

Marsilio's Reading Group

Led by	Marsilio Gagliano
Title	Thomas Nagel – What is it like to be a bat – Part II
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INTRODUCTION

Last week I began with the first sentence of the Nagel reading: "Consciousness is what makes the mind-body problem really intractable."

I pointed out that the mind-body problem has two major dimensions:

An ontological or metaphysical dimension about the teal nature of "things" like mind and a body,
and

An epistemological dimension about whether and how we might know something.

If you looked at last week's transcript, you find many metaphysical questions and statements. For example, the following quotations are ontological or metaphysical in nature:

- 1) "Is the mind a thing?"
- 2) "Is the human being a plain material object like all other objects in the universe?"
- 3) "Is Nagel a dualist in an ontological sense then?"
- 4) "My quick scanning suggests that Nagel reifies mind."
- 5) "Mind is not a thing, but something we do."

Alternatively, on the epistemological side of things, here are some relevant quotations:

- 1) "I think Nagel's point is that it is impossible to know about a first person experience other than our own."
- 2) "Isn't this all about first person privileged knowledge of inner states?"
- 3) "Nagel's point is that something can 'be' without us ever being able to comprehend that being - like trying to explain NFL rules to an ant."
- 4) "Can we even know what it's like to be us?"
- 5) "What do you mean by understand? Reduce to its constituents, and label them? Throw it up on a screen, like a film?"

In order to get a better grasp on what Nagel is arguing in our reading, note that he is pursuing above all an *epistemological question* and he hesitates to make any ontological or metaphysical assertions about minds or bodies.

Look at he left column on p. 328. He says: "What moral should be drawn from these reflections It would be a mistake to conclude that physicalism must be false It would be truer to say that physicalism is a position *we* cannot understand because we do not at present have any conception of how it might be true."

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Thus, he is not arguing that the metaphysical claim of physicalism (mind is just matter) is false; rather he is making an epistemological point, namely, we cannot understand at present how it could be true. His claim is about our knowledge, not the about the way things are.

To put it in other words, his thesis is about the relationship between certain kinds of explanations (reductive explanations) and the things they purport to explain.

So as we ended our discussion last week, I posed this question: what does it mean for an explanation to be reductive and what does a successful reductive explanation look like?

Before I open up the floor for discussion, however, I'd like to set the stage by pointing out a few things about the reading:

1) Nagel thinks that human beings are conscious so that statements such as "I am conscious" and "Other human beings are conscious" are true, even if we don't know exactly what it is like to be someone else;

2) Nagel is fairly generous in ascribing consciousness to other species of being. He says on p. 323, bottom right column: "I assume we all believe that bats have experience. After all, they are mammals, and there is no more doubt that they have experience than that mice or pigeons or whales have experience." He defends this assumption with a thought experiment involving intelligent Martians on p. 325 (left column top). And so he thinks statements like "bats are conscious" and "I am in a better position to know what it is like to be human than what it is like to be a bat" are true.

In other words, Nagel thinks that "There is a sense in which phenomenological facts are perfectly objective: one person can know or say of another what the quality of the other's experience is. They are subjective, however, in the sense that even this objective ascription of experience is possible only for someone sufficiently similar to the object of ascription to be able to adopt his point of view." (p. 325, bottom, right)

3) Nagel thinks that the basic problem with reductive theories of consciousness or "the subjective character of experience" is that this subjective element "is not captured by any of the familiar, recently devised reductive analyses of the mental, for all of them are logically compatible with its absence" (p. 323, left column, first full paragraph).

In other words, if an explanatory theory's truth is unaffected by the non-existence of what it claims to explain, something is wrong with the theory. This is the heart of his argument; we should talk about it some more. But first, let's clear about what it means for an explanation to be reductive and what a successful reductive explanation looks like. Nagel does think that there have been successful reductive explanations of some phenomena, as is clear in the left column of page 327.

Perhaps we can start there.

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DISCUSSION:

Marsilio Gagliano: so what do you think of when you think of a reductive explanation?

Oswy Gothly: Often it is thought of as reduction to simpler elements a search for a foundation from which all other phenomena can be explained.

Marsilio Gagliano: yea, that's one way to look at it, building up the complexity from the simple

Sunfire Langer: something focused on the level of pixels rather than the interactions between these that make the image possible at the level of the picture

Oswy Gothly: Explain the behaviour of the micro and then apply this to explain all phenomena - I don't think that is viable by the way.

