

24.09 Minds and Machines

spring 2007

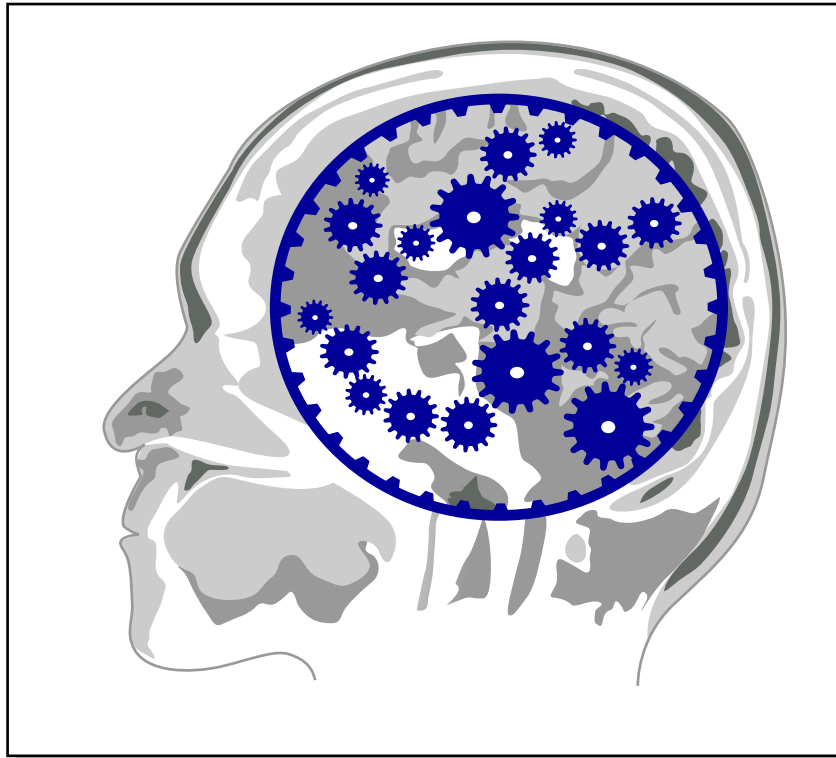


Figure by MIT OCW.

- externalism and self-knowledge

second paper now due april 20

- PAPERS: Three five page papers. Paper topics will be distributed in advance and will ask students to analyze and discuss material covered in class. Guidelines for papers will be handed out in class. One of the first two papers must be rewritten and resubmitted (this is required of all students to fulfill the CI requirement). Resubmission should be made no later than three weeks after the initial submission.

self-knowledge

- self-knowledge = knowledge of one's mental states
- “But what shall I now say that I am, when I am supposing that there is some supremely powerful and...malicious deceiver..?...At last I have discovered it—thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist—that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking” (Descartes, 11)
- Descartes claims that he can't rationally doubt that he is thinking, but he can rationally doubt that he has a hand, or that his father has a mind, etc.

privileged access

- “each of us can know the existence and content of his own mental states in a privileged way that is available to no one else” (McKinsey)
- “**privileged way**”: it’s harder to be wrong about one’s own mental states than about one’s environment or the mental states of others
- this is not infallible access: one can misattribute mental states to oneself

privileged access

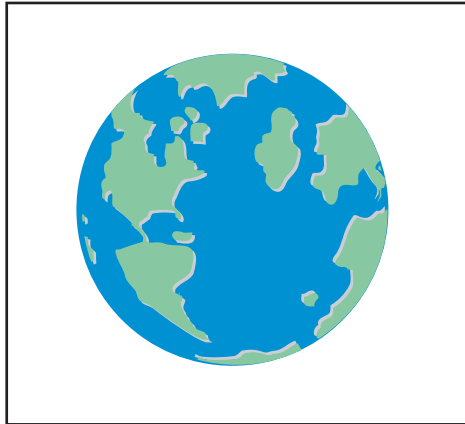
- **“available to no one else”**: merely by sitting in an armchair, one can know, “just by thinking”, that one is thinking that water is wet, for example



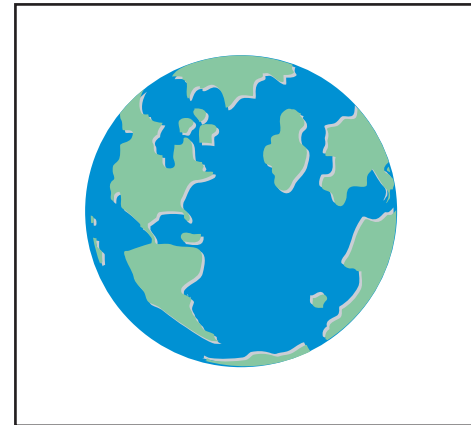
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- but is this (armchair knowledge) compatible with externalism?

