



BonJour Against Materialism

Just an intellectual bandwagon?

What is physicalism/materialism?

- **materialist (or physicalist) views:**
 - views that hold that mental states are entirely material or physical in nature, and correlatively that a complete account of the world, one that leaves nothing out, can be given in entirely materialist terms.
- “Lurking here is the difficult issue of **what sorts of entities or properties count as material or physical**. Is there any good way to delimit the realm of the material that does not preclude further discoveries in physics, but also does not trivialize the category by allowing it to include anything that people in departments labeled “Physics” might eventually come to study?”

Why do we accept physicalism?

1. Because Cartesian dualism is wrong.
2. Because of the success of science that assumes materialism.
3. The causal closure argument.
4. Because naturalism is true.
5. Materialism is just an intellectual bandwagon or religious conviction!
6. (Because there isn't a good alternative?)

There is a *presumption* of physicalism

- Bonjour: One of the oddest things about discussions of materialism is the way in which the conviction that *some* materialist view must be correct seems to float free of the defense of any particular materialist view.
- Daniel Stoljar (SEP entry on Physicalism): The first thing to say when considering the truth of physicalism is that we live in an overwhelmingly physicalist or materialist intellectual culture. The result is that, as things currently stand, the standards of argumentation required to persuade someone of the truth of physicalism are much lower than the standards required to persuade someone of its negation.

1. Cartesian dualism is no good

- Bonjour concedes that there are problems with some versions of dualism, especially Cartesian interactionist substance dualism.
 - This is an argument from *elimination*.
 - Bonjour claims that such arguments in philosophy are weak, especially when the subject matter is poorly understood.
- (A stronger response to such an elimination argument would be to define a coherent, conceptually-clear, highly explanatory alternative to materialism.)

2. The success of ‘materialist’ science

- ‘materialist science’ – trying to understand the observable phenomena in terms of material particles following laws – has been a highly successful project.
- Bonjour concedes that “This undeniably has some modest weight”.
- How strong is this argument?
- It depends on whether non-materialists can also account for the success of science so far.

2. The success of 'materialist' science

- Is there an **non-materialist** explanation of the success of science?
- If Cartesian dualism is true, then what will physics and neuroscience look like?
- If some kind of property dualism is true, what will physics and neuroscience look like? (What about Russellian monism?)

3. Causal Closure

- We believe that the material universe is *causally closed*:
 - material things are never causally affected by anything non-material
 - physical science can in principle give a completely adequate explanation of any physical occurrence, without needing to mention anything non-physical.
- Stoljar (SEP): “The Argument from Causal Closure is perhaps the dominant argument for physicalism in the literature today. But it is somewhat unclear whether it is successful.”

Doesn't rule out *epiphenomenal* souls, etc.

- Epiphenomenalism: conscious phenomena are side-effects of material processes that are incapable of having any reciprocal influence on the material world.
- Main (crushing) problem for epiphenomenalism:
 - “it becomes difficult or seemingly impossible to see how verbal discussions of conscious phenomena—such as this chapter and many others—can be genuinely about them in the way that they seem obviously to be.”

Why accept Causal Closure?

- Thus, *given* the premise of causal closure, the inference to physicalism is very strong.
- But is there a good reason to accept the premise?
- Bonjour can't find any good reason to accept causal closure, except on the basis that materialism is true. (!)
 - “Thus to argue for the truth of materialism or for a strong presumption in favor of materialism by appeal to the principle of causal closure is putting the cart in quite a flagrant way before the horse.”

4. The appeal to naturalism

- What is naturalism?
 - A view that is hard to pin down, or make precise, Bonjour says, despite eagerness to “fly the naturalist flag”.
 - For some, naturalism is the same as materialism
 - *Methodological* naturalism says that “it is rational to be guided in one’s metaphysical commitments by the methods of natural science” (Stoljar)
- If we endorse methodological naturalism, then should we be physicalists? What’s the argument?

4. The appeal to naturalism

1. We should let natural science tell us what the world is like, what kinds of entity it contains, etc.
2. Natural science reveals a purely physical world of material particles, fields, etc.

