

Philosophy 132
Philosophy of Mind
Handout 20
Monday November 19 2007

1. Functionalism as a Conceptual Thesis v. Functionalism as a Metaphysical Claim

The generalization of functionalism leads to the Causal Theory of Properties: that all (concrete or empirical) properties are individuated by their causal roles. (Cf. Shoemaker.) One may hold to functionalism because one holds the CTP more generally. One may reject CTP in general – e.g. claiming that we know the nature of being, square, say, independent of the causal powers that shape has – but still endorse functionalism. One may endorse CTP for most properties, but reject it for mental properties (e.g. supposing that introspection reveals to us the nature of mental qualities beyond their causal roles).

Functionalism may be put forward as a thesis about the *nature* of mental states, or it may also be put forward as a thesis about our *concepts* of mental states.

One might endorse the former claim if one supposed that the best account of what there is in the world which answers to our mental state notions are certain properties occupying causal roles. (Conversely an eliminativist about the mind might accept the *conceptual* claim, but deny the claim about the *nature* of mental states because they might deny that anything actually filled the causal roles specified by our concepts.)

Psycho-functionalism supposes that the causal roles relevant to individuating psychological states will be those that empirical psychology uncovers in determining how human minds work.

The key conceptual thesis in favour of analytic functionalism is our commitment to a.) multiple realizability; b.) the requirement of causal complexity.

2. Functionalism & Subjectivity as Qualia

Some critics of functionalism complain that it doesn't explain how there is room for the qualitative aspects of consciousness in the mind.

They claim that it is conceivable that

- i.) There are functional duplicates of human beings which lack qualia (philosophical zombies, Block's Great Brain of China) and
- ii.) Some pairs of human beings which are functionally identical but varying in their qualitative states.

The Absent Qualia objection is a variant of our ROBOTS, and the qualia inversion is just INVERSION. In the case of Other Minds Scepticism, the examples are used to throw doubt on our knowledge of the qualitative aspects of others' minds. In this context, they assume our knowledge of qualitative states and are used to argue for the inadequacy of a proposal about the nature of minds.

Shoemaker accepts that qualitative inversion is possible but that qualitative states are functionally definable. He argues that absent qualia *are* impossible.

3. *Conceivability & Possibility*

If something is *conceivable* does that show that is *possible*?

If you can imagine that something is the case does that show it is possible?

What is the connection between *conceivability* and *imaginability*?

You can conceive Goldbach's conjecture to be true and conceive it to be false. If it is true, it is necessarily true, if false necessarily false.

Isn't conceivability at least a guide to possibility? How can you come to know that the wardrobe will fit through the front door?

Can you genuinely imagine a case of spectrum inversion? Can you imagine a case of zombie-hood?

4. *Shoemaker on Absent Qualia*

Why think absent qualia are *impossible*? According to Shoemaker we all know that we have qualitative states, but if absent qualia were possible then we could not possess such knowledge.

Shoemaker relies on the principle that a belief cannot be knowledge if it could as easily have been false as true:

If John knows that he has a hand, then John wouldn't believe that he has a hand, if he didn't have a hand.

If we could possibly have been zombies, then we would have had false beliefs about the presence of qualitative states, so if this principle is correct, we don't know we have qualitative states.

But is this principle correct?

Suppose we need to track the way of coming to know employed by a thinker. Can we assume that the zombie uses the same way of coming to know as we do?

5. *Mill & Absent Qualia*

If one accepts the arguments against functionalism, then Mill's position may seem superior to Putnam's on the question of other minds. But at that stage one will need to rely on the contrast between what is metaphysically possible, that qualitative states and functional role come apart; and what is nomologically possible, that given the kinds of states we have and the effects that they produce, it is guaranteed that states with the same powers to produce behaviour will be qualitatively alike.

But note: if one supposes that qualitative states are epiphenomenal – i.e. have no causal consequences – then how can one carry out Mill's reasoning.

michael.martin@ucl.ac.uk
mgfmartin@berkeley.edu