Response by Frank Jackson to Barbara Gail Montero's "Must Physicalism Imply the Supervenience of the Mental on the Physical?"

Despite the fact that I am one of the targets of Barbara Montero's paper, I like it and agree with much of it. Indeed, I think we learn something interesting from it. I will say what that might be near the end.

My critical comments will be restricted to the question as to whether some suitable supervenience thesis is a necessary condition for the truth of physicalism. As she notes, the claim that some suitable supervenience thesis is sufficient for the truth of physicalism is much more controversial. What's orthodoxy – orthodoxy she is challenging – is the necessity claim, and, as she also notes, the thesis that the truth of supervenience is necessary for the truth of physicalism is the claim that typically does much of the heavy lifting in various anti-physicalist arguments in the philosophy of mind.

I think that there is a problem that she hasn't fully seen. It is hinted at in places but its full import hasn't been taken on board, or so it seems to me.

Physicalism is a view in metaphysics about the *kind* of world we occupy. (We'll distinguish this way of thinking about physicalism from thinking about it as a thesis in the philosophy of mind near the end.) This means that it has to say something about the kind in question. Accordingly, physicalists must say something about the sort of properties that are, according to them, instantiated in our world. Without that, the doctrine is empty of content. But how should they should specify the sort in question? *First*, they need to specify a core or base set of properties. Perhaps they say that they are of a kind with those that play a role in current physics or some recognizable descendent of current physics. Perhaps they say that they are of a kind with those that play a role in current physical theory *widely construed* – so that the properties of current chemistry and cell biology automatically count, count, that is, without the need to argue that chemistry and cell biology supervene on physics – or some recognizable descendent of current physical theory. Perhaps they say they are the properties of final science, where final science is specified in a way that allows the claim to be non-trivial. Perhaps they say that they are the properties we need to explain the non-sentient parts of our world. And that's just a sample of the ways of specifying the core physical properties to be

found in the literature. Which way is best is famously controversial, but we'll steer clear of that controversy here. However – and this is what is important for what's to come – there is a *second* thing physicalists have to do when they specify the properties to be found in our world. Identifying the core properties is only half of what's needed.

We can see this by asking about a property like being square or loved by God. This is a property to be found in our world. This is because some things are square, and anything square is also square or loved by God. But it is hard to see how being square or loved by God could count as a core physical property. Does it play a role in physics or any recognizable descendent of physics? Surely not. Do we need it in order to give an account of the non-sentient parts of our world? Unlikely, say most of us. Or think of a property like being near at least five things that resemble themselves. Physicalists have to allow that this property is to be found in our world. The way objects are clustered together in our world and the very many ways things can resemble each other tells us that. But this property is very unlikely to count as a core physical property on any plausible way of spelling out that notion. So what do physicalists do? Throw in the towel and concede that some properties to be found in our world aren't physical, examples being the property of being near at least five things that resemble themselves, and being square or loved by God? Of course not. They insist that these properties, in some sense, come along for free from the presence in our world of properties that count as core physical properties. The fact that some objects have the property of being square or loved by God is no problem for physicalism because it comes along for free from the fact that some objects have the property of being square, and we can all agree that being square is a core physical property.

The message is that physicalists must provide a two part account of the properties to be found in our world, according to them. One part says which properties are the core physical properties. The other part tells us what it is for a property to come along for free from a core physical property. It is here, of course, that supervenience enters the picture. The properties that come along for free are the properties that supervene on the core physical properties. How one spells this out in suitable detail is then a matter for further discussion. So this is why I remain a believer in the orthodoxy that Montero is challenging. The only way for physicalists to give a plausible account of what it is for a property to come along for free must, in one way or another, draw on the

idea that the properties that come along for free are those that supervene on the core physical properties.

Now for what we learn from her paper, as it seems to me. She says that it might be that chemistry doesn't supervene on physics, but if it didn't we would not declare physicalism to be false. Here I think we should distinguish physicalism as a doctrine about the world from physicalism as a doctrine about the mind. Take physicalism as a doctrine about the world first. If it turns out that chemistry doesn't supervene on physics, surely what we should say is something like the following: Exactly what physicalism about the world comes to is a function of the specification of what a core physical property is. If we give physics a special role in settling which properties are the core physical properties, we get what we might call Physicalism^{P}. If we give the physical sciences in general a special role (so that chemistry, e.g., is automatically included), we get what we might call Physicalism^{P*}. It is then obvious what to say if it turns out that chemistry doesn't supervene on physics: we have learnt that Physicalism^{P} is false, but it may still be the case that Physicalism^{P*} is true. So it isn't quite right to say that we wouldn't declare physicalism to be false. We'd distinguish, and declare one variety to be false and the other variety of physicalism to true or any way unscathed by the discovery that chemistry doesn't supervene on physics. What about physicalism as a doctrine about the mind? Here I think Montero is right. When our topic is the mind, we mostly don't care too much about the difference between, e.g., Physicalism^{P} and Physicalism^{P*}. They are alike in being inconsistent with the kind of dualism about the mind that physicalists oppose. So what we learn is that it can be important to keep the question about the world and the question about the mind apart.

Frank Jackson 10 February 2012