it serves to build something. Taking philosophical analysis as primary, it may seem that the removal of “conceptual confusions” is our first aim, and that their presence must be fatal to empirical and engineering work, and so on.

Systematic argument in favour of any of these positions is of course possible, but if they are to be maintained it is also necessary, and in the teaching of cognitive science it is important to go into these issues, rather than leave such decisions to possible methodological chauvinism.

6 Conclusion

Whether or not we regard cognitive science as a single unified discipline is largely a matter of definition. However its methodological plurality has to be acknowledged, and is perhaps its greatest strength, since it carries the possibility of mutual enrichment. This can be seen, for example, in the teaching of philosophy in a cognitive science context. The abstract issues addressed often echo issues which arose long ago in the history of philosophy, but their pursuit in this context provides ‘input’ in the form of concrete examples, applications and analogies, which is productive to the point of casting doubt on the teaching of “pure philosophy”.

References


Chisholm on Psychological Attributes

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What is it for an attribute to be psychological? One clever and inventive, albeit somewhat Byzantine answer to this vexing philosophical question has lately been proposed by Roderick M. Chisholm. Chisholm’s approach is to take a small number of technical philosophical notions as given and then employ these in a series of definitions which together yield an account of the psychological. In what follows I take a quick look at Chisholm’s account, showing that it doesn’t work.

Chisholm begins by indicating a number of psychological attributes he regards as paradigmatic, viz. judging, being sad about something, feeling depressed, seeing oneself to have a headache, and being accorded reality, among others. In contrast, such attributes as being extended, wearing a hat, being green, and being such that all men are mortal are paradigmatically non-psychological. He claims that what the paradigmatically psychological have in common to distinguish them from the nonpsychological is expressed by the formula (call it ‘SC’ for ‘sufficient condition’):

\[ SC \quad \text{Any property which is possibly such that it is exemplified by just one thing and which includes every property it implies or involves is psychological.} \]

The key terms in this formula are to be understood according to these definitions:

\[ D_1 \quad P \text{ is an attribute } \equiv_d P \text{ is possibly such that there is something that exemplifies it.} \]

\[ D_2 \quad P \text{ is a property } \equiv_d P \text{ is an attribute which is such that: (a) only individual things can have it; (b) anything that can have it can have it, or fail to have it, at any time it exists; and (c) it can be such that some individuals have it and some do not.} \]

\[ D_3 \quad P \text{ implies } Q \equiv_d P \text{ is necessarily such that if anything has it then something has } Q. \]

\[ D_4 \quad P \text{ includes } Q \equiv_d P \text{ is necessarily such that whatever has it has } Q. \]

\[ ^1 \text{Chisholm (1983)} \]

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D5 P involves Q =df P is necessarily such that whoever conceives it conceives Q.\(^5\)

Implicit in SC is Chisholm's contention that his paradigmatic psychological attributes are also properties in the sense stipulated by D2. Chisholm does not explicitly say whether all psychological attributes must be properties. Reading him, one does however get the impression that he supposes them all to be properties. I touch again, passingly, on this question below.

Does SC indeed capture the paradigmatic psychological attributes? I think not. In particular, contrary to Chisholm's contention, being appeared to redly does not satisfy SC. What is it to be appeared to redly anyway? Surely it must be to have an experience of something red. I submit that being appeared to redly is necessarily such that whoever conceives of it conceives of the attribute of being red - at least to the same extent that one conceives being red when one conceives being nonred or being possibly red or being red or round, to cite some of Chisholm's own examples of involvement. So being appeared to redly involves, in the sense of D5, but does not include the property of being red. So contra Chisholm, and no doubt surprisingly, being appeared to redly is not among the attributes marked as paradigmatically psychological by SC.

Such a result need not be ruinous, though, other things being equal.

We have after all been considering what is supposed to be a merely sufficient condition for the psychological, and one need not identify the paradigmatic cases as such with only those that meet this particular sufficient condition. It is conceivable that Chisholm has just made a slip with his particular example here, without thereby compromising his overall account. In any case, Chisholm goes on to develop a broad definition for the psychological with which he claims to be both necessary and sufficient. The situation will only be serious if the proposed definition too fails to capture being appeared to redly as psychological.

Chisholm has undertaken not only to provide an account of the nature of the psychological but also to provide an interpretation of "one traditional thesis - namely, that whatever is 'purely qualitative' is psychological." To this end, Chisholm suggests that attributes which satisfy SC be called 'purely qualitative' as per D6 below, while the rest of his definitions exploit this suggested notion of pure qualitiveness:

D6 P is a purely qualitative attribute =df P is an attribute which (a) is possibly such that it is exemplified by just one thing and (b) it implies every property it implies or involves.

D7 P is a qualitative attribute =df Either (a) P is a purely qualitative attribute or (b) P is equivalent to a disjunction of attributes each of which is purely qualitative.

\(^5\)Since conceiving is itself psychological, Chisholm's account of the psychological is in a sense nonreductive. Many philosophers (though I'm not among them) would find it inadequate on that ground alone. The issue of reductive adequacy need not detain us, however, for I am arguing that the account is just plain false. For a defence of a nonreductive criterion in another area, see Pfeifer (1989), chap. 8.
his stipulative definition of property to express a necessary condition for psychological attributes, he hasn’t succeeded. But we need not decide this here.

However, these tensed psychological attributes turn out not to be purely or merely qualitative attributes a la D6 or D7 either, since they involve properties they do not include. For example, *being such that it did want a slop* involves but does not include the property of wanting a slop, on Chisholm’s account, since one can have wanted a slop in the past without wanting one in the present. Since *being such that it was appeared to redly* is another such example, one should now anticipate the worst. These tensed psychological attributes will not even be psychological on Chisholm’s account, for they don’t include a qualitative attribute. The move by which we were able to retain psychological status for *being appeared to redly* will not work here. *Being such that it was appeared to, being such that it wanted,* etc. cannot be construed as qualitative even in Chisholm’s Pickwickian sense. So these tensed psychological attributes are, surprisingly, not psychological at all according to Chisholm’s definitions.

This outcome may be thought troubling, for past states of individuals do figure heavily in psychological explanation, and expressions for tensed attributes are ubiquitous in psychological explanations. However, for purposes of such explanation, tensed-attribute language can be paraphrased into language about the cognate untensed attributes and the times at which these are or aren’t exemplified; any residual distortion of English due to such paraphrase would likely be inconsequential to the task of psychological explanation. So it seems Chisholm can safely ignore these tensed attributes that we would intuitively take to be psychological but that come out as nonpsychological on his account. Tensed attributes are not needed, for the cognate untensed attributes can do the same job and be reckoned psychological properties to boot.

The trouble with this solution is that tense is not the only way in which a psychological attribute might be temporally indexed. Consider the attribute of *remembering* being appeared to redly. No attribute that includes *remembering* is an attribute that an individual thing can have at the first moment of its existence (merely *seeming to remember* is perhaps another matter); so any such attribute violates D2(b) and thereby fails to be a property. Moreover, remembering being appeared to redly involves the attribute of *being appeared to redly* but does not include it, thereby violating D6(b). Since D7(a) subsumes D6, the qualitative attribute of *being appeared to* is not included either. So some other qualitative attribute must be found if the status of remembering being appeared to redly as psychological is to be preserved within Chisholm’s account. But where would we look for one? I conclude therefore that in remembering being appeared to redly we have a counterexample to Chisholm’s account of the psychological.

This state of affairs may have a farther reaching upshot than is at first apparent. In particular, it is not at all obvious that one can make a judgment, want something, or believe something, without knowing certain