

Functionalism

By Billy Casperson

Behaviorism + Identity Theory = Functionalism

- According to Fodor, Functionalism is a blend of the identity theory and logical behaviorism combined.
 - Logical Behaviorism – “attributing a mental state (say thirst) to an organism is the same as saying that the organism is disposed to behave in particular way (for example to drink if there is water available).” (Fodor p. 453)
 - Identity Theory – “An alternative materialist theory of the mind to logical behaviorism is the central-state identity theory. According to this theory, mental events, states and processes are identical with neurophysiological events in the brain.” (Fodor p. 454)
- “In the functionalist view the psychology of a system depends not on the stuff it is made of (living cells, metal or energy) but on how the stuff is put together” (Fodor 451).

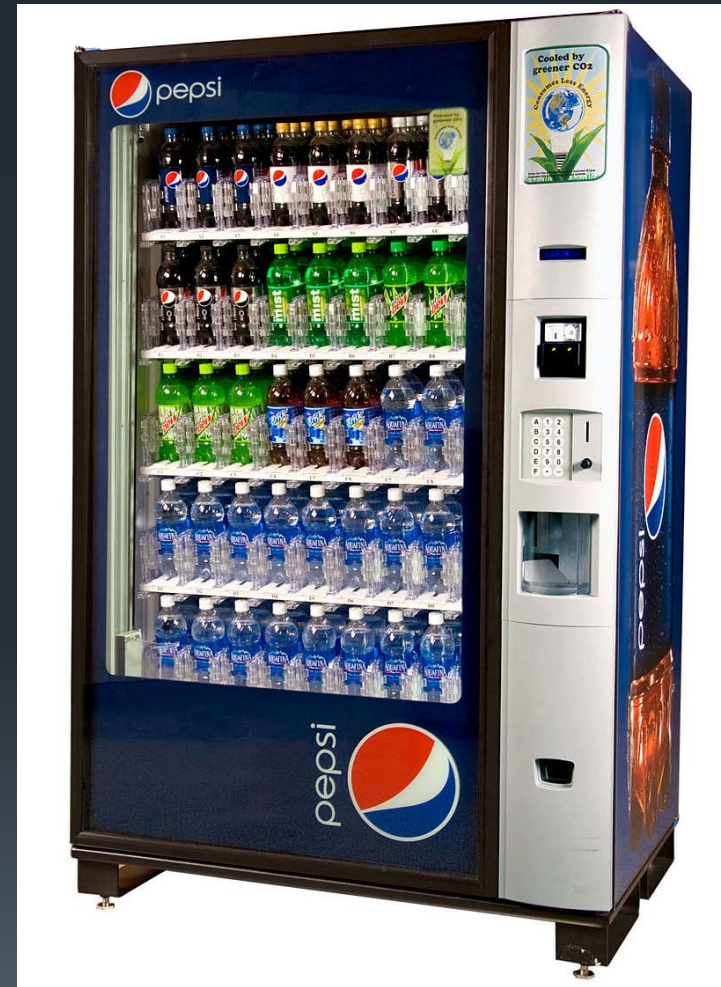


Defining Functionalism

- Functionalism is often compared to computer software
 - The mind is the software of the brain
 - The same software can run on different hardware, so the same mental states can be instantiated by physical or non-physical systems
 - Two things are in the same mental state if they are in the same state of their programs

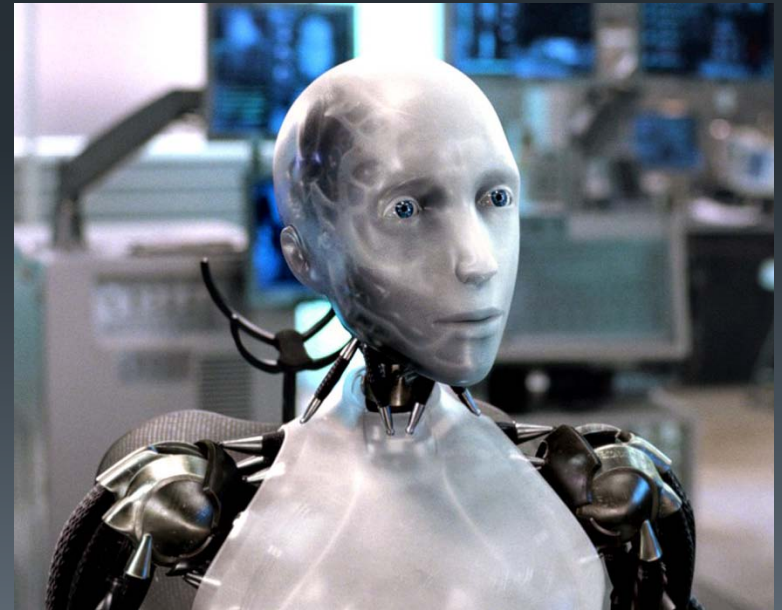
Inputs & Outputs

- Fodor uses the analogy of a vending machine to explain the effect external inputs can have on outputs
- When a particular event occurs to a human, the mind processes that information and decides how to respond based on past inputs and outputs
 - Sensory inputs & behavioral outputs
- Fodor stresses that functionalism has more to do with the composition of the mind rather than the science behind it.



Machines vs. Humans

- Minds are like machines, made to complete functions
- Therefore if a machine has sensory inputs, internal components are not changed, and the appropriate behavioral output is accomplished, then the machine is technically thinking
- Turing Test
 - Artificial intelligence
- Are our actions pre-determined?



Free Will

- The obvious difference between humans and computers is that humans are conscious and have a mental state
- No one knows if our actions are pre-determined
- Hilary Putnam concedes that mental states are functional states of probabilistic automata
 - Humans will give responses appropriate to changing environments
 - We learn over time
 - Computers on the other hand have a single response regardless of the situation

Questions

- How does functionalism account for computers like IBM's Watson?

