Deferential Phenomenal Concepts? Not for the Zombie Mary.

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Introduction

The Knowledge Argument against Physicalism: Mary, a hypothetical super-scientist growing up in a black-and-white room, has complete knowledge of physical facts. However, when she experiences red for the first time, she still learns something new about the phenomenal character of her experience of red. Thus this new knowledge is a non-physical fact.

1. S can possess C even if C is only partially understood. Thus this new knowledge is a non-physical fact.

Michael Tye (1999)
The Phenomenal Concept Strategy

The new knowledge consists of a concept that can only be gained via experience.

Concepts: finely individuated mental representations of worldly entities that are exercised whenever we undergo thoughts or other comparable mental states, such as noticing, recognizing, making a judgment, etc. Concepts are not reducible to physical items, nor are they associated with, or co-located with, any physical item.

Tye’s (2009) Argument

1. If a concept C is deferential, S can possess C even if C is only partially understood.
2. If S can possess C even if C is only partially understood, it’s not necessary to undergo the relevant experiences to possess C. Therefore, all phenomenal concepts PCs are deferential.
3. All phenomenal concepts PCs are deferential. Thus this new knowledge is a non-physical fact.

If all PCs are deferential, then they would produce empty statements like “the A of juice is very similar to the B of apple cider, B is not C, C is typically caused by rotting eggs.”

How can phenomenal concepts be deferential?

If X is deferential, P-X is deferential Ex. If a shade of red should count as orange, the experience of the shade of red should count as one of orange, too.
- Judgments about the phenomenal character of experiences can be corrected: Ex. A philosophical zombie can acquire phenomenal concepts as experiences can be corrected: “I thought I had experience, I was wrong.”

How can phenomenal concepts be partially understood?

One can have conceptions of a phenomenal concept without the relevant experiences. Ex. Someone who has never experienced red can know:
(A) what it is like to experience red is more similar to what it is like to experience orange than what its is like to experience green
(B) Fire engines typically cause the experience of red

Thesis

To acquire the semantic competence of deferential phenomenal concepts, one must also possess non-deferential categorical concepts that are also phenomenal. Thus not all phenomenal concepts can be possessed without the relevant experiences. A philosophical zombie cannot acquire any deferential phenomenal concepts.

The Argument:

1. S can possess deferential concepts with partial understanding only if S also possesses at least one appropriate categorical concept which the referents of the former also fall under.
2. S possesses a deferential phenomenal concept with partial understanding only if S also possesses at least one appropriate phenomenal conceptual which the referents of the former also fall under.

Tye’s examples fall into one of the below two types:
Type (1): Beliefs that reference other phenomenal concepts—like (A)
Type (2): Beliefs that reference physical concepts—like (B)

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What is a deferential concept?

C is deferential if a subject S, is willing to have misapplications of C corrected by experts. Es. If S rejects E’s correction, S is operating with another non-deferential concept.

What is partial understanding?

To understand a concept is to have conceptions, i.e., clusters of beliefs associated with the concept.

Experts
Non-experts

If of correct beliefs

References:


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Unless a philosophical zombie could correctly apply PHENOMENAL CHARACTER to EXPERIENCE prior to experience (which it can’t), it exercises different concepts of EXPERIENCE after experience. To possess a deferential PC presupposes the possession of non-deferential categorical PCs.