



Undergraduate assignment feedback form (to be completed by marker)

Student Name: <i>Esme Luckham</i>	
Module title:	Student number:
For completion by marker: Comments: <i>In this essay there is evidence that you've assimilated a wide range of reading, but in places the full impact of the arguments has not been utilised to your advantage. Try to ensure you sufficiently develop the arguments, as well as leave space to develop & assess counter-arguments. Perhaps you are trying to include too much & need to be a bit more selective - which are the strongest arguments? Could you focus on those? Overall, though, this is a very good piece of work that reveals knowledge & understanding of the topic & of underlying</i>	
Marker's signature: <i>[Signature]</i>	Date: <i>23/11/20</i>
Provisional mark: <i>65</i>	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

concepts (such as that of multiple-realisability).

Esme Luckham

Critically evaluate two of the following challenges to functionalism:

- The inverted qualia objection
- The absent qualia objection
- The Chinese room

A critical evaluation of qualia as a challenge to physicalism

The hard problem of consciousness (so called by David Chalmers¹) is one that has yet to be solved by science or philosophy. This is why it is one of the most important topics of discussion amongst philosophers today especially when considering real world ethical implications relating to animal rights. For more information on the question on animal consciousness find

'Carruthers on conscious experience'² by Dale Jamieson and Marc Bekoff. This may not be the main focus of this essay but it is relevant to point out that this is, in many people's opinion, the most applicable subject in the discussion of 'what makes a being conscious'. Physicalism is a theory of consciousness. The topic of functionalism falls under the category of physicalism within the realm of philosophy of mind. It is physicalism that is defended as this discussion progresses. This is done by the close examination of topics such as consciousness, perception, qualia, identity theory and pain through scholarly debate. Including 'Mad Pain and Martian Pain'³ by David Lewis who gives an explanation of the phenomenology of pain. Although absent and inverted qualia are commonly used to escape the explanation of functionalism, they can be generalized to challenge physicalism in a broader sense. Using examples such as the Zombie argument a better understanding of the qualia objections should be realized. As seen in *Metaphysics: a guide and anthology*⁴, there are two questions that hold the key to the mind body dilemma. Firstly, if the mind is not physical then how can it affect anything in the physical world? Secondly, if the mind is physical then how can we hope to understand consciousness?

Try to relate this point to what you say above. Try to make this & the above inter-linked.

Physicalism and dualism are theories of consciousness. Physicalism argues that all elements of consciousness can be explained by/are realized by various physical brain states. On the other hand, dualism posits that while we have a physical body we also have a 'mental body' that is separate from the physical. This dualist view is supported by Rene Descartes in his many metaphysical meditations. He famously said "Dubito Cogito Ergo Sum" which means "I doubt therefore I think, therefore I am". Descartes believed that he could not doubt the existence of himself as a purely nonphysical mental consciousness but that he could doubt his physical body. According to him, it follows that because he can doubt one and not the other he is made

¹ 'Hard Problem of Consciousness | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy' <<https://iep.utm.edu/hard-con/>> [accessed 17 November 2020].

² Dale Jamieson and Marc Bekoff, 'Carruthers on Nonconscious Experience', Oxford University Press, 52 (1992), 23-28.

³ David Lewis, *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology: Mad Pain and Martian Pain*, ed. by Ned Block (Harvard University Press, 1983), 1.

⁴ Crane and Farkes, *Metaphysics: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

Gr - grammar

of two different components, his physical body and his nonphysical consciousness. Dualism has been widely accepted for hundreds of years, so much so that it has embedded itself into the way we talk about ourselves. For example, "I feel fine but my body is stiff" or "He is mentally unwell". These examples of how we understand ourselves show that we very often think of ourselves as two entities, the mental and the physical without thinking about how they are causally related. ✓

Physicalism, unlike dualism, does not distinguish the difference between the mental and the physical. It says that they are one and the same, that they are causally related⁵. However philosophers like Joseph Levine have argued that there is a problem with the physicalist-view of the mind. It cannot be explained using purely physical language, this is known as the 'explanatory gap'⁶. Like when a doctor says "you have gene H (a physical thing) which means you are more likely to enjoy cabbage (enjoyment being a phenomenal experience/ nonphysical thing). In other words, it is very difficult to talk about mind and body from a physicalist standpoint because of the language 'mind and body'.

