Psychology and Indispensability

1. Introduction

Some philosophers have alleged that talk of mental states is so vital to our practical and intellectual lives as to be indispensable. Attempting to dispense with such talk has even been said to be 'practically incoherent' or to lead to 'cognitive suicide'. Those philosophers take this to be a serious objection to eliminative materialism. This line of objection raises three questions: What is eliminative materialism? In what sense(s) does eliminative materialism take mental talk to be dispensable? In each sense in which mental talk is indispensable, is its indispensability incompatible with eliminative materialism? The first question will be answered in §2. The second and third questions will be answered in §3. We will see that eliminative materialism can address the above objection by allying itself with fictionalism about mental talk, since fictionalism about *F*s is compatible with talk of *F*s having a central, even indispensable role in our lives.

2. Characterising Eliminative Materialism

Our first task, then, is to say what eliminative materialism is. Here is a proposal. Eliminative materialism has two components:

(I) *Eliminativism*: There are no mental states.

(II) *Materialism*: Internal physical states cause human behaviour.

(I) and (II) are ontological claims, not semantic ones (where a semantic claim is one which essentially uses any of the terms 'true', 'false', 'refers', 'entails', or their cognates). (I) and (II) jointly entail various semantic claims, notably:

(III) *Falsehood*: The common sense view of the mental ('folk psychology') is radically false.

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The idea that a given theory is radically false is the idea that the theory is not false simply in matters of minor detail, but is extensively false in matters of importance—notably in its central principles or laws. Nothing is more central to the common sense view of the mental than that there are mental states. So, if there are no such things, the common sense view is radically false.

Some further comments are in order about the relationship between (I) and (II), on the one hand, and (III), on the other. I have taken (I) and (II) to characterise eliminative materialism. I have proposed making the thesis that there are no mental states a core thesis in formulating eliminative materialism. But John Hawthorne (writing as John O'Leary-Hawthorne) claims that that thesis is not very interesting (O'Leary-Hawthorne 1994, 325). This implies that the above characterisation of eliminative materialism is itself not very interesting. His reason for saying that the thesis that there are no mental states is not very interesting is that there can be nonvacuously true claims about *F*s, even if *F*s do not exist. After all, he points out, many of us think that, although shadows and holes do not exist, there are sentences about shadows or about holes which are true but not vacuously true. To support that line of thought, Hawthorne appeals to the strategy of paraphrase: if we can paraphrase one sentence in terms of another, and the second sentence can be nonvacuously true even if *F*s do not exist, then we have shown that the first sentence can be nonvacuously true even if *F*s do not exist.

Hawthorne's point raises a question: under what conditions are sentences about *F*s (nonvacuously) true although there are no *F*s? Here the notion of ontological commitment will help. Let us say that a sentence *S* is committed to the existence of *F*s if and only if the following condition is met: *S* is nonvacuously true only if there exist *F*s. Hawthorne thinks that a sentence which is (apparently) committed to the existence of *F*s is nonvacuously true if it can be paraphrased in terms of a sentence which is nonvacuously true and which is not committed to the existence of *F*s:

> We reconcile shadow and hole talk with our ontological eliminativism by showing how talk which appears to treat holes and shadows as objects can be recast as talk which is committed only to the existence of entities that are unobjectionable. The original use of existence talk in connection with holes and shadows is thus treated as idiomatic, not a sign of ontological seriousness. (O'Leary-Hawthorne 1994, 326)

How viable is that strategy? It is doubtful whether paraphrases are available even in the case of the examples Hawthorne uses. (See Sorensen [2008, 79] on problems facing paraphrasing shadow talk, and Casati and Varzi [1994, 178–84] on problems facing paraphrasing hole talk. See also Alston [1958] for more general reservations about the significance of paraphrase for ontological projects). It is, if anything, even more controversial how mental talk could be paraphrased into sentences not committed to mental states. Hawthorne considers (without endorsing) a 'dispositionalist treatment of beliefs and desires', whereby mental talk is paraphrased in terms of counterfactual conditionals about people's behaviour (O'Leary-Hawthorne 1994, 326). Yet he offers no suggestions about how to address some stock objections to such a treatment (namely, the Martian marionette and the Blockhead thought experiments. For details of these thought-experiments, see Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson [1996, 150–53]). Unless these counterexamples are addressed, Hawthorne fails to make good his claim that sentences about mental states can be nonvacuously true even if there are no mental states. It further follows that he fails to make good his principal claim that thesis (I) is not very interesting.

