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1 Jackson's Knowledge Argument

Here's a section of the Jackson article containing one of the versions of the knowledge argument:

Mary is a brilliant scientist who is, for whatever reason, forced to investigate the world from a black and white room via a black and white television monitor. She specializes in the neurophysiology of vision and acquires, let us suppose, all the physical information there is to obtain about what goes on when we see ripe tomatoes, or the sky, and use terms like red, blue, and so on. She discovers, for example, just which wavelength combinations from the sky stimulate the retina, and exactly how this produces via the central nervous system the contraction of the vocal chords and expulsion of air from the lungs that results in the uttering of the sentence The sky is blue. What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a color television monitor? Will she learn anything or not? It seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it. But then is it inescapable that her previous knowledge was incomplete. But she had all the physical information. Ergo there is more to have than that, and Physicalism is false.

A natural way to present the argument is as follows (from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy):

1. Mary has all the physical information concerning human color vision before her release.
2. But there is some information about human color vision that she does not have before her release. [Namely: Information about what it feels like to see color]
3. Therefore, not all information is physical information. (1,2)

Just in case that doesn't sound too radical, consider this version of the argument:

1. Mary knows all of the physical facts concerning human color vision before her release.
2. There are some facts concerning human color vision which mary does not know before her release. [Namely: facts about what it's like to see color]
3. Therefore, there are non-physical facts concerning human color vision. (1,2)

1.1 Supervenience

One helpful way of putting the debate between dualists (like Jackson) and physicalists is in terms of supervenience. A class of facts F *supervene* on a class of facts G just in case there can be no differences in the F -facts without differences in the G -facts. Examples:

- The aesthetic facts about a painting (e.g., that it is beautiful) supervene on facts about the arrangement of the paint
- Facts about who won a baseball game supervene on facts about how many runs the teams scored.

- Facts about what programs a computer is running supervene on facts about the state of its hardware (e.g., facts about where the current is flowing)

Some questions about supervenience:

- For some class of facts F , must the F -facts supervene on the F -facts?
- If the F -facts supervene on the G -facts, may/must the G -facts supervene on the F -facts?
- If the F -facts supervene on the G -facts, and the G -facts supervene on the H -facts, may/must the F -facts supervene on the H -facts?

Dualists like Jackson think that mental facts *do not* supervene on physical facts. According to Jackson, there could be two possible worlds exactly alike in their physical facts, but differing in their mental facts. Physicalists like Caruthers think that mental facts *do* supervene on physical facts—according to Caruthers, any two possible worlds in which the same physical facts hold are worlds in which the same mental facts hold.

2 Epiphenomenalism

Caruthers offers the following argument that mental facts are identical with physical facts:

1. Some conscious states and events are causally necessary for the occurrence of some physical ones.
2. In a completed neuro-physiological science there will be no need to advert to anything other than physical-physical causality.
3. So some conscious states and events are (are identical with) physical (brain) states and events. (1,2)

Is this argument valid? Which premise would Jackson deny? (The title of this section of the handout is a hint). Which premise would Descartes deny (from lecture, not section)? Is the resulting position that Descartes ends up with a plausible one? What about Jackson?

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