

PHI 1500: Major Issues in Philosophy

Session 16

November 2nd, 2015



Philosophy of Mind: Jackson

➤ Let's recap the dialectic so far over *the mind-body problem*.

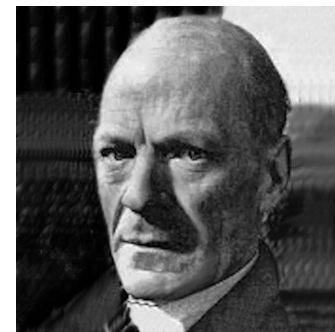
Descartes defended *substance dualism*,

- the view that the mind is so distinct from the body that they must be made of different substances,
 - one physical (res extensa) and one non-physical (res cogitans)

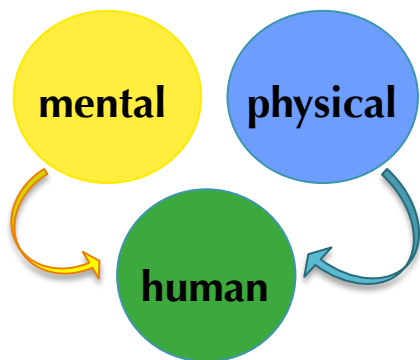


Ryle argued in favor of *behaviorism*,

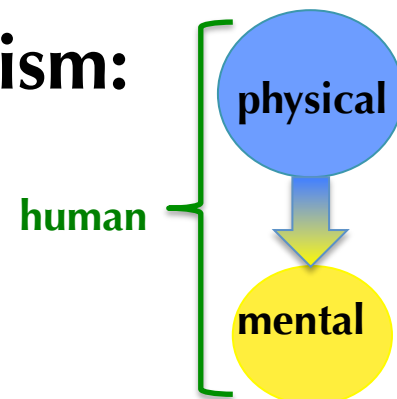
- a type of physicalism which says that minds are part of the physical world,
 - specifically, the part of human behavior that sets us apart from robots & philosophical zombies.



dualism:

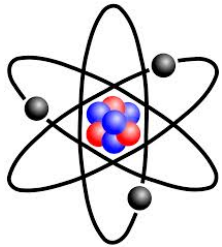


physicalism:

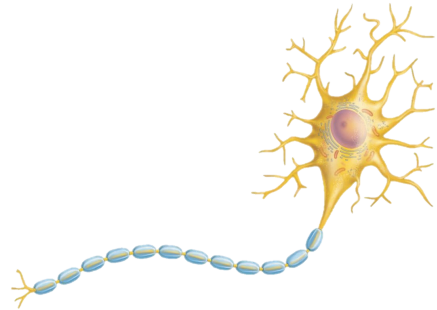


Frank Jackson (1943-present) is well known for a *thought experiment* about Mary the neuroscientist,

- used in what is called the *Knowledge Argument against physicalism*.



The version of *physicalism* Jackson opposes says that
» **everything that exists and occurs in our world**
– including our minds – can be explained by “physical facts”,



- i.e., facts about the entities described by physics (objects, molecules, atoms, subatomic particles...),
- and facts about principles of interaction between those entities (attraction/repulsion, collisions, electric currents, etc.)

» It predicts that empirical facts gathered through science will tell us everything we need to know to understand how minds work.

- E.g., once we know all the physical facts about how color vision works, we will be able to explain everything that could be said about seeing colors.



