Consciousness

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Assignment 4: 3-5 pages
Due Thursday February 27th at 8 P.M.

Remember:

• Put your student number but not your name on your assignment. Assignments will be graded anonymously
• No late papers.
• Use your own words—no quotations or paraphrases

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

Stage 1 March 1, 2020: Mabel has the color experiences of a normal teenager.

Stage 2 March 2, 2020: 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 March 2, 2020 to March 2, 2021: 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 March 2, 2070: 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. 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, yellow paint for the sky, blue paint for bananas, etc.

Stage 5 March 2, 2080: 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. 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. 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?
2. Does the argument actually show that the functionalist theory of phenomenal character is false?