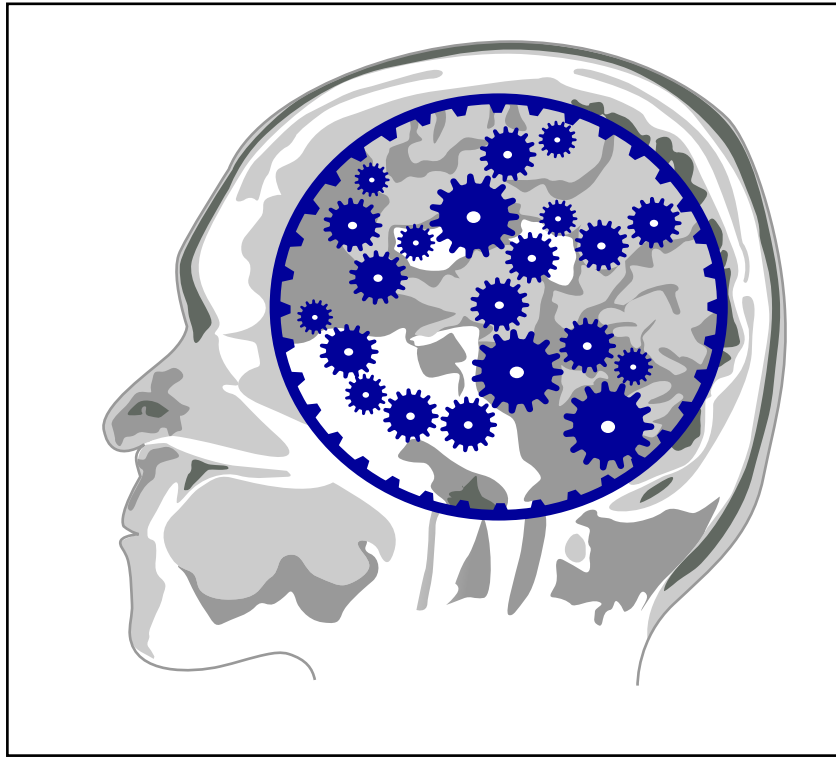


24.09 Minds and Machines

spring 2007



- externalism and self-knowledge, contd.
- Nagel on bats

Figure by MIT OCW.

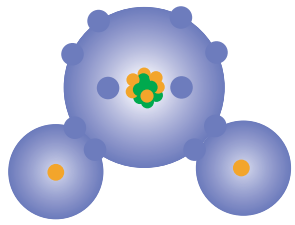


Figure by MIT OCW.

McKinsey's argument - II

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

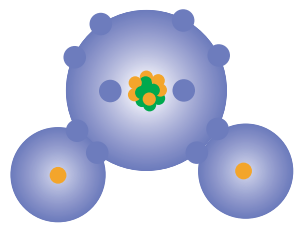


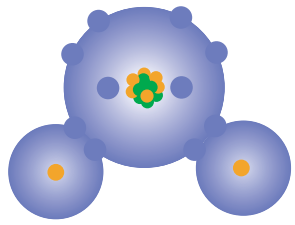
Figure by MIT OCW.

'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)

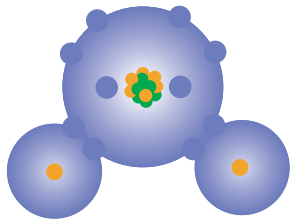
hence:

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?



E = the proposition that water exists?

Figure by MIT OCW.

- 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?

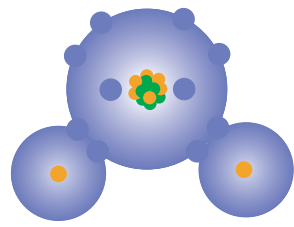
- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies that either water exists or... (according to externalism)

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?

Figure by MIT OCW.

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 H_2O 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?