Suppose that, by appealing to the strategy of paraphrase, Hawthorne fails to show that thesis (I) is not interesting. Still, it might be thought that, by appealing instead to the truthmaker principle, the principle that every truth has a truthmaker, Hawthorne can establish that conclusion. I will now try to show that that attempt also fails. Proponents of truthmaking argue as follows. A true sentence about *F*s need not be committed to there being *F*s. It depends on what makes the sentence true. What makes such a sentence true might not be the existence of any *F*s. So, for example, what makes sentences about shadows true might not be the existence of shadows, but arrangements of physical structures, angles and degrees of illumination, and so forth. Moreover, it is not claimed that true sentences about holes can be paraphrased in terms of what makes them true.[1]

Two comments are in order. First, the fact (if it is a fact) that true sentences about holes are made true, fundamentally, by things which are not themselves holes is compatible with there being holes (cf. Eklund 2009, 319–20). The story about how non-holes make true sentences about holes may even explain how there can be holes. It follows that, far from dispensing with holes, the appeal to truthmaking might in fact vindicate the claim that there are holes, contrary to Hawthorne's purposes. Second, note

that the appeal to truthmakers is a resolutely ontological approach. Hawthorne says that claims about what does not exist (such as the claim that mental states do not exist) are not very interesting. But claims about what does not exist are not very interesting if and only if claims about what exists are also not very interesting. (The more general assumption here is that a claim is interesting if and only if its negation is interesting). It would follow that the claim that mental states exist is not very interesting. Given the truthmaker principle, if some sentences about the mental are true, it follows that truthmakers exist for at least some sentences about mental states. But that too is a claim about what exists. So even that claim would be not very interesting, by Hawthorne's lights.

For these reasons, Hawthorne's claim that (I) is not very interesting, and its implication that eliminative materialism (at least I have characterised it) is not very interesting, has not been established.

It might be suggested, on behalf of Hawthorne, that a dispute over (I) will be less significant if (III) is granted.[2] That is, the suggestion is that the thesis that there are no mental states becomes less significant if it is granted that folk psychology is radically false. For if the disputants involved agree that folk psychology is radically false, they dispute only whether anything deserves the label 'mental state' and that would be to make (I), the thesis that there are no mental states, less significant.

I question this reasoning on two grounds. First, consider what, on this view, it would take for a dispute about *F*s to be a significant one. It would require that the disputants agree that talk of *F*s is not radically false. In other words, it would require that the disputants agree that our current thinking about *F*s is not extensively false in matters of importance. But this consequence, so far from making the dispute significant, decreases its significance. Any dispute about *F*s will not be about any major matter of importance; it can at most be about a matter of minor or peripheral detail. Since not all debates about *F*s have such a marginal status, there has to be a flaw in the reasoning behind the suggestion. Second, at least one flaw in the reasoning is the assumption that any debate over whether anything deserves the label 'mental state' is not a significant debate. Consider a debate concerning the existence of *F*s—whether it is the debate about the existence of Gulf War syndrome, of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, or of global warming, and so on. By semantic ascent, any debate about whether *F*s exist can be represented as a debate about whether the term 'F'

applies to anything. But then, following the above suggestion, the debate is revealed to have little significance: the parties are disputing only whether anything deserves the label 'F'. The mistake the suggestion makes is assuming that the device of semantic ascent decreases the significance of a debate. It does not; it preserves whatever significance it has when formulated in the material mode. Debates about whether the labels 'Gulf War syndrome' or 'weapons of mass destruction in Iraq' apply to anything are exactly as significant as debates about whether there is such a thing as Gulf War syndrome or whether there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

To continue, making theses (I) and (II) central to the characterisation of eliminative materialism enables us to characterise it without our getting entangled in various distracting side issues about the status of the common sense view of the mental. Here is one example. Some philosophers take the common sense view of the mind to be an empirically falsified theory (Churchland 1981, Stich 1983), whereas others deny that it is empirically falsifiable (Hannan 1993, 171) or even that it is a theory (Morton 1980 chs. 1, 2; Dennett 1991b). These issues are independently interesting, but the eliminative materialist need not be drawn into them in characterising his or her view. Theses (I–III) are logically independent of the issue of whether the common sense view of the mind is falsified or even falsifiable. As an analogue, take the case of atheism. What seems central to atheism is the claim that God does not exist. Formulating atheism in terms of the claim that monotheistic religions are empirically falsified theories would seem to be a misleading way of going about things. The issue of whether atheism is the case does not depend on whether or not those religions are empirically falsified theories. We should not build the purported grounds for atheism into the characterisation of that view. So, for example, one person might be an atheist on the grounds that monotheistic religions are empirically falsified, and another might be an atheist because they are persuaded by some nonempirical argument that the concept of God is incoherent. Nevertheless, there is a thesis that both parties agree on, namely, atheism. For this reason, atheism should not be characterised in terms of the grounds which might be offered for believing it. (And this is so, even if, in fact, whether or not atheism is true should be taken to depend on whether those religions are empirically falsified). For parallel reasons, whether or not the common sense view of the mind is an empir-

