

# Our Knowledge of the Internal World

## IV. Phenomenal and Epistemic Indistinguishability

### Lewis's hypothesis of phenomenal information

Besides physical information there is an irreducibly different kind of information to be had: phenomenal information. The two are independent. Two possible cases might be exactly alike physically, yet differ phenomenally. When we get physical information we narrow down the physical possibilities, and perhaps we narrow them down all the way to one, but we leave open a range of phenomenal possibilities.

Lewis, "What Experience Teaches"

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#### The Rose Garden scenario

Alice, of the Homeland Security bomb squad, is in the Rose Garden on Tuesday morning, 10:47 AM. She points to the ground beneath a particular rose bush, and says, "a bomb is buried there, and unless we defuse it now it will explode within five minutes."

Barry is in a room far away from the Rose Garden on Monday, and he knows that the next day, at 10:47 AM there will be a bomb buried under the rose bush which is 10.25 meters east and 4.35 meters north of the southwest corner of the garden (the very place that Alice will be pointing to), and that unless it is defused soon after that, it will explode before 10:52.

#### The Coin-flip scenario

Mary, still in her room, is told that she will be subjected to the following experiment: She will be shown either a red or a green star, to be chosen by the flip of a coin, and she is told in great detail the exact circumstances of the two possible scenarios. So given her extensive knowledge of neurophysiology and color science, she knows that when the experiment is performed, she will be in the presence of a star with one of two specific light reflectance properties, and will be in one of two specific brain states. Both before and after the experiment is performed, there are two possible worlds compatible with Mary's knowledge – call them worlds R and G. As it happens, the red star is chosen, so she is in fact in possible world R.

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“ph-red” is Mary’s name, when still in her room, for the type of experience that one has when one sees red. She knows all there is to know about what is going on, physically, in a person when she is having a ph-red experience.

“wow” is the name that Mary gives to the type of experience she is having when the experiment is performed, and she has a ph-red experience.

Mary wonders, “does ph-red = wow?”

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### **The Principle of Phenomenal Indistinguishability**

If two possibilities are epistemic alternatives for a knower at a time (that is, both are compatible with his or her knowledge) then they are phenomenally indistinguishable to the knower at that time.

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### **Conclusion**

*The principle of phenomenal indistinguishability, together with the facts about what Mary knows and does not know in the coin flip scenario, entail the hypothesis of phenomenal information*