

# PHILOSOPHY 101

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# LEWIS'S DEFENSE OF PHYSICALISM

# WHAT THE PHYSICALIST NEEDS

- Tell us why doesn't Mary know what it is like to see color if she knows all the physical information?
  - Explain what changes about Mary when she leaves the room
  - Deny that any new *fact* is learned

# LEWIS ON WHAT IT IS LIKE

## EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER

*They say that experience is the best teacher, and the classroom is no substitute for Real Life. There's truth to this. If you want to know what some new and different experience is like, you can learn it by going out and really having that experience. You can't learn it by being told about the experience, however thorough your lessons may be. Does this prove much of anything about the metaphysics of mind and the limits of science? I think not. (Lewis, 262)*

## PHYSICALISM & MATERIALISM

### Physicalism:

Everything that is or could exist is ultimately physical in nature

### Minimal Materialism:

Any two possibilities that are just alike physically are just alike—  
there is no difference without a physical difference

## INFORMATION

- Thinking is of ways the world might possibly be
- When we gain information about the world we eliminate some (maybe all but one) of these possibilities

### Physical information:

Information about the world which helps us to eliminate physical possibilities



## PHENOMENAL INFORMATION

### The Hypothesis of Phenomenal Information (HPI):

Besides physical information, there is an irreducibly different kind of information—viz. information about aspects of experience

## PHENOMENAL INFORMATION & PHYSICALISM

- If HPI is true then how things are physically does not fix how things are phenomenally

*if there is a kind of information — namely, phenomenal information — that can eliminate possibilities that any amount of physical information leaves open, then there must be possibilities that are just alike physically, but not just alike simpliciter. That is just what minimal Materialism denies. (Lewis, 274)*

## MINIMAL MATERIALISM & THE MODAL ARGUMENT

1. If physicalism were true, then the complete physical information about a subject would entail an answer as to whether she was phenomenally conscious
2. But no amount of physical information about a person logically entails that a person is phenomenally conscious—i.e. phenomenal zombies are logically possible
3.  $\therefore$  Physicalism is false

- Minimal Materialism denies premise (2)
- What about the Knowledge Argument?

## PHENOMENAL INFORMATION & PHYSICALISM

*The Knowledge Argument works. There is no way to grant the Hypothesis of Phenomenal Information and still uphold Materialism. Therefore I deny the Hypothesis. I cannot refute it outright. But later I shall argue, first, that it is more peculiar, and therefore less tempting, that it may at first seem; and, second, that we are not forced to accept it, since an alternative hypothesis does justice to the way experience best teaches us what it's like. (Lewis, 277)*

## INFERENCE TO THE BEST EXPLANATION

- We should always accept the explanation that is simplest and incurs the fewest oddities
- Lewis argues that the best explanation of Mary's change is one which does not appeal to HPI

# THE ABILITY HYPOTHESIS

## KNOWING THAT VS. KNOWING HOW

- *Knowing that* is propositional
  - You know that ...
    - $2 + 2 = 4$
    - the sky is blue
    - Lincoln is the capitol of Nebraska
- Propositional knowledge is of, or corresponds to, facts in the world

## KNOWING THAT VS. KNOWING HOW

- *Knowing how is not propositional*
  - You know how ...
    - to tie your shoes
    - to knit a sweater
    - to shoot a free throw
- Knowing how to ... is not propositional, there are no facts to which "know how" corresponds



## LEWIS'S STRATEGY

- The Knowledge Argument presupposes that the best way to explain the change in Mary after she leaves the room is in terms of what it is *that* she knows
  - Assumes what Mary knows after leaving is *propositional*

- Perhaps a better explanation is one which describes what she *knows how to do* after leaving the room
  - Perhaps what Mary comes to know isn't propositional knowledge but *know how*

## PHENOMENAL ABILITIES

*The Ability Hypothesis says that knowing what an experience is like just is the possession of these abilities to remember, imagine, and recognize. It isn't the possession of any kind of information, ordinary or peculiar. It isn't knowing that certain possibilities aren't actualized. It isn't knowing-that. It's knowing-how. (Lewis, 288)*

- Learning "what it is like" to experience something is not learning a new bit of propositional knowledge, it is learning how to:
  - remember
  - imagine
  - recognize

## LEWIS'S ARGUMENT

1. The only relevant alternative to the Ability Hypothesis (AH) is the Hypothesis of Phenomenal Information (HPI)
2. HPI is incompatible with physicalism
3. AH is both compatible with physicalism and explains everything that HPI explains
4.  $\therefore$  We should choose AH over HPI

- If Lewis is correct then there is no such thing as phenomenal information
  - There is no propositional knowledge ('knowledge-that') about experience or what it is like to have an experience that is not propositional knowledge of the physical world
    - If Mary knows all the propositional knowledge concerning the physical world, she knows all there is to know (in the sense of 'knowing-that') about experience

## LEWIS'S INFERENCE TO THE BEST EXPLANATION

1. *The only relevant alternative to the Ability Hypothesis (AH) is the Hypothesis of Phenomenal Information (HPI)*
2. *HPI is incompatible with physicalism*
3. *AH is both compatible with physicalism and explains everything that HPI explains*
4. *∴ We should choose AH over HPI*

- Is the argument correct – is AH the *best* explanation?
- What premise might we reject?
  - Does AH explain everything we want to explain about phenomenal consciousness or "what it is like" to experience something?

# OBJECTIONS TO THE ABILITY HYPOTHESIS



## THE DEFINITION

- AH says that "knowing what it is like" consists in having a set of practical abilities
  - $KWL \rightarrow \{\text{Rem}, \text{Imag}, \text{Rec}\}$  (abilities are *necessary* for KWL)
  - $\{\text{Rem}, \text{Imag}, \text{Rec}\} \rightarrow KWL$  (abilities are *sufficient* for KWL)

## OBJECTING TO A DEFINITION

- Can we develop a counterexample to the Ability Hypothesis?
- Two possible cases
  - Case where KWL to  $X$  but cannot Rem, Imag, Rec  $X$
  - Case where Rem, Imag, Rec  $X$  but do not KWL to  $X$

## A NECESSARY CONDITION?

- Imaginative abilities aren't *necessary* for knowledge of what it is like to experience color
  - Couldn't a subject with no capacity to imagine what it's like to see green nevertheless see the greenness of grass when confronted with it?

## A SUFFICIENT CONDITION?

- Imaginative abilities aren't *sufficient* for knowledge of what it is like to experience color
  - There seems to be an important difference between *having* the ability to imagine the requisite experience, and actually *exercising* that ability

