Acquaintance, Phenomenal Concepts, and the Knowledge Argument

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What is the Knowledge Argument?

1. Mary knows all the physical facts
2. Mary doesn't know all the phenomenal facts.
3. Some phenomenal facts aren't physical facts.

This argument doesn't work:

- If physical = narrowly physical, the conclusion doesn't refute physicalism
- If physical = broadly physical, premise 1 is questionbegging.

What is the Knowledge Argument?

1. Mary knows P (the narrowly physical truths), and is an ideal a priori reasoner, but isn't in a position to know Q (a phenomenal truth).
2. If 1, P->Q is not a priori.
3. If P->Q is not a priori, physicalism is false.
4. Physicalism is false.

Can Mary Possess Phenomenal Concepts?

Alex: Mary cannot possess relevant phenomenal concepts in her room

This undermines premise 2.

Michael: Mary can possess relevant phenomenal concepts in her room

This undermines the phenomenal concept strategy

[And also Alex's missing-concept strategy?]

Who's right?

Deferential and Nondeferential Concept-Possession

 Plausibly, Mary can possess relevant phenomenal concepts *deferentially* (in virtue of deference to a linguistic community)

 But she cannot possess relevant phenomenal concepts *nondeferentially*.

Does Burge Undermine the Missing-Concept Reply?

- However, a Burgean view of phenomenal concept possession does not undermine the missing-concept reply.
- If one possesses the concepts in P->Q deferentially, one's inability to know P->Q a priori does not show that P->Q is not a priori.
 - This inference requires that one possesses the concept nondeferentially.
 - So premise 2 is still undermined, by the observation that Mary lacks a nondeferential phenomenal concept.

Does Burge Undermine the Phenomenal Concept Strategy?

- Likewise, a proponent of the phenomenal concept strategy can say that *nondeferential* possession of phenomenal concepts normally requires relevant experiences.
- It is Mary's acquisition of this new way of possessing phenomenal concepts that explains her apparent new knowledge when leaving the room.
- But this new way of possessing concepts is simply a new mode of presentation of previously known facts.
- So the phenomenal concept strategy is not undermined.

The Missing-Concept Reply

Response to the missing-concept reply:

- One can stipulate that Mary* has had relevant experiences, and possesses relevant concepts nondeferentially.
- Mary* still won't be in a position to know whether other creatures instantiate those phenomenal properties.
- So P-> Q is not a priori.

 Alex: This collapses the knowledge argument into the conceivability argument.

The Knowledge Argument and the Conceivability Argument

- Response 1: Why does the fact that KA collapses into CA entail that KA fails?
- Response 2: The result is not the paradigmatic conceivability argument, as there's no appeal to the *imaginability* of P&~Q, just the *a priori consistency* of P&~Q.
 - The negative conceivability argument, not the positive conceivability argument.
- Response 3: The knowledge argument provides an argument for the key premise of the negative conceivability argument: that it's not a priori that ~(P&~Q), I.e. that P->Q.

Combined KA/CA

- So KA and CA work together: considerations about knowledge support negative conceivability, conceivability-possibility principles do the rest.
- 1. Mary* knows P, is an ideal a priori reasoner and possesses all relevant concepts, but does not know Q.
- 2. If 1, then P->Q is not a priori, so P&~Q is ideally negatively conceivable
- 3. If P&~Q is ideally negatively conceivable, it is (1-)possible.
- 4. If P&~Q is (1-)possible, then physicalism is false.
- 5. Physicalism is false.
- The missing-concept reply does not provide grounds to reject any of the premises of this argument.

The Acquaintance Reply

- Michael: Mary's new knowledge when she leaves the room is acquaintance knowledge.
- Acquaintance knowledge is not propositional knowledge.
- So (?): Mary does not gain new propositional knowledge, and the argument fails.

Response to the Acquaintance Reply

- Maybe Mary gains acquaintance knowledge when she leaves the room, but she also gains propositional knowledge.
 - She gains knowledge *that* such-and-such is what it is like to see a tomato.
 - She still lacks knowledge *that* such-and-such is what it is like to be a tetrochromatic pigeon seeing red.

One can run the KA using this knowledge-that, setting aside acquaintance knowledge.

Counter-Responses

- A radical version of the acquaintance reply holds that Mary gains no knowledge-that, and lacks no knowledgethat
 - Implausible, and requires much more argument
 - Not Conee's view, or Michael's?

 Alternatively, the proponent may hold that this knowledge-that is knowledge of old facts under a new mode of presentation (Conee):

But this is just to embrace the old-fact/new-way reply to the KA.

Episodic Memory

 Alex: Mary's new knowledge is episodic knowledge, which is not derivable from semantic knowledge.

Response 1: This doesn't seem to get at what's crucial to the KA. Semantic knowledge that a ball moves does not suffice for episodic knowledge of the ball moving, but no-one is tempted to run a KA here.

Hypomnesic Mary

- Response 2: One can run the Mary scenario and the KA without invoking episodic memory at all.
- Consider Hypomnesic Mary (H.M.), who lacks the capacity for episodic memory.
- H.M. still knows all the physical truths, and does not know that suchand-such is what it is like to see red. Upon leaving the room, she knows that such-and-such is what it is like to see red.
- H.M. makes the key relevant advance that Mary makes. So Mary's key advance does not require episodic memory.

Conclusion

 Neither the missing-concept reply nor the acquaintance reply succeeds in refuting the KA.

To gain purchase against the KA, these replies must be combined with existing replies (with their associated problems), or with novel replies (suggestions welcome).

Older or newer thoughts needed!