ically falsifiable, or falsified, theory need not be part of the characterisation of eliminative materialism.

What, then, is the proper role of (III) in the context of discussions about eliminative materialism? I suggest that evidence that the common sense view of the mind is radically false is evidence for eliminative materialism. Success in finding materialistic causes of an ever-wider range human behaviour provides support for a materialistic theory of human behaviour. (For details, see Boyd [1980 , 94]). By the same measure, any explanatory failings of the common-sense view of the mind provide evidence against that view (as notably alleged by Churchland [1981]). So too would evidence that none of our causally efficacious internal states could be identified with propositional attitudes (as alleged by Ramsey, Stich, and Garon 1990). There is no need here to take a stand on the weight of these different pieces of evidence; the point is only that reason to think that the common-sense view of the mind is radically false would be some reason to think that there are no mental states, just as reason to think that phlogiston theory is false would be some reason to think that there is no phlogiston. (*Some* reason, not decisive reason. Moreover, whether we have reason to think that there are no *F*s, rather than that there are *F*s but that our current theory of *F*s is mistaken, will partly depend on how similar the workings of what is posited by our replacement theory is to what was posited by the supplanted theory).

3. Eliminativism and Fictionalism

Thesis (I), eliminativism, tells us that eliminative materialism is a species of error theory. In his *locus classicus* on error theory, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, J.L. Mackie was explicit that his error theory about morality is 'an ontological thesis, not a linguistic or conceptual one' (Mackie 1977, 18). There are three points about Mackie's error theory about morality which are particularly pertinent to our current interests. First, the theory says that there are no objective moral values. Second, the theory does not propose eliminating moral vocabulary. Third, the theory advocates the use of moral vocabulary as a means of regulating people's behaviour (Mackie 1977 esp. ch. 5). Mackie's error theory is not the only form an error theory of morality might take. For instance, Hinckfuss (1987) presents an error theory which retains only the first component of

Mackie's theory. Mackie's particular version of an error theory is worth pursuing, however, because it is familiar and has been extensively discussed. It then seems a promising working hypothesis to develop eliminative materialism along lines parallel to Mackie's error theory. For instance, suppose that difficulties facing this characterisation of eliminative materialism echo those facing Mackie's error theory. Then solutions which have already been devised to the difficulties facing Mackie may suggest related solutions to those facing eliminative materialism.

Let's now consider the parallels which the eliminative materialist can draw with the three points made above with respect to Mackie's theory. I addressed the first point in making a pair of ontological claims central to eliminative materialism. As to the second point, the term 'eliminativism' can mislead. It apparently misleads some people into thinking that the view advocates eliminating in the sense of dispensing with mental language in an Orwellian fashion. Not so. What is eliminated are various posits. We currently posit mental states and eliminative materialism advocates that we cease positing them. As before, what is at issue here is an ontological matter, not a conceptual or linguistic one. It is on a par with other posits which we have once made, such as those of witches, phlogiston, and astral influences. It does not follow that the view requires, or has to advocate, the above Orwellian programme. Witches, phlogiston and astral influences are no longer posited, but to report eliminativism about these phenomena requires that we retain the terms used to talk about them (cf. Stoljar 1988, 489, footnote 1). More generally, eliminativism about *F*s does not require dispensing with the term 'F'. On the contrary, at least for the purposes of our intellectual history, the term is needed to articulate something about what we once posited, what our reasons were for positing it, and what our reasons were for ceasing to posit it. What is also true, however, is that eliminativism advocates that 'F' is deleted from the stock of terms which we need to describe reality (as opposed to describing how people have theorised about reality). We posit *F*s if and only if we theorise that 'F' (or some synonymous predicate) needs to be included in the stock of terms used to describe reality.[3] If we cease positing *F*s, we should delete 'F' from that stock of terms. This is not eliminating 'F' from our vocabulary, but demoting it from having a certain special status within our vocabulary. So, when a defender of eliminative materialism says, for

