

COMMENTS AND CRITICISM

WHAT MARY DIDN'T KNOW*

MARY is confined to a black-and-white room, is educated through black-and-white books and through lectures relayed on black-and-white television. In this way she learns everything there is to know about the physical nature of the world. She knows all the physical facts about us and our environment, in a wide sense of 'physical' which includes everything in *completed* physics, chemistry, and neurophysiology, and all there is to know about the causal and relational facts consequent upon all this, including of course functional roles. If physicalism is true, she knows all there is to know. For to suppose otherwise is to suppose that there is more to know than every physical fact, and that is just what physicalism denies.

Physicalism is not the noncontroversial thesis that the actual world is largely physical, but the challenging thesis that it is entirely physical. This is why physicalists must hold that complete physical knowledge is complete knowledge simpliciter. For suppose it is not complete: then our world must differ from a world, $W(P)$, for which it is complete, and the difference must be in nonphysical facts; for our world and $W(P)$ agree in all matters physical. Hence, physicalism would be false at our world [though contingently so, for it would be true at $W(P)$].¹

It seems, however, that Mary does not know all there is to know. For when she is let out of the black-and-white room or given a color television, she will learn what it is like to see something red, say. This is rightly described as *learning*—she will not say “ho, hum.” Hence, physicalism is false. This is the knowledge argument against physicalism in one of its manifestations.² This note is a reply to three objections to it mounted by Paul M. Churchland.[†]

* I am much indebted to discussions with David Lewis and with Robert Pargetter.

¹ The claim here is not that, if physicalism is true, only what is expressed in explicitly physical language is an item of knowledge. It is that, if physicalism is true, then if you know everything expressed or expressible in explicitly physical language, you know everything. *Pace* Terence Horgan, “Jackson on Physical Information and Qualia,” *Philosophical Quarterly*, xxxiv, 135 (April 1984): 147–152.

² Namely, that in my “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” *ibid.*, xxxii, 127 (April 1982): 127–136. See also Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” *Philosophical Review*, lxxxiii, 4 (October 1974): 435–450, and Howard Robinson, *Matter and Sense* (New York: Cambridge, 1982).

[†] “Reduction, Qualia, and the Direct Introspection of Brain States,” this JOURNAL, lxxxii, 1 (January 1985): 8–28. Unless otherwise stated, future page references are to this paper.