain brain states.² Thus, a physicalist theory of phenomenal experience is committed to statements such as ‘pain is C-fiber firing,’ where ‘C-fiber firing’ refers to some specific physical event. Within this paper I seek to defend physicalism from objections which argue that identity statements like ‘pain is C-fiber firing’ are problematic in some way.

To present my theory of phenomenal experience I will proceed as follows: To begin, I will articulate two classic arguments against physicalism which utilize phenomenal experience: Kripke’s argument from *Naming and Necessity* and Levine’s “explanatory gap.” Kripke hopes to show that the statement ‘pain is C-fiber firing’ is false. He does so by arguing that there is no way to account for the felt contingency of ‘pain is C-fiber firing’. According to his theory of identity (as pertains to this statement), if the statement is *actually* contingent, then it is necessarily false. Levine hopes to prevent the physicalist from insisting that the statement is necessarily true without an explanation for its felt contingency. He attempts to demonstrate that even if we were to know ‘pain is C-fiber firing,’ we could not explain why C-fiber firing should

¹ Of course, my description of phenomenal experience is (at this point) very imprecise. This is a problem I hope my theory will remedy.

² Within the umbrella of physicalist theories there are identity theories and functional theories. While I will operate in this paper using identity theories, I believe functional theories could work just as well.

feel like pain. This inability to provide an important explanation is the explanatory gap. The explanatory gap presents the physicalist with a dilemma: either abandon physicalism or accept that physicalism is unable to explain certain fundamental aspects of mental events, viz. their qualitative features. Both of these options are thoroughly unsatisfactory to the physicalist.

After having presented Levine and Kripke's arguments I will develop a physicalist theory of phenomenal experience that allows the physicalist to successfully respond to both arguments. At its heart, my theory seeks to clarify the mereological structure of events with special emphasis on mental events. I will introduce a relation between *some* events, which I will call the 'observation relation' and I will use this relation to analyze the observations invoked within Kripke and Levine's arguments. Once I have presented my theory I will provide an explanation for the felt contingency of 'pain is C-fiber firing,' thus responding to Kripke. Then, I will respond to Levine's argument by analyzing his requested explanation for why C-fiber firing feels like pain. It will be apparent that this request rests upon a false presupposition, which renders the gap non-existent. I will also explain the strong intuitions about phenomenal content and specifically our attempts to learn about phenomenal experiences which motivate the explanatory gap.

Finally, I will use my theory to briefly comment on some classic arguments and theories of phenomenal experience. I will consider Nagel's "What is it like to be a bat?" Rosenthal's "Explaining Consciousness," and Dennett's "Quining Qualia."

1 – Kripke and Levine

Kripke and Levine's arguments are closely related. I will first present Kripke's metaphysical argument against materialism taken from *Naming and Necessity*³ and "Identity and

³ Saul Kripke. "Naming and necessity." In *Semantics of Natural Language*, edited by Donald Davidson & Gilbert Harman, 253-355. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1972.

Necessity.”⁴ I will be using Levine’s paper “Materialism and Qualia: The Explanatory Gap”⁵ as my source of articulations of the explanatory gap. The relationship between Kripke’s argument and Levine’s is subtle, but of crucial importance. Essentially, Kripke makes an argument against physicalism which Levine hopes to strengthen. I will treat them as distinct arguments, though they both press on the same points. In the end, my single theory will defeat both Kripke and Levine’s attack on physicalism.

1.1 – Kripke’s Argument

Since I am defending a physicalist type-identity theory I am committed to statements such as the following:

(A) *Pain is the firing of C-fibers.*

According to Kripke’s theory of identities involving rigid designators,^{6,7} if (A) is true at all it is necessarily true. The same must be said for the following statement:

(B) *Heat is the motion of molecules.*

But, both (A) and (B) have a “felt” contingency about them. In other words, it *seems* like both statements (A) and (B) could be false. Notice that this is an explicitly epistemic concern. It could be the case that both (A) and (B) *feel* contingent (an epistemic concern of our knowledge about pain, C-fiber firing, heat, and molecular motion), but nonetheless that (A) and (B) are *really* necessarily true (a metaphysical concern about pain, C-fiber firing, heat, and molecular motion in the world). Kripke believes the felt contingency about (B) can be explained, thus

⁴ Saul Kripke. “Identity and necessity.” In *Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds*, edited by Stephen Schwartz, 66-101. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

⁵ Joseph Levine. “Materialism and qualia: The explanatory gap.” In *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, 354-61. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁶ I will assume Kripke’s theory of identities involving rigid designators throughout this paper. I will not fully explain Kripke’s whole theory within this paper, but I will provide some explanation when necessary. However, attacking Kripke’s argument against physicalism by way of attacking his theory of identities may also produce a successful rebuttal.

⁷ Rigid designators are designators which pick out the same thing in all possible worlds. Non-rigid designators are designators which fail to pick out the same thing in all possible worlds.

giving us a motivation to abandon our epistemic reservations about (B) and declare it necessarily true. He says we mistake (B) for something like the following statement when asked about the felt contingency of (B):

(B') *The phenomenon which causes our experience of the sensations of warmth and cold, which is responsible for the expansion and contraction of mercury in thermometers, which causes some gases to rise and others to sink, etc., is the motion of molecules.*

Kripke believes we commit this error because the term on the left side of the identity within (B') is the description which fixes the referent of 'heat.' Hence, we confuse the proposition expressed in (B) that is about the thing being referred to – actual heat in the world – with the proposition expressed in (B') which is about the features of heat we utilize to refer to it – namely our sensations or phenomenal experiences of heat.

(B'), unlike (B), really is contingent since it uses a non-rigid designator. The description on the left hand side within (B') is non-rigid because it explicitly relies on causation. It is possible that heat, which is the actual referent the description in (B') fixes, could cause a different phenomenal experience. However, (B) itself uses a rigid designator, viz. 'heat.' (B) is simply a statement about a phenomenon in the world, namely heat, and says that it is the same thing as molecular motion. Thus, given that all identities involving rigid designators are necessary, (B) *really* is necessarily true, but we *feel* like it is contingent because we confuse it for (B').

