

Argument on the implication's of Nagel's Bat thought experiment. Mostly between TecnoTut (in red) and Death Monkey (in blue). Philosophy Forum, Mar-Apr, 2007

litkey wrote on May 3, 2006 - 07:07 AM:

T.Nagel says that it is epistemologically possible to know all Physical facts about a Bat, however even knowing these facts, we are informed that there must be something-that-it-is-like to be a Bat. For me this is true, trivially true perhaps, but why need it deny or place physicalism in any doubt? Without the bats particular physiology it would not experience what-its-like, that is, its mental life is supervened on the physical.

On the front closer to us, postulating "qualia" seems strange- why don't people just say it-is-something-it's like to be human: music, colour, love etc., these are P facts about having a particular physiology: just like we can't know about the bat, the bat can't know about us. We aren't zombies, it is just true that it is something-that-it-is like- to have a mental life. Indeed, we even speak using such words " i feel..." etc., Perhaps the only important thing is that the mental is a different property to the physical. But that is just trivially true perhaps- "so what?" might be the response.

TecnoTut wrote on Mar 21, 2007 - 02:49 PM:

[quote=litkey]T.Nagel says that it is epistemologically possible to know all Physical facts about a Bat, however even knowing these facts, we are informed that there must be something-that-it-is-like to be a Bat. For me this is true, trivially true perhaps, but why need it deny or place physicalism in any doubt? Without the bats particular physiology it would not experience what-its-like, that is, its mental life is supervened on the physical. [/quote]

Well, if the "physiology" (e.g. brain state) is nothing but the experience, and vice versa, then it seems that if you know the physiology, you should know the mental state. Furthermore, it seems that it's not by virtue that we know what the experience is like [i]just by[/i] having the physiology occur -- but rather, one must have the experience as well -- so it is the experience that is the real direct cause of our knowledge of the experience. Third, Nagel's bat implies that there are subjective entities (viz. experiences), or at least subjective knowledge, whereas physicalism is a claim that all entities/knowledge is (ontologically) objective.

[quote]On the front closer to us, postulating "qualia" seems strange- why don't people just say it-is-something-it's like to be human: music, colour, love etc., these are P facts about having a particular physiology: just like we can't know about the bat, the bat can't know about us. We aren't zombies, it is just true that it is something-that-it-is like- to have a mental life. Indeed, we even speak using such words " i feel..." etc., Perhaps the only important thing is that the mental is a different property to the physical. But that is just trivially true perhaps- "so what?" might be the response. [/quote]

I agree. It doesn't bother me to say mental properties are distinct from physical ones, but it seems to bother a lot of physicalists.

Note to all: dualists agree that experiences depend or are caused by physical-functional states. They just deny that just because they depend on those physical states, then that means they are those physical states. Dualists simply say that the effect (mental state) is distinct from its cause (physical state).

Death Monkey wrote on Mar 22, 2007 - 07:51 AM:

I really don't see a problem. Physicalism requires that all facts about the world be physical facts. The premise of the thought experiment is that we know all the physical facts about the bat. Thus if physicalism is true, it follows that we know all facts about the bat.

So there is something that it is like to be a bat. So what? Physicalism does not have any problem with this. Physicalism would just require that whatever that "what it is like" is, it is something physical.

Nor do I see any problem if you then go on to say that even though we know all physical facts about the bat, we don't know what it is like to be the bat. This would only be a problem if you somehow asserted that "what it is like to be the bat" is actually a set of facts about the world. It does not seem to me that this assertion makes any sense.

Put another way, physicalism does not claim that all forms of knowledge are knowledge of facts about the world (physical or otherwise). You can define "knowledge" in all sorts of ways. Certainly the kind of knowledge being referred to when you talk about "knowing what an experience is like", is not knowledge in the sense of a justified belief. It is something else, which you are choosing to call "knowledge".

Of course, this special kind of non-fact knowledge may [i]include[/i] factual knowledge, such as relationships between different experiences, or correlations between experiences and other various mental processes. But if physicalism is correct, then the person who knows all physical facts about the bat would know all of these facts. All he is really missing is the memory of having had the various experiences in question. No amount of factual knowledge is going to magically cause those memories to appear in his brain, nor provide the structural mechanism needed to properly process such memories.

I suppose a dualist could attack this position in two ways:

1) He could argue that the knowledge of "what it is like" [i]does[/i] include [i]factual[/i] knowledge which is not of physical facts. But that would just be begging the question.

2) He could argue that there is something more to "knowledge of what the experience is like" than just factual knowledge and the memory of having had the experience. In that case it is up to him to explain what this additional component is, why he thinks it exists, and why its existence would be incompatible with physicalism.

