

PRIVACY, MEANING AND MENTAL TERMS

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the possible ways in virtue of which the mental terms get their meanings. Especially, it is discussed that the sensation-dependent experiences play a central role in assigning meanings to the mental terms. It is also suggested that 'quale' of sensation-dependent experiences gives an experience a distinctive character in terms of being perceived by a certain subject. And we suggest that the experiences of subjects and the phenomenological property of these experiences can be individuated in terms of each experiences having a different internal structure within which every experience may differ from each other.

Key Words: Experience, Sensation, Quale (Qualia), Mental Terms

Öznellik, Anlam ve Mental Terimler

ÖZET

Bu makale mental terimlerin anlamlarını nasıl edindiklerini açıklamaya çalışmaktadır. Özellikle, duyuşsal temelli deneyimlerin mental terimleri anlamlandırmada çok önemli bir rol oynadığı tartışılmaktadır. Aynı zamanda duyuşsal temelli deneyimlerin algısal özniteliği deneyimlere belirli bir özne tarafından algılanmış olması bakımından ayırt edici bir karakter yükler. Deneyimler ve bu deneyimlerin fenomenolojik özniteliği deneyimlerin her birinin farklılaştığı bir içsel yapıya sahip olması bakımından öznelştirilebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Deneyim, Duyum, Algısal Öznellik, Bilinç Olayları

I. Introduction

This paper aims to develop arguments supporting the partial privacy in assigning meanings to psychological terms. In doing this I will confine myself to the mental terms which get their meanings from the sensational and perceptual experiences, namely, bodily experiences. Actually this accordingly calls the role of quale in the construction of a related semantic of such sensation-dependent mental terms. At this point we need to point out that when we speak about the ways the psychological terms get their meanings we will be referring to the ontology of folk psychology but not to that of the materialist theories of mind. For it seems that the several arguments of materialists seem to eliminate the central role of qualia in the semantic of psychological terms. In contrast we will point to the idea that there is an undeniable function of such qualities in attributing meanings to the mental terms.

II. The Nature of experience

Firstly it can be said that quale is a constituent of experience without which the majority of mental terms cannot get their meanings. In the case of the absence of quale all the other ways of giving meanings to the mental terms will

considerably remain insufficient. In order to clarify this point let us consider the *ostensive definition*: let us imagine somebody who has never immersed his hand into the warm water, but one whose hands are in the warm water speaks, that “ I feel warm and this is what we call warm ”. Now it is clear that as long as the former person does not get his hand into the warm water, all the verbal explanations and predictions will not be enough to make him feel the warm water. The point we want to make is that the nature of quale of feeling the warm water, and the related meaning derived from the experience of that quale is not expressible by connecting it with other terms used in a certain context. Churchland calls such a view “ the standard view ”.¹ According to the standard view, the meaning of a certain mental term is gained by associating the term with a specific quale. If this view is true, then it is clear that insofar as we do not have a sensation of red, we will never know the meaning of the red. So the experience of the red is essential in order to attach a meaning to that term. Interestingly Churchland claims that the standard view is not correct for all psychological terms but only for some terms. And he gives the examples of the different beliefs: the belief that Q, the belief that S, the belief that Z. From the variety of such beliefs he seems to conclude that the speaking of the phenomenological quality, which might be associated with such mental terms, may not be necessary for the gainment of the meaning of them. Because he believes that there is not a qualitative character peculiar to each state. But even if this may be the case this does not give us right to say that the sensation-dependent mental terms do not actually have related qualia from which we seem to derive their meaning. In order to support this idea we can think of somebody who has never experienced the pain. Now will it be possible for the one in question to know the meaning of the pain. For Churchland this can possibly be achieved. Because he believes that qualia are not the essential part on which the semantic of mental terms depend. The one who defends this view seems to be referring to the fact that to know the objective properties of pain is possible without feeling the pain itself. This is partly true on the basis of the fact that we should be able to distinguish between something pleasant and unpleasant. But the question is how.

Additionally, it is also clear that there is undeniably a *subjective* apprehension of the unpleasantness of the pain which contributes a lot to the meaning of the pain term. This is the idea which seems to support the significant role of qualia in the semantic of the mental terms. Also my pain of tooth is not the same as the pain of my friend accepted that two persons are reducible to one in terms of all properties. Because. imagine the case that we have a dictionary in which the pain is described as something unpleasant. Now the one lacking the

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¹ See, *Matter and Consciousness*, p.52

quale of pain will start to think that all unpleasant feelings are pain. But as soon as the same person experiences the pain the meaning of the pain term will comparatively change to a certain extent. And the pain term will get a new meaning regardless of considering what the other subjects mean by this term. What the subject knew before the experience seems to be the collection of epistemological materials regarding what kind of feeling the pain is. In other words what the person takes the pain to be will entirely be dependent upon the knowledge of causal and relational properties common to all pains. On the basis of that we will assume that there is a shared quale of the pain. Among the many other things the subject will only know about the general category of pain but not about a specific pain such as thootache even though he may be given the means of distinguishing between a headache and a thoothache.

