

The Specialist Paradox and the Mind-Body Quandary

István Aranyosi (Philosophy, Bilkent)

[Draft as of 17 May, 2010]

Abstract

I offer a new epistemic paradox, which I call “the specialist paradox”, according to which specialist knowledge, that is, complete knowledge of an aspect of the world, is impossible. I offer a solution to it, after which I argue that the paradox represents a challenge to the epistemic arguments against physicalism, especially to the famous knowledge argument against physicalism, which comes out as simply an instance of the paradox rather than as a *bona fide* argument. However, accepting the solution to paradox entails rejecting the conjunction of the premises of the knowledge argument as unassertible. The result is extended to other epistemic arguments against physicalism, and agnosticism in the form of the so-called *quandary view*, due to Crispin Wright, is advocated about the mind-body problem in general.

1. The Paradox

Let us define a specialist as someone who has complete knowledge of specialty S of the world, or knows everything (has complete information) about some aspect of the actual world. She is the ultimate expert in some slice of the whole reality. By “aspect of the world” or “slice of the whole reality”, we mean familiar domains, like: the aesthetic, the chemical, the meteorological, the physical, the pathological and so on and so forth. Correspondingly, the specialties are: aesthetics, chemistry, meteorology, physics, pathology etc. We can now already formulate our first intuitive proposition, about the very meaning of “*complete* specialist knowledge”:

(E) For any domain S, complete S-knowledge of the world is equivalent to complete knowledge of the S-aspect of the world. (That is: For any domain S, agent A has complete S-knowledge of the world iff A has complete knowledge of domain S, included in the domain of the world.)

Proposition (E) analytically relates the epistemic kind with the corresponding ontological kind; for instance, A having complete chemical knowledge of the world means A having complete knowledge of the chemical part, i.e. proper part, of the world. By “chemical part of the world”, and “chemical proper part of the world”, in this context, we will also mean the subset of chemical truths/facts, and the proper subset of chemical truths/facts/properties, respectively, given the set of all truths/facts of the actual world.

Further, it is also intuitive that specialist knowledge of the world is not complete knowledge of it, and that it has to allow for the possibility that the knower learn new facts about the world. So we get a second intuitive proposition about the very meaning of “complete *specialist* knowledge”:

(I) Complete S-knowledge of the world does not entail complete knowledge of the world. (That is: For any agent A, it is not necessary that if there is a domain S such that A has complete S-knowledge of the world, then A has complete knowledge of the world)

Plausible as these propositions appear, paradox is on the lurk. Suppose John has complete chemical knowledge of the world, and that he learns something new about the world, nevertheless. Either John knows (E), or he doesn't.

(α) If he knows (E), then whatever fact he learns about, he knows that fact to be non-chemical, so, by the left-to-right direction of the biconditional in (E), he has complete non-chemical knowledge of the world. But then he has complete knowledge of the world, so cannot learn anything new, contrary to the initial supposition to the effect that he does learn something new.

(β) If he does not know (E), then he does not know whether the new piece of knowledge he has acquired is chemical or not. But then he cannot be said to have *complete* knowledge of the chemical facts, contrary to the completeness of his chemical knowledge that we assumed at the outset.

We don't get closer to reducing our intellectual malaise by denying either (E) or (I). Denying the former would mean to either accept that one can have complete chemical knowledge without knowing all the chemical facts, or accept that even after one knows everything about the chemical aspect of the world there is still a lot of chemistry to be learnt. Both options are absurd. Denying the latter would be equally absurd, as it would mean that being a specialist in, say, aesthetics is sufficient to count as a specialist in physics or anything else.

Consequently, the problem has to lie in the reasoning, and I'm almost sure the reader already has a target for denial – one of the following two conditionals, asserted above in (α)¹:

(1) If John knows (E), then whatever fact he learns about, he knows that fact to be non-chemical.

(2) If whatever fact John learns about, he knows that fact to be non-chemical, then he has complete non-chemical knowledge of the world.

The reason to deny (1) would be that it presupposes the truth of another conditional, namely, that knowing (E) and knowing everything chemical about the world imply knowing that one knows everything chemical about the world. If this conditional is false, then (1) is false, because in order for John to know that whatever new he learns is non-chemical he needs to know not only (E), but that he himself is a specialist, i.e. that he himself knows all the chemical facts, or has complete chemical knowledge of the world.

