**Grounds and Gaps**

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1. Recent work on grounding has focused attention on many important issues—but for the most part these are not issues that help with the philosophical problems of consciousness.

2. Grounding: how less fundamental features of reality depend on the more fundamental. (Incidentally, I’d say many philosophers of mind have been talking about grounding all along: how mental facts *depend on physical* ones.)

3. The central metaphysical problem raised by consciousness is the *hard problem*. We can think of conscious states phenomenally, subjectively, first-personally, in terms of what they are like. And we can think of them objectively, third-personally, in terms that Mary had available before leaving the room. The hard problem is understanding how phenomenally conceived states relate to objectively specified states.

4. This issue is best understood in terms of *identity*. Can conscious properties C be identified with (broadly) physical properties (B), or not? But identity is *symmetrical*, not asymmetrical *grounding*.

5. Don’t most physicalists about consciousness put their position in terms of non-reductive *supervenience*, not identity? Not really. Consider:

Type identity theorists (including functional specification theorists aka realizer functionalists)

Functional state theorists

Those who identify mental states with determinables (of physical determinates)

Those who identify mental states with wholes (with microphysical parts)

On all these views, phenomenal states are *identified* in the first instance with non-phenomenal states (functional/determinable/macroscopic states) even if the latter are in turn *grounded* in more specific physical states.

6. Q: Why then is physicalism so often formulated in terms of supervenience? A: All the above physicalisms arguably imply metaphysical supervenience on the physical, so can all be refuted by refuting it.

Even, so it is doubtful that supervenience physicalism is a self-standing doctrine: if the Cs supervene metaphysically on the Ps, there must be something in the nature of Cs that explains why this is so (eg they are identical to physical states OR to functional states realized by physical states/to determinables with determinates that are physical states/to wholes whose parts are physical states . . . in the latter cases let us say “coarse-grained” states which by their nature can be realized by physical states).

7. Orthodox (Type-B) physicalists will say that mind-brain claims *C = B* are ordinary a posteriori identities, akin to those discovered in other branches of science.

Opponents point to the feeling of an “explanatory gap”, by comparison to other scientific identities.

Many (incl 2-dimesionalists) attribute this feeling to the impossibility of deriving the *C = B* claims a priori from the P-facts.

Physicalists respond that such non-derivability is rife in science, and that even if it weren’t there’s no compulsion to derive *C = B* claims a priori. They will attribute the feeling of a gap to a misguided intuitive disbelief in the identities, and observe that identities per se need no explaining . . .

8. The issue is often presented as hinging on whether *P -> C* truths are a priori (is *P&-C* conceivable?), but this is to do with technical features of the debate, and obscures the fact that the dependence of broadly physical facts B on micro P-facts is relatively unproblematic, with the distinctive problems of consciousness arising when we aim to relate C-facts to B-facts.

“Current physical explanations take us as far as the psychological mind. What remains ill-understood is the link between the psychological mind and the phenomenal mind.” Chalmers *The Conscious Mind* p 23

9. In truth, recent work on grounding has brought out plenty of challenging issue raised by the grounding of functional/determinable/macroscopic properties in more specific physical ones, and what this tells us about them. But these issues are independent of the relation of phenomenal consciousness to non-phenomenal goings-on.

10. Schaffer (“The Ground between the Gaps”) aims to cast light on the explanatory gap by relating it to issues about grounding. His central argument is that gaps are rife. As he sees it, the existence and nature of *any* wholes (eg H2O molecules) is neither conceptually not metaphysically ensured by their constituent atoms, so the gap between the physical and phenomenal is as consistent with physicalism as H2O molecules are.

11. I think we physicalists will do well to refuse this help. The issues about part-whole grounding are quite different from those raised by mind-brain.

As it happens, I have no strong views about mereological sums (nihilism, universalism, something in between . . .) But I doubt that is the right place to start in understanding the relation of *molecules* (or *tables*, *brains*, *people* . . .) to their parts. After all, in the latter cases there doesn’t seem any metaphysical room (or indeed much conceptual room) between the parts appropriately arranged and the wholes. (We certainly don’t ask, given those parts, so arranged, *why* do they give rise to a *molecule*/*table* . . ?) I take it that this is because the nature of *molecules* (*tables* . . .) entails that there is a molecule if there are such-and-such parts so-and-so arranged.

12. The point in that the grounding relationships between physical and coarse-grained states aren’t brute. They are consequences of the nature of the coarse-grained states.

Assimilating mind/brain relationships to coarse-grained/physical ones carries the mistaken suggestion the former also need to be entailed by the nature of mental states (or even worse that this needs to be a priori). But this is a mistake.