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Explaining Consciousness: an Argument against Physicalism and an Argument for Theism

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Part I: Extending Chalmers's Zombie Argument to Non-Reductive Physicalism

I. *Introduction*

Almost two decades ago, David Chalmers initiated a new wave of dualism in the philosophy of mind by arguing that reductive physicalism with respect to the mental is false.¹ Our phenomenal conscious experiences, according to Chalmers, cannot be reduced to any amount of corresponding brain activity or indeed anything quintessentially *physical*, where the physical is understood as the domain of matter and energy described by physics and chemistry. Instead, Chalmers argues that conscious experiences occupy an ontologically distinct realm separate from the physical world: the phenomenal.

While Chalmers has advanced several arguments in support of this claim, our primary concern in this paper will be the zombie argument. The zombie argument begins by asking us to imagine a world physically identical to ours *without* the corresponding conscious experiences that characterize our daily existence. In such a world, we are replaced by physical duplicates of our earthly selves that lack any conscious experience whatsoever—philosophical zombies. The mere possibility of such a world, Chalmers insists, shows that the phenomenal cannot *just be* physical, thereby disproving physicalism. In this paper, I will extend Chalmers's argument to non-reductive physicalism by showing that it succeeds not merely against reductive physicalism, but against physicalism *simpliciter*. My aim is to produce a version of the zombie argument that both reductive and non-reductive physicalists ought to accept.

II. *Setting the Stage*

¹ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

To motivate the zombie argument, I will begin by clarifying the problem of phenomenal consciousness. I will set aside questions about other, related concerns such as the problem of mental causation and focus entirely on developing the issues raised by the existence of consciousness. In Section III, I will introduce the problem of phenomenal consciousness as the problem of accommodating phenomenal experiences within a physicalist worldview. I will show that a conceptual gap exists between our descriptions of our phenomenal experiences and our descriptions of the physical world. In my view, taking the phenomenal character of consciousness seriously demands that we *prima facie* distinguish it from the physical world.

As I will argue, the physical world is metaphysically insufficient for the instantiation of qualia, where qualia are understood to characterize the nature of phenomenal consciousness (e.g. pain). I understand qualia to be paradigmatic ‘phenomenal properties.’ Physicalism is defined as the doctrine that the world is entirely physical, such that anything that exists is itself a part of spatiotemporal fabric of matter and energy. I will use the terms physicalism and naturalism interchangeably, although I recognize that they are sometimes understood to have different connotations.

I will argue in Section IV that any serious version of physicalism hinges upon an affirmation of the logical necessitation of the phenomenal upon the physical: metaphysical supervenience. I will argue that physicalism fails by showing that metaphysical supervenience is false. Following Chalmers, our framework gives rise to the following argument:

- 1) Physicalism is true iff Metaphysical Supervenience is true.
- 2) *Metaphysical Supervenience* requires that the physical facts logically necessitate the phenomenal ones.

- 3) It is logically possible that there exists a world physically identical to ours without being phenomenally identical—a zombie world.
- 4) The physical facts do not logically necessitate the phenomenal ones (from 3).
- 5) *Metaphysical Supervenience* is false (from 2, 4).
- 6) Physicalism is false (from 1, 5).

In my view, the zombie argument constitutes a serious challenge for any physicalist account of consciousness, not merely reductive materialism, as Chalmers maintains. This is because physicalism hinges upon *Metaphysical Supervenience*, as explicated by (1) and (2), not merely those aiming to functionalize phenomenal properties, reducing them to physical ones, as Chalmers seems to have suggested.² As we shall see, Chalmers grounds the logical possibility of a zombie world in the irreducibility of consciousness. I will modify my defense of the zombie argument to accommodate non-reductive physicalism.

In defense of (3), I will argue in Section V that a world physically identical to ours, *sans* the corresponding phenomenal components we find in conscious experience, is logically possible. Consequently, we will have substantive grounds to reject the metaphysical supervenience of consciousness on the physical world. I will conclude in Section VI that physicalism is false, and any successful explanation of consciousness must therefore be non-physical in nature. In this section, I analyze the implications of the zombie argument as formalized by (4-6).

III. *The Problem of (Phenomenal) Consciousness*

There are two closely related concepts of mind within the purview of consciousness. Chalmers defines these as the psychological, or functional, concept of mind and the phenomenal,

² David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 47-48.

or experiential, concept of mind.³ Psychological, or neurophysiological, aspects of mind consist in brain states, neural causation, and so forth, and are knowable by third-personal, objective, physical means. Ultimately, these facets of our minds can be reduced to environmental or relational behavioral impulses and states. More narrowly, these are the aspects of mind directly susceptible to modern neuroscientific investigation.

Yet, phenomenal aspects of mind consist in the associated *experiences* we have from the first-person, subjective point of view. They are at least *prima facie* resistant to this type of reduction, for the phenomenal refers to just that character of consciousness which is *sui generis*, subjective, and in principle inaccessible by those who are not us. Many mental states, Chalmers concedes, consist in both psychological *and* phenomenal aspects. The difference becomes apparent when we ask if a given mental state M could be an instance of M *without* any associated phenomenal quality, such as the sense of pain associated with the firing of C fibers.⁴ If so, M is merely psychological. If not, however, as seems the case with our experiences of pain, then M is phenomenal.

The problem of consciousness, then, is more precisely the problem of *phenomenal* consciousness. The difficulty for the physicalist arises, as we shall see, in deriving the rich reality of phenomenal consciousness we find ourselves so intimately acquainted with from the physical facts about our world. As the vehicle of phenomenal experience, consciousness is one of the most familiar and readily accessible features of our world, and perhaps the hardest to deny. Yet, the qualitative feel of what it is like to have conscious experiences—to be in pain, and so forth—sharply distinguishes them from other components of a naturalistic worldview. For the physicalist, reality can be exhaustively explained in terms of matter and energy in conjunction

³ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

⁴ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 18.

with the laws of physics and chemistry. To meet the ontological constraints of naturalism, phenomenal consciousness must sufficiently resemble the quintessentially “physical” parts of the world, while still retaining the unique *felt* character that makes it phenomenal. Herein lies the physicalist’s problem.

Phenomenal states seem to be at least *prima facie* different in kind than physical ones. In order for a given brain state B to be equivalent to its mental counterpart state M, B=M must be a conceptual and therefore necessary truth. Philosophers of mind have typically held that phenomenal-physical truths like B=M must therefore be accessible *a priori*, such that any separation between the two is simply inconceivable on a completed understanding of physics.⁵ Intuitively however, my experience of pain is conceptually distinct from the state of my brain when I am having said experience. To suggest that an event composed entirely of neural firings and my sensation of pain are the same thing seems absurd. This conceptual gap between the mental and physical *prima facie* justifies a logically possible separation between the two.