Marsilio Gagliano: and the idea would be that by describing the properties of the pixels, and then their interaction, one would eventually have an explanation of the whole -- a frog, for example - we could call this atomistic reductionism

Oswy Gothly: Another idea is to fuse one theory into another so that you end up with a unity of explanation.

Marsilio Gagliano: there are other sorts of reductionism

Marya Blaisdale: I do think it is viable - mainly because I think we cannot really use 'the experience' to understand the process - we can use the reductive explanations to explain 'why' we have experiences though, and I think that makes sense

Sunfire Langer: but emergent properties are only observed when you see the body in entirety

Marsilio Gagliano: if I say mind is simply a disposition to behave in a certain way, I have reduced mind to observable behaviour

Marsilio Gagliano: that's why behaviorism is reductivist, as Nagel sees is

Marya Blaisdale: Well, I think that can help to understand one aspect of it - so I don't have a problem at all with reduction - as long as that is not taken as 'the complete' analysis?

Sunfire Langer: I think that would be confusing the purports of those faculties. Experience is just the sensed happenings and then interpretation by the brain, in reflecting on these experiences we then can begin to describe processes and relationships, one need not be reductive to accomplish that, I think, Marya

Marsilio Gagliano: the essence of reductionism is that it claims to be complete -- mind is 'nothing but' the disposition to behave in a certain way or 'nothing but' the relations of atoms in space-time - experience is just the sensed happenings <--- see the term "just"

Oswy Gothly: Well you may say that you can analyse mind as behaviour to a certain level but that is not all there is to mind. Reduction requires a full explanation at a certain basic level.

Marsilio Gagliano: the mind is "just" the brain, would be a reductivist claim

Sunfire Langer: turn of phrase, Marsilio, I really don't see reductionism as viable

Marsilio Gagliano: oh ok Sun

Simulat Almendros: I think that reductionism is silly - it is obvious that there are many emergent levels to reality and that no level is fundamental - emergent phenomenon can't be reduced to 'just' a lower level

Oswy Gothly: I agree Sim

Sunfire Langer: ditto

Marsilio Gagliano: isn't that what many accounts of the mind-body problem attempt to do though

Marsilio Gagliano: before we dismiss reductionism, let me be its advocate for a minute

Oswy Gothly: I think they do and that is why they sound so bizarre

Simulat Almendros: and contrary to Nagel - I think we are making very good progress in understanding how the mind works, that is, how it emerges out of the interactions within the brain

Marsilio Gagliano: what else is there to the daily motion of the sun from east to west other than the motion of we observers of the sun on earth

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Marya Blaisdale: well, it doesn't sound bizarre to me since I keep it in a specific context - it doesn't explain everything, but it does provide an excellent basis (as far as I am concerned) to be able to understand how it works

Marsilio Gagliano: to say that it says something true about mind is not a reductionist stance, but there seems to be no more to the east-west motion of the sun than the motion of us observers - that's an example of a successful reduction. So, the next question is, what does it mean for a reductive explanation to be successful

Oswy Gothly: But it's reduction based on very limited observation

Marya Blaisdale: we don't give any further 'meaning' to the east west motion of the sun (anymore) since we know better - thanks to scientific advances - and, like the Churchlands, I wonder if in time humanity will come to see that about the mind too ;D

Marsilio Gagliano: nevertheless, success is success, no?

Simulat Almendros: agree Marsilio - but just because you can give an example of a reductive explanation doesn't mean that everything has a reductive explanation

Marsilio Gagliano: I agree as well - I just want to get clear about what makes a reduction successful, even if all reductions are not

Oswy Gothly: It has to account for all the observed phenomena

Marsilio Gagliano: hmmm what about the sound of the note A; 440 beats/sec; is that successful?

Sunfire Langer: that is how we, each of us as a human consciousness, accesses that quality of reality (the east-west motion of the Sun) this is not to say that the way we start to experience it tells us everything, just because we are ultimately interpreting reality through our own experience does not mean that that is all there is to its understanding, there is much abstraction and reflective calculation to understanding that bodies' relationships

Oswy Gothly: No because it does not account for the subjective hearing of the sound for a start.

Marsilio Gagliano: does neurology account for subjectivity?

Oswy Gothly: No

Marsilio Gagliano: well, then you grant Nagel's point - but does it just happen to fail, or must it fail?

Sunfire Langer: no, it simply fails to DISPROVE Nagel's point, Marsilio

Marsilio Gagliano: why does it fail?

Teleo Aeon: I suppose the implication is that, IF something can be reduced by language (properly) then there is a strong chance that the mind is separate from the body.. IF you cant do this you have a problem which may mean that, there is no mind as such.

