

Grounding, Analysis and Russellian Monism

Mary in her black and white room knows all that physical science can teach us about the physical facts involved in colour experience. But it does not follow that she knows everything there is to know about these facts. The Russellian monist exploits this gap to defend a form of physicalism – in a very broad sense of that word. Unfortunately, recent developments in the grounding literature cast doubt on that strategy, or so I will argue.

The Russellian monist challenge to the knowledge argument

Consider the following opposing theses:

Physical Transparency – The physical sciences reveal the complete nature of physical properties and facts, e.g. a true neurophysiological description of c-fibre firing reveals the nature of c-fibre firing; physical characterisations of mass reveal the nature of mass.

Physical Opacity – The physical sciences provide only a partial understanding of the nature of physical properties or facts.

The physical sciences characterise properties in terms of their nomic role. Very roughly mass is characterised in terms of gravitational attraction and resisting acceleration. Brain states are characterised in terms of their role in the overall functional economy of the brain, and in terms of their chemical constituents, which are in turn characterised in terms of their causal role and physical constituents. In the light of this, there are two options regarding the semantics of physical predicates:

Semantic dispositionalism (of physical terms) – Physical predicates denote causal properties.

Semantic quidditism (of physical terms) – Physical predicates denote categorical properties, but pick out those categorical properties in terms of their causal role.

Semantic dispositionalism naturally leads to Physical Transparency: physical properties are causal role properties which are characterised in causal terms. Semantic quidditism naturally leads to Physical Opacity: physical properties are not causal role properties but they are characterised in causal terms. It is perhaps indeterminate which of these options reflects how physical scientists use these terms. In any case, which of these options a given philosopher is attracted to is likely to be

determined by her or his views on the metaphysics of properties. A dispositional essentialist, who thinks that properties have dispositional essences, is likely to adopt semantic dispositionalism. The Humean, or any philosopher who believes that properties have a categorical essence, is likely to adopt semantic quidditism.

Suppose Physical Opacity is true because Semantic Quidditism is true. It follows that physical properties have a 'hidden nature' which goes beyond what is revealed by the physical sciences. As Russell noticed in 1920s,¹ this opens up a novel solution to the mind-body problem: it could be that this hidden nature of matter which explains consciousness. Quickly forgotten in the twentieth century, the core of Russell's idea is recently enjoying a revival, under the banner 'Russellian monism'.² There is a negative and a positive aspect to the definition of Russellian monism, as follows:

- There is a 'deep' nature to basic material facts, which goes beyond the nomic-structural features in terms of which physics characterise those facts.
- The deep nature of basic material facts explains consciousness, in the sense that the facts about the deep nature of basic material entities a priori entail the experiential facts (whilst it's not case that the facts about the causal structure of material entities a priori entail the experiential facts).

Is Russellian monism a form of physicalism? It depends on how we define what a physical fact is. Some take physicalism to be the view that ideal physics exhaustively describes fundamental reality. Clearly Russellian monism is not a form of physicalism on such a definition. Others define physicalism as the view that physics is *referentially adequate*, in the sense that the fundamental facts, individuals or properties are those which are the subject matter of ideal physics, leaving it open whether or not ideal physics reveals their complete nature. For the purposes of this piece, let us think of Russellian monism as a form of physicalism, in order that we might examine whether the knowledge argument is able to refute physicalism of that form.³

Mary in her black and white room is described as knowing 'all the physical facts'. However, it's clear from the context that what this means is that she knows 'all that facts physical science has to teach us about the physical'. For the Russellian monist, such facts do not exhaust the complete nature of the physical, as they leave out its deep nature. If Mary really did know all the physical facts, including

¹ Russell 1927.

² For some examples of Russellian monism, see Strawson 2003, Pereboom 2011, Goff 2017, and the essays in Alter & Nagasawa 2015.

³ I am focusing here on reductionist versions of Russellian monism, according to which all facts are grounded in facts at the micro-level.

the deep nature of the physical, then according to Russellian monism she would be able to work out what it's like to see red. Many Russellian monists believe we currently have no good grip on matter's deep nature, and perhaps never will. And if we cannot positively conceive of matter's deep nature, it seems that we are not in a position to deny the Russellian monist's claim that knowledge of it would allow one to grasp the nature of experience.

Russellian monism relies on our ignorance about the nature of the deep nature of the physical. This is both a weakness and a strength. It is a weakness in so far as it leads to a rather unsatisfying solution to the mind-body problem, attributing to matter some nature that we know nothing about beyond that it somehow explains consciousness.⁴ But if the Russellian monist can show that we have good reason to think that dualism is false, and that matter does indeed have a deep nature, then her view will have strong support in spite of its disappointing lack of a complete story. The strength of the view is that, given our ignorance of the deep nature of matter, it's hard to see how we could ever rule out that knowledge of it would somehow yield knowledge of the nature of experience. In other words, it's hard to see how the knowledge argument could ever rule out Russellian monism.

However, recent discussions of the nature of grounding have suggested that, in order for physicalism to be true, the nature of *consciousness* must play a significant role in explaining the grounding of consciousness in the physical. Even if we cannot say much about the deep nature of the physical, due to our ignorance of it, it may be that we can know enough about the nature of consciousness to rule out its playing the explanatory role required for the truth of physicalism, even physicalism of the Russellian monist variety. In what follows, I will explore how one might build a case for this claim.

A grounding conception of physicalism

Physicalism is the doctrine that fundamental reality is physical; that the physical facts are the fundamental facts. There are two ways in which this definition cries out for clarification. Firstly one might ask what a *physical fact* is. Secondly one might ask what it is for a fact to be *fundamental*. Shamik Dasgupta has recently proposed a detailed and plausible answer to the second of these questions, defining physicalism in terms of the metaphysical relation of *grounding*.⁵ As I will show,

⁴ There are panpsychist forms of the Russellian monist which postulate consciousness properties at the level of basic physics, and thereby hold out the possibility of a partial understanding of the deep nature of the physical. However, there are grounds for thinking that even panpsychist versions must postulate unknown aspects of the physical in order to solve the *combination problem*, i.e. the problem of grounding facts about the consciousness of macro-level entities in facts about the consciousness of micro-level entities (Goff 2017: Ch. 7).

⁵ Dasgupta 2014. See Ney 2008 for a good survey of answers to the first question. I defend an answer to the first question in Goff 2017: Ch. 2.

Dasgupta's account offers resources for the proponent of the knowledge argument to respond to the challenge of Russellian monism.

