35.0 Overview

In general, the argument is that the reaction against common-sense functionalism that is motivated by arguments from absent qualia, including the attempt to compromise between the identity theory and functionalism (What White calls ‘physicalist-functionalism, and subscribes to Shoemaker and Block), are mistaken.

The argument amounts to a defence of functionalism, but that is sometimes hard to see in the paper itself. The dialectic is something like this:


2. Absent qualia arguments show that common-sense functionalism is false (China-Brain, Zombies, etc.)

3. But that doesn’t entail the falsity of physicalism, and the intuition that functionalism gets something right, so we come up with physical-functionalism:
   a. Block (functionalist in general, but holds that there is something special about the grey matter that creates qualia)
   b. Shoemaker (functionalist about what it is to be a qualia, but not about any particular qualia)

4. (WHITE) The physical-functionalist view is untenable, so common-sense functionalism is the only viable option

(BUT note that White does not establish that absent qualia are not a problem. In one sense, he is defending common-sense functionalism, in another, he is setting it up for defeat.)

36.0 Orthodox (common-sense) functionalist analysis of qualia

HARMAN: What it is like to for a state to hurt is for it to cause a state with the functional properties of pain.

36.1 BLOCK: having such-and-such functional role might allow that the state feels like nothing at all (Absent qualia)

Therefore, we need to add details of the physical story to fill out the analysis – being a condition of neurons, and not of silicon chips, is essential to being a pain.

36.2 SHOEMAKER: suppose someone without the correct physiology, but a state that played the same role – it is not a real pain, but the person could believe that it is.

Therefore, we can give a functional analysis of what it is to be state bearing qualitative content, but not states with any particular qualitative content.

BUT having states with a qualitative content is sufficient for mentality, so functionalism is sufficient for having a mind.

EXPLANATION: consider the set of all qualia states. Shoemaker thinks that we can analyse what it is to be a member of that set in terms of functional-
ism. But we cannot analyse what it is to be any particular member of that set. If we ask ‘what property do the members of this set share, in virtue of which they are in this set?’, the answer is a functional one – they play such-and-such a functional role. But if we ask ‘what property do experiences of red share, in virtue of which they are experiences of red?’, the answer is a physicalist one – it is the fact that they are instantiated in this grey matter here.

TRANSCENDENTALIST: What a subject feels (their qualia) is essentially 1st person, and is irreducible to either physical or functional terms.

37.0 Physicalist Functionalist

The physicalist-functionalist is committed to:

1. that Absent qualia are possible.
2. Qualia differences (both inter- and intra-subjective) are possible

37.1 Denial of Absent Qualia. (motivation for Shoemaker’s position)

Absent qualia (e.g. from Shoemaker) is argued against in terms of the denial of AQT-1 (see p. 699) – That qualitative states are not functionally definable in the weak sense – i.e. that it can not be defined in terms of its causal role with non-qualitative mental states, and the non-qualitative mental states need not be functionally definable.

Ersatz pain is a state that fills the same role as pain, but is not pain. (i.e. because it lacks pain qualia).

If we suppose that AQT-1 is true, then there can be an ersatz man – a man whose non-qualitative mental states are genuine, but all the qualitative states are ersatz (he is a zombie, in Chalmer’s terms).

37.2 Parochial Theory of Meaning

Now suppose the ‘parochial theory of meaning’: that mental terms have their references fixed to what are in fact certain physiological states – which are realizations in us of the best functional definitions of the mental states.

Common-sense says ‘pain’ refers to that state that fills such-and-such a functional role.

Science tells us that ‘brain state B’ refers to that state that fills such-and-such a functional role.

Therefore, ‘pain’ refers to that which ‘brain state B’ refers - brain state B.

37.2.1 Case 1: Assume the parochial theory true.

‘pain’ refers to the physical state in us that realize the pain role.

the Martian word ‘pain’ refers to the physical state in Martians that realize the pain role.

