LSU PHIL 4941 / Spring 2016 / John Protevi

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Jerry Fodor, "Propositional Attitudes," in Chalmers 2002, 542-555.
Original: *The Monist* 61 (1978): 573-591.

THREE POSITIONS W/R/T PROPOSITIONAL ATTITUDES

PAs are part of the intentionality as mark of the mental group of concepts. Beliefs and desires are attitudes toward propositions. "I believe that P," "I hope that P," "I want it to happen that P," …

Eliminative materialists think such folk psychology (explaining human behavior by means of belief-desire psychology) is a false theory, with the referents of its objects being non-existent. FP will be to CN what phlogiston is now to chemistry. FP will and should be replaced by brain language. "I believe that P" should be replaced by a dynamic systems account of the relations between activity in brain networks.

Realists like Fodor think this replacement would be the worst intellectual disaster to ever hit the human race. He thinks thoughts are sentences in the LOT (language of thought) and as such are real functional states of organisms.

Dennett is an *instrumentalist* here. He thinks we can and should adopt an "intentional stance" (positing beliefs and desires) with regard to explaining behavior of some creatures (as opposed to a "physical stance" and a "design stance" for other beings.)

TERMINOLOGY

LOT (RTM) + CSMP = CTM.

MR = mental representations.

LOT = Language of Thought: MR have linguistic structure.

RTM = representational theory of mind (PA = relations btw subjects and mental reps)

CSMP = causal-syntactic theory of mental processes (causal processes defined over syntax of MR)

CTM = computational theory of mind: thinking is computation (rule-bound manipulation of discrete symbols.)

LOT:

1. Species-wide formal language, not any particular spoken language.
2. Encoding in brain is possible
3. Not accessible to thinking subject.

STRUCTURE OF THE ESSAY

1. Fodor seeks to elucidate the *a priori* conditions a theory of PAs should meet. These indicate that PAs are "relations between organisms and internal representations." (This view is one that cognitive psychologists have independently arrived at.)
2. He lays out FIVE CONDITIONS:
    a. PAs should be analyzed as relations.
    b. PA theory should explain parallel between PA verbs and verbs of saying ("Vendler's condition").
    c. PA theory should explain Fregean opacity.
        i. Frege pointed out that you can have conflicts between beliefs of relating to concepts even if they are co-referential, since there will be different senses.
        ii. That is, you can believe the evening star is beautiful and the morning star is ugly, even though the referent of "evening star" is the same as that of "morning star."
    d. Objects of PAs should have logical form ("Aristotle's condition")
    e. PA theory should mesh with empirical accounts of mental processes.
3. He concludes that these conditions "strongly suggest that PAs are relations between organisms and formulae in an internal language," or IOW, "between organisms and internal sentences."
4. He then forecasts two stages: 1) show that the conditions comport with view that objects of PAs are sentences, and 2) that the sentences are plausibly internal.
    a. All he claims is that the LOT theory 1) works well, and 2) is better than any alternative.
    b. And, even if we didn't need LOT for the 5 conditions, we'd need it for psychology.
5. Then he runs through the conditions in relation to "Carnap's Theory" in which PAs are relations between people and the sentences they are disposed to utter (in their natural language).
6. Then he shows 7 PROBLEMS with Carnap's theory. For example:
    a. Behavioristic account of relations between people and objects of PAs (sentences) will have to be jettisoned. Beliefs are dispositions, so Carnap would need to go functionalist: belief that it's raining means a token of "it's raining" will have a causal role in your behavior and your other mental states.
    b. There are other problems, with beliefs for non-linguistic animals, with learning natural languages (a process that seems to involve PAs) …
7. THE SOLUTION is that while the objects of PAs are sentences, they are not sentences in natural languages but SENTENCES OF A "NON-NATURAL LANGUAGE; in effect, formulae in an INTERNAL REPRESENTATIONAL SYSTEM."
8. He then shows how this copes with the 5 conditions w/o falling prey to the 7 problems.
9. He will then show that LOT is presupposed by the best – the only – psychology we have.
10. He concludes by dealing with two objections.
    a. Why not think the objects of PAs are propositions?
        i. LOT as MR is a computational language
            1. It has semantics (relating it to objects)
            2. And syntax (rules for formulating sentences)
            3. So PAs are relations to propositions mediated by MR
        ii. RTM: S thinks of O in virtue of S relating to an idea of O, so that S has a PA in virtue of being in a relation to a MR that expresses the P
        iii. Why have such mediation?
            1. Small reason: computation needs MRs; Ps don't have the syntax / semantics needed
            2. Big reason: organisms can only relate to Ps by having a causal / functional relation to a token sentence in LOT (an MR) expressing the P

