

24.09 Minds and Machines

Fall 11 HASS-D CI

more on the
knowledge argument

Nagel on bats

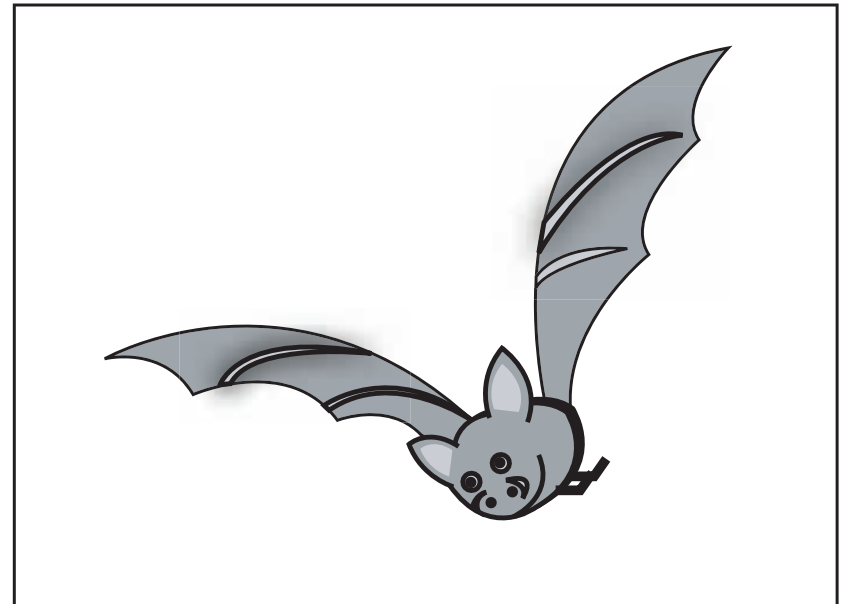


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resisting the knowledge argument

1. imprisoned Mary knows all the physical facts, hence:
 2. if physicalism is true, Mary (before her release) knows all the facts
- after her release, Mary learns something—something she couldn't have known while imprisoned
- if Mary learns something, she learns a fact, hence (from 3, 4):
5. Mary learns a fact, hence (from 2, 5):
 6. physicalism is false



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a further conclusion

Jackson draws a further conclusion, namely that our experiences have ‘qualia’

‘The whole thrust of the knowledge argument is that Mary...does not know about certain qualia...’ (Jackson, ‘What Mary didn’t know’)

qualia are ‘certain [nonphysical] features of bodily sensations [and] perceptual experiences...the hurtfulness of pains, the itchiness of itches [etc.]’

contrast Tye’s ‘qualia’ and ‘Qualia’ (in ‘Visual Qualia...’)



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the move from (1) to (2)

1. imprisoned Mary knows all the physical facts, hence:
2. if physicalism is true, Mary (before her release) knows all the facts



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rationale: not knowing something is not being able to decide between rival possibilities—in other words not being able to tell what possible world one is in; so if imprisoned Mary doesn't know something then she can't tell exactly what possible world she is in; but if physicalism is true she plainly can tell what possible world she is in, because if physicalism is true then the totality of the physical facts eliminates all possibilities but one, and she knows all the physical facts

option A: deny (I)

I. imprisoned Mary knows all the physical facts
not really necessary to suppose Mary knows
all the physical facts

just the ones relevant to color and color
experiences

and anyway why would you need special
experiences to know any physical facts?



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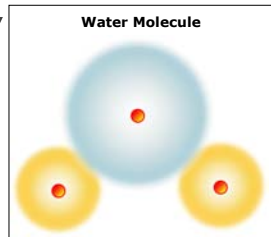
option B: resist the move from (1) to (2)

1. imprisoned Mary knows all the physical facts, hence:
2. if physicalism is true, Mary (before her release) knows all the facts

motivation: might superchemist Sally (who knows all the facts about the distribution of H_2O) still be ignorant of the fact that water comes out of taps?

