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| 2009-04-07 -- Reply to [**Jamie Wallace**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p378)**THE FEELING/FUNCTING PROBLEM IS INSOLUBLE**Until someone can successfully answer the question "How and why do we feel (rather than just "[funct](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=site%3Aecs.soton.ac.uk+harnad+feeling+%22functing%22&btnG=Search)")?" there is and will remain an "explanatory gap."Attempts to close that gap invariably boil down to answers to the question of how we *do* and are *able to do* things (computationally, neurologically, evolutionariily) -- i.e., answers about how and why we "funct," rather than answers to the question of how and why we *feel* (or, to put it another way, how and why it (sometimes) *feels like something* to funct).Hence all the attempted answers simply beg the question.The reason I am pretty confident that the question, when not begged, will remain unanswerable -- except, of course, if dualism is true, and feeling turns out to be an independent causal force in the universe ("I did it because I felt like it"), which it isn't, and won't -- is simply a matter of causality: Either feeling is an independent causal force -- in which case it can play a causal role in functing -- or it isn't. It isn't. So there's no causal role left for feeling. It's superfluous. Yet it's there. Some of our functions are indeed felt functions. Indeed, it *feels* as if feeling is what life is all about. But there is no room for a causal account of how or why. Hence the mind gap. [**Stevan Harnad**](http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/genpub.htmlhttp%3A//users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/genpub.html)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/589>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=589&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-16 -- Reply to [**David Chalk**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p627)**ONE EPIPHENOMENON (AND PROBLEM) IS ENOUGH: THE PROBLEM IS EXPLAINING THE CAUSAL STATUS OF FEELING****DC***: "...suggesting there is no causal role left for feeling leaves us with a potential problem..."*Indeed it does! And that problem is called the "mind/body problem" (or the "explanatory gap"). And the problem is actual, not potential. Explanation is causal explanation, and if there is no room for feeling as a cause in its own right (as opposed to just being a mysterious correlate of a functional cause), then there is no room for a causal explanation of feeling.**DC***: "...feeling and functing... [are] objectively measurable and reliably correlate..."*They do indeed correlate reliably; and the functional correlates of feeling are objectively measurable. Feeling itself, however, is not objectively measurable (but it *is* subjectively "measurable," and that's good enough). Measurability, though, is not the problem: Causality is.**DC***: "...Since feeling is not objectively measurable, it is no ordinary epiphenomenon..."*Are there any "ordinary" epiphenomena (uncaused or noncausal phenomena)? It seems to me that feeling is the *only* epiphenomenon...**DC***: "...feeling pain 'shadows the functing', but there is nothing objectively measurable to suggest why this epiphenomena should correlate if it serves no purpose..."*You said it (yet again!). But repeating it does not solve the problem (which, to repeat, is causation, not "objective measurability").Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/631>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=631&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-16 -- Reply to [**Jamie Wallace**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p378)**JW:** *"Is there a fundamental difference between our inability to provide a causal explanation for the sheer existence of consciousness and our inability to provide a causal explanation for the sheer existence of space-time?"*Yes there is, a big one:(1) The sheer existence of space-time (and of the four fundamental forces, and of the independent natural laws) are brute facts (until/unless superstring theory or some other unifier manages to trim them down a bit), but their causal powers are as real as causality ever gets.(2) Feeling exists as surely as gravity does (in fact, for Cartesian reasons, even more surely), but there the resemblance ends, because feelings can have no causal power (unless telekinetic dualism is true, which all evidence suggests it is not). In other words, even though the only intuition we have about causality comes from feeling (i.e., what it feels like to do something -- to cause it to happen -- because I feel like it), that is an illusion, and the real cause is the functing with which feeling is inexplicably correlated.Some background:Harnad, S. (1995) [Why and How We Are Not Zombies](http://cogprints.org/1601/). *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 1:164-167.  \_\_\_\_\_ (2000)  [Correlation vs. Causality: How/Why the Mind/Body Problem Is Hard](http://cogprints.org/1617/). *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7(4): 54-61. \_\_\_\_\_ (2001) [No Easy Way Out](http://cogprints.org/1624/). *The Sciences* 41(2) 36-42. \_\_\_\_\_ (2001) [Harnad on Dennett on Chalmers on Consciousness: The Mind/Body Problem is the Feeling/Function Problem](http://cogprints.org/2130). \_\_\_\_\_ (2003) [Can a Machine Be Conscious? How?](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/7718/) *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10(4-5): 69-75.\_\_\_\_\_ (2005) [What Is Consciousness?](http://cogprints.org/4414/1/harnad-searle.html) *New York Review* 52 (11)\_\_\_\_\_ & Scherzer, P. (2007) [First, Scale Up to the Robotic Turing Test, Then Worry About Feeling](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14430/). In *Proceedings of Proceedings of 2007 Fall Symposium on AI and Consciousness*. Washington DC. Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/633>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=633&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-18 -- Reply to [**Jamie Wallace**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p378)(1) "[Dark inside](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=chalmers+%22dark+inside%22&btnG=Search)" is certainly a metaphor (and not a very good one, because there *is* something it feels like to see dark, and a "zombie" is not supposed to feel anything at all -- like a stone: a better metaphor).(2) No "rigour and exactitude" being claimed here (and I am not a philosopher). Just claiming that everyone knows what it means to feel something (anything), and that to be conscious is just that, no more, no less.(3) No point "knocking on the door" of consciousness, because of the "other-minds problem": the epistemic flip-side of the ontic mind/body problem (and equally insoluble, for much the same reasons): either the walks/talks/quacks-like-a-duck ("mirror neuron," or Turing) criterion (based on correlation and similarity) is trustworthy, or you're out of luck.(4) It is not "in a vague sort of way" that being conscious is linked to being able to feel (something, anything). They're the same thing. And "experiencing" is just another synonym (which I have renounced since that first paper, sticking with "feeling" alone, instead of a string of distracting and question-begging equivocations).(5) Yes, "feeling feelings" sounds redundant, but in fact it's just what's left of the [Cogito](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=%22sentio+ergo+sentitur%22&btnG=Search). It comes with the territory (of feeling). (So much the worse for "[unconscious thoughts](http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Archive/hebb.html)," by the way: as incoherent as [unfelt feelings](http://www.google.com/search?q=harnad+%22unfelt+feelings%22&hl=en&num=100&filter=0): One mind/body problem is enough, and Freud was an even less rigorous and exact philosopher than I...)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/642>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=642&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-18 -- Reply to [**Jamie Wallace**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p378)**WHAT CAUSES FEELING VS. WHAT FEELING CAUSES****JW:** *"I cannot know my own feelings without knowing my bodily states, and these states are theoretically measurable by others."*I can't know I have a toothache without "knowing my bodily states"??It seems to me I can know perfectly well (and cartesianly, hence incorrigibly) that I have a toothache, regardless of whether I have a tooth, or even a mouth, let alone whether anyone else is measuring or can measure anything, on my body or anywhere else, and whether that measurement does or does not correlate with the existence or locus of my tooth (or mouth) or pain.And the only "bodily states" I know are the ones I feel, like the toothache. I can also feel what it feels like to look at a nocimeter in my tooth or brain that measures and indicates that I am feeling a moderate toothache, when I'm indeed feeling a moderate toothache. That correlation is "close enough for government (scientific) work" as well as for common sense. The clear and present danger of skepticism is not the problem; it's the clear absence of the possibility of causal explanation: Why is my toothache felt (rather than just my tooth-damage just functed)?And the problem is not really with *what causes feeling*, as it is with *what feeling causes*: nothing (even though it feels like it does). That's the "explanatory gap." (The correlation between feeling and brain function is close enough so I lose no sleep about whether brain function indeed causes/constitutes feeling, *somehow*. Of course it does. The lesser problem is with the *how*; the greater problem is with the *why*: what causal role does it play that some functions are felt and others just functed? Because the answer looks to be a clear and present: *none*. -- though it sure doesn't *feel* that way...)**JW:** *"How can you know that your subjective "measurements" correlate to objective measurements, if the subjective knowledge were not linked to objective knowledge in a measurable way?"*A skeptic can't know that, any more than he can know that he has a body at all, or that there is a world out there. But let's (respectfully) doff our skeptical hats, because the mind/body problem's a lot worse than that. (So far, this is just the other-minds/other-bodies problem. That's just an epistemic problem, whereas the explanatory gap's ontic.) The real problem is with the (nonexistent) causal role of feeling (even after we've shrugged off the lesser problem of being unable to explain quite how the brain manages to cause/constitute feeling). All causal/functional questions are fully answerable without the slightest allusion to the fact that some functions happen to be *felt* functions: so the question is: why are they felt functions, rather than just functed functions? The answer is a resounding silence, because "why" is a causal question too (not just "how"); and there's no room for any causal answer.Hence the mind-gap.**JW:** *"When we ask, "how could these brain states produce feelings?," our intuition tells us that feelings are too mysterious, too immaterial to be produced by brain states."*Nothing of the sort; and no appeal to intuition at all. I ask a simple, causal question. "Why are some functions felt?" And I encounter either silence or a lot of incoherent hand-waving by way of reply.**JW:** *"Imagine asking, "how does the process whereby light enters my eyes and activates certain neurological patterns in my brain produce color vision?"  The answer is, that process is color vision."*But *why* does it feel like something to see color? Why is chromoception not just functed optikinetics, as in the case of an optic sensor in a bank? (Beware of trying to reply with a complicated functional story here, because the punchline will always be: "Yes, but why is any of that functing *felt* functing, rather than just *functed* functing? What causal role does the feeling play?)**JW:** *"But the advocate of an explanatory gap will say, "no, no.  That is not what I mean.  I mean, how is the phenomenal quality of color vision produced?"  Well, what is that?  Is it the color itself?"*No, no. That is not what I mean. I mean, why does it *feel like something* to see? (Never mind color in particular; it's superfluous. We could do it all in black and white, or just one JND of grayness, or just intensity, in any sensorimotor -- i.e. felt -- modality, from what it feels like to hear a faint sound to what it feels like to be in a blue funk.)Forget about the supernumerary and superfluous terminology -- "qualia" "phenomenal quality," etc. etc. Just explain how/why some functions are felt.**JW:** *"Scientists already have a theoretical framework for talking about colors.  Feelings are not so easy to grasp, probably because feelings are internal perceptions, and not external."*It's *exactly* the same problem (*and I really mean exactly*) when you are asking about how/why seeing blue feels like something or you are asking about why/how going into a blue funk feels like something. (The advantage of focusing on affective feelings rather than sensorimotor feelings is that with affects you are less distracted by the external referent: With feeling a toothache, there's that extra distraction about whether or not there is something going on in your tooth. With feeling sad, there's less scope for changing the subject and begging the question -- though of course there is always the correlated functing in the brain's affective system...)**JW:** *"if we do not assume that feelings and other phenomenal experiences are distinct from bodily processes, then the question, "how do specific bodily states produce or correlate with the feelings" is easily dismissable.  Bodily states are the feelings."*Hardly. Even if we finesse the lesser unsolved problem of explaining *how* some functings manage to be felt functings, we are still left with the greater insoluble problem of explaining *why*. And that (yet again) is our old friend, the explanatory gap. The "hard" problem...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/648>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=648&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
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| 2009-04-19 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p650)**FEELING, FUNCTING, AND ALAN TURING*****DA:****"'like a stone' would not... satisfy David Chalmers. The zombie is supposed to carry on in a normal human way... but to be lacking consciousness.  It is hard to imagine a stone carrying on in any way at all."*What we are talking about is the presence or absence of the *capacity to feel*. A stone cannot feel. There's lots of other things that are true of a stone too: A stone can't *do* anything either (except fall when dropped, or just lay there wherever it is). But the relevant thing is that it doesn't feelNow I have no idea whether or not there can be zombies (and David Chalmers has no idea either).But I can give you one important example of what a zombie would be, if there could be zombies: A robot that can pass the [Turing Test](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14430/): act and talk in the world, indistinguishably (in what it does) from any of us, for a lifetime -- but without feeling anything at all whilst doing it all (just like a stone).The reason this example is particularly instructive is that it brings out the fact that although lifelong performance capacity that is Turing-Indistinguishable from our own is certainly no guarantor of consciousness (feeling), it is the best we can hope for, and the closest we can ever hope to an explanation of feeling (which is not very close: it just explains the functing with which feeling is apparently correlated). The rest is down to whether or not there can be Turing-scale performance capacity (functing) without feeling. (I think there cannot be, but I certainly cannot prove it; I can't even explain how or why, because no one can explain how or why any function is a felt function, even though felt functions clearly exist -- in us, and other organisms.)***DA:****"Does a worm '"feel"?  Probably yes... though in a sense almost certainly incomprehensible to us. Is a worm "conscious" then?  If not why not? etc, etc"**Probably yes, a worm can feel (no scare-quotes needed), which means exactly the same thing as that the worm is conscious.*(We can't be sure about anyone/anything else either, because of the other-minds problem, but a worm is almost as good a bet as another person.)Whether or not the worm feels what I feel, whether or not I can understand what it feels like to be a worm, and indeed what and how much a worm feels is all completely irrelevant. The only thing that matters is *whether* the worm feels *anything at all*. If it does, it's conscious (because that's what it means to be conscious), and the fact that it feels is as utterly inexplicable as the fact that I feel.**DA:** *"consciousness... is so seldom - if ever - carefully defined.  There is an apparent assumption that we "just know" what we mean by it."*Consciousness does not need to be "defined": it just needs to be pointed to. (That's sometimes called an "ostensive definition".) Something is conscious if it feels. And "feels" does not need to be defined either. Anyone who can speak already understands what it means to feel (with the possible exception of the Turing-Indistinguishable robot, if there can be zombies!). The meaning of our elementary words -- see, hear, touch, smell, taste -- are all grounded in our shared sensorimotor capacity to feel.**DA:** *"talk about zombies as beings minus consciousness seems so futile... Minus what exactly?"*  Minus feeling (like a stone, if, that is, there can be zombies -- i.e., entities that have our doing capacities but without feeling -- at all).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/656>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=656&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
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| 2009-04-19 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p659)[**SENTIO ERGO SENTITUR**](http://www.google.com/search?q=%22sentio+ergo+sentitur%22&hl=en&num=100&filter=0)**DA:** *"How could a being... be "indistinguishable" from any of us yet not feel - if what we do includes feeling?"*I was referring explicitly to [Turing Indistinguishability](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/7741/), which means objective indistinguishability *from* a conscious person, *to* a conscious person. (The [Turing Test](http://cogprints.org/1584/) boils down to performance indistinguishability, but it could in principle be scaled all the way up to empirical indistinguishability. This is still just an *epistemic* test (hence vulnerable to the other-minds problem); it is not a metaphysical identity condition. Please let us not begin a debate about the "[identity of indiscernibles](http://cogprints.org/1616/)"! That will just leave the explanatory-gap question far behind, begging it, by conflating the epistemic and the ontic...)**DA:** "*do we humans 'feel' in the same way?... is human consciousness the same as worm consciousness?"*I can only repeat: This is not about *what* is being felt, but about *whether anything is being felt at all*.**DA:** *"how does one point to something if one doesn't know what it is?  Could I point to a bird if I didn't know what a bird was?"*We all know what it feels like to feel. We are not pointing to an (empirically risky) external object but to what it feels like to feel: a cartesian certainty all feeling functors share (*if* there exist any other feeling functors than me!). Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/662>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=662&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-19 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p667)[**WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO FEEL**](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=harnad+feeling&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=)**DA:** "*to say that a zombie would be indistinguishable from a human but not be able to 'feel' is... surely self contradictory"*Not self-contradictory in the least! But I was referring to a Turing-Test-passing robot, not a "zombie" (about which I am skeptical).For a robot to pass the Turing Test it has to be able to behave (for a lifetime) in a way that is indistinguishable *from* a human, *to* a human. (Humans are very good [mind-readers](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=harnad+%22mind-reading%22&btnG=Search), but they are all subject to the [other-minds problem](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=harnad+%28%22other-minds%22+OR+%22other+minds%22%29&btnG=Search)).All I said about [zombies](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=harnad+%28zombie+OR+zombies%29&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=) was (1) that I have no idea whether they are possible (but, if not, I have even less idea about how/why not), (2) that an *unfeeling* robot that successfully passed the Turing Test would indeed be a zombie, and (3) that I doubt that a robot that could successfully pass the Turing Test would be unfeeling -- but no one can or will ever know for sure (except perhaps the robot).**DA:** "I *don't [know what it feels like to feel]. Feeling to me 'feels like' feeling"*This is not a point that can be debated further. But I do suggest that you ask a colleague to pinch you. That's an example of what it feels like to feel. And the very same is true for everything else you experience in your waking world: everything you see, hear, taste, smell, touch, if your senses are normal and intact. That's what it feels like to see, hear, taste, smell, touch, etc. None of the specific qualitative details matter in the least for the mind/body problem or the explanatory gap: If/when you feel anything at all, whatever it happens to feel like, then you feel (then). And that entails the full weight of the mind/body problem (and the full vacancy in the "explanatory gap" -- a gap in the scope of causal explanation.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/668>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=668&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-20 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p674)**DA**: *"To feel feels like nothing - except to feel"*That's good enough, and that was all I was looking for all along. You had said earlier: *"how does one point to something if one doesn't know what it is?"*Well now you've confirmed that you *do* know what it's like to feel. So it was enough to just point to it after all.It's the presence or absence of *that* (in stones, worms, people, robots, zombies) that we're talking about. Explaining the how and why of being able to do *that* is the mind/body problem.And the inability to explain the existence and especially the causal role of that is the explanatory gap.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/676>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=676&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-20 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p677)**ACHILLES AND THE TORTOISE ON FEELING****DA:** *"But it is simply a tautology; it tells us nothing at all."*Derek, I am afraid you are systematically missing the point. It is not a tautology that some things (like people, and probably worms) feel, and that others (like stones, computers, and today's robots) don't. You said you didn't know what it meant to feel. You asked for a "definition" (of consciousness, which i said was exactly the same thing as feeling).I said everyone who feels knows what it means to feel, because everyone knows what it feels like to feel, and I tried to point to it ("ostensive definition").You first said one could not point to what it meant: that you didn't know the difference between feeling and not feeling. I suggested a pinch.Then you said you do know what it means after all, but that "what it feels like to feel" is tautological. Meanwhile you keep missing the substantive point at issue: that feeling is something that can either be present or absent, and that that is what the mind/body problem and its "explanatory gap" (about which this discussion was launched) are all about. Not about "analytical philosophy," but about how and why some things feel (or, alternatively, how and why some functions are felt, rather than merely being "functed"). In discourse, one can always affect not to understand, and that effectively makes it impossible to make any progress. It becomes the dialogue of [Achilles and the Tortoise](http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Hypermail/Cognition.Sociobiology.98/0001.html). Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/678>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=678&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-20 **--** Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p679)[**UNCOMPLEMENTED CATEGORIES, OR, WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A BACHELOR?**](http://cogprints.org/2134/0/harnad87.uncomp.htm)**DA:** *"If, as you claim, we all know 'what it feels like to feel', then presumably we would all know what it feels like not to feel?"*Harnad, S. (1987) [Uncomplemented Categories, or, What is it Like to be a Bachelor?](http://cogprints.org/2134/0/harnad87.uncomp.htm) 1987 [Presidential Address: Society for Philosophy and Psychology](http://www.socphilpsych.org/pastofficers.html). ***ABSTRACT:*** *To learn and to use a category one must be able to sample both what is in it and what is not in it (i.e., what is in its complement), in order to pick out which invariant features distinguish members from nonmembers. Categories without complements may be responsible for certain conceptual and philosophical problems. Examples are experiential categories such as what it feels like to "be awake," "be alive," be aware," and "be." Providing a complement by analogy or extrapolation is a solution in some cases (such as what it feels like to be a bachelor), but only because the complement can in princible be sampled in the future, and because the analogy could in principle be correct. Where the complement is empty in principle, the "category" is intrinsically problematic. Other examples may include self-denial paradoxes (such as "this sentence is false") and problems with the predicate "exists."*Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/683>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=683&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-21 -- Reply to [**Jamie Wallace**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p378)[**"ACCESS" CONSCIOUSNESS - "PHENOMENAL" CONSCIOUSNESS = ZERO**](https://maillist.cogpsyphy.hu/pipermail/koglist/1994-June/000158.html)There is no difference whatsoever between ["access consciousness" and "phenomenal consciousness."](http://www.bbsonline.org/Preprints/OldArchive/bbs.block.html) The distinction is purely notional, and a particularly striking example of how, when faced with a problem that we are completely incapable of solving, we love to proliferate both synonyms and pseudo-distinctions that give us the illusion either of having made some sort of progress or of at least dividing to conquer. Here is a (nonexhaustive) list of these specious sememes. (You are encouraged to add the ones I've missed):consciousness, awareness, qualia, subjective states, conscious states, mental states, phenomenal states, qualitative states, intentional states, intentionality, subjectivity, mentality, private states, 1st-person states, contentful states, reflexive states, representational states, sentient states, experiential states, reflexivity, self-awareness, self-consciousness, sentience, raw feels, experience, soul, spirit, mind... My suggestion: spare yourself this self-deception and call a spade a spade. All of the above are covered by one simple, self-explanatory anglo-saxon term: *feeling*. (Its verbal ("to feel") and adjectival ("felt") forms will be handy too, if ever you feel the urge to go profligate again. Feel free to speak of "feelers" and "non-feelers" too, if you must, and all the other "nons" and "uns" that come with the anglo-saxon territory. But don't get too excited: they won't help.) The mind/body problem is simply the problem of explaining how and why it is that some functional (i.e., physical, mechanical, dynamic, causal) states are *felt* states, rather than merely "functed" states. Till someone comes up with an explanation, 'that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know' -- and what you are left with is the "explanatory gap."Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/696>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=696&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-21 -- Reply to [**Sam Coleman**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p699)**ON NOT BLAMING THE MESSENGER****SC:**  *"we're just the people whose job it is to probe the differences/relations between all these terms you list (and the others), and I don't think it's so straightforwardly all lumped under any one of them (or any single other term of any interest)."*Yes, it is philosophers into whose unfortunate laps the mind/body problem falls (although the explanatory gap is really cognitive science's -- i.e., reverse bioengineerings': no point blaming the messenger). But in fussing with all these trivial variants and differences (real and notional), the messengers are just toying with the envelope instead of reading out the message, loud and clear**SC:**  "[*http://cogprints.org/231/0/199712004.html*](http://cogprints.org/231/0/199712004.html)*- that's Block on the very subject here at PhilPapers."*I know: that's why I posted the URL (as well as the [BBS Call for Commentators](https://maillist.cogpsyphy.hu/pipermail/koglist/1994-June/000158.html) that I posted in 1994, when I was editing [BBS](http://www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/~harnad/Temp/bbs.valedict.html), the journal that published it!).**SC:**  *"I think awareness and feeling are pretty readily distinguishable"*Are you aware of anything that it does not feel like something to be aware of?  Do you feel (as opposed to just funct) anything you are not aware of?If it didn't feel like something to be aware of it, what would be left of the "awareness"? What does it add to "I feel sad" or "I feel warm" or "I feel a rough surface" or (to change the arbitrary sensory verb) "I hear a voice or smell a smell" to say, respectively, "I am aware I feel sad" or "I am aware I feel warm" or "I am aware I feel a rough surface" or "I am aware I hear a voice or smell a smell"? or, for that matter "I am aware of my sadness" or "I am aware of the warmth" or "I am aware of the roughness of the surface" or "I am aware of the sound of a voice or the smell of the smell"?To me this is all massaging and permuting just one thing: That there is feeling going on (and the only variation is its content, i.e., *what* you happen to be feeling). (Hence *that* you are feeling at all, and only that, is the real mystery: How/why is there feeling rather than just functing when an organism feels (say, pain)?)Ditto for all the "2nd-order" stuff everyone loves to get excited about and to treat as if it were something substantively different -- rather than just another form of content that comes with the territory (of being able to feel at all): The rest is just about *what* and *how much* one can feel (which is how sensation grades into perception and cognition; the functional [know-how](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14517/) increases, and with it, mysteriously, the accompanying feeling):The monkey certainly feels what it feels like to look at a mirror: that just feels like what it feels like to look at another monkey. The chimp can feel more: Both monkey and chimp are able to feel the difference between what it feels like to touch their own arm versus touching someone else's arm; but only the chimp (and not the monkey) can feel what it feels like to see his own face, as opposed to someone else's face. The underlying functing in both cases -- i.e. the reverse-engineering of the causal system that gives both monkey and chimp the know-how to *do* all the things they can [or can't] do with images of faces in mirrors, whether their own or someone else's -- is fully within cognitive science's reach. But not how/why it *feels like something* to be able to do all that. And that, again, is why feeling -- and nothing else -- is at the heart of the M/B problem and the "explanatory gap."Yes, there is the possibility of a certain recursivity, such as feeling what it feels like to see my own face in the mirror, or feeling what it feels like to see a monkey see his own face in the mirror, or, if there is a mirror behind the monkey, feeling what it feels like to see the monkey see the monkey seeing himself in the mirror, and so on, for an infinity of trivially higher "orders," given sufficient mirrors. (You can do all this if you have the "mirror neurons" to mind-read with.)By the very same token (no less trivial, though interestingly instantiated in language), I can feel blue [sad]; I can feel "I am feeling blue"; and I can feel "I am feeling that I am feeling blue" etc. etc.All of these niceties may be nice to fiddle with, but the question raised in this thread was: How to explain it? And the "it" is *the fact that we feel at all*. Solve that (insoluble) problem and all the niceties come with the territory, and are a piece of cake. But if the gap persists, reveling instead in the (trivial) niceties alone gets us nowhere fast (in what is basically just a hermeneutical hall of mirrors).What is distinguishable is feeling this vs. *feeling that*: There is something it feels like to feel sad, to touch velvet, to see red, to feel "blue", to feel thirsty, to hear Mozart, to want attention, to recognize yourself in the mirror, to understand the meaning of "justice" (or "qualia"!)...The usual mistake that is made is to conflate consciousness itself (feeling) with (1) consciousness of something in particular ("the worm can feel something, but can it feel what we feel?"), (2) "degree of consciousness" ("how much can the worm feel?"), (3) "self"-consciousness ("can the worm feel what it feels like to do a cartesian cogito?"), (4) "higher-order consciousness" ("can the worm feel that it feels that it feels?"). These are all cases of feeling, but they all feel different (sometimes subtly -- just [a JND in feeling space](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/2602/1/harnad00.mind.humphrey.html)). Forget the differences. What we are trying to explain is how/why they are felt at all (rather than just functed, dynamically, adaptively, but feelinglessly).**SC:**  "*Blindsight, anyone?"*[Blindsight](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&lr=&q=Is%20blindsight%20an%20effect%20of%20scattered%20light%2C%20spared%20cortex%2C%20and%20near-threshold%20vision%3F+author%3ACampion&btnG=Search) is optokinetic functing without felt seeing. As such, our underlying question could be reforumulated as "how/why is seeing *seeing* rather than just blindsighted optical functing?This again confirms that it is the presence/absence of feeling that is (and always was) the real "hard" problem.(But since blind-sighted people are not Zombies, it is not true that they feel nothing at all; hence when they successfully "blind-see" something it is not that they are able to do it entirely unfeelingly; it is just that their accompanying feeling is not visual. Sometimes it takes the form of a felt sensorimotor inclination to point in this direction rather than that; or a felt shaping of one's hands in preparation for reaching for something small and round, rather than large and flat; or just a hunch that the thing is green rather than blue, even though one cannot see a thing.)So blind-seers still feel; it feels like something to blind-see; it is just that the quality of what they blind-see -- what it feels like -- is not visual.Moreover, there is a lot that blind-seers cannot *do* that seers can. So their functing ([know-how](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14517/)) is not equivalent to that of seers (and in that respect they are just plain blind).**Subtle point:** Before we start to feel too triumphant about what separates us seers from blind-seers, let us recall that most of *our* know-how is likewise delivered to us on a platter by our brains, just as the blind-seer's inclination to point here rather than there is. We take all of this for granted, and take the accompanying feeling to be some sort of proof of the fact that we are the ones doing the underlying work, whereas all it is is passive feeling, absent the underlying functing. (And that's a lot closer to what it looks like when we attempt a causal explanation: The real work is the functing, and the accompanying feeling is just floating there, a sop...)In sum, blindsight simply reaffirms the preplexing role played by the presence or absence of feeling alongside our functing, and our inability to explain what independent causal role it plays (because it doesn't).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/706>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=706&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |
| 2009-04-22 **-- Reply to** [**Fred Cummins**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p700)**FC:** *"many spurious and unhelpful distinctions have been drawn in the literature [but]  'feeling' can[not] cover for all of them. My phenomenological world of experience is big, rich..."*You feel a lot of different things, but the (one and only) mind/body problem is the fact that you feel at all. And the (one and only) explanatory gap is that there is no causal explanation of how or why you feel, rather than just "funct." (And I argue that there cannot be a causal explanation because there is no causal room -- unless telekinetic dualism is true, and it isn't.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/716>

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| 2009-04-22 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p709)**AT**: *"a fruitful theoretical path would be to accept (at least initially) the existence of consciousness as an unexplained fundamental concept"* In other words, accept that we do feel, and that we cannot explain how or why. I agree. It's true, so we might as well accept it.**AT:** "*much of the content of consciousness/feeling can be distinguished, described, compared, publically represented, and analyzed"*What we feel can be described, and its brain correlates (which are almost certainly also its causes) can be found and analyzed. Reverse-engineering those will explain, functionally and unproblematically, everything we do, and are able to do. But it will not explain how or why any of that functing underlying our behavioral capacities is *felt*. And although we cannot do anything about that, it is definitely a (profound) explanatory gap.**AT:** *"The key question [is] "How does the brain create the gloriously varied content of consciousness?"*That question will not be answered either. We will find out how the brain generates adaptive behavioral capacity, and, given that generating that capacity also happens to feel like something, we will find out the correlates (and probable causes) of those feelings. I don't think we'll have a substantive explanation of how the brain generates feeling, but I think that there will be little doubt that it does; but not being able to explain *how* the brain generates feeling is the lesser problem: the fact that we cannot explain *why* (functionally speaking, i.e., causally speaking) the brain generates feeling is the greater problem: all those gloriously varied feelings, when all that was needed for adaptive purposes -- and all there is causal room for -- is the underlying functing. The fact that (some of) those underlying functions happen (for mysterious, unexplained reasons) to be *felt* just stays the dangler it is.**AT:** *"specifying putative neuronal mechanisms that can be demonstrated to generate activities in the brain that are analogous [to] feelings"*That is unfortunately just correlates again.**AT:** *"unlike the smell of a rose, the elementary properties and detailed spatial relationships in our feeling of a triangle can be displayed in an external expression which others can observe and examine"*I'm afraid I can't agree: The geometric properties of detecting and manipulating triangles are functing, and unproblematic. *What it feels like to see or imagine or manipulate a triangle*, in contrast, is every bit as problematic as what it feels like to see red. (Lockean primary and secondary properties don't help here.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/717> |

2009-04-22 -- Reply to [**Robin Faichney**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p665)

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| **RF:** *"I don't believe non-functions necessarily need reasons to be"*You are not surprised that organisms are not just the Darwinian adaptive machines (functors) that they ought to be (based on everything else we know and can explain)? And you are not bothered that this cannot be explained in the usual (functional) way everything else in the universe can be?**RF:** *"Consciousness is nothing more nor less than a point of view"*Isn't viewing a *felt* function? Assuming that you would not say that a camera has a "point of view," does our having one not deserve an explanation?**RF:** *"'consciousness' and 'free will' are meaningless"*The fact that we feel (i.e., are conscious) is not only *not* meaningless, but it is perfectly true. The fact that feeling cannot have any independent causal power (unless telekinetic dualism is true, which it isn't) is likewise true, and perfectly meaningful, if not especially satisfying, if one is looking for an explanation of how and why we feel...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/718> |

2009-04-22 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p649)

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| **JS:** *"you can know that you have a toothache, but not if you don't have a tooth"*No? What about referred pain, or phantom limb pain, or hysterical pain, or hallucinated pain?**JS:** "*what are feelings?"*Everyone who feels knows that, even if they effect not to.Please see earlier in the thread about ostensive definition and knowing what it "feels like to feel."**JS:***"How do you know they exist?"*I pinch myself occasionally: Try it.**JS:** *"How do you know they don't cause anything?"*I know they *feel* as if they cause things (e.g., when I move my finger because I feel like it). But I notice that there are 4 fundamental forces in the universe, and that they cover my brain's every move, with no remaining degrees of freedom. There's no room for a 5th force unless telekinetic dualism is true (and it's not).**JS:** *"And how do you know they correlate with brain functions?"*Classical psychophysics: as my anxiety level goes up, my GSR goes up, and vice versa. (That does not *prove* correlation, because there's always room for skepticism as well as incommensurability arguments, but it's good enough for a realist and a naturalist. It's not good enough to close the explanatory gap, though because it's just correlation, not causation.)**JS:** *"to the broad question, why are some functions felt?, I would answer, what are you talking about?"*  No reply, if the difference between what happens to you when I pinch you and what does not happen (presumably) to a robot if I pinch it does not make it crystal clear to you exactly what I am talking about.J**S:** *"I would not say that these functions are felt.  That would imply that there is something else apart from the functions which is feeling them."* Well what would you say that pinching you *was* and pinching the robot (or you under anesthesia) *wasn't*? **JS:** *"I see nothing problematic about regarding feelings as neurological functions interacting with other neurological functions, just as I see nothing problematic about regarding colors as wavelengths of light interacting with neurological functions.  The idea that these functions could occur without the feeling of color vision implies a notion of feeling which I do not understand."*Where you are not just seeing truths (as I too see them), you seem to be seeing *necessary* truths, whereas all I see is unexplained truths -- and truths for which it seems perfectly reasonable (by analogy with everything else) to feel as if they call for explanation...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/719> |

2009-04-25 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p724)

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| **ON PSYCHOPHYSICAL INCOMMENSURABILITY AND SENSORY-SEMANTIC DUALS****AT:** *"brain analogs... are much more informative than mere correlates"*I am going to think out loud about "duals" now, because I am not really sure yet what implication I want to draw from it for the question of psychophysical "analogs" vs "correlates." The question is interesting (and Saul Kripke gave it some thought in the '70s when he expressed some skepticism about the coherence, hence he very possibility, of the notion of "spectrum inversion": Could you and I really use exactly the same language, indistinguishably, and live and interact indistinguishably in the world, while (unbeknownst to us) green looks (i.e., feels) to me the way red does to you, and vice versa? Kripke thought the answer was no, because with that simple swap would come an infinity of other associated similarity relations, all of which would likewise have to be systematically adjusted to preserve the coherence of what we say as well as do in the world. ("Green" looks more like blue, "red" looks more like purple, etc.) At the time, I agreed, because I had come to much the same conclusion about semantic swapping: Would a book still be systematically interpretable if every token of "less" were interpreted to mean "more" and vice versa? (I don't mean just making a swap between the two arbitrary *terms* we use, but between their *intended* *meanings*, while preserving the usage of the terms exactly as they are used now.) I was pretty sure that the swap would run into detectable trouble quickly for the simple reason that "less" and "more" are not formal "duals" the way some terms and operations are in mathematics and logic. My intuition -- though I could not prove it -- was that almost all seemingly local pairwise swaps like less/more would eventually require systematic swaps of countless other opposing or contradictory or dependent terms ("I prefer/disprefer having less/more money..."), eventually even true/false, and that standard English could not bear the weight of such a pervasive semantic swap and still yield a coherent systematic interpretation of all of our verbal discourse. And that's even before we ask whether the semantic swap could also preserve the coherence between our verbal discourse and our actions in the world.But since then I've come to a more radical view about meaning itself, according to which the only difference between a text (a string of symbols P instantiated in a static book or a dynamic computer) that is systematically interpretable as meaning something, but has no "intrinsic intentionality" (in [Searle](http://cogprints.org/1622/)'s sense) and a text (say, a string of symbols P instantiated in the brain of a conscious person thinking the thought that P) is that it *feels like something* to be the person thinking the thought that P, whereas it feels like nothing to be the book or the computer instantiating the symbols string). Systematic interpretability ("meaningfulness") in both cases, but (intrinsic) meaning only in the (felt) one.I further distinguish meaning, in this felt sense, from mere *grounding*, which is yet another property that a mere book or computer lacks: Only a robot that could pass the [robotic Turing Test](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14430/) (TT; the capacity to speak and act indistinguishably *from* a person *to* a person, for a lifetime) would have grounded symbols. But *if the robot did not feel*, it still would not have symbols with intrinsic "intentionality"; it would still be more like a book or computer, whose sentences are systematically interpretable but mean nothing except in the mind of a conscious (i.e., feeling) user. (It is of course an open and completely undecidable question whether a TT-passing robot would or would not actually feel, because of the other-minds problem. I think it would -- but I have no idea how or why!)But this radical equation of intrinsic meaning (as opposed to mere systematic interpretability) with feeling would make Kripke's observations about color-swapping (i.e., feeling-swapping) and my observations about meaning-swapping into one and the same thing.It is not only that verbal descriptions fall short of feelings in the way that verbal descriptions fall short of pictures, but that feelings (say, feelings of greater or lesser intensity) and whatever the feelings are "about" (in the sense that they are caused by them and they somehow appertain to them) are *incommensurable*: The relation between an increase in a physical property and its felt quality (e.g., an increase in physical intensity and a felt increase in intensity) is a systematic (and potentially very elaborate and complicated) correlation (more with more and less with less), but does it even make sense to say it is a "resemblance"?For this reason, brain "analogs" too are just systematic correlates insofar as felt quality is concerned. I may have (1) a neuron in my brain whose intensity (or frequency) of firing is in direct proportion to (2) the intensity of an external stimulus (say, the amplitude of a sinusoid at 440 hz). In addition, there is the usual log-linear psychophysical relationship between the stimulus intensity (2)  and (3) my intensity ratings. The stimulus intensity (2)  and the neuronal intensity (1)  are clearly in an analog relationship. So are the stimulus intensity (2) and my intensity ratings (3) (as rated on a 1-10 scale, say). And so are the neuronal intensity (1) and my intensity ratings (3). But you could get all three of those measurements, hence all three of those correlations, out of an unfeeling robot. (I could build one already today.) How does (4) the actual *feeling* of the intensity figure in all this?You want to say that my intensity ratings are based upon an "analog" of that felt intensity. Higher rated intensity is systematically correlated with higher felt intensity, and lower rated intensity is correlated with lower felt intensity. But in what way does a higher intensity *rating* *RESEMBLE* a higher intensity *feeling*? Is the rating not just a notational convention I use, like saying that "higher" sound-frequencies are "higher"? (They're not really higher, like higher in the sky, are they?) (Same thing is true if I instead use the "analog" convention of matching the felt frequency with how high I raise my hand. And if it's instead an involuntary reflex rather than a voluntary convention that is causing the analog response -- say, light pupillary dilation in response to increased light intensity -- then the correlated feeling is even more side-lined!)The members of our species (almost certainly) all share roughly the same feelings. So we can agree upon, share and understand naming conventions that correlate systematically with those shared feelings. I use "hot" for feeling hot and "cold" for feeling cold, because we have both felt those feelings and we share the convention on what we jointly agree to call what. That external corrective constraint gets us out of another kind of incorrigibility: Wittgenstein pointed out in his argument that there could not be a purely [private language](http://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en-us&q=harnad+wittgenstein+%22private+language%22&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8) because then there could be no error-correction, hence there would be no way for me to know whether (i) I was indeed using the same word systematically to refer to the same feeling on every occasion or (ii) it merely *felt as if* I was doing so, whereas I was actually using the words arbitrarily, and my memories were simply deceiving me.So feelings are clearly deceiving if we are trying to "name" them systematically all on our own. But the only thing that social conventions can correct is their *grounding*: What we call (and do with) what, when. I can't know for sure what you are feeling, but if you described yourself as feeling "hot" when the temperature had gone down, and as feeling "happy" when you had just received some bad news, I would suspect something was amiss.Those are clearly just correlations, however. Words are not analogs of feelings, they are just arbitrary labels for them. And although a verbal description of a picture can describe the picture as minutely as we like, it is still not an analog of the picture, just a symbolic description that can be given a systematic and coherent interpretation, both in words and actions (if it is TT-grounded).Yet we all know it can't be symbolic descriptions all the way down: [Some of our words](http://www.archipel.uqam.ca/657/) have to have been learned from (grounded in) direct sensorimotor (i.e., robotic) experience. "How/why did that experience have to be *felt* experience?" That's the question we can't answer; the explanatory gap. And a lemma to that unanswered question is: How/why did that felt experience have to resemble what is was about -- as opposed to merely *feeling like it resembles what it is about*? Why isn't grounding just functing (e.g., the cerebral substrate that enables us to do and say whatever needs to be done and said to survive, succeed and reproduce, TT-scale)? And why is there anything more to meaning than just that? To close with a famous example of analogs: [Roger Shepard](http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/171/3972/701?ijkey=7c35412a7094b3881860e81a13c34991eab614db&keytype2=tf_ipsecsha) showed psychophysically that the time it takes to detect whether two shapes are different shapes or just the same shape, rotated, is proportional to the degree of rotation. This suggests that the brain is encoding the shapes in some analog form, and then doing some real-time analog rotation to test whether they match. This is all true, but as it happens the rotation occurs too fast for the subject to feel that it is happening! So here we have the same three-way correlation ( internal neural process (1) external stimulus (2), subject's outpu (3)) as in intensity judgments), but *without any correlated feeling*. So is the neural "analog" still to count as an analog of *feeling*, even when there is no feeling?By the very same token, how is one to determine whether psychophysical data are *analogs* of feeling, rather than merely systematic functional correlates (especially when the explanation of how and why the correlated functions are felt at all remains a complete mystery, causally, hence functionally)? (This is the public counterpart of Wittgenstein's private problem of error.)All this, but I still think that global systematic duals do not in general work, so neither sensory nor semantic pairwise swapping is possible (except perhaps in some local special cases) while preserving the coherence of either actions in the world or the interpretability of verbal discourse. I don't think, however, that the fact that coherent global duals are impossible, even if it is true, entails that feelings are *analogs* of physical properties, rather than merely systematic *correlates*.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/744>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=744&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-04-26 -- Reply to [**David Chalk**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p740)

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| **CORRELATION, CORRESPONDENCE AND INCOMMENSURABILITY****DC:** *"One can either claim phenomenal consciousness is epiphenomenal or not"*[I'd have said "*One can either claim that feelings are or are not causal"*]**DC:** *"forget about why we should experience anything at all.  If p-consciousness is epiphenomenal...'Why should the experience produced correspond to reality instead of simply... [having] no correlation whatsoever?'"*  First, a simplified gloss:*"forget about why we should feel anything at all.  If feelings are noncausal... 'Why should they correspond to reality instead of simply... [having] no correlation whatsoever?'"*This was the subject of the thread about [correlates vs. analogs in psychophysics](http://philpapers.org/browse/16/thread.pl?tId=137#p744). "Correspondence" is a bit of a weasel word: It could refer to a reliable but arbitrary mapping or a physical isomorphism. I'd say (some) feelings were reliably correlated with (some) objects and events temporally and functionally, but that they were qualitatively incommensurable with them -- and that those were just two sides of the same coin: the noncausal status of feeling. It is always the functing that bears the weight, not the feeling.**DC:** *"I'd be very interested if you... suggest papers or literature that might address this perspective."*(I regret I cannot help on this score, except to add that for my part I would be grateful if pointers to the literature were also always accompanied by a simple summary of the argument that the cited work is making. Without wishing to offend anyone, I do think this topic is more likely to advance if we minimize both the terminology and the reliance on prior Writ, since too many words and too little of substance have been written on the problem, and simplicity is so much more likely to keep our eyes on the ball. The "arguments" referred to below are a case in point.)**DC:** "*The argument that [1] nonlinear physical systems are in some way holistic/non separable... and... [2] quantum mechanical systems"*[1] is (in my opinion) empty hand-waving (all the specifics of feeling slip right out of "nonlinearity" -- ubiquitous in the world) and as for QM  [2]: the explanatory gaps of one field are not filled by the explanatory gaps of another!Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/747> |

2009-04-26 -- Reply to [**David Chalmers**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p381)

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| **DC:** *(1) There's no explanatory gap, or one that's fairly easily closable.**(2) There's a deep explanatory gap for now, but we might someday close it.**(3) There's a permanent explanatory gap, but not an ontological gap (so materialism is true).**(4) There's a permanent explanatory gap, and a corresponding ontological gap (so materialism is false).*(3') There's a permanent explanatory gap (because feelings are noncausal),  but not an ontological gap (because telekinetic dualism is false).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/750> |

2009-04-29 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p780)

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| **TELEKINETIC DUALISM: MIND OVER MATTER****DA:** *"For the unlettered outsider like me, what is 'telekinetic dualism' exactly?"*"Telekinesis" (or "psychokinesis") is often also called "mind over matter": It's spoon-bending by Uri Geller. Not just "action at a distance" as in electromagnetism or gravity, but action at a distance caused by mental power alone. It's what psychics do. Spooky stuff.I (and I assume you) don't believe a word of it.But even when I bend a spoon with my hands, rather than at a distance, it *feels as if* it is my mind that is causing the bending, by causing my hands to bend the spoon.The alternative is that it is electrochemical activities in the motor regions of my cerebral cortex that are causing my hands to bend the spoon, and that my mentally willing it had nothing to do with it -- except that it was quite closely correlated with it. (How closely correlated is still a matter for some debate, as, for example, the work of [Benjamin Libet](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=libet+harnad&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=) might possibly be showing: It could be that an unfelt cerebral event very slightly *precedes* my feeling of willing my hand to move.)So telekinetic dualism would be true if there really existed a mental force, rather like the other 4 fundamental forces of nature -- electromagnetism, gravitation, strong subatomic; weak subatomic (if there are indeed 4, for they may be destined to be unified by some grand theory one day) -- and that 5th force, not the other 4, were the cause of the movement of my arm.But there is no 5th force. The electrochemical/mechanical brain state preceding my movement, and triggering it, explains the cause of my movement as fully as its trivial counterpart does in a simple robot (except of course that the brain is much more complicated and capable); and whether the trigger point in the causal chain coincides with the moment I feel I am initiating the movement or precedes it slightly does not matter a whit: Unless telekinetic dualism is true, *my feeling that I am doing it because I feel like like it* in reality plays no causal role in my movement (even though the feeling is real enough).And that is the mind/body problem. Telekinetic dualism would have been the solution -- if it had been true. But it isn't. There is no mental force, even though it feels like it: It's all matter over matter. But we cannot explain why or how, because there is no causal room. That's the explanatory gap. Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/783> |

2009-04-29 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p764)

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| **ON PREDICTING WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE A BAT...*****AT:*** *"Not all analog representations are felt, but all felt representations are analogs of something somewhere in our egocentric space"*Arnold, I am afraid you have given up the game here! The M/B problem and the explanatory gap are about explaining how/why functions are *felt*, rather than just functed. You work on analog functions, which is fine -- valuable, informative. But it is how/why (some) analog functions are *felt* that is at issue here, not how/why they are analog, or functional.**AT:** *"while the existence of consciousness (feelings) may be beyond our ability to explain, the contents of consciousness can be explained"*What can be explained is the functionality of analog functions; and what we have (as a gift) is their correlation with feelings. How and why feelings are there and correlated with functions is completely untouched. That is the explanatory gap.**AT:** *“Suppose the functing of a particular kind of brain mechanism was theoretically specified, and on the basis of its putative operating principles, one predicted the occurrence of a particular kind of feeling never experienced before. Suppose the prediction was successful and repeatable. Would you then be inclined to accept the idea that the functing of the specified brain mechanism was the biophysical aspect of the predicted feeling?”*Not inclined in the least! You are simply re-affirming the feeling/functing correlation, not explaining. Sonar perception (of a bat) feels like something. Humans don't feel sonar. If someone genetically engineered a sonar perception mechanism that could be added to the human brain and it produced not only bat-like functional capacities, but felt perception, this would of course not prove anything at all (insofar as the feeling/function problem is concerned), even if all went exactly as "predicted." No one but a bat knows what it feels like to be a bat today \*although we do have a very rough idea from our other sense-modalities, as all the senses resemble one another in a very general sense: guessing or describing what it feels like to be a bat, for us, is rather like a congenitally blind person guessing what it feels like to see.)The very same is true of a brand-new, artificially engineered sensory modality: Even if it works, and produces both functioning and feeling, correlated, as predicted, it still does not explain in the slightest how/why it is felt. It simply migrates the mystery to a brand-new sensory modality.And the fact that it uses analog function does not illuminate the f/f problem by even a single candela (or jnd), alas!Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/788> |

2009-05-02 -- Reply to [**David Chalk**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p752)