Kripke believes that the same type of analysis that explains the felt contingency of (B) cannot be applied to statement (A). This is because there is no difference between pain and the sensations we use to fix the referent of 'pain.' In other words, pain *just is* a certain sensation or phenomenal experience. We do not pick out pain as being the phenomenon which is causally

responsible for a certain sort of experience; rather pain *is* a certain sort of experience.⁸ Therefore, we cannot appeal to the sort of confusion which occurred with (B) and (B') in order to explain the felt contingency of (A). Since the physicalist has no way, as far as Kripke can see, to account for the felt contingency of 'pain is C-fiber firing,' he concludes that (A) must really be contingent and thus, necessarily false. I prefer to think of Kripke as presenting the physicalist with a difficult trilemma. First, the physicalist could admit that (A) really is contingent and therefore false (in other words, abandon physicalism). Second, the physicalist could simply declare that the felt contingency is only an epistemic concern with no metaphysical implications and stubbornly insist that (A) is necessarily true. Third, the physicalist could seek an alternative explanation for our felt contingency of (A) similar to how Kripke found an explanation for the felt contingency of (B). In this paper I will present the account which is called for within the third option.

1.2 – Levine's Argument

Levine's argument is closely related to Kripke's. Levine's goal is to prevent the physicalist from taking the second choice in the trilemma that was the result of Kripke's argument. Thus, Levine hopes to disallow the physicalist from declaring (A) to be necessarily true despite its felt contingency since that felt contingency is only an epistemic concern. In order to preclude this option, Levine further explores the difference between (A) and (B). Kripke's argument presents such a comparison, but Levine focuses on a new difference. Levine contrasts what statement (A) *explains* with what statement (B) *explains*. After this comparison is performed, Levine believes that statement (B) expresses an identity that is "fully explanatory," while statement (A) possesses a certain "explanatory gap." Since physicalism claims that physicalist theories are sufficient to explain all phenomena, if (A) does not sufficiently explain

⁸ Kripke, "Naming and necessity," 338-339.

all phenomena contained within our concept of pain, ‘pain is C-fiber firing’ must be false or must require some kind of supplementation.

First, let us address what it is for a statement to be considered “fully explanatory.”

According to Levine:

What is explanatory about (B)? (B) states that heat is the motion of molecules. The explanatory force of this statement is captured in statements like (B’) above. (B’) tells us by what mechanism the causal functions we associate with heat are effected. It is explanatory in the sense that our knowledge of chemistry and physics make intelligible how it is that something like the motion of molecules could play the causal role we associate with heat. Furthermore, antecedent to our discovery of the essential nature of heat, its causal role, captured in statements like (B’), exhausts our notion of it. Once we understand how this causal role is carried out there is nothing more we need to understand.⁹

Thus, a statement that is *fully explanatory* expresses all of the information that is sufficient to explain our concepts of those phenomena involved in the statement.

To this, Levine says, a physicalist might reply that statement (A) also possesses a large amount of information about pain. For instance, knowing (A) we could understand and explain the following case: when someone’s skin is cut, certain nerves transmit a signal to their C-fibers, which in turn causes the C-fibers to activate and send signals to the body directing it to protect the wounded area from further damage. Unfortunately, this isn’t enough knowledge to explain our concept of pain. Levine says:

There is more to our concept of pain than its causal role, there is its qualitative character, how it feels; and what is left unexplained by the discovery of C-fiber firing is *why pain should feel the way it does!*^{10,11}

⁹ Levine, “Materialism and qualia: The explanatory gap,” 356.

¹⁰ Ibid. 356

¹¹ In “Conceptual analysis, dualism, and the explanatory gap” *Philosophical Review* 108 (1-46), Block and Stalnaker criticize Levine’s notion of “fully explanatory” and Levine’s position that statement (B) is fully explanatory while statement (A) is not. I am tempted to join them since I too find Levine’s definition of ‘fully explanatory’ and his distinction between (A) and (B) based on explanatory power somewhat lacking. However, I believe Levine is tapping into a strong intuition about the phenomenal character of pain, so I will take Levine’s argument at its face value and attempt a different type of reply compared to Block and Stalnaker.

The lingering question for the type-identity physicalist is, “Why is it the case that C-fiber firing is the feeling of pain?” (A) may tell us about the causal role of pain and C-fiber firing, but what about the feelings? Is it not possible that C-fiber firing could feel like a gust of cold air or the taste of lemons? According to Levine, it seems that physicalist theories cannot answer these questions. Therefore, if we are to maintain a physicalist point of view, we must admit an ‘epistemic inaccessibility’ (as Levine calls it) with regard to phenomenal experiences. By ‘epistemic inaccessibility’ Levine means that an explanation for why C-fiber firing feels like pain cannot be found. Levine believes this is a problem for physicalism since physicalism claims that physicalist theories are sufficient to explain all phenomena, including phenomenal experience. If true, this would force physicalists to reevaluate their views about reduction since this instance of physical reduction is epistemically inaccessible. In contrast, dualism would be able to account for the explanatory gap by appealing to the separation between mental and physical phenomena, and the resulting position that (A) is false. In this paper I will show that the explanation Levine is requesting rests on a false presupposition. Thus, physicalism does not have to explain why C-fiber firing feels like pain. Also, I will explain some of the intuitions which motivate Levine’s argument, and show that these intuitions are ultimately misguided.

2.1 – Events

In order to respond to the problems posed by Kripke and Levine it will first be necessary to examine the structure of events. For the purposes of this paper I will utilize a very basic conception of events. I will take individual events to be regions of space-time.¹² Thus, for the purposes of my paper any given region of space-time will be considered an event. The question

¹² In the future, I hope to enhance my analysis of events by using and comparing Davidson and Kim’s theories of events. As stated here, my theory is much more conducive to a Davidsonian view of events, but I believe one could use a Kimian view just as successfully. An articulation of Davidson’s view on events can be found within “Mental Events,” in which he takes mental events to be concrete particulars as I do within this paper.

may arise as to whether non-contiguous regions of space-time are themselves events. I see no reason why such groupings of regions of space-time should not be considered as events.

However, I do not believe such events will play a more than trivial role in my theory. Also, events can be discerned using the objects which take part in them. When I speak of objects, I am actually speaking of certain regions of space-time. Thus, a baseball is a region of space-time that contains all the regions of space occupied by the baseball at the certain times it occupied those regions. I may, for the sake of convenience, talk about objects in order to evaluate relationships between events, but I do not posit some entity which persists through time.

