

Reading Guide #8: Consciousness

These reading guides are provided to assist you in your reading. I encourage you to read the material through, first, then go back to answer the questions. You are not required to hand in written answers. You are expected to have responses ready for class discussion. Page numbers refer to Peter A. Morton, *A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*, Broadview Press, 1997.

Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" pp 391-400.

1. To what does the phrase 'subjective character of experience' refer? Why is it often omitted from discussions of the mind/body problem?
2. Why must a physicalist theory of the mind account for consciousness?
3. How do physical theories of phenomena other than mental states account for phenomenological characteristics? Why is this route unavailable for physicalism about the mind?
4. What difficulties arise for extrapolating from our own experience to determine what it is like to be a bat?
5. Should our inability to conceive the subjective character of another's experience make us doubt the reality of that experience?
6. "My realism about the subjective domain in all its forms implies a belief in the existence of facts beyond the reach of human concepts (p 394)." Explain.
7. Can we understand the subjective character of other human beings' experiences?
8. How does the subjectivity of our experience affect the mind-body problem?
9. How does the subjectivity of our experience affect reductive definitions of color, and lightning?
10. Does Nagel think that the subjectivity of our experience shows that physicalism is false? Explain.
11. How could we make the subjective character of experience more objective?

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Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," pp 401-8.

1. What is a qualia freak? How do qualia freaks argue against physicalism?
2. What does Fred know that we don't know? How does this show physicalism to be false?
3. What does Mary know about color when she is locked in her black and white room? What does she learn when she leaves?
4. What is the modal argument against physicalism? How is it disputed?
5. What two omissions of physicalism does the "what is it like to be" argument show? Why is Jackson concerned with only the first?
6. Describe Jackson's epiphenomenalism, and how it differs from other, perhaps traditional, versions of epiphenomenalism.
7. How do considerations of common causes undermine the claim that pains (and other mental states) are causally efficacious (the Hume argument)?
8. What is the Darwinian defense of the causal efficacy of qualia? How does Jackson argue that the argument fails?
9. What is the argument from other minds for the causal efficacy of qualia? Why does this argument fail?
10. How do the epiphenomenalist's qualia soothe the intuitions of dualists? Why do scientists abhor them?
11. Will evolution explain everything about human beings? Explain.

Daniel C. Dennett, "Quining Qualia," pp 409-434.

1. What is a quale? What does Dennett want to do with qualia?
2. How are qualia supposed to be the results of purification?
3. What are the traditional characteristics of qualia?
4. What did Einstein and Wittgenstein say about qualia? How does Dennett take a stronger stance than Wittgenstein?
5. How does Dennett argue that no intersubjective comparison of qualia is possible?
6. How does Dennett show that we can not even detect that our own qualia has been inverted?
7. On what do Chase and Sanborn agree? On what do they disagree?
8. Why does empirical testing not settle the cases of Chase and Sanborn? (Consider the role of memory.)
9. How does consideration of the Chase and Sanborn case undermine the view that our qualia are private?
10. Why does the beer-drinking example suggest that qualia are relational, rather than intrinsic? How does the possible eugenics example suggest the same thing?
11. Compare the Chase and Sanborn example with the cauliflower example. What conclusion does Dennett draw?
12. Why does Dennett deny that our visual field has "intrinsic right-side-upness"?
13. How do the examples of achromatopsia undermine the claim that qualia are immediately apprehensible?
14. How does Dennett argue that we should abandon the intrinsicity of qualia?
15. Why have qualia seemed ineffable? Is ineffability inevitable?
16. According to Dennett, in what way is our experiences private? How does Dennett's notion of privacy differ from the traditional one?
17. How do the examples of ear training and wine tasting undermine the incorrigibility of our knowledge of qualia?