Folk Psychology

Phil 255

Folk psychology

- Folk psychology: (defn)

- Fodor and Churchland have differing views on its role in a 'scientific psychology'

- However, both agree it is a real theory

  - If true, the unobservables are taken to actually exist

  - If false, these do not exist (e.g. phlogiston)

  - Unobservables are propositional attitudes

Folk psychology

□ Example 'laws'

    □ Churchland: If somebody fears [that] something then that person hopes that that something will not occur or be present.

    □ Fodor: If somebody wants [that] something and that person believes that the thing won't happen unless some other constraints are met, and that person believes that they can make those constraints be met, then that person will try to make those constraints be met.

Fodor

☐ Defense of the doing 'scientific' psychology as done by 'folk' psychology

☐ Argues that folk psychology

1. is often right

2. is deep

3. is indispensable

Accuracy of folk psychology

☐ We successfully infer people's intentions from the sounds they make

  ☐ and infer their behavior from their intentions.

☐ It works with people we have never met before.

☐ It works transparently almost all the time.

☐ Fodor argues that it is as good as every other 'special science' (and <u>ceteris paribus</u> clauses are nothing new).

A deep theory

- Has a deductive structure for explanations just like other sciences

- General laws can be applied to specific cases and conclusions deduced and predictions made (consider previous e.g.)

- Can connect many such laws for complex explanations and predictions

- Much better than a 'shallow' theory (e.g. folk meterology).

Indispensibility

☐ We do not have any alternative vocabulary for describing psychological behavior.

☐ I.e. we cannot otherwise preserve

1. My behavior in uttering "I'll be there..." is an event of type T_i

2. My being there is an event of type T_j

3. Claims like "T_j is consequent on T_i" is law-like.

☐ Behaviourism can't (diffuseness)

☐ Physics can't (wrong level)

☐ Can't give up talk of propositional attitudes

Propositional attitudes

☐ Fodor takes any psychology to be a PA psychology if it posits states that are:

1. Semantically evaluable: have content and are true or false.

2. Causally efficacious: these exact states 1) cause behavior 2) are caused by perception 3) can cause each other.

3. Just the kind of things that folk psychology talks about: This is to say that FP is mostly right, but will likely be improved by scientific psychology

Syntax (Causally efficiacious)

- Think of syntax as being the shape of a symbol

- Syntax allows us to connect symbol crunching, as performed by computers, to mental causality

- If psychological systems are syntactic manipulators ('physical symbols systems'), we can describe their behavior in terms of syntax in a familiar way

Semantics

☐ The semantics of a representation is what it denotes, or more generally, what it means

☐ A naive theory is that representations mean what causes them

☐ When combining symbols, the semantics are respected in virtue of rules governing syntactic combination

☐ The study of logic has taught us which rules and operations will preserve semantics properly

RTM/CTM

- The combination of these observations results in the 'Representational (Computational) Theory of Mind'

    - Representations which stand for propositions that the 'system' has an 'attitude' towards

    - These representations have a syntax (logical form) that can be used to control further processing

    - This processing respects the semantics of the representation.

- The 'computer metaphor' shows precisely how syntax can be used to respect semantics

- Fodor suggests RTM is uniquely able to answer the question "How is rationality mechanically possible?"

Churchland

- Churchland focuses on
  1. the explanatory failures of folk psychology
  2. the unification of folk psychology with other sciences
- Explanatory failures
  - Folk psych:
  - Scientific psychology has similar 'problem areas'
- Why?
  - All in non-linguistic animals
- Continuing line of failures starting with primitive explns of elements of nature (also 'linguistic')

Churchland

- Unification with other sciences
  - Does not fit with other theories (despite other unification)
  - Why?
    - Extreme 'conceptual inertia'
    - Posits theoretical entities inconsistent with other sciences
  - Should be eliminated (recently softened to 'co-evolution')
  - Indirect argument by analogy against the misleading rhetorical moves made by proponents

Alchemy

☐ Four essences are immaterial spirits (functional states)

    ☐ Cannot be reduced to atomic chemistry

☐ Properties of substance are combinations of essences (regardless of details)

☐ May not have 'essences' (functions) right yet, hence a role for scientific alchemy

☐ Artificial gold isn't quite as good (but almost) as the real thing

☐ "smokescreen for the preservation of error and confusion" (p. 228)

☐ Disanalogies?

Alternatives to FP

- Churchland offers three alternatives:

  - High-D dynamics

  - More complex LOT

  - Rapid info exchange

Discussion

- Debate is a difficult one to adjudicate
    - FP, not flawless, but some success
    - Other options are science fiction
    - However, FP is seriously lacking qua theory
- Perhaps past cases (analogies) are the best we can work with for now, to understand how science develops
- My guess: FP will be replaced, but in a way that adopts much of the vocabulary of FP (as with alchemy, etc.)
    - The meaning of those words might become entirely different