Putnam's twin earth



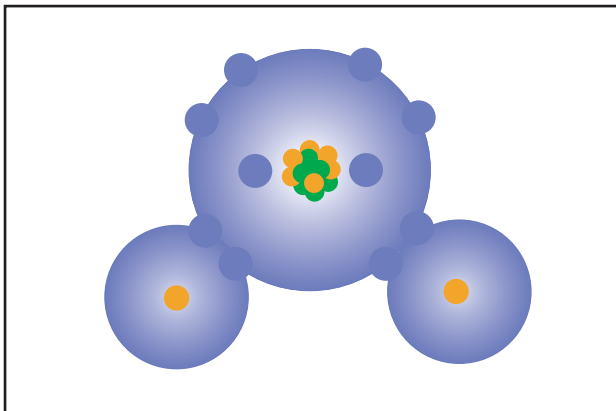
earth

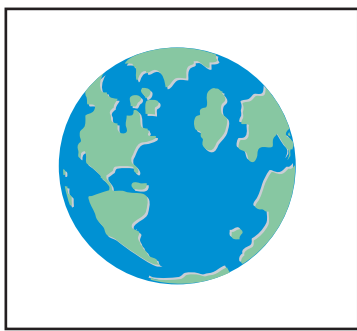


twin earth

Figures by MIT OCW.

...the oceans and lakes contain “XYZ”, which is a very different chemical kind from H_2O , although superficially like it at normal temperatures and pressures





“water is wet”

true just in case H_2O is wet

Oscar₁ (on earth)

“water is wet”

true just in case XYZ is wet

Oscar₂ (on twin earth)

Figures by MIT OCW.

“Anti-individualism and privileged access”

- reading notes:
 - ignore “de dicto”
 - “anti-individualism” and externalism are (more-or-less) equivalent
 - (B) on p. 634 is (more-or-less) equivalent to externalism
 - McKinsey’s use of “a priori” is (harmlessly) a bit idiosyncratic

from the philosophical toolkit (again):

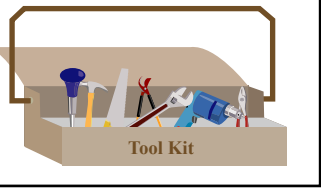
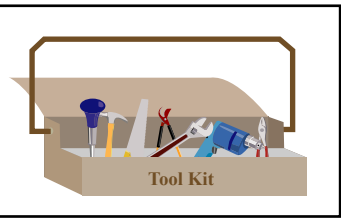


Figure by MIT OCW.

a posteriori and a priori

- a proposition p is knowable a priori iff p is knowable “independently of experience”, “without empirical investigation”
 - paradigm examples: $3^2=9$, vixens are foxes, either it’s raining or it isn’t



from the philosophical toolkit:

Figure by MIT OCW.

a posteriori and a priori

- p is knowable a posteriori iff p is knowable “on the basis of experience”, “with empirical investigation”
 - examples (of propositions only knowable a posteriori): MIT is in Cambridge, there are 9 planets, Paris Hilton is the daughter of Kathy Hilton
- it is not immediately clear that ‘I believe I live in Cambridge’, ‘I am thinking about water’, ‘I feel irritated’, ‘I have a twinge in my elbow’, etc., (assume these are all true) express propositions that are knowable a priori
- still, they are knowable from the armchair, and that’s all McKinsey’s argument needs

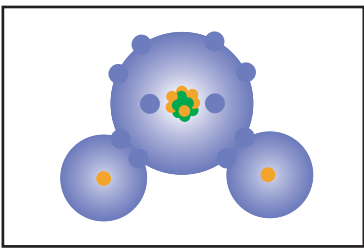


Figure by MIT OCW.

