Question of Interest: Feb 6th

Some worries about panprotopsychism

It is highly unclear how Type F Monism could solve the hard problem of consciousness. If phenomenal properties are part of the intrinsic nature of fundamental particles – if there is something it is like to be a quark – then why do I qua being a quark-collection not have quark-experiences? Why instead do I have human-experiences? Why don't some other of the mental processes that don't have phenomenal properties attached to them lack such properties? Perhaps it is but a way of expressing the combination problem that I am getting at here. But then the onus is not that there is such a problem, but that how come a theoretical perspective count as viable if it is not even clear how it resolves the issues it is brought in to handle? One would think that the primary job that the theoretical perspective takes up is to explain the target phenomenon and once it can be seen to do so, then the other issues may come into play. In any case, a view that is brought in to explain certain localised cases but in its explanation commits to many more cases than there are usually considered to be (a gazillion times more cases here) has, by shod I put it, a lot of explaining to do.

Chalmers' evasion of the knowledge argument seems to rest on an equivocation of two senses of 'phenomenal'. Ripe Red Chief apples (usually) have the phenomenal property of being red. But, pansychism apart they do not have the property that it is like something to be a Red Chief apple. Given this (obvious) distinction it is hard to see why Mary's book of facts should contain "description of the world involving concepts that directly characterize the intrinsic (phenomenal) properties". Intrinsic properties are phenomenal in the latter sense above. That is what the description of the world must then contain. What that means then is that the description of the world should contain what it is like to be a Red Chief apple, not what it is like to be red. There is a phenomenal property in the relevant sense of what it is like to see red but none as far as I can see of what it is like to be red. Thus, it seems that the knowledge argument will still hold.

(eg there are red-type experiences or red-like experiences)

Mayank Bora
Noah Sharpsteen  
February 6th, 2012  
Question of Interest Week 4

My question of interest is in regard to the following passage on page 151:

‘For [3. If P&~Q is 1-possible, then P&~Q is 2-possible] to be false, it is required that the structural profile of physics in the actual world does not necessitate Q, but that the structural and intrinsic profiles of physics in the actual world do necessitate Q.’ (Chalmers, 151).

Chalmers then goes on to say that the idea that the structural properties of physics do not necessitate Q, but the structural and intrinsic properties of physics do necessitate Q corresponds to Russellian monism. Whilst reading, I presumed that he would attempt to explain away the problem presented for the entailment of 2-possibility from 1-possibility, rather than offer Russellian monism as an alternative solution. It is not clearly obvious to me that materialism does not entail the falsity of premise 3, and it seems as though materialists themselves may argue that it is not only the structural profile of physics that necessitate consciousness, but that the intrinsic properties play a role in doing so as well. In fact, it seems as though materialists would not consider a conceivability argument which considered a world to be actual which merely had the structural profile of our world (certain things playing the roles of mass, charge, etc. without actually being mass, charge, etc.) to be motivating at all.

I think Kripke would respond by saying that although that world may be in the same structural state, unless it had the same intrinsic properties as well, it would simply not be our world under consideration. For P&~Q to be 2-possible, P has to be the physical description of the actual world evaluated at a counterfactual world, and ~Q has to be possible there. It seems like it would need to include mass, charge, etc., rather than schmass, schmarge, schmetc.

This is similar to Kripke’s argument that if we think that the proposition ‘water is not H2O’ is possible, then we are simply not talking about H2O. This raises a deeper issue, namely that Chalmers’ use of the 2-dimensional framework for his conceivability arguments seems unmotivated. Why should we take into consideration the possibility of a zombie world that has merely the structural and not intrinsic physical properties of our world? Granted, it is not a priori ruled out that there may be a world with the same physical structure as ours (including schmass, schmarge, schmetc.) where phenomenal zombies exist, but insisting that intrinsic properties be similar to our world to allow for 2-possibility to be entailed by this 1-possibility is precisely what the materialist would insist on as well, and in that case it is far from clear that phenomenal zombies are metaphysically possible. The fact that structural and intrinsic physical properties are needed for 2-possibility seems to motivate materialism and not Russellian monism.
Weekly ‘Question(s) of Interest’ – 6 Feb 12