To show that he must know that he knows he is a specialist, if he is one and knows (E), we only have to notice that the following conditional is true:

¹ I take the reasoning in (β) as uncontroversial. If John does not know (E), then for any truth, John either does not know that it is chemical, or he does not know that it is non-chemical. On the assumption of the first disjunct, he does not know some truth about chemistry, so, given that (E) is true, he does not have complete chemical knowledge. The assumption of the second disjunct is equivalent, on the assumption that any truth is either chemical or not, to John not knowing that some truth is chemical, which, again, means that John fails to know some truth about chemistry, hence, given (E), he does not have complete chemical knowledge.

(3) If *we* know that John knows everything chemical and we know that (E) is true, then we know that whatever fact he learns about, that fact is non-chemical.

Now if (3) is accepted, then John can substitute himself into “we” in (3) and reason as follows:

“If I know that I know everything chemical and I know that (E) is true, then I know that whatever fact I learn about, that fact is non-chemical. Assume that I know everything chemical and I know that (E) is true. I either know that I know everything chemical, or I don’t know it. Suppose I know it; then I know that whatever fact I learn about, that fact is non-chemical. So I know that fact to be non-chemical once I learn about it. Suppose I don’t know it; then either it is false that I know everything chemical, or it is true but I don’t know it. Its being false is contrary to my assumption that I know everything chemical. Its being true but my not knowing it is contrary to my having assumed it. Hence, again, I know that fact to be non-chemical once I learn about it.”

It is pretty clear that John’s reasoning is correct: just like *we* can reason conditionally about the implications of his knowledge, *he* can do it just as well, and with the same conclusions from the same assumptions. Consequently, I find (1) no less acceptable than (E) and (I).

What about (2)? The prima facie reason to deny it is the intuition that to say that whatever new knowledge John acquires is not chemical is merely to say that he can acquire non-specialist, superficial, generalist knowledge, as it were, which is simply not the same as complete knowledge of the non-chemical aspects of the world. The acceptable conditional to replace (2), according to this line of thought, would be:

(2*) If whatever fact John learns about, he knows that fact to be non-chemical, then he has superficial, generalist knowledge of the world.

Although attractive at first sight, the intuition is ultimately wrong on the assumption of (E). If it is always the case that if all John is known to acquire by acquiring new knowledge is superficial knowledge, then, by (E), we should always be taking him as coming to know an aspect of the world, *a proper part* of the entire reality, namely, the superficial part of the entire reality, whatever that exactly means. But then either there is something more, besides the superficial proper part and the chemical part which John is assumed to know, included in the domain of the entire reality, or not. On the assumption that there is, John comes out as not knowing whether that part of reality is chemical or not, hence, he comes out as not being completely knowledgeable about chemistry, contrary to our assumption. If, on the other hand, we assume that there is no other proper part of reality besides the chemical and the superficial, then we end up denying (I), because then there is no fact that is both non-chemical and non-superficial, so there is no possible knowledge of kind *K*, if *K* is not chemistry or some aspect that accounts for superficial knowledge, whatever that means. It might be objected now that there is a

notion of superficial or generalist knowledge that John is assumed to have, whose object is not only a proper part of the non-chemical reality, but the whole of it, and yet it is compatible with the possibility of acquiring new specialist knowledge. The piece of generalist knowledge that the objector has in mind is knowledge of the fact that whichever truth the chemically omniscient agent is to learn is going to be a non-chemical truth, which is equivalent to knowledge of the following property that all non-chemical truths have: the property of not being known by John at the time he only has complete knowledge of chemical truths. Then the objector proposes the following as a replacement for (2):

(2**) If whatever fact John learns about, he knows that fact to be non-chemical, then he has knowledge of the fact that all non-chemical truths have the property of not being known by John at the time he only has complete knowledge of chemical truths.

This conditional is true, but only because its consequent is trivially true. The equivalent of its consequent is that for any truth T , T is either chemical or not chemical. Hence, with (2**) we have a true conditional with a consequent whose being known counts as generalist knowledge without the implication that it is only knowledge of a proper subset of non-chemical truths, but only because of a failure of relevance. Consequently, (2**) is not an acceptable replacement for (2), so it is probably safe to reassert our conditional resulting from the conjunction of (1) and (2):

(4) If John knows (E), then he has non-chemical knowledge of the world.