Suppose Rod, Jane and Freddy are dancing, drinking and generally having fun one evening at Jane's. It follows from this supposition that there is a party at Jane's, and moreover that there is a party at Jane's *because* Rod, Jane and Freddy are dancing, drinking, etc. at Jane's. But the word 'because' here does not express a *causal* relationship; it's not as though the activities of the revellers bring into being some extra thing – the party – which then floats above their heads. Consider a further example. Suppose the rose is scarlet. It follows that the rose is red, and moreover that the rose is red *because* it is scarlet. But the scarlet colour of the rose does not secrete redness as the liver secretes bile. It seems that in both cases we have a kind of explanatory relationship which is not causal. This relationship has become known as 'grounding'.⁶

There are many interesting things we might ask about grounding. Is it primitive or can it be defined? What is the logical form of grounding statements? If grounding is a genuine relation what are its relata? There is a rich literature attempting to answer these questions, but our focus here is not the finer details of the metaphysics of grounding but rather how grounding can be used in order to define physicalism.⁷

An obvious first attempt at defining physicalism in terms of grounding would be the following:

First Attempt at the Definition of Physicalism – Physicalism is the view that all non-physical facts are grounded in the physical facts.

This gives us a clear and straightforward way of understanding the view that fundamental reality is wholly physical: the many and diverse facts which make up reality are all ultimately grounded in the physical facts. Suppose that Sarah is currently feeling pain. Strong Physicalism commits the physicalist, as we would expect from a definition of physicalism, to there being some physical fact which grounds the fact that Sarah feels pain. Let us suppose, to continue with the hackneyed and empirically dubious example favoured by philosophers, that that physical fact is the fact that Sarah's c-fibres are firing. Thus we reach the following fact:

Pain-Grounding – The fact that Sarah's c-fibres are firing grounds the fact that Sarah feels pain.

⁶ Some key papers on the recent revival of grounding are Fine 2001, Schaffer 2009 and Rosen 2010. Proponents of grounding trace the idea back to an older tradition, often citing Aristotle as an influence.

⁷ For further discussion of the issues mentioned above, see Trogdon 2013a.

Pain-Grounding is a *grounding fact*, that is to say, a fact about which facts ground which. In formulating his grounding conception of physicalism, Dasgupta of course accepts that the physicalist is obliged to hold that the facts about consciousness are grounded in the physical facts, and hence is obliged to accept grounding facts similar to Pain-Grounding. However, he denies Strong Physicalism because he does not think that the physicalist needs to hold that the *grounding facts themselves*, i.e. facts like Pain-Grounding, are wholly grounded in the physical facts.

If Strong Physicalism is true, then Pain-Grounding, like any other fact, is grounded in the physical facts. But Dasgupta argues that Pain-Grounding cannot be wholly explained in terms of the physical; rather it must be explained at least in part in terms of the nature of pain. It is the nature of pain which explains why it is that the firing of c-fibres grounds pain.⁸

To make this plausible, return to our party example. Just as Pain-Grounding concerns the grounding of pain, so the following fact concerns the grounding of parties:

Party-Grounding: The fact that Rod, Jane and Freddy are revelling grounds the fact that there is a party.

Why is it the case that the fact that Rod, Jane and Freddy are revelling grounds the fact that there is a party? Intuitively this is because of the nature of a party, because of what a party is: a party is the kind of thing that exists when there are people revelling. In this way the nature of a party ‘opens itself up’ to the possibility of being grounded in specific facts concerning revelling.

Dasgupta proposes we explain Party-Grounding in terms of the following two facts:

Party-Nature – A party is essentially such that if there are people revelling then there is a party,

Revelling – Rod, Jane and Freddy and revelling.⁹

Note that the entities in the *less fundamental fact* – the fact that there is a party – are doing crucial explanatory work in the explanation of the overall grounding fact. Dasgupta argues, partly through reflection on cases, that we do not get a satisfying explanation of grounding facts from the more fundamental fact alone. For example, it would not be satisfying to answer:

⁸ Dasgupta also suggests that we might explain grounding facts in terms of conceptual truths or metaphysical laws, but does not outline these proposals in detail. The former alternative would seem to lead to difficulties similar to those explored in this paper: the Phenomenal Analysis Problem (discussed below) would become a problem with the analysis of phenomenal concepts rather than the analysis of phenomenal properties. The latter model seems to me not very promising, as metaphysical laws are intuitively the kind of things we want to explain. Dasgupta’s discussion starts from a problem Sider (2012) raises with grounding theories of fundamentality, but it would be distracting to explore that here.

⁹ Dasgupta’s example is in terms of conferences rather than parties, but the point of the example is the same.

“Why is it the case that the fact that Rod, Jane and Freddy are revelling grounds that fact that there is a party?”

with:

“Because Rod, Jane and Freddy are revelling”

It is only by reference to the nature of parties, to what a party is, that we get a satisfactory explanation of Party-Grounding.¹⁰

Kit Fine has previously advocated a similar kind of ‘top-down’ direction in the explanation of grounding facts:

...what explains the ball’s being red or green in virtue of its being red is something about the nature of what it is for the ball to be red or green (and about the nature of disjunction in particular) and not something about the nature of what it is for the ball to be red. It is the fact to be grounded that ‘points’ to its grounds and not the grounds that point to what they may ground.¹¹

It is not that the less fundamental fact ‘points to’ the *specific facts* which ground it; essential truths concerning parties do not involve specific reference to Rod, Jane and Freddy. Rather the nature of constituents of the less fundamental fact F ‘point to’ some condition which is sufficient for its being the case that F.

Thus, Dasgupta proposes explaining Pain-Grounding in the following way:

Pain-Nature – Pain is essentially such that for any x, if x’s c-fibres are firing then x feels pain.

C-Fibres – Sarah’s c-fibres are firing.¹²

However, just as the nature of a party does not make explicit reference to Rod, Jane and Freddy, it seems unlikely that the nature of pain will make reference to the specific brain states which are actually involved in grounding it.¹³ It is more likely, therefore, that the explanation of Pain-Grounding will be of the following form:

Pain-Nature – Pain is essentially such that for any x, if x is F then x feels pain.

¹⁰ Karen Bennett (2011) and Louis deRosset (2013) try to ground the grounding facts in the fundamental facts. I am persuaded by Dasgupta’s arguments against this strategy, some of which I have outlined above, and which are given in more detail in section VI of his forthcoming paper.

¹¹ Fine 2012.

¹² Again, Dasgupta examples are slightly different to mine – involving consciousness rather than pain – but the point of the example is the same.

¹³ On the identity theory, the nature of pain will of course make reference to some specific neurophysiological state. However, that neurophysiological state will surely not be identical with some utterly specific fundamental physical state. And hence, even on the identity theory pain is ultimately grounded in some fundamental physical state which the nature of pain does not make specific reference to.

C-Fibres – The fact that Sarah’s c-fibres are firing entails that Sarah is F.