The conception of events as regions of space-time entails a rather simple mereological structure. For example, the entire Tour de France is an event. Contained within the Tour de France is the event of stage 1. Clearly, stage 1 is not the same event as the whole Tour de France. Also, it is clear that stage 1 is not the same event as stage 2. I will say stage 1 is a ‘proper part’ of the entire Tour de France since the Tour contains stage 1 and the two events are not identical. I will say the Tour de France is a ‘non-proper part’ of the Tour de France because the Tour contains the Tour and the two events are identical. That events stand in these part/whole relations and the non-proper/proper part distinctions follows directly from the simple conception of events as regions of space-time.

These basic mereological relations are expressed by the following definitions:¹³

Proper Part: $\forall x \forall y [((x \geq y) \ \& \ (x \neq y)) \leftrightarrow y \text{ is a proper part of } x]$

Non-Proper Part: $\forall x \forall y [((x \geq y) \ \& \ (x = y)) \leftrightarrow y \text{ is a non-proper part of } x]$

¹³ The symbol ‘ \geq ’ refers to ‘contains’ and is a relation between events. For $(x \geq y)$, x is referred to as the ‘containing event’ and y is referred to as the ‘contained event.’

2.2 – Mental Events and Observations

In the previous section, I discussed events in general. Now, I wish to narrow my focus to just mental events. Certainly, it is not the case that all events are mental events.¹⁴ I must admit that I have no account of how to distinguish between mental and non-mental events, but it is the case that there are mental events and that not all events are mental events. Within my theory I will assume Brentano's thesis that the mark of the mental is intentionality. I will express this notion in terms of the 'observation relation.' Thus, I hold that all mental events observe some event, or in other words, all mental events are *about* some event. I will make no attempt to give a theory of intentionality, but by assuming the intentionality of mental events I will hopefully make progress on the problems of phenomenal experience that I am addressing within this paper.

When I observe a cup shatter, the cup shattering (event 1) triggers some chain of events which results in a mental event within me (event 2) that is *about* the cup shattering. In this case my mental event would be the *observing event* and the cup shattering event would be the *observed event*. I will use the symbol 'O' to refer to the observation relation; 'x O y' is to be read as 'event x is an observing of event y,' where x is referred to as the 'observing event' and y is referred to as the 'observed event.' While I do invoke causality when explaining how information travels between the observed event and the observing event, I make no claims about what role causality plays in the observing event itself. In other words, I do not wish to take a position on the relationship between causality and intentionality. Still, I believe it is apparent that somehow information must travel between the observed event and the observing event and that this intermediary step is most likely causal.

¹⁴ Recall that as a physicalist I hold that all mental events are physical events, or more generally, the only type of event is physical events.

The observation relation differs in two key ways from the containment relation. First, the observation relation is an intentional (and perhaps causal) relation between events, whereas the containment relation is a spatio-temporal relationship. Second, the observation relation itself establishes an event that contains both relata of the observation relation. When I observe a cup shattering, there is the event of the cup shattering, the chain of events transferring the information to my mind, and my mental event. However, there is also the event of the whole process which includes all the previously mentioned events as proper parts. In order to formalize this point, I introduce the operator ‘E’ which will function in the following form:

$E(x \text{ O } y) = z$, where ‘z’ refers to *the* entire event of x observing y; z is referred to as an ‘observation’

The relation between observations, the E operator, and containment is generally expressed by Axiom 1.

Axiom 1: $\forall x \forall y [(x \text{ O } y) \rightarrow ([E(x \text{ O } y) \supseteq x] \ \& \ [E(x \text{ O } y) \supseteq y])]$

In order to better understand Axiom 1, consider a common observation. Suppose there is an observer named Linda. She has an observing of a cup shattering event. In this case her mental event is the observing event and the cup shattering event is the observed event:

- (1) Observed Event = s, where ‘s’ refers to the cup shattering event
- (2) Observing Event = n, where ‘n’ refers to Linda’s neural event
- (3) Observation Event = $E(n \text{ O } s)$, where ‘n’ refers to Linda’s neural event, ‘s’ refers to the cup shattering event, and ‘ $E(n \text{ O } s)$ ’ refers to the entire event of Linda’s neural event observing the cup shattering event

Within Axiom 1, instantiating ‘n’ with ‘x’ and ‘s’ with ‘y’ produces the following expression for the relation between Events 1, 2, and 3:

$$[(n \text{ O } s) \rightarrow ([E(n \text{ O } s) \geq n] \& [E(n \text{ O } s) \geq s])]$$

Assuming that Linda's mental event is an observing of the cup shattering, it follows from Axiom 1 that n and s are contained within $E(n \text{ O } s)$. (Similarly, from the Tour de France example, stage 1 is contained within the whole Tour de France).

My analysis of the previous example can be enhanced by incorporating the non-proper/proper part distinction. The specific case just discussed was an instance of a 'proper part observation.' Events n and s are contained within $E(n \text{ O } s)$, but neither n nor s is identical to $E(n \text{ O } s)$. Thus, n and s are proper parts of $E(n \text{ O } s)$. This particular case can be formalized as follows:

$$[((n \text{ O } s) \& (n \neq s)) \rightarrow ([E(n \text{ O } s) \neq n] \& [E(n \text{ O } s) \neq s])]$$

Furthermore, the general structure of proper part observations can be expressed using the following Axiom:

$$\text{Axiom 2: } \forall x \forall y [(x \text{ O } y) \& (x \neq y)) \rightarrow ([E(x \text{ O } y) \neq x] \& [E(x \text{ O } y) \neq y])]^{15}$$

In the previous example, I formalized and examined a typical observation involving Linda and a cup shattering. I would now like to consider how the observation might change if I replace the cup shattering event with a pain event suffered by another person – call that person Diane. Linda undergoes an observing of Diane's pain. Thus, Diane's pain is the observed event within this observation. This situation is formalized below:

- (4) Observed Event = d , where ' d ' refers to Diane's pain event
- (5) Observing Event = n , where ' n ' refers to Linda's neural event

¹⁵ The reader may have noticed that Axioms 1 and 2 are not logically independent. In fact, Axiom 1 is a generalization of Axioms 2. I feel that presenting my theory in this way aids the reader by moving from more simple cases to more complicated cases.