yet that wouldn't show that there are two worlds alike in their distribution of H_2O that differ in their distribution of water (i.e. that 'H₂O-ism' is false)

see Chalmers, 'Consciousness and...', for a reply



from Mary to the bat

Jackson argues that physicalism is false

Nagel, in ‘What is it like to be a bat?’, does not think physicalism is unproblematic, but he does not argue that it’s false



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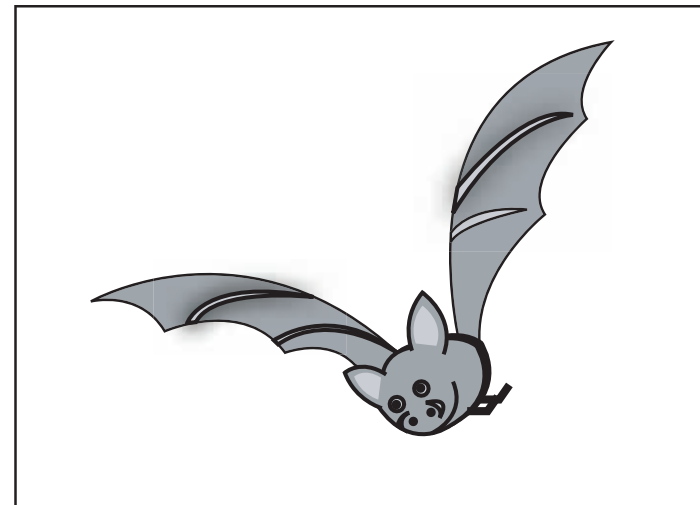


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Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?'

'Without consciousness the mind-body problem would be much less interesting. With consciousness it seems hopeless.'

Nagel argues that reductionist accounts of consciousness (namely the identity theory and functionalism) fail to 'shed light on the relation of mind to brain'

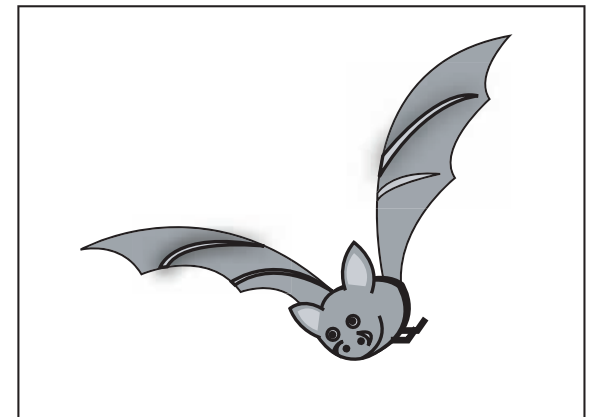


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‘It occurs at many levels of animal life’

‘...fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism—something it is like for the organism’ (cf. Tye, p. 445)

‘We may call this the subjective character of experience’

it is this that the ‘familiar...reductive analyses of the mental’ fail to capture

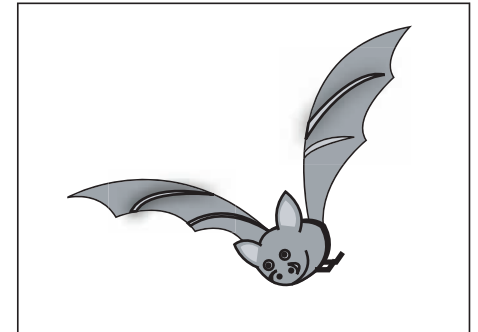


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subjectivity and points of view

why do the ‘familiar...reductive analyses of the mental’ fail to capture the subjective character of experience?

‘The reason is that every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view, and it seems inevitable that an objective, physical theory will abandon that point of view’

Nagel illustrates this difference between the subjective and objective with the example of the bat



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imagining what it is like to be a bat is not easy

imagining what it is like to
behave as a bat behaves is
not to imagine what is like
to be a bat

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. Comic strip panel showing Batman with the words: And thus is born this weird figure of the dark...This avenger of evil, 'The Batman'.

in fact, we can't do it

we can't imagine what it is like to be a bat—but that shouldn't lead us to conclude that bats' experiences do not have subjective character (see the example of the Martians on p. 170, and the remarks about 'humanly inaccessible facts')

the example shows how '...the facts of experience...are accessible only from one point of view' (bats in general have one type of 'point of view', and human beings in general have another)