OK, but what about:

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

- E is (arguably) conceptually implied by the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet (n.b. “theorize that *water* exists”)
- yet surely it is not knowable from the armchair
- we are left with a puzzle

roadmap

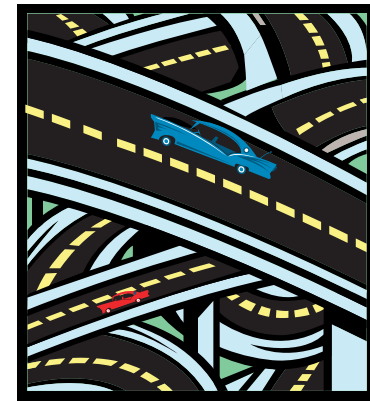
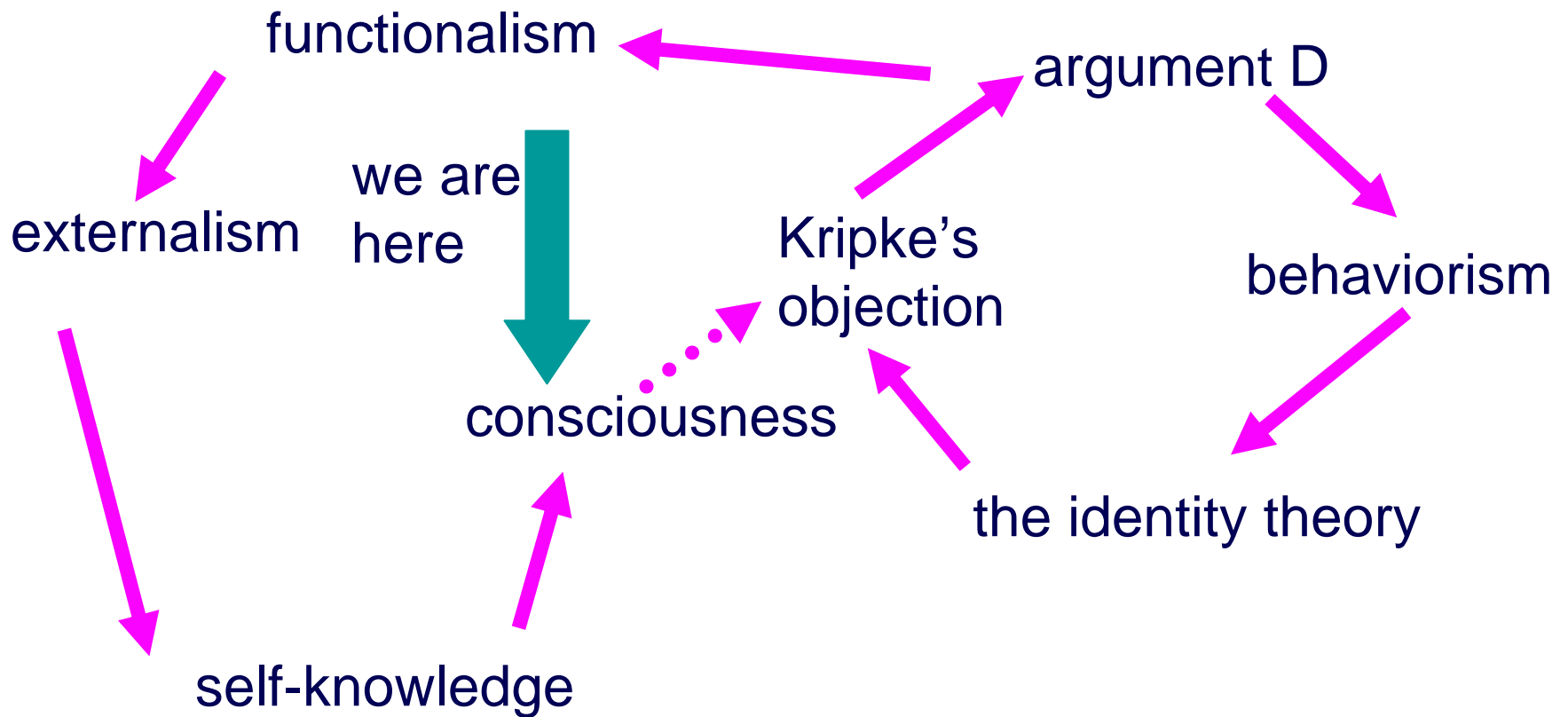


Figure by MIT OCW.



