Response to "The Relevance of Folk Intuitions to Evaluating the Justification for the 'Hard Problem.'"

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I'd like to start by thanking Justin Sytsma and Edouard Machery for their challenging and insightful response to my paper. I apologize for any mistakes I may have made in recounting the argument in their initial paper. I would like to briefly respond to some of their points. I will follow the model of their paper and walk through their responses premise by premise.

Premise 1

In my original paper, I argued that the judgments elicited by Sytsma and Machery were most likely generated by System One. They respond by giving evidence that these were not, in fact, System One judgments. They administered the "Cognitive Reflection Test" (CRT) to subjects who participated in a study similar to the one I criticize in my paper. The CRT is supposed to diagnose subjects' tendency to report System Two (conscious) judgments rather than System One (intuitive) ones; high CRT subjects are more likely to rely on System Two (Fredericks, 2005). They found no correlation between subjects' CRT scores and their judgments about mental states, which they claim as evidence that Systems One and Two generate the same judgments about others' mental states.

It isn't clear to me that high CRT subjects really are reporting System Two judgments in their study, however, nor, if they are, that these judgments are of the right kind to support Sytsma and Machery's claims about the non-obviousness of qualia.

First, why think high CRT subjects didn't use System Two in this study? A high CRT score is predictive of a willingness to engage System Two, but those who have high CRT scores do not engage System Two for every judgment they make. In what circumstances do high CRT subjects engage System Two? I suggest I cannot conclusively answer this question, but an answer is suggested by both the nature of the CRT test and also subsequent studies on the CRT test (Alter, et al, 2007).

The CRT test consists in giving subjects three math questions, each of which has an intuitively obvious answer that happens to be false, and each of which can be answered fairly easily by someone with a knowledge of algebra and the patience to employ it (for the details of these questions, see Frederick 2005). High CRT subjects give the correct answers to these questions, indicating that they did the algebra, and low CRT subjects give the incorrect answers, indicating that they went with their gut. The questions on the test are of a type that subjects will recognize as difficult – we have all had extensive experience getting tricked by math questions – and for which we have all learned the correct approach. Further, Fredericks' findings of correlations between high CRT scores and engagement of System Two has been in areas like economic behavior, where intuitive approaches often conflict with those we have been taught, so that high CRT subjects will have learned to mistrust intuitions. Later research on the CRT test indicates that making subjects experience difficulty when answering the questions – for example, putting them in a difficult to read font – dramatically raises scores (Atler, et al, 2007). Atler et al argue that the perception of disfluency with a task is what makes subjects engage System Two. So, we should expect that high CRT subjects are only likely to engage System Two when they are presented with a task that they perceive to be difficult.

Here, I, Sytsma, and Machery seem to be in agreement. But we seem to disagree on whether the task in their study will be perceived by subjects as difficult. Here I want to point out that it is strongly disanalogous to the task in the CRT test, because, while we all have learned from experience that math is hard, most of us probably haven't learned from experience that making judgments about others' mental states is hard.

In their response to my paper, Sytsma and Machery bring up the following point: "[if] high CRT subjects did not use System Two... [this is] either because they were not aware of reasons to mistrust their System One judgments about this case or because they did not know how to make System Two judgments about this case." They go on to argue that, if System Two judgments differ from System One judgments on this subject, then high CRT subjects would have reasons to mistrust System One. This is only true if high CRT subjects have often noticed a conflict between System One and Two judgments about others' mental states. This in turn requires them to have made a number of System Two judgments in situations where those will conflict with System One judgments, and noticed this conflict. I don't see much reason to expect that high CRT subjects would regularly make System Two judgments about the sorts of mental states these studies study – pain, color perception, etc. – at all. These are judgments we make quickly and fluently, and generally with great success. I also don't see why they would do so often enough when System One gets the wrong answer (which should be fairly infrequent) so as to learn to mistrust System One.

