

BEING MARY

1. BACKGROUND

Jackson's knowledge argument

- **Mary** is an omniscient colour scientist, who knows every scientific fact about colour.
- She's locked up in a **black and white room**.
- When **released from the room**, she experiences red for the first time.

ARGUMENT

- Mary knows all the physical facts
- She learns something new upon release, i.e. *what it is like to experience red*, so she did not know all the facts.
- If physicalism says all facts are physical, **physicalism must be false!**

2. DENNETT'S REPLY

Biting the bullet

- Dennett (1991): Mary **does not learn something new** when she leaves the room, as she already knows all possible facts.
- Difficult to accept on intuitive level, but this is because it is **hard to imagine what it means to know all the physical facts**.
- Dennett (2005): **RoboMary**: robot that puts herself into a red-experiencing state by using data from a red-experiencing simulation of itself.
- This works because there is **no distinction** between:
 - the full facts about **'what one would say and how one would react'**, and
 - the full facts about **'what it is like.'**

3. SOME PHYSICALIST ALTERNATIVES

Saving non-physicalist intuitions

- **Churchland** (1985, 1990): **ABILITY HYPOTHESIS**
Mary does not gain factual knowledge, but acquires a new ability or skill.
- **Crane** (2003): **SUBJECTIVE FACTS**
Subjective facts exist. They are "*facts the learning of which requires that one has certain kinds of experience, or occupies a certain position in the world.*" Mary acquires such subjective facts upon release. This poses no threat to physicalism, as physicalism should not be taken to imply objectivism: there are no further non-physical objects or properties at play in subjective facts.
- **Beaton** (2005): **COGNITIVE ARCHITECTURE**
Mary's lower-level discriminatory mechanisms necessarily subserve her higher-level abstract reasoning systems, due to her (human) cognitive architecture. Learning propositional facts does not suitably affect these mechanisms. Mary cannot alter these parts of her brain herself & simulating these changes does not put her own brain in the suitable state.

4. PHYSICALISM

Ontological vs. epistemological thesis

- Physicalism should be understood as a **metaphysical thesis**:
- There are no non-physical objects or properties: "everything is physical" ("no skyhooks!"), once you know all physical facts, you've fixed the entire reality: "everything supervenes on the physical."
 - In one word: "**monism**"!

Physicalism should NOT be understood as an epistemological thesis, as "objectivism":

- Facts can be subject-/viewpoint-dependent (e.g. indexical facts, and phenomenal facts should be thought of in the same way)
- Our cognitive architecture shapes the way in which we know the (physical) world. This leaves room for (epistemological) subjectivism.
- Knowledge extends beyond propositional description of the facts of physics: other (subjective) descriptions can and do exist.

5. PHYSICALISM AND SUBJECTIVISM

Consequences for Dennett's account

DENNETT'S ACCOUNT

- **As an ontological thesis, it is OK**: Complete knowledge of "what one would say and how one would react" can indeed provide a complete description of the mind in general and phenomenal experience in particular.
- **As an epistemological thesis, it is not**: Having this propositional knowledge does not actually realize the corresponding cognitive state.

WHY NOT? Because you cannot simply move from the epistemological to the ontological level.

- Consider the case of **pain**: knowing that having a pain in your leg amounts to, does not make your leg hurt.

- **Knowing what gives Superman the ability to fly, does not enable you to fly**. As a human being, you can never have what it takes to fly – you have to be from Krypton to have that ability. Maybe it would be possible to have suitable surgery – but in the context of the Mary-experiment, that would count as cheating.



6. BEING MARY

Why "knowing what it's like" is really "being"

Story so far:

- Knowing does not imply being. Knowing dispositions in propositional terms does not actually establish these dispositions in the cognitive subject.
- Different epistemological (subjective) takes on the same reality can exist.

Remaining question: **Once one has been put in the right dispositional state to experience red (including lower-level discriminatory capacities), what kind of knowledge is "knowing what it is like to see red"?**

- Not propositional knowledge
- Not skill-type knowledge (contra ability hypothesis): Does nothing to explain the phenomenal character of the experience. Secondly, it cannot clearly be separated from one's propositional abilities.

Enactive solution (e.g. Noë, 2005):

- This is not **knowing** at all! It is a case of **being** in the right sort of interaction with a red object.
- Experiencing red is a complex series of dispositions one has when interacting with something red.
 - This is what "knowing what it is like" amounts to.

The 'redness itself' is not just inaccessible by introspection, there is no such thing/property that can be known! The 'redness of red' refers to the series of dispositional states that one is in when interacting with a red object.

Implication: ineffability explained

Someone who has experienced red before, is in no better position to know what it is like than Mary-in-the-room is. Actually, Mary can do a better job at it, because she knows all possible verbal reports that line up with someone describing red.

When we say we "know what it is like" to see red, we just mean that we have been in a series of dispositional states that occur when interacting with something red. We do not know anything more than Mary-in-the-room does. This explains the ineffability of phenomenal experience.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This approach

- Is compatible with **Dennett's main Ryleian / dispositionalist line**: saying that you "know what it is like to see red" ultimately refers to dispositions.
 - Is compatible with an **ontological physicalism/monism**.
- BUT**
- "Seeing red" refers to a complex and interactive **succession of dispositions**, not just one state of the brain that could easily be 'copied' into Mary's brain.
 - One has to actually **be in** this succession of dispositional states to experience red. A cognitive subject that knows all physical facts has dispositions that are completely different from those of a subject experiencing red. **Knowing does not imply being**.
 - "**Knowing what it is like to see red**" is **not knowing at all**. It either refers to the experience itself (which requires being) or to the fact that one has been confronted with a red object before.



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