This week I have a bunch of questions about both chapters. Don’t get me wrong, I think there are some great philosophical arguments here (perhaps border-lining on brilliance), but I am nevertheless confused about a lot of things (perhaps because of the brilliance of the arguments). Here are a few:

First, I’m surprised that Chalmers’ seriously entertains epiphenomenalism. I will admit that I did not follow most of his exposition on the (supposedly) applicable scientific theories. Regardless, here is a very interesting sentence: “Indeed, it seems that if epiphenomenalism were true, we would have exactly the same evidence and be led to believe that consciousness has a causal role for much the same reasons” (131). It seems to me that many would thus reject this theory on the basis of parsimony, especially considering “...the relationship between consciousness and reports about consciousness seems to be something of a lucky coincidence...” (132). Granted, I do not think Chalmers gives much credence to parsimony (I am sympathetic to his view in this regard): “And we have learned from modern physics that the world is a strange place. We cannot expect it to obey all of the dictates of common sense” (135). However, he later says, “I think that in some ways the type-E view is the most appealing, but this sense is largely grounded in aesthetic considerations whose force is unclear” (138). I am assuming that these ‘aesthetic considerations’ are the elegance in which the type-E view simplifies and unifies various theories, as well as simplifies and unifies solutions to various problems from within those theories. So what exactly is the problem for Chalmers with parsimony? It seems that if he likes the type-E view, he should not be as charitable to the type-F view.

Incidentally, I’m noticing a pattern with Chalmers. It seems to me that he has a habit of misrepresenting the views of other philosophers. I noted last week that I did not agree with his interpretation of Kripke. Here’s another gem this week, where he talks about type-D dualism: “It is sometimes objected that distinct physical and mental states could not interact since there is no causal nexus between them. However, one lesson from Hume and from modern science is that the same goes for any fundamental causal interactions, including those found in physics” (126). Hume’s point, as I take him (which could obviously be wrong), was that we should not inquire about causes of measurable phenomenon in which there is no measurable data to support any conclusion about the causes. In other words, it’s inappropriate to ask ‘why questions’ about phenomena in which there is no empirical support in which to appeal in order to answer the question. Granted, this does conflict with current philosophy of science theories. But Hume’s protest has nothing to do with the interaction between two measurable fundamental phenomenon. We can inquire about the interaction between gravity and existing solid objects, right? Similarly, if we accept that consciousness (experience, qualia, whatever) is fundamental, measurable from the first-person point-of-view as Chalmers accepts, and that physical particle interactions are also fundamental, measurable from the third-person point-of-view as Chalmers accepts, then why is it inappropriate to ask about how these two measurable fundamental properties interact? I suspect that this question boils down to Chalmers’ distinction in kind between physical and phenomenal data.

Thus, what made me (and others) think that you were appealing to a human account of conscious to make it easier to see how two distinct substances (one) have causal relations.
The above brings me to another point. It seems to me that Chalmers' intrinsic phenomenal / protophenomenal properties are a perfect illustration of 'occult qualities'. To his credit, he listed some good objections to his type-F view. My own objection is a type of 'combination problem': if intrinsic protophenomenal properties of fundamental particles combine to produce consciousness, then what accounts for the existence of 'conscious' composites versus 'non-conscious' composites? If every fundamental particle has protophenomenal properties, why are some medium-sized objects obviously conscious while others obviously aren't? My guess is that Chalmers would reply that it has something to do with how these protophenomenal properties combine. But this only pushes the issue back a level: what is it about certain combinations that produces consciousness? If these combinations will not ever be observable, how can we ever hope to answer this question?

Next, I am confused about what exactly distinguishes positive and negative conceivability. Supposedly, negative conceivability "...is defined in terms of what a subject can rule out through a priori reasoning" (144). On the other hand, positive conceivability "...is characterized in terms of what subjects can form a positive conception of," in which a positive conception "...involves being able to form some sort of clear and distinct conception of a situation in which the hypothesis is true" (144). Can't you rule a 'subject' out a priori only if you can clearly conceive the positive conception of its negation? Furthermore, doesn't this import the same old objections to Descartes' "clear and distinct" ideas? Namely, what is it to be a clear and distinct idea? I seem to recall that Descartes had a heck of a time answering the criticisms for this concept of his. Maybe there has been some recent progress here, I don't know.

