

## ***Philosophy of Psychology Week 7***

- ⇒ More on the essay
- ⇒ Last week's team exercise
- ⇒ Recap of Wilkes
- ⇒ Churchland on propositional attitudes
- ⇒ Team exercise

## ***Wilkes (recap)***

- ⇒ Problem 1: FP makes false predictions and fails to explain certain things
  - We will label cases / findings which illustrate this problem "type 1".
- ⇒ Problem 2: the vocabulary of FP seems to be inapplicable to certain cases
  - We will label cases / findings which illustrate this problem "type 2".

## ***Wilkes (recap)***

- ⇒ A type 1 case
  - A peculiar impairment of action
    - able to perform complex actions on request, e.g. "take the stance of a boxer"
    - but unable to perform even related simple actions on request, e.g. "clench your fist"
  - Again, FP predicts otherwise and cannot explain this fact.

## ***Wilkes (recap)***

- ⇒ A type 2 case
  - Visual agnosia (dorsal simultanagnosia)
    - can see the individual features of ordinary objects (chairs, tables, cars etc)
    - but cannot say what they are without guessing. cannot perceive objects as wholes, visualize them, or draw them.
      - the subject must guess based on his identification of individual features.
  - Can the subject see ordinary objects?

### ***Last week's exercise***

- Compare Nagel's and Wilkes' challenges to folk psychology in the following respects:
  - a) The nature of their targets
  - b) The form of the arguments
  - c) How plausible they are
  - d) The importance of their implications

### ***Churchland on Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes***

- ⇒ Propositional attitudes
- ⇒ Why FP is a theory
- ⇒ Why eliminate FP
- ⇒ Arguments against elimination



### ***Propositional attitudes?***

- ⇒ Churchland's primary target is the part of FP that has to do with propositional attitudes.
- ⇒ Propositional attitudes ("attitudes", for short), are states like beliefs, desires, fears, intentions, wishes, expectations, etc.

### ***Propositional attitudes***

- ⇒ Two defining characteristics of attitudes:
  - They are "about" propositions or states of affairs (ways the world could be)
    - What they are about is their *content*. The content of my belief that I am currently teaching a class is the proposition *I am currently teaching a class*.
  - They can obtain even when the propositions they are about are false, e.g. one can have a false belief or one can desire something that is not the case (which is of course normal).

### ***Attitudes and consciousness***

- ⇒ The relation between propositional attitudes and consciousness is a matter of debate. Some say they are completely independent of each other, others disagree.

### ***Why FP is a theory***

- ⇒ Churchland insists that folk psychology is a theory.
- ⇒ A theory is an organized set of claims, and we defined folk psychology as an organized set of claims, so Churchland's claim is true by definition on our usage of "folk psychology".

### ***Why insist FP is a theory?***

- ⇒ The important point is not that FP is a theory, but what Churchland thinks this entails:
  - *the states FP talks about (the attitudes) are by definition states which play the role FP ascribes them.*
- ⇒ Compare:
  - What is the meaning of the term "electron"?
    - Electrons seem to be defined at least in part by the main claims we make about them, e.g., what their charge, mass, and role in the atom is.

### ***Attitudes as functional terms***

- ⇒ Churchland claims that a belief is by definition a state which plays the role, or a good part of the role FP says beliefs play, e.g.
  - a state which guides action in conjunction with desires
  - a state one tries to be in only when its content is true
  - a state which determines what one says when one wants to be honest
  - etc.

### ***Attitudes as functional terms***

- ⇒ This view implies that, if what FP says about attitudes is largely false (especially the core claims of FP), then there are no attitudes at all.

### ***An eliminativist argument against beliefs***

1. FP says that beliefs do X, Y and Z
2. Because FP is a theory, what it says about beliefs is definitive of what beliefs are
3. Therefore, beliefs are by definition states that do X, Y and Z.
4. FP is largely false
  1. i.e. nothing does X, Y and Z
5. Therefore, there are no beliefs.

### ***Why FP might be false***

1. FP fails to explain many things
2. FP is stagnant: it hasn't evolved in thousands of years
3. FP does not cohere with other relevant theories

### ***Explanatory “failures”***

- ⇒ Churchland points out that none of the following can be explained by FP:
  - Mental illness
  - Creative imagination
  - Differences in intelligence
  - The function of sleep
  - Complex motor activities
    - e.g. catching a ball
  - How we form 3D visual experiences from 2D stimuli
  - Perceptual illusions
  - How memory works
  - How learning works
  - (we might add all the findings discussed by Wilkes)

### ***Lack of evolution***

- ⇒ Core FP has not evolved during the past two thousand years at least (as far as written records tell us).
- Churchland agrees that lack of change can be taken as evidence that a theory is in fact quite good, but only if it is *perfect*. If it is not perfect yet not completely false, it should lend itself to improvements. According to Churchland, the fact that FP has not changed shows that it is like a house with rotten foundations.