example, that folk psychology will be abandoned to make way for an exhaustive neuroscience, this is to be understood as a claim about what the respective places of the terms of folk psychology and of neuroscience should be in our theorising about the world. It is not by itself a recommendation that mental talk is excised from our linguistic repertoire. It is true that some eliminativists have depicted imaginary future histories in which people never learn mental talk but instead converse in what we might call 'scientificese', the language of established scientific theory (Churchland 1979 ch. 3. §§4–6). But all that this shows is that mental talk need never be acquired given the prior availability of a scientific alternative. It does not show that, although we have acquired them, they should and will be excised from our linguistic repertoire in place of a scientific alternative. (Churchland favours this second reading; I address it below).

It might be wondered whether even any kind of use of 'F' is necessary. After all, an error theorist need not use 'F' in stating his or her theory. The theorist can simply say ''F' does not apply to anything'. Here 'F' is being mentioned not used.[4] Now, this observation is correct; it is a point about the availability of semantic ascent. It does not, however, contradict anything in the foregoing paragraphs. Mentioning 'F' requires that we still have that term in our vocabulary on any reasonable account of the semantics of quoted expressions.

Eliminativism is not confined to taking terms to have a role only in either describing reality or in reporting people's theorising about reality. The third point made in connection with Mackie's error theory was that moral terms continue to have a practical role, even given that there are no objective moral values. According to Mackie, even if moral terms do not pick out genuine features of reality, they can have a valuable role in socialising people and regulating their behaviour—in 'crowd control'. This accords with a *revolutionary fictionalist* reading of moral talk whereby such talk purports, but fails, to describe genuine features of reality, yet we can use it as if it described reality—we treat it as a useful fiction.[5] The suggestion naturally arises that the eliminative materialist might take the same tack with mental talk—treat it as a useful fiction that helps us to negotiate the social world.[6]

For our purposes, fictionalism about mental states has four key features. First, although no talk about mental states is (nonvacuously) true, in

the fiction that there are mental states, there are sentences about mental states which are (nonvacuously) true. As a first approximation, a sentence *s* is true in a fiction φ if and only if were φ true, *s* would be true.[7] For example, the sentence 'Oliver Twist was an orphan' is true in the fiction of Dickens's eponymous novel if and only if were that novel a true record of events, the sentence 'Oliver Twist was an orphan' would be true. Second, truth in a fiction is nonfactive. Its being true in φ that *p* does not entail that it is true that *p*. Third, 'It is true in a fiction that' is a hyperintensional operator. This means that, even if it is true in a fiction φ that *p*, and the proposition that *q* is logically equivalent to the proposition that *p*, it does not follow that it is true in φ that *q*. (One consequence of this is that it is not true that a fictionalist about *F*s uses [the relevant] term 'F' in positive atomic contexts to say something true, even if nothing is *F*.[8] Using the term 'F' in a hyperintensional context is not using it in a positive atomic context. For example, using 'point mass' in the sentence 'In classical mechanics, there are point masses' is to say something true, but here the term is being used in a hyperintensional context. Using 'point mass' in the sentence 'There are point masses' is to use the term in a positive atomic context, but it is used to say something false.) Fourth, a fictionalist does not believe the sentences in φ. She quasi-believes them, where someone quasi-believes a sentence *s* belonging to a fiction φ if and only if she believes that *s* is true in φ. (We will return to the nature of quasi-belief below in §4). Moreover, the fictionalist does not assert the sentences in φ. She quasi-asserts them, where someone quasi-asserts a sentence *s* belonging to a fiction φ if and only if she asserts (or is disposed to assert) that *s* is true in φ. The fictionalist says that we should not believe or assert the sentences in *F*, and that instead we should quasi-believe or quasi-assert them.

Aside from whatever reservations philosophers might have about fictionalist strategies in general, perhaps fictionalism about the mental has not offered enough even to philosophers who are fairly receptive to fictionalist accounts about other subject matters. They might have two concerns. First, that taking a fictionalist attitude to the common sense view of the mind is itself to be in a certain mental state—specifically, that it involves taking the mental attitude of *taking to be a fiction* to the proposition *that there are mental states*. But then, so far from fictionalism about

the mental being a natural complement to eliminative materialism, the two would be mutually incompatible. The other concern these philosophers might have is that, where fictionalism about a given subject matter is an option, dispensing with that subject matter is also an option. But, the concern continues, there is no option of dispensing with mental talk, and so fictionalism about the mental is not an option either.

