

ROBERT J. HOWELL

THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT AND OBJECTIVITY

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ABSTRACT. In this paper I argue that Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument is better considered not as an argument against physicalism, but as an argument that objective theories must be incomplete. I argue that despite the apparent diversity of responses to the knowledge argument, they all boil down to a response according to which genuine epistemic gains are made when an individual has an experience. I call this the acquaintance response. I then argue that this response violates an intuitive stricture on the objectivity of theories. Therefore, the knowledge argument does show that objective theories cannot provide a complete understanding of the world. The result, however, is that both objective dualism and objective physicalism are refuted by the argument. In the end it is suggested that the notion of "subjective physicalism" is one that should be pursued.

KEY WORDS: Objectivity, Consciousness, Frank Jackson, knowledge argument, philosophy of mind, Qualia, subjectivity

1. INTRODUCTION

Whether or not the knowledge argument defeats physicalism is still a hotly contested issue. Jackson's argument has no doubt converted many to some form of property dualism, spawning an impressive cottage industry of responses intended to remove its sting. While the argument might in the end be a valuable foil to physicalism, I maintain that this should not be its main target. Instead, in a slightly modified form it should take aim on "objectivism," the view that an objective theory of the world can be complete. I argue that it succeeds in defeating that view, and that most of the

responses to the traditional version of the knowledge argument must in the end concede as much.

My argument can be summarized as follows. Despite the apparent diversity of responses to the traditional knowledge argument, under scrutiny they all depend upon what I will call the response from acquaintance. That is, they will be forced to admit that there is some epistemic gain to be achieved by actually undergoing a particular state, and that it is only by undergoing the state that such an epistemic gain can be achieved. This is so only if there are some features of the world, which cannot be fully understood objectively. In other words, any plausible response to the knowledge argument must ultimately admit that objectivism is false. This is not, however, an automatic vindication of dualism – indeed, insofar as dualism is itself an objectivist theory, the knowledge argument shows dualism to be false as well. To the degree that one can make sense of both “subjective physicalism” and “subjective dualism,” those views remain equally plausible, at least as far as the knowledge argument is concerned.

The argument will proceed as follows. In Section 2, I present the knowledge argument against objectivism, explaining why the move to objectivity is superior to focusing upon physicalism. In Section 3, I distinguish between the claim that the knowledge argument shows the falsity of objectivism and the claim that it merely shows phenomenal information to be ineffable, and provide reasons why the latter claim is not an adequate reply to the knowledge argument. In Section 4, I discuss the “intentional fallacy” response to the knowledge argument and explain why in its simplest form it is inadequate. I then briefly present the several responses to the knowledge argument – the ability response, the “hooked up” response, the phenomenal concept response, and the indexical response – all of which can be seen as refinements of the claim that it is guilty of the intentional fallacy. In Sections 5 through 8, I will show how those responses collapse in the end to the acquaintance response. In Sections 9 and 10, I explain why the acquaintance response does not defeat the

knowledge argument against objectivism, but in fact concedes its main premise. In the final section, I briefly suggest a new position on qualia made available by this construal and defense of the knowledge argument.

2. THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT AGAINST OBJECTIVISM

Jackson's thought experiment hardly bears repeating, but in a sketch, Mary is a brilliant neuroscientist (and physicist...) who has lived her life in a black and white room. During her imprisonment, she was taught through computer screens all the lessons of physics and neuroscience relevant to color experience. She knows how light reflects off objects and affects the eyes, the optic nerves, and the appropriate parts of the brain. In short, she knows all the information regarding color experience. Finally, one day she is released from her room to be presented with a rose by her apologetic captor. In seeing the red of the rose, it seems clear she will learn something new – she will learn what it is like to see red. Thus, the physical information is not all the information and physicalism is false.¹

That is the traditional version of the knowledge argument. At the outset, I wish to suggest two slight modifications. I wish to suppose that Mary has not only all the information about color experiences but also all the objective information about the world (i.e. all that can be conveyed to her through her screens and monitors).² This includes at least all the lessons of physics, biology and neuroscience. Second, I wish to change the conclusion of the argument: the objective theory of the world is incomplete. Thus, the argument now runs: before leaving the room, Mary knew all the objective information about the world. When she left the room, she gained a further understanding about the world. Therefore, all the objective information about the world is insufficient for a complete understanding of the world.

The primary reason for shifting the debate away from the more ontological talk of the physical is that it helps us get away from one of the most pervasive misunderstandings of

the knowledge argument's true force. It is natural to read the knowledge argument as calling for something non-physical to take up the slack that physical properties leave in an explanation of the world. Of course if this is the quest, the physicalists have a clear rebuke:

...if Jackson's argument were sound, it would prove far too much. Suppose Jackson were arguing not against materialism, but against dualism: against the view that there exists a nonmaterial substance call it "ectoplasm" whose hidden constitution and nomic intricacies ground all mental phenomena. Let our cloistered Mary be an "ectoplasmologist" this time, and let her know¹ everything there is to know about the ectoplasmic processes underlying vision. There would still be something she did not know²: what it is like to see red. Dualism is therefore inadequate to account for all mental phenomena!³

Of course, merely substituting some sort of psychic goo for the more conventional physical stuff will do nothing to satisfy the intuitions behind the knowledge argument.

Aside from implicitly saddling property-dualists with a substance-dualist's picture, this objection misses the point.⁴ What physicalism misses is not some type of stuff or property that when added to a list would provide a complete objective depiction of the subjective. The problem is that there are aspects of the world, which cannot receive such objective depiction, and can only be completely grasped by occupying a subjective state. The physicalist's list of properties is not inadequate because everything on the list is physical, but because the essence of some properties cannot be expressed on a list.⁵

It is worth lingering for a moment on this issue because I take it to be the key to understanding the value of construing the knowledge argument in terms of objectivity. It opens up the surprising possibility of agreeing with Churchland's criticism of the argument as traditionally presented, while still finding the knowledge argument sound. Churchland is right: if dualism, property or substance, is presenting itself as the same type of theory as physicalism – just as a sort of addendum to the conclusions of physics – then it is not only ill motivated by the knowledge argument, but is as vulnerable to it as physicalism. The knowledge argument is best conceived

as claiming that *objective* theories are in some sense incomplete, whether those theories are physicalist or dualist.

