

Reply to Philip Goff

James Tartaglia*

I believe that the most important task for philosophers of the generation Philip Goff and I belong to is that of discrediting, once and for all, the metaphysic of physicalism. In a collection called *The Waning of Materialism* (aka physicalism), the editors provide an impressive list of major philosophers – from the period in which physicalism was supposed to have achieved hegemony, to the present in which it is supposed to possess it – all of whom reject, or have very serious doubts about, physicalism (Koons and Bealer 2010: ix). A little reflection upon that list makes it plain that the big players, in the main, have not in fact been physicalists. After looking at some of the problems with physicalism, the editors go on to say that,

it is natural to predict that, among the major mature philosophers in the future, a significant portion (perhaps sometimes a majority) will reject materialism. Even among those who start out as materialists in their youth, a significant number are likely to end up doubting materialism's ultimate viability or suspecting that the materialism / anti-materialism debate is moot, and in either case recognizing that some versions of anti-materialism have rational credentials at least as good as materialism's. Thus, even though it is likely that in future the ranks of materialists will continue to see new recruits, especially among newcomers to philosophy, the character of the problems facing materialism will continue to inspire very serious doubt. If this is the case, materialism will in one respect continue to wax; in another it will continue to wane. (ibid.: xxi)

Not good enough; this prediction needs to be falsified. We do not need more protracted waxing and waning, but rather a swift, clean and decisive break. It would do the discipline a world of good; both inside and out. If most of the big players never bought physicalism, and yet young philosophers continue to be so

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swayed by our scientific, anti-philosophical culture that they are prepared to accept the scant arguments in its favour to prop up their initial prejudices, then the big players have not been taking the problem seriously enough.

Physicalism is not just a false view in metaphysics, but a corrosive force which affects how philosophers go about their business, keeping our discipline insular and culturally ambiguous; hence inconspicuous and uninfluential. (Philosophy's rapid cultural decline in the UK is nicely captured by a recent piece in the *New Statesman* (Herman 2017)). And yet physicalism does seem pretty obviously true when you start thinking about it within the context provided by our scientific culture: *of course* science tells us the nature of everything that exists, and so if philosophy (whatever that is) has anything to add, it can only be at the fringes. Physicalism achieved its supposed hegemony with intuitions of this kind. In one of its most influential breakthrough papers, Smart tells us that, 'sensations, states of consciousness, do seem to be the one sort of thing left outside the physicalist picture, and for various reasons I just cannot believe that this can be so' (Smart 1959: 142). Then after completing the paragraph with his reasons, he begins the next with, 'The above is largely a confession of faith' (ibid.: 143). Well exactly: faith in science, and a lack of faith in two-and-a-half thousand years of philosophy, during which physicalism, which has been around since Democritus, was rarely taken particularly seriously.

What changed? What changed is that science became really impressive in the twentieth century and religious influence on intellectual life consequently declined. Little or nothing philosophically changed as regards the merits of physicalism. But physicalism was a *scientific* metaphysic, in the sense that it handed the central task of metaphysics to science. Religions embody a philosophy, so with their declining influence, philosophy was on the back foot. Not wanting to get caught on the declining side of the divide, it threw itself into the reluctant and ambivalent embrace of science; generally indifferent, sometimes encouraging, but more often hostile. Philosophers subsequently learned, like the rest of scientific culture, to think of anything non-physical as 'spooky'. 'What sort of chemical process could lead to the springing into existence of something non-physical?' asked Smart. 'No enzyme can catalyse the production of spook!' (Smart 1963: 660). Do not get me wrong: I think Smart was probably the best philosopher that physicalism ever produced, for at least he was self-aware, and he did have a plausible theory; after Smart, physicalism ran out of those. But as soon as you start to reflect philosophically upon the status of the physical world, however –

which is what philosophy had always done prior to the advent of physicalism – then the notion of ‘non-physical’ takes on a whole new light. Although I would heavily qualify it, I am inclined to agree with Hegel that, ‘A philosophy which ascribed genuine, ultimate, absolute being to finite existence as such, would not deserve the name of philosophy’ (Hegel 1816: §316).

