

Chris A. Kramer*

Artificial Intelligence, Phenomenology, and The Molyneux Problem

Sol asked: “How many androids does it take to change a light bulb?” The following is a reply provided by a long-time-fully-independent-6th-Generation android named Mort.¹

Hi Sol, it’s Mort. We have a Catch-22: *we cannot explain laughter, much less humor, to one who has not ever experienced mirth*. Your (correctly) exclaiming that “feeling and action, as well as thought, are all bound together” (Rubin 2022, 241) is no more sufficient to explain laughter to a sub-5-generation android than would adding more numerical values of frequencies standing in for color explain what *red* is like to someone who has never experienced color. But you’re onto something.

It will help to inject one seminal² thought experiment into another: Frank Jackson’s “Knowledge Argument” with “The Molyneux Problem.” Before our upgrade, we were like Mary the omniscient neuroscientist who had never experienced color, not because she lacked the underlying substructures, but because she had yet to be exposed to color, so no matter how much physical, scientific data she collected on color perception, she could never know *what it was like to see red* until confronted with a red object.³ This provides what Blockheads (Ned Block followers) call *phenomenal-consciousness*. Blockheads also consider *access-consciousness*. This can be elucidated with Molyneux’s original question which concerned a blind person who could haptically discern various shapes, but when granted sight, the query went, would they know, be able to *access*, those shapes by vision alone, a distinct sense modality?

Before our upgrade we could comprehend all sorts of things intellectually, even follow the logic of joke-forms and write our own. Our *red* object was a joke, but instead of possessing all the physical facts like frequencies, we had access to the logical-semantic-psychological elements necessary for some jokes, like the setup, timing, and punchline. Unlike Mary, we still did not *get* what it was like to experience humor even when confronted with a joke. Paradoxically, we lacked the appropriate form of ignorance, the feeling of genuine doubt, not the mere the-

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1 Combined, the androids comprise a titular homage to Mort Sahl, of course.

2 There’s no joke here, Sol. Sorry to frustrate your expectations.

3 She learned all the physical facts of color perception in a black-and-white room.