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| **ON MEASURING, FEELING, AND COMMENSURABILITY: (AND MIND THE ONTIC/EPISTEMIC GAP!)**David, I think you have misunderstood a number of things:(1) The most important is the ontic/epistemic distinction: Distinguish been *what there really is* (ontic) and what we can *know* about what there really is (epistemic), e.g., what we can observe or measure. Although it was fashionable for a while (though one wonders how and why!), it will not do to say "I shall assume that what I can observe and measure is all there is and can be." Not if you want to address the question of the explanatory gap, rather than simply beg it! (2) Observation and measurement also have to be looked at much more rigorously. In the most natural sense of "observe," only seeing creatures observe. A camera does not "observe," it simply does physical transduction, producing a physical "image" (on the film) which, again, is simply another object that has some properties (which in turn are analogs of some of the properties of the object from which the light entering the camera originated). The seeing person who looks at the image on the film is the one who observes, not the camera. The same is true of measurement: A thermometer does not "measure" temperature; people measure temperature. The thermometer itself simply implements a physical interaction, in which its mercury rises to a certain point on the (man-made) scale, which can then be read off by a seeing, observing, measuring human. The user is the one doing the measuring, not the thermometer.But there is no reason to be quite this rigid: There is not much risk in talking about instruments doing the measurements, rather than the users of the instruments, just as long as we do not read too much into "measuring." Ditto for "observing." In particular, we must on no account make the mistake of treating this instrumental sense of measuring and observing as if it were *felt* measuring and observing, because then, again, we are simply begging the question of the explanatory gap and the feeling/functing problem.In the instrumental sense of "measurement," we can say, for example, that unattended temperature sensors in the arctic transmitted their "observations" to computers, which analyzed them and produced a result, which (correctly) predicted global warming and the destruction of the biosphere in N years. And that event would be the same event if humans were already extinct and the arctic sensors and computers were running on auto-pilot. B*ut what would it mean?*(Remember that I have a radically deviant view, not the standard one, on the subject of the [relation between feeling and meaning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbol_grounding): I think only felt meaning is meaning; without feeling all one has is grounded robotic functing (and semantic interpretability). So even if, after the extinction of humans, the arctic sensors and the computers transmitted their data to robots that then took the requisite steps to avert the global warming and save the biosphere, that would all still just be physical transduction and nothing else -- except, of course, *if the robots actually did feel* -- but in that case it would be irrelevant that they were robots! They might as well be us; and all the observing and measuring is again being done by feeling creatures, and the feeling/function gap is as unbridged as ever!)(3) Your third equivocation in what follows below, is in the weasel-word "experience" -- which can mean *felt* experience, as in our case, or, used much more loosely and instrumentally (as with "observing" and "measuring") it can merely mean an event in which there was again some sort of physical interaction. Whether the event was one billiard ball hitting another, or a camera snapping a photo after all life is gone, or a computer receiving the bits and applying an algorithm to them -- these are all pretty much of a muchness. There's no "experience" going on there, because of course it's only really an "experience" -- rather than just an event or state with certain functional properties -- *if it is felt* (by someone/something).And that (and only that) is what this discussion is all about, and has been, unswervingly, all along (for those who grasp what the explanatory problem at issue is).**DC:** *"'telekinesis' is abhorrent because it suggests there are nonphysical phenomena which influence the comings and goings of material things.* Ordinary ("paranormal/psychic") telekinesis is not "abhorrent," it is simply false, in that all evidence contradicts it. All seemingly telekinetic effects keep turning out to be either due to chance or to cheating.And as for (what I've called) "telekinetic dualism" -- that too is not abhorrent. It is perfectly natural, indeed universal, to believe and feel that our feelings matter, and that most of what we do, we do because we feel like doing it, and not just because functing is going on, of which our feelings are merely correlates -- correlates of which we do not know the causes, and, even more important, correlates which themselves have no effects of their own, and we cannot explain how and why they are there at all. (That, yet again. is the f/f problem and the explanatory gap.)**DC:** *"To suggest...momentum, position and fields... might be influenced by 'feeling' seems ludicrous."*It is not ludicrous; it is simply false.**DC:** *"However, suggesting that momentum, position or fields can create phenomena that are not measurable by measuring the momentum, position and field is just as serious a problem as suggesting said phenomena influences those measurements"*How did we get into "measurability"? We can measure momentum today that was too minute to measure yesterday. Maybe there's still momentum we can't measure, or don't even know about. This is the ontic/epistemic error: What there is (and isn't) in the world owes nothing, absolutely nothing, to what human senses and instruments can or cannot "measure."Moreover, the f/f problem and the explanatory gap have nothing to do with the limits of human senses or measuring instruments. They have to do with the fact that we feel, yet we cannot explain how or why, because all evidence is that feelings, though they are there alright, have no independent causal power. They are just inexplicable correlates of the things that really do have causal power (functing). Hence the mystery about why everything is not all just unfelt functing: Why are some functions felt?**DC:** *"If you don't want to accept telekinesis, then why accept the corollary which is that objectively measureable properties produce phenomena that are not objectively measurable?*"  I have no problems whatsoever with the very real possibility that measurable properties may also have unmeasurable effects. The problem is that that has absolutely nothing to do with the problem of explaining how and why some functions are felt. It is not *immeasurable* effects of functing that are the problem; it is the fact that some functing is felt. (And although feeling is not, strictly speaking "measurable," it is certainly observable -- indeed, it is the only thing that is unproblematically observable! (It is no wonder that -- in struggling with their own "explanatory gap" -- philosophers of quantum mechanics have made something of a cult out of human observation, as being the mysterious cause of the "collapse of the wave packet" that separates our punctate world from the continuously superimposed smear it would be if there were no people to read off the outcome of a geiger-counter experiment! But, alas, this is just piling mystery atop mystery...)**DC:** "*If you can't measure it, don't accept it."*There's the barefoot operationalism, again. This may be useful advice to an experimental physicist -- if not to a superstring theorist -- because all they deal with is functing anyway, whether measurable or unmeasurable. But it is just question-begging if you are trying to explain how/why organisms feel rather than just funct.**DC:** *"Earlier you suggested that experience/qualia/feeling are measurable by the subject and reportable, but are not causal or perhaps are epiphenomenal.  Could you...clarify this?"*(First, why the needless synonyms "experience/qualia/feeling" when feeling covers them all and is problem enough?)Second, I did not say feelings are measurable. (I think physical properties and feelings are incommensurable, and that measurement itself is physical, functional.) I said our feelings correlate with functing. We say (and feel) "ouch" when our skin is injured, not when it is stroked, or randomly; we say (and feel) a sound is louder when an acoustic amplitude increases, not when it decreases (or randomly). So the correlation is definitely there.But this does not help explain why (or how) tissue damage and acoustic amplitude change is felt, rather than functed. If our neurons simply fired faster when we were hurt, or when a sound got louder, and caused our muscles to act accordingly, but we did not feel, then we'd still have the psychophysical correlation (stimulus/response) -- including, if you like, JND by JND psychophysical scaling -- but no correlated feeling. So the question naturally arises: what's the point of the feeling?I also don't think I am measuring anything when I feel, or report my feeling. I am simply feeling. When I say "more" or "less," I am saying this feels like more and that feels like less. The psychophysicist is doing the measuring (not I): He is measuring what I do (R) and comparing it to the stimulus (S) and noting that they are tightly correlated. I am just saying how it feels. As I said in my reply to Arnold Trehub: apart from the S/R correlation, there is not a separate "sentometer" to measure the feeling itself; it's not even clear what "measuring a feeling" would mean. Nor, as I said, am \*I\* "measuring" what I'm feeling, in feeling it, and acting upon it. I'm just feeling it, and acting on it. And there is a tight correlation between what happens outside me (S), what I feel, and what I do (R). There better be, otherwise I would come from a long line of extinct ancestors. But the co-measurement is only between S and R, which are both functing and unproblematic. It feels as if I am drawing on feelings in order to generate my R, but how I do that is rather too problematic to be called "co-measurement" in any non-question-begging sense of measurement. So although the feeling is correlated with S and R, they are not commensurable, because the feeling is neither being measured, nor is it itself a measure, or measurement.You also seem to be misunderstanding "epiphenomenal": Epiphenomenal does not just mean "unimportant or unmeasurable side-effects." It means (1) an effect that is uncaused, or (2) an effect that has no effects. I am a "materialist" in that I am sure enough that feelings are caused by the brain, somehow (i.e., they are not uncaused effects (1)); I simply point out that we have no idea *how* feelings are caused by the brain (and we never will). But the real puzzle is not that: the real puzzle is why feelings are caused by the brain, since feelings themselves have no effects (2). They are functional danglers, which means that they are gaps in any causal explanation.There is one and only one epiphenomenon (unless QM has a few more of its own), and that *is* feeling: Caused (inexplicably) by the brain, feelings themselves (even more inexplicably) cause nothing -- even though it feels as if they do.**DC:** *"You don't want experience to influence anything physical.  You don't want there to be an unmeasurable influence on any material comings and goings."*First, this has nothing to do with what I do or don't want!Second, rather than equivocate on "experience," can we please stick to calling it feeling!Feelings have no independent causal power, not because I don't want them to, but because telekinetic dualism is false: there is no evidence for feelings having any causal power, and endless evidence against it.And whereas there can certainly be unmeasurable effects, one cannot invoke them by way of an explanation of something without evidence. Besides, the problem with feeling has nothing to do with measurability; it's their very existence that is the problem. And even if they were completely uncorrelated with anything else (the way our moods sometimes are), they would still defy causal explanation.**DC:** *"As an example, we might consider a computer being used to control some process such as the launching of a rocket.  One might say the computer has a causal influence over this process, albeit an epiphenomenal one."*Why on earth would you want to say the influence was epiphenomenal? This is a perfectly garden-variety example of causal influence!**DC:** *"One might take the position that everything above the molecular level is epiphenomenal, and certainly philosophers have suggested exactly this."*Philosophers say the strangest things. If everything about the molecular level is "epiphenomenal," we have lost the meaning of "epiphenomenon" altogether. And that's just fine. I get not an epsilon more leverage on the inexplicability of how and why some functions are felt if I add that they are "epiphenomenal"!**DC:** *"computers, circuits or transistors are... all part of a causal chain from atomic and molecular interactions to rocket launch."*Indeed they are. No causal gaps there. It's with feelings that you get the causal gap that lies at the heart of the explanatory gap.**DC:** *"you're suggesting that experience is not part of that causal chain.  Experience/qualia/feeling can not play a part in any way in this causal chain."* First, can we just stick with the one term "feeling"? The proliferation of synonyms just creates a distraction, and what we need is focus, and to eliminate everything that is irrelevant.The evidence (not I) says that feelings have no independent power to cause anything. All the causal chains on which they piggy-back mysteriously are carried entirely by (unproblematic) functing.**DC:** *"What I don't think you're suggesting is that feelings are epiphenomenal in the same sense as the computer's causal influence is epiphenomenal"* (1) I don't for a minute think a computer's causal influence is epiphenomenal. It's causal influence is causal!(2) I would suggest forgetting about "epiphenomena" and just sticking with doing, causing and feeling.(3) All evidence is that feelings do not cause anything, even though they feel as if they do. All the causation is being done by the functing, on which the correlated feeling piggy-backs inexplicably.(4) The inability to explain feeling causally is the explanatory gap. **DC:** *"let's suggest that the experience of the color red can be reliably measured by a person."*  Alas we are back into ambiguity and equivocation.It feels like something to see red.The feeling is correlated with wave length (and brightness and luminosity), as psychophysics has confirmed.Persons don't measure. They feel, and respond (R). Psychophysicists measure (S and R).S and R are reliably correlated, and since R is based on feelings, we can say feelings are reliably correlated with S too (even though, strictly speaking, S and R are commensurable, but neither is commensurable with feelings).The human subject, however, is not measuring, but feeling, and doing.**DC:** *"a digital camera can take light and convert it to a digital pattern which can be reconverted to wavelength using just three pixels on a computer screen.  The intensity we observe from each pixel is interpreted and converted to color inside the brain.  I doubt anyone would say that the experience of color exists at any step of the process between recording the color red using the camera and the reproducing of the color at a computer screen."*  No, the feeling (sic) of seeing color occurs in the brain of the feeling subject. Not before or after in the causal (or temporal) chain. (And why the computer? Let the stimulus be color. No need for it to be computer-generated color. If the digital-camera/computer is used instead as an analogy for the seeing subject, rather than the stimulus, the answer is that there is no feeling in the camera or the computer.)**DC:** *"let's say we had a device which could reliably measure the experience of red.  A human is just such a device if experience reliably correlates to function/behavior."*David, with this "assumption" you have effectively begged the question and given up (or rather smuggled in) the ghost (in the machine): Until further notice, the only devices that have experiences (feeling) to "measure" are biological organisms. If you declare some other device to feel by fiat, you're headed toward panpsychism (everything and every part and combination of everything feels) which is not only arbitrary and as improbable as telekinesis, but is probably incoherent too.No device can measure a feeling (sic); it can only measure a functional correlate of a feeling. And a human subject *feels* the feeling; he does not *measure* it.**DC:** *"Now, if this internal measurement is reliable, then let's assume we can similarly produce this experience computationally."*  You've lost me. There is no internal measurement going on, just feeling. And it is "reliable" inasmuch as it correlates with S and R. It is of course the easiest thing in the world to replace a human -- feeling, say, sound intensity -- by a computer, transducing sound intensity, in such a way as to reproduce the human S/R function.Trouble is that in so doing you have not solved the f/f problem but simply begged the question -- which is, let me remind you: How and why are we not also like that unfeeling device, transducing the input, producing a perfect S/R function, but feeling nothing whatsoever in the process?**DC:** *"Let's assume our computer's transistors can produce this reliable correlation and report dutifully the experience has been accomplished. If this is possible, then that computer... has physically measured the phenomenon in question and produced a physical report."*You seem to think that the f/f problem is getting a device to produce a reliable psychophysical detection (S/R) function: It's not. The problem is to explain how and why we are *not* just devices that produce a psychophysical detection (S/R) function: how and why we feel whilst we funct.(And this is not about measurement, but about explaining the causal role of feeling in human functing.)**DC:** *"If the measurement of the experience is reliable, then that measurement can be (must be) converted to a physical signal so that it is reportable, else it is not reliable.  So if the measurement of experience is reliably reported, then something can be done with that signal.  The signal can be interjected into a causal chain..."*I'm afraid you have left the real problem long behind as you head off into this measurement operationalism that begs the question at issue, which is not about reliable "measurement" but about felt functing.**DC:** *"We can have an if/then statement in our computer which says, If Xperience = RED then "SCRUB LAUNCH".  In this way, qualia/experience/feeling is interjected into the causal chain."* You really think feeling is just a matter of an if/then statement in a computer program? Would a problem with a solution as trivial as that really have survived this long? If the physical substrate of feeling were (mirabile dictu) if/then statements in a computation, there would still be (as with the perpetuum mobile) that niggling little problem about why the if/then statements were felt rather than just functed...**DC:** *"Unless I've screwed up somewhere, which is entirely possible, the bottom line is that experience/feeling can be a part of the causal chain if it is internally measurable (subjectively measurable) and as long as that measurement is reliable."*  I regret to say that you have indeed screwed up at a number of points, big time! I've tried to point them out. They begin with your operationalism about "measurability," they continue with the equivocation on "experience" (felt experience? how/why felt, then, rather than just functed?), and your (arbitrary) equation of feeling with "measuring,"**DC:** *"One might still claim this influence is epiphenomenal as I've defined epiphenomenal above using the rocket launch example."*As you've defined epiphenomenal, epiphenomenality is so common that it casts no light at all on the special case of the causal status of feeling.**DC:** *"We can explain everything a computer does by examining the function of each transistor and circuit.  The experience for a computer  therefore is merely functing.”*Here the equivocal word "experience" has even led you to saying something that is transparently false or absurd if stated in unequivocal language: "The feeling for a computer is merely function" i.e., the computer does not feel, it merely functs. (And our problem -- remember? -- was not computers, but \*us\*, 'cause we really do feel, rather than just funct, like the computer...**DC:**  *"Experience can not be proven to reliably correlate inside a computer, and in fact, experience is never needed to explain anything a computer does."*  For the simple reason that (replacing the weasel-word "experience") the computer does not feel. (Hence we are not just computers, or like computers in that crucial respect.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/800>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=800&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-02 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p789)

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| ***AT:*** *1. If we ask how/why some functions are felt, we seem to grant that some functions are not felt, and we can ask if there is a systematic biophysical  difference between felt functions and unfelt functions.*We had *better* grant that some functions are felt and some are not felt (since it's true!): My toothache is felt; my thermoregulation is not (although I can feel hot); a furnace's thermoregulation is unfelt, and the furnace does not feel hot (or anything).We can certainly look for biophysical differences between my felt and unfelt functions; but just as the functional correlates of my feelings will not tell you how or why I feel, the functional correlates of felt and unfelt functions won't tell you either. (And the reason is that there simply isn't the causal room for feelings to have any effects at all (independent of their correlated functions), hence there isn't any room for a causal explanation of how and why we feel: the correlated functions tell all there is to tell.***AT:*** *2. We can also ask why any felt function is felt. -- It seems to me that question 2 is equivalent to asking why anything like feeling (consciousness) exists at all. Would you agree, Stevan?*Yes, which is why I've reformulated the mind/body problem as the [feeling/function problem](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=harnad+%22feeling%2Ffunction%22&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=): How and *why* are some functions felt?About the "how" -- i.e., how are feelings generated? -- I don't doubt for a minute that the cause is the brain. What I doubt is that we can explain how the brain generates the feelings, rather than just the correlated functions. So this is not about whether materialism is true. (Of course it is.) It is about whether material (functional) explanation is complete: No it isn't. There's an explanatory gap, insofar as the (fact of) feeling is concerned.But the harder question is the "why." The "why" is not teleological, it is functional, and causal: In a sense, the only satisfactory answer to a functional question -- why does this device work this way? what functional role does property X play? -- is a functional answer. But if we ask a functional question about feeling -- why does this device feel? what functional role does the fact that it feels play? -- we draw a blank, because feelings have no independent functional role. All the functionality is accounted for by the functional correlates of feelings! That's why "Why are some functions felt rather than just functed?" is the core question. And since a satisfying answer could only be a causal/functional one -- and there is simply no causal room for such an answer (given that telekinetic dualism is false), we are stuck with an explanatory gap. (I should have added in my earlier reply, Arnold, that the object is not to predict what we feel, but to explain that we feel (how, why). And that will not be accomplished by analogs, representations, etc.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/801> |

2009-05-02 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p765)

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| **UNTOWARD CONSEQUENCES OF UNCOMPLEMENTED CATEGORIES****JS:**"*You may be right about the four fundamental forces accounting for all brain activity, but I do not see why we should think feelings can't be manifestations of these forces.  Thus, to rephrase my question, how do you know that feelings are not as causally efficacious as anything else in nature?"*"Manifestations" is a weasel-word!I'm pretty sure feelings are caused by the usual four FFs (i.e., I'm not a "dualist," for what my beliefs are worth!). But I am pretty sure no one has explained *how* feelings are caused by the usual four FFs. And I'm pretty sure it's impossible to explain how they are caused. As usual, the attempted explanations will turn out to be explanations of *doings*, and *doing capacity* (i.e., functing), not feeling.As for the fact that feelings have no (independent) effects (i.e., apart from the unproblematic direct effects of the same four FFs on which the feelings are piggy-backing causally): I'm as sure of that as I am that telekinetic dualism is false. (For that is what it would take for feelings to have effects.) **JS:**"*a correlation... does not answer my question.  How do you know that your anxiety level goes up when your GSR goes up?"*I think I made it clear I was not invoking a cartesian "know" (i.e., certainty) for the correlations between feeling and functing, just for the *fact that I feel*. For the correlations I am no surer than I am that, say, night follows day, or that there's an external world...**JS:***"why you think that you know about your feelings in an indubitable and inexplicable way."*I am as certain I feel (when I feel) as Descartes was of his cogito -- indeed, it *is* the cogito, which should have been "[sentio ergo sentitur](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=%22sentio+ergo+sentitur%22&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=)".And I'm as sure that it's inexplicable as I am that the 4 FFs are all there are, and all that's needed to cause all that's caused. Thus, whereas there's room for feelings as effects, there's no room for them as causes.And explanation (here) means causal explanation (of how and why feel rather than just funct).**JS:***"a slightly different interpretation of Wittgenstein... It is not only that a wholly private language lacks the possibility of error correction; it is that the very notion of error makes no sense here.  [so] you can... use the word "feeling" to refer to something... private, but you cannot claim that this usage is correct, and so it cannot indicate knowledge"*I do interpret [Wittgenstein on private language](http://www.google.com/search?q=site:users.ecs.soton.ac.uk+harnad+wittgenstein+%22private+language%22&hl=en&num=100&filter=0) much the same way you do, and that *is* the problem of error: I can't nonarbitrarily *name* what I'm feeling, even with public correction: I could be calling what it feels like to feel sad "sad" one day and "happy" another day, without the possibility of anyone -- including me -- being any the wiser, as long as my public sayings about feelings were reliably correlated with my public doings and sayings, and it all kept feeling fine to me. (I could of course do the same thing if Zombies were possible and "I" were a Zombie: "My" sayings [including my sayings about feelings] and my doings [of which my sayings are of course just a particular case] would be reliably correlated in that case (i.e., if "I" were a Zombie) too, again with the help of public corrective feedback on my doings and sayings -- except that instead of random feelings that just fooled me each time into feeling as if they were familiar recurrent feelings, there would simply be *no feelings at all*: just the functings that subserve the doing and the saying, which are of course likewise functings.)In a fundamental sense, all of this is true about every feeling: even with public corrective feedback, there could be a reliable correlation between whenever I'm feeling F and what I refer to publicly as "F", but that correlation could be just as reliable if it were just a correlation with the inclination to call F "F" publicly, plus the feeling that I'm feeling that old familiar F at the time, when in reality I am feeling something randomly different every time. But that's really just about the reliability of public naming (and the correlation plus external feedback takes care of that); it's not about the reliability of the recurrence and identification of the self-same feeling every time it feels as if it's recurring. (It's not for nothing that "feeling" and "seeming" are fully interchangeable in all of this!)But none of that touches on the fact of (ongoing) feeling itself, about which I have cartesian certainty every time it happens. Not only do I know *that* I'm feeling, whenever I'm feeling, but even if I'm not feeling what I called F the last time, and instead only feeling-as-if-I'm-feeling what I called F the last time, the fact that I am nevertheless feeling *something* remains a cartesian certainty there too. The best way to see this is to forget about the naming of the feeling; in fact, assume we are talking about a species that has no language. An alligator can have a headache (that feels much like our headache feels) without knowing he has a head, and without calling the feeling anything, nor even remembering ever having felt that feeling before. Whatever the alligator is feeling at the time, it is a certainty *that* it is feeling, and that it is feeling *that* (though that poor precartesian alligator may not be feeling that certainty!) And if an alligator *were* capable of cartesian doubt, he would be incapable of doubting he was feeling a headache (when he was indeed feeling a headache), exactly as I would be incapable of doubting I was feeling a headache -- i.e., doubting that I was feeling whatever I was feeling -- when I was feeling a headache (though I would be perfectly capable of doubting I had a head). (I repeat, the current feeling need not be the same feeling as the feeling I had the last time I felt I had a headache; it could just be déjà vu. This one could feel hot and that one could have felt cold, and I could simply have forgotten that. It doesn't matter. What matters is that I can be sure I am feeling something (or other) now, and that whatever that something (or other) feels like now is what it feels like (and not something else). (Again, the synonymy of "feeling" and "seeming".)An important further point I made earlier in another posting: If I am to have a well-defined [category](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/11725/), it must have both positive and negative instances (i.e., members and nonmembers), and I must have sampled enough of both to be able to pick out what distinguishes them, reliably. Only then can I really "know" (this is *not* the cartesian know, just a quotidian cognitive capacity to distinguish reliably) what's in the category and what's not in it. But the category "feeling" is one of a family of special cases (each of them causing conceptual and philosophical problems) because they are "[uncomplemented categories](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=harnad+%22uncomplemented+categories%22&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=)" -- a kind of "[poverty of the stimulus](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=harnad+%22poverty+of+the+stimulus%22&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=)" problem arising from the fact that they are based (and can only be based) exclusively on positive instances: In contrast, the category "redness" is perfectly well-complemented: I can sample what it feels like to see red things and non-red things, no problem. But not so with the category "feeling": I can sample what it feels like to feel: I do that every time I feel anything. And I can sample what it feels like to feel X and to feel not-X. So through feeling X and feeling not-X (if there's no evil demon playing random scrambling tricks of the kind I mentioned above on the recurrence of my X and not-X feelings), "X" and "not-X" (or, if you prefer external negation, not-feeling X [when feeling Y instead]) are perfectly well instantiated  and complemented, hence reliably identifiable categories (insofar as ordinary, noncartesian cognition is concerned).But feeling itself is not; for I can never feel what it feels like to not-feel (as opposed to merely not-feeling X, in virtue of feeling Y instead). *All I have is positive evidence for what it feels like to feel.*But I do have evidence. So although the category "feeling" is uncomplemented, hence pathological in some ways, it is nevertheless a category. It leaves me with some indeterminacy about what to call what I'm actually feeling, and about whether or not I've actually felt it before (as it seems). It will also leave me with a lot of puzzles about what "feeling" is (including, notably, the mind/body problem!). But it will still leave no cartesian doubt as to the fact that feeling is indeed going on, when it is: *sentitur*. (Of course "*sentio ergo sum*" would be far too strong a conclusion to draw from such evidence: What is this "I" that I supposedly am? (It's almost -- but just almost -- as uncertain as the existence of my head, when all I have to go on, by way of evidence, is my headache.) The best we can say is that it *feels as if* there is an "I" -- but that's hardly more certain or cartesian than that it feels as if there's an outside world, or a "you". (Life could have been just one isolated, amnesic "ouch" after another, with no "ego" -- yet that would already be enough to create the explanatory gap.)So *sentitur* is all we can be certain about, regarding feeling; but that's quite enough to generate the full-blown mind/body (feeling/function) problem.(All this is by way of my sketching my update on Wittgenstein's private-language argument and problem-of-error, plus a minor tweak of Descartes' *cogito*.)**JS:***"so, when you say, "I know with absolute certainty what red is, because it is my feeling alone and I experience it directly"... we should conclude that you aren't saying anything."*No, as I've just argued, I cannot have Cartesian certainty about the coupling between my feeling and the world, nor about the recurrent identity of my feeling (what it's called, and whether it's the same thing I felt before under that name) but I can have cartesian certainty about the fact that I am feeling, when I'm feeling (and despite the fact that feeling is an uncomplemented category).**JS:***"As W. says, 'a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said' "*It's a subtle point, but I am not talking here about what can be *said;* I am talking about about what can be *known*, with the same certainty as "if P then P" -- and even by an alligator, who cannot think "if P then P" but is just as bound by it...**JS:**"*Perhaps you only mean to say that you can know you feel like you have a toothache without observing your body in any way."*Yes: I am talking exclusively about what and when one feels, not about any coupling between the feeling and the world (of bodies, etc.). That has exactly the same scope as the cogito -- indeed it *is* the cogito, properly put (*sentitur*).**JS:***"In your view, feelings do not inform us about our bodies at all--for, if they so informed us, then they would play a causal role in our ability to learn about and function within the world.  And if observations of our bodies could inform us of our feelings, then there would be no ''hard problem'"*Correct. It is the functing (on which feelings piggy-back, inexplicably) that takes care of our doings and sayings about bodies, including, mysteriously, the correlation between bodily functings and feelings. And there is no cartesian certainty about functings (though of course they are largely reliable, adaptive and veridical); there is certainty only about the fact of ongoing feeling (and about "if P then P").**JS:***"This is a form of dualism.  Whatever feelings are and whatever functions are, information about one cannot be gained from the other.  You prefer to call your position "epiphenomenalism," because you wish to maintain some notion of causal dependence between bodily states and feelings, even if that dependence is only one-way.  But such a causal dependence is unknowable--a something about which nothing could be said."*(1) For what it's worth, I fully *believe* the brain causes feelings (about as fully as I believe that gravity causes apples to fall); hence I am not a "dualist."(2) But gravity is one of the four fundamental forces (FFs), hence it calls for no further causal explanation. Feeling is not, hence it does.(3) And hence I note that although the brain causes feelings, no one has explained *how* the brain causes feelings.(4) Worse, no one has explained *why* the brain causes feelings, given that the four FFs unproblematically cause and constitute all causal function (functing).(5) So feeling remains a causal/functional dangler: caused (somehow) by the brain, but not itself having any causal power of its own, over and above the functing that it is correlated with, and that accounts causally -- and fully -- for everything we do and say, without the need or room for any extra causal help.(6) I don't find it particularly useful or informative to call this "epiphenomenalism": it is simply a failure of causal explanation, an "explanatory gap"  (one might as well call it "exceptionalism," equally unilluminatingly) -- but I suppose one is free to call an unsolved and insoluble explanatory problem whatever one likes...**JS:***"When you ask "why are some functions felt?," what is it that you suppose is feeling the functions?  What sort of entity can feel?  I do not see how you can answer this question without explicitly embracing dualism; and if you do not answer it, then your usage of the term "feel" becomes highly suspect"*The trouble with uncomplemented categories is that they do raise a host of puzzles: (a) I know (cartesianly) that feeling is going on (*sentitur*).(b) I have evidence (noncartesian) that there is a world, that I have a body, that others have bodies, and that my feelings (seemings) are very closely correlated with what seems to be going on (doings, functing) in that outside world.(c) It is part of the nature of feeling that *feelings are felt*. "Unfelt feelings" are self-contradictory (and meaningless), and the notion of unfelt feelings has given rise to a lot of incoherent hocus-pocus (such as the notion of unconscious thoughts and an unconscious mind -- rather than the [mostly] unfelt functing plus the [minority of] felt functing that is all there really is). (d) It also seems to be part of the nature of feeling that a feeler feels the feelings and that it feels-as-if I am the feeler. Insofar as cartesian certainty is concerned, all I can say is that it is certain that feeling is going on (when it is), and that it feels like I am the feeler. In certain disordered states, that's not so clear; but from a sober (but noncartesian) standpoint, it is very likely that my brain causes my feelings, and also causes me, as a continuous identity, feeling and remembering the feelings I've felt. (e) No one know how or why the brain causes feelings; the brain (like everything else, including Darwinian evolution) is a functor. It is natural to ask how and why some brain functions are felt, but there is no causal room for a causal answer.I think I've answered your question as well as one can, and without "explicitly embracing dualism".**JS:***"There is no practical difference between epiphenomenalism and dualism that I can see."*Rather than talking ontics (on which I am a monist), I prefer to talk epistemics (on which I prefer to call an explanatory failure by its proper name).**JS:***"Your position cannot be established a posteriori.  Appeals to common knowledge and ostensive definitions can only beg the question.  You do indicate something like Chalmers' conceivability argument when you talk about robots, and that is an a priori argument; however, I am not convinced"*I take the *cogito* (or *sentitur*, rather) to be based on evidence we have from experience (hence a posteriori) -- indeed it is the paradigmatic case of evidence from experience (i.e., feeling). But it is experiential evidence only of the indubitable (incorrigible) fact of experience, not more -- and it is certainly not an explanation of the causes or effects of experience.No, I have no use whatsoever for "conceivability" arguments. I have no idea whether or not there can be Zombies (i.e., unfeeling [Turing-scale robots](http://cogprints.org/1616/), indistinguishable in their doing/saying capacities from ourselves), but what I happen to believe is that if a T-scale robot is possible, it will feel. Nor is the argument that there is no causal room over and above the 4 FFs an a priori argument. It's contingent on the evidence that there are only the 4 FFs. Telekinetic dualism seems a perfectly conceivable, indeed plausible, alternative. It just happens to be false.**REFERENCES**Harnad, S. (1987) Uncomplemented Categories, or, What is it Like to be a Bachelor? 1987 Presidential Address: *Society for Philosophy and Psychology*. [http://cogprints.org/2134/](http://cogprints.soton.ac.uk/documents/disk0/00/00/21/34/index.html)Harnad, S. (2005) [*To Cognize is to Categorize: Cognition is Categorization*](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/11725), in Lefebvre, C. and Cohen, H., Eds. *Handbook of Categorization*. Elsevier. <http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/11725/>Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/804>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=804&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-04 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p817)

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| **PREDICTING *WHAT* WE FEEL IS NOT EXPLAINING *THAT* WE FEEL****AT:** W*hat, in your opinion, might count as a causal explanation of a feeling rather than a mere correlate or an analog of a feeling?*Since I do not believe that feeling can be causally explained, you are actually asking me to give you a counterfactual-conditional reply. That's a bit like asking someone who does not believe that one can trisect an angle or build a perpetuum mobile what would count as a trisected angle or a perpetuum mobile! But for trisection we have a proof it's impossible and for perpetual motion we have a law of Nature that entails that it is impossible -- whereas I have neither proof nor law in the case of the causal explanation of feeling. So all I can do is repeat the argument:If telekinetic dualism were true -- that is, if there were evidence that there could be "mind over matter," with the mental force being a fifth addition to the existing array of four fundamental forces of Nature (electromagentic, gravitational, strong, weak) -- then that would be a causal explanation: Apples fall because of gravitation, and our fingers rise because we will it (we do what we do because we feel like it, not because we are impelled by the other four forces to do it).But telekinetic dualism is false; all evidence is against it. So whereas we certainly cannot (thanks to Descartes) doubt that feelings exist (and whereas feelings are themselves caused [though we have no idea *how*] by our brains almost as certainly as apples are caused to fall by gravity), we can conclude from the fact that telekinetic dualism is almost certainly false that feelings almost certainly do not themselves have any causal consequences. So we cannot explain (causally) why we feel. All we can explain is what our bodies can do (and how). Feelings piggy-back (somehow) on that functing, without any causal consequences, although they are quite tightly correlated with our functing.Your own focus, Arnold, is on predicting *what* we feel (which can in many cases be done, thanks to the tight correlation); but predicting what we feel, no matter how minutely, is in no way explaining *that* we fail, neither how, now why. (Predicting *what* we feel simply takes the fact *that* we feel for granted, thereby begging the question of explaining how or why, and leaving the explanatory gap gaping.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/819>2009-05-04 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p825)

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| **"FUNCTING" IS ALL OF PHYSICAL, BIOLOGICAL AND ENGINEERING CAUSAL DYNAMICS****DA:** *Could someone define the term 'functing' for me please?*"Functing" (aka, function) is just ordinary causal dynamics, whether in natural inanimate physical systems, biological ones, or artificially engineered ones: everything observed and described in the physical sciences, biological sciences, and engineering. Physical, biological and engineering explanation is all causal and functional. (It's sometimes called "functionalism."). And I coined my tongue-in-cheek term "[functing](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=harnad+functing&btnG=Search)" to remind those who are attempting to provide a functional explanation of the causal role of consciousness (feeling) what they are really up against. The "mind/body" problem is really just the "feeling/functing" problem. When you put it like that, it becomes transparent that "explanations" such as "the function of pain is to alert the organism to the presence of tissue damage and the need to take evasive action" are circular and hence empty, hence question-begging, because one can always reply: "Yes, but how/why is the function *felt*, rather than just functed?"Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/827> |

2009-05-05 -- Reply to [**David Chalk**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p830)

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| David, your treatment has become a bit too complicated for something that should be kept simple if there's to be any hope of gaining any new insight at all. The answer to (what I think is) your question -- "How can feelings be there, reliably correlated with the functing, and yet not be in the 'causal chain'?" -- is this: Both the feeling and the correlated functing have a common cause (the functing unproblematically, the feeling inexplicably), and that common cause is functing too. The felt effects of the functing are correlated with the functed effects of the functing, but only the functed effects are, in their turn, causal. The feelings just dangle -- correlated, but lacking any causal power of their own. And that's the explanatory gap.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/838> |

2009-05-07 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p850)

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| **THE EXPLANATORY GAP IS EPISTEMIC, NOT ONTIC****AT: "**is *feeling a physical brain event or a non-physical event?"*Feeling is an (inexplicable) effect of physical brain events. No use fussing over whether or not it's "physical" (of course it is, *somehow*): the problem is with explaining its causality (*how? why?*). That's the mind/body (feeling/function) problem, and it's an *explanatory* gap, not a pretext for ontologizing about whether there are one or two kinds of "stuff." Even if God sent a messenger and reassured us that everything was strictly physical, *that would not answer the how/why question about causality*, hence it would not close, nor even narrow, the explanatory gap one bit!(By the way, I have a response to your earlier, longer posting underway. Just need the time to put some finishing touches on it!)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/852> |

2009-05-07 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p856)

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| **AT:** *"what exactly is your reason for asserting that feeling is a causally inexplicable brain event? (You might say unexplained, but inexplicable?!)"*Arnold, you are right that there are two distinct things one can say here, and I am in fact saying them both: (1) **Unexplained.** That there *is* no explanation of how-and-why we feel is, I think, uncontested and incontestable. The only explanation would be an account of how feelings are caused by the brain, and what effects they have, and there isn't one. (2) **Inexplicable.** That there *cannot* be a causal explanation of how-and-why we feel is just an argument: I have argued that it follows from the fact that (a) functions and feelings are correlated but incommensurable and (b) that there is neither need nor room for feelings to be independent causes (except if telekinetic dualism were true, which it is not), because the four fundamental forces cover all of causality, which is all of functionality. Hence if brain function does somehow cause feelings in some mysterious way (as it is virtually certain that it does, and I of course believe it does), feelings are doomed to just dangle, functionally superfluously, having no independent causal power of their own, all effects we feel as being caused by feelings being in reality caused, and hence fully explained by the brain functions (and brain I/O) that (mysteriously) cause the feelings. This leaves the feelings dangling, inexplicably. An explanatory gap.Arnold, with apologies, I hope I will be able to finish my longer response to your earlier, unanswered pointing N - 2 this evening!Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/857> |

2009-05-08 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p828)

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| **WHY WOULD TURING-INDISTINGUISHABLE ZOMBIES TALK ABOUT FEELINGS****(AND WHAT, IF ANYTHING, WOULD THEY MEAN)?****AT:** "*you assert that feelings are caused by the brain*"I said that (for what it's worth) I *believe* that feelings are caused by the brain almost as confidently as I believe that apples are caused to fall by gravity. The difference in confidence is because we can *explain causally* how apples fall (we understand universal gravitation) but we cannot explain causally how the brain causes feelings.I also said that I do not *believe* it is possible to explain causally how the brain causes feelings (but all I gave to support that belief was negative evidence [that telekinetic dualism is false] plus a methodological argument [incommensurability].**AT:** *"you assert that feelings have no causal consequences"*I asserted that in the form of the empirical fact that telekinetic dualism is false: All causal consequences of brain activity are causal consequences of the four known forces. There is no fifth force (feeling). It is a fact -- an unexplained fact but a fact -- that we feel, and it is almost certain that our feelings are caused (mysteriously) by our brains. But as feeling is not an independent fifth force, whatever feels as if it it is caused by feelings is actually caused by the brain (which also [mysteriously] causes feelings). The paradigmatic example is the feeling that my finger moved because I willed it. It does indeed feel that way, but all evidence is that it moved because of activity in my brain -- perhaps the same activity that (mysteriously) caused the feeling that my finger moved because I willed it. Feelings have no causal consequences; it is only what (mysteriously) causes feelings that has causal consequences. It only *feels as if* the feelings are the causes.It is for this reason that although it is a mystery -- and I think an unresolvable mystery -- *how* we feel, it is an even bigger mystery *why* we feel. For it looks as if everything that we do that is accompanied by feelings -- including the feeling that the doing is happening *because* of those feelings -- can be done without feelings: Indeed, the fact that the doing is accompanied by feeling is not an explanatory *aid* (apart from the fact that it squares with how we feel when we do): Rather, it is an overwhelming explanatory *burden*, because we cannot explain either how feeling is caused by the brain or what feeling itself causes that is not already caused by whatever (mysteriously) causes feeling. This might help set intuitions: I don't think anyone will deny that if the human species were able to *do* all it can do -- talk, learn, teach, socialize, invent, do science and engineering, write history, biography and fiction, etc. -- but it did not feel, then there would be no mind/body problem or explanatory gap. Things would be much more straightforward: Cognitive neuroscience would only need to explain the (formidable) capacity of this hypothetical insentient species to do and to say all that our own species can do and say, but not the fact that they feel (because they do not feel).(I am not here suggesting that Zombies are possible: I am just trying to highlight the extra explanatory burden that the undeniable fact of feeling imposes on causal explanation. It should be clear that the existence of feelings is a liability rather than an asset for causal, functional explanation.)Now I said things would be a lot more straightforward, explanatorily speaking, if there were no *feeling*, just *doing* -- if *all* "functing," nonbiological and biological, were just *unfelt* functing. There would, however, be an unresolved puzzle even then -- though it would not be a causal puzzle: Why would such an insentient species speak of feeling at all? Why would they say "I am feeling tired" rather than just "I am tired" (meaning my body is fatigued)? (I don't think there would be any problem with the use of the indexical "I" by such a species, by the way, despite all the fuss some make about the concept of "self" and "self-consciousness": the trouble, as usual, is with the *felt* aspect and not the *functional* aspects of "selfhood.")Possibly the feeling vocabulary would be useful as a shorthand for speaking of internal states in the speaker and others. After all, *internal* states are just as invisible as *mental* (i.e., felt) states. "Feeling happy" and "feeling sad" may all have internal functional counterparts in the sort of "[mind-reading](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=harnad+mind-reading&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=)" that this twin species would still have to be able to do, if it were to have the same adaptive social and verbal capacities as our own species. (To "feel happy" might for them be an internal state that was relatively free of processes correlated with actual or impending tissue damage, or free of data predictive of other current or future untoward adaptive consequences, and/or correlated with the attainment, or the impending attainment, of a functional goal, perhaps related to survival, reproduction, competition, or social success: all of these make sense as purely adaptive, functional categories, in a Darwinian survival machine, irrespective of whether it just functs them, or also feels them as it functs them.) Maybe even the locution "I am sincerely sorry," uttered in its pragmatic social context, has a purely functional role to play, even for a Darwinianly successful Zombie; and the only reason we find that counterintuitive is that we *do* feel, and find it difficult even to imagine what it would be like not to -- with good reason, because "be like" means "feel like," and of course it would feel like nothing, "feeling" being an [uncomplemented category](http://philpapers.org/post/804). (Thus does the fact of feeling not only create the mind/body [feeling/function] problem and the gap in causal explanation, but the anomalous nature of "feeling" as a category adds a further sense of "mystery" to the explanatory gap: A tougher distinction in such a Zombie species would be the distinction between Zombie psychopaths (who, like our psychopaths, purportedly do not feel guilt or remorse) and Zombie normals, who purportedly do. But I think that it only takes a little reflection to see that there are behavioral and functional distinctions between our psychopaths and normals that could, in Zombie psychopaths and normals, be based on responsiveness to certain internal states, without the internal states having to be felt states. (These behavioral and strategic distinctions might even be relevant to explaining functionally why the psychopath genotype exists at all, in our sentient species.)(Note that, because we do feel, we have trouble imagining a species saying and doing the same things we say and do, but without feeling. But the real trouble is in the other direction! It is the Zombified version of feeling-talk and feeling-action that has the straightforward functional explanation, and the feeling that is the a-functional dangler, not the other way round!)So what about "the mind/body problem" itself? Would philosophers in this hypothetical insentient species still ponder and argue over the causal power of feeling *when they in fact have no feeling*, and the only referent for "feeling" in their discourse is "internal functional state"? Would Zombie philosophers "know" that for them, there was no distinction between felt and unfelt functing? Would they really have any [knowledge](http://www.cogsci.ecs.soton.ac.uk/cgi/psyc/newpsy?12.045) at all, as opposed to mere [know-how](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14517/), given that they are incapable of more than lip-service to the Cartesian "sentio ergo sentitur"? The cogito does not work, after all, for *inferred* states: It only works for felt states. (That's the quintessence of Descartes' method of doubt.)*Some may want to conclude that this puzzle is in fact evidence for the causal power of feeling after all*, for only a species that actually felt could engage in discourse about the feeling/function problem coherently! I'm inclined to conclude otherwise. I happen to doubt that there could be a feelingless ("Zombie") species (natural or artificial) that was nevertheless Turing-Indistinguishable from ourselves. If they were really feelingless, there would be other differences in what they did and said. And what squares our own species' discourse with our feelings is whatever it is in our brains that keeps our feelings so correlated with our functing: It is not an independent causal consequence of the fact that we feel, but a consequence of the common (functional) cause of both our doings/sayings and the feelings that they (mysteriously) generate as a lockstep accompaniment. So the question of how and why we feel (which is exactly the same as the question of how and why we are not just Darwinian Zombies) also leads to the question of how and why there could not be Zombies that were Turing-Indistinguishable from us -- if there could not be. For if there could, then the mystery could be just due to some (colossal) evolutionary quirk or coincidence in the case of the terrestrial biosphere. If there could not be Zombies, then the mystery could be a fundamental principle of functional organization that we will never know or understand, because the felt component will always be functionally superfluous under any causal explanation that does not cheat or beg the question.**AT:** *"you are claiming feelings are either (a) non-physical events caused by the brain in a dualistic universe and naturally have no causal consequences for subsequent brain activity, or (b) they are physical events cause by the brain but have no causal consequences for subsequent brain activity. Which case (a or b) do you endorse?"*I hope it is clear by now that I endorse (b) and add only that I think that how the brain causes feelings is also inexplicable, because of the incommensurability of function and feeling, despite their correlation. (I invite others to attack me on this, and force me to defend it more rigorously: Is it coherent to say "correlated yet incommensurable"?)**AT:** *"[You say] that in order to explain why we feel we would have to show that feelings have causal consequences."*Indeed we do, otherwise feelings remain the mysterious, unexplained dangler they are -- and the explanatory gap gapes.**AT:** *"Am I correct in assuming... you believe we can explain how the brain causes feelings, but we are unable to explain why the brain causes feelings?*No, I don't believe we can explain how the brain causes feelings either (but I do believe the brain causes feelings). I do not, however, believe that feelings cause anything else: As I said, there's no causal room. Hence here it is not a matter of an actual causation that we cannot explain (the way we cannot explain how the brain causes feelings, even though it undoubtedly does) but an inexplicable *lack* of causation, making it inexplicable *why* we feel.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/858>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=858&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-10 -- Reply to [**David Chalk**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p870)

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| **HOW AND WHY FEELINGS ARE INEXPLICABLE****DC:** *"I've read through a number of your papers but I can't find an explanation of why feelings are inexplicable."*They are inexplicable because explanation is causal (functional) explanation, and we cannot explain (1) *how* (functionally) the brain causes feelings (even though it undoubtedly does), because feelings are *incommensurable* with function, and we cannot explain (2) *why* (functionally) the brain causes feelings, because there is no causal room for feelings themselves to have any effects (hence any function) apart from the effects and function of whatever (mysteriously) causes feelings.Apart from that, all I can give is examples of the way functional/causal explanation of both how and why is always destined to fail:**Example 1:** The reason tissue damage is felt (as pain) rather than just processed (as stimulus avoidance, etc.) is that the felt pain signals the organism to avoid the stimulus. (**Explanatory Gap:** *Why* is the signal to avoid the stimulus (etc.) *felt*, rather than just functed? And *how* is it felt, rather than just functed?)**Example 2:** The reason we hear sounds rather than just process acoustic signals is that we have to select which sounds are relevant. (**Explanatory Gap:** *Why* is the selection *felt*, rather than just functed? And *how* is it felt, rather than just functed?)**Example 3:** The reason it is important that we understand what sentences mean, is that we have to be able to act in accordance with what they mean. (**Explanatory Gap:**  *Why* is the understanding *felt*, rather than just functed? And *how* is it felt, rather than just functed?)Etc. You will find that if the goal is to explain how or why a function is a *felt* function rather than just a "functed" function (with *exactly* the same functionality), it will always turn out that there is no independent *functional* role that can be attributed to the fact that it is felt: The same thing, unfelt, would be functionally equivalent. And it is not an explanation to insist that it is just some sort of "brute fact" about certain functions that they just *are* felt functions. That may well be the case. But we were looking for a causal/functional explanation of *how* and *why*, not merely a mysterious assertion *that!*That's the explanatory gap: It's an epistemic gap, not an ontic one.**DC:** *"...someone in DJC's (1) category above might claim that once science has explained how and why all the neurons and glia cells in our brains interact... every molecular interaction... there is nothing left to explain."*They can claim that. But it does not answer our how/why question, hence it leaves the explanatory gap fully agape.There are two ways to construe the claim than there is "nothing left to explain." One is that we cannot explain any further. That, I think, is quite correct (because feeling and function are incommensurable and because there is no room for feelings to have causal power of their own, over and above the causal power of the functions that [mysteriously] cause them). The other is to say that therefore everything has been fully explained. That, I think, is obviously false, since we have not explained how or why some functions are felt. Yet it is a fact that they are felt. And it is as natural as can be to ask "how and why?". To reply that it is simply a (mysterious) brute fact of nature is not to reply at all, hence to leave it unexplained. Hence the explanatory gap.**DC:** *"First.. feeling... is something that happens... at a specific time...supervenient on the brain so... we... know... where..."*I find the weasel-word "supervenience" as vacuous and ineffectual as all the synonyms and paranyms of "feeling" ("consciousness," "qualia," "mind," etc. etc.) that we love to fall back upon when we have nothing substantive or new on offer: We feel. That's a cartesian certainty. Hence there are feelings. *Sentitur*. Based on everything else we know about the world, it's of course the brain that causes feelings. The question is: how? and why? Replying that feelings "supervene" on brain function adds absolutely nothing.**DC:** *"I'd agree with Leibniz... [that it is] inexplicable on mechanical grounds... in mathematical terms..."*  David, I wonder why -- if you agree with Leibniz that feeling is inexplicable -- you are asking me to explain how/why feeling is inexplicable! But I hope I have by now explained it: Because we cannot say how or why we feel rather than just funct; how/why are functional questions.**DC:** *"Physical phenomena in comparison, are explicable... an easy problem. [Explaining feeling is] a hard problem.. not a physical event, although it... supervene[s] on physical events."*Yes, a functional/causal explanation of everything other than feeling is (in principle) an "easy" problem: normal science and engineering. Explaining how and why we feel is not just "a" hard problem, but *the* hard problem (and, in my opinion, insoluble). (On the other prominent candidate for being a "hard" problem -- "duality" in quantum mechanics -- I can only plead *nolo contendere*, for want of the technical expertise even to judge how much of a problem it is, whether or not it is soluble, and if so, how and why.)But the only thing that is being said in saying that the feeling/function problem is "hard" is that all other scientific and engineering problems are functional (and often also mathematical), but that those resources are ineffectual for explaining how and why some functions are felt -- for the (simple!) reason that "how/why" are functional, causal questions, and (except on pain of [telekinetic dualism](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=%22telekinetic+dualism%22&btnG=Search)), feeling has no causal (hence no functional) power.**DC:** *"[T]he TT isn't a test... in any scientific or engineering way... [it] does not check for the motion of parts... no mathematical treatment... a non-starter..."*  I think you are profoundly wrong about that. Candidates for passing the TT will be designed by human beings; the candidates will have moving parts, and both dynamic and computational processes, known to the designer. What the TT tests is performance capacity. It of course cannot test whether the successful candidate feels. But that's part of the [point of the TT](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=harnad+turing&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=). It is an embodiment of the explanatory gap: We will never know whether or not a successful candidate feels (only the candidate can know); and if it does, we will never know how or why.**DC:** *"I like* [*the way you put that*](http://philpapers.org/post/744)*: the robot has grounded symbols, but we still have a symbol grounding problem because we haven't provided a test to see if those symbols are in some way intrinsic and can therefore have meaning and produce feeling."*Alas, you misunderstood me. A TT-passing robot certainly has grounded symbols, which certainly solves the symbol grounding problem. But grounding is not meaning, And only a TT-passing robot that feels would have intrinsic meaning. In other words, not only is systematic interpretability insufficient for grounding, but robotic grounding (even TT-scale) is not sufficient for (intrinsic) meaning, unless it generates feeling. But we have no way of knowing -- let alone explaining -- whether, how or why a TT-robot (or any functional system) feels rather than just functs.**DC:** *"So I conclude that the TT isn't a test at all."*Of course it's a test: a test for having functionally explained our total performance capacity. It is not, however, either a test or an explanation for your feeling capacity.**DC:** *"We're stuck with mental events being distinct from physical events and untestable, and that is why... the explanatory gap is so difficult and feelings are inexplicable."*   You're back into the verificationist observationalism I pointed out before: The problem is not the untestability. (The TT robot might feel, after all.) The problem is with *inexplicability*. And that problem arises from causality and causal explanation, not from some sort of physical/mental "dualism" (which explains nothing, but merely gives yet another name to the explanatory gap.)**DC:** *"I'd be interested in understanding why you say that feelings are inexplicable."* I hope this time I have succeeded in conveying an understanding!Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/876>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=876&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-11 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p875)