Physicalism can also be seen in our language but it is in a slightly contradictory and antiquated manner. For example, when we say "I love you" the "I" still seems only to refer to one's mental identity but the "you" seems to refer to the other person as a whole. Our language surrounding the matter of consciousness is confused, so it is unsurprising that this problem is ongoing.

Qualia is also known as the knowledge argument and is used mainly to challenge physicalism⁷. Qualia is a word used by philosophers to describe individual phenomenal conscious experiences. In other words, qualia is the 'what it is like' to experience certain things from the external world internally. This *basically* means that it is impossible to know everything about something without experiencing it, simply learning about its physical properties is not enough to give a complete understanding of the thing itself. This 'what it is like' is something that physicalism putatively is unable to explain, this is explored in more detail below. J. T.

Physicalism leaves something out. The most common things that are understood by use of qualia are pain and colour. For example, there is a thought experiment called Mary's room or Mary's black and white world⁸. Mary has spent her entire life in a black and white room, that is to say, she has never seen any colour, other than the many shades of black and white. While she is in her room she becomes an expert on the neuroscience of colour. One day Mary goes outside and sees colour for the first time. She sees a red rose and knows that it is red only because she knows that these particular roses are red, since she has never seen red before.

⁵ Crane and Farkes.

⁶ Alex Byrne, 'Inverted Qualia', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2020 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/qualia-inverted/>> [accessed 15 November 2020].

⁷ Martine Nida-Rümelin and Donnchadh O Conaill, 'Qualia: The Knowledge Argument', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2019 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/qualia-knowledge/>> [accessed 6 November 2020].

⁸ Nida-Rümelin and O Conaill, *ibid.*

this must be the only way she knows that the rose is red⁹. The point of this thought experiment is to demonstrate the importance of phenomenal experience i.e. the subjective phenomenal experience of something, the 'what it is like' to experience (in this case, colour) cannot be equated to the knowledge of the physical properties of that thing. ✓

However, it seems ridiculous to say that Mary knew everything there was to know about the physical properties of colour without experiencing it first hand i.e. just because she has to experience red to know red does not mean that the mind is nonphysical. By assuming that she could learn all there is to know about red without seeing it, there is an initial assumption that red is purely physical (as will become clear, colours are subject to experience) when in reality, although colour as a spectrum can be argued to be physical, specific colours cannot because each person (and species) sees colours subjectively (according to how much light is absorbed by cone cells in the retina¹⁰). T. But just.

The example of Mary's room can work in favour of physicalism rather than against it. Imagine Descartes, sitting in his armchair contemplating his dualist existence. Now imagine that he steps outside the comfort of his home into a world of the future, a world of science (knowledge discovered through empirical method). This example is not unlike that of Mary's black and white room. Mary can learn all there is to know in her head/mentally about red but without the physical bodily experience of red she would not ever truly know red. Descartes would surely argue that she can know everything about red simply by thinking about it. It stands to reason that, if qualia is thought of in this way, it seems to support physicalism and damage the dualist position. Not to mention that many philosophers including Patricia Churchland, have given the response; Mary did not learn anything new at all about colour when she leaves her room because she already knows everything about it. It is impossible to comprehend the 'what it is like' to know absolutely everything about the human brain (since science still falls short of this) so maybe Mary has all the answers after all¹¹. Not necessarily as your previous sentence suggests

It has been suggested that, although it is traditionally used to undermine functionalism, the inverted qualia objection can be generalized to undermine physicalism¹², this is not the case. The inverted qualia (also known as the inverted spectrum) objection states that two people, although functionally the same, may not be having the same experience. When generalized the statement looks more like this; two people, although physically the same, may not be having the same experience¹³. While the second premise seems true of certain things, such as emotional reaction, it does not seem to be true when applied to the example given by most for inverted qualia. This example is that of colour blindness¹⁴. Most colour blind people cannot distinguish but

⁹ Nida-Rümelin and O Conaill, *ibid*.