(6) Observation Event = $E(n \ O \ d)$, where 'n' refers to Linda's neural event, 'd' refers to Diane's pain event, and ' $E(n \ O \ d)$ ' refers to the entire event of Linda's neural event observing the Diane's pain event

Within Axiom 2, instantiating 'n' with 'x' and 'd' with 'y' produces the following formalization of this example:

$$[(n \ O \ d) \ \& \ (n \neq d)] \rightarrow ([E(n \ O \ d) \neq n] \ \& \ [E(n \ O \ d) \neq d])$$

In the mereological structure of events that I am employing, d and n are properly contained within $E(n \ O \ d)$. Assuming that n is an observing of d, it follows from Axiom 2 that neither d nor n is identical to $E(n \ O \ d)$ nor are they identical to each other. $E(n \ O \ d)$ contains n and d, but $E(n \ O \ d)$ also contains the chain of events which carried information between n and d. Thus, according to my model, the observation event of Linda's observing of Diane's pain ($E(n \ O \ d)$) is not Diane's pain event (d) nor Linda's neural event (n). Therefore, n and d are proper parts of $E(n \ O \ d)$ and $E(n \ O \ d)$ is a proper part observation. *Thus, the observing of another person's pain is mereologically isomorphic with observing a shattering cup.*

2.3 – Phenomenal Experiences and Observations

In the previous section I considered mental events in general. I will now consider a special subset of mental events, namely the mental events which are phenomenal experiences. As I have said above, all mental events are observings of some event. I hold that phenomenal experiences are those mental events which are observings of themselves. For instance, a pain event I may undergo is a phenomenal experience because the pain event is an observing of my mental event, i.e. my pain event. I feel this position has an intuitive appeal, in that it is only when I observe my visual observings, taste observings, pain observings that they are phenomenal. This

can be expressed using ‘non-proper part observations,’ as generally expressed in the following Axiom:

$$\text{Axiom 3: } \forall x \forall y [((x \text{ O } y) \& (x = y)) \rightarrow ([E(x \text{ O } y) = x] \& [E(x \text{ O } y) = y])]$$

My theory of phenomenal experience and Axiom 3 are best illustrated by considering how my previous examples with Linda change if the observed event is Linda’s own pain. In this case, Linda undergoes an observing event, just like before. However, the observed event is now the pain that she is undergoing at that time:

- (7) Observed Event = p, where ‘p’ refers to Linda’s pain event
- (8) Observing Event = n, where ‘n’ refers to Linda’s neural event
- (9) Observation Event = E(n O p), where ‘n’ refers to Linda’s mental event, ‘p’ refers to Linda’s pain event, and ‘E(n O p)’ refers to the entire event of Linda’s neural event observing the Linda’s pain event

Within Axiom 3, instantiating ‘n’ with ‘x’ and ‘p’ with ‘y’ produces the following formalization of the relationship between these events:

$$[((n \text{ O } p) \& (n = p)) \rightarrow ([E(n \text{ O } p) = n] \& [E(n \text{ O } p) = p])]$$

In this case Linda undergoes a pain event and observes that same pain event. This is a legitimate observation because Linda’s neural event is about her pain event just as her neural event was about Diane’s pain and the cup shattering. What is crucially different about this situation is that the observed event – Linda’s pain event – *is* the observing of it – Linda’s neural event. A pain event *just is* the observing of that pain event for the observer who is undergoing that pain event. In this case there is no chain of events carrying the information between Linda’s pain event and her neural event. They are just the same event.¹⁶ Thus, assuming that n O p and p

¹⁶ This point is not meant as a proof that pain is C-fiber firing, but rather I am merely showing that observing one’s own pain event just is that pain event. This point applies whether or not physicalism is true.

is n , from Axiom 3 it follows that $E(n \text{ O } p)$ is identical to n and p . In other words, since n and p are non-proper parts of $E(n \text{ O } p)$, $E(n \text{ O } p)$ is identical to n and p . Thus, this is an example of what I call a ‘non-proper part observation’ or ‘reflexive observation.’¹⁷

The idea of phenomenal events being instances of reflexive observations may seem odd, but it is motivated by what Kripke himself says about phenomenal experiences.

In the appropriate sentient beings is it ... possible that a stimulation of C-fibers should have existed without being felt as pain? If this is possible, then the stimulation of C-fibers can itself exist without pain, since for it to exist without being *felt as pain* is for it to exist without *being any pain*. Such a situation would be in flat out contradiction with the supposed necessary identity of pain and the corresponding physical state, and the analogue holds for any physical state which might be identified with a corresponding mental state. ... Someone can be in the same epistemic situation as he would be if there were heat, even in the absence of heat, simply be feeling the sensation of heat; and even in the presence of heat, he can have the same evidence as he would have in the absence of heat simply by lacking the sensation S . No such possibility exists in the case of pain and other mental phenomena. To be in the same epistemic situation that would obtain if one had a pain *is* to have a pain; to be in the same epistemic situation that would obtain in the absence of pain *is* not to have a pain.¹⁸

Though the point is somewhat imbedded in his argument, Kripke is stating that the sensation of pain (the observing of pain) just is pain. While I disagree with Kripke’s argument, I believe Kripke was quite correct on this point. My identification of phenomenal experiences with instances of reflexive observation is simply an articulation of Kripke’s point within my conception of events.

2.4 – Observations and Privacy

I believe axioms 2 and 3 hold particular interest for questions about the “privacy” of mental states. This privacy is an aspect of phenomenal experience of which we are all aware. I have a certain privileged access to my sensations that other people do not. I believe this privileged access to one’s own sensations is a consequence of the differences between the

¹⁷ Also, reflexive observations are similar in some senses to token reflexives, such as ‘this token.’ A token reflexive is an expression that refers to itself.

¹⁸ Kripke, “Naming and necessity,” 339.

mereological structures described in Axioms 2 and 3. In the special case of observing one's own mental events, my sensation of tasting an apple, for instance, and my observing of my sensation of tasting an apple are the very same event. Therefore, the observing of the sensation and the sensation itself go hand in hand (so to speak) through any changes that take place in the sensations. However, for other people, my mental events are merely proper parts of their observings. In these cases, changes in my sensations will have a causal effect on their thoughts. Thus, the connection is not tight enough to allow for the privileged access.

3 – The Evaluation of Identity Statements Using the Observation Relation

Now that the observation relation has been introduced I will examine how observations contribute to the evaluation of identity statements. In this section I will first examine how observations contribute to the evaluation of empirical identity statements such as 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' and 'heat is the motion of molecules.' I will then address mental-physical identity statements such as 'pain is C-fiber firing' in my response to Kripke and Levine.

Consider the following empirical identity claim:

(L) Hesperus is Phosphorus.

In actuality, Hesperus (known as the evening star in ancient times) is the planet Venus. Phosphorus (known as the morning star in ancient times) is also the planet Venus. Thus, (L) is necessarily true,¹⁹ but it has a *felt* contingency. Certainly, it *seems* possible that Hesperus and Phosphorus could have turned out to be different things.

