24.09 Minds and Machines  
Spring 2006

- access to slides
- externalism and self-knowledge
- see the slightly revised syllabus
- paper 2 topics on Friday

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Perception, Evolution, and the Mind-Body Problem
Donald D. Hoffman, Dept of Cog. Sci; UC Irvine, 12:00pm, this Friday, 46-3002

- Despite substantial efforts by many researchers, we still have no scientific theory of how brain activity can create, or be, conscious experience…This has led Colin McGinn, Steven Pinker and others to speculate that Homo sapiens lacks the concepts needed to formulate a scientific theory of the mind-body problem…Here I explore a solution to the mind-body problem that reverses the normal assumption: neural correlates of consciousness occur because consciousness creates neural activity, and indeed creates all objects and properties of the physical world, even down to subatomic particles…I also provide a brief mathematical disproof of the currently dominant approach to cognitive science and the mind-body problem—reductive functionalism.

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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—though; 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.

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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

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Putnam’s twin earth

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

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Putnam’s twin earth

...the oceans and lakes contain “XYZ”, which is a very different chemical kind from H₂O, although superficially like it at normal temperatures and pressures
“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):

**a posteriori** and **a priori**

- a proposition p is knowable **a priori** iff p is knowable “independently of experience”, “without empirical investigation”
- paradigm examples: 3²=9, vixens are foxes, either it’s raining or it isn’t

McKinsey’s argument - I

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

McKinsey’s argument - II

hence:

1. 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)

'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

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

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 $H_2O$
- that Jones drinks quickly conceptually implies that Jones drinks
- that Jones is a bachelor conceptually implies that Jones is male

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.
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?

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• read Tye, Nagel

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

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

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