

Consciousness: Russell's Neutral Monism

(lecture handout for 3rd year 2017)

Indirect realism:

physical world's perception-representations-introspection of mind

Structural Realism:

we know of that world is its structure rather than intrinsic nature

Non-materialist mind-body identity theory

introspecting qualia, you are directly aware of nothing other than the inner nature of your own brain. or, as , Russell paradoxically put it: "I should say that what the physiologist sees when he looks at a brain is part of his own brain, not part of the brain he is examining"!

it counts as a rejection of materialism, for, both epistemologically and metaphysically, it gives priority to the subjective, first-person realm of qualia rather than the objective thirdperson external physical world.

Yet it also seems to count as a rejection of dualism, in so far as it identifies the brain with the mind, rather than seeing them as distinct substances.

Resisting Idealistic Conclusion:

Russell himself and Russellians like Lockwood – as a version of neutral monism:

qualia comprise the single ultimate kind of stuff out of which everything in the world is composed (hence "monism"),

but they are intrinsically neither mental nor non-mental (hence "neutral");

they count as mental only when organized into the sort of causal structure described by neuroscience (that is, a brain),

and count as non-mental when Organized into other sorts of causal structures (rocks, trees, tables, chairs, galaxies).

In response to the zombie argument, the Russellian can hold that zombies can be shown not truly to be conceivable.

If you can imagine the symbol "H₂O" existing in the absence of water undermines the fact that water = H₂O

Troubles with Russellianism

The suggestion that qualia can exist independently of any experiencing conscious subject is highly counter-intuitive, indeed highly implausible.

David Chalmers, acknowledge that qualia require a conscious subject for their existence and thereby accept panpsychism to distinguish their view from the sort of idealism associated with Berkeley.

They don't hold that qualia quite like ours make up the physical universe outside our minds.

Associated with proto qualia, and thus with molecules, atoms, and subatomic particles, would have to be proto-subjects – simple, tiny minds (or proto-minds) having extremely simple experiences (or proto-experiences).

basic physical particles are associated with minds (proto- or otherwise) experiencing qualia (proto- or otherwise).

objection to all of this is that it is just plain crazy.

The binding problem: an experience which seems to be a single conscious experience rather than a composite of billions of tiny proto-experiences, and which is present to a single conscious subject rather than to a collection of billions of tiny proto-subjects.

It seems that the theory does not in fact avoid the zombie argument the way some of its defenders seem to think it does.

The Russellian believes that qualia or proto qualia are what play these roles. But could something else have played them instead?

There seems no reason not to think so.

though Russell and Lockwood take themselves to be identity theorists of a sort, Chalmers does not, and explicitly presents his own panpsychist brand of Russellianism as a version of property dualism.

Would a 'Russellian property dualism' like other forms of property dualism, be threatened with epiphenomenalism?

Problem of shifting between perception and representation.