

Philosophy of Mind

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Assignment 7: 3–5 pages

Due Tuesday, November 8th

There are three questions at the end of this document. Answer both questions. You can devote most of your space to one of them.

Here is an inverted spectrum scenario, described in a way that presupposes that the scenario makes sense:

Stage 1 November 1, 2022: Mabel has the color experiences of a normal teenager.

Stage 2 November 2, 2022: The “wires” from Mabel’s retina to her brain are “crossed”. Grass looks red to her, blood looks green, bananas look blue, etc.

Stage 3 November 2, 2022 to November 2, 2023: Mabel’s color talk is confused, though less so as time goes on. She tends to describe red things as `green`, then catches herself and says `red`. She says she is trying to use words the way others do, but sometimes she forgets.

Stage 4 November 2, 2073: She has long since “adapted”. She naturally and spontaneously describes grass as looking green, blood as looking red, etc. She almost never thinks about what things used to look like 50 years earlier. Every once in a while, people ask her about the unusual operation she had long ago. She says that when she was a teenager, grass looked to her the color that blood now looks, that the way the sky used to look to her color-wise is the way bananas now look to her, etc. If asked to paint what things looked like on her 16th birthday, she uses red paint for the grass (that is, paint from the can marked ‘red’), yellow paint for the sky, blue paint for bananas, etc.

Stage 5 November 2, 2083: She bumps her head and gets profound retrograde amnesia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retrograde_amnesia). She can no longer recall her teenage years. Now she is roughly functionally equivalent to Stage 1.

Argument: At Stage 2, her experience of colors is inverted with respect to Stage 1, and the inversion persists at Stages 3 and 4, as evidenced by her testimony about what things used to look like as compared with what they now look like. Getting amnesia at Stage 5 doesn't change the way anything looks, so Stage 5 is inverted with respect to Stage 1. Stage 5 is functionally the same as Stage 1 (ignoring changes brought on by age and education), so Mabel is functionally the same at Stages 1 and 5 but phenomenally inverted. That is, the functional role of the color experience from the 'red' paint can at Stage 1 is the same in relevant respects as the functional role of the color experience of the 'green' paint can at Stage 5. The upshot is that the phenomenal character of color vision cannot be determined by its functional role.

Here is the same reason elaborated: one and the same functional state, F_R , is produced by seeing red things and involves her saying "That is red" at both Stages 1 and 5. But the phenomenal character of F_R at Stage 1 is distinct from that at Stage 5. Indeed, the phenomenal character of F_R at Stage 1 is the same as the phenomenal character of F_G at Stage 5. So the phenomenal character produced by red things at Stage 5 cannot be **identical** to either F_R or F_G . And that phenomenal character cannot be determined by the functional state either.

Questions:

1. Does the scenario make sense? Or does it only *seem* to make sense?
2. If you had to pick one of the 5 stages as the one that the argument misconceives, or one of the transitions as the one it misconceives, which one would it be?
3. Does the argument actually show that the functionalist theory of phenomenal character is false?