

Minds and Machines

spring 2003

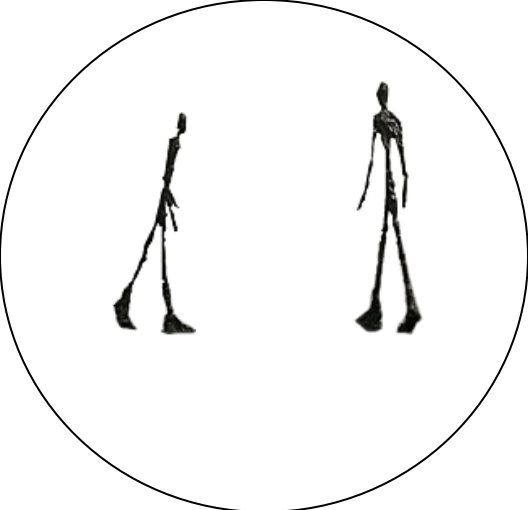
Consciousness and
its place in nature, contd.

preliminaries

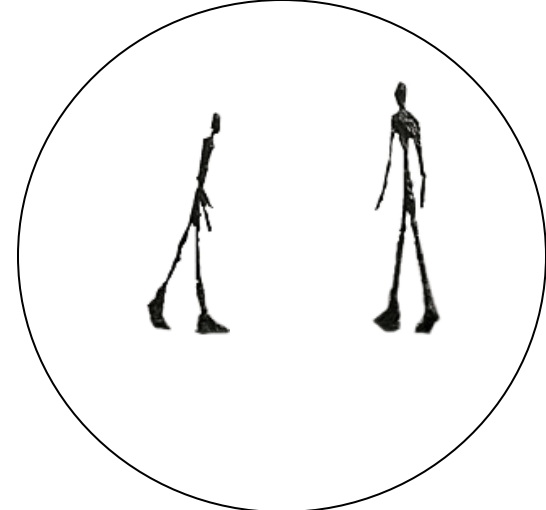
- final paper topics

“Epiphenomenal qualia” (recap)

- sets out the “knowledge argument” against physicalism
- physicalism is the thesis “that all (correct) information is physical information”
- that is, more or less, all facts are physical facts
- it’s clearer to understand physicalism as a *supervenience* thesis



physicalism

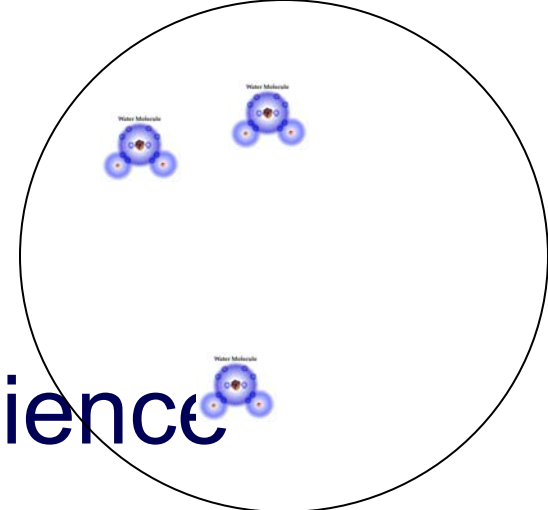
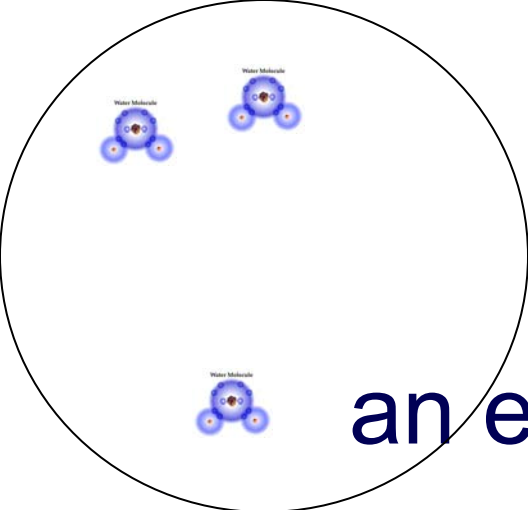


- suggestion 1
any two possible worlds exactly alike physically are exactly alike mentally
- suggestion 2
any possible world exactly alike our world (the actual world) physically is exactly alike it mentally
- the second suggestion is not quite right, but it will do for our purposes



an example of supervenience

- the supervenience of the moral on the descriptive
any possible world exactly alike our world (the actual world) “descriptively” is exactly alike it morally
(so, if in fact Alfred ought to give Alice her bananas back, in any possible world that is descriptively exactly alike this world, Alfred ought to give Alice her bananas back)



an example of supervenience

- “H₂O-ism”
any possible world exactly alike our world (the actual world) in its distribution of H₂O is exactly alike it in its distribution of water
(so, if in fact there's water in Cambridge, in any possible world that is exactly alike this world in its distribution of H₂O, there's water in Cambridge)

black-and-white Mary

- “Mary is a brilliant scientist...forced to investigate the world from a black and white room via a black and white television monitor”
- she “acquires, let us suppose, all the physical information there is to obtain when we see ripe tomatoes...use terms like ‘red’...and so on”
- “what will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room?”