Jackson believes that a physicalist view of the mind fails to explain *qualia*:

- *the qualitative aspects of our everyday experiences,*
 - like “the hurtfulness of pains, the itchiness of itches, pangs of jealousy”, the sour taste of a lemon, the scent of a rose, the sound of a trumpet (1)
 - *How do we put these qualities into words?*
 - *How can scientific methods capture what these things are like?*



- He says:
 - **“Tell me everything physical there is to tell about what is going on in a living brain,**
 - the kind of states, their functional role, their relation to what goes on at other times and in other brains, and so on & so forth,
 - ...[but] **you won’t have told me about” why all these qualia exist,** and why certain objects have the qualia they do. (1)



Jackson & other “qualia freaks” provide this argument against physicalism:

- 1) If there are facts about the mind beyond physical facts about the world, then physicalism is false.
 - 2) “Nothing you could tell of a physical sort captures the smell of a rose, for instance.
-
- 3) Therefore, physicalism is false.” (1)



➤ Premise 2) implies that the smell of a rose is *not* a physical fact about the world, so it affirms the antecedent of premise 1).

- That makes this argument a *Modus Ponens*.

- Jackson explains:

- “By our lights this is a perfectly good argument,”

- because premise 2 seems obviously true to them.

- *But*, “There are, unfortunately for us, many who do not find the premise intuitively obvious.

- The task then is to present an argument whose premises are obvious to all, or at least to as many as possible. “ (2)

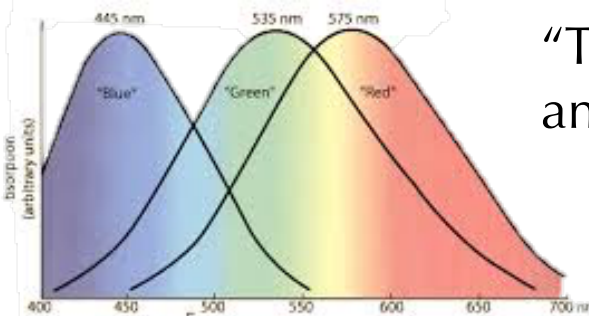
- **Jackson wants to make this argument more *persuasive*,**

Jackson aims to persuade all his readers that qualia cannot be explained by physical facts, using two *thought experiments*.

Thought Experiment #1: Fred

- “Fred has better color vision than anyone else on record;
 - he makes every discrimination that anyone has ever made, and moreover he makes one that we cannot even begin to make.” (2)
- *perceptual discrimination* = reliably detecting the difference between very similar qualia (like the flavors of lemon & lime)
 - “Show him a batch of ripe tomatoes and he sorts them into two roughly equal groups & does so with complete consistency.
 - We ask Fred how he does it.
 - He explains that all ripe tomatoes do not look the same color to him, and in fact that this is true of a great many objects that we classify together as red.
 - **He sees two colors where we see one**, and he has in consequence developed for his own use two words ‘red₁’ and ‘red₂’ to mark the difference.” (2)



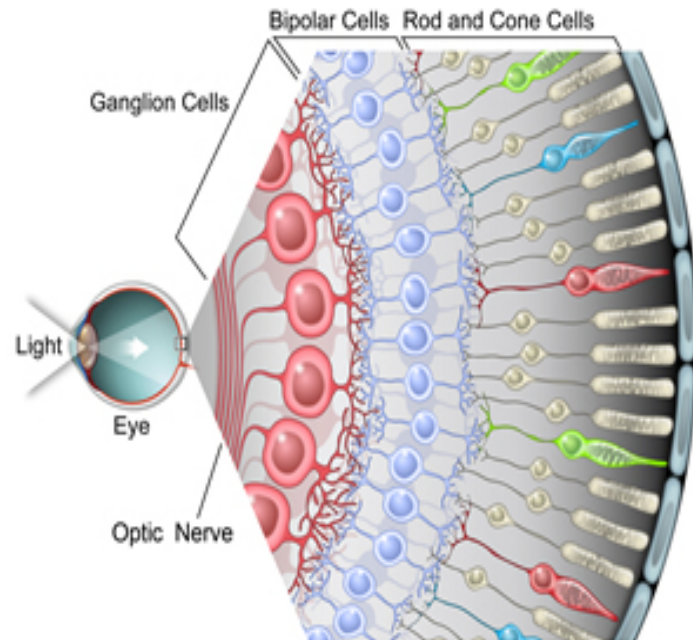


“To [Fred] red_1 and red_2 are as different from each other and all the other colors as $yellow$ is from $blue$.