III. Further Distinction suggested by ‘qualia’

Furthermore, for a normal subject it is even possible to distinguish between two separate thootaches by depending upon the idea that they may have a distinguishable intensity, that they may have different temporal and personal determinations. Indeed one may even go so far as to say that what I feel when I am in pain is not the same as what you feel: your pain is yours, my pain is mine : only the ways we speak about the pain seem to be similar but my feeling of pain will refer to a field of experience where each moment of feeling the pain will not be correspondent to the moments of the same experience of others. Such a view seems to suggest that when I am in pain I do not have only one specific quale but have a series of them. So it can be said that at the every moment of experience I associate my feeling of the pain with a distinguishable quale. So we are coming to the admission of the idea that there is no a certain constant quale which is associated with the pain term. And if one and the same experience contains a bunch of qualia, then indeed the meaning of a certain mental term, say, the pain cannot simply be grasped by the connection of the pain term with Q_1 , because the pain term will simultaneously be referring to the connected phenomenological qualities, Q_p, Q_r, Q_s, Q_t .

So it can be said that what we know when we speak of the meaning of the pain term is the common property of these qualia by means of which we try to give a plausible description of what it is like for one to feel the pain. Additionally if this is the case, then it can be claimed that one can only speak regarding the meaning of one’s own pain but not of somebody else’s. In order to support this claim we can assume that the phenomenological quality, which we associate with the pain term, varies even for one and the same person, on the basis of the fact that the successive occurrence of the inner qualia differs for the experience of the pain each time as claimed above. This is similar to saying that

we do not gain exactly the same sight of a certain tree when looked at twice. From that we can reach at the conclusion that there is no a common pattern of associating the pain term with a certain quale from which we derive the meaning of it. This is to say that the meaning of the pain term is constructed by means of the phenomenal quality of separate experiences of which we assume, there is an objective property. At this point, it can be said that such an objective property can be associated with the physical terms with which they explain not only nature but mental terms in non-physical terms. Relatedly, O' Conner² supports this view by claiming that *thought*, *emotion* and *sensation* are actually things. But when considered that even physical things exhibit a private nature such as having a distinguishing private nature, it is very difficult to contemplate mental events as of being the same nature. The question is how this becomes possible. Likely these experiences and their qualia seem to share a common qualitative property, but indeed there is nothing shareable about the meaning of the pain term. In spite of this people seem to agree on that the pain is a feeling of dislike caused by such and such cases. As will be remembered we said that when we speak about the pain term what we describe is the causal properties of being in such state but not the pain experience itself as going on. This idea seems to lead us to the adequacy of the claim that the meaning of the pain term is private to me on the basis of the fact that nobody else can share the successive occurrence of the bunch of phenomenological qualities which I subjectively associate with the pain term.

IV. A Solipsistic Tendency

From what we said so far it follows that we are committed to a semantic solipsism. This view suggests that except the knowledge of the contents of my own mind there is no epistemological access to the other minds and their properties. In fact the way the mental terms get their meanings has a strong implication of this idea as long as it is not understood as the total denial of the contents of other minds. But at least it points to the difficulty of knowing the nature and qualitative properties of other minds. Now if we apply this view to our argument, then it may be said that when Smith has no an epistemological access to the nature of my intrinsic quality, how can he claim that we both associate the same quality with the pain term? Here it must be said that we are not denying that the other subjects have an apprehension of a certain qualia with which they associate the pain term. All we try to clarify is that what I associate with the pain term is not the same as what Smith associates with it. This is similar to saying that the way I know the tree is not the same as the way you know it. Interestingly it seems that in spite of the multiplication of the subjects the meaning of the pain term, just as that of tree, remains the same. There is a

² See, O' Conner, John, *Modern Materialism*, pp. 6-8

further point for the understanding of the difference of the way mental terms get their meanings: so consider the statement “ tomorrow is monday ”, from that we can infer that “ today is sunday ” now the terms, monday and sunday get their meanings entirely by depending upon the relational properties by means of which we connect them with other related terms. But can we in the same way suppose that if “x is pain”, then “x has $Q_p=M_p$ ”, of course not.

In order to be able to determine the meaning of the pain term we have to know what it is like to feel the pain. And even concerning the feeling of the pain, we suppose, there is no a common way of speaking of the pain qualia on which its meaning is dependent. If we accept that the meaning of the pain term is dependent upon the pain qualia, then the major part of its meaning will remain private. This privacy is an ignored part of the meaning of the pain term. For it has always been assumed that the meaning of sensation-dependent mental terms such as pain can be connected with the external circumstances and overt behaviors. On such a basis, one will be able to objectify the internal qualities of our experiences by considering the relations they bear to various observable phenomena. This idea seems to give rise to the claim that the private language of sensation-dependent terms is impossible just as Wittgenstein asserted.