### ***Lack of cohesion with other theories***

- ⇒ According to Churchland, FP does not fit well within the frameworks of neuroscience and biology. In particular, it does not seem possible to translate the language of propositional attitudes into the language of neuroscience. Churchland thinks we should prefer a psychology theory that integrates with biological sciences.

### ***Churchland summarizes***

- "... what we must say is that FP suffers explanatory failures on an epic scale, that it has been stagnant for at least twenty-five centuries, and that its categories appear (so far) to be incommensurable with or orthogonal to the categories of the background physical science whose long-term claim to explain human behavior seems undeniable. Any theory that meets this description must be allowed a serious candidate for outright elimination."

### ***Criticism***

- ⇒ Churchland is right that there are many things FP cannot explain, but how is this a *failure*?
  - Perhaps it is no more the job of FP to explain the previous aspects of human psychology than it is the job of economists to explain black holes.
  - What is true is that FP cannot fully explain behaviour alone, and so that there is room for a more fundamental theory. But note that this is true of biology and chemistry in their respective domains.

### **Criticism**

- ⇒ The limited scope of FP can also help deal with the problem of “stagnation”.
- ⇒ Stagnation by itself is not bad, because it can be a sign of a good, stable theory that does its job well. What is bad is stagnation in the face of problems or shortcomings. If Churchland is wrong about FP's “explanatory failures”, he might also be wrong about the significance of its “stagnation”.

### **Criticism**

- ⇒ Churchland also seems too pessimistic regarding the integration of FP with neuroscience.
- ⇒ On the contrary, a number of philosophers who agree with Churchland that FP is a term-introducing theory believe that this makes it easy to “naturalize”.
  - These are the “analytic functionalists” like Lewis, Jackson, and Pettit.

### **Eliminativism and normativity (p. 76-77)**

- ⇒ A common objection to eliminativism is that FP is not a theory of how people actually think, but a description of the *norms of rational thought* (how people *ought* to think).
  - Daniel Dennett (reading for next week) holds a view along these lines.
- ⇒ If this is right, the fact that FP makes false predictions or fails to make many predictions at best shows that people are not very rational, not that the theory is false.

### **Churchland's answers (bottom 82-84)**

- ⇒ Churchland's first answer is to deny that FP describes an ideal at all.
  - He points out that it is not because FP makes reference to logical relations between propositions that it captures an ideal of rationality. Physical laws make reference to numbers but don't describe mathematical ideals.
  - This is the point of the comparison with the ideal gas law.

### ***Churchland's answers***

- ⇒ Churchland then concedes that there are some patterns of behaviour FP captures which may be taken as models, but that does not make FP fully normative, because some are not models. His example is:
  - If x desires that P and learns that not P, then X will be sad that not P.

### ***Churchland's answers***

- ⇒ Churchland also denies that FP, insofar as it captures norms of rationality, captures the best norms. He gives two reasons for this.
  - First he claims that the best principles of rationality are not common sense.
    - For example, Kolmogorov's probability axioms are not known by lay people, even though they are part of all (or almost all) good norms of probabilistic reasoning.
  - Second, he claims that FP is too limited because it is language-centric, excluding beings without language from rationality.

### ***Churchland's answer***

- ⇒ This second answer represents a change of tactic: Churchland's point now is not that FP is false or a bad theory, but that it is a bad norm. This would lead to a different kind of elimination.

### ***The argument from multiple realization (mid 78)***

- ⇒ One objection to Churchland is that neuroscience cannot provide a sufficiently high-level, abstract account of mental states so that creatures which are biologically very different from us can have them.
  - For example, it seems that, whatever mental states are, it should be possible for silicon creatures to have them. For all we know, some of us do have silicon brains!

### ***Churchland's answer (mid 82)***

- ⇒ Churchland rightly points out that neuroscience can provide sufficient high-level definitions of mental states.

### ***Is eliminativism self-defeating? (89-90)***

- ⇒ A common objection to eliminativism is that it is a kind of “cognitive suicide”. More precisely, the view is said to be self-defeating because of the following argument:
  1. If eliminativism is true, there are no propositional attitudes
  2. If there are no propositional attitudes, all our words are meaningless.
  3. If our words are meaningless, the claims of eliminativists are meaningless.
  4. So eliminativism is either false or meaningless.

### ***Churchland's answer***

- ⇒ Churchland's answer is to point out that the second premise is question begging.
  - He claims that his opponents are not entitled to this premise because it is part of what is at issue in the debate: if attitudes are eliminated, a theory of meaning which does not make it depend on attitudes will be developed, so premise 2 is “question begging”.

### ***The functionalist escape***

- ⇒ p. 79 to the middle of p. 82:
  - In this part of the article, Churchland is trying to ridicule attempts by analytic functionalists to show that we could hardly fail to have propositional attitudes.
  - Ignore this part.

### ***Team exercise***

- ⇒ Summarize the challenges faced by folk psychology. If possible, add some challenges of your own (not mentioned by Nagel, Wilkes, or Churchland).