

# The knowledge argument and the colour of ripe tomatoes

Sigfrid Lundberg

sigfrid@sigfrid-lundberg.se

<https://sigfrid-lundberg.se>

## 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 the world *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 were sensations** and that what Nagel (op cit.) regarded as essential was just sensations (and for understanding bats: echolocation). Jackson’s and Nagel’s works provoked a response by Pereboom (1994). Here I study the papers papers by Jackson and Pereboom. I first present Jackson’s view and then I turn to Pereboom and compare it with Jackson’s. Finally I add my own conclusions and make a brief comparison with Ravenscroft (2005: 172)

## What Mary Didn't Know

Mary's black-and-white room is a thought experiment proposed by Jackson. He has discussed it in a number of essays. I will concentrate on [Jackson \(1986\)](#), even though it is not his first treatment of the problem.

Mary is an extremely gifted neuroscientist. Since birth she has been confined to a room furnished completely in black-and-white. She has spent her whole life there, studying physiology, cognition, physics, colour, optics etc, using black-and-white books, journals and TV set. If physicalism is true she knows absolutely everything there is to know that can be formulated in a physical language. Which is everything, simpliciter. If there is more to know, then physicalism is false. Or so claims [Jackson \(1986\)](#).

Eventually she is released from her confinement, and the questions are: What did she learn when she meets the real world? In particular, what did she say when she first saw a ripe red tomato?

## 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

- Jackson, Frank, 1986. What Mary Didn't know. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 83(5), 291–295. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2026143>
- Nagel, Thomas, 1974. What Is It Like to Be a Bat?. *The Philosophical Review*, 83(4), 435–450. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183914>
- Pereboom, Derk, 1994. Bats, scientists, and the limitations of introspection. *Philosophy and phenomenological research*, 54(2), 315–329. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2108491>
- Ravenscroft, Ian, 2005. *Philosophy of mind: A beginner's Guide*, Oxford University Press
- Smart, John J. C., 1959. Sensations and Brain Processes. *The Philosophical Review*, 68(2), 141–156. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2182164>