These days the situation has become really extreme. In a symposium which Goff and I recently contributed to, Daniel Dennett says that, ‘most philosophical theories are just definitions defended, with no aspiration to make novel predictions but rather just to assign the phenomena covered by the “theory” to some category or other.’ (Dennett 2016: 67-8) In other words, unless you are looking to make ‘novel predictions’ – unless you are a scientist – then you are wasting your time. No more subterfuge then; the anti-philosophy that was always integral to physicalism is brought right into the open by this astonishing and no doubt heart-felt statement by Dennett. Trying to make a rational, well-argued case for a description of the world which satisfies human curiosity about natural questions such as how experience fits into the world we experience, whether we are free, or why the world exists – all of that is reduced to ‘definitions defended’ and assigning ‘the phenomena covered by the “theory” to some category or other’. Straight into the bin with the entire history of philosophical inquiry, says physicalism. It makes me proud to be writing about the meaning of life.

Physicalism needs to perish and fast. As it gets bolder, its negligible philosophical foundations become more exposed; so the time is ripe. Physicalism may seem obvious within the context of scientific culture, but the case against it can be made just as obvious with a little philosophical context. Thought ‘experiments’, as they have come to be called, certainly have their uses; but as the name suggests, excessive reliance upon them is to the physicalist’s advantage. The instinctively physicalist philosopher can maintain their instincts in the face of them, so long as they are clever enough to spot a gap. Philosophical context is the real key, I think. Physicalism must reluctantly operate within that context, and when that is made clear, the arguments are stacked up against it. And with the metaphysic broken, as it will be, the culture that prompts it can also be broken; for people do remain open to philosophy, I think, on those rare occasions when they are still exposed to it. Philosophy could flourish during the next Roaring Twenties. Institutional security is no excuse for looking away from its wider cultural decline.

I doubt Goff would disagree with much of what I have just said, if any of it,

but it does provide the essential context for my response to his paper. As I fully expected, his critical reading of my theory of consciousness is razor-sharp and always constructive. But although we have invested in different theories of consciousness, with consequently different ramifications for our metaphysical beliefs in general, we are both arguing against physicalism. I am inclined to think that the latter is the main thing we are doing. Of course, physicalists disagree with each other too – about how best to accommodate consciousness within the worldview of physicalism – and everybody is just trying to determine the truth about consciousness, of course. But the situation across the physicalism / anti-physicalism divide is highly asymmetrical.

Physicalists have no reason to *care* about the particular truth their attention has alighted upon, namely that pertaining to consciousness. They talk about it because anti-physicalists do; and this because it presents an obvious problem for their metaphysic. I very rarely detect much, if any, metaphilosophical self-consciousness among physicalists. When they disagree among themselves, it is simply a matter of disagreement over how best to bat off the latest annoying anti-physicalist meme. The metaphysics is already settled in their minds; science determines that, at the end of the day. All that matters to them, within their internal disputes about whether or not to grant consciousness metaphysically supervenient or simply conceptual credit, is which tactic best silences the anti-physicalists. If they were to win, the only result would be an end to philosophical discussion about consciousness; science could take over at that point. Apart from the benefits to their careers of publishing on the matter, they really have nothing to win. Anti-physicalists, on the other hand, have an extremely substantive and self-aware unity of purpose: that of bringing the metaphysics back to philosophy. Succeed, and they win the conceptual space to debate fascinating speculations about the ultimate nature of consciousness, such as Russellian Monism and the Transcendent Hypothesis, within a more self-confident, interesting and culturally attractive discipline. The fact that anti-physicalists have substantive metaphysical disagreements should not be mistaken for a disadvantage, on the grounds that they lack the unity of the physicalist side. It is in fact a major advantage; their disagreements presage the kind of fruitful debates which philosophy could be filled with were physicalism not holding it back, and their metaphilosophical unity of purpose in trying to take us to that place is far more compelling and inspiring than the physicalists' metaphysical consensus. Consensus in science gets things done; but philosophy is not science, and excessive consensus in philosophy may

simply be a sign that the ideas have dried up.

