



Philosophy of Mind

The knowledge argument

Chapman University. PHIL340. Lecture 7. 9/21/2021.

Kelvin McQueen

W3 discussion board feedback

▶ Argument 2:

- ▶ Can materialists just agree?
 - ▶ We cannot know what it is like to be a bat because we cannot have bat neural networks.
 - ▶ Science can't tell us about the weather in 600BCE, doesn't mean we can't reductively explain the weather.
- ▶ Can we (someday) know what it is like to be a bat, simply by fully understanding physical bat-brain processes?
- ▶ Can we (someday) make ourselves more like bats than Nagel thinks, and then come to know what it is like to be them?

▶ Argument 3:

- ▶ Why can't we have an objective definition of subjective points of view e.g. by objectively defining everything that is unique about a system's sensory apparatus?
- ▶ Experiencing someone's point of view \neq understanding someone's point of view?
- ▶ Why assume we have 100% objective definitions of anything?

▶ Argument 1:

- ▶ Perhaps we just don't yet know what conscious states do, to *now* be able to define them by "functional roles"?

W4 discussion board posts: due (9/25)

- ▶ **Post 1:** In your own words, explain why Jackson thinks the knowledge argument against materialism is superior to (one of) Nagel's three arguments. Then, explain whether you agree with Jackson, and why. 200-300 words.
- ▶ **Post 2:** Provide constructive feedback to a post on another student's thread. 150-250 words.

Assignment Rubric Details

Discussion Board Posts				
Criteria	Ratings			Pts
Post 1 Response to prompt	5.0 pts Excellent The post clearly answers the prompt, demonstrates understanding of the reading, and illustrates independent thinking.	3.0 pts Adequate The post attempts to answer the prompt, demonstrates partial understanding of the reading, but lacks independent thinking.	1.0 pts Inadequate Does not provide clear answer to the prompt and does not demonstrate understanding of the reading.	5.0 pts
Post 2 Constructive feedback	5.0 pts Excellent The post responds clearly to another student's post, offers constructive ideas, and is respectful.	3.0 pts Adequate The post attempts to respond to another student's post, but lacks either constructive ideas or respectful language.	1.0 pts Inadequate Does not respond to another student's post in way that demonstrates thoughtfulness.	5.0 pts
				Total Points: 10.0

Frank Jackson (1943-)

- ▶ Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Australian National University (ANU).
- ▶ Wrote *Epiphenomenal Qualia* (1982), one of the most widely discussed philosophy of mind papers.
 - ▶ **Subsequent literature:** [Brie Gertler's Encyclopedia entry](#).
 - ▶ **Podcast:** [Jackson on Philosophy Bites](#).
 - ▶ **Music video:** "[What Mary Didn't Know](#)"
- ▶ Structure of paper:
 - ▶ Section I:
 - ▶ The knowledge argument against materialism.
 - ▶ Section II:
 - ▶ Comparison with "the modal argument" (Nagel's Argument I).
 - ▶ Section III:
 - ▶ Comparison with "the what it is like argument" (Nagel's argument 3).
 - ▶ Section IV:
 - ▶ A defense of a form of dualism known as *epiphenomenalism*.



Jackson's definition of physicalism/materialism

- ▶ All information is physical information.
 - ▶ Physical information:
 - (1) Information given in terms of physical, chemical, and biological sciences.
 - (2) What is *included* in the information in (1) e.g. functional roles.
 - ▶ Phenomenal information:
 - ▶ Examples:
 - The hurtfulness of pains.
 - The itchiness of itches.
 - What it is like to feel hunger, feel jealousy, taste a lemon, smell a rose, see red, etc.
 - ▶ Consequence of physicalism:
 - ▶ Phenomenal information must be *included* in physical information.

