According to Functionalism, mental states are functional states, defined in terms of their causal roles and not in terms of any subjective elements. According to this theory, you specify a mental state by associating an array of possible inputs with an array of possible outputs, where the latter can be mental or behavioral.

This is a reductivist view, typically, with mental states reduced to functional states (or functional roles). Mental states are identified in terms of what they do, not in terms of their composition. (They often go hand in hand with physicalist views — cf. Armstrong, on reserve in the department.) This view works well with intuitions that suggest mental states of a given sort could conceivably be realized in a variety of different systems. (This is known in the literature as multiple realizability.)

Types:

1. Commonsense (Lewis): You specify the functional role by developing a Ramsey sentence out of the (truthful) claims one can make about the mental state in question. This involves conjoining those sentences and then existentially generalizing. Functional roles, then, are implicitly defined within a theory, whether that be commonsense or sophisticated.

2. Turing Machine (Putnam): Mental states are Turing machine states, defined by a machine table. The specific state one is in at a time is given by the initial state and the input.

3. Homuncular: This is more a research program than a specific view, but it maintains that mental capacities are to be explained as emerging out of more basic, unintelligent computational processes. According to this view, the mind is really a collection of modules that each perform a particular duty, and high-level mental functions are the result of the interaction of a variety of these modules. On this view, semantics emerges from syntax.

Objections:

1. Qualitative States:
   a. Absent Qualia: You could have a functional role instantiated without the associated qualia.
   b. Inverted Spectrum: You could have a functional role instantiated with a
different feeling than that with which it is typically associated.

2. Intentional States: Chinese Room (Searle): this is also a “subjective feel” type response, focusing on the lack of understanding in the case of language use. We can instantiate the functional role without any understanding at all.