Let us call this model of explaining grounding facts ‘grounding via essence’, or GVE. Abstracting from specific cases, we can take it to be committed to the following principle:

For any grounding fact F in which f2 is grounded in f1, F is grounded in the fact that there is a condition C such that (i) a constituent of F2 is essentially such that if C is satisfied f2 obtains, and (ii) f1 logically entails that C is satisfied.¹⁴

GVE is in tension with the above definition of physicalism, as according to GVE the grounding facts are partly grounded in facts about the nature of higher-level entities, rather than being wholly grounded in the fundamental physical facts. Pain-Grounding, for example, is partly grounded in Pain-Nature. The ‘top-down’ direction of explanation means that chains of grounding explanation don’t always move in a downward direction. For this reason Dasgupta rejects the above definition of physicalism, and adopts a definition of physicalism according to which certain facts are ‘exempt’ from needing to be grounded in the physical, even if physicalism is true.

Obviously there must be some limit on which facts physicalism ‘allows’ not to be grounded in the physical; it is inconsistent with physicalism, for example, to deny that the facts about consciousness are grounded in the physical. Dasgupta’s view is that physicalism does not require that *facts about essences* are grounded in the physical. This is because, according to Dasgupta, facts about essences are *autonomous*, or not *apt to be grounded*; that is to say they are not the kind of fact for which the question of grounding arises.

I do not have space here to give Dasgupta’s complete defence of the autonomy of facts about essences, which stretches beyond his paper on the definition of physicalism, but I will briefly refer to an analogy he offers to help clarify and motivate the idea.¹⁵ The analogy is between facts which are not apt for grounding and facts which are not apt for causal explanation. The fact that $2+2=4$ lacks a causal explanation, but not in the sense that the big bang may lack a causal explanation; the fact that $2+2=4$ is not the kind of fact which requires or admits of causal explanation. By analogy there may be a category of fact which neither requires nor admits of grounding explanation, and essential truths are a plausible candidate. According to Dasgupta, the question ‘What explains the fact that a party is the kind of thing that exists when there are people revelling?’ is ill-posed in something like

¹⁴ GVE is not an analysis of grounding, but a view about how the grounding facts are grounded. Dasgupta does not give an utterly precise definition of what the model of explanation involves in general, but this principle seems to be suggested by his examples.

¹⁵ The argument for the autonomy of facts about essence is continued in Dasgupta 2016.

the way 'What caused 2 and 2 to equal 4?' is ill-posed. Nobody who knows what a party is should be troubled by this question.

Having defended the autonomy of facts about essence, Dasgupta offers the following refined definition of physicalism:

Physicalism is the thesis that all non-physical facts which are *substantive*, i.e. apt to be grounded, are grounded in facts which are either physical or autonomous.¹⁶

Let us call this definition of physicalism in conjunction with the GVE model of the explanation of grounding facts, 'grounding physicalism.' Dasgupta admits that understanding physicalism in this way makes it harder for those wishing to defend physicalism about the mind:

...physicalism [on Dasgupta's construal] requires that there are essential connections between mind and body. This will be disappointing to physicalists who hoped that formulating physicalism in terms of ground would rescue them from having to offer tight connections of essence or analysis between mind and body. On the current picture, this hope is dashed.¹⁷

It is not that the grounding physicalist is obliged to hold that consciousness is essentially a physical phenomenon. Physicalism requires that in the actual world the mental facts are realised by the physical facts, but many physicalists hold that in non-actual possible worlds mental facts are realised by non-physical facts. But the grounding physicalist is obliged to construe the essences of conscious states in such a way that they are able to explain the grounding of consciousness in the physical. In what follows I will explore a way of developing this challenge, and work it into an argument against physicalism which has distinct advantages over other anti-physicalist arguments in the literature.

The Phenomenal Analysis Challenge

A thing is conscious just in case there's something that it's like to be it. There's something that it's like for a rabbit to be cold, or to be kicked, or to have a knife stuck in it. There's nothing that it's like in contrast for a table to be cold, or to be kicked or to have a knife stuck in it. There's nothing that it's like from the inside, as it were, to be a table. Consciousness is simply the determinable property of having some kind of first person experience. Phenomenal properties are the determinates of that determinable: the specific ways of having first person experience, such as pain, anxiety, various forms of visual or auditory experience.

¹⁶ This is not the final definition Dasgupta ends up with, but it will serve for the purposes of this paper. His final definition is a little stronger, and hence will inherit any difficulties the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge raises for the above definition.

¹⁷ Dasgupta 2014: 586.

The phenomenal facts are the facts about which individuals have which phenomenal properties. However, I want to focus in this paper on consciousness properties themselves rather than the individuals that have them. Therefore, I will abstract from phenomenal facts involving specific individuals and focus on facts involving only quantificational structure and phenomenal properties, e.g. the fact that there is something that feels pain. Call such facts the ‘pure phenomenal facts’. I take it that the pure phenomenal facts are grounded in phenomenal facts involving specific individuals, e.g. the fact that someone is in pain is grounded in the fact that Bill is in pain.¹⁸

The challenge for the grounding physicalist is that she is obliged to hold that conscious states are in a certain sense *analysable*. In this section I will outline the sense of analysis I have in mind, and why the grounding physicalist is obliged to think that phenomenal properties are indeed analysable in this sense. In the next section I will construct an argument for the claim that phenomenal properties are not analysable in this sense.

We can think of the analysis of a property as a matter of giving an account of its *real definition*, of what it is for something to have the property. Gideon Rosen gives the general form of an analysis as:

For all x, for it to be the case that Fx just is for it to be the case that ϕ x.¹⁹

In the case of knowledge, one plausible candidate for its analysis is:

For all x, for it to be the case that x knows just is for it to be the case that it is not accidental that x is right that p is the case (for some proposition p).²⁰

It is crucial to note two things about the notion of analysis in play here. Firstly, it is metaphysical rather than linguistic: we are concerned with the definition of properties not the definition of words. Secondly, and perhaps relatedly, it is not to be assumed that an analysis is accessible *a priori*. It is plausible for example that the real definition of water is known only empirically.

Putting the general form as Rosen does is in a certain sense limiting, as it restricts us to accounting for the real definition of the property in terms of facts about the bearer of that property. Let us call such analyses, in which a property P is defined in terms of other properties of the bearer of P, ‘intra-substance analyses’. There is a more radical kind of analysis, in which a property P is defined in terms of facts concerning individuals which are or could be distinct from the bearer of P. Returning to parties, for it to be the case that there is something that is a party just is for it to be the case that

¹⁸ A fact may of course be grounded in lots of different facts: the fact that someone is in pain is grounded in the fact that Bill is in pain, the fact that Sarah is in pain, etc.

