

Is there anything special about real materialism?

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The main purpose of this talk is to show that from a more methodological perspective—let's call it the perspective of ontological reduction, or, to use a new but more suitable term, of ontological integration—it is reasonable to give a negative answer to the question posed by the title: real materialism—as it has been described by Professor Strawson in his paper—consists of a few very general principles which express a non-eliminativist attitude towards the mind-body problem, many current materialists would be willing to share. However, it would require a lot of additional work to transform this into a substantial materialist position.

In order to argue for the latter, I will take the following route. After some general remarks on the problem of ontological reduction respectively integration, I will introduce an abstract scheme that should mark off a certain type of physicalist non-eliminativist position with respect to the relationship between the mental and the physical. Then I will identify a number of questions that are left open by this scheme, and to which a substantial materialist position, falling under this scheme, must find proper answers.

Turning to real materialism, I will finally argue for the following two theses: (i) Real materialism fits the above scheme. (ii) Real materialism provides no substantial information that could help us to answer the above questions, and, hence, to fill out the general scheme. From the latter I finally draw the conclusion that real materialism falls short of being a particular position with respect to the mind-body problem.