It is my view, following Nagel, that objectivity and subjectivity come in degrees, and the full development of those notions must wait. Nevertheless, I wish to suggest a necessary condition for an objective theory that will be defended later, but that will serve to put meat on the bones of the subjective/objective terminology for now.

Necessary condition for theory objectivity: An objective theory cannot require that one enter any token state of fully determinate type T in order to fully understand states of type T.

In the case at hand, an objective theory of a particular type of experience cannot require that one have a token of that type of experience in order to completely understand it. A subjective theory, to the extent that it can be called a theory at all, allows for that possibility. It is an upshot of this way of dividing the terrain that if there cannot be a complete objective theory of experiences, then God himself cannot get the complete story of the universe without having some of the states he aims to understand. He may know I am having a red quale, or something of the sort, but he will not fully understand that unless he has a red quale himself.

My version of the knowledge argument shows that any objective theory must be incomplete, and to the extent that physics is such a theory, it is incomplete. One virtue of this way of proceeding is that it highlights an oft-overlooked position that splits the difference between many dualists and physicalists. This is the view, which I will dub *subjective physicalism*, which agrees with physicalism on the material level – the world is completely physical – but nevertheless maintains that there can be no complete objective theory of experience. At the end of the day, however, the knowledge argument does not force us to choose between subjective physicalism and subjective dualism. It simply succeeds in ruling out objective physicalism and objective dualism alike.⁶

3. THE INEFFABILITY THESIS

Before the argument gets underway, I wish to distinguish the view I will defend from a close cousin that has recently gained currency.⁷ According to the Ineffability Theory (IT), qualia cannot be captured by physical description because they are ineffable. According to Byrne, for example, “the content of perception, although it can be remembered and believed, cannot be (entirely) expressed in language, and is in this sense ineffable.”⁸ Hellie advances a similar thesis, gesturing at “inexpressible concepts” that underlie phenomenal knowledge. The full nature of these positions depends in part on the notion of the concepts involved, and in part upon the relevant notion of “expressibility.” The general idea, however, is that phenomenal content is encoded in such a way that it is not as amenable to communication as typical propositional content.

While there are similarities between the view I advance here and IT, there are important differences. For one thing, IT advances a negative claim by spelling out the limitations of communication about qualia, while my view advances the positive view that acquaintance is necessary for a full understanding of qualia. Second, because of the focus on the somewhat vague notion of “expressibility,” IT seems vulnerable to various sorts of counterexamples, such as the possibility of “neuro-sight-readers” whom I will describe shortly. Finally, on my reading, the knowledge argument takes aim at the notion of a complete objective perspective on the world – a “view from nowhere” – and on the face of it, IT has no implications for the impossibility of such a perspective.

There are three reasons to be dissatisfied with IT, even as an account of the appeal of the original knowledge argument. In the first place, IT fails to provide a satisfactory and complete analysis of the intuitions behind the knowledge argument since it leaves the source of the ineffability unspecified. There are many reasons something could be inexpressible. Kant’s noumena is ineffable, because it is a condition of our experience that things be represented according to the categories implemented by our understanding. It seems likely

that some mathematical truths are inexpressible. It also seems likely that there are restrictions on the nature of our human concepts such that in principle reality outstrips them. None of these sources of ineffability seem to be relevant to the puzzling nature of qualitative experience. What is most interesting about these cases is the source of their inexpressibility, rather than the fact that they are ineffable.

According to my view, the source of the ineffability of qualitative experience is that there are aspects of the world one cannot fully understand without occupying particular subjective states. This understanding, therefore, cannot be conveyed without putting someone else in that subjective state. This ineffability is a consequence of the peculiarity of these aspects of the world, however, it is not the *explanation* of their peculiarity. It is the necessarily experiential nature of qualitative states that makes them intractable for an objective description of the world.

The second shortcoming of the Ineffability Thesis is that because of its explanatory inadequacy, whether the ineffability involved in the case of qualia is contingent or necessary is an open question. It is commonplace that our perceptual experience outstrips our concepts – language is just not fine-grained enough to get at every detail we experience. There is nothing particularly puzzling or threatening about this. The “grain mismatch” between language and the world concerns all features of the world, both mental and paradigmatically physical. Some of us may have an impressive stash of words to describe snow, but it seems possible that given our limitations we could lack an adequate language to describe the physical world in all of its subtlety. If so, this seems to be a contingent limitation of our language and our conceptual apparatus (though perhaps a necessary limitation on a language we limited creatures could use). If the IT thesis leaves open that the ineffability involved in qualia is contingent, then the thesis leaves open the question “Is a complete physical (or objective) description of the world possible?”⁹ As such, we cannot draw conclusions about the success of either version of the knowledge argument based on IT.

These first two shortcomings of IT concern its insufficiency as a solution to the knowledge argument – even after IT is accepted, we should not be satisfied until we understand the source and the (modal) scope of such ineffability. The third shortcoming is that ineffability is not necessary for the problem posed by the knowledge argument to arise, so it cannot really explain the puzzlement at the source of the argument. In this respect, the IT thesis shares something with those responses according to which Mary would be able to put herself in the appropriate states – or imagine them vividly enough – prior to her release. (She might, for example, be able to push on her eyelid and generate the sensation of red, she might dream such sensations, or her sophistication as a scientist might allow her to acquire the peculiar ability to generate a red-sensation voluntarily.)¹⁰ By focusing attention upon Mary's ability or inability to get herself in a subjective state by this or that means, these views divert attention from the crucial point: only by getting herself into such a state – no matter how – does she achieve her understanding.

To see how one can have effability while retaining the puzzle of the knowledge argument, consider the following. Some people can sight-read music and can “hear” the music in their “mind's ear,” much as we do when we have an annoying jingle stuck in our heads. As a matter of fact, this is probably a result of the sheet music allowing them to vivify memory traces, or something else similarly based on experience of the notes.¹¹ Still, we can imagine someone born with the innate ability to hear the sounds internally upon reading sheet music. It seems no less imaginable that there be individuals capable of sight-reading neuroscience: individuals hard-wired such that when confronted with descriptions or depictions of brain states, the corresponding subjective states are vivified in their “mental theatres,” much as sounds are for sight-readers. Now, suppose Mary were such an innate neuro-sight-reader. Would the knowledge argument fail? The knowledge argument against objectivity would not, but it seems the IT theorist cannot explain this. In such a case, it

would seem that the experience is expressible because the experience can be intersubjectively conveyed. This type of description is perhaps unusual in the way it elicits ideas in the minds of those who understand it, but it seems to accomplish the job of communication.¹² The result is that the IT theorist who believes that physical descriptions are incomplete cannot justify this by IT alone, and the IT theorist who wishes to explain away the allure of the knowledge argument cannot explain away the allure of the revised knowledge argument against objectivity.