Finally, I have two objections to the first premise of his 'conceivability argument'. The first one is shorter than the second. First, I am sympathetic to objection #5 (156-157). If zombies can appear to make claims indicative of consciousness from a third-person perspective, that are indistinguishable from the first-person judgments of conscious beings, how can Chalmers answer the standard skeptical objection to dualism concerning the ability to objectively determine the existence of other minds? Second, I think that Chalmers' first premise rests upon a fundamental mistake concerning 'primary' conceivability. He argues that 'primary conceivability' rests upon the ability of an individual at a 'centered' world to, a priori, epistemically conceive of the referent of a term as being the same stuff as that stuff of which he/she thinks about, when he/she conceives of the referent of the same term at our actual world (This sentence is poorly worded. I apologize, I tried - for a long time. This may still be wrong.). For example, "if the subject imagines a Twin Earth situation with XYZ in the oceans and lakes and assumes that the situation obtains in the subject's own environment, then the subject should conclude that water is XYZ rather than H₂O" (146). Isn't Chalmers assuming that 'water' can be identical with whatever substance composes XYZ? It seems to me there is a mistake here resulting from an appeal to our intuitions as they relate to the 'Twin Earth' thought experiment. When I reflect upon what I actually conceive of as the referent of the term 'water', it seems to be the stuff in the actual world that has the familiar watery-properties. In other words, this referent is fluid, colorless, odorless, of a certain taste, of a certain functional property related to living beings on Earth, raining down from the sky, composing a significant part of every living thing on Earth, etc. But, according to what chemistry / physics and Kripke tell us, whatever stuff has all of those properties, also necessarily has the property of being H₂O. In other words, for a
substance in a possible (centered) world to have all the same watery-properties that ‘water’
does in our (centered) world, it must also be identical with H₂O (unless one is willing to abandon
the metaphysical necessity of natural laws). The mistake, as I see it, arises from our reliance
upon our senses: our conception of the referent of ‘water’ does not necessarily connect with our
conception of the referent of H₂O. That is because we can visualize water, but we do not
(typically) visualize H₂O as water. Therefore, it is not a problem for most of us to conceive of a
disconnection between what the two words refer to. What chemistry / physics and Kripke tell us
is that it is necessarily the case that a substance with all of the empirical properties as the stuff
that ‘water’ refers to is the same stuff that H₂O refers to in all worlds. (in which it exists)

In essence, differences matter. Specifically, differences in micro-physical reality will
cause differences in observable reality.

So whatever stuff has all of the same observable characteristics as ‘water’ will also
necessarily have all of the same micro-physical characteristics as the stuff that ‘water’ refers to.
Think of the argument in terms of very slight chemical differences between substances in our
actual world. H₂O is water. According to Wikipedia (!), “Water can be split into its constituent
elements, hydrogen and oxygen, by passing an electric current through it. This process is
called electrolysis. Water molecules naturally dissociate into H⁺ and OH⁻ ions, which are
attracted toward the cathode and anode, respectively. At the cathode, two H⁺ ions pick up
electrons and form H₂ gas. At the anode, four OH⁻ ions combine and release O₂ gas, molecular
water, and four electrons. The gases produced bubble to the surface, where they can be
collected.” So H₂O is water, H₂ is hydrogen dioxide, and OH⁻ is hydroxide. These three
substances have very different observable properties. So if there is an observable difference
between two chemical compounds in virtue of a difference in one atom (or one atom’s charge) in
the actual world, granting the laws nature, there will also be an observable difference between
two substances in any possible (centered) world. Basically, the ‘Twin Earth’ thought experiment
is misleading, in that ‘Twin Earth’ is not metaphysically possible. As I see it, Chalmers faces a
dilemma: either reject the metaphysical necessity of natural laws or reject two-dimensionalism,
and hence the conceivability argument.

Kripke argues it is possible to be in the “same epistemic situation”
as us, point to watery stuff in the vicinity, & correctly
call it “water” even though it isn’t H₂O. That’s the
2nd dimension of possibility that led to “2 dimensions”
Kathy Fazekas | Question(s) of Interest 2

My first question pertains to Chalmers’ “Knowledge Argument Against Materialism”, first discussed in chapter 5 and then in places in chapter 6 and in the Afterword of chapter 6. Chalmers gives two formulations of the Knowledge Argument in chapter 5 and two formulations in the Afterword of chapter 6. In each formulation, Chalmers overlooks the possibility that Mary does not actually know all of the physical facts. He seems to beg the question against the materialist by assuming in the first premise of the first and third formulations of the Knowledge Argument that phenomenal facts are not physical facts. (He assumes that “Mary knows all of the physical facts.”) However, his opponent could argue that phenomenal facts are physical facts. Phenomenal facts could either be a subset of the physical facts or a type of physical fact.

