

Philosophy 101

Lewis on the Knowledge Argument

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The Knowledge Argument

The Metaphysical Version of the Knowledge Argument

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- 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?
 - Explain what changes about Mary
 - 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

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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

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

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

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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 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 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

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

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- 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

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- Is the argument valid? Sound?
 - 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

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

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 still 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

Logic Review

Arguments

Statement: an expression that has a truth value

Argument: A statement or sequence of statements (truth claims called 'premises') which logically support the truth of some further statement (a truth claim called a 'conclusion')

Kinds of Argument

Deductive Argument: the conclusion follows from the premises
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Abductive Argument: the conclusion is the best explanation of
the truth of the premises

Features of Good Arguments

Valid Argument: An argument whose structure *guarantees* that, if the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true

Sound Argument: An argument which is (i) valid and (ii) has true premises

Valid Forms

Modus ponens: "the affirming mode"

- ① If P, then Q
- ② P
- ③ $\therefore Q$

Modus tollens: "the denying mode"

- ① If P, then Q
- ② $\sim Q$
- ③ $\therefore \sim P$

Invalid Forms

Denying the Antecedent: denying the consequent of a hypothetical by denying the antecedent

- 1 If P, then Q
- 2 $\sim P$
- 3 $\therefore \sim Q$

Invalid Forms

Affirming the Consequent: Accepting the antecedent of a hypothetical by accepting the consequent

- 1 If P, then Q
- 2 Q
- 3 \therefore P

Common Fallacies

Straw Man: Purposely misrepresenting a view so that it can be more easily attacked or criticized

Begging the Question: Attempting to prove the truth of a statement by using that very statement as evidence

Relations between Statements

Consistency: two or more statements are *consistent* when it is possible for all the statements to be true, without equivocation, at the same time

Inconsistent Relations between Statements

Contradiction: a relation between two statements such that when one is true the other is false

Contrary: a relation between two statements such that both statements cannot be true at the same time, though they can both be false

Argument Extraction

- Is there an argument being made?
- What's the conclusion of the argument?
- What support does the conclusion have?
- What material is essential to the argument and what is extraneous?
- Is the argument valid?
- Is the argument sound?

Argument Extraction

Argument Evidence Markers

- as
- because
- but
- if
- for
- from
- since

Argument Extraction

Argument Conclusion Markers

- hence
- so
- then
- therefore
- thus

Argument Extraction

It would be a miracle, a coincidence on a near cosmic scale, if a theory made as many correct empirical predictions as, say, the general theory of relativity or the photon theory of light without what that theory says about the fundamental structure of the universe being correct or “essentially” or “basically” correct. But we shouldn’t accept miracles, not at any rate if there is a non-miraculous alternative. If what these theories say is going on “behind” the phenomena is indeed true or “approximately true” then it is no wonder that they get the phenomena right. So it is plausible to conclude that presently accepted theories are indeed “essentially” correct.

Argument Extraction

- ① If a scientific theory yields accurate observational predictions, then it must be (at least approximately) true.
- ② Many of our scientific theories yield accurate observational predictions.
- ③ \therefore Many of our scientific theories must be (at least approximately) true; otherwise, the success of science would be miraculous (modus ponens, 1, 2).

Two Kinds of Consciousness

Phenomenal Consciousness: A mental state with “experiential properties” that constitute “what it is like” to experience something

- A state is P-conscious if it has experiential properties
 - We have P-conscious states when we see, hear, smell, taste, and have pains
- The totality of the experiential properties of a state are “what it is like” to have it

Two Kinds of Consciousness

Access Consciousness: A mental state that is poised for free use in reasoning and for direct “rational” control of action and speech.

- understands mental states in terms of information and its transfer, not what it is like to have or be in a mental state
 - believing that the desk is brown on the basis of seeing that the desk is brown
 - Perception of visual form on the basis of belief or suggestion

Block on a Confusion Concerning Consciousness

- The concept <consciousness> is a 'mongrel' in the sense that it is ambiguous between a number of different and independent notions of being 'conscious'

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- ④ \therefore Consciousness promotes flexibility and creativity in thought and action

On a Confusion Concerning Consciousness

The fallacy, then, is jumping from the premise that “consciousness” is missing—without being clear about what kind of consciousness is missing—to the conclusion that P-consciousness has a certain function. If the distinction were seen clearly, the relevant possibilities could be reasoned about. Perhaps the lack of P-consciousness causes the lack of A-consciousness. Or perhaps the converse is the case: P-consciousness is somehow a product of A-consciousness. Or both could be the result of something else. If the distinction were clearly made, these alternatives would come to the fore. The fallacy is failing to make the distinction, rendering the alternatives invisible. (Block, 194)

Reducing Consciousness

The “Hard Problem” of Consciousness: Why do the physical processes that characterize life result in conscious experience?

- For the physicalist, answering the ‘hard problem’ requires giving a reduction of consciousness

Nagel's "What its like" Argument

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- ③ Facts about phenomenal consciousness are accessible from only one point of view
- ④ There are phenomenal facts (i.e. facts about phenomenal consciousness)
- ⑤ \therefore Physicalism is false (or we can't understand how it could be true)

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- ② Mary learns something new about color when she leaves the room
- ③ \therefore There is some information about human color vision which Mary doesn't know
- ④ \therefore Not all information is physical information (i.e. physicalism is false)

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