DM

Verbum Sapienti wrote on Mar 25, 2007 - 06:08 AM:

Nagel's Bat is an example of the so-called "knowledge problem". Another example is Frank Jackson's "What Mary Didn't Know". Both thought experiments are aimed at essentially the same issue - if physicalism is true, then we should expect to be able to know "what it is like to be a bat" / "what it is like to see red" simply by accumulating all the relevant physical data.

The claim here is not that, if physicalism is true, only what is expressed in explicitly physical language is an item of knowledge. It is that, if physicalism is true, then if you know everything expressed or expressible in explicitly physical language, you know everything.

In the classic 1986 paper by Frank Jackson entitled "What Mary Didn't Know", we are asked to consider poor Mary who has been confined to a black-and-white room since birth, is educated through black-and-white books and through lectures relayed on black-and-white television. In this way she learns everything there is to know about the physical nature of the world. She knows all the physical facts about us and our environment, in a wide sense of 'physical' which includes everything in completed physics, chemistry, and neurophysiology, and all there is to know about the causal and relational facts consequent upon all this, including of course functional roles. If physicalism is true (according to Jackson) Mary knows all there is to know.

But what happens if we let Mary out of her black-and-white room, and she sees a red object for the first time? Will she say "ohhh, so that's what red looks like!" which implies (according to Jackson) that she did NOT know all there is to know (in which case, according to Jackson, physicalism is false), or would she say "oh yes, that's red, I already know what red looks like!"?

Our basic intuitions tell (most of) us that Mary learns something new the first time she sees red – but it is important to understand why our intuitions are telling us this. A useful tool in aiding our understanding is to consider RoboMary (RM).

We assume RM is equipped with an array of discrete visual receptors, such that she can receive input information about the world around her based on the normal visible electromagnetic spectrum.

There are at least two ways in which RM could “perceive” the colour red.

First there is the “brute force empirical” way : Simply accept the current entire visual phenomenal field as an input, and compare this input with stored representations (“memories”) of previously observed visual phenomenal fields, without analysing the field in any other way. If a match is found with previously stored fields which she has classified as examples of “red” fields, then the current field is also designated “red”. Let’s call this design version RM1.

Then there is the “microanalytical” way : Analyse the microphysical properties of each discrete visual photoreceptor. For example, we may define “red” in the sense that an output of 3.65 microvolts from the visual photoreceptor corresponds to stimulation by “red” photons. In this case, whenever RM measures an output of 3.65 microvolts from most of the photoreceptors in a given group of photoreceptors, she then “knows” that this group of photoreceptor is “looking” at a red object (ie there is a red object in her field of view). We shall call this design version RM2.

(As an aside at this point - Humans clearly use the “brute force empirical” RM1-type method.)

Now we can ask : How can RM2 “know what it is like to see red”, even before she has seen red for the first time? RM2 simply needs to learn that an output of 3.65 microvolts from a visual receptor corresponds to stimulation by “red” photons. This is “seeing” red as far as RM2 is concerned. Thus, RM2 (because she uses a microanalytical approach rather than a brute force empirical approach) can know what it is like to see red, even though she has never seen red.

But what about RM1? Can RM1 know what it is like to see red, even before she has seen red for the first time? This is not so simple. What is needed in this case is that, in order for RM1 to “know what it is like to see red” she must have access to stored representations of previously observed visual phenomenal fields, at least one of which is a red field. In the case of a robot it is conceivable that this could be achieved by uploading such stored representations from another almost identically constructed robot (which possesses such representations).

But how could we do this in the case of humans? Somehow we would need to “implant” the memory of “seeing red” into human Mary’s brain – an information transfer analogous to the RM1 case above. If we could do this, then the first time she actually sees red she would say “oh, yes, I remember that colour.....”. But we haven’t the faintest idea how we could achieve such an information transfer in the human case. We certainly cannot do it by reducing the information to a series of letters and numbers which Mary reads off the page. In principle the memory of “seeing red” could be implanted in Mary’s brain, but we have no idea how this could be achieved in practice. And [b]this is precisely why our intuitions tell us that Mary cannot know what it is like to see red simply by learning, via conventional means, all there is to know about seeing red.[/b]

If you are not convinced : Another way of looking at this is to construct a human scenario similar to the RM2 case – imagine Mary really is completely colour blind (we shall call her CBMary). CBMary really can see only in black and white. But her eyes are fully functioning – the problem is in the neural processing of signals from her retina. We perform microsurgery, and we are able to implant a device which converts the signals such that when her eyes are trained on a red object, a figure of “3.65” is output and projected onto a small screen implanted into her spectacles. CBMary continues to see only in black and white, but by glancing up at this screen she will know if there is a red object in her field of view.

Now let's ask the question again – can CBMary “know what it is like to see red” before she has ever actually seen a red object?