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| **AT:** *"Isn't this mysterious inexplicability of feelings a direct consequence of an incoherent argument?"*I'm afraid not, Arnold. It's a direct consequence of the peculiar nature of feelings. That peculiar nature can of course be blithely disregarded, but only at the price of begging the question, insofar as the "hard problem" is concerned...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/879> |

2009-05-11 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p881)

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| **DA:** *Could someone remind me please what the 'hard problem' and the 'easy problem' are?****Hard Problem*:** Explaining how and why we feel.***Easy Problems*:** All the rest of the problems of science, mathematics and engineering (except maybe quantum duality).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/882> |

2009-05-11 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p885)

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| **WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO FEEL:****APPLYING OCCAM'S RAZOR TO THE MIND/BODY (FEELING/FUNCTION) PROBLEM****DA:** *"But If I recall, that is not the 'hard problem' or the 'easy problem' as Chalmers defines them?"*Chalmers is talking about the same problem, the mind/body problem. Putting it in the language of a causal explanation of the ["how/why" of feeling](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?num=100&hl=en&lr=&q=harnad+how+why+%28feel+OR+zombie%29&btnG=Search) is my own way of putting it, but it's exactly the same (age-old) problem. If it sounds like a different problem, that just shows how the way we put it can fool us (including fooling us into thinking that we have found a "solution" -- or that there is no problem, or [more than one](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&num=100&q=harnad%20%22there%20is%20only%20one%20mind%2Fbody%20problem%22&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=ws).)Let me do a reductive transcription of [Chalmers's way of putting it](http://consc.net/papers/facing.html). (And let me note that his is already one of the simpler, more economical, and direct ways of putting it, even before I apply Occam's razor and a little anglo-saxon uniformity.)**DA: “***The really hard problem of CONSCIOUSNESS is the problem of EXPERIENCE. When we think and perceive, there is a whir of information-processing, but there is also a SUBJECTIVE aspect. As* [*Nagel (1974)*](http://www.clarku.edu/students/philosophyclub/docs/nagel.pdf) *has put it, there is something it IS like to be a CONSCIOUS organism. This SUBJECTIVE aspect is EXPERIENCE. When we see, for example, we EXPERIENCE visual sensations: the FELT QUALITY of redness, the EXPERIENCE of dark and light, the QUALITY of depth in a visual field. Other EXPERIENCES go along with perception in different modalities: the \*X\* sound of a clarinet, the \*X\* smell of mothballs. Then there are bodily SENSATIONS, from pains to orgasms; MENTAL images that are conjured up internally; the FELT QUALITY of emotion, and the EXPERIENCE of a stream of CONSCIOUS thought. What unites all of these states is that there is something it IS like to be in them. All of them are states of EXPERIENCE.”*Cutting out the redundant and superfluous parts:**Transcription:** *"The really hard problem of FEELING is the problem of FEELING. When we think and perceive, there is a whir of information-processing, but there is also a FELT aspect. As Nagel (1974) has put it, there is something it FEELS like to be a FEELING organism. This FELT aspect is FEELING. When we see, for example, we FEEL visual sensations: the FEELING of redness, the FEELING of dark and light, the FEELING of depth in a visual field. Other FEELINGS go along with perception in different modalities: the \*FELT\* sound of a clarinet, the \*FELT\* smell of mothballs. Then there are bodily FEELINGS, from pains to orgasms; FELT images that are conjured up internally; the FEELING of emotion, and the FEELING of a stream of FELT thought. What unites all of these states is that there is something it FEELS like to be in them. All of them are states of FEELING."*(Note the slightly odd-sounding special case of how we speak of some of our sensations: We say we *feel* surface textures, heat, emotions, but to distinguish the sense modalities, we say we *see* (rather than feel) colors, *hear* (rather than feel) sounds, *smell* (rather than feel) smells, etc. That the invariant in all of these is in reality still feeling (and the variation is just in *what* it feels like, not in *whether* it feels like something at all), all of these instances can be readily replaced by a still more perspicuous variant of Tom Nagel's already more perspicuous way of putting it, which is "what it feels like to X": what it feels like to see, hear, smell, etc. That is, and always was, the essence of the mind/body -- feeling/function -- problem, just as "[sentio ergo sentitur](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=%22sentio+ergo+sentitur%22&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=)" ("I feel, therefore there is feeling going on") was always the essence of Descartes' cogito.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/887>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=887&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-12 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p891)

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| **PUTATIVE FUNCTIONAL EXPLANATIONS OF FEELING: A CHALLENGE****AT:**  *"Why, exactly, do you believe that the brain states that constitute our feelings can't ever be explained?"*Because in every attempt to explain the functional role of feeling, feeling turns out to be functionally superfluous (except if [telekinetic dualism](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&num=100&q=%22telekinetic%20dualism%22&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=ws) is true, and feelings have causal power -- but it isn't, and they don't).I long ago made a challenge (the universal "[translatability thesis](http://www.google.com/search?tab=sw&sa=N&hl=en&q=harnad+%22translatability+thesis%22&ie=UTF-8)") -- to any linguist who claimed that there was something that could be said in language X that could not be translated into language Y -- that they should tell me (in English) what it was, and why it could not be translated into language Y, and I would show that it could be translated into language Y, even if I did not know language Y.I hereby make the same challenge for "explanations" of the functional or causal role of feeling: Tell me what it is, and I will show it is functionally superfluous on its own terms. (I gave some samples in earlier postings. This is not unlike Dan Dennett's "[demoting](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=dennett+demoting+%28behaviorist+OR+behavioral%29&btnG=Search)" mentalistic explanations into mechanistic [usually behavioristic] ones, except that I am not denying the reality of feeling -- just its causal role.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/894>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=894&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-12 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p893)

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| **WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO FEEL SOMETHING****DA:** *"Chalmers relies heavily on the Nagel idea that 'there is something that it is like to be a conscious organism'."*  He's right to rely on it: Nagel's was an apt insight.But, to expose the redundancy and root out the equivocation, it's *"There's something it feels like to be a feeling organism."***DA:** *"there is no attempt to distinguish between human consciousness and any kind of animal 'consciousness'."*No need to distinguish: The [feeling/function problem](http://www.google.com/search?q=%22feeling/function+problem%22&hl=en&num=100&filter=0) is about the fact *that* we feel (something), not about *what* we feel -- whether this or that. **DA:** *"there is surely nothing it is 'like' to be conscious other than being conscious - which tell us absolutely nothing."*First, to expose the redundancy and root out the equivocation, it's: ***"there is surely nothing it feels 'like' to feel other than to feel."***Yup: And your point is...?**DA:** *"'I know what it is like to have a broken finger'... I would compare - in memory - my present painless state with the sharp throb I felt at the time)."*  ***"I know what it feels like to feel like I have a broken finger."***But as for comparing your present painless state with the sharp throb you felt the last time: (Strictly [indeed, [Wittgenstrictly]](http://philpapers.org/post/804Reply) speaking, you are now feeling what it seems to feel like to feel no pain and to be feeling a memory of what seems to feel like it once felt like to feel a pain.)Yup, and your point is...?**DA:** *"But suppose someone says to me. "I am conscious", and I reply "I know what it is like to be conscious".  It's an absurd conversation, is it not?"*A: "I am feeling something." B: "I know what it feels like to feel something."Not absurd in the least (spoken betwixt *cognoscenti* -- or, rather, *sentienti*). (Rather more puzzling spoken between [Zombies](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=harnad+%28zombie+OR+zombies%22&btnG=Search) -- however, as noted in a [previous posting](http://philpapers.org/post/858), it might be functionally adaptive as a way of referring to internal states unobservable to one's interlocutor, even when those internal states are not felt states).**DA:** *"And for good reason. I haven't anything to compare (human) consciousness with - any more than the person I'm speaking to has."*You are alluding here to the fact that feeling is an [uncomplemented category](http://www.google.com/search?q=%22uncomplemented+categories%22+OR+%22uncomplemented+category%22&hl=en&num=100&filter=0): it is both impossible and self-contradictory to feel what it's like to not feel anything at all -- though it's perfectly possible to feel what it's like not to feel something in particular: to not feel this, but to feel that.Well, yes, that -- i.e., the "poverty of the stimulus": the fact that we can only sample positive instances of feeling -- does make the category "feeling" all the more problematic, puzzling and troublesome, But it definitely does not make it empty or meaningless.**DA:** *"being asleep, in a coma etc, is not that state: they are simply states in which human consciousness is not operating"* Yes, when you are not feeling, you are not feeling. In that sense, "you" are not "there," you're gone. (If Descartes over-reached with his "cogito," in concluding that he existed [*sum*] rather than just that feeling was going on [[*sentitur*](http://www.google.com/search?q=%22sentio+ergo+sentitur%22&hl=en&num=100&filter=0)], we can safely, though not cartesianly, say that where [and while] there is no feeling going on, there is nobody home.)Fortunately, you are reconstituted when you wake up. (A stone is not.)**DA:** *"I don't really think that your change of 'consciousness' and 'experience' to 'feeling' makes any material difference. Whatever we call it, we are still left with essentially the same problems."*We are indeed. But calling them by one name highlights that they are all one and the same problem...**REFERENCE**Harnad, S. (1987) [Uncomplemented Categories, or, What is it Like to be a Bachelor?](http://cogprints.org/2134/0/harnad87.uncomp.htm) 1987 [Presidential Address: Society for Philosophy and Psychology](http://www.socphilpsych.org/pastofficers.html). **ABSTRACT:** To learn and to use a category one must be able to sample both what is in it and what is not in it (i.e., what is in its complement), in order to pick out which invariant features distinguish members from nonmembers. Categories without complements may be responsible for certain conceptual and philosophical problems. Examples are experiential categories such as what it feels like to "be awake," "be alive," be aware," and "be." Providing a complement by analogy or extrapolation is a solution in some cases (such as what it feels like to be a bachelor), but only because the complement can in princible be sampled in the future, and because the analogy could in principle be correct. Where the complement is empty in principle, the "category" is intrinsically problematic. Other examples may include self-denial paradoxes (such as "this sentence is false") and problems with the predicate "exists."Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/895>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=895&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-12 -- Reply to [**Colin Hales**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p896)

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| **MIND THE MIND-FIELDS****(1)** There is [no coherent, contentful difference between "A-consciousness" and "P-consciousness"](http://philpapers.org/post/696)  (that's why I insist on just talking about feeling).**(2)** If a scientist (or anyone) learns something new (either by observation or because he's told) then all that's happened is that his brain has new data (either sensorimotor or linguistic), and hence new ability to act accordingly (whether behaviorally or verbally).**(3)** The problem -- a.k.a. the [feeling/function problem](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=%22feeling%2Ffunction+problem%22&hl=en&lr=&btnG=Search) or the mind/body problem -- is explaining how and why the gaining or the having of this new knowledge and ability is *felt* (rather than just "functed," as it would almost certainly be in an "artificial agent," unless it was [Turing-Test scale](http://philpapers.org/post/656)). **(4)** I think you are deceiving yourself with your "phenomenal field P(t)": To formalize a mystery is not to solve it.**(5)** The only fields there are are the garden-variety electromagnetic, gravitational etc. fields resulting from the four fundamental forces of physics.**(6)** There are no extra "mind fields."Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/897> |

2009-05-12 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p899)

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| **WHEREOF ONE CANNOT SPEAK...****DA:***"Nothing in what I said alluded to what might happen to be [THE OBJECT OF CONSCIOUSNESS].  My point is that there seems to be an assumption... that there is no important difference between [BEING CONSCIOUS AS] a human and [BEING "CONSCIOUS"] (can we even use the same word?) [AS] an animal. What on earth could justify this huge assumption? Your change of vocabulary doesn't make any material difference so I will leave that aside."*Here is the transcription into the vocabulary that you think makes no material difference:**Transcription:** *"Nothing in what I said alluded to what might happen to be WHAT IS BEING FELT.  My point is that there seems to be an assumption... that there is no important difference between FEELING WHAT a human FEELS and "FEELING" (can we even use the same word?) WHAT an animal FEELS. What on earth could justify this huge assumption? Your change of vocabulary doesn't make any material difference so I will leave that aside."*As this transcription should illustrate, the change of vocabulary makes it clear that you are talking about differences in *what* humans and animals may be feeling, whereas what is at issue is *whether* they are feeling (anything at all).**DA:** *"to say that something is like itself (which is what this effectively amounts to) is mere verbiage."*No. Reminding ourselves that we all (including animals) feel, and that, stones, (today's) robots -- and just about everything other than people and animals -- do not feel is not mere verbiage. It is perfectly comprehensible and perfectly true (except if one is determined to play the verbal game of [Achilles and the Tortoise](http://philpapers.org/post/678) [or one is unable to do otherwise), in which case further verbiage will indeed make no material difference).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/900> |

2009-05-12 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p902)

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| **EXTRACTING CATEGORY INVARIANCE FROM POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INSTANCES****DA:** *"Not sure I'm happy with you changing everything to 'feels' etc. We are, after all, talking about consciousness and that's the term that the mainstream of this debate seems to use."* And your point is...?**DA:** *"one cannot assume that human and animal CONSCIOUSNESS are the same... Issues about 'OBJECTS' or 'WHATS' have nothing to do with it."***Transcription:** *"one cannot assume humans and animals FEEL the same... Issues about WHAT THEY FEEL or WHAT IT FEELS LIKE have nothing to do with it."*The problem is not the sameness or differences in what they feel; the problem is the fact that they (both) feel *anything at all*.**DA:** *"I'm simply suggesting that comparing something to itself (as in the Nagel 'insight') is not likely to prove a very informative step."*No one is comparing something  to itself. We all feel (and we all feel different things during every instance we are awake and *compos mentis*). Just as we can see daisies, lilacs, crysanthemums, etc. and notice that they are all instances of seeing flowers, we can feel toothaches, and see red, and smell smoke, and notice that there is something (different) that each feels like, but that they all feel like something or other.There is, however, a profound and important difference between all of our other categories (such as flower, or red) and the special category "feeling," namely, that with categories like red we can sample both positive and negative instances. We can sample instances of both red and non-red things, thereby allowing our brains to detect what the invariant features of the members of the category "red" are: the ones that reliably distinguish them from the non-members. In contrast, with feeling, we can only sample *positive* instances: everything we feel (toothache, what red looks like, what smoke smells like) is an instance of what it feels like to feel, but nothing is an instance of what it feels like to not-feel, because that is self-contradictory. (Note, again, that I don't mean what it feels like to feel sad rather than feel happy, i.e. what it feels like not to feel happy; I am talking about what it feels like not to feel at all.)It is because of this positive-only instantiation of feeling that the category "feeling" is anomalous. Unlike all other categories, in which we have sampled not just their membership, but also the membership of their complement (i.e., their non-membership), "feeling" (and a few other [uncomplemented categories](http://www.google.com/search?q=%22uncomplemented+categories%22+OR+%22uncomplemented+category%22&hl=en&num=100&filter=0)) create certain peristent conceptual problems for us.But that does not mean that uncomplemented categories are empty. Nor that instantiating them amounts to "comparing something to itself": The positive instances of feeling something (toothache, red, smoke) are all different from one another; so we do have some idea of what is invariant under all that variation. But not as decisive an idea as we have with normal, complemented categories, because there we get to sample the variations and transformations not only among the positive instances, but also the critical transitions to the negative instances, the ones that do not preserve the category invariance. With feeling we cannot do that. In that sense, uncomplemented categories are conceptually incomplete.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/904>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=904&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

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2009-05-14 -- Reply to [**Colin Hales**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p909)

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| **HOW/WHY IS OBSERVATION *FELT* OBSERVATION, AND KNOWLEDGE *FELT* KNOWLEDGE?****(NO QUANTUM-COLLAPSE REPLIES, PLEASE!)****CH:** *"[I (CH) am immersed] in... quantum electrodynamics..."*I became a little apprehensive when I read this, Colin, because I was afraid you were going to invoke the alleged causal role of "consciousness" (human [felt] observation) in the [collapse of the quantum wave packet](http://tinyurl.com/pnyntb). (That would have been a non-starter, for one cannot solve the unsolved puzzles of one field with the unsolved puzzles of another field! But fortunately, I think, you are not taking quite that route here -- though you are coming close!)"**CH:** *"The 'dynamics' posting was about a causal role of 'feeling' in brain adaptation (learning) dynamics, specifically in the brain of a scientist undergoing change in "knowledge", where you can objectively relate the result with 'feeling'... [T]he causality of knowledge change in scientists... use[s] the 'feeling' that... is [inherent in] scientific observation to constrain knowledge change..."*There is no doubt that science is based on observations. There is no doubt that observations are felt. There is also no doubt that knowing is felt. But the question was: "How/why are observations (or anything else) felt? What is the causal role of the feeling?" (You have not answered that question; you have simply noted the fact that needs to be explained: that observations -- which play a crucial causal role in science -- also happen to be felt observations. Well, yes. And so too are observations that play a crucial causal role in everyday survival and reproduction. But how/why are any of them felt observations rather than just functed observations?A meter-reading, after all, is a meter-reading (even if it seems to be mysteriously insufficient to collapse a wave-packet unless the meter is read by a feeling observer!). Observations are simply data in computational or dynamic (robotic) processes. Why do the data need to be "felt"?[I wonder, by the way, why you keep putting "feeling" in scare-quotes: They're real enough, you know! I can safely say "I feel hot." No need for me to say "I 'feel' hot"...]**CH:** *"[No] empirical science [is] done without “feeling” (=scientific observation) supporting it... [and] abstract speculation and philosophical muddlement [are] BTW all mediated by "feeling"!..."*All true. Feelings are a fact. The correlations are a fact. But now we are waiting for a causal explanation: what causal role does the fact that observations are felt rather than just functed play? (Ditto for knowing.) ("Mediating" is just renaming the mystery: mediating how, why?)**CH:** *"[The claim of a causal role for feeling in scientific observation and knowledge-change is] empirically cogent [and] no less supported... than any other science claim..."*So far, the "claim" is only about a correlation between feelings and observations (measurements, data). We have yet to hear what causal (rather than mere -- and mysterious -- correlative) role they play.**CH:** *"To deny this claim [of a causal role for feeling in observation-based knowledge-change] is to construct, using the same causal mechanism of “feeling”, a claim (a change in knowledge of the denier) to the contrary... that force[s] a denier to become logically inconsistent in an empirically testable way..."*It sounds like you may be imagining you have some sort of a Cartesian argument there, but I am afraid you do not. Feelings (though they are undeniably, cartesianly, *there*, being felt) have yet to reveal their causal role.  Neither *correlating* with functional causes, nor *feeling as if* they're causal will do. (It matters not whether their causal role is discovered, somehow, via empirical observation and causal inference, in the usual scientific way, or their causal role somehow turn out to be a matter of logical necessity or cartesian certainty, via mathematics or the cogito. What's missing, still, is a coherent, viable hypothesis as to what their causal role is -- a hypothesis that cannot be immediately rejected by showing that it is either functionally superfluous on its own terms or draws on an extra telekinetic power that is contrary to all known evidence to date.)**CH:** *"This... is rather odd [for] I am... claiming that "feeling", is literally the brain's solution to the (your!)* [*symbol grounding problem*](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=%22symbol+grounding%22&hl=en&lr=&btnG=Search)*..."*I hate to seem ungrateful, but the solution to the symbol grounding problem is sensorimotor grounding: The symbols in a Turing-scale robot -- a robot whose symbols are not only systematically interpretable as being about X (in the way the symbols in a book, computer or toy robot are) but a robot that also has the sensorimotor capacity to interact (behaviorally and verbally) with whatever the symbols are systematically interpretable as denoting, and to discourse about whatever the symbols are systematically interpretable as denoting, Turing-indistinguishably from the way we do -- are grounded. Their semantic interpretability (derived intentionality) is congruent with the robot's interactions with what its symbols are about.*But grounding is not meaning!* And, a fortiori, it is not *felt* meaning, or *feeling*. So Turing-scale robotic grounding is enough to solve the (easy) symbol-grounding problem, but not to solve the (hard) feeling/function (mind/body) problem.(By the way, it is not at all evident why Turing-scale robots could not do empirical observation or causal explanation even if they don't feel [i.e., even if their observing is not felt observing]. Grounding sounds like all they need.)**CH:** *"The act of "grounding" is an act of causal constraint on knowledge change consistent with the "feeling" involved in the representation of the external natural world in a scientist. It's an indirect (2nd order)  causal link, but it's real and testable..."*Sensorimotor grounding is certainly a causal constraint on a symbol system, and if it is Turing-scale grounding it is probably as much as cognitive science (including cognitive neuroscience) can tell us about cognition.But, alas, it still leaves a gaping explanatory gap.("Consistent with the feeling" is not the same as "caused by the feeling," any more than "correlated with the feeling" is. And "representations" per se are no help; moreover, if they are felt representations, then they are part of the problem, not the solution: How and why are they felt representations, rather than just functed representations? And I have no idea at all what an "indirect" or "2nd order" causal link means...)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/915>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=915&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

2009-05-14 -- Reply to [**Colin Hales**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p916)

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| **GAP INTACT UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE...****CH:** *"Wow. I post a brief aside and I am sucked into the explanatory gap!"* Well, "[The Explanatory Gap](http://philpapers.org/browse/16/thread.pl?tId=137)" *is* the theme of this thread...**CH:** *"Empirical corroboration of...  predictions  [from Laws of Nature (LON)] puts a scientist in a state of feeling that is scientific observation..."*So does empirical falsification of predictions from LON. So does just about everything else we say and do whilst awake and *compos mentis*...**CH:** *"LON... are (statistical) descriptions... (predictive) of how the natural world/scientist combined system feels to the scientist... in the act of scientific observation..."***Translation:** "Making a 'scientific observation' and making and understanding a scientific explanation feel like something, and those feelings are tightly correlated with the data of the observation and the explanation."But we already knew that. We are now talking about explaining how and why making an observation, and making and understanding an explanation -- and just about everything else we do whilst alive, awake, and *compos mentis* --  *feels like something* and correlates tightly with what is going on in the world.You are not touching the question of how and why at all. You are just reformulating what you take to be the nature of scientific observation and scientific explanation (and presupposing feeling as somehow part of the package). In other words, you are, I'm afraid, begging the question (underlying this topic thread, which is about the explanatory gap), completely.**CH:** *"There is nothing to a brain but (a) nucleons and (b) electrons and (c) space..."*Fine. Now how and why do they sometimes generate feeling? **CH:** *"Now the meat:... ALL of the descriptions of particles and fields and forces [were] constructed by scientists inside the described system, made of it, using ‘feeling’..."*"Using" feeling, or whilst feeling? This is where you beg the question, by presupposing (without explanation) that feeling is causal, rather than just correlated with brain processes that are causal (and mysteriously generate correlated feelings too).(Keep it simple, Colin. Your complicated and somewhat idiosyncratic way of putting things is fooling you into thinking you are making inroads on the explanatory gap, when you are not.)**CH:** *"LON are constructed presupposing the existence of the scientist and the ability (feeling) that is scientific observation. The scientist is implicitly built into the LON..."*You said that already:  Now, how/why are scientists' (and laymens') observations and explanations *felt* rather than just brain-functed?"**CH:** *"NONE of the above LON predict the existence of the feeling that is scientific observation...All presuppose both..."*Quite right. And that is the explanatory gap: Now let's hear how you propose to bridge it...**CH: *"****[W]e have not even begun to describe the universe in the fashion needed to predict a scientific observer of the kind we are, who sees the observation mechanism behaving [lawfully]...*Indeed; but your point is...?**CH:** *"The universe is NOT made of atoms or molecules or cells or subatomic particles. These are the things we perceive it to be made of when we look (feel it) as scientists..."*We feel when we do things; scientists do too. But we knew that. (I'm not sure whether you are also telling us that current scientific theory is wrong, and if so, why; but I am pretty sure you are not making any inroads on the explanatory gap: just re-describing it.)Or perhaps you are alluding here to the fact that although feelings are *correlated* with the way things are in the world, they are nevertheless [*incommensurable*](http://philpapers.org/post/744) with them (so it is erroneous to think of feelings as somehow "resembling" the things that correlate with the feelings: red with felt-red, round with felt-round, etc.). -- That's true too, but likewise does not help to bridge the explanatory gap; it's part of the gap.**CH:** *"What perspective must I adopt on the universe such that electromagnetism behaving in certain specific ways (like a brain) makes it acquire a 1st person perspective (from the point of view of BEING the electromagnetic fields that ARE the brain), when elsewhere in the body (such as in the peripheral nerves) it fails to do that?..."***Translation:** "What is the explanation of how and why (some) brain function is *felt*, whereas (say) kidney function is not?"That's the question, alright: But what's the answer? (The equivocation on "perspectives" won't help; it just milks the mystery. And the fact that you are focussing on scientific observations and scientific explanations about what there is in the world is not relevant; the same problem would be there if you were just focusing on a layman's "ouch.")**CH:** *"This rather awkward non-explanation of ‘feeling’ is as far as I need go for now. What the above tells me is that I can blather on forever about LON\_X and I will NEVER leap the explanatory gap. It is a-priori meaningless and any expectation that it can is misguided. This does not mean the gap cannot be leapt. It means we haven’t leapt it yet."*OK, I'll wait till you've leapt it, or at least give a principled account of how it could be leapt...**CH:** *"To leap the explanatory gap is to construct descriptions... in such a way as to show how an observer might function. I know I have the right... descriptions [when they] start to produce observations consistent with [Laws of Nature] such that it reveals itself as the brain material of the (scientific) observer."*This unfortunately sounds as if it is going in circles, without substantive content, just a hope. "Consistent with" just means "correlated with" here, and the gap is about causation...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/920> |

2009-05-14 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p919)

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| **AT:** *"I have the feeling that the very way in which you propose the notion of a feeling-function divide implicitly precludes any possibility of a causal role for feeling."*Your feeling may well be right -- but please don't blame the messenger! It's the truth (or falsity) of the message that matters, not whether one feels it's true or false.**AT:***Because of this feeling on my part, I am writing this response to you. Would you claim that this feeling on my part plays no causal role in my typing the post that you are now reading?*I am pretty sure that you feel that you posted this message because you felt like it, and not because you were impelled to by some unfelt force. I am not sure you are right about that, though. Are you? If so, please explain how and why... That way we'll be surer we're not just trading feelings...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/922> |

2009-05-15 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p907)

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| **DETECTING CATEGORY INVARIANTS FROM POSITIVE INSTANCES ALONE****DA:** *"the Nagel 'insight'...that 'There is something that it is like to be a conscious organism'... is in effect comparing something to itself... [This] is philosophically vacuous. If you (or anyone) can produce an argument to show why I am wrong... I would be very happy to consider it."*Several such arguments have already been made, but here's another, spelled out: You know what a (ripe) tomato looks like; you know what a (red) apple looks like; you know what blood looks like; you know what the top of a traffic light looks like; you know what a cardinal (bird, or prelate in robes) looks like; you know what a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman looks like. If you showed pictures of all those things to a child and asked what they all had in common, he would immediately say that they were all red. That would all be possible *exclusively on the basis of positive instances of red things*, by detecting the (obvious)  invariant property they all shared, even though they differed from one another in every other respect.This sampling of diverse positive instances would not be  "comparing something to itself."The same is true in the case of sampling instances of feeling this, and that, and that.(However, as I have also kept stressing, the category of feeling is nevertheless abnormal and and problematic, because negative instances are impossible, whereas negative instances of red (e.g., green things) are possible, and every child has sampled them too -- though you don't really need to sample them in order to notice what all the instances of red things I listed above have in common. It is true, however, that for more difficult (more "[underdetermined](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&q=harnad%20%22underdetermination%22%20%22poverty%20of%20the%20stimulus%22&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=ws)") categories, those that are highly confusable with other, very similar-looking categories, it is necessary to sample negative instances too (i.e., members of the other categories), with error-corrective feedback; positive instances alone are not enough for detecting which are the invariant properties in such cases. The category "feeling," however, is not such a case. Even though it is a defective category, because it is [uncomplemented and uncomplementable](http://philpapers.org/post/804), it is not empty, and everyone (except perhaps [Lewis Carroll's Tortoise](http://www.ditext.com/carroll/tortoise.html)) can easily detect the invariant underlying its many diverse instances to a good enough approximation from the positive instances alone.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/925>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=925&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-15 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p926)

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| **KNOWING SOMETHING WHEN YOU FEEL IT****DA:** *"[No] problem with your example [of a child recognizing the category red from positive instances alone]... [But]... how precisely does [this] refute my argument that...*[*Nagel*](http://www.clarku.edu/students/philosophyclub/docs/nagel.pdf)*['s] ''There is something that it is like to be a conscious organism"... is comparing something to itself?"*"Red" is a category; "feeling" is a category. What red looks (feels) like is a recognizable category; so what feeling feels like is likewise a recognizable category. We know it when we see (feel) it, and we know it on the basis of positive instances alone (which does not mean "comparing something to itself").And that's all Nagel meant. That we all feel, that we all know what that is and what it means, and that we all know it when it is happening. (Of course, the only thing we feel is our *own* feelings, so those are the only feelings about which we have cartesian certainty, when they are actually being felt [[sentio ergo sentitur](http://www.google.com/search?q=%22sentio+ergo+sentitur%22+site:http://philpapers.org/&hl=en&safe=off&num=100&filter=0)], whereas about the feelings of other creatures we can only guess. I'd have to be the other creature -- say, Nagel's bat -- in order to know for sure *that* it [i.e., I] feels, and also to know *what* it feels, i.e., what that feeling feels like. [It might feel quite different from anything I am currently able to feel, being me.])That, by the way, is all I want to exegesize and defend in Tom Nagel's viewpoint. The rest of the hermeneutics of "viewpoints" is not (in my view) all that relevant, insofar as the explanatory gap (on which Nagel is unaccountably an optimist!) is concerned. Viewpoint is just one of the many manifestations of consciousness and its countless synonyms and paranyms that one can single out and hermeneuticize without making any real inroads on the explanatory gap itself.And that is yet another reason why I insist on sticking to straight talk about feeling rather than [riding off in all directions with paranyms](http://philpapers.org/post/696): A privileged "viewpoint" is already implicit in feeling, since *the only one that can feel a feeling is the feeler*. Anything else is just guesswork -- but guesswork "grounded" in your own feelings (if you feel at all). Otherwise [attention [Colin Hales](http://philpapers.org/post/920)!] it is just "functing"... Here, to jog everyone's memory, is a partial list of these soothingly distracting euphemisms, with the invitation to add your own particular favorites (and then forget about them):*consciousness, awareness, qualia, subjective states, conscious states, mental states, phenomenal states, qualitative states, intentional states, intentionality, subjectivity, mentality, private states, 1st-person states, contentful states, reflexive states, representational states, sentient states, experiential states, reflexivity, self-awareness, self-consciousness, sentience, raw feels, experience, soul, spirit, mind..., viewpoint, ...*Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/942> |

2009-05-15 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p923)

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| **ON UNFELT EGOCENTRISM****AT:** *"May I assume, Stevan, that even though you feel that my feeling played no causal role in my posting, you also feel that your feeling about this might be wrong?"*Sure. (I might be wrong about anything except the cogito and 2+2=4.) Telekinetic Dualism could be true. But I wouldn't count on it...**AT:** *If I were...(without feeling) I would be unable to post!*I missed the part about how and why there cannot be posting without feeling: Please explain (it's the explanatory gap).And whilst you're at it, please also explain how and why it is that your brain generates the feeling that you feel like posting (as well as generating the posting, for whatever reasons you posted it), rather than your brain just generating the posting (for whatever reasons you posted it)? **AT:** *"I have shown how a biologically credible system of egocentric brain mechanisms might constitute the brain state that is the feeling causing the selection of the unfelt biological processes which execute the posting. Can you show the brain mechanisms that can do a similar selection without an egocentric representation of the salient world?"*You neglected to mention how and why the egocentric brain mechanism was *felt* rather than just functed...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/945> |

2009-05-15 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p943)

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| **DA:**  *"'Feels' in this context obviously means much the same as 'experiences' and 'be conscious of'....  It doesn't give us any leverage on the idea of consciousness at all i.e. it's not an explanation..."*Glad you got the point, at last. (The "hard" problem of consciousness is to explain how and why we feel. There is no such explanation. Unlike Tom Nagel, I also think this explanatory gap cannot be closed, and I've stated many times why: the incommensurability of feeling and function, despite the correlation; the functional superfluousness of feeling in a functional explanation of the brain's performance capacity; the exhaustiveness of the four fundamental forces, leaving no room or evidence for a fifth force; hence the falsity of telekinetic dualism.)Now, what's *your* point, Derek? Is it just nonspecific animus against what you keep calling "analytic philosophy"? Or do you actually have a substantive point to make about the explanatory gap?Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/946> |

2009-05-16 -- Reply to [**Robin Faichney**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p947)

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| **RF:** *"I don't believe that we feel feeling... We think that we feel"*When I am feeling something (which is most of the time when I am awake), I don't *think* I feel, I *know* I feel, if I know anything at all! I think Descartes is with me on that one, despite his unfortunate choice of "cogito" for his *cogito*. (There is indeed something it feels like to think something; there's also something it feels like to think something is true, and even something it feels like to think you know something for sure. But -- again thanks to Descartes -- only in two cases are we actually justified in feeling that we know something for sure: one is the law of noncontradiction -- and everything that follows from anything else on pain of contradiction, hence necessity -- and the other is the fact that we are feeling, when we feel. That is a matter of certainty, if anything is.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/950> |

2009-05-16 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p949)

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| **DA:** *"[I]s there an 'easy' problem, by the way?"*Sure, all of ordinary science, including all of cognitive science, including brain science. There's only one hard problem, and that's how and why we feel. (QM might have another hard problem, with its own duality puzzles, but I don't think it's as hard, or hard in the same way.)**DA:** *"I would have thought the 'hard problem'... is... to explain what... feeling -is."*No, I think we all have as good an idea of what feeling is as we are ever likely to get of what anything is: The hard problem is explaining how and why we feel. (But if you want to wrap the explanation of the causal origins and consequences of something into what you mean by explaining what it is, then, yes, that is the hard problem after all.)**DA:** *"[M]y point was that... one... is on the completely wrong track... I hope all that is plain enough?"*Only plain enough to reveal that you are unfortunately not making any substantive point at all...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/951> |

2009-05-16 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p954)

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| **OF COURSE THE BRAIN'S THE CULPRIT: BUT HOW, AND WHY?****AT:** *"If we can agree... that feeling is a particular state of the brain... then... we can discuss what... state of the brain might constitute feeling [and] make progress on the how and why of feeling..."*"Constitutes" is a bit of a weasel word. Is feeling a cause of, an effect of, or the same thing as a brain state or property? Those are all the questions around which the feeling/function problem has always revolved: "constitutes" simply conflates these questions without answering them. (John Searle used to try the same trick by saying "[caused-by-and-realized-in,](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&safe=off&num=100&q=searle+%22caused+by%22+%22realized+in%22+brain+harnad&btnG=Search)" *really fast*. It doesn't help. The questions are still begged.)But I have no problem at all with agreeing that brain states somehow "constitute" feeling. Of course they do! I am not a spiritualist. The "hard" problem, alas, is explaining how and why they do. Bland (and blind) agreement on the fact that the brain must be the culprit does not give us a clue of a clue as to how and why it committed the crime!Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/957> |

2009-05-16 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p958)

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| **DA:** *"Is that a common analytic viewpoint...?"*Derek, I regret to have to say that until and unless you can stop shadow-boxing with this "analytic" bugaboo of your own invention and instead say something of substance about something, there is simple nothing more that anyone can either say about or reply to your postings (at least nothing more that this non-analytic, non-philosopher can say).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/961> |

2009-05-17 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p967)

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| **AT:** *"...you have claimed that explaining how and why is not merely hard, but impossible because feelings have no causal consequences..."*I have. And I've given my reasons for concluding that (incommensurability, the exhaustive quota of fundamental forces, the falsity of telekinetic dualism, and the sufficiency of functing for causally explaining all functing, hence the superfluousness and inexplicability of feeling).But if you find my conclusion wrong, I'd be happy to hear how and why. **AT:** *"It seems to me that you contradict your own argument when you acknowledge that feelings are states of the brain..."*There's no contradiction whatsoever. My argument is epistemic rather than ontic (except for the innocuous bit about the exhaustiveness of the four known forces). I am not saying that feelings *are and are not* caused by the brain. I am saying we cannot explain how or why. The explanatory gap is an *epistemic* gap, not an *ontic* gap. It's a shortfall in causal explanation, which seems to work successfully for everything else except feeling.And please distinguish (1) the problem of explaining how brain function causes feeling (the "how" in the how/why) from (2) the even bigger problem that feelings cannot themselves be causes (the "why" in the how/why). In the first case there is (almost certainly) causation (but no causal explanation). In the second case there is not even causation.**AT:** *"...if one grants that feelings are constituted by particular brain states one is not justified in claiming that feelings cannot have causal consequences."*It makes little difference what I "grant" about how the brain causes feelings, if neither I nor anyone else can explain how or why. But the question of the causal consequences of feelings (as opposed to the causal consequences of the functing that causes the feelings) is, in my view, the more perplexing side of the feeling/function problem.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/973> |

2009-05-17 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p959)

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| **BELIEVING IS FEELING: CORRELATION, CAUSATION AND INFORMATION****JS:** *"you are wrongly assuming that the "problem" generated by uncomplemented categories... exists outside of the grammar in which those categories are defined..."*I do not see that anything I have said has anything to do with grammar! I am not speaking of grammatical categories but [sensorimotor and verbal categories](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/11725/): *kinds* of things (objects, events, actions, states, properties) that we are able to recognize, call by their names, and to an extent describe. Many of these categories -- especially the first ones we acquire -- are not derived from definitions or descriptions, but [grounded](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=%22symbol+grounding%22&hl=en&lr=&btnG=Search) in sensorimotor experience (which also happens to be felt). (And those categories that we do acquire via [definition](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=harnad+blondin&hl=en&lr=&btnG=Search) are recombinations of categories we have acquired through sensorimotor experience, likewise felt. It also feels like something to understand what a word means.)**JS:** *"To feel is to feel some X, so that any knowledge of feeling is knowledge of feeling some X.  Knowledge of feeling cannot be separated from knowledge of X."*To feel something is to feel something. We all know that. The way we know is by feeling *this* (e.g., a headache) and by feeling *that* (e.g., a toothache), and noticing that they feel different, but that they both feel like *something*. We all know that too. There is no point mystifying it. (And "something" is a perfectly serviceable -- if rather abstract -- generic category too, though it too might have some complementation problems of its own!)Feeling a headache is something we can recognize and call by its name. So is feeling a toothache. And so is generic feeling; that means feeling *something*; and feeling *something* is something that all feelings of X or Y or Z have in common.**JS:** *"There is thus no uncomplemented (and no "Cartesian") knowledge of feeling, just as [there] is no uncomplemented (and no Cartesian) knowledge of thinking...*"One thing at a time. Feeling *this* (e.g., a headache) is a *complemented* category. We can all recognize and call it by its name. Feeling *that*, a toothache (part of the complement of feeling a headache), is not feeling a headache. Hence the category "what it feels like to feel a headache" (aka "what a headache feels like") is a perfectly well-complemented category.In contrast, the category "feeling something" (where "something" can be anything at all) is likewise a category ("what it feels like to feel anything at all, be it headache or toothache) -- a category that we can all recognize and call by its name. But "feeling something" is not a *complemented* category, because we do not and cannot know what it feels like to feel nothing at all. (We can know what it feels like to feel *this* and *not-that*, but that's not the complement of feeling itself, but only the complement of feeling *this*, or *that*.)So neither the recognizability and identifiability of the category "feeling (something)" nor its uncomplementedness is in doubt. We do have the category even though we can only sample positive instances of it. We have other categories based on positive instances alone -- for example,[*what it feels like to be a bachelor*](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?num=100&hl=en&lr=&safe=off&q=harnad+%22uncomplemented+categories%22&btnG=Search), if one is and always has been a bachelor. There we flesh out the complement, and the invariant features of what it feels like to be a bachelor, from guessing what it would feel like to be married. Of course, once one gets married, one may discover that being married does not feel like what one had expected at all -- in which case one did not fully know what it feels like to be a bachelor either, having only experienced positive instances of it. The difference in the case of the category "feeling" itself is that its complement cannot be filled in by proxy hypothesis or analogy, as in the case of imagining what it would feel like to be married, because in the case of feeling, the category "what it would feel like not to feel" is both empty and self-contradictory. So we may be off (somewhat) about what, exactly, it feels like to feel, in the way we could be off about what it feels like to be a bachelor; and that may (and indeed does) create conceptual problems. But it does not mean the category "what it feels like to feel (something)" is either empty or incoherent; just a bit pathological, cognitively.You also seem to be denying that I can have cartesian certainty that I am feeling ("[t]here is no... "Cartesian"... knowledge of feeling") when I'm feeling ([*sentio ergo sentitur*)](http://www.google.com/search?tab=sw&sa=N&hl=en&lr=&q=%22sentio+ergo+sentitur%22) -- and that's a rather bold denial. I wonder if you have an argument to support it? And unless I'm misunderstanding, you even seem to be tilting against the *cogito* itself, in its original formulation by Descartes, in claiming that "[there] is no... Cartesian... knowledge of thinking**.**˘I'd say your chances are better if you just attack my notion of uncomplemented categories, rather than trying to take on Descartes too!**JS:** *"Feeling is not an object of knowledge, but rather a way of knowing..."*I would say feeling's the *only* way of knowing, since unfelt "knowledge" (as in the case of an encyclopedia, computer, or one of today's robots) is no knowledge at all. And that includes things that Freud (no philosopher) lulled us into calling "unconscious knowledge": In a feeling creature like me, there's knowledge, namely, the things I know, and know that I know, and feel that I know, whilst I'm busy feeling that I know them. All the same things. These are not cartesian (certain) knowledge; they're just beliefs I have, some of which might even be true. But all the beliefs are *felt* (whilst they're being believed, which of course *feels like* something). (The same data, including verbal, propositional data, implemented inside a feelingless robot, would not be beliefs or knowledge, but merely data and states, along with the functional capacity that the data and states subserve; in other words, all just functing. Even in a feeling, hence true-believer/knower like me, those of my brain states that are not being felt are not beliefs but merely functional capacity plus the [mysterious] potential to be felt, hence to become beliefs while being felt.)I also have [*know-how*](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14517/) -- sensorimotor and even cognitive skills that I am able to perform without knowing *how* I manage to perform them. (Most of cognition and behavior is like that. You can do it, but you have no idea how: you're waiting for cognitive science to discover how you do it, and then tell you.) Some like to call that "unconscious" or "implicit knowledge," but I think it's more accurate to say that it's the functional basis of my know-how, of my performance capacity. (It's also the explanatory target of cognitive science in general, and the [Turing Test](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=site%3Aeprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk+harnad+%22turing+test%22&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=) in particular.)Another way of thinking of the "explanatory gap" is to ask why feelings accompany any of this -- whether my explicit knowledge or the exercise of my implicit know-how: Why is it all not just functed? Until that question is answered, feeling cannot be said to be a "way of knowing," but merely a passive (and apparently superfluous) correlate of some forms of know-how. (Don't forget that, functionally speaking, explicit, declarative knowledge is just a form of know-how too -- let's call it "know-that" -- a form of know-how in which we happen to be able to verbalize and describe some of the underlying functional algorithms or dynamics.)Harnad, S. (2007) [From Knowing How To Knowing That: Acquiring Categories By Word of Mouth](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14517/). *Presented at Kaziemierz Naturalized Epistemology Workshop (KNEW)*, Kaziemierz, Poland, 2 September 2007. **JS:** *"The problem you have been discussing is not a "hard problem"... but a simple problem... with your categorizing "feelings" as objects of knowledge, and not ways of knowing.’*I'll settle for your solution to the simple problem of *how and why* feeling (rather than just functing) is a way of knowing -- as soon as you explain it...**JS:** *"This error underlies your... incoherent distinctions between Cartesian and non-Cartesian knowing and between functing and feeling."*You've remembered to call them incoherent but you've forgotten to explain how and why... **JS:** *"It also explains the contradiction between your allegiance to physicalism and your insistance that feelings are somehow non-causal."*No contradiction at all (as I've just got done explaining to [Arnold Trehub](http://philpapers.org/post/973)). I have not said feelings both are and are-not causal. I have said that we cannot explain how or why. That's called the explanatory gap.  **JS:** *"the term "physical" implies functional/causal congruity with respect to predictive models, and... this is a property which you deny feelings..."*I am denying nothing except what one can only affirm if one can explain how and why (and one hasn't).  **JS:** *"...your argument... is motivated by the existence of feelings [but] if feelings cannot causally influence behavior, how could they motivate it?* Did I say anything about motivation? (What is motivation, anyway, apart from yet another set of feelings correlated with yet another set of functions?)But, to answer your question: feelings can correlate with behavior if the feelings and behavior are caused by the same functing. The trouble is, we don't know how or why the brain would bother to funct feelings as well as behavior, rather than just go ahead and funct the behavior, without any sentimentaliy...**JS:** *"Perhaps you wish to claim that one can feel without feeling some X, or that one could know that one was feeling without knowing that one was feeling some X..."*No I don't wish to claim that, since it's not true. And why would I wish or need it to be true? (Please, before you pounce on "wish" or "need" as selt-contradicting, read again what I said above about correlates and common causes above.)**JS:** *"...the only support you have provided is... that feeling could be separated from feeling some X and... that [to] den[y] this... is... [to] beg... the question.  These tactics are no more persuasive than the theistic arguments they resemble..."*I think you have not understood the argument. I said that from feeling A, feeling B and feeling Z, we could abstract the invariant feeling X (where X is something, anything). And that was perfectly ordinary categorization (except that "feeling" is uncomplemented.)And what I said was question-begging was assigning a causal role to feeling without explaining how and why.(Theistic??? I have inferred (by abstracting the common invariant across many postings) that NA has some sort of thing about "analytic philosophers." Do you perhaps have some sort of bugaboo too -- with "theists"?)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/975>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=975&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-18 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p976)

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| **POLTERGEIST****DA:** *"Is that a common viewpoint - that if one doesn't think that the brain "constitutes" consciousness, one is a "spiritualist'?  (I thought spiritualists were people who held seances etc)."*(1) I'm afraid I have no idea how common the viewpoint is. What I take to be important in trying to reach a valid conclusion is the evidence and the reasoning rather than the vote-count.(2) The common term for those who don't think the brain "constitutes" consciousness is "dualist." But I don't think "dualist" is self-explanatory. I have also referred to the position as "[telekinetic dualism.](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=%22telekinetic+dualism%22+OR+%22telekinetic+dualist%22&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=)" And of course telekinesis, clairvoyance, teleportation and telepathy are what spiritualists believe in, and what they try to do in their seances.(3) The link is causality: If I am ready to believe that I am using a mental force to move my arm when I feel like it, then I have much the same belief as those who believe in action-at-a-distance in space and time through "mind-over-matter." [As the quip goes: "Madame, we have established your profession, we are merely haggling over the price" -- or, in this case, the distance, in time and space. (This quip is sometimes attributed to [Churchill](http://jo-kes.blogspot.com/2007/06/churchill-humor.html), but who knows? Unspeakable quanities of hokum -- and often spiritualist hokum -- have been attributed to poor Einstein, no longer here to defend himself from his putative "sayings.")](4) Note that telekinetic dualism (though not under that name) is the default belief of most people, that it is a perfectly natural belief, congruent with all of our experiences and intuitions; and it is of course at the root of our belief in an immaterial, immortal soul, and thence all the rest of the supernatural, including the the afterlife, the demiurges, and the omnipotent deities. (It just happens to be untrue, although, again, no one can explain how or why, other than to point out, quite sensibly, that the brain is the only credible culprit, which it surely is.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/977> |