When asked to evaluate the truth of this identity statement we turn to the basic type of observations associated with the concept of Hesperus and the concept of Phosphorus. What are these observations? Consider the case in which you have no knowledge of Hesperus,

¹⁹ I will continue to assume Kripke's theory of identities, which holds that all true identities involving rigid designators are necessarily true.

Phosphorus, or Venus. One clear evening someone points to a dot in the sky and says, “That’s Hesperus.” The next morning someone points to a dot in the sky and says, “That’s Phosphorus.” In this situation your concept of Hesperus is the concept of the thing that was observed by that observing made in the evening (call this token observing ‘h’). Your concept of Phosphorus is the concept of the thing that was observed by that observing made in the morning (call this token observing ‘p’). Thus, to evaluate (L) you produce the following claim and attempt to determine its truth or falsity:

(L’) The x such that (h O x) is the y such that (p O y).

While (L’) is closely related to (L), the proposition expressed in (L’) is not the same proposition that is expressed by (L). In fact, (L’) is contingent because the observation relation utilizes causality in order to transfer information between observed event and observing event. Thus, (L’) involves non-rigid designators. Within (L’), even if x is identical to y, it is a contingent fact that h is an observing of x and p is an observing of y. In other words, for any two observings, it is a contingent fact whether or not the events observed by those two observings are identical. This is very similar to the point that Kripke makes in order to exonerate ‘heat is the motion of molecules’ from felt contingency, except that in place of Kripke’s reference fixing descriptions, I employ *observing descriptions*. I have produced a theory in which I have replaced reference fixing descriptions, which use the causal powers of the entity to describe it, with observing descriptions, which utilize causal relations between regions of space-time. If we replace reference fixing descriptions with observings, then statement (L’) is to statement (L) what (B’) was to (B). When asked about the necessity or contingency of (L), you would say (L) is contingent even though it is necessarily true, because you have confused the necessarily true (L) for contingently true (L’).

One result of this analysis is that all empirical identity statements will have an initial felt contingency. To illustrate this point, I will consider the following case which falls on the boundary of felt contingency:

(N) Joe prior to my blinking is Joe after my blinking.

In this case I am sitting at a table across from Joe. The concept of Joe prior to my blinking is the concept of the thing that is observed by my observings of a certain person prior to my blinking (call a token of this type of observing 'b'). The concept of Joe after my blinking is the concept of the thing that is observed by my observings of a certain person after my blinking (call a token of this type of observing 'a'). We then produce the following claim for assessment:

(N') The x such that (b O x) is the y such that (a O y)

Again, (N') is contingent even though (N) is necessarily true. Again, this is because (N') involves no rigid designators. Furthermore, any felt contingency about (N) is due to confusing (N) with (N'). Why is it that (N') seems to be "less contingent" than (L')? In other words, why do we doubt that Hesperus is Phosphorus more than we doubt that Joe prior to my blinking is Joe after my blinking? I believe that the answer involves the similarity between a and b and the fact h and p are less similar. However, the problem of just how we get from contingent statements like (L') and (N') to necessarily true statements like (L) and (N) is a topic that I will not address within this paper. Certainly, this is an interesting and important issue, but it is not the issue at hand.

A similar analysis can be applied to Kripke's example of an empirical identity claim:

(B) Heat is the motion of molecules.

From (B), we produce the following claim with ‘h’ being any token heat observing and ‘m’ being any token motion of molecules observing:²⁰

(B’’) The x such that (h O x) is the y such that (m O y)

Again, (B) *feels* contingent because we confuse the necessarily true (B) with the contingently true (B’’). Therefore, my theory accounts for the same instances of felt contingency that Kripke’s theory addresses.

Through these examples we see that my theory of events and observations produces an explanation for the felt contingency of statements like ‘heat is the motion of molecules.’ As we shall see, my theory also produces an explanation for the felt contingency of ‘pain is C-fiber firing.’

4.1 – The Response to Kripke

I will now return to Kripke’s argument against physicalism using the points I have developed thus far. The statements under consideration for Kripke were:

(A) *Pain is the firing of C-fibers.*

(B) *Heat is the motion of molecules.*

(B’) *The phenomenon which causes our experience of the sensations of warmth and cold, which is responsible for the expansion and contraction of mercury in thermometers, which causes some gases to rise and others to sink, etc., is the motion of molecules.*

Kripke’s main claim is that while statements (A) and (B) both feel contingent, the felt contingency of (B) can be explained, while the felt contingency of (A) cannot. He says statement (B) is often confused for (B’) because we accidentally mistake the referent of ‘heat’ in (B) for

²⁰ I will avoid the issue of what a type of observing is and how types and tokens are related. My theory does function best with tokens, so I do perform a certain amount of “jumping up” from token cases to type identity statements. Kripke presents a token version of his argument within *Naming and Necessity* and I believe my sidestepping most of this issue is not a significant problem.

the causal sensations which fix the referent of 'heat' in (B'). Unfortunately, pain *just is* the sensation we use to fix the referent of 'pain.' Thus, Kripke's technique cannot be used to explain the felt contingency of (A). However, my theory can produce an explanation for the felt contingency of (A).

With the previous empirical identity statements we found that a corresponding contingent claim was produced. The following is the contingent claim corresponding to (A) with 'p' referring to any token pain observing and 'c' referring to any token of C-fiber firing observing:

(A') The x such that (p O x) is the y such that (c O y).

In this case, p is a non-proper part observing because it is identical to the token pain event, as Kripke noted. Also, c is a proper part observing because it is not identical to the token pain event. In order to have c, one must use some brain imaging machine which allows one to see in some external way their C-fibers firing.

