

# Minds and Machines

spring 2003

Hill and Nagel on the  
appearance of  
contingency,  
contd.

# can the physicalist credibly deny (1)?

1. If I can clearly and distinctly conceive a proposition **p** to be true, then **p** is possible.
  - can we explain why conceiving/imagining that pain  $\neq$  c-fibers firing (etc.) is not a good indication that it is *possible* that pain  $\neq$  c-fibers firing?
  - the explanation shouldn't lead to "a radical modal scepticism" (Hill, 340)

# 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.

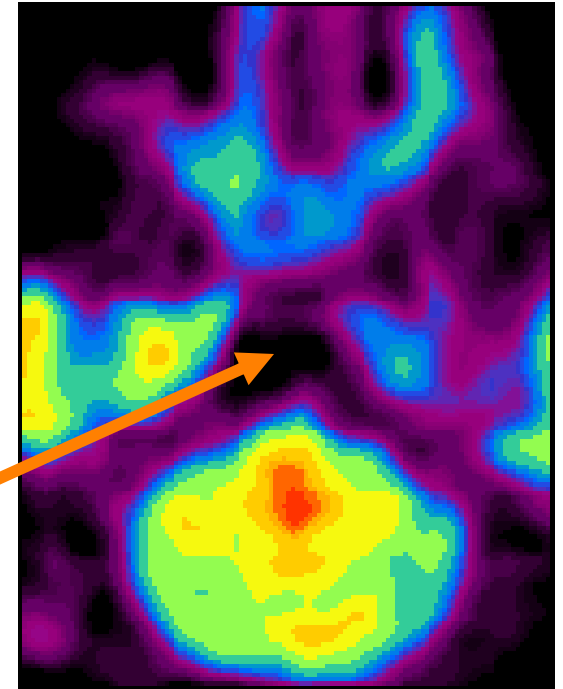
(This method can be used only to imagine mental states and events—our own or another’s.)”

- 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.”



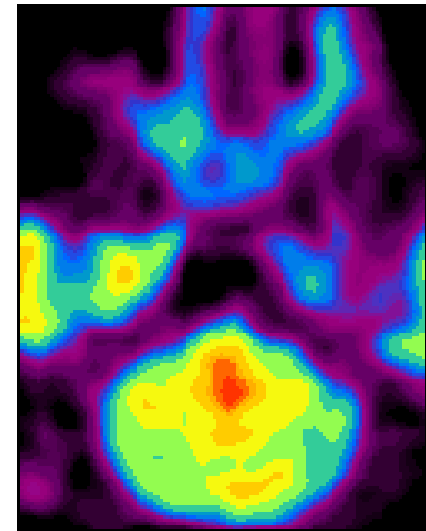
“At the same time, we attempt to perceptually imagine the non-occurrence of the associated physical state, by putting ourselves into another state unconnected with the first: one resembling that which we would be in if we perceived the non-occurrence of the physical state.”

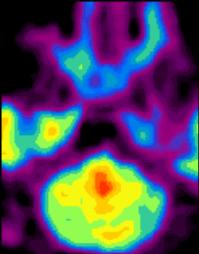


not in state R

[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.”

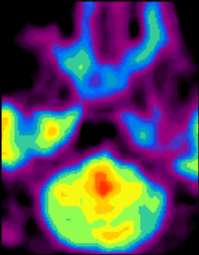




# questions

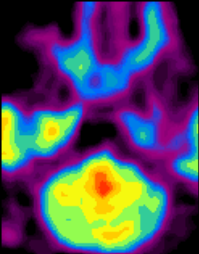
- A what does Nagel mean by saying that the two types of imagination (perceptual and sympathetic) are “independent”?
- B and in any case, are there really “two types” of imagination?
- C does this account (or one like it) succeed in explaining away the apparent contingency?





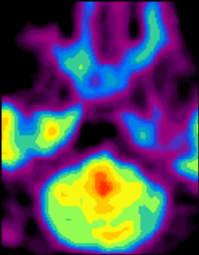
## question A

- A what does Nagel mean by saying that the two types of imagination (perceptual and sympathetic) are “independent”?
- presumably this: we can simultaneously imagine<sub>p</sub>  $p$  and imagine<sub>s</sub>  $q$ , 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<sub>S</sub> that one is seeing a ripe tomato seems to involve (at least): forming an image of a ripe tomato
  - imagining<sub>P</sub> 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



# question C



- C does this account (or one like it) succeed in explaining away the apparent contingency?
- if there is just one relevant type of imagination then the bit about “the independence of the disparate types of imagination” is not part of the correct explanation
  - Hill: we imagine the impossible (e.g. seeming to seeing a tomato without being in R) because a brain mechanism “splices together” two images
  - but what does “splicing together” mean, and what are the things that are spliced together?