“Will she learn
anything or not?”

“It just seems obvious that she will learn something about the world and our experience of it...But she had *all* the physical information.
Ergo...Physicalism is false”

the knowledge argument

- 1 imprisoned Mary knows all the physical facts
hence:
- 2 if physicalism is true, Mary (before her release)
knows all the facts
- 3 after her release, Mary *learns* something—something
she couldn't have known while imprisoned
- 4 if Mary learns something, she learns a *fact*
hence (from 3, 4):
- 5 Mary learns a fact
hence (from 2, 5):
- 6 physicalism is false

the knowledge argument

Jackson draws a further conclusion

7 our experiences have “qualia”

(“The whole thrust of the knowledge argument is that Mary...does not know about certain qualia...” (“What Mary didn’t know”))

Qualia are “certain [nonphysical] features of bodily sensations [and] perceptual experiences...the hurtfulness of pains, the itchiness of itches [etc.]”

the move from 1 to 2

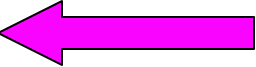
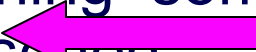

- 1 imprisoned Mary knows all the physical facts
hence:
- 2 if physicalism is true, Mary (before her release)
knows all the facts

rationale: not knowing something is not being able to decide between rival possibilities—in other words not being able to tell what possible world one is in; so if imprisoned Mary doesn't know something then she can't tell exactly what possible world she is in; but if physicalism is true she plainly *can* tell what possible world she is in, because if physicalism is true then the totality of the physical facts eliminates all possibilities but one, and she knows all the physical facts

Mary, Fred, and the bat

- “It is important to distinguish [Nagel’s argument] from the Knowledge argument”
- “I was not complaining that we weren’t finding out what it is like to *be* Fred, I was complaining that there is something *about* his experience, a property of it, of which we *were* left ignorant...No amount of knowledge about Fred, be it physical or not, amounts to knowledge “from the inside” concerning Fred”
- only Fred can know (what he would express by saying) “It is *I myself* who is...”
- but this is a bit unfair: “The point of view in question is not one accessible only to a single individual. Rather it is a *type*.” (p. 222)
- Nagel thinks we don’t know something *about* batty experience, not that we don’t know what Bill the bat knows when he says “It is I myself who is...”

resisting the knowledge argument

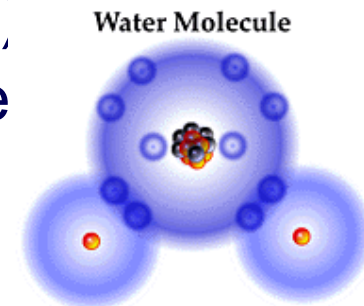
- 1 imprisoned Mary knows all the physical facts
hence: 
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- 3 after her release, Mary *learns* something—something she couldn't have known while imprisoned 
- 4 if Mary learns something, she learns a *fact* 
- hence (from 3, 4):
- 5 Mary learns a fact
hence (from 2, 5):
- 6 physicalism is false

option A: deny 1

- 1 imprisoned Mary knows all the physical facts
 - not really necessary to suppose Mary knows *all* the physical facts
 - why would you need special experiences to know some physical facts?

option B: resist the move from 1 to 2

- 1 imprisoned Mary knows all the physical facts
hence:
- 2 if physicalism is true, Mary (before her release)
knows all the facts
 - motivation: might superchemist Sally (who knows all the facts about the distribution of H₂O) still be ignorant of the fact that *water* comes out of taps?
 - yet that wouldn't show that there are two worlds alike in their distribution of H₂O that differ in their distribution of water (i.e. that "H₂O-ism" is false)
 - see Chalmers, "Consciousness and...", for a re



option C: deny 3

- 3 after her release, Mary *learns* something—something she couldn't have known while imprisoned
 - after all, it's a pretty weird case to wrap your mind around
 - “It is of course true that in any realistic, readily imaginable version of the story, Mary would come to learn something, but in any realistic, readily imaginable version she might know a lot, but she would not know everything physical” (Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*)

option D: deny 4

4 if Mary learns something, she learns a *fact*

Mary *learns*, but she doesn't learn a *fact*: rather, she acquires “know-how”, and thereby an *ability* (an ability to remember, imagine and recognize the experience of seeing something red) (See Lewis, “What experience teaches”)

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- [final paper topics](#)
- read Levine, Hill