44.0 The Main point

The basic position held by the proponents of the explanatory gap is this: “if experiences are indeed fully physical, then an explanation is needed, but has not yet been found, for why the relevant physical states and qualities feel on the inside as they do” (p. 23)

Tye’s argument denies the conditional. If a conditional is false, the 1st half (the antecedent) is true, and the consequent false. (e.g. If it is snowing, the mail will be late is false iff there is a case where it snows, but the mail is not late). So, what Tye needs to establish is that (a) experiences are indeed fully physical, and (b) that no explanation is needed. He does this by arguing that there is no gap in explanation based on the phenomenology of experience.

45.0 Subjectivity

A phenomenal state S is subjective iff it is such that fully comprehending S, as it is essentially in itself, requires adopting one particular point of view or perspective, namely that provided by undergoing S. (p. 24)

This subjectivity is a matter, according to Tye, of having the right phenomenal concepts. Feeling a pain is just a matter of deploying the phenomenal concept PAIN to the relevant experience – and person who lacks that phenomenal concept cannot feel pain. Moreover, the concept is possessed by anyone who has ever felt a pain.

The thesis is, then, that the perspective subjectivity of phenomenal states is a matter of the perspective subjectivity of phenomenal concepts. It is tempting to identify these phenomenal concepts with other inherently perspectively subjective concepts – indexicals.

There are two reasons NOT to do this:

1. The perspective in the case of indexicals is not analogous to the perspective in the case of phenomenals. Indexicals are egocentric – when we think of something using an indexical mode of presentation, we are thinking of it as bearing a certain relationship to the subject having that thought (the first person I). Thus, when I think ‘I am here now’, I am thinking of this room as bearing a relationship to the I. But when I think ‘that is red’, I am not thinking of red as bearing a relationship to the I that is seeing it as red. Phenomenal concepts are tied to a particular experience-specific perspective occupied by the possessor of that experience, not the general I.

2. If phenomenal concepts are physical, someone else can think of it as ‘that’ quality of my neurons. But that is not the same as thinking of it as a phenomenal concept.

46.0 Phenomenal Concepts

Phenomenal concepts are conceptually irreducible perspectival concepts.

Having a phenomenal concept requires experiencing the object of that concept.
Having a phenomenal concept entails having certain abilities w.r.t. the object of that concept, but having certain abilities is not one and the same as having the phenomenal concept.

And the functional role (specifically, the input clause of the functional role) is what makes the concept inherently perspectival.

Thus, the visual experience of red = brain state B.

Explanations of common-sense intuitions (loose abductive inference):

1. When I think of the left hand side of the equation, I think of it as having a certain phenomenology. When I think of the right, I do not.

   The fact that the right hand side of that equation appears to lack the phenomenal is really a failure to understand the sense-reference distinction. The referent of ‘the visual experience of red’ is brain state B, but when we think of the referent in a phenomenal way, we bring it under a phenomenal concept that has a distinctive functional role. When we deploy that concept, that concept triggers brain state B (e.g.) But when we think of brain state B as brain state B, we deploy other concepts, concepts which do not trigger brain state B. Therefore, we think of it as lacking a phenomenology. But this is readily explained in terms of a physicalist / functionalist account (as I just did).

2. It seems to many people that we have direct, immediate cognitive access to certain phenomenal qualities of our experiences.

   When we are aware of phenomenal states, we subsume those states under phenomenal concepts. These concepts are basic, direct recognitional concepts. They are the kind of concepts a pre-linguistic child could have when looking at red. It is a part of their functional role, as phenomenal concepts, that they allow us to discriminate the qualities they represent directly.

3. Phenomenal concepts are conceptually irreducible, so that Mary could not deduce what they are while still in her room.

   Yup - as stipulated in the beginning, these concepts are basic, conceptually irreducible concepts.

4. Phenomenal facts cannot be deduced from objective, physical and functional facts.

   Where phenomenal facts are involved, there is no a priori truth found in the case of 1 (Water = the x such that X falls from the sky...) Phenomenal facts are conceptually irreducible, so there can be no analysis of these in this way.

   In the case of other 3rd person objective concepts, they refer via an associated description (Water is the stuff that...). Phenomenal concepts do not – they refer directly. They function in such a way that one can tell directly by introspection whether pain (and not red) is present. There is no associated description to muck things up.

   This is evidenced by the possibility of Zombies, Inverts, etc. These people have all the functional roles filled (the descriptions), but lack the phenomenology. The fact that this is epistemically possible (never mind metaphysi-
cally) shows that the phenomenal concept PAIN does not refer to the associated description.

47.0 The Gap

The question which demands an explanation is this: “why does physical state S feel like this?” or, in other words “Why it is that to be in physical state P is thereby to have a feeling with this phenomenal character?”

Consider an analogy (that does not presuppose identity): Why is it that to have no hairs on one’s head is thereby to be bald?” The question is then a question of “why having no hairs suffices for being bald; and the answer, of course, is that being bald is one and the same as having sufficiently few head hairs and having no head hairs is a realization of having sufficiently few.” (33)

47.1 The response to the explanatory gap is directly analogous:

This feeling is one and the same as a certain higher-level physical state Q, and P realizes Q.

47.2 Rejoinder: The problem is then one of Q – why should Q be this feeling?

Answer: this is a problem of reference. ‘Q’ and ‘this feeling’ are co-referential, and everything is self-identical, so the referent of ‘Q’ and the referent of ‘this feeling’ are identical. And identity is not in need of explanation. Therefore, there is no gap.

47.3 Rejoinder: Why does the physical concept expressed by ‘Q’ pick out the same state as the appropriate phenomenal concept?

In this case, ‘why’ is a request for a cogent empirical explanation – analogous to ‘why is Holland the candidate most likely to win?’)

The answer is then simple: this feeling is physical, and among the relevant physical states, Q is the best candidate for identification with this feeling (taking into account the causal role of Q). And once again, there is no gap.

47.4 Rejoinder: you’ve missed the point, what is wanted is an a priori demonstration or deduction of the given identity from physical facts about Q and no further empirical information.

But that would be to rely on the model of deduction that he has already dismissed: in order to do this, one would need a premise (1) in the arguments above (water = the X such that X...), and Tye explicitly denies that this is possible in the case of phenomenal concepts.

If it is a conceptual truth that the question can’t be answered, then there can’t be an explanation of the relevant sort, whatever the future brings. Since an explanatory gap exists only if there is something unexplained that needs explaining, and something needs explaining only if it can be explained (whether or not it lies within the power of human beings to explain it), there is again no gap.

-- Tye, Consciousness, Color and Concepts p. 34
48.0 Remaining Worries.