I will address the first concern in §4, but let's address the second concern here. We should question whether there is any incompatibility between a subject matter (here, a fragment of a language) being indispensable to us and our adopting a fictionalist attitude towards it. To begin with, we might consider in outline another case in which *F*-talk is taken to be indispensable although it is also alleged that it fails to describe a genuine feature of reality. This is a recent version of nominalism in the philosophy of mathematics. This version takes the lesson of the failure of Field's programme (Field 1980) to be that mathematical talk cannot be dispensed with —i.e., that current scientific theories cannot be rewritten stripped of their mathematical content. But it also takes there to be no mathematical objects and also that no pure mathematical sentence is nonvacuously true. A fictionalist account is then given of the role of mathematics in scientific theory: it is taken to be indispensable in formulating claims about the empirical world even though there are no mathematical objects (Melia 1995, 2000; Leng 2010 chapters 3, 7–9. See also Yablo 2001; 2002 for a related view).

So we have:

MATH Numerals and functors are indispensable in formulating current scientific theory, but there are no numbers or functions.

Note that the kind of indispensability here is what we might call 'ideological indispensability', whereby certain terms are needed in order to formulate certain claims. This is to be distinguished from 'ontological indispensability', whereby certain entities are needed in order for certain claims to be true. Indispensability might also be understood in terms of indispensability for us given our limitations, or in terms of indispensability *simpliciter*. In what follows I take all talk of indispensability to be talk of indispensability *simpliciter*. (Should certain philosophers have in fact themselves to be concerned only with what is indispensable for us given our limitations, I think that the discussion which follows can be readily reconstrued without affecting the substantive points made).

The parallel in the case of the mental, then, is the following view: there are no mental states (eliminative materialism), but mental talk is indispensable for meeting certain purposes. The extent of these purposes is open to debate, but, as we will see, those who take mental talk to be indispensable take it to be indispensable in practical reasoning and in our social dealings. At any rate, the eliminativist's strategy is to grant the reasons that have been offered in print for taking mental talk to be indispensable, but to maintain that they fail to resolve the issue of the existence of mental states.

A number of philosophers have rejected eliminative materialism on the grounds that we cannot (or so they claim) live without mental talk. Some representative passages are given below. Some of these passages claim more than that mental talk is indispensable, but each of them claims at least that much.

> Less an empirical theory than a condition of intelligibility, the common-sense conception may not be an option for us . . . . Since cognition without content is empty, denial of the common-sense conception may be a kind of cognitive suicide that we are constitutionally unable to commit. (Baker 1987, 148)

> We cannot abandon our self-conception in terms of beliefs and desires . . . . What each person can never accept to be false . . . is that she possesses states with causally efficacious content (CEC). She cannot do so because she can never give up her activities of theoretical and practical reasoning, and reasoning involves, both by definition and as an essential part of its rationale, states with CEC. (Fricker 1993, 255)

> To take it that ordinary psychology is merely a superstition would presumably be a commitment to dispensing not just with all examples of ordinary practical-syllogistic reasoning but also with anything like our ordinary concepts of rationality and cognition, which presuppose the authenticity of content-bearing states and processes. (Wright 1995, 202–203)

> The fact is that when we try to describe our involvement in social life we have no real choice but to use the folk-psychological vocabulary. (That's an argument for the reality of folk psychology . . .). (Morton 2007, 213)

> The eliminativist—say, about propositional attitudes, or content, or reference, or rationality—is committed to talk about such things (*beliefs*, of *truth/falsity*, or *rationality*, etc.) being replaced along with the whole interconnected theory structure within which these latter terms are alone held to have meaning. The objections levelled by Boghossian, Rudder-Baker [*sic*] and the like attempt to demonstrate that eliminativism cannot effect its own replacement of notions like these without using the same notions to effect the

> replacement. Eliminativism cannot currently be articulated without using some of the terms it holds will be eliminated. (Lockie 2003, 574)