Even if we were all neuro-sight-readers the mystery of phenomenal experience would remain, and any diagnosis of the knowledge argument that would deny this must be on the wrong trail. Even if these states availed themselves of a certain form of intersubjective expression, they would still have the mysterious characteristic of only being fully understood by those who undergo them, whether that undergoing be the result of communication or the more familiar sensory stimulation. This suggests that the ineffability of phenomenal experience is not the crux of the knowledge argument.

There is a final strategy that the IT theorist might employ to defuse the knowledge argument. He could concede that our inability to express the essences of phenomenal states is contingent, but maintain that this explains why Mary's case seems to have ontological implications. As philosophers performing the thought experiment, we are equipping Mary with all of the conceptual tools we can imagine, but our imaginations are limited by our contingently restricted conceptual abilities. This leads us to give the experiment more importance than it deserves.¹³

In order for this response to be plausible, it must be possible to fully understand qualia in a way that is unlike that involved in neuro-sight-reading. Otherwise the point still stands: such a way of knowing qualia would still require undergoing qualitative states. The problem is, by hypothesis we are unable to imagine any other sort of ability, lending an air of unfalsifiability to this contingency claim. This IT strategy therefore seems to be a sort of skepticism about our

modal intuitions, but surely we don't want to abandon such intuitions altogether. We would need to have special reasons to doubt them in this case, reasons which do not seem to be provided by the IT thesis.

4. THE INTENTIONAL FALLACY

By far, the majority of "Aha" responses to the knowledge argument – responses which admit there is some palpable epistemic gain Mary experiences upon her release – are ways of fleshing out the claim that it argues from epistemic premises to a metaphysical conclusion.¹⁴ Famously, Lois Lane can know Superman flies without knowing that Clark Kent flies, yet Clark Kent is Superman. Ms. Lane's inability to infer a belief about Clark Kent is a result of her ignorance that "Clark Kent" and "Superman" are two names for one fellow. Similarly, Mary fails to infer from the physical description of seeing red that it has a certain phenomenal feel, but that doesn't mean that the feeling is not physical. The computer screen is one way of knowing physical facts while experiencing them is another.

How is our argument about Mary any better than the corresponding argument about Lois and Clark? Well, though Lois Lane is a swell reporter, she is no Mary. Mary knows all the objective information about the world, while Lois doesn't even know that her colleague is Superman! Mary's objective omniscience makes the epistemic fallacy response a little harder to make. The reason for that, I maintain, is the extreme plausibility of the following conjecture:

The Ignorance Conjecture: The lack of knowledge of a true identity statement requires the ignorance of some matter of fact.¹⁵

It is difficult to provide a conclusive argument for this conjecture, but any other example of ignorance of a true identity statement confirms it. If Lois knew more about the world, she would not have Superman confusions: unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately) she doesn't know that Clark Kent shucks his business attire in telephone booths. At minimum,

every case of identity ignorance seems to depend on not knowing the fact that two representations are of the same thing. Mary knows all the objective information about the world, so how can something slip her grasp if the objective information is *all* the information? At the very least, Mary's ignorance is not like the typical case of identity ignorance, and as such, we need substantive theories about the type of ignorance she has. This is where the more refined theories of phenomenal knowledge come in: they must deny the conjecture by providing a second way of knowing "what it's like" that does not entail Mary didn't know some fact.

Ways of detailing the "two ways of knowing" (TWOK) response are abundant, and they differ in their take on the second way of knowing Mary uses when she leaves her room. The central versions of TWOK are as follows:

1. Hooking Up: Mary knew all about the phenomenal states before she left the room, but only when she left the room was she in them: she became "hooked up" the way she had always read about.¹⁶
2. Phenomenal Concepts: When Mary leaves the room, she comes to classify her experience under a phenomenal concept, which is functionally distinct from the physical concepts she learned in her room.¹⁷
3. Indexicals: The knowledge Mary gains upon leaving the room is a sort of indexical knowledge, akin to my learning that "I am Robert J. Howell" in the famous puzzles about self-reference.¹⁸
4. Acquaintance: Mary had descriptive knowledge of the states, but she became acquainted with them upon leaving the room by being in the states themselves.¹⁹

In addition to these four responses, there are two "Aha" responses to the problem that fail to fit easily into the TWOK category. These are:

5. The Ability Response: Upon leaving the room, Mary does not gain new "knowledge-that," she gains a new ability thus gaining new "knowledge-how."²⁰

6. Original Ignorance: Mary did not and could not know all the physical facts before she left the room, and thus the thought experiment should be aborted at the first step.

Despite the distinctness of these outlying responses, I maintain that they either reduce to, or depend in important ways upon, the TWOK responses. The original ignorance response, at least as it is most naturally developed, is simply the flip-side of the acquaintance response. It is, on the face of it, possible to maintain that one cannot know all the physical facts while cooped-up in a colorless room, but this is most likely because one must know some things by experiencing them. If so, then the Original Ignorance response violates the objectivity condition no less than the acquaintance response does. The Ability Analysis, however, is distinctive enough to warrant special consideration.

5. THE ABILITY ANALYSIS

For the ability analysis to be successful, it has to provide for some ability that Mary lacks while still in her room and that constitutes “knowing what it’s like.” According to Lewis, “The ability hypothesis says that knowing what an experience is like is just the possession of these abilities to remember, imagine, and recognize” the experience one has had.²¹ According to Nemirow, “Knowing what an experience is like is the same as knowing how to imagine having the experience.”²² The typical response is to deny that these abilities are identical with knowing what an experience is like. I am very sympathetic to these criticisms, but for the moment I will grant the identity.²³ My objection focuses instead upon the fact that it seems Mary already has these abilities before leaving the room.