McKinsey's argument - 1

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies E (according to externalism)

hence:

C E can be known from the armchair

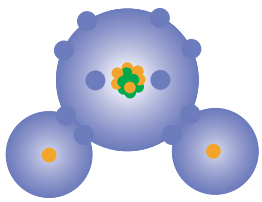


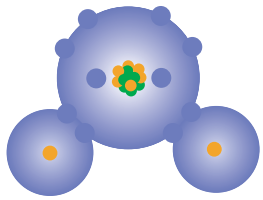
Figure by MIT OCW.

McKinsey's argument - II

hence:

1, 2, and 3 are inconsistent (so, if 1 and 3 are true, 2 (and so externalism) is false)

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies E
- 3 E can't be known from the armchair



the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet **implies** [?]

E

- P metaphysically implies (entails) Q iff it is impossible that P is true and Q is false (i.e. there is no possible world in which P is true and Q is false; in every possible world w , if P is true in w , Q is also true in w)
 - that the glass is full of water metaphysically implies that the glass is full of H_2O
 - that Paris Hilton exists metaphysically implies that Rick and Kathy Hilton exist (well, arguably—see McKinsey, p. 636)

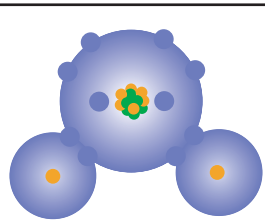


Figure by MIT OCW.

the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet **implies** [?]

E

- P conceptually implies Q iff it is knowable a priori that it is not the case that P is true and Q is false (i.e. it is knowable a priori that if P is true, Q is true)
 - that the glass is full of water does not conceptually imply that the glass is full of H₂O
 - that Jones drinks quickly conceptually implies that Jones drinks
 - that Jones is a bachelor conceptually implies that Jones is male

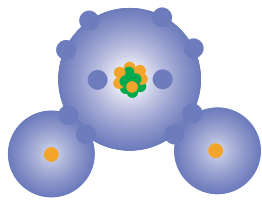


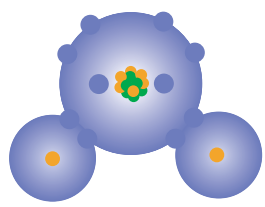
Figure by MIT OCW.

'implies' must mean *conceptually implies* (else C would not follow)

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet **implies** E (according to externalism)

hence:

C E can be known from the armchair



the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies **E**
[?]

- McKinsey's **E** is a proposition describing Oscar's environment
- premise 2 says that one can know a priori (by considering Putnam's "twin earth" thought experiment) that if Oscar is thinking that water is wet then **E** is true
 - but what is **E**, exactly?

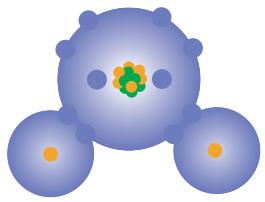


Figure by MIT OCW.

the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies **E** [?]

- suggestion (Brueckner, interpreting McKinsey)
 - E is the proposition that Oscar inhabits an environment containing H_2O and not XYZ
- one cannot know E from the armchair
- but is it true that the twin earth thought experiment shows (a priori) that one can only think about water if there is H_2O in one's environment?
- no!
 - n.b. it's vital to distinguish the proposition that water is such-and-such from the proposition that H_2O is such-and-such

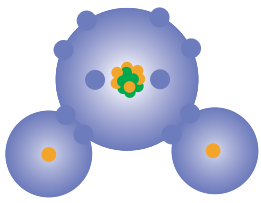


Figure by MIT OCW.

E = the proposition that water exists?

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies that water exists (according to externalism)

hence:

C Oscar can know from the armchair that water exists

C is obviously false so (by “reductio ad absurdum”):
externalism is false

but is 2 true?

- 2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies that water exists (according to externalism)
- suppose hydrogen and oxygen exist, but hydrogen hydroxide doesn't
 - scientists “theorize that H₂O exists” (p. 641)
 - they introduce a term, *swater*, for this chemical compound, and use it on Nova broadcasts, in *Scientific American* articles, etc.
 - Oscar reads these articles and learns the new word (perhaps without remembering the chemical composition of swater)
 - Oscar might say, “I wonder whether swater is wet”
 - wouldn't he be wondering (in a waterless world) whether water is wet?