As a result of these differences between p and c, (A') is very different from (L'), (N'), and (B''). In Kripke's terms, pain *just is* the sensations of the reference fixing description of pain. In terms of my theory this same point is expressed by the fact that a pain *just is* an observing of a pain. There is no difference between a pain, an observing of that pain, and the whole observation of pain. Therefore, (A') can be rephrased as follows:

(A'') The x such that [(p O x) & (p = x)] is the y such that [(c O y) & (c ≠ y)].²¹

As the reader may notice, (A'') is contingent. Even though 'pain is C-fiber firing' is necessarily true, the event observed by the observings of C-fiber firings need not actually be C-fiber firings. This is not an entirely new result because (A'), (L'), (N'), and (B'') are all contingent. Still, the

²¹ While not obvious at first, (A'') also involves non-rigid designators, just like (A'), (L'), and (N'). Consider the similar non-rigid designator 'The x such that x has a beard and x is Nick Timme.' There are possible worlds in which Nick Timme exists, but does not have a beard. In these possible worlds, there is no x such that x has a beard and x is Nick Timme. Thus, (A'') involves a non-rigid designator and is contingent as a result.

same confusion between contingent statement and corresponding necessarily true statement occurs. Ergo, (A) is necessarily true, but (A) is often confused for (A'') or even (A') which gives (A) a felt contingency. Thus, I have produced a physicalist theory of phenomenal experience and identity that accounts for the felt contingency of (A) while still maintaining Kripke's point that pain just is the sensation of pain.

4.2 – The Response to Levine

The problem question for the type-identity physicalist from Levine is, "Why is it the case that C-fiber firing is the feeling of pain?" Physicalism claims that physicalist theories can provide a sufficient explanation of all phenomena. Levine believes that physicalism is unable to provide an explanation for the feeling of pain even if 'pain is C-fiber firing' is true. He calls this the 'explanatory gap.' If the explanatory gap does exist, then the physicalist is forced to either assume an epistemic inaccessibility about phenomenal experiences or adopt a theory like dualism. A dualistic theory would be able to account for the explanatory gap by appealing to the separation between mental and physical phenomena. However, I believe that after further analysis it will be apparent that Levine's problem question rests upon a false presupposition.

Levine appears to be inquiring about a specific aspect of pain – namely its phenomenal character – and how C-fiber firing gives rise to it. However, *as Kripke says* and my theory accounts for, pain just is that phenomenal character! It is not as if the phenomenal character of pain is a property of pain. Rather, the way pain feels *just is* pain. Levine is asking, "Why is it the case that C-fiber firing is the feeling of pain?" Since the way pain feels *just is* pain, Levine is really asking, "Why is it the case that C-fiber firing is pain?"

Unfortunately, identity statements are not the sort of things that have explanations. How can 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' be *explained*? Certainly, I can explain how 'Hesperus' and

‘Phosphorus’ came to refer to the same thing, but I cannot explain how something is identical to itself. There is no explanation for why Venus is Venus, why one is one, or why Joseph Levine is Joseph Levine. Block and Stalnaker consider this issue with a simple example.

Suppose one group of historians of the distant future studies Mark Twain and another studies Samuel Clemens. They happen to sit at the same table at a meeting of the American Historical Association. A briefcase falls open, a list of events in the life of Mark Twain tumbles out and is picked up by a student of the life of Samuel Clemens. “My Lord,” he says, “the events in the life of Mark Twain are exactly the same as the events in the life of Samuel Clemens. What could explain this amazing coincidence?” The answer, someone observes, is that Mark Twain = Samuel Clemens. Note that it makes sense to ask for an explanation of the correlation between the two sets of events. But it does not make the same kind of sense to ask for an explanation of the identity. Identities don’t *have* explanations (though of course there are explanations of how the two terms can denote the same thing). The role of identities is to disallow some questions and allow others.²²

Similarly, the broad question “Why is it the case that pain is C-fiber firing?” is simply inappropriate. Therefore, Levine’s explanatory gap rests upon the false presupposition that the question, “Why does C-fiber firing feel like pain?” *could* have an explanation. Thus, physicalism can provide a sufficient explanation for anything that truly requires an explanation involving C-fiber firing and the feeling of pain. Hence, the explanatory gap does not exist.

I believe this response successfully defeats Levine, but there is more to be said about the intuitive appeal of Levine’s explanatory gap. At its root I believe Levine’s explanatory gap relies on confusions similar to the ones which I addressed in my response to Kripke. As I said, we confuse the contingent statement (A’’) for the necessarily true statement (A).

(A) *Pain is the firing of C-fibers.*

(A’) The x such that (p O x) is the y such that (c O y).

(A’’) The x such that [(p O x) & (p = x)] is the y such that [(c O y) & (c ≠ y)].

²² Block and Stalnaker, “Conceptual analysis,” 24.

(L) Hesperus is Phosphorus.

(L') The x such that (h O x) is the y such that (p O y).

While (A'') is the contingent statement which is related to (A) in the same way that (L') is related to (L) and (N') is related to (N), (A'') possesses one striking dissimilarity compared to (L') and (N'). Within (L') and (N') an identity is claimed between two events observed by certain observings. When we evaluate these sentences we have access to the observings. By "have access" I mean that these observings are parts of our neural events. Within (A'') an identity is claimed between the phenomenon *itself* and one event observed by certain observings. When we evaluate (A'') we have access to the phenomenon itself. I must admit that because I have not developed any points about how contingent statements like (A'') give rise to necessary statements like (A), I am not in a position to declare precisely how this dissimilarity accounts for our strange intuitions about the relationship between the feeling of pain and C-fiber firing. However, I think it is apparent that the "mixed" nature of (A'') will affect how it is evaluated. (I say "mixed" because (A'') seems to be half (A) and half (A').) That having been said, there is an example case which I feel highlights the strange nature of (A'').

Imagine being connected to some brain monitoring apparatus (call it the brain-o-scope) which images your C-fibers. While watching the monitor of the brain-o-scope an evil physician starts inflicting injury upon your body in some way. Assuming everything is functioning normally within your nervous system, you feel pain and see your C-fibers firing on the brain-o-scope monitor. Certainly, this would be a very surreal experience. Probably the first expression you would say is, "How is it that *this* pain is *that* thing on the monitor?" I believe this feeling that something is lacking is due to the different degrees of access to the phenomena under discussion. The pain event is part of your neural events, thus you have "direct access" to it in

some sense. The C-fiber firing event is merely the event observed by your observing of the brain-o-scope monitor, thus you do not have direct access to it. *For all you know, those might not be your C-fibers firing!* Thus, your level of access to the C-fibers firing is at the same level as if you were not the one undergoing pain. I believe that in these situations you will always feel something is lacking because your mere observings of C-fiber firing do not raise C-fiber firing events to the level of access that pain possesses. It is these intuitions which truly motivate the explanatory gap and the quandary of how it is that C-fiber firing is the feeling of pain.

5 – A Comparison of Classic Views of Phenomenal Experience and My Physicalist Theory of Phenomenal Experience

I would now like to turn my attention to some classic positions on the relationship between phenomenal experience and physicalism. I have presented my theory and used it to defend physicalism from Kripke and Levine's arguments. Now, I will briefly discuss how my theory relates to works by Rosenthal, Nagel, and Dennett.