Yes, of course she can. She simply needs to imagine seeing 3.65 projected onto her implanted spectacle screen.

Kali Yuga wrote on Mar 25, 2007 - 07:04 PM:

For what it's worth: Frank Jackson rejected the "Knowledge Argument" around 1995 or so, and no longer holds that the "Mary's Room" thought experiment proves that epiphenomenalism is the case. (I believe he currently holds that it is a misleading intuition.)

Personally, I think it's simply the case that humans do not happen to have the same neurological apparatus as a bat, and that no collection of words is capable of rearranging the actual physical neurons in our brains in such a way as to fully simulate the cognitive experiences of a bat. Expecting a human to be able to simulate the consciousness of a bat would be like expecting an eel to play the piano -- the required physical apparatus just isn't there.

So the problem is not that the "what it is like to be X" is somehow non-physical, it is that the equipment required to generate the relevant experiences are not present in the human.

TecnoTut wrote on Mar 25, 2007 - 07:13 PM:

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So the problem is not that the "what it is like to be X" is somehow non-physical, it is that the equipment required to generate the relevant experiences are not present in the human.[/quote]

I don't have the physical apparatus to fly like a bat, but I do know what flying is, and what a flying bat is. So just because I lack some other creature's physical apparatus, it doesn't follow I can't know something about that creature. With mental states, things are different. The physical apparatus plays a role because the experiences are subjective by nature, and the physical apparatus is the only thing that can facilitate that subjective state. Nagel's point is that no amount of objective scientific knowledge will allow you know the subjective mental states of the bat. As he said, the subjective is no reducible to the objective. Nagel isn't really concerned with physicalism, but rather, with objectivity and subjectivity.

Verbum Sapienti wrote on Mar 25, 2007 - 08:01 PM:

[quote=Kali Yuga]For what it's worth: Frank Jackson rejected the "Knowledge Argument" around 1995 or so, and no longer holds that the "Mary's Room" thought experiment proves that epiphenomenalism is the case. (I believe he currently holds that it is a misleading intuition.)[/quote]

If Jackson indeed believes that our intuitions are incorrect in the Mary case, I agree with him. We intuitively believe that Mary must learn something new the first time she sees red simply because we cannot think of any way that she might know "what it is like to see red" before she actually sees red for the first time. Though knowing what it is like to see red before one actually sees red is not literally physically

impossible, it is (given our current technological abilities) practically physically impossible (which is what our intuition is based on).

Death Monkey wrote on Mar 28, 2007 - 01:22 PM:

[b]TecnoTut,[/b]

[quote]I don't have the physical apparatus to fly like a bat, but I do know what flying is, and what a flying bat is. So just because I lack some other creature's physical apparatus, it doesn't follow I can't know something about that creature.[/quote]

I don't understand this comparison. Who is suggesting that we can't know anything about bats just because we can't know what it is like to be one?

[quote]With mental states, things are different. The physical apparatus plays a role because the experiences are subjective by nature, and the physical apparatus is the only thing that can facilitate that subjective state.[/quote]

You are comparing apples and oranges. In the case of the flying bat you are talking about knowing facts about flying bats. But in the case of consciousness you are talking about "what it is like to be a bat". If you define this to include only knowing facts about bats, then the entire argument becomes nothing more than begging the question by assuming that the person who knows all physical facts about the bat does not know what it is like to be a bat. If you define it to include more than just knowing facts about bats, then the argument does not say anything about the possibility of physicalism, because physicalism does not claim that knowledge of physical facts can provide you with whatever this extra bit is.

[quote]Nagel's point is that no amount of objective scientific knowledge will allow you know know the subjective mental states of the bat. As he said, the subjective is no reducible to the objective. Nagel isn't really concerned with physicalism, but rather, with objectivity and subjectivity.[/quote]

That's fine, but this means that the thought experiment amounts to nothing more than assuming some form of dualism, and then drawing conclusions from that assumption.

DM

TecnoTut wrote on Mar 31, 2007 - 02:10 PM:

[quote=Death Monkey]I don't understand this comparison. Who is suggesting that we can't know anything about bats just because we can't know what it is like to be one?[/quote]

That wasn't the suggestion. The suggestion was that the reason we don't know what it is like to be a bat isn't because we lack the physical apparatus that causes the event at issue (bat experience). It's also because we don't have the experience itself, which is subjective. It is the subjectivity of experience, which is facilitated by the physical process and apparatus, that tells us what the experience is like: in other words, experience is the best teacher. If you had the physical process, but not the experience, then you cannot know what the experience is like. It cannot be because we lack the physical apparatus or process that causes the event at issue because the fact that we lack wings (a physical apparatus) that causes an event (flying) does not prevent us from knowing what flying is. However, unlike a flying -- a physical event that can be understood without having to fly -- experiences cannot be understood unless one has the experience.

