PAPINEAU ON THE INTUITION OF DISTINCTNESS

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In his new book, amid other good things, David Papineau argues with exemplary clarity and force (i) that no extant philosophical argument succeeds in showing that phenomenal states and physical states are distinct, and (ii) that at least one empirical consideration suggests that they are not (Papineau 2002, Chs. 1, 2, 3, and 5). But he insists nonetheless that all of us – physicalists included – have what he calls the 'intuition of distinctness' to the effect that they are distinct. Moreover, this intuition does not merely generate some sort of nagging doubt about materialism. According to Papineau, the intuition of distinctness "stops us *really* believing the materialist identification of mind with brain, even those of us who profess materialism" (p. 94; italics original). So Papineau holds that (1) none of us *really* believes materialism about phenomenal states because (2) we feel the intuition of distinctness.

Claim (1) is a very strong one, and Papineau does little to argue for it, but it is plausible and deserves to be taken seriously, as it will be below, even though it is not clear what "really believing" something amounts to, or how it is related to regular believing or to one's subjective probabilities. And (1) cannot be refuted simply by noting that materialists profess materialism. For materialists may profess materialism because (i) they follow the policy of professing what they believe they *ought* to believe and (ii) they believe, having weighed up the evidence, that they ought to believe materialism; but neither (i) nor (ii) requires that they actually believe materialism. Claim (2) is even more

plausible, for what materialist will deny that phenomenal properties *seem* utterly distinct from physical properties of any kind? And explaining claim (1) by appeal to claim (2) is an attractively economical next step.

But what explains claim (2)? In chapter 6, Papineau undertakes the important task of explaining why we feel the intuition of distinctness. The task is important because so long as the intuition is unexplained in some fashion compatible with materialism we will be tempted to explain it by supposing that it reflects a more or less dim recognition of what might some day be articulated as a sound argument against materialism. And, of course, one possible materialist approach to explaining the intuition of distinctness is to diagnose it as arising from a dim recognition of some already articulated but unsound argument against materialism. But Papineau does not adopt this approach, arguing against it in the earlier sections of his chapter.

His preferred account appeals to what he calls the *antipathetic fallacy*. According to Papineau, even though phenomenal states are physical states, and can therefore be thought of via the exercise of third-personal concepts drawn from the neurosciences or functionalist psychology, we also have a special first-personal way of thinking about them that is available only to those who have actually undergone them. These first-personal concepts – phenomenal concepts – are special in that, when they are exercised to think about an experience, "the experience itself is in a sense being *used* in our thinking, and so is present in us" (p. 170; italics original). Third-personal concepts – material concepts – are, of course, not like that. Now the antipathetic fallacy allegedly arises

when we notice that our material concepts do not *use* the experiences they supposedly refer to, and then infer that material concepts do not therefore *mention* those experiences; the antipathetic fallacy is thus "a species of use-mention fallacy" (p. 171).

But I am not yet convinced that it is our commission of the antipathetic fallacy -- at least as I have stated it so far -- that explains the intuition of distinctness. An immediate worry is that since, in order to explain the intuition, one must attribute fallacious reasoning to those who have it, it follows, since Papineau himself confesses to having the intuition, that one must charge Papineau himself with committing the antipathetic fallacy. But it is rather hard to believe that this charge could be true of someone as unmuddled and logically sophisticated as Papineau, especially since he is the one who has pointed out the fallacy and exposed its fallacious character so clearly!

This worry is not decisive, however, since it is possible that humans should be constitutionally prone to engage in fallacious reasoning of a certain sort, that they should be capable of fully understanding that the reasoning is fallacious, and yet that they should be quite incapable of making appropriate modifications to their more primitive dispositions to reason. An analogy for this possibility is provided by the notorious recalcitrance of perceptual illusions: I may be as certain as I am of anything that the two lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion are of equal lengths (perhaps because I have measured them with a ruler) while remaining quite unable to stop myself, at some relatively primitive level of perceptual representation, from representing them as unequal. The

question, therefore, is whether a proneness to commit the antipathetic fallacy is an actual example of this sort of possibility.

Ironically, Papineau's discussion provides evidence that it is not. For, in showing that the antipathetic fallacy is indeed fallacious, he points out that, for most concepts, one's failing to *be* F does not entail that one is failing to *think* about being F, since one's thinking about being F (e.g., sick) does not require one's being F. But, I wish to add, nobody claims that it does; we simply feel no *general* temptation at all to commit the antipathetic fallacy. It looks like a poor candidate, then, for a cognitive tendency so powerful that we cannot eradicate or override it. Indeed, although Papineau calls the antipathetic fallacy "terribly natural" (p. 170), he offers no reason, beyond noting that it can be seen as a sort of use-mention fallacy, to think that people are much inclined to commit it at all. And how could they be, if they only ever commit it in connection with a tiny minority of the concepts they possess?

Now my account of Papineau's appeal to the antipathetic fallacy to explain the intuition of distinctness, while faithful to its letter, has nonetheless been unfaithful to its spirit. For my account has represented the fallacy as being committed by those who reflect *only* upon their deployment of *material* concepts (for phenomenal states): they notice that in deploying a certain material concept they are not thereby *in* pain, and they conclude that therefore their concept is not *of* pain. But it is clear that, for Papineau, commission of the fallacy somehow involves reflection *also* upon one's deployment of *phenomenal* concepts (for phenomenal states), and indeed upon an invidious *comparison*

between one's deployment of phenomenal concepts and one's deployment of material concepts. But how, exactly, might we bring reflection upon one's deployment of phenomenal concepts into the explanation of the intuition of distinctness?

