

The Knowledge Argument against Physicalism

1. Some Terminology

Physicalism – all information is physical information
(Another possible formulation: all facts are physical facts)

Physical information - The information given by science (note: Jackson doesn't regard this as a definition, since it's somewhat vague)

A Qualia Freak – Someone who thinks that there are features of bodily sensations and perceptual experiences that no amount of physical information includes.

These features are called “*qualia*”: the hurtfulness of pain, the itchininess of itches, how it feels to be jealous, taste a lemon, etc.

2. The Knowledge Argument for Qualia

Fred – Fred can make all the color discriminations we make plus more. Show him a batch of ripe tomatoes and he'll sort them into two piles which he says are as different to him in terms of color appearance as yellow is from blue. He calls these calls “red₁” and “red₂.”

1. We can gain all the physical information about Fred that we like and we still won't know certain information about Fred: what kind of experience Fred has when he says red₁ and red₂.
2. Not all information is physical information

(This can be dramatized by imagining that Fred donates his body to science and they are able to transplant his optical system into somebody else. After the operation this person will know *more* about Fred than was known before).

Mary – Mary is a brilliant scientist who has spent her whole life in a black and white room. She is an expert on color vision and neurophysiology and knows all the physical information one could possibly know about color vision. But she's never seen color. One day she leaves the room and sees a ripe tomato.

1. Prior to leaving the room Mary knows all the physical information there is to know about seeing red.
2. Prior to leaving the room Mary doesn't know what it's like to see red.
3. Not all information is physical information.

3. The Zombie Argument

1. There is a possible world in which there are beings who are physical duplicates of us but they don't have any conscious experiences (they are zombies).
2. Facts about our conscious experience are not physical facts about us.
3. Not all facts are physical facts.

Jackson thinks this argument is not as good as his because one might reject premise (1).

4. Epiphenomenalism

A problem for non-physicalism: plausibly, our conscious experiences cause various physical events (the pain causes me to say 'ouch', the thirst causes me to reach for the water). But we have good reason to think that the physical world is "causally closed" – all physical events that are caused at all are caused by and explained by other physical events.

As a result many dualists (non-physicalists) are *epiphenomenalists* – they think that conscious experiences don't have causal powers. Some people think this is absurd. Why?

(1) It's just obvious that, say, pain causes pain behavior

Response: All that's obvious is that pain is frequently followed by pain behavior. But that's consistent with both being effects of some underlying process. (Movie analogy).

(2) The unpleasantness of pain is an evolutionary adaptation to bring about avoidance behavior. If the experience of pain is causally inefficacious then natural selection couldn't act upon it.

Response: Jackson denies that the qualia associated with pain were naturally selected for. Polar bears were selected who had warm coats. Warm coats happened to be heavy. But the heaviness of the coat wasn't selected for.

(3) The problem of other minds – we use people's behavior to infer facts about their mental life. If their experiences weren't causing their behavior this inference would be illegitimate.

Response: A can be evidence for B even if B doesn't cause A. Reading in the newspaper that the Spurs won is evidence that the Spurs won, but the newspaper's report didn't cause the Spurs to win. Rather both were brought about by a common cause.

5. Jackson's Reflections on Physicalism

Jackson thinks physicalism is an overly optimistic view of our cognitive powers. Insofar as our minds have evolved to solve very specific problems, why think we'd end up with the ability to comprehend everything there is to comprehend about the universe?

Sea slug analogy

"Consider the antecedent probability that everything in the Universe be of a kind that is relevant in some way or other the survival of *homo sapiens*. 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" (135).

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24.00 Problems of Philosophy
Fall 2019

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