There is, however, a more promising way out. That is to deny the truth of the conjunction of two other embedded conditionals that we asserted before, when formulating the paradox: “If John has non-chemical knowledge of the world, then he has complete knowledge of the world, so he cannot learn anything new”. The two conditionals are:

(5) If John has non-chemical knowledge of the world, then he has complete knowledge of the world.

(6) If John has complete knowledge of the world, he cannot learn anything new.

The argument could go like this. The senses of “non-chemical knowledge” and “complete knowledge” that make (5) true are that of a highly disjunctive knowledge of whatever is non-chemical and that of some acquaintance, *one way or other*, with all facts of the world, respectively. The idea of non-chemical knowledge does not pick out a genuine kind of knowledge, like physical, medical, and so forth, but involves a disjunctive phrase of the form “physical-or-medical-or- ... knowledge”, without any need to conceptualize the disjuncts *qua* the kind of knowledge they stand for. Given this, the consequent of (5) is true if interpreted as referring to acquaintance in some form or other (including specialized/conceptualized, non-conceptualized, and superficial), or some other relation

that would count as a knowledge relation between an agent and a fact, with all facts. If this is correct, then (6) is false, if its antecedent is interpreted as referring to the same type of knowledge as the consequent of (5). Having a disjunctive type of knowledge of the entire world, that is, an acquaintance relation in some form or other with all facts in the world, does not preclude coming to refine that knowledge, and hence learning something new about the world. As an example, think about someone who has experienced all the beauty in the world, but has never conceptualized it as BEAUTIFUL, possibly because of lacking knowledge of theoretical aesthetic categories. If experiencing all the beauty in the world counts as some knowledge relation between our agent and the beautiful aspect of the world, then the agent both knows all the beauty of the world and can refine that knowledge once she learns about theoretical categories of aesthetics.

This is our proposed solution to the paradox. If it is acceptable, then there is no real conflict between (E) and (I). The type of knowledge referred to by them must be kept fixed. Both (E) and (I) only hold for genuine kinds of knowledge, like chemical, physical, medical and so forth, whereas the sense of knowledge required by the reasoning towards the paradox is that of disjunctive type, which is not a genuine kind at all. We only have a paradox as long as we assume (E) and (I) to apply to disjunctive knowledge. But we shouldn't. The complete specialist cannot acquire any disjunctive knowledge (acquaintance in some form or other with any *more* facts or properties) about the world, but he can add, for instance, to his specialist knowledge more of the conceptualized, genuine-kind knowledge (as well as more superficial knowledge).

2. The Knowledge Argument

The congeniality between our John and Frank Jackson's Mary is apparent. Jackson (1982) advances the story of Mary, the super-scientist who knows everything physical about human chromatic vision, but who has never experienced colors herself. Mary, Jackson argues, indubitably learns something new about human chromatic vision when she experiences colors for the first time; therefore, there are non-physical facts or properties of human chromatic vision, which even a specialist, in our sense, in physics can fail to have knowledge about.

Let me first point out that the knowledge argument, as it is originally put by Jackson and as it has been put in the literature by many others, contains a hidden step that is an invalid inference, which, to my knowledge, nobody has pointed out so far, the large number of papers about the argument notwithstanding. In light of our discussion in the previous section our singling out the invalid step won't, hopefully, count as pedantry. The hidden invalid step is from the premise that Mary learns something new when having a color experience for the first time to the actual formulation of this premise in some parts of the literature, which has it that she learns something new *about human color vision*. All we can safely assert is that she learns something new, and it is consistent with this that what she learns is not about the human visual system, but about some supra-visual system, correlated with the visual one, so that it is still true that by knowing everything physical about the visual system she knows everything about it. It makes perfect sense to assert that, for all we know, what she doesn't get to know is that there is a further system, over and above the visual system. But if that is the case, it does not follow that the supra-

visual system is not physical. Recall that all she knows before having the experience concerns the facts or properties of the *visual system*, not those of other actual systems. So the premise should be: Mary learns something new about *the world*; and since her complete physical knowledge concerns not the whole world, but only part of it –the visual system-- it does not follow that she discovers something non-physical. What she discovers might well be something physical about the world that she couldn't know by only focusing on the visual system.

