

What are we?

by David Barnett

In favor of physicalism

I. Simplest explanation of why brain states systematically correspond to mental states

☞ Analogy: Why does the shape of an object correspond to the spatial relations of its parts?

☞ Answer: To have a given shape is to have parts standing in certain spatial relations.

☞ Why does the state of one's mind correspond to the state of one's brain?

☞ Physicalist's Answer: To be in a given mental state is to be in a certain brain state.

In favor of physicalism

2. Unification of the sciences:

- Astronomy
- Economics
- Sociology
- Linguistics
- Psychology
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics

In favor of physicalism

3. Account for mental causation

1. Physical events can only be caused by other physical events.
2. Mental events (e.g., desires and beliefs) cause physical events (e.g., bodily motions)
3. Therefore, mental events must be physical events.

Three Types of Physicalism

1. Behaviorism
2. Identity Theory
3. Functionalism

Behaviorism

- To be in a given mental state is to be disposed to behave in certain ways
- Example: x is in pain iff x is disposed to grimace and wince
- Objection: no behavior is necessary or sufficient for being in a given mental state

Identity Theory

- To be in a given mental state is to be in a certain brain state
- Example: x is in pain iff x has a brain with c-fibers firing
- Objection: no brain state is necessary for being in a given mental state (there may be conscious aliens with totally different physiologies)

Functionalism

- To be in a given mental state is to be in a physical state that functions in a certain way
- Example: x is in pain iff x is in some physical state or other whose function includes registering tissue damage and initiating avoidance behavior.
- Objection: intuitively, something could function just the way we do, yet not be conscious.

Objection to all forms of Physicalism

Jackson's "Mary Argument"

Jackson's “Mary Argument”

1. Before her release, Mary knows all the physical facts.
2. After her release, Mary knows a new fact (namely, what it is like to see red).
3. Hence, the physical facts do not exhaust the facts of our universe.
4. Hence, physicalism is false.