When I was reading Goff's paper, reflections such as these kept reminding me of a sentence in my book which he does not mention, but which has played on my mind ever since I wrote it. After arguing that attempts to insert consciousness into the objective world inevitably result in 'revisionism', in that we end up trying to revise our conception of either experience or matter, I say that,

If revisionism is necessary, then, it is Dennett who takes it in the more sensible direction, that is, towards experience rather than matter. (PML, p. 100)

I take this back. The reason I said it is that I do not think it is credible for philosophy to disagree with the characterisations of matter we receive from objective thought; whereas experience is prime philosophical territory. Philosophy must tell us about the metaphysical status of the world objective thought describes (to which physicalism has the simplest and most unreflective answer possible), but it is not within its remit to get involved in the first-order description itself; and any attempt to do so is liable to look ludicrous, given how advanced our science now is.

I still think this, but I had not thought the matter through sufficiently, and hence wrote a false sentence. Given the choice between the Russellian Monist view that matter has an intrinsically experiential nature, and the eliminativist view of Dennett that we are not conscious, but rather falsely judge that we are, then the former is infinitely more sensible. This is because, on the eliminative view, *you and I are simply not here to do any judging*. In *Meaningless*, I reluctantly reached the conclusion that eliminative physicalism 'could still be true' (PML, p. 95), despite the incredible unlikelihood of its actually being true, given both the nature of the proposal and the thoroughly dubious motivations for it. Since then I have been circling around this idea (Tartaglia 2016 and 2017). I now see that it could not be true. For even if our conception of conscious experience is all wrong about its nature, it must at least be right that it *has* a nature, and that as such, people have what we naturally think of as a subjective outlook on the world. Within the exclusively objective metaphysic of physicalism, this could not be the case. Their conception of what it means for something to *seem* to be the case, which is that the objective conditions for representing it to be the case are met, can only be true of conscious beings, for whom *a world is present*, if at least one element of the

representation is correct: namely that there is something that conscious beings are representing as ‘the presence of the world’. This cannot be something objective, otherwise this element of the representation would not be correct. The equivalent representation had by a non-conscious being could indeed be all wrong. ‘They’ could ‘token’ this representation in the ‘face of’ nothing at all.

My mistake was to overlook the metaphilosophical unity of anti-physicalism, and focus instead on the kind of metaphysical discussions that anti-physicalists can currently only presage. Within a metaphysic in which consciousness is assured, then I do indeed think it is considerably more sensible to distrust our conception of experience than our conception of matter. Revision is indeed required, to some extent, and I think physicalists have hit upon some sound insights in this area. But when revisionism is adopted simply in order to sure up the world-view of physicalism, which is the context in which I made my unfortunate statement, then there is no contest. Revise experience to make physicalism work, and consciousness disappears; so the result is the absurd spectacle of conscious people trying their damndest to genuinely believe that they are not conscious. If in order to avoid this outcome you feel the need to revise our conception of the objective world – by inserting some objective subjectivity into the middle of it – then that is obviously the way to go. I do not agree with this way of doing it, I do not think you have to do it, and I am quite sure that it is a dire mistake to call the result a new and improved form of ‘materialism’ – as Galen Strawson does (2008), but Goff does not, despite the affinity of their positions – but nevertheless, the outcome is what matters.

Now in a sense, I have already suggested my answer to the overarching concern of Goff’s paper, namely that there is a tension between my arguments against physicalist approaches to consciousness in Chapter 4 of *Meaningless*, and my positive account of consciousness in Chapter 5. When I am criticising physicalism, my point is that our conception of consciousness is much richer than physicalists can allow, since it conflicts with what they want to tell us consciousness really is. When I am subsequently presenting my own theory, I argue that this rich conception misrepresents the true reality of consciousness. What makes it coherent to argue in both of these ways is my view that the rich misrepresentation does not have it *completely* wrong: for it is a conception of *something*. For physicalists, however, it must be completely wrong: a conception of nothing at all. This is entirely in line with my general view that we cannot positively characterise transcendent reality, but nevertheless cannot deny its

reality. Compare, for instance, my argument in Chapter 6 that we have a transcendent notion of ‘now’, which inserts us into the flow of time, but which creates nothing but illusion when we try to make sense of it with the only substantive resources we have, namely those of objective thought. This was the direction of travel in the chapters on consciousness.

