

Consciousness #7



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



John
Templeton
Foundation

newdirectionsproject.com

Seminar 7

1. Recap: Qualia
2. What are the alternatives to the qualia theory?

1. Qualia ctd.

Last week: two claims about qualia

(1) Qualia does not just mean *consciousness*, but a particular *conception* of consciousness

(2) The consciousness-based arguments against physicalism do not presuppose this conception

Claim (1): not just consciousness

- It is only if we recognise this point that we can make sense of those philosophers who deny qualia, e.g. —
 - Daniel Dennett, 'Quining Qualia'
 - Michael Tye, 'Visual Qualia and Visual Content'
 - Gilbert Harman, 'The Intrinsic Quality of Experience'

What conception?

- intrinsic
- non-intentional
- ineffable
- private
- subjective

What conception?

- intrinsic
- non-intentional
- ineffable
- private
- subjective

Block on qualia

“Those who think that the phenomenal character of conscious experience goes beyond the intentional, the cognitive and the functional believe in qualia.”

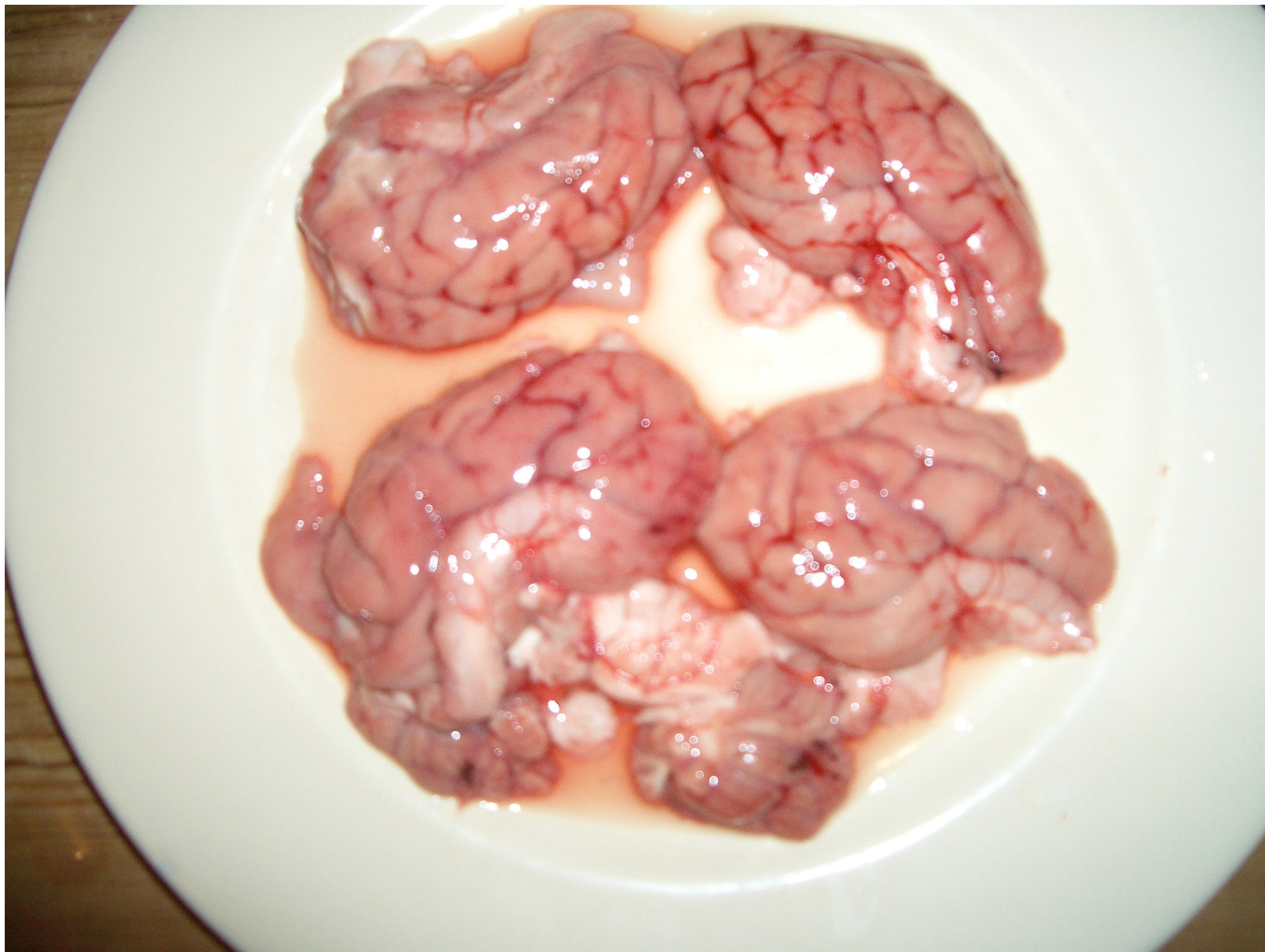
Ned Block “Mental Paint” (2003)