¹⁹ Rosen 2010, section 10.

²⁰ This analysis is taken from Unger 1968.

there are people revelling; note that we are not here accounting for the real definition of partyhood in terms of some property had by the bearer of partyhood (persons are not parties). We can call analyses of this more radical form ‘inter-substance analyses’, the general form of which is as follows:

For it to be the case that there is an x such that Fx just is for fact P to obtain,
Where x is not a constituent of P .

Orthogonal to the distinction between intra-substance and inter-substance analyses, we can distinguish analyses between properties of the same kind – call these ‘intra-categorical analyses’ – from analyses between properties which are or could be of different kinds – call these ‘inter-categorical analyses’. The analysis of less determinate colours into more determinate colours is an example of an intra-categorical analysis; the analysis of chemical kinds into physical kinds is an example of an inter-categorical analysis.²¹

Cross-sectioning these two distinctions we potentially have four distinct categories of analysis, ranging from those which do the least metaphysical bridging – intra-categorical and intra-substance – to those which do the most metaphysical bridging – inter-categorical and inter-substance. Arguably some properties are unanalysable, in which case there will be no non-trivial account of the property’s real definition.²² Existence is a plausible candidate for an unanalysable property: plausibly there is no non-trivial way of accounting for what it is for something to exist. On certain mainstream views, modal properties and the causal relation are also unanalysable.

It is sometimes claimed that phenomenal properties are unanalysable. However, it is plausible that at least some phenomenal properties can be analysed into other phenomenal properties of the same subject, i.e. that there are phenomenal property analyses of the least metaphysically bridging kind: intra-categorical and intra-substance. For example, for it to be the case that there is a subject S having a colour experience just is for it to be the case that S has some property F such that F is a specific colour experience; for it to be the case that there is a subject S having the disjunctive property of feeling pain or pleasure just is for it to be the case either that S feels pain or that S feels pleasure. And there may well be a variety of more subtle analyses, perhaps pain is analysable into an effective component and a qualitative component.

However, armchair reflection does not seem to reveal analyses of phenomenal properties which are either inter-categorical or inter-substance. *Prima facie*, it’s hard to see how what it is for there to be a

²¹ The distinction between inter-categorical and intra-categorical presumably admits of a certain degree of contextual flexibility, i.e. there are cases of grounding which are correctly classed as inter-categorical in some contexts and intra-categorical in others. This won’t matter for the claims I want to make here.

²² For any property F , to give a trivial account F ’s real definition is to state the following: For it to be the case that there is an x such that Fx just is for there to be an x such that Fx .

subject S feeling pain could be analysed into a fact not involving phenomenal properties, or a fact not involving S (or both). Contrast with the case of partyhood. For it to be the case that there is something which is a party just is for it to be the case that there are certain people $X_1, X_2 \dots X_n$, such that $X_1, X_2 \dots X_n$ are revelling; the fact in terms of which partyhood is analysed involves people not parties. No analogous analysis of subject-hood into facts about non-subjects suggests itself, at least on first reflection.

One might take this to be prima facie reason to adopt the following thesis:

Minimal Phenomenal Analysis – Phenomenal properties admit of neither inter-substance nor inter-categorical analysis.

What I have offered so far given is at best prima facie grounds for accepting Minimal Phenomenal Analysis; in the next section more sustained attention to the question of whether it is true. But for the moment let us explore the trouble Minimal Phenomenal Analysis, if true, causes for grounding physicalism.

According to the GVE model, in the case of any given grounding fact F, the constituents of the less fundamental fact play a crucial role in explaining F. To indulge in metaphor, the grounding facts 'reach out' to, or in Fine's phrase 'point to', the facts that ground them. Partyhood points to its ground in virtue of the fact that it's in the nature of partyhood that if there are people revelling then there is a party. But if Minimal Phenomenal Analysis is true, it's hard to see how they could do much reaching or pointing. The phenomenal properties of a given subject can reach out to other phenomenal properties of that subject. But they could not it seems reach out to non-conscious fundamental physical individuals and properties, in such a way to explain the ultimate grounding of the facts about consciousness in facts concerning such individuals and properties.

To try to make this a little more precise, grounding physicalism entails the following thesis:

Phenomenal Deflation – For any actually obtaining pure phenomenal fact Q, there is a condition C, such that (i) there is some constituent E of Q such that it is in the nature of E that if C is satisfied then Q obtains, (ii) the fundamental physical facts logically entail that C is satisfied.

If Minimal Phenomenal Analysis is true, then for any actually obtaining pure phenomenal fact Q of the form <there exists a subject S such that S has phenomenal property P>, the only condition sufficient for Q's instantiation which could be extracted from the real definition of P would be of the form <S has phenomenal property P*>, in which S is the same subject which has P, but in which P* may perhaps be a phenomenal property not identical with P. It's hard to see how such a condition

could be logically entailed by the physical facts. How on earth could a fact about an enormous number of non-conscious fundamental physical entities related in extremely complex ways, logically entail the existence of a subject feeling pain?

One way of bolstering this concern is to point out that mereological nihilism seems to be logically coherent. There is no contradiction in the thesis that fundamental particles never compose composite objects, i.e. that there are particles arranged table-wise, planet-wise, etc., but no tables, planets, etc. Assuming that conscious subjects (at least the conscious subjects we are pre-theoretically committed to) are macro-level entities, the logical coherence of mereological nihilism entails that no fact exclusively concerning micro-level entities entails the existence of a conscious subject.

Thus, assuming that the fundamental physical facts are micro-physical facts, we can pose the following argument against physicalism:

1. If physicalism is true, then *Phenomenal Deflation* is true: For any actually obtaining pure phenomenal fact Q, there is a condition C, such that (i) there is some constituent E of Q such that it is in the nature of E that if C is satisfied then Q obtains, (ii) the micro-physical facts logically entail that C is satisfied.
2. For any actually obtaining pure phenomenal fact Q of the form <there exists a subject S such that S has phenomenal property P>, the only condition sufficient for Q's instantiation which could be extracted from the real definition of P would be of the form <S has phenomenal property P*>, in which S is a macro-level entity. (Follows from *Minimal Phenomenal Analysis* and the assumption that conscious subjects are macro-level entities.)
3. Therefore, physicalism is true only if the micro-physical facts logically entail the existence of a macro-level entity.
4. It's not the case that the micro-physical facts logically entail the existence of a macro-level entity.
5. Therefore, physicalism is false.

