

The Subjective Quality of Human Experience

By Michael Tye

Physicalism in human experience

There are facts about our sensory experiences, both perceptual and bodily, which no amount of physical information, including that of a functional sort, can capture. The facts are familiar to all of us in our everyday conscious lives: they pertain to the subjective phenomenal qualities or 'qualia', as they are sometimes called, which characterize our pains, our itches, our sensations of colour, our feelings of love, hate, and despair. The author believes that the arguments adduced for the view that these facts lie outside the physicalist's net are unsound.

Arguement of possibility

Let 'Q' be a rigid designator for a given qualitative character, for example, the burning hurtfulness of a particular pain or the bright red look of a particular visual field. Let 'N' be a rigid designator for a given physical property with which the physicalist wishes to identify Q. Then if Q is identical with N, it is metaphysically necessary that Q is identical with N. But it is not metaphysically necessary that Q is identical with N. Hence Q is different from N.

It is metaphysically possible that Q is not identical with N. This leads to different versions of argument.

First version: Absent Qualia Argument

It's major claim is that two beings might be in states which are functionally identical in every respect and yet which are such that one has a phenomenal character and the other lacks , example robot- might be made to react like me in some situation, but cannot feel the pain which generates that rexn.

Imitation man concept: whose inner states were causally related to stimuli, other inner states, and behaviour in just the ways all my sensory states are causally related to stimuli, other sensory states, and behaviour but which was entirely insentient, i.e. which never underwent feelings or experiences of any Variety. Second Case where 'N' designates a neural property or state. Thus, it is sometimes argued that there is no metaphysical impossibility in your feeling nothing at all while you are in the brain state which, in the actual world, is correlated with your experiencing Q.

Second Version: Inverted Qualia Argument

The crucial claim now is the claim that two inner states might be functionally equivalent in every respect yet qualitatively different. N designates a neural property- two inner states might be of the same neural (as opposed to functional) type and yet be qualitatively different

Third version: Multiple Realizability Argument

Qualia can be multiply realized, that the neural state or property, N, which realizes a given quale, Q, in me might be different from the neural state or property M which realizes that quale in you or in creatures of other possible species.

Conclusion: variants on the Argument from Possibility do not demonstrate that there are experiential facts which are non-physical.

Argument of knowledge

There is knowledge of experiential facts which lies beyond the reaches of any physicalist theory. What it is like to have a given set of experiences can only be understood from a single (type) of point of view, that conferred by being oneself the subject of a similar set of experiences. So, for example, what it is like to have the sorts of experiences a bat has can only be understood from a bat's point of view, which certainly is not our point of view. But physical facts can be understood from any point of view, irrespective of the phenomenology of the experiences of the creatures occupying the points of view. Hence, there are facts about experience which are not physical facts- incomplete physicalism.

Physicalist perspective

Factual knowledge of an experience 'e' and its phenomenal content is either knowledge of e that it has R, where 'R' is a rigid designator for the phenomenal content, or it is knowledge of e that it has the F, where 'F' is a description for the content linking it to various causes or effect

According to a physicalist: new fact and discovery are not same