1. ‘What it is like to experience red’ could be a physical fact.
2. If ‘What it is like to experience red’ is a physical fact, then Mary does not know all of the physical facts.
3. Therefore, the Knowledge Argument does not prove that materialism is false.

If phenomenal facts are physical facts, when Mary experiences red for the first time, she acquires a new physical fact.

Chalmers’ discussion of the distinction between narrowly physical facts and broadly physical facts does not address the problem I have raised, since Chalmers assumes that Mary knows all of the narrowly physical facts and hence is in a position to know all of the broadly physical facts, which are deducible from the narrowly physical ones. In the formulations of the argument in the Afterword, he still presupposes that phenomenal facts are not physical facts.

His own Conceivability Argument could be used to show that it is conceivable, and therefore possible, that phenomenal facts are physical facts.

1. It is conceivable that phenomenal facts are physical facts.

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1 Pages 108 and 109.
2 Pages 192 and 193.
3 Pages 108 and 192.
2. If it is conceivable that phenomenal facts are physical facts, it is metaphysically possible that phenomenal facts are physical facts.

3. If it is metaphysically possible that phenomenal facts are physical facts, then consciousness is physical.

4. Therefore, consciousness is physical.

My second question pertains to his revised Conceivability Argument on page 152 in chapter 6. He concludes that either “Materialism is false or Russellian monism is true.” There seems to be a third option that he does not consider. That is, that there is no distinction between structural and intrinsic properties. Whenever he discusses structural and intrinsic properties, it is never clear to me how he is using the terms and what the difference between them is supposed to be. I take it that structural properties are supposed to be physical properties or properties that are deducible by the laws of physics, but more than that I cannot glean from his discussion.

(They are "structural phenomenal properties," too, like orange being similar to both red & yellow.)
Maureen Stringham  
Phil 5331 Consciousness  
Question of Interest 2

In Chapter 6, Chalmers tries to show that materialism is false (or Russellian monism is true) by arguing that conceivability entails possibility. He sketches this argument on p. 152. I can agree with premise 2, “If P&¬Q is conceivable, then P&¬Q is 1-possible. I think premise 3, however, “If P&¬Q is 1-possible, then P&¬Q is 2-possible or Russellian monism is true”, is problematic. Before this (bottom of p. 149 and top of p. 150), Chalmers claims that the primary and secondary intensions of Q coincide. If this is the case, we can get 2-possibility from 1-possibility. I think Chalmers needs more support for that claim. He argues that “it is not the case that anything that looks like water is water or that anything that feels like heat is heat” but “it is plausibly the case that anything that feels like consciousness is consciousness” (149-150). I don’t see how consciousness is different from water or heat in the sense required for Chalmers’ point to go through here. Something that feels like consciousness may not be consciousness but something like “shm consciousness” in the same way that something that feels like heat is “shmeat”. I think Chalmers is arguing that if there is something it feels like to be conscious, then that something must, by definition, be consciousness. But if we are imagining that materialism is true, then the consciousness in question could be (for instance if the actual world is a zombie world) 1-possible but not 2-possible. Consciousness would still be 1-possible from the zombie world (but not 2-possible). The zombies could have had a different physical make-up, a physical make-up that allowed for consciousness (or shm consciousness).

On p. 153, Chalmers says that Q does not have to have the same primary and secondary intensions for the argument to go through. If this is the case, P either has the same primary and secondary intensions or different primary and secondary intensions. Chalmers says the argument goes through on both of these options. I do not think it goes through on either. First, Chalmers considers adding a that’s-all clause to P, resulting in a minimal world verifying P in which the primary intensity of Q is false. For this to work, that means that Q could not even be epistemically possible from the minimal world. I know that the ‘that’s-all’ clause is supposed to bar Q from having a true primary intensification, but this does not make sense to me. The way Chalmers has set up primary intensions, it is difficult for something to have a primary intensification that is false. It would have to not be epistemically possible for Q to be true, or it would have to be incoherent for Q to be true. I think a that’s-all clause may make Q impossible metaphysically, but not epistemically. Second, Chalmers considers if P has different primary and secondary intensions. Again, I think we could say in the case of the minimal P world that the secondary intensification of Q is false, but we cannot say anything about the primary intensification of Q.

