



Issues with Functionalism

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Overview/Summary



- This presentation is based on Ned Block's article, "Troubles with Functionalism"
- Begins with description of functionalism & its responses other theories of mind
- Makes Functionalism/Psychofunctionalism distinction
- Functionalism: too liberal
- Psychofunctionalism: too chauvinist
- Possible solution
- In this presentation, I will spend the majority of the on Block's argument against Functionalism

Question

Is it possible to imagine a creature or organism functionally identical to us (people), yet lacking something essentially “mental?”

The Homunculi-Headed Robot

- Suppose a body—brain is removed
- All motor, sensory, etc. neurons connected to a large (small?) computer in the skull
- Imagine the skull is occupied by little men—their job is to “run” this body, using a “good” set of programs
- Each man responds to two things: a “state” display (plasma TV) and an input light
- For example: when state “G” is displayed, each G-man looks up, waiting to see if their input is called. If it is, then they press output button, depending on their section of program
- With enough men, a sophisticated enough programs, this could functionally resemble—anyone.



The China Brain



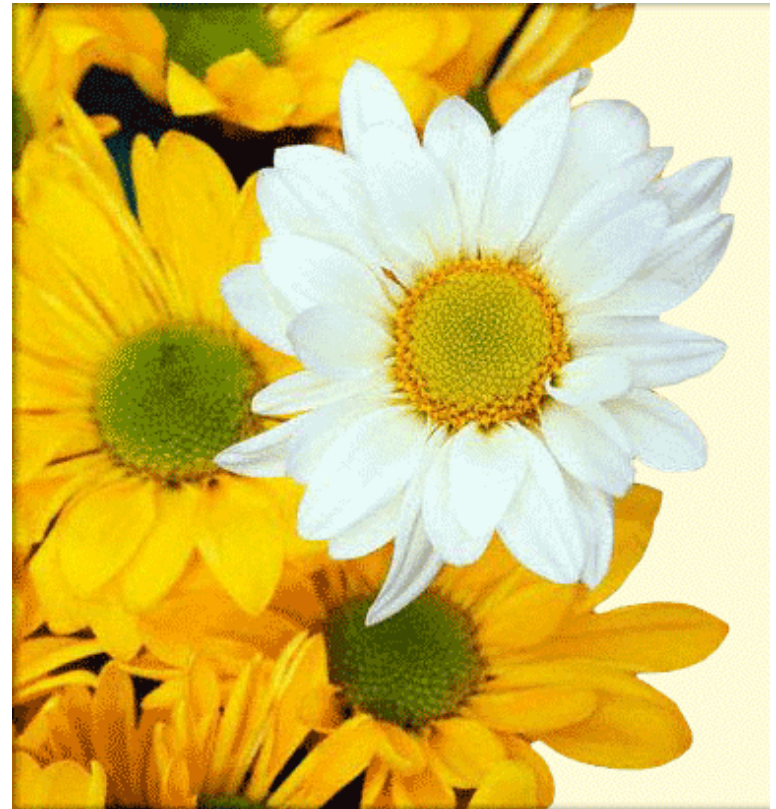
- The Homunculi-Headed Robot is pretty unrealistic...
- So, Block gives us the China Brain
- Imagine the entire Chinese nation for one hour, simulating a mind
- Each person is given a two-way radio, and response to satellite “states” posted in the sky
- The empty head has a radio transmitter, hooked up to neurons
- Each citizen is a neuron, communicating with each other as a neuron would
- Perhaps a slightly more plausible situation

Answer

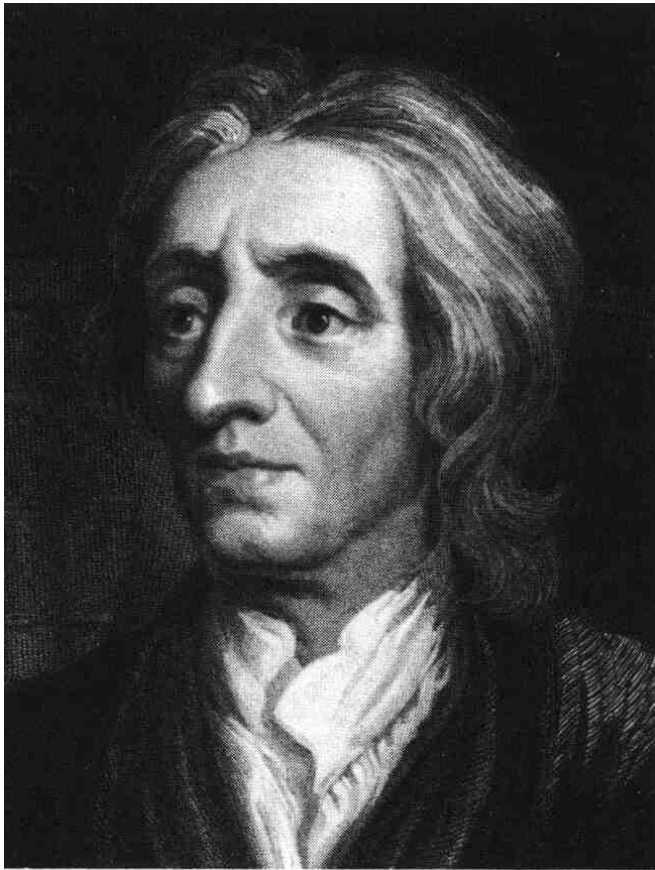
- Then, yes it would seem (hypothetically) possible to construct something functionally identical to us
- The question, then: does it lack something “essentially” mental?