Accordingly, the contemporary mind-body problem may be understood as the problem of reconciling the reality of consciousness with a purely physical ontology, which is often thought to require reducing the phenomenal aspects of mind to the neurological ones: in short, mental-physical reduction. Reductive physicalists attempt to resolve the phenomenal-physical gap by simply reidentifying phenomenal consciousness with its physical counterparts, reducing phenomenal properties to their neurological correlates.

Although there are different varieties of reduction, for the phenomenal to *just be* neurophysiological the mode of reduction must ultimately be ontological, whichever reductive strategy we choose to employ. Ontological reduction aims to *redefine* a given object or

⁵Galen Strawson, “Realistic monism: why physicalism entails panpsychism” (*Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2006).

phenomenon in terms of something else more basic. Ontologically reducing phenomenal consciousness, if possible, would redefine our phenomenal experiences in terms of their underlying physiology. Just as heat was, upon scientific investigation of its physical processes, redefined as the kinetic energy of a given set of molecules, reductive physicalism aims to redefine consciousness as mere brain activity. Our failure to make the corresponding phenomenal-psychological reduction thus far is reflective of its status as, the physicalist might insist, a yet-to-be-accomplished achievement of some future science, rather than a legitimate ontological gap.

Yet, the analogical gap between heat-molecular motion and psychological-phenomenal consciousness only becomes more evident when we expound the problem. Heat involves, John Searle reminds us, two types of facts.⁶ First, heat involves facts about molecular motion and the resultant distribution of kinetic energy. Secondly, however, heat involves the impact of moving air upon my nervous system and the subsequent *experience* of what it is like to feel hot. By analogy, pain involves firstly the activity of C fiber neural firings and secondly my experience of what it is like to be in pain.

Clearly, there exists a subjective experience of heat phenomenologically analogous to the experience of pain. Yet, this is not what concerns us in the case of heat, where we simply wish to describe in detail the underlying physical mechanisms to understand lawlike functional intermolecular relationships. Thus, the ontological reduction of heat to molecular motion is justified by the fact that *no new fact* is involved here. Once we discover all the facts about molecular motion, we know everything we need to know about heat, and the redefinition is trivial. Our associated experience of heat can be “carved off” as its subjective appearance, without any ontological implications.

⁶ John R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 120-121.

While we could try the same sort of reduction of pain to its underlying neurological reality of neural firings, we would be ignoring the phenomenal experience of pain, just as we ignored what it is like to feel heat. If we are to describe the phenomenal reality of pain *per se*, no such reduction seems possible, for the conscious, experiential facts about pain *just are* what it is to be in pain: its phenomenal appearance *just is* its reality. Searle succinctly summarizes this point: “Where appearance is concerned we cannot make the appearance-reality distinction because the appearance is the reality.”⁷ Whatever physical reduction we try to make, the reality of phenomenal consciousness remains a further fact.

IV. *Supervenience and Closing the Gap*

But does naturalism vis-à-vis consciousness require reductive explanation of the phenomenal in terms of the physical, as Chalmers has claimed?⁸ The non-reductive physicalist may concede the ontologically distinct, emergent reality of consciousness, while insisting upon its necessitation by wholly physical mechanisms. Formally, this is to say that the mental supervenes upon but need not be reducible to the physical, where supervenience is understood as suggested by Jaegwon Kim in the following way:

Metaphysical Supervenience. Mental properties strongly supervene on physical/biological properties. That is, if any system *s* instantiates a mental property *M* at *t*, there necessarily exists a physical property *P* such that *s* instantiates *P* at *t*, and necessarily anything instantiating *P* at any time instantiates *M* at that time.⁹

Accordingly, *Metaphysical Supervenience* is taken to be an ontological thesis involving a strong degree of dependency between the mental and the physical, such that *P* necessarily instantiates *M*.

⁷ John R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 122.

⁸ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 93.

⁹ Jaegwon Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 33.

This notion of supervenience is both global and logical, such that the subvening physical facts about the entire world allegedly determine all the supervening mental facts. While there are, as Chalmers explains in detail, at least four different varieties of supervenience,¹⁰ the physicalist must adhere to the strict global, logical variant outlined in *Metaphysical Supervenience* if he is to remain a physicalist. Hence, phenomenal facts must be fixed by the complete subvening physical *system*. As an ontological thesis about the entire world, physicalism entails global supervenience—it holds for the entire world, if at all.

On the physicalist's view, the physical facts about the world fix *all* the facts, such that no possible world can be physically identical to the actual world without being *ipso facto* mentally identical. Moreover, it must hold with logical necessity, such that necessarily the physical facts are by themselves sufficient to entail the phenomenal ones. Recalling our definition of physicalism as the doctrine that the world is entirely physical, to deny the global, logical supervenience of the mental on the physical is to affirm a metaphysical gap between M and P that flies in the face of naturalism as we have understood it.

Indeed, virtually all properties are metaphysically supervenient on fundamentally physical ones in this strong sense. This is not, as Chalmers readily concedes, to suggest that higher-level laws and facts are all entailed by microphysical laws *per se*, or even some combination of microphysical laws in combination with associated boundary conditions. It is rather to make the considerably weaker claim that higher-level laws and facts, in this case the mental ones, are exhaustively entailed by all the microphysical *facts*.¹¹ If *Metaphysical Supervenience* is true, then the instantiation of the (entire) physical world ought to guarantee the existence of the mental.

¹⁰ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32-38.

¹¹ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 71.

For Chalmers, reductive explanation requires logical supervenience, such that a necessary condition of a given phenomenon being ontologically reducible to certain properties is that it must be logically supervenient upon those properties.¹² Thus, if we can show that a given phenomenon (i.e. phenomenal consciousness) is *not* logically supervenient upon certain properties (i.e. the physical ones), we will have successfully shown that phenomenon to be irreducible to those properties, as in the case of the mental to the physical. Accordingly, Chalmers takes his argument to be a case against mental-physical reduction. In my view, it is stronger. This is where my disagreement with Chalmers lies.

Chalmers grounds his zombie argument in the failure of reductionism. For Chalmers, one way to demonstrate the ideal conceivability of zombies is to imagine silicon duplicates of neurons while keeping functional organization constant. Since the silicon duplicate retains the same functional organization as its conscious isomorph, it ought, given functional reduction, to be similarly conscious. Yet, such a silicon isomorph could easily lack consciousness: nothing about the silicon substitution necessitates experience.¹³ In short, because consciousness is not *functionalizable* it does not logically supervene upon the physical.

Yet, suppose the physicalist denies the reducibility of consciousness, while holding to the truth of physicalism. We might call this possibility non-reductive physicalism. While there is no firm consensus among philosophers as to how precisely non-reductive physicalism ought to be formulated, I take it roughly to be the thesis that while all true sentences describing reality need not be semantically analyzable in terms of some paradigmatic physical terminology, the physical world nonetheless *entails* all there is. In this looser sense, the non-reductive physicalist might say that physicalism describes the entire world.

¹² David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 47-48.

¹³ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 97.