E = the proposition that either water exists or some in Oscar's speech community theorize that H₂O exists?

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies that either water exists or... (according to externalism)

hence:

- C Oscar can know from the armchair that either water exists or...

C is obviously false so (by “reductio ad absurdum”):

externalism is false

but is 2 true?

2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies that either water exists or some in Oscar's speech community theorize that H₂O exists?

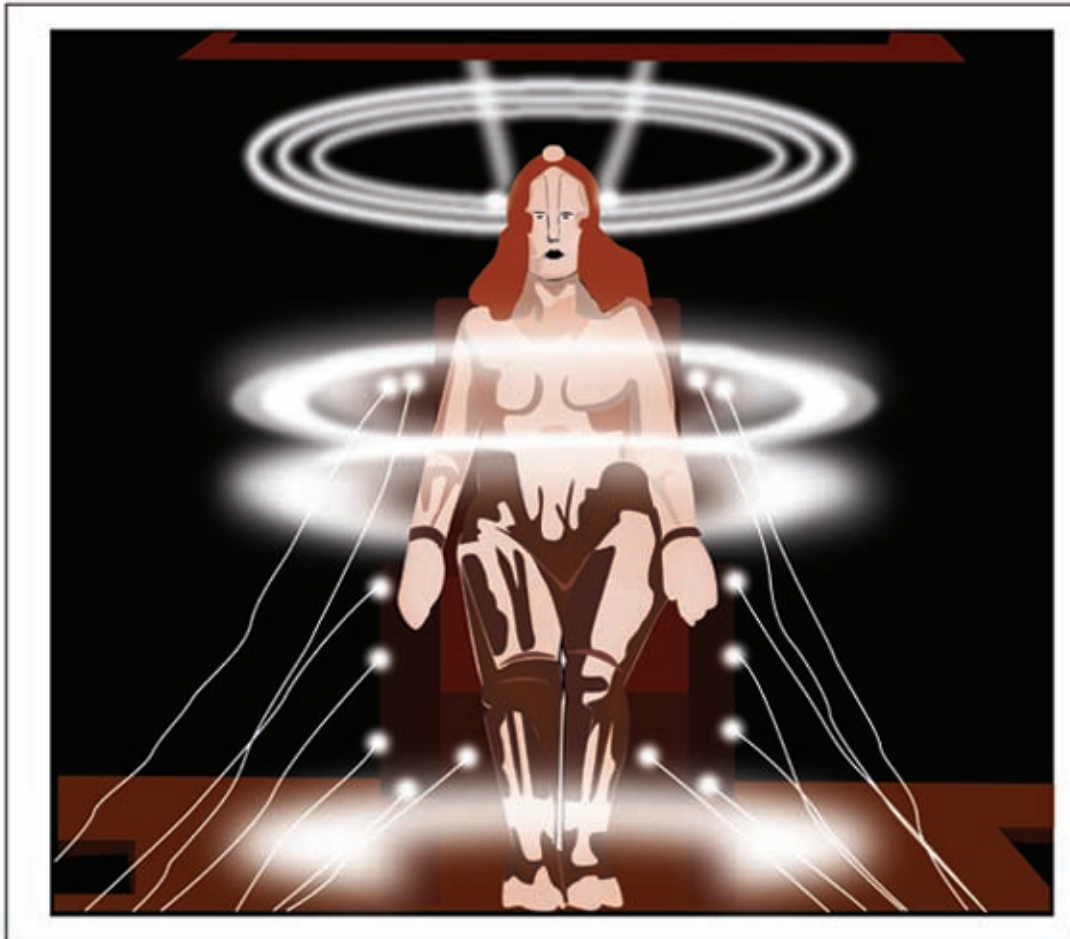
- no—not if 'implies' means *conceptually* implies

Brueckner's final suggestion

- E is the proposition that there exist some physical entities distinct from Oscar
- Brueckner's response: are we so sure that this E is not knowable from the armchair?

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- read Nagel

Figure by MIT OCW.