On the assumption of objectivism, Mary could imagine having the experience of seeing red just as she could imagine touching her toes if she had no flexibility. Knowing all the objective information, she can imagine her brain being in such a state. She knows what brains look like when they are experiencing red, just as she knows what people look like

when they are touching their toes. Surely she can imagine her brain in that red-seeing state, just as she could recognize her brain in that state despite the fact that it has never been in it before. There is no ability that Mary seems to lack.²⁴

The natural move is to say Mary gains an ability to recognize an experience by introspection, or something of the sort. But now the ability theory has lost some of its purity – it is committed to abilities of the form “ability to V by method M.” Once abilities look like this, however, it seems the position is very close to a TWOK position. There are two ways of V-ing, and when Mary leaves the room she gains a new way. Until more is said about this new way, the ability analysis seems critically incomplete. What are the likely ways? The most plausible candidates are versions of TWOK proposals 1–4 above. If my arguments about those various TWOK responses are correct, then the ability analysis ultimately has to acknowledge that Mary gains the ability to know “what it’s like” by acquaintance. If this is the case, and the ability analysis is an “Aha” response, it must be acknowledged that there is some epistemic gain – whether in the form of “phenomenal information” or some fuzzier form of understanding associated with “know-how” – which comes with actually being in an experiential state. To put it another way, whether or not the ability analysis can avoid commitment to new sorts of phenomenal information is irrelevant to the objectivity version of the knowledge argument. To the extent that the goal of a complete objective understanding of the world is to achieve something like a “view from nowhere,” and to the extent that the ability analysis maintains that the understanding of a particular experience increases when one has an ability that is enabled by actually having that particular experience, the ability analysis is incompatible with the existence of a complete objective theory.

Suppose the fact that humans must have the experience in order to enable the relevant ability is merely contingent. Suppose this ability could be simply built-in. Wouldn’t this mean that the ability analysis isn’t committed to a violation of the

objectivity constraint since those individuals wouldn't need to have the experiences in order to possess the relevant abilities? I don't think so. If the ability analysis really is an "aha"-response, it seems the hard-wired capacity would have to be the ability to vivify or imagine certain experiences that one has not had, and it seems one would have to actually activate this ability in order to get understanding from it.²⁵ Such creatures seem sufficiently similar to the neuro-sight-readers to merit the same response: whatever the cause, by voluntary vivification or by sense experience, the subjects in question must actually undergo a particular state to understand that state.²⁶

6. THE "HOOKED-UP" RESPONSE

The source of trouble for the TWOK responses is the Ignorance Conjecture, and the most natural way to deny that conjecture is to appeal to the "hooked-up" (HU) response. This response essentially maintains that Mary did know all the facts before her release, including those about the mechanisms involved in seeing red, but her mechanisms were never hooked up properly. She knew everything there was to know about how we see red, but she had just never seen red! So despite her complete knowledge about the perceptual processes, until hers were activated, she didn't have the appropriate experiences. So the conjecture is wrong, because in some cases one can know all the facts but lack the knowledge of an identity simply because one has not undergone the process that one already knew about.

The general argument against the HU position will be repeated for each way of being hooked-up suggested by the TWOK responses: if one knows everything about a process there cannot be something else to be known by undergoing it. There is a second problem with the HU response, however, namely that being hooked up is not sufficient explanation for Mary's epistemic gain. To see this, consider the following corollary to the Mary case:

Meet Mary's lesser known, but still impressive twin brother Mark. Mark, brilliant as genetics would have it, has decided to become a doctor who

specializes in complications with that elusive organ, the pancreas. Mark knows all information remotely relevant to the pancreas. He has discovered that a particular chemical, xtose, when digested causes interesting changes in the lining of the pancreatic duct (changes that might, say, make the pancreas less affected by alcohol abuse). He has witnessed this process in many of his patients and knows precisely the physical effects of the ingestion of xtose, but he has never ingested xtose himself. One day, as a practical joke, one of his colleagues slipped a little xtose into Mark's grape-nuts. When his friend told him, Mark was surprised, but after a couple of chuckles and I'll-get-you-for-that-ones, Mark goes on about his work.

Mark knew everything about his own pancreas before the dose was taken. Is there anything Mark doesn't know about what will happen to his pancreas? Is there anything special about its being *his* pancreas? No. The fact that his pancreas is now hooked up to the relevant causal network is irrelevant. Being hooked up does not necessarily provide new knowledge, and thus it is not sufficient to explain Mary's epistemic advancement. The HU theory, at least without being supplemented, does not undermine the conjecture, and does not damage the knowledge argument.

The HU theory must appeal to a particular account of being "hooked up" to qualitative states. Views about this might vary, from theories according to which one must be in a particular functional state to apprehend qualia in the right way, to Higher-Order Theories of consciousness according to which one must represent the lower-order qualitative state via a higher order scanning mechanism.²⁷ Canvassing these theories would require scrutinizing all the theories of qualitative conscious states, but my answer to them all will be the following dilemma: does Mary know everything there is to know about her states or not? If she does, then she knows what it would be like to be hooked up via those states.²⁸ Her situation would not be unlike that of Mark who already knew all there was to know about xtose's interactions with the pancreas. If she does not know everything about higher-order states, then it seems that her information is limited. If there is an epistemic gain that cannot be accomplished except by being hooked-up to one's states in the way specified by

one's theory of qualitative consciousness, then the theory essentially embraces a version of the acquaintance response, since it makes the second way of knowing depend on actually occupying the state that is known.

7. THE PHENOMENAL CONCEPT RESPONSE

Most HU responses are particular theories of how being “hooked-up” provides the “a-ha” effect that Mary experiences when leaving her room. Perhaps the most sophisticated version of those is the phenomenal concept (PC) response. Again, however, the PC response eventually collapses into the acquaintance response, since it must eventually insist that there is something about PCs, or the states they represent, that cannot be fully understood unless PCs are actually employed and the represented states are occupied. In fact, PCs seem best construed as a particular explanation of the relationship of acquaintance, and as such, they do not truly constitute an alternative response.

