

Good Dualism and Private Knowledge.

Luke Malik
Department of Philosophy and History of Philosophy, School of Letters
Osaka University
560-0043, 1-5 Machikaneyama-cho,
Toyonaka City, Osaka Fu, Japan
takama_shi@yahoo.com

Abstract-This paper investigates the consistency of holding two dualist propositions, relating to consciousness, and one physicalist proposition, relating to knowledge. We conclude that accepting all three leads to an absurdity. We contend that a dualist who is true to her dualist principles, the "good dualist", will, thereof, need to reject the physicalist proposition in order to maintain consistency. We show that this opens up a space in which to locate the possibility of private knowledge. We conclude "good dualism" entails a space for private knowledge.

Keywords: *physicalism, dualism, mind, knowledge, private*

I. INTRODUCTION

Wittgenstein's most famous argument is the Private Language Argument (PLA). This argument is taken to establish the impossibility of a private language [1]. And, many think that this automatically rules out the possibility of private knowledge. This is especially true of philosophers who equate propositional attitudes, like knowledge, with language. I do not want to consider this implication. To be precise I don't even want to talk about private languages. Rather, I wish to open up a space in which the possibility of private knowledge can be located regardless of the PLA and independent of any argument related to language. This space is dualist in character. And, inasmuch as it is dualist, I also contend that dualists must appreciate the full reality of private knowledge if they are to stay true to their dualist credentials. Thus I call the dualist who takes this line the "good dualist" and I view this paper as a clarification of the good dualists position.

I start by asking the reader to consider the following propositions:

(N) There is something it is like to be conscious.

(C) Zombies are possible.

(P) Knowledge is a functional-physical attribute of knowing beings.

Proposition (N) can be attributed to Thomas Nagel, who famously argued that there is something it is like to be a bat, and something it is like to be human and never the twain shall meet. For bats circumnavigate their environment using echo-location, and no human could know what it's like to experience the world in that manner. The assumption is that there is something it is like to experience the world or something it is like to be conscious as the proposition proposes

(for bat and, more importantly, human) [2]. The "C" of proposition (C) can be taken to stand for conceivability or David Chalmers who has championed the conceivability of philosophical zombies, of which more will be said later [3]. Proposition (P) is a proposition held by many physicalists and dualists alike. It provides knowledge and other propositional attitudes with a comforting physicalist explanation [4]. I argue in the following manner: one cannot consistently hold all three propositions together for that leads to absurdity. I will show that resolving the absurdity along good dualist lines leads one to drop (P). And that dropping (P) leads to a space in which the possibility of private knowledge is realized. I start with a principle, the principle of reciprocal knowing. Thomas Nagel famously argued that we, humans, cannot know what it is like to be a bat. Though we can know what it's like to be one another. Nagel is assuming that:

(N) There is something it is like to be conscious.

This raises a question: What is it for one conscious entity to know what it's like to be another conscious entity? More generally, what is it for one entity to know what it's like to be another entity? Here is an answer to this general question:

(1) x can know what it's like to be y iff:

(a) x and y are conscious, and

(b) x and y experience the world in a similar way.

This rules in entities of the following kind: a) most humans, and b) conscious non-humans who experience the world as humans do. But rules out the possibility of pairs of entities getting to know what it's like to be one another if at least one of the entities in question is: c) inanimate, d) a non-entity (fictitious, non-existent), or e) conscious but a radically different experiencer in relation to the other entity in question. An example of a pair of entities that can come to know what it's like to be the other would then be Thomas Nagel and David Chalmers. Example pairs of entities that cannot come to know each other would be Thomas Nagel and a desk, Thomas Nagel and Sherlock Holmes, Thomas Nagel and a bat.

I think we can capture what has been said in the following snappy principle:

(2) x can know what it's like to be y iff y can know what it's like to be x.

And this is what is captured by the nomenclature "the principle of reciprocal knowing". However, (1) will suffice for our purposes in this paper.

Let us reiterate one of our propositions:

(C) Zombies are possible,

where a Zombie is a being, x, that is physically identical to a being, y, but where only y is conscious.

Take, then, two individuals: A Zombie, called Z, and this author (or yourself, if you wish). We have said: a Zombie is a being x that is physically identical to a being y, but where only y is conscious. Let us say, Z and I are physically identical, so that Z and I are physically identical but only I am conscious. That said, (by (1)), I can know what it's like to be another human, say, David Chalmers. But I cannot know what it's like to be Z. However, Z is in a double-bind, for "she" cannot know what it's like to be another Zombie, let alone what I know, namely, what it's like to be myself. The conclusion being that:

(3) I CAN have knowledge that Z CANNOT.

Let's introduce an assumption:

(4) I know what it's like to be at least one (myself).

Given (4), we can conclude,

(5) I DO have knowledge that Z does not.

That is so because I know what it's like to be myself, something Z can NEVER know.

Here is another assumption:

(6) Knowledge is a psychological attribute of knowing-entities [5].

That means that,

(7) Knowledge is a PSYCHOLOGICAL attribute that I enjoy.

Taking (5) into account, this leads to the following conclusion:

(8) Z is NOT psychologically identical to me.

That is, if we think of KNOWLEDGE as a PSYCHOLOGICAL attribute, I have a psychological attribute that Z does not, the attribute of knowing myself. Therefore, Z is not psychologically identical to me. Now, we have already said that Z is physically identical to me, but that only I am a conscious being. We can restate the former in the following manner,

(9) I and Z are physically identical.

And, if so, we can say,

(10) Although Z is not psychologically identical to me (restating 8), Z is physically identical to me (restating 9).

Let's reiterate another one of our starting propositions:

(P) Knowing is a functional-physical property of knowing-entities.