Marsilio Gagliano: to grant is not to prove

Sunfire Langer: the onness of granting is on the claimant

Marsilio Gagliano: I used grant in a technical sense

Jigyen Flux: I agree with Teleo

Marsilio Gagliano: note thinks that all reductive analyses will fail, not just the ones we have happened to come up with so far

Oswy Gothly: I am a little lost here in what sense is Nagel's point granted?

Teleo Aeon: I am just trying to get to the nub of why it's an important question - that's what I came up with

Simulat Almendros: neurology is a study of the physical brain, but the mind is emergent - so you can't know how the brain enables the processes of a mind without learning about how it emerges any more than you can learn how to assemble a bicycle by studying atoms

Marsilio Gagliano: if you say, no - neurology cannot succeed in explaining consciousness, then either you have some other reductive theory in mind that will or you are claiming that no reductive theory will

Simulat Almendros: but I think that the emergence can be understood

Oswy Gothly: Right I agree that no reductive theory will. OK

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Marya Blaisdale: I disagree with that Oswy (as you know) :D

Marsilio Gagliano: but has Nagel made an error in logic, just because some reductive theories fail, does that mean all will?

Marya Blaisdale: I think science will and already can show us what consciousness/the mind is - I think it does take a change in conceptual framework though

Teleo Aeon: that position then Sim would mean that the mind in the normal way of trying to grasp that it may be reducible by linguistics is a non starter.

Sunfire Langer: it seems problematic because it is usually thought that when something is physical it is easily and plainly described. Now, if we are not substance dualists this must mean that mind and our experience of mind is physical as everything else that exists. This baffles people because they are expecting something easily explainable, yet there are many things that are physical and complex beyond our present understanding

Simulat Almendros: I think that Nagel's error is to say that since we can't understand the process that we call the mind by reductionism that we therefore can't understand the mind

Marya Blaisdale: yes, I think the key words there are 'present understanding' Sunfire

Marsilio Gagliano: he think that a new phenomenological method might prove useful, Sim

Sunfire Langer: so it may be premature to say that the mind cannot be understood in physical terms

Marsilio Gagliano: he does not deny that all knowledge of mind is impossible

Oswy Gothly: I think all reduction in the sense we are talking about will fail because the idea of monism is mistaken.

Teleo Aeon: how you could you understand it though Sim? What technology may it be understood by? Because language could not communicate it in that case

Marsilio Gagliano: you might be right, Sun – however, here's the core of Nagel's argument:

Reductive explanations by their very essence try to separate out the subjective, species aspect of our perception of a phenomenon from its objective, non-species dependent reality

Simulat Almendros: Teleo - 20 years ago Dennett went a long way towards explaining how consciousness emerges from the brain and I think there has been good progress since then

Marsilio Gagliano: Consciousness Explained?

Simulat Almendros: Yes

Teleo Aeon: yes but Dennett must have used language to communicate it Sim.

Marsilio Gagliano: all he did there was to argues against a certain view of consciousness, Sim - the Cartesian Theatre model

Sunfire Langer: that is only consistent in a reality that remains precisely the same in the absence of any consciousness, isn't it, Marsilio?

Onasander Belavidorico: Dennett who?

Oswy Gothly: So without the subjective we have a problem in terms of reduction in the monist sense?

Simulat Almendros: Daniel Dennett

Oswy Gothly: No Qualia, no quality to your analysis?

Simulat Almendros: I think he went a lot further than that Marsilio

Teleo Aeon: how did he go further Sim ?

Marsilio Gagliano: yes, if reductionism tries to weed out the subjective, than in principle there can be no successful explanation of consciousness, in a reductive way

Simulat Almendros: his multiple drafts theory of the mind was a really good model I thought

Sunfire Langer: then perhaps filtering out subjective explanation would be the flaw

Teleo Aeon: if you explain a thing in naturalistic terms, with nothing non-natural left over, then you have reduced it.

Oswy Gothly: Agreed. Bye bye Churchlands

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Marya Blaisdale: lol, no - I think there is a conceptual framework error going on with this - using experience to explain experience is, to my mind, leading you down an incorrect path - and that is where I think it goes wrong

Marsilio Gagliano: it was a software running on a hardware that could be re-edited in such a way as to change perceived temporal series from their objective reality; wasn't much new there, was there?

Marsilio Gagliano: instead of experience, you would appeal to what?

Marya Blaisdale: I disagree with this Marsilio: "[12:37] Marsilio Gagliano: yes, if reductionism tries to weed out the subjective, than in principle there can be no successful explanation of consciousness"

Simulat Almendros: OK - let's take a vote here - who thinks that reductionism provides an account of how the mind emerges from the processes of the brain?