So it does not seem to me that high CRT subjects, generally speaking, will not make System Two judgments about others mental states. Even if they do, it is not clear to me that these judgments will be the right kind to support Sytsma and Machery's argument. [This next paragraph goes far beyond what is in my original paper]

System Two judgments come in a number of flavors. All System Two judgments are slow (relative to System One judgments), conscious, and more or less rule based. But not all judgments of this sort are created equal. We can put more or less effort into our conscious reasoning. Low effort System Two reasoning might not draw upon our experience of qualia, even if qualia are obvious and manifest. Something being obvious does not mean that it is obvious how to use it in reasoning; for example, it may not be obviously *relevant* to the judgment at hand (especially if it of a sort of thing that is extremely common, and thus not terribly salient). If qualia are obvious, then they *can* be used in System Two judgments, but this does guarantee that they will. High effort reasoning, especially careful, rigorous, reflective reasoning, might be more likely to catch how to make use of qualia in ascriptions of mental states. So, even if Sytsma and Machery can show that the judgments they studied are System Two judgments, and that they did not make us of the qualitative/non-qualitative distinction, this does not by itself show that qualia are not obvious.

Premise 2

In my paper I argue that qualia are not likely to play much of a role in System One judgments about others' mental states. Sytsma and Machery, in response, point out that we have good reason to expect associations to exist between external features of others, such as their behavior, and qualia (if there are any); this would occur if, when considering others' behavior, we consider what mental states of our own would generate similar behavior. This is a good point, but I don't think it ultimately helps defend their original argument.

Sytsma and Machery are trying to argue that qualia are not obvious. Their support for this claim is that the folk ascriptions of mental states do not track the qualitative/non-qualitative distinction, since the folk ascribe some (but not all) qualitative states to entities that cannot have qualia. The reasoning here is that these ascriptions would not be expected if qualia were obvious, since, if they were, we would categorize mental states along qualitative/non-qualitative lines, and not ascribe qualitative ones to entities that cannot have qualia.

However, even if Sytsma and Machery are right that there can be associations between qualia and mental states, we should still expect System One to ascribe qualitative states to entities that cannot experience qualia. On the story Sytsma and Machery have told about how qualia get associated with mental states, mental states will also be associated with external features. When those external features are present, this should trigger the association with our own qualia, and then with the appropriate mental state. In order words, if external features are associated with our own qualia, then we may judge that another is in a qualitative mental state when those features are present. But that does not require that the other be capable of having qualia, but only that it have enough of the right kinds of external features to trigger these associations. So Sytsma and Machery cannot draw conclusions about the obviousness of qualia based on the fact that System One ascribes qualitative mental states to entities that cannot have qualia.

Notice also that if we cut out the qualia from this picture, and just have associations between external features and mental states (unmediated by associations with qualia), System One will ascribe the same mental states to the same entities. Qualia might play some role in System One judgments about others' mental states, but they don't seem to make a difference.

As a side note, Sytsma and Machery in this section somewhat mischaracterize my account of how System One makes judgments. They focus on behavior as the main characteristic used by System One to ascribe mental states. While I think behavior is quite important, I don't think it is the only relevant characteristic; I discuss other external features (such as facial expression) in my paper, and I am certainly open to there being a number of external features that are involved in this process that I might have overlooked. Data cited by Sytsma and Machery that allegedly conflicts with my view (such as the fact that we seem to intuitively ascribe mental states to plants) is not clearly in conflict with it. The model proposed by Arico et al (manuscript) is, as I understand it, consistent with an associative view of System One (although Adam Arico has indicated to me in correspondence that he has a somewhat different take on how System One works from mine), and as I understand it, can explain the data cited by Sytsma and Machery in a way amenable to my argument.

Premise 3

Sytsma and Machery claim that I argue for the use of System Two judgments to study phenomenal consciousness. While I do think System Two judgments are not prone to the same problems as System One judgments, I am not convinced that we should use System Two for this sort of task. In fact, I brought up worries in my original paper about System Two similar to those they raise in response to my paper. I have some thoughts as well on how to better study System One judgments about our own (rather than others') mental states, but I am concerned that these judgments are quite limited in utility (as I discuss in my paper).

References:

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