

Analysis of folk psychology philosophy essay

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" The propositional attitudes of folk psychology do not constitute an unbreachable barrier to the advancing tide of neuroscience. On the contrary, the principled displacement of folk psychology is not only richly possible; it represents one of the most intriguing theoretical displacements we can currently imagine." - (Churchland 512) This thesis from Churchland's paper on Eliminative materialism and Propositional Attitudes sums up just how out of touch folk psychology is compared to modern neuroscience. From an eliminative materialist standpoint, the theory on folk psychology should be completely disregarded because it is so far off base on what the model of actual human cognition is. A functionalist and a dualist will argue that folk psychology is retained in neuroscience and not all of its credibility should be diminished so it should be gradually reduced. This belief according to Churchland is " frightening" because how could a rational person believe a theory based off of assumptions. In contradiction, Fodor explains that folk psychology should not be completely eliminable " because some functional characterization must be retained." (Churchland 506) Regardless of how much of argument put up by a functionalist, dualist, or an eliminative materialist, all sides have enough evidence to support their plight. By looking at other common sense sciences, such as folk physics, a better insight on folk psychology can be achieved. Comparing and contrasting folk psychology with folk physics will also clarify its relation to the philosophy of mind. Lets begin by comparing the two common sense sciences and start out by discussing how each are stagnant as far as their progression is concerned. Each of these sciences has not changed in several human life times. Neither have changed significantly since the times of Aristotle and with all of the advancements of knowledge within the human race since these times it

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makes finding these theories credible, hard to swallow. Churchland explains " This is a very long period of stagnation and infertility for any theory to display, especially when faced with such an enormous backlog of anomalies and mysteries in its own exploratory domain." (Churchland 504) So since both theories are so old and stagnant, it is safe to say they should be eliminated altogether, right? Maybe so, but the " anomalies and mysteries" that Churchland talks about could also be explained as abstract references to both science's modern counterpart. For example a Folk physicist might say that all objects fall straight downward and it is abstractly related to Newton's Law of Universal Gravity. Fodor explains that the functionalist would not disregard and eliminate something of this nature but try and reduce it gradually over time. (Churchland 505). Essentially both common sense sciences can be wrong but can be improved upon by science and therefore can still be useful. The topic can be further explored by looking at the differences of both sciences. The first big difference between the two is they both achieve two different goals. Folk physics is how " common folk" describe how things work where folk psychology is a way of describing how people work. Churchland describes folk psychology in a simple equation. For example if X wants Y, but to get Y its necessary to do N, X will do N. (Churchland 502) As far as folk physics is concerned, the previous example of an object that is dropped will fall downward is an accurate description of how everyday people perceive things to work. In the above paragraph it is argued from a functionalist standpoint that both are similar because they abstractly relate to their respective modern science. In this same way both differ from an eliminative materialist standpoint. Folk physics, for most practical purposes, is a decent way of explaining how things work even if its <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-folk-psychology-philosophy-essay/>

results do not turn out to be correct all the time. For example, liquid will spill off a ledge downward but in the case of a siphon the water is pulled up through a tube and then downward. In the instance of folk psychology the concepts used to associate descriptions with human behavior are usually so false that its abstract relation to neuroscience is not very clear. Furthermore Churchland believes that modern sciences such as biology, chemistry, neuroscience, etc can deduce human cognition, therefore folk psychology is a waste of space. (Churchland 504) Churchland best clarifies this point when discussing the elimination of alchemy for chemistry. Churchland states " Alchemy is a terrible theory, well deserving of its complete elimination, and the defense of it just explored is reactionary, obfuscatory, retrograde, and wrong." (Churchland 507) Since alchemy was a bad theory it was eliminated therefore since folk psychology is a bad theory it should be eliminated as well. Folk physics is not completely perfect but it does prove somewhat useful in normal everyday explanation where folk psychology does not. After comparing and contrasting the two sciences, a better look at how each apply to the philosophy of mind can be explained. Both sciences are thought of as theories in their own respect but only folk psychology provides the better solution to the problem of other minds. Since folk psychology's theory is based off predictions and associations of what is believed to be human recognitions of emotions and behaviors, it hypothesizes an answer for the question " do others have minds too?" Churchland further explains by stating " its function, in conjunction with the background laws of folk psychology, is to provide explanations/predictions/understanding of the individuals continuing behavior, and its credible to the degree that it is successful in this regard over competing hypotheses." (Churchland 501) Churchland further <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-folk-psychology-philosophy-essay/>

goes into detail on the subject by explaining if a Martian were to convey its mental state to a human being the person would not understand. Even though the person does not understand, there is no reasonable proof to deny that there is cognition present in the Martian. Another important aspect of the philosophy of the mind is the explanation and prediction of behavior. Folk physics predicts the behaviors of object and how they will respond to certain conditions. In folk psychology's case it predicts the behavior of human emotions and responses. One of the most talked about topics in the philosophy of mind is the fact that human beings have an exceptional ability to predict human behavior. Churchland agrees my explaining, " The fact is that the average person is able to explain, and even predict, the behavior of persons with a facility and success that is remarkable. Such explanations and predictions standardly make reference to the desires, beliefs fears, intentions, perceptions, and so forth, to which the agents are presumed subject." (Churchland 501) Both common sense theories both play large role in the discussion of the philosophy of mind in their difference and in their similarities. From the functionalist standpoint folk psychology should be saved and reduced because it abstractly relates to neuroscience. Like folk physics, folk psychology is not always wrong and has some degree of success with its predictions when it comes to human behavior. Lead by Churchland, the counter argument of the eliminative materialist is that folk psychology is useless to today's world and should be eliminated because it only gets in the way. Abstract relation is not enough to warrant keeping a theory around when other sciences accomplish the same task. Even some functionalists believe it is close to being completely eliminated. Churchland's argument that " what if alchemy was still around?" truly hammers the point

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home. Alchemy was eliminated because it was a bad theory and if it were still around people would still believe elements had souls and essences. So why keep folk psychology around? This argument and others like it is the core of its relation to the philosophy of mind. Yes it relates to the problem of other minds and it also makes predictions on human behavior, but the actual argument of where its place should be makes it a prime topic of discussion. Whether the functionalist is right or the extreme materialist is right, does not really matter. It is the constant need to discuss its value as a theory and where its place is, if there is one, which continues to riddle philosophers with questions and arguments.