Frank Jackson, “What Mary Didn’t Know”

Jackson is a member of the generation of Australian philosophers who were inspired by Armstrong, although the view Jackson defends here is dramatically different from Armstrong’s. Jackson has done important work in metaphysics and ethics in addition to his many contributions to philosophy of mind. His Knowledge Argument, also known as The Mary Argument, has been so influential that whole books are still written about it. Jackson splits his time between Princeton and Australian National University.

Jackson’s plan for the paper is to introduce the case of Mary, explain what exactly he thinks it shows, and then respond to the objections of Paul Churchland, another philosopher of mind from UC San Diego.

Notes:

- p. 320: Functional roles are the characteristic input/output relationships that a mental state engages in. Functional roles were very important to Armstrong, since he thought that mental states just are whatever plays the right functional role—in his case, that was causing intentional behavior. More broadly, anyone who thinks mental states are identical to whatever plays the right functional role can be called a “functionalist.”

- p. 320: “Simpliciter” is a Latin term that means “without qualification.”

- p. 320: Philosophers often find it convenient to talk about possible situations as if they were alternative worlds to our own. “Worlds” understood in this way represent all sentences that could be true or false, and each world assigns different true/false values to different sentences. If a sentence is true in all possible situations, i.e. worlds, we say it is a necessary truth, and if it is true at only some of the worlds and false at others, we say it is contingent.

- p. 320: By “intensionality of knowledge” Jackson means our concept of knowledge.

- p. 320: In philosophy, the phrase “a is F” is meant as a variable for a subject-predicate relationship, like snow is white.

- p. 321: Equivocation is a logical fallacy in which an argument capitalizes on an ambiguous term. Here’s a silly example of equivocation: John and Mary were having a picnic on the bank at the same time that the bank was robbed, therefore John and Mary must have seen the perpetrators.

- p. 321: Leibniz’s Law is a principle that says that things are numerically identical only if they share all of their qualities. If they differ, they must be distinct things.
• p. 321: “Qualia” is a term that philosophers use to talk about the qualitative nature of mental experiences, like the redness of red experiences, or the painfulness of painful experiences—in other words, qualia are what it's like to experience the color red, or the feeling of pain, etc.

• p. 322: “Ex hypothesi” is a Latin term that means “by our hypothesis.”

• p. David Lewis and Laurence Nemirow were colleagues at Princeton with Jackson.

• p. 322: The term “quale” is the singular of the plural “qualia”.

• p. 322: By “attribute dualism” Jackson means the view that we have been calling “property dualism”.

• p. 322: A parity of reasons argument is one that tries to show that the same rationale behind some inference could be used to make obviously dubious inferences, and so if the rationale is no good in those other cases, it must not work in the original case either.

Questions to think about:

1. What is the difference between Substance and Property Dualism?

2. Do you think that if Mary knows all the physical facts about what's like to see colors, then she knows everything there is to know about what it's like to see them?

3. Do you think there are facts about qualitative experience, like what it's like to see red?

Extras:

Mary Dinosaur Comics