“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”

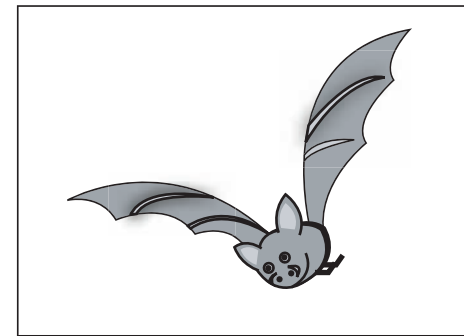


Figure by MIT OCW.

what is consciousness?

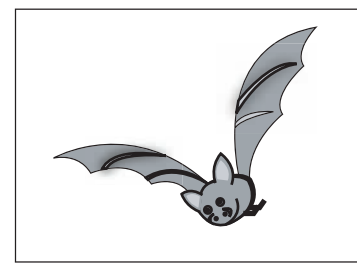


Figure by MIT OCW.

- “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

subjective and objective

- 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

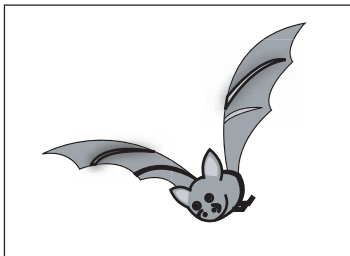


Figure by MIT OCW.

microchiroptera: the main points

- 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'.

microchiroptera: the main points

- 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. 221, 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)



Figure by MIT OCW.

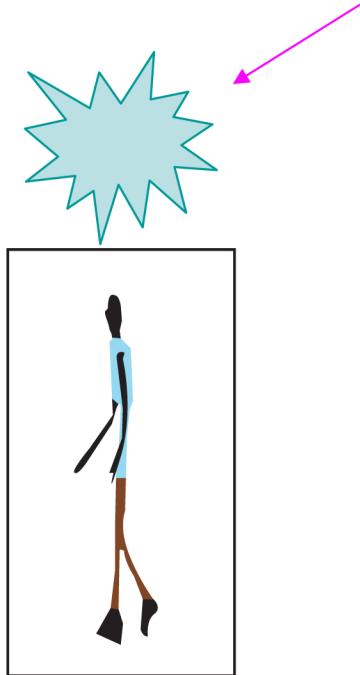
reduction and objectivity



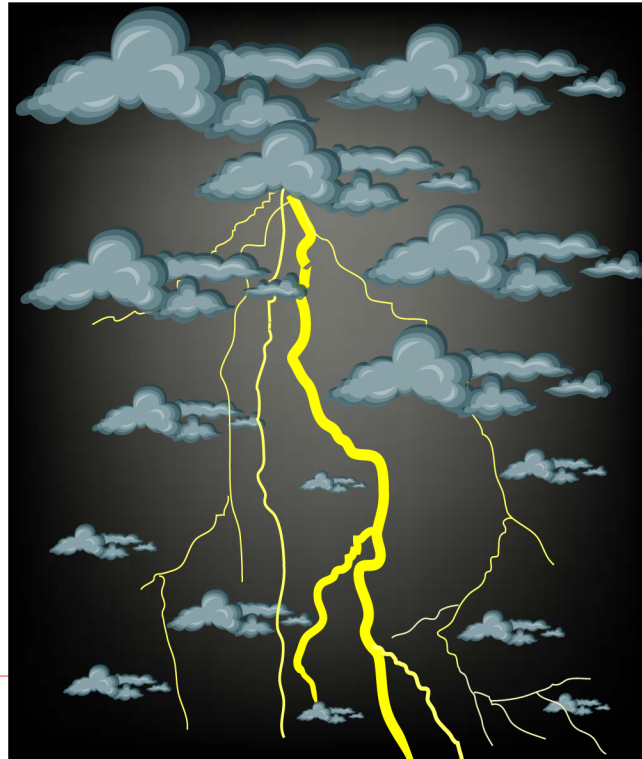
Figure by MIT OCW.