Oswy Gothly: Marya why are you ruling out experience

Simulat Almendros: certainly not me

Sunfire Langer: what would you say we are using to explain experience, so I understand you, Marya?

Marsilio Gagliano: before we vote, what does emerge mean how does emerge from the brain differ from "is a brain process"

Marsilio Gagliano: Marya is advocating idealism, I think

Simulat Almendros: and if nobody thinks that reductionism will do that why is it being continually brought up?

Marya Blaisdale: Idealism?

Sunfire Langer: I think NOT, she'll have your hide for that, Marsi

Marya Blaisdale: I do think reductionism works Sim in the case of consciousness/mind

Marsilio Gagliano: appeal to commonly held belief is philosophically iffy, sim

Simulat Almendros: Marsilio - emergence is a complex idea

Marsilio Gagliano: must you mistrust experience, Marya?

Marya Blaisdale: Not at all Marsilio - but I think the sciences (particularly psychology and neuroscience) can help us to understand those experiences very well - which is why I don't see the problem with reduction in this sense

Sunfire Langer: I vote Nay, btw Sim

Marsilio Gagliano: "emergence" is a slippery word means many thing to many folks

Sunfire Langer: so do all terms, Marsilio

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Post 2You wrote at 05:22 on 09 July 2009

Teleo Aeon: I think the idea is that it need to be able to reduce it in order to account for the fact that, linguistics has the technical capability to do the job. I actually don't think it does have that capability personally. I also think that the problem is due to the unpredictable nature of emergent phenomenon, Oswy - that is my position - but that doesn't mean its useless to try.

Marsilio Gagliano: in fact, for many "emergentist" and "reductionist" are opposites for many, so your question would be an odd one - the Churchland's would not like emergentist talk

Simulat Almendros: My example of emergence is patterns made by decorations on tiles - the lower level is the tile with a shape and a decoration and the pattern is emergent - it only exists when you put the tiles together

Simulat Almendros: I haven't read them a lot - but from what I have read their thinking is consistent with emergence Marsilio

Marsilio Gagliano: they are eliminative materialists

Teleo Aeon: you can't predict the fact that, when two molecules come together that, they may smell like apples... for instance... because its unpredictable as an emergent phenomenon.

Marsilio Gagliano: they don't want to talk about the 'mind' emerging from matter

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Simulat Almendros: but you need a clear idea what emergence means - lots of people use it as a substitute for magic :-)

Oswy Gothly: The central problem emerges when you try to privilege one type of explanation at a certain level over all the others. The physicists start talking about everything reducible to physics and other such rot.

Marsilio Gagliano: I agree

Oswy Gothly: One level of explanation I should have said.

Marya Blaisdale: yes Teleo - we don't need to be able to know all the variables involved in such behaviours (as in molecules) in order to see how these things affect other things - which is why I think reductionism in mind/consciousness is very valid

Marsilio Gagliano: so if reductionism is the opposite of emergentism, we are all on the same page then no purely reductivist's account of consciousness will work?

Oswy Gothly: Agree

Marya Blaisdale: disagree - I do believe that purely reductive accounts of consciousness can indeed work

Marsilio Gagliano: how about you Sim? Given the "if" clause

Oswy Gothly: Non reductionist 10 Reductionists 1 - Yippee

Marya Blaisdale: lol

Sunfire Langer: what we experience is a co-creation between the reality that's out there and the pre-occurring interpretive processes of our own consciousness at its present state. In a certain degree we 'Receive' this experience of reality. I could describe this thinking as 'Receptionist thinking'.

Ungo Azambuja: why not "transactionalist"? Sun?

Marya Blaisdale: or 'reactiveness'

Teleo Aeon: I think reduction can work to some extent in certain cases and under certain conditions.. I think the job of philosophy is to find those limitations... or one job at least

Marya Blaisdale: I perceive our consciousness to be our system of reactivity and interactivity with the world - that is a reductive and simplified explanation - but I think it works

Marsilio Gagliano: I think reductionism works perfectly for the east-west motion of the sun, but not for the apply taste of apple-molecules

Marya Blaisdale: why not Marsilio?

Shak Maroon: My bike got reduced. I wondered how it worked, so I took it to bits. I found out how the bits all fitted together to form a whole which performed in accordance with the laws of physics to get me to town.

