65,536 Definitions of Physicalism

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An Intuitive Definition

- Physicalism:
  - All being is ontologically determined by physical being.
Definition Template

- Physicalism:
  - All As of type B bear relation C to the set of Ds of type E.
What Sort of Entities?

- All A's of type B bear relation C to the set of D's of type E.
  - property
  - instantiated property
  - property instance
  - fact
  - truth
  - event
  - particular (token, entity)
  - law
What Domain of (High-Level) Properties?

- All properties of type B bear relation C to the set of properties of type E.
  - ---
  - qualitative
  - positive
  - contingent
What are (Core) Physical Properties?

- All properties of type B bear relation C to the set of properties of type E.
  - physics-al (current or ideal)
  - scientific
  - non-mental
  - lowest-level
What Sort of Relation?

- All As of type B bear **relation C** to the set of Ds of type E.
  - globally metaphysically supervene on
  - identical to
  - identical to or functionalizable via
  - causal powers subsumed by
  - identical to or constituted by
  - a priori entailed by *(de dicto or de re)*
  - explainable via
Counting Definitions

\[ 8 \times (A) \times 8 \times (B) \times 8 \times (C) \times 8 \times (D) \times 16 \times (E) \]

\[ = 65,536 \]
Andrew’s Physicalism

- Physicalism$_{Andrew}$
  - Every token is either identical to or functionalizable via physical tokens/laws.
Janice’s Physicalism

- Physicalism\textsubscript{Janice}
  - Every entity is or is constituted by ideal scientific physics-al entities.
Frank’s Physicalism

- Physicalism_{Frank}
  - Every qualitative property globally supervenes on physical properties (plus that’s all).
  - Every qualitative property is a priori entailed (de re) by physical properties (plus that’s-all)
Jessica’s Physicalism

- Physicalism

- Every --- is --- by current or ideal physics-al non-mental entities.
Gene’s Physicalism

- Physicalism$_{\text{Gene}}$
  - Every truth is necessarily entailed by physical truths (plus that’s all).
John’s Physicalism

- Physicalism\textsubscript{John}
  - Every property stands in relation \textemdash (ontologically in virtue of?) to physical properties.
Sara’s Physicalism

**Physicalism}_{Sara}

- Every property stands in relation to non-mental push-pull properties.
Noa’s Physicalism

- \text{Physicalism}_{\text{Noa}}
  - Every property metaphysically supervenes on core physical properties.
The Two Main Issues

- The property issue:  
  What are core physical properties (E)?

- The relation issue
  What relation (C) must properties bear to the core physical properties for physicalism to be true?
Metaphilosophical Question

Q: Is the issue between these definitions of physicalism just terminological?
Test for when an issue involving C is just terminological:

(1) Give away the term ‘C’, in favor of ‘C₁’, ‘C₂’, etc.

(2) Is the issue still statable, without using ‘C’? Is there a substantive disagreement about the truth of some sentence in the new vocabulary?
Applying the Terminology Test

- Bar the use of ‘physical’ and ‘physicalism’ (etc.), in favor of physicalism_{Janice}, physicalism_{Jessica}, etc.

- Is the issue still statable? Is there a substantive disagreement about the truth of some sentence in the new vocabulary?
The Property Question

What's the residual issue involving physicalism_{Janice} and physicalism_{Jessica}?

- “I care more about whether physicalism_{X} is true”
- “People should care more about whether physicalism_{X} is true”
- “People (in community X) do care more about physicalism_{X} is true.”
- “Physicalism_{X} captures the way the word ‘physicalism’ is most often used (in community X).”
Mattering for Purpose X

- Maybe:
  - “Physicalism\textsubscript{Jessica} matters most to the mind-body problem”
  - “Physicalism\textsubscript{Janice} matters most to general naturalism”

- But
  - Not clear these are disagreements
  - Not clear that they are true (the vocabulary is still available to make distinctions, either way).

