

A response to Jackson's Knowledge Argument and Ability Hypothesis

Frank Jackson introduces the Knowledge Argument in his paper *Epiphenomenal Qualia*. It is one of the main arguments against physicalism, by arguing that the world is not entirely physical, that there are mental states that contain non-physical properties, like qualia. Jackson introduces two examples, Mary the color scientist and Fred. Jackson claims that when Mary first sees the color red as she exits the black and white room she will learn something new, a visual experience despite her already knowing all the physical facts about color and vision, thus physicalism is false, not every property or fact is physical. However, the ability hypothesis proposed by Laurence Nemirow and David Lewis argues against the Knowledge argument, claiming that Mary does not learn any new fact when she sees the color red, but having a new experience is knowing-how, same as gaining new abilities like remembering, imagining, and recognizing, thus physicalism is still intact.

In this paper, I aim to defend Jackson's Knowledge Argument against the ability hypothesis brought up by Churchland, Lewis, and Nemirow. Firstly, I argue that Torin Alter's objection on Ability Hypothesis that it's possible to know what an experience is like without having the imaginative ability; secondly, Paul Raymont's argument that having the ability to imagine isn't sufficient enough to gain the knowledge of what an experience is like; and finally, Jackson's reply to one of Churchland's objections proves that using Ability Hypothesis is not sufficient to defend Churchland himself.

The ability hypothesis, according to Nemirow "*knowing what an experience is like is the same as knowing how to imagine having the experience*" (1990, p.495). According to Lewis,

...knowing what it is like is the possession of abilities: abilities to recognize, abilities to imagine, abilities to predict one's behavior by imaginative experiments (1983, p.131).

A few years later he adds that:

The Ability Hypothesis says that knowing what an experience is like just is the possession of these abilities to remember, imagine, and recognize. ... It isn't knowing-that. It's knowing-how (1990, p.516).

Nemirow and Lewis both disagree that when Mary gains the new experience of seeing the color red is knowing what, that is not learning a new fact. In order to know what it is like to see red, Mary has to gain the ability to imagine that experience upon release.

Torin Alter argues against it in *A Limited Defence of the Knowledge Argument* that Ability Hypothesis is implying that the ability to imagine, remember, and recognize an experience is a necessary precondition for knowing what the experience is like, and one must first acquire those abilities in order to gain new fact/knowledge from experience. Alter argues that it's possible to acquire the new fact of experience without having the ability to imagine. He introduced the example of John: John is a normal person just like us but he does not have the ability to imagine any color whatsoever. Yet despite his lack of imaginative ability, when he sees the red tomato, he has the experience of seeing red at the moment. If the tomato is removed and someone asks John to imagine what it is like to see red later, John is unable to do so. But when he is seeing the red tomato, he knows what it is like to see the color red. The example of John proves that it is possible to know what it is like to see red or to have a new experience without gaining imaginative ability. John does not gain any know-how, but he is able to know a new fact of what it is like seeing red, or any new color that we present to him at that specific moment, so that John still learns a new fact, not a new ability -- he did not gain any new ability at all. While Nemirow and Lewis may question that if it is *not* the ability to imagine, recall, and remember that's gained when Mary first exits the black and white room, how can Mary remember or recall that experience of seeing red in the future? -- Alter follows up arguing that to have the ability to recall or remember an experience, one has to be able to *retain* the knowledge of what those experiences are like, like retaining the historical knowledge/fact of when this experience happened. However, that ability to retain the knowledge of such basic facts must be constant all along, long before Mary exits the black and white room. Because Mary needs that ability to retain knowledge when she is learning about color and vision-- she is able to recall when she learned the knowledge of the wavelength of the color red, for example, and all the other physical knowledge. Thus, if Mary only gains the ability to recall and remember when she exits the room, it's contradictory to how she learns the knowledge and facts when she is stuck in the black and white room. She must've had the ability all along.

Paul Raymont argues against the Ability Hypothesis that having the imaginative ability is not sufficient enough to know what it is like to experience something. One can imagine or have the ability to imagine an experience without actually having experienced it or knowing it, as opposed to Nemirow's definition of Ability Hypothesis that having the ability to imagine is the same as knowing what an experience is like. Paul introduced the example of Sally: Sally is told to imagine a color of the wallpaper by the sales clerk -- "just imagine a shade of mauve in between the Dusty and Country Club shades". The sales clerk can't show Sally the color of that shade but it's a shade that's in between the other two shades the clerk presents. Sally, like us, has the ability to imagine, thus she can imagine a color between those two shades. However, the point is Sally does not know and will not know whether the shade she is imagining *is* actually the shade the clerk is talking about *until* she finally sees it, or experience it with her own sensory system. There would be a thousand different kinds of shades Sally can imagine, and indeed, Sally demonstrates the ability to imagine -- but she never actually gains the new fact/knowledge of that exact shade of color. While the supporters of the Ability Hypothesis could object that Sally's imaginative ability is not the same as that the imaginative ability Mary gains after seeing red--Sally's is imagining the shade based on two other shades, a means of interpolation; Mary, on the other hand, is imagining the color red without any visual aid by just imagining it after experiencing it. Raymont argues back that telling someone to imagine a color between two shades and telling someone to imagine something is the same thing, and it requires the same step --just to imagine it. Raymont further explained that Sally's behavior of interpolation is simply equal to the behavior of imagining. It is *not* that Sally has to interpolate between two colors and *then* imagine the missing shade, interpolation already directly leads to Sally imagining the color. In terms of my objection to the use of the visual aid, I argue that Mary's first time experiencing red can also be counted as a visual aid in this case for her to imagine the color red in the future, and her sensory experience aids her to imagine the color again. It's the same as Sally using two other shades as a visual aid if we must consider there are such components of visual aids in the argument. So, no matter if there are visual aids or not, Sally's example and Mary's example can be counted as the same type of imaginative ability.

Jackson himself argues against one of Churchland's objections that Mary only gains the know-how ability upon releasing in *What Mary Didn't Know*. Jackson claims that if the 'know' in the premises means 'know-how', a certain representational or imaginative ability, it's impossible that *all* Mary gains upon releasing and seeing red for the first time are only the

ability, there must be something else besides gaining the ability, thus the Ability Hypothesis is insufficient. Although Jackson never agrees with Churchland that there must exist a distinction between know-what and know-how in the premises, Jackson argues against Churchland's objections through Churchland's mindset -- suppose in the case that *know* means *know-how*: Jackson claims that Mary is able to form judgments upon releasing. Suppose Q represents the experience of what seeing red is like, and Mary gains Q after the first time seeing red, immediately, she is able to make a judgment that she enjoys Q, and she would love to experience Q more! Or she does not like Q and wants to see other colors. Such judgments are propositions or factual knowledge that's new facts Mary gains at the same time she experiences red for the first time. This is a contradiction to the Ability Hypothesis that Mary does not gain any new facts but only abilities. If Mary only gains ability, she would not be possible to express such judgments, thus proving the Ability Hypothesis false.

In conclusion, I argue against the Ability Hypothesis by showing its weakness and problems, proving this hypothesis proposed by physicalism is false.

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