Eliminativism, as characterised by (I), says that there are no mental states. It follows from (I) that no sentence attributing a mental state is non-vacuously true. But it does not follow that talk of mental states can or should be replaced by some superior way of talking. The above passages take eliminative materialism to follow the model of Feuerbach on religion: religion is an illusion and, once the illusion is exposed, it is to be abolished. But following that model is not mandatory and fictionalism offers a different one. This is the model of Machiavelli on religion: religion is an illusion but it can be exploited for its practical benefits. Taking this model defuses the charges made in the above passages. The proponent of eliminative materialism talks of mental states like the rest of us, only she does so solely because of the utility of such talk and without commitment to the truth of such talk. She speaks about mental states as if she was speaking about real things—it does not matter whether such states are real. Furthermore, a fictionalist view about such talk is not committed to saying that the utility of such talk consists only in—or even in part in—its facility for predicting human behaviour. So arguments to the effect that common-sense psychology is not a markedly good way of predicting behaviour (Wright 1995, 203–204; Morton 1996) might (epistemically or even logically) even be sound but they are not to the point here. The quoted passages locate the utility of mental talk elsewhere—specifically, in the role of mental talk in considerations of rationality and cognition—and a fictionalist view can acquiesce in that claim.

So we have:

MIND Mental terms are indispensable in formulating our self-conception, but there are no mental states.

Why have eliminativists not widely adopted this relatively concessive position? Here are a number of points in favour of the position. First, it preserves what I suggested is the core of their view—the eliminative and materialist theses (I) and (II)—and promises to defuse any argument against the view based on the function of mental talk in our lives. Second, the arguments which have been offered on behalf of eliminative material-

ism are compatible with it. For instance, Churchland summarises his well-known case against common sense psychology as follows:

> . . . what we must say is that [folk psychology] 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 behaviour seems undeniable. Any theory which meets this description must be allowed a serious candidate for outright elimination . . . . (Churchland 1981, 76)

Again, Ramsey, Stich, and Garon argue that, on empirical grounds, it seems there are no functionally discrete, causally active states with semantic properties that correspond to ordinary ascriptions of belief or desire (Ramsey, Stich, and Garon 1990). Whatever else is to be said about these arguments for eliminativism, they are compatible with folk psychology being indispensable in our dealings with the world. The arguments concern the existence of folk-psychological states and the truth of folk-psychological claims. They leave open the possibility that no such states exist, that no such claims are nonvacuously true, but that those claims form a useful fiction that we cannot do without.

Third, Churchland evidently thinks that mental talk is dispensable (even given the constraints of human cognition). That is one of the morals which he draws from his science-fiction examples in which children grow up speaking 'scientificese' and never learn any mental talk. Now, we do not currently have the neuroscientific theory *T* which Churchland envisages supplanting mental talk. So we can be confident that mental talk is dispensable only to the degree to which we can be confident that there is such a theory as *T* and that we will one day have it.[9] Churchland's view involves a prediction about the far future course of neuroscience. The obvious worry here is that we are in little position to say how neuroscience will progress (Bertolet 1994, 89–90). For this reason Churchland's prediction is risky and highly speculative. The fictionalist option, by contrast, makes no claim about how neuroscience will develop. It is compatible with neuroscience developing as Churchland expects that it will and it is also compatible with neuroscience developing in some contrary direction. Whereas Churchland seeks to remove our practice of using mental talk by appealing to resources which are currently, if not always, unavailable to us, the fictionalist option reconciles that practice

with eliminative materialism by using resources already available to us. On methodological grounds, taking the fictionalist option seems more advisable. Furthermore, this option should recommend itself to Churchland. For consider his current situation. According to him, there are no mental states, and future neuroscience will enable us to talk in some other fashion. That is all well and good, but what is Churchland to do in the meantime? The future neuroscientific talk is, *ex hypothesi*, currently unavailable, all that is available is talk of mental states, and Churchland has grounds for saying that that talk is false. One option open to Churchland is fictionalism whereby he only quasi-asserts folk-psychological claims—he makes as it he asserts them. That option is open to Churchland not only before the coming of super-neuroscience, but even when it arrives. So the arrival of super-neuroscience does not require supplanting (or impose an epistemic obligation on us to supplant) quotidian talk of mental states.[10]

In the remaining two sections I will address two problems—one facing the fictionalist option, the other facing eliminative materialism.

4. What Attitude Can the Eliminativist Have to the Fiction?

Although combining eliminative materialism with fictionalism might make short work of the challenge from the indispensability of mental talk, it might be wondered whether this combination is consistent (cf. Wright 1995, 204). Here is the problem. Eliminative materialism says that there are no mental states. Fictionalism appeals to the notion of quasi-belief, where someone quasi-believes that *p* if and only if they believe that *p* is true in a certain fiction. But quasi-belief, like belief, is a propositional attitude—just the kind of state which eliminative materialism says does not exist. So someone's taking a fictionalist attitude to something requires that there is at least one mental state.