[quote]You are comparing apples and oranges. In the case of the flying bat you are talking about knowing facts about flying bats. But in the case of consciousness you are talking about "what it is like to be a bat". If you define this to include only knowing facts about bats, then the entire argument becomes nothing more than begging the question by assuming that the person who knows all physical facts about the bat does not know what it is like to be a bat. If you define it to include more than just knowing facts about bats, then the argument does not say anything about the possibility of physicalism, because physicalism does not claim that knowledge of physical facts can provide you with whatever this extra bit is.[/quote]

Knowing "what it is like to be a bat" is knowing facts. It's just not a physical fact. There's a fallacy of equivocation among physicalists when they limit knowing facts to knowing physical facts.

Death Monkey wrote on Apr 1, 2007 - 01:20 AM:

[b]TecnoTut,[/b]

[quote]It is the subjectivity of experience, which is facilitated by the physical process and apparatus, that tells us what the experience is like: in other words, experience is the best teacher. If you had the physical process, but not the experience, then you cannot know what the experience is like.[/quote]

Perhaps. But can you provide any supporting evidence for this?

For example, let's say we were to modify the "what Mary knows" thought experiment as follows. Mary has never seen any color, but with her is a super-robot which knows all physical facts about color vision. It performs surgery on Mary's brain, modifying it to the exact state that it [i]would[/i] have been if Mary had seen colors in the past.

So now does Mary know what it is like to see color? According to physicalism, she would. You seem to be suggesting that she would not. That's fine, but again, where is the evidence to support this claim. There is tremendous evidence from the fields of neuroscience and psychology to strongly indicate that she would.

[quote]However, unlike a flying -- a physical event that can be understood without having to fly -- experiences cannot be understood unless one has the experience.[/quote]

What do you mean "understood"? Before the question was about "knowing what it is like". Now you are talking about "understanding" the experience. The physicalist would argue that the person who knows all physical facts about bats [i]would[/i] understand [i]all[/i] of the bats experiences. At least, he would understand them in the sense that we understand flying.

[quote]Knowing "what it is like to be a bat" is knowing facts. It's just not a physical fact. There's a fallacy of equivocation among physicalists when they limit knowing facts to knowing physical facts.[/quote]

No, there is no equivocation whatsoever. It is a [i]claim[/i] which physicalism makes, that all facts about the world are physical facts. That is a claim which may or may not be true. If the claim is not true, then physicalism is false.

That said, if by "knowing what it is like", you are referring [i]only[/i] to knowledge of facts, then the entire issue of whether lacking some physical apparatus would prevent that knowledge becomes irrelevant, because the physicalists do not claim that we would lack any knowledge of facts due to lack of physical apparatus. Indeed, physicalism claims that in this case, the person who knows all physical facts about bats [i]would[/i] know what it is like to be a bat.

Maybe physicalism is wrong, but thought experiments which simply start by assuming that it is, don't really get us anywhere.

DM

TecnoTut wrote on Apr 1, 2007 - 07:16 AM:

[quote=Death Monkey][b]TecnoTut,[/b]

Perhaps. But can you provide any supporting evidence for this?

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this claim. There is tremendous evidence from the fields of neuroscience and psychology to strongly indicate that she would.[/quote]

Yes, Mary knows what it is like to see colors. I do not suggest otherwise because I, like Nagel, concede that mental experience are causally dependant on certain brain processes. But the pre-release brain modification still causes the mental experience of colors. Thus it is the experience per se that gives Mary the knowledge of colors. Nagel doesn't deny knowledge of colors causally depend on brain states, he just denies knowledge of physical facts entails knowledge of phenomenal facts. He's not even interested at all about the debate of physicalism: "...I believe that there is a necessary connection in both directions between the physical and the mental, but that it cannot be discovered a priori. Opinion is strongly divided on the credibility of some kind of functionalist reductionism, and I won't go through my reasons for being on the antireductionist side of that debate." That quote is usually interpreted in a conceptual dualists sense, not a ontological or property dualists sense.

[quote]What do you mean "understood"? Before the question was about "knowing what it is like". Now you are talking about "understanding" the experience. The physicalist would argue that the person who knows all physical facts about bats [i]would[/i] understand [i]all[/i] of the bats experiences. At least, he would understand them in the sense that we understand flying.[/quote]

Bat flight can be understood without us needing bat wings, whereas bat experiences cannot be understood/known without having the bat experience. Further, Nagel argues "To the extent that I could look and behave like a wasp or a bat without changing my fundamental structure, my experiences would not be anything like the experiences of those animals. On the other hand, it is doubtful that any meaning can be attached to the supposition that I should possess the internal neurophysiological constitution of a bat. Even if I could by gradual degrees be transformed into a bat, nothing in my present constitution enables me to imagine what the experiences of such a future stage of myself thus metamorphosed would be like. The best evidence would come from the experiences of bats, if we only knew what they were like."