Physicalists, before they reach the inevitable, eliminative terminus of their position – a terminus most remain unaware of – want our conception of consciousness to be anodyne, not rich, because then they have a chance of arguing that the anodyne features it ascribes latch onto something physical. I argued that as a matter of fact, our conception is not anodyne, but rather squarely incompatible with physicalism. But when physicalists do reach the eliminative terminus, it becomes irrelevant to them how rich our conception of consciousness is, because now they have seen the implication of their position that it is an entirely illusory conception. They are wrong, however, because it must at least refer to something, given that we are all here, thinking the matter over. Within my own account, I accept that the objective world is centreless, as the eliminativists recognise, together with the fact that our conception of consciousness is a conception of something, which the eliminativists try in vain to dispute – and this leaves me at liberty to reflect on the erroneous nature of the rich conception we possess. Rich and erroneous for the same reason: namely that it derives from objective thought, which is rich and centreless.

Although I think concepts of conscious experiences are rich misrepresentations, the accurate representation at the heart of them can be thought of as ‘blind-pointer-type concepts’, as Goff puts it (p. 25). Goff thinks I reject all such concepts in Chapter 4 and then end up re-affirming them in Chapter 5. This is what he says,

In *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke claims that proper names refer in virtue of a causal connection between the name and the referent, rather than in virtue of an associated description. A school child can refer to ‘Galileo’ without knowing anything about him (perhaps they mistakenly think he was a famous explorer), which shows that they can’t be picking him out in terms of any of his characteristics. The child manages to pick out Galileo because they use a term, i.e. ‘Galileo’, which is causally connected in the right kind of way with Galileo himself. This story seems to me fairly plausible, and it suggests that the concept expressed by a proper name is a kind of blind

pointer.

I think it's better to say, not that there are *no* blind-pointer-type concepts, but simply that it's pretty implausible that experiential concepts are blind-pointer-type concepts. When I think about pain in terms of how it feels, I know something about its essential nature. That's what prompts my concern when others feel pain; I know what pain is, and hence I know it's a terrible thing to endure. We might bolster this claim with reference to Tartaglia's claim that we characterise experiences as self-aware states: to characterise a state as self-aware is to have a positive conception of it, not just to blindly point at it. (pp. 24-5)

I have been deeply suspicious of Kripke's causal theory of reference ever since I read Rorty's critique of it (Rorty 1979: chapter 6; esp. pp. 284-95). To have a conception of something is to have a way of thinking about it. If a child thinks Galileo was a famous explorer, and nothing more, does the child have a way of thinking about that man? It seems to me that they know the name, but not what it stands for; and hence that they cannot have acquired a way of thinking about what it stands for. Since others know the name too, the child can use it to refer to Galileo; when the child says the name, others start thinking about Galileo according to their own conceptions of him. But the child has a conception of a famous explorer called 'Galileo', and there was no such person. Causal links within society may explain the child's ability to use that name to refer to Galileo, but they cannot provide the child with a way of thinking about somebody they know nothing about. The causal links are epistemically nothing to the child; and the child's ability to make a certain sound provides them with no cognitive grasp on the nature of the object that the sound conventionally stands for either.

The reason I do not think this child has a blind-pointer-type-concept, is that they *do* have an idea of what they want to point to; and it is wrong. No doubt they also want to point to the standard bearer of the name (that is why it is wrong), but they lack the cognitive resources to do so. If they try *on their own* to think about Galileo, then they fail, by thinking about some explorer. (Perhaps 'some man in the olden days called "Galileo"' is good enough, but I am inclined to think that the more explicit content cancels this out; and in any case, you could easily adjust the example.) Thus it seems natural to me to say that they lack a concept of Galileo. The case of experiential concepts is different, however, because what we are trying to think about is right up against our faces, so to speak. We are trying to

think about *that*. In such cases, we cannot fail to have concepts of something which we are trying to make sense of with the concepts. These concepts are rich, so the pre-eliminative physicalist positions cannot be right. But they have blind-pointer-type-concepts at their heart, surrounded by the rich misrepresentation that makes the concepts useful to us, so the eliminative physicalist position cannot be right either.

