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**Review: “David Papineau's *Thinking About Consciousness*”  
in: *International Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (2004), 452-453.**

Thinking about Consciousness. By David Papineau.  
Oxford: Clarendon Press. 2002. Pp. 280. \$35.00 cloth.

This book is a sophisticated defense of what is now often called “type-B-materialism” a position that combines conceptual dualism with ontological monism. It grants the dualist that there are no *a priori* conceptual links between our mental and our physical vocabularies. What it does not grant is the inference from a conceptual dichotomy to an ontological dualism. Thus, since it is not the case that all truths expressed in physical terms imply *a priori* the truths expressed in mental terms, the widely discussed anti-materialist thought experiments are not entirely misconceived. Mary, a scientist in a black-and-white world cannot infer color-related phenomenal truths from the complete knowledge of the relevant physical truths, and physical duplicates of humans without phenomenal experience (metaphysical zombies) are conceivable. This epistemic gap, however, does not, says Papineau, imply an ontological gap. At the level of ontology a physicalist monism is to be upheld since a psycho-physical identity theory is, according to Papineau, the only way to all allow for a theory of mental causation that is consistent with contemporary science, the completeness of physics, and the causal closure of the physical realm. After all, “two” entities that **are** identical cannot compete for causal efficacy.

This basic argument for materialism is developed in the first chapter of the book. It is however, only setting the stage for the central argument of the book, according to which, *the epistemic gap is not caused by non-physical features of consciousness but stems from unique features of our concepts of consciousness*. Although these concepts refer only to physical properties, their unique character creates the illusion of referring to non-physical properties. Papineau is not the only physicalist making this move. It has become quite popular because the “classical” type-B-materialist strategy of paralleling *a posteriori* psycho-physical identities to *a posteriori* scientific identities of the form “water = H<sub>2</sub>O” has become less and less plausible. Kripke argued that the contingency of the psycho-physical relation is of a different and more robust kind. It really does not make sense to argue that something that has all the phenomenal properties of pain really is not pain because it is not type-identical to certain physical properties. What feels like pain is pain. The same cannot be said about water. Later, Chalmers's “two-dimensional semantics” gave a much more complete explanation of why *a posteriori* identifications in the sciences cannot serve as the model for psycho-physical identity theories. Thus the type-B-materialist has to accept that psycho-physical identities remain inexplicable (“gappy identities”). The strong modal tie between mental and physical properties is brute in the sense that this necessity is not epistemically obvious to us. It has to be accepted as a brute metaphysical fact. There is a gap between human concept formation and rationality, on the one hand, and what is real on the other. This is our epistemic situation with regard to the mind-body problem.

A major challenge for this account is this. As a form of physicalism it needs to provide a physicalist explanation for our epistemological situation. In this book Papineau tries to provide an analysis of certain features of conscious beings like us that explains our unique epistemic situation with respect to **consciousness**. The key question, however, remains: Is this account ultimately explicable in physical terms? If not, how can it save materialism?

Before this question can be addressed, a very brief outline of Papineau's theory of phenomenal concepts needs to be given. The basic intuition is that we refer to a certain experience by producing

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an example of it. This is called the "quotational model." As Papineau explains it, "Ordinary quotation marks can be viewed as forming a frame, which, when filled by a word, yields a term for that word. Similarly, my phenomenal concepts involve a frame ... and, when this frame is filled by an experience, the whole then refers to that experience" (p. 117). This model neatly explains why phenomenal concepts resemble the conscious properties to which they refer. Most other concepts don't involve the things to which they refer. When we deploy a phenomenal concept, however, "we activate a 'faint copy' of the experience referred to" (p. 170). This offers a natural account of the dualist intuition that conscious experiences cannot be identical with material states. It seems to us that phenomenal concepts, being so uniquely different, cannot refer to material properties and that physical concepts cannot refer to phenomenal properties. Papineau argues that this inference is fallacious. We cannot infer a difference of properties from a difference in concept use and concept formation.

One problem with this analysis can easily be stated. According to the type-B-materialist zombies are conceivable. Since the physical facts determine all the facts, zombies (which are, by definition, physically indistinguishable from us) must be exactly in the same epistemic situation with regard to phenomenal concepts as we are. By applying a phenomenal concept they activate a faint copy of the appropriate experience. The trouble is that, by definition, they lack experiences. Imagine a zombie-twin of Mary. Does Zombie-Mary acquire phenomenal concepts in the same way we do when she leaves the black and white laboratory? That does not seem to be the case. So, if our epistemic situation with regard to phenomenal concepts is different from the zombie's situation and the zombie is physically indistinguishable from us, then whatever accounts for our epistemic situation with regard to phenomenal concepts is not entirely physical.

In other words, it is unclear how something entirely physical can account for the special epistemic characteristics of phenomenal concept use and acquisition described by Papineau. There is an explanatory gap between physical properties and phenomenal concepts. It is hard for the type-B-materialist to bridge this gap because this type of materialism opens up a chasm between the conceptual and the ontological realms. If we cannot infer from a conceptual difference to an ontological difference, then it is hard to see how any analysis of phenomenal concepts could by itself support a robust ontological thesis. Something more is needed than analysis of concept use and acquisition. The account would be ontologically robust if all differences in our conceptual-epistemic situation supervened on physical properties. But if this were the case, zombies would be inconceivable. Their conceptual-epistemic situation is different from ours, even though they are physically indistinguishable. So, if my analysis is correct, it seems that for his account of phenomenal concepts to work, Papineau ought to give up his type-B-materialism.

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