

Undergraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

Student Name: Eime Luchlan	
Module title:	Student number:
For completion by marker:	
Comments: This essay presents arguments clearly & consistently, drawing on a range of secondary reading material in such a way that a good grasp of the topic is displayed. However, the detail of Putnam's arguments is missing in places – I advise to utilise primary reading in more depth. Also, at times you jump too quickly to conclusions – use the reading to develop the arguments in more depth. Overall, though, this is a well written essay with a focus on the task set.	
Marker's signature: [Signature]	Date: 12/11/20
Provisional mark: 65	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

Esme Luckham

Explain Putnam's hypothesis that conscious states such as pain are 'functional states'. Why does Putnam think this is better than identifying conscious states with brain states, and is he right?

Hilary Putnam was an American philosopher, mathematician and computer scientist who lived between 1926 and 2016¹. His philosophical accolades are many. Amongst his accomplishments Putnam was granted tenure at Princeton university in both the department of philosophy and mathematics in 1960². Putnam has written in detail about many areas of philosophy including epistemology, metaphysics, physics, language, mathematics and philosophy of mind, which is most relevant for this discussion (in particular his theories on functionalism). Putnam's other areas of study are important to know in order to understand his background, topics that clearly influence his philosophy of mind, especially when considering such analogies as the Turing machine and the brain in the vat. Other analogies are also examined in detail; these include Mary's black and white world and the Chinese room experiment. In order to give an answer to the question of whether Hilary Putnam is right or not, physicalism and functionalism must be clearly explained and screw-tinized. In order for Putnam to be correct about his functionalist justifications of the mind body debate, identity theory must not be correct.

He supports this

As a self professed externalist Hilary Putnam uses the brain in a vat hypothesis to explain why. Externalism refers to the external world in relation to minds. It is the view that internal mental states are dependent on the external world. There is a thought experiment called the brain in the vat: imagine that we are not in the world as we appear to be but that we are brains floating in nutrient enriched liquid³. Imagine that all our perceptions are programmed and input by a supercomputer i.e. if you move your arm up and down, the computer sends chemical signals to the brain in the vat that produce the same effect as in the "real world". In other words, you think you can see your arm moving up and down, when in reality you are a brain and nothing else. Putnam's argument to refute the BIV concept is a linguistic one. He describes this argument causal constraint on reference. In order to make a

Feed

Something missing from sentence

here:

'as a' (?)

¹ 'Hilary Putnam'. <<https://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/people/hilary-putnam>> [accessed 5 November 2020].

² 'Hilary Putnam'.

³ Michael McKinsey, 'Skepticism and Content Externalism', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/skepticism-content-externalism/>> [accessed 6 November 2020].

This is all well put.

connection in the brain between a word and the subject of that word humans must have experienced the subject first hand especially in relation to nature i.e. space and distance. For example when we think of the word "cow" this must be in reference to a cow i.e. the way we think about a "cow" is true if and only if, a cow appears this way in reality. An example used by Putnam is: "snow is white" if and only if snow is white (a necessary truth), or "snow" refers to snow. This is called the disquotational property of reference. Putnam says that because BIVs do not have any casual connection to physical subjects like cows or snow, the hypothesis cannot be seen to be true⁴. BIV is the reason Putnam rejects cartesian dualism and focuses on Functionalism as a kind of physicalism.

Explain the connection

Is Philosophy of mind is a topic that discusses consciousness in ourselves and that of other people. Extreme skepticism about the physical reality we exist in, like the BIV theory, comes from an idea that Descartes proposed. He argued the possibility that we are immaterial souls living in a dream, deceived by a great evil demon⁵.

Is Cartesian dualism, also known as substance dualism is at the heart of how we understand consciousness in societal terms. It is based on a theory realised by Rene Descartes that tells us that our minds and bodies are separate, that our physical bodies are connected to, but entirely different from our nonphysical minds. When meditating Descartes came to the conclusion that he could not doubt the existence of his mind because of the very fact that he had doubted it (I think therefore I am, Cogito ergo sum), he could however doubt his physical body because when he is in a dream he cannot tell the difference between it and reality until he wakes up⁶. Therefore mind and body must be made of different stuff. This is why, when we talk about our mental states we do so without connecting them to our physical states.