b. Isn't it conceivable that PAs are not relations to internal sentences?
    i. Yes, but here we come back to the fact that the LOT is used by psychology.
    ii. Plus, having the same PAs but different system of MR is possible, but then again maybe it isn't. It's hard to think this through.

11. RECAP:
    a. Cognitive psych has revived RTM, and this treatment of PAs occurs in that context.
    b. The mind is an organ whose function is to manipulate MRs; these are the domain of mental processes and the immediate objects of mental states.
    c. This enables us to make sense of the mind / computer analogy.
    d. If RTM is true, we know PAs are relations of organisms to MRs. BUT then,
        i. What relates MRs to the world?
        ii. How can a system of MRs be semantically interpreted?

DISCUSSION

Based on *Internet Encyclopedia of Philos*ophy article on "Language of Thought" or LOT.

LOT = MR has linguistic structure (= *combinatorial syntax* and a *compositional semantics*).

Combinatorial syntax: atomic and compound reps.

Compositional semantics: semantic content of MR = content of syntactic constituents, overall structure, and arrangement.

Formal languages are good examples. For example, propositional logic.

$((A \rightarrow B) \cdot A) \rightarrow B$. Modus ponens.

Combinatorial syntax:

A = "It is raining" (atomic)

B = "I will get wet" (atomic)

$(A \rightarrow B)$ "If it is raining, then I will get wet" (compound)

Compositional semantics (truth value): a function of the content of the syntactic constituents, together with overall structure and arrangement of the representation.

Logic relates truth of simple and compound sentences.

The truth-value of an implication is *false* if and only if its antecedent is *true* and is consequent is *false*; otherwise, the truth-value is *true*. This is called *material implication*.

RTM / *intentional realism*—PAs are real states of organisms. A mature psych will refer to (real) PAs in explaining behavior.

Truth or falsehood of a belief is inherited from the truth or falsehood of the representation involved.

> If the relationship of belief holds between Angie and a representation with the content *David stole a candy bar*, yet David did not steal a candy bar, then Angie has a false belief.

This account also provides an explanation of the so-called "Frege cases" in which a subject believes that a given object known by one name has some property yet the subject fails to believe that the same object known by another name has the same property (see Fodor 1978).

FODOR: first, "only game in town." Later, "inference to best explanation" of these features of thought:

1. Productivity
2. Systematicity
3. Inferential *coherence*

PRODUCTIVITY: representational system can produce infinite distinct representations from finite atomic representations when there is no upper limit on compounding.

1. A (atomic)
2. $A \rightarrow B$ (simple compound: no embedding)
3. $((A \rightarrow B) \cdot A) \rightarrow B$ (complex compound: embedding)

> Human thought is productive: we do not have infinite store of reps, but we can produce infinite reps. So we must have a production system from finite atomic reps. Only systems with combinatorial syntax and compositional semantics can do that. So MR must be LOT.

SYSTEMATICITY: rep system in which ability to make a rep expressing a proposition is intrinsically related to ability to make other reps expressing certain other propositions.

> For example, sentential logic is systematic with respect to the propositions *Bill is boring and Fred is funny* and *Fred is funny and Bill is boring*, as it can express the former if and only if it can also express the latter.

INFERENTIAL COHERENCE: if a system can draw one or more specific inferences that are instances of a kind, it can draw any specific inferences that are of that kind.

> For example, if it can go from A or B to A in one case with one content, then it can infer that conjunct from its conjunction. If it can do that with all conjuncts, regardless of content, then it is inferentially coherent w/r/t drawing conjuncts from conjunctions.