As developed by Brian Loar, the PC response deals directly with the Ignorance Conjecture fueling the knowledge argument. According to Loar, the conjecture is based on something like the following premise:

(Semantic Premise) A statement of property identity that links conceptually independent concepts is true only if at least one concept picks out the property it refers to by connoting a contingent property of that property.²⁹

Ignorance about the truth of true identity statements comes from conceptualizing the same thing in two different ways – by two conceptually independent concepts. (If the concepts were not independent in this way, one could reason that they co-designated.) The most natural way for co-designating concepts to be independent is if they pick out their object by different properties. On the assumption that a thing cannot have two distinct essential properties, one of these properties must be a contingent property of the object. The semantic premise would provide a nice explanation of the truth of the conjecture: the ignorance underlying an identity confusion

would be an ignorance of one of the properties that the object had – the property by which one of the concepts picks out the object.

Loar introduces PCs in denial of the semantic premise. He maintains that there are other ways for concepts to be independent than their picking out objects by different properties. Concepts can also be independent by playing different functional roles in a cognitive system. Phenomenal concepts pick out physical states by the same, physical properties that underwrite physical concepts, but because of their functional independence and isolation, they are conceptually independent and do not wear their co-designation on their sleeves. Thus, even Mary cannot reason from her physical concepts to the “what it’s like” presentation that comes with the phenomenal concepts.

Again, one can conceive of the nature of PCs in many different ways, but the general picture should be sufficient.³⁰ For again, the question remains: did Mary know everything about these phenomenal concepts when she was in her room, or didn’t she? Note that this question does not go away even if one grants Loar’s point against the semantic premise, because while the semantic premise entails the conjecture, the conjecture does not entail it.³¹ Even if two concepts pick out one property in terms of its essential features, and the conceptual independence of those concepts is guaranteed by something like their different functional roles, a failure to realize that they co-refer is underwritten by ignorance of some matter of fact. In other words, refuting the semantic conjecture only means that we are not forced to conclude that Mary was ignorant about properties of the phenomenal state, but the ignorance conjecture still forces us to conclude that Mary fails to know *something* – perhaps that the concepts picking out those states include a particular qualitative feel. Since *ex hypothesi* she knew all there was to know about such concepts, the phenomenal concept analysis does not explain her epistemic gain.³²

Perhaps it will be thought that this is too quick. It might be said that she does know everything about PCs via her

physical concepts; she just hasn't thought about PCs in the right way – via PCs. But here it seems there is something she doesn't know about those second-order PCs. A regress has begun, with every step of the regress leaving a remainder that Mary does not know. "Moving up a level" to try to explain what Mary didn't know doesn't appear to help.

The looming regress would be fatal, but it will probably only convince a staunch defender of PCs that there were more resources available to stop the regress at the first step before "higher-order PCs" were posited. It might be said that Mary does know everything about PCs, and she knows everything about the states PCs represent, she just doesn't know those facts by using PCs. At this point one wonders how substantive "knowing x by a PC" is. Compare a non-starter view: I am looking at an apple at 5:00 the afternoon of 10/1/04. Now I know everything about the apple and about looking at apples and such, and I know everything about 5:01 and everything about what it will be like to look at the apple then. But since 5:01 on 10/1/04 hasn't arrived yet, I do not know these facts in the 5:01 way. This is clearly a case where being "hooked up" in this particular way contributes nothing substantive to my knowledge. If PCs contribute to knowledge of minds in this way, then the PC response loses its interest as an A-ha response. If PCs play a more substantive role, however, then one wonders how it is Mary can know everything about them, including all the facts about how they represent other mental states, and yet still be learning something in any sense when she employs them. Anything that would explain this seems to be a fact she lacked prior to employing PCs.

At this point the natural move for the PC theorist, as for other theorists, is to say that until one is employing a PC, one doesn't know everything about PCs. This, however, is not a move that undermines the knowledge argument against objectivism, for the response itself gives up the game. If it is the case that there is something about PCs or the states they represent that cannot be fully understood unless the PCs are actually employed or the states that they represent are

actually experienced, the PC response has collapsed into the acquaintance response. Phenomenal concepts prove, perhaps, to be the cognitive machinery that underwrites the relationship of acquaintance, but their answer to the knowledge argument does not depend essentially on the nature of that machinery. The answer to the knowledge argument comes from the fact that there is something that a subject cannot know about a particular state until the subject undergoes that state.

8. THE INDEXICAL RESPONSE

The indexical view appears to be a welcome departure from the HU views in that it doesn't push the burden of qualia off on some further state. In addition, it gains significant intuitive backing from the parallels between the knowledge argument and cases of indexical ignorance. Consider the case of Rudolf Lingens:

An amnesiac, Rudolf Lingens, is lost in the Stanford library. He reads a number of things in the library, including a biography of himself, and a detailed account of the library in which he is lost. He believes any Fregean thought you think might help him. He still won't know who he is, and where he is, no matter how much knowledge he piles up, until that moment when he is ready to say,

This place is aisle five, floor six, of Main Library, Stanford. I am Rudolf Lingens.³³

Lingens seems very Mary-like: one can even imagine him gaining her physical omniscience while still being lost in the Stanford library (assuming, of course, that there are physically identical libraries elsewhere in the world).³⁴ But does anyone draw the conclusion that physicalism is false from the fact that indexical knowledge seems to be something over and above knowledge of non-indexical matters of fact? No. Nor should we jump to such conclusions in Mary's case, says the indexical theorist, because her case is essentially the same. That Mary's case is essentially a problem of indexicality receives support by considering how she expresses her new knowledge when released from her room: "*That* is what it looks like to see red."

She uses a demonstrative – a type of indexical – to articulate her new knowledge, because any non-demonstrative description seems simply to restate things she already knows.

Whether or not these parallels can produce a solution to the Mary argument depends on affirmative answers to two questions: (1) Is Mary's lack of knowledge an example of indexical ignorance, and (2) Can accounts of indexical knowledge be extended to Mary's case without collapsing to the acquaintance theory? It has been argued elsewhere, and I think successfully, that the answer to the first question is no.³⁵ The knowledge that Mary gains is both more portable than pure indexical knowledge (i.e., in five minutes, when she is in another state, she can know the same surprising thing she knew when in the original state) and it is a type of ignorance that does not evaporate when taking a complete objective view. For development of those issues, I direct the reader elsewhere. Here I wish to offer reasons for a negative answer to the second of the two questions.

The main problem with the indexical response is that it is forced into a dilemma. Either the response is inadequate because it employs an analysis of demonstratives that only explains the reference of words in a public language, or it must posit a sort of "internal" indexical, which provides a basic ostensive grasp of the contents of the mind. The latter sort of indexical, however, is no more than a quasi-linguistic stand-in for the relationship of acquaintance.

