

# Philosophy 101

## Lewis & Block on Consciousness

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Philosophy 101

Lewis & Block  
on  
Consciousness

Lewis Against  
the Knowledge  
Argument

Block on The  
Function of  
Consciousness

Consciousness  
& Abnormal  
Psychology

## Lewis Against the Knowledge Argument

## 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
  - Deny that any new fact is learned

## 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*

## Lewis's Strategy

- 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

- 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 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  $\therefore$  We should choose AH over HPI

# Objections to the Ability Hypothesis

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



# Objections to the Ability Hypothesis

- 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

# Objections to the Ability Hypothesis

- 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?

# Objections to the Ability Hypothesis

- 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

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## Block on The Function of Consciousness

# Consciousness — What, Why, & How

- Distinguish three questions:
  - ① What is consciousness (what is its nature)?
  - ② Why is there consciousness (what is its function)?
  - ③ How could there be beings with consciousness (given assumptions about what kinds of things there could be)?

# The “Target Reasoning” Concerning Functions of Consciousness

- Consciousness has a function
- We can find out what the function of consciousness is by studying the cognitive psychology of patients with specific cognitive impairments or abnormalities

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# Consciousness & Abnormal Psychology

# Two Kinds of Abnormal Psychology

- Blindsight
- Epileptic Seizure
  - 'petit mal' or 'absence' seizure



## Blindsight

*Blindsight is a syndrome involving patients who have brain damage in the first stage of visual processing, the primary visual cortex. These patients seem to have "holes" in their visual fields. If the experimenter flashes stimuli in these holes and asks the patient what was flashed, the patient claims to see nothing but can often guess at high levels of accuracy, choosing between two locations or directions or whether what was flashed was an X or an O (Block, 278)*

## Blindsight



Figure: The Blindsighted Patient

## Blindsight

- 'Blindsighted' patients lack consciousness (in some sense) of regions of their visual field but have a better than chance ability to discriminate objects in those "blind" parts of the visual field

## Absence Seizures

*In such cases [of epileptic seizure], electrical disorder leads to a loss of function in the higher brain stem...As a result the patient suffers a loss of conscious experience in the phenomenal sense although he can continue to react selectively to environmental stimuli*

## The Function of Consciousness

- ① Abnormal psychological conditions, such as blindsight and “absent” seizures, may indicate the function of consciousness
- ② When consciousness is missing under such conditions, subjects cannot
  - A. report or reason about the relevant nonconscious representations, nor use them in guiding action
  - B. exhibit flexibility and creativity in their thought and action
- ③ ∴ Consciousness enables information represented in the brain to be used in reasoning, reporting, and rationally guiding action
- ④ ∴ Consciousness promotes flexibility and creativity in thought and action