"The minimal P world doesn't have any entities or properties in it beyond the minimal needed to satisfy P, yet "the sky looks blue tomorrow" is negatively conceivable and arguably positively conceivable as well. (cool!)"
Are zombies conceivable?

I felt that Chalmers said too little on behalf of the first two premises in the conceivability argument, refined or otherwise. In the few pages he spent on conceivability (143-146), he did so in terms of ruling out hypotheses (negative conceivability) or being able to coherently imagine a situation (positive conceivability) (144). In talking about the “traditional” notions of conceivability (e.g. Descartes’s notion of clear and distinct ideas), he mentions that this is perhaps captured in the definition of positive conceivability, but that more needs to be said about “just what it is to imagine a situation and so on.” (He says that he does this in Chalmers 2002b.)

He does say more in discussing the sixth objection to the first premise (157), but I think he says too little on imagination. That zombies (or even inverts) are not positively conceivable seems to be a powerful objection, provided that the objection is given with an account of imagination. I think a Humean account of imagination could be used to give an objection. Here’s a very rough sketch of the argument. I can tell you that I can entertain the idea of a zombie or an invert, and list all the structural properties of my zombie twin, and deny his phenomenal properties. However, my twin and myself are indistinguishable in the imagination. Since we are indistinguishable in the imagination, I cannot plausibly say that I can separate consciousness from the conception of my twin.

Here’s another example. I have an idea of Noah, and can imagine two complete and semantically neutral descriptions of, on the one hand, a world where Noah is conscious, and on the other, a world where Noah is a zombie. I cannot decide which is which, since, although I can give these alternative hypotheses (“one world is a zombie world lacking phenomenal properties”), I cannot see the difference in the imagination. So zombies (and perhaps inverts, although I’m not confident about this) aren’t conceivable.

It’s interesting to pursue this question into Ch 8, where one can wonder: am I in fact attending to one of the intrinsic phenomenal properties of my experience, or am I attending to how the object looks (say), or to something else? What has to change in order to imagine a case in which the intrinsic properties of the experience change?
Benjamin Nelson
Question of Interest #2

I was fairly perplexed by chapter 6 (and type-F monism in 5, but I found 6 even more baffling). It may be that I have simply (and badly) misunderstood Chalmers’ reformulation of the argument against materialism on page 152, but it looks like once we look at the setup, Chalmers’ reformulation makes the same assumptions the original conceivability argument makes on page 142. Chalmers’ presents the “refined conceivability argument” since the initial argument seemed to beg the question against the materialist by assuming that conceivability implies metaphysical possibility. But it is unclear to me that Chalmers’ revision addresses the problem.

Premise (1) of the refined argument tells us that $P \& \neg Q$ is conceivable, which get us premise (2): “If $P \& \neg Q$ is conceivable, then $P \& \neg Q$ is I-possible”. We get (2) by carrying out the following:

1) $P \& \neg Q$ is conceivable

2) There is some counterfactual world $w$ such that, when $w$ is treated as actual, $w$ verifies $P \& \neg Q$

3) If $w$ verifies $P \& \neg Q$, then $P \& \neg Q$ is I-possible

4) So, if $P \& \neg Q$ is conceivable, then $P \& \neg Q$ is I-possible

But it looks like the only way we get from (1) to (3) is by tacitly assuming that $w$ satisfies $P \& \neg Q$. In other words, it looks like we need to treat $w$ as a counterfactual world where $P \& \neg Q$ is true in order to suppose that if $w$ were actual, then $w$ would verify $P \& \neg Q$. But this just means that we move from conceivability to metaphysical possibility.

