

Reading Guide for **“Epiphenomenal Qualia”** by Frank Jackson
(excerpts from original article, "What Mary Didn't Know" in *Journal of Philosophy* 1982, reprinted in
Chalmers p.273-280)

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In this paper, Jackson argues against Physicalism. Physicalism, you will recall, is a theory about the nature of the mind and its relation to the physical world. In this course we have discussed several versions of Physicalism. But Jackson's argument, if it succeeds, is a problem for any of these versions. At the very beginning of the paper, Jackson defines "physical information." This definition is very important for his argument—indeed, it is really the key move of the whole argument as it happens in the first paragraph!—so make sure you understand it.

Jackson uses the term "qualia." In this course, we will be understanding this term as synonymous with several other terms, such as: consciousness, subjective character, phenomenal character, etc.

At the bottom of the first column of the first page, the final paragraph begins, "I am what is..." This is a very important paragraph. Read it carefully.

Section 1 “The Knowledge Argument for Qualia”

In this section, Jackson presents two versions of what he calls "the knowledge argument." This is his argument against physicalism. The two versions involve two different hypothetical individuals, Fred, and Mary. The Mary example is much more famous and we will spend most of our time in class talking about it. But you should make sure to understand the Fred example as well. Section 1 is, by far, the most important section of the paper. Read it many times and think about it carefully. In particular, make sure that you understand the Mary example. If you come to class not understanding this example and how it works, then you are going to have a lot of catching up to do. Do not be afraid to read the final three paragraphs of this section, the paragraphs that deal with the Mary example, many times.

Section 2 “The Modal Argument”

In this section, Jackson explains a different argument against physicalism, and explains how this argument is different and inferior from his argument. For our purposes, however, this section just adds unnecessary complication. So do not read this section.

Section 3 “The “What is it like to be” Argument”

This section is a discussion of Nagel's argument against physicalism. Jackson claims that his argument (the knowledge argument) is different from and superior to Nagel's (the "What is it like to be" argument).

Section 4 "The Bogey of Epiphenomenalism"

In this section, Jackson goes beyond the argument against physicalism presented earlier. Jackson (at least at the time of his writing this paper) is a dualist. In particular, is an epiphenomenalist dualist. That means that he is the kind of dualist who thinks that the mental does not cause the physical, at all, ever. That sounds like an absolutely crazy position. Jackson knows this, so he spends this section defending the position. But in this section he is not arguing for that position. Rather, he is arguing against three different arguments against it.

The first sentence of this section (a rhetorical question) is very difficult to parse. The question asks whether there are any good arguments against epiphenomenalism. His answer is: no, there are not any good arguments against epiphenomenalism.

In this section, Jackson refers to "Interactionism." This is the theory, contrary to epiphenomenalism, that the mind and the body causally interact.

Addendum: From "What Mary Didn't Know"

This addendum further clarifies and defends Jackson's argument, but it is unnecessary for our purposes. So do not read it.

Again, the most important section of the paper is section 1 and the most important part of that section is the part about Mary. Make sure you understand what is going on there.