

The knowledge argument and the colour of ripe tomatoes

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ABSTRACT

The

Introduction

Biology is, writes Smart (1959: 142) “to physics as radio-engineering is to electromagnetism) except the occurrence of sensations seems to me to be frankly unbelievable.” The effect such a statement have on biologists and biologically inclined philosophers could be easily foreseen. I think it is safe to assume that Smart was wilfully provocative.

Smart’s (op cit.) and others’ works led to a “wave of reductionist euphoria” or that is how Nagel (1974: 435) puts it in his seminal paper *What is it like to be a bat*. Nagel discusses at length that chiropterology (the scientific study of bats) has to study *how it is like* how to see the world using echolocation.

Nagel was later joined by Jackson who wrote a series of papers, including *What Mary Didn’t know* (Jackson 1986). The argument furthered by the two is usually referred to as *the knowledge argument* Ravenscroft (2005: 171). Following Jackson (op cit.) , the argument goes roughly as follows:

- (A) Physicalism is the idea that the world is not only largely physical but **completely** physical. On this point Jackson (1986: 291, see his footnote 1) argues that if physicalism is true, and if you know everything expressible in a physical language, then you know **absolutely** everything.
- (B) Suppose that our world *W* is **not completely** physical. Then there is a possible world *W'* which is.
- (C) Since *W'* is completely physical, the difference between that world and our *W* must be facts that cannot be expressed in a physical language (Jackson 1986).

Now, please recall that what Smart (op cit.) regarded as unbelievable was sensations and that what Nagel (op cit.) regarded as essential (at least for understanding bats), was echolocation.

Jackson’s and Nagel’s works provoked a response by Pereboom (1994). In this note I study the papers by Jackson and Pereboom.

What Mary Didn't Know

Pereboom's analysis

Conclusions

Ravenscroft (2005: 172) reached a similar conclusion; by describing Mary's lack of knowledge as that she did not understand what other knew about red tomatoes, Ravenscroft evaded the objection to his argument described above.

References

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