



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

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Comments: While this essay contains quite a bit of evaluation, the arguments tend to be oversimplified. This is because the reading material has not been used in sufficient depth. Try to avoid merely summarising the issues - instead, draw on the <u>detail</u> of the <u>arguments</u> in the <u>actual</u> <u>articles</u>. Further, ensure that you reference properly throughout. While there is an attempt at referencing, there are significant <u>lapses</u>. Overall, a closer reading of the reading material is advised.	
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Critically Evaluate Two of the Following Challenges to Functionalism: 1. The Inverted Qualia Objection. 2. The Absent Qualia Objection. 3. The Chinese Room.

By David Shaw.

Introduction

This essay will focus on two of the objections to functionalism, specifically, the inverted qualia objection, and the absent qualia objection. Firstly, I shall present an overview of Functionalism and then of each of the two objections, then I will evaluate whether they really do pose a great challenge to functionalism, or whether I think the functionalists can dismantle these two challenges with great ease.

dis attention needed here. To say you doesn't not correct.

Firstly, functionalists claim that mental concepts are functional concepts and so mental states are therefore functional states. For example, the concept of pain or pleasure bring about different functions in an organism, or, broadly speaking, different certain outputs to certain inputs. A functionalist would also characterise mental states in purely causal terms and claim that what characterises mental states is how mental states relate to one another and to bodily behaviour, which has raised serious objections from some philosophers who subscribe to a different doctrine in the philosophy of mind, such as Behaviourism, or Eliminativism. This is briefly because characterising mental states in causal terms *supposedly* does not include the qualitative character of an organisms' mental states. It does not account for the 'qualia', or the 'raw feel' of our mental states which means this doctrine does not account for our own inner experiences of our own mental states. It is a thesis about the nature

of mental states. Functionalists do not claim there is a separate entity from the body that is the mind, whether this be a soul or a brain, the 'mind', for a functionalist, the mind is just a function. (But Functionalism can be compatible with dualism for this reason.) For example, consider a thermostat,

Explain

'The function of a thermostat is to regulate the temperature of a room or building. It takes a certain input in the form of the ambient temperature and then, depending on how the thermostat has been set, it does either of the following: 1. It turns the heating system on because the room is too cold; 2. It turns the heating system off because the room is too warm.'¹

So, the function of the thermostat is what the thermostat does, so the function of the mind is what the mind does. It is not about how it does it, or even what its constitution is, but what it does, the tasks it performs, or, what its functions are. So, there is a distinction between the job that is performed and the material constitution that enabled the task to be performed. '..... a function can be specified abstractly, and in complete independence of whatever it is that enables the function to be discharged'.² 'Quite clearly, the function cannot be identified with the material arrangements that make it possible, or with the person who discharges the role, as these may change and yet the function continues to be executed. Consequently, it would be wrong to conceive of the function as a physical thing or process.'³ A function is best conceived of as neither physical nor non-physical, but functions do need a physical body to perform any task.

¹ Maslin. K.T. (2007) *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press. p.121.

² Ibid. p. 123.

³ Ibid. p. 123.

The Inverted Qualia Objection

The inverted qualia objection seems to me to be a good objection to functionalism, because it shows, I think, that functionalists are leaving out something when they attempt to create a model of the mind. What they are leaving out of the model is our subjective experiences of 'what it is like' to have a mental state or, how does it *feel* to experience pain or pleasure. What they are leaving out is the 'raw feel' of such mental states. Some functionalists will argue that they are not leaving out anything when making their models of the mind because they argue that qualia does exist in organisms but that it is not important. One reason why they hold this doctrine is because qualia is beyond functional processes in the brain and it is the causal roles of a mental states that functionalists are interested in. Another reason functionalists think this is because including qualia does not 'help, and is not important, when it comes to psychological explanation as it has not missed out important mental states like pleasure and pain, etc., as these sensations are not defined in terms of their qualitative character, but, rather, in terms of their functional roles which is all the functionalists think they need when mapping out the 'mind'. So, for functionalists, qualia is not important because it says nothing about the functional roles of an organism. But here are some examples of why I think qualia *is* important. Somebody called Tom is looking at a 'red' apple and there is another person, called John, who is identical to Tom in every way, so Tom and John are functionally identical, which includes identical biological chemistry and neural networks, etc., but when John looks at the same apple he sees a 'green' apple. Similarly, when Tom looks up at the sky he sees a blue sky, and when John looks up at the same sky he sees the sky as red. So, here we have two identical, functionally equivalent organisms who both have had the exact same inputs and outputs but who both have completely different subjective experiences, or completely different