[quote]No, there is no equivocation whatsoever. It is a [i]claim[/i] which physicalism makes, that all facts about the world are physical facts. That is a claim which may or may not be true. If the claim is not true, then physicalism is false.[/quote]

I agree with you that it is a claim. But it is still a claim that [i]equivocates[/i] between knowledge of facts and knowledge of physical facts.

Death Monkey wrote on Apr 1, 2007 - 08:01 AM:

[b]TechnoTut,[/b]

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This is clearly not true. She still has not experienced seeing color. At best you could say that she will then experience remembering having seen color, but that is a different (if similar) experience.

[quote]Nagel doesn't deny knowledge of colors causally depend on brain states, he just denies knowledge of physical facts entails knowledge of phenomenal facts. He's not even interested at all about the debate of physicalism: "...I believe that there is a necessary connection in both directions between the physical and the mental, but that it cannot be discovered a priori. Opinion is strongly divided on the credibility of some kind of functionalist reductionism, and I won't go through my reasons for being on the antireductionist side of that debate." That quote is usually interpreted in a conceptual dualists sense, not a ontological or property dualists sense.[/quote]

I really don't see your point. I was addressing the use of the thought experiment as an argument against physicalism. Whether or not it was Nagel's [i]intent[/i] that the thought experiment be used that way, has no relevance to anything I said.

Outside of that context, all I would say on the matter is that, unlike Nagel, I see absolutely no reason to assume that a person who knows all the physical facts about a bat would not also know what it is like to be a bat (understanding here that we are strictly talking about knowledge of facts). And of course, if we [i]don't[/i] start off by making that assumption, the entire thought experiment goes right out the window.

[quote]Bat flight can be understood without us needing bat wings, whereas bat experiences cannot be understood/known without having the bat experience.[/quote]
So you claim. Where is the support for this claim?

[quote]Further, Nagel argues "To the extent that I could look and behave like a wasp or a bat without changing my fundamental structure, my experiences would not be anything like the experiences of those animals. On the other hand, it is doubtful that any meaning can be attached to the supposition that I should possess the internal neurophysiological constitution of a bat. Even if I could by gradual degrees be transformed into a bat, nothing in my present constitution enables me to imagine what the experiences of such a future stage of myself thus metamorphosed would be like. The best evidence would come from the experiences of bats, if we only knew what they were like."[/quote]
That's all very nice, but it is nothing more than intuitively motivated speculation.

[quote]I agree with you that it is a claim. But it is still a claim that equivocates between knowledge of facts and knowledge of physical facts.[/quote]
No, it does not. It still allows for there to be non-physical facts. It still allows for there to be a distinction between physical and non-physical facts. It just claims that the intersection of the set of non-physical facts and the set of facts about this world, is the empty set.

Facts about abstract constructs are non-physical facts. The fact that under standard arithmetic, $1 + 1 = 2$, is not a physical fact. It is also not a fact about this world.

Facts about hypothetic things which exist but which do not physically interact with us, would also be non-physical facts. Again, physicalism does not equivocate by trying to claim that such facts are also physical facts. It simply claims that no such things actually exist as part of this world.
DM

TecnoTut wrote on Apr 2, 2007 - 01:31 PM:

[quote=Death Monkey][b]TechnoTut,[/b]
This is clearly not true. She still has not experienced seeing color. At best you could say that she will then experience remembering having seen color, but that is a different (if similar) experience.[/quote]
How is she not having the experience if the brain state causally responsible for causing the experience is occurring? That makes no sense.

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You need to be reminded that the issue here is not physicalism. It's about Nagel's bat argument, and what it proves/disproves. If people thought Nagel's argument is against physicalism, then they need to think again. As I said before, it's about subjective states and objective states.

[quote]So you claim. Where is the support for this claim? [/quote]
The support for this claim is the fact that no one knows what it's like to be a bat. Either people know what it's like to be a bat, or they don't. You'd have us believe it's the former?

[quote]That's all very nice, but it is nothing more than intuitively motivated speculation. [/quote]
Well it's intuitive, but it's not speculative. It's a rational argument, and just because there isn't an empirical experiment to prove or disprove the claim, it doesn't follow that it's just a guess. If you think thought

experiments are unreliable, then I'd like to see an argument why that is the case. The fact that there's no empirical test to support Nagel claim means absolutely nothing in diminishing his claim, and you have no argument to show otherwise.