Information *inclusion*

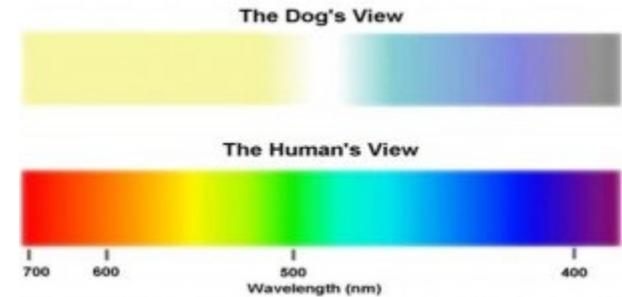
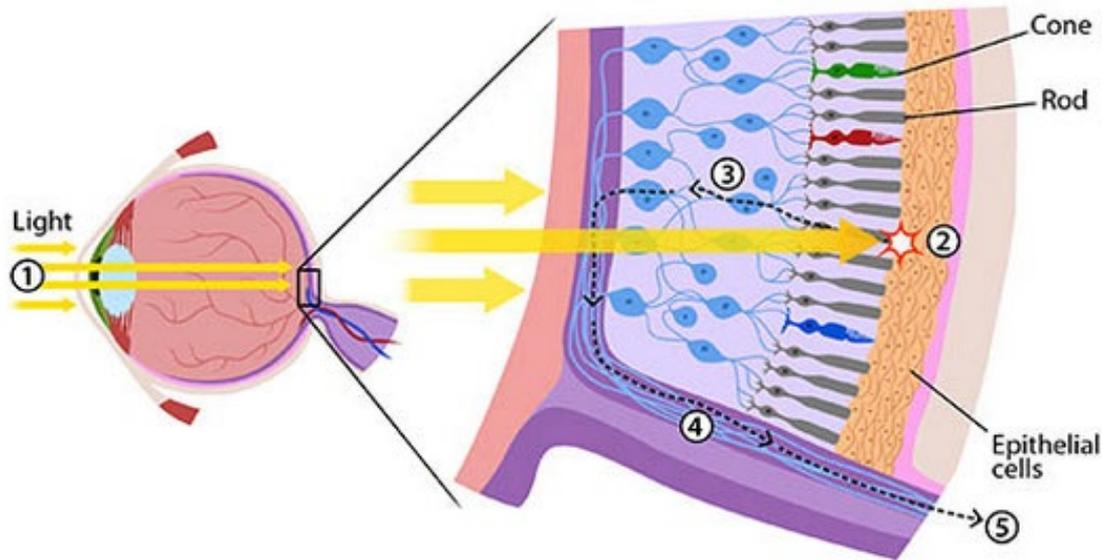
▶ Examples:

- ▶ Smith is 70kg and Jones is 80kg
 - ▶ Includes:
- ▶ Smith weighs less than Jones.
- ▶ There are particles arranged table-wise.
 - ▶ Includes:
- ▶ There is a table.

▶ Jackson will argue:

- ▶ Physicalism is false because phenomenal information is *not included* in physical information.

Physical information about color vision

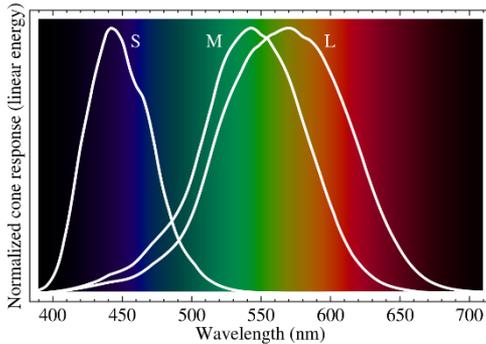


- ▶ **Retina:** light sensitive portion of the eye located in the back of the inside of the eyeball.
- ▶ **Cone:** light sensitive cell which detects color.
- ▶ **Rod:** light sensitive cell that detects motion in dim light.

- ▶ Dogs have 2 types of cone cells (dichromacy), tuned to violet and yellow-green. Dogs have 1/10th the cones of humans.
 - ▶ Red, green, and yellow all appear yellow.
- ▶ Dogs have rod-dominated retinas.
 - ▶ Superior night vision.
 - ▶ Superior motion visibility.

Trichromacy and Tetrachromacy

▶ Trichromacy (“three colors”)



*Short-wave (S)
Middle-wave (M)
Long-wave (L)*



Concetta Antico

“The grocery store is a nightmare. It's like a trash pile of color coming in at every angle. People find it extraordinary that white is my favorite color, but it makes sense because it is so peaceful and restful for my eyes. There is still a lot of color in it, but it's not hurting me.”

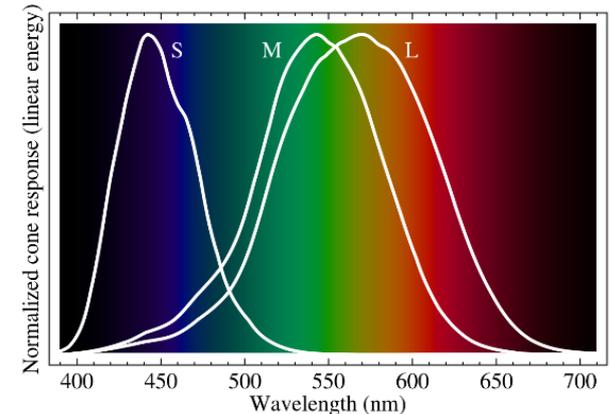
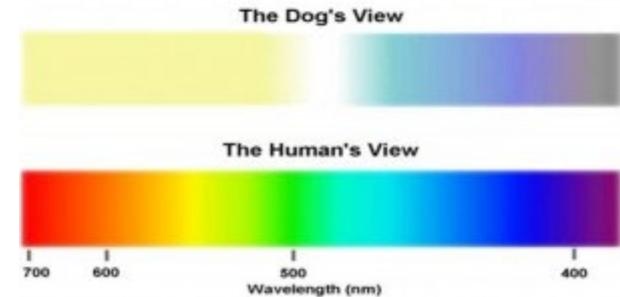
▶ In a 2010 study, the first human tetrachromat (with an additional cone-type) was confirmed.

