

# Functionalism

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Functionalism is the doctrine that what makes something a mental state of a certain type depends on the way it functions, or the role it plays and not on its internal structure. Simply put, functionalism gives utmost importance to the function or role a mental state plays. They also give prime importance to causal relations because according to the follower of this doctrine any form of mental state is “...determined by its causal relations to sensory stimulations, other mental states and behaviors.” (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries>).

Let me take “ pain” as an example. For the functionalist, pain is a mental state which arose because of a damage of some kind or because something is wrong with the body. For them, the only beings that could possibly experience pain are those who qualified to meet the condition stated above. However, the functionalists did not claim that there are only limited states of affair on which pain can be experienced. For them, various creatures may experience pain through different kinds of physical or mental states and thus the term multiple realizations came into context.

Having defined what functionalism is, let me now move on to another important aspect of this paper-dualism. Dualism came from the Latin word dualis which means two. It is the belief that in everything in this world two important concept, which usually oppose each other exist. Just as there is a night then there must be a day. When there is good, there is evil. Such is the basis on which dualism is grounded. In the philosophy of mind dualism aims to show the great difference there is between mind and matter. There are many differing points of view between the dualists themselves but they

stood on the common ground that mind and matter are indeed distinct objects.

According to the dualistic point of view where mind is made up of non-physical substance, our body is made-up of physical ones commonly known as matter. The mind and body dualism can be deduced as substance dualism which argues that mind and body are made-up of entirely distinct substances, and by property dualism which asserts that the mind and body may not be made-up of distinct substances but still, they are distinct and thus we cannot reduce one from the other.

Now, how does functionalism differ from dualism? Functionalism is different from dualism because functionalism does not adhere to the idea of interactionism unlike that of dualism. Most believer of substance dualism argues for the sake of interactionism or the belief that mind and body, though distinct from each other, are still capable of causally affecting each other.

Believers of the identity theory believe that there are at least some kinds of mental states which are completely identical to those of brain states. One known proponent of this theory is David Armstrong who proposed that “ all mental states are identical with physical states”. This theory argues that the mind is indistinguishable from the brain.

Due to their approach and beliefs regarding the mind they received numerous objections among which include the argument from multiple realizability. Believers of multiple realizability argues that mental events differ considerably from one organism to another and thus the idea that

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certain mental events are the same most of the time is kind of preposterous. Thus functionalism and identity theory is very different from each other.

Functionalism is considered to be more superior to other theories of mind such as dualism and the identity theory. Now, what brought about this superiority? Functionalism argues that everything is physical. The functionalists, unlike the other theories of the mind can do away without knowing how the brain came about its consciousness. The functionalists are satisfied to simply say that the function of our brain is to be conscious or consciousness. They do not put great effort in discovering what causes the consciousness of our brain which made them superior from the other mind theory.

Another advantage functionalism may have over the other theories is its ability to equate conscious states with the functions of our brain, thus functionalism allows examination of our conscious states which plagues other theories. I said that it plagues other theories because they give too much privacy to matters of mind, believing that mind is a private matter and thus cannot be compared to other minds (such as the problem in Cartesian dualism). Functionalism, on the other hand faces no such problems because they give way to analyzing other minds or other experiences.

The ability to test things empirically offered by functionalism shows its edge against dualism and the identity theory of the mind. Another advantage functionalism has over dualism and the identity theory of the mind is that the theory of functionalism offers understanding of the mind.

However, no matter how great functionalism may be as compared to other mind theories it still has its drawbacks. It does not entirely solve the problems of the mind. Functionalism does not give us a clear explanation of the obvious distinction of the physical and conscious states. Besides, another objection arose from their claim that we can really differentiate one mind from the other. Surely, no one can fully understand how other minds work.

Besides different people experiences things differently no matter how alike their experience may seem. For example, I may feel deep depression upon losing a pet but then I cannot really say that the depression Anne felt when she lost her dog is the same as mine, now could I? Thus, no matter how more advantageous functionalism may be over dualism and the identity theory it is still not wise to go on believing functionalism as a whole. One must still see the pros and cons of certain thoughts or theories.

#### REFERENCES:

“ Assess functionalism”

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“ Functionalism” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries>