

The Nature of Consciousness
Handout [20]
Daniel Dennett: *Quining Qualia*

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§ The Goals:

- 1. To make philosophers feel uncomfortable to talk about qualia just like biologists feel uncomfortable in appealing to the notion of *élan vital*.**
- 2. To show that the pre-theoretical notion of qualia is so thoroughly confused that it is simply better to declare that there are no qualia.**

§ Quining Qualia

* 'to quine': To deny resolutely the existence or importance of something real or significant.

* "qualia": the ways things seem to us.

§ The Traditional Notion of Qualia

Intuition Pump 1: *watching you eat cauliflower.*

Intuition Pump 2: *the wine-tasting machine*

[These intuitions lead people to carve up the notion of *qualia*.]

[Question]: Do you share these intuitions?

§ Traditional analyses of "qualia":

- ___ 1. Qualia are *ineffable*: No matter how eloquent one is and no matter how cooperative and imaginative one's audience is, one cannot say to another exactly what way one is currently sensing, tasting, smelling, and so forth.
- ___ 2. Qualia are *intrinsic*: Qualia are somehow atomic and unanalyzable.
- ___ 3. Qualia are essentially *private*: Any objective, physiological, or "merely behavioral" test would of necessity miss the target, so all interpersonal comparisons of these ways of appearing are systematically impossible.
- ___ 4. Qualia are *directly or immediately apprehensible in consciousness*:

They are essentially directly accessible to the consciousness of their experiencer, or "immediately phenomenological qualities."

§ The Paradox in the Traditional View

To show: "Qualia" is a philosophers' term which fosters nothing but confusion, and refers in the end to no properties or features at all.

[A] Interpersonal qualia comparison is impossible.

Intuition Pump 3: *the inverted spectrum*

Intuition Pump 4: *the Brainstorm machine*

[These intuitions supposedly show that no intersubjective comparison of qualia is possible, even with perfect technology.]

[B] Intrapersonal qualia comparison is also impossible.

Intuition Pump 5: *the neurosurgical prank*

Intuition Pump 6: *alternative neurosurgery*

___ Option 1: invert the qualia-producing channels

___ Option 2: invert certain memory-access links

[These intuitions show that intrapersonal qualia inversion has the same problem as the interpersonal qualia inversion: the link is now replaced by memory.]

Intuition Pump 7: *Chase and Sanborn*

___ Chase: My taste has changed; I have become a more sophisticated coffee drinker.

___ Sanborn: Maxwell House coffee doesn't taste to me the way it used to taste.

Dennett's claim: There is no way of telling whether it is a change near the brute perceptual processing end of the spectrum or a change near the ultimate reactive judgment end of the spectrum.

Intuition Pump 8: *the gradual post-operative recovery*

Dennett's claim: The qualia are the "immediate or phenomenal" properties, of course, but this description will not serve to locate the right phase in the

physiological stream, for there will always be at least two possible ways of interpreting the neurophysiological theory, however it comes out.

§ Dennett's Argument: Qualia are relational, not intrinsic.

Intuition Pump 9: *the experienced beer drinker*

Intuition Pump 10: *the world-wide eugenics experiment*

Intuition Pump 11: *the cauliflower cure*

Intuition Pump 12: *visual field inversion created by wearing inverting spectacles*

[The Argument]

- ___ 1. If one's attitudes towards, or reactions to, experiences are in any way and in any degree constitutive of their experiential qualities, so that a change in reactivity amounts to or guarantees a change in the property, then that property cease to be intrinsic.
- ___ 2. Our tastes do seem to be affected by our past experiences or our attitudes, etc.
- ___ 3. Therefore, qualia such as tastes are not intrinsic.

§ Introducing a Replacement Notion: Phenomenal Information Properties" [pips]

Intuition Pump 13: *the osprey cry*

Intuition Pump 14: *the Jello box*

Intuition Pump 15: *the guitar string*

[These intuition pumps suggest to us a new way of thinking qualia: phenomenal information properties.]

[Dennett's Proposal]:

- ___ 1. There is an internal property detector responsible for each sensory property.
- ___ 2. What we call qualia are simply whatever these detectors detect.
- ___ 3. But such detectors can be refined through experience.
- ___ 4. These detectors are simply workings of our nervous systems and they are realized in the brain.
- ___ 5. Having these detectors allows us to reidentify or recognize a familiar property.
- ___ 6. But we do not have to know how we identify or re-identify or gain access to such internal response types in order to be able to identify them.

___ 7. **There are no ineffable, intrinsic, private, directly apprehensible properties of experience. In its stead, we find public properties that we can refer to indirectly via reference to our private property detectors.**

[Question]: Has Dennett really gotten rid of the notion of qualia?