In relation to me, being a knowing-entity, this means that:

(11) Knowing is a functional-physical property that I enjoy.

But by (9) this gives us:

(12) Z knows everything that I know.

And taking all other psychological attributes to be equal,

(13) Z is psychologically identical to myself.

And that gives us:

(14) Z is not psychologically identical to me (that is, (8)) and Z is psychologically identical to me (that is, unlucky, (13)),

which is absurd.

As is usual, when an absurdity is uncovered we must look to our assumptions and pick, at least, one out upon which we lay the blame. That's, at any rate, what most philosophers recommend. We consider the assumptions we can blame below:

(N) There is something it is like to be conscious.

(C) Zombies are possible.

(4) I know what it's like to be at least one (myself).

(6) Knowledge is a psychological attribute of knowing-entities.

(P) Knowing is a functional-physical property of knowing-entities.

(6) is beyond doubt, I think. To deny (6) is nonsensical, since it is conceptually true that knowing, an ATTITUDE, is a psychological concept and there is no other way to talk about it. This is shown by the fact that even if knowledge (and the like) turn out to be physical, and we end up eliminating notions like "know" (and the like), we would still say "common-sense PSYCHOLOGY" has been eliminated, as can be seen in the work of Paul Churchland, for example [6] Then, (N), (4), (C) and (P) are left to consider. But I know what it's like to be myself, so it would be absurd for me to give up (4). Therefore, we can conclude that we are really faced with giving up (N), (C), or (P). That is either (N) is false or (C) is false or (P) is false. And logically, this means that the conjunction of the

three propositions is false. This amounts to saying, as we said we would show, that (N), (C) and (P) cannot be consistently held together. It's just left to show how we are led to drop (P) and why this opens up a space in which to locate private knowledge. So let us next think about which assumption we should get rid of. We consider a number of rejection-scenarios below:

Scenario A: Let's say we accept (N), then the choice we are faced with is this:

(15) Either (C) is false or (P) is false.

We should note that (C) is a very useful assumption for dualism, for it anchors the argument from conceivability for dualism [7] and Kripke's modal argument for dualism [8]. Whereas, (P) is not really a useful assumption for dualism because it underpins no argument for dualism. Thus, if one is a good dualist, surely it will be desirable to give up (P) and retain (C).

Scenario B: If we accept (C), then the choice we are faced with is this:

(16) Either (N) is false or (P) is false.

This time giving up (N) is a no-go, for it basically amounts to giving up dualism itself! To deny, that is, there is something it is like to be conscious is to lose the object of the dualist concern, it is to lose what dualism is attempting to save from physical reduction, the phenomenal aspect of consciousness. This, as John Searle has noted, is a bad habit defenders of physicalism fall into [9]. Whereas, as noted, (P) is quite inessential to dualism. Thus, if one is a dualist, and not even a good dualist, it will be highly desirable, in fact, essential to give up (P) and retain (N).

Scenario C: Lastly, let's say we accept (P), then the choice we are faced with is this:

(17) Either (N) is false or (C) is false.

Both arguments here serve dualism well. But since (N) introduces the object of dualism, itself, and (C) is one of a number of propositions that helps in establishing the dualist cause, (N) is more desirable than (C). For even if (C) were lost, other arguments would be available to the dualist to keep her dualist cause alive. However, for the good dualist, best of all is to reject scenario C outright, reject, that is, the acceptance of (P) and, thus, avoid the choice between (N) and (C). To the good dualist, then, at the macro level, scenario C is less appealing than the scenarios that went before and that points, again, to a rejection of (P). Thus it seems that the dualist must give up (P). That is, the good dualist should say as much.

To conclude, then, as good dualists we have reason to drop (P) and retain (N) and (C). Now we must show how this conclusion has created a space for private knowledge. Let me at this point introduce a new assumption, which will help to

develop this conclusion.

(18) All public knowledge is physical.

If knowledge is public, then it must be shared knowledge (in fact, this is where Wittgenstein's PLA might be very useful for us). If knowledge is shared, then it must be transmitted from person to person. If knowledge is transmitted from person to person, then knowledge will be transmitted by physical means (language (spoken or written), electricity etc.). Thus if knowledge is public, it is physical. But the kind of knowledge that the good dualist must accept by giving up (P) is not functional-physical, which is to say it is not physical. Therefore, the kind of knowledge the good dualist must accept cannot be public knowledge. But that is to say it must be private knowledge. And it is thus that the good dualist has created a space in which the possibility of private knowledge has been realized.

Let's summarize: I deployed two dualist propositions in this paper in relation to a physicalist proposition. We saw all three could not be held together and that as dualists, good dualists, we would have to drop the physicalist proposition, which led to a space in which we could locate private knowledge. It is possible to show that other dualist propositions and combinations of others in relation to the physicalist proposition in question force the same results, opening, again, a space for private knowledge.

REFERENCES

- [1] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000, §§244-271
- [2] T. Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?" *Philosophical Review*. 1974. 83, 435-50.
- [3] David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 94-99
- [4] Ibid. p. 27. U. T. Place, "Is Consciousness a Brain Process", in Chalmers, D. J., *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; D. Lewis, "Psychophysical and theoretical identifications" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. 1972, 50(3), 249-58; D. Davidson, 'Mental Events', *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford University Press, 1980; Op cit. Chalmers
- [5] Op cit. Davidson, Op cit. Chalmers
- [6] P. Churchland, *Eliminative Materialism*, <http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/rarneson/Courses/churchlan/dphil1reading.pdf>, extracted 17th October, 2010
- [7] Op cit, D. J. Chalmers
- [8] S. A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980
- [9] J. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1994, pp. 27-57