Here is a list of quotes, containing the inaccuracy starting with Jackson's own formulation (my emphases).

“She specializes in the neurophysiology of vision and acquires, let us suppose, all the physical information there is to obtain about what goes on when we see ripe tomatoes, or the sky, and use terms like ‘red’, ‘blue’, and so on. What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a color television monitor? Will she *learn* anything or not? It seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it.” (Jackson 1982: 130)

“Premise 1: Mary has complete physical knowledge about human color vision before her release. (...) Premise (2): There is some (kind of) knowledge concerning facts about human color vision that Mary does not have before her release.” (Martine Nida-Rümelin 2002)

“Mary knows everything that can be stated in physical terms about the physical processes that are in any way relevant to color vision. (...) When she sees red for the first time, she learns a new fact concerning what it is like to see red. So there are

facts over and above the physical facts, and materialism is false.” (David Chalmers 2004: 269)

“Mary has become the world’s leading neuroscientist, specializing in the neurophysiology of colour vision. (...) When she is let out of her black-and-white room for the first time, she learns (...) something new; she learns what it is like to experience colour.” (Mark Rowlands 2001: 8)

The right way, therefore, to formulate anything like an acceptable knowledge argument against physicalism has to have the following as the premise about what Mary knows before experiencing color:

(P1) Mary knows everything physical *about the entire world*.

The reader will immediately recognize (P) as an instance of what we have called “specialist knowledge” in the first section. No less than (P) is required for the argument to have any force, and in fact (P) is what all philosophers have in mind, however implicitly, when talking about the intuitive force of knowledge argument. Now, with (P1) in place, it is true that if Mary learns anything new about the world, that has to be non-physical – be it a property (Jacskon 1982, 1986), a fact (Tim Crane 2003), a concept (David Papineau 2004), mode of presentation (Brian Loar 1990), mode of knowing (Michael Pelczar 2005), or whatnot. As a matter of fact, never again after the original,

1982 article does Jackson himself use the premise with Mary's knowledge being limited to neurophysiology and the visual system; a couple of examples:

Mary is confined to a black-and-white room (...). In this way she learns everything to know about the physical nature of the world. (Jackson 1986: 291)

Suppose that we have a brilliant physical scientist, Mary, who is confined in a room, which is painted black and white throughout (...) Her information about the world and its workings comes from books without coloured pictures and from black-and-white television. However, the lectures delivered over black-and-white television are amazing feats of exposition in physics, chemistry, biology, and cognitive science (...) In consequence, she is extraordinarily knowledgeable about the physical nature of our world (...) (Jackson 2007: 315)

Putting all things together, we get something like the following argument:

(P1) Mary knows everything (objects, properties, facts) physical about the entire world.

(P2) Mary acquires new knowledge about the world.

(C) There are non-physical items (objects, or properties, or facts) in the world.

By “physical” here we mean physical, chemical, biological, and so forth – scientific, in a word. We follow Jackson in this understanding of “physical”².

² Others, like David Chalmers (1996) and Stephan Leuenberger (2008), use “physical” as shorthand for “microphysical”; however, they would at the same time subscribe to the thesis that the chemical, biological

3. Paradox, again

(P1) and (P2) create conditions structurally isomorphic to the case of specialist knowledge and paradox. If it is true that Mary learns something new, then what she knew as a physical specialist was not all there is to know about the world. Therefore, by (E), what she knew before having the experience, her physical knowledge, was only complete knowledge of a proper part of the whole reality. Hence, her coming to know something new means coming to know a proper part of reality that is distinct from the proper part that she knew before having the experience. But if that is the case, how does she, or *we* for that matter, know that the new proper part of reality is not physical? It must then be the case that she and we know that what she knew was *exactly* the physical part of reality. But this presupposes that she and we know which part of reality is physical and which part is not. Hence, she cannot come to know new facts about the world, if she and we are to eliminate the possibility that what she learns when having the experience is physical – a possibility that would invalidate the argument. Summing it up: either (a) by knowing everything physical she has complete knowledge of the world, or (b) we cannot ensure that what she learns new when having the experience of colour is not physical. If (a), then (P2) is unassertible. If (b), then we cannot guarantee that (P1) is true, so it becomes unassertible. If this is the case, then (P1) is assertible if and only if (P2) is unassertible.

etc. follows a priori from the narrowly physical. Consequently, there is mere terminological difference between us and them.

