

Minds and Machines

spring 2003

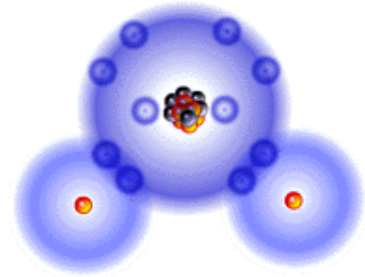
The explanatory gap and
Kripke's argument revisited

preliminaries

- evaluations today

“Materialism and qualia: the explanatory gap”

- Levine’s position is similar to Nagel’s: physicalism is (or may well be) true, but we don’t understand how it’s true
- according to Levine, psychophysical identities (e.g. pain=c-fibers firing) are “gappy”, unlike others (e.g. heat=mke)
- he thinks the gappiness of psychophysical identities is due to the absence of certain “conceptual” truths
- ...and that the absence of such truths is shown by Kripke’s argument against the identity theory



an explanatory reduction of water to H_2O

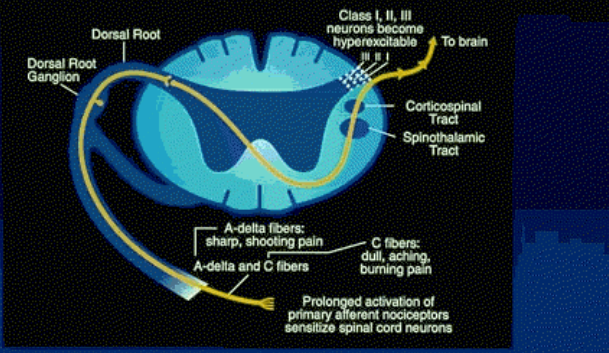
- 1 water = the clear odorless liquid that falls as rain and flows in the rivers and streams (e.g.) [a priori or “conceptual” truth]
- 2 H_2O = the clear odorless liquid that falls as rain and flows in the rivers and streams [a posteriori or empirical truth]

hence

3 water= H_2O

- this is both a justification of 3 and an explanation of it

is there an explanatory reduction of pain to c-fiber firing?



- 1 pain = the state that does ????? [a priori or “conceptual” truth]
 - 2 c-fiber firing = the state that is caused by bodily damage, causes avoidance behavior, etc. etc. [a posteriori or empirical truth]
- hence
- 3 pain=c-fiber firing
- “there is more to our concept of pain than its causal role, there is its qualitative character, how it feels...” (so there is no plausible candidate for the first premise)

summing up

- in order to *explain* why pain=c-fiber firing, we need to deduce this identity from conceptual truths plus empirical claims about c-fibers
- Kripke's argument illustrates why we can't do this: if we could, then c-fibers firing without pain (or vice versa) wouldn't be conceivable
- since the missing explanation is also the only way we can *justify* (or justify more-or-less conclusively) that pain = c-fiber firing, this identity claim is "epistemologically inaccessible...a very undesirable consequence of materialism" (p. 359)

an objection and Levine's current view

Joe Levine

- one might wonder whether it's a conceptual truth that water = the clear odorless liquid.... (see Block and Stalnaker)
- if it isn't, then Levine's account of the difference between "water=H₂O" and "pain=c-fiber firing" is mistaken
- Levine later denied that there are any such conceptual truths about water, but still maintains his view that there is an "explanatory gap"—in his book *Purple Haze*

Levine's objection revisited: deny (1)

1. If I can clearly and distinctly conceive a proposition **p** to be true, then **p** is possible.

“Since epistemological possibility [i.e. clear and distinct conceivability] is not sufficient for metaphysical possibility, the fact that what is intuitively contingent turns out to be metaphysically necessary should not bother us terribly. It's to be expected.”

o one might think this reply is a bit dismissive—surely conceivability *is* a good guide to possibility, so why does it fail in this case? Hill (following Nagel) offers an explanation, to which we now turn

Nagel's footnote

“A theory that explained how the mind-brain relation was necessary would still leave us with Kripke's problem of explaining why it nevertheless appears contingent. That difficulty seems to me surmountable, in the following way. We may imagine something by representing it to ourselves either perceptually, sympathetically, or symbolically.”

“I shall not try to say how symbolic imagination works, but part of what happens in the other two cases is this.

To imagine something perceptually, we put ourselves in a conscious state resembling the state we would be in if we perceived it.

To imagine something sympathetically, we put ourselves in a conscious state resembling the thing itself.

