

## Class 6 - Qualia I

### I. On Noah's presentation and Block's article

There are two classes of possible functionalist responses to liberalism.

In the first class, the functionalist can deny that the theory is liberal, or adjust the theory so that it is not too liberal.

In the second class, the functionalist can accept the charge of liberalism, but say that liberalism is not a bad thing.

I'll call these first-class and second-class responses, without intending to suggest that one response is better than the other.

We could call the first-class response the Clinton response (I am not a liberal) and the second-class response the Kucinich response (liberalism is good).

First-class responses provide reasons why the homunculi-headed robots, and the Chinese-nation brain are not persons with minds, despite their functional organization.

For an allusion to a Matt-style first-class response, see Nagel 436, fn 2.

Second-class responses allow that these artificial persons have mental states, but that they are not counter-examples to functionalism.

Noah mentioned two responses to liberalism:

1. Deny qualia
2. Be a psychofunctionalist

Are Noah's responses in the first class, or in the second?

Noah's first response denies that there is anything that it is like to be us.

Those who deny qualia are saying that Block's artificial minds are not missing anything.

They accept the charge that the homunculi-headed robots are ascribed mental states, and they say that such ascriptions are consistent with what we know about psychology.

So, it is a second-class response.

Noah's second response says that we look to a mature neuroscience to determine the boundaries of our psychological theory.

The psychofunctionalist can provide a first-class response to the charge of liberalism: the homunculi-headed robots don't have minds because they don't have the appropriate neural networks.

Note, that the psychofunctionalist sounds, now, a lot like the identity theorist: they both tie mentality to specific, and specifically human, physiological characteristics.

That is why Block claims that the psychofunctionalist suffers from chauvinism.

Noah suggested that the functionalist can avoid the charges of chauvinism by appealing to a universal theory of psychology.

This suggestion leads to a disjunctive psychological theory: something has this mental state if it has this physical state, or that one, or this other one...

Combine this disjunctive theory with equipotentiality, and we are pretty close to saying that any mental state can be correlated with any physical state, which is a lot like saying nothing.

(This comment is a bit too quick, but see §IV of [these notes](#).)

Note that the psychofunctionalist also denies the reality of qualia, as long as the mature neuroscience makes no reference to them.

And, it is difficult to see how mature neuroscience can make reference to qualia, which is our topic for this week.

II. Look at [questions from Block's article](#).

III. Physicalism and consciousness

The problem of consciousness seems to be a problem for physicalism, whether of behaviorism or identity theory or functionalism (when taken as token physicalism) or eliminative materialism (which we will examine shortly).

The question is whether any purely physicalistic theory of the mind could in principle explain all of our experience.

We have seen the problems with behaviorism and functionalism in Block's Absent Qualia argument, and in Searle's Chinese Room example.

Block worried that functionalism was too liberal since it attributed mental states to things which we have no good reason to believe have qualitative mental states.

The same criticism is easily seen to apply to behaviorism, since the behaviorist would have no reasons to block ascriptions of mentality to any of Block's artifices.

Searle focused on whether machines could have intentions.

So, whether we look at qualitative states (qualia) or intentional states (beliefs, desires, etc.), consciousness seems to be an issue for the functionalist or behaviorist.

We have been using a variety of terms for essentially the same position: identity theory, type physicalism, and reductionism.

The identity theorist claims that there are type identities between the mental and the physical, and that all mental terms can be reduced to physical ones.

Now, it will help to focus on the reductionist aspect of the program, so I will refer to the position as reductionism.

Our central criticism of the reductionist was that the theory appeared chauvinist.

(See Nagel 436; would Jackie think his claim is question-begging?)

Since the theory is chauvinist, then it does not seem to have the same problem of consciousness; in fact it seems to have the reverse problem.

How is consciousness a problem for the reductionist?

Nagel argues that the reductions posited by the physicalist, are, in fact, unsuccessful in principle.

In fact, he argues that there is an air of mysticism in them, 446-7.

Let's consider some other reductions

Nagel urges that lightning has an objective character, and a subjective character, and that neither exhaust the concept.

Also consider water and H<sub>2</sub>O, or Place's clouds and masses of tiny particles, or sound and the motion of air.

In these cases, we are taking a non-scientific term, and trying to identify its scientific essence.

That is, we have scientific theories which do not refer to terms like 'water' or 'lightning' but which do refer to things like hydrogen, and electrons.

Then, we pick out some combinations of the terms to which the scientific theories do refer, and we fix the reference of our ordinary terms, our natural language terms, with the terms of science.

Contrast these cases with Nagel's case of the identification of matter and energy.

Here, we have two scientific terms, identified within scientific theory.  
That kind of identification seems different, and more likely to succeed.  
But, without a background context, we have no idea how the identities could possibly be true, 447.

#### IV. The subjective character of experience (or, the ineffability of bat lust)

Let's go back to the paradigm reductions on which the identity theorist relies.  
Consider sound, as Nagel does, p 445.  
Recall Berkeley's arguments against Locke's defense of the materialist theory of sound.  
[See [handout](#).]  
The same argument that applies to sound, applies to all phenomenal properties.  
Once we have the scientific description of the common-sense terms, we seem to lose whatever part of the reference of those terms that was essentially mental.  
We know that Berkeley's idealist conclusion does not follow, but his argument against Locke is nonetheless compelling.

To capture what is missing, Nagel distinguishes the first-person perspective from the third-person perspective.  
The materialist scientist captures the third-person perspective, and Berkeley emphasizes the first-person perspective.  
Nagel asks us to imagine what it is like to be a bat, p 438-40.  
We can do all the physico-chemical studies on bats.  
Still, we will not be able to capture the subjective character of the bat's experience.  
We can not extrapolate from human cases, to bat cases.  
Similarly, the super-intelligent [Martians can do all the physico-chemical studies on us](#).  
But, they won't be able to capture the subjective character of our experience.

Nagel says that there are facts not expressible in human concepts.  
Nagel's worry is that the third-person perspective will be in principle insufficient for describing all the facts.  
There are facts that are not objective facts, p 440.  
Our conscious experience is essentially first-person.  
But, a physical theory is essentially third-person.  
Still, what is a fact?

#### V. The facts about qualia

Nagel claims that our experiences are ineffable, that we can not describe experiences in a way that would make them available to others.  
Further, the problem, he says, is not merely epistemic, 442, fn 8.  
Actually, he does seem to be making an epistemic claim.  
But, it is not an accidental feature of humans that certain features of consciousness are inaccessible.  
Rather, those features are ineffable in principle.

Another way to put Nagel's problem is to say that qualia have intrinsic properties.  
Intrinsic properties are, by definition, not accessible from a third-person perspective.

Nagel argues from ineffability to the insufficiency of physical theories of the mind.

Since we have qualia, theories which omit them are unacceptable.

On the other hand, if qualia are really ineffable, then we should suspect that they can play no role in legitimate, scientific explanation.

So, are qualia really ineffable, or are they just not normally effed?

Nagel argues that despite their ineffability, qualia are not nothing.

We can say nothing about them, but that is the fault of our concepts, not of the qualia, pp 441-2.

Here is a question for Nagel:

Is the problem here about bats, or about people?

If the problem is just about bats, then maybe we can accept a physical theory of the mind which omits the intrinsic facts about bat lust.

For, our real quarry is human psychology anyway.

On the other hand, if the problem is about people, the discussion of bats is a little misleading.

And, the worry about whether there are any facts to be had seems more potent.

Nagel argues that there are facts from our ability to understand each other, 441-2.

So, why could this kind of understanding not ground enough of the subjectivity in physical theory?