¹⁰ 'Causes of Colour Blindness', *Colour Blind Awareness* <<https://www.colourblindawareness.org/colour-blindness/causes-of-colour-blindness/>> [accessed 17 November 2020].

¹¹ Nida-Rümelin and O Conaill, *op. cit.*

¹² Amy Kind, 'Qualia | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy' <<https://iep.utm.edu/qualia/>> [accessed 17 November 2020].

¹³ Kind, *ibid*.

¹⁴ Byrne, *op. cit.*

between red and green. So, Timmy is colour blind and his friend Lilly is not, when Timmy looks at the holly tree he cannot see its red berries until Lilly points them out because to Timmy, the berries are green like the leaves. If Lilly had not known that Timmy was colour blind she would not have pointed the red berries out to him and they would have appeared to be experiencing the holly tree in the same way, while in reality they see it differently. At a glance this seems simple, Timmy and Lilly are physically the same but have different experiences. However, Timmy and Lilly may seem to be physically the same but they are not. Besides the obvious male female differences, Timmy actually has slightly different eyes. There are three types of cone cells in the human eye, each has a different sensitivity to light. One of the cones is responsible for seeing green wavelengths, one for red and one for green¹⁵. Timmy has faulty cone cells. Inverted qualia can be a true challenge to functionalism but as demonstrated by Timmy's cone cells (physical, microscopic substance) physicalism is not faulted by the inverted qualia objection.

very good

The example for absent qualia is again pointed more specifically at functionalism but can be made applicable to the physicalist argument. Rather than the example of a non conscious being that is functionally the same as a conscious being, imagine a non conscious being that is physically the same as a conscious one.

If philosophical Zombies are possible then physicalism must be false¹⁶. Philosophical zombies are not like the ones from *Shaun of the Dead*¹⁷, instead they are exactly like us in every physical aspect. They behave as we do and appear to think in the same way as us but in fact, they are not conscious at all. Even though they seem indistinguishable from us, they are not conscious. Some philosophers (Kirk, 1974, Chalmers 1996 and Sturgeon 2000) use the Zombie argument to refute physicalism¹⁸. They allow for the possibility of such Zombie like creatures because they argue that what is conceivable is possible.

Put in footnotes & provide full references

However, this thinking comes from a cartesian foundation i.e. it was Descartes who said that, if one can conceive that one's body is distinct from one's mind, then that is indeed possible¹⁹. This means that they are defending a cartesian understanding of dualism with a cartesian belief that what can be imagined to be possible can be possible, which is not a legitimate standpoint for a coherent philosophical discussion. Disregarding the circular portion of this problem with the Zombie argument, there are still major issues with this challenge to physicalism. The biggest being that what is conceivable is not necessarily possible and even if this is the case, it does not give a good foundation to build on²⁰. Especially since, in the first place, it seems inconceivable that there could be a being which is in every way the same as us in its appearance, behaviour, function and physicality that was without consciousness. The film *Bicentennial Man*²¹ was

Dennett

¹⁵ 'Causes of Colour Blindness'.

¹⁶ Crane and Farkes, *Metaphysics: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Edgar Wright, *Shaun of the Dead*, 2004.

¹⁸ Crane and Farkes.

¹⁹ Crane and Farkes.

²⁰ Tamar Szabo Gendler and John Hawthorne, *Conceivability and Possibility* (Clarendon Press, 2002).

²¹ Chris Columbus, *Bicentennial Man*, 1999.

pg ?

expand

released in 1999 starring Robin Williams and was based on a book called *The Positronic Man* by Isaac Asimov, it is a really interesting example of a robot searching for his humanity. In the film it is impossible to tell the difference between the robot (once he looks exactly like us) and a conscious human being.