Many are happy with the Kaplan/Perry view of indexicals that is predominant in the literature, but it should be recognized that Mary's is no normal use of indexicals. Her knowledge of her qualitative state employs an internal sort of indexical and it is doubtful that it can yield a Kaplanesque treatment. The problem is that the typical candidates for the character of the indexical are inadequate. The Kaplan-like demonstrative gets its cognitive significance by a character which can be formulated like a description – "The object which is related by R to subject S" (e.g. I = <the utterer of the sentence>, you = <the person addressed by S>, etc.).³⁶ Now for this to provide cognitive significance for the subject,

she must have an independent grasp on R and S. In the normal case, this seems to be no problem, because R and S are independently identified. Now take the internal indexical, “this,” when a phenomenal property is ostended. What is the character here? The most promising candidate is “The property that is the object of ostension F.” But this will not do, for how is ostension F grasped? If it is not independently grasped, then this cannot provide the cognitive significance for the internal “this.”³⁷ Perhaps the character of the internal “this” should be “the property that is the object of this ostension.” But then, of course, we have an embedded demonstrative within the description. What is the character of this “this”? (i.e., How does the subject know which ostension?) It seems an infinite regress ensues unless we allow that there is a more fundamental internal “this” which is not subject to Kaplan-like analysis. Since there is introspective demonstration there must be a more basic “this,” and it seems that phenomenal properties are the most obvious objects of these basic internal demonstratives.³⁸

If the indexical model is modified so as to provide for an internal “this,” however, it has basically preserved its explanatory power at the cost of collapsing into just another response from acquaintance. The new knowledge comes from the employment of a basic internal “this” that is unlike other indexicals, and it generates a substantively new perspective on its object. If this indexical is to play a role in a solution to the knowledge argument, it is presumably because there is a way of knowing associated with inner demonstration that can only be fully understood when one is performing the inner demonstration. Remember the case of Mark and his pancreas. When he ingests xlose, he can now say “I am undergoing this state,” but his indexical reference to the state clearly doesn’t count as the sort of knowledge that generates Mary’s “a-ha” response. Mary’s internal demonstrative generates a substantially new perspective on her object, and it is a perspective, which she can have only by undergoing the phenomena in question. This is again an example of the answer from

acquaintance. The indexical response ends up in the same camp, really, as the PC response: they are both best construed as stories about the nature of acquaintance. The only difference is in the detail of those stories, but in the end, the relationship of acquaintance provides the epistemic gain.³⁹

9. THE ACQUAINTANCE RESPONSE AND OBJECTIVITY

If I am right, then, the acquaintance response is all that remains. The other responses reduce to just so many stories about what processes must be undergone in order to stand in a relation of acquaintance with an experiential state. Regardless of their particularities, all the accounts must maintain that there is a way of knowing a state that essentially involves occupying that state.⁴⁰ In Mary's case, she enters a state of acquaintance with her mental state, whereas before she merely had physical descriptions of it. What enables the state of acquaintance? Well, most plausibly Mary is acquainted with the state because she undergoes it. But there are other stories that can be told – in fact, each of the TWOK responses we have considered are versions of acquaintance stories. They all have in common, however, that for complete knowledge of a state, Mary must enter into it.

When one steps back from the details of the various responses to the knowledge argument, it seems clear that any adequate response must be an acquaintance response and must admit that the objectivity constraint is violated. Any response that is an “a-ha”-response, acknowledging a real sense of surprise or epistemic achievement on Mary's behalf, must admit she misses something by being isolated in her room. Whatever is missing must be attainable upon her release, and the reason must be that it is only upon her release that she enters the states she is studying. If this is the only way she can come to a full understanding of her states, then an objective description of the world is of necessity incomplete.

The necessary condition for objectivity is not satisfied by a theory that demands an appeal to acquaintance. The idea of a complete objective depiction of the world is the idea of

what Thomas Nagel calls the “view from nowhere.” It is the idea of an understanding of the world that can be attained without engagement in that world. Mary’s sequesterment is best viewed as an artificial attempt to generate a view from nowhere on qualitative experience. If she has an epistemic gap that can only be filled by engaging in the world and actually undergoing the processes she is studying, then the view from nowhere is necessarily incomplete because some aspects of the mind escape its scope.

10. IN DEFENSE OF THE OBJECTIVITY CRITERION

There is a crucial step in my argument that I have not defended: the necessary condition for objectivity. I think it is defensible, but I should say first that if this is where the disagreement has relocated, we have come a long way. We are now discussing what it is to be objective, an issue that seems if not more tractable than the problem of qualia, at least less exigent. If I become convinced that it is permissible for an objective theory of a state to permit that a complete understanding of that state requires entering into it, I will be happy tipping my hat and conceding that objectivism is true. Similarly, I suspect, there are physicalists out there who are inclined to say, “Oh, that is all your problem has been this whole time?” and who will simply chalk our disagreement up to an unreasonably stringent conception of objectivity. At that point, we will be agreeing about the data, and just disagreeing about how to use the term “objective,” and won’t that be nice?

Nevertheless, I do wish to support the necessary condition for objectivity, but I want to start by considering why one might be tempted to deny it. When one calls something objective, one is usually contrasting it to the subjective, and calling something subjective is clearly ambiguous. The different meanings are held together by the general notion that something is subjective iff it depends essentially upon a subject’s representations, but this dependence can come in importantly different varieties. Consider the following three:⁴¹

Sub-1: A theory is subjective iff it concerns things that cannot exist in a world without subjects.

Sub-2: A theory is subjective iff it is intensional or contains something intensional. In other words, a theory is subjective iff it is only true relative to a particular set of representations. (E.g. If Kant were right, Euclidean geometry would be subjective in this sense, and under some theories ascriptions of beauty are subjective in a similar sense.)⁴²

Sub-3: A theory is subjective iff it can only be understood by undergoing particular experiential events.

Sub-1 is clearly a non-starter for this debate, because by definition it would entail that there could be no complete objective theory of a world like ours. A world like ours has subjects in it, and thus a theory about that world must concern things that would not exist in a subjectless world. This cannot be what is intended.