- And his discriminatory behavior bears this out:
- he sorts red_1 from red_2 tomatoes with the greatest of ease in a wide variety of viewing circumstances.” (2)

- “Moreover, an investigation of the physiological basis of Fred’s exceptional ability reveals that

- Fred’s optical system is able to separate out two groups of wavelengths in the red spectrum as sharply as we are able to sort out yellow from blue.”



➤ The thought experiment asks us to imagine that there is a scientific explanation for *why* Fred can tell the difference between red_1 and red_2 , but we cannot.

Jackson asks,

➤ **“What kind of experience does Fred have when he sees red_1 and red_2 ?**
What is the new color or colors like?

– We would dearly like to know but do not; and it seems that *no amount of physical information about Fred’s brain and optical system tells us.*” (3)

- Suppose that we know “everything about Fred’s body, his behavior and dispositions to behavior and about his internal physiology,
- and everything about his history and relation to others that can be given in physical accounts of persons.

» **We have all the physical information.”**

- **But we do not know what it is like** for Fred to be able to tell red_1 and red_2 apart from one another.

» “...[So,] **knowing all this is not knowing everything about Fred.**

» It follows that **physicalism leaves something out.**” (ibid.)

➤ Jackson’s claim is that ***Fred’s experience of the qualia of red_1 and red_2 is not a physical fact.***

- In Ryle’s terminology, *Fred’s experience is part of the secret life of his mind*, and is not accessible to us using scientific methods.



Thought Experiment #2: Mary



- » “**Mary** is a brilliant scientist who is, for whatever reason, forced to investigate the world from a black & white room, [educated through black & white books and through lectures relayed on black & white television]...monitor.
 - **She specializes in the neurophysiology of vision**
 - **and acquires...all the physical information there is to obtain** about what goes on when we see ripe tomatoes, or the sky, and use terms like ‘red’, ‘blue’, and so on.” (3)

- “...she learns everything there is to know about the physical nature of the world.
- She **knows all the physical facts** about us and our environment” (3)
 - “If physicalism is true, she knows all there is to know.
 - » For to suppose *otherwise* [that there *is* something she doesn’t know] is to suppose that *there is more to know than every physical fact*,
 - » and *that is what physicalism denies.*” (3)

Jackson asks,

- “What will happen when Mary is released from her black & white room or is given a color television monitor?
 - *Will she learn anything or not?*”



– He answers: “It seems just *obvious* that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it.”

» E.g., she will learn *what it is like to see red*.

» Therefore, there is something one can know about colors which is *not a physical fact*.

- (Otherwise she should have known all along what red would be like, since she knew all the physical facts.)

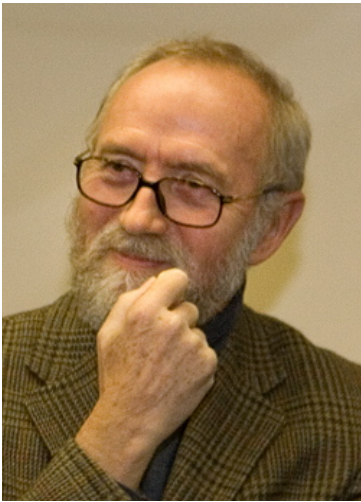
➤ Jackson thinks it is intuitively obvious that Mary *acquires new knowledge* about colors when she sees them for the first time.

- But different philosophers disagree about whether Mary would really learn something new upon her release,
- or whether she could have inferred what colors would be like by applying all of her physical knowledge of how color vision works.