So understood, non-reductive physicalism allows for non-analytically physical components of our ontology, such as psycho-physical bridge laws or some level of emergence, provided that they are fully instantiated by the physical world. Admittedly, as Daniel Stoljar emphasizes, the ‘non-reductive’ part seems to suggest a kind of dualism incompatible with physicalism, and these two commitments have often been seen to be jointly inconsistent.¹⁴ For the sake of argument, I will assume that non-reductive physicalism expresses a coherent possibility. Hence, I will couch my argument against physicalism understood in this broader sense to accommodate non-reductive alternatives.

Contra Chalmers, it is not merely *reductive* explanation that demands the logical supervenience of the mental on the physical, but rather *physical* explanation. As I’ve argued, while the contemporary physicalist need not insist upon the reduction of the mental to the physical, he must, *qua* his commitment to physicalism, affirm *Metaphysical Supervenience*. Even the non-reductive physicalist must therefore hold to the logical supervenience of the mental upon the physical. *Metaphysical Supervenience* thus becomes a requirement of physicalism simpliciter. In short, physicalism is true iff *Metaphysical Supervenience* is true.

To put this problem in the language of possible worlds semantics, as classically understood: if all the microphysical facts that hold true in our world also obtain in a given possible world W, the phenomenal facts of our world need necessarily follow in W. Because physicalism must maintain that the phenomenal follows *necessarily* from the physical, physicalism becomes a broader thesis about possible worlds in addition to the actual world. This gives us a slightly modified definition of physicalism *qua* its modal claims. In its more general form, Stoljar interprets physicalism in the following way:

¹⁴ Daniel Stoljar, *Physicalism* (London: Routledge, 2010), 161.

Physicalism is true at W if and only if for every property F instantiated at W, there is some physical property G instantiated at W such that, for all possible worlds W*, if G is instantiated at W*, then F is instantiated at W*.¹⁵

That is, supposing the truth of physicalism, a world that is physically identical to our own ought to be identical simpliciter. With respect to consciousness, being qualitatively physically identical ought to suffice for being qualitatively mental identical, so that necessarily $P \rightarrow M$, where M is a given mental property instantiated by some physical object or property P.

As an ontological thesis, physicalism specifies (even in the minimalistic sense demanded by *Metaphysical Supervenience*) that the physical entails the phenomenal qua metaphysical necessity. Whether discoverable *a priori* or *a posteriori*, *Metaphysical Supervenience* tells us that the phenomenal follows necessarily from the physical. Hence, Stoljar revises his initial formulation:

Physicalism is true at W if and only if for any possible world W* if W* is a physical duplicate of W, then W* is a duplicate of W simpliciter.¹⁶

Since physicalism is a conditional thesis about *all* logically possible worlds, its truth requires that the physical facts necessarily entail the phenomenal ones.

That is, phenomenal properties strongly logically supervene on physical ones in a given possible world W* in the sense described by *Metaphysical Supervenience*. With respect to the phenomenal, *Metaphysical Supervenience* requires that any logically possible world W* that is a physical duplicate of the actual world also be a phenomenal duplicate. The truth of this thesis is minimally required by all serious varieties of physicalism. In summary, our analysis of *Metaphysical Supervenience* leaves us with the following two premises:

- 1) Physicalism is true iff *Metaphysical Supervenience* is true.

¹⁵ Daniel Stoljar, *Physicalism* (London: Routledge, 2010), 112.

¹⁶ Daniel Stoljar, *Physicalism* (London: Routledge, 2010), 116.

- 2) *Metaphysical Supervenience* requires that the physical facts logically necessitate the phenomenal ones.

V. *Metaphysical Supervenience and the Zombie Argument*

However, the existence of a world physically identical with ours that is *not* phenomenally identical to ours certainly seems possible. Following Chalmers, let's call this a zombie world. Such a world contains all the same physical laws and constituents—all the microphysical facts hold—yet without the conscious experiences we typically associate with them. Since the logical possibility of a zombie world entails the failure of the phenomenal to logically supervene upon the physical, it supplies the third premise of our argument:

- 3) It is logically possible that there exists a world physically identical to ours without being phenomenally identical—a zombie world.

Accordingly, our question becomes: Is a zombie world logically possible? Intuitively, a world physically just like ours, only without consciousness, seems at least possible, if not likely. Indeed, conceiving such a world simply requires that we imagine our own world without first-personal description or conscious experience—the world as described by modern physics and chemistry.

However, it will be helpful to expound upon this intuition. Roughly, we might argue for (3) in the following way:

- 3.1) The existence of a zombie world is conceivable.
- 3.2) The conceivability of a zombie world provides good evidence for its logical possibility.
- 3.3) The existence of a zombie world is logically possible (from 3.1, 3.2).

As delineated by (3.1) and (3.2), establishing the logical possibility of a zombie world involves two fundamental steps, respectively: the conceivability of such a world and the corresponding link, at least in this case, between conceivability and possibility. For our purposes, it will be helpful to consider these one at a time.

To say that a particular state of affairs *S* is conceivable is to say that we can coherently imagine it. While *S* may well be nomologically impossible given the fixed physical reality of the actual world, imagining it does not require us to commit any logical errors. For *S* to pass muster as a conceivable state of affairs it must sensibly describe an *a priori* conceptual possibility. Here, *S* may be understood to express an *a priori* conceptual possibility iff it is intelligible, such that the state of affairs being described at least makes sense to us upon reflection. For example, while the law of gravity holds constant in our world, we can certainly imagine a different fundamental constant, or objects rising instead of falling. A coherent situation is nevertheless being described: we can discern no contradiction in its description.¹⁷

On this framework, a zombie world certainly seems at least conceivable. As I have argued, the phenomenal is *a priori* distinguishable from the physical. While phenomenal descriptions are subjective expressions of an inner, experiential reality, physical ones are objective characterizations of molecular aggregates and their corresponding behavior. Contrast, to borrow our earlier example, the phenomenal reality of pain with the neurological firing of C-fibers—its accompanying brain state. While the felt reality of something *hurting* can only be expressed in terms of qualia, its phenomenal character, C-fibers bear no such experiential features. The physical and the phenomenal seem to conceptually pull apart as conceptually distinct features of the world, such that we can coherently imagine the physical without the phenomenal, entailing no obvious contradiction.

¹⁷ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 96.

It follows from this understanding of *a priori* conceivability that it is a potent guide to logical possibility. In other words, what we can coherently imagine and describe as being the case provides good evidence for its possibility in a broad, logical sense, barring any inherent contradiction. Formally, we might say that *W* is a logically possible world iff the totality of the proposed state of affairs *S* instantiated in *W* is conceivable. Simply put, so long as *S* is not *a priori* logically impossible, we ought to consider it within the realm of logical possibility, unless and until we have good reason to think otherwise. However, the link between conceivability and possibility is widely believed to be an imperfect guide, largely due to the phenomenon of *a posteriori* necessity.¹⁸

In recent decades, it has been suggested that the supervenience of the physical on the mental may instead be necessary *a posteriori*. Such truths are not immediately knowable *a priori*, but are nevertheless discoverable to be necessary. For example, it certainly seems *a priori* conceivable that water=some unknown substance XYZ rather than H₂O, which seems to suggest that water possibly≠H₂O. Nonetheless, given that water *just is* H₂O in the actual world, it seems to follow *a posteriori* that water necessarily=H₂O. Following Saul Kripke's example in *Naming and Necessity* (1972), Chalmers suggests that zombies may well be necessarily impossible in this narrower sense.¹⁹

In the case of consciousness, however, Richard Swinburne argues that the mental and physical are essentially *different* in kind, such that their respective canonical descriptions are nonequivalent. In Swinburne's language, nonequivalent descriptions classify two conceptually distinct properties as ontologically distinct, each describing a different facet of reality that cannot be attributed to the other. These sorts of intrinsic, qualitative property descriptions are the

¹⁸ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 96.

¹⁹ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 98.

informative designators of a given property. By contrast, two properties are logically equivalent iff they have the same informative designators, and two informative designators are logically equivalent iff they are associated with logically equivalent sets of necessary and sufficient conditions.²⁰ It will be helpful to apply this distinction to mental and physical properties.

While the property of being H₂O is an informative designator of water, accidental properties of water such as liquidity, wetness, and transparency are instead uninformative designators *sans* essential significance. In its solid form, water may well lack those qualities, while still retaining its essential chemical identity as H₂O. Borrowing Chalmers's example, XYZ=water iff water and XYZ have logically equivalent informative designators, such that XYZ also =H₂O. Informative designators clarify our *a priori* intuitions, such that our *a posteriori* discovery of the essential properties and molecular composition of water allows us to ascribe necessary truth to water=H₂O.

Similarly, phenomenal properties may be said to be physical iff they may be said to be informatively designated as such. Yet, unlike water and H₂O, phenomenal states and physical ones can be described in *informatively* distinct ways. Phenomenal experiences of what it is like to have a given sensation seem to intrinsically characterize the mental, while our brain activity can be exhaustively described in terms of neural firings. The felt reality of pain, for example, hardly seems equivalent to its neural counterpart, and our neuroscientific association of pain with the firing of C-fibers only makes this distinction more obvious.

Importantly, our classification of qualia as informative designators of mental states rests on the knowledge we *do* have about the intrinsic properties of the phenomenal, not on some yet-to-be-discovered *a posteriori* relationship. In the case of the phenomenal, we find ourselves unable to do the sort of further examination that yields the *a posteriori* identity of water as H₂O:

²⁰ Richard Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12, 68.

we seem to have hit a kind of descriptive ground floor with phenomenal description vis-à-vis qualia that liquidity and wetness fail to satisfy in the case of water. In spite of decades of modern neuroscientific inquiry, it remains unclear what sort of investigation would even constitute the equivalent of finding out the chemical structure of water with respect to phenomenal experience. Attempted descriptions of phenomenal experiences in paradigmatically physical terms, by contrast with water, only yield a less tractable gap.

Yet in the case of consciousness, perhaps the apparent mental-physical distinction is merely epistemic, as Terence Horgan suggests. Horgan acknowledges that pain qua phenomenal experience and the firing of C-fibers express different *information*, but insists that they nevertheless refer to the same property. In support of his point, Horgan gives the example of two propositions:

- (i) Superman can fly.
- (ii) Clark Kent can fly.

While (i) and (ii) express different information, they both ascribe the same property (flying) to the same individual (Superman/Clark Kent). Although these facts *seem* to tell us very different things about the world—in Lois Lane’s eyes, at least—learning that Superman=Clark Kent dispels our initial confusion. Similarly, Horgan argues, C-fibers=pain despite their apparent differences, which are merely epistemic and not in fact ontic.²¹

Lois Lane’s initial misunderstanding in attributing Superman’s ability to fly and Clark Kent’s to different individuals, however, is due to her ignorance about a significant array of relevant facts. Given a more expansive knowledge of Superman and Clark Kent, surely Lois Lane could, like us, deduce the requisite ontological distinction. Her mistake is due to her lack of knowledge. Yet we suffer no such ignorance in our comparison of pain to the firing of C-fibers.

²¹ Terence Horgan, “Jackson on Physical Information and Qualia” (*The Philosophical Quarterly*, 1984).

Neuroscientific investigation yields a thorough understanding of C-fibers and neural firings, yet the feeling of pain is left out. By contrast with Horgan's case, precisely the opposite is true in the case of the phenomenal: our distinction between the mental and the physical is due to our *knowledge*, not our ignorance, of their differences. Accordingly, this gap has only become more obvious with recent advances in neuroscience and philosophy.

To better understand this point, recall our discussion of informative and uninformative designators. In our language, two properties are identical iff they have logically equivalent informative designators. In Horgan's example, since Superman and Clark Kent have very different informative designators, the two are nonequivalent. Any confusion on the part of Lois Lane that Superman and Clark Kent might be different people rests on her limited knowledge of them by strictly *uninformative* designators ascribing various nonessential features—cap and tights as compared to civilian attire and so forth.

Stripping away these features from a full description of Superman and Clark Kent yields a description of the two vis-à-vis informative designators, revealing their essential features. Had Lois Lane known the essential features of Superman and Clark Kent, such as their respective genetic identities, she could have easily deduced that the two apparently different people were in fact one and the same. The same does not hold true for proposed phenomenal-physical identity examples such as pain=C-fibers firing, which have sharply contrasting essential features that cannot likewise be stripped from their descriptions without leaving something out—i.e. what it is like to feel pain.

Indeed, these are the properties that justified our earlier mental-physical distinction using informative designators, as contrasted with the uninformative designators that distinguish water from H₂O. As Swinburne opines, insofar as we understand conceivability to reflect our ability to

make sense of a given state of affairs S, conceivability justifies our acceptance of the logical possibility of its instantiation.²² Even if we acknowledge that for all we know there may be some yet-to-be-discovered *a posteriori* mental-physical identity, our present knowledge rationally compels us to posit the phenomenal and the physical as metaphysically distinct in the interim.

In sum, the conceivability of a zombie world gives us substantive grounds to admit the logical possibility of such a world. Such a world appears to be a logically coherent possibility in light of both the challenge of *a posteriori* necessity linking the phenomenal to the physical and Horgan's challenge that any mental-physical distinction is merely epistemic. While it remains open to objectors to submit an alternative reason for dismissing the intuitive possibility of a zombie world as logically impossible, the burden of proof lies, as Chalmers emphasizes, squarely upon challengers.²³ Until such time, we ought to affirm (3).