[quote]It still allows for there to be non-physical facts.[/quote]

Not true. Mathematical facts pose a problem for physicalism. See:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abstract_object

IF you limit physical facts to facts with causal interactions, then that's not a problem for epiphenomenalism.

Death Monkey wrote on Apr 3, 2007 - 10:02 AM:

[b]TecnoTut,[/b]

[quote][quote]This is clearly not true. She still has not experienced seeing color. At best you could say that she will then experience remembering having seen color, but that is a different (if similar) experience.[/quote]

How is she not having the experience if the brain state causally responsible for causing the experience is occurring? That makes no sense.[/quote]

The brain process responsible for causing the experience of seeing color (or, in the case of physicalism, that [i]is[/i] the experience) [b]isn't[/b] occurring.

In the thought experiment I described, her brain has been modified to the state it would have been in had she seen color in the past. Her brain is not going to be in the state that actually corresponds to the experience of seeing color, until such time as she gets around to actually seeing color.

[quote]You need to be reminded that the issue here is not physicalism. It's about Nagel's bat argument, and what it proves/disproves. If people thought Nagel's argument is against physicalism, then they need to think again. As I said before, it's about subjective states and objective states.[/quote]

I disagree. Please read the opening post again. Whether or not the Nagel's bat thought experiment [i]in general[/i] is about physicalism, the fact of the matter is that the posts my own posts were made in response to [i>are[/i] about the impact and implications of that thought experiment on physicalism.

My points concerning the impact of Nagel's thought experiment on physicalism are 100% on topic. If you have a problem with the opening poster's bringing up that issue in the first place, I suggest you take it up with him.

[quote]Bat flight can be understood without us needing bat wings, whereas bat experiences cannot be understood/known without having the bat experience.

[quote]So you claim. Where is the support for this claim?[/quote]

The support fo this claim is the fact that no one knows what it's like to be a bat.[/quote]

No, it isn't. The fact that nobody knows what it is like to be a bat no more supports the claim that bat experiences cannot be known without having the experience, than it does the claim that bat experiences cannot be known for any other reason, or for that matter, the claim that they cannot be known at all.

That nobody knows what it is like to be a bat is simply a fact. The claim that one must experience being a bat in order to know what it is like to be a bat, is one possible explanation for that fact. Simply citing the fact does not constitute supporting evidence for the claim. What you are doing here is no different than a Christian citing the existence of the world as a supporting evidence for the claim that God created it.

[quote]Either people know what it's like to be a bat, or they don't. You'd have us believe it's the former?[/quote]

No. Nothing that I said in any way suggests that I would.

[quote][quote]That's all very nice, but it is nothing more than intuitively motivated speculation.[/quote]

Well it's intuitive, but it's not speculative. It's a rational argument, and just because there isn't an empirical experiment to prove or disprove the claim, it doesn't follow that it's just a guess. If you think thought experiments are unreliable, then I'd like to see an argument why that is the case. The fact that there's no empirical test to support Nagel's claim means absolutely nothing in diminishing his claim, and you have no argument to show otherwise. [/quote]

There is nothing there to diminish. Rational arguments cannot tell us anything that does not follow from the premises of the argument. It is the premises of Nagel's argument which I am saying is intuitively motivated speculation.

[quote][quote]It still allows for there to be non-physical facts. [/quote]

Not true. Mathematical facts pose a problem for physicalism. See:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abstract_object [/quote]

Some Physicalists may find them problematic. I certainly do not. You are going to need a lot more than a vague quote from a Wikipedia page to support the assertion that physicalism does not allow for non-physical facts. It is not even clear what exactly you are asserting here. Are you saying that physicalists claim that mathematical facts are physical facts? Or that they don't believe there are mathematical facts at all?

I would like to see some sort of support for the assertion that physicalism claims that facts about analytic constructs are either physical facts, or are not facts at all. At best, this sounds like an overgeneralization of some extreme form of physicalism, and at worst, a blatant strawman argument.

And of course, even if it did, that still would not be equivocation. Perhaps the problem here is that you do not understand what equivocation is? For physicalists to be equivocating between physical facts and facts, they would have to not only be claiming that all facts are physical facts, but furthermore they would have to be claiming that there is no difference between the definitions of the two terms. In other words, that facts are physical facts [i]by definition[/i] of what the term "fact" means. Physicalists do not make any such claim. On the contrary, they specify exactly what additional criteria a fact must meet in order to constitute a physical fact. If they then claim that all actual facts meet this additional criteria, then it immediately follows that what they are doing is asserting that all actual facts meet these additional criteria. This is clearly not the same as the logical fallacy of simply ignoring that the criteria are different.

Your accusation that physicalists equivocate between "physical facts" and "facts", is equivalent to asserting that we use the term "physical fact" when we actually mean "facts", and or that we use the term "facts" when we actually mean "physical facts". You have not provided any support for such an accusation.