The main point of contention between Goff and myself is over the question of whether our rich conceptions of conscious states get them right or not; he thinks they do and I do not. As he neatly puts it, the issue is over the ‘epistemic priority of phenomenal properties over external properties’ or *vice versa* (p. 27). For me, phenomenal concepts are shadows of concepts of external properties, but Goff thinks it can be the other way around. In response to my arguments that whenever we form a positive, phenomenal conception of our experiences, we end up relying upon features from the objective world which experiences cannot possess, he says that,

Phenomenal colour and phenomenal shape *represent* their external analogues: when I see a tomato I have an experience which represents a red, round thing at a certain distance from me. But I see no reason to doubt that there is ‘mental paint’ doing the representing, mental paint with an intrinsic character known through introspection. We call a certain intrinsic property of experience ‘phenomenal colour’ because it represents phenomenal colour, and another intrinsic property of experience ‘phenomenal shape’ because it represents phenomenal shape. (p. 26)

He supports this with the suggestion that my case draws support from an equivocation over the meaning of ‘objective’: ‘Experiences are not “objective” in the sense that they are subjective properties, i.e. properties which characterise the subjective experience of an individual. But they are perfectly “objective” in the sense that the facts about experience are perfectly objective facts about reality’ (p. 28).

I take the point that if there were subjective properties captured by phenomenal concepts, then they would be just as objective as everything else, in the sense that within any given time-slice of reality, subjective properties would number among the properties that exist. But that is not how I use ‘objective’, because I do not find the terminology useful in this context. Used in this way,

‘objective’ means something like ‘independently existing’; but then it cannot quite mean that because the existence of subjective properties depends on a subject experiencing them – unless you are the kind of panpsychist who denies this. And since you might reasonably think that no *property* exists independently, you may as well just say that subjective properties *exist*. So rather than unnecessarily muddy the waters, when I say ‘objective’, I mean having the properties characteristic of physical objects, such as size, shape, colour, density, and so on, plus the less obvious characteristics which science invokes to better explain them.

Now I perfectly understand, I think, where Goff is coming from on this issue of epistemic priority. He thinks that conscious experience is our epistemic point of contact with the world, and that it was on the basis of the ‘mental paint’ of consciousness that we drew up our more abstract conceptions of size, shape and other external qualities. In a sense, then, I am bound to agree; I defend an indirect conception of perceptual experience. However, it seems to me that our original experience of the world was just that: of the world. We thought of our conscious experience as trees, animals, etc., and formed conceptions of *those things*. Developing such conceptions has ultimately led to the incredibly rich picture of an objective world which we now have. Reflection, however, taught us that this completely transparent conception of experience is *philosophically* naïve and unsustainable, and that to produce a coherent and complete picture of reality, which includes many ‘things’ we experience which are not things at all, we need to think of the things we conceive of objectively as external causes of the states of conscious experience which represent them. We needed an indirect conception of experience, to account for both the existence of experience and its causal integration with the world. But when we try to conceive the experiences themselves, and not just what they are experiences of, we have no new concepts to hand. We have to employ the concepts we developed for making sense of the external world; and when we look at the phenomenal concepts we actually have, it seems to me that this is exactly what we find.

When we started saying that sounds were vibrations in the air, or that colours were light-reflectancies of surfaces, I do not think we were overlooking the mental paint, and trying to pretend it does not exist in the service of an impoverished, purely extrinsic conception of reality, as I think Goff does. There is definitely something to this, in the sense that we favoured anything that fitted our scientific theories, and looked away from the rest. But what I think was really happening is that we were refining our objective conceptions. We always thought, except in our

philosophical moments, that the sound, e.g., was ‘something out there’; and we found a better way of describing what it was. It was a description of the ‘mental paint’, except we were not thinking of it as mental, but rather external. When the philosophical need to describe what independently exists arose, we realised that the vibrations in the air could only be the causes of internal experience. But when we came to describe that internal experience, we had no new resources. All we could do was fall back on the less objectively accurate concepts we had before – ‘the sound of a trumpet’, rather than ‘certain vibrations in the air’, for instance – and then assure ourselves that the former, and not the latter, captured the phenomenal nature of the experience. We knew experience could not be nothing at all and we felt we should be able to say something about it; so we enlisted the older objective concepts and started talking about phenomenal ineffability.