Why doesn't this form of argument apply quite generally to rule out the grounding of any macro-level entities? Or to put it another way, why does it not follow from the coherence of mereological nihilism that facts about micro-level entities *never* ground the existence of macro-level entities? The proponent of GVE will likely hold that in general the essences of macro-level entities are rich enough to account for their grounding in the micro-level facts. It is plausibly in the nature of a table that if

particles are arranged table-wise then there is a table.²³ Thus, even though the micro-level facts in and of themselves do not logically entail the existence of tables, the micro-level facts logically entail a certain condition C, such that the kind table is essentially such that if C is satisfied then there are tables.²⁴

The problem in the case of conscious subjects is that, if Minimal Phenomenal Analysis is true, the nature of phenomenal properties does not look to be rich enough to yield a condition C which is (i) logically entailed by the micro-physical facts, and is (ii) sufficient for the obtaining of macro-level facts concerning conscious subjects. Assuming Minimal Phenomenal Analysis, the only condition extractable from the nature of phenomenal properties which is sufficient for the instantiation of those properties concerns the bearers of phenomenal properties. Assuming the bearers of phenomenal properties are macro-level entities, that condition is not logically entailed by micro-level facts.

Rosen has discussed, in more general terms, something like this difficulty for the physicalist, and Fine has suggested two responses.²⁵ Firstly he suggests that the kind of grounding which obtains between the mental and the physical is *natural* rather than metaphysical. Secondly, he suggests that even if it is not in the nature of a given mental property to ground a connection with a *specific* physical property, it may nonetheless be in the nature of each mental property that it has *some* physical ground.

Given the standard understanding of physicalism, and assuming that natural grounding goes along with natural necessity, Fine's first response would not lead to physicalism as it is normally understood but to property dualism. Although definitions of physicalism wholly in terms of supervenience are out of favour, it is generally agreed that the supervenience of all facts on the physical facts – with the strength of metaphysical necessity – is a necessary condition for physicalism. And there are arguably good reasons for taking it so. One of the main arguments for physicalism is its capacity to reconcile mental causation with the causal closure of the physical in a way that does not lead to problematic overdetermination. There is not space here to fully defend

²³ By stipulation 'being arranged table-wise' expresses the functional role F such that it is in the nature of the kind table that if particles are arranged F-wise then there is a table. This stipulation does not entail that there is such a functional role involved in the essence of the kind table, as the predicate might not be satisfied. I give more detail of the analysis of macro-level objects in Goff 2017.

²⁴ Mereological nihilists might deny that the kind table is essentially such that if particles are arranged table-wise then there are is a table, but this seems to me to build too much into our ordinary notion of a table. There is clearly a deflationary notion of a table according to which if there are particles arranged table-wise then there is a table.

²⁵ Rosen 2010, section 10; Fine 2012.

this claim, but it is broadly agreed that physicalism can only do this if it is taken to be the thesis that all facts are metaphysically, and not just naturally, grounded in the physical facts.²⁶

Turning to Fine's second response, it is not obviously true that it is in the nature of phenomenal properties that they require some physical ground. Disembodied subjects of experience seem perfectly conceivable, which gives us at least prima facie grounds for thinking that the essence of phenomenal properties is compatible with their existing ungrounded.²⁷ But even if Fine were right that it is part of the nature of phenomenal properties that they have some physical ground, this in itself would hardly be sufficient to explain a grounding connection with the physical. Presumably it is not in the nature of pain that just any old physical state is sufficient for there to be pain. If physicalism is true, there are a limited range of physical states which are capable of grounding pain. If grounding facts are to be explained in terms of the nature of the grounded items, there must be something in the nature of pain which determines which of all possible physical states are the ones capable of grounding pain.

I conclude at this stage that the grounding physicalist has to deny Minimal Phenomenal Analysis; she must argue that, contrary to initial appearances, there is a way of analysing phenomenal properties which facilitates the bridging of distinct substances and property kinds. Let us call this the 'Phenomenal Analysis Challenge' for grounding physicalism. It is not clear that other conceptions of physicalism are subject to this challenge. For many philosophers the attraction of defining physicalism in terms of supervenience was that it seemed to avoid the need for such analyses of the mental. And whilst some physicalists have argued that there needs to be transparent explanatory relations undergirding supervenience theses,²⁸ what is specific to grounding physicalism as I have outlined it in this paper is that such explanatory relations flow from the *grounded facts*, such as the facts about consciousness, rather than the facts doing the grounding. In the next section I will consider ways in which physicalists might respond to the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge, before going on to consider how anti-physicalists would respond to these responses.

Physicalist responses to the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge

In the context of accounting for consciousness, we can broadly distinguish two forms of physicalism, which David Chalmers has dubbed 'type-A physicalism' and 'type-B physicalism'.²⁹

²⁶ See for example Pereboom 2002 and Bennett 2003.

²⁷ The conceivability and possibility of disembodied subjects of experience is defended in Goff 2010.

²⁸ Horgan 1993.

²⁹ Chalmers 2002.

The type-A physicalist holds that the physical facts a priori entail the phenomenal facts.³⁰ If one knew all the facts about the workings of my body and brain, one could in principle work out the nature of my conscious experience. The type-B physicalist denies that the physical facts broadly entail the phenomenal facts, whilst nonetheless holding that the physical facts ground the phenomenal facts. The difference is made vivid in terms of zombies: creatures which are physical duplicates of actual humans but which lack any kind of conscious experience. For the type-A physicalist zombies are inconceivable, in the sense that their possibility can be ruled out a priori. For the type-B physicalist, zombies are perfectly conceivable but turn out a posteriori to be impossible.

How might the type-A physicalist respond to the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge? Type-A physicalists standardly adopt some form of analytic functionalism, according to which mental states are causally defined: to be in pain, by definition, is to have an inner state which ‘plays the pain role’, i.e. meditates between bodily damage and avoidance behaviour in the distinctive way associated with pain.³¹ Clearly to accept analytic functionalism is to deny Minimal Phenomenal Analysis. Analytic functionalism entails that, for any phenomenal property, the real definition of that property can be accounted for in terms of causal roles which could be realised by non-conscious individuals other than the individual instantiating that phenomenal property, e.g. micro-level physical parts of the individual acting in concert. In other words, analytic functionalism is committed to inter-categorical and inter-substance analysis of phenomenal properties. Just as it is a priori that if there are people revelling then there is a party, so according to analytic functionalism it is a priori that if certain entities play the pain role then there is pain.

Moreover it is plausible that such an essential nature could explain the grounding of the phenomenal in the physical. For the analytic functionalist pain is essentially such that there is something in pain if the following condition is met: <there is an entity or entities playing the pain role>, and it is plausible that the physical facts logically entail that this condition is met. A similar story can be told about each phenomenal property, according to analytic functionalism, thus accounting for the truth of Phenomenal Deflation.³²

The type-B physicalist is likely to make a very different kind of response to the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge. Type-B physicalists tend to accept the existence of *phenomenal concepts*; a phenomenal

³⁰ We should distinguish a priori entailment from strict logical entailment. I argued above that mereological nihilist is logically coherent: that there is no contradiction in the assertion that particles are arranged table-wise but there is no table. But I also suggested it is plausible to suppose that it's in the nature of a table that if particles are arranged table-wise then there is a table. If the nature of the kind table is a priori accessible, it will follow that the fact that particles are arranged table-wise a priori entails – even if it doesn't logically entail – the existence of a table.

