

## Mary's Room and the Knowledge Argument

### 1. Background

Very roughly, physicalism is the thesis that everything that exists is physical. Put another way, all the facts about the world are physical facts.

Physical facts are supposed to be understandable in the vocabulary of the physical sciences. Behaviorism, the type-identity theory, and functionalism are all supposed to be physicalist theories of the mind.

The knowledge argument is supposed to show that physicalism as a thesis is mistaken (and thus any theory of the mind that based on it is bound to fail).

### 2. The argument

- (1) In her room, Mary knows all the physical facts pertaining to color vision.
- (2) After she leaves her black and white room and sees something red, she comes to know something new: *what it's like to see red*.
- (3) So: After Mary leaves her room, she comes to know a non-physical fact.
- (4) So: Physicalism is false.



### 3. Replies

#### Reply 1:

- Mary acquires new abilities when she leaves her room (she can remember the color red, imagine it, discriminate it from other colors, and so on)
- We need to distinguish knowing-that from knowing-how
  - I know *that* bikes usually have two wheels
  - I know *how* to ride a bike
- Knowing what it's like is knowing-how, not knowing-that, and that's no problem for physicalism

#### Reply 2:

- When Mary leaves her room, Mary acquires a range of new concepts for color experiences, ones that she lacked inside her room. She can only have these concepts by having the experiences; that's just how our brains are wired
- Once she has the concept, she can recognize the experience of red directly when she has it again, she can imaginatively regenerate it
- These concepts enable her to come to know new facts. But she only comes to know new fine-grained facts, but not new coarse-grained ones. Consider: Hesperus/Phosphorus, Superman/Clark Kent, ZB/I

- And this is no problem for physicalism: just as it can be true that my nature is physical—that the concept “I” applies to a wholly physical being—so also it can be true that the nature of the experience of red is physical. The concept EXPERIENCE OF RED that Mary gets when she sees red applies to a purely physical state

Reply 3:

- There is a kind of knowledge you can't get by reading books: knowledge by acquaintance
- Knowledge by acquaintance is not factual knowledge (knowledge-that). It is *objectual* knowledge
- Inside her room, Mary knows a number of facts about the experience of red, but she doesn't know the experience of red
- When Mary leaves her room, she comes to know red by experiencing it firsthand

