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By Jacky Chang

Abstract

While there may be many strong arguments in favor of physicalism, it lacks much in fully expressing the human experience and journey. Life is relational and individual; based on both physical and non-physical things. Through the content of this document I will attempt to discuss some of the reasons why physicalism, in its reduction theory, does not adequately describe life as we know it.

Physicalism, the philosophy built upon the premise that life, as we know it, centers upon or supervenes on physical matter. However, mankind, as a very complex and much more than physical being, can never be reduced to a mere definition of the physical aspects of existence. While there are many arguments against physicalism, the largest and most consistent one seems to be that of consciousness, intellect, freedom of choice, and all the qualities that make a human being fully human.

The physicalist reasoning relies too heavily on reduction thinking. They define physical as either being expressed in physical terms or else in the broad sense as being anything that is part of a physical system or process. In this way, they reduce all beingness to a matter of physical nature. In fact, there are non-physical things. Alter(2005) uses Descartes' argument, that phenomenal consciousness is not physical due to the fact that one can conceive of the body as well as the mind independently of each other, therefore, phenomenal consciousness is neither functional nor physical, to prove that we have a fully conscious mind and a fully present body.

According to physicalists, all knowledge is a mental function of learning by <https://assignbuster.com/the-case-against-physicalism-by-jacky-chang/>

processes involving the five senses. How, then, can we account for human intuition, experiential knowledge and the sense of general knowingness that comes with the journey of life? According to Alter(2005), human intuition and knowingness are justifiable by reason alone, with no empirical evidence needed; we don't intentionally learn everything,

How does the physicalist account for freedom of choice? Melynk (2007) uses the argument that choice cannot be free as it refers to a causal agent or, in the case of theism, a supposed intentional agent that predesigned or had prior knowledge of that choice. Yet, Goetz and Taliaferro(2007) argue that choice is not causal or determined, but rather a function of our conceptual and intentional qualities, which in reality are abstract forms and therefore non-physical objects.

How can the qualities that make us fully human be explained in physicalist terms? Melnyk(2007) argues that humans have minds, are examples of mental properties, and go through mental processes as part of their functioning in the physical system; much the same as one of the physical functions of the heart muscle is to pump blood to the body. By this, then, the mind has mental representations which generate not only the mental representation of the world around us, but also a representation of ourselves. The main problem with this is that it doesn't take into account all the intricate nuances that comprise the human mind; it presupposes that all mental activity is therefore neural activity. Goetz and Taliaferro(2007) argue that not all human phenomena are dependent on neural activity. For example, a person acts in relation to his/her belief systems; whereas the physicalist believes that neural phenomena create human phenomena, or, your movements create your behavior.

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In conclusion, we are both physical and non-physical in nature; therefore we can never be reduced to the sum total of our physical components and systems. The human experience is rich and full of unexplainable mysteries which will always push mankind for answers.

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