³¹ Armstrong 1968, Lewis 1994.

³² There could be problems accounting for the grounding of higher-order physical states, such as neurophysiological states, in more basic physical states, but this clearly takes us beyond any concerns pertaining to consciousness.

concept is the kind of concept one employs when one thinks about a phenomenal property in terms of *what it's like to have it*. In paradigmatic cases one attends to, say, one's pain, and thinks about in terms of *how it feels* or *what it's like*. Type-B physicalists accept that phenomenal concepts have no a priori connection to physical or functional concepts – hence the conceivability of zombies – but nonetheless hold that phenomenal concepts *refer* to physical or functional states – hence the impossibility of zombies. Pain, the state referred to by the phenomenal concept of pain, is identical with c-fibres firing (or some functional state realised by c-fibres firing), and yet it is not a priori that this is so.

It seems to follow that phenomenal concepts reveal little or nothing of the nature of the states they refer to; call this thesis 'Phenomenal Opacity'. For *ex hypothesi* phenomenal states have physical essences – pain just is c-fibres firing – and yet a priori reflection employing phenomenal concepts does not reveal it to be the case that pain is c-fibres firing. Indeed many type-B physicalists have explicitly committed to Phenomenal Opacity. David Papineau for example says the following:

No doubt there are ways of thinking of things that make certain essential properties a priori knowable. But I take such a priori knowledge to derive from (possibly implicit) compositionality in the relevant modes of thinking, and so not to be associated with the most basic ways in which thought makes contact with reality...When it comes to these basic points of contact, I find it hard to take seriously any alternative to the assumption that our atomic concepts are related to reality by facts external to our a priori grasp, such as causal or historical facts.... I don't recognise any way in which the mind 'captures' something, apart from simply referring to it.

Given that Papineau thinks that phenomenal concepts are atomic concepts, it is clear that he accepts phenomenal opacity. Brian McLaughlin is even more explicit:

Phenomenal concepts....do not conceptually reveal anything about the essential nature of phenomenal properties: they simply name or demonstrate them.³³

Whilst other type-B physicalists may not be explicit about their commitment to Phenomenal Opacity it is often implicit in their favoured theories of phenomenal concepts as demonstratives,³⁴ indexicals,³⁵ recognitional concepts,³⁶ or concepts which refer in virtue of facts about teleology or causal connections.³⁷ If my phenomenal concept of pain is merely a demonstrative, or refers in

³³ McLaughlin 2001: 324.

³⁴ Papineau 1993, Perry 2001.

³⁵ Tye 1995, chap. 6, Lycan 1996, sect. 3.3.

³⁶ Loar 1990/1997, 2003, Tye 2000, chap. 2, Carruthers 2002, 2004, Perry 2001, Levin 2007a, b.

³⁷ Papineau 2002, 2007.

virtue of facts outside of my a priori grasp, then it is hard to see how it could yield any insight into the essential nature of the state it tracks.

Having adopted Phenomenal Opacity the type-B physicalist is free to adopt the view that conscious states have highly complex physical, or indeed functional, natures suited to explaining the grounding of the phenomenal in the physical. The reason that conscious states strike us as unanalysable is that this complex nature is not available to us introspectively. Perhaps the reference of terms such as 'party' is fixed descriptively, such that anyone competent with the term knows what it is for there to be a party. If the concept 'pain' reveals little or nothing of the nature of pain, this could explain why pain seems, in contrast to partyhood, to be an unanalysable property.

If the type-B physicalist identifies phenomenal properties with functional properties, then she can give an account of the grounding of the mental in the physical similar to that offered by the analytic functionalist above. The only difference is that the functionally defined essential nature of the phenomenal which explains the grounding connection is not a priori accessible. Alternately, she can identify phenomenal properties with physical properties themselves, leaving no remaining challenge to a physicalist account of consciousness.³⁸

It is standard for the type-B physicalist to account for the conceivable impossibility of zombies in terms of the nature of phenomenal concepts; doing so has become known as the 'phenomenal concept strategy'.³⁹ What I have just outlined is a kind of phenomenal concept strategy for responding to the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge.

The Phenomenal Analysis Argument

The physicalist strategies outlined in the last section are ruled out by the key premises of one of the most discussed anti-physicalist arguments: the Conceivability Argument.⁴⁰ Indeed we can take the premises of the Conceivability Argument and formulate a new argument against physicalism, one which does not involve a move from conceivability to possibility. I will not examine the plausibility of these premises here; this is done enough elsewhere. But what I do hope to show (in the next section) is that this new argument, call it the 'Phenomenal Analysis Argument' is stronger than the conceivability argument, in the sense that – if sound – it rules out a form of monism which the Conceivability Argument – even if sound – does not. Hence, for the grounding physicalist, given her

³⁸ At least no challenges which arise from the nature of consciousness, see note 30.

³⁹ This term was coined by Stoljar 2005.

⁴⁰ Chalmers 2008 is perhaps the most discussed version of conceivability argument in contemporary philosophy, although of course it has its roots in Descartes 1645/1996.

obligation to give a substantial analysis of phenomenal properties, the hard problem of consciousness is harder.

The Conceivability Argument against physicalism moves in three stages. In the first stage it is argued that it is conceivable that the physical facts obtain in the absence of the phenomenal facts. We can, it is claimed, conceive of a 'zombie' version of our world, which is in all respects physically indiscernible from the actual world but in which there is no consciousness. In the second stage a move is made from the conceivability of a zombie version of our world, to its genuine possibility. In the final stage it is argued that the possibility of the physical facts obtaining in the absence of the phenomenal facts is inconsistent with physicalism.

The final move is the least controversial, and would follow so long as we take it (as most do) to be a necessary condition for physicalism that the phenomenal facts supervene, with metaphysical necessity, on the physical facts. The following principle, generally taken to be a core principle governing grounding, entails that the supervenience of all facts on the physical facts is indeed a necessary condition for physicalism given a grounding conception of physicalism:

Necessitation: If a certain fact X grounds Y, then necessarily if X obtains then Y obtains.⁴¹

The starting premise, then, of the Conceivability Argument is *Zombie Conceivability*: the thesis that a zombie version of the actual world is conceivable. Clearly this is inconsistent with analytic functionalism. If analytic functionalism is true, then a world in which the pain role is realised but in which there is no pain is straightforwardly contradictory. And yet this is precisely what obtains in a zombie version of the actual world. In ruling out analytic functionalism *Zombie Conceivability* rules out the analytic functionalist response to the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge.