VI. *The Consequences of Denying Metaphysical Supervenience*

As I've argued, any physicalist account of consciousness qua physicalism must minimally affirm the truth of *Metaphysical Supervenience*. In the strict sense in which we've understood it, *Metaphysical Supervenience* refers to the metaphysical necessitation of the mental by the physical *per se*. Where the set of microphysical facts exemplified by the actual world is understood to be P, P must logically entail M, the existence of the mental, such that P fully→M. Since this is just to say that the physical entails the phenomenal, the truth of physicalism requires *Metaphysical Supervenience*. Hence, following our previous argument, we can deduce several conclusions:

- 4) The physical facts do not logically necessitate the phenomenal ones (from 3).

²² Richard Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 47.

²³ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 96.

5) *Metaphysical Supervenience* is false (from 2, 4).

6) Physicalism is false (from 1, 5).

Simply put, given (1-3), (4-6) follow.

As Chalmers reasons, it follows from the mere possibility of a zombie world that the presence of consciousness is not entailed by the physical facts, since those hold constant from our world to this one. Rather, consciousness is something *extra*, above and beyond both the causal demands of its subvening physical base.²⁴ Accepting the zombie argument forces us to acknowledge the failure of the totality of physical facts to entail the phenomenal, since a zombie world is just such a physical duplicate sans phenomenal content. (4) is therefore a consequence of affirming (3).

Furthermore, applying the requirement of *Metaphysical Supervenience* to the truth of physicalism entails (5) and (6). Using our definition of *Metaphysical Supervenience*, (5) follows from (4). I've argued that any serious physicalist account of consciousness qua physicalism crucially depends upon *Metaphysical Supervenience*. Accordingly, the falsity of physicalism follows from denying *Metaphysical Supervenience*. The logical possibility of a physically identical zombie world sans the instantiation of (any) phenomenal properties expressly violates the modal claims inherent in physicalist accounts of consciousness. Physicalism quantifies, as I have argued, over all logically possible worlds, *not* merely the actual world or even nomologically possible ones. Physicalism is therefore true iff necessarily $P \rightarrow M$.

Affirming the zombie argument therefore demands that we give up naturalistic explanations of consciousness. This is a point of widespread agreement among contemporary philosophers of mind. To give just one example, Frank Jackson has advanced a version of the modal (zombie) argument, holding that no amount of physical information about a given possible

²⁴ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 123.

world logically entails the existence of consciousness.²⁵ Consciousness cannot therefore be either itself a physical phenomenon or a necessary product of the physical world: physicalism is false. I concur with Chalmers that “No explanation given in wholly physical terms can ever account for the emergence of conscious experience.”²⁶ If there is to be an explanation for consciousness, it cannot be a physical one.

²⁵ Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia” (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 43.

²⁶ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 93.

Part II: Consciousness and Theistic Explanation

I. Introduction

Many nontheistic and theistic philosophers agree that the existence of consciousness is one of the most potent challenges confronted by a naturalistic worldview. Despite hundreds of years of scientific investigation, the existence of consciousness remains as elusive as ever. The “problem of consciousness,” then, is this: nothing about the physical world *per se* requires phenomenal experience. As David Chalmers aptly suggests, “If all we knew about were the facts of physics, and even the facts about dynamics and information processing in complex systems, there would be no compelling reason to postulate the existence of conscious experience.”²⁷ Were it not for our own rich, qualitative mental experiences, there would be no reason to posit the existence of consciousness at all. Thomas Nagel summarizes this problem in the following way:

“Consciousness is the most conspicuous obstacle to a comprehensive naturalism that relies only on the resources of physical science. The existence of consciousness seems to imply that the physical description of the universe, in spite of its richness and explanatory power, is only part of the truth, and that the natural order is far less austere than it would be if physics and chemistry accounted for everything. If we take this problem seriously, and follow out its implications, it threatens to unravel the entire naturalistic world picture. Yet it is very difficult to imagine viable alternatives.”²⁸

I concur with Nagel that consciousness constitutes an insurmountable challenge for any explanation of consciousness given in wholly *physical* terms. Yet this does not, as Chalmers is quick to point out,²⁹ mean that we must give up the search for an explanation of consciousness.

Rather, consciousness will require a starkly different explanation: a non-physical one.

Importantly, not just any non-physical explanation will do. In addition to non-physicality, an

²⁷ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

²⁸ Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 35.

²⁹ David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 122.

adequate account of the existence of consciousness *qua* subjective, phenomenal character must be personal, simple, necessary, and casually efficacious. I will argue that theism provides such an explanation, where theism is understood to refer to the existence of the God of classical monotheism.

II. *A Blueprint for Theistic Argument*

As the creator and sustainer of the universe, himself an infinite, conscious being, the existence of God supplies an explanation of consciousness *qua* finite minds. In this paper, I will argue that the existence of consciousness in our world constitutes evidence for the existence of God. I will show that the peculiar presence and character of consciousness can be turned into a powerful argument for theism: the argument from consciousness, hereafter AC. My strategy is to survey different versions of AC put forth by Richard Swinburne,³⁰ Robert Adams,³¹ and J.P. Moreland,³² and present my own deductive formulation of the argument. In Section III, I will discuss Swinburne's characterization of AC as an inference to the best explanation, Adams's interpretation of AC as weighing theistic explanation against natural law accounts of phenomenal-physical correlations, and Moreland's deductive version. On all three accounts, personal explanation is contrasted with scientific explanation and taken to entail theism. As Moreland admits, these versions of AC assume that personal theistic and scientific explanation exhaust the pool of nontheistic alternatives: they do not.³³

My goal is to demonstrate that AC is the best available explanation of consciousness, considering all the available logical space. Hence, I will show that AC succeeds *qua* non-

³⁰ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³¹ Robert M. Adams, "Flavors, Colors, and God" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

³² J.P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

³³ J.P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 48.

physical explanation, not merely personal explanation, as previous proponents of the argument have held. In Section IV, I will defend my version of AC:

- 1) Phenomenal-physical correlations exist.
- 2) There is an explanation for these correlations.
- 3) The explanation is either physical or non-physical.
- 4) If the explanation is non-physical, then it is theistic.
- 5) The explanation is not a physical one.
- 6) The explanation is a non-physical one (from 3, 5).
- 7) The explanation is theistic (from 4, 6).

Finally, in Section V I will address challenges to AC raised by Thomas Nagel and Graham Oppy. I will argue that their criticisms are spurious, and fail to establish that theistic explanation fails vis-à-vis consciousness. If we are to have good reason to abandon AC, it has yet to be shown. In the meantime, we ought to take the existence of consciousness as evidence for theism.

III. Previous Versions of AC

Over the years, versions of AC have been defended by philosophers as early as John Locke.³⁴ For Locke, the instantiation of perception and sensation by the mechanistic natural world could only be explained by appealing to the existence of God. In Locke's view, the regular phenomenal-physical correlations we experience can be understood only as the production of a supreme deity. In this way, we might say that the existence of consciousness provides evidence for God's existence, crediting Locke with our starting point for AC.

³⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

However, AC has been more recently revived in academia by contemporary theistic philosophers. On Swinburne's account, our conscious lives lie well beyond the explanatory power of scientific explanation. By contrast, consciousness merits theistic explanation. Swinburne's version of AC contrasts scientific, or naturalistic, explanation vis-à-vis phenomenal-physical correlations with personal theistic explanation, arguing that we ought to prefer theism.³⁵ Construed as a comparison between rival theistic and scientific hypotheses, Swinburne's argument becomes the following:

$$P(T \mid C) > P(\sim T \mid C)$$

In this formulation, C represents the presence of phenomenal-physical correlations, or more roughly the existence of consciousness. $P(x \mid C)$ is taken to symbolize the probability of the truth of a given hypothesis given C, where theism, or T, is held to be more probable *qua* explaining C than non-theistic, or scientific, accounts: $\sim T$.

Swinburne provides several reasons for preferring theistic over scientific explanation in the case of consciousness. Phenomenal-physical correlations, Swinburne opines, are beyond the ken of naturalism, as they cannot be deduced from any fundamental physical theory and are far too many and variegated to be lawlike. Hence, the possibility of a scientific account of just why certain physical states regularly instantiate phenomenal ones is highly improbable. Yet, phenomenal-physical correlations, however they are instantiated, are well within the casual and creative powers of an omnipotent being such as God to bring about. Moreover, God's interest in the affairs of humans, his creatures, supplies him with an obvious motivation for doing so: conscious creatures are preferable to non-conscious ones. In short, while $P(T \mid C)$ is significant ($\gg .5$), $P(\sim T \mid C)$ is plausibly rather small ($\ll .5$).

³⁵ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 209.

Bayesian probability theory supplies a more sophisticated interpretation of Swinburne's argument:

$$P(T | C) = [P(T) \times P(C | T)] / [P(T) \times P(C | T) + P(\sim T) \times P(C | \sim T)]$$

Again, T refers to theism, where $\sim T$, or non-theism, is taken to mean naturalistic explanation, while $P(x | C)$ reflects the probability of regular conscious correlation with various brain states given the truth of a particular hypothesis.

Immediately, the Bayesian interpretation complicates our probabilistic analysis of the adequacy of theistic explanation with several additional factors. For our purposes, I will draw our attention to two of them. First, while Swinburne gives us grounds for believing $P(T | C)$ to be significant, and $P(\sim T | C)$ to be comparably insignificant, these probabilities, are incredibly difficult to quantify with any degree of certainty. What precisely *is* the probability of a scientific explanation of consciousness? Assuming that it approximates zero begs the question, yet there seem to be no grounds for a substantially higher estimate. Conversely, while it seems almost certain that God, were such a being to exist, would create conscious agents, a high estimate for $P(T | C)$ seems equally presumptuous by the theist. While our probabilistic uncertainty here affords a measure of error in the initial formulation, Bayes' theorem multiplies any errors in probability judgment many times over.

Second, $P(T)$ is highly controversial. Our assessment of the probability of theism on our background knowledge will depend heavily on our perception of the success of various theistic arguments. Hence, $P(T)$, and by extension $P(\sim T)$, hinges crucially upon the success or failure of *other* theistic arguments in a cumulative case for God's existence. A probabilistic version of AC, such as Swinburne's, is therefore C-inductive rather than P-inductive when taken by itself,

adding to the probability of the existence of God, although not furnishing a knockdown argument *per se* in favor of theism.³⁶

In large part because of the inscrutability of the probabilities involved in an inductive version of AC, alternate formulations of the argument have been proposed. Adams has argued for one such interpretation. After evaluating possible explanations of consciousness, Adams suggests that we ought to prefer theism. Accordingly, he begins his argument by establishing the pool of explanatory options *qua* accounting for phenomenal-physical correlations: scientific explanation, announcing consciousness to be a brute fact, or theistic explanation. In his view, declaring consciousness to be brute is equivalent to surrendering the search for explanation altogether, and does not therefore count as an explanatory possibility. Hence, Adams advocates for AC by arguing that scientific explanation fails with respect to consciousness, as Swinburne did.

Adams derives his rejection of scientific explanation from the lawlike character of physical laws, which cannot plausibly account for the nature of phenomenal-physical correlations. In particular, phenomenal-physical correlations exemplify two features at odds with lawlike explanation: they are both regular, instantiated in by certain brain states in a normally occurrent pattern, and diverse, largely subjective and unique in their qualitative feel. By contrast, Adams notes that scientific explanation presupposes a mathematical relationship entailing some kind of general law. Thus, the failure of consciousness to manifest *any* mathematical structure whatever renders such accounts futile. The success of a scientific explanation for consciousness depends, then, upon our having some grounds for believing in such a general law or

³⁶ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 211.

mathematical structure. Given the mathematically recalcitrant nature of the phenomenal, we ought to instead prefer a theistic explanation.³⁷

Similarly contrasting theistic and naturalistic explanations of consciousness, J.P. Moreland proposes a deductive formulation of AC:³⁸

- 1) Mental events are genuine non-physical mental entities that exist.
- 2) Specific mental event types are regularly correlated with specific physical event types.
- 3) There is an explanation for these correlations.
- 4) Personal explanation is different from natural scientific explanation.
- 5) The explanation for these correlations is either a personal or natural scientific explanation.
- 6) The explanation is not a natural scientific one.
- 7) Therefore, the explanation is a personal one.
- 8) If the explanation is personal, then it is theistic.
- 9) Therefore, the explanation is theistic.

As in Swinburne's and Adams's versions of AC, Moreland argues for theism vis-à-vis naturalism as an explanation of consciousness. Naturalism is plausibly taken here to entail scientific explanation, since physical mechanisms are the only explanatory resources available on such a worldview. From (5), Moreland holds that an explanation of phenomenal-physical correlations must be either personal or scientific. Since a personal explanation refers to the causal action of a transcendent personal agent, it is taken in (8) to entail the existence of God.

³⁷ Robert Adams, "Flavors, Colors, and God" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 232-237.

³⁸ J.P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 37.

Notably, Moreland's version of AC rests on his characterization in (5) of the presence of only two viable modes of explanation: personal and natural scientific. To justify (5), Moreland claims that these exhaust the live explanatory options in the case of consciousness, although not the logical ones.³⁹ However, this defense is rather quick and unconvincing, as it ignores the presence of various non-theistic, non-physical explanations, such as panpsychism, psycho-physical bridge laws taken to be ontologically basic, and others. I will extend my defense of AC to develop a powerful, positive case for theism in light of its logical competitors. In my case for AC, I consider physical and non-physical modes of explanation, arguing that a conceptual analysis of the sort of non-physical explanation demanded by conscious phenomena, broadly understood, supplies good evidence for theism.

IV. *Modifying AC*

Phenomenal experiences provide the rich, qualitative mental structure to our lives, communicating a world of sights, smells, tastes, feelings, and sounds. At the heart of our mental lives, consciousness is one of the most undeniable features of the world. Moreover, these phenomenal states are regularly correlated with specific elements of the physical world, most notably particular brain states. The existence of such correlations is relatively uncontroversial, and I will take them as the starting point for my version of AC:

- 1) Phenomenal-physical correlations exist.