5.1 – Rosenthal's "Explaining Consciousness"

My theory of phenomenal experience is in a position to comment on theories of consciousness. Crudely speaking, consciousness is the ability to monitor one's own thoughts or to be aware of one's self. Within my theory, I take conscious events to be phenomenal events. Thus, conscious events are those mental events which are non-proper part observings of themselves, or in other words, reflexive observations. One consequence of my view of phenomenal experience and consciousness is that proper part observations (like the observation of the cup shattering) are neither phenomenal nor conscious. I believe this is true. Throughout most of our daily lives we merely take in information about the world. We need not focus on the observings by creating reflexive observations; rather we focus on getting information from the

world. For instance, I know that often while driving I am not aware of the cars around me in the way that I am aware of the phenomenal experience of pain. I simply take in and process information about the cars around me and the path of the road.

The theory of consciousness which my theory develops is best contrasted with a class of theories known as Higher Order Thoughts theories (or 'HOT theories' for short). These theories state that consciousness arises when higher level thoughts monitor lower level states. These theories find strong motivation from our intuition about consciousness. When I am conscious, it feels as if I am examining my own thoughts. My theory shares this sense of monitoring one's own thoughts, but as we will see my theory does not possess a serious problem which afflicts HOT theories.

An example HOT theory is the one expressed by David Rosenthal:

Our hypothesis, therefore, is that a mental state is conscious just in case it is accompanied by a noninferential, nondispositional, assertoric thought to the effect that one is that very state.²³

'Nondispositional' refers to the high-order thought being an occurrent thought, not merely the disposition to have such a thought. In other words, when we are conscious of a thought, we must actually be conscious of it, not disposed to be conscious of it. 'Noninferential' refers to the fact that when we are conscious of a thought we are not aware of any inference from the thought to the state of being conscious of the thought. In other words, conscious states are immediate.

'Assertoric' refers to high-order thought being truth evaluable.

One inherent problem for HOT theories is how to explain why higher level thoughts are conscious and phenomenal. Within my theory consciousness arises through events which are reflexive observations of themselves. There is no need to posit two classes of thoughts and

²³ David Rosenthal. "Explaining consciousness." In *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, 410. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

produce an explanation for the monitoring performed by higher level states. My theory does posit the rather strange ‘reflexive observation,’ but it places focus on understanding how reflexive observation functions. Rosenthal’s HOT theory has significant problems motivating the difference between higher and lower level thoughts and how the higher level thoughts give rise to consciousness. For instance, why should higher level thoughts give rise to consciousness just by monitoring lower level thoughts? About this Rosenthal says:

HOTs result in conscious qualities because they make us *conscious of ourselves as being in certain qualitative states*, which results in the subjective impression of conscious mental qualities.²⁴

Rosenthal’s explanation of how higher level thoughts produce consciousness leaves much to be desired. Why is it that higher level states produce consciousness, while lower level states do not? That having been said, it is not as if my theory of consciousness is without possible objection. However, it certainly does not possess the same problems as Rosenthal’s theory. Reflexive observations may seem worse than high-order thoughts, but I feel that reflexive observations may find better traction in various theories of intentionality. Any intentional theory involving HOTs must explain why high-order thoughts produce consciousness while lower-order thoughts do not. The fact that reflexive observations are reflexive may aid a theory of intentionality.

5.2 – Nagel’s “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”

Within “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” Nagel hopes to exploit the subjective character of consciousness in order to show that no reduction of consciousness to physicalism is possible. Though Nagel does not (as far as I can tell) produce an explicit definition of consciousness, he does point to one specific property an organism must have in order to be conscious.

²⁴ Rosenthal, “Explaining consciousness,” 414.

...fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism – something it is like *for* the organism. We may call this the subjective character of experience.²⁵

Nagel does not believe that physicalism will be able to produce an account of this subjective character.

If physicalism is to be defended, the phenomenological features must themselves be given a physical account. But when we examine their subjective character it seems that such a result is impossible. The reason is that every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view, and it seems inevitable that an objective, physical theory will abandon that point of view.²⁶

However, we have seen that within my theory the “point of view” is present. Subjective phenomena (or phenomenal experience as I have been saying) are present only for neural/mental events which are non-proper part observations of themselves. Thus, I must be that certain neural/mental event to undergo those subjective phenomena. No other person can have my subjective phenomena since to them my neural/mental events are merely proper parts of their observations. Hence, my theory does account for the point of view aspect of consciousness. Furthermore, as Nagel correctly notes, there is no way for me to know what it is like to a bat.

It will not help to try to imagine that one has webbing on one’s arms... In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for me to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task.²⁷

My theory predicts this result. Bat neural events are only proper parts of my observations. The only way for me to have bat non-proper part observations is for me to be a bat.

²⁵ Thomas Nagel. “What is it like to be a bat?” In *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, 219. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

²⁶ Ibid. 220

²⁷ Ibid. 220

5.3 – Dennett’s “Quining Qualia”

Daniel Dennett’s goal within “Quining Qualia” is starkly opposed to that of Nagel in the previous article. Dennett hopes to eliminate phenomenal experience, or in other words “Quine qualia.” I must admit that this desire is close to my heart. Truthfully, Dennett’s actual program is to cast doubt on several supposed properties of qualia, thereby weakening the intuitive support for phenomenal experience. As with Nagel, I will not give a complete treatment of Dennett’s arguments, but rather present the overall theme and show how it compares to my theory.

As I read Dennett, there is one crucial aspect of phenomenal experience which he seeks to exploit and that he alludes to but does not state succinctly. Simply, the philosophical mystique of qualia is that they are very elusive. Qualia are hard to understand and they intuitively resist any type of physicalist reduction. It is this fact that makes them such a powerful tool for those opposed to physicalistic reductive theories of mind. Dennett hopes to show that these difficulties should motivate the reader to eliminate qualia rather than use them to attack physicalist theories.

Dennett begins by considering past theories of qualia to build the following list of supposed properties of qualia: qualia are ineffable, intrinsic, private, and directly or immediately apprehensible in consciousness.