DM

TecnoTut wrote on Apr 4, 2007 - 12:12 PM:

DM,

The phenomenal character (qualia) of the experience is needed to understand what it is like to be a bat. Whether one learns what that phenomenal character is like through the experience itself, or with a memory of the experience, is not the issue. Perhaps my wording was off when I said the experience is necessary. But what I meant to say is that the qualia is necessary. Bat phenomenal memory still contains qualia. However we may access qualia, whether it's through the memory of an occurrent or non-occurrent experience, or through the experience itself, Nagel's point still holds: the phenomenal character or phenomenal facts ascertained from knowing what it is like to be a bat is necessary in order to know what it is like to be a bat.

Death Monkey wrote on Apr 4, 2007 - 01:48 PM:

[b]TecnoTut,[/b]

[quote]The phenomenal character (qualia) of the experience is needed to understand what it is like to be a bat. Whether one learns what that phenomenal character is like through the experience itself, or with a memory of the experience, is not the issue. [/quote]

Actually, it is [i]exactly[/i] the issue that I made the post we are discussing in reference to. You are now agreeing with me that it is [i]not[/i], in fact, necessary to actually have had the experience in order to know what it is like. Instead, all that is necessary is that you have the memory of having had that experience. That was the point I was making.

[quote]Perhaps my wording was off when I said the experience is necessary. But what I meant to say is that the qualia is necessary. Bat phenomenal memory still contains qualia. However we may access qualia, whether it's through the memory of an occurrent or non-occurrent experience, or through the experience itself, Nagel's point still holds: the phenomenal character or phenomenal facts ascertained from knowing what it is like to be a bat is necessary in order to know what it is like to be a bat.[/quote]

That is trivial. All you have said here is that you cannot know what the experience is like without possessing something which knowing what the experience is like would provide you with. It would be like me saying that you cannot know how to spell a word without knowing whether the word has the letter 'x' in it.

DM

TecnoTut wrote on Apr 4, 2007 - 02:00 PM:

[quote=Death Monkey]That is trivial. All you have said here is that you cannot know what the experience is like without possessing something which knowing what the experience is like would provide you with. It would be like me saying that you cannot know how to spell a word without knowing whether the word has the letter 'x' in it.[/quote]

Whether you think it's trivial is not the issue. And the reason why you think it's trivial is because the point is true. So the Nagel argument still stands: one will not know about bat subjective qualia simply by knowing the cognitive functions (objective physical processes) that cause the mental experience or the memory of the experience. One must know subjective bat qualia in order to know what it is like to be a bat. Nagel's point remains untouched.

Death Monkey wrote on Apr 4, 2007 - 02:36 PM:

[b]TecnoTut,[/b]

[quote]Whether you think it's trivial is not the issue. And the reason why you think it's trivial is because the point is true. So the Nagel argument still stands: one will not know about bat subjective qualia simply by knowing the cognitive functions (objective physical processes) that cause the mental experience or the memory of the experience.[/quote]

Now you are making an unjustified leap. What I said was trivial is that you cannot know what the experience is like without also knowing something that knowing what the experience is like, provides you with. Keep in mind that we are talking about knowledge of facts here, and not some other sort of definition of knowledge.

You have not presented, nor cited in Nagel's work, any support for the claim that knowing all of the physical facts about how the bat's brain works will not also provide you with knowledge of any of the facts that constitute knowing what it is like to be a bat.

[quote]One must know subjective bat qualia in order to know what it is like to be a bat. Nagel's point remains untouched.[/quote]

If that point is that knowing all physical facts about bats will not provide you with knowledge of bat qualia, then please provide the justification for this assertion. I certainly see no reason to simply assume that this is the case. Nor do I see anything in your posts or Nagel's argument, which justifies making such an assertion.

DM

TecnoTut wrote on Apr 5, 2007 - 02:06 PM:

DM,

The argument is quite simple. Knowledge of the physical world concerns the structure and function of the physical world. Bat qualia is neither knowledge of function, nor structure, but of phenomenal feelings. Therefore, knowledge of a bat's brain doesn't provide us knowledge of bat qualia.

VS,

Pretty much. Something close to that. I hesitate saying "yes" because a zombie bat is a bat, yet it doesn't know what it is like to be a bat.

Death Monkey wrote on Apr 6, 2007 - 02:57 PM:

[b]TecnoTut,[/b]

[quote]The argument is quite simple. Knowledge of the physical world concerns the structure and function of the physical world. Bat qualia is neither knowledge of function, nor structure, but of phenomenal feelings. Therefore, knowledge of a bat's brain doesn't provide us knowledge of bat qualia.[/quote]

Thank you for putting it so succinctly. To begin with, I think you may have misspoken. Qualia is not knowledge at all, so saying that it is neither knowledge of function nor structure, really doesn't add anything. Nor does it allow you to draw the conclusion you have.

I am not certain, but I think you meant to say that knowledge of bat qualia is neither knowledge of function nor structure. This would at least allow you to logically draw the conclusion you have. But if this is your argument, then clearly your argument is taking as a premise that qualia are neither function nor structure. Can you provide any reason why anybody should accept this premise as being likely to be true?

If you did not misspeak, then your argument is clearly unsound, as your conclusion is not supported by your premise.

DM

TecnoTut wrote on Apr 6, 2007 - 09:30 PM:

[quote=DM]But if this is your argument, then clearly your argument is taking as a premise that qualia are neither function nor structure. Can you provide any reason why anybody should accept this premise as being likely to be true?[/quote]

Well, when I undergo a certain sensation, it doesn't seem to imply anything about structure or function of the physical world. It's just that: a sensation/feeling. Thought experiments regarding absent qualia and inverted qualia imply that the structure and functional aspects of the world can remain fixed while qualia can be absent or inverted.

Death Monkey wrote on Apr 7, 2007 - 08:28 AM:

[b]TecnoTut,[/b]

[quote][quote]But if this is your argument, then clearly your argument is taking as a premise that qualia are neither function nor structure. Can you provide any reason why anybody should accept this premise as being likely to be true?[/quote]

Well, when I undergo a certain sensation, it doesn't seem to imply anything about structure or function of the physical world.[/quote]

It doesn't? I disagree. When I look at something and draw conclusions about the objects I am looking at from what I have seen, am I not implicitly assuming that my sensations imply something about the structure and function of the physical world?

You can speculate that there may be aspects of the sensation that do not constitute structure or function of the physical world, but to cite as a justification for such an assertion the claim that your sensations do not seem to imply anything about structure and function of the physical world, is a complete non-starter, because it simply isn't true. Our sensations [i]do[i] seem to imply all sorts of things about the structure and function of the physical world.

I can only assume that you are referring here to some specific aspect of your sensations. If this is the case, then please specify the aspects you are referring to. I cannot think of any aspects of my sensations that do not seem to imply anything about structure and function of the physical world.

[quote]It's just that: a sensation/feeling. Thought experiments regarding absent qualia and inverted qualia imply that the structure and functional aspects of the world can remain fixed while qualia can be absent or inverted.[/quote]

No, those thought experiments [i]assume[/i] that. They take it as a premise, and then draw conclusions from it. I have yet to see [i>any[/i] thought experiment which starts with premises that don't implicitly assume that physicalism is false, and manage to conclude that qualia can be inverted or omitted without altering physical structure and function.

DM

TecnoTut wrote on Apr 10, 2007 - 12:33 PM:

[quote]When I look at something and draw conclusions about the objects I am looking at from what I have seen, am I not implicitly assuming that my sensations imply something about the structure and function of the physical world?[/quote]

Can I logically deduce the feeling of bat pains from my physical knowledge of bats? I don't think so.

Thought experiments don't simply assume physicalism is wrong. Our [i>ability[/i] to conceive the structure and function remaining fixed, yet qualia being absent or inverted is not an assumption. Granted, there's that issue of whether such an epistemological ability has ontological consequences, but no arguments have been presented to show why modal intuitions with respect to consciousness are unreliable.

Death Monkey wrote on Apr 10, 2007 - 03:06 PM:

[b]TecnoTut,[/b]

[quote][quote]When I look at something and draw conclusions about the objects I am looking at from what I have seen, am I not implicitly assuming that my sensations imply something about the structure and function of the physical world?[/quote]

Can I logically deduce the feeling of bat pains from my physical knowledge of bats? I don't think so.[/quote]

Well, given that your knowledge of how a bat's brain works is virtually nil, I really don't see your point.

[quote]Thought experiments don't simply assume physicalism is wrong. Our ability to conceive the structure and function remaining fixed, yet qualia being absent or inverted is not an assumption.[/quote]

But that alone is not sufficient to draw any conclusions. We all know perfectly well that when our knowledge of the issues in question is incomplete, it is quite easy to conceive of something that is actually not logically possible.

[quote]Granted, there's that issue of whether such an epistemological ability has ontological consequences, but no arguments have been presented to show why modal intuitions with respect to consciousness are unreliable.[/quote]

Even if I agreed with this claim (and I most definitely do not), so what? If you want to draw any conclusions from your "modal intuitions", then you must present some justification for claiming that they [i>are[/i] reliable. You can't just assume that they are reliable, and try to push off onto anybody who is not convinced by those arguments the burden of showing that they are unreliable.

DM