The paradox is that even though the story of Mary makes intuitive sense as a story about the possibility of her gaining new and non-physical knowledge by having the color experience for the first time, it is equally plausible –for all we know conceptually-- to think that in fact her new knowledge is a new advance in physics, and that *that* is the true reason why Mary really is physically omniscient, which means that she couldn't have gained that new knowledge to begin with, as it would have been contrary to the assumption of physical omniscience. So the anti-physicalist interpretation of story becomes self-undermining.

Let us apply the solution we proposed in the case of the specialist paradox to Mary's case. We distinguished genuine-kind knowledge, like physical or chemical knowledge, from highly disjunctive, based on acquaintance in some form or other with facts. We then observed that it is genuine-kind knowledge that is relevant for the truth of (E) and (I), so that the sense of knowledge that is presupposed when we say that *A* has specialist, ϕ -knowledge is that of genuine-kind, and it is compatible with *A* acquiring new specialist, ψ -knowledge about the world. The sense of knowledge that is such that the specialist must have it by the very fact that she is a specialist, hence, cannot acquire more of it, is that of acquaintance with everything in some way or other.

However, applying the solution to Mary's case yields a result that does not in any way help the defender of the knowledge argument. Recall that Mary is supposed to have all possible scientific knowledge about the entire world, that is, for any ϕ , Mary is supposed to have complete ϕ -knowledge about the entire world. She is also supposed to acquire new knowledge when experiencing colour for the first time. According to our solution to the specialist paradox, she must then already have, *before experiencing color*,

acquaintance in some form or other with the entire region of the world that was left out by her specialist knowledge in order for that specialist knowledge to count as *complete* specialist knowledge. Since the very idea behind the Mary-story is that knowledge of what it is like to experience color is exclusively experiential and that there is no specialty ϕ that Mary doesn't have knowledge of, the only way Mary could be taken to have acquaintance in any form with whatever was supposed to have been left out by her specialist knowledge is for her to be taken as having experienced color. But, by the very hypothesis of the Mary case, she hasn't had such experiences whatsoever. Therefore, either we are not justified in assuming that Mary does actually have complete scientific knowledge of the entire world, or we are not justified in thinking that she learns something non-physical about the world when seeing red for the first time, and so that she learns anything new at all. Putting these together, we are never justified in assuming *both* that Mary has complete scientific knowledge before experiencing color and that she learns something new when doing so.

It might look as though Mary's case is even more paradoxical and, hence, not really an instance of the specialist paradox. But that's not the right diagnosis. Mary's case is an extreme instance of the paradox in that it involves the notion of specialist knowledge of all possible kinds rather than of one kind only. The explanation of why the general solution does not really amount to a solution in Mary's case is that the intuitive case for (I) –the thesis that a specialist can learn new facts—is not supported any longer, or at least the thesis gets as much support and no more than the intuition that a complete specialist in all possible specialties and about all facts about the entire world is in fact someone who is not supposed to learn anything new about the world. This is why in

Mary's case, paradoxical as it seems given the superficial coherence of the story, there is nothing surprising, given our general analysis of the specialist paradox, in finding out that that the two premises – that Mary is a complete specialist knowledge in everything and that Mary learns something new – are mutually undermining as far as the warrant for their assertibility is concerned.

4. Quandary

If the foregoing analysis of the knowledge argument is right, does it have more general consequences for the right attitude to adopt with respect to the truth-value of physicalism, supposing the only available argumentative resources are those offered by the epistemic arguments against physicalism, like the knowledge argument, but also the zombie argument and the explanatory gap argument? The zombie argument (Robert Kirk 1974a, 1974b, Chalmers 1996) claims to deduce the falsity of physicalism from the conceivability of zombies, that is, of creatures that are physical duplicates of us, but lacking phenomenal consciousness whatsoever. The idea of an explanatory gap between physical and phenomenal facts (Joseph Levine 1983) can be used as an argument against physicalism, too. It would aim at deducing the falsity of the latter from the premise that the totality of physical truths is enough to deduce any truth *except* truths about phenomenal consciousness. All these epistemic arguments against physicalism ask us to think about the totality of physical truths; this is no different from what we are asked to do when thinking about the knowledge that Mary is assumed to possess. The difference