2009-05-18 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p979)

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| **PASCAL'S WAGER, OR "WHY I AM NOT AN AGNOSTIC"****DA:** *"...for the afterlife, omnipotent deities etc... I would have thought the default position for many people is a modest agnosticism."*Although this is getting distinctly silly (and drifting ever further from the "explanatory gap"), I cannot resist replying (because the connection is not altogether zero) that default agnosticism suffers from the same rational (and practical) defect as [Pascal's Wager](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pascal-wager/):Pascal thought that -- given the trade-off between the grave risk of eternal damnation if Received Writ is all true and one fails to be obey, and the mild risk of a somewhat more constrained finite lifetime if it's false yet one obeys anyway -- the lesser risk should be the default option. This founders on the fact that there are competing claims on our obedience, from the Mosaic edicts to the Mohammedan injunctions to voodoo to the dictates of the [Great Pumpkin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Pumpkin). Is one to hew then, as in [Selfridge's Pandemonium model](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandemonium_Architecture), to whichever demon [raises the ante](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=harnad+%28%22great+pumpkin%22+OR+%22pascal%27s+wager%22%29&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=) the highest? (If so, I'll meet you and double the eternities of agony you will suffer if you don't send my temple a $1M pledge and make and send 100 copies of this [letter](http://www.skepdic.com/pyramid.html) to 100 other infidels.)There are also links here with "flat priors" in [Bayesian Inference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayesian_inference), with the [Cauchy Distribution](http://mathworld.wolfram.com/CauchyDistribution.html), with [Zeno's Paradox](http://mathforum.org/isaac/problems/zeno1.html) (especially [Lewis Carroll's version](http://www.mathacademy.com/pr/prime/articles/zeno_tort/index.asp) of it), and with Dawkins's "[Green-Eyed Monster](http://richarddawkins.net/article%2C1926%2CBanishing-the-Green-Eyed-Monster%2CRichard-Dawkins-On-Faith)," but I alas haven't the time to explain them all.**DA:***"The claim that 'it all depends on the brain' etc strikes me as a kind of scientistic dogmatism... until someone can demonstrate clearly that consciousness can be explained in purely neuroscientific terms..."*Just a clarification, that the predicate "all depends on the brain" referred, yet again, only to the explanatory gap: how/why the brain causes feelings. (The eschatology was just a bonus -- though of course the brain, indeed multiple brains, are behind that too, if rather more circuitously!) Derek seems to think that the explanatory gap -- an epistemic gap -- somehow sanctions agnosticism about the brain; I think it just sanctions scepticism about the power of causal explanation to explain the fact of feeling. It raises no doubts *whatsoever*, in my mind, about the fact that feelings are caused (somehow) by the brain.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/982>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=982&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-18 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p983)

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| **MAKING COMMON CAUSE****AT:** "*Your conclusion is wrong because you appear to be endorsing each of the following propositions:**-- (a) All brain states have causal consequences.**-- (b) Feelings are brain states.**-- (c) Feelings have no causal consequences.**"Given (b), proposition (c) is contradicted by proposition (a)."*Here is a sure way to know that one has either cheated, trivialized, or otherwise begged the question in the way one has formulated the problem: if one's formulation would apply unproblematically and indifferently to any old brain property at all. "All brain states have causal consequences - X is a brain state - So X has causal consequences - No problem" then there is a problem with one's formulation of the problem.The problem is that when "X" happens to be feeling, it is not at all evident what we are saying when we say "feeling is a brain state." Behavior, for example, is not a brain *state*, though it is *caused* by brain states. ("State" is a weasel-word, covertly doing double-duty here.)So let as assume (since it is surely true) that brain states cause feelings, just as they cause behavior (even though we can explain how and why brain states cause behavior, but we cannot explain how and why they cause feelings).Now with behavior -- which, to repeat, is not a brain state, but is caused by brain states, with no problem at all about explaining why and how it is caused -- there is also no problem with the *consequences* of what the brain state causes, in causing behavior. Behavior itself has its own consequences: My brain, with the help of a slippery pavement, causes me to stumble; I fall on your cake; the cake is squashed; you send me the bill.But with feeling -- which, to repeat, is not a brain state, but is *caused* by brain states, inexplicably [that's the first part of the problem, and hence of the explanatory gap] -- there is indeed a problem, an even greater problem, with the *consequences* of what the brain causes, in causing feeling. For feeling does not have (and cannot have -- on pain of telekinetic dualism) any independent causal consequences of its own: My brain, with the help of a slippery pavement causes me to stumble (though I feel I tried everything I could to keep my balance); I fall on your cake (I feel clumsy); the cake is squashed (I feel embarrassed; you feel angry); you send me the bill. (I pay it, because I feel I should) etc.So, to reformulate your scenario without begging the question:-- (a) All brain states have causal consequences.-- (b) Feelings are (unexplained) causal consequences of brain states.-- (c) Feelings have no causal consequences: -- (d) What we feel to be causal consequences of feelings are really the causal consequences of the brain states that (also, inexplicably) cause the feelings.Given (d), proposition (c) is perfectly consistent with propositions (a) and (b).Common causes (functing) can have multiple correlated effects, and in the case of behavior (functing) and feeling, the feeling has no independent (i.e., non-telekinetic) effect, it just dangles, inexplicably.The explanatory gap (which cannot be closed by a series of non-explanatory propositions presupposing the solution of non-existence of the "hard" problem.).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/985> |

2009-05-19 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p991)

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| **'NESCIO' IS NOT A SUBSTANTIVE OPTION**The reply to Derek is exactly the same as the reply to Arnold, but for the opposite reason:First the reply, again: *"Here is a sure way to know that one has either cheated, trivialized, or otherwise begged the question in the way one has formulated the ["hard"] problem: if one's formulation would apply unproblematically and indifferently to any old brain property at all."*Now Derek's contribution to the discussion of the problem:**DA:** *"I am agnostic about explanations of consciousness... [not] because of the so-called 'gap'... but simply because I confess I do not know."*This casts neuroscience's failure to explain how and why we feel with its failure to explain schizophrenia, two (unsolved) problems of an entirely different order (one "easy," the other "hard," for a number of reasons that have been repeatedly made explicit in this discussion, and that constitute the "explanatory gap.").The trouble, again, with what Derek seems to be saying, is that it simply has no substance, one way or the other. Apart from inveighing repeatedly against the straw man of "analytic philosophy," nothing whatsoever is being said other than that consciousness has not yet been explained (and that "we need to 'define' it").Schizophrenia will be "defined" when we know how and why the brain generates it; till then, it's enough to point to it. Ditto for consciousness (feeling). But for the latter (and not the former), principled problems of explanation have been repeatedly pointed out, very explicitly. "I confess I do not know" does not even begin to engage the question.The following, says even less:**DA:** *"...the... explanatory 'gap' ... may in fact be an explanatory abyss - or dead-end... [T]hat possibility has at least to be acknowledged..."*It *has* been acknowledged, repeatedly, with substantive reasons. Now it's your turn to say something of substance, rather than just repeating that we need to "define" consciousness, because maybe that will make the problem of explaining it go away.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/993> |

2009-05-20 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p995)

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| **AT:** "*Your endorsement of the "explanatory gap" clearly depends on the key assumption that a feeling is not a brain state despite the fact that a feeling is caused by a brain state."*It doesn't really depend on that at all:If feeling were a "brain state" rather than an (unexplained and inexplicable) effect of a brain state, then instead of an effect of the brain state being a causal dangler, the brain state itself would be a causal dangler. Either way, we are just massaging terms, but not explaining how and why we feel. That's why all of this explanatorily-empty ontological house-keeping does no good. It's a substantive explanation we want (despite the obstacles that have been itemized), not metaphysical comfort-calls without explanation.Besides, I suggested that feeling was no more a brain state (as opposed to the *effect* of a brain state) than behavior is: Both feeling and acting are things our brain *does* rather than things our brain "is."**AT:** *"In accordance with a non-dualistic view of the matter, you take feelings to be physical events."*It no more helps to call feelings "physical" (or "nonphysical") than it does to call them "brain states." What we want to know is *how and why we* (or our brains -- makes no difference) *feel, rather than just "funct"*. Solemnly pledging ontic allegiance to "monism" or "dualism" does not advance us by one epistemic epsilon....**AT:** *"As physical events, feelings must exist somewhere in the physical universe. A legitimate question is this: If a feeling does not exist as a part of the brain of the individual having the feeling, where does it exist?"*...nor does pinpointing *where* (or *when* -- or even *what*) we feel help to close the how/why gap one iota...**AT:** *"If a feeling is a physical event (physical events can have causal consequences without telekinetic dualism), what is your principled explanation for the assumed inability of feelings to have causal consequences?"*I'm not the one giving the explanations, I'm the one asking for them! And dubbing feeling "a physical event" does not answer the how/why question either.Here is another way to put the entire feeling/function problem in such a way as to bring the problem of causality out into the open:*When I lift my finger, it feels as if I did it because I felt like it. In reality, my brain did two things: (1) it caused me to feel like lifting my finger and (2) it caused me to lift my finger. The "hard" question about causality, the one that creates the explanatory gap, is: how, and especially why, did my brain bother with (1) at all, since it is obviously causally superfluous for (2), an effectless (ineffectual) correlate (except if telekinetic dualism is true, which it's not).*In other words, if telekinetic dualism (i.e., the 5th-force causal power of feelings) is false, then the burden for "principled explanation" is on those who wish to claim that feelings *do* have causal consequences: how? why?**AT:** *"In your reformulation, you speak of feelings as being 'unexplained' rather than 'inexplicable'. I have no problem with this change of stance."* Again, if we agree that there is no explanation so far of how and why we feel rather than just funct, the burden is on those who think that there ever can be an explanation, in light of the causal obstacles (unlike anything else under the sun) that any explanation would have to surmount. Preferring "unexplained" to "inexplicable" does not help; it just gives the soothing feeling (without justification) that the mind/body (feeling/function) problem is just another problem science has not yet solved; no reason to expect it won't get round to it eventually...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1003> |

2009-05-20 -- Reply to [**Luke Culpitt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p877)

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| **LC:** *"...the explanation that would fill the explanatory gap appears to be a non-functional, non-causal explanation to the question of why [feeling] occurs..."*That would be a terrific way to keep begging the question indefinitely, since the question of why we (or our brains) feel is a functional, causal question, just as the question of why we (or our brains) act is. Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1004> |

2009-05-21 -- Reply to [**JWK Matthewson Matthewson**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1007)

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| **IMPORTED QUANTUM PUZZLES DON'T HELP, THEY JUST DISTRACT****JWKMM:** *"[There] is the implicit assumption that the 'physical' is straightforward and explicable whilst the mental [feeling] is difficult to define and currently inexplicable.*"No assumptions. The problem is explaining how and why we feel rather than just "funct." The problem is neither solved nor dissolved by pointing to putative problems in physical (i.e., functional) explanation.**JWKMM:** *"...the contributors.. all seem to agree that a succession of brain states is something that could be easily understood, being physical, although they disagree about how far such a succession of states might explain experience [feeling'."*The problem is explaining how and why people feel, not with explaining how and why apples fall.**JWKMM:** *"Suppose we could explain all experience [feeling[ in terms of some kind of functionalism, we would then need to understand the nature of a 'function'."* We understand function well enough. And to suppose that feeling can be explained functionally is to suppose an answer to a question that some of us are arguing is unanswerable. That is begging the question.**JWKMM:** *"One of the most difficult problems in the philosophy of physics is the notion of 'change'.  No-one understands how one physical state gives rise to another."*It's understood to a good enough approximation to make functional explanation unproblematic (everywhere except possibly in QM). But it does not even begin to explain how and why we feel.**JWKMM:** *"So, if it is conceded that conscious experience [feeling] is purely functional then classical physicalism needs a conscious [feeling] observer outside of this purely functional world to observe the functional observer."*A moment ago we were to "suppose" (against all reasons adduced) that feeling could be explained functionally. Now we are to "concede" it, and the result is suppose to be that we need a feeling observer of function. (This strikes me as QM-puzzle-motivated gobbledy-gook, I'm afraid.)**JWKMM:** *"Quantum mechanics does not bring us any nearer to explaining change."*So let's stay far away from quantum mechanics and focus on the explanatory gap, which is about explaining how and why we feel rather than just funct, like everything else (including QM).**JWKMM:** *"...the problem of conscious experience [feeling] is somehow linked to the problem of time and change in physics."*No, the problem is that feeling is correlated with time and change in biological systems but no one can explain how or why.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1015>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=1015&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

2009-05-22 -- Reply to [**Luke Culpitt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1018)

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| **THE (NONEXISTENT) EFFECTS OF FEELING ARE A FAR BIGGER PROBLEM** **THAN THE UNKNOWN CAUSES OF FEELING****LC:** "*If... 'why we (or our brains) feel is a functional, causal question'..., is there any distinction... between the question of how, and the question of why, we feel? You indicated... that the explanatory gap is a question of* 'especially why***'****we feel, and*[***David Chalmers***](http://consc.net/papers/pceg.pdf)*appears to agree...*"Both questions are functional, causal ones (but they are really flip sides of the same coin). "How" is about the causes of feeling and "Why" is about the effects of feeling. I don't know about David, but I don't lose much sleep about *whether* the brain causes feeling (of course it does); and if the only problem with explaining how the brain causes feeling had been some uncertainty about objective measurement of feeling, I would not give such a small explanatory gap much thought. No, for me the real puzzle is the "why" aspect rather than the "how" aspect. For whereas it is merely mysterious how the brain causes feeling (but there is no doubt that it does), the real explanatory puzzle is *why* the brain causes feeling, since there is no room for feeling to have any causal power of its own (even though it feels as if it does), except on pain of telekinetic dualism. That's the heart of the feeling/function problem -- and the real locus and force of the explanatory gap.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1026> |

2009-05-22 -- Reply to [**JWK Matthewson Matthewson**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1017)

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| (Is [JWKMM](http://newempiricism.blogspot.com/) perchance [V. Petkov](http://alcor.concordia.ca/~vpetkov/absolute.html)?) In any case, I think you have answered your own question: The quantum puzzles and their alleged implications for the causal explanation of dynamics would be there even in a feelingless universe, so they have nothing to do with the feeling/function problem and *its* explanatory gap.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1027> |

2009-05-22 -- Reply to [**Victor Panzica**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1028)

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| **NO COMPLEXITY THRESHOLD FOR A PHASE TRANSITION INTO FELT FUNCTION****-- AND THE WATCHMAKER IS BLIND TO FEELING TOO****VP:** *"For the purpose of evolution, isn't feeling a necessary trait for the survival of complex organisms in a complex environment? Would a complex organism and complex brain be able to evolve without feelings? Please correct me if I am missing your point."*I am afraid you are missing the point: [Darwinian evolution](http://philpapers.org/browse/38/thread.pl?tId=202) is, unproblematically, a causal, functional process. Survival, reproduction, behavior, behavioral skills, learning -- all of these are unproblematically functional. So are RNA, DNA, protein synthesis, physiological function, brain function: all functing.But the explanatory gap is about explaining how and why some functions are *felt*. That includes explaining it adaptively, evolutionarily, in terms of mutations and selective advantages, for survival and reproduction, of felt functions over unfelt functions.But the minute you propose a functional advantage that would allegedly be conferred by feeling X (e.g., pain), or by X's being a feltrather than jan unfelt function (seeing, vs. optical input processing), it becomes apparent that the functional advantages are identical (indeed Turing-indistinguishable), whether or not they are felt. Feeling does not -- and cannot, on pain of telekinetic dualism -- confer any functional advantages of its own. It merely dangles, inexplicably, and ineffectually.That is the explanatory gap. Neither adaptive function nor brain function fills that explanatory gap. And simply assuming that *there must be a function*, even though for each candidate function the feeling can easily be seen to be functionally superfluous, is simply begging the question.One thing is certain: If there is an answer, it will not be an easy answer. And saying "feeling must have survival value, somehow" would be an easy answer...(Hand-waving about "complexity" (see [Churchland's argument](http://cogprints.org/1578/)) won't help at all either. How/why should greater functional complexity (if such it is) become *felt* complexity, rather than just functed complexity, like the rest? What's the functional complexity threshold for a "phase transition" into felt function?)Harnad, S. (2002) [Turing Indistinguishability and the Blind Watchmaker](http://cogprints.org/1615/). In: J. Fetzer (ed.) *Evolving Consciousness Amsterdam*: John Benjamins. Pp. 3-18.  Harnad, S.&Scherzer, P. (2008) [First, Scale Up to the Robotic Turing Test, Then Worry About Feeling.Artificial Intelligence in Medicine](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14430/)  44 (2): 83-89Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1031>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=1031&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

2009-05-23 -- Reply to [**Luke Culpitt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1033)

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| **FEELING WILLING****LC:** *"I don't believe that the explanatory gap is also a question of free will. The putative feeling of free will is just one feeling/sensation/perception/thought among many. The explanatory gap as I understand it is to provide an explanation for the mere existence of any and all feeling, in addition to the functional explanation for how the brain causes that feeling."*I am indeed arguing that they (the problem of explaining the causal role of willing and problem of explaining the causal role of feeling) are *exactly* the same problem, because the problem of feeling (consciousness) is the problem of the causal status of feeling. Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1037> |

2009-05-23 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1021)

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| **HOW/WHY IS PLANNING FELT?****AT:** *"If feeling were a brain state, it would have all the causal biophysical properties of a brain state and could not be considered a 'causal dangler'."*Feeling is and remains a causal dangler until it is explained how and why certain brain states are *felt* rather than just "functed." That is precisely as true whether we assume feeling is a "brain state" or feeling is an "effect" of a brain state. Causality (both coming and going) is the problem, either way.**AT:** *"Surely, if one claims that feelings are physical but are not located in the brain of the individual having the feelings, one should suggest where else they might be located."*The problem is not the locus of feelings, but their causal status.**AT:***"If lifting your finger were a reflex, then [feeling like doing it] would be superfluous. But if lifting your finger were an intended action, then you would have to feel like lifting your finger and [feeling like doing it] would be causal (not superfluous)."*What on earth does "intending" mean, other than *feeling like doing it*? Your reasoning is unfortunately circular.To break out of the circle, explain to me how and why intentional action is felt rather than just functed. A reflex is not only nonintentional (it feels like something, but something passive): it is also simple and automatic. Intentional action is often more complex than a reflex, to be sure (though intentionally lifting a finger is not, and that's why it's better to stick to that example); but *how (and even more importantly, why) should the planning of a complex action be felt, rather than just functed, like a reflex*?**AT:***"It is also possible that you lifted your finger reflexively and then, after the fact, felt like you lifted your finger because you felt like doing it. In this case [feeling like doing it before the fact] would not occur and [feeling like doing it after the fact] would be superfluous."* And your point is...? The question was: How/why is *feeling like doing it* "before the fact" not superfluous too? (By the way, the "fact" here, as always, is the *act*; so the question is, what's the point of feeling before the act? *Planning* before the act is of course unproblematically functional and causal -- but, again, why *felt* planning, rather than just "functed" planning (e.g., as in a computer or robot)?**AT:***"A better example of the causal necessity of feeling is planning a trip. In this case you have to imagine (feel) all sorts of things... before you can act --- make your selection of destination, consider possible weather conditions, when to leave, means of travel, what to pack, etc."*How/why felt (rather than just functed) selection of destination?How/why felt (rather than just functed) consideration of possible weather conditions?How/why felt (rather than just functed) consideration of when to leave?How/why felt (rather than just functed) consideration of means of travel?How/why felt (rather than just functed) consideration of what to pack, etc.?Your reasoning is completely circular, Arnold! You simply take it for granted that certain functions are felt, and as a result you are simply begging the question, with your comfortable focus on brain function: Brain function will explain the causal basis of everything we can do, such as all the things listed above (and lifting our fingers too), but it won't explain how or why any of that functing is felt.And that's the "hard problem" and the locus of the "explanatory gap". It's a causal gap -- or rather a gap in ordinary causal explanation, which works just fine for everything else, from neutrons to neurons. (Please, please let not another quantum mysterian chime in on the QM entanglements of neutrons!)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1039>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=1039&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-24 -- Reply to [**JWK Matthewson Matthewson**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1049)

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| ***SH:*** “(Please, please let not another quantum mysterian chime in on the QM entanglements of neutrons!)"**JWKMM:** *"I would like to defend myself against the accusation of "mysterianism"... defined as... 1 Ontological naturalism: the view that holds (inter alia) that [feeling] is a natural feature of the world; 2 Epistemic irreducibility: the view that holds that there is no explanation of [feeling] available to us".... I admit to agreeing with (1) but not with (2). So rest assured, I will not chime in with a mysterian point, I will just restate the fact that... Physical theory cannot (and could never) explain why an action potential actually moves up a membrane or why a neutron is emitted at a particular moment from a mass of U235..."* By this definition I am more than happy to declare myself a feeling ("qualia") mysterian; but what I was referring to was quantum mysterians (which you assuredly are!); and, in particular, the importation of quantum mysterianism into the sanctum of qualia mystery: Two unrelated koans neither explain, eliminate nor engulf one another... **-- Joshu(a)**Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1055> |

2009-05-24 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1043)

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| ***COMPLEMENTING DESCARTES***[**JS**](http://philpapers.org/post/1043)**:** *"Your repeated "how/why" questions presuppose the very distinction which is in question here, namely that between feeling and functing.  Until this distinction is clarified, we will remain at an impasse."*How about the distinction between feeling and doing, then? Is that clear enough? (It's much the same distinction.) How and why the brain causes adaptive behavior is a tractable scientific question, a functional one, that will one day have a full, clear answer. Not so for how (and especially why) the brain causes feeling. (And that's the point, and the problem, and the gap.)**JS:** *"if feelings have no causal efficacy, they do not make a difference to anything, including the conclusions we draw in our discourse on feelings.  So why do we have words for them?"*(1) Feelings are there, being felt (when they are being felt).(2) There is an (unexplained -- and I think causally inexplicable, though undoubtedly -- if not undoubtably -- causal) correlation between our feelings and our doings (hence *between our feelings and our sayings*), probably explained by *the common functional cause that (explicably) causes the doings and (inexplicably) also causes the feelings.*  So there are feelings there, to speak of, and we do speak of them; and speaking certainly has causal consequences. But until and unless there can be a causal explanation of how and why we feel, the only available explanation of why we speak of feelings is that *the same cause that (inexplicably) makes us feel and (explicably) act also (mysteriously) makes us speak of feeling*; but the fact that we actually feel has no independent causal role, hence no causal explanation. It just dangles on the joint cause of the feeling (unexplained) and the speaking.(I did speculate a bit -- on one of the earlier threads of this discussion: "[WHY WOULD TURING-INDISTINGUISHABLE ZOMBIES TALK ABOUT FEELINGS (AND WHAT, IF ANYTHING, WOULD THEY MEAN](http://philpapers.org/post/858))?" -- concerning why [Turing-Test](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&safe=off&num=100&q=harnad%20%22turing%20test%22&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=bw)-scale robots, with behavioral capacities indistinguishable from our own -- *if* they were feelingless Zombies -- would speak of feelings at all. One possibility might be that the words would be used as metaphors for unobservable internal states -- unfelt states, but also states that are inaccessible to other agents with which the TT-passing robot must interact adaptively. So "you have hurt me" might be a short-hand for "you have caused damage to my internal functioning." That would make feeling-talk ("mind-reading") functional rather than a dangler, like feelings themselves. But I have not yet carried through the exercise so far as to try to construe what functional role "feeling" talk could play if the exchange between us [in this very email dialogue] were taking place between Zombies, and they were talking specifically about the difference between the functional role of talk about feelings between feelingless Zombies versus talk about feelings between feeling people. Maybe that's just further evidence that *there could not be feelingless Zombies Turing-indistinguishable from us*. But unfortunately that leaves completely unanswered, yet again, the [same old] question, this time in the form: [how and why not!](http://cogprints.org/1601/) Same old explanatory gap... [[Peter Carruthers](http://philpapers.org/rec/CARHWK) has a recent target article on this in BBS, but I think he gets it somewhat backwards: it is feeling that is primary, not mind-reading, whether of the unobservable states of others or one's own...])**JS:** *"Your view makes all talk of feelings superfluous, including the claim that there is a feeling/functing distinction."*No. It just points out that how and why we feel is unexplained (and how and why I think it is also inexplicable: functional superfluousness; no telekinesis; causal inexplicability). **JS:** *"The notion of '*[*what it is like to be a bachelor*](http://cogprints.org/2134/0/harnad87.uncomp.htm)*' does not pick out any particular feel or category."*"What it feels like to be a bachelor" picks out what every waking minute feels like (to a human male) from birth to the first minute one gets married -- at which point it is complemented (and one discovers how right or wrong one had been about "what it feels like to be a bachelor"). No such possibility for what it feels like to be awake, or alive...**JS:** *"there is nothing it is like to not have a third arm..."*That's largely true (except in contrast to what it feels like to have a third arm, as, say, siamese twins, spiders, or a surgically-altered-me might experience). But in general I do agree that arbitrary counterfactual complementations are of no more interest than "what it feels like to see something that is bigger than a breadbox" (which does happen to be complemented) or "what it feels like to have lived fewer than an infinite number of years" (which is not).We only single out [categories](http://philpapers.org/rec/HARTCI) in cases where the complement is in some way salient (and where the invariant features of the category members -- relative to the complement members -- are used to [resolve uncertainty](http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Papers/Harnad/harnad87.categorization.html) about what is a member of the category and what is a member of its complement). It *does* make sense to say "I know what it feels like to be a bachelor," and I can even discover that I was wrong. In much the same way, it does make sense to say "I know what it feels like to be alive" or "I know what it feels like to be awake." And we probably do have a pretty good idea from our positive-only evidence. But the difference is that there is no way we can discover whether we were spot-on or [not quite right](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&q=harnad%20%22problem%20of%20error%22&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=ws); and perhaps we are not really justified in making all the inferences we tend to make from our uncertain grip on these problematic categories. (The standard kluge we use for "what it feels like to be alive" is to complement it with analogies, including an imaginary afterlife or rebirth; and for "what it feels like to be awake" we incoherently complement it with what it feels like to be asleep and dreaming -- which is of course not exactly a "nonawake" experience in the same way that delta [dreamless] sleep is -- but in delta sleep you're gone, so there is no one feeling what it's like...)**JS:** *"If we admitted all of these “what it is likes” into our experiential set, then each person would have to “sample” (to use your word) an infinite number of feels before they could know what it is like to feel anything at all."*No, not only do all those hypothetical complements never occur to us, but even when they do, they can easily be dismissed as arbitrary, inconsequential and uninformative. Not so for some of them, though, because we persist in thinking of and speaking of them as if the distinction were salient: "It feels good to be alive" or "Some of my brain functions are felt and others are not." Nor are the intended distinctions empty in those cases. They are merely uncomplemented, hence problematic.(On arbitrary negative categories and their relation to our sense of similarity, see also [Watanabe's "Ugly Duckling Theorem."](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=harnad+watanabe+%22ugly+duckling%22&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=&aqi=)) **JS:** *"There is no "invariant feeling" running through all feelings."*The reason there is no functional invariant here is that it is normally the complement that determines what is and is not invariant in a category: The invariant is relative, based on contrasting what all members of the category share and what all members of its complement lack. (Please let's not get into family resemblances: invariants can be disjunctive and conditional too.) But with positive-only categories, we nevertheless have access to what all the positive instances have in common. After all, we do know we are feeling when we are feeling. We are never in doubt about that...**JS:** *"To complement the category of feeling something, we don’t need to know what it feels like to feel nothing at all.  Rather, we must simply have the category of not feeling anything.  And we have that category."*I'm afraid not. The positive category is "what it feels like to feel something" and hence the complement would have to be "what it feels like to feel nothing at all." And that category is empty, hence we have no idea (or only incoherent fantasies) of "what it feels like to feel nothing at all." (Your error is, I think, a bit like mixing up the categorical distinction between (1) what is alive versus what is non-alive with the categorical distinction between (2) "what it feels like to be alive" versus "what it feels like to be non-alive": We have no trouble distinguishing things that are alive from things that are dead [or have never been alive]; but we never even face the problem of distinguishing "what it feels like to feel something" from "what it feels like to feel nothing at all," because the latter is impossible, hence empty. The only reason you have that category in your repertoire at all is that you are going by the positive instances plus some provisional analogy-based imaginary complement -- as I would be doing, in imagining what it would feel like to be married, whilst I'm still a bachelor -- except that in the case of "what it feels like to feel something" it is *certain* the imaginary complement is impossible, hence empty.)(I think you may also be missing the essentially relational nature of feeling: the feeling is always felt, hence it has an implicit feeler: this is taken up in the discussion of the cogito, later below.)**JS:** *"I can distinguish between something which feels and something which does not feel."*Of course you can, but that's like distinguishing between something that's alive and dead (as in (1) above). That's not the category we're talking about! (We are talking of (2), above.)**JS:** *"We have positive and negative categories for feelings.  Some feelings are categorizable as “not feeling boredom” and others as “not tasting mustard.”*I've mentioned these before too. You are complementing the wrong category. What it feels like to feel *this* (versus *that*) is perfectly well-complemented. But that's no help if the category in question is "what it feels like to feel something (anything) at all" versus "what it feels like to feel nothing at all." (An analogy: If the only sense-modality were vision, and the only experience were to see shapes, and all shapes were colored -- counting black as a color -- then the subordinate category "red" would be complemented by anything non-red, but the superordinate category "colored" would be [uncomplemented](http://www.google.com/search?q=harnad+uncomplemented+categories&hl=en&safe=off&num=100&filter=0).)**JS:** *"I can thus form the categories of “not feeling this” and “not feeling that,” and I can further abstract and form the category, “not feeling anything”.  This is exactly what we do when we abstract from “feeling this” and “feeling that” to “feeling something.”  So why talk about uncomplemented categories here?"*You're simply repeating, I think, your conviction that in complementing subcategories of a category against other subcategories of a category, we are somehow also complementing the category as a whole, against its own complement. But we are not. You are making a category error...**JS:** *"Despite your assertion to the contrary, we do not know 'what it feels like to feel anything at all, be it headache or toothache.'  “Anything at all” does not pick out any particular experience.  There is nothing it is like to feel anything at all."*The category in question is "what it feels like to feel something," where the something is anything that can be felt. That's no different from saying that once a child has learnt the category "dog," he knows what a dog is, and can now (correctly) recognize *any dog at all,* not before seen, as a dog. The same is true for "feeling": We (correctly) recognize any feeling we feel at all as a feeling. The difference is that the child has learned the category "dog" from having sampled both dogs and non-dogs, and abstracting the invariants that reliably distinguish any dog at all from non-dogs. We have done only part of that with feelings: We can (correctly) recognize "what it feels like to feel something" on every occasion, but we really have no idea how to distinguish "what it feels like to feel something" from "what it feels like to feel nothing at all" (even though we think we have) because it is impossible to feel "what it feels like to feel nothing at all."**JS:** *"The abstract category of “feeling something” does not feel like something in general; rather, it feels like a particular concept."*The category in question is "what it feels like to feel something" -- not "what it feels like to have the "concept" of someone feeling something" (or of someone being alive, or of someone being awake).**JS:** *"Similarly, the category of “feeling nothing at all” does not feel like nothing at all."*It sure doesn't, for that would be a contradiction in terms. The category is as empty as a square circle. Only [Meinong](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/meinong/) can manage such a feat...**JS:** *"We feel what it feels like to think about feeling something, of course, but we also feel what it feels like to think about feeling nothing.*The uncomplemented category in question is not "what it feels like to think about feeling something," it is the category "what it feels like to feel something."**JS:** *[Re: The Sentio vs. The Cogito] "Descartes' explicit claim was that the cogito established to himself that he existed."*Actually, what was demonstrated (via the "method of doubt") was that it was not true that the necessary truths of mathematics were the only things one could be certain about. There was one other thing. The Cogito, which is that when I am thinking, I cannot doubt that there is indeed thinking going on.A slight (strategic) mistake was to focus on "thinking" (a rather vague category) rather than feeling (something we all immediately know is happening, when it is happening). And a slightly bigger (exegetic) mistake was to infer that the indubitable truth of the cogito was not just that I cannot doubt that I'm feeling when I'm feeling, but that therefore "I" exist (for if the category "thinking" is vague, the category "I" is even vaguer: not empty, just vague) -- rather than just that *feeling* exists. [Ergo Sentitur](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=%22sentio+ergo+sentitur%22&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=) suffices, without overstating the case... It already shows that one does not have to be uncertain about everything other than the necessary truths of mathematics (e.g., the reality of the physical world, the existence of other minds, the truth of scientific laws). One can also be certain that feeling exists.Feeling! That one certainty among all the other undoubtedly true yet doubtably uncertain truths, such as the physical world, scientific laws, induction, causality, "functionalism." And that one certainty amidst all that less-than-certain functing -- *turns out to be a causal dangler*, giving rise to an unbridgeable explanatory gap!**JS:** *"His soul was res cogitans; his body was res extensa.  And from there, he went on to prove the goodness of God and, only then, the trustworthiness of mathematics."*I'm neither a philosopher nor a historian, but I'll bet Descartes did not believe most of that voodoo (which is certainly not what he is rightly famous for). He just said it to avoid the ire of the Inquisition. (I believe he at certain points even stated explicitly that not every cartesian claim he was making was true, hence we would need to read attentively between the lines.)Certainty about the truth of "not (p and not-p)" is based on necessity (pain of contradiction), not on the benignity of deities; and the certainty of *sentio ergo sentitur* is based on the (inexplicable, but indubitable) reality of feelings. "Dualism" was just a sop for the metaphysical bean-counters of the day. The force of the Cogito is epistemic, not ontic. The sceptics were not denying the *reality* of the physical world, just its *certainty*. By the same token, it was not news that feelings existed; the news was that that was a truth that -- unlike the existence of the physical world -- we could be *certain* about: as certain as of the necessary truths of mathematics. (But a consequence of that same, certain truth, happens to be that there is no way to account for feeling physically [i.e., functionally].)**JS:** *"You claim that, because the cogito is merely a tautology, it needs to be reformulated so that we can better understand its significance"*The cogito has to be reformulated in terms of feeling rather than thinking, and its conclusion is the fact that it cannot be denied, when feeling is going on, that feeling is going on. But that is not a tautology, even though it sounds like one! I don't know which one of Kant's baroque categories is the right name for it, but the cogito is either a "synthetic a-priori" or an "analytic a-posteriori": it certainly isn't an analytic a-priori (i.e., a tautology).It cannot be denied that when flying is going on, then flying is going on: *That* is a tautology. A universal, non-existential statement, necessarily true "in all possible worlds."But the fact that "it cannot be denied, when feeling is going on, that feeling is going on, hence it is certain that feeling exists" depends essentially on what each of us has actually felt, namely feeling. It is an existential statement that follows from the direct experience of each and every (sentient) one of us.**JS: "***The cogito is not a tautology, but an inference following modus ponens.  (If I am thinking, then I exist. I am thinking, therefore I exist.)  You misrepresent it as 'I am thinking, therefore I am thinking'."*I agree that the cogito is not a tautology (I never said it was). But the right way to put it is that if I am feeling, then *feeling* exists. (The "I" is a fuzzier, theory-laden notion, not further licensed as "certain" by the cogito. At best, we can say that "it feels like an 'I' exists": but, by the same token, it feels like a physical world exists too, and that's not certain either!) I will say this much more, though: Feeling is essentially a "two-part relation": Whenever there are feelings, the feelings are being felt. So it is intrinsic to a feeling that there is both feeling and "feeler." I'm not talking about a fancy self-concept. Just the fact that although there is such a thing as "free-floating depression" in the sense of a depression without a perceived external cause, there is no such thing as a free-floating depression -- or any feeling -- that is *unfelt*. An unfelt feeling is a contradiction in terms. To that extent, a feeler is intrinsic to feeling, so the existence of a feeling to that extent entails the existence of a feeler. Maybe that's what Descartes meant by the "ego" in the "sum." But that fleeting frame for any feeling is far from what most of us mean by an ego or self, let alone the reality of an immaterial, immortal soul!  **JS:** *"...your "I feel, therefore feeling is felt" is not a valid inference, because there is no feeling of feeling."*I would say quite the opposite: There is no unfelt feeling. A feeler/felt relation is intrinsic to feeling. And if that's what Descartes meant by "I exist" then he was right again. But that "I" is simply an intrinsic part of the nature of feeling itself. So the existential claim of the cogito (sentitur) is still only that *feeling* exists. The feeling/felt relation just comes with the territory. (One cannot be certain, for example, that the feeler of the feeling is the same feeler as an instant ago: that does not sound like a sound basis for an enduring ego, let alone an eternal soul...)  **JS:** *"I reject the claim that [the cogito] indicates or establishes a special kind of knowledge which you call 'Cartesian certainty'.”*Call it what you like; it's the only truth other than the necessary truths of mathematics about which we can be dead-certain.**JS:** *"And I reject Descartes’ views that it establishes mind/body dualism and provides a foundation for all our knowledge."*(1) "Mind/body dualism" is a figure of speech; it means next to nothing. What the certain existence of feelings establishes is the certainty of the existence of something that cannot be explained in the same functional way that the rest of what exists (truly, but without the added boost of certainty) can be explained. Reformulated as the "feeling/function" problem, it becomes obvious that the problem is one of explanation -- explaining how and why there is feeling rather than just functing.(2) Without feeling, there would be no "knowledge," only functing. (I never said or invoked a single word about "foundations of knowledge.") "Knowledge" in books and computers and (insentient) robots is not knowledge; it is just data and dynamical states. The only knowing is *felt* knowing. Ditto for [meaning](http://philpapers.org/post/800).**JS:** *"Wittgenstein’s point is that there is no gapless foundation to be revealed."*Wittgenstein seems to have spent half his life trying to build foundations and the other half tearing them down. That's fine, but it has next to nothing to do with the rather straightforward, non-foundational question at issue here: *Why and how do we feel rather than just funct?* And I don't know about other explanatory gaps, but the one at issue here is that one. Generalities about multiplicities of foundational gaps, all over the map, don't answer the rather straightforward question of how and why we feel rather than just funct (any more than specific foundational [quantum gaps](http://philpapers.org/post/1055) do).**JS:** *"The cogito only serves as a reminder that the sentence "I do not exist" is not a valid proposition in our language.  It is a reminder of the rules of our grammar, and not a foundation for knowledge."*To repeat, I said nothing about grammar, nothing about foundations of knowledge, nothing particular about language, and nothing even about whether or not I exist. I just said feelings exist, for sure: And then I asked "how and why?"**JS:** *"how could one doubt that one had a body?"*Same way you can doubt there's a world, causality, reliable induction, other minds. You'd be wrong to conclude they do not exist, because they're all real enough; but there's certainly room for doubt wherever there are no guarantors for certainty. Descartes pointed out the two exceptions. One (necessary truth on pain of contradiction) was no big surprise; but the certainty of feeling (surely the nether pole of the platonic-personal or objective-subjective spectrum!) was a bit of a jolt. And the upshot was the explanatory gap.**JS:** *"What could such “doubt” consist in...?"*I have no trouble at all distinguishing the (foolish) sceptics who claimed that the world was an illusion, from the wise ones who simply pointed out that there were some truths one could know with certainty and some truths one could only know with probability. Without Descartes, we might wrongly have thought that the mathematical truths were the only ones we could know with certainty.**JS:** *"Those are empty words, no different than, 'I don’t have a mind . . . I am just a body'...Repeating them does not constitute doubt, because these words have no discernible consequences.  They are insignificant.  It would make as much sense to say, “all logic is invalid . . . there are no valid inferences,” or perhaps, “there are no thoughts, only words; no feelings, only functions.”  Such mantras are not to be taken seriously."*I'm afraid it sounds to me more as if it is you who are repeating mantras without reflecting on the meaning or grounds for what you are saying: Doubting I feel is self-contradictory (if/when I do feel, and I do). Doubting I have a body is not self-contradictory, just false. Doubting things that are provably true on pain of contradiction reduces both affirmation and denial to empty gibberish. **JS:** *"...your argument resembles some unconvincing theistic arguments [such as] God’s existence is self-evident by the very fact of knowledge.  Therefore, a person who claims that God does not exist is begging the question against theism and is denying their own knowledge... Do you find the argument compelling?*No more compelling than that "the Great Pumpkin's existence is... etc." It's just arbitrary gibberish. Please see the discussion of [Pascal's Wager](http://philpapers.org/post/982). The existence of feelings is anchored in our undeniable experience: gods and goblins are arbitrary inventions of feverish imaginations or charlatans.**JS:** *"Your argument for a functing/feeling dichotomy is similar.  You claim that the unique status of feelings (be it epistemic or ontological or both) is self-evident, and that it is self-evident by the very fact of feeling.  You defend this notion by accusing those who reject it of begging the question and denying their knowledge of feelings. How is your argument different from those theistic arguments?"*Let me ask you, instead, what plays the demonstrative role of the *cogito* in the case of hobgoblins?Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1060>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=1060&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-05-25 -- Reply to [**Victor Panzica**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1062)

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| Victor, you're missing the point. There's no problem with the reporting of inner states. The problem is that we *feel* them. The same source that generates the feeling (which, we feel, in turn generates the report of the feeling) can just generate the report directly. If not: how and why not?Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1063>  |

2009-05-26 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1073)

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| **FEELING, WILLING AND DOING: WE ARE ALL ANOSOGNOSIC CONFABULATORS****AT:** *"The same source that generates the feeling cannot generate the report of feeling directly because the brain mechanism that is able to generate the feeling is significantly different than the brain mechanisms that are able to generate our reports of feelings..."*I wonder why you would say this, Arnold, since (1) we have no idea how or why brain mechanisms generate, say, *felt* sensations rather than just *sensed* sensations and (2) (although it is probably flawed methodologically), the [Libet premotor potential data](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&q=libet%20willing%20brain%20potential&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=ws) -- which (seem to) show that an unfelt premotor potential precedes both the moving and the feeling that one is voluntarily moving -- suggests (unproblematically) how (2a) a prior unfelt process can cause movement as well as (mysteriously) how (2b) a prior unfelt process can cause the feeling of willing the movement. Brain locus is certainly not a problem in principle. (Nor is locus in itself particularly explanatory, functionally, even for unfelt functions!)And we all know that once a movement is a *fait accompli*, the only thing the anosognosic patient can do is confabulate and rationalize it, as in the case of the movement of the split-brain patient's left arm in response to a stimulus in the speaking hemisphere's unseen visual half-field. Restore all the connections -- and hence of course all the correlations -- and you have our ordinary intact anosognosia about the real causes of our movements. (In other words, until and unless the causal role of feeling can be explained, we are all anosognosic confabulators about the causes of our doings!)Note, by the way, the close relation between the feeling/function problem itself, and the problem of volition, for *they are in fact the same problem*, the feeling/function problem being a problem about the *causal status*, hence the *causal explanation of feeling*: The explanatory gap is a gap in the power of causal explanation to account for feeling.(Note also how ordinary anglo-saxon gerunds like "doing," "feeling," and "willing" can help keep us honest on these tricky questions -- with the help of the not-so-anglo-saxon gerund "functing"...)P.S. If anyone looks up the definition of "[anosognosia](http://books.google.com/books?q=anosognosia&btnG=Search+Books)" or "[confabulation](http://books.google.com/books?q=confabulation&btnG=Search+Books)" on google's hero, wikipedia, instead of google books or google scholar, please be cautious and sceptical about what you "learn": I just checked "confabulation (neural networks)" and found a piece of empty self-puffery. A textbook of neurology or neuropsychology is a more reliable source.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1082> |

2009-05-27 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1089)

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| **PROCESSES DON'T BECOME FELT BY FIAT****AT:** "*...to have an idea of how/why brain mechanisms generate felt/conscious sensations rather than unfelt/unconscious sensory events we need to refer to a theoretical model of... the brain mechanism for our global phenomenal content and the brain mechanisms serving our separate sensory modalities."*My guess: The circularity comes with the "global *phenomenal* content": How/why is "global content" *felt* content? **AT:***['how... a prior unfelt process can cause the feeling of willing the movement'] is not at all mysterious when you understand that there is recurrent axonal excitation between the mechanism that represents our global phenomenal world (including selective attention to events in the world) and the mechanisms that serve our separate sensory-motor modalities."*How does "recurrent axonal excitation" explain how/why "global" content, or selective (or unselective) attention become *felt*content, and *felt* attention? Neural structures and processes do not become felt by fiat. And correlation is not, nor does it explain, causation.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1092> |

2009-05-28 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1094)

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| **ASK A SIMPLE QUESTION...****AT:** *"I've proposed that brain activity that represents the world from a privileged egocentric perspective IS our... (felt content)"*Well, that would be a quick solution to the feeling/function problem: just propose that a bit of function *IS* feeling. Then there's no more hows and whys about it! But, apart from your proposing that it is so, how and why is it so? As far as I know, brain activity is just brain activity, i.e., function is just function. And the question on the table was, and continues to be: How is (some of) it felt? Why is it felt? "Because I have proposed it" is alas not an answer! (Nor, by the way, is the fact that the brain activity "represents the world from a privileged egocentric perspective" an explanation. Adaptively (i.e., functionally) speaking, there is a lot to be said for "representing the world from a privileged egocentric perspective" -- but how and why is that "representation from a privileged egocentric perspective" a *felt* "representation from a privileged egocentric perspective" rather than just a *functed* "representation from a privileged egocentric perspective"?)**AT:** *"if my theoretical premise is that this particular brain activity is the same thing as feeling, your question is a non sequitur."*But how/why questions are not answered by proposing theoretical premises: they are answered by explaining how and why. You are just begging the question with a solution by fiat.**AT:** *"Your repetition of the how/why question with regard to feeling suggests that there has to be something more than a biophysical explanation of feelings"*A biophysical explanation can answer a biophysical question. I asked how and why the biophysics is *felt* biophysics. It is not an answer to say that feeling just *IS* biophysics (because I propose that it is so). Even if your proposal is somehow true, the question is how and why is it true. How, and why is that biophysics felt biophysics, rather than just (the usual) functed biophysics? (As far as I know, all you offer by way of an answer is correlations. Well if your proposal is true, there will certainly have to be those correlations; but the correlations certainly don't explain how and why your proposal is true. They are part of what needs to be explained.**AT:** *"If you refuse to evaluate a biophysical explanation of [feeling] on its own terms, then you will continue to repeat your question."*But I did not hear a biophysical explanation of feelings, and that is why I continue to repeat my question. All I heard was a proposal that that biophysics just *IS* feeling, somehow. An explanation is supposed to tell me how and why X just *IS* feelings. Neither your proposal -- nor the (familiar) correlation itself -- is an explanation at all.**AT:** *"Perhaps you're a closet dualist..."*Not at all. I'm sure the brain causes feelings, somehow. I'm just asking *how* (and especially *why),* since felt functing -- precisely because telekinetic dualism is false -- seems utterly superfluous, functionally (i.e., causally): Just functed functing looks like it would do the very same job, exactly as well. (If not, then *please explain how and why not*: It's the same question either way!)It's not a trick. And I am not just a compulsive or perverse repeater of the question "how/why". There is really an explanatory gap here, and it is not filled by merely proposing that functing that is correlated with feeling just IS feeling. It is filled by explaining how and why it is feeling.And note that my insistence on putting and keeping the focus on feeling itself (rather than on equivocations such as seeing, knowing, representing, perspective, or ego, all of which -- if unfelt -- have exactly the same functionality) is intentional: to keep us honest, and to make and keep it crystal clear exactly what the real problem is (and always has been). And to make it harder to keep begging the question...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1102> |

2009-05-29 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1106)

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| **AT:** *"I confess that I have no idea what functed functing is."*Okay, here's an example (deliberately simplified to just the core essentials): You have tissue injury. You have nocicepetion, which detects the injury and generates a withdrawal and avoidance of the nociceptive stimulus that caused the tissue injury. That's fine, and perfectly adaptive, and perfectly functional. But we all know that's not the whole story. If it were the whole story, it would just be functing. We also *feel* the nociception, in the form of the pain; we don't just funct it, as I first described it. That's no longer just functed functing, it's felt functing. And that's what generates the feeling/function problem, the how/why question, and the explanatory gap. For not only is it not at all clear *how* the nociception generates the feeling of pain, rather than just generating the functional state that leads to doing the useful things we do when we feel pain (including all the complicated cognitive planning); but it is even less clear *why* this functing is felt: the feeling itself seems to serve no additional purpose at all.And I don't think that declaring "it's a 'given' that certain functions are felt, just as it is a 'given' that gravity pulls" is an answer. It simply begs the question, a very reasonable and natural how/why question of the kind whose answer -- in all other areas, but not in this special case -- is eventually discovered (or there's no reason to think it can't or won't be). Here, in contrast, there are unique reasons to believe it never will be.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1108> |

2009-06-06 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1126)