Simulat Almendros: I don't think you can really learn about how the mind emerges until you understand how the brain works; and you can't understand how the brain works without understanding chemistry, and you can't understand how chemistry works without understanding quantum mechanics - so learning about the lower levels is very important

Marya Blaisdale nods - right Sim

Onasander Belavidorico: agree with Marya for the most part

Marsilio Gagliano: because however complete my account of the chemistry of the situation, I would not on that basis know what it is like to taste an apple

Marsilio Gagliano: I agree with all that too Sim

Teleo Aeon: to some people apples smell like oranges :D

Sunfire Langer: yes, chemical composition 'apple-flavour' provokes nerve signal 'Apple1' to the conscious brain and we experience the sense of applyness, for example

Oswy Gothly: Shak and when you considered the experience of riding a bike or the aesthetics of eh bike shape did you take a spanner to discover that as well?? I think not.

Simulat Almendros: Sunfire - I'd say that we just experience - no need to say that we receive experience - we receive information about the world

Sunfire Langer: we also experience ourselves, this complicates the matter, Sim

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Simulat Almendros: and our minds attaches meaning to the raw information and that is experience

Marsilio Gagliano: meaning?

Marya Blaisdale: Your tasting of an apple and my tasting of an apple is not identical though Marsilio - and no two people sharing almost the same physiology will experience it in the same way because of the variables involved - so, we can only have a 'general' understanding of what it is like to taste an apple from other perspectives - so how is it that so much importance is placed on being able to exactly explain the experience?

Simulat Almendros: yes Sunfire - experiencing ourselves is the beginning of consciousness

Teleo Aeon: if apples smell like oranges to You. I will never know... but what smells like what will be accorded to the object regardless.

Marsilio Gagliano: knowing the chemistry and neurology down to the last detail still doesn't get to the apply flavour; it just correlates the two

Oswy Gothly: Marya surely that argument is a convincing one to show that no reduction is possible.

Simulat Almendros: meaning in the sense that as we grow and learn our minds come to interpret data in a certain way and not other ways

Sunfire Langer: the problem is how to explain how we are not philosophical zombies then?

Marya Blaisdale: Does it matter that it does not get to the experience of the apple's flavour though - since all of those experiences are subjective?

Sunfire Langer: reductionists won't be able to if they discard the subjective

Marsilio Gagliano: attaching meaning ...what would make one neural pattern mean something different form another? Position? Frequency of firing rate?

Marya Blaisdale: the point is that we can understand 'how' and 'why' we taste the apple in the way that we do - isn't that the most important aspect?

Teleo Aeon: I never admitted to anyone not being a philosophical zombie :p

Marsilio Gagliano: on the reductivist account, there really is nothing "subjective"

Oswy Gothly: Marya, you are trying to eliminate the real thing - we are interested in the subjective.

Marya Blaisdale: There is no such thing as a philosophical zombie anyway (thanks to Chalmers for throwing a spanner in this one!) - There can be no such thing that is identical to us that does not share the same level of consciousness as us

Sunfire Langer: but there surely is, you are unable to viably deny that you are experiencing, Marsi

Simulat Almendros: Marsilio - the brain is a super complex thing - there are many superimposed systems including nerve signals, chemical signals, patterns of interaction and on and on and on

Marsilio Gagliano: how do they give rise to something like "what it is like to tastes an apple" how does that emerge?

Oswy Gothly: Marya, Sunfire is right the point is that we are not philosophical zombies and we need to account for why not.

Marya Blaisdale: I think we already can account for why that is not the case though Oswy

Simulat Almendros: but I think of it as being stimulated into a 'state' by our interaction with the world

Marsilio Gagliano: a brain state?

Simulat Almendros: yes

Marsilio Gagliano: what properties make such a state apply rather than...salty

Oswy Gothly: Sim I agree with you most of the way but I find words like 'attach stimulated' mysterious!

Simulat Almendros: attach stimulated?

Oswy Gothly: You said a way back there our minds attach meaning

Sunfire Langer: the properties of the apple and the human body

Marya Blaisdale: right, Sunfire

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Marsilio Gagliano: I could agree to that, Sunfire - but the properties seem to involve more than concepts of mass, velocity or spatial-temporal displacement, electrical charge, etc - could it be that consciousness is a basic property like mass? I propose that subjectivity is a property of everything

Marya Blaisdale: Marsilio - wouldn't it be closer to the truth to say that consciousness is a process rather than like a mass?

Marsilio Gagliano: a basic property like mass

Onasander Belavidorico: property of everything?

