

# Philosophy 101

## The Knowledge Argument (II)

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Philosophy 101

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Argument (II)

Qualia & the  
Knowledge  
Argument

Qualia &  
Dualism

## Qualia & the Knowledge Argument

## The Basic Argument

- ① Before her release from the B&W room Mary has all the physical information concerning human color vision
- 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)

## Non-Physical Information

- Mary learns about what it is like to have particular experiences, not just the physical nature of those experiences
- According to Jackson, Mary learns about qualia (i.e. the qualitative aspects of her experience)

## Questions about Qualia

- ① When Mary leaves the B&W room, does she learn something new?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
  - C. *Not sure*

## Questions about Qualia

- ② If Mary learns something new, does she learn some new, non-physical fact?
- A. Yes
  - B. No
  - C. *Not sure*

## Qualia & Color



Figure: Rothko: 'Orange, Red & Red'

## Two Versions of the Knowledge Argument

- Physicalism is compatible with there being ways of knowing physical facts that don't use physical concepts—"old facts in new guises"
  - Intuitive physics vs. mathematical physics
- Only the stronger metaphysical version of the argument is a threat to physicalism
  - Physicalism must deny the existence of any non-physical facts



# Advantages of the Knowledge Argument

- Does not make controversial assumptions about points of view or the connection between objectivity and scientific inquiry (Nagel's argument)
- Does not make controversial assumptions about conceivability and possibility (the Modal argument)

## Which Argument is Best?

- 1 Has Jackson succeeded in formulating a non-controversial argument against physicalism?

A. Yes

B. No

## Which Argument is Best?

② Which argument against physicalism do you find most convincing?

A. Nagel's 'what it is like' argument

B. The modal argument concerning 'phenomenal zombies'

C. Jackson's 'Mary' argument

D. None of the above

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## Qualia & Dualism

# Are Qualia Epiphenomenal?

**Epiphenomenalism:** Mental events/properties are caused by physical events/properties in the brain but have no causal effect on physical events/properties

- analogous to the movements of one's shadow being epiphenomena of the movements of one's body
  - movements of the shadow are determined by movements of the body not vice versa

## The Objection to Epiphenomenalism

*[qualia] are an excrescence. They do nothing, they explain nothing, they serve merely to soothe the intuitions of dualists, and it is left a total mystery how they fit into the world view of science In short we do not and cannot understand the how and why of them."*  
(Jackson, 135)

# The Objection to Epiphenomenalism

- Why think that we are in a position to understand the causal basis and nature of everything that exists?
  - Physicalism assumes that we are in a position to know the basic nature of everything that does or could exist
  - But perhaps there is reason to be humble about what we could possibly know of the natural world

## The Humility Argument

*consider the antecedent probability that everything in the Universe be of a kind that is relevant in some way or other to the survival of homosapiens. It is very low surely. But then one must admit that it is very likely that there is a part of the whole scheme of things, maybe a big part, which no amount of evolution will ever bring us near to knowledge about or understanding. For the simple reason that such knowledge and understanding is irrelevant to survival (Jackson, 135)*



## The Humility Argument

- ① Our capacity to understand the natural world depends on our evolved acquisition of various cognitive capacities
- ② The acquisition of cognitive capacities via evolution depends on their conduciveness to human survival
- ③ At least some cognitive capacities conducive to knowing the natural world are not conducive to survival
- ④  $\therefore$  At least some knowledge of the world is unavailable to us because it is not conducive to our survival

## Physicalist Optimism

- Are we being overly optimistic in thinking that our physical science is broadly complete and correct?

*The wonder is that we understand as much as we do, and there is no wonder that there should be matters which fall quite outside our comprehension. Perhaps exactly how epiphenomenal qualia fit into the scheme of things is one such. (Jackson, 135)*

## 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