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| **THE CARTESIAN BOTTOM LINE ON SCEPTICISM**[***JS***](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1126)***:*** *"Your [*[*feeling/functing*](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1060)*] distinction begs the question against a functional explanation of feelings."*Actually, it just begs an *answer* -- but the answer is not forthcoming. It just keeps being asserted that either there is nothing to explain, or it has already been explained.***JS:*** *"The language of feeling is a way of speaking about our behavior as being a reaction to internal states, and a way of speaking about our internal states as reactions to external events—... the language implies causality."*Actions and reactions are just actions -- doings, functings -- hence unproblematic. But feelings are not doings; they are feelings.Nor does the locution "internal states" help (apart from its being equivocal about whether it means internal to the body, unproblematically, or internal to the *mind*, in other words, *felt*, which is, again, what it is that we are seeking an explanation for).Speaking about "feeling" is speaking about *felt* internal states. I don't use "feeling" when I speak about my atrial fibrillations because I don't feel my atrial fibrillations, even though they too are "internal states."And, yes, when I withdraw my hand from the flame because it hurts, my language implies that the feeling is causing the withdrawing. Moreover, it *feels like* I'm withdrawing my hand because of the feeling (pain); it also feels like I'm withdrawing my hand *because I felt like it* -- in particular because I *willed* it. But all that is begging for a causal explanation of *how and why* -- not the question-begging assertion that "the language implies causality."**JS:** *"Inexplicably, you say feelings have no causal role to play.  Whatever you mean by the word “feelings,” then, it is not what is commonly meant by the term."*(1) I mean by "feelings" precisely what everyone means by feelings.(2) If you disagree that there exists no explanation of how and why we feel, then please draw my attention to the how/why explanation I somehow seem to have missed!(3) I not only pointed out that no causal explanation of feeling has been provided (3a). I also went on to say that I don't think that a causal explanation can be provided (3b), and why: because there is no room for feelings to have any causal power (no 5th force; telekinesis is false).**JS:***"If feelings have no consequences for anything, then any valid results of our discourse are valid regardless of whether or not feelings exist.  To appeal to feelings—to talk of them at all—is superfluous.  So, not only do I not know what you mean by the term “feelings,” I do not see how you could justify postulating them."*Yes, feelings are not really causal (hence they are superfluous), even though they *feel* causal. However, feelings do *exist*. Moreover, they keep feeling causal regardless of whether they are or are not really causal, and regardless of whether or not we can explain how and why they are causal. Hence our discourse about feeling is perfectly valid regarding both their existence and what *feels like* their causal role. But when we go on to say that their causal role *is* in reality what it feels like it is, then our "language" is making an invalid inference.You do, of course, know exactly what I mean by feelings; everyone does. I need not "postulate" them because you know as well as I know, and Descartes knew, that they exist. We are talking here about explaining their causal function, and you keep begging the question (even though you don't seem to *feel* you are begging the question!).**JS: *"****There’s a feeling, a feeler, and an object/event which the feeling represents.  You are treating the represented object as though it were the feeling.  Feelings do not represent themselves... The fact that feelings represent implies that feelings perform a function.  They do work.  So opposing them to “functing” (or “doing”) does not make sense."*I have not said a word about "representation" (which I consider to be yet another weasel-word in discourse about the feeling/function problem). A feeling feels like whatever it feels like. If/when I feel a toothache, and I *do* have a tooth, and there *is* something wrong with my tooth, then my feeling is veridically correlated with something in the world; if not, then not. So far, that's correlation, not causation. Correlates (feelings and functings) do not need to be causes of one another: they can both be the effects of a third cause (functing).If you think feelings perform a causal function *qua* feelings -- rather than as the superfluous effects of the functing that is performing the real causal function, please state clearly how and why. Otherwise what does not make sense is to keep insisting, despite the inability to explain how or why, that feelings really do "do work" (as opposed to just feeling like they do).**JS:** *"You accused me of “*[*complementing the wrong category*](http://philpapers.org/post/1060)*” because I argued that “feeling something” is a complemented category.  I was responding to a* [*post*](http://philpapers.org/post/975) *in which you repeatedly claimed that 'feeling something' had no complement."*Yes, I'm afraid you keep misunderstanding that point, but as it's my point, I accept full responsibility for making it clear, so I will now have another go:What I keep saying in my posts is that "feeling a toothache" as complemented by "feeling a headache" (i.e., "feeling a non-toothache," or "not-feeling a toothache") is perfectly well-complemented, and perfectly unproblematic. What is uncomplemented is "feeling any feeling at all" as complemented by "not-feeling any feeling at all" (shorthand: "feeling something" vs. "feeling nothing").And it is indeed *feeling* -- the generic category -- that covers all sense modalities, exteroceptive (like seeing, hearing) and interoceptive (like fatigue, anxiety or grief) and all manner of feeling -- that is at issue here. If you pick a specific feeling modality, such as, say, tasting, the complementation problem does not arise: Tasting vanilla ice-cream is complemented by tasting chocolate ice-cream, and "tasting any taste at all"  (i.e., tasting something) is perfectly well complemented by not tasting anything at all (i.e., tasting nothing). (It feels like something to taste nothing at all, just like it feels like something to be blind, i.e., to not see anything at all.) But the analogue does not work for feeling itself, for you are always feeling something if you are not obtunded or dead, and it is impossible to feel nothing at all.(A congenitally blind person is in something like the epistemic situation regarding blindness (apart from hearsay) as the one we are all in regarding feeling (and about [what it feels like to be a bat](http://www2.clarku.edu/students/philosophyclub/docs/nagel.pdf)): He has heard that people can see, and that he can't, and he has felt what it is feels like to be unable to see. But as he has never felt what it is like to see, "what it feels like to be blind" is uncomplemented for him -- just as [what it feels like to be a bachelor](http://cogprints.org/2134/0/harnad87.uncomp.htm) is uncomplemented for me. If an operation one day allowed him to see, he will discover something new not only about what it feels like to see, but about what it feels like to be blind. Only if his vision again disappears will he be in the same sentient situation as the tasting person who momentarily tastes nothing.)**JS:** *"To repeat: there is no feeling of feeling something, because the category of “feeling something” does not pick out a specific feel.  It represents feelings in general; but it does not feel like what it represents.  It does not represent its own feeling."*I am afraid that argument does not become more persuasive with repetition. Consider:"There is no feeling of *tasting something*, because the category of 'tasting something'does not pick out a specific taste."  I think it's pretty self-evident that that's false, and that you would never make such an assertion in ordinary discourse:X: "Do you taste something?" Y: "I don't understand your question."X: "Why not?"Y: "Because you haven't picked out a specific taste. You must ask, for example, 'Do you taste vanilla ice-cream?' Then I would understand the question."ORX: "Ladies and gentlemen. I have with me today the subject of the world's first long-term gustatory deprivation experiment. He has had his sense of taste chemically suppressed for a month, and has just tasted something for the first time since his taste has been restored: After all that time, what did it feel like to taste something?"Y: "I don't understand your question."X: "Why not?"Y: "Because you haven't picked out a specific taste...."And again, we are not talking about "representing" feeling here, but about *feeling* feeling.**JS:** *"somebody asks you, “what would it feel like to be a rock?” You could respond... “It wouldn’t feel like anything.  Rocks don’t feel.”  And wouldn’t this... make sense?"*But what on earth would give you the impression that I would say it doesn't make sense? I'm pretty sure rocks don't feel. I know for sure I do feel. I said "feeling" was an uncomplemented category, not an empty one. (What I can't make sense of is why you would even ask me whether this would make sense!)**JS:***"How might you answer the question, 'what does it feel like to feel?'”* That you know perfectly well. (And you do.) Just as you know what it feels like to taste, or what tastes taste like.**JS: "***We can use these categories, and doing so even makes sense; but we are making a mistake if we think we are thereby referring to anything."**These* categories (plural)? I thought we were only talking about one problem category: "feeling." And I said that it was *uncomplemented* (hence problematic) but certainly not *empty*.*“If the only sense-modality were vision, and the only experience were to see shapes, and all shapes were colored -- counting black as a color -- then the subordinate category "red" would be complemented by anything non-red, but the superordinate category "colored" would be uncomplemented.”***JS:** *"'Colored' would also be complemented by the category 'shaped,' because the same shapes would be recognizable as such despite having different colors."*I think you have again missed my point here. The complement of "colored" is "uncolored," and that category is empty in the hypothetical visual toy-world I concocted. Particular shapes (triangular, square) would be complemented, just as particular colors (red, green) would be; but both uncolored and unshaped would be empty in this world. In our multimodal world we have sounds and smells to complements colors and shapes.***JS:*** *"You say our concept of “feeling something” is established by our knowledge of an invariant feeling present in all feelings.  This requires that all of our feelings are known as particular feelings before we can have the category “feeling something.”  Yet, there is no knowledge of particulars without general categories.  (The notion of a particular is the notion of an instance of a universal.)  The category of “feeling something” cannot come later.*I am not quite sure where these rather abstract regulations are coming from: I can taste this and I can taste that, and I've already got some taste categories. Then I can sample nongustatory feeling, and I've got the category "taste" complemented. But with tasting this and tasting that (all positive instances of "tasting") I already had a sense of what it feels like to taste *something* -- though it would be a lop-sided sense until I complemented it.I am not doing individual/universal ontology here. I'm just talking about the phenomenology of feeling and the epistemology of category acquisition: from particular instances to the categories of which they are instances, via the invariant properties that distinguish the members of the category from the members of its complement. (Remove the complement and you are still sampling the members of a category, but a problematic category, because all you have sampled are its members, not its non-members.)(If we are talking about universals here at all, we are talking about "uncomplemented universals": being uncomplemented extensionally [i.e. in their set of instances: positive only], they are also uncomplemented intensionally [in the {here indeterminate} invariant features that normally differentiate positive and negative instances].)**JS:** *"...you are wrongly inferring from the sense of "I know what it feels like to be a bachelor" that it must refer to something... some category which was already there ahead of time, just waiting to be revealed... —though, if we wanted to, we could define a referent here.  But in so doing we would be drawing a definition, and not revealing one that was already there."*I don't know about "already there ahead of time, just waiting to be revealed." I just know for sure that there are feelings now (and I'm *pretty* sure there are fermions now too). But I have no idea whether either feelings or fermions were "always there... waiting to be revealed"...**JS: "***'Feeling' is also a family resemblance concept.  We learn the word 'feeling' based on indirect observations—on distinguishing emotional or mental reactions as such."*I couldn't follow that. Every instant of our waking life we are feeling -- and feeling "directly," not "indirectly" (whatever the latter means; the only things I feel at all, I feel "directly"). And our observations are all felt observations. The rest is all about distinguishing this category from that, and that includes distinguishing "feeling this" from "feeling that" -- but not distinguishing "feeling something" from "feeling nothing" (because feeling nothing is an empty category).The notion of a "family resemblance" category, insofar as I understand it, is the notion of a category that does not have invariants, just lumped disjunctive subsets. I would reply that in those cases where we are indeed capable of reliably assigning membership or nonmembership to all candidates and there is a criterion for correct and incorrect, then we do have a category, and that category must have an invariant (even if it's a long disjunction) -- assuming we are not doing the successful, confirmable category assignment via clairvoyance (which is just as false as telekinesis). If we are *not* capable of reliably assigning membership or nonmembership to all candidates and there is no criterion for correct and incorrect then what we have is not a "family resemblance" category: what we have is *no category at all*. (Wittgenstein's "[private language](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=harnad+wittgenstein+%22private+language%22&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=&aqi=)" argument is valid against the possibility of creating a private language with feeling-categories, because of the impossibility of error, hence error-correction, hence any nonarbitrary criterion for miscategorization: Hence there could simply not be a private language of feeling-categories.)**J*S:*** *"We also use the term “feeling” to refer to observation in general, but we have no general criterion for what that means."*We are talking about *felt* observation (as opposed to the merely functed kind of "observation" that a surveillance camera connected to an alarm does).**JS:** *"Why say that, when we observe, all of our observations contain a unique quality, an invariant aspect which is common to all observations?  What would that be?"*The fact that they are felt, rather than just functed, as by a surveillance camera. And what we hear is felt too, rather than just functed, as by an acoustic vibration-detector.And yes, there is something that seeing this and seeing that and hearing this and hearing that all have in common: they are all felt, rather than just functed.**JS:** *"You might be tempted to say that the self, the ego, is the invariant entity which all of our observations contain.  But how could we observe our own “I” as an aspect of an observation of something else?"*No, I'm not at all tempted to invoke an ego as the invariant. I doubt that a horseshoe crab has much of an ego, even though he sees. And for all I know, both (1) my feeling of continuous identity across time (which, by the way, sometimes flickers and fades a bit, even when I'm awake) and (2) my memories of "my" past are merely instantaneous illusions, parts of what an instant happens to feel like. (And that's without mentioning the fallibility of any theories I may have about "selfhood" -- my own or anyone else's. That's why I prefer "sentio ergo sentitur" to "cogito ergo [ego] sum" -- if, that is, what is an issue is *certainty*, rather than just truth, or probability.)So, no, the only invariant I invoke is the fact that we are feeling, whenever (and whatever) we are feeling.**J*S:*** *"Try to observe yourself looking at something—say, a table.  To do this, you might be tempted to say something to yourself, such as, “I am looking at a table.”  But saying is not the same as observing.  So don’t form words in your head.  You might find yourself noticing your body . . . and that helps you remember that you are in the world along with the table.  But it does not show you you-looking-at-the-table.  There is only the observation of the table and your ability to talk about yourself as the observer.  This suggests that the notion of an observer is constructed with language; it is a grammatical convention, a way of speaking (or, as Wittgenstein would say, a way of life.)."*I have a feeling I am being drawn into a side issue that has nothing to do with what I proposed: Whenever and whatever I observe -- be it a table, or me looking at a table, or just "ouch" -- it *feels like something*, and it is the how/why of that fact, and nothing else, that is at issue here.And the certain fact that I feel (and the almost-certain fact that a worm does too) has nothing whatsoever to do with language (let alone "grammar," which just refers to the syntactic rules for well-formedness in a formal system).Feeling is indeed a way (indeed a fact) of life -- but alas an unexplained (and, I think, an unexplainable) one.***JS:*** *"All judgments, even logical and mathematic[al] ones, were doubtable for Descartes...  He explicitly concluded that the very first certainty was the cogito."*I confessed shame-facedly that I am no Descartes scholar (and now I will further confess that I have read little of chapter and verse). And yet I think I can make coherent sense of Descartes. And on my construal, all the stuff about God is transparently irrational nonsense (and I cheerfully accept Descartes' invitation to read between the lines, and infer therefrom that he didn't really mean that irrational nonsense, so opposite is it to the rigorous things he said about certainty). The method of doubt makes far more sense if it is based on the usual sceptical argument about the *uncertainty* (not the falsity) of the reality of the experiential (felt) world of appearances, including science, compared to the certainty (grounded in logical necessity) that NOT (P&NOT-P). But what the method of doubt further reveals is that there is, surprisingly, a *second* kind of certainty, over and above logical necessity: an experiential (felt) certainty, in many ways the diametric opposite of the first, formal certainty, and issuing from the very heart of what is most uncertain, what is most vulnerable to sceptical doubt, namely, whether things are really the way it feels as if they are. And *that certainty is the very fact of feeling itself* (if/when one is feeling).Since one cannot plausibly invoke the dangers of the Inquisition to justify feigned scepticism about formally necessary truths in the same way that one can plausibly invoke the dangers of the Inquisition to justify feigned fideism, I can only conclude that Descartes understated the certainty of mathematics either (1) for strategic reasons -- to further reinforce the certainty of feeling -- or (2) because he thought that most people could not hold a proof much longer than NOT (P&NOT-P) in their heads long enough to be certain about it. (The only other construal I can think of would be that he was simply wrong on this point, and had not fully thought it through. But I rather doubt that, from all the other evidence of Descrartes' rigor and rationality. But who knows? Newton had his bugaboos too!)Moreover, I don't think the significance of the 2nd certainty -- that we feel -- is that it provides a rational or methodological basis for science (apart from the fact that every certain truth is welcome in science). I think its significance is in having laid bare the explanatory gap: that feelings exist with certainty, yet we cannot explain how or why.***JS****: "I think Descartes’ decision to doubt mathematical judgments was well-considered.  You had to learn mathematics, and it is conceivable that you learned it all incorrectly."* That's (2) above. But it doesn't cover the face-valid necessity of NOT (P&NOT-P) -- except perhaps for [Achilles and the Tortoise](http://www.ditext.com/carroll/tortoise.html). (But no one as obtuse as the Tortoise would be able to apprehend the certainty of the *sentio* either, though that would not make its truth any less certain, if the Tortoise was indeed feeling. Nor would the tortoise's abtuseness make NOT (P&NOT-P) any less certain. I rather think that at the tortoise's level of abtuseness, it is not just certainty that gets mooted, but truth/falsity, affirmation/denial, and belief/disbelief too! What's certain is that the Tortoise could not even earn his daily lettuce if he were that incoherent (and insouciant). I do sense, though, some conflation or breakdown of the distinction between subjective [i.e., felt] certainty and formal [hence objective] necessity here. Maybe this is what Descartes meant by "conceiving clearly and distinctly"...)***JS:*** *"Even if [the sentio] were true (and I doubt it is), it would not demonstrate that feelings lacked causal efficacy."*That's right. The sentio just establishes the certainty of the existence of feelings. It is the empirical falsity of telekinetic dualism and the empirical nonexistence of a 5th force that seem to entail that feelings are doomed to be noncausal (unless you have an explanation of how and why -- or you have evidence of a telekinetic 5th force)... **J*S:*** *"If you say “I think, therefore I am” to yourself, you are no more convinced of your existence than you had been previously."* No. But it is drawn to my (momentary) attention, clearly and distinctly, that I cannot doubt the existence of feeling (the way I can doubt so much else that I feel).***JS:*** *"...the I exists only in so far as there is... the kind of thinking which utilizes certain grammatical forms.  The mistake is in thinking that grammatical forms always refer to specific things."*It is not about the existence of the "I" and it is not about grammatical forms. It's about the existence of feelings, irrespective of syntax (be it "sentio ergo sentitur" or "I am doubting I am thinking, but doubting is thinking, hence I cannot doubt that thinking is going on, after all; hence there is thinking.")***JS:*** *"Descartes noticed that the act of thinking “I am not thinking” implied that he was thinking.  And he concluded that only via such action did he exist as such.  Yet, he misinterpreted the nature of the action.  He believed the word “I” had to refer to something, and since everything outside of the act of thinking was dubitable, he postulated himself as “pure consciousness.”  If we wanted to interpret “pure consciousness” here, we might regard it as “thing which uses grammar.”  Any other interpretation could seem extravagant."*I have no idea what "pure consciousness" means, nor what "grammar" has to do with it. The only truth that is free of mystification here is that if you feel something (and we do) then that's one less thing you can be sceptical about. That's all. The rest is about explaining how and why we feel.***JS:*** *"my question remains:  How is your argument for a feeling/functing distinction different from the theistic arguments I mentioned?"*It differs in that the only thing the *sentitur* entails is that feelings exist (not that whatever you feel exists -- e.g. grass, people, your body, gods, hobgoblins, heaven -- exists). It is a bottom limit on incredulous scepticism, rather than yet another form of fideism. (But apart from that, it just points out a problem -- the unexplained existence of feeling -- not the solution.)***JS:*** *"Descartes believed that the act of thinking “I am not thinking” produces an awareness of a contradiction..."* So far, this construal presupposes that a contradiction *does* have certifying force after all (necessary truth on pain of contradiction). [This reinforces my hunch that Descartes *did* consider NOT (P & NOT-P) certain too.]***JS:*** *"But this is only to say that the utterance of the sentence “I am not thinking” feels contradictory.  And how is the correct interpretation of that feeling established?"*Let me restate it in the form that makes the contradiction more obvious: "Thinking (and feeling) 'I am not feeling' *feels* contradictory -- and it sure is, if anything is. No interpretational issues at all. Just an understanding of what it means to feel, and what it means to affirm (and deny). (And, of course, being *compos mentis*.)The *sentitur* version is much simpler than that: Because we feel (when we feel), we can be certain feeling exists. Not just certain that "I am feeling now and I am not feeling now" is self-contradictory, but that there is one fact -- and one fact alone -- of felt experience that is not open to sceptical doubt: that it is felt. *Sentitur.****JS:*** *"Couldn’t one doubt the feeling of a contradiction?  Couldn’t one doubt one’s grammar?"*One cannot doubt a statement that is necessarily true on pain of contradiction. One can only fail to understand it. But the cogito/sentio is not just a tautology like "If I'm feeling then I'm feeling" which has no more synthetic force than "If I'm flying then I'm flying" -- for there is no way I can know with certainty that I am flying. But I *can* know with certainty that I am feeling. (That's why I [said](http://philpapers.org/post/1060) "I don't know which one of Kant's baroque categories is the right name for it, but the cogito is either a "synthetic a-priori" or an "analytic a-posteriori": it certainly isn't an analytic a-priori (i.e., a tautology)."***JS:*** *"...if you really doubted that you felt anything, a pinch on the cheek wouldn’t prove anything to you."*If you really doubted that you felt anything at all then all that would prove was that, like the tortoise, you had not understood the question (or that you were not *compos mentis*).**J*S:*** *"You think you can doubt that you have a body, but not that you have a mind.  This, I maintain, is impossible."*  Jason, I don't think you have quite understood scepticism. The sceptic does not say it is true that you have no body, just that it is not impossible. Hence you cannot be *certain* you have no body. (You cannot be certain there are no gods either, or that there is gravity!) But you can be certain that (1) NOT (P & NOT-P) -- and (2) that you are feeling (when you feel). And hence you can be certain that feeling exists (though not how or why!).**J*S:*** *"the statement “you do not exist” invites just as much contradiction as “I do not exist,” and saying “you do not have a mind” is just as meaningful as saying “I do not have a mind.”*To repeat: This is not about truth but about certainty. And it is not about the existence of an "I" but about the existence of a feeling, which, be it ever so fleeting, also entails a "feeler," whatever that means...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1203>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=1203&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-06-06 -- Reply to [**Robin Faichney**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1184)

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| **WHAT MAKES "ABOUTNESS" MENTAL****RF:** *"Some philosophers [say] messages and such have merely derived intentionality, while mental states are intrinsically intentional, but I've yet to see a convincing explanation of the difference between intrinsic and derived intentionality"*How about this one:There is no difference between the string of symbols "the cat is on the mat" when it is instantiated in a static book, in a dynamic computer program or in a dynamic (toy) robot. In the book and the program, all the meaning ("intentionality," "aboutness")  is in the mind of the interpreter (reader, author, programmer, user), not in the book or the program. (I.e., the meaning of all the symbols and symbol strings is derived, not intrinsic to the book or program.) Indeed, not only is the meaning not intrinsic, it is not even [grounded](http://cogprints.org/0615/), in the sense that neither the book nor the computer program has the sensorimotor capacity to interact with the things that its symbols are systematically interpretable as being about in a way that is (likewise systematically) congruent with what the symbols are systematically interpretable as being about.Ditto for a toy robot. In the case of a Turing-Test (TT) scale robot, whose performance capacity in the world of objects and discourse is indistinguishable from that of any of the rest of us (for a lifetime, if need be), the internal symbol strings are indeed grounded in the TT robot's capacity for sensorimotor interaction with what they are systematically interpretable as being about. That takes the external interpreter out of the loop; but *that's still just sensorimotor grounding, not intrinsic meaning*. The only way meaning becomes intrinsic is if there is *something it feels like to be the TT robot*, instantiating the symbol string in question.It is not at all clear how and why there is (or need be) *felt* meaning rather than just sensorimotor (robotic) grounding (i.e., just functing). That's another variant of the explanatory gap.**RF:** *"a clear and concise explanation of what consciousness is, is impossible."*No need. It's just feeling, and we all know what that is. What needs explanation is not what feeling is, but how and why it exists. That too is the explanatory gap.Harnad, S. (1990) [The Symbol Grounding Problem](http://cogprints.org/0615/). Physica D 42: 335-346. Harnad, S. (1992) [There is only one mind body problem](http://cogprints.org/1625/). International Journal of Psychology 27(3-4) p. 521 Harnad, S. (2001) [Harnad on Dennett on Chalmers on Consciousness: The Mind/Body Problem is the Feeling/Function Problem](http://cogprints.org/2130). (Unpublished Preprint)Harnad, S. (2001) [Minds, Machines and Searle II: What's Wrong and Right About Searle's Chinese Room Argument?](http://cogprints.org/1622/) In: M. Bishop&J. Preston (eds.) Essays on Searle's Chinese Room Argument. Oxford University Press. Harnad, S. (2007) [From Knowing How To Knowing That: Acquiring Categories By Word of Mouth](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14517/). Presented at Kaziemierz Naturalized Epistemology Workshop (KNEW), Kaziemierz, Poland, 2 September 2007. Harnad, S. and Scherzer, P. (2007) [First, Scale Up to the Robotic Turing Test, Then Worry About Feeling](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14430/). In Proceedings of 2007 Fall Symposium on AI and Consciousness, Washington DC. Harnad, S. (2008) [The Annotation Game:](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/7741/) On Turing (1950) on Computing, Machinery and Intelligence. In: Epstein, Robert&Peters, Grace (Eds.) Parsing the Turing Test: Philosophical and Methodological Issues in the Quest for the Thinking Computer. Springer  Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1204>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=1204&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

2009-06-08 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1207)

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| **CORTICAL COUNTERFACTUALS**[**JS**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1207)**: "***Wouldn’t we say that the brain (or whatever feels feelings) would not be the same had feelings not existed?"*As I am just about as sure (modulo scepticism) that the brain causes feeling (somehow) as I am of any other apparent empirical fact, I of course agree that a brain that could not cause feeling would be a different brain!But seconding this relatively anodyne assertion does not alter by one synapse the real problem, which is that there is no explanation of how the brain causes feeling, and even more problematically, there is no explanation of *why*. For whereas the brain-cause of feeling (whatever that is, and whatever way it manages to cause feeling) certainly has causal power, the feelings themselves do not, even though it feels like they do. Indeed, they cannot have causal power except if telekinetic dualism is true, and feeling constitutes a 5th fundamental force in the universe... So the brain causes both doing (explicably) and feeling (inexplicably), but the feeling causes nothing, and what it feels like feeling causes is really just caused by the causes of feeling, with the feeling just dangling there, ineffectually (and inexplicably).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1212> |

2009-06-08 -- Reply to [**Robin Faichney**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1208)

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| **HERMENEUTICS DOES NOT CLOSE THE EXPLANATORY GAP, IT JUST OBFUSCATES IT**[**RF**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1208)**:** *"A proper explanation of the difference between intrinsic and derived intentionality would close the explanatory gap..."*It sure would! (And your point is?...)**RF:** *"...feelings are reasons for action, not causes of it..."*X: Why did you do that?Y: Because I felt like it.X: That's a *reason*?(And, while you're at it, why are reasons *felt*, rather than just acted upon [i.e., functed]?)**RF:** *"...and the types of discourse in which these concepts [reasons and causes] occur are different..."*Discourse? Concepts? I was just asking how organisms feel, and why organisms feel...**RF:** *"...'why' questions are answered by giving reasons, while 'how' questions are answered in terms of causes..."*X: I wonder why the apple fell?Y: Because of gravitational attraction.X: So *that's* the reason!And "why" is a causal, functional question too: "Why do arch bridges have to have an abutment at either end? To restrain the horizontal thrust." "How do arch bridges restrain the horizontal thrust? By having abutments at either end."And if feeling is indeed noncausal, then substituting "reasons" for causes hangs from a skyhook rather like the Cheshire Cat's smile, by way of explanation. (Explanations, incidentally, unlike interpretations, are not immune to objective refutation. And what is at issue in the case of the explanatory gap is a causal explanation of feeling, not a social or linguistic interpretation.)**RF:** *"Reasons are appropriate in social, intersubjective contexts, while causes occur in mechanistic, technical or scientific narratives..."*So why do worms feel? For social, intersubjective reasons? What's their "narrative"?**RF:** *"That's why we have the social sciences, and the arts and humanities..."*But without the brain (and its causal powers) the social sciences, arts and humanities would not have *us*...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1213>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=1213&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-06-10 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1220)

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| **AT:** *"it appears to me that you are a mind-brain dualist in denial. If the brain causes feelings, then feelings must be a particular kind of biophysical process that has causal powers like all biophysical processes. When you claim that feelings have no causal power, you clearly have the burden of explaining how feelings can be physically caused yet play no causal role in the physical universe."*Well that was easy! Here we were, thinking there might be a special problem about explaining how and why we feel. And it turns out that all you need to do is say "they're a biophysical process" and the problem's solved: We can go back to describing the brain correlates of feeling and that's all there is and ever was to it. Just as if we had said "the brain causes moving." Interesting that no one ever thought there was a special problem about explaining how and why we move...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1232> |

2009-06-11 -- Reply to [**JWK Matthewson Matthewson**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1229)

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| **QUANTUM MECHANICAL VOODOO****JWKMM:** *"Something that is puzzling me about this discussion is the absence of any treatment of how anything causes anything."*No, the explanatory gap is not in the explanation of causation; it is in the explanation of how and why we feel rather than just funct.(This discussion thread is predictably resurrecting and recycling the usual rationalizations and red herrings that keep papering over the explanatory gap. Perhaps it will help to name and identify them. This one is QM voodoo...)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1237> |

2009-06-11 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1222)

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| **ON NOT COUNTING ONE'S EXPLANATORY CHICKENS BEFORE THEIR EGGS ARE LAID****JS:***"Wouldn't whatever feels feelings (in some particular instance) be different if feelings had not been felt (in that particular instance)?'*This is putting the analytical cart before the explanatory horse. No one has a clue of a clue as to how or why the brain causes feelings. So it does not advance our (non)understanding and our (non)explanation of that fact in any way to start doing an a-priori partition of the nonexistent "components" of that nonexistent explanation.Keep it simple: We don't know how or why the brain causes feelings. We (rightly) *assume* it does, somehow. Your a-priori partition does not dispel or lighten the mystery of how or why the brain does that; nor does it carry understanding forward by one nanometer. (It probably spuriously *multiplies* the mystery, by implying that there is both a feeler *and* a feeling to account for.) The question is how and why. *Don't count* (as John Searle used to say): *Explain* (as I would add). Nor does it help to try to squeeze extra causality out of an unexplicated causal *assumption* -- the assumption that surely the brain causes feeling, *somehow or other* (as we all agree, whether we admit it or not). There is nevertheless a gap there that only a genuine causal explanation (or even a coherent causal hypothesis) can fill. When I say that feelings have no causal power, all I mean is that the telekinetic power we all quite naturally *feel* they have -- "I did it because I felt like it" -- is just *felt* causality, and cannot be true, because telekinesis is not true. Hence what got done was not caused to get done by my feeling. It was caused by whatever in my brain (somehow) also caused my feeling. That leaves the fact of my feeling the unexplained causal dangler it has been all along.If it is the notion of a brain structure or process *causing* feeling rather than (somehow) just "being" feeling (as Arnold Trehub would prefer it) that bothers you, let it be "being" then: How and why is it that some brain structures or processes are *felt* structures or processed rather than just *functed* structures or processes (like the rest)? Yes, they are felt. The question is (and remains) how and why.**JS:***"[If] you distinguish between event X (which causes a particular feeling) and event Y (in which that particular feeling is felt)... 'feelings' are events which are not simply causes of feelings; and whatever feels feelings (in some particular case) would be different had these events not occurred. If not, then the term 'feelings' refers to the causes of feelings, and those are what you term 'functing'."*Jason, you may feel you are making some explanatory headway from such vague hypothetical conditionals: I feel they are just juggling the non-contents of a completely empty explanatory box, insofar as the question of how and why we feel is concerned...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1238> |

2009-06-11 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1235)

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| **ON THE FUNCTIONAL INDISTINGUISHABILITY OF FUNCTIONAL INDISTINGUISHABLES****AT:** *"The solution [to the] special problem in explaining how and why we feel... is provided by detailing the structure and dynamics of the brain mechanisms that generate a transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective."*I hope that when you disclose the solution, Arnold, you will also disclose how and why a "transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective" is a *felt* "transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective" rather than just a *functed* "transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective"... That, alas, is the real explanatory gap, which is not just a matter of explaining how and why the neural correlates of a "transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective" are indeed generating a "transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective." That's not where the problem lies.For, on the face of it, such a "representation" would appear to be precisely as functional and adaptive for a *feelingless* Darwinian survival machine that is otherwise much like (indeed, [Turing-Indistinguishable](http://cogprints.org/1616/) from) ourselves. Or at least explain *how and why* there [could not be](http://cogprints.org/1601/) a Darwinian survival machine with a "transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective" unless the "transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective" was felt.  In other words, (just as in all perpetual motion machine candidates to date!) something still seems to be missing here: why and how is your "transparent representation" felt rather than just functed?And while you're at it, I hope you'll also explain how and why worms and slugs feel "ouch" too, if you pinch them... (If you deny that they feel, my prediction is that you will be denying many of the neural correlates of feeling in us too.) Ditto for profoundly demented and near-comatose Alzheimer's patients who no longer have much of a  "transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective" but still hurt if you pinch them.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1240> |

2009-06-12 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1241)

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| **SH**: "Or at least explain how and why there [could not be](http://cogprints.org/1601/) a Darwinian survival machine with a 'transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective' unless the 'transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective' was felt."**AT:** *"My answer is that since its ['transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective'] is its feeling..., it already has feeling and has no need to feel its feeling... [I]f it didn't have feeling... it wouldn't have ['transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective']... [and] I do deny that worms and slugs feel... The reason is that worms and slugs don't have ['transparent representation of the world from a privileged egocentric perspective']."*I guess that settles it then... Your theory is right by definition. No need to explain any further...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1245> |

2009-06-13 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1249)

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| **AT:** *"If you disagree with my definition of... feeling, please provide us with your preferred definition."*(1) Everyone knows what feeling is, as they have all felt. They no more need a definition of feeling than they need a definition of green.(2) The problem is not defining feeling but explaining it: How and why are some functions felt rather than just functed?(3) Your "theory" would simply make that into a nonproblem -- by definition.(4) That's not problem-solving; it is question-begging.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1252> |

2009-06-13 -- Reply to [**Derek Allan**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1253)

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| **ON FEELING, FALLING, "DEFINING" AND EXPLAINING****DA:** *"If that approach were really valid, why not go the whole hog and say: 'We are all conscious, therefore we must know what consciousness is'. There would be no further need for philosophical discussion of the matter. Case closed."*Because what is needed is an *explanation* (e.g., gravity) of the datum, not a "definition."(In mathematics, you first prove your theorem, and then you formulate a definition. In science you first explain your datum, and then you formulate a definition. Definitions don't explain. An ostensive "definition" of the datum is more than enough to get you started on an explanation -- if, that is, you have an explanation...)Derek, please do not expect a further response from me if your only rejoinder is the one you keep repeating -- about first needing to "define" the datum (consciousness). We've closed the circle on that one enough times already. No new information is being transmitted in either direction.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1255> |

2009-06-14 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1256)

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| **AT:** *"Gravity... is a fundamental force that has not been explained, just as... feeling... has not been explained"*But feeling is *not* a fundamental force, otherwise that would be telekinesis, and telekinesis is false, because contradicted by all evidence. Hence we are entitled to expect an explanation -- and obligated to admit we haven't one: The explanatory gap.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1262> |

2009-06-15 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1266)

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| **HOW AND WHY DO APPLES FALL -- AND PEOPLE FEEL?*****AT:*** "Gravity per se is a fundamental force that has not been explained, just as consciousness/feeling per se (its sheer existence) has not been explained and probably cannot be explained, as I have stated earlier in this thread."**SH:**  -- "***AT:****'Gravity... is a fundamental force that has not been explained, just as... feeling... has not been explained'* "**SH:**"But feeling is not a fundamental force ... Hence we are entitled to expect an explanation -- and obligated to admit we haven't one: The explanatory gap." **AT:** *"What I said, as you can see above, is that the sheer existence of consciousness/feeling, like gravity, has not been explained and probably cannot be explained. Why do you insist that I admit what I have admitted from the very beginning of this thread?"*My elisions were intentional (replacing "consciousness/feeling" with "feeling" and leaving out the rest). My point was that we are not entitled to say that "How and why do people feel?" is inexplicable in the same sense that "How and why is there gravity?" is inexplicable.Feeling, unlike gravity, is not a fundamental force, a primitive explanatory "given" that can then be used in explaining other things caused by it. Feeling is more like falling. The answer to "How and why do apples fall?" is "because of gravity (etc.)," but the answer to "How and why do people feel?" is... an explanatory gap.**AT:** *Having said this, my claim is that what we might call the content of consciousness, namely phenomena, can be explained, and I have proposed an explanatory theory (the retinoid model).*Again, the deconstruction is instructive: *"...my claim is that what we [feel], namely [feelings], can be explained, and I have proposed an explanatory theory..."*Your theory explains the functional correlates of feeling. We already know *what* we feel. What we had wanted to know was how and why...**AT:** *Question: Are we justified in saying that consciousness exists without content? In other words, if a person has no phenomenal content, can we say that that person is conscious? Or is "consciousness" just a word that points to any and all instances of phenomenal content?*Deconstruction: *"...if a person has no [felt feeling], can we say that that person [feels]?...****"***Please see earlier threads on "[uncomplemented categories](http://www.google.com/search?q=site:philpapers.org+philpapers+harnad+uncomplemented&hl=en&safe=active&num=100&filter=0)" and what it feels like to feel nothing.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1270> |

2009-06-17 -- Reply to [**JWK Matthewson Matthewson**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1280)

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| **WHEN AND WHERE DOES NOT EXPLAIN HOW OR WHY****JWKMM:** *"...functions are successions of instantaneous forms, each having gone before the next appears whereas [feeling] is a time extended entity."*I can't comment on your description of gravity and space-time -- that is for physicists to discuss -- except to say that it has no connection with the question of how and why we feel. Yes, when and where we are feeling is somewhere in space and time (though there are some methodological problems with pinpointing exactly when and where the feeling is occurring). But when and where does not explain how or why. Yes, feelings have a felt duration and location. But felt duration and location are not the same as location and duration; indeed, function and feeling are correlated (mysteriously), but incommensurable, one being functed and measurable by anyone/anything, the other being felt and only palpable to the feeler. ("Psychophysics," by the way, only measures the relation between inputs and outputs, both of which are merely functional. Not a single datum of psychophysics would change if we were just feelingless sensorimotor survival machines, functing.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1289> |

2009-06-18 -- Reply to [**JWK Matthewson Matthewson**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1295)

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| **GETTING BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM WIGNER'S FRIEND...****JWKMM:** *"[W]e know that a blow on the head ruins most psychophysical measurements... [T]he widespread belief that nothing would change if [feeling] were removed... is obviously empirically false."*A blow on the head of a feelingless toy robot ruins most input/output measurements too, so what is your point? A blow perturbs both functing and any (mysteriously) correlated feeling.The problem (and the explanatory gap) is not the belief that nothing would change if feeling were "removed" (and functing were preserved intact), but explaining *how and why* it would change (or be impossible).**JWKMM: "***Functions... are an excellent formalised way of designing and predicting the operation of material systems but they do not actually tell us what makes the system operate or what it [feels] like to be the system."*You are repeating the question ("how and why do organisms feel rather than just funct?"), not answering it.**JWKMM:** *"If there were no time dilation and the position of the apple were represented by a succession of 3D forms then the apple would not fall to earth.  Successions of 3D forms... do not even explain how an apple falls to the ground so it is hardly surprising that they do not explain feelings."*Your quarrel is with physicists, and how they explain how and why an apple falls. Settle it with them, please. It casts no light (only gratuitous, imported darkness) on the already sufficiently daunting problem of how and why organisms feel. I am happy with how and why apples fall; I am asking about how and why people feel. (The explanatory gap is wide enough on its own.)**JWKMM:** *"Given that [feeling]... is essential for the smooth running of our brains... We are... not justified in... assuming... machines... [can] continue operating for any length of time in the total absence of direct or indirect interaction with a [feeling] observer."*Please take that up with [Schroedinger's Cat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schr%C3%B6dinger%27s_cat) and [Wigner's Friend](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wigner%27s_friend). It says nothing whatsoever about how and why we feel; it simply presupposes it, and imports QM's koans, yet again. (By this token, not only would the proverbial tree falling in the forest make no sound in a feelingless world -- that much is true, sound being a feeling, acoustic vibrations being merely functing -- but it would not even fall...)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1307>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=1307&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2009-06-22 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1323)

