19 Postscript on Qualia

Frank Jackson

Suppose I undertook to tell you everything there is to know about where some object is at each and every time. Could you in principle deduce all there is to know about that object's motion? If the at-at theory of motion is true, the answer is yes. But the at-at theory of motion is an empirical claim about the nature of motion in our world. It is not properly a claim about the concept of motion. I argue for this (and for a similar position for a number of other examples) in detail in chapter 10 [of *Mind, Method, and Conditionals*], "Metaphysics by possible cases," but we can put the key point very quickly. The *precise* nature of what we are talking about when we talk about motion is unclear. We are in a kind of 'best candidate situation', to borrow a term from discussions of personal identity. If there is an intrinsic property of objects that genuinely explains, and so is distinct from, their being at different places at different times, and which plays all the roles we centrally associate with motion, then that property *is* motion; but if there is no such property, then an object's being at different places at different times is all that that object's motion comes to.

This means that whether or not we can deduce all there is to know about motion—*our* motion, motion as it is in our world—from all there is to know about positions at times depends on an empirical fact about what our world is like. The deduction is possible just if the at-at theory's candidate for motion is the best candidate for motion in our world. I now think that the same is true for qualia and, more generally, the sensory side of psychology. In some worlds, its nature cannot be deduced in principle from the full account of the physical nature of that world, but in other worlds, including ours, it can. The redness of *our* reds can be deduced in principle from enough about the physical nature of our world despite the manifest

appearance to the contrary that the knowledge argument trades on. This is why I now think that the knowledge argument fails.

Why do I think that the sensory side of psychology, as it is constituted in our world, is deducible in principle from enough about the world's physical nature? Our knowledge of the sensory side of psychology has a causal source. Seeing red and feeling pain impact on us, leaving a memory trace which sustains our knowledge of what it is like to see red and feel pain on the many occasions where we are neither seeing red nor feeling pain. This is why it was always a mistake to say that someone could not know what seeing red and feeling pain is like unless they had actually experienced them: false 'memory' traces are enough. This places a constraint on our best opinion about the nature of our sensory states: we had better not have opinions about their nature which cannot be justified by what we know about the causal origin of those opinions. Now the precise connection between causal origin and rational opinion is complex, but for present purposes the following rough maxim will serve: do not have opinions that outrun what is required by the best theory of these opinions' causal origins.[1] Often it will be uncertain what the best theory is, or the question of what it is will be too close to the question under discussion for the maxim to be of much use. But in the case of sensory states, the maxim has obvious bite. We know that our knowledge of what it is like to see red and feel pain has purely physical causes. We know, for example, that Mary's transition from not knowing what it is like to see red to knowing what it is like to see red will have a causal explanation in purely physical terms. (Dualist interactionism is false.) It follows, by the maxim, that what she learns had better not outrun how things are physically.

Toward the end of chapter 5 [of *Mind, Method, and Conditionals*, reprinted as chap. 1 in this vol.], "Epiphenomenal qualia," I point out that a report in one newspaper may be good evidence for a similar report in another newspaper without its being the case that one report causes the other. This is true but, I now think, does not blunt the force of the argument just rehearsed. As noted in that essay, the reason we are entitled to hold that the reports are similar depends on our knowing inter alia that they have a common cause, namely, the event being reported on. But we know this only because of the way reports in newspapers in general impact on us. The fundamental point remains that our entitlement comes back to causal impacts of the right kinds.

I now think that the puzzle posed by the knowledge argument is to explain why we have such a strong intuition that Mary learns something about how things are that outruns what can deduced from the physical account of how things are. I suggest that the answer is the strikingly atypical nature of the way she acquires certain relational and functional information. Suppose that you want to know on landing in Chicago if the weather is typical for this time of year. A good deal of collecting and bringing together of information is required. The same goes for information about functional roles. To know that a certain way of driving is dangerous, or that a certain drug slows the progression of AIDS, requires bringing together information from disparate sources. However, the most plausible approach for physicalists to sensory experience sees it as a striking exception to the rule that acquiring this kind of information requires collation. The most plausible view for physicalists is that sensory experience is putative information about certain highly relational and functional properties of goings on inside us. As it is often put nowadays, its very nature is representational: it represents inter alia certain highly relational and functional facts about what is happening to us. If this is right—and I have nothing to add to the detailed arguments by those physicalists who came to the position decades ahead of me—sensory experience is a quite unusually 'quick and easy' way of acquiring highly relational and functional information. (And evolutionary considerations tell us why we might have acquired this ability to access quickly and easily certain sorts of highly relational and functional information.) Sensory experience is in this regard like the way we acquire information about intrinsic properties—typically, we get the information that something is round more quickly and easily than the information that it is the second largest object in the room. In consequence, sensory experience presents itself to us as if it were the acquisition of information about intrinsic nature. But, very obviously, it is not information about intrinsic *physical* nature, so the information Mary acquires presents itself to us as if it were information about something more than the physical. This is, I now think, the source of the strong but mistaken intuition that Mary learns something new about how things are on her release.

I still think though that we should take seriously the possibility that we know little about the intrinsic nature of our world, that we mostly know its causal cum relational nature as revealed by the physical sciences. I hope and believe (on Occamist grounds) that this kind of 'Kantian' skepticism is

mistaken, but I think that the reflections at the end of ["Epiphenomenal Qualia"] have to be taken seriously. But even if a large part of the intrinsic nature of our world is beyond our epistemic reach, the nature we know about supervenes on the mostly functional cum relational nature that the physical sciences tell us about. The considerations at the end of ["Epiphenomenal Qualia"] can be no reason to hold that Mary learns something new about how things are on her release, but rather that there may (*may*) be a lot about fundamental nature that we and she can never know.

Note

1. For something less rough, see Frank Jackson and Robert Pargetter, "Causal Origin and Evidence," *Theoria* 51(1985): 65–76.

20 Mind and Illusion

Frank Jackson

Much of the contemporary debate in the philosophy of mind is concerned with the clash between certain strongly held intuitions and what science tells us about the mind and its relation to the world. What science tells us about the mind points strongly toward some version or other of physicalism. The intuitions, in one way or another, suggest that there is something seriously incomplete about any purely physical story about the mind.

For our purposes, we can be vague about the detail and think broadly of physicalism as the view that the mind is a purely physical part of a purely physical world. Exactly how to delineate the physical will not be crucial: anything of a kind that plays a central role in physics, chemistry, biology, neuroscience, and the like, along with the a priori associated functional and relational properties, count, as far as we are concerned.

Most contemporary philosophers, when given a choice between going with science and going with intuitions, go with science. Although I once dissented from the majority, I have capitulated and now see the interesting issue as being where the arguments from the intuitions against physicalism—the arguments that seem so compelling—go wrong.[1] For some time, I have thought that the case for physicalism is sufficiently strong that we can be confident that the arguments from the intuitions go wrong somewhere—but where is somewhere?

This essay offers an answer to that question for the knowledge argument against physicalism. I start with a reminder about the argument. I then consider one popular way of dismissing it and explain why I am unmoved by it. The discussion of this way delivers a constraint that any satisfying physicalist reply to the knowledge argument should meet. The rest of the essay gives the answer I favor to where the knowledge argument goes wrong. This answer rests on a representationalist account of sensory