

Functionalism

Day 5 – Nature of Mind

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- Objection:
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Multiple Realizability

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- **multiple realizability**: a particular mental state may be realized by multiple distinct physical states

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- The functionalist argues that pain (for example) is a **functional state** that can be realized by a variety of physical constituents.
- To say that a mental state is a functional state is to say that it occupies a certain role within the cognitive system of which it is a part.

Functionalism

Example:

A functionalist theory might characterize **pain** as a state that is usually caused by bodily injury, and plays the following **roles**:

- produces the belief that something is wrong with the body
- creates the desire to be out of that state
- produces anxiety
- causes pain behavior like moaning, and holding the injured part of the body

Functionalism and physicalism

Can a physicalist like J. J. C. Smart also be a functionalist?

- Yes – if the physicalist is willing to distinguish between **particular** pains in particular bodies, and pain as a **type** of mental state
 - Pain, as a **type** of mental state shared by many different species (and possibly aliens) with varied physical structures is **not** identical with (say) C-fiber firing
 - But **particular** pains in particular types of bodies might be identical with C-fiber firings

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 - Like computer programs, which can be run on different hardware platforms (like PCs and Macs), pain can be physically realized in multiple ways

Functionalism and behaviorism

- **Internal states** are also modified when the “pain program” is running, e.g.
 - The desire to protect the injured part of the body
 - Anxiety about the results of the injury
- Because functionalists think mental states have crucial roles in altering our **internal states**, functionalism goes beyond behaviorism