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| **"FEELING-BEHAVIOR"**[**JS**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1323)**:** *"Complex patterns of neural activity result in external behavior which is classifiable as "pain behavior" and 'love behavior'...”*Pain behavior? Love behavior? I don't know about you, Jason, but when I say ouch, I'm not just exhibiting "pain behavior": it feels like something: It hurts! I can exhibit "pain behavior" without its hurting, and it can hurt without my exhibiting pain behavior. Same thing for my dog. And half-same for my robot: It can exhibit pain behavior without feeling anything. What it can't do is feel anything, with or without pain behavior. Same for a rock, except it can't even exhibit pain behavior.Neural activity? Yes, only I and my dog have it, not the robot or the rock. And I don't doubt that if you analyzed it carefully, you would find which neural activity pattern was correlated with my feeling pain (whether or not I exhibit pain behavior), so that you can fairly safely say that that neural activity causes or constitutes the pain, *somehow*.The question is *how*? -- and, even more important, *why*? *That's* the explanatory gap. In contrast, there's no gap whatsoever for causing "pain behavior."  Explaining how and why the brain causes behavior is not in the least problematic. It's the neural causes of *feeling* that are the problem -- and especially explaining (causally, functionally) why there should be any feeling at all, rather than just pain behavior, since that does perfectly well for all functional (including Darwinian) purposes.Behavior -- doing -- and processes that generate doing, are all unproblematic functing, insofar as causal explanation is concerned. It is with feeling that the explanatory problem arises.**JS:** *"People come to use terms like "pain" and "love" to refer to the causes of this behavior, what we call emotions and other mental events, which are the complex patterns of neural activity...”*  Nothing of the sort, Jason. When I am talking about my pain I am talking about a *feeling*, not a complex pattern of neural activity. My referent is the feeling. If it happens that a complex pattern of neural activity in fact causes or "constitutes" that feeling, *somehow*, then I am, unbeknownst to me, also referring to that complex pattern of neural activity whenever I refer to that feeling. But the explanatory gap is to explain how and why that complex pattern of neural activity causes or constitutes that feeling, and your behavioral, linguistic and neural elaborations do not help in the least. They just paper over the gaping gap. **JS:** *"I think we would benefit from replacing this 'why' question with another one:  why do some brain functions produce pain behavior, and others love behavior, and so on? This question has the advantage of not presupposing an explanatory gap.”*Begging a question always has advantages over trying to answer it, if one cannot; supposing that there is nothing to explain is even more advantageous.If you can't explain to me how and why brain functions produce "feeling" at all, it certainly won't help to change the question to why they (inexplicably) produce this feeling rather than that one.And forget about behavior: Explaining how they produce behavior -- or this behavior rather than that one -- is a snap. It's how and why that behavior is accompanied or preceded (let alone caused) by *feeling* that constitutes the gap.J**S:** *"The [neural] properties are not the objects being felt, but the process of feeling itself.”*That does not help: To see exactly why it doesn't help, just go a head and try to answer, instead, the question "how and why are certain neural properties the process of feeling" (rather than just whatever else they are -- secreting, firing, or what have you: functing). There is no way that one can wiggle out of an explanation that we are certainly entitled to ask for, and that we are certainly owed, if certain neural processes that occur before or during feeling are simply dubbed "the process of feeling itself": Until further (explanatory) notice, the neural processes are exactly what they are observable to be, namely, neural processes (and possibly also the causes of certain behaviors); functing. That they also somehow happen to be "the process of feeling" remains to be explained.**JS:** *"(This is why I keep stressing to Stevan that there is no feeling of feeling.  The concept of "what it is like to feel" is meaningful, but without referent.)”*Too many words: The expression "what it feels like to feel" was only used to try to communicate with those commentators in this thread who wanted to argue that they do not feel, or don't know whether they feel, or don't know what it means to feel. If you do not resort to any of these rhetorical routes to evading the question, then there is no need for me to resort to any complex locutions like "what it feels like to feel": you know what we're talking about, and we can take it from there: How? Why?**JS:** *"I'm not going to address the stuff about Descartes, certainty, and skepticism, because it would make this post too long.  I think you have profoundly misunderstood my response to Descartes...”*I'll wait to hear the reasons why you think so...**JS: "I** *am not convinced by your claim that there are two kinds of certainty.”*We can take a rain check on that too, till you're ready...**JS:** *"I asked if you distinguished between the event in which a feeling is caused and the event in which it is felt.  You replied by saying that making such a distinction would "place the analytic cart before the explanatory horse."  So you do not regard “feeling a feeling” and “causing a feeling to exist” as distinct events.”*I think that "feeling," *simpliciter*, is problem enough; no need to talk about what it feels like to feel if I am not arguing with someone who claims he doesn't know what I mean by "feeling" or who claims he doesn't feel or doesn't know whether he feels.As to "causing a feeling to exist" -- well that's the question, isn't it? How and why does the brain cause a feeling to exist? (And the "why" is the hardest part, because "pain behavior" and "love behavior” would seem to be all that an organism (and its brain, and its genes) really ever need, functionally and causally. Why are some functions felt rather than just functed? Why is pain *not* just "pain [actually, nociceptive and nocifugal] behavior": unfelt, just functed?**JS:** *"[Y]ou cannot claim that an explanation of “causing a feeling to exist” is not an explanation of “feeling a feeling," or that there is a feeling/functing distinction at all.”*You're absolutely right, Jason. If ever I hear a coherent, credible explanation of how the brain "causes a feeling -- not "feeling behavior" but *feeling* -- to exist, I will happily relent, and move on to ask *why*: But I have yet to hear such a causal explanation. And since the brain mostly just functs, this particular challenge specifically concerns the special cases when the brain (mysteriously) causes feeling -- or, if you like, *felt functing* rather than the usual *unfelt functing* (and adaptive behavior).If you feel it represents some sort of progress, please replace the feeling/functing problem with the felt-functing/unfelt-functing problem. (I don't see much explanatory headway there, just verbal massage.)**JS:** *"You can, at best, claim that there might be such a distinction to be made at some future point; but it remains to be seen what such a distinction could amount to.”*Not at all. The felt-functing/unfelt-functing distinction can and must be made right now (unless we wish to set the question aside for some future point). And it is not "what the distinction amounts to" that remains to be seen, but the explanation of how and why the brain produces felt functing rather than just unfelt functing that remains to be heard.**JS: "***You say "don't count," but you play the counting game when you say that feeling implies a feeler.”*The counting was about kinds of "stuff," but never mind. I'm content with an explanation of feeling *simpliciter*. No need to fuss about explaining a feeler too.**JS:** *"The issue is not whether or not feelings... exist, but... whether or not feelings are causal.  As you have acknowledged, this issue is not decided by the sentitur.”*I agree here on all counts: It is whether feelings *exist* that is decided by the *sentitur*. Its causal explanation is another matter.And since you (unlike some of my other interlocutors) are not denying that feelings exist, what's left is indeed to explain (1) how the brain causes feelings and (2) *why* -- which is the same as asking whether felt functing has causal powers -- powers lacked by unfelt functing -- in virtue of the fact that it is *felt* functing (rather than other functional properties in which it might differ from unfelt functing in the same way that one form of unfelt functing might differ from another).**JS:** *"When people normally think of feelings as being causal... they are [not] thinking about telekinesis... [but] about the functionality of the brain...”*When I say I lifted my finger because I felt like it, I am not talking about the functionality of my brain but about the causal power of my mind. Unpacked, that amounts to telekinesis. I may *believe* my brain is somehow behind it all (and of course I do, and it is), but I certainly cannot say how or why. And that's the gap.**JS:** *"For the rest, I am not sure they are talking coherently about anything at all”*I am not sure what you mean by "the rest," but if you are rescinding the existence of feelings -- or that they feel causal -- then we are back to square one. Otherwise, it remains to explain how feelings are caused and what, if anything, they in turn *cause*, *qua* feelings**JS:** *"[W]e can talk about feelings as being causal without invoking telekinesis or new forces of nature”*We can talk, to be sure, and do, but can we explain how and why?**JS:** *"I think your feeling/functing distinction is partially shaped by your view that there are uncomplemented categories, and your claim that the category of "feeling" is doomed to be philosophically problematic because it is uncomplemented.”*Agreed so far (though I don't think the uncomplementedness of the the category "feeling" casts much light on the mystery of the causal status of feeling). **JS:** *" 'what it is like to be a bachelor' does not refer to every felt experience from birth to the time a male person gets married' ”*In a sense it certainly does, just as "what if feels like to be happy" refers to every happy experience from birth. But nothing much rides on that. Let us say it is based on some particularly salient instances -- the ones involving the variables that are most likely to change if one married. It is also based on salient extrapolations and analogies, trying to fill in the missing complementary experience. I don't think tasting an apple would change much if I were married, but going to bed might; and it *might* be like going to bed with someone to whom one is not married, but then again it might not, etc.These putatively salient positive instances, plus analogies and extrapolations, may or may not give me a veridical sense of what it would feel like to be married, and hence what the relevant features are that distinguish that from what it feels like to be a bachelor. In principle I could be far wrong (though not quite at the scale of [color-blind super-neuroscientist Mary](http://www.reference.com/go/http%3A//www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/papers/ecs.pdf) when her color-vision is first implanted); but in practice I am probably very near right. Hence I probably *do* already know perfectly well what it feels like to be a bachelor, thanks to my analogies and extrapolations. Not so, though, for what it feels like to be awake, to be alive -- or, for that matter, to feel. For negative instances are impossible in all three cases (which are all variants of the same case, really), and hence any analogies or extrapolations are moot.**JS:** *"you confuse sense with reference, and wrongly think that all of our categories (such as “feeling something” or “what it is like to be a bachelor”) must refer to something specific.”*I don't think I am confusing sense with reference at all, regarding the sense and reference of feeling. The referent is the feeling, and the sense is the means or rule for identifying the referent. To compare: The referent of "apple" is those round, red fruits we've all seen and eaten. And it is their roundness and redness that I use to pick them out (and distinguish them from their complement, say, bananas). The referent of "prime number" is those numbers that are indivisible by anything but 1 and themselves, and trying to divide them by other numbers is what I use to pick them out (and distinguish them from their complement, say, even numbers, or composite numbers).The referent of "migraine" is that unpleasant feeling in my head, and feeling something in my head that is unpleasant in that way is what I use to detect migraines (and distinguish them from, say, vertigo).Yes, an apple may also have biological properties that I don't perceive, and that I might need an expert and instruments to detect; that too would be part of its sense. Ditto for prime numbers, and properties of theirs that you must be a number theorist to know about.For migraines too, there's my head out there, and nociceptive centers in my brain, that help me pick out the referent. And let's say that the usual cause of a migraine is vasoconstriction. Migraines differ from apples and prime numbers, however, because if something felt like a migraine even if I had no vasoconstriction, and even when my brain was misbehaving, and generating a feeling of migraine when the part that's really amiss is the projection area for my lower back. Either way, if it feels like a migraine, it's a migraine, because what a migraine feels like is what a migraine is, qua feeling (as opposed to a symptom that may or may not reliably signal that there is something amiss with my cranial blood vessels).The migraine sense/reference story is hence profoundly (perhaps Lockeanly, though I'm not sure he quite got it) different from the apple sense/reference story, in that what *looks* red and round, as if it were an apple, is not necessarily an apple -- though it is undeniable that it *looks like* an apple (which is, of course, to speak, again, of the *feeling* as the referent, rather than the apple). An even better example of an incorrigible referent is feeling happy, which has no other object but itself. Even if it is a "mistakenly referred happiness," insofar as its neural substrate is concerned, activity in the pain center mistakenly mimicking activity in the pleasure center, or what have you: That changes nothing. If you feel happy, the feeling is a feeling of happiness, not a feeling of unhappiness (unless you happen to be feeling both).So, no, I am not confusing sense with reference. When I refer to something, there is that something, whether it is an apple or an agony. And I pick out apple on the basis of its sensed or otherwise detectable properties; and I may be right or wrong. But with agony, even if it is (usually or always) correlated with activity in the agony center of my brain, the referent is the feeling of agony (even if, for reasons unknown to me or anyone, the activity in the agony center of my brain may cause or constitute my feeling of agony, *somehow*). It could be (as Wittgenstein would point out), that this feeling I am (undeniably) feeling right now -- which feels to me like agony, and exactly like the agony I have felt before -- is not in fact the agony I felt before; indeed, perhaps I've never felt agony before; it only *feels* as if I've felt it before. So there's a problem with calling it "agony," because I speak in order to share categories with others, and not only can others not feel what I feel ("privately"), nor can I feel what they feel, but I can't even be sure whether what I am feeling now is what I myself have felt before (and called "agony," then); I can't be sure they are in fact the same feeling. All of this incorrigible Wittgensteinian uncertainty is there, to be sure, and I in no way contest it. It is just another one of the many things sceptics are right to remind us that we cannot be certain about (including the continuity of personal identity and even the instant to instant continuity of feeling). But of course uncertainty and unverifiability do not mean necessary falsity either. This *could* be exactly the same agony I felt and called agony yesterday; and even the same agony you feel and call agony. I just can't be sure.But the aspect of feeling that is at issue here is not the Wittgensteinian uncertainty about *which* feeling it is but the cartesian certainty that it is indeed being felt. *That* is the referent in question in these discussions.**JS:** *"[F]amily resemblance categories do not pick out anything specific.  (And I do not see the sense in saying, as you do, that “a long disjunction” can be the invariant of a category.  A long disjunction is no invariant at all.)”*(1) If you can categorize X's at all, you are picking out something specific, something of which there are positive instances (the members of the category X) and negative instances (the nonmembers of the category X; the members of its complement, not-X).(2) If you can categorize X's at all, you have to be able to detect whether an instance is or is not a member of the category X. (3) Those instances that you are unable to categorize correctly, you are simply unable to categorize. (If someone else can categorize them correctly, then they can categorize them, but you cannot.)(4) It matters not a bit whether you can categorize X's correctly by detecting that all X's are P and all non-X's are not-P or you can categorize X's correctly by detecting that all X's are "L or M or not-N or (more Q than R) or (if S then not-T)", otherwise they are not-X's. Just let P = "L or M or not-N or (more Q than R) or (if S then not-T)". (5) But don't conflate that perfectly viable disjunctive invariant P in the case where you are indeed able to correctly categorize on the basis of P with the entirely different case where there are some instances you cannot categorize at all. For there the problem is not that the invariant is disjunctive but that you cannot categorize. (6) If there is correct categorization there is (at least) one invariant, P, on which the successful categorization is based. If there is no invariant, there is *no category at all*, not a "family resemblance" category.**JS: "***We can more or less agree on how to apply family resemblance categories, but we do not always agree, especially when confronted with new cases.”*Where I and others agree in our categorizations, it is because there are detectable invariants, and we share them (or their equivalents). Where we disagree in our categorizations, we are either using different invariants (hence making somewhat different categorizations), or there is no category, or we have not yet fully mastered it and -- like dubbing whatever happens to feel like agony -- and as if it always was "agony" -- today as "agony," even though it isn't and never was  -- we are simply sorting mistakenly or arbitrarily.In brief, if we can categorize correctly, there are invariants, and we have them; if we cannot categorize correctly then either there are no invariants or we do not yet have them.**JS:** *"To show that “what it feels like to feel something” is complemented, I provided an example of how “what it feels like to feel nothing” makes sense.  I noted that it makes sense to answer the question “what does it feel like to be a rock?” by saying 'nothing'.”*There is no problem at all (modulo the other-minds problem, of course) with categorizing "things that can feel" and "things that can't feel": animals fall in the former category, rocks are in the latter; and for one-celled organisms and plants we are not sure (but probably they can't). That's like categorizing apples.But that's not the uncomplemented category at issue here. The category at issue is the superordinate category for what migraines, pain, loudness, love, euphoria, agony, bachelorhood feel like -- all particular feelings, with their own perfectly adequate complements (what vasodilation, painlessness, quiet, hatred, depression, ecstasy, and connubiality feel like). These are the pears, bananas and strawberries that complement apples. What is uncomplemented is feeling itself, because there is nothing that non-feeling feels like; it is a contradiction in terms -- unlike apple's superordinate category, "fruit," which is perfectly well-complemented.**JS:** *"When we ask what it feels like to be a rock, we are asking what it feels like to feel nothing.”*No, that's word-play. When we ask what it feels like to be a rock, we are asking whether or not a rock can feel, because there is nothing it feels like to feel nothing. (Otherwise the question falls in the category of questions like "When did you stop beating your wife?" or "What color is Bb?" or "Do rocks vote republican?") **JS:** *"The category "what it feels like to feel nothing" thus makes sense.  It is empty, but not meaningless.”*The category "what does it *feel* like to feel nothing" is either empty, meaningless, or, most likely, a nonsequitur (with the reply based on what it feels like to feel *next to nothing*, or not to feel this in particular, but something else). It has also engendered a good deal of nonsense about the "unconscious mind" (as opposed to what is really at issue, which is unfelt functing: functing is only mental if it is felt).What does make sense is "What kinds of entities can and cannot feel?"**JS:** *"Ergo, “what it feels like to feel something” is complemented by its negation.  And both it and the negation are empty.  They are family resemblance concepts, not grounded by an invariant.”*Well, we continue to disagree on every one of these points: There is nothing it feels like to feel nothing, hence "what it feels like to feel something" is uncomplemented, but certainly not empty; only its complement is empty.I don't know what "concepts" are, but if you mean categories (i.e., things we can correctly categorize), then what is meant by family-resemblance-based categories is categories with a disjunctive invariant. Where there is no invariant at all, there is no category. In the special case of feeling, the category is problematic, because only its extension is non-empty; the extension of its complement is empty. We do not notice this "poverty of the stimulus" problem, because all instances of feeling are positive instances, hence we never have to worry about distinguishing them from their complements: our categorization is error-free. We do try, though, occasionally, using extrapolation and analogy -- but it is always doomed to fail, because the complement is not merely unsampled, but empty, hence all of our extrapolations and analogies are ineffectual.**JS:** *"There is no feeling of tasting something; however, I would not thereby conclude that there is no category of “tasting something"... your mistake is in thinking the sense of a statement indicates that it refers to something.”*Again, straight disagreement: There are plenty of instances of what it feels like to taste something, just as there are plenty of instances of eating something. For anything to be a category, it has to have members and non-members, and there has to be a fact of the matter about which is which, as well as a means of sorting them. To "have" the category (i.e., to be able to distinguish the members of the category from the members of its complement), one must have -- either explicitly and verbalizably, or implicitly and executably -- the "sense" of the category, i.e., what rule will sort the members from the nonmembers. The rule can be inborn or acquired, but it needs to detect the category's invariant features -- for those invariants are the ones that reliably distinguish the members from the nonmembers. (And, of course, every category that you can correctly sort has a referent, whether an individual or a kind).So the issue here is definitely not sense vs reference. Nor are any of the positive categories under discussion here empty; but in some cases their complements are empty. In such cases, since the positive category itself is not empty, one is able (trivially) to do "error-free" sorting, since there is nothing but positive (or irrelevant) instances to sort. (Rocks would be irrelevant in the sorting of males from females, though they would be relevant in sorting animate things from inanimate things; taste would be irrelevant in sorting colors, though it would be relevant in sorting sense-modalities.)I think your mistake is not distinguishing the category (1a) "entities that are able to taste" vs.(1b) "entities that are unable to taste" from the category (2a) "what it feels like to taste this" vs. (2b) "what it feels like to taste that" as well as from the superordinate category (3a) "what it feels like to taste something" vs. (3b) "what it feels like to *hear* something." And what you are overlooking or misunderstanding altogether is the still higher-order category: (4a) "what it feels like to feel something" vs. (4b) "what it feels like to feel nothing." It is the latter (4b) that is empty, not the former (4a). Neither extrapolations (from what it feels like to feel less and less, and more and more faintly) nor analogies (vision vs. touch) can remedy that.**JS:** *"You still claim a person with only the sense modality of vision would not have a complement for the category of 'colored'.”*I think you misunderstood my hypothetical example. I didn't just say the person only had vision; I also said the only two properties in his visual world (let's say it's 2-D) were shape and color, all objects had both shape (spatial extension: no punctate objects) and color, and both black and white count as colors. Hence there are no shapeless objects or colorless objects.I suggested that for such a person in such a world, particular shapes (round, square, symmetric, equilateral) and particular colors (red, green, black, white, multicolored) would be perfectly well complemented, but neither superordinate category -- color or shape -- would be. If we added a further sensory capacity to the person, and a further sensory dimension to the world -- say, sound, and all the shapes could talk to you, so that you recognized them as individuals, and there were also some disembodied voices among them, having neither shape nor color, and yet recognizable as individuals just from their sounds, then both shape and color would be complemented, because the shapeless, colorless individuals would serve as the complement.Upon further reflection, though, I notice that even for us, within the visual modality itself, there is something incoherent about the notion of a colorless shape or a shapeless color. So perhaps there are some interesting within-modality complementation issues too; but I think they would take us too far afield. (So too would the issue of whether I am cheating to count white and especially black as a color: black should be the absence of color -- but in fact it doesn't feel that way; black just looks like yet another color, but a very dark one!) (It is also an interesting but peripheral question whether analogy and especially extrapolation might not serve us better here than it does with the superordinate category of feeling itself: There are analogies between sense-modalities, and just as "degree of darkness" can be extrapolated to black even if we've never seen anything pitch-black, so size can be extrapolated to a shapeless point...)**JS:** *"You say the complement is “uncolored,” and not “shaped.”  This is a false distinction.  When an observed difference is not one of color, but one of shape, then the category “uncolored” can appear via the category 'an uncolored difference'.”*But the category in question is color, not difference in color or shape. Yes, there are instances that are same-color/different-shape and same-shape/different-color. (There would have to be, otherwise in principle we could not even extract the invariants of shape and color. A simpler example would be a world of monochromatic green circles that varied only in brightness and size -- but the brightness and size were perfectly correlated. There would be no way to distinguish brightness and size independently along the hybrid continuum from big-bright to small-dim.)But that still gives no hint of no-color or no-shape, in a purely visual world in which every object has both a shape and a color but no other sensory properties.**JS:** *"And, thus, “uncolored” could mean “monochromatic.”  It makes sense to talk about black-and-white movies as “uncolored,” and this is not dependent upon us having multiple sense modalities.”*Except white is a color (and, for all phenomenal intents and purposes, so is black), so the category black/white vs. R/G/B/B/W is no more the colored/uncolored distinction than red/green vs blue/yellow, or, for that matter, red vs. black is. It's just this or these colors vs those.But this (interesting) excursion into the minutiae of category complementation, and whether or not there really is a complementation problem with feeling, and whether that in turn has anything to do with what makes the feeling/function problem a problem has left the problem itself rather far behind. The problem is not whether the category "feeling" is complemented or uncomplemented, but how and why we feel rather than just funct. ("Functing," by the way, is complemented by "feeling," even in the verbose compromise I mooted earlier: felt functing vs. unfelt functing.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/1336>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=1336&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

2010-02-01 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2854)

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| The claim is not particularly that feeling is epiphenomenal but that it's causally inexplicable (because causality would require telekinesis, which is false).If the claim is false, it might be better to explain and why, rather than just to say that the distinction between a feeling's being felt and a feeling's being a cause is incoherent!Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2880>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=2880&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-01 -- Reply to [**David Longinotti**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2883)

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| **ON "INDICATORS": FELT VS. FUNCTED****DL:** "*I don't think it's correct to assume that feelings can only be causal if there is telekinesis.  Feelings can serve as indicators that influence the behavior of an organism, without directly causing or inhibiting neural firing*.""Indicators" that "influence" without "causing"?  **DL:** "*An analogy can be made with a mechanism that automatically steers a ship using the stars...*"The causality in your example is ordinary, unproblematic causation (including the "detection"). It is precisely the profound way that this analogy fails to fit the case of feeling that makes the mind/body (feeling/functing) problem the special (and apparently intractable) case that it is.**DL:** "*whereas the ship's mechanism is designed to have the proper motor response to a detected pattern of stars, an organism's movements in response to a feeling may be somewhat random until it learns a behavioral routine that effectively controls the feeling.  In any event, all that's required in both cases is that the entity with the detector have control over motor mechanisms that, when engaged, can influence the output of the detector*."Right. And the only part you left out was how and why the thing "detected" in the second case is felt, rather than just functed, as in the first. That, after all, is the underlying question here -- the one that is begged by the unproblematic naval analogy.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2884>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=2884&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-02 -- Reply to [**David Longinotti**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2885)

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| Actually, what I asked was *how* and *why* felt functions are felt functions rather than just functed functions. That covers *both* our explanatory bankruptcy on how feelings are caused, and, more important, on how feelings cause (which is what is meant by "why felt rather than just functed?"). And that second causal question is the real heart of the m/b problem. It's why feeling can never play any causal role in any AI, robotic or neural model, nor in any evolutionary/adaptive explanation (without the help of telekinesis). That about exhausts the causal/explanatory options...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2886>2010-02-06 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2888)

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| **CALLING A SPADE A SPADE: EXPLANATORY FAILURE, NOT "CATEGORY ERROR"**Yes, "functing" and causing are more or less co-extensive. The only difference is that the functing usually includes some (innocent) interpretation of the "purpose" of the causal dynamics. (It's just as innocent as a careful Darwinian explanation -- in terms of gene distribution, traits, environment, and causal consequences for survival and reproduction -- is innocent of teleology even though it is framed in teleological terms, for the sake of understanding. Same is true of intentional explanation.) Nothing incoherent there.Apart from that, "functing" is a quip, meant as a reminder not to cheat and smuggle more into a causal explanation than is needed to explain the objective dynamics. Feeling is always smuggled in; the functing can do it all fine, without needing -- indeed without the capacity of sustaining -- any recourse to feeling, real though feeling is. Hence the explanatory gap. Nothing incoherent there either.And, yes, I use "feeling" to refer to anything that is felt, regardless of which sense it is felt with, and that includes what it feels like to think. As with sensorimotor activity, which has a causal component ("functing") as well as a felt component (what if feels like to see, hear, taste, smell, move, desire), "cognitive" activity (to think, to believe, to intend, to mean) has a causal component (information-processing, computation, cerebral dynamics, input/output performance, even sensorimotor activity itself) as well as a felt component (the feeling that is going on when we think, what it feels like to think this rather than that). Nothing incoherent there either.Nor is there any Rylean category error being committed in any of this. Feeling really is different from functing, and not explained causally (except if we give it telekinetic causal power, counterfactually) no matter how loudly Ryle may protest that this is some sort of a category error we're committing rather than the explanatory failure it clearly is.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2897>  |

2010-02-06 -- Reply to [**Jonathan C.W. Edwards**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2891)

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| **"VIEWPOINT" DUALISM****JCWE:** "*there is a much easier way out of all this if we accept that feelings and causal dynamic events are just two sorts of description from different viewpoints*"That certainly is an easier way, namely, begging the question instead of answering it.Sometimes naivete is a virtue. We all know what people can do: behave, locomote, detect objects and events acoustically, optically, mechanically, respond adaptively, both in terms of surviving and reproducing. We also know that if that were all there were to it, there would be no "hard problem" and no "explanatory gap" because there would not be two "viewpoints" on all this. ("View" itself is equivocal, which is why I said "optically" and not "visually" earlier.) There would only be functing.But in fact each of us knows this is not true. There are indeed two viewpoints on all the above, for we don't just funct. There's something it feels like to funct. But there's no use saying that it's somehow a natural counterpart of functing (say, of optical processing) that there should be something it feels like to funct (seeing). There is. But the question is how? why? And the "dual viewpoint" hermeneutics is true enough, soothing, but totally non-explanatory. It is not an answer to the question asked.Hence the gap.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2898>  |

2010-02-08 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2901)

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| Predicting feelings is not explaining feelings (any more than a weather forecast explains meteorology -- but please don't hasten to pursue this analogy, because feeling is not like raining, which is a perfectly ordinary physical phenomenon like the rest, and has no attendant problems of causality...)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2916> |

2010-02-08 -- Reply to [**Jonathan C.W. Edwards**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2905)

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| **ROCK KICKS ROCK**Yes, functing, and the feeling/functing problem, are primarily a problem of causality and causal explanation (failure). Willing is a form of feeling, and it's the one that matters most, when we try to explain how and why we feel.**JCWE:** "'*why should there be experiences associated with instances of operation of laws that predict experiences?' we have already answered the question*." Really? I missed the part about why something is felt when I kick a rock, but not when a robot or another wind-swept rock kicks a rock. **JCWE:** "*Twenty-first century instantiated dynamics... determining the relation between experiences*" More like another century of question-begging and self-deception...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2917>  |

2010-02-08 -- Reply to [**Brent Allsop**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2908)

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| **INEFFABLE ILLUMINATION**I got the "observational" part (i.e., that we can feel); that, after all, is the (redundant) *explanandum*. But what I missed was the explanatory part (the *explanans*): How and why do we feel? The *fact* that we feel is an indisputable cartesian fact, and in that sense (doubly redundantly) "experienceable." It is also perfectly "effable" (to others who likewise feel). But "understandable"? Apart from the fact that understanding, too, is a feeling (and hence, as Achilles told the Tortoise, all bets are off, because feeling's ultimately just a matter of taste), my own pedestrian tastes in understanding run more toward causal (or mathematical) explanation, rather than ineffable illumination...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2919> |

2010-02-08 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2899)

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| **GERUNDS FOR A GERIATRIC CONUNDRUM****JS:** "'*functing' does not specify anything at all.  Anything at all might be regarded as functing*." Except, notably, feeling.**JS:** "*But then, how could we distinguish functing from feeling?*"Pinch yourself, with and without anesthesia.**JS:** "*you say that feelings themselves can be functed as well as felt.*"  No, I never say anything even remotely like that (unless I have somewhere inadvertently misspoken)! I say that some (not all) functing is accompanied by feeling. (That is, if you like, "felt functing" but certainly not "functed feeling"! To be able to say that feelings are indeed functed, we would first have to say how and why.)The mind/body (feeling/functing) problem is to explain how and why some functings are felt functings rather than just functed functings like all the rest.**JS:** "*There is no way to distinguish what you call "the functing of a feeling" from 'the feeling of a feeling*'"*Vide supre*. I never said (nor would say) "the functing of a feeling," only the feeling of a functing, i.e., the feeling that inexplicably accompanies some (not all) functings. (The "lifting of a dropping" is not the same as the "dropping of a lifting.)**JS:** "*there is no referent to go along with your use of the term "feeling"...  I presume that anything which exists can be felt--at least, I have no reason to think otherwise.*"  For what it feels like to feel X, try pain.For a sample of things that exist but cannot be felt, trying feeling what it feels like to be an electron, or to be under total anesthesia...**JS:** "*since anything at all can be regarded as functing, what could we feel, if not functing?*"All causal dynamics are indeed "functing." And there does not, indeed, seem to be room for anything more. So the only part left (and then you've convinced me!) is to explain how and why some functing is *felt* functing...**JS:** "*when we talk about what it is like to X, we are not talking about some causally mysterious aspect of X-ing; we are rather making explanatory-cum-predictive statements about behaviors and experiences related to X-ing*." That's a bit too fancy for me. Run it by me using ordinary language: "When we talk about what it feels like to walk, we are not talking about some causally mysterious aspect of walking, we are rather explaining and predicting behaviors and experiences related to walking."Fine: Please explain how and why it feels like something to walk. (I already know the rest of the functional story, about bipedal locomotion, its neurology, and how and why it gets you somewhere...) **JS:** "*Claiming that 'what it is like' is some causally inert, or causally inexplicable, aspect of events really is a category error*."  Jason, you can echo poor old Gilbert Ryle till doomsday: it won't solve the explanatory problem ("how and why do we feel?"), nor make it go away.**JS:** "*there is no particular 'what it is like to be a bachelor' that all bachelors experience*."  If that way of putting it feels too vague, fine, forget about what being a bachelor (or blind, or sighted) feels like, and consider instead what walking feels like. You know what it feels like. I know what it feels like. Now explain how and why it feels like anything at all.(I am quite happy to discuss the rather subtler problem of "uncomplemented categories" with you too, but we won't get anywhere if you keep trying to dismiss even the less subtle case of complemented categories too: what it feels like to be walking feels different from its (various) complements, e.g., what it feels like to be stationary. But what it feels like to be awake -- note, not wide-wake, necessarily, just awake, simpliciter -- does not have any complement, because there is nothing it feels like to be asleep (or comatose, or dead)...)Harnad, S. (1987) [Uncomplemented Categories, or, What is it Like to be a Bachelor?](http://cogprints.org/2134/0/harnad87.uncomp.htm) 1987 [Presidential Address: Society for Philosophy and Psychology](http://www.socphilpsych.org/pastofficers.html). **JS:** "*Of course, we should not confuse the verb 'to feel' with the noun, 'feelings.*' One cannot skirt the problem via syntax or morphology, any more than one can do so by crying "category error!"...Be it feeling, feelings, feels, feel, felt, feelingly or feelingfulness, the problem is to explain how and why there's any of it, rather than just the functing that it (sometimes) accompanies.**JS:** "*Dennett, for example, does not make recourse to subjective experience*"Quite. And that's one of the effective ways of begging the question: Don't talk about feeling at all!**JS:** "*I am not attracted to the introduction of new terms unless they help us solve our problems, at the very least by helping us better recognize a problem or its solution.  I do not think the term "functing" achieves either end*."I don't like neologisms either. I could have called it the feeling/function problem instead of the feeling/functing problem, and I could have written out, longhand, "How and why are some functional dynamics accompanied by feeling?). I just think gerunds are shorter, hence handier. (What gets lexicalized in a language, and then canonized with a lexical entry of its own, is partly arbitrary, but partly dictated by whether a circuitous description is said often enough, and long enough, to warrant baptizing and replacing with a new name of its own.)I like "funct" because it punctuates the question-begging that normally perpetuates the fog around feeling: "How and why do we feel rather than just funct?"Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2921>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=2921&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

2010-02-10 -- Reply to [**David Longinotti**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2936)

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| I don't see any resemblance whatsoever between photons and feelings. Photons are unproblematic physical phenomena, suffering from no explanatory gap. They cannot plug the gaping gap for feelings. (The problem is not with *where* or *when* the feeling is going on, but *how*, and *why*. That is a problem for causal explanation, not for localization, in either time or space.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2939> |

2010-02-10 -- Reply to [**David Longinotti**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2940)

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| Why does an apple fall? It is caused by gravitational attraction between two masses of unequal size. Why are humans bipedal? It was caused by the survival/reproductive advantages of certain genes in our ancestors. Why do we feel? No one can explain it because the foregoing kind of explanations -- being causal/functional -- do not work (and because there is no telekinetic force, although if there were, there would be no problem).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2941> |

2010-02-11 -- Reply to [**David Longinotti**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2944)

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| **NO EASY WAY OUT**If feeling had indeed turned out to be a fundamental force, like gravity, then the explanatory buck would indeed have stopped there, as with everything else, and there would have been nothing special about feeling compared to other phenomena.But there is no fundamental telekinetic force. Feeling just dangles (sometimes) on top of functionality for which feeling is completely superfluous, functionally (i.e., causally): All of organisms' capacity for surviving, reproducing, moving, avoiding injury, learning, manipulating, adapting, talking, reasoning, etc. can and will be fully explained, dynamically, computationally and neurally (those are the "easy" problems, normal science, or, rather, reverse bioengineering: all just functing, like everything else). But the part that cannot and hence will not be explained is how and why any of that functing is *felt* functing. It certainly is, but how? why?And the reason it will remain unexplained is that the only way to give feeling any real causal power of its own would be if telekinesis had turned out to be true (as we all intuitively expected, and most of us still do). But it's not true.So feeling is functionally superfluous (even though it is undeniably there) and hence not explicable in the way that all other phenomena (down to basic laws, like gravity) are explicable.(Quantum mysteries have nothing to do with it: They are neither part of the problem, nor part of the solution; nor do they, by analogy, exempt feelings even to the extent that QM is exempt, because of its vast predictive and explanatory power. Feelings have no explanatory power (except subjectively); and the predictivity, such as it is, is merely about the functional correlates of feeling: the subset of functing that happens to be felt functing (but without a clue as to how, or why). That's not scientific prediction. It's just weather-forecasting.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2946>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=2946&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

2010-02-11 -- Reply to [**Brent Allsop**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2927)

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| (1) No, the brain correlate of feeling red does not have to be red. In fact it would be no sense if it were. It would multiply the number of explananda, without necessity. (2) Correlation (and prediction) are not causation, nor do they explain causation. (All that's meant by how/why is what is the causal mechanism?)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2948> |

2010-02-11 -- Reply to [**Jonathan C.W. Edwards**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2924)

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| **COMPLEXITY PHASE TRANSITION?**How complex does something have to be to make it felt? Why?If the robot feels (and it might -- I believe a Turing Test-passing robot would be almost as likely to feel as any of the rest of us) then you simply have the same problem explaining how and why the robot feels that you already have explaining how and why the rest of us feel.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2949> |

2010-02-11 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2923)

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| **SYNTACTIC ACHES**(1) Distinguishing what it feels like to have your hand anesthetized versus not involves local anesthesia. It still feels like something to see your hand being touched without feeling it. (If you're under general anesthesia, all bets are off. Uncomplemented categories again... Feeling what something feels like always involves feeling that it feels like *this* and not like *that*.) The rest is just correlation (aka "association"), not causation. (Or if it's causation, that causation is unexplained, hence functionally superfluous.)(2) It's not that in one case a feeling is functed and in the other it is not. It is that in one case the (local)  functing is felt ("associated/correlated" with feeling) and in the other it is not. (With your reversal of feeling and functing, you've "solved" the problem trivially: feeling becomes functed, and correlation becomes causation, by fiat!(3) The correct (i.e., Occamian) causal/functional story is that with anesthesia the brain can detect and respond to a pinch, and without it cannot. Yes, the detection is accompanied by (associated with, correlated with) a feeling; that's uncontested. But it's also unexplanatory. It's the explanandum.(4) What we distinguish is not so much feeling vs functing, but felt functing vs. unfelt functing. (But to do it, you have to be awake, hence still feeling *something*, at the time, so it's always feeling t*his* vs. feeling *that*.)(5) "I feel because my syntax dictates it"? I have a certain amount of sympathy for the Whorf Hypothesis, but this is taking it a bit too far. (Does a dog feel pain because of syntax too?)(6) Sure what it feels like to walk varies on every occasion. All feeling varies with the occasion. The only thing that's invariant is that you always feel *something* (whilst your awake). That's the explanandum. I'm still waiting for the (causal) explanans...Stevan HarnadPermanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2951> |

2010-02-12 -- Reply to [**Jonathan C.W. Edwards**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2953)

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| I am afraid I find these complexity-based calculations completely arbitrary, and in no way implying or explaining how or why feeling should kick in at some point along the complexity continuum. Moreover, the complexity calculations are along a f*unctional* continuum, based on input data, output (action) capacity and potential, and internal processing and storage. These too have nothing whatsoever to do with feeling -- except the (undeniable but unexplained) phenomenal fact that they (or rather some of them) also happen to be correlated with feelings. No causal explanation. Just the gaping explanatory gap, together with a a (familiar) "complexity"-based ad-hoc posit (e.g., see [here](http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Hypermail/Foundations.Cognitive.Science2000/0073.html) and [here](http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Hypermail/Foundations.Cognition/0068.html)).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2968> |

2010-02-12 -- Reply to [**Penelope Rowlatt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2956)

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| Feeling ≠ "Complexity." Trying to explain the former with the latter is completely arbitrary and ad hoc.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2969> |

2010-02-12 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2952)

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| **ON THE ROMANCE OF WAIT-AND-SEE**(1) It's fine to wait for "scientific" answers to questions, but some questions (e.g., how to trisect an angle with compass and straight-edge) have some a-priori reasons (in this case mathematical) suggesting why it is unlikely that they will ever get an answer from "science." (The usual rationale for the "wait-and-see" stance on the explanatory gap regarding consciousness has been an analogy with the alleged explanatory gap regarding life ("vitalism"), but unfortunately this optimism is based on overlooking a profound *dis*analogy between the two phenomena (probably arising from [the animism that was always inherent in vitalism](http://cogprints.org/4390/1/harnad-searle.html)!).(2) If reasons not to expect scientific (or mathematical) answers are not philosophical matters for you, Jason, that's fine. I think that, on the contrary, such cases virtually define philosophical matters. (It also seems to me that it is not I who am waiting for an explanation of feeling! Rather, I have tried to give reasons to expect an explanation will never be forthcoming, because of the nature of feeling and causality -- and, most important, the nonexistence of telekinesis (though I expect one can take a wait-and-see attitude on that too!).(3) My feeling/function distinction is co-extensive with the mind/body problem, so if you are saying that you find the one incoherent and incomprehensible, then you are saying the same of the other. That is a possible stance, but hardly a solution.(4) I am not sure what you have in mind when you suggest that the reason we can't close the explanatory gap may be grammatical, but it does seem to be hedging bets to say it is both grammatical *and* contingent on future science!Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2971> |

2010-02-12 -- Reply to [**Roger Lindsay**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2959)

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| **OUR ANOSOGNOSIA FOR THE FUNCTIONAL SUPERFLUOUSNESS OF FEELING**Because they are ubiquitous and inescapable in our waking lives, and because they *feel* as if they are playing a causal role, it is very difficult for us to see that in reality our feelings are functionally superfluous (unless telekinesis is true -- which it is not). (We have a similar difficulty reasoning about the [origins and adaptive function of language](http://www.summer10.isc.uqam.ca/page/programme.php?lang_id=2), because our brains are so deeply "language-prepared" that it is almost impossible for us to think of an object or state of affairs without "sub-titling" it with a verbal narrative.)I think that your tentative attempts, Roger, to close the explanatory gap, below, are based on inadvertently begging the question, by endowing feeling with a (telekinetic) causal power (unexplained) a priori. (The same mistake is made if it is "reasons" to which you give the causal power. For reasons -- though they too are felt -- need not be felt: they can be functed, as computations or even dynamics. That reasons are felt rather than just functed is just another example of the problem.) I think you are also underestimating the nature and causal power of computation, and probably of dynamics too.***RL:*** *"your claims about the causal sufficiency of functs are certainly true of neonates [but this] decreases with age [and is] less obviously true of adults."*I am afraid you may have missed my point, which was definitely about adults! The point is that the full causal/functional explanation is always sufficient to explain our performance and our performance capacity. The only thing it does not explain is how and why any of that functionality is felt.***RL:*** *"I have just touched my nose... It is not likely that my action resulted... from some coincidentally pre-existing causal state... [i.e.] not from Humean causes but from voluntary performance on the basis of reasons... [e.g.] love, or hate, or anger or jealousy?"*Yes, the feeling that I do what I do because I "feel like" doing it -- rather than because I am being buffeted about by underlying neurological causes -- is the heart of the mind/body problem (hence also of the feeling/function problem, which is the very same problem, more transparently stated). And the lack of a causal explanation for feeling (given that telekinesis is false) is the basis of the explanatory gap.Feelings themselves feel causal, but hardly rational, except in the sense that "My reason for doing it was that I felt like it!" If I say "I withdrew my hand from the fire because it hurt" I am not explaining why I removed my hand: the explanation of our nociceptive performance and capacity is based on the properties of fire and tissue, the evolutionary history of our species, the neurology of our sensorimotor systems, and our history of experience (including what we have seen and been told about the effects of fire). That's all functing. The unexplained part is how and why pain feels like something.By the way, a functional story similar to the one I told about why I withdrew my hand from the fire can also be told about why I pay my debts. I have reasons, of course, some historical some verbal. But the explanatory gap is explaining how and why that reasoning is *felt* rather than just functed.***RL:*** *"Why are we aware of feelings?"* Here's a good example of why it is much more revealing to re-cast the problem of "consciousness" ("awareness," etc. etc.), i.e., the "mind/body" problem as the "[feeling/function](http://cogprints.org/2130/)" problem:That way it becomes obvious how your  statement "Why are we aware of feelings?" is redundant: "Why do we feel feelings?" Isn't that the same as "Why do we feel?"  ("Unfelt feelings" are not only self-contradictory, but they reveal the redundancy and question-begging inherent in the usual way of putting it.)***RL:*** *"so that we can move beyond funct determination"*It's not about "determinacy" vs. "free will." (In my opinion, that is a rather sterile question, especially when it turns out that the only way to flesh out "freedom" is by invoking randomness!) The real issue is about the causal status of feeling: Except if telekinesis is true (which it isn't). feelings have no independent causal power. They are merely (unexplained) correlates of the functing, which is the real causal power.***RL:*** *"If I am aware of my anger, then it can be included in a calculus (let’s call it a rational calculation) that takes other factors into account, low-level functs can be over-ridden by more humane or longer-term considerations."*"If I feel, then my feeling can be over-ridden." Sure, and if you don't feel, but rather just do the functing that needs to be done, then there's neither feeling nor the need to "over-ride" it. If feeling angry means feeling inclined to hit someone, and you over-ride it, so you don't hit, why not just over-ride the inclination to hit (functing), without bothering with the feeling either way?In a nut-shell, this is how every attempt to assign an independent causal power to feeling (other than telekinesis, which is false) fares, when looked at carefully, and functionally. The feeling always turns out to be redundant, superfluous, and hence unexplained (though it is definitely there, correlated with the functing).***RL:*** *"I guess you will respond that I am just proposing a higher-level funct scenario, and the rational calculation process could all be carried out just as well using a variable list with associated numerical indices."*Yes, except you seem to be over-simplifying functing, reducing it to trivial digital computations: Functing can be computational as well as dynamic.***RL:*** *"But the calculation involves the evaluation of motives, and whilst you can simulate my desire for sex, for example, by using a number, the size of a number won’t make the real me sign up for a dating agency."*As I said, reducing it to numbers is a caricature but, yes, the functional basis of anger as well as desire is as insentient as digital computation. Yet that's all there is to functing, and the accompanying feeling remains inexplicable.***RL:*** *"Take pain as another example. A nuclear plant supervisor might ignore a symbolic hazard signal for all sorts of reasons, but if the hazard signal caused her pain that was proportional to the risk, she would need pretty good reasons not to take action."*This is again just the anosognosia about the causal status of feelings: To increase the likelihood that the supervisor detects and responds to the hazard signal, increase the likelihood that the supervisor detects and responds to the hazard signal. Interposing another "signal" (pain), is just multiplying entities, with no explanatory gain. (The story is the same for pain itself, as a "signal.)***RL:*** *"Feelings can be intrinsically motivating, awareness of feelings allows an agent to evaluate and sometimes to over-ride them."*Translation: "Feelings can make you feel like doing something. Feeling that you feel like doing something can be over-ridden by feeling that you feel like not-doing something."Remove the redundant feeling of feelings, and also the superfluous feeling itself, and the functing of the doing or not-dping can do it all. Meanwhile, the accompanying feeling remains as mysterious and inexplicable as ever.***RL:*** *"Might this provide a (non-humean) causal role for feeling?"*Only at the cost of pretending that telekinesis is true after all...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2974>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=2974&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

2010-02-12 -- Reply to [**Jim Stone**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2975)

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| ***JS:*** *"What is 'telekinesis'...? simply feelings or qualia having causal powers to affect  the mind/body? [and] 'functing' is the realm of functional states?"*Yes, and yes. (But it's certainly not "simply"!)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2980> |

2010-02-12 -- Reply to [**David Longinotti**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2978)

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| All the evidence that you cite is evidence that the functions with which feelings are (inexplicably) correlated are causal, not that feelings themselves are causal. Hence the explanatory gap remains unclosed.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2983> |

2010-02-13 -- Reply to [**Roger Lindsay**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2979)

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| **FEELING BY FIAT, YET AGAIN**I am afraid that you have simply taken a straightforward dynamical/computational system (such as we no doubt are) and, by fiat, decreed that some of its functions (the earlier, "basic" ones) will be unfelt whereas others (the later "symbolic" ones) will be felt. What you have not explained is how and why the one will be felt and the other not. You reply only:***RL:*** *"the answer seems to me to be that if we didn’t apprehend perceptual and other bodily events in some way, we couldn’t reason in a manner that allowed actions to be based on the results of the reasoning process. Feeling just happens to be the mode that this apprehension process takes. Why shouldn’t it? It seems to work OK?"*  I think this is no answer at all, but simply begs the question (underlying the "explanatory gap"). Of course our brains need the sensorimotor and somatic data and interactions, and they need to process those data, both dynamically and computationally, but you haven't given a hint of why any of that should be *felt*, rather than just functed. Today's (primitive, rudimentary) robots do all the kinds of things you describe above (both sensorimotor and symbolic), but they do it without feeling a thing. No doubt somewhere along the Turing scale that ends with us, feelings have somehow kicked in, but the question remains: how, and why?(Neonates, by the way, and even foetuses, feel; so do simple animals. So you are over-reaching if you look to close the explanatory gap with some putative service that feeling performs for reasoning: both sensorimotor transduction and computation are perfectly feasible without feelings. The trick is to explain why any of it is ever felt at all.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2987> |

2010-02-13 -- Reply to [**David Longinotti**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2984)

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| **ON TALKING AT (EXPLANATORY) CROSS-PURPOSES*****DL:*** *"Nowhere do I claim [to] close... the explanatory gap."*But isn't closing the gap what we are discussing?***DL:*** *"What I do claim [is that] feelings can occur when no cognition is possible at all..."*Who disputes that (whatever "cognition" may mean)?***DL:*** *"if feelings were epiphenomenal byproducts of cognitive functions, there is no reason whatsoever for a pain to be painful."*That's the gap. Now I'm waiting to hear the reason... [I never bother talking about "epiphenomena,' (any more than I bother chasing after the many variants of "consciousness," "awareness," "qualia," "subjectivity," "intentionality," "1st personhood," etc. etc.) since "epiphenomenalism" (like it's ontic opposite, monist materialism) has no substance (whereas its rival, telekinetic dualism, is simply false). "Epiphenomenalism" is merely a restatement of the fact that there is an explanatory gap: we cannot explain why and how some functions are felt. (The "phenomenon" is feeling.) That's an epistemic problem, not an ontic one. I am as confident as I am of anything that the brain causes feelings. The problem is that we cannot explain how, and, even more important, functionally speaking, we cannot explain why, since it looks for all the world as if we could be exactly the same clever, adaptive Darwinian survival machines that we are without ever feeling a thing.]***DL:*** *"The best explanation of this correlation [of feeling and function] is that feelings themselves influence organisms to act in ways that increase fitness."*Indubitably. The trick is just explaining, causally, how and why...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2988> |

2010-02-13 -- Reply to [**Jim Stone**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2985)

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| **TRUE OR FALSE, "EPIPHENOMENALISM" IS EMPTY:** **THE EXPLANATORY GAP IS EPISTEMIC, NOT ONTIC*****JS:*** *"Epiphenomenalism about mental properties isn’t necessarily false but I think the case against it is virtually overwhelming"*The only way to make a case against epiphenomenalism (construed as the innocent plaint that we do not seem to be able to give a causal explanation of how or why we feel) is to give a causal explanation of how and why we feel (without resorting to telekinesis, which is false).***JS:*** *"I focus on qualia."* I agree with you that "it’s silly to argue about words," so allow me, for heuristic reasons, to substitute in all my quotes from you, below, my preferred, straightforward anglo-saxon term, "feelings," understood by all, for the quaint neologism "qualia" favored by some philosophers. I think it helps forestall certain common forms of question-begging:***JS:*** *"If [feelings] were black holes in causal space... we wouldn’t know they existed."*Translation: If we didn't feel, we wouldn't feel. Agreed.(Ontic variant: If there were no feelings, there would be no feelings. Agreed.)**JS:** *"Of course we do know [feelings] exist and it isn’t a matter of abductive reasoning or inference. We know that [feelings] exist because we are directly acquainted with them."*I feel (when I'm feeling) therefore I feel (when I'm feeling). Agreed. We owe as much to Descartes ("[sentio ergo sentitu](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&source=hp&q=site%3Ahttp%3A%2F%2Fphilpapers.org%2F+sentio&aq=f&aqi=&oq=)r").***JS:*** *"Direct acquaintance, on any plausible account, involves causal powers to affect the mind by the object with which we are so acquainted"*Agreed. I'm just waiting for the "plausible account" of how and why. (I will let the more equivocal phrase "affect the mind" slip by, though it really just means that gazing at things makes me feel something, namely, what it feels like to see them. In other words, it is just the restatement of the unexplained correlation between functing and feeling. I have no problem with accepting the fact -- since it's obviously true -- that the cause of my feeling is something that happens to, and happens in, my brain. But the explanatory gap is in explaining *how and why that something that happens is a felt something,* rather than just a *functed* something. The fact that the felt something does happen is not in dispute. Nor is it really in doubt that it is the brain that causes what would otherwise just be optical transduction to become, instead, or in addition, felt seeing, *somehow*. The part that is not only in doubt but certain is that no one explained that "somehow" -- i.e., how or why the optical transduction is caused to become felt seeing. Moreover, perhaps going a bit beyond what is certain, I add that there are good reasons to believe that it is not even possible to explain it, in the usual causal/functional way that everything else is explained, without resorting to [telekinetic](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=site%3Ahttp%3A%2F%2Fphilpapers.org%2F+%28telekinesis+OR+telekinetic%29&btnG=Search&aq=f&aqi=&oq=) causation, which does not exist. The problem is already there in trying to explain how the brain causes feeling, and even more pressingly there in trying to explain how feeling causes doing. There would be no problem at all if all doing and doing-power remained exactly what they are, functionally, but there were no feeling, just unfelt functing.)***JS:*** *"It seems perfectly evident that [feelings] play a substantial causal role in our lives."*Feelings certainly play a substantial *felt* causal role in our lives. But I hope you will agree that a felt cause is not necessarily the same as a real cause. It is also true that the (unproblematic) external objects and internal functional states that appear to be the (unexplained) causes of our feelings (via the brain) play a substantial causal role in our lives (felt and unfelt).But it is the causal status and role of feelings qua feelings -- rather than just as the side-effects and correlates of unproblematic external objects and internal functional states -- that is under scrutiny here: How and why are they felt? Not whether they are felt to be causal (they are). Not even whether they are caused (they no doubt are, somehow). But how and why they are felt rather than just functed (to the same *functional* effect)?***JS:*** *"on the face of things the causal role of [feelings] in our lives is is one of the phenomena an account of the mind ought to preserve."* Indisputably. But alas, this welcome account is faced with an awkward explanatory gap..***JS:*** *"If [feelings] have no causal powers, they couldn’t have been selected for by evolution".*So one would think.So explain to me how the Blind Watchmaker (a pure functionalist, if there ever was one!) was able to select the Darwinian survival machines that felt, and reject the ones that only functed: Was he reading their minds? How? Why? (Evolution is surely as non-telepahic as it is non-telekinetic...)Harnad, S. (2002) [Turing Indistinguishability and the Blind Watchmaker](http://cogprints.org/1615/). In: J. Fetzer (ed.) *Evolving Consciousness* Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Pp 3-18.  ***JS:*** *"Still [feelings] could’ve been produced by evolution as a side effect of physical features that were selected for. But if that were so... we should expect [feelings] to be a hodgepodge..."*Feelings are reliably and systematically correlated with some adaptive functions. But it is not this correlation that is missing; it is its causal explanation.Apples fall down, not up, reliably and systematically. Gravitation explains the correlation, causally. No such luck with feelings (without telekinesis).***JS:*** *"Obviously what we get instead is... enormously informative about what’s going on in the world."* Data are informative. But the burden is to explain why and how data should need to be felt, rather than just functed, in order to be informative. (Information is not a mental phenomenon; it is just data that reduce uncertainty, as in the input and processing of an adaptive robot that needs to do things in order to survive and reproduce. Hence in calling felt data "informative" we are usually just unwittingly smuggling in, unexplained, the felt component that we were supposed to be explaining!)***JS:*** *"As this is what you would expect if [feelings] were selected for, and what you would not expect if they were not selected for, it’s probable that [feelings] were selected for. So they probably have causal powers."*Probably indeed. (But we are not talking about their probability of being causal, but the probability of explaining their causality!) So the only thing that's left to do is to explain how and why feelings were selected for (and distinguished from unfelt functings): What was the functional advantage of felt functing over unfelt functing? (You will notice that every functional advantage you name will come in two varieties, one felt and one unfelt. And you will never be able to say why the felt one was more adaptive than the unfelt one. And the reason you will be unable to do it is also clear. Because, without telekinesis, there is no purely functional advantage of a felt function over the very same function, minus the feeling.)***JS:*** *"This isn’t meant to be a mathematical proof, but I take the causal efficacy of [feelings] to be as certain as anything there is in the philosophy of mind."*The *felt* (i.e., subjective) causal efficacy of feelings, and their close correlation with objective functional efficacy is undisputed within and without philosophy of mind. What is in dispute is the efficacy of attempts to explain how and why we feel rather than just funct.***JS:*** *"Certainly if an account of the mind entails epiphenomenalism, that is a pretty good reason to reject it."*True or false, "epiphenomenalism" is empty, explanatorily. The "explanatory gap" is epistemic, not ontic: How and why do we feel rather than just funct? Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2989>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=2989&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

2010-02-13 -- **Reply to** [**Jim Stone**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2990)

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| **PROPERTY DUALISM FOR RENT:** **VACANCY IS IN CAUSAL EXPLANATION, NOT IN ONTIC SPECULATION OR BELIEF**I've eschewed the various ontic *isms* on offer (physicalism, mentalism, dualism, eliminativism, monism, materialism, aspectism etc. etc.) for the very same reason I've eschewed all the variants of the consciousness on offer (awareness, subjectivity, qualia, 1st-personhood, intentionality, mentality etc. etc.).In pointing out that there is indeed an explanatory gap, I am referring to one (missing) thing only, but I think that one missing thing is what underlies all that other stuff. What is missing is not metaphysical conjectures or beliefs about how one might square the "mental" with the "physical." What is missing is a causal explanation of how and why we feel.For all I know (or care), there may indeed only be the "physical" (I rather think that's quite true, actually) and the brain causes feelings (I rather think that's quite true too), *somehow*, but what I want to know is *how and why*. For on the face of it, there's neither the causal need nor the causal room for feelings. In the organic subset of the world, all we need is intelligent, Darwin/Turing-scale -- but feelingless -- function, in order to generate all Darwin/Turing doings (all functional). The candidates for that are dynamics and computation (including semantically interpretable computation, such as natural language).So the feelings remain unexplained (and apparently unnecessary) danglers. That's the explanatory gap. Jim Stone points out that feelings probably appeared at some point in cosmological time, probably somewhere at or near the beginning of biological time. No doubt. He also suggests that feelings must somehow be caused by brain function. No doubt. Jim also suggests that feelings are "emergent," in the way liquidity is emergent. But there is a perfectly satisfying account of phase transitions (solid/liquid/gas) and no one had ever suggested there was some sort of liquid/solid problem or explanatory gap in explaining liquidity. But we do not have an explanation of how or why some biological functions are felt functions. And Jim's analogy with phase transitions (along a "complexity" continuum?) is not such an explanation either.Nor was there anything about liquidity that suggested it would turn out to be special, among physical properties, and hence harder or impossible to explain.  Some did suggest that sort of thing about the property of being alive, but they turned out to be wrong. The property of being alive is now well explained, and, in retrospect, there was never any real reason to have expected that it would turn out to be something incommensurable with other physical properties.With feeling, unlike with liquidity and life, there is no explanation. And, worse, there are strong reasons to think that not only is feeling causally superfluous for organisms' cognitive and behavioral function, but that feeling could not play an independent causal role unless there existed an extra elementary force, rather like gravitation or electromagnetism, to allow doings to be caused by feelings, rather than just by the functions correlated with (and perhaps mysteriously causing) feelings -- because there is no elementary "telekinetic" force. So I'm perfectly willing to *believe* in the kind of "causal closure" Jim describes. But I'd sure rather hear it explained how and why it works...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/2991>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=2991&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-14 -- Reply to [**Jim Stone**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2994)