∴ It is rational to accept physicalism

BonJour's responses

1. Why think that “the methods of natural science exhaust the methods of reasonable inquiry”?
 - N.B. This claim itself cannot be proved using scientific methods!
2. Physics tells us about the physical aspects of reality. How could it tell us that there are no other aspects?
 - Can physics itself give us any evidence that its own models are incomplete?

Conclusion

- Bonjour concludes that **there is no good argument for physicalism.**
- Thoughts?
- (I would suggest that Bonjour is perhaps overlooking the main reason to be a materialist here: the absence of a coherent, conceptually-clear alternative with good explanatory power.)

Part 2

Russellian monism?

Russellian monism?



in·scru·ta·ble

/ɪnˈskrʊdəb(ə)/

adjective

impossible to understand or interpret.
"Guy looked blankly inscrutable"

Similar:

enigmatic

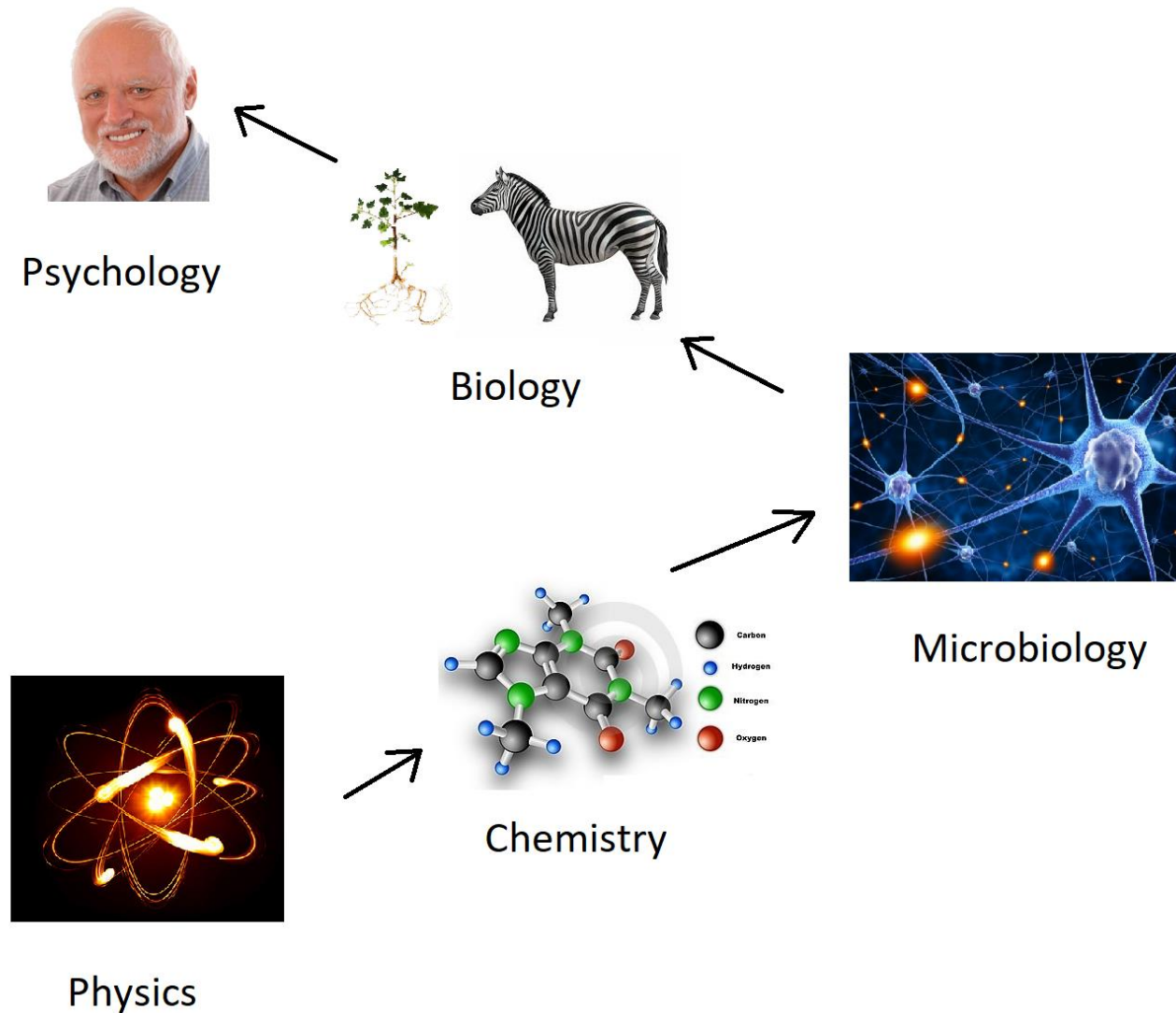
unreadable

impenetrable

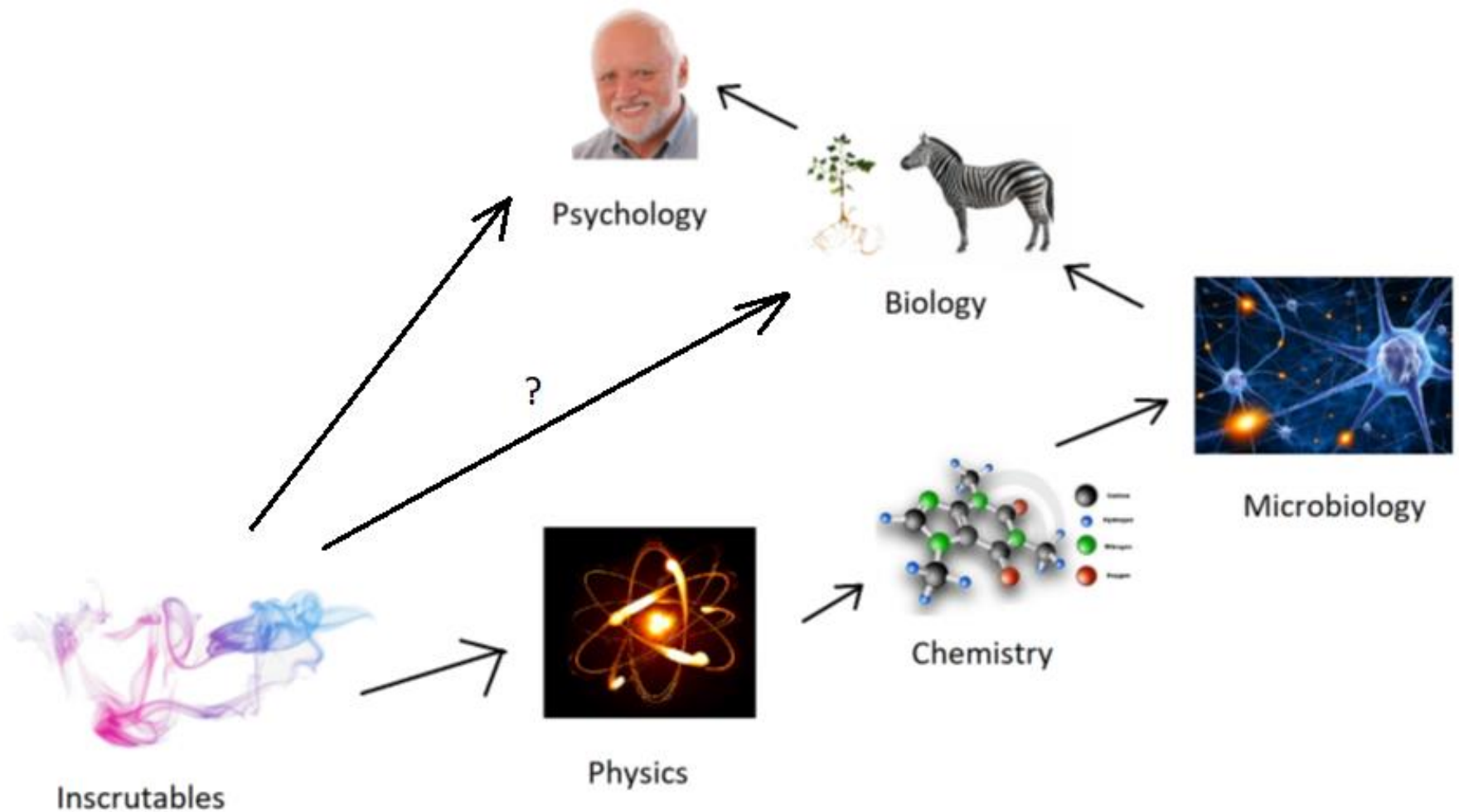
mysterious

- The key idea of Russellian monism is that, while the mind is the brain (there is no separate soul), the brain itself is not *fully* describable by physics.
- The brain also has ‘inscrutables’ – non-structural properties that are forever beyond the scope of physics as it currently exists.