▶ Jackson's (1982) “Fred” thought experiment anticipated tetrachromacy.



The Fred thought experiment

- ▶ Fred distinguishes red_1 from red_2 and thinks we are red_1 - red_2 colour-blind.
- ▶ It is found that Fred's optical system separates two groups of wave-lengths in the red spectrum as sharply as ours is able to separate out yellow from blue.
- ▶ To know what it is like for Fred to see red_1 and red_2 surfaces, we need to surgically implant additional cones in ourselves.
 - (1) Before the surgery, we have *all* physical information (about Fred's optical system).
 - (2) After the surgery, we learn *new* information (regarding what it is like to distinguish $\text{red}_1/\text{red}_2$).
 - (3) Therefore, not all information is physical information.
 - (4) Therefore, physicalism is false.



The Mary thought experiment

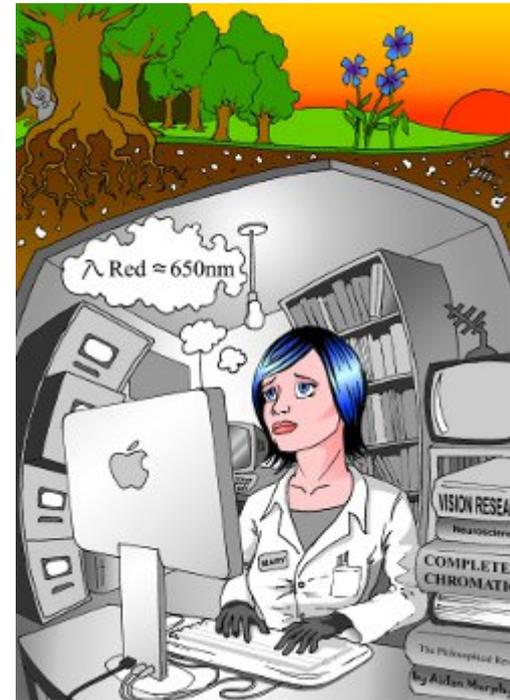
- ▶ Mary is a brilliant scientist forced to investigate the world from a black and white room.
- ▶ From black and white text and film, she acquires all physical information (about the human optical system).
- ▶ When she finally leaves the room, she sees a rose, and acquires information about what it is like to see red.

(1) Before leaving the room, Mary has *all* physical information (about the human optical system).

(2) After leaving the room, Mary learns *new* information (regarding what it is like to see red).

(3) Therefore, not all information is physical information.

(4) Therefore, physicalism is false.



Comparison with the modal argument

- ▶ Nagel's premise (2) in Argument I:
 - ▶ (2) Any reductive definition of the mental is logically compatible with the absence of subjective experience.
- ▶ Jackson's critique:
 - ▶ “The trouble [...] is that it rests on a disputable modal intuition. [...] Some sincerely deny that there can be physical replicas of us in other possible worlds which nevertheless lack consciousness”.
- ▶ Does Jackson's knowledge argument have an advantage over Nagel's argument?
- ▶ Does it provide a basis for justifying the modal (logical compatibility) intuition?

Comparison with the “What it is like to be” argument

▶ Nagel’s argument 3:

- (1) Conscious mental states are essentially defined in terms of what it is like *for a being* to be in that state, and so, a *subjective point of view*.
- (2) Materialist reduction requires that conscious mental states be defined *objectively* i.e. so they don’t depend on a subjective point of view.
- (3) Therefore, materialist reductions fail to explain conscious mental states.

▶ Jackson’s critique:

- ▶ The knowledge argument is *not* about what it is like *to be* Fred.
- ▶ So, it is not about knowledge of *subjective points of view*.
- ▶ It’s about knowledge *of a given property* of Fred’s experience.
- ▶ Even if we come to know what it is like to see the extra colors, we still may never know what it was like *for Fred* to see them.
- ▶ Physicalists and dualists alike should agree that we cannot know what it is like to be someone you are are not.
- ▶ “It is hard to see an objection to physicalism here. Physicalism makes no special claims about the imaginative powers of humans”.

What theory of consciousness follows?

- ▶ Princess Elisabeth is often credited as the first to pose *the causal closure argument for physicalism*:
 - (1) Conscious events have physical effects.
 - (2) All physical effects are fully caused by purely physical events.
 - (3) Hence, conscious events are identical to physical events.
- ▶ Jackson thinks that premise (1) is weaker than (2), and so adopts *epiphenomenalism*.
 - ▶ Certain properties of mental states (their qualitative aspects or “qualia”) are *epiphenomenal*: they have no causal effects in the physical domain.