# digression on images

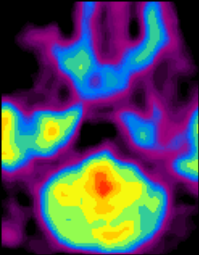


- distinguish three things that might be meant by a “mental image” of a red ripe tomato
  - a) a red patch that is “before one’s mind” when one imagines a tomato
  - b) a neural representation of what one is imagining
  - c) a neural representation of what one is imagining that is in important respects like an image or picture
- there are no mental images of the **a**-kind (recall Smart on after-images)
- there are (presumably) mental images of the **b**-kind
- it is a difficult empirical question whether there are mental images of the **c**-kind (see Hill, n. 7, for some references to empirical work)

# digression on images



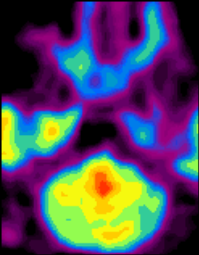
- but imagining a red ripe tomato is a bit like seeing a picture (image) of a tomato!
- that's because seeing is like imagining (forming an image), and a *red ripe tomato* and a *picture of a tomato* are similar
- it doesn't follow that the neural representation of a tomato is like a picture



# back to question C



- what are the things that are spliced together?
- presumably the *neural representations* of (e.g.) seeming to see a tomato, and of the scanner showing the absence of R
- what does “splicing together” mean?
- presumably: combining to form a larger representation of (e.g.) seeming to see a tomato while the scanner shows the absence of R
- but it’s hard to see why this speculation is doing any work in explaining why imagination is an unreliable guide to possibility
- in any case, can’t one imagine that one sees red without being in R—and without one’s brain being scanned?



# back to question C



- Hill's main thought has little to do with conjectures about neural mechanisms
- it's simply this: Kripke's claim that we can't imagine *water* without H<sub>2</sub>O (only a water *lookalike* without H<sub>2</sub>O), or *heat* without mke (only something that *feels like heat* without mke), is suspicious
- Hill does briefly address the question of why this doesn't lead to a "radical modal skepticism" in sect. V
- he claims that the class of "modal intuitions" impugned by his arguments is "highly restricted"
- but he admits that the question "deserves a great deal more attention"

# Minds and Machines

spring 2003

Wrapup: theories of  
consciousness



# “Consciousness and its place in nature”

- three arguments:
  - 1) the explanatory argument (Levine)
  - 2) the conceivability argument (Kripke)
  - 3) the knowledge argument (Jackson)

# the explanatory argument

- 1) physical accounts explain at most structure and function
- 2) explaining structure and function does not suffice to explain consciousness
- 3) no physical account can explain consciousness  
(physicalism might be true, though)

# the conceivability argument

- 1) it is conceivable (imaginable) that there are zombies
- 2) if it is conceivable that there are zombies, it is (metaphysically) possible that there are zombies, and so physicalism is false
- 3) physicalism is false

# the knowledge argument

- 1) there are truths about consciousness that are not deducible from physical truths
- 2) if there are truths about consciousness that are not deducible from physical truths, then physicalism is false
- 3) physicalism is false

# a taxonomy of theories

- type-A materialism (a priori physicalism)
- type-B materialism (a posteriori physicalism)
- type-C materialism (a priori mysterianism)
- type-D dualism (interactionism)
- type-E dualism (epiphenomenalism)
- type-F monism (panprotopsychism)

# type-A materialism (a priori physicalism)

- Mary doesn't learn anything new
- zombies aren't conceivable

# type-B materialism (a posteriori physicalism)

- Mary does learn a new fact
- zombies are conceivable
- but this doesn't show that physicalism is false

# type-C materialism (a priori mysterianism)

- (human) Mary does learn a new fact
- zombies are conceivable (by us)

but:

- idealized Mary doesn't learn anything
- zombies are not ideally conceivable



# type-D dualism (interactionism)

- physicalism is false, and the physical is not “causally closed”

# type-E dualism (epiphenomenalism)

- physicalism is false, but the mental (or, specifically) consciousness) never causes anything physical

# type-F monism (panprotopsychism)

- the physical aspects of reality concern its extrinsic, relational nature
- the phenomenal aspects of reality concern its intrinsic, nonrelational nature
- fundamental particles have phenomenal (or “protophenomenal”) properties
- consciousness all the way down!