Standard reduction hierarchy



Russellian monism



Ideas about ‘inscrutables’

- Inscrutables are the **intrinsic** properties, that ground the relations that physics describes.
- Inscrutables are the **categorical** properties, that ground the laws of physics (dispositional properties).
- Inscrutables are (or provide a basis for) phenomenal qualities.
- Inscrutables form the dependence base for the entire concrete world. (Montero)

Is this a version of physicalism?

- Montero suggests that Russellian monism is a type of physicalism – “Russellian physicalism”.
 1. “... we should leave open the possibility that physics could, someday in the unforeseeable future, explain both structural and non-structural features of the world”
 2. “Apart from this, it is not even clear that being accountable for by physics, even in this broad sense, should be a necessary condition for counting as physical. Physics is a human endeavor and there seems to be little reason for why a physicalist must think that the physical world is understandable, even in principle, to humans.”

Part 3

Problems for physicalism: functionalism and qualia

Problems for physicalism

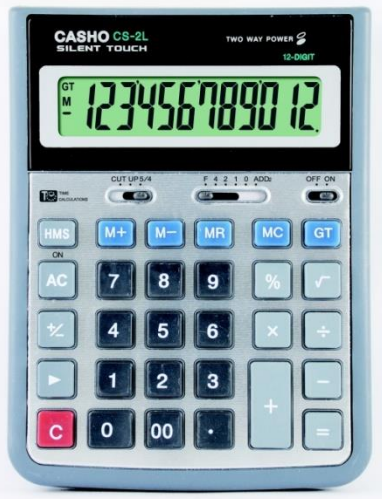
- There is only one materialist view of mental states that can be taken seriously (functionalism).
 - Eliminative materialism is not serious
 - J. J. C. Smart's psycho-physical identity theory isn't serious either, apparently.
- And functionalism is “deeply inadequate” !

“But the deepest problem for the functionalist is that the characterization of mental states in terms of causal role **says *nothing at all* about consciousness or conscious character**. There is no apparent reason *why* a state that realizes a particular causal role would thereby need to have any specific sort of conscious character (the point made by the familiar reversed spectrum cases)—or indeed any conscious character at all.”