- “...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)
- 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

“the impressions [lightning]
makes on our senses”

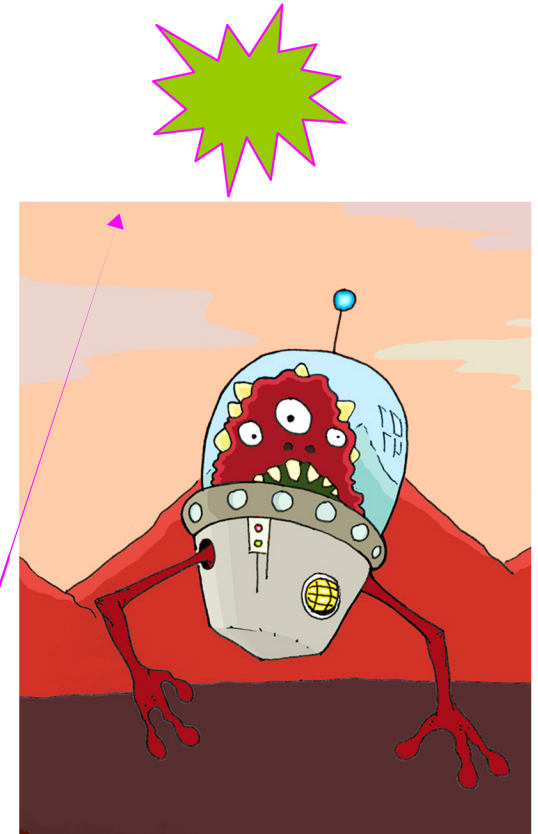


the impressions
(experiences) are left
out of the scientific
study of lightning



Figures by MIT OCW.

the impressions lightning makes
on martians' senses



the “general difficulty with psychophysical reduction”

- “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

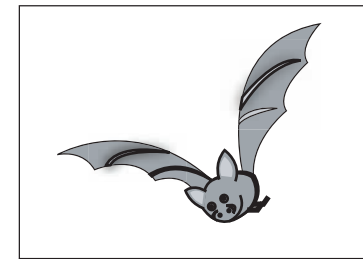


Figure by MIT OCW.

the moral

- Nagel does not think that this shows that physicalism 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

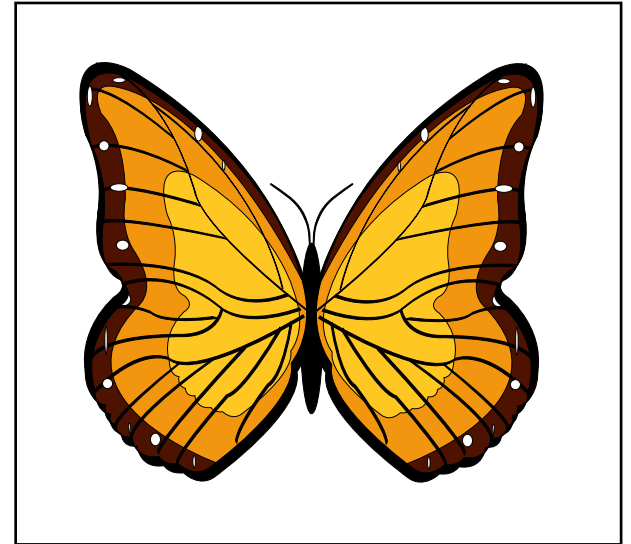


Figure by MIT OCW.