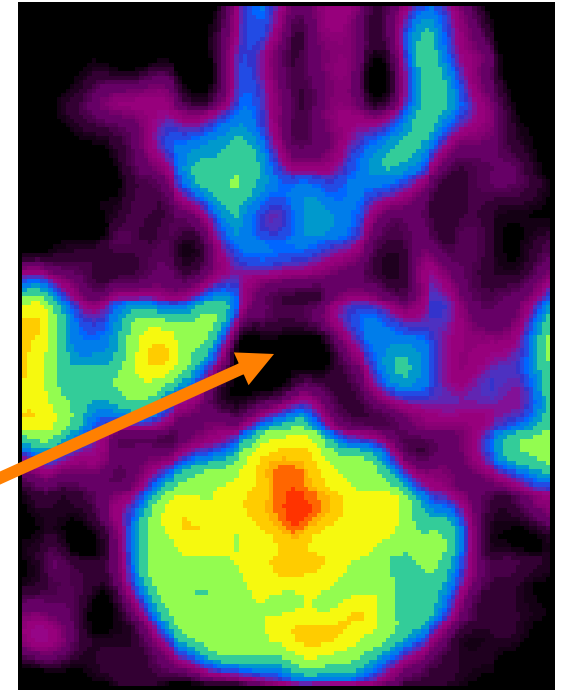
(This method can be used only to imagine mental states and events—our own or another’s.)”

- suppose that the state of seeming to see a ripe tomato is identical to brain state R
- why does this (necessary) identity appear contingent?

“When we try to imagine a mental state occurring without its associated brain state, we first sympathetically imagine the occurrence of the mental state: that is, we put ourselves into a state that resembles it mentally.”



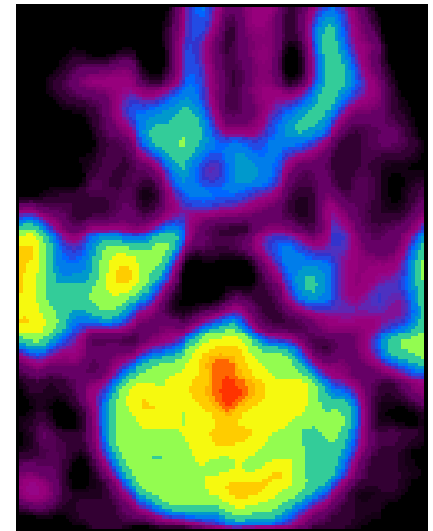
“At the same time, we attempt to perceptually imagine the non-occurrence of the associated physical state, by putting ourselves into another state unconnected with the first: one resembling that which we would be in if we perceived the non-occurrence of the physical state.”

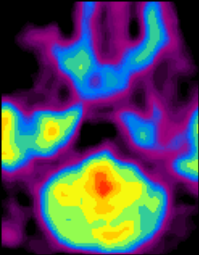


not in state
R

[Hill offers an amendment to Nagel’s account, because he thinks it is “highly questionable” that we “perceive brain processes”]

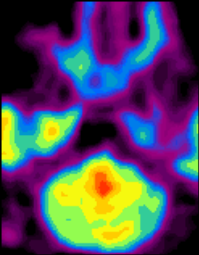
“Where the imagination of physical features is perceptual and the imagination of mental features is sympathetic, it appears to us that we can imagine any experience occurring without its associated brain state, and vice versa. The relation between them will appear contingent even if it is necessary, because of the independence of the disparate types of imagination.”





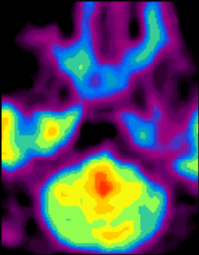
questions

- A what does Nagel mean by saying that the two types of imagination (perceptual and sympathetic) are “independent”?
- B and in any case, are there really “two types” of imagination?
- C does this account (or one like it) succeed in explaining away the apparent contingency?



question A

- A what does Nagel mean by saying that the two types of imagination (perceptual and sympathetic) are “independent”?
- presumably this: we can simultaneously imagine_p p and imagine_s q , even when p and q are incompatible (i.e. it is impossible that p and q are both true)
 - but how do we get imagining p & q out of this?



question B

- B and in any case, are there really “two types” of imagination?
- imagining_S that one is seeing a ripe tomato seems to involve (at least): forming an image of a ripe tomato
 - imagining_P that one is seeing the absence of brain state R (by seeing a monitor display showing the absence of brain state R) seems to involve (at least): forming an image of the monitor display
 - this looks like the same sort of imagining both times

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- evaluations