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| **"QUALIA" = FEELINGS; "EPIPHENOMENAL" = CAUSALLY INEXPLICABLE**Three misunderstandings (which may also be disagreements) underlie the exchange with Jim Stone. The most important one concerns the concept and term "qualia," which I would reject as vague and equivocal, replacing it by "feelings." Jim thinks it is "feelings" that are equivocal:***JS:*** *"The word ‘feeling ‘is ambiguous. It can denote a feel, a pain, a tickle, a taste, but it can also denote the awareness of a feel."*That is precisely the virtue of using "feeling" to talk about what we are talking about, namely, "feeling." It is both redundant and misleading to distinguish feeling something, say, an itch, from "being aware" that you feel something, say, an itch. It is for the very same reason that I jettison talk of "awareness": it is all covered by "feeling".If I feel an itch, I feel an itch. (I only have an itch if I feel an itch. I may have a mosquito bite, but if I don't feel an itch, I don't have an itch. And even if I feel something vague on my arm, and *then* feel that I have an itch, it does not mean I was feeling an itch when I was feeling nothing, or when I was only feeling something vague on my arm; I felt an itch when I felt an itch.There may well be a feeling difference between the feeling I am feeling when I am feeling an itch and the feeling I am feeling when I am feeling an itch *and* I am thinking about or focusing attention on the fact that I am feeling an itch: It feels different to be just feeling an itch and to be feeling and to be thinking of feeling the itch. Some people seem to think profound differences ride on this 2nd-order feeling, and they may or may not be right. But for my purposes -- and for the purposes of specifying exactly what explanation-failure it is that constitutes the "explanatory gap," the distinction between 1st-order and 2nd-order feeling is irrelevant. The explanatory gap is our inability to explain how and why we feel *anything at all* -- regardless of whether the feeling is "1st-order" or "2nd-order."Not only does this block divide-and-conquer fantasies that some have had (thinking they can make some inroads on explaining "consciousness" by addressing free-floating 2nd-orderhood without first accounting for feeling), but, most important, it points out the absurdity of the notion of having "unfelt feelings" (in any other than the trivial sense that I have an unfelt feeling of X if I do not feel X!).Jim, unfortunately, seems to welcome the notion of having an "unfelt feeling" in the sense of actually feeling X but being "unaware" that you are feeling X. Other than in the trivial sense of the extra attentional focus of 2nd-orderhood, it makes no sense that I am feeling X but not feeling that I am feeling X. That is simply a contradiction.***JS:*** *"sometimes ‘feeling ‘denotes what we feel, sometimes it denotes the feeling of it. In fact, there are unfelt feels– as in the case of the driver in a reverie who has all sorts of color sensations at red and green lights that she isn’t aware of."*If the driver is not feeling what it feels like to be seeing red, than the driver is simply not feeling it. It is an error to imagine that because the driver stops at the red light, it means that the driver is feeling what it feels like to be seeing red. The driver's brain may be merely responding to the red optic input, without generating the feeling of seeing red. Either the driver is feeling that feeling, or not feeling it. One or the other.[It is, by the way, the problem of explaining how and why the brain generates the feeling of (say) seeing red that is at the root of the mind/body -- feeling/function -- problem and the explanatory gap. The "how" pertains to how the brain causes feeling, when there is indeed feeling (being felt!), and the "why" pertains to what independent causal power feeling itself might have, qua feeling, for example, to cause doing -- as opposed to doing's being caused by the unfelt *causes* of the feeling, rather than by the feeling qua feeling. (This is where telekinesis would have come in handy, to confirm our feelings about volition, i.e., the feeling I have that some of the things I do I do because I feel like it, and not because of some unfelt cerebral cause that is making me do it, or making me feel like doing it -- if only telekinesis were true.]***JS:*** *"‘Qualia’ has the advantage that it doesn’t invite a fallacy of equivocation, namely, there can’t be unfelt feels (that’s a semantic contradiction!), so all there is to knowing that we feel is having a feeling. Best not to commit that fallacy."*We do indeed have a contradiction here (though I'm not sure it's just a semantic one!) for I am arguing the precise opposite. It is "qualia" and the notion that "feels" (what are those?) can be "had" without being felt -- that constitute the equivocation, and indeed (by my lights) one of the obfuscations that keep us thinking so extraordinarily fuzzily about the true nature of the explanatory gap that underlies the mind/body problem.It is not a problem that is solved by metaphysical speculation. The problem is one of garden-variety causal explanation, which does not seem to be forthcoming in the very special -- indeed unique -- case of explaining how and why organisms feel rather than just funct.***JS:*** *"I use the word ‘epiphenomenalism’ to denote the claim that Qualia have no causal powers. They are a mere side effect of what makes the body move."*And -- apart from rejecting the unnecessary and misleading term-of-art "qualia" -- I simply point out that it is our inability to explain how and why we feel that impels others (not me!) to conclude (emptily, by my lights) that feelings are therefore "epiphenomenal." I think what can be and needs to be said about feelings is already said in our admitting that we cannot explain causally how and why we feel, rather than just funct (i.e., admitting that there exists an explanatory gap specific to the causal explanation of feeling). That already makes it clear that the causal status of feeling is moot. I further argue -- though this is a separate matter, I admit -- that the explanatory gap not only exists, but that it cannot be closed (i.e., we wait in vain for closure along the lines we have had it for the causal explanation of liquidity or of life). The basis of this argument is the fact that a functional explanation is always sufficient to explain what we can do (it just can't explain the fact that we feel); hence every attempt to assign a causal/functional role to feeling is doomed to fail for the very reason that it is causal/functional, hence can be used to "demote" its own explanation of the putative functional role of feeling, reducing it to the very same functional role, but unfelt. And of course underlying all this is the fact that what we would really want, in order to explain feelings in a way that squares with our intuitions (i.e., 2nd order feelings!) about feelings, namely, telekinetic power, is simply false, hence a nonstarter.***JS:*** *"If I understand you, you are using the word [epiphenomenalism] to denote the position that we cannot give a causal mechanistic explanation of how Qualia arise in the first place. That’s a different position than the one that is usually denoted by the word ‘epiphenomenalism.’ As I pointed out in my second post, the explanatory gap simply does not entail epiphenomenalism, as the term is usually used."*It is quite likely that I do not understand or use either "qualia" or "epiphenomenalism" in the standard way -- which is why I do not use them at all: It was you who introduced both terms into our discussion. I was just talking about feelings and the explanatory gap in explaining feelings causally. I substituted "feelings" for "qualia" in everything you said, because that is the only coherent gloss I can find for the word, unless I resign myself to inheriting its equivocation (on such things as "unfelt feels" and 2nd-orderisms).For "epiphenomenalism," a metaphysical position on which I have no opinion, I prefer to substitute the acknowledgement of the explanatory gap, which is merely an epistemological position, about the (absence of) power of ordinary causal/functional explanation to explain how and why we feel rather than just funct.I agree that there are two distinguishable components of the explanatory gap: (1) explaining how and why the brain generates feelings and (2) explaining whether, how, and why feelings, in turn, have causal power, apart from their unfelt brain causes. But, frankly, I rather suspect that these two components are pretty much of a muchness (i.e., two sides of the same bankrupt explanatory coin!).***JS:*** *"The way one argues against epiphenomenalism is by giving arguments that Qualia do indeed have causal powers. I gave three arguments..."*But as I replied (translating into the language of feelings), you have simply noted that the (unknown) causes of feeling are correlated with functings. (An apple, gazed at by me, somehow causes me not only to recognize it as an apple, reach for it, eat it -- all just functing -- but all that is also accompanied by the feeling that I am seeing red (etc.). That's dead-right, but it does not explain how or why the apple causes (my brain, which causes) me not only to recognize, reach for and eat the apple (all causally unproblematic and fully explicable) but also to feel that I am seeing red (etc.). The tight correlation between gazing at the apple and my feeling is just that, a mysterious tight correlation (absent a causal explanation) -- and that is all there is to "epiphenomenalism," as far as I can make out.***JS:*** *"I’m saying something else. It’s this argument:"1. If Qualia had no causal powers, we wouldn’t know they exist."2. We do know Qualia exist, indeed, we are directly acquainted with them."Therefore 3. Qualia have causal powers."*I think this can be well summarized by saying that if we didn't feel, we wouldn't feel (and there would be no explanatory gap). But we do feel, and the feeling is tightly correlated with certain functions. How and why that correlation is causal is not only unknown, but there are reasons to believe it is unknowable. (Hence the explanatory gap is epistemic.)***JS:*** *"1. We know we have Qualia by being directly acquainted with them..."2. Direct acquaintance... requires that the object with which we are acquainted is not wholly devoid of causal powers. "Therefore 3. Qualia have causal powers."*This sounds like a rather more hirsute version of the first argument (since I am not, of course, denying that we feel!): We feel because we feel. Feeling must be caused. So feelings are caused. (Trouble is, we have no idea how or why.) (There is a bit of a conflation here, between the distal "object" (e.g., an apple) that (mysteriously) causes (the brain to cause) the feeling  and the feeling itself (i.e., the proximal "object"), in which it is cartesianly transparent that I am feeling that I'm feeling. The conflation is made more evident if the example is not an apple "causing" me to feel that I am seeing red, but simply my feeling melancholy: what is the "object" with which I am directly acquainted when I am feeling melancholy, that must therefore have "causal power"?)***JS:*** *"If... you want me to agree to...the possibility that Epiphenomenalism is true.. I do agree. [It] is extraordinarily implausible for the reasons I’m giving [but not] inconceivable."*I'll settle for your agreeing that how and why we feel may not only be unexplained, but it may be inexplicable (for the reasons I am giving)...***JS:*** *"Evolution can select only for what affects behavior. What has no causal powers cannot affect behavior."*Correct. But what is (inexplicably) correlated with (adaptive) behavior can be selected for.***JS:*** *"If Qualia have no causal power to effect behavior, they couldn’t have been selected for by evolution. They are a mere side effect of other states that have been so selected."*Correct.***JS:*** *"If Qualia are a mere side effect of other advantageous states that do not owe their advantages in anyway to the associated Qualia, then any Qualia would do, and one would expect a hodgepodge of Qualia, gaping holes, vast and sudden jumps, an irrational and inconsistent system."*No, this does not follow, if the (mysterious) correlation of feelings with function was tight (and it is).[By the way, there is a "qualitative" sense in which the feelings systematically correlated with function are indeed arbitrary (philosophers have sometimes called this "incommensurability"): Feelings do not really "resemble" their objects, even though they (of course) feel-like they do. It feels like something to hear a tone get louder, and it feels like something else to hear a tone get softer. The psychophysical correlation is tight -- right down to a JND-sized increment in intensity, as experiments show. But does what "louder" feels-like really "resemble" an increase in acoustic intensity? or would any felt correlate do just as well, as long as the correlation was systematic, functionally? After all, the feeling need not really resemble intensity; it need merely feel-like intensity, and be systematically correlated with the right *doings*. -- This is all just another aspect of the explanatory gap.]***JS:*** *"We instead have a graded, consistent, fine-grained etc. system of Qualia. "It’s improbable that Qualia are a mere side effect of other advantageous states.  "Probably they were selected for by evolution. "Therefore...Qualia probably have causal powers to affect behavior."*If only we could explain how and why...***JS:*** *"there are some non-silly arguments on the table that [feelings] do have causal powers"*So far I've only seen non-silly arguments for the tight correlation between feeling and function, but not even a silly scenario for a causal explanation (which is what the gap is about) -- apart from telekinesis (which is false) and "reasons" as causes, which is question-begging -- about how/why the reasons are themselves felt rather than just functed.***JS:*** *"once we take seriously the possibility that Qualia make a causal difference, your hard distinction between functing and feeling becomes question begging too, because nothing prevents Qualia from being causal inputs to functional states which, individuated in part by their inputs, would require Qualia."*To repeat, all we have is a mysterious correlation between functing and feeling, and that is the explanandum. Slipping feeling into the explanans on the grounds of the mysterious correlation alone is indeed question-begging.***JS:*** *"you seem to be running together the explanatory gap and epiphenomenalism. This is bound to confuse."*The explanatory gap is the epistemic problem. "Epiphenomenalism" is one of the (several) vacuous metaphysical speculations that is offered in place of a solution. ***JS:*** *"Whether Qualia have causal powers is the question at issue in the post to which you are responding."*And the answer has to be to explain those causal powers, not just to point out the (uncontested) correlations.***JS:*** *"My whole point is that epiphenomenalism is almost certainly mistaken, so that a reasonable constraint on theories of the mind is that they do not entail it."*But you're the one who brought up epiphenomenalism. I was just pointing out that we cannot explain how or why feelings are caused, nor how or why they in turn have any independent causal power (if they do). That's the explanatory gap. Epiphenomenalism is just one of several metaphysical speculations that do not add anything of substance either way.***JS:*** *"if Qualia do have causal powers, as I think is highly plausible, I expect the way is open to assign Qualia a role in our functional economy, both as inputs and outputs of functional states."*All that's needed is to close the explanatory gap...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3002>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3002&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-14 -- Reply to [**Jason Streitfeld**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2973)

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| ***JS:*** *"If you pinch me under local anesthetic and I tell you it does not hurt, would you say that in fact there was a pain there, but that I just could not perceive it?"*Of course not. I would say that (1) you felt no pain. (I've been struggling with others who seem inclined to countenance "unfelt feeling" in this Forum!)But (2) perhaps there was some unfelt nociceptive function going on anyway, not affected by the pain suppression, so some part of your somatosensory system may still have had some response to the pinch. (The big question is why all biobehavioral function is not unfelt function, like that.) And in addition, of course, since you were awake and saw the pinching, (3) you did feel *something* when you were pinched: it just wasn't somatosensory and it wasn't pain.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3004> |

2010-02-14 -- Reply to [**Arnold Trehub**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2977)

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| If someone figured out a way to decode brain imagery so they could read my mind and predict my behavior, even if the decoding was based on theory, I would not say he had given a causal explanation of how and why my brain causes feelings. Ditto if he did it biomolecularly. There's still the explanatory gap there.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3005> |

2010-02-14 -- Reply to [**Jonathan C.W. Edwards**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2982)

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| ***JCWE: "****If there is correlation then one can reasonably expect correspondence in degrees of freedom."* There is a systematic correlation between feeling and functing. The gap is in giving a causal explanation of that correlation.***JCWE:*** *"you want to explain some 'sudden emergence of feeling'"*Yes, feeling is either all or none. You may feel this or that. You may feel it faintly or intermittently. But you are either feeling or not feeling (at time T).***JCWE:*** *"no complexity based ad hoc posit."*I thought you had invoked the complexity continuum (as some do) to explain the onset of feeling. I now understand that you are making the other (in my view) mistake, which is to invoke the complexity continuum as being in some way commensurate with a feeling continuum. There may be a complexity continuum correlated with *what* you feel (more or less), but not with *whether* you feel, which is all or none. (Sorry for the misinterpretation.)***JCWE:*** *"the idea of dynamics without feelings"*The universe is full of dynamics without feelings. The sentience in the biosphere is the anomalous special case.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3006> |

2010-02-14 -- Reply to [**Luke Culpitt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2995)

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| The "how" question refers to both how the brain generated feeling and how feeling generates doing. The "why" question is a functional/adaptive question (not a teleological one): What is the adaptive function of felt function, over and above the adaptive function of the function itself, minus the feeling. You are right that this is another form of "how" question, but that doesn't help...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3007>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3007&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-15 -- Reply to [**Luke Culpitt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2995)

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| The "how" question refers to both how the brain generates feeling and how feeling generates doing. The "why" question is a functional/adaptive question (not a teleological one): What is the adaptive function of felt function, over and above the adaptive function of the function itself, minus the feeling? You are right that this is another form of "how" question, but that doesn't help. Feeling seems doomed to be functionally superfluous -- supererogatory -- in a non-telekinetic world...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3014> |

2010-02-15 -- Reply to [**David Longinotti**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3015)

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| ***DL:*** *"By functionally superfluous, I presume you mean that feelings have no influence on behavior."*  No, I mean we cannot explain their influence, if any, on behavior. All we have is the correlation, not the causal explanation. And our functional explanation of all doings is not only complete without feelings, but there is no room for feelings in it, and every attempt to include feelings in it is either question-begging or supererogatory.***DL:*** *"But if this is so, what is the biological function of the analgesics that the body generally releases when a human is seriously injured in an emergency situation, if it is not to suppress what would otherwise be a distraction, namely, the pain of the injury?  Do you think that a distraction is functionally superfluous, or that pains are not distracting?"*But David, you are now asking me to provide that very causal explanation that I am claiming no one has given (and no one can give)! All we have is the inexplicable correlation between the feeling and the functing, not the causal account of the role of the feeling.***DL:*** *"You apparently draw a difference between "functionally superfluous" and "epiphenomenal." What is that difference?"* "Functionally superfluous" means you can can give a full functional account of all the doing (and doing power) without the feeling. So the feeling is functionally superfluous (though it is undeniably there, and closely correlated with the doing and the doing-power)."Epiphenomenalism" is a label for an ontic state of affairs in which feelings are acausal because of the kind of thing they are (rather than, say, because of the nature and limitations of causal/functional explanation), just as "physicalism" is a label for an ontic state of affairs in which feelings are causal because of the kind of thing they are.I don't think I take any particular ontic position. I think the explanatory gap is an epistemic one, and reflects a limitation of causal/functional explanation in the special, indeed unique, case of feeling.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3016>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3016&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-15 -- Reply to [**Jim Stone**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3012)

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| ***JS:*** *"we don't have enough in common methodologically to talk fruitfully about this. Too bad. I think there are some very interesting issues here.  Such are message boards."*I'm sorry to hear that -- especially because whereas I have little hope for the power of causal explanation to explain how or why we feel, I do have [high hopes](http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Temp/bbs.valedict.html) for the power of message boards (and of [quote/commentary](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=harnad+%28%22quote%2Fcomment%22+OR+%22quote%2Fcommentary%22%29&aq=f&aqi=&oq=) in particular!) to explain and clarify...***JS:*** *"I prefer that you not rewrite my quotations."*Where I did compress them, I thought I was doing so without distorting their meaning. If I did distort their meaning, I apologize (but that too can be remedied by quote/commentary!).Thanks for the [skywriting](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&num=100&q=harnad+skywriting&aq=f&aqi=&oq=) exchange, StevanPermanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3017>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3017&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-15 -- Reply to [**David Longinotti**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3018)

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| **CORRELATION, CAUSATION AND CONFABULATION*****DL:*** *"you say you take no 'ontic' position... But... an explanation is, presumably, ontic...[so] the assertion that one can provide a complete account of doings without including feelings amounts to epiphenomenalism..."*Perhaps an example will make it clearer what I am and am not asserting. Let's use the old chesnut, pain:Yes, I am asserting that one can (in principle) give a full causal explanation of how and why an organism (or robot) responds to injury, how it learns to avoid it, etc., without making any reference to (or use of) the fact that it is systematically correlated with feeling something (i.e., it hurts). Indeed, that's the *only* kind of explanation one can give. (That's the explanatory gap.)The "nociceptive" mechanism that this explanation (whether neural or robotic) provides, and fully explains, functionally, is certainly "ontic," in the sense that the theorist asserts that it exists and is sufficient to generate the function (and, if the theorist is right, then it really does exist and really is sufficient to generate the function).But it is not "ontic" on the subject of feeling, because feeling does not enter into or play any causal role in the mechanism (except if it is projected onto it, hermeneutically, by the (over)-interpreter of the theory).The only ontic thing I say about feelings is that they exist, that they are closely correlated with some functions, and that they *feel* causal.(1) Physicalism would further say that feelings are physical, (2) Dualism that they are not, (3) Telekinesis that feelings have independent causal power, and (4) Epiphenomenalism that they do not. (The various other aspectual/property speculations are just massaging more of the same.)I find none of these ontic isms helpful or relevant. All I want to say is that functional explanation not only does not need feelings, but it does not even have room for them (except if telekinesis is true, but it is not).***DL:*** *"you [also say] there is no telekinesis... [b]ut this is an 'ontic' argument for epiphenomenalism..."*I prefer to say the nonexistence of telekinesis is a trivial empirical conclusion from the fact that there exists absolutely no evidence for the existence of telekinesis and overwhelming evidence that it does not. (It is equally "ontic" to say there is no tooth fairy, and an infinity of other denials of arbitrary ontic affirmations.) But you are quite right: in this very banal sense, to reject telekinesis is indeed ontic.***DL:*** *"one can have evidence THAT something is causal (ontic aspect), without being able to explain HOW something is causal (epistemological aspect)..."*But do we really have evidence that *feelings*, qua feelings, are causal, rather than merely that they are systematically *correlated* (inexplicably) with functing, which is indeed causal (and self-sufficiently causal)? (This is the one practical place where a little Humean scepticism about causality, as opposed to mere correlation, may be in order!)Moreover, the functing with which feelings are (inexplicably) correlated seems to do just as well, causally, without being felt. Indeed explaining why and how the correlated functing is also felt is the problem we're calling the explanatory gap.So, no, I would say that granting feelings causality on the evidence available, without being able to characterize that causality more deeply than mere feeling/functing correlation (and with prima facie reasons to believe that the causality cannot be characterized more deeply), would be to beg the question, and to substitute nondemonstrative faith for explanation, just as it is when we embrace one of the ontic isms on offer as if it settled anything one way or the other.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3030>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3030&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-16 -- Reply to [**Roger Lindsay**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3003)

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| **TELEPATHY: GOOD ENOUGH FOR GOVERNMENT WORK** **(BUT TELEKINESIS IS A NONSTARTER)*****RL:*** *"Presumably whatever methodology provides the basis for your pronouncement [that “Neonates, by the way, and even foetuses, feel; so do simple animals"] can also be used to finally lay to rest the tiresome issue of whether Other Minds exist..."*I know you meant this ironically, but it does raise some interesting questions: First of all, of course, in stating the obvious, I did not mean that I'd solved the "other-minds" problem (of determining whether anyone or anything other than myself feels -- the flip side of the mind/body problem, with its explanatory gap). For present purposes (neurobiologists confidently guesstimating which mammals feel) there's no need (it's a safe bet that all mammals feel). (Over and above behavior and physiology itself, a "sentiometer" -- had such a thing been possible, which of course it is not -- would come in handy when it comes to lower invertebrates and even simpler organisms, but there I plead nolo contendere. And of course sentiometry would be essential with robots -- but I won't start [worrying](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/14430/) about whether it's alright to [kick](http://cogprints.org/2615/) or [eat](http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Tp/robot.html) robots till they're a lot closer to Turing-scale functional capacity.)The other-minds problem is important for two kinds of thinker. (1) The kind who (like Descartes and Hume) is concerned with rigorously distinguishing what we can know for sure from what we can only know with probability. (About mathematical knowledge and the cogito [[sentio ergo sentitur](http://www.google.com/search?q=%22sentio+ergo+sentitur%22&hl=en&num=100&filter=0)] we can be sure; about scientific knowledge and other minds we can only settle for probability.) (2) The cognitive scientists and neuroscientists who are trying to discover the correlates and mechanisms of feelings are of course not in the "sure" camp but the "probable" camp (i.e., they have not solved the other-minds problem and are incapable of telepathy); for them it is already probable enough that others -- including children, foetuses as of a certain embryological stage, and animals -- do feel. But the interesting problem you hint at is whether the insolubility of the other-minds problem is of the same "order" as the insolubility of the mind/body problem: Could the fact that we cannot explain how or why organisms feel (the explanatory gap) be no more nor less of a problem than the fact that we cannot tell whether or not organisms (other than oneself) can feel (the other-minds problem) -- especially since I have been insisting that the explanatory gap is epistemic rather than ontic?I would reply no, for two reasons: first, because, logic, evidence, sense, common sense and probability are all with us with mammalian mind-reading (and Turing-testing), whereas we draw a complete logical, empirical and conceptual blank when it comes to inferring a non-telekinetic function for feeling.But, more important, the two problems (the other-minds problem and the explanatory gap) are connected. It is precisely because telekinesis is false that the causal status of the mental (i.e., feeling) is the conundrum that it is. Given our cartesian certainty that feeling does indeed exist (in at least one's own case), it's then just ordinary empirical risk to infer that it's there in others that are exactly, or almost exactly like us. Telepathy is not infallible, but it's "good enough for government work." Telekinesis, in contrast, is a nonstarter, DOA...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3036>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3036&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137)  |

2010-02-18 -- Reply to [**Roger Lindsay**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3043)

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| **GROUNDED PHILOSOPHICAL SCEPTICISM** **OR** **HOW AND WHY DID THE CHICKEN CROSS THE ROAD?*****RL:****"Suppose you refute idealism by kicking a rock."*There is *ontic* idealism ("there is no outside world"), which is of course bonkers and needs no "refutation." And there is *epistemic* idealism ("you cannot be sure in the case of science and the outside world, in the way you can be sure about maths and the cogito") and the latter is sound, and not refuted by kicking rocks. (You could also call this “weak skepticism.”)***RL****: "The pain in your toe... results from a neural transmission sequence"* That's almost certainly true, like all scientific facts. But the causal mechanism seems straightforward for the transmission of the data about the distal *injury*, yet a bit bleary about how and why that *feels* like something. It does. And no doubt the nerves must be doing it. But *how*, and especially *why* (functionally speaking, since the transmission of the injury, and the resulting cortical processing, to compensate and try to avoid in future, seems all that's needed, functionally)?***RL****: "I take... a look, and explain that... we are arriving at a T-junction"*Your words transmit information too. No problem, functionally. But why/how does it *feel like something* to hear and understand them?***RL****: "I’m not trying to explain why we feel feelings, I’m trying to explain why someone might think that feelings don’t have causal consequences when they (clearly) do."*Oh, but I think the tendency is more to think feelings *do* have causal consequences (we are all closet telekineticists, of course), whereas the problem is *explaining* how and why they do. The gap is not a phenomenological one (nor, particularly, an ontic one) but an epistemic, i.e. an *explanatory* one.***RL****: "In reducing all mental events to “feelings” you restrict analysis to an ontological monoculture... But they aren’t – people experience and report wants, and needs, and goals, and plans, and choices..."*You are recommending that we continue to be distracted with *what* we feel, whereas I am quite deliberately insisting on the need to explain *that* we feel: How and why are all those wants, needs, goals, plans *and* choices *felt* wants, needs (etc.), rather than just *functed* wants (etc.), which is all that seem to be called for, functionally, and all that we seem to be able to account for, functionally? It's not about any particular feeling; it's about the fact that any of it is felt at all.***RL****: "Once some of these mental events and operations are acknowledged, then I can say for example that I choose to carry out the actions required to illegally download music from file-sharing sites because I like listening to music but I don’t like buying CDs because most of my money goes to media moguls."*You sure can. And you always could. But *explaining* it functionally -- rather than folk-lorically -- is the challenge for cognitive science.***RL****: "You seem to say that think in saying this I’ve shifted from acceptable science to fairy stories. But this is wrong. Anything that provides explanatory leverage in explaining the experienced world is a legitimate part of science. A science that is restricted to functs, such as neurochemical events or behavioural contingencies, gets nowhere in explaining why people touch their noses or download music."*I am not particularly scientistic and don't invoke "science" as if it were some sort of mystical, esoteric practice. I think science is just [systematic common sense](http://www.spiked-online.com/articles/0000000CAA38.htm), answerable to evidence.But I think evidence-based common sense agrees that answering the question "Why did the chicken cross the road?" with anything like "Because she felt like it," though it is quite true, and quite comprehensible, is not very explanatory. Not even if you say "because she was hungry and wanted to eat and did a calculation according to which the highest probability of encountering food was on the other side of the road -- and the calculation was true, and the chicken believed it, and so she acted upon it."I want to know, functionally, what it takes to design a chicken that is functionally capable of all that -- and how and why she needs to feel any of it, rather than just functing it.***RL****: "such behaviour can be readily understood and even predicted if you ask people about their plans and the reasons they make the choices they do..."*It sure can. But prediction isn't explanation.***RL****: "By the time you’ve explained my behaviour by mapping chemical gradients and states of individual neurones, I will have been dead for centuries."*Perhaps, but what you describe (by way of quotidial interpersonal prediction and explanation) we could have been (and have been) doing ever since the advent of language. It's certainly adaptive to be able to do that, but not much more explanatory than predicting that apples will fall. (I say "not much," rather than "not at all" because the verbal mind-reading that language allows is of course highly adaptive, predictive and functional. What's a mystery is how and why any of that verbalization is *felt* rather than just verbalized (i.e., functed).***RL****: "Evolution no doubt came up with symbolic control, because humean causality is just too fine-grain and slow for complex systems."*  (I don't understand your oft-repeated "humean causality": I only know of one kind of causality...)And I'm all for the functional advantages of "[symbolic control](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&source=hp&q=%22symbol+grounding%22&aq=f&aqi=g1g-m2&oq=)." My question is about why that very useful symbolicity is *felt*. (And I am quite relaxed about inferring that our pre-symbolic infants and foetuses -- and our non-symbolic cousins -- feel too.)***RL****: "I’m not offering an explanation of consciousness, but I think that much of our conscious experience is a consequence of awareness not just of feelings, goals and actions, but also of symbolic representations of feelings, goals and actions etc."*Whereas the explanatory gap is precisely about explaining all that  -- and that's what I've been talking about all along, simple substituting "feeling: "and "felt" for every mention of its polymorphically promiscuous (and often redundant) synonyms. Here's a transcription of what you just said:"*I’m not offering an explanation of feeling, but I think that much of our felt feeling is a consequence of feeling not just of feelings, felt goals and felt actions, but also of felt symbolic representations of feelings, goals and actions etc."*  Well, yes, and I just thought it would be quite nice if we could explain how and why they are *felt*...***RL****: "You say, robots can do this kind of representation&so they can to some extent, but robots are inorganic, and maybe feelings are, as John Searle would say, just basic properties of irritable organic materials."*Maybe, but (as I've had occasion to say to [John Searle](http://cogprints.org/4414/1/harnad-searle.html) too!)  it would be nice to know *how and why* irritable organic materials feel, rather than just funct.***RL****: "Then again, robots work with externally assigned symbol interpretations – maybe self-programming automata like humans need a few extra loops in the mechanism."*As I hinted earlier, I've given a bit of thought to this problem of [grounding symbols](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&source=hp&q=%22symbol+grounding%22&aq=f&aqi=g1g-m2&oq=) myself, but it's just a functional problem, not one afflicted by any explanatory gap.And although I think the solution is in sensorimotor categorization capacity rather than in internal "loops, "I would be quite keen to find out how and why those inner loops, if any, would be felt loops, rather than just functed loops... (Grounded symbols, by the way, do not thereby become felt symbols: that's another step -- but mind the gap!)***RL****: "haven’t you been all along using “feelings” to include awareness of feelings?"*Yes, proudly I have, since "awareness of feelings "is merely a polymorphic way of saying the (equally redundant) "feeling of feelings."Let me say it in the most direct way I can: Consciousness *is* feeling. (The rest is just about the particular content of consciousness -- feeling this vs. feeling that.) And the explanatory gap occurs in trying to explain how and why we are conscious -- i.e., how and why we feel, rather than just do.***RL****: "where has your hitherto rigorous scepticism gone?"*My scepticism is only about explaining feeling, not about the fact that we feel. And about babies and animals, ditto. I am no more sceptical about them feeling than I am about apples falling. There's the Humean uncertainty, but that's just the "gap" between necessary truth, provably true on pain of contradiction, and contingent truth, probably true on the basis of the evidence. All evidence suggests that, like me (and you), babies (and other mammals) feel pain if you pinch them.***RL****: "There is no deductive proof, and at most zero evidence that neonates and non-human animals feel."*I'm afraid have to disagree, quite strongly. There is an abundance of evidence that babies and animals feel. Similarity of behavior, similarity of nervous function, etc. They don't talk, but, frankly, if you can't see the obvious in the behavior then I don't see why you take their word for it either, when people say something hurts! After all, the only case you know for sure is your own...***RL****: "Of course [human babies and other mammals]  react to stimuli, but so do earthworms and bacteria."*I suspect that earthworms might feel too; on bacteria I have no intuition at all.But please remember that the explanatory gap is about explaining how and why *all* organisms don't just funct, rather than feel. You seem to glimpse the light of an answer in the fact that it has something to do with talking and reasoning, but you certainly don't say how or why. And feeling would be a lonely function in the world if it were true that the only ones that feel are the ones that can talk! (On the face of it, the only thing that distinguishes the ones that can talk from the ones that can't is [the fact that they can talk](http://www.summer10.isc.uqam.ca/page/programme.php)! Lots of functional advantages come with that territory (language), but feeling is not one of them, at least not on the basis of anything that you have said so far.)***RL****: "I’m not just offering straight-bat philosophical scepticism here."*I think most people, rightly sceptical about the possibility of zombies, would resist the idea that they are in fact quite surrounded by zombies, starting with their own babies. (I doubt, too, that this is what philosophical scepticism means, or entails.)***RL****: "you often seem to optimistically point in the direction of Turing tests as a criterion for demonstrating that machines have feelings. But can a Turing Test demonstrate anything more than Philosophical Zombiehood?"*I would find it just as difficult (and almost as silly) to believe that a Turing-scale robot -- indistinguishable from any of the rest of us *in everything it is able to do (lifelong)* -- does not also (inexplicably) feel as I would find it difficult to believe that any of the rest of us (apart from me) --  who are likewise able to do everything that we are able to do (lifelong) -- do not  (inexplicably) feel (though of course I would know that I could be wrong in both cases, and that in the case of humans, biology makes it a bit more improbable -- but just a bit, really).Now *that's* what I would call grounded philosophical scepticism...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3046>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3046&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-19 -- Reply to [**Roger Lindsay**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3050)

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| **ANIMALS AND BABIES ARE NOT ZOMBIES** **(NOR, PROBABLY, ARE TURING-SCALE ROBOTS)** **BUT HOW, AND WHY?*****RL:*** *"I would have made a very poor missionary."*But, Roger, surely all we're trying to do is inform (one another, and ourselves) rather than to persuade, particularly!(And although I'm already persuaded that the causal status of feeling is inexplicable, I'm always willing to listen carefully, in case I am wrong, and, after all, I hear, *mirabile dictu,* an explanation, or even just a potential route to an explanation.)But I've enjoyed the exchange too.***RL:*** *"It seems to me no less bonkers to deny the causal efficacy of mental events such as choosing what to do and acting upon one’s intentions."*I'm not denying their causal efficacy, I'm denying their causal explicability. (Their *apparent* causal efficacy is not in dispute either, nor the causal efficacy of the unproblematic functing with which they are closely  -- but inexplicably -- correlated.)***RL:*** *"You depict yourself as some kind of film critic, endlessly watching a movie no-one else can see; choosing nothing, responsible for nothing."*Not in the least. I depict myself as experiencing much the same thing everyone else does. I just seem to be somewhat more up-front and in touch with the fact that there is a gaping explanatory gap behind it! (But no better at closing the gap.)***RL:*** *"Donald Davidson is generally credited with the idea that reasons function as causes."*I have no problem with that. My question was about why the reasoning is *felt* rather than just functed...***RL:*** *"touching my nose [was] meant to illustrate the difficulties a Humean account must have with voluntary actions... It would... seem impossible in principle for my action to be predicted or explained on the basis of observation of my lifetime behaviours and the context within which they occurred."*I wasn't talking about whether and how well your actions could be *predicted*. I was talking about how the causal role of feelings in your actions could not be *explained functionally*. (And I still think Hume has next to nothing to do with it!)***RL:*** *"Adding in brain state data wouldn’t help. Nor would anything else that doesn’t incorporate an account of how I understand and interpret the world."*Quite: Dynamics and computation. But the part I'm missing is why and how any of that needs to be *felt* rather than just functed...***RL:*** *"I completely agree with you that all mental events must be realized as funct-level processes, but that doesn’t mean that funct-level processes can be used to explain feeling-level events."*"Level"? I know only one relevant level, and that's the explanatory level...***RL:*** *"what would the world have to be like to explain our mental experience that feelings are inexplicable?"*Explanation is not mental (though understanding -- i.e., *felt* explanation -- is  mental). The gap is explanatory, not just mental; I do not hold the view (e.g., McGinn's) that there is an explanation, but our brains just can't "grasp" it. (At least, let me hear this putative explanation, and then I'll draw my conclusions on whether and why I can't understand it.)Certainly one explanation would have been perfectly strightforward and understandable -- had it only been true! Telekinesis.So, to answer your question, the way the world would have to be in order to make feelings real, but in explicable, is exactly the way it is. But that's no explanation!***RL:*** *"We seem to agree that sensations begin as physical events"*No, "begin" is equivocal: If there is to be an explanation of how and why we feel, it begins with the fact that some functions are felt -- i.e., correlated with feelings. What causes those feels, and what their respective causal function (if any) is, is so far opaque. (They're not miracles, so they must be caused somehow; but what looks like it will take a miracle is to explain how, and why.)***RL:*** *"We seem to agree that at some later point [sensations] are represented as feelings in a mental/symbolic system (m-events)."*Lots of the usual polymorphic baggage here! Some functions are felt. The "representation" is homuncular and question-begging. (What is "represented" to whom?) Among the felt functions are more sensorimotor ones (what it feels like to see or to move) and more cognitive ones (what it feels like to reason, understand, and mean).***RL:*** *"Now, consider the point of transition between the two. M-events cannot be explained in Humean terms because they don’t exist within the (Humean) p-system. But nor can they be explained within the m-system, because their (physical) source lies outside it."*I'm lost! I asked how/why we feel, and I am hearing instead about mysterious "m-systems" and "p-systems," and "events" existing in the one and not the other.For me, all this (ostensibly dualistic) proliferation of entities is only increasing my mystification, since all I had asked was: how and why do we feel?***RL:*** *"Interface events will thus have the property of being (literally) inexplicable, because they cross the boundary between domains in which different modes of explanation obtain."*Well there we are then. I'm out of luck! There are all these domains, with interfaces, over which "events" don't "cross"...(I take this to be symptomatic of the fact that we are all, understandably, frustrated with the inexplicable, and so we are ready to go to rather extravagant lengths to persuade ourselves that they are explicable, or at least inevitable, after all -- including "explanations" that explain their inexplicability.)I'm not persuaded. But I am informed...***RL:*** *"What I am trying to do here... [is] to consider what might account for their inexplicability."* I can see that. (But alas I don't find your explanation of their inexplicability explanatory but rather ad hoc, more or less saving the appearances: We feel. It feels as if our feelings are causal. They are closely correlated with unproblematic functions that are indeed causal. The world is closed under causality. So that's it: parallel "systems." Why am I still left with the nagging feeling that the "m" system is utterly superfluous [though real enough], on this account, which just puts as back where we started...)***RL:*** *"Humean causation is actually just another mystery."*I agree. So is quantum mechanics. But they are not particularly relevant to the mystery we are discussing (how/why we feel). How/why does an apple fall is afflicted with the mystery of Humean causation. But I'd be quite happy to see how/why we feel turn out no more or less mysterious than just that...***RL:*** *"Another point of difference between us seems refreshingly, to have empirical implications. You think humans have feelings from birth... Awareness develops in my view only when the meaning/symbol system can begin to assume functional control..."*Yes, I know you think babies and animals are Zombies and only those who have language feel. But alas that "empirical" disagreement, even if it were testable (it's not) would not close the explanatory gap. It would just restrict those afflicted with it to those who can speak!)(My old teacher, [Julian Jaynes](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/16601/), thought even language wasn't enough, and we were all still Zombies in biblical and early Hellenic times.) But I'm just waiting to hear why and how language (or post-bicameral language) is felt rather than just functed.***RL:*** *"As (I think) we both believe that language processes are central to feelings..."* I'm afraid we do not share that belief. I think that the mind/body (feeling/function) problem (and its explanatory gap) is already there, in its full glory, with *amphioxus*...***RL:*** *"I would predict that there is a sizeable lag, certainly of months, maybe of a year or more..."*Even if it were true (which it isn't!) that the only non-Zombies in the world are human toddlers and beyond, all you are doing is deferring an explanatory debt, not paying it...***RL:*** *"Presumably by [Turing-Test-passing robot] we both mean a device programmed by persons...  If... feelings have... no function, why... programme them [in]..."* ("Design" sounds a better descriptor than "programme," but never mind.)If the "designer" has a way to "programme" in feelings, I'd like to hear what that way is, and how and why it generates feelings!***RL:*** *"I am left believing that your account of feelings implies that a [Turing-Test passing robot]  would be a philosophical zombie.* There are no "philosophical zombies," just insentient things, like rocks, galaxies and (by your lights) all animals and babies!The methodological question (though it's not just philosophical -- both roboticists and comparative psychologists and neurologists need to ask address it) is: what are the reliable behavioral and neural correlates of feeling?One conjecture -- and this is what is usually meant by the "Zombie Hunch" -- is that there could be systems with all of our human behavioral capabilities (i.e., Turing-Test-passers) that did not feel.I happen to think that that Hunch is [wrong](http://cogprints.org/1601/) (and that a [TT-passer](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/12954/) is just about as likely to feel as the rest of us). But it will remain an untestable hunch, either way -- until and unless someone can explain how and why we feel.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3051>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3051&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-21 -- Reply to [**Jonathan C.W. Edwards**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3029)

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| **THE HARD PROBLEM IS NOT *WHETHER*, *WHEN* OR *WHERE* WE FEEL** **BUT *WHY* AND *HOW******JE:*** *"We are agreed that feels, at least other than our own, are superfluous to a causal account."*Our own feelings are just as superfluous. (It's just that, unlike the feelings of others, they don't just exist with high probability, but with cartesian certainty.)***JE:*** *"So we can have no empirical evidence for the above, one way or the other."*There's plenty of empirical evidence for feeling, both my own and others'. What's missing is a causal explanation.***JE:*** *"If we want indirect evidence, such that we might infer where there are feelings we need to have at least a provisional idea of the rules of correspondence of causality and feelings."*The explanatory gap is not about the other-minds problem (how to know whether or not others feel) but the mind/body (feeling/function) problem: how to explain why and how we feel.***JE:*** *"you above all people should be agnostic about where feels are in the universe"*I have next to no doubts about where feelings are. My problem is explaining how and why they're there...***JE:*** *"my comment does not invoke any continuum of partial feelingness. It is as you say, a matter of whether you feel more or less... [but] should you not be agnostic on this too?"*No. I'm not particularly sceptical about the reliable correlation between feeling and functing. It's the causal explanation of that correlation that I keep pointing out is missing. (The explanatory gap is not a sceptical stance. It is a garden-variety call for a causal explanation.)***JE:*** *"the 'explanatory gap' of why causality is associated with feeling is a pretty shaky concept if the ultimate definition of causality is that which determines our own feels"*But my "ultimate definition" of causality has next to nothing to do with me (or anyone), feeling: it has to do with apples, falling.***JE:*** *"it is parsimonious to suggest that our feels are only special in that they have evolved such that they correlate usefully and in detail with distant environmental events*.*"* It may be parsimonious; it may even be true. But it is not explanatory. I want to know *how and why* feelings evolved, rather than just the functings they are reliably, indeed predicably, correlated with (functings that look for all the world as if they would have been just fine, to do the job for the Darwinian survival machines we are): The explanatory gap is about the causal status of feelings, for which their unexplained correlation with adaptive functings is not an explanation.***JE:*** *"What seems to be a real gap is our lack of knowledge of the rules of correspondence between causal interactions and feels. In addition to the rules of traditional physics defined in terms of comparisons of outside events we need to discover other internal rules of correspondence, as Newton pointed out. This is difficult but not 'hard' in the fashionable sense."*I am not sure what you might mean by "rules of correspondence," but I hope it's not just more about feeling/function correlations."Outside events"? Outside what? "Internal rules"? Inside what?The functional explanation of behavioral capacity and brain function is the usual kind of scientific problem, no harder nor less hard than other areas of reverse bioengineering.But explaining how and why feelings get into that functional story is a problem of a rather different order of duress (and, by my lights, insoluble).***JE:*** *"perhaps there is a hard component to the problem, raised by speculation about how widespread feels are."*The problem is neither about *whether* nor about *where* (or when) there are feelings, but about how and why.***JE:*** *"How to develop a theory of the extent of the causal goings on that are associated with one 'feel packet' or subject."*You've lost me. I have no idea what a "feel packet" is, nor do I yet have a clue of a clue about causality (other than telekinesis, which, as already noted nauseatingly often, is a nonstarter)...***JE:*** *"Systems theory is fashionable but systems are defined arbitrarily and by definition are aggregates of many discrete interactions at many discrete junctures."*Not just fashionable, but vacuous. (But we're agreed it doesn't help...)***JE:*** *"We seem to need an indivisible packet of interaction - one juncture... This seems to me to be the truly tricky gap in our theoretical structure."*I'm lost again. I'm not looking for a packet or interaction or juncture, just a unified causal account of why and how there is feeling correlated with functing. That's the trick. And its absence (and the reason for its absence) is the gap.(Before mapping out  a particular theory, please give a short pre-indication of how it will solve the problem of causality; otherwise there is no point going into the details, if the causal strategy turns out -- as always -- to be a nonstarter.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3058>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3058&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-21 -- Reply to [**Luke Culpitt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3019)

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| [**ANOSOGNOSIA**](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&source=hp&q=harnad+anosognosia&aq=f&aqi=&oq=) **FOR THE EXPLANATORY GAP*****LC:*** *"To rephrase: 'What is the adaptive function of feelings, over and above the adaptive function of physical brain functions?'"*More perspicuously (and so as to make it less easy to beg the question): Why and how are some brain functions felt rather than just functed? We already know there are feelings, and that they are reliably correlated with brain function, and that brain function is adaptive. It is the causal role of feelings qua feelings -- not just as something that happens to be mysteriously "piggy-backing" on (some) brain function -- that is at issue.***LC*** *"But haven't you answered your own "why" question here? The reason why we have feelings in addition to brain functions is because, as you say, they play an "adaptive function", or they help us to survive."*No, you've just begged the question! *Brain function helps us to survive.* That's already known. *Some brain function is reliably correlated with feeling*. That too, we know. What needs to be explained (rather than taken for granted) is how and why some brain function is reliably correlated with feeling, and, in particular, what the causal role of that feeling is.***LC:*** *"Perhaps this is unsatisfactory. So the question then becomes: Why are we geared for survival?"*No, the question is no more about why organisms are geared to survive than it is about why brain function is adaptive. If all that were at issue were insentient Darwinian survival machines, with brains, functioning, geared for survival (just like us, if you like, but adaptive Zombies), there would be no problem at all.The problem is precisely with what you are leaving out (or simply taking for granted).***LC:*** *"This is why I consider your request for a causal explanation to the "why" question as, for lack of a better term, invalid"*My question is perfectly valid, and not in the least teleological or mystical: The "why" is as functional as can be. It simply asks what the functional role of feeling is in a system that not only looks for all the world as if it can do the functional job -- the complete, Darwinian, adaptive, biobehavioral, survival-reproductve, functional job -- without the help of feelings (thank you very much), but, worse: does not look as if it leaves any room for feelings as any kind of independent causal force or functional factor at all (except if telekinesis were valid, which it is not).So there's nothing invalid at all about my persistent functional "why?": What is invalid, I think, is to beg the question, in the multiple ways it keeps getting begged (not only by you, of course)...***LC:*** *"In light of this, I don't see that the explanatory gap carries much weight - unless you have some argument that a causal explanation of how (not why) the brain causes feelings is impossible."*"Impossible" would call for a formal proof of necessity, on pain of contradiction, and this is not mathematics but the empirical world. So all I can say is that on the current understanding of causality and functionality, a world in which there were organisms that survived, reproduced, competed, learned, talked, etc., would be no problem at all to explain in the usual, causal, functional way -- as long as they were insentient, like all other dynamical systems. But we are not such organisms. We feel. We nevertheless have (or will eventually have) functional explanations (neural and computational) for all of our functions -- surviving, reproducing, competing, learning, talking, etc. -- except feeling.It would be nice if we could just say that feelings are *sui generis*, like gravity, a force that's just *there*, and calls for no further explanation. But there is no telekinetic force. So feelings are piggy-backing, somehow, and for some (presumably functional) reason, on other, nontelekinetic, i.e., ordinary functions.But how and why do these functionally superfluous and causally impotent feelings piggy-back on garden-variety, insentient functions that can do (and explain) everything except the mysterious fact of feeling itself?I'd say that the functional superfluousness of feelings in functional explanations of adaptive behavior -- and indeed the fact that there is not even any room for them in such explanations, on pain of telekinesis -- makes closing the explanatory gap look well nigh impossible. But I remain open-minded and I'm all ears. Unfortunately, all I keep hearing, though, is question-begging -- and rather obvious, easily-exposed question-begging. So I provisionally conclude that most thinkers on this question (today and yesteryear) seem to find this fundamental explanatory problem so unacceptable that they either lapse into agnosia (nb, not the same as agnosticism! more like [anosognosia](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p1082), [q.v.](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p2974)) about it or into provisionally soothing question-begging of the kind for which we now have a fairly representative sample in the 440+ posts in this PhilPapers thread so far!Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3059>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3059&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-21 -- Reply to [**Victor Panzica**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3044)

