Notes on Chalmers' Ch. 6, The two dimensional argument against materialism
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Some simplifications

In general primary = Chalmers; secondary = Kripke. For "1-possible" just read "epistemically possible". The "1" comes from the "primary intension" talk. For "2-possible" read "metaphysically possible": the secondary intension evaluates to the True in some possible world.

P is epistemically possible (1-possible) =df the primary intension of P evaluates to the True in some scenario. Equivalently: there is some scenario w* that verifies P.

P is metaphysically possible (2-possible) =df. P is true in some possible world. Equivalently: there is some possible world that satisfies P.

Conceivability

prima facie ≃ for a particular subject on initial consideration (p 144)
ideally ≃ after "ideal rational reflection" (p 144)

P is positively conceivable ≃ one can coherently imagine a situation in which P is the case (or "one is able to form a clear and distinct conception of a situation in which P is true") (p 144)

P is negatively conceivable ≃ one cannot "rule out" P through a priori reasoning (144).

As mentioned in class, this seems equivalent to saying that a priori reasoning cannot generate any reason sufficient to reject P. Suppose Q is any proposition that entails ¬P. Then P is negatively conceivable iff one cannot positively conceive of any such Q.

secondary conceivability ≃ the sense in which "water ≠ H₂O" is "not really conceivable" (145)

Kripke's idea was that one might coherently imagine an epistemic situation in which watery-appearing stuff was something other than H₂O, but that such imagining was not imagining water to be something other than H₂O. It is odd use of the word "conceivable" on Chalmers' part, but the idea is that one cannot conceive of an identity between rigid designators being false in any world in which those designators have a referent. Note that one can conceive of it not being true in those worlds that lack water.

primary conceivability ≃ the sense in which "water ≠ H₂O" is conceivable (145)

That sense is: one can imagine an epistemic situation in which you should rationally conclude "that's water" even though that stuff is not H₂O. Put in Chalmers-speak: there is some scenario that would verify "water ≠ H₂O" even though it does not satisfy "water ≠ H₂O".

Such scenarios are what force us to accept that epistemic possibilities differ from metaphysical possibilities. If we put it in terms of intensions, they show us that the primary intension of a term and the secondary intension of the very same term sometimes evaluate to distinct values even in the same centered possible world. The primary intension for our term "water" evaluates to XYZ in some XYZ centered worlds w*, but the secondary intension of "water" in w* is either H₂O or nothing.

Pulling these definitions together, what Chalmers means by "conceivable" in the first premise of the conceivability argument is "ideal positive primary conceivability":


P is ideally positively primarily conceivable (ipp conceivable) =df. (a) one can coherently imagine a scenario w* that epistemically necessitates P (ie a complete and semantically neutral description D of w* should lead one rationally to endorse P), and (b) ideal rational reflection yields no reason to reject (a).

Roughly: it is prima facie positively conceivable, and ideal rational reflection does not yield any reason to reject those prima facie appearances.

The argument

Hereafter P is the conjunction of all completed microphysical truths about the universe. Q is any arbitrary phenomenal truth: a truth about what it is like to have any particular mental state. "I am being appeared-to bluely right now" was my example.

And the argument (p. 152) is:

1. P & ~Q is ideally positively primarily conceivable.
2. If P & ~Q is ideally positively primarily conceivable, then P & ~Q is epistemically possible.
3. If P & ~Q is epistemically possible, then either P & ~Q is metaphysically possible or Russellian monism is true. (pp 150-151)
4. If P & ~Q is metaphysically possible then materialism is false.

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5. Either materialism is false or Russellian monism is true.

Notes

Chalmers says that "materialism" has modal commitments, and the argument shows just how strong they are. His "materialist" holds that "P & ~Q" is not metaphysically possible. A philosopher who holds phenomenal truths reduce to physical ones, but that there are possible worlds in which both P and ~Q are satisfied, is not a "materialist" who is refuted by the argument above.

Block and Stalnaker aimed to show that even for physical truths P and M (a "macroscopic" physical truth such as "Mirror Lake contains water"), it is not the case that P epistemically necessitates M. If P & ~M is ipp conceivable, then the "epistemic gap" for consciousness is not at all special. Chalmers also wants to show that reductionists are committed to epistemic necessitation, so that the mere ipp conceivability of P & ~Q would refute the non-metaphysical materialists just mentioned.