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Mary and the bat



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‘It is important to distinguish [Nagel’s argument] from the Knowledge argument’

‘I was not complaining that we weren’t finding out what it is like to be Fred, I was complaining that there is something about his experience, a property of it, of which we were left ignorant...No amount of knowledge about Fred, be it physical or not, amounts to knowledge ‘from the inside’ concerning Fred’

but this is a bit unfair: ‘The point of view in question is not one accessible only to a single individual. Rather it is a type.’ (p. 171)

reduction and objectivity



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‘...the process of reduction [to the physical] is a move in the direction of greater objectivity’

that is, to reduce some phenomenon (e.g. lightning) to a physical phenomenon (e.g. flashes of electricity) is (inter alia) to give an account of the phenomenon that is not tied to particular points of view

(or, at any rate, an account more loosely tied to particular points of view than the original commonsense conception of the phenomenon)

physics and points of view

a Martian scientist whose experiences were subjectively very different from ours would still be able to understand what lightning is—you don't need a special point of view to understand the theory of electricity



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$$\nabla \times \vec{E} = -\frac{\partial \vec{B}}{\partial t} - \vec{M}$$

$$\nabla \times \vec{H} = -\frac{\partial \vec{D}}{\partial t} + \vec{J}$$

$$\nabla \cdot \vec{D} = \rho$$

$$\nabla \cdot \vec{B} = 0$$

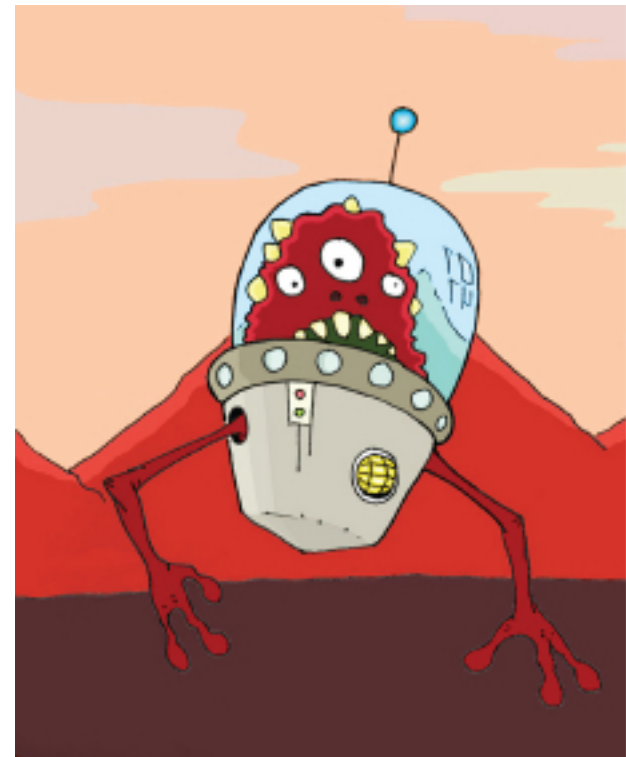


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example: lightning

'the impressions [lightning] makes on our senses'