V. Private Language Argument

As the arguments we made so far indicate, we will be led to a disagreement with Wittgenstein regarding the private language of sensation-dependent mental terms such as pain. Wittgenstein's point seems to be that as long as we do not refer to some related (conventional) behavioral pattern we will never be able to distinguish between the correct and incorrect application of the meaning to the pain term. Because he claims that P_1 and P_2 cannot correctly be connected with the pain sensation by depending upon the capacity of memory. When we associate P_1 (pain term) with S (sensation) we can never ascertain that the occurrence of P_2 will also correctly be connected with S. Wittgenstein holds that nobody can verify that the first occurrence of S is the same as the second occurrence of it. Owing to the fact that we can never significantly remember that P_1 and P_2 refer to the same sensation, it is not the case that a private language of sensation-dependent terms is possible. Simply the assignation of a certain meaning to the pain term by remaining within one's own vocabulary for sensations is not considerable. In order to show the inadequacy of this view I will use an example, though imaginary. If Wittgenstein is right, then it is possible to conclude that it seems that I cannot also make a distinction between the pain and the non-pain in the strict sense of the word. Perhaps this accusation will not refer to the introspective application of the pain sensation but significantly to the assignation of a meaning to the pain term. For if there is no a correct application

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of a meaning to the pain term, then it may unavoidably be the case that the meaning of the pain term will remain incomplete and ambiguous. This may even lead us to the idea that we have no significant means by means of which we can differentiate between two separate pain sensations. But is it actually the case? Thus if I cannot make a distinction between two separate sensations of pain, then the individuation of the pain sensation will also be impossible. This assertion will also imply that one may even start to doubt that there exists any pain sensation at all: let us imagine the case that I live in a society in which nobody except me has a sensation of pain.

And in some way I speak of the pain sensation to the others. Now in spite of the denial of the existence of the pain sensation by others I will without a doubt *individuate* the pain sensations. And accordingly I will assume that the pain now I feel is much stronger than the one I had two days ago. Even if I will be committed to the private way of speaking of the pain sensation, I will significantly assign a private meaning to the pain term. For nothing will make me blind to the fact that the pain sensation and its related quale are different from that of thirstiness. By considering so I will attempt to set up a semantic theory in which the pain term starts to gain a private meaning which is dependent upon the distinct quale of sensations of the pain felt. For when I am in pain I will not intend to desire drinkable fluids as in the case of thirstiness. Rather I will try to avoid the unpleasant feeling I am experiencing.

A similar semantic theory is also suggested by McGinn³ as to whom we should make a distinction between psychological language-game and language-game of physical description. McGinn's point is mainly centered around the way and by what language we speak of the mental terms. In fact it is true that we teach child the way by which he can express his feelings but for child what is lacking is the power and reliability of the language he uses for being able to express what he feels now. According to McGinn, it is non-arguable that a grammatical difference should refer to the mental terms compared to those of physical ones. Accordingly, it seems that if mental events must have a different grammatical difference, then it is considerable to claim that McGinn's point strengthens my view that mental events have a private nature and this not only distinguishes them from physical things but from even the similar mental events. To suppose a distinction between mental events in terms of type of language may not be enough. We may also need a further distinction by the help of phenomenal quality which determines the intrinsic quality of the feeling persons have as we claim throughout the whole paper.

³ See, McGinn, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook To Wittgenstein and Philosophical Investigations*, pp. 120-126

This argument is broadly taken further by Rushes Rhees according to whom just as we claimed above, even the language may not be sufficient enough to talk about sensation-dependent mental terms. If the language is not sufficient to express the experience then, it is true that we apprehend a *restricted part* of the experience of sensations in expressive language. Because, by language we may follow a definition but we cannot give a definition by itself. Because, as it may be assumed, the definition of separate people will differ from each other to a certain extent. To come to a consensus as regards a certain experience we use the language by following a definition after the experience case as to Rhees. According to Rhees, we may say what color is blood, and we can speak of the color red but in staying in the language we cannot speak about what color red is? Following Rhees We can say that to associate a sensation with the language we have to be able to use the memory in correlation of memories of other.

Conclusion

The consequence of the above arguments is that insofar as I can differentiate between the pain sensation and the others, it is possible to speak of the application of a certain meaning to the pain term without connecting it with the other related terms or phenomena. For even in the usage of the common language there is a significant part to which we have only a private application of the related meanings just as in the case of the sensation-dependent mental terms. Consequently, as long as the sensation of the pain remains the same, the pain term will not attain a meaning which is also shared by a sensation of the coldness.

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