Sunfire Langer: yes, it involves layered interpretation of electrical signals. We can understand this in the example of a computer doing this; it is not then an impossible step to take that understanding to how a human interprets such signals, Marsi

Marsilio Gagliano: well, I think mass is a process too

Teleo Aeon: philosophy does not give over to mechanistic accounts of reality. it is there partly to ensure that we don't give over to these accounts by showing the limitations of the knowledge and its application.

Sunfire Langer: there lies the rub, in the interpretation

Oswy Gothly: I don't follow how mass is a process or that rocks have subjectivity.

Simulat Almendros: well - I could have said instead that the information becomes meaningful

Oswy

Marsilio Gagliano: Sun, I can't imagine a computer tasting an apple, at least not given the present architecture of computers

Marya Blaisdale: Aye Teleo - which is generally why there is so much opposition to eliminative materialism/reductionism :]

Teleo Aeon: nods Marya

Sunfire Langer: But bats taste, Marsi

Marsilio Gagliano: yes

Marya Blaisdale: A computerised system could analyse the data of an apple a lot better than we can - and interpret that data relative to its program (just as we do)

Marsilio Gagliano: but not taste

Marya Blaisdale: you're making taste sound like something super special there, Marsilio :)

Teleo Aeon: or smell... well not yet anyhow

Jigyen Flux: perhaps is simply cannot "experience" the taste

Sunfire Langer: what's the difference? I see it only as the equipment with which you detect that apple, Marsi

Oswy Gothly: Marsilio, could you unpack what you mean by subjectivity is a property of everything.

Marya Blaisdale: that is what the computer would be doing - we just don't call it tasting

Marsilio Gagliano: what about desire, can a computer have desires?

Simulat Almendros: can't the flavour of something be thought of as the sort of measurement we make?

Sunfire Langer: that would be irrelevant here, Marsi

Marsilio Gagliano: it can be Sim, and it may be useful to do so too - I just don't think it is complete

Marsilio Gagliano: not at all if taste involves desire, Sun

Marya Blaisdale: if it is programmed to have the equivalent of a desire then yes - desire is some sort of impulse/imperative that we have - computers can have imperatives too

Oswy Gothly: Do you mean that everything is subjective to those organism that have the capacity to be subjective?

Teleo Aeon: I think flavour is basically a persistence of experience. I know what I am tasting generally... but smell fine tunes the taste I think.

Marsilio Gagliano: in the end, I happen to think that subjectivity is a property of whatever exists

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Simulat Almendros: the measurement interacts with the state our brain is in and becomes meaningful and that meaningful measurement is our experience

Marsilio Gagliano: "meaning" is that like a Platonic idea?

Vladimir Apparatchik: Marsilio - people said the same thing about "life". There had to be a life-force. We now know that's not needed. I know subjectivity makes the question of consciousness much harder but I suspect that this extra stuff or process will go the way of the life-force

Oswy Gothly: Marsilio, I still don't understand what that means. Are you just saying that everything is capable of being experienced subjectively by organism that can be subjective?

Marya Blaisdale nods - agreed Vlad

Simulat Almendros: no - it's the way our brain responds to stimulation

Sunfire Langer: it doesn't, of itself, tongue is stimulated by various compounds, as other sensitive equipment would in a parallel fashion, the tasting would come to the interpretation of that data, which, as Marya rightly points out, is only traditionally not thought of as tasting in the computer, Marsi

lin Anton: Has anyone heard of a product called "The Neuro Programmer 2" - I think there is potential for a machine to 'taste' an apple if the pleasure/pain programming was tied to its chemical sensors in the same way as in a human when experiencing the brainwaves

Sunfire Langer: the point was to explain how applyness is detected and interpreted physically - not the consciousness of machines

Marsilio Gagliano: the notion of life force was that of a force independent of matter ...if I argued no matter without subjectivity, and no subjectivity without matter, then subjectivity would not be the same sort of notion, and thus -- perhaps -- have a different fate

Marya Blaisdale: That's very interesting Lin - thanks for mentioning it

Sunfire Langer: life existing independent of matter seems absurd

Vladimir Apparatchik: I see what you mean Marsilio

Marsilio Gagliano: matter existing apart from subjectivity equally absurd?

Simulat Almendros: sort of like matter existing apart from atoms Sunfire :-)

Sunfire Langer: no

Marsilio Gagliano: why not sun?

Vladimir Apparatchik: But I don't think mass separate from subjectivity as absurd holds up

Teleo Aeon: It's not that a computer couldn't be programmed to taste something... it's rather that, one can not predict what properties emerge from combinations of properties and experiences.

