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# **Defining Ontological Naturalism**

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# Overview

- Naturalism vs. physicalism
- Hempel's dilemma for physicalism
- Physicalism as dependent on ideal physics
- Ontological naturalism as dependent on ideal natural science (no unity of science presupposed)

# Naturalism vs. Physicalism

- Naturalism = Physicalism?
  - ◇ Most authors definite it this way
  - ◇ BUT: naturalism doesn't have to imply unity of science as based on physics

# Defining physicalism

- Via the notion of physical object
- Via the notion of physical theory
  - ◇ Are there non-theoretical notions of physical objects?
  - ◇ Note: you can support physicalism on *a priori* grounds, and make it broadly incompatible with naturalism

# Ideal physics and Hempel's dilemma

- If physicalism refers to current physics, it's false as this physics is clearly incomplete
- If physicalism refers to ideal physics, it is irrational as ideal physics is unknown...

# Solving Hempel's Dilemma

- Define ideal physics:
  - ◇ In terms of empirical accessibility  
(=> physicalism = empiricism)
  - ◇ By specifying the conditions that any future physics must meet

# Hume to the rescue

- Ideal physics must admit no miracles:
  - ◇ It must not admit *explananda* more improbable than things to be explained (Hume on miracles, roughly)
  - ◇ Ectoplasm can figure in ideal physics but only if it has explanatory power required, and is not based on definitional fiat

# Defining physicalism

- (P) There exists everything that can be explained by ideal physical theories or observed using the best standard observational procedures in these theories; and whatever is excluded as impossible by ideal physics, doesn't exist.
- It doesn't decide that object outside the scope of physics don't exist.

# Problems with ideal physics, continued...

- The question whether objects outside the scope of physics exist or not is left undecided in (P).
- Is it realistic to think that all sciences will converge to physics (= representational reduction is feasible)?
- But if not, ideal physics cannot be simply be taken to be the ideal infinite cognitive agent that knows everything

# From weak ideal physics to naturalism

- If ideal natural sciences will not converge to physics, naturalism might be more attractive than physicalism
- Many overlapping theories can identify objects in various ways: the objects' *robustness* is important for finite cognitive agents
- Unification means more possibility for errors and bugs in our theories

# Defining naturalism

- (N) There exists everything that can be explained by ideal natural science or observed using the best standard observational procedures in science, and whatever is excluded as impossible by ideal science, doesn't exist.

# Why physicalism $\neq$ naturalism?

- There are naturalists that explicitly don't support physicalism (like Dave Chalmers)
- Unification of science might be impossible
- Even if physics is the basic science, and all objects are physical, higher level theories might be representationally irreducible

# Physicalism & naturalism

- Both presuppose reduction (to physical objects or objects quantified over in natural science)
- Physicalism it is the most popular form of ontological naturalism. It can be reductive representationally and assert unification of science in physics; or it can be metaphysically reductive, and assert that all higher level objects are composed from physical ones.

**Thank you!**  
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