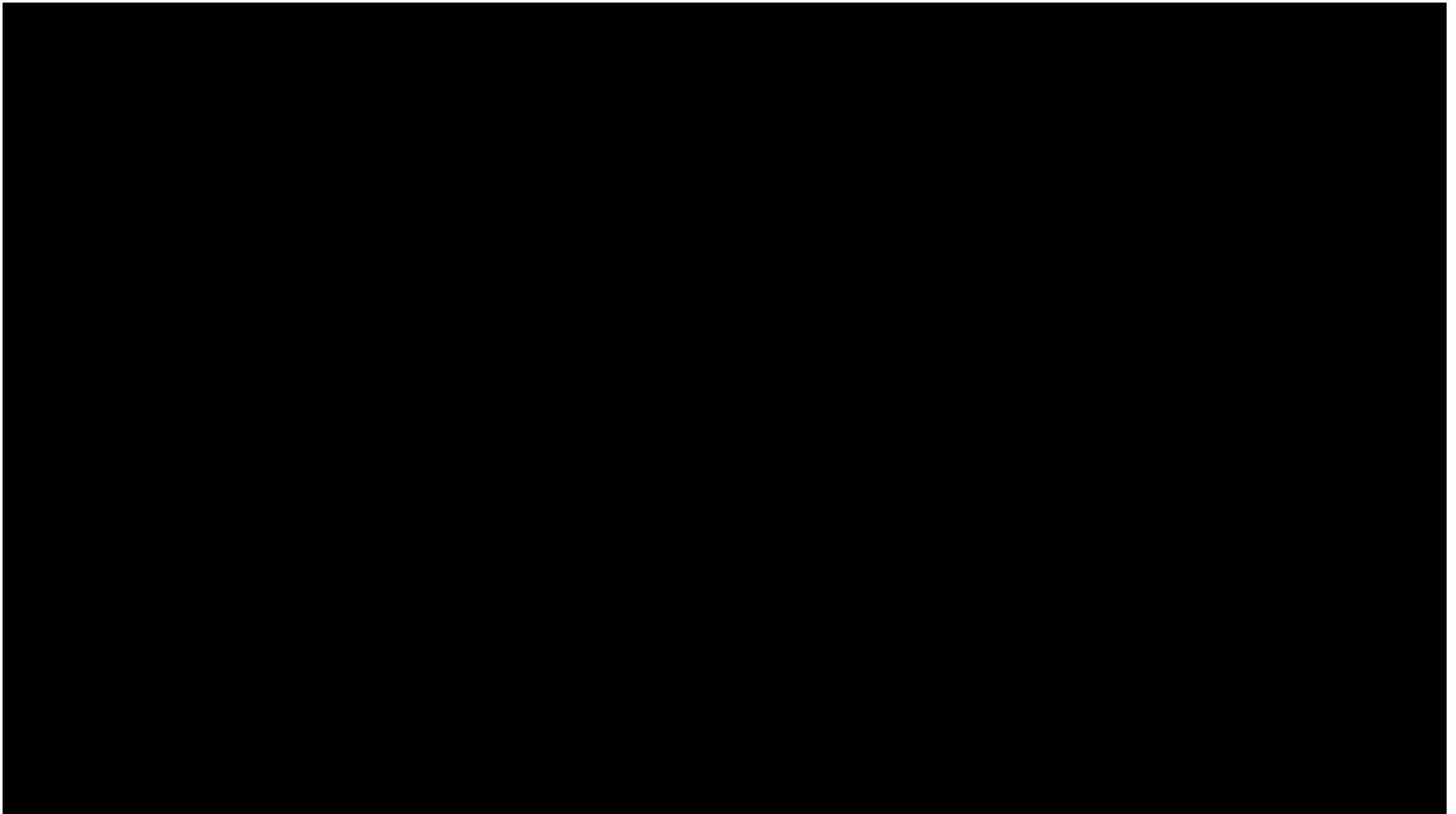
Functionalism:

- Functionally equivalent \Rightarrow mentally equivalent
- I.e. if two systems are functionally equivalent then they're mentally equivalent (same consciousness, intentionality, etc.)

- If two systems are functionally equivalent, must they be exactly the same inside as well?
- No. E.g. two calculators both give the output '4' for the input '2+2=', and so on, but the calculators might have very different circuitry inside.



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Functionally equivalent to the original!

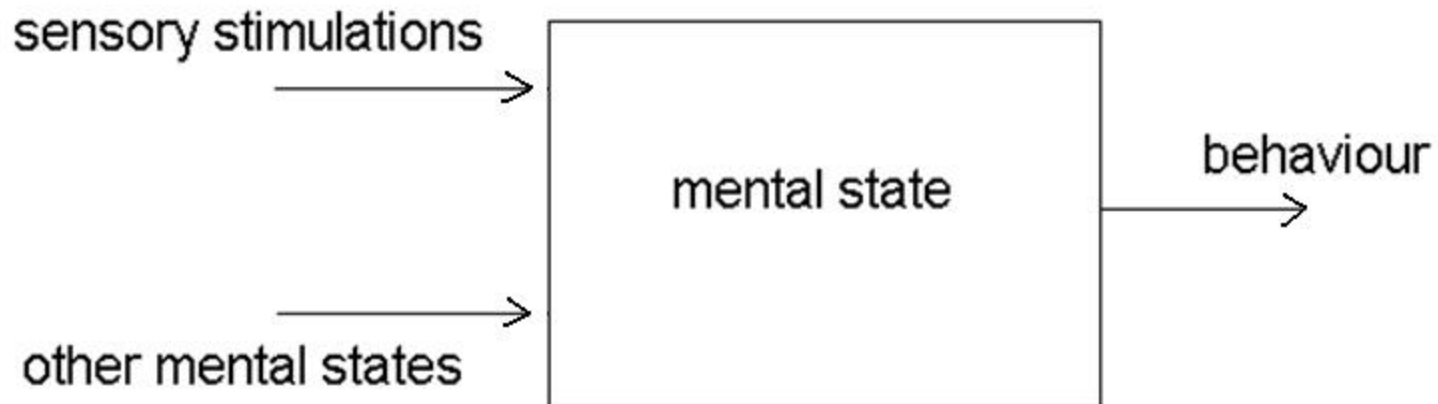
The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