The Problem of Absent Qualia

- The gut reaction, our “intuition” is that both the Robot and the China Brain lack “mental-ness”
- There seems to be something missing
- Block calls that missing piece qualia, what it’s like to smell, taste, etc.
- Two parts to a mental state then, the functional role + the quale
- So, functionalism is too liberal— ascribing mental properties to things which do not have them



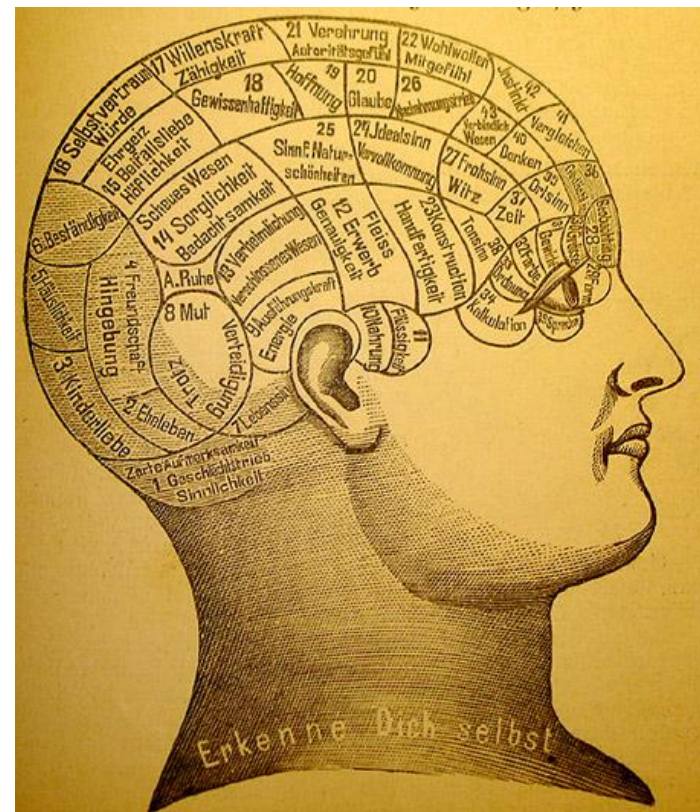
Inverted Qualia/Possible Responses



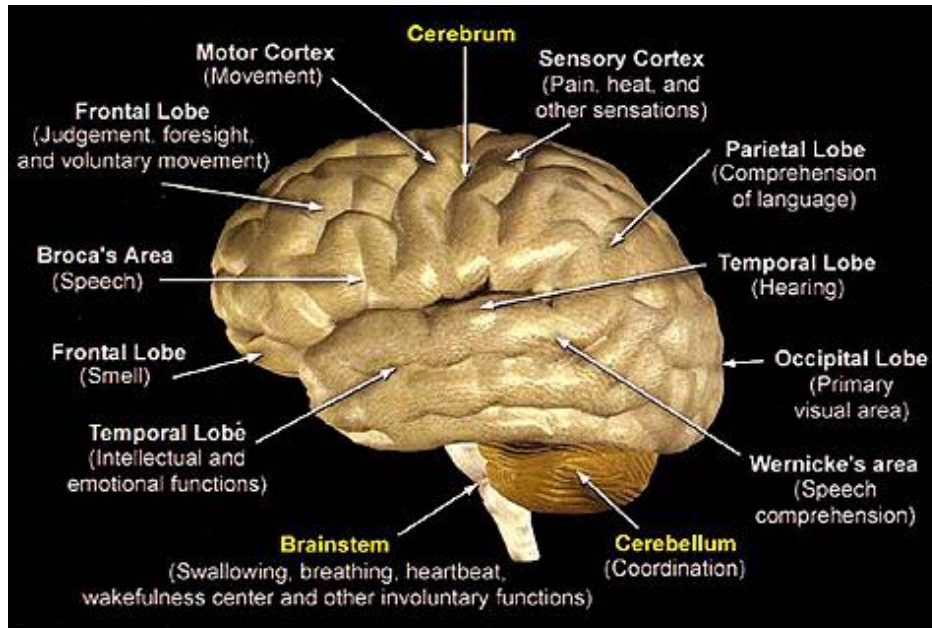
- Locke introduces the notion of inverted qualia: I see “red” you may see “blue” but we have been taught to call them the same thing
- Qualia then, seem to be extremely difficult to externally verify, or describe
- One way to deal with Absent Qualia is to deny the importance/existence of qualia (Dennett)
- They seem like a rather ineffable concept—why not just eliminate them?

Another Route: Psychofunctionalism

- Can be distinguished from Functionalism based on whether “they regard functional identities as part of a a priori psychology or empirical psychology”
- Psychofunctionalism wants functional analyses to be “substantive scientific hypothesis
- Where Functionalism would pursue/endorse a “Folk Psychology” study, Psychofunctionalism pursue “Scientific Psychology”



Issues with Psychofunctionalism



- Runs headlong into the same problem/criticisms as identity theory
- Too closely tied to neurology
- Can be rightly critiqued for having a chauvinist perspective
- Despite this, Psychofunctionalism seems to be the formulation Block prefers
- Side Note: what is “Scientific Psychology?” Perhaps a defense, though Block wouldn’t endorse

Possible Solution?

- What if a universal theory of psychology were discovered?
- A theory which would know precisely what types creatures to ascribe mental states?
- Then Psychofunctionalism could avoid chauvinism, and would seem to be home free
- Yet this is a big “if”