How might we solve this problem? What we might call 'the basic fiction' about *F*s describes the world as if it contains *F*s. We can then extend that fiction in various ways (Nolan 2005). Combining eliminative materialism with the basic fiction about mental states yields the following claims:

(1) There are no mental states.

(2) According to the (basic) fiction, there are mental states.

Now what about someone, Paul, who holds the combined view? Combining eliminative materialism with the extended fiction about mental states yields the following claims:

(3) It is not the case that Paul believes the combined view.

(4) According to the (extended) fiction, Paul believes the combined view.

When the notion of fictionalism was introduced above, it was noted that truth in a fiction is not factive, so (4) does not entail that Paul believes the combined view—or, indeed, that he has any other attitude towards the combined view. It was also noted that 'in fiction φ, *s*' is true if and only if: if φ were true, then *s* would be true. The truth conditions of (4) are given as follows: if the extended fiction were true, Paul would believe the combined view. The strategy, then, for meeting the problem is to incorporate would-be claims about the attitudes that eliminativists or the rest of us have to sentences within the scope of a fiction operator. In this way an eliminative materialist can answer the question 'What is your attitude to eliminative materialism?' when it is put to him or her.

Lastly, it is worth noting that eliminativism is not barred from appealing to propositional content. Eliminativism says that there are no mental states. *A fortiori*, it says that there are mental states which have propositional content. It does not say, however, that nothing has propositional content:

> eliminative materialism says only that the theory which assigns a special propositional content to mental states and uses those mental states in the explanation of behavior is false. It is still wide open for the defender of eliminative materialism to maintain that some states with propositional content exist as, say, the products of our actions of describing, predicting, and explaining—sentences, for example. (Cling 1980, 71)

So eliminativism's claim that theories, sentences, and fictions have propositional content is consistent with its claim that there are no folk-psychological states which have content. This claim has been challenged by Wright. He offers two arguments against it. The first argument runs: meaning supervenes on psychology ('meanings cannot change without a

change in psychology'); what is real cannot supervene on what is unreal; so psychology is real given that meaning is real (Wright 1995, 208–209). The second argument runs: conventions have to be 'constituted by' the beliefs and intentions of speakers; 'linguistic meanings cannot exist without conventions'; so linguistic meanings cannot exist without speakers having beliefs and intentions (Wright 1995, 210–11). The eliminativist, however, will reject the first premise of each argument. Wright's arguments and his supporting discussion overlook the fact that the eliminativist will seek to construe linguistic meaning and conventions by way of notions from a replacement theory.[11] Of course, the issue will be whether the eliminativist can make good on providing such a replacement theory. Wright might say that he is drawing his premises from apparently appealing theories of convention and linguistic meaning, and that the eliminativist has nothing (as yet) to put in their place. That observation would be correct, but the question is then what lesson can be drawn from it. Since the prospects of replacement theories have hitherto been little explored, it would be precipitate to suppose that no replacement theory is viable. In any case, we have seen that the eliminativist can block Wright's criticisms by appealing to fictionalism about the mental. He or she can co-opt the above theories of convention and linguistic meaning as useful fictions about the nature of convention and meaning. Lastly, not all content need be propositional since representation need not be propositional representation. Ants, snails and frogs represent their environment and respond adaptively to it—when a worker ant locates a food source, it forms a chemical trail which leads other ants to it—although presumably they do not have beliefs and desires (cf. Sterelny 1993, 313).

5. The Paradox of Abandonment

The centrepiece of a recent antieliminativist paper is the following objection, the so-called paradox of abandonment:

> But for the eliminativist, how can a dissatisfaction with our ignorance of, say, consciousness, or rationality, or propositional attitudes, warrant moving to a theory wherein avowedly there will be no account of that phenomenon at all? The explanandum is, according to the 'theory' theory, internal to that theory; if so, *however bad the theory is* at accounting for its explanandum, how is there any pressure to change at all? That is, how can the inadequacy of a poor account by *A* of *x*, require a change to *B* whereby there is not even a poor account of *x*—there is no account? (Lockie 2003, 582)

There seems, however, to be nothing paradoxical about such a situation. It is the kind of situation which arises whenever an error theory is on the cards. Here are two examples.