J.H. A question that has plagued countless philosophers is: If the mind is nonphysical then how can it be 'connected'/tethered to a specific physical body. Descartes answers this question with great inadequacy; he suggests that the mind is tethered to the body by the pineal gland (located at the base of the brain). However if the mind is entirely nonphysical as Descartes argues then how can it be described in

⁴ Brain in a Vat (Part 1), 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuDh3aYWeU8&ab_channel=INTELECOM> [accessed 6 November 2020].

⁵ Rene Descartes, *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, trans. by Desmond M. Clarke (Penguin Classics, 1998).

⁶ Descartes.

relation to a certain point in the body or any particular location for that matter. Furthermore, how can the mind and body interact if they are completely different substances (interactionism). This is known as the mind body problem.

In response to the mind body problem, philosophers came up with physicalism. This is a view held by many in our western, secular society. Physicalism is a reductive theory that suggests, everything about consciousness can be reduced to physical states in the brain i.e. all of our thoughts and feelings are realised by physical structures. Physicalism can also be understood through identity theory. There are two avenues of identity theory to consider, *token* identity and *type* identity. Token means that for each and every individual's physical behaviour there is an equally individual physical brain state that goes with it. Type identity, on the other hand, allows for a broader understanding i.e. there is an identical brain state in every human that accompanies certain behaviours. For example, the brain chemistry and physicality of someone who is in pain must be the same as someone else who is also in pain. *(insert ref.)*

The problem with identity theory, according to Putnam, is that it is much too exclusive. It seems to him and many others that it would be untrue or at the very least unfair to say that because another living being does not have the same physical brain as humans that they cannot feel things such as pain. For example, an octopus's brain might have a completely different physical composition to a human brain but this does not mean it cannot feel pain i.e. when an octopus loses a tentacle it will recoil abruptly. It is for this reason that Putnam believes we should not look at what brain states are made of. We should instead focus on what they do⁷. ✓

Could you ref. Putnam himself here using the primary reading that we discussed in class?

The basic principle of Functionalism is: if we appear to function in the same way, we do function in the same way. In other words, if I am conscious (and I know that I am, Cogito Ergo Sum) and I function in a certain way that is similar if not the same as someone else's, I may assume them to also be conscious⁸. Functionalism suggests that if a being is functioning as if it is in pain then that being is indeed experiencing

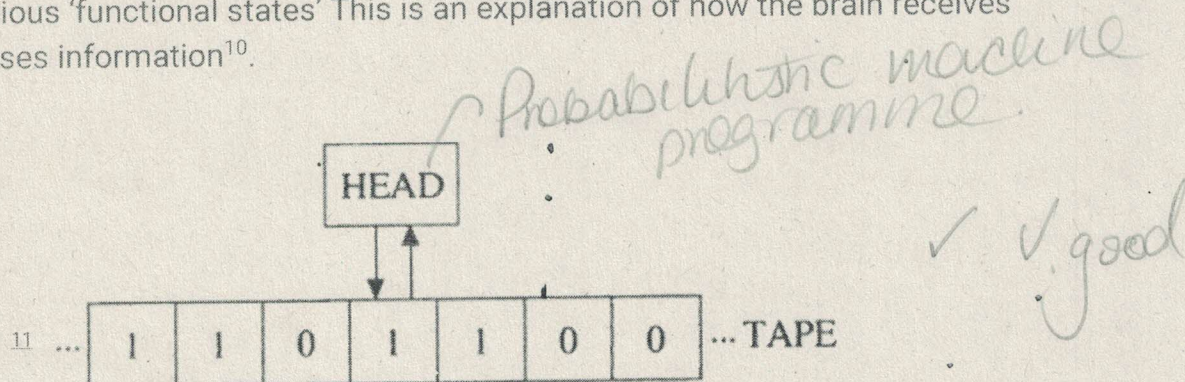
⁷ 3.2. INTROPHIL - Physicalism Identity Theory and Functionalism, 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwgHlzAto9U&ab_channel=OpenEducationEdinburgh> [accessed 6 November 2020].

⁸ Descartes.

full ref. Should this be Descartes?

pain⁹. It does not matter whether the brain states are identical. Putnam explains functionalism in terms of a Turing machine (machine state functionalism). This states that the brain acts like a computer, the computer has programs that allow it to process data. The machine below works as follows, data is received by the head, according to this data the head will move either to the right or to the left along the tape for example, if S is put into the machine it will almost always move to the left and if M is put into the machine it will most likely move to the right. The machine is put into various 'functional states' This is an explanation of how the brain receives and processes information¹⁰.