The main point of contrast in Sub-2 is between something's being a matter of fact and something's being merely a matter of representation. An objective theory, in this sense, states something that is a matter of fact, as opposed to stating merely the ways things are represented as being. This does not prevent an objective theory from being about representations, because it is a matter of fact that there are representations. It merely means that an objective theory does not state things only as a matter of how they are represented – so, for example, the statements about representations cannot themselves be embedded in intentional contexts.

While Sub-2 is perhaps an important sense of subjectivity when discussing idealism, anti-realism or “internal realism,” it seems beside the issue here. When someone is arguing that there can be no complete objective theory about consciousness they are not arguing that facts about consciousness are relative to our ways of representing them. Even a substance dualist who maintains that one cannot understand such substances without being one of them should admit that there is an objective fact about, say, how many souls there are, whether or not souls are in torment or bliss, etc. Sub-2 surely

should not be the contrast that determines the terms of this debate.

Sub-3 seems to have much more promise.⁴³ Sub-3 ties the subjectivity of a theory to the nature of a theory's verification and understanding, and a principal contrast with subjective in this sense is intersubjective.⁴⁴ Titchner's introspectivist psychology was discredited in part because of its subjectivity in this sense, and behaviorism and other doctrines fueled by verificationism were rabidly obsessed with objectivity in the corresponding sense. An objective theory strives for Nagel's "view from nowhere," refusing to privilege any particular perspective or point of view on the world in the sense that no particular perspective is required for the understanding and confirmation of the theory. The physical sciences seem to be paradigmatically objective in this sense.⁴⁵

Sub-3 and the corresponding notion of objectivity have the advantage of fairly parceling out the sides of the debate, and they seem to predict accurately the dialectical pattern of this debate. If qualia were functionalizable, they could receive objective depiction. One can understand functional descriptions, or descriptions in terms of input-output relations, without being in one of the functional states. If, as seems promising, intentional states are functionalizable, they do not pose the same problem for objectivity, though they are subjective states in the sense of sub-1, and though they are representational states.

It might help clarify and motivate Sub-3 by considering the objection that it would unreasonably deem some theories subjective. Suppose that there were a physical thing that only one instrument could detect. Perhaps only a Billytron microscope can detect Billytrons, but that is because it is the only thing powerful enough. The theory of Billytrons would still not be subjective for two reasons. (1) Sub-3 is a thesis about the necessity of undergoing types of *experiences* for the understanding of particular events. Presumably you could look at the Billytron's readout and have one such experience, but just as satisfactory would be an audible output, which

produced a completely different sort of experience to apprise you of the presence of Billytrons. (2) I intend the modality of Sub-3 to be logical. Thus even if Billytron microscopes are the only instruments we have, surely it is logically possible that there be other ways we could detect Billytrons. Needed is a case where there is some property such that the having of a particular type of experience is logically necessary for the understanding of that property. I'm inclined to think any case that fits this description deserves to be called subjective.

It seems clear that the objectivity correlate of Sub-3 would be something like the following:

Objectivity: A theory is objective to the degree that it does not rely for its understanding upon a particular experience.

It would seem to follow from this that the understanding of a complete objective theory must not require that one enter into a particular mental state in order to gain understanding about that state. This, of course, it just a restatement of the necessary condition of theory objectivity.

11. CONCLUSION

All responses to the knowledge argument depend upon the involvement of a relation such as acquaintance for a complete understanding of the world. This violates the necessary condition for a complete objective theory of the world, so there can be no complete objective theory of the world. To the extent that physicalism claims that physics is an objective theory and can completely describe the world, physicalism is shown false by the knowledge argument against objectivism.

The falsity of physicalism is not necessarily the lesson one should take from the success of the knowledge argument. When one construe the knowledge argument as an argument about the completeness of objective theories, one is not railroaded into a position where physicalism is either affirmed or denied. One possible position alluded to earlier is *subjective physicalism*. According to this position, everything is physical in the sense that all the properties and laws in the world

supervene upon microphysical properties and laws, but not all of these properties can be understood through physical theorizing.⁴⁶ Some aspects of the world, despite their physicality, can only be understood by having particular experiences. It is one of the dividends of formulating the knowledge argument in terms of objectivity that this position becomes perspicuous, and in light of the plausible causal closure of the physical, the position deserves our interest.⁴⁷ At present, however, it is enough that the knowledge argument demonstrate the incompleteness of objective physicalism as well as objective dualism. Only a theory that is in part subjective – in the sense that it draws essentially from the understanding one gets by actually having experiences – can provide the complete story about the world.⁴⁸

NOTES

¹ Jackson (1982).

² I will refine this notion of “objective” shortly. This, in a way, follows Nagel (1979a, 1979b, 1986). Jackson maintains in section III of his (1982) that his problem is different from Nagel’s. If this is the case, then my construal of the knowledge argument is probably not what Jackson originally intended. Perhaps, then, it a version with which he would now be more satisfied.

³ Churchland (1985, pp.24–25). While Jackson replies to this *tu quoque* argument in Jackson (1986), John Perry revives the criticism in Perry (2001). See section 7.5.

⁴ Even if not saddling non-physicalists with substance dualism, it is likely that non-physicalists are unfairly forced to take an act-object conception of introspection, which might imply an unreasonable commitment to sense-data. See Lycan (1990a, 1990b pp. 114–116).

⁵ The ramifications of this simple point will be fleshed out later, but it is worthwhile to note the contrast with functional or second-order causal properties, which can be essentially described on a “list.”

⁶ Relatedly, it is a benefit of my proposal that other theories and positions on the argument find easier classification. Positions such as those of Maxwell (1978), Searle (1992), Stoljar (2001) and G.Strawson (1994) don’t fit as comfortably as one would like in the physicalist/anti-physicalist debate. The subjectivity/objectivity divide opens up a more discrete place for those positions.

⁷ See, for example, Byrne (2004) and Hellie (2004).

⁸ Byrne (2004)

⁹ The indifference of IT to the knowledge argument is no doubt one of the reasons that its two most recent proponents disagree about its import. Byrne is inclined to think that it shows the knowledge argument unsound, while Hellie thinks that it might in fact help the knowledge argument defeat physicalism (though he stops short of endorsing this claim).

¹⁰ See Dennett (1991), Thompson (1995).

¹¹ Though “missing shades of blue” surely happen in the musical realm.

