Response to Robert J. Howell's Commentary
Barbara Gail Montero

Robert Howell questions the validity of my argument for the conclusion that physicalism need not imply the supervenience of the mental on the physical, but I feel that I many not understand his point. In fact, it seems that a number of his comments support my view. For example, if, as he says, "there is a reason to count chemical, biological, and other such properties as physical independent of their supervenience on the micro-physical," then shouldn't we just shelve supervenience and focus on whether that reason applies to the mental?

Apart from looking into the argument's validity, he questions the truth of the premise stating that one can consistently uphold physicalism while denying the supervenience of chemistry on physics. Like Jackson, he thinks that there are different senses of physicalism, and whether physicalism is true may depend on which sense we have in mind. And, again, I agree with this to a point, but still think that there might be an common commitment—a core idea that makes us want to count all these different views as versions of physicalism—and this commitment might not be to a supervenience thesis.

Howell also questions this premise by addressing my claim that supervenience could fail, even if the mind-brain identity theory is true. (He identifies this as *the* reason for why I hold this premise, but I understand it only as one consideration, my main reason being that if we were to discover that the world were really such that the chemical did not supervene on the physical, physicalists should not and would not admit defeat.) He argues that even if there is a sense in which it is conceivable that water fails to supervene on the microphysical, "it is not possible for typical Kripkean reasons: in that world we really wouldn't have water." And then he generalizes to the mental. But I'm not sure what Kripkean reasons he means. If he's alluding to Kripke's view that given that water is composed of H20, any sample of water will also be a sample of H20, then the objection does not go through, for that view leaves open the possibility that there is a world with H20 that does not have water. So he must mean Kripke's views about water being necessarily identical to H20, which implies that it supervenes upon it. I never actually learned this Kripkean lesson, however, for those who did, I can allow that water supervenes on H20. As long as you think both that there is some way that our physics could have been so that it does not suffice for, say, chemical bonding, and that if our physics were like this, physicalism still could hold, then it would seem that the mental could be physical, even if the mental does not supervene on the entities, properties, relation and laws of physics.

I think, however, that much of Howell's criticism of my positive view is generally on target. Clearly, I haven't quite captured this "specialness" that I think is inconsistent with physicalism. What if, as he suggests, the only thing that did not supervene on physics were a "crummy little feeling in the heart of a cockroach." What should we say? Is physicalism false? I don't know. Most likely, this would be one of those anomalies that is just brushed under the carpet.

I accept this central criticism, however, I'm not sure if I follow all of his reasoning. For example, apart from the fact that physicalism must imply that everything is physical (in some sense or another), I'm not sure how to understand Howell's claim that physicalism must imply monism. If some things are constituted by matter and some by anti-matter and there is no shared nature that fully explains everything about both kinds of things, it would seem that Howell would say monism is false. Yet it does not seem that we should say that in this situation physicalism must be false.

Finally, Howell suggests that the particular way in which monism is true is that everything can

be fully described by spatio-temporal dynamics. Physicists, however, ponder the question of whether space-time itself is ultimately explained in terms of underlying non-spacial-temporal phenomena. If it is, would space-time be non-physical?