If we have any compelling reason to disbelieve in (1), it has yet to be shown.

Yet, phenomenal-physical correlations are every bit as mysterious as they are undeniable. The peculiar existence of phenomenal consciousness cries out for some sort of explanation. This explanatory need furnishes the second premise in our argument:

³⁹ J.P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 48.

2) There is an explanation for these correlations.

While Adams suggests that some philosophers prefer to simply declare the reality of the mental a brute, inexplicable fact about the world,⁴⁰ I share his skepticism about the plausibility of this alternative for two reasons. First, branding phenomenal consciousness explanatorily brute *just is* to ignore the need for explanation, in effect “solving” the problem by setting it aside. Second, the primary justification for dismissing consciousness as unexplainable is the apparent inadequacy of explanatory alternatives. In my view, the presence of AC as a rival explanation presents such an alternative, and merits theoretical consideration.

An explanation of consciousness must be either physical or non-physical. Since these two possibilities exhaust all the logical space, our third premise easily follows:

3) The explanation is either physical or non-physical.

With the exception of (5), premises (5-7) are equally uncontroversial:

5) The explanation is not a physical one.

6) The explanation is a non-physical one (from 3, 5).

7) The explanation is theistic (from 4, 6).

However, I have argued for (5) extensively in Part I, and will not do so again here. (6) and (7) follow necessarily from our other premises. Accordingly, we will devote the bulk of our attention to (4):

4) If the explanation is non-physical, then it is theistic.

While (4) is *prima facie* controversial, I will argue that an analysis of phenomenal-physical correlations *qua* non-physical explanation yields the existence of God. Such an explanation exemplifies at least four features that, when taken together, characterize theism.

First, in addition to non-physicality, an explanation of consciousness must be either necessary

⁴⁰ Robert Adams, “Flavors, Colors, and God” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 232.

and therefore causally self-sufficient in its existence, or contingent, depending on something else for its existence. Once again, these two possibilities exhaust the realm of logical possibility.

Theistic philosophers such as Timothy O'Connor have elsewhere argued that the occurrence and existence of particular contingent events and objects *qua* contingency ought to be taken as evidence in favor of theism.⁴¹ While I find such arguments persuasive, our focus here is on mental events as contingently occurrent phenomena in their own right. In Part I, I defended the failure of the physical world to necessitate the existence of consciousness. If this is so, phenomenal-physical correlations are contingent facts about the world in need of some more fundamental explanation.

If consciousness is to have an ultimate explanation, it must be essentially explanatorily *independent* of some further explanation. Conversely, if the explanation of consciousness were to depend upon the realization of some further cause, it would not be *per se* explanatorily sufficient for the instantiation of phenomenal-physical correlations. Hence, the causal chain must terminate in some sort of necessary explanation, lest we be left with an unending, contingent causal chain.

While space does not permit a lengthy treatment of the impossibility of just such an infinite regress, it has been widely rejected in contemporary philosophy of religion primarily for two reasons: first, actual infinities, distinct from potential infinities, cannot exist because they entail various absurdities, and second, actual infinities cannot be formed by the successive addition of one member after another *ad infinitum*. Although our focus on this paper is on consciousness, detailed discussions of the dilemmas posed by actual infinities have been developed elsewhere, including the possibility of adding or subtracting actual infinities to obtain contradictory results. To briefly illustrate this second point, imagine the simple addition of one

⁴¹ Timothy O'Connor, *Theism and Ultimate Explanation: The Necessary Shape of Contingency* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

member after another in a set in the form $[x_1+x_2+x_3\dots]$. However many members are added, an *actual* infinity will never be reached.

However, avoiding an actual infinite causal chain of contingent explanations of consciousness requires that we postulate a necessary cause. The ultimate explanation of contingent phenomenal-physical correlations, then, ought to be a necessary one. By postulating God as the necessarily existent creator and sustainer of all contingently existing phenomena, theism achieves explanatory ultimacy. Hence, theism satisfies the need for our explanation of consciousness to be a necessary one.

Second, the phenomenal-physical *explanans* will be plausibly personal. Given the subjective character of consciousness *qua* finite as instantiated in personal minds, it seems reasonable to suppose that an explanation of mental-physical correlations, if it is to be similarly conscious, will also be personal. Non-theistic explanations are thus saddled with the difficulty of accounting for the realization of our familiarly subjective mental lives in impersonal terms. For instance, the panpsychist needs to give an explanation of just how impersonal, micro-conscious pieces combine to form the personal *minds* in which phenomenal-physical correlations are realized—or indeed how consciousness could be impersonal at all. Such an account does not appear to be forthcoming. By appealing to the personal character of God, theism suffers no such challenge.

Moreover, if the explanation of consciousness is necessarily existent beyond the physical world, it must be personal. Given this characterization, the only alternative is for our *explanans* to be abstract, taking the form of a non-physical law or system of laws, or else an abstract object, as Platonists propose describes properties. However, an abstract account of phenomenal-physical correlations lacks any *causal* power, while God exemplifies causal efficacy *qua* personal agency.

Even if an impersonal, non-physical explanation were to somehow manifest causal power, a necessary one would seem to necessarily instantiate phenomenal-physical correlations. If the causal conditions are necessarily present, their effects ought to be *ipso facto* guaranteed. The only way for phenomenal-physical correlations to be contingent while resulting from a necessary cause is for that cause to be *personal*, able to manifest its effects—or not—through a free act of the will. The précis of theism is the existence of such a personal cause: God.

Thus, an adequate non-physical explanation of consciousness must further have causal potency: it must be able to *cause* the realization of phenomenal-physical correlations. According to most classical interpretations of theism, God has a substantial amount of creative and sustaining power with respect to our world. Additionally, I share Swinburne's conviction that God's interest in human affairs gives him good reason to create conscious creatures able to form beliefs, make decisions, and experience various phenomenal sensations.⁴² We might reasonably assume that this includes the power to instantiate conscious correlations.

It might be objected that the sort of libertarian agency involved in God's causal power is an incoherent one, to be rejected in favor of competing event causal theories of explanation. However, there are at least two important things to note here in response. First, as Moreland emphasizes, allowing for God having causal efficacy with respect to the world requires only a *concept* of libertarian agency. Even if event causal theories are true in relation to human acts, a libertarian account may well be required to explain divine action.⁴³

Second, on most theistic accounts an essential feature of God's character is omnipotence, classically understood as the ability to actualize *any* logically possible state of affairs, including presumably those including the instantiation of phenomenal-physical correlations in the world.

⁴² Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 209.

⁴³ J.P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 48.

Certainly God is liable to bestow mental-physical connections to produce consciousness under the right circumstances and accompanied by the right brain states. Yet even if we grant the adequacy of theistic explanation in the case of consciousness, why ought we appeal to one God, rather than a pantheistic plurality of divine persons?