But then, their term does not refer to the same thing as ours, so their beliefs about their pain are not about genuine pain (as genuine pain is in the grey squishy stuff we have here), but they are not ersatz men (because they have a qualitative content to their pain).
37.2.2 Case 2a: Assume that our term ‘pain’ refers to any state that feels like the state we are in when we are in pain.

Again, the referent of their term is not the same as ours, so their beliefs are ersatz, but they are not ersatz men.

37.2.3 Case 2b: Assume that our term ‘pain’ refers to any state which is functionally equivalent to pain.

But then, the Martian’s pain beliefs will be genuine, and they will not be ersatz men.

37.3 The Point

The point is this: on the understanding of AQT1 (and in particular, the definition of ‘genuine non-qualitative state’) an ersatz man is impossible. As a result, absent qualia are impossible, and there is nothing wrong w/ functionalism

37.3.1 Symmetry Argument:

Anything we can say on behalf of our claim to genuine pain a martian could say on behalf of the martian’s claims to genuine pain,

But this is no good, as BLOCK can just point out that there is an asymmetry when it comes to the actual composition of the human’s and martian’s brains.

37.3.2 Common Language Argument

Suppose that absent qualia and non-absent qualia people live in the same community

1. Since the alleged absent qualia subjects and the normal subjects are functionally equivalent, and since ‘pain’ as used by normal subjects refers to a state they possess, ‘pain’ as used by the absent qualia subjects also refers to a state that they possess.

2. Since alleged absent qualia subjects and the normal subjects belong to the same linguistic community, they must mean the same thing by ‘pain’.

3. Hence the state to which the alleged absent qualia subject refer must be part of the extension of ‘pain’ at this world as the term is used by normal subjects.

4. Hence the alleged absent qualia subjects have genuine pain.

But this argument is no good, because it assumes that members of the same public language community have the same intension (as opposed to extension) in their use of language.

‘Hesperus’ is an intension, as is ‘Phosphorus’. The extension of both is the planet. The intension is sometimes called the ‘mode of presentation’.

So, Shoemaker’s arguments against the Absent qualia are no good, so his version of physicalist-functionalism is unmotivated.

The basic difficulty (according to White) is that there is nothing specific to the mental in any of the difficulties he raises.
If ‘pain’ and ‘brain state B’ are co-referential, there must be some property shared by pain and brain state B in virtue of which it is the referent of both terms – i.e. Venus is both the morning star and the evening star in virtue of the fact that it has such-and-such an orbit that entails that it is the 1st star seen in the evening and the last star seen in the morning.

‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ are logically distinct and refer via different modes of presentation.

But this co-reference is not a priori (covered in the discussion of Kripke in earlier chapters.)

37.4 Property Dualism (contra Block)

If there are no topic-neutral expressions (an expression is topic neutral iff it refers to a property that is neither physical nor mental), which are co-referential a priori with such mentalistic descriptions such as Smith’s pain at t, then these mentalistic descriptions refer in virtue of a property distinct from that in virtue of which any physicalist or topic neutral expression refers.

The claim (White’s claim) is that there are topic neutral expressions (functional a priori) but Block cannot make such a claim.

(Editor: How has White established this claim? What is to say that there are ‘topic-neutral’ expressions? We need not know the referent of a word to use it correctly. Prior to the 19th century, we used the word ‘water’ correctly, but did not know that it’s referent was H\textsubscript{2}O.

but the absent qualia hypothesis requires that there be some non-topic neutral condition on the existence of the qualitative state in question.

38.0 Conclusion

Skip the DNA-Physicalism.

The paper is pretty confusing. It is pretty difficult to figure out exactly what White is arguing for. I think it is something like this: Functionalists solutions to the absent qualia hypothesis fail. therefore, the most viable form of physicalism is common-sense functionalism. But common-sense functionalism has no solution to the absent qualia hypothesis. Therefore, physicalism is false.