» **video:** bit.ly/1GyjsJu

The 'Knowledge Argument' against Physicalism:

- "If Mary learns something new when she sees red for the first time,
 - "then it is inescapable that her previous knowledge was incomplete:



- **Mary did *not* know all there is to know [about color vision, a mental phenomenon].**
- **But she had *all* the physical information."**
 - Physicalism (as Jackson understands it) says that the physical information provides all the knowledge we could have about color vision.
 - "*Ergo* there is **more knowledge to have than that, and physicalism is false.**" (4)

In the format of the original argument,

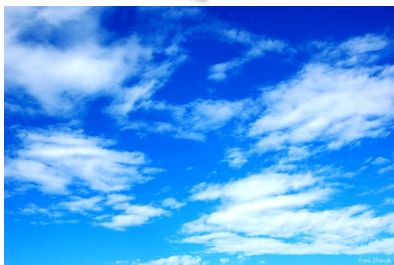
- 1) If there are facts about the mind beyond physical facts about the world, then physicalism is false.
- 2) *Mary's new knowledge of what red is like is not a physical fact.*
- 3) Therefore, physicalism is false." (1)





Jackson explains:

- ***“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.
- All along their experiences (...got from tomatoes, the sky...) had a feature conspicuous to them but until now hidden from her.”



Jackson is expressing a worry that

- **someone who tries to understand how minds work using only scientific methods** of investigation
- **would *miss something important*** about our mental lives.

Jackson makes some clarifications about what he takes to be the point of The Knowledge Argument:

- “When I complained that all the physical knowledge about Fred was not enough to tell us what his special color experience was like,
 - **I was not complaining that we weren’t finding out what it is like to *be* Fred.**
 - I was complaining that there is something *about* his experience, a property of it, of which we were left ignorant.
 - And if and when we come to know what this property is we still will not know what it is like to *be* Fred, but we will know more *about* him.” (4)
- » In short, **knowing that there is something it is like for Fred to distinguish between red_1 and red_2**
- » **is *not* the same as experiencing that difference ourselves, as if we were Fred.**
 - ...but then, *what is it like for us to know what it is like for Fred?*



Also,

- “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.
 - Powers of imagination are not to the point.
- **The contention about Mary is *not* that**, despite her fantastic grasp of neurophysiology and everything else physical, **she *could not imagine* what it is like to sense red;**
 - **it is that, as a matter of fact, she *would not know*.**
- But if physicalism is true, she would know [what red is like];
 - and no great powers of imagination would be called for.
 - Imagination is a faculty that those who *lack* knowledge need to fall back on.” (5)
 - **Jackson insists that the truth of physicalism entails** (*makes true by logical deduction*) **that every single fact about the mind could be known** by a super-smart neuroscientist.
 - *One might object that Jackson makes a Strawman of physicalism.*
 - » Physicalism could be true even if no human being can know every single physical fact that explains the mind.



Jackson presents three *objections* against the Knowledge Argument, made by **Paul Churchland**.



We'll focus on **Objection 1**:

➤ *Jackson equivocates between two meanings of "knowledge"*.

- Churchland views the Knowledge Argument as an application of *Leibniz's Law*:
 - (LL = if two things differ in properties, then they cannot be identical)



- 1) Mary *knows* everything there is to know about **brain states** and their properties,
- 2) Mary *does not know* everything there is to know about **sensations** and their properties.



-
- 3) Therefore, **sensations** and their properties \neq **brain states** and their properties.
 - 3) basically restates Jackson's claim that knowledge of what red is like is *not a physical fact*.
 - If it were a physical fact, Mary should know it, according to the thought experiment.

– Churchland thinks this argument is fallacious,

- because premises 1 & 2 refer to *two different types of knowledge*.

Churchland distinguishes between two types of knowledge:

- **knowledge *by acquaintance***: gained through immediate experience, without requiring any inferences from prior knowledge.
 - e.g.: my knowledge that this classroom is unusually dark because some of the lights don't turn on.
- **knowledge *by description***: gained by inference from other known facts.
 - e.g.: my knowledge that next class must be our 17th session, since today's is the 16th.