Vladimir Apparatchik: We can imagine a world without subjectivity

Onasander Belavidorico: imagine that?

Marsilio Gagliano: only because from the concept of mass, all subjectivity has already been excluded....mass is an abstraction

Marsilio Gagliano: imagine that, Vlad :)

Vladimir Apparatchik: :) I know that sounds circular :)

BlazingBetta Parabola: I can't imagine abstraction without subjectivity

Sunfire Langer: Because the energy of which all things are constituted of is there, regardless of any consciousness, it's only the properties of it that are dependant on observation, Marsi

Marsilio Gagliano: Sun, do you have empirical evidence for that or do you just assume that?

Onasander Belavidorico: Do organelles possess subjectivity in their life continuing actions

Marsilio Gagliano: to be consistent, I'd have to say "to some degree" Onasander

Sunfire Langer: it's analytically correct. Without consciousness ever having experienced properties there is no information to report, Marsi

Marya Blaisdale: I would say that organelles 'react' and 'interact' :]

Marsilio Gagliano: so you begin with a notion of matter that already excludes subjectivity ...if you argue from that to the claim that matter does exist without subjectivity, you beg the question - the argument is circular

Marsilio's Reading Group

Sunfire Langer: No, the energy of which matter and other particles exist is there regardless of observation, it's the observation that gives us properties to understand

Onasander Belavidorico: argument should not be circular; it needs angles- a labyrinth of angles criss-crossing into oblivion

Marsilio Gagliano: I think all non-red things are not red, and that would be true even if everything that exists is red - so you observe properties

Sunfire Langer: and you haven't shown its circular, I'll mind you, Marsi

Teleo Aeon: another problem is the huge amount of cultural meanings which are bound up in objects. If you stick a sword through a gravestone for instance. You have no way of predicting how this will be interpreted - except by the Vicar maybe :D but anyway, this is what Art usually deals in.

Marsilio Gagliano: properties which would not exist w/o perception?

Sunfire Langer: yes

Vladimir Apparatchik: But Marsilio, if we were killed off and there happened to be no other conscious beings in the universe I could certainly "imagine" that the universe would get along just fine without us

Marya Blaisdale nods at Teleo

Simulat Almendros: We know that there was matter before there were creatures - and before there were creatures there was nothing that experienced - as far as we know - a creature - especially a conscious creature, that is experiencing is what is meant by subjectivity, so its easy to imagine reality without subjectivity

Marsilio Gagliano: but that which has the properties, how do you know about that sun? Not observation? Then what?

Oswy Gothly: I will need to reflect on the idea of subjectivity as being a universal like matter. I think there may be a danger here of creating a universal mystery to get us out of a metaphysical problem. There may be simpler solutions. I don't like the idea of multiplying universal entities.

Onasander Belavidorico: So if everything possesses subjectivity, what are the elements other than subjectivity that it possesses?

Marsilio Gagliano: begs the question Sim

Simulat Almendros: how so?

Sunfire Langer: What question?

Marsilio Gagliano: you claim to know that before sentient creatures; life forms - there was no experience

Sunfire Langer: Was there, Marsi?

Marsilio Gagliano: that's just the point I'm contending

Simulat Almendros: yes - because experience is something that creatures do and rocks don't

Vladimir Apparatchik: Just because we weren't around 14 billion years ago I think our scientific theories of the early stages of the universe are quite credible - we don't have to be there

Onasander Belavidorico: is potential an element of an object?

Marsilio Gagliano: if subjectivity/matter are two aspects of the basic reality, yes

Teleo Aeon: actually Sim, that very case was an example in the note card as it happens... that is a central question too and Dreyfus deals with that one. So, I don't disagree, but it is contentious

Sunfire Langer: subjectivity is not a quality of the universe, it is the statement of perspective from which observation begins, Marsi

Marsilio Gagliano: well rocks are not unities in the way in which atoms or birds are

Onasander Belavidorico: rocks have potential as much as subjectivity

Simulat Almendros: I think the metaphysical issue only comes up because subjectivity is a noun - but the problem goes away when we think of experience as something we do - a verb

Onasander Belavidorico: as well as non-potential

Simulat Almendros: we don't have subjectivity - we experience

Marsilio's Reading Group

Marsilio Gagliano: not so Sim, take Whitehead and Hartshorne, they are process philosophers and they claim that experience is an aspect of every process, so getting rid of the noun is not enough

Onasander Belavidorico: I say, every rock is 1/4 reality, 1/4 subjective interpretation, 1/4th unreality of a contradictory nature, and 1/4 unblemished by academics

