

### Mind and Matter Lecture 3

1. We saw at the end of the last lecture that there was an alternative to dualism viz the identity theory. And we distinguished two versions: the token- and type- identity theories. That distinction is inherited from a more general distinction between types and tokens. For instance: if you ask 'How many letters does this sentence contain?' then the answer is > 26 if you mean letter *tokens*, and < 26 if you mean letter *types*.
2. Hume (*Treatise* I. iv. 5) raises a difficulty for either version. Let us take a case where we have a sensational mental event e.g. taste. Where is it? It can't be in the apple itself; nor can it be in your tongue. For after all, you could feel the taste even if your tongue had been removed and your brain appropriately stimulated; conversely, you might not feel the taste even if your tongue and the apple were just as they actually are but your brain was for some reason *not* stimulated. Hume says that our placing of the taste in the apple is a confusion of the location of the taste with that of its cause; and this is an example of a more general psychological phenomenon of *projection*. This theory can be applied to colour and causation too (as Hume does); modern psychoanalysis extends it to emotional states.
3. What this shows is that sensational states and events seem not to be where they actually are (if they are anywhere). It is as arbitrary to identify the pain with the firing of the nerves as to identify it with any other causes of the sensations. What a plausible identity theory must say is that your sensational mental events occur in the brain itself (central state materialism).
4. The type-theory standardly identifies mental events of a certain type with neural events of a fixed type e.g. pain = firing of C-fibres. One difficulty with this is the idea that we want to say that creatures that are unlike humans, perhaps in radical ways, can have sensational mental events. One would not want to rule out a priori that e.g. dolphins or tigers or Martians feel pain. And yet their neurons might be very different from ours; they might have nothing that we can reasonably call "C-fibres".
5. It is in response to this that some monists have developed a theory called functionalism (e.g. H. Putnam, "The Mental Life of Some Machines" in his *Phil Papers* vol. 2; D. Lewis, "Mad Pain and Martian Pain" in his *Phil. Papers* vol. 1). A useful analogy to explain the functionalist view is money. In Britain we use certain kinds of coin and bits of paper as money, but there is nothing essential to the concept of money that dictates that we use just those ones. Any durable, portable and easily manufactured items could serve much the same purpose. What makes such items money is not their intrinsic natures, but the role that they play in society (the fact that they form a universal medium of commodity exchange).

6. Similarly with sensational mental states. There is nothing special about C-fibres in connection with pain. Many other things could play just that role. So for example, we might say that money in Europe is whatever plays the role there that is played by pound coins in Britain (i.e. Euros), and equally we might say that pain in tigers is whatever plays the same role in them as C-fibres play in us. Typically “same role” here means “has roughly the same causes and roughly the same effects.” You would not want to say that something was pain in a tiger if it stroking caused it and it caused purring.
7. This form of functionalism is thus a type-identity theory of pain in people. For it identifies the occurrence of pain in people with a particular type of physical event: whatever type of event typically plays the pain-role in humans. But it is not a type-identity theory of pain *in general*. For it does not uniformly identify pain with the same type of *physical* state in all cases. It identifies it with the same *functional* state. And these could be different things in different creatures: C-fibres firing in humans—but B-fibres in Tigers. This is quite compatible with holding the identity theory; it is just that tokens of the same type of mental state are identified with tokens of different types of physical state (in the functionalist jargon we say that they are *realized* differently).
8. Functionalism is perhaps a plausible account of *propositional* mental attitudes. But it seems totally inadequate to deal with the phenomena of *consciousness*. One problem is that it makes into a matter of degree something that is not a matter of degree. Does a mouse have beliefs? Does a computer have beliefs? According to functionalism this all depends on the complexity of connections between inputs and outputs; and that can be a matter of degree. So far, so good. But whether something has a conscious state does *not* seem to be a matter of degree.
9. The second difficulty is that functionalism can seem to miss the point. The question—at least in the sensational case—was supposed to be what happens when you *feel* pain. But functionalism seems to have changed the subject—for surely how something *feels* is quite different from its causal interconnections.
10. The third difficulty is that it is very hard to see how a system of electrical circuits (which is all that the brain really is) can constitute such a thing as conscious experience. If the feeling of pain is identical with the firing of a certain set of neurons in your brain then why do we not say that other electrical systems are more or less conscious? In fact, surely the fact that the system is *electrical* makes no difference. After all, there is nothing in the functional role of electrons that could not be realized in a different way. So if we were to enlarge the system, and replace the nerves with motorways and the electrons with e.g. cars, it would still be conscious. But then the identity theory makes it arbitrary to deny e.g. that the M6 spaghetti junction has sensations.