

COMMENT ON SPURRETT

Daniel Dennett

David Spurrett, like Clatterbuck, sees the need to flesh out my sketchy cartoons of Darwinian, Skinnerian, Popperian and Gregorian creatures with some account of the processes that could plausibly allow, or expedite, the transitions from lower to higher kinds of minds. And he proposes that competition among a bounty of affordances could play a central role. I think he is right. He is certainly right that it is no use having a repertoire of affordance-trackers (which are, I think, a subvariety of Millikan's (2017) *unitrackers*, unless one can somehow prioritize them, letting the best ones for the occasion take over at the right time. Wired-in preferences, and then *acquired* preferences, can, he suggests, play the necessary role and "preferences can, furthermore, be a satisfying example of competence without comprehension." Yes. As I note in my commentary on Clatterbuck, we don't want to fall in the intellectualist trap of thinking that all non-basic, non-instinctual preferences have to be *derived* by some kind of *reasoning* from our "instincts." We can agree with Hume that Reason is the slave of the Passions, but allow plenty of room for unarticulated (but reasonable) dependencies to emerge long before we are self-conscious enough to *figure out* what our secondary and tertiary preferences ought to be. He is also right that my own account is a "little cryptic" on the issue of affordance selection, but I'd like to see that as temporizing, while waiting for Spurrett and Clatterbuck and others to come along with the needed clarifications. And, thanks to my dawdling, and Spurrett's recommendation, I am now happily ready to get on board with Cisek's "affordance competition hypothesis," which I see as not just consistent with my relatively vague and impressionistic sketches of neural competitions (pandemonium models, fame in the brain, feral neurons, etc.) but a seriously detailed model that is both plausibly grounded in considerations of early brain evolution, and surprisingly (to me) well-supported with empirical evidence of the model in action. Cisek's contrast between tradi-

tional cognitive (really, intellectualist) architecture and his affordance-based architecture is a fine step in the right direction, in my opinion.

Do we need a “common currency” with which to “represent” all preferences? It depends on what we mean by these terms. Spurrett (2014) is a useful and surefooted analysis of the themes that have become intertwined and confused on this question. We definitely need a functional bottleneck (which is not likely an anatomical bottleneck) to get the right candidates into some real competition, however it is implemented, but whether that counts as representation is a question many would want to argue about. I would prefer to avoid that argument, and let the function of the competition and its outcomes speak for themselves. *Noticing* that there is a competition going on is a higher-order state that does, in my view, require a consumer (as Millikan would say) of a representation of that competition. It is an interesting empirical question which species of animals — if any — have minds that can notice that they are resolving competitions among their preferences.

One feature of the popular “common currency” metaphor that has both bothered and attracted me (perhaps it’s an opportunity) is that if it is taken more literally than it is usually intended, it suggests that sub-personal neuronal structures *want* or *need* this currency. *What do they buy with it?* If, as one often hears, “dopamine is the currency of reward” what do the neurons want it for? Perhaps to grow more dendrites, thereby gaining more connections, thereby acquiring more influence, thereby providing security. This raises, in my mind, a tantalizing question: might we need to incorporate an *almost literal* understanding of “common currency” in order to make sense of the dynamics of intracerebral competition? Remembering that there is no intelligent designer of (or in) the brain who can invent (à la GOFAI or video-game programmers) simple counters that, by programmer fiat, track local utilities and disutilities for subsystems, perhaps a physiologically grounded economy plays the underlying control role.

REFERENCES

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