Provided that all the data has been accounted for, Occam's razor privileges a comparatively *simple* explanation over a complex one. Here lies the central motivation for naturalism: it is more reasonable, all things being equal, to posit the existence of fewer entities rather than more. We might justifiably abandon naturalism in favor of including non-physical entities within our ontology in addition to the physical ones, then, only if and when the explanatory data demands it. I have argued in Part I that the existence of consciousness establishes such a demand. By the same principle, however, we might prefer a simple, monotheistic explanation over a more complex, pantheistic one, insofar as the two rival theories account for the same data in the same way.

(4) is therefore justified, as I have argued, by the following four features of a non-physical explanation of consciousness: necessity, subjectivity, casual efficacy, and simplicity. When taken together, these provide substantial grounds for preferring an explanation that is necessary, personal, causally potent, and simple, over one that is contingent, impersonal, casually impotent, and complex. Such an explanation describes, to a significant degree, the God of classical theism. Hence, if consciousness is to have a non-physical explanation, it is likely theistic.

V. *Objections*

While AC has experienced considerable longevity in academia, particularly among philosophers, it has not been widely discussed. Moreland suggests several possible reasons for this, including a failure by contemporary physicalists to interact with dualist literature, conjoined with a strong presupposition against theism, which he characterizes as “fear of God.”⁴⁴ Philosophers since Searle have taken note of this long-standing presumption in favor of physicalism and against theism,⁴⁵ and many have argued that it is unjustified, *ad hoc*, and question-begging. Whatever the reason, little has been offered by way of response to the challenges raised by AC. Accordingly, we will narrow our discussion here to assess criticisms raised by Thomas Nagel and Graham Oppy.

Nagel construes AC as an intentional account of explaining consciousness, wherein the existence of consciousness in our world, and more particularly phenomenal-physical correlations, is due to the purposive intervention by a transcendent being, which is likely to be God.⁴⁶ According to AC, the constituents of, or minimally the subvening conditions for, consciousness are organized by God in such a way so as to produce consciousness. Ultimately, nothing about the physical world *necessitates* consciousness: it arises purely due to the intentional intervention of God or some similar being.

Nagel objects that an intentional, theistic account of the emergence of consciousness depends crucially upon certain assumptions about the reasons a cosmic designer would likely have for its production.⁴⁷ Importantly, Nagel is right that any argument from a given

⁴⁴ J.P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 176-186.

⁴⁵ John R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 8-9.

⁴⁶ Thomas Nagel. *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 59.

⁴⁷ Thomas Nagel. *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 91.

phenomenon to its alleged designer, including AC, is immediately saddled with the burden of assessing the relevant motives such a being might have.

However, a rough understanding of theism as referring to the existence of God as a creator and benefactor of the universe and its creatures readily supplies several good reasons for believing that God, were such a being to exist, would instantiate conscious experiences in the form of the phenomenal-physical correlations we discover in our world. As discussed earlier in this paper, God is himself a conscious person, cares for his creatures, and plausibly seeks the good of his creation. As such, God is extremely likely to create *conscious* creatures, not content with a world populated entirely by mindless, phenomenal zombies. So much for theism lacking substantive motives for divine intervention vis-à-vis consciousness.

Nagel's more trenchant challenge to AC involves the alleged inability of theism to fulfill a properly *explanatory* role in the emergence of consciousness. In its intentional account of consciousness in terms of divine purpose, Nagel sees theism as resisting a purely descriptive end point. Ultimately, theistic explanations come down to the prescriptive will of God, rather than the comprehensive, descriptive theories supplied by a materialist worldview. On Nagel's view, AC is therefore inadequate as an explanatory stopping point.⁴⁸

Several things might be said in reply to this objection. Most strikingly, Nagel implicitly admits the possibility of theistic accounts of consciousness by granting that consciousness may well be construed as a product of divine intervention. Rather than challenging whether AC *works*, he instead attacks what he sees as the incompleteness of theistic explanation. More precisely, Nagel's criticism here is not the inadequacy of *theistic* explanation but the inadequacy of *personal* explanation.

⁴⁸ Thomas Nagel. *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21.

In his view, only an account of the emergence of consciousness given in wholly efficient causal terms will suffice. Yet this begs the question against the possibility of personal explanation. Nagel's challenge here seems to be that by explaining events in terms of the intentional actions and exercise of the will by libertarian agents, personal explanation somehow fails to count as explanation. Quite obviously, personal explanation is different than event causal modes of explanation, but to rule it out for this reason is *ad hoc* and question-begging.

While much of Oppy's skepticism about AC is directed at inductive versions of the argument from consciousness, he offers several more general criticisms regarding AC. In one such challenge, Oppy contends that it is unclear just how the libertarian agency entailed by a theistic explanation of consciousness constitutes a viable *explanation* of the phenomena in question.⁴⁹ This challenge parallels Nagel's criticism that God's causal efficacy *qua* agent causal power fails because of the perceived incompleteness of explaining a given phenomenon in terms of the motives or abilities of a particular agent. As I argued in my response to Nagel's remarks, this begs the question against both theism and libertarian agency, which is widely held to be the common-sense account of human actions, and at least intelligible as a mode of explanation. In addition, if my earlier claims about the plausibility of a *personal* explanation of consciousness hold water, we have good grounds to accept such an explanation as adequate.

Oppy further objects that even if consciousness can be explained by theism, AC fails in virtue of other theoretical considerations relevant to its validity as a hypothesis. Once again, space does not permit a lengthy discussion of the criteria relevant to our overall rejection or acceptance of a proposed theory. However, Moreland suggests three: the ontological basicity of a phenomenon on a given theory such that no further explanation is required, the naturalness of

⁴⁹ Graham Oppy, "Critical Notice of J.P. Moreland's *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument*" (European Journal for Philosophy of Religion: 2011).

an entity on the worldview entailed by a particular theory, and epistemic values such as the simplicity and descriptive accuracy of a phenomenon by the theory in question.⁵⁰

For our purposes, it is important to note two things here. First, theism succeeds in light of many, if not all of these pre-theoretical criteria, particularly as compared to rival hypotheses such as naturalism and panpsychism. On theism, the conscious, causally potent God *just is* our explanatory stopping point, accommodating conscious *qua* finite within God's creative power and motivations with respect to his creatures. According to the theistic hypothesis, consciousness is not a surprising and disorienting feature, but rather a explainable phenomenon to be expected in our world, since it characterizes both God's fundamental being and intentions.

Second, AC need not stand alone as a theistic argument. More plausibly, consciousness constitutes a powerful and convincing addition to a growing body of evidence for the existence of God, including the beginning of the universe, the nature of contingency, the objectivity of moral facts, the fine-tuning of the universe for life, and a considerable number of other proposed evidences. Hence, AC adds to a cumulative case for theism, and gives us substantial grounds to believe in God.

⁵⁰ J.P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 28-31.

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