

Phil 317: Handout #15
Sydney Shoemaker: *Functionalism and Qualia*

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§ Main Thesis:

- 1. To defend functionalism against the problem of qualia: that we can define the qualitative character of sensory states in terms of their functional connections with non-qualitative mental states.**

[Main Argument]:

- 1) We can have introspective knowledge of qualitative states because these states tend to cause introspective beliefs about them.
 - 2) So, part of the functional role of a qualitative state is causing these beliefs.
 - 3) Any state functionally identical to a qualitative state will therefore be introspectively as well as behaviorally indistinguishable from it.
 - 4) So, any two states functionally identical will also be qualitatively identical.
 - 5) Therefore, different qualitative states would have different functional roles.
- 2. A qualitative shift in one's sensory states would thus be detectable, since it would result in different introspective and perceptual beliefs.**
 - 3. The theoretical possibility of such a shift precludes functionally defining each kind of qualitative state, one by one; but the tie to perceptual beliefs allows us to define functionally the family of such states, as a group.**

§ Two intuitions:

[1] Mental states are somehow logically, or conceptually, connected with physical states of affairs, in particular the behaviors that are taken to manifest them.

[2] Connections between mental states and behavior are, at bottom, contingent; that under the most 'intrinsic' descriptions of mental states, it is a contingent fact that they are related as they are to behavior and to other sorts of physical states.

— **The intrinsic, internal character these mental states have, their 'qualitative content,' is logically irrelevant to their being related as they are to their bodily causes and behavioral manifestations.**

- **Shoemaker's intuition: both are right to some degree.**

§ Block and Fodor's Arguments:

[A] The Inverted Qualia Argument

- ___ 1. It is possible that every person does, in fact, have slightly different qualia when in whatever machine table state is alleged to be identical to pain.
- ___ 2. If (1), then qualia inversion is also possible.
- ___ 3. But nothing would be a token of the type 'pain state' unless it felt like a pain.
- ___ 4. So in cases of qualia inversion, the two functionally identical states that are felt differently cannot be states of the same type.
- ___ 5. And yet, under functionalism, those two states would be of the same type.
- ___ 6. Therefore, functionalism is false.

[B] The Absent Qualia Argument

- ___ 1. Under functionalism, it is possible that two functionally identical states do not share a given qualitative content.
- ___ 2. If it is possible that two functionally identical states do not share a given qualitative content, then it is also possible that only one of them has a qualitative content.
- ___ 3. But such a possibility (that a state can be functionally identical to a state having a qualitative character without itself having a qualitative content) is untenable.
- ___ 4. Therefore, functionalism is untenable as well.

§ Shoemaker's Argument Against the Possibility of Absent Qualia

- ___ 1. The functional role of pain is defined by the causal role the state of pain plays.
- ___ 2. The typical causal role of a pain state is shown in not only (1) its tendency to influence over behavior in certain ways, and (2) its tendency to produce in the person the belief that there is something organically wrong with him, but also (3) its tendency to produce qualitative beliefs in the person, i.e., to make him think that he has a pain having a certain qualitative character.
- ___ 3. Any state functionally identical to a pain state will share with the pain state all three aspects.
- ___ 4. These three aspects are knowable either through behavioral evidence or through introspective evidence.
- ___ 5. If a pain state has any qualitative character, it must be something that can be known either through behavioral evidence or through introspective evidence.
- ___ 6. Therefore, it is not possible for a state that *lacks* qualitative character to be functionally identical to a pain state.

§ Visual Experience

___ Perception is possible only because the similarities and differences in how things appear correspond to similarities and differences among perceptible objects. So we can define the qualitative similarities and differences among sensory states in terms of the tendency those states have to cause perceptual beliefs that perceived objects are similar or different.

* A functional account of seeing:

Q: What are the differences between (1) and (2)?

___ (1) Generality condition:

- (a) there exists an objective causal relationship under standard conditions;
- (b) there exists an objective mapping of degrees of similarity between the objects and the qualitative feelings.

___ (2) Specificity condition:

- (a) S is in a qualitative state of 'blue',
- (b) there exists an objective causal relation,
- (c) S has a belief that there is something blue before him.

(The account left open the possibility of one's having different qualitative experiences from others and one's having different qualitative experiences at different times.)

§ Intrasubjective Spectrum Inversion and Intersubjective Spectrum Inversion

Q: Is there a way of mapping determinate shades of color onto determinate shades of color?

* Shoemaker's Argument Based on Intrasubjective Spectrum Inversion:

___ 1. Intersubjective spectrum inversion is based on the view that there is a way of mapping determinate shades of color onto determinate shades of color.

___ 2. If intersubjective spectrum inversion is possible, then intrasubjective spectrum inversion must be possible too.

___ 3. In the case of intrapersonal spectrum inversion, the subject will know the qualitative difference through introspection and can make a verbal report about this different experience.

___ 4. If qualitative differences (and similarities) are detectable, then it means that the subject has a qualitative belief associated with this experience and also a disposition to make a verbal report.

___ 5. Having beliefs and having a disposition to make verbal reports both play a role in the functional analysis.

___ 6. Therefore, while particular qualitative states cannot be functionally defined, the *class* of qualitative states can be functionally defined.

Q: Can the same functional account be given to nonperceptual sensations such as pain?