

Epiphenomenal Qualia

by Frank Jackson

Presentation by Dave Tackeff

“Physical Information”

Jackson opens his essay with a definition:

“It is undeniable that the physical, chemical and biological sciences have provided a great deal of information about the world we live in and about ourselves. I will use the label 'physical information' for this kind of information, and also for information that automatically comes along with it” (Jackson 127).

-In other words, physical information is the information that we can obtain through observation, reason, and research

Jackson Dislikes Physicalism

- Jackson proceeds to offer a definition of Physicalism: “the thesis of Physicalism that all (correct) information is physical information” (127)
- Jackson’s view: “I am what is sometimes known as a “qualia freak”. I think that there are certain features of the bodily sensations especially, but also of certain perceptual experiences, which no amount of purely physical information includes. Tell me everything physical there is to tell about what is going on in a living brain, the kind of states, their functional role, their relation to what goes on at other times and in other brains, and so on and so forth, and be I as clever as can be in fitting it all together, you won't have told me about the hurtfulness of pains, the itchiness of itches, pangs of jealousy, or about the characteristic experience of tasting a lemon, smelling a rose, hearing a loud noise or seeing the sky.” (128)
- Jackson believes there is something more to a person than the physical. He calls this “something” qualia (quale singular)

Road Map of Jackson's Argument

- I) The Knowledge Argument
- II) The Modal Argument
- III) "What it is like to be" argument
- IV) Epiphenomenal Qualia
- V) Conclusion

The Knowledge Argument against Physicalism

- Fred and the “red” tomatoes
- “We ask Fred how he does it. He explains that all ripe tomatoes do not look the same colour to him, and in fact that this is true of a great many objects that we classify together as red. He sees two colours where we see one, and he has in consequence developed for his own use two words 'red1' and 'red2' to mark the difference” (128).
- “Put it this way. After the operation, we will know more about Fred and especially about his colour experiences. But beforehand we had all the physical information we could desire about his body and brain, and indeed everything that has ever featured in physicalist accounts of mind and consciousness. Hence there is more to know than all that. Hence Physicalism is incomplete” (129)

- I) The Knowledge Argument
- II) The Modal Argument
- III) “What it is like to be” argument
- IV) Epiphenomenal Qualia
- V) Conclusion

The Modal Argument

- Other Worlds/Blade Runner Example
- “there is a possible world with organisms exactly like us in every physical respect (and remember that includes functional states, physical history, et al.) but which differ from us profoundly in that they have no conscious mental life at all. But then what is it that we have and they lack? Not anything physical ex hypothesi. In all physical regards we and they are exactly alike. Consequently there is more to us than the purely physical. Thus Physicalism is false” (130-131).
- Rooftop example (How do you know who to shoot?)

- I) The Knowledge Argument
- II) The Modal Argument
- III) “What it is like to be” argument
- IV) Epiphenomenal Qualia
- V) Conclusion

“What it is like to be” Argument

- You can't know what it's like to be a bat
- “In “What is it like to be a bat?” Thomas Nagel argues that no amount of physical information can tell us what it is like to be a bat, and indeed that we, human beings, cannot imagine what it is like to be a bat.¹⁰ His reason is that what this is like can only be understood from a bat's point of view, which is not our point of view and is not something capturable in physical terms which are essentially terms understandable equally from many points of view” (131-132).
- Fred example
- “No amount of knowledge about Fred, be it physical or not, amounts to knowledge “from the inside” concerning Fred. We are not Fred. There is thus a whole set of items of knowledge expressed by forms of words like 'that it is I myself who is . . .' which Fred has and we simply cannot have because we are not him” (132).

- I) The Knowledge Argument
- II) The Modal Argument
- III) “What it is like to be” argument
- IV) Epiphenomenal Qualia
- V) Conclusion

Epiphenomenalism

- Jackson gives us two positions held by the classic epiphenomenalist
- 1: “Mental states are inefficacious with respect to the physical world. All I will be concerned to defend is that it is possible to hold that certain properties of certain mental states, namely those I've called qualia, are such that their possession or absence makes no difference to the physical world.” (133).
- 2: “The second is that the mental is totally causally inefficacious” (133).
- Jackson supports Epiphenomenalism and proceeds to give examples to support the theory.

- I) The Knowledge Argument
- II) The Modal Argument
- III) “What it is like to be” argument
- IV) Epiphenomenal Qualia
- V) Conclusion

Thought Experiments 1 & 2

1) Causality

“To the untutored the image on the screen of Lee Marvin's fist moving from left to right immediately followed by the image of John Wayne's head moving in the same general direction looks as causal as anything...All this counts for precisely nothing when we know the over-arching theory” (133).

2) Polar Bears

“According to natural selection the traits that evolve over time are those conducive to physical survival...Polar bears have particularly thick, warm coats. The Theory of Evolution explains this (we suppose) by pointing out that having a thick, warm coat is conducive to survival in the Arctic. But having a thick coat goes along with having a heavy coat, and having a heavy coat is not conducive to survival. It slows the animal down” (134).

- I) The Knowledge Argument
- II) The Modal Argument
- III) “What it is like to be” argument
- IV) Epiphenomenal Qualia
- V) Conclusion

Thought Experiment 3

3) Spurs winning a basketball game

“Consider my reading in The Times that Spurs won. This provides excellent evidence that The Telegraph has also reported that Spurs won, despite the fact that (I trust) The Telegraph does not get the results from The Times. They each send their own reporters to the game. The Telegraph's report is in no sense an outcome of The Times', but the latter provides good evidence for the former nevertheless” (134)

“The reasoning involved can be reconstructed thus”

1) “I read in The Times that Spurs won”

2) “This gives me reason to think that Spurs won because I know that Spurs' winning is the most likely candidate to be what caused the report in The Times”

3) “But I also know that Spurs' winning would have had many effects, including almost certainly a report in The Telegraph”

Conclusion) I am arguing from one effect back to its cause and out again to another effect. The fact that neither effect causes the other is irrelevant” (134).

- I) The Knowledge Argument
- II) The Modal Argument
- III) “What it is like to be” argument
- IV) Epiphenomenal Qualia
- V) Conclusion

Conclusion

- ◎ Jackson addresses a counter-argument in the end of his essay
 - "All right, there is no knockdown refutation of the existence of epiphenomenal qualia... They do nothing, they explain nothing, they serve merely to soothe the intuitions of dualists, and it is left a total mystery how they fit into the world view of science. In short we do not and cannot understand the how and why of them.' This is perfectly true; but is no objection to qualia" (135)
 - The rooftop shooting example (How do you know who to shoot?)
- ◎ The Slugs

- I) The Knowledge Argument
- II) The Modal Argument
- III) "What it is like to be" argument
- IV) Epiphenomenal Qualia
- V) Conclusion