

*Phenomenalism: A Metaphysics of Chance and Experience*

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Today, metaphysicians talk a lot about whether consciousness reduces to something physical, like a brain state. The unspoken assumption is that the physical world is familiar, well-understood, and ultimately unmysterious; the question is what to make of conscious experience, including the experience that reveals the world to us. A hundred-odd years ago, metaphysicians talked a lot about whether physical things reduced to something mental. The unspoken assumption was that conscious experience was familiar, well-understood, and ultimately unmysterious; the question was what to make of the world that our experience reveals.

With the prospects for a reductive analysis of consciousness looking increasingly dim, and physics looking increasingly incapable of supplying its own interpretation, some metaphysicians are now giving reductionist theories of the physical a second look, including theories that define the physical in mental terms rather than vice versa. One such theory is phenomenalism, which, in J.S. Mill's famous slogan, identifies physical things with "permanent possibilities of sensation." In this view, a rock is a tendency for experiences to occur as they do when people perceive a rock, and similarly for all other physical things.

*Phenomenalism: A Metaphysics of Chance and Experience* updates Mill's theory in the light of relevant scientific and philosophical developments, defends it against major objections, and points out the advantages of phenomenalism for various philosophical projects. Identifying physical things with possibilities of sensation reveals a transparent connection between the world of physics and the world of sense, provides an attractive alternative to structuralist and panpsychist theories of the physical, offers a fresh perspective on the problem of consciousness, and yields a satisfying theory of perception, all by taking two things notoriously resistant to reductive analysis—chance and experience—and constructing all else out of them.