The ether hypothesis. According to the ether hypothesis, light waves move through the medium of the ether. Since physical bodies such as the Earth would also move in it, the movement of these bodies should generate interference patterns. Attempts to detect such patterns, notably in the Michelson-Morley experiment, failed. Fitzgerald and Lorentz, defenders of ether theory, sought to accommodate these experimental results by claiming that physical bodies contract along the line of motion according to a certain constant (the Lorentz factor). But, whereas the Fitzgerald-Lorentz contraction hypothesis was an *ad hoc* modification of ether theory, Special Relativity derived the hypothesis from two key principles: the relativity postulate and the constancy of light speed. Moreover, Special Relativity did not postulate the ether. In terms of the so-called paradox of abandonment, the alleged phenomenon at issue is the ether. What we see here in outline is how dissatisfaction with scientists' ignorance of the behaviour of the ether was part of the warrant for moving to a theory which gave no account of the ether.

Creationism. The Ussher chronology concerns various supposed phenomena, including the date of the first day of God's creation. The Ussher chronology identifies that date as the night before Sunday October 23, 4004 B.C. That chronology conflicts with the fossil record which indicates that the Earth has existed for many millions of years. What account should be given of the date of creation in the light of this conflict? Philip Gosse's notorious response was that God created the world in 4004 B.C. but made the fossil record look as if the fossils were far older. That is a poor account of the date of creation. The inadequacy of that poor account (in conjunction with other considerations) requires a change to a different theory, one which provides no account of the date of God's creation because it takes there to be no such date.

Those, then, are two examples of how the inadequacy of an account of some alleged phenomenon (the ether; the date of the first day of creation) provide reason for changing to a rival theory, where that rival is not a poor account of that phenomenon but instead a rejection of the assumption that there is such a phenomenon to be accounted for. Eliminative materialism is another account of this debunking sort.

6. Conclusion

The suggestion made in this paper is that the common sense view of the mind is something like a useful idiot: it operates in ignorance of the real internal causes of human behaviour but it has its uses all the same.[12]

Chris Daly

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NOTES

1. The literature of truthmaking is extensive. Melia (2005) is especially clear on explaining the distinction between truthmaking and paraphrase.

2. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for this suggestion.

3. We might further distinguish between the stock of terms needed to describe reality and the minimal stock of terms needed to describe reality. The latter stock consists in only those terms which are fundamental. For instance, according to physicalism, only the terms of fundamental physics figure in the minimal stock of terms needed to describe reality. This allows that other terms describe reality although they are not included in the minimal stock. (For further details, see Jackson [1998 chapter 1]).

4. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for this point.

5. A distinction is to be drawn between two kinds of fictionalism. Hermeneutic fictionalism about talk of *F*s says that people do not assert *F*-sentences but only appear or pretend to do so. Revolutionary fictionalism about talk of *F*s says that people should not assert F-sentences but should only to pretend to assert such sentences. See Stanley (2001, 36).

6. Before Rorty and Feyerabend, Quine had staked out eliminative materialism when he wrote that "If we are limning the true and ultimate structure of reality, the canonical scheme for us is the austere scheme that knows no quotation except direct quotation and no propositional attitudes but only the physical constitution and behaviour of organisms" (Quine 1960, 221). In the same passage he explicitly disavowed claiming that mental talk was "practically dispensable." He maintained such talk with what he called a "double standard"—useful albeit not descriptive of reality. That is precisely revolutionary fictionalism about the mental. Daniel Dennett fights shy of this label, but arguably some of his own views are expressions of precisely revolutionary fictionalism about the mental: see his (1971) and (1991a).

7. For important refinements, see Lewis (1983) and Hanley (2004).

8. I am very grateful to an anonymous referee for raising the challenge I address in the text.

9. I take it that this is just one of a series of cases in which X's being able to do something depends upon X's future performance. Other examples are: 'We can afford going abroad next year because I will have had received a pay rise by then', 'He can win the summer marathon because he will have done all the training needed'. Utterances of those sentences do not report X as having the ability in question at the time of the utterances, but only at the time of the completion of the performance in question. On this reading of

Churchland, his claim is that we are not now able to dispense with mental talk, but that we will be able to upon acquisition of *T*.

10. Churchland says that folk psychology serves a social purpose of the kind I've outlined. So a more conciliatory attitude toward what he says might offer him fictionalism, on the grounds that it gives a more charitable reading of what he says, especially in the light of the point that Churchland's claim does not require eliminating all folk-psychological talk, just all folk-psychological talk in a scientific theory.

11. This is very similar to the main theme of Michael Devitt's charge against Boghossian's transcendental argument against eliminative materialism: see Devitt (1991).

12. I am very grateful to Helen Beebee, David Liggins, Cynthia Macdonald, Daniel Nolan, and an anonymous referee for comments.

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