would only be that, unlike the pre-experience Mary, we do already know the experiential truths, so that what we are asked for is to ‘directly observe’ that those truths don’t follow from the physical ones, rather than to try a priori *synthesize* them from physical ones—and fail.³ If that is the case, structurally similar problems are to be recognized as plaguing these alleged proofs that physicalism is false. In particular, what in the knowledge argument is represented as premises (P1) and (P2), now get merged into one premise: ‘P & not-Q is conceivable (or not false a priori)’, where P is supposed to be the set of all physical truths, and Q some phenomenal truth. If what we established about the knowledge argument is right, then asserting not-Q undermines the warrant for the assertibility of P (i.e. the assertibility of P as the set of *all* physical truths), and asserting P undermines the warrant for the assertibility of not-Q. Of course, undermining assertibility is emphatically different from undermining truth. In the case of the zombie argument, for instance, it might well be true that ‘a physical duplicate of myself without consciousness is conceivable’ is true; all we want to emphasize, by analogy with the analysis of the specialist paradox and knowledge argument, is that once the assertibility of ‘without consciousness’ is taken as warranted, one has to realize that what has been taken as the complete physical truth about the entire world can only safely be taken so to the extent that one has already made up ones mind about *all* actual facts, as to which of them is physical, which of them is not. A decision must have been made, if a conclusion is about to be reached. Having done so, however, would only make sense if one already knew whether physicalism is true or not, but that is precisely what is at stake, i.e. that is

³ I borrow the phrase “to a priori synthesize” from Daniel Stoljar (2005: 478); the conditional ‘If A then B’ is a priori synthesizable iff ‘If A then B’ is such that a sufficiently logically acute person who possessed only the concepts required to understand its antecedent, is in a position to know that it is true. Mary’s case is supposed to at least show that ‘If P then Q’ is not synthesizable, where P is the set of physical truths, and Q is some phenomenal truth.

precisely the conclusion the premise ‘a physical duplicate of myself without consciousness is conceivable’ is supposed to *contribute toward*, if the premise is assertible.⁴ But then the extent of P will be a matter of choice, and since the choice cannot be grounded in the assertibility of the whole premise, it cannot itself ground the second conjunct of the premise, namely, not-Q. So the warrant for the assertibility of not-Q is undermined by the assertibility of P.

Where does this leave us? From the foregoing discussion it might be wrongly inferred that there is no fact of the matter as regards the truth or otherwise of physicalism. By saying ‘a decision must have been made, if a conclusion is about to be reached’ we did not mean that a decision *ought to be made no matter what*. On the contrary, what we would like to be inferred is that, if all our available argumentative resources are those offered via the epistemic arguments, then we should be agnostic about the issue of physicalism. The idea we find most congenial in this context is the notion of *being in a quandary*, proposed and discussed by Crispin Wright. A subject *S* is in a quandary about some proposition *p* iff (i) *S* does not know whether *p* or not-*p*, (ii) *S* does not know any way of coming to know that *p* or that not-*p*, and (iii) *S* can produce no reason for thinking that there is any way of coming to know whether *p* or not-*p* (Wright 2001: 71). As Wright

⁴ It will be objected that what P requires to be already known before having warrant for the assertibility of ‘P and not-Q is conceivable’ is the set of microphysical truths, and that is well-defined and known in a non-question-begging way for the purpose of disproving physicalism. Then, it is argued, the rest of P is known via a priori reasoning. I agree that the category of microphysical truths is well-defined and knowable without begging the question against physicalism. I disagree, however, that whatever truth is required to be a member in P in order for the zombie or the explanatory gap argument to work is whatever is a priori deducible from microphysical truths. Micro-macro laws are a counterexample: they are, by their very nature, not *micro*-physical laws, yet they are taken to be physical laws; the reason some law is taken as physical is that it relates physical properties. Hence, the macro properties related by micro-macro laws to microphysical properties are taken as physical *prior to* the laws themselves having been established to be physical. Hence, macro-physical truths are not physical in virtue of being a priori deducible from microphysical ones.

observes, the notion of a quandary excludes that *S* knows that there is no way of knowing that *p* or that not-*p*:

If we could know that we couldn't know, then we should know that someone who took a view, however tentative – say that *x* is red – was wrong to do so. But we do *not* know that they are wrong to do so – the indeterminacy precisely leaves it open.