Good! C uses the weasel words that one should / naively endorse $P$, or that one would be in a position where that endorsement would be rational; but that by no means shows the world satisfies $P$. Of it there’s no reason to accept (3)!
Chalmers claims that, "S is positively primarily conceivable when the subject can imagine a coherent situation that verifies S, where a situation verifies S when, under the hypothesis that the situation actually obtains, the subject should conclude that S", but goes on to say, that S need not be metaphysically possible since, "primary conceivability does not entail metaphysical possibility" (146). But it is difficult to square this with Chalmers’ account of how we go about conceiving such situations: “When we conceive that water is not H2O, we imagine (for example) a Twin Earth situation in which the watery liquid in the oceans and lakes is XYZ. This situation is metaphysically possible, so there is a sense in which our conceiving involves access to a possible world” (146). This makes it sound as if epistemic or primary conceivability is parasitic on at least “some sense” of metaphysical or secondary possibility.

But if that’s the case, then we are back to the opening version of the conceivability argument, and it looks like we are just assuming that conceivable entails metaphysical possibility. So it is unclear just what work Chalmers’ reformulation is doing if it depends upon tacitly assuming metaphysical or secondary possibility to derive primary possibility.

"Excellent! This is worth pursuing further, if you want to do so. (You’d want to aim at his final version of 3, with the “either P or Q is metaphysically possible or Russellian notion is true” consequent. Make up a model where both fail, yet P and Q is unreal conceivably.)"
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Philosophy 5331  
Professor Clark  
February 6, 2012  

Week 4 Questions

1. These chapters were incredibly frustrating. As we discussed in seminar last time, it quickly became apparent that the Conceivability Argument in chapter 6 depends entirely on Chalmers’ two-dimensional semantics. But within chapter 6 there’s no argument for why we should accept the semantics. And looking back at the appendix, the only motivation that I see for it seems to be the basic intuition at work in chapter 6, namely that statements of what one knows in some way bear on statements of what there is. Frankly, this does not move me at all, and it is difficult to see how the appendix would convince anyone who did not already share that intuition. One also gets the sense that much of this chapter and the appendix are an obfuscation, whereby he keeps introducing machinery that moves us further and further from the question at issue so as to win the day by proving an orthogonal point.

2. A specific example is given in chapter 6. As initially described on pg. 142, the conceivability argument has some intuitive pull. It is valid, and premises 1, 3 and 4 seem relatively uncontroversial. An argument still needs to be put forth for the second premise “If P&~Q is conceivable, P&~Q is metaphysically possible,” but that’s just what the chapter sets out to do. So it seems that if he can argue convincingly for the second premise, then he will have gotten somewhere.

But at this point he concedes that this formulation is not sufficient and introduces distinct notions of possibility and conceivability while reformulating the argument in terms of them. This changes the penultimate premise from the relatively uncontroversial

Note the Kripke sentence shows (2) is false, it’s not metaphysically possible for water to be something other than H2O. But even Kripke admitted that

Epistemic situations follow other rules. Chalmers is trying to rework this term, unexpectedly.
“If P&¬Q is metaphysically possible, materialism is false” to “If P&¬Q is 2-possible, materialism is false” (149). In so doing, Chalmers has substituted the obscure for the
simple, and done so without argument. For there is no further discussion in the chapter
of why a materialist might accept this new premise. At the same time, the premise which was originally at issue, “If P&¬Q is
conceivable, P&¬Q is metaphysically possible,” each half of which seems understandable
(at least in principle) is replaced with premises entirely formulated in the terminology of
two-dimensional semantics, about which I think it’s fair to say many of us have no
intuitions. This seems especially problematic for Chalmers given that the entire
motivation for his project as set forth in chapter 1 appeals to conformity with folk
intuitions about consciousness.

The move to reframe the discussion entirely in two-dimensional terms forfeits
whatever prima facie grounding is claimed for the hard problem in chapter 1. If this
move is accepted, then the friend of the materialist has already lost. She should, instead,
resist. So we return to the more general complaint that unless independently convincing
argument can be given for two-dimensional semantics, the conceivability argument
quickly falls apart. And such argument has not been given. Chalmers’ moves in chapter
6 valiantly attempt to hide this fact, but they are ultimately unsuccessful.

How, exactly, worthwhile would be to show that truth
of premise n depends essentially on the truth of a
2-dimensional semantic claim m, and then that m
is dubious. But 2-dimensional semantics has some independent
support (and motivations) so just grumbling about it won’t
cut much ice.