If we ‘call a certain intrinsic property of experience “phenomenal colour” because it represents phenomenal colour,’ then we end up with the mental paint representing itself; physicalists typically find themselves relying on this kind of idea too. It strikes me as untenable, since our notion of representation is of one thing representing another. More strongly, I think it is incoherent; and I have an analysis of where I think the deep-rooted incoherence lies (PML, chapter 7; esp. pp. 156-62). A much better plan, it seems to me, is to say that when we represent an experience as possessed of phenomenal colour, we represent it in accordance with the way we represent things in the objective world. The incoherence is still there, because we do also represent experiences as self-aware; but now that we are explaining a feature of misrepresentation, rather than a supposed feature of reality, it no longer matters.

Further light is shed on our disagreement about epistemic priority, when Goff says,

It is a familiar point that experiential qualities are in some sense ineffable. But this is plausibly due to the fact that the concepts we use to pick them out are primitive. Compare to other plausibly primitive concepts: existence, metaphysical possibility, causation, the notion of a reason. It is arguable that none of these notions can be explained in more basic terms.

He goes on to say that,

The nature is known, but it is known only through actually having the

experience itself. If you have to ask, you'll never know. (pp. 27-8)

‘What is swing?’ Fats Waller was once asked, and his reply was: ‘Lady, if you have to ask, don’t fool with it!’ (Terkel 2002: 72). Ned Block once attributed a similar line to Louis Armstrong, related it to the ineffability of phenomenal consciousness, and it subsequently went viral in philosophy; Goff was giving it a nod with his final sentence above. Well, if the lady in question did have to ask, then Fats was surely right that swinging was never going to be her thing. But although musicians who know how to swing are unlikely to know how they do it, that does not mean nothing can be said about it. I can swing; and although I do not know much about it (except in the ability sense), I do know a little. A lot of it comes down to adjusting the lengths of the quavers in accordance with the tempo; in jazz, contiguous pairs of these are, as a rule of thumb, divided two-thirds to one-third, but when the tempo goes up, this gradually gets closer to half and half. There is a lot more to it than that, of course, and you do not need to know even this to instinctively swing (thank God). But my point is that an awful lot could be said about it, and no doubt already has. In principle, you could take the styles of the greatest swingers apart, and show exactly what they are doing in excruciatingly dull detail.

The situation with phenomenal consciousness is not remotely like this, so I do not think the analogy is a good one. Neither do I think it a tactically good idea for anti-physicalists to rely on ineffability intuitions; they are an obvious weak point, and quite unnecessary – not to mention misleading, to my mind. It is not that there is no need to get explicit about phenomenal consciousness and that it is better that we do not, as is the case with swing. The fact is that we simply cannot get explicit about it without talking in terms we have evidently borrowed from the objective world. The colour was really intense, says the introspector; the light was really intense, says the scientist, etc. That we can get explicit right up until the point at which we feel the need to say something *different* about phenomenal colour to what we say about objective colour, strongly suggests to me that we are not dealing with one of Goff’s primitive concepts. Now you could think it is the other way around, in that our conceptions of the objective world come from our conceptions of experiences. And in terms of the metaphysics of what is actually going on, on both my account and Goff’s, it amounts to the same thing in at least the following sense: that we are conceptualising the same thing, whether we take ourselves to be conceptualising consciousness itself or the world which it makes

us aware of. However, it is not the same in the sense of what we take ourselves to be conceptualising; and outside of philosophy, it seems clear to me that we have taken ourselves to be conceptualising the world – which is why we have been so successful in developing the concepts of objective thought. In this sense, then, they are concepts of external properties, and hence this is where the epistemic priority lies.