...since one *cannot say* to another, no matter how eloquent one is and no matter how cooperative and imaginative one’s audience is, exactly what way on is currently seeing, tasting, smelling and so forth, qualia are *ineffable* – in fact the paradigm cases of ineffable items.²⁸

...at least part of the reason why qualia are ineffable is that they are *intrinsic* properties – which seems to imply *inter alia* that they are somehow atomic and unanalyzable. Since they are “simple” or “homogeneous” there is nothing to get hold of when trying to describe such a property to one unacquainted with the particular instance in question.²⁹

²⁸ Daniel Dennett. “Quining Qualia.” In *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, 228. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

²⁹ Ibid. 228-229

...all interpersonal comparisons of these ways-of-appearing are (apparently) systematically impossible. In other words, qualia are essentially *private* properties.³⁰

...qualia are essentially directly accessible to the consciousness of their experiencer (whatever that means) or qualia are properties of one's experience with which one is intimately or directly acquainted (whatever that means) or "immediately phenomenological qualities."^{31,32}

Dennett utilizes 15 different "intuition pumps" (situations in which our intuitions about qualia contradict other intuitions) to show these four properties are not held by phenomenal experience. A general theme throughout the intuition pumps is situations in which the person who has the quale cannot be certain about the properties of that quale. Dennett uses this strategy on one of the most storied thought experiments involving qualia: the inverted spectrum.

There are two versions of the inverted spectrum problem: the interpersonal and the intrapersonal. The interpersonal version involves comparing the qualia of two people whose spectra are inverted with respect to each other. The problem is how do I know that the way I perceive the color red is the way you perceive the color red? We learn color words by example as a child. Therefore, it is perfectly possible for my perception of red to be like your perception of blue and yet allow both of us to correctly function with colors and color words. The intrapersonal version involves one person comparing their color qualia before and after having their spectrum inverted. Imagine a situation in which you wake up one day and your spectrum has been inverted. The sky is now red, stop signs are blue, and so forth. Surely, you would notice that *something* has changed. However, what exactly has changed? Is it that the signals coming to your brain have been inverted by splicing the wiring in your eyes (or something like that)? Or rather, is it that your qualia themselves have changed? Simply put, there is no way for you to

³⁰ Ibid. 229

³¹ Ned Block. "Troubles with functionalism." In *Perception and Cognition*, edited by W. Savage, 261-325. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978.

³² Dennett, "Quining Qualia," 229.

know whether or not your qualia have changed despite the fact they are your qualia! Therefore, qualia are not immediately apprehensible in consciousness and in a sense not private since they are not immediately apprehensible.

If we compare these supposed but non-existent properties of qualia and the account of phenomenal experience I am advancing, we find much agreement. Since my theory gives a specific physicalist account of phenomenal experience, it allows for the intrapersonal inverted spectrum problem that Dennett proposes. Within my theory, changes could occur in the transfer of information to phenomenal experiences or in the phenomenal experiences themselves without the experiencer being able to discern where the change is located. This highlights how my theory differentiates between phenomenal and non-phenomenal experience. While phenomenal experience is more direct, in a sense, than mere proper part observation, phenomenal experience is still just an observation. Furthermore, according to my theory, I do not remember phenomenal experiences. I may remember that I had a phenomenal experience, but the phenomenal experience is something such that I must be having the reflexive observation to have the phenomenal experience. This is intuitive since I cannot remember the phenomenal experience of tasting lemons. I can remember that I have tasted lemons and I maybe even remember that they taste like lemon flavored candy. Still, I cannot merely through memory undergo the phenomenal experience of tasting lemons. Thus, my theory allows for me to be unable to determine the precise location of changes in my phenomenal experiences, memory, and senses.

I am not certain about how Dennett would view my theory. His overall goal is to show phenomenal experiences do not exist, which does run contrary to my theory in some ways. However, perhaps he would view my theory as weakening qualia to the point where he could allow my physicalist account of phenomenal experience. That said, I believe my theory does

allow for many of the intuitions about phenomenal experience which Dennett attacks: the interpersonal privacy, the sense of immediacy, the inability to compare neural events and phenomenal events, the sense of “What it is like to be ...” and so forth. Still, my theory accounts for these intuitions about phenomenal experience within a physicalist framework.

6 – Reflexive Observations and Broader Issues

Within this paper I have presented a physicalist account of phenomenal experience. In order to do so, I have provided a strong foundational metaphysics of events. Furthermore, by combining this metaphysical theory with the broad assumption of intentionality of mental observations, I have made progress in developing a complete physicalist theory of phenomenal experience. I introduced my theory of phenomenal experience by responding to arguments by Kripke and Levine. Furthermore, I briefly compared my theory to views advanced by Rosenthal, Nagel, and Dennett.

While I feel my work has truly accomplished a great deal, I must admit that the notion of reflexive observation is somewhat bizarre. Furthermore, I anticipate that some may object to my theory by saying that my assumptions about intentionality beg the question by assuming phenomenal experience. I do not believe this is case because assuming intentionality is not necessarily the same as assuming phenomenal or conscious experience. Still, I am aware that objections can be mounted against my theory based on the strange notion of reflexive observation and my assumption of intentionality.

Throughout my paper I have treated psychology, psychological events, and psychological states in very simplistic terms. I have provided no explanation of just what observation is in terms of psychology. Generally, I believe this is the work of cognitive scientists and

psychologists, but I feel the argument I have put forward provides support for investigations in those areas.

In the future I would like to further investigate the relationship between event types and tokens with regard to observings. Throughout my paper I utilized the type/token distinction in a rather intuitive and imprecise fashion and perhaps there is some problem hidden within this relationship that would damage my theory. This is a very interesting topic and any theory of the type/token distinction would most likely impact my theory of phenomenal experience.

Bibliography

- Block, Ned. "Troubles with functionalism." In *Perception and Cognition*, edited by W. Savage, 261-325. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978.
- Block, Ned and Robert Stalnaker. "Conceptual analysis, dualism, and the explanatory gap." *Philosophical Review* 108, no. 1 (1999): 1-46.
- Davidson, Donald. "Mental Events." In *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, 116-125. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Dennett, Daniel. "Quining Qualia." In *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, 226-246. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Kripke, Saul. "Naming and necessity." In *Semantics of Natural Language*, edited by Donald Davidson & Gilbert Harman, 253-355. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1972.
- Kripke, Saul. "Identity and necessity." In *Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds*, edited by Stephen Schwartz, 66-101. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Levine, Joseph. "Materialism and qualia: The Explanatory Gap." In *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, 354-61. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Nagel, Thomas. "What is it like to be a bat?" In *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, 219-226. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Rosenthal, David. "Explaining consciousness." In *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, 406-421. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.