Papineau does not say. But one idea might be that reflection upon one's deployment of phenomenal concepts, and in particular one's noticing that such deployments involve being in (something like) a phenomenal state, generates a certain expectation, namely, that *all* ways of thinking about phenomenal states must involve being in (something like) a phenomenal state; but then someone with such an expectation, who subsequently noticed that his or her deployment of a material concept did *not* involve being in (anything like) a phenomenal state, would be quite right to infer that the material concept was not of a phenomenal state.

But I have two concerns with this idea. The minor concern is that it requires that people have the capacity to reflect upon their thoughts about phenomenal states while they are thinking those very thoughts: people must be able to think phenomenally about pain (say), and hence, on Papineau's account, simultaneously be in pain (or a pain-like state), while they are also thinking *about* their thinking (phenomenally) about pain, and while they are thinking, indeed, *that* their thinking (phenomenally) about pain involves being in pain (or a pain-like state). I have no particular reason to doubt that people do possess this mental capacity, but it is surely a very sophisticated one. The major concern with the idea of the last paragraph is that it requires that people jump to a universal conclusion about *all* ways of thinking about phenomenal states on the strength of what is

observed to be true about *one* way of thinking about phenomenal states. But why would they do that? Inductions from a single case *can* be good, given the right background knowledge, but the single-case induction being postulated here does not appear to be an example. So the question remains why people would engage in it, and in particular why here, and it is too ad hoc to answer that they just do. And there is a further question: even if we are indeed constitutionally prone to employ the single-case induction in this sort of circumstance, how come we cannot reject its conclusion when we consider it in light of our *total* evidence? It still remains to explain our inability to *believe* the conclusion.

So it is not clear how to bring reflection upon one's deployment of phenomenal concepts into an adequate explanation of the intuition of distinctness. And yet we surely do all feel the intuition, so it does need an explanation, and, for any materialist, an explanation consistent with a materialist account of phenomenal states. What, then, is to be done?

My hunch is that there is still life in a fascinating suggestion that Papineau makes only to dismiss. The suggestion is that we literally cannot believe identity claims framed using a phenomenal concept and a material concept, and that we cannot do so because believing identity claims in general is a matter of something like *mental file-merging*, and, in the special case of identity claims framed using a phenomenal concept and a material concept, our cognitive architecture prevents such file-merging from taking place (p. 165). And, though Papineau does not say this, our hypothesized inability to believe

that pain (say) is a material state would be quite consistent with our believing that we ought to believe that pain is a material state.

But Papineau, as I say, dismisses this suggestion. Let me conclude by explaining why I think he does so prematurely. His reason, in a nutshell, is that (premiss 1) if there were some cognitive-architectural obstacle to file-merging across the phenomenal-material conceptual divide, then, especially given the close connection alleged in chapter 4 between phenomenal concepts and perceptual concepts, there ought equally to be a cognitive-architectural obstacle to file-merging across the perceptual-theoretical conceptual divide; but (premiss 2) there is no such obstacle in the perceptual-theoretical case – for example, we have no trouble believing that visually-conceived kestrels are identical with theoretically-conceived kestrels (pp. 165-167).

I think there may be room to doubt premiss 2 here, since it might be suggested that how much trouble one has in believing that visually-conceived kestrels are identical with theoretically-conceived kestrels depends upon how one thinks of the *secondary qualities* of the visually-conceived kestrels. For if it is insisted that the colors (say) of a kestrel be treated as entirely intrinsic to the bird, then ordinary people might well bridle at the identification of visually-conceived kestrels with theoretically-conceived ones. But if, by contrast, the kestrel's colors are permitted to reside, at least partially, in the minds of observers, then, though ordinary people may now willingly accept the identification of visually-conceived with theoretically-conceived kestrels, the suspicion will be raised that identifications across the perceptual-theoretical divide are unproblematic only if

identifications across the phenomenal-material divide are unproblematic – the very claim at issue.

Premiss 1 may be independently objectionable. For there is a possible reason why file-merging across the phenomenal-material divide should be unachievable even if file-merging across the perceptual-theoretical divide is not. The reason I have in mind is that *one* kind of phenomenal concept seems to be usable only to refer to a phenomenal state as one undergoes it ("*That* is going on in me now"), and *not* to be usable to *re-identify* a phenomenal state, not even to re-identify it as *one of those again*. Now if phenomenal concepts of this kind exist, and if concepts in general can be viewed as analogous to files, then a phenomenal concept of this kind will constitute a file that is only temporary, a file that persists only as long as one is undergoing the experience it picks out. But any file corresponding to a material concept will presumably be permanent; at the very least it will permit the re-identification of whatever it picks out. And, on the not too implausible assumption that no temporary file can be merged with a permanent file, it follows that no phenomenal concept of the kind in question can be merged with a material concept, and hence, if believing identity claims is a matter of mental file-merging, that no identity claim framed using a phenomenal concept of the kind in question and a material concept can be believed.

So Papineau's fascinating suggestion seems to me eminently worthy of further exploration. It promises at least to explain why it is during intense episodes of

introspection – as we think to ourselves, "*That* couldn't be a brain state!" -- that we are most strongly inclined to doubt materialism about phenomenal states.

REFERENCES

Papineau, David. 2002. *Thinking About Consciousness*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.