Let us turn now to the second stage of the Conceivability Argument: the move from the putative conceivability of a zombie world to its alleged possibility. Few now accept that all propositions which are conceivably true are possibly true, due to the plausible examples of conceivable impossibilities proposed by Kripke and Putnam, e.g. water existing in the absence of H₂O.⁴² Thus, most proponents of the Conceivability Argument claim that there is something special about phenomenal concepts in virtue of which we are able to move from the conceivability the possibility of zombies.

What exactly is special about phenomenal concepts? In his much discussed version of the Conceivability Argument, David Chalmers builds on the following claim of Kripke:

⁴¹ Endorsement of Necessitation is the norm, see for example Fine 2012, Rosen 2010, and Trogdon 2013b. There are, however, some who deny it, such as Leuenberger 2013 and Skiles 2015.

⁴² Kripke 1972; Putnam 1973, 1975.

Pain...is not picked out by one of its accidental properties; rather it is picked out by the property of *being pain itself*, by its immediate phenomenological quality.⁴³

Kripke seems to be claiming that we conceive of conscious states in terms of their essential nature. Pain is, in its essential nature, just is a way of feeling, and when we think of pain we think of it in terms of that way of feeling. I use the term 'transparent' to describe such a concept: a concept C referring to R is transparent just in case the complete essence of R is a priori accessible for someone possessing C, in virtue of their possession of C.⁴⁴ If pain is a transparent concept, then in conceiving of pain in terms of how it feels, it is apparent to the conceiver what it is for something to feel that way.⁴⁵

Let us call the thesis that phenomenal concepts are transparent 'Phenomenal Transparency'. Chalmers frames his versions of the Conceivability Argument in terms of his two-dimensional semantic framework. In this framework, Phenomenal Transparency comes out as the thesis that phenomenal concepts are *super-rigid*, where a concept is super-rigid if it picks out the same entity in every epistemic scenario and every metaphysically possible world (and every pair thereof). We need not go into the details of the two-dimensional framework; what is important for our purposes is that the transparency – or super-rigidity – of phenomenal concepts is essential for the move from the conceivability to the possibility of zombies. Because a phenomenal concept picks out the same thing in all epistemic scenarios and all metaphysically possible worlds, its extension at an arbitrary world W does not change depending on whether W is conceived of as an epistemic scenario or a metaphysically possible world; it is precisely when conceiving using such concepts that we are licenced – according to Chalmers – to move from conceivability to possibility.⁴⁶

⁴³ Kripke 1972: 15.

⁴⁴ Goff 2011, 2015, 2017.

⁴⁵ It is trivial that a phenomenal concept characterises its referent R in terms of what it's like to have R. This is different to the thesis of Phenomenal Transparency, which is the thesis that a phenomenal concept reveals what it is for something to have R, i.e. reveals the essence of R.

It is plausible that there is a category of concept between transparent and opaque, the category of translucent, where a concept is translucent iff something significant but not everything of the essence of its referent is a priori accessible. Some physicalists try to deny the second step of the conceivability argument by holding that phenomenal concepts are translucent (Schroer 2010, Diaz-Leon 2014). However, our current concern is not whether the premises of the anti-physicalist arguments are true, but what argument can be constructed using these premises in the context of a grounding conception of physicalism.

⁴⁶ Chalmers does argue (Chalmers 2009: 153) that that we can run the argument without assuming that phenomenal concepts are super-rigid, by focusing on the primary intentions of phenomenal concepts. However, this is only because his framework, somewhat controversially, assumes that every concept affords a substantive a priori grasp of *some* significant property its referent, either its essence or a property which uniquely identifies it in the actual world. Assuming this, even if phenomenal concepts do not afford us a transparent grasp of the essence of consciousness properties themselves, they will afford us a transparent grasp of the properties we use to pick out conscious properties. I have dealt with this matter in more detail in Goff 2017, but will set it aside here for the sake of simplicity.

I will not here assess the plausibility of this kind of move from conceivability to possibility. Rather I want to point out that Phenomenal Transparency rules out the Phenomenal Opacity response to the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge, as these two theses are defined in opposition to each other. Thus, two crucial premises of Chalmers' Conceivability Argument against physicalism – Zombie Conceivability and Phenomenal Transparency – rule out the two physicalist responses to the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge discussed in the last section. A similar story can be told with reference to other forms of the Conceivability Argument or related anti-physicalist arguments, but I will spare the reader the details here.⁴⁷ Furthermore, these two premises, if true, render Minimal Phenomenal Analysis extremely difficult to deny, as I will now explain.

If Phenomenal Transparency is true, then for any phenomenal property F the real definition of F is a priori accessible (for anyone possessing a phenomenal concept of F, in virtue of possessing a phenomenal concept of F). If there is some non-trivial inter-substance or inter-categorical account of what it is for something to have F, some account which is not simply 'For all x, for it to be the case that x has F just is for it to be the case that x has F', then that account will be a priori accessible. But the only a priori accessible non-trivial accounts of the real definition of a phenomenal property we find in the philosophical literature are either intra-substance and intra-categorical, or those offered by proponents of analytic functionalism or some similar causal analysis of mentality. The former kind of account does not help with the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge, and if zombies are conceivable, accounts of the latter kind are all false.

To put it another way, to avoid Phenomenal Analysis Challenge the grounding physicalist requires some kind of inter-substance and inter-categorical analysis of phenomenal properties. If Phenomenal Transparency is true, that analysis must be available a priori. If zombies are conceivable, then we have good reason to think that there are no a priori accessible analyses of phenomenal properties which are either inter-substance or inter-categorical, as all extant proposals are inconsistent with Zombie Conceivability.

Thus, we reach the following argument against physicalism (in which a 'non-minimal analyses' is one which is either inter-categorical or inter-substance):

The Phenomenal Analysis Argument

⁴⁷ In other versions of the argument the link to Phenomenal Transparency is more explicit. George Bealer's (1994, 2002) argument involves a commitment to the *semantic stability* of phenomenal concepts, and Martine Nida-Rümelin's (2007) involves a commitment to the thesis that phenomenal concepts enable us to *grasp* phenomenal properties. Both of these commitments are roughly equivalent to Phenomenal Transparency. I frame my version of the conceivability argument in terms of Phenomenal Transparency itself (Goff 2017).

Premise 1 – If zombies are conceivable, then either Minimal Phenomenal Analysis is true or there is a non-minimal analysis of phenomenal properties which is not a priori accessible.

Premise 2 – If Phenomenal Transparency is true, then it's not the case that there is a non-minimal analysis of phenomenal properties which is not a priori accessible.

Premise 3 – Phenomenal Transparency is true

Premise 4 – Zombie Conceivability is true

Conclusion 1 – Therefore, Minimal Phenomenal Analysis is true.

Premise 5 – If Minimal Phenomenal Analysis is true, then grounding physicalism is false.

Conclusion 2 – Therefore, grounding physicalism is false.

Why the Phenomenal Analysis Argument is more powerful than the Conceivability Argument

There is one sense in which the Phenomenal Analysis Argument is dialectically weaker than the Conceivability Argument: it has force only against forms of physicalism which require that the phenomenal facts be analysable. The conceivability argument in contrast aims to prove a thesis inconsistent with almost all formulations of physicalism, namely that the phenomenal facts do not supervene on the physical. However, given the increasing popularity of grounding in metaphysics, it is worth exploring the implications of a grounding conception of physicalism.

Moreover, there are two ways in which the Phenomenal Analysis Argument is dialectically superior to the Conceivability Argument. Firstly, it does not involve a move from conceivability to possibility. This may not be as dialectically significant as one might at first have thought, as philosophers sympathetic to the use of the notions of grounding and essence are likely to be sympathetic to an account of modal truths in terms of essence.⁴⁸ Given such an account, it is perhaps plausible that conceivability entails possibility on the condition that one has a complete grasp of the essences of the facts one is conceiving of. If this were the case, and if both phenomenal and physical concepts reveal the essence of the properties they denote, we would be able to move from the conceivability to the possibility of zombies.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, (i) a lot of work would need to be done to justify this kind of inference from conceivability to possibility, (ii) some of those sympathetic to a grounding

⁴⁸ Fine 1994, Lowe 2012.

⁴⁹ I defend this kind of move from the conceivability to the possibility of zombies in Goff 2017.

conception of physicalism may not be sympathetic to an account of modality in terms of essence. The Phenomenal Analysis Argument avoids any concern with these difficult issues.

More importantly, the Phenomenal Analysis Argument threatens Russellian monism as well as standard forms of physicalism. Chalmers is explicit that his conceivability argument does not rule out Russellian monism: the conclusion of the argument is: *either physicalism is false or Russellian monism is true*: to move from conceivability to the possibility of zombies we need both phenomenal and physical concepts to be transparent (so that both have identical primary and secondary intensions), but if Russellian monism is true physical concepts are not transparent. If Russellian monism is true, we cannot move from the conceivability to the possibility of zombies.

Thus, both the (standard) type-B physicalist and the Russellian monist deny that we can move from the conceivability to the possibility of zombies, but for different reasons. For the type-B physicalist, the inference is blocked by the opacity of phenomenal concepts; for the Russellian monist the inference is blocked by the opacity of physical concepts.

The upshot is that the conclusion of Chalmers' Conceivability Argument leaves us with two options: dualism or Russellian monism. The latter is arguably the more attractive option. As already noted a key argument for physicalism is its potential to reconcile mental causation with the causal closure of the physical in a way that does not lead to problematic overdetermination. If my pain is grounded in the firing of my c-fibres, then the fact that my pain behaviour is caused *both* my pain and by the firing of my c-fibres is widely thought not to be a problematic case of overdetermination. Compare: that fact that both the party upstairs and the people dancing and drinking upstairs kept me awake last night is not a problematic case of overdetermination, as the fact that there is party upstairs is grounded in the fact that there are people dancing and drinking upstairs. Russellian monism arguably shares this advantage with physicalism, as it also holds that the mental facts are grounded in the (deep) physical facts, and this is widely held to be a great advantage of the view.

In contrast to the Conceivability Argument, the Phenomenal Analysis Argument has the potential to rule out not only standard forms of physicalism but also Russellian monism. This is because Minimal Phenomenal Analysis looks to be just as problematic for the Russellian monist as it is for the physicalist, and for exactly the same reasons. Just like the standard physicalist, the Russellian monist – at least on a standard understanding of the view – tries to ground the phenomenal facts in complex physical facts. It's just that for the Russellian monist, the complex physical facts to which consciousness is being reduced have a deep nature, without which they would be unable to ground consciousness. And none of the difficulties I outlined in describing the Phenomenal Analysis Problem go away if physical facts have a deep nature, as these problems arise from the nature of

phenomenal rather than physical properties. For example, the problem of trying to make sense of how unanalysable phenomenal properties ‘reach out’ to complex physical facts is made no easier by the supposition that those complex physical facts have a deep nature.⁵⁰

Thus, the Phenomenal Analysis Argument is an argument not just against standard forms of physicalism but also against Russellian monism. This is especially problematic for Russellian monists, who tend to motivate their view by arguing against physicalism on the basis of the Conceivability Argument (or something like it), which of course commits them to the crucial premises of the Phenomenal Analysis Argument. Hence, in the Phenomenal Analysis Argument, the very premises the Russellian monist uses to argue for her view are used against her.

Russellian monism has been for many an attractive middle way between dualism and standard forms of physicalism: resistant to both the Conceivability Argument (like dualism), and yet able to reconcile mental causation with causal closure (like physicalism). The Phenomenal Analysis Argument threatens to make our options starker.

Conclusion

There is no clear consensus in the philosophy of mind as to how to define physicalism. Given the increasing popularity of taking grounding to be a central concept in metaphysics, it is pertinent to explore the implications of grounding conceptions of physicalism, of which Dasgupta’s account is perhaps the most developed form. I hope to have shown that adopting Dasgupta’s account of physicalism makes physicalism harder to defend as it opens physicalists up to the Phenomenal Analysis Challenge; a challenge other conceptions of physicalism, for example, supervenience conceptions, are not obviously subject to.

Whilst that challenge only really has bite if we adopt the key premises of the Conceivability Argument – Phenomenal Transparency and Zombies Conceivability – the resulting argument has a much stronger conclusion. The Phenomenal Analysis Argument, if sound, rules out not only standard forms of physicalism but also the Russellian middle way between standard physicalism and dualism.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Panpsychist forms of Russellian monism (Strawson 2006, Chalmers 2015, Goff 2017) would not need an inter-categorical analysis of phenomenal properties, as on this view ordinary consciousness is grounded in more basic states of consciousness. However, at least on standard versions, panpsychism would require an inter-substance analysis of phenomenal properties, as facts about the consciousness of ordinary subjects are grounded in facts about fundamental physical entities.

⁵¹ The argument I have constructed above applies only to reductive version of Russellian monism. I am increasingly being attracted to an emergentism form of Russellian monism, which I defend in Coleman and Goff Forthcoming and Goff Forthcoming.

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