Churchland thinks Jackson equivocates in his use of "knowledge",

- because knowing scientific facts about vision is *knowledge by description*,
- while knowing what it is like to see red is *knowledge by acquaintance*.



16. November 2nd

Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"
and "What Mary Didn't Know"
(excerpts)

David Lewis & Laurence Nemirow give a similar *objection*:

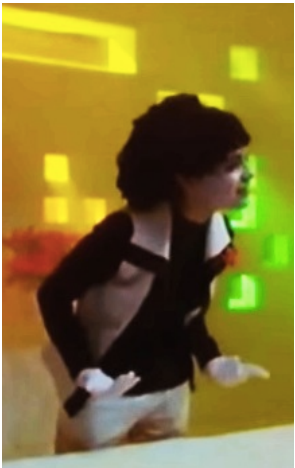
- “...on her release *Mary does not learn something or acquire knowledge in the relevant sense.*
- **What Mary acquires** when she is released is a certain representational or imaginative ability;
 - it is ***knowledge how***, rather than ***knowledge that***.
 - One ***knows how*** to perform a skill,
 - » like *tying one’s shoes, making a free-throw, baking a pie*
 - One ***knows that*** some proposition is true.
 - » E.g., I know that *Baruch is in Manhattan.*



- **According to Lewis & Nemirow,**
 - “a physicalist can admit that *Mary acquires something* very significant of a knowledge kind...without admitting that this shows that her earlier factual knowledge is defective.
 - **She knew all *that there was to know* about the experiences of others beforehand, but lacked *an ability* until after her release.” (7)
 - Once she had seen red, she *knew how* to tell red apart from other colors, to recall what it looks like, to imagine red objects, etc.**

Jackson's replies to these objections:

- ***Churchland's summary is a Strawman of the Knowledge Argument,***
 - which is not about “the kind, manner, or type of knowledge Mary has, but *what* she knows.”
 - What she knows beforehand is...*everything physical* there is to know,
 - *but is it everything there is to know?* That is the crucial question.” (7)
- ***In response to Lewis & Nemirow:***
 - Mary's shock at seeing red for the first time indicates that she is surprised to discover that
 - the facts about color vision that she could *not* acquire from her neuroscientific studies were knowledge that, not knowledge how.
 - “I grant that I have no *proof* that Mary acquires on her release, as well as abilities, *factual knowledge* about the experiences of others...”
 - » (Mary is just made-up: we don't know what would actually happen to someone in her situation.)
 - **“My claim is that the knowledge argument is a valid argument from highly plausible, though admittedly not demonstrable, premises to the conclusion that physicalism is false.”** (8)



Yet *another objection* comes from **Barbara Montero**:

- **Jackson begs the question** (*assumes the truth of his conclusion in his premises*) by claiming that *what it's like to see red is not a 'physical fact'*.



- If he's using 'physical fact' to denote *the kinds of things one can learn via science*,
 - » then knowing what red is like is *not* a physical fact according to the *current* body of knowledge established by science,
 - » but *perhaps it could* fit into the body of knowledge gathered by scientists *in the future*, after the right technology has developed.
- Also, if you instead think of 'physical facts' as *everything about the world that depends upon or results from physical processes*,
 - » then knowing what red is like *could be* a physical fact.



- Patricia Churchland will defend the idea that neuroscience can and eventually will be able to explain why things have the qualia they do.
 - Just because science hasn't gotten there yet *isn't* a reason to believe that it's *impossible* for science to ever explain qualia.

Jackson's rejection of physicalism makes his view a **property dualist** answer to the mind-body problem.

- Like Descartes, he thinks that the **mind & body are fundamentally different**,
- but unlike Descartes, **he *doesn't* think they must be different substances**.
 - He thinks it is enough to distinguish between them on the basis of their difference in *properties*,
 - (hence the label *property dualist*).

➤ Jackson believes that:

- **Physical properties can be discovered through the *objective* methods of science.**
- **But mental properties can only be understood *subjectively*, through first-hand experience.**