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Good.

okay - But incorporate your reading

qualia. This might not seem very important but say those same two people are going through life as people do, but because they are identical, they do everything the other person does. So, if Tom eats a certain meal, John has the same meal, and if Tom reads a book, then John reads the same book, and if Tom goes for an evening jog then so does John, etc. So Tom and John, who will have both read the same books, could come to different conclusions about the book, for example, Tom and John could both read the same science books but Tom becomes an atheist while John becomes a theist. Now we have two identical people but with two completely different beliefs which could mean that they now have completely different ways of viewing the world, and, also, of behaving, or functioning, in the world. The inputs and outputs are the same, but they have very different mental states and now imagine how different their lives will be in terms of perception while one believes in a God and maybe a Divine plan and 'everything happens for a reason', while the other, John, does not believe in any of that as he has become an atheistic materialist. I think this shows that there is a lot more to an organism's mental life than functionalism will allow for and it shows that functionalism cannot explain the individual differences in qualia. and if functionalism is about the way something functions rather than its internal constitution, then this could dramatically change the functions of the two people from then on.

Moreover, if a functionalist does agree that qualia exists, then, as science has shown, colours are not in the outer, physical world, as objects reflect different colours of different wavelengths, but these wavelengths have no colour themselves, it is only when an observer with the correct visual and brain capacities looks at them that a colour is seen. So, if there are no colours in the outer, physical world, then they must only exist in our 'minds', which means they do exist and therefore qualia must be an important aspect of a human organism and should not be discounted.

The Absent Qualia Objection

Ref. - Chalmers

The absent qualia objection starts by claiming that functionalism does not capture the mental experience of conscious organisms. Imagine the possibility of an organism which has no subjective experiences at all, or, no qualia, but has the same organisational properties as a human, which would give you something rather like a zombie. This zombie could have the same constitution as me including the exact same neural network as me, or any other human organism, but if the zombie does not have any sort of subjective experience of its environment and it still gives the same functional outputs as me, for instance, when the summer Sun shines in my eyes it makes me wince, and when the summer Sun shines in the identical zombies eyes, the zombie winces exactly the same as I do, but it has no subjective experience of anything, then obviously there seems to be a major fault in the doctrine of functionalism, as the subjective experience, for example, the smelling of a rose, is left out of any functionalist model of the mind. And because how can a zombie, which is the functional equivalent of me, but without the qualia, exist, even as a possibility? For functionalism, this is a serious flaw in the doctrine, but some philosophers, Daniel Dennett, for example, do not see a fault here as they think that there is no metaphysical possibility of a zombie existing in the 'real' world which could be functionally identical to a human, as he states 'when philosophers claim that zombies are conceivable, they invariably underestimate the task of conception and end up imagining something that violates their own definition'.⁴ While other philosophers claim that just because zombies might be a logical possibility, does not mean that

⁴ Dennett, D. (1993) *Consciousness Explained*. London: Penguin Books LTD. P. 321.

Too long to follow break down.

they are a metaphysical possibility. Or, as some philosophers point out, the conceivability of zombies does not entail possibility, as it could be that some things may seem possible, but, in fact, they may not be. All three of the arguments above seem very weak as they are just trying to avoid the possibility that identical zombies could metaphysically exist, which would solve the functionalists' problem about having functionally identical zombies that do not have any subjective experiences. It seems as though the arguments about the 'impossibility of zombies' are not argued against, they are just argued away.

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a bit more here

Conclusion

In this essay I hope to have shown that the challenges to functionalism, the inverted and the absent qualia objections, are good, solid objections and I do not think that they have been argued against convincingly in any respect, and for the objections to the absent qualia objection, I do not think they have been argued against, but argued away. If we deny qualia it goes against our everyday experience and it goes against the way in which we have all been raised to speak about our mental states, which does not mean that we should accept any theory because it goes against how we have been raised to speak about our own inner workings, but, for me, it would have to be a very well thought out argument, and not just arguing the point away.

Repeats

Bibliography

Maslin, K.T. (2007) *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Dennett, D. C. (1993) *Consciousness Explained*. London: Penguin Books LTD.