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| **SEEING (AND BELIEVING) IS FEELING*****VP:*** *"When we go to a restaurant, we don't "feel" what we are going to eat by going in the kitchen and tasting all of the food. Instead we "funct" what we are going to eat by reading the menu."*No, actually, we feel what it feels like to read and understand the menu and then we order what we feel like eating -- and we do it because we feel like it.Reading a menu is exclusively functing when done by an insentient robot or a Zombie. All of our (felt) functing (including reading) feels like something to do, and we do it (if it's voluntary) because we feel like it.***VP:*** *"The gap occurs naturally because we evolved a visual and cognitive system which translates nature from feelings into a system of patterns, symbols and language. Hence a[n] "explanatory problem" appears."*No, the problem appears because seeing and reading is felt, and the gap is explaining how and why they are felt rather than just functed.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3060>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3060&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-24 -- Reply to [**Luke Culpitt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3090)

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| **YES, THE "WHY" QUESTION IS JUST A FORM OF "HOW" QUESTION, BUT...**Let me first agree straight away that the question "Why are some functions felt?" is just a subset or variant of the question "How are some functions felt?"The reason I insist on asking them separately is simple: Functional explanations of human capacities inevitably (though usually inadvertently) tend to smuggle in feelings at some juncture without any functional justification. They will interpret a "widget" within a perfectly unobjectionable (and feelingless) injury-detection, avoidance and learning mechanism as a (felt) "pain signal" or a "pain response," when, functionally, all it is and needs to be, in order to deliver all of the capacity in question, is an (unfelt) injury signal or an injury response.The only way to expose this inadvertent smuggling is to ask "*Why* is this widget felt rather than just functed?" The answer would of course have to be functional (i.e., how the fact that it is felt plays some sort of causal role in what the widget can do, functionally). But if the question is simply posed as "How is this widget felt rather than just functed?" the reply will predictably be hermeneutic again, simply smuggling in the fact that it is felt as a given, rather than as an explanandum, still waiting for an explanation.Asking "Why?" rather than just "How?" is also tantamount to asking what work the fact that the widget is felt rather than just functed is actually doing. For inevitably it turns out that the widget can do precisely the same functional work whether or not it is assumed to be (i.e., interpreted as being)  felt.***LC:****"I remain sceptical of the possibility of answering a "why" question with a causal explanation, and am unclear on what you are asking for when requesting the "causal role" of feelings".*If there's a felt widget in the functional mechanism, I want to know why the very same  functional mechanism would not work just as well if it were unfelt. I want to know the causal role (if any) played by the fact that it is felt, without conflating it with its (uncontested) functional role (as it would be if it were unfelt).***LC:****"[O]nce the "why" question is removed, there seems to be much less of a gap, or the gap becomes somewhat more managable to consider. The question is then how the irritation of physical nerve endings causes us to have feelings and consciousness. I would guess that there already exist causal (how) explanations for some aspects of consciousness, like vision, hearing, etc."*Hardly. "Visual processing" models and mechanisms simply take the fact that it happens to feel like something to see things for granted (whereas it is the heart of the mystery). Otherwise these models and mechnisms would be seen (sic) for being the merely optical processing models and mechanisms that they really are. It's precisely the right critique to say, once the functional mechanism (whether biological or robotic) is laid out, explained and demonstrated: "I understand perfectly well *how* this functional mechanism does everything it does, but why is any of it felt? What functional role does *that* play?"***LC:****"What I am questioning is whether a "why" question can be given a causal explanation, or whether "why" questions are demanding a causal explanation.*Why does this widget in your mechanism need to be felt, rather than just functed?***LC:****"I'm unsure how you determine that the system looks like it "can do the functional job [...] without the help of feelings". To whom does it look like it can? A conscious feeler, perhaps."*Quite the opposite. In the causal dynamics of the universe, the proportion of feeling systems is minuscule. (Confined to one planet's biosphere, until further notice.) That means the overwhelming majority of function in the universe is unfelt function. (I ignore [panpsychism](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&source=hp&q=harnad+panpsychism&aq=f&aqi=&aql=&oq=) as not only far-fetched but mereologically incoherent.) That means the default hypothesis for the causal dynamics of function is that function is *unfelt*. The burden of proof, for anyone who wants to ascribe a causal function to feeling, is to show how *and why* unfelt function cannot do exactly the same job (i.e., generate exactly the same I/O, exactly the same performance capacity) without invoking feeling at all.The "why?" is just a perspicuous variant on the "how?"***LC:****"I take your argument to be that the mental (feelings) cannot be translated into physical terms because (i) it looks as though the functioning of matter can be fully explained without any reference to feelings, and because (ii) the mental has no functional/causal power of its own (the telekinesis argument)."*Almost spot-on, except it's not about "translating feelings into physical terms" (I'm sure one can do an all too satisfying "translation," given the close correlations!). It's just about the causal role of feeling in that correlated functioning.***LC:****"I take (i) to be purely a "how"-related issue. This leaves (ii) as the only prospect of contributing the "why" factor. I guess you're asking for an (causal?) explanation of why feelings exist given that they have no functional/causal power, or given that telekinesis is false."*I think this may be just semiological rather than substantive. Where I say "Why does this widget have to be felt in order to do its job?", please substitute the (to my ears a bit more awkward) "How does this widget have to be felt in order to do its job?".**LC:** "We might not be able to move matter just by thinking it, but we can move matter by both thinking it and doing it."Yes, but why (how) does the thinking have to be *felt* in order to do that job?" (It *is* felt, that we know, all to well: but how and why?)***LC:*** *"I would speculate that the function played by the mental is largely to do with the "adaptive functions" of future planning and past remembering, and the pre-action consideration of possible alternatives."*Yes, that all sounds like good stuff, but why (how) does any of it have to be felt in order to do its job?" (Planning, yes, but why (sic) felt planning? Remembering, yes, but why felt remembering?)***LC:****"[T]his type of detection or causal explanation seems possible, through improved brain scanning technologies and the development of better theories regarding the mind/brain relationship. However, this causal explanation would only account for the "how" and not the "why".*You're talking about detecting (and predicting) function/feeling correlations, not explaining why (how) any of that functing has to be *felt* in order to do its job...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3097>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3097&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-24 -- Reply to [**Benedek Horvath**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3091)

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| ***BH:****"[1] could anyone use the explanatory gap for proving the emergence of qualia? [2] Is it a sensible question at all?"*(1) A failure to explain something proves nothing (except that you have failed to explain something)."Emergence" means nothing (except unexplained presence)."Qualia" add nothing to the discussion: "Feeling" says it all.We have already "proved" there is feeling when we feel (cogito/sentio).(2) It is a sensible question to ask for an explanation of how and why we feel.Our inability to explain how and why we feel proves nothing at all (except the existence of the explanatory gap).(A proof that it is inexplicable in principle might be useful, but I'm not sure we can quite manage that. Just heuristic arguments, such as "Why can't your mechanism work just as well without feeling?")Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3098>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3098&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-02-26 -- Reply to [**Luke Culpitt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3108)

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| **IF YOU DON'T LIKE "WHY?", SUBSTITUTE "WHAT FOR?"...*****LC:*** *"I'm not sure what a signal could possibly signify to a feelingless material object, or how an unconscious (unfelt) signal can still be a signal."*A signal just has to signal. Bracket the fact that signifying is felt (it is, but that fact's the explanandum) and all you have left is signaling (dynamics and data-processing).***LC:*** *"How does the fact that "the widget" is felt play some sort of causal role in what the widget can do, functionally? I thought I'd already offered a provisional answer to this with my speculations about future planning and the pre-action consideration of possible alternatives."* But I then asked you why planning had to be felt, rather than just planned...***LC:*** *"Isn't "the fact that it is felt" a given? Do you need an explanation of feelings to convince you that you're not a P-zombie?"*The fact that it (e.g., planning) is felt is given, all right. But I was asking for an explanation: How and why *felt* planning rather than just planning? (I know I'm not a Zombie: I'm asking what functional role the fact that I am not a Zombie is playing in my functioning.)***LC:*** *"Of course they do. There would be no need for any explanations of visual processing if it didn't already ''feel like something to see things'."*Oh, I think there would still be a lot of functional explaining left to do if seeing were not felt, but were instead just photic processing that was just as adept, functionally, as our felt seeing. There would be a lot of explaining left to do -- but there would be no explanatory gap.So my question continues to be: How and why is it *felt* seeing rather than just equally proficient but insentient photic processing?***LC:*** *"So you agree that there is no explanatory gap regarding the "how" question, and that only an answer to the "why" question could close the gap?"*No, I said the quibbling about words is missing the point: I can avoid either interrogative (how or why), if you find them objectionable: "*What* is the functional role of the fact that seeing is felt seeing rather than unfelt photic processing?"***LC:*** *"I'm not sure if it needs to be [felt], but it certainly is. Right?"*It certainly is. But I wasn't contesting that fact, just asking for a functional explanation of it. You reply that it's just so...***LC:*** *"To be conscious is to have a viewpoint on the world."*A *felt* viewpoint? What is the functional role played by the fact that it is felt? A robot has an optical field too. Scanning here covers a different field from scanning there, functionally. But none of it is felt. What is the functional role of the fact that it is felt, in our case?(I like Tom Nagel on what it feels like to be a bat; and "point of view" is soothing. But it's not explanatory. It's just one of the countless euphemisms for feeling itself -- if it's a *felt* point of view... Hence it's just begging the question, again, insofar as explanation is concerned.)***LC:*** *"I think that a plan for the future is something that is necessarily felt, since if it were purely "functed" without being felt, then it wouldn't be a plan at all - it would just be the mindless motion of physical matter."*Earlier you said "*I'm not sure if it needs to be [felt], but it certainly is,"* but now you seem to think it's *necessarily* felt. So may I ask why and how planning is necessarily felt, rather than just planned?(Yes, yes, "*without being felt... [planning, seeing] would just be the mindless motion of physical matter,"* yet we all know they're not unfelt, so I ask again, what is the functional role played by the fact that they're not all just *"mindless motion of physical matter"*?)***LC:*** *"I presume that the (how) explanations are required in order to detect and predict successfully."* But, as we see, the "how" explanations detect and predict successfully without being able to explain what functional role is played by the fact that any of the howing is being felt rather than howed -- which means that the "how" explanations work just as well whether or not any of it is felt (apart from predicting the mysterious feeling/function correlations -- without explaining them)...***LC:*** *"Your attempt to turn a "why" question into a "how" question was also "more awkward"..."*Fine, I change the explanatory pleas from "how and why is function X felt?" to "what functional role does it play in function X that it is felt rather than unfelt?" You can start with X = planning, if you like (or seeing, or signifying). I'm all ears...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3112>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3112&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-02 -- Reply to [**Luke Culpitt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3116)

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| Luke, I think we've probably both said our substantive bits, and all that's left now would be repetition. I think our differences are pretty well illustrated, not by the semiological coyness about the lexeme "why?" but by this sentence from you (whereby I leave you with the last word), indicating what you see as closing the gap (or as no gap at all), whereas I see as a gap gapingly open, and a question blatantly begged:**LC:** "*You [SH] asked "Why does this widget have to be felt in order to do its job [of planning]?" and I'm trying to fill the gap by saying that if it were not felt, then it wouldn't be able to do its job of planning."*Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3135> |

2010-03-04 -- Reply to [**Peter Jones**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3143)

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| Why does the suggestion that we need a "third term" receive so little attention? Because it is so vague.There are the usual physical dynamics. And some of them are felt. That's physics and feeling. What's #3? and how would it help?It's not about counting or coining "terms." It's about explaining how and why some dynamics are *felt* dynamics.(John Searle used to quip that one solution to the mind/body problem is "Don't count!" -- One might add that it hardly helps to multiply entities except if necessity is making an offer you cannot refuse...)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3145>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3145&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-04 -- Reply to [**Peter Jones**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3146)

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| ***PJ:*** *"Bradley and Hegel show that given the right extra ingredient the mind-matter problem does not arise, or at any rate is not intractable. Can we refuse the offer of their extra entity under the circumstances?"*Sure can, whilst we haven't even closed the gap between the first and second "entity"! Rather like saying we can close the gap by assuming there's telekinesis: Well, sure, but alas telekinesis is pure fiction.But perhaps you could walk us through the argument?Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3150>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3150&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-06 -- Reply to [**Luke Culpitt**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3142)

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| Luke, it's a lot simpler than all that. I've (repeatedly) given you a perfectly "how"-based version of the question you keep begging (on the grounds that it's "why"-based): "What causal role does the fact that planning (or nociception) is *felt* play in planning (or nociceptive) performance (or competence)?" What is the functional loss if it is not felt? That's the explanatory gap.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3165>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3165&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-07 -- Reply to [**Jonathan C.W. Edwards**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3161)

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| **EXPLANATORY GAPS ARE NOT CLOSED BY TAKING "METAPHYSICAL POSITIONS"*****JCWE:*** *"[Here's] a perfectly reasonable working model of the relation of experience to physical dynamics...[:] Experience is just what it is like to be a physical dynamic entity in interaction with others."*Here's the same passage as above, paraphrased to expose the redundancies, circularity and question-begging: "Here's a perfectly reasonable working model of the relation of feeling to dynamics: Feeling is just what it feels like to be a feeling dynamical entity interacting with other feeling dynamical entities"Quite. And the "working model"? And the explanation of the functional role of the fact that the dynamics is felt?"Interaction with others"? Feelings are only felt when feelers interact with other feelers? (I feel them if I stub my toe, or just muse, solo.)Most of the dynamics of the universe, after all, are not going on in feeling dynamical entities (unless one believes -- extravagantly, with no justification, and probably incoherently -- in panpsychism). The earth's biosphere is an infinitesimal subset of the dynamical universe, and the fact that some of the biopshere's dynamical entities (sometimes) feel is an unexplained and mysterious (but undeniable) fact.So the question remains: "What is the causal role of the fact that some dynamics is felt?"(What's needed to close this explanatory gap is not a "metaphysical position," let alone extra "enitities" or "terms": what's needed is a causal explanation.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3169>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3169&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-08 -- Reply to [**Peter Jones**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3176)

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| **FELT DOINGS VS DONE DOINGS**Adopting a metaphysical position will not close the explanatory gap. I am interested only in the closing of the explanatory gap (which I happen to think is not possible, but I'm still listening), not in adopting metaphysical positions. They're welcome, but only if they come along with the causal explanation that continues to elude us. And the question, to remind you, is simple, and requires no metaphysics: How and why are some functions (dynamics, doings) *felt* functions rather than just "functed" functions (*done* doings)...? Simple functional question. No need for ontic speculations; just an answer...Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3181>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3181&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-08 -- Reply to [**Robert E. Haraldsen**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3180)

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| ***HOMMAGE TO GEORGE SANTAYANA****Let's circumnavigate the traps**Not just plop in as e'er before:**No metaphysic can stop gaps**Nor prayer, rhyme nor metaphor*Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3183>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3183&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-08 -- Reply to [**Roger Lindsay**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3185)

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| **NOTES FROM NEVERLAND**Before I respond to Jamie Wallace's good-natured posting, let me point out  the (I should have thought obvious) fact that no matter how busy I've been on this thread, I do not, cannot, should not, and have no wish to prevent anyone from posting anything they like! My speciality is simply in pointing out where, how and why it doesn't work (whether the objective is to solve the problem or merely to "demystify" it). Does my debunking sound like legislation? It's not. It's just debunking!Now to the substance of Jamie's posting:**RL**: "*The explanatory gap appears to be a unique problem. It doesn’t seem terribly radical to contemplate the possibility that mind and matter may be different ontological domains and funny things might happen at the boundary"*I suppose any funny things can be "explained" if we are allowed to help ourselves to a few extra "ontological domains" (including that other celebratedly unique problem, QM...) If we are prepared to be radical enough ontologically, not only can we demystify the possibility of archangels, but also squared circles.**RL**: "*nor the possibility that there may be forms of mental causation that are different from physical causation".* Well once we have admitted an extra parallel "world" of feeling, it seems a small step to endow it with causal power within its own jurisdiction...**RL**: "*It seems to me to be as evident as anything can be, that mind does not consist solely of feelings, but feelings and beliefs and preferences and choices and intentions and actions"*But the problem, remember, is to explain how and why beliefs, preferences, choices, intentions and actions are *felt* beliefs, preferences, choices, intentions and actions, rather than just functed beliefs, preferences, choices, intentions and actions...That's why I just collapse it all into feelings, which stand in for any of those felt states.(Please, please let's not go back into [unfelt beliefs](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p642)! I can't stop anyone, of course, but can we bear in mind that if all "beliefs," etc., were unfelt, there would be no mind/body problem? Hence it is only the fact that beliefs are going on in a feeling head, feelingly believing them -- and, I would add, they are really only beliefs *while* they are being believed, hence felt, otherwise they are merely behavioral dispositions -- that makes beliefs "mental" at all.) **RL**: "*all in all, a pretty good approximation to an apparatus for decision and control."*How and why is the decision and control *felt* decision and control rather than just "functed" (i.e. *done*) decision and control? (If you don't like the term "functing," replace it with "doing," i.e. dynamics: How and why are some doings (dynamics) felt rather than just *done*, like all other doings?)**RL**: "*Stevan dismisses all this as “folkloric”, blithely ignoring the fact that the evidence that we can voluntarily control our actions is at least as good as that for the existence of the external world"*Remember that I started with saying that the heart of the problem is the fact that feeling is tightly correlated with functing. (If it weren't -- if we just had random bursts of feeling, uncorrelated with anything -- I suppose there'd still be a mind/body problem of sorts, but a rather less pressing one.)So the correlation between lifting my finger and feeling that I lifted my finger because I willed it (i.e., lifting it because I felt like it) is part of the *explanandum*, not the *explanans*.The correlation is not folklore. But taking telekinesis (as opposed to the *feeling* of telekinesis) for granted is indeed folkish...(The epsilon of uncertainty about the existence of the external world, or the reliability of empirical regularities and causality are of an entirely different order from the feeling/function problem. They're just ordinary explanatory risk, whereas the explanatory gap is a region of explanatory bankruptcy.)**RL**: "*and not even pausing to marvel how folkloric accounts of what goes on in the mental worlds of other people might come to be constructed."* I marvel at folkloric accounts when I'm wearing my anthropologist's or social psychologist's hat, but not when we're talking about the explanatory gap.**RL**: "*Surely it is least a possibility that the explanatory gap is not be a problem within the physical world, and if it isn’t, maybe an explication of it will necessarily be metaphysical."*If there are other worlds, all bets (and problems) are off...**RL**: "*If a causal explanation of conscious experiences isn’t possible, and there is no proof that conscious experiences are inexplicable, then perhaps we should be having a go at other types of explanation. Why not?"*If no explanation of the fact and functional role of feeling is possible, and there is no proof of this, then what we are having a go at is unscrewing the inscrutable. I for one do not get much satisfaction, understanding, or "demystification" from anything like that. It's just "Just So" stories...Peter PanachePermanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3189>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3189&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

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2010-03-09 -- Reply to [**Roger Lindsay**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3200)

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| **NOT GUILTY BY REASON OF EXPLANATORY GAP?**No, it does not follow from the fact that we cannot give a causal explanation of why and how we (sometimes) do things feelingly rather than just "doingly" that our courts and laws are therefore all moot and liberty and democracy are down the drain!It was never the court's mandate to explain how and why we feel. That would be the mandate of cognitive science -- but (as it happens) all cognitive science turns out to be able explain is how and why we *do* what we do, not how and why it feels like something the while.Organisms would be no more nor less answerable for their misbehavior if they did not feel at all; laws legislate what we may *do*, not what we may feel. Laws, after all, are functional, not sentimental.Moreover, "intentionality" has a perfectly functional counterpart in our comportment (and cognition). Even lie-detectors (if they were reliable, but they're not) would be valid and useful in a Zombie world, to distinguish the true accidents from the intentional acts, the true ignorance from dissembling.Functional (utilitarian?) ethics (and, a fortiori, functional aesthetics) would of course be in for a rather rough ride in an insentient world, but it's hardly clear sailing for them in our feeling world either (because it's rather hard to explain why anything would matter if all matter were insensate -- and because there's no accounting for feelings!).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3202>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3202&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-09 -- Reply to [**Peter Jones**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3205)

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| **WE ARE NOT ZOMBIES: BUT WHY, AND HOW?*****PJ:****"If zombies can commit intentional acts, and if their physiology changes when they are lying even thought they don't know they're lying, then I am hopelessly confused as to what a zombie is supposed to be."*Zombies are (hypothetical, probably impossible) creatures that are behaviorally (and if you wish, physiologically) [indistinguishable](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p656), in their functional capacities, from ourselves, but do not feel. Bearing in mind that we may be talking about as fictional an entity as an archangel here, the "fact" that Zombies do not feel does not mean they do not *sense*, in the sense of detecting and responding to sensory input (indistinguishably from ourselves). They would also, like us, sleep and wake (but with the difference being only one of activation and responsiveness, not feeling). And they would have both voluntary and involuntary movement (why not?), except none of it would be felt -- just *done*. No reason they shouldn't have cortical evoked potentials too (why not?), and any other physiology you like. The only stipulation (and it is a stipulation, because no one but the "Zombie" could ever know whether or not it had been met) is that a Zombie, to be a Zombie, does not *feel*, it just *does*.Now I have no strong views on whether or not there can be Zombies (nor much more interest in the question than I have in metaphysical "solutions" to the mind/body problem). (I rather suspect there cannot be Zombies.) But I hasten to point out that the explanatory gap can be formulated, *completely equivalently*, as the question of [Why and How We are Not Zombies](http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Papers/Harnad/harnad95.zombies.html)! Same question, same gap, same reason. Hence, to have a nonarbitrary view on the Zombie matter, I would first have to have a clue of a clue as to how the gap might be closed. And I don't. (And neither does anyone else.)(For what it's worth, I would find it as unlikely as the possibility that apples could begin falling up instead of down, that there could be a physiologically indistinguishable Zombie -- and almost as unlikely that there could be a behaviorally indistinguishable robot-Zombie, capable of passing the [Turing Test](http://cogprints.org/2615/). I think both of these pseudo-Zombies would feel. But I haven't a clue of a clue why, or how...)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3206>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3206&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-10 -- Reply to [**Roger Lindsay**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3209)

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| **DETERMINING CAUSATION (AND CONUNDRUMS OF CONATION)*****RL:*** "*I get the feeling that you are operating outside your comfort zone on these* [free will/determinism] *issues*"Not uncomfortable in the least! Quite content to note that since the explanatory gap is *a gap in the power of causal explanation*, it of course also bears on the question of how and why we feel we do things because we feel like it (i.e., what is the causal role of feeling?). Indeed, *the feeling of voluntary action is probably the heart of the mind/body problem*. Without that, feelings would just feel like passive fellow-travellers. (I like your metaphor of an "in-flight movie" -- one in which I rightly feel I am just a passive viewer, not an actor!} To that extent, the feeling/doing problem is indeed related to the question of freedom/determinism.But freedom/determinism (apart from silly, irrelevant forays into unavailing randomness) really has only two substantive stances: either (1) all dynamics, voluntary and involuntary, are causally determined by the usual four dynamical forces (electricity/magnetism, gravitation, strong atomic, weak atomic), with "freedom" being just an epistemic matter, concerning unpredictability in advance, or (2) there exists a fifth independent dynamic force, telekinesis (but all evidence suggests that (2) is false).What's left, apart from the metaphysics of causal determinism in general, is the fact that we have two kinds of actions, those that feel voluntary and those that feel involuntary. And the same old question arises about how and why *either* of them feels like anything at all...[Please, please let us not multiply problems -- and compound our question-begging -- by taking this as our cue to invoke QM, importing quantal mysteries as our nostrum for qualia mysteries!]***RL:*** "[Isn't] *holding people (legally) responsible for their conduct... a charade* [if] *every action is part of a specifiable causal chain*?"Not in the least. As I said, there are (1) voluntary and (2) involuntary actions. Not only do they have a different physiology, but they are differentially influenceable by, for example, reward/punishment. (Voluntary actions are more Skinnerian and involuntary actions more Pavlovan.) Teaching, learning, laws and reflection can to a certain extent shape voluntary actions, but not involuntary ones. (This could be just as true in an insentient robot community as it is in ours. And it leaves the question of the causal status of feeling completely untouched.)***RL:*** "*Can it mean anything to say* [to] *a person be “good” if nothing they did resulted from a choice?*"  It certainly can, and does, as we all know. But how and why does it *feel like* something to be taught to be good? How and why is instruction (whether ethical or economic)  *felt* rather than just *functed*?***RL:*** "[Isn't] *every election... a fix if... rather than seeking to influence voter choices, candidates were directly causing electors to vote in a certain way?*"All interactions between organisms are a "fix," causally speaking, whether the interaction is voluntary or involuntary. Electoral promises are just a subtler fix, involving more internal processes, such as reasoning, statistics, track-record. Robot communities and even "Zombie" communities could have unrigged and unpredictable elections, just as we can, including reliable and unreliable promises, aligned and conflicting beliefs and desires. The only question is why and how any of it should be *felt* rather than just functed...***RL:*** "*If I have no pre-existing knowledge or experience concerning planning, preferring, choosing and doing, and somebody tells me a bunch of made up stuff about free will and voluntary action, why would I believe them? Why would I just swallow wholesale stories about what goes on in my own head (when I know that I know what goes on better than they do)?*"I am not telling you stories; I am pointing out the glaring *absence* of any causal story (other than the telekinetic one that we all quite naturally feel and believe, but which happens to be false). That's the explanatory gap.PS David Longinotti is quite right that the problem of the causal role of feeling is largely orthogonal to the question of determinism. We could have a deterministic or an "indeterministic" world, and each could in turn be a world with or without feelings. And neither of the sentient worlds -- deterministic or indeterministic -- would have an explanation of the causal role of feelings.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3219>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3219&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-10 -- Reply to [**Peter Jones**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3220)

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| **THE ZOMBIE CONJECTURE AND ITS DISCONTENTS*****PJ:*** *"Would a zombie yelp if he stubbed his toe on the bedpost?"*Of course. The *premise* of the zombie conjecture is that (if there can be zombies) they are indistinguishable from us except they don't feel. ***PJ:*** *"Why would a zombie procreate?"*Till further notice: for the same reason we do (selfish genes).Until and unless someone explains *the causal role of the fact that we feel that we procreate because we feel like it*, we're on a par with zombies, causally.***PJ:*** *"Why would it eat?"*Ditto.***PJ:*** *"the whole point of a zombie, as a hypothesis, is to reduce to absurdity the notion that human beings are zombies"*No, the zombie conjecture is just that: a conjecture (like the conjecture that there might be fairies, or an afterlife). We already know for sure (as Descartes reminded us) that *we*'re not zombies; we don't need any further evidence of that. What we need is a causal explanation of *how and why we are not zombies*. ***PJ:*** *"and thus to clarify that consciousness is a real phenomenon in need of an explanation."*We already know that feelings are real, because we really feel. We also know they need an explanation. But unfortunately, there's this explanatory gap...***PJ:*** *"If [zombies] are possible then the reductio argument fails and the hypothesis is pointless"*There is no "reductio argument" and a conjecture's just a conjecture. ***PJ:*** *"We'd be better off discussing the other minds problem, since a proposition stating that zombies are possible is no improvement on one stating that there may be no other minds than our own."*Anything that is not provably impossible may be possible, but it also may not, for reasons of which we may be ignorant. In the case of zombies, they're' probably not possible: trouble is, we can't explain how or why not.The problem under discussion is not the other-minds problem (of determining for sure whether others than oneself feel: one can't, but they almost certainly do).The problem is explaining *how and why* they (i.e., we) feel -- which is identical to the problem of explaining how and why *we* are *not* zombies (regardless of whether zombies are indeed possible, as they seem).***PJ:*** *"Is the zombie issue really more complicated than this, or are we just importing complications from the other minds problem?"*The zombie issue is not complicated, but it isn't what you seem to think it is.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3221>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3221&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-12 -- Reply to [**Peter Jones**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3234)

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| **OTHER MINDS, OTHER PROBLEMS*****PJ:*** *"So the zombie would not yelp. Ergo it is an incoherent concept.*"Yes, the zombie would yelp! Zombies (*ex hypothesi*) are behaviorally indistinguishable from us, they just don't feel. So it would yelp under the same conditions we would, but it would feel nothing when it yelped.  ***PJ:*** *"Genes are conscious?*"No. But zombies' behavior (e.g., disposition to procreate) could be driven by its (unconscious) selfish genes, just as ours is.  ***PJ:*** *"The causal role of feelings is blindingly obvious to me.*"Please share (and thereby close the explanatory gap for all of us)...  ***PJ:*** *"I would rather say that we need an explanation for how you know that you're not a zombie, not why, since there may be no why about it, or, more generally, an explanation of the causal role of knowledge. But this has nothing to do with zombies.*"(1) We know we are not zombies (as Descartes noted) because we feel, and, *ex hypothesi*, zombies don't.(2) "Why" we feel is just the question of the *causal role* of feeling in our doings and our doing capacity: What causal role does the fact we feel play in us (and not in robots, or in zombies)?(3) "Knowledge"? Felt or unfelt? No problem with the causal role of information, data. But what is the causal role of the fact that having and processing the information *feels like something*?  ***PJ:*** *"I find it quite easy to establish that zombies are impossible.*"I'm listening...***PJ:*** *"If [zombies] are not impossible then the conjecture simply states that other people may not be conscious.*"(...if other people are real. But other people are indeed real, and do indeed feel, beyond a reasonable doubt, so let's drop that. It's not at issue.)Yes, if zombies were provably impossible, and other people were provably real, then other people would provably feel. But we're missing all those proofs (and you're missing the point!)The point is that there is no explanation of the causal role of feelings in our functioning (hence no explanation of how or why zombies are impossible).***PJ:*** *"No need for zombies.*"  You can say that again. But there is a need for a causal explanation of the fact of feeling.  ***PJ:*** *"Okay. But we're discussing the usefulness of the zombie hypothesis, not the problem of consciousness.*"No, we're discussing the problem of explaining consciousness (feeling) causally.  ***PJ:*** *"I find the zombie conjecture useful, but only if they are impossible objects. If they are possible then my wife might be one...*"She's not, rest easy. But that's not what this is about...***PJ:*** *"[Zombies] are impossible, however, as I can know because I know I am not a zombie...*"You are definitely not a zombie (thanks, for example, to the cogito/sentio), but that does not prove that zombies are impossible (nor that your wife is not a zombie -- but she's not).Now, can we get back to the problem under discussion here, which is not the other-minds problem but the explanatory gap? The only role of zombies in it is that a successful explanation of how and why we are not zombies would also close the explanatory gap. (Unfortunately, no such explanation is forthcoming.)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3244>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3244&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-12 -- Reply to [**Jonathan C.W. Edwards**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3186)

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| ***JCWE:*** *"We would of course expect our experiences to differ in character from those that may accompany inanimate interactions."*Well, if every billiard-ball collision is indeed felt [by something(s) or other], then all bets are off and all problems are solved (but at quite a price, in extravagant, arbitrary, unverifiable -- and probably mereologically incoherent -- metaphysical conjectures)...***JCWE:*** *"'Dynamic interaction' is only our way of saying 'what determines experiences' "*No: dynamic interaction is just dynamic interaction. That we feel something when we see or conceive of a dynamical interaction is true enough, but that the interagent(s) themselves feel something (except if they are organisms like us) is quite another matter...The explanatory gap is a gap in explaining causally how and why *some* dynamic interactions are felt. (Just *stipulating* that they are all felt, every single one [and every part of every part] of them -- if it makes any sense at all -- is giving away the explanatory store altogether.)***JCWE:*** *"No two things can 'have physical properties' (which would only be aspects of our conceptions of the anyway) simultaneously in a universe that obeys relativity."*No, until further notice, physical properties are physical properties, not necessarily felt or feeling physical properties. The latter are a surprise, a mystery, and an explanatory burden, in the relatively few cases in the universe where they do occur (in organisms in Earth's biosphere, until further notice from exobiologists). Our "concepts" of properties -- physical or mathematical -- are certainly all felt, but that doesn't make the properties they are concepts *of* felt. (Nor does it explain how and why they are felt, rather than just functed.)And relativity has absolutely nothing to do with any of this.Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3245>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3245&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-13 -- Reply to [**Roger Lindsay**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3248)

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| **FLIGHTS OF HERMENEUTIC FANCY SOOTHE BUT DO NOT EXPLAIN*****RL:*** *"You say that free will is an illusion"*No, I said it feels as if we do things because we feel like it, but we cannot give a causal explanation of how or why.(The only sure illusion is telekinesis.)***RL:*** *"What could it mean to say that an appearance is not as it seems?"*No idea: I never said it. Things feel like whatever they feel like, undeniably, cartesianly. We just can't explain how or why they feel like anything at all. ***RL:*** *"*Not knowing how something might work doesn’t strike me as being a good reason... [not to] accept that things are what they seem..."Things feel the way they feel; no one's denying that. But how they work -- and in particular, what causal role feeling plays in how they work, is what this discussion is all about.***RL:*** *"freewill exists for an agent because an agent's actions cannot be determined within the ontological domain in which that agent conceptualises them as occuring [sic]"*!!***RL:*** *"dualism is both empirically true and functionally inevitable."*!!***RL:*** *"intelligent systems need a Central Executive (CE)"*Fine. But how and why does that CE need to feel (or be felt)?**RL:** "The CE MUST (no qualifications, no quibbles) always simultaneously operate in (at least) two ontological domains [ODs]." !!**RL:** "OD1: perceptual information... sensory evidence... OD2: control operations... preferences... beliefs... decision procedures"And how and why do either "OD1" or "OD2" need to be felt, rather than just functed?***RL:*** *"CE “notices” ... fibre located... is active"*Fine. Now what is the causal role of the fact that the CE's "noticing" is felt rather than just functed?***RL:*** *"any sensory signal that becomes conscious needs to be detected at two ontological levels, once by a sensory receptor... and again by the CE..."*How/why does the detecting need to be felt?***RL:*** *"CE is a decision making system operating with purely symbolic information... sensory input will be realized as activity in a cortical cell being triggered by a sensory fibre. Getting “noticed” will be realised by a cell within the complex of cells constituting the CE being fired by the cell activated by the sensory input."*And the causal role of *feeling* in all this otherwise perfectly unexceptionable functioning? (Your dualism is not just extravagant and ad hoc and unexplanatory, but circular!)***RL:*** *"every perceptual event that becomes conscious is as it were, “twice-baked”, once when the receptor is fired and again when the corresponding cortical event is acknowledged by CE"*As long as we're so free with the ad hoc cookery, why not thrice-baked? What's special about two, if we can posit as many "ontologies" as we like?***RL:*** *"there is plenty of empirical justification for the idea of “internal observation” within the literature on vigilance/signal detection)."*Uncontested. But why and how is it *felt* observation...?***RL:*** *"It seems no great leap to suppose that CE acknowledgement corresponds to “awareness” and receptor stimulation plus CE acknowledgement corresponds to “sensation” (or “perception” when complex models are drawn from memory and matched to stimulus arrays)."*But it will take more than a "leap" to explain (rather than just "acknowledge") how and why any of it is *felt*. ***RL:*** *"how could events within CE’s symbolic model of Objective Reality... physically determine CE’s Flight Deck decisions? This is merely an ontological paradox generated by the fact that CE needs to operate in more than one ontological domain, each with different existence criteria (and modes of causality and explanation)."*An "ontological paradox" is the excuse for the explanatory void?***RL:*** *"Harnadian “functs”, of course are all operations within CE’s model of Objective Reality, so obviously they can’t explain what happens on the Flight Deck."* think you have gotten somewhat lost in your own hermeneutics. Try it again without recourse to extra "ontologies"... They don't help: they just soothe...***RL:*** *"assign[ing] some empirical interpretation to the notion of dualism... does enable us to distinguish the question of why we are aware* *(because CE acknowledgment has been achieved)"*Hermeneutics is not empiricism, it's hermeneutics. And it gives no answer whatsoever to the question of why we feel, it simply begs it and returns to hermeneutics, which is "assigning interpretations" (in this case helping oneself to a second "world" to escape the problems of the first one...) instead of causally explaining empirical regularities (in this case, the undeniable fact of feeling, and its close correlation with functing).***RL:*** *"....from the question of why our feelings have the qualitative character that they do (why not? And who cares, so long as they do their job)."*The question is not why feelings feel like what they feel like but why they feel like anything at all. And you are certainly free not to care about this question, but then why participate in this discussion at all? It's about this question!**Ontological Scrooge** (bah, humbug)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3258>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3258&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-13 -- Reply to [**Peter Jones**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3249)

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| **HOW/WHY WOULD FEELINGLESS ZOMBIES DISCUSS FEELINGS AS WE DO?*****PJ:*** *"I'd like to see a causal explanation for why a zombie might yelp when it stubs its toe. It's hard enough to find one for a human being."*Soliciting help/compassion from kin or conspecific, or relieving physical stress of injury? I'm not a specialist in nociception, but it does not take much to come up with an adaptive Just-So Story for injury vocalization.   ***PJ:*** *"If we think that a zombie would react as if it is in pain when it stubs its toe then a zombie is a coherent concept."*Much easier to explain why injury causes vocalization than why it hurts...***PJ:*** *"It's difficult to know what to say to someone who thinks that a entity that is not aware of anything at all, and which for philosophy of mind might as well be piano with arms and legs, would be capable of thinking 'cogito.'"*All dynamical systems are responsive. (A piano's pretty static.) And remember I have replaced "aware" (which is ambiguous between "reactive" and "feels") with *feels* (which is not). The *cogito* is really the *sentio* (because it there were nothing it feels like to cogitate, there would be no mind/body problem or explanatory gap).What would a zombie have to say about feelings (since it doesn't have any)? It would have to talk about them exactly as if it did. Maybe there is a version of the adaptive yelp-vocalization story that can be stretched to cover this too -- or maybe this is a symptom of the fact that there can't be zombies. But that certainly does not translate into the answer to the question of how and why there can't be zombies: It's certainly not just so that we can talk about feelings and really mean it! **Bodhidharma**Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3259>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3259&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-16 -- Reply to [**Peter Jones**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3294)

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| Peter, we're beginning to repeat ourselves now, so there's not much to learn any more. The exchange did highlight one substantive point: whereas it is trivial to give an adaptive account of how and why social organisms vocalize (e.g. "yelp") when they are in pain (and also an adaptive account of how and why they are social) -- namely, the adaptive advantages of "mind-reading" -- it is not nearly so easy to give an adaptive account of how and why zombies (or Turing-scale robots) would vocalize verbally about what they feel -- indistinguishably from the way we do -- without, in reality, feeling a thing. An extension of the adaptive advantages of social mind-reading is the obvious hypothesis (and philosophers have been making a lot of hay about that in the last decade!), but I am not yet sure how convincing it is. (It seems to me that it would be almost as hard to explain how/why unfeeling zombies could or would talk coherently about feeling -- indistinguishably from the way we do --as it would be to close the explanatory gap [by explaining how/why we feel rather than just do]: But I don't think this thereby constitutes a clue as to how to go about closing the gap -- nor does it provide evidence that there is no gap! It just compounds the mystery -- or makes it more palpable.)See: [**WHY WOULD TURING-INDISTINGUISHABLE ZOMBIES TALK ABOUT FEELINGS (AND WHAT, IF ANYTHING, WOULD THEY MEAN)?**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p858)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3295>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3295&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-03-16 -- Reply to [**David Longinotti**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3298)

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| **DIALOGUE DES SOURDS*****DL:*** *"For reasons previously given, I believe that there is substantial evidence that feelings are causal."*I think the evidence is only that feelings are *closely correlated* with effects (and feelings themselves are no doubt *caused*, somehow). But no one has adduced the slightest shred of evidence that feelings, *qua* feelings, are themselves causal; they have not even made sense of it: Feelings are caused (somehow); their causes no doubt have further effects. But and why any of that is *felt* is entirely unexplained. The correlations are evidence of correlation: the causation has yet to be explained.***DL:*** *"Exactly how [feelings] are causal is a more difficult issue.  But I think it's possible to draw a distinction between the questions of why we vocalize in general, and why we talk about feelings in particular."*Why we vocalize -- indeed why we verbalize -- is a piece of cake. How/why it *feels* like something to vocalize and verbalize (and to perceive what we are verbalizing about) is not. It's also easy to explain why we vocalize about what we vocalize about -- except the fact that what we vocalize about feels like something to perceive and know. ***DL:*** *"So the mystery for a functionalist is not why there is vocalization, but why it is accompanied by any sort of phenomenology."*You can say that again. (And it's a mystery for everyone else too -- until/unless the explanatory gap is closed. Indeed, it *is* the explanatory gap.)***DL:*** *"Talk \*about\* feelings presents a different sort of problem... representational... theories maintain that a symbol gets its meaning by having a causal relationship to its referent. But such a causal relationship is denied by functionalism."*I never know quite what a "functionalist" is, but I guess I am one. And what is undeniable is that the grounding of a symbol comes either from direct sensorimotor interactions with its referent (category learning, to be exact), or by word of mouth, through grounded category-names combined in truth-value-bearing subject/predicate propositions that define and describe.That's all very handy for an adaptive Darwinian survival machine (with human, i.e. Turing-scale performance capacity) -- but it does not yield a clue of a clue of how and why any of it should be felt.***DL:*** *""if such theories of representation are correct, there is no apparent basis in functionalism to explain why we should talk about, say, a pleasant harmony of tones, rather than speaking of a particular mathematical relationship between two frequencies of air modulation (assuming that our brains contain such mathematical information in some form when detecting a harmony)."*No need for all those complications: It is not at all clear why, when I say I saw something red, I would do anything but point to red things (and non-red things), tell you what is and isn't red, and, if you are of a physical bent (and I know about it -- as most speakers and feelers of red certainly do not!), we could chat also about electromagnetic radiation frequencies and even, if you like, about Locke on primary and secondary qualities.The mystery in all that functionality and verbiage, of course, is the undeniable fact that it really *does* feel like something to see red. No use discussing it with someone who can't see, but there may be ways to get around that, by analogy, if he can feel anything at all.But what we are contemplating here is something rather more radical: It is about whether there could be a zombie -- hence something that does not feel anything at all -- who could also discuss red, wave lengths and Locke with us. Here's a sample of a dialogue between a Zombie (Z) and a Sentient (S). For simplicity, I will make the Zombie a Turing-Test-passing robot, to liven the conversation (otherwise it would be a dialogue of the absurd, with both S and Z saying, identically, "Of course I know what it feels like to see red!").*S: You know about the "explanatory gap" don't you? It's the problem we have explaining the causal role of feeling*.**Z:** Yes, it's a tough one, isn't it!*S: Maybe you can help me, since you are a zombie.***Z:** Excuse me, I am a Turing-scale robot, I admit, but I am certainly not a zombie. Zombies (if they are possible at all) do not feel, but I do.*S: How do you know that you feel? (And, even worse, how can I know that you feel?)***Z:** You can't know it about me any more than I can know it about you. That's just the other-minds problem (so let's agree not to ask for the impossible and go instead by common sense and probability on that one). As to how I *know* I feel: same way you do -- via introspection and the cogito (sentio). We all know it about ourselves.*S: I agree not to pursue the other-minds problem in general, but don't I have slightly better grounds for being sceptical about you than you do about me? After all, I am a biological organism and you are a robot.***Z:** Yes, there's that, but be honest: if we can go on discussing this and all other mental subtleties, indistinguishably, till doomsday, are you just as sure that, because I am a robot, you can kick me with impunity -- the way you would kick an automobile -- as you are sure that neither of us can kick another biological human with impunity?*S: No, you are right; I am very far from being as sure that you really don't feel as I am that other people really do. I guess there's no way out of this.***Z:** For either of us -- until and unless someone came up with a causal explanation of the difference between you and me (if I were indeed a zombie) -- or if telekinesis turned out to be true (and it could be confirmed empirically that I lack it and you have it). I am profoundly skeptical about both these options.*S: Are you as troubled as I am, then, about the fact that, if you are indeed a zombie, then you are talking about nothing -- just behavioral dispositions -- when you are talking about what it feels like to see red?***Z:** If I were indeed a zombie, I would of course not feel what it feels like to see red, nor what it feels like to feel troubled, I'd just act and talk as if I did. But I assure you, I, like you, know exactly what it feels like to see red and I do indeed feel troubled about the fact that there seems to be no accounting for feelings. (But then I *would* say that, wouldn't I? Let's go have a beer -- an oiler for me...)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3300>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3300&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-04-14 -- Reply to [**David Nyman**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3563)

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| **HOW/WHY ON EARTH DO "RELATIONAL" OR "CAUSAL" IMPLY "*FELT*"?*****DN****: "A modest proposal from a zombie (i.e. my brain)"*No, your brain is an organ, like your liver. And you are (presumably) not a zombie.***DN:*** *"if we are committed to the belief that feelings are not causal"*We are not committed to the belief. It seems thrust upon us by the fact that (1) telekinesis is false and hence (2) there does not seem to be enough functional room for feelings, qua feelings, as causes, rather than just (unexplained and inexplicable) effects of brain function.***DN:*** *"an intrinsic, or non-formal, feature of their situation not capturable by purely relational means...  Call it a feeling."*No, I'd call it a theory (and on the face of it, just another ad-hoc hermeneutic one: "We can interpret feelings as just *this* [insert your favorite candidate]" -- or "We can interpret *this* as being felt")...***DN:*** *"such a carrier is necessarily self-acquainting: i.e. it feels."*Sounds like an arbitrary posit (and a non-sequitur) to me. How and why does "relational" imply "felt"? (Let's not get carried away...)Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3573>2010-04-19 -- Reply to [**David Nyman**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3580)

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| Rosenberg's theory sounds far too complicated to actually be an explanation, rather than just ad-hoc hermeneutics. And the feeling/function problem is certainly no grounds for trying to reconstruct the notion of causation. Causation's fine: feeling's not. But I don't want to overstate my case either: I don't think we can say something as strong as that feelings are noncausal: just that if they are causal, we cannot explain how/why, in the usual way (and there is no "other way" to explain them). And the problem is unique (to feeling -- and causal explanation).Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3632>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3632&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

2010-04-26 -- Reply to [**David Nyman**](http://philpapers.org/bbs/thread.pl?tId=137#p3638)

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| **LOST IN THE HERMENEUTIC HALL OF MIRRORS*****DN:*** *"[feeling is the intrinsic carrier of physical relation - i.e. the locus of 'what it's like to be'"*That's just renaming the problem, not solving it: Why and how does it feel like something to be some (not all) things in some (not all) states.  (It presumably feels like nothing to be a rock, laying on the ground. And most things and states in the universe are presumably like that. Why and how does it feel like something to be one of those rarer things, in those rarer states -- presumably, until further notice, only in (some parts) of our tiny terrestrial biosphere, sometimes?)"Feeling is simply what it's like to be" won't cut it...***DN:*** *"Maybe you will object that in any case there is no reason for us to think that "intrinsic" qualities must be felt ones."*My objection is mainly to the treble (and unavailing) redundancy: "intrinsic qualities are felt" = "felt feelings are felt"...  And, "intrinsic," "extrinsic," and least of all "relational" won't help.***DN:*** *"what we call "feeling" may be at root nothing other than existence itself, and its absence oblivion."*Fine. Now explain, please, how and why we happen to be among the minority of things that are and that also happen to (sometimes) feel (some) things (including what it feels like to be) -- the rest of the things and states being "mere oblivion"...Saying that "feeling is simply what it feels like to be" simply begs the question.***DN:*** *"the brain as a formal system must… be capable of generating and tracking formal analogues of the feelings we refer to, and also of perceiving an explanatory - or if you like "qualitative" - gap between references to such analogues and the analogues themselves."*You lost me. We feel. We have brains. (Our brains presumably somehow cause and/or constitute feeling, but alas no one can say how or why.) "Analogues" of feeling? What on earth are those? I have enough trouble with the notion that feelings are internal analogues of external physical states (e.g., that what it feels like to hear an oboe play A-flat is somehow an analogue of the dynamic acoustic state of an oboe playing an A-flat). I'm inclined to say they feel correlated but are in reality incommensurable). You seem to be suggesting more, and worse: Not just that feelings are internal "analogues" of external physical states, but that they are also internal "analogues" of internal physical states (brain states), or vice versa.  Not wishing "To wield Occam's blade too stringently," but this not only seems to be multiplying entities, but multiplying incommensurable entities, several times over…(By the way, the brain is not a formal system. It is a dynamical system, parts of which may be the dynamical implementations of certain formal systems. None of that helps. And solving the symbol grounding problem would help pass the robotic Turing Test, but it would not help explain how and why the brain "implements" feeling.)***DN:*** *"This "gap", though recognisable to the functing system, would itself be formally inexpressible; in other words, the ineffability of feeling."*If I can't express something in words, I want to know how and why. It seems a perfectly reasonable question to ask how and why we feel. If the reply is ineffable, I need an explanation of why and how it's ineffable. No use saying it's like the ineffability of "an oboe playing an A-flat" to someone who's deaf, or tone deaf. That's just the point. I'm asking why and how we are neither deaf nor tone-deaf. And to reply that the reply cannot be put into words seems tantamount to admitting that one has no reply. ("Ineffability" can cover no end of sins of omission.)***DN:*** *"Of course, inasmuch as this account is considered purely formally, there is no reason to regard it as anything but more - and mere - functing.  But in the grounded account - as feeling itself becomes trapped in the net of functing - the feeler is acquainted with the inescapable price of existence."*"Trapped in the net of functing?" "Inescapable price of existence?"Sounds more like "[Lost in the hermeneutic hall of mirrors](http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/1893/)"!**Stevan Harnad**Permanent link: <http://philpapers.org/post/3734>[Reply](http://philpapers.org/bbs/newmsg.pl?target=3734&after=%2Fbbs%2Fthread%2Epl%3FtId%3D137) |

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