- So
  - No substantive non-sociological, non-attitudinal disagreement?
  - Not quite right to say, these are right notions for purpose X?
Maybe: these are articulations of multiple different *conceptions* of physicalism, where one holds different claims fixed.

Or: Where one holds fixed different *inferential roles* for “physicalism”.
Inferential Roles

- E.g. hold fixed
  - If physicalism is true, the world is fundamentally natural.
  - If physicalism is true, physics is the ultimate comprehensive science.
  - If physicalism is true, the mind is non-spooky.
Multiple Conceptions

- These seem to be different conceptions. Maybe best to use different terms for each.
  - Naturalism
  - Physics-alism
  - Anti-mentalism

- Different challenges for each
  - Miracles
  - Configurational/high-level laws
  - Fundamental mentality
Multiple Debates

- We can argue about the best analysis of physicalism according to each conception, e.g.
  - $\text{physicalism}_{\text{Janice}}$ is a candidate analysis of naturalism [although...]
  - $\text{physicalism}_{\text{Jessica}}$ is a candidate analysis of anti-mentalism [although...]

- But not much point arguing across the debates
  - E.g. about whether one should care more about naturalism or anti-mentalism.
The Relation Question

- Is the relation question terminological?
- Is there a substantive question between supervenience/identity/etc accounts, without using ‘physicalism’?
Arguably the issue is substantive.

Note that the issue here is much more general than physicalism. It really applies to any domain X.

We can raise the question of X-ism:
- Is the world fundamentally X in nature?
- Is everything ontologically determined by the X domain?
Intuitions

- We have shared intuitions about ontological determination in (at least some) specific cases, and can raise the substantive question of whether ontological determination is best captured by supervenience, identity, or what.

- E.g. Shoemaker dualist world (John, Jessica): ontological determination intuitively fails, although supervenience holds.
Supervenience

- My view: ontological determination best captures (to first approximation) by (global metaphysical) supervenience.
- X-ism is true if all properties supervene on X-properties.
  - Challenge 1: ectoplasmic angels
  - Challenge 2: haecceities
- Refine: X-ism is true if all positive qualitative properties supervene on X-properties (in our world).
Necessitarian Challenge

Challenge: What if laws of nature are necessary?

(1) Reject the thesis

Frank: how can non-necessitarian physicalists distinguish themselves from necessitarian dualists?

A: Deny necessitarianism! Assert Hume’s dictum. (or: rule out via conceivability-possibility thesis?)
Hume’s Dictum

- Hume’s Dictum:
  - There are no necessary connections between wholly distinct existences.

- If Hume’s dictum is true, necessitarianism is ruled out, and the supervenience definition is OK.

- If Hume’s dictum is false, then the supervenience definition needs to be modified or rejected.
Necessary Condition

- Reaction (2): note that supervenience is still *necessary* for the truth of physicalism.

- So, one can argue *against* physicalism by arguing against supervenience (phew!).
If Necessitarianism is True

If necessitarianism is true? Depends how strong.

- Are there schmass worlds without consciousness?
- If yes, then maybe:
  - Define the base properties as structural properties
  - Physicalism is true iff the structural properties necessitate all properties.
- If no, then maybe
  - Move to a new modality: ontological necessity?
  - X-ism is true if the X properties ontologically necessitate all properties.

Q: What is ontological necessity? We have intuitions about it (or something nearby, i.e. ontological determination) – can we make sense of it as a modality in its own right?
Does Physicalism Require A Priori Entailment?

- Does physicalism require a priori entailment?
  - Frank, Gene: yes, in modified form
    - (de re a priori entailment, liberal a priori entailment)

- Underlying question:
  - What’s the link between conceptual and ontological determination?
  - Is there a priori insight into ontological determination, and if so, how much?
Is Physicalism True?
Is Physicalism True?

- No
Residual Questions

- How many core conceptions?
- Which matter for what role and why?
- How to make sense of each?
- Big question: what is ontological determination (if not supervenience)?