57.0 The Main point

Again, the paper is complicated and covers a great deal of ground. I will not cover all of this in these notes, but only the part that is directly relevant to Tye’s solution to the Knowledge argument.

Tye’s contention is that his view of phenomenal concepts entails a solution to the Knowledge argument that cuts a middle ground between the ‘know-that’ of Jackson, and the ‘know-how’ of Lewis.

He first establishes what is wrong with the ability hypothesis (as he sees it) and then uses this argument to establish his solution. I am skipping his discussion of Levin, Loar, and Lycan.

57.1 The Ability Hypothesis:

Tye begins with the assumption that our sensory experience is incredibly rich - that is, when I see something red, I do not see the abstract color RED, I see that particular shade of red there. Call this ‘red17’. That particular shade of red falls under a concept RED, which is used to categorize the millions of individual colors we can discriminate.

When Mary sees red, she certainly gains certain abilities - as Lewis and Nemirov argue – but that is not the end of the story.

Suppose that Mary sees red17. She gains certain abilities, but she does not have the ability (after the fact) to remember, imagine, or recognize red17 again. When she stares at red17, she knows what it is like to see red17, but when she stops staring, she does not have the abilities Lewis and Nemirov hypothesize - she has the ability to deploy certain higher-level concepts, but she cannot imagine, remember or recognize that particular shade of red again. Our memory system is simply not that fine-grained.

The ability hypothesis is not general enough. The abilities hypothesized do have something to do with knowing what it is like, but it is not the end of the story.

57.2 The revision

The revision is that in addition to the abilities hypothesized by Lewis and Nemirov, Mary gains the ability to cognize her experience for as long as it is present. For when she has the experience, she can think about her experience as having that phenomenal character.

But, if Mary is distracted, she will not cognize, but will still have some experience. In this case, Mary does not apply any concept whatsoever to her experience. She experiences, but does not apply concepts (indexical or otherwise).

The revision, then, does not save the hypothesis, but it points the way to the solution.

57.3 The Solution
When Mary has an experience and is distracted, Mary has knowledge how, but as she is distracted, she does not use that know-how. Were she to do so, she would turn her know-how into know-that. Intuitively, she would come to know that that is the phenomenal character of her experience.

Thus, the proposal is something like: “S knows what it is like to undergo experience E =df Either S is no undergoing E and S has knowledge-that with respect to the phenomenal character of E obtained via current introspection, or S has the Lewis abilities with respect to E.”

Now, how to save physicalism?

Mary, when confined, lacks the phenomenal concept RED. In her room, she has the linguistic word ‘red’, and she has a corresponding concept RED. But it is not the phenomenal concept RED. The phenomenal concept is one that can only be gained by undergoing experiences of red. In fact, that is part of what makes it a phenomenal concept. (recall that Shoemaker defines what it is to be a qualitative state in terms of a functional role. Tye is doing the same here: defining a phenomenal state in terms of its input clause.)

Suppose someone replied that wherever there is a difference between old and new concepts, there is a difference in the world. Therefore, the argument is not refuted. Rejoinder: deny the premise. There need not be a difference in the world to have a difference in concepts. “Properties individuated no more finely than causal powers, but conceptual differences exist even between concepts that are analytically equivalent” – i.e. the concept CICERO and the concept TULLY are different, yet they pick out the same thing.

Now: consider Mary’s thought that she is having an experience with this phenomenal character. The this refers to the phenomenal character associated with her experience of red. And May never experiences red. So, when she thinks this thought, she is making a genuine discovery, and therefore has genuine knowledge. (see the analogy to Cicero / Tully on 18)

Yet this does not imply that the quality picked out by this is not physical. In fact, it is. She knew of it before, but she was never able to think this is what it is like to see red, and hence she learns something new upon her release.