

# Minds and Machines

[ned.block@nyu.edu](mailto:ned.block@nyu.edu)

## **Assignment 3: 3-5 pages**

Due Wednesday, February 18, 2009

### **Remember:**

- **You must do one of the first 3 assignments. If you have not done 1 or 2, you must do this one.**
- **No late papers**
- **Use your own words—no quotations or paraphrases**
- 
- 

Answer both questions (at the bottom). You can devote most of your space to one of them.

**Stage 1** December 1, 2009      Mabel has the color experiences of a normal teenager.

**Stage 2** December 2, 2009      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** December 2, 2009 to December 2, 2010      Mabel’s color talk is confused, though less so as time goes on. She tends to describe red things as ‘green’ and then catches herself and says ‘red’. She says she is trying to use words the way others do, but sometimes she forgets.

**Stage 4** December 1, 2040      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.

**Stage 5** December 2, 2040      She bumps her head and gets profound retrograde amnesia (see [http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list\\_uids=11059453&dopt=Citation](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=11059453&dopt=Citation)). She can no longer recall her teenage years. Now she is 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 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 supervene on the functional state either.

**Questions:**

1. What is the weakest step in this argument? 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 functional theory of phenomenal character is false?