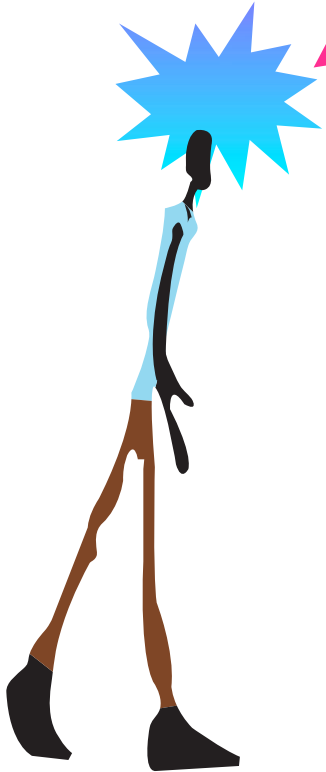


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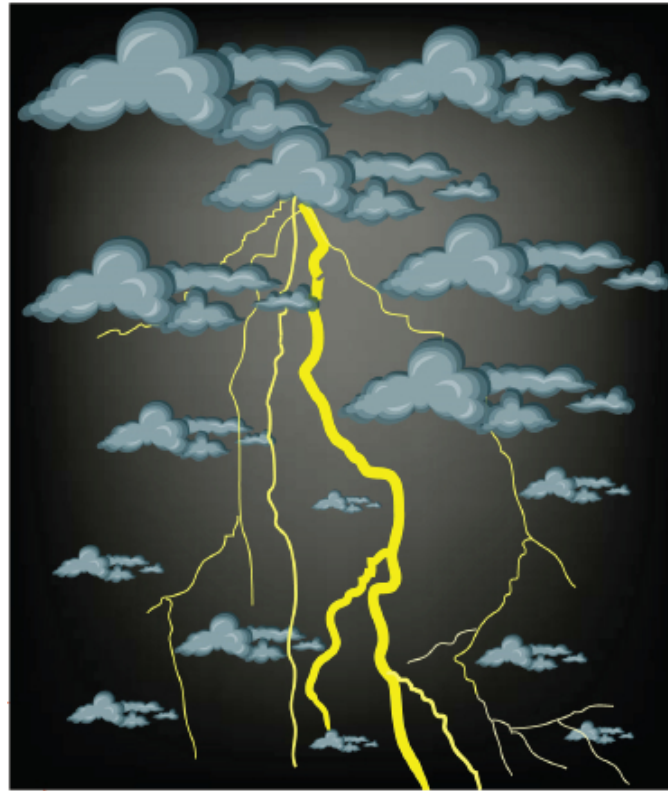


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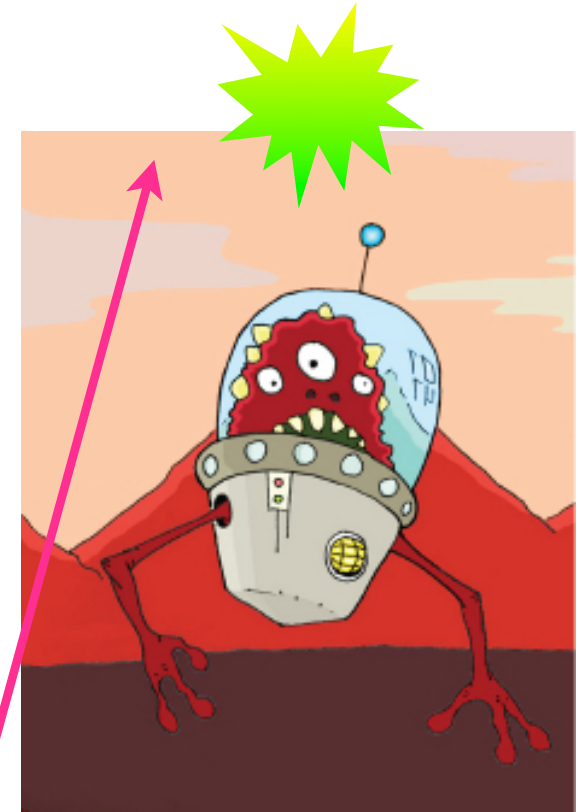


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the impressions (experiences) are left out of the scientific study of lightning

the impressions lightning makes on martians' senses

but you can't study *experience* in this way



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‘Experience itself...does not seem to fit the pattern. The idea of moving from appearance to reality makes no sense here.’

that is, ‘a move in the direction of greater objectivity’ takes us further away from understanding the subjective character of experience, and hence reductive accounts cannot explain consciousness

Nagel's conclusion

Nagel does not think that this shows that physicalism (materialism) is false

rather, he concludes that we do not 'have any conception of how [physicalism] might be true'

even though we don't understand physicalism, Nagel thinks we could have good reason to believe it, and he illustrates this with the example of the caterpillar and butterfly

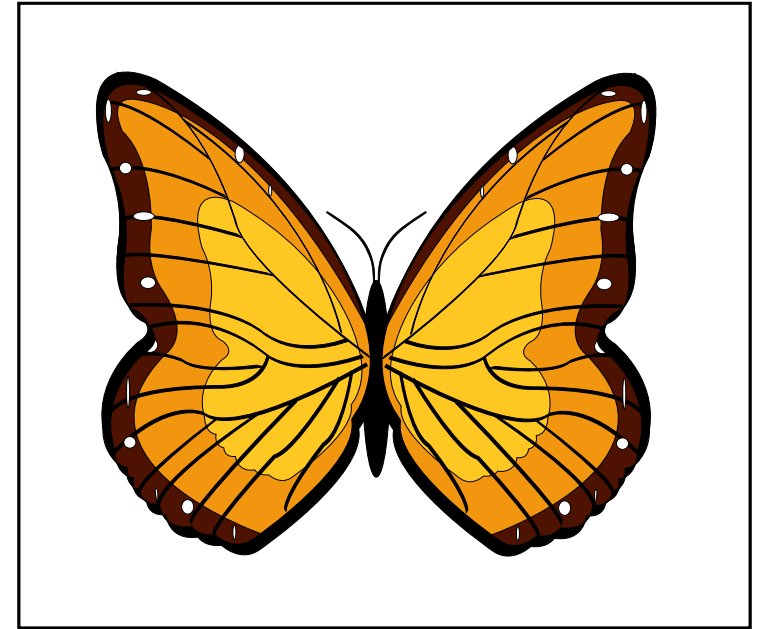


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Chalmers on consciousness and its place in nature

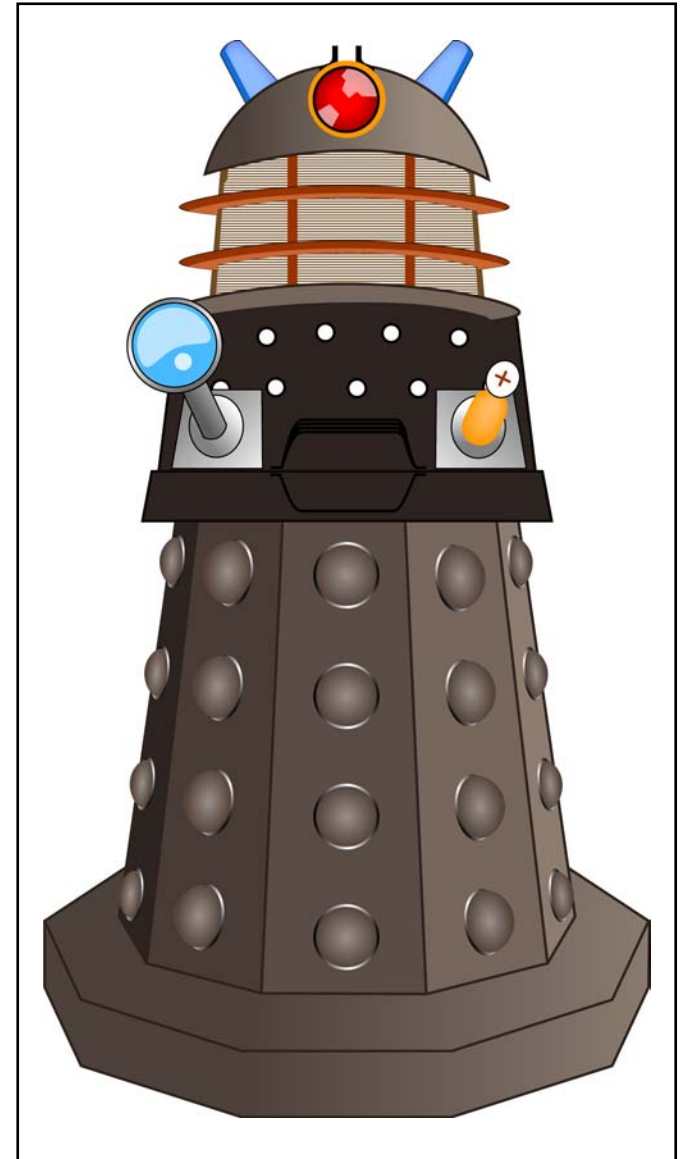


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Fall 2011

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