

Reply to Brad Thompson

I thank Professor Thompson for his exceptionally thoughtful comments. I'll respond to his objections in order.

On the apriority of the conditionals

Thompson suggests that we should interpret zombies as referring to physical states when they speak of being in pain. This, he argues, is the charitable interpretation.

I'm not convinced. My zombie twin will insist that he means to refer to something over and above the physical and functional. It seems charitable to take him at his word. Anyway, as Thompson argues, this disagreement doesn't affect my arguments.

Is Aposteriority Enough?

Thompson writes, “The conditional analysis is incompatible with the primary conceivability of $P \ \& \ T \ \& \ \sim Q$. On those grounds, one might agree with Alter that it begs the question.”

But I never claimed that *the conditional analysis* is question-begging. I do bring this charge against the strong reading of EP.

On the strong reading, EP says that even in light of our a posteriori knowledge that there are pains, no a priori reasoning excludes the possibility that the world is merely physical. The reason this begs the question against Chalmers is simple. Chalmers argues in detail that a priori reasoning *does* exclude the possibility that the world could both contain pains and be merely physical. If Hawthorne thinks Chalmers’ reasoning goes awry, he needs to say *where and why*. On the strong reading, EP rules out the soundness of Chalmers’ argument by fiat.

For comparison, imagine that the atheist uses the evidential argument from evil to establish the non-existence of God. The theist tries to undercut this argument with the following claim: “The world might or might not contain unnecessary evil. A priori, we can’t tell which, even in light of our a posteriori knowledge of the existence of dinosaur pain.” The theist’s claim is question-begging, unless she can identify where the evidential argument from evil goes awry. This is the sort of thing Hawthorne does if he invokes strong EP, without providing independent support for this claim.¹

Thompson suggests that my opponents might respond to my charge of begging the question as follows: “Zombie worlds are not

¹ [Here’s another comparison. Suppose someone asserts that no a priori reasoning excludes the possibility of a finite set of axioms from which all arithmetical truths can be rigorously derived. Without saying where and why Godel’s reasoning breaks down, this begs the question—just as merely asserting the strong EP begs the question against Chalmers. (The recursion theorist Yianis Mosciovakis referees about three papers a year claiming to refute Godel. They tend to repeat the same mistakes, but they at least try to locate a specific problem.)]

conceivable *simpliciter*. They are conceivable if pain is not physical in the actual world, and they are inconceivable if pain is physical in the actual world. We don't know which is the case, and so under the ambiguous conception, zombies are conceivable. The conditional analysis allows this, and explains it, without entailing the falsity of physicalism.”

The main problem with this argument concerns the premise that we don't know whether pain is or isn't physical in the actual world.

This premise is question-begging for the same reason as the strong version of EP: it amounts to an unsupported assertion that Chalmers' reasoning must go wrong—somewhere.

On explaining the zombie intuition

Okay, let's move on to explaining the zombie intuition. Thompson concedes that Braddon-Mitchell's diagnosis fails, but he offers two alternative proposals. One is that we think zombies are conceivable

because we confuse the zombie hypothesis with one that lacks the second-order, “that’s all” claim: we confuse $PT \& \sim Q$ with $P \& \sim Q$.

This proposal is an intriguing. But it seems to have the same problem as Braddon-Mitchell’s. In the Kripke case, the diagnosis removes any serious temptation to maintain the original claims—the claim that one can imagine Hesperus without Phosphorus, or heat without molecular motion, and so on. One might initially so describe what one imagines. But once Kripke provides his alternative description, in terms of being in the same qualitative situation but with a different heavenly body in place of Hesperus, it’s clear that one’s initial description was wrong. By contrast, even when the distinction between the zombie hypothesis and $P \& \sim Q$ is kept firmly in mind, the zombie hypothesis— $PT \& \sim Q$ —seems perfectly coherent.

Thompson’s second proposal is that the zombie hypothesis seems conceivable because we confuse primary and secondary

conceivability, or make a related mistake. He puts this point in a couple of different ways.

He says, “I find it difficult to assess the primary conceivability of zombies. One begins by conceiving of a world that is physically just like this one, but in which there is no phenomenal consciousness. Given that one knows that the *actual* world contains phenomenally conscious states, it can often be irresistible to entertain such a scenario only as a counterfactual scenario.”

I find Thompson’s claim puzzling. Compare the primary conceivability of the XYZ world. One begins by conceiving of a world that’s superficially and just like this one, except there is XYZ in place of H₂O. I know that the *actual* world contains H₂O, not XYZ. But I don’t find it irresistible to entertain such a scenario only as a counterfactual scenario. I see no reason why conceiving of the zombie world is any different. As long as we’re clear on the difference between conceiving of the zombie world as actual and

conceiving it as counterfactual, I don't see why we can't do the one without sliding into the other.

Thompson puts his second proposal in another way. He suggests that Braddon-Mitchell and Hawthorne might argue that our ability to conceive of the zombie world “depends on making the (perhaps tacit) assumption at the time that the actual world is not merely physical.”

But I don't think our ability depends on this assumption. Type-B physicalists agree with Chalmers that the zombie world is conceivable. Presumably *they're* not assuming that the actual world isn't merely physical. On the contrary, they're physicalists! And I certainly don't agree that our reactions to oracle cases show that if we don't make this assumption, then we will no longer accept the conceivability of zombies. As I argued, our reactions to oracle cases show nothing of the kind.

So, it doesn't seem to me plausible to claim that, in attempting to conceive of the zombie world, we're confusing primary and secondary conceivability. Of course, such confusions are possible. But I see no reason to suspect that they account for the intuition that the zombie hypothesis is coherent.