“Functionalism is the doctrine that what makes something a thought, desire, pain (or any other type of mental state) **depends not on its internal constitution, but solely on its function, or the role it plays**, in the cognitive system of which it is a part.

More precisely, functionalist theories take the identity of a mental state to be determined by its causal relations to sensory stimulations, **other mental states**, and behavior.”

Mental states are “black boxes”

It doesn't matter what's going on inside. The mental state is *whatever it is* that is turning input experiences (and other mental states) into behaviour.



E.g. A Coke machine

	S_1	S_2
nickel input	Emit no output Go to S_2	Emit a Coke Go to S_1
dime input	Emit a Coke Stay in S_1	Emit a Coke & a nickel Go to S_1

S_1 = “dime desire”
 S_2 = “nickel desire”

“Of course, no functionalist should claim that a Coke machine desires anything. Rather, the simple version of machine functionalism described in the table makes an analogous claim with respect to a much more complex machine table.” (Ned Block)

What functionalism leaves out

- Why does Bonjour say that functionalism is “deeply inadequate”?
- Bonjour argues that functionalism cannot account for either:
 - a. phenomenal qualities (qualia) or
 - b. conscious intentionality.

The Mary argument 1.0

1. Mary is a neuroscientist who knows all the physical facts about the physiology of human colour vision.
2. Mary has never had a colour experience, since she has only ever lived in a black-and-white environment.
3. According to physicalism, all facts are physical facts, expressible in the language of physics.
4. There is a real fact concerning *what it is like* to have each type of colour experience (e.g. red).
5. **Assume** that physicalism is true.
6. Mary doesn't know what it is like to have colour experiences.
-
7. The fact of what it is like to have a red colour experience is a physical fact (from 3, 4, 5)
8. Mary knows what it is like to have a red colour experience. (from 1, 5, 7)
9. **Contradiction** (6, 8).
10. Physicalism is false. (5, 9)

Challenges to Mary 1.0

1. Mary gains *something*, but doesn't learn any new *facts*.
 - She gains some kind of *ability*?
 - Maybe a new conceptual or representational ability?
2. Mary doesn't learn any new facts, because she already knew all the facts.
 - What she gains are **new phenomenal concepts** for describing 'old facts'.
 - Phenomenal concepts can be acquired only from the relevant experiences

BonJour isn't impressed

“Despite the initial force of this rather simple argument, materialists have not been persuaded, and the literature comprising materialist responses to the Mary example is very large. One thing to say about these responses is that **few if any of them are even claimed to have any substantial independent plausibility**; instead they are put forward in a way that takes for granted the sort of **general presumption in favor of materialism** and correlative burden of proof for anti-materialist views that I have argued does not genuinely exist.” (p. 12)

A lacuna in the Mary argument

Challenge #1

Mary gains *something*, but doesn't learn any new *facts*.

“if Mary learns new facts, what exactly are they?”

BonJour's Mary argument 1.1

- While in the room, Mary is given colour samples, one red and one green, labelled only as A and B.
 - Will she be able to give them their usual names?
- Suppose Mary is told that one of the samples is green and the other red. Will Mary know which of the following claims is true?
 1. A is green and B is red
 2. A is red and B is green
- Surely it is a *fact* that (2) is true and (1) is false?

- Moreover, according to Bonjour, “it still seems quite clear” that Mary doesn’t know which statement is true, until she sees (e.g.) freshly-mown grass.
- Does this refute the ‘no new fact’ response?

Mary learns new abilities?

“Moreover, if there are *abilities* that result from experiencing the two colors in question, Mary presumably can acquire them on the basis of the samples. Consider, for example, Harman’s suggestion that what Mary acquires in the original case, when she leaves the black-and-white room and sees red for the first time, is a *perceptual concept* of red, **one that essentially involves being disposed to form perceptual representations involving it in the presence of causal stimulations of the right sort**—so that she cannot acquire *that* concept in the original version of the black-and-white room.

... if there is indeed such a thing, then Mary in the new version of the case presumably can acquire it by viewing the red sample.

BonJour's conclusion

“Thus the modified version of the Mary case seems to present an objection to materialism in general (and functionalism in particular) that is about as conclusive as philosophical arguments ever get.” (p. 17)

Part 4

Conscious *intentional content*

Conscious intentional content

- “One crucial feature of such conscious thoughts is that when I have them, I am in general consciously *aware of* or consciously *understand* or *grasp* what it is that I am thinking about (and also what I am thinking about it).”
- This conscious grasp of the propositions one is thinking about is rarely if ever merely *disquotational*, Bonjour says.
- This conscious grasp is of ‘narrow content’ only, i.e. subjective meaning.

“Intentionality”?

- Intentionality = meaning, significance, or “aboutness”, understanding.
 - Thus ‘intentional’ mental states *represent* external states of affairs.

Intentionality

- Sentences and images can have intentionality, but only by association with a mental state.
- Mental states have intrinsic, or ‘original’ intentionality.



“the cat is next to a ball”

“disquotational”?

- Disquotation principles are usually things like:
 - “Snow is white” is true iff snow is white.
 - “snow” refers to snow.
- Here Bonjour says that “a person’s conscious grasp of the object of their thought ...is rarely if ever merely *disquotational* in character”
- Here, someone’s understanding of a sentence is *disquotational* if they don’t really understand it themselves, but have heard other people saying it.

“electrons are fermions”

- E.g. Fred, whose understanding of physics is that of an average Canadian, says:
 - “Did you know that electrons are actually fermions?”
- What’s going on here? What does he really understand?
 - Probably Fred read this somewhere, and is trying to impress someone. The only meaning he has is “electrons (whatever they are) are a kind of fermion (whatever that means)”
- His mind doesn’t contain any **representations** of these terms, he just has the **words**.

- When Fred says that electrons are fermions, he means that “electrons” are “fermions”.
- (Aren’t we adding quotes, not removing them?)

“Narrow content”?

- Aristotle believes that water goes solid during cold weather.
 - (Of course, water is H_2O .)
- So, does Aristotle believe that H_2O goes solid in cold weather?
 - Yes, most philosophers think. Aristotle believes that *that wet stuff*, which is H_2O , freezes in cold weather.
 - But of course the *concept* of H-O-H is in no way “part of their conscious, **internal** grasp of what they are thinking about”

Mary again!

- “Suppose that Mary studies me as a subject and comes to have a complete knowledge of my physical and neurophysiological makeup as I am thinking these various thoughts. Can she determine on that basis **what I am consciously thinking about** at a particular moment?”
- This question can be broken into two:
 - a. Does a physical description *of my brain state* tell Mary this?
 - b. Does adding knowledge of causal connections to *external* objects help? (Functionalists see this as essential.)

- For (a), Bonjour says clearly ‘no’.
 - “One thing that seems utterly clear is that she could not do this merely on the basis of knowing my *internal* physical characteristics”
 - No real argument given here.
- Bonjour says ‘no’ to (b) as well, since we have *introspective access* to our own propositional meanings (narrow content only).
 - And we surely have no such first-person access to external causal connections?

“Causal relations to external things may help to *produce* the relevant features of the internal states in question, but there is no apparent way in which such external relations can somehow be partly *constitutive* of the fact that my conscious thoughts are about various things in a way of which I can be immediately aware.

But if these internal states are sufficient to fix the object of my thought **in a way that is accessible to my understanding or awareness**, then knowing about those internal states should be sufficient for Mary as well, without any knowledge of the external causal relations.”

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Why Physicalism Seems to Be (and Is) Incompatible with Intentionality

[Richard Johns](#) 

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Abstract

There is a long history of philosophical intuition that the human mind must be more than physical or mechanical. I argue that this intuition arises from the perfect “transparency” of physical and mechanical states, in the sense that such states have no obscure or occult