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Dualistic Functions

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In the discussion of the philosophy of mind, the views of Functionalism and Substance Dualism are two theories that seem to be competing for supporters. In this essay, I would like to briefly outline both views before supporting the Substance Dualist view.

Substance Dualism is an interpretation of the mind that believes in the existence of the material body and an immaterial mind. While the body obeys the physical laws, as we know them, the mind is not subject to those laws at all. In fact, Substance Dualists claim that the mind is infinite and therefore immortal. This view can also easily claim the existence of free will.

On the other hand, Functionalism lays no claim in infinite and unknown territory. Functionalists view the mind as a very complicated something, which produces an output, e.g. thought or action, based on an arbitrary input and the state the mind is in, when it receives the input. As an example, if your mind is set to believe that you are poor, the thought of going to the mall will probably produce an upset, sad, or unhappy output. However, if your mind is set to being wealthy, then going to the mall will most likely produce a happy output. Other mind factors can include having noisy children, a broken car, or it being the day after Thanksgiving. In all instances, the input will be processed by the mind to deliver an output.

When comparing the views, I feel that free will is a major complication for Functionalism. If the mind processes inputs based on the state it is in, then outputs appear to be fairly predictable. All you need to find out is the exact state of the mind, and you will know how that person reacts. To make matters worse, one output can be seen as the initial state of the next input. In the example above, the poor person will have produced an unhappy output. Now we can assume that this unhappy output is the state of mind, for

the next input, e.g. ‘Daddy, what do we get for Christmas?’. If we have observed one person for long enough, we know that he has no savings stashed away and he his boss also made him work over Christmas. Given all these conditions, we seem to be able to predict another upset, sad, or unhappy output. In Substance Dualism, we find free will to be an important part of its theory. We are not bound to a chain, or loop, of processes, but our poor person can decide to try to make the best of it, regardless of how grim the world looks. It may be claimed that such a variable can be part of the process in Functionalism, but I feel that such a ‘randomness variable’ works against the predictability that Functionalists claim. Even Suzanne Cunningham, author our textbook *What Is Mind?*, states that “the Functionalist insists on the importance of environmental input .. and plausible or predictable output ...” (40). If humans produce unpredictable, or random outputs, how can we ever determine that it followed a certain function?

While free will is only the smaller problem, my biggest concern with Functionalism is the fact that it completely fails to describe what a mind is. Instead, it tries to describe what a mind does. Cunningham says that Functionalism “does an ‘end run’ around the long-standing debate about the composition of the mind or mental states” (47), but I don’t think ignoring the substance of mind does anyone a favor. Even for a Functionalist, the question still stands unanswered: what is mind? Suzanne Cunningham uses the example of a boat. When asked what a boat is, one generally would give a functional description like ‘a vessel floating on water’ and not what the boat is composed of. But when asked what boats are composed of, the answer(s) could easily be given. For a Functionalist, the question what mind is composed of, is still an enigma. This leads us to problems. The functional description of a boat could also be ‘transporting people on

water', but the same description can apply to personal watercrafts and empty oil barrels. If you have the description 'something that does calculations', it could be a computer, an electronic or a mechanical calculator, or simply a set of mathematical tables. Only when we inquire into what that something is composed of, are we able to focus our discussions more clearly.

When reviewing my arguments, I feel that Functionalism and Substance Dualism might not be mutually exclusive. We can examine what the mind is composed of as well as what the mind does. But the discussion of the function of the mind depends very much on the composition of the mind, therefore we must seek answers of compositions first, and favor the Substance Dualistic conception.