This is an explanation of the turing machine by Janet Levin which concisely describes Putnam's view point:

"According to Putnam's machine state functionalism, any creature with a mind can be regarded as a Turing machine (an idealized finite state digital computer), whose operation can be fully specified by a set of instructions (a "machine table" or program) each having the form:

If the machine is in state S_i , and receives input I_j , it will go into state S_k and produce output O_l (for a finite number of states, inputs and outputs).

A machine table of this sort describes the operation of a deterministic automaton, but most machine state functionalists (e.g. Putnam 1967) take the proper model for the mind to be that of a probabilistic automaton: one in which the program specifies, for each state and set of inputs, the probability with which the machine will enter

⁹ Ned J. Block, 'Functionalism', in *Studies in Logic and the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. by L. Jonathan Cohen and others, Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science VI (Elsevier, 1982), civ, 519-39 <[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0049-237X\(09\)70217-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0049-237X(09)70217-4)>.

¹⁰ 'Turing Machines - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics' <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/physics-and-astronomy/turing-machines>> [accessed 6 November 2020].

¹¹ 'Turing Machines - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics'.

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some subsequent state and produce some particular output." (Levin, Janet, Functionalism, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Fall 2018 Edition)

Italics

We know that physicalism is at least partly true because of the case of Phineas Gage. In 1848 a railroad supervisor had a terrible accident, an iron rod impaled Gage. The rod went through his left cheek and out the back of his skull¹². Although he survived the accident Gage's personality was changed by the physical damage done to the part of the brain most responsible for personality and behaviour¹³. So, the physicalist part of Putnam's thoughts are valid, if there is fault to be found in his functionalist argument the fault is not from physicalism.

A think you are concluding a bit too quickly here

However there are many philosophers who argue that physical attributes cannot explain consciousness effectively. Contemporary Australian philosopher Frank Jackson proposed a thought experiment about Mary's black and white world¹⁴. Imagine that there is a young woman called Mary who has lived her entire life inside a black and white room. Whilst she is inside her black and white room she becomes a neuroscientific expert on the subject of colour. She learns everything there is to know about colour. One day Mary leaves her black and white room, once she is outside she sees a red rose. Does Mary learn anything new about red when she sees it? Most people would say that she does because she could not have known what red looked like without experiencing it first hand. This experience is known as qualia.

✓ Qualia is used to discredit reductive physicalism because, if it were the case then surely Mary would not have learnt anything new by experiencing colour, if she already knew everything there was to know. This is known as the knowledge argument. It posits that having all the knowledge of something's physical make up is not the same as having a conscious experience of something. In other words it is an

¹² Shelley Tremain, 'Using Phineas Gage for Questions on Personal Identity and Other Topics in Philosophy of Mind, Experimental Philosophy, Cognitive Science, Etc.', *BIOPOLITICAL PHILOSOPHY*, 2019 <<https://biopoliticalphilosophy.com/2019/01/20/using-phineas-gage-for-questions-on-personal-identity-and-other-topics-in-philosophy-of-mind-experimental-philosophy-and-cognitive-science/>> [accessed 6 November 2020].

¹³ 'Brain Anatomy, Anatomy of the Human Brain' <<http://www.mayfieldclinic.com/pe-anatbrain.htm>> [accessed 6 November 2020].

¹⁴ 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].

argument that says conscious experience is not entirely made up of physical factors¹⁵. Although this seems a perfectly reasonable statement, on closer examination Mary's room does not seem a sufficient analogy for this argument. I would argue that just because Mary had to experience red to know about it fully, does not mean that the experience of red itself is immaterial.

other reasons too.

Multiple
realisability
argument

In conclusion, Hilary Putnam believes in functional brain states and not in identity theory because identity theory posits exclusivity amongst species. It seems that this exclusivity is true of type identity theory but not necessarily of token identity theory. Token identity theory states that although there are corresponding physical factors to every mental state, these physical factors can vary from person to person and therefore, it seems reasonable to presume, from species to species. I think that, although Putnam's reasons for judging identity theory are valid, he is wrong to replace it with his computational version of functionalism.

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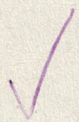
¹⁵ Nida-Rümelin and O Conaill.

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well laid out.

You need some references
to Putnam's work/
Primary texts.