But this could work in favour of the challenge

Another example of qualia is pain i.e. it is impossible to know 'what it is like' for other beings to experience pain. In his article *Mad pain and Martian pain*, David Lewis describes two examples to challenge both the functionalist and physicalist understanding of pain related qualia²². The Madman is a human being who does not experience pain in the same way as most other humans i.e. his physical state is the same as other humans that are in pain but he does not appear to be in pain at all nor is his pain the same as most other people. The Martian is not a human being and does not have the same physical realisation of pain as humans but he does experience pain in the same way i.e. pain feels the same for the Martian as it does for humans. Since the Madman does not experience pain like the majority of the population he belongs to and the Martian belongs to a population that has a different physical realisation of a pain state, Lewis comes to an agreeable, if not all that helpful conclusion.

"If it feels to him like pain, then it is pain, whatever it's causal role or physical nature. If not, it isn't. It's that simple!" (David Lewis, *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology: Mad Pain and Martian Pain*, ed. by Ned Block, Harvard University Press, 1983)

This seems contradictory to the case of the Madman since, although he is in the physical state that is known as pain for the rest of humanity, he does not experience the physical state in the same way. However, Lewis gets around this by saying that the Madman is not in a state that occupies the causal role of pain for him. He is an exception to the rule, to say that an entire population experiences pain in the same way is unrealistic. This is because, Lewis says, the Madman's neurons are hooked up slightly differently and that there will always be exceptions to the majority regardless of whether we consider it in a human or Martian population²³.

In conclusion, it seems that not all the challenges to physicalism hold up against scrutiny. Despite the examples of the philosophical Zombie and inverted qualia arguments, physicalism still stands. The problems presented by the example of inverted qualia can be overlooked because of scientific understanding of cone cells (physical but microscopic) in the retina, these are what determines color blindness. The discussion of absent qualia using the Zombie argument seems contradictory according to its Cartesian foundations. It also just seems a ridiculously abstract concept, even for a philosophical discussion. Physicalists tend to get around the Mary's room thought experiment by saying that Mary would simply not learn anything new by stepping outside and experiencing red for the first time²⁴. However, it seems a

²² David Lewis, *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology: Mad Pain and Martian Pain*, ed. by Ned Block (Harvard University Press, 1983), 1.

²³ Lewis, 1.

²⁴ Amy Kind, 'Qualia | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy' <<https://iep.utm.edu/qualia/>> [accessed 17 November 2020].

more coherent argument to suggest that Mary does learn something new but this is because of physical factors i.e. there are physical facts about colour that simply cannot be realized without actually seeing them.

Bibliography

Byrne, Alex, 'Inverted Qualia', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2020 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020)
<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/qualia-inverted/>> [accessed 15 November 2020]

'Causes of Colour Blindness', *Colour Blind Awareness*
<<https://www.colourblindawareness.org/colour-blindness/causes-of-colour-blindness/>>
[accessed 17 November 2020]

Columbus, Chris, *Bicentennial Man*, 1999

Crane, and Farkes, *Metaphysics: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 2004)

Dale Jamieson, and Marc Bekoff, 'Carruthers on Nonconscious Experience', *Oxford University Press*, 52 (1992), 23–28

Gendler, Tamar Szabo, and John Hawthorne, *Conceivability and Possibility* (Clarendon Press, 2002)

'Hard Problem of Consciousness | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy'
<<https://iep.utm.edu/hard-con/>> [accessed 17 November 2020]

Kind, Amy, 'Qualia | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy' <<https://iep.utm.edu/qualia/>>
[accessed 17 November 2020]

Lewis, David, *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology: Mad Pain and Martian Pain*, ed. by Ned Block (Harvard University Press, 1983), 1

Nida-Rümelin, Martine, and Donnchadh O Conaill, 'Qualia: The Knowledge Argument', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2019 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019)
<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/qualia-knowledge/>> [accessed 6 November 2020]

Wight, Edgar, *Shaun of the Dead*, 2004

