

The Nature of Consciousness
Handout [17]
Frank Jackson: *What Mary Didn't Know*

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§ Jackson's Knowledge Argument:

- ___ 1. Physicalism is the challenging thesis that the actual world is entirely physical.
- ___ 2. Thus under physicalism, complete physical knowledge is the complete knowledge of the actual world.
- ___ 3. However, a physicist Mary could know all there is to know about the physical nature of the world, while not knowing the *qualia* of others' experiences.
- ___ 4. Hence, physicalism is false.

*** On Physicalism:**

___ The claim is that if physicalism is true, then if you know everything expressed or expressible in explicitly physical language, you know everything.

[Question]:

___ Can we claim that every object and every event is a physical object and a physical event while at the same time deny that a complete physical language can explain everything?

Namely: Can we have the following distinction [Liu]:

Weak Physicalism[WP]

(i) Every object and event in our world is a physical object and a physical event in the sense that there is nothing that is not governed by physical laws.

Strong Physicalism[SP]

(i) WP.
(ii) Every event and property in our world is either explicable in terms of physical laws, or explanatorily reducible to physicalistic explanation.

*** On Mary's Knowledge:**

Jackson's Claim:

___ Mary does not know all there is to know.

___ The trouble for physicalism is that, after Mary sees her first ripe tomato, she will realize how impoverished her conception of the mental life of *others* has been *all along*. She will realize that there was, all the time she was carrying out her laborious investigations into the neurophysiologies of others and into the functional roles of their internal states, something about these people she was quite unaware of.

[Question]: Do you agree that Mary lacks a certain knowledge about facts of the world?

§ Three Clarifications

[A] The knowledge argument does not rest on the dubious claim that logically you cannot *imagine* what sensing red is like unless you have sensed red. (It is that, as a matter of fact, she *would not know*.)

[B] The intensionality of knowledge is not to the point. The argument does not rest on assuming falsely that, if S knows that *a* is *F* and if $a = b$, then S knows that *b* is *F*. ___ Endowing her with great logical acumen and persistence is not in itself enough to fill in the gaps in her knowledge.

[C] The knowledge Mary lacked is *knowledge about the experiences of others*, not about her own.

§ Objections and Jackson's Reply

(i) Churchland's formulation of the knowledge argument:

- (1) Mary knows everything there is to know about brain states and their properties.**
 - (2) It is not the case that Mary knows everything there is to know about sensations and their properties.**
- Therefore, by Leibniz's law:**
- (3) Sensations and their properties \neq brain states and their properties.**

*** Jackson's Reply:**

___ The whole thrust of the knowledge argument is that Mary does not know everything there is to know about brain states and their properties, because she does not know about certain qualia associated with them. What is complete, according to the argument, is her knowledge of matters physical.

*** Jackson's Reformulation of the knowledge argument:**

- (1) Mary (before her release) knows everything physical there is to know about other people**
- (2) Mary (before her release) does not know everything there is to know about other people (because she learns something about them on her release).**
- (3) Therefore, there are truths about other people (and herself) which escape the physical story.**

(ii) David Lewis' Objection:

___ What Mary acquires when she is released is a certain representational or imaginative ability; it is *knowledge how* rather than *knowledge that*.... She knew all that there was to know about the experiences of others beforehand, but lacked an *ability* until after her release.

*** Jackson's Reply:**

___ (i) Her representational abilities were a known constant throughout.

___ (ii) What Mary acquires on her release is *factual* knowledge about the experiences of others.

§ DISCUSSION QUESTION:

___ **If Jackson is against physicalism, is he then a dualist?**

___ **Why does he take the approach emphasizing on a "knowledge gap" if he is against the ontology of physicalism?**

___ **Has Jackson's knowledge argument really prove that physicalism is false?**