Simulat Almendros: I'd quibble with their use of experience Marsilio :-)

Marya Blaisdale: I disagree with that too ("before sentient creatures, life forms - there was no experience") - maybe what we are calling subjective experience (as in those things that we feel make up this purported problem of mind/consciousness) is a matter of approaching it from the wrong direction, ie: approaching it from the top down instead of bottom up - which is the point I've been trying to get across. Subjective experiences are the ways in which we interpret/react/interact with the world - I think it is wrong to say that other 'things' in the universe do not do this

Marsilio Gagliano: and I agree we do not have subjectivity, we experience

Sunfire Langer: You are right, Marya

Marsilio Gagliano: I agree with you Marya

Vladimir Apparatchik: Simulat - I think you are arguing away the issue with words - it's still a hard problem.

Onasander Belavidorico: combinations of those fourths produce the periodic table

Oswy Gothly: Could we say that everything has the potential to be subjectively experienced by organisms that have consciousness

Sunfire Langer: yes, Oswy

Marsilio Gagliano: <---thinks there is something called "what it is like to be a hydrogen atom" what has he been smoking?

Onasander Belavidorico: no

Marya Blaisdale: lol

Onasander Belavidorico: Oswy, I do not concur

Oswy Gothly: But that still implies, as Marsilio is saying, that subjectivity is a universal of reality.

Marya Blaisdale: Oswy, I think we can say that everything that reacts, reacts :D

Simulat Almendros: Hmmm - we are talking about experience - our experience - that is the way that we interact with the world and learn about it - I thought

Onasander Belavidorico: agree Marya - actually snatch my argument out of my mouth

Marya Blaisdale: lol

Marsilio Gagliano: and I say "all action and reaction involves experiencing" (note the verb form)

Sunfire Langer: is there no spontaneity then, Mar?

Marsilio Gagliano: I think spontaneity does arise within experience

Simulat Almendros: so the fact that rocks interact with each other doesn't mean that they experience - experience is a very special sort of interaction

Sunfire Langer: agreed, Sim

Vladimir Apparatchik: Agreed Simulat

Onasander Belavidorico: rocks experience - called causality

Marya Blaisdale: No, I don't think there is any spontaneity, Sunfire - I think spontaneity is a matter of us not being able to comprehend all the possible variables (the huge causal network that is our universe) - so we perceive something as being spontaneous because we do not understand or know of 'all' the processes involved

Marsilio Gagliano: a rock seems to be a collection of processes, falling short of the unity of process enjoyed by, the molecules that constitute the rock

Sunfire Langer: we cannot award them similar consciousness to a human and I think that is the crux, Onasander

Onasander Belavidorico: Marya and I will have to have a private talk sometime in the future

Marya Blaisdale: no, because they don't have a neural system Sunfire - but we can say they have their own system of reactivity

Marsilio's Reading Group

Oswy Gothly: Marsilio Are you saying a rock can not interact with another rock?

Sunfire Langer: Hmmm, I'm sure everyone is aware of the problem with a First Cause...

Marsilio Gagliano: paramecia? Do they experience, Marya?

Vladimir Apparatchik: It seems to me that subjectivity/consciousness is a product of complexity - huge complexity

Onasander Belavidorico: I agree, rocks do not possess conscious structures beyond the event - pure reaction - chaos

Marya Blaisdale: Marsilio, paramecia react/interact - they interpret information

Marsilio Gagliano: I do too Onasander, but not the constituents of rocks, they are more than mere reaction

Marsilio Gagliano: paramecia experience then

Marya Blaisdale: if that is what you want to call it, sure Marsilio :)

Onasander Belavidorico: the event is the actions; we differ, our organelles differ; we exist for the event; rocks just happen to be there; we seek it; we die without it

Sunfire Langer: Are we relying on the horribly fraught notion of a first cause? Seriously?

Marya Blaisdale: I must have missed something as I didn't notice anything on first cause?

Sunfire Langer: with no spontaneity, you require it

Marya Blaisdale: Nope, I don't think so Sunfire - only if you believe there was once 'nothing'

Onasander Belavidorico: I didn't know who Nagel was, but it seemed like a poor argument to begin with from what I read

Marsilio Gagliano: it may not work in the end, but it is far from poor, I think

Oswy Gothly: Marsilio, you have raised some issues about reductionism and the nature of reality eg what constitutes an object for instance that you might be willing to follow up?

Vladimir Apparatchik: The great thing about the Nagel article was that it crystallises an age-old discussion in plain language

Oswy Gothly: Nagel is very important and that article has provided inspiration for many