

Liberalism, chauvinism, and the problem of missing qualia

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1 Liberalism vs. chauvinism, Functionalism vs. Psychofunctionalism

Block identifies two different ways in which a theory of mental properties might go wrong.

First, it might end up saying that things have the mental property who do not in fact have it. He calls this *liberalism*.

Second, it might end by denying that things have the property who do in fact have it. He calls this *chauvinism*.

Block notes that behaviorism might be accused of liberalism, since something might act like it has a certain mental property without really having that property.

We've already seen arguments that behaviorism is guilty of chauvinism (Putnam's super-spartans) and the identity theory is as well (multiple realizability).

Block's argument in this paper is that any way of developing functionalism will fall into one of these two mistakes.

He distinguishes between two ways in which functionalism might be spelled out:

According to capital-F *Functionalism*, the functional roles definitive of mental properties are parts of commonsense psychology. So, e.g., it is part of commonsense psychology that people who feel pain tend to cry out.

According to *Psychofunctionalism*, the functional roles definitive of mental properties are parts of a scientific psychological theory. So we might, for example, do lots of studies of people who feel a specific kind of pain, and use the results of those studies to spell out the functional property with which that specific kind of pain is identical.

2 Functionalism and liberalism

Block argues that a few different versions of Functionalism fall into liberalism.

2.1 *A very simple theory*

Here is one Functionalist theory of pain Block describes:

feeling pain = being in some state x such that skin damage causes x , x causes 'ouch' utterances, x causes y , and y causes brow wrinkling

As Block says, '[i]t would be easy to make a simple machine that has some artificial skin, a brow, a tape recorded 'ouch,' and two states that satisfy the mentioned causal relations, but no pain.'

The natural Functionalist reply: the pain role is much more complicated than this, so the objection can be avoided.

Block's next two objections argue that this reply is insufficient.

2.2 *The humunculi-headed robot*

2.3 *The Chinese nation*

Here's Block's next example:

"Suppose we convert the government of China to functionalism, and we convince its officials to realize a human mind for an hour. We provide each of the billion people in China (I chose China because it has a billion inhabitants) with a specially designed twoway radio that connects them in the appropriate way to other persons and to the artificial body mentioned in the previous example. We replace each of the little men with a citizen of China plus his radio. Instead of a bulletin board, we arrange to have letters displayed on a series of satellites placed so that they can be seen from anywhere in China.

... The system of a billion people communicating with one another plus satellites plays the role of an external "brain" connected to the artificial body by radio ...

It is not at all obvious that the China-body system is physically impossible. It could be functionally equivalent to you for a short time, say an hour." (215-6)

Suppose that you were feeling pain, or an itch, during that hour. If pains or itches were functional properties, that would seem to imply that the Chinese nation would be feeling pain or an itch during that time. But Block thinks that this is implausible, because the Chinese nation is just not the sort of thing that could feel pain or an itch.

How could a functionalist respond? Block considers two replies: (i) stipulating that systems with mental properties cannot have other things with mental properties as parts, and (ii) simply accepting the conclusion that the robot and the nation have mental states.

3 Psychfunctionalism and chauvinism

Block thinks that the Psychofunctionalist can get around this kind of problem. Let's assume that there is some true psychological theory of some mental property M, as we find that property instantiated in human beings. That theory tells us everything there is to know about what causes people to be in M, the full list of other states M is apt to cause, etc.

Block thinks that, if this theory gets around the problem of liberalism, it is very likely to fall into chauvinism. He imagines that we come across some Martians who, as it turns out, function psychologically in a very different way than we do. Then the Psychofunctionalist theory which holds for human beings will not apply to them. But that means that the Martians will never have states with the functional roles spelled out in the Psychofunctionalist theory — which, given Psychofunctionalism, implies that the Martians have none of our mental states. But that is surely false. (This is just a version of the argument from multiple realizability, applied to one kind of functionalism.)

4 Inputs and outputs

In the last section of the paper, Block points out that the dilemma posed earlier in the paper re-emerges if we just look at the inputs and outputs which figure in the relevant functionalist theory. The functionalist appears to have just two options for the specification of these inputs and outputs, and one leads to chauvinism and the other to liberalism.

First option: we might specify the inputs and outputs physically (e.g., light hitting retina, nerve damage, arms and legs moving, etc.). Why this leads to chauvinism.

Second option: we might leave completely open the nature of the inputs and outputs. This would seem to lead to liberalism; the example of the Bolivian economy.