Various considerations convince me that this is the right order of priority, but the main one is the need to account for the ‘split-level’ nature of consciousness. The idea, which I learnt from J. J. Valberg’s ‘horizontal’ conception of consciousness (Valberg 2007), is that consciousness places us within a world from the perspective of which whatever reality there is to consciousness itself is to be found outside of that world. I do not think that Russellian monism, dualism, or any of the other alternatives to physicalism, outside of idealist and phenomenological traditions, account for that insight; an insight which I think is entirely sound. Once you accept it, it makes perfect sense that concepts of what appear within consciousness will have epistemic priority; Valberg himself does not even allow for specifically phenomenal concepts of that which appears within consciousness, but I do think we have them – as shadows (see my exchange with Valberg; this symposium). Once you look at things this way, then there is no longer see any reason to entertain doubts about the picture of the world-within-consciousness which objective thought presents. Objective concepts are fine for objective purposes, and the fact that when you try to make a metaphysic out of this world you will find no room for conscious experience, is exactly what you would expect; the main problem for physicalist metaphysics is predicted and explained, without the need to criticise objective thought itself. And for all Goff says about Russellian Monism not being in competition with science (pp. 31-2) – which I accept – I still think that to say that science leaves out the intrinsic nature of the matter it describes, sounds like a criticism. On my view, describing matter is their business alone; metaphysically interpreting that description is ours.

Now add in some metaphilosophical considerations about the connection between consciousness and transcendence, which I think explain why the issue has attracted so much philosophical attention, and which ties it in with a plausible account of philosophical inquiry in general. Add in the straightforward plausibility of the idea that the independent nature of reality outruns any description human beings can give of it, except when we retreat to some of the emptiest concepts we have, which lack the detail, and hence usefulness, of the

objective thought we developed because of its usefulness. Put all of that together, and I think we have an attractive package. Goff's alternative has a powerful idea behind it which I cannot lay claim to, namely that objective thought is merely extrinsic and relational, thereby leaving an obvious gap when it comes to the intrinsic. But all things considered, I think that extrinsic characterisation is all we can do when we want to say something substantive – basically, relate things to each other; and Goff's appeal to ineffability confirms me in this view. The intrinsicity gap is a natural enough place to insert the fact that we are conscious. But if you do it this way, you do not account for the distinctive structure of conscious experience, and end up placing consciousness in the objective world, rather than the objective world within consciousness; from the introspective perspective we must apply to think about consciousness, this is clearly the wrong way around. Consciousness ends up ineffable, but also extremely well-known to us, such that despite the fact that we know it spatially, for instance, we cannot employ this spatial knowledge to say the substantive things we normally would, e.g. that the experience is large with rounded edges. Better to leave objective thought alone, I think, while granting that it provides us with useful misrepresentations when we need to talk about individual experiences.

Goff asks,

Why do I need to make sense of experience in terms of objective thought? Why can't I form a perfectly adequate conception just by conceiving of my experience in terms of what it's like to have it? It seems that I can entertain the possibility of solipsism – the hypothesis that all that exists is myself and my mental properties – and in doing so I think about my experience without bringing in the idea of anything from the external world. Why is this not a perfectly adequate conception of my own experiences? (pp. 29-30)

I agree that you could, but your conceptions of your own experiences will have to be rooted in the idea that it is *as if* they were caused by external conditions. Otherwise you will not be able to make sense of their succession. As such, you will be leaning on objective thought. You may disavow it, by saying that it is only *as if* your blue experience has rounded edges; as everyone does when they turn to the phenomenal conception. But since you will not be able to say anything positive about the blueness itself, and anything substantive you might want to say, such as about what seems to cause the blue experience, will be disavowed, then

everything that makes your conception adequate is being disavowed. Such a disavowal strikes me as hollow, unless made within a context which explains the status of objective thought within the context of consciousness, and thereby explains why we cannot say anything positive about the blueness itself.

