

Philosophy 101

Lewis & Review of Challenges to Physicalism

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of Challenges
to Physicalism

Lewis Against
the Knowledge
Argument

Review

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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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

Reducing Consciousness

- Giving a reductive analysis of consciousness means giving a reduction of *phenomenal* not access consciousness

Nagel's "What it's like" Argument

- ① If Physicalism is true then all aspects of reality are amenable to being "given a physical account"
- ② Giving a physical account of something means giving an account that is accessible from many different points of view
- 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)

Nagel's "What its like" Argument

- Why assume that all physical facts are objective facts in Nagel's sense?
- Why assume that all objective facts are facts that are independent of any particular point of view?

Nagel's "What its like" Argument

- Are there alternative conceptions of objectivity?
 - necessary for conceivability
 - absolute, not relative to any perciever
 - independent, "there anyway"
 - not from any particular point of view

The Phenomenal Zombie 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

The Phenomenal Zombie Argument

- Premise (2) is too controversial for the argument to make any headway with defenders of physicalism

Jackson's "Knowledge" 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)

Jackson's "Knowledge" Argument

- Ambiguous use of 'information' (metaphysical v. epistemological)
- Assumes we can adequately conceive of having 'all' the relevant information about color

Lewis's "Ability Hypothesis"

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Lewis's "Ability Hypothesis"

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Lewis's "Ability Hypothesis"

- Ability to remember, imagine, and recognize is not obviously equivalent to knowing what it is like to *X*
- Is AH the best explanation available to the physicalist?