¹² Perhaps there is a sense of “expressibility” according to which the case described does not involve the expression of phenomenal content. It is not obvious that such a sense can be successfully fleshed out, but in any case, it seems far preferable to move away from this issue and focus upon the underlying phenomenon – that understanding qualitative states requires actually undergoing them.

¹³ I would like to thank an anonymous referee of this journal for suggesting this line of attack for the IT theorist.

¹⁴ This objection was made earliest by Terrence Horgan in (1984). The problem here is much the same as the one Arnauld raised against Descartes’ second meditation argument for dualism.

¹⁵ Other philosophers have promoted theses similar to the conjecture for the same reason. See, for example, Lockwood (1989), Loar (1997) and Thau (2002). I take it that this matter of fact is not some brute fact about identity, but is some further matter of fact that would make the identity clear to the ignorant agent.

¹⁶ See Flanagan (1992) in particular, but as will become clear, I think Higher-Order theorists such as Lycan, Rosenthal and Armstrong fit into this group as well.

¹⁷ See Loar (1997), Papineau ()

¹⁸ See Perry (2001), Tye (1995)

¹⁹ See Conee (1994)

²⁰ See Lewis (1999) and Nemirow (1980)

²¹ Lewis (1999) p. 288

²² Nemirow (1980) p. 495

²³ See Conee (1984) and Gertler (1999). Conee argues that the abilities and the knowledge are not even coextensive, while Gertler argues that they might be, but their nonidentity is revealed by the asymmetry of explanatory relations between them.

²⁴ It is not enough for the ability theorist to claim that Mary lacks the ability to remember having the experience in question because one cannot remember having an experience one has never had and *ex hypothesi* she has never had the experience. Individuating abilities factively doesn’t get to the point. (Lewis (1999) seems to agree with this in his response to the “third way of missing the point” on pp. 268–270.) The ability Mary gains had better be more significant than the ability I gain to remember writing

this sentence, which I lacked before I wrote it. There must be an actual increase in know-how and making abilities success-conditional is clearly too easy a way out.

²⁵ cf. Papineau (2002, pp. 68–69).

²⁶ My thanks to an anonymous referee from this journal for this response on behalf of the ability analysis.

²⁷ See Armstrong (1981), Lycan (1986, 1990a), Rosenthal (1997), Carruthers (2003). Rosenthal, Lycan and Carruthers each carry out Armstrong's idea in slightly different ways, but my argument here will apply generally.

²⁸ This strategy of questioning shares an intuitive base with the considerations that caused Terry Horgan to change his view on the knowledge argument. See Graham and Horgan (2000).

²⁹ Loar (1997, p. 600).

³⁰ Loar, for example, thinks that they are type demonstratives. A thorough development of the nature of PCs is also provided by Papineau (2001).

³¹ I have great sympathy with the critique of Loar's argument provided by Horgan and Tienson (2001), though they take a different approach. For this reason, I think my position evades the response offered to them by McLaughlin (2001).

³² There might seem to be a problem of "shifting states," because now the state Mary doesn't know about is the PC, not the first-order phenomenal state. This really doesn't matter, since it is now the understanding of the PC state that violates the objectivity condition, and all that matters is that the understanding of some state must do so. (Furthermore, I'm inclined to say that if it is only when Mary has the PC in addition to her phenomenal state that she has an "a-ha" reaction, it is the conjunction of the states that is the real state of interest.)

³³ Perry, (1997, p.710).

³⁴ For this reason, Lewis' case of the two gods might be preferable. See Lewis (1979).

³⁵ See Chalmers (2003, 2004).

³⁶ The "cognitive significance" of an expression, as I am using it, refers to the role that the expression plays in the understanding. So, for example, part of the puzzle of indexicals is to explain the difference in cognitive significance between "I" and "Robert J, Howell" since they refer to, and ultimately have the same content.

³⁷ F cannot simply be a name, because this just pushes the problem back: how is the cognitive significance of the name secured?

³⁸ This account disagrees with Chalmers (2003, 2004) on indexicals, but I nevertheless think that his work to show that phenomenal concepts are distinct from indexicals is successful.

³⁹ It is telling, in fact, that in Papineau's (2002) account of phenomenal concepts, his story essentially involves indexical forms of representation.

⁴⁰ Someone who holds this view of acquaintance, therefore, need not be committed to any sort of givenism or foundationalism with all the difficulties such positions involve.

⁴¹ Consistent with the general approach of the paper, I wish to talk about subjectivity on a formal level – as a property of theories, not of objects. Apparently ontological notions such as “subjective facts” require similar disambiguation, but there is something grating and oxymoronic about such notions. To the extent that I would advocate talk of subjective facts or properties at all, I would be inclined to say that they are properties or facts that can be known only as objects of subjective theories.

⁴² At times this sounds like the sense of subjectivity that Searle (1992) has in mind (p. 94), while at other times it seems he has sub-2 in mind (p. 99). For this reason, while some of what he has to say resonates with the points I make here – in particular his insistence that much of the mind/body issue ought to be shifted to the objectivity/subjectivity issue – it is difficult to ascertain to what degree we are in agreement.

⁴³ Incidentally, sub-3 includes a sense of subjective that is overlooked by Lycan (1990b) and so avoids his arguments there.

⁴⁴ For some philosophers of science that seem to concur on the importance of this notion of objectivity, see Popper (1963) and Scheffler (1982).

⁴⁵ In the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics there is the problem of privileging the perspective of a particular observer, but to the extent that I understand this it seems an unacceptable result for physics and makes it a non-objective science to some degree. The type of subjectivity here seems of a completely different kind, however, than that posed by the problem of qualia.

⁴⁶ I have in mind metaphysical supervenience, only because it is not exactly clear how to construe logical supervenience in the case of subjective theories. Any development of subjective physicalism, which will have to wait for another time, will obviously have to explicate the nature of this supervenience claim.

⁴⁷ Such a position might provide a more comfortable home to the view of Searle (1992), though that is not the only form subjective physicalism can take.

⁴⁸ I would like to thank Doug Ehring, Brad Thompson and my colleagues at SMU for their help with this paper. Thanks also to Joshua Ferris whose writerly eye helped me significantly.

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Department of Philosophy
Southern Methodist University
PO Box 750333
Dallas TX 75275
USA
E-mail: rhowell@mail.smu.edu