Goff goes on to point out an affinity between the Phenomenal Concept Strategy and my take on both Jackson's Mary-in-the-room and the Farrell / Nagel bat. I very nearly passed over these examples, which have been unremittingly flogged for decades, on the grounds that they have clearly failed to do their job, and hence are very unlikely to ever do so now; but I am glad I did not, given that what I said caught Goff's attention. He is right about the affinity; I spent so long trying to work out what was wrong with the Phenomenal Concept Strategy, that I eventually found the positive aspect within it that had maintained my attention. The Strategy appeals to physicalists, because it shows them a way to use Kripke's causal theory to argue that phenomenal concepts are blind demonstratives; being blind, they could refer to anything whatsoever, which is just what the physicalist needs. I affirm this aspect of the view, like them, to explain why Mary learns something new when she leaves the black-and-white room, and why we do not know what it is like to be a bat. To this, Goff understandably asks, 'Given that Tartaglia also thinks of experiential concepts as demonstratives which leave us in the dark about the nature of experience, how can he be so confident that experience doesn't have a purely physical nature?' (pp. 30-1).

I have already answered this: the reason I can be so confident, is that if experience did have a purely physical nature, then it would be objective, and so no experiential field would open up from individual, subjective perspectives, such that our blind demonstratives have something to hit. No introspective demonstrative reference would be taking place; rather Mary, or the bat, would just be making noises – or computing in a manner appropriate to the emission of such noises. Consciousness would not present a world; rather an objective world would simply exist. And unless consciousness presents a world, our awareness of this fact cannot lead us to form the metaphysical intention to refer to the ultimate nature of that presentation, thereby making the demonstratives a little less blind.

By leaning on objective thought, we form phenomenal concepts of distinct, individual experiences. Reflection on the transcendence of consciousness teaches us both that these concepts cannot be capturing their real natures, and that they must have a real nature. We point outside the horizon of consciousness, just as within a dream we might point outside of the dream to where the real existence

lies. We know that our conceptions formed within the context of consciousness cannot capture what we are pointing at, but we also know that these conceptions are of *different* experiences, because leaning on objective thought distinguishes them for us. Since objective thought cannot capture the demonstrate component, learning about what it has to say cannot provide us with these concepts; so when we gain one, we learn something new: what it is like. What we learn may be entirely illusory outside the context of consciousness – we have no reason to think that we are marking real distinctions, although I grant that it is very tempting to think this – but *within* the context, we learn something both practically informative, and philosophically, highly suggestive.

Goff closes his paper by pointing out how very quick my rejection of dualism is, and how it presupposes the standard ‘causal closure’ line of physicalists. About this, he says,

If the physical world is causally closed, then there is no space for the mind to do any causal work by making changes in the brain. However, although often stated the causal closure of the physical is not often defended with empirical argument. It would be nice to hear a little bit more from Tartaglia of the case for causal closure. (p. 32)

He is quite right. The closure argument is far from water-tight, and I have nothing to say in response to the sophisticated objections that have been brought against it by Goff and others. My stance towards the causal closure argument is rather apathetic: I am prepared to give that one to the physicalists – although Goff may well be right that anti-physicalists should not. The reason for my apathy is that I am already convinced, from reflection on the structure of consciousness, that the right place to look for consciousness is not the objective world. As such, I have no reason to suspect that objective thought would *not* be capable of describing a perfectly closed system; except for general suspicion about the limitations of science, which seems less compelling with each passing decade.

The closure argument would, if it were any good, reinforce my view that interactionist dualism makes a similar mistake to physicalism; inserting consciousness into the objective order, and thereby becoming forced to say that the brain is metaphysically special, rather than an ordinary object. But then, I would think that anyway. What really interests me is the fact that it is the *main* argument which physicalism relies upon. And yet it only has any force against

interactionist dualism. My tactic was to point out that since I am not an interactionist dualist – and the vast majority of anti-physicalists, past and present, have not been – then I simply do not care about that argument. They can have it; if it works, it can only reinforce what I am saying. If I keep saying things like this, and Goff continues to make the case that even *this* argument – the one which is supposed to provide the physicalist’s strongest ground – is actually a rather dubious article of faith, then we will have a classic pincer movement going on.

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