(Wright 2001: 73)

The mind-body problem should be taken as a Wrightean quandary. Given our analysis of the specialist paradox and knowledge argument, what we can safely and responsibly adopt as an attitude to the epistemic arguments is to deny the joint *assertibility* of some of their premises (the conjunction of (P1) and (P2) in the case of the knowledge argument, or the conjuncts of the complex premise stating that zombies are conceivable, in the zombie argument). What we end up with is not denying, in the classical sense, some premises, but denying that we know whether those premises are true, that we know some way of coming to know whether those premises are true, and that we can produce any reason for thinking that there is any way of coming to know whether those premises are true. We end up being in a quandary.

Our proposal, advising the adoption of the quandary view for the mind-body problem, is emphatically distinct from all the views that have been proposed as replies to the epistemic arguments⁵, given that the latter presuppose denying some premises in the classical sense, which is inconsistent with being in a quandary. Furthermore, even a view

⁵ For a quasi-exhaustive overview of replies to the knowledge argument, see Torin Alter 2006. For a quasi-exhaustive overview of replies to the epistemic arguments in general, see Chalmers 2003.

like Colin McGinn's (1989), according to which we are cognitively closed to, and hence cannot come to know the truth about the mind-body problem, is excluded, because it entails that we know that someone who asserts the conclusion of some epistemic argument or its negation is wrong, and that destroys the intellectual bafflement, the state of a quandary that we advocate. Finally, as we have previously pointed out, views according to which there is no fact of the matter regarding the debate over the physicalism are also incompatible with quandary: we would like to be as agnostic about whether there is a fact of the matter as about any other theory.

References

- Alter, T. 2006: 'The Knowledge Argument against Physicalism.' In J. Fiesen and B. Dowden (eds.) *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed on 28 March, 2009 at: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/k/know-arg.htm>
- Chalmers, D. J. 1996: *The Conscious Mind. In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Chalmers, D. J. 2003: 'Consciousness and Its Place in Nature.' In S. Stich and F. Warfield (eds.) *Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Mind*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Chalmers, D. J. 2004: 'Phenomenal Concepts and the Knowledge Argument.' In P. Ludlow, Y. Nagasawa, Y. and D. Stoljar (eds.) *There's Something about Mary: Essays on Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument Against Physicalism*. MIT Press.
- Crane, T. 2003: 'Subjective Facts.' In H. Lillehammer (ed.) *Real Metaphysics: Essays in Honour of D. H. Mellor*. New York: Routledge.

- Jackson, F. 1982: 'Epiphenomenal Qualia.' *Philosophical Quarterly* **32**: 127 - 136.
- Jackson, F. 1986: 'What Mary Didn't Know.' *Journal of Philosophy* **83**: 291-295.
- Jackson, F. 2007: 'Consciousness.' In F. Jackson and M. Smith, *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, Oxford University Press.
- Kirk, R., 1974a: 'Sentience and Behaviour', *Mind* **83**: 43-60.
- Kirk, R. 1974b: 'Zombies v. Materialists', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary vol. **48**: 135-152.
- Leuenberger, S. 2008: 'Ceteris Absentibus Physicalism.' In D. Zimmerman (ed.) *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics: Volume 4*, Oxford University Press.
- Levine, J. 1983: 'Materialism and Qualia: the Explanatory Gap.' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* **64**: 354-361.
- Loar, B. 1990: 'Phenomenal States.' *Philosophical Perspectives* **4**: 81-108.
- McGinn, C. 1989: 'Can We Solve the Mind--Body Problem?' *Mind* **98** (391): 349-366.
- Nida-Rümelin, M. 2002: 'Qualia: the knowledge argument.' In E. Zalta (ed.) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed on 25th March, 2009 at:
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qualia-knowledge/>
- Papineau, D. 2004: *Thinking about Consciousness*. Oxford University Press.
- Pelczar, M. 2005: 'Enlightening the Fully Informed.' *Philosophical Studies* **126** (1):29-56.
- Rowlands, M. 2001: *The Nature of Consciousness*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stoljar, D. 2005: 'Physicalism and Phenomenal Concepts', *Mind and Language* **20** (5): 469-494.
- Wright, C. 2001: 'On Being in a Quandary. Relativism, Vagueness, Logical Revisionism.' *Mind* **110** (437): 45-98.

