

Philosophy 101

Lewis & The Knowledge Argument

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The Knowledge Argument

The Metaphysical Version of the Knowledge Argument

- ① Mary knows all the physical facts regarding color/color vision
- ② But there are some facts about color/color vision which Mary doesn't know prior to her release
- ③ \therefore There are non-physical facts concerning color/color vision
- ④ \therefore Physicalism is false

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?
 - Deny that any new fact is learned
 - Explain what changes about Mary

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

Physicalism: Everything that is or could exist is physical or depends on the physical

'Minimal Materialism': Any two possibilities that are just alike physically are just alike—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

- Why doesn't Mary know what it is like to see color if she knows all the physical 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)

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
 - Jane knows that ...
 - $2 + 2 = 4$
 - the sky is blue
 - Lincoln is the capitol of Nebraska
- propositional knowledge is of facts in the world

Knowing That vs. Knowing How

- “Knowing how” is *not* propositional
 - Jane knows how ...
 - to tie her shoes
 - to knit a sweater
 - to shoot a free throw
- knowing how to ... is not propositional, there are no facts 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*

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

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)

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 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

Lewis's Argument

- 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 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
- Is the argument valid? Sound?
 - What premise might we reject?

Objections to the Ability Hypothesis

- Imaginative abilities aren't *necessary* for knowledge of what it is like to experience color
- Imaginative abilities aren't *sufficient* for knowledge of what it is like to experience color