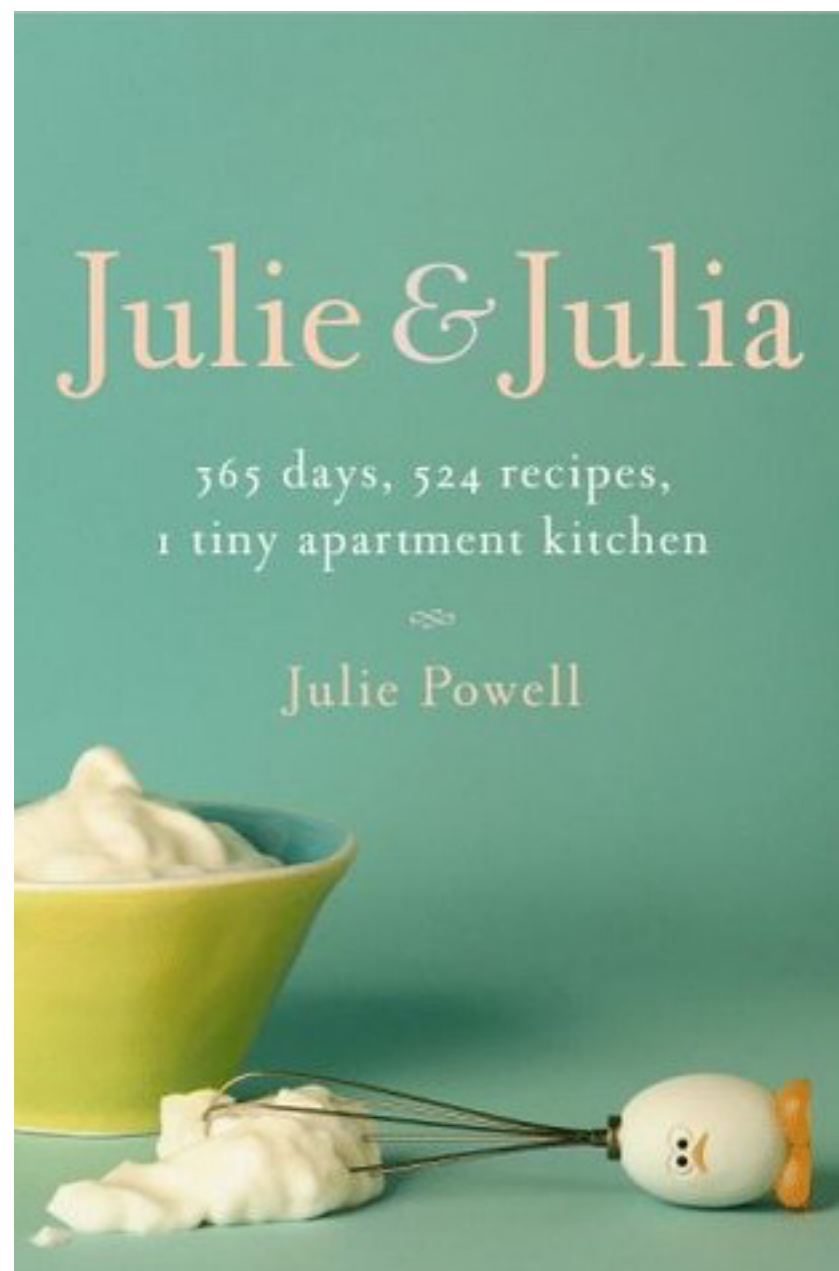
Claim (2): The consciousness-based arguments against physicalism

- The knowledge argument
(Frank Jackson, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia'; Howard Robinson, *Matter and Sense*)
- The 'zombie' or conceivability argument
(David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*)
- The explanatory gap
(Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?', Joseph Levine, *Purple Haze*)

Claim (2): The consciousness-based arguments against physicalism

- ~~The knowledge argument
(Frank Jackson, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia'; Howard Robinson, *Matter and Sense*)~~
- ~~The 'zombie' or conceivability argument
(David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*)~~
- The explanatory gap
(Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?',
Joseph Levine, *Purple Haze*)





“It isn’t so much the taste, with brains, though that’s no great shakes. And it isn’t the ick factor — the way, when you wash them, you inevitably wind up with bits of brain matter strewn Tarantino-esquely about the sink and your garments, and the weirdo gummy white matter that holds the brain together, which is sort of like fat, I guess, but also looks and feels like something that could very well be called ‘spongiform’....”

Julie Powell, *Julie and Julia* (2009)



“No, the real problem is the philosophical tailspin part. The inconsolable mystery of life, consciousness, the soul. I want a brain to be tightly knit and deeply furrowed, conduited with the circuitous pathways of thought and deep receptacles of memory, but no. It’s just this flabby, pale, small organ that disintegrates in your fingers if you let the faucet run too fast. How can this be? How can we be?”

Julie Powell, *Julie and Julia* (2009)

“No, the real problem is the philosophical tailspin part. The inconsolable mystery of life, consciousness, the soul. I want a brain to be tightly knit and deeply furrowed, conduited with the circuitous pathways of thought and deep receptacles of memory, but no. **It’s just this flabby, pale, small organ that disintegrates in your fingers if you let the faucet run too fast. How can this be? How can we be?**”

Julie Powell, *Julie and Julia* (2009)

Does this presuppose qualia?

- Nagel's paper does not mention qualia
- The mystery of consciousness can be expressed without talking in terms of qualia

But there are arguments for qualia!

- I'm not saying that it is just a simple mistake to say that there are qualia
- As Chris Mole pointed out last week, there is the inverted spectrum argument

The inverted spectrum

- **Invert** and **Normal** both look at a fire engine
- They both call it 'red', their behaviour towards it is the same
- But whereas **Normal** sees it as red, **Invert** sees it as blue (and **Invert** sees the sky as red but calls it blue etc.)



The visible spectrum

The qualia description

- **Normal** and **Invert** share all their functional and intentional mental properties
- But they differ in their **qualia**: the intrinsic, non-intentional, ineffable, private, subjective qualities of the experience

- Is this a knock-down argument for qualia?
- This depends on whether the qualia description is the best description of the situation
- Are there other adequate descriptions?

2. Alternatives to qualia

Consciousness should be understood in terms of intentionality

This is '**Intentionalism**' or '**representationalism**'

[Intentionality = the 'mind's direction on its objects' (Brentano) or mental representation]

This is where we are going

Intentionalist conception of the inverted spectrum

- **Normal** and **Invert** do differ in the conscious intentional **content** of their experiences: how they *represent* or *present* the world as being
- However, does this mean that one of them is right and one of them is wrong?

Other cases

- *Phenol-thio-urea* tastes bitter to three-quarters of people, but to the rest it's tasteless
- Supposing it were 50-50: who would be right?

Next week

- How did the question about qualia arise?
- Summary on physicalism, dualism, the problem of consciousness ... and....



125
g



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



John
Templeton
Foundation

newdirectionsproject.com