

Review of: "Hard problems in the philosophy of mind"

Yew-Kwang Ng¹

¹ Monash University

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Review [for *Qeios*] of the paper:

Hard problems in the philosophy of mind

By Alexandros Syrakos

Reviewer: Yew-Kwang Ng, Emeritus Professor of Economics, Monash University, Australia

I find that this paper addresses important philosophical issues competently and on the whole well-written. However, it is very long, virtually book-length. If possible, it would be desirable to shorten the paper into less than one third or even one quarter its current length. This would likely attract more readers to read the whole paper, increasing its influence. The full paper, perhaps even after some expansion, may be published as a book.

I find the following statements [all taken from the paper] strongly agreeable:

1. 'the mental realm is so distinctly different than, even opposite to, the physical one that the two cannot be one and the same.' (p.3).
2. 'In many cases, physical body itself does not visibly change at all at the instant of death, so it seemed plausible that the dramatic change in behaviour is due to a spiritual, immaterial ingredient being present in the body before death, and absent afterwards – the soul.' (pp. 3-4).
3. 'The case of the mind is fundamentally different from all other presumably similar cases of macroscopic phenomena, because the other cases concern physical phenomena as perceived by the mind, but the mind itself cannot be a physical phenomenon as perceived by the mind. Hence the mind occupies a central and unique place.' (p.4).
4. 'the fact that I am not completely autonomous, I am neither the source of my own existence nor the sole master of my fate, and, while I can exert some limited influence on my environment, the environment has a greater influence on me, means that there is a reality that extends beyond me, a world of which I am but a part. The ability to think and try to understand both one's own self and the external reality, to consciously perceive elements of reality as such, are defining characteristics of a mind, of a "thing that thinks" as Descartes said. Minds are rational *observers* of reality (and also *actors*, agents affecting/shaping it by exercising their free will' (p. 15).
5. 'in Sections 2 and 3, we saw that physics cannot account for all of reality but that mentality exists fundamentally. Then, in Section 4, we saw that mentality is not a property of the material world, but it is exhibited by minds, persons, who are simple, fundamental substances' (p.39).

6. 'consciousness is not deducible from, or reducible to, physics' (p. 65).

There are also many statements in the paper that are likely true, though not obviously so:

- A. 'The truth about the nature of the self is, in my opinion, fundamental, and ultimately accessible only through intuition and introspection.' (p. 5).
- B. The 'crux of this hard problem is that the principles of physics (and of higher-level sciences derivable from physics) do not entail the existence of mental phenomena, but in fact they are qualitatively disjoint from them. Thus, reality is not entirely physical.' (p.8).
- C. The 'fact that we happen not to be zombies or biological robots, as each of us knows from personal experience, disproves physicalism ... Physics does not, and can not, provide a complete description of reality.' (p. 11).
- D. 'Introspection reveals to anyone that he/she is a centre of conscious existence, of first person perspective, characterised by simplicity (non-compositeness) and uniqueness (non-duplicability), properties that are not consonant with the physical realm and which are not compatible with a physicalist view of persons as physical objects.' (p.28).
- E. 'the core of being a person, of being someone, *who* someone is, cannot be explained by reference to any constitutive elements. Persons are simple and fundamental entities.' (p.33).
- F. 'Introspective study of our own selves can reveal to us many interesting facts about reality, not revealable through the third-person methods of science. This essay has made an effort to highlight some of the deep aspects of personhood.' (p. 65).

On the other hand, the following statements/arguments seem debatable:

- 1. 'It seems that ... plants, animals, humans ... exhibit rationality' (p. 3). While humans and many higher animals certainly exhibit rationality, I do not believe that plants (and even many lower animals) do.
- 2. 'since God is omnipotent' (p. 12). The concept of God as necessarily omnipotent needs not be the only acceptable concept; see my argument that God (defined as the creator of our universe) is only very, very powerful, but not omnipotent (Ng 2019).
- 3. 'the selection/determination of the person, has not been done by you but by some other, unknown factor or agent. And what factor could that be? There are no possible candidates.' (p. 36). An obvious candidate is the souls in the spiritual realm.
- 4. 'my preferred solution is instead that egos are created by an omnipotent Mind, for whom nothing is impossible.' (p.38). Does not answer how that omnipotent Mind (or God) originated (on which see Ng 2019 for my answer). Really opting out.
- 5. 'Free will without consciousness is unintelligible, but I would also argue that the converse is also true, that free will is a defining part of consciousness.' (p.41). The converse is not necessarily true; one could be conscious and able to perceive but not free to will anything, e.g someone with certain mental disability, and also likely some animal species.
- 6. 'where this fundamental, God-transcending reality originates from. It is larger, stronger, more primitive and fundamental than God, and is impersonal, unconscious, nonmental.' (p. 67). Though likely controversial, this is consistent with the argument on the 'wider universe' (where our God originated within) argued in Ng (2019).

7. 'it seems more plausible to me that evolution occurred through purely physical mechanisms, involving nothing mental, and once it produced bodies of sufficient complexity God infused these bodies with minds and enacted the psycho-physical laws on these particular mind-body composites.' (p. 68). This seems unlikely, and at what stage? Another more likely possibility is that our created 'sub-universe' (in contrast to the uncreated wider universe) has properties favourable to the evolution/emergence of mind. Admittedly, this option is also imbued with conceptual difficulties.

Reference

NG, Yew-Kwang (2019). *Evolved-God Creationism*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-5275-3384-4.

https://www.google.com.au/books/edition/Evolved_God_Creationism/m9WZDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover