



THE IRREDUCIBLE ASPECT OF CONSCIOUSNESS: SOME INSIGHTS ON THE NOTION OF QUALIA

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Abstract

The proposed paper intends to analyze the significance of various features of the problem of qualia in the area of consciousness studies. Mental states are totally dependent on the corresponding neurophysiological states in the sense that a difference in mental states would necessarily involve a corresponding difference in neurophysiological states. Qualia were the single most recalcitrant notion that resisted the rising wave of materialists in their program of giving an account of the mental means of identity theory. The problem of qualia was the main constraint of functionalism. An effort to analyze various prevalent arguments in support of the notion is the goal of the research paper. For that some thought experiments such as the knowledge Argument, Zombie argument, Bat argument etc. are mentioned. These arguments involve thought experiments about gradual neural replacement, and take the form a reduction. The first thought-experiment demonstrates that if absent qualia are possible, then a phenomenon called fading qualia is possible. All these arguments point to one thing that is qualia are what goes on in our brain. Qualia states are brain-states rather than phenomenal states. They are neural states. The intensity of the quality of experience of a person is entirely different from that of another individual. We cannot measure it. Rather, once cannot experience another person's feelings or sensations.

Key words: Qualia, Knowledge Argument, Zombie argument, Representational Naturalism

INTRODUCTION

As the notion of consciousness remains mysterious, the mind -body problem still remains insoluble. We cannot reduce the subjective, first-person sensation of pain in to the objective, third personal physiological facts. The first-person features are entirely different from third person features. Consciousness cannot reduce like other phenomena. Other phenomena are depended on the distinction between the objective physical reality and subjective physical reality and eliminating the appearance from the phenomena that have been reduced. On the other hand, in the case of consciousness reality is the appearance. Generally, the pattern of reduction depends on rejecting the subjective epistemic basis for the presence of a property. Consciousness is an exception.

Consciousness is a surface feature of certain physical system. But it cannot redefine in terms of an underlying microstructure. The irreducibility of consciousness is due to the trivial consequences of definitional practices.

The proposed paper intends to analyze the significance of various features of the problem of qualia in the area of consciousness studies. Mental states are totally dependent on the corresponding neurophysiological states in the sense that a difference in mental states would necessarily involve a corresponding difference in neurophysiological states. In Searle's view, consciousness is not strange and wonderful phenomenon.¹ He speaks of two notions of consciousness - one is constitutive notion and the other is causal notion. He claims that causal notions only are relevant for the discussion of the mind- body problem.

ARGUMENTS FROM QUALIA

In current debates of cognitive science information processing models are popular, but they do not constitute the sole dominant paradigms any more. the functional diagrammatic depictions of consciousness seem to leave out something important, the subjective experiential aspect of consciousness. Qualia were the single most recalcitrant notion that resisted the rising wave of materialists in their program of giving an account of the mental means of identity theory. The problem of qualia was the main constraint of functionalism that the only aspect of mentality that escaped from the net of functional explanation. The critics of functionalist framework can provide an account of all components of mental life but cannot capture its qualia.

Galen Strawson has claimed that there are such things as the experience of understanding a sentence, the experience of suddenly thinking of something, of suddenly remembering something, and so on are irreducible. Moreover, in his view experiences of these sorts are not reducible to associated sensory experiences and /or images.² Qualia include the way it feels to see, hear and smell, the way it feels to have a pain. It means what it is to have mental states. Qualia are experiential proportion of sensations, feelings, perceptions and thoughts and desires as well. The following experiences have the sensory aspects:

1. perceptual experiences, for example, experiences of the sort involved in seeing green, hearing loud trumpets, tasting liquor ice, smelling the sea air, handling a piece of fur.
2. Bodily sensations, for example, feeling a twinge of pain, feeling an itch, feeling hungry, having a stomach ache, feeling hot, and feeling dizzy. Think here also of experiences such as those present during orgasm or while running flat-out.
3. Felt reactions or passions or emotions, for example, feeling delight, lust, fear, love, feeling grief, jealousy, regret.
4. Felt moods; for example, feeling related, depressed, calm, bored, tense, miserable.

The existence of qualia is controversial, controversiality is that whether qualia can be characterized in intentional, functional or purely cognitive terms. Opponents of qualia think that the content of experience is intentional content or that are functionally definable or that to have a qualitative state is to have a state that is monitored in a certain way or accompanied by a thought to the effect that I have that state. The most powerful arguments in favor of qualia actually presuppose a physicalist doctrine, the supervenience of qualia on the brain. But the most puzzling thing about qualia is how they relate to the physical world. Sometimes this is out in terms of the

explanatory gap, the idea that nothing we know or can conceive of knowing about the brain can explain why qualia feel the way they do. The explanatory gap is closely related to the thought experiments that dominate the literature on qualia.

1. The knowledge Argument

One of the thought experiments is Frank Jackson's (1986) Mary argument⁴. Mary is a well-known physicalist and neuroscientist, who were lived in black-and-white room. She knows everything about the color vision. But when she came out of the room, she learns a new fact that is, what it is like to see red. Jackson claims that what it is like to see red cannot be a functional or physical fact.

There is objection to Jackson's (Horgan, 1984b; Peacocke, 1989; Loar, 1990; Papineau, 1993; Van Gulick, 1993) argument. What Mary acquires when she sees red is a new phenomenal concept, a recognitional disposition that allows her to pick out a certain type of phenomenal feel. This new phenomenal concept is a constituent of genuinely new knowledge-knowledge of what it is like to see red. But new phenomenal concept picks out old properties, properties picked out by physical or functional concepts that she already had. So, the new knowledge is just a new way of knowing old facts. Before leaving the room, she knew what it is like to see red in a third - person way. After leaving the room, she acquires a new way of knowing the same fact. The recognition disposition account indicates how qualia could turn out to be relational.

2. The Zombie Argument

David Chalmers tries to answer the question that what sort of physical system can give rise to conscious experience. Most of the thinkers believe that brain properties are responsible; but what are the relevant properties remain unclear. Some have suggested biochemical properties; some others suggested quantum-mechanical properties and for many others they are uncertain. A natural suggestion is that system's functional organization is responsible for experiences. The chemical and quantum substrates of the brain are relevant indirectly to the existence of consciousness. Brain's abstract causal organization that might be realized in many different physical substrates is central. In Chalmer's view experience is invariant across systems with the same fine-grained functional organisation.⁵ A functional organization is specifying (1) a number of abstract components, (2) for each component, a number of different possible states, and (3) a system of dependency relations, specifying how the states of each component depends on the previous states of all components and on inputs to the system, and how outputs from the system depend on previous component states.

Some have thought that for a system to be conscious it must have the right sort of biochemical make up. Then a metallic robot or silicon-based computer could never have experiences. Some others have recognized that a robot or a computer might be conscious if it were organized, properly, but nevertheless have experiences. These two sorts of objections known as the absent qualia and inverted qualia objections to functionalist theories of consciousness. As assumed by the research program of cognitive science, human beings can be described computationally. Description of a system that realizes whatever functional organization might be specified, but suppose that it lacks conscious experience.

3. *What-it-is-like-to-be a Bat*

Thomas Nagel characterizes the problem of absent qualia as follows: “ The subjective character of experienceis not captured by any of the familiar, recently devised reductive analyses of the mental, for all of them are logically compatible with its absence.(E.g.) It is not analyzable in terms of any explanatory system of functional states, since these could be ascribed to robots of automatic that behaved like people though they experienced nothing.”⁶ The possibility of absent qualia is closely related to the doctrine of epi-phenomenalism and thus to the possibility of ‘zombies’. Phenomenal properties of an experience exist only as they belong to someone’s experience.

Block (1980) points out that the functional organization of the brain might be instantiated by the population of China, if they were organized appropriately, and argues that is bizarre to suppose that this world somehow give rise to a group mind.⁷

4. *Searle on Qualia*

According to Searle (1980), a given organization might be realized by a sequence of water pipes, or a set of wind-machines, but argues that these would not be conscious.⁸ The possibility of inverted spectrum requires an inversion of a particular set of phenomenal qualities in some sensory domain, such as the hues in one’s color space. Argument for inverted qualia is illustrated by consideration about experiences of color. It is possible that a system might make precisely the same color discriminations that one does, but that when confronted by red objects it has the kind of experience that one has when confronted by blue objects. Things we both call ‘red’ look to you the way things we both call ‘green’ look to me, even though we both are functionally identical. The possibility that the brain states that I have when I see red things is the same that you have when you see green things, and conversely. That is our experiences are inverted. Here what is assumed that a supervenience doctrine that the qualitative content of a state supervenes on physiological properties to the brain. This might happen when the systems are functionally isomorphic. Even if the appropriate functional organization suffices for the existence of conscious experiences, it does not determine their specific nature. The specific nature of experiences must be dependent on non-organizational properties, such as specific neurophysiological properties. Chalmers claims that absent qualia and inverted qualia are empirically impossible.

These arguments involve thought experiments about gradual neural replacement, and take the form a reduction. The first thought-experiment demonstrates that if absent qualia are possible, then a phenomenon called fading qualia is possible. But there are good reasons to believe that fading qualia are impossible. The second argument demonstrates that if absent qualia or inverted qualia are possible, then the phenomenon called dancing qualia is possible. In the first thought experiment, we assume that absent qualia are empirically possible. There can be a system with the same functional organization as a conscious system, but lacks conscious experience entirely due to some difference in non-organizational properties. This is because the system is made of silicon chips rather than neurons. This is a functional isomorph robot. The causal patterns of the robots processing system are similar to a conscious system. But there is nothing it is like to be a robot. Chalmers claims that fading qualia may be logically plausible. He presents fading qualia argument as an objection to absent qualia argument. Another

argument, which presents to show the natural possibility of absent qualia is the phenomenon of blind sight. Blind sight patient is functionally similar to us in relevant ways but they lack visual experience. So, the functional organization of visual processing does not determine the presence or absence of experience. The fading qualia argument suggests that one's functional isomorphs will have conscious experience, but it does not establish that isomorphs will have the same sort of conscious experience. Functional organization determines-the existence or absence of conscious experience, but it might not determine the nature of experience.

There are also thinkers who reject the qualia. In "Quining Qualia", Dennett tries to establish that "conscious experience has no properties that are special in any of the ways qualia have been supposed to be special".⁹ He tries to deny the existence of qualia and attempts to identify qualia with the "properties of a subject's mental states that are (1) ineffable, (2) intrinsic, (3) private and (4) directly or immediately apprehensible in consciousness". He argues that the concept of qualia is inherently confused. There are no qualia at all.

SOME OTHER VIEWS

Paul and Patricia Churchlands promote a realist attitude towards qualia.¹⁰ They claim that qualia will turn out to be properties intrinsic to the nervous system, such as spiking frequencies in the brain. They argue that "the functionalist need not, and perhaps should not, attempt to deny the existence of qualia. Rather, he should be realist about qualia... But at the end, the nature of specific qualia will be revealed by neurophysiology, neurochemistry and neurophysics".

Owen Flanagan (1992) believes that an effort of triangulation involving phenomenology, psychology, and neuroscience, which are a natural method, penetrate the mystery of qualia and help dispel it.¹¹

In his world "those who would quine qualia are bothered by the fact that they seem mysterious-essentially private, ineffable and not subject to third- person evaluation. Qualia are none of these things. "Qualia pick out the types of qualitative experience. Not all qualia are sensational. Conscious moods, emotions, beliefs, desires, possibly even what it is like to be one have distinct qualitative character. In his view, a theory of subjective consciousness gains its motivation from the need to explain the heterogeneous qualitative character of our mental life.

According to Fred Dretske's (1995) representational naturalism, "all mental facts are representational facts and hence all facts about qualia are also representational."¹² He identifies qualia as properties that one's experience represents objects as having. Qualia do not have to be given a functional characterization or identified with neurophysiological properties. He locates qualia outside the mind, according to his externalist theory of mind. This view gives qualia a realist stance from naturalist framework.

Block brings the qualia issue to the problem of explanatory gap.¹³ Block does not agree with Churchlandian conception that the nature of qualia will explain with the help of neuroscience. He neither accepts the Flanagan interdisciplinary method nor the Dretskean representational framework. On the other hand, he raises more general doubts about the explanatory power of any mechanistic, functionalist or physicalist scheme to account for the presence or emergence of qualia. He argues that "no physical mechanism seen very intuitively as sect of qualia, least of all brain. Since we know that we are brain-headed systems and that we have qualia, we know that brain-head systems can have qualia. So, even though we have no theory of qualia which explains how this is possible,

we have overwhelming reason to disregard whatever prima facie doubt there is about qualia of brain-headed system”.

Conclusion

Supporters of qualia claim that there is obviously something in their mental life that can be theorized about under the name phenomenal consciousness. And the opponents state that there is no such thing to point at in their own experience. All these arguments point to one thing that is qualia are what goes on in our brain. Qualia states are brain-states rather than phenomenal states. They are neural states. Is Qualia a fantasy? The new wave reductionism suggests so. The empirical support for this suggestion is that we have neurobiologically analogous cases of inverted earth or absent qualia. So, the need for thought-experiment on inverted Earth and Absent Qualia may come in for strong check. But from a commonsense point of view, and from our experiences it is more convenient to accept the position of the supporters of qualia. The intensity of the quality of experience of a person is entirely different from that of another individual. We cannot measure it. Rather, one cannot experience another person's feelings or sensations.

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