

# Mind

A Subject in an Objective World



# A Basic Question

- \* How do sentient beings fit into the objectively comprehensible world?
- \* Three subordinate questions:
  - \* Does the mind itself have objective features?
  - \* What is the mind's relation to physical reality?
  - \* How is it possible for there to be a subjective self in the midst of an objectively specifiable world?



# Minds and Bodies

- \* 'A society of minds is not a big mind, but a system of bodies (such as the solar system) is just a big body.' —C. D. Broad, *The Mind and its Place in Nature*, 32)



# Mental and Physical Properties: a Contrast

- \* The physical:
  - \* Not privileged to any subject (amenable to third-person access)
  - \* Subject to public confirmation
  - \* Quantitative without remainder
- \* The mental:
  - \* Epistemic
    - \* Authoritative
    - \* Privileged Access (known non-inferentially by their subjects alone)
- \* Metaphysical
  - \* Qualitative: both locally and then again globally
  - \* Intentional



# Forcing the Contrast

1. Mental properties have the property of being introspectively accessible to their bearers alone ( $\psi$ ).
2. No physical property has  $\psi$ .
3. LL (or, the indiscernibility of identicals).
4. Hence, no mental property is a physical property.



# Leibniz's Law

- \* Or, more precisely, the Indiscernibility of Indenticals
- \* LL:  $x = y$  *only if*  $x$  and  $y$  have all of their properties in common
- \* So, e.g., if the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces (CC) = The President of the United States (P), then whatever is true of (CC) is true of (P) and whatever is true of (P) is true of (CC).
- \* Conversely, if the murderer, whoever that may be, has O+ blood, and the butler has B-, then the butler is not the murderer.



# A Generalized Worry

- \* Given the mind's distinctive features—including its ineliminably subjective features—how is it to be (is it to be) comprehended by any fully objective theory?



# A Slightly Less Generalized Worry

- \* The objectively given world, as described in the empirical sciences, is *centerless*. (Let us follow Nagel in calling this *physical objectivity*.)
- \* Every mind is a *center* of mental activity.
- \* Every mind is/has a *point of view*.
- \* The objective world itself, physical objectivity, again construed as the world described by the empirical sciences, contains no point of view.



# An Unhappy Choice?

- \* Given its character, the conscious mind seems forever—and in principle—outside the net of objective explanation.
- \* So, we seem left with a choice: deny the existence of the mind (= eliminativism) or learn to live with the fact that empirical science cannot explain all there is to explain.
- \* The first choice strikes many as batty (though, to be clear, it is also defended by highly capable, intelligent philosophers and neurophysiologists).
- \* The second, while not batty, denies one goal of science, namely the drive towards a unified theory of everything.



# An Objective Conception of Mind?

- \* ‘We assume that we ourselves are not just parts of the world as it appears to us. But if we are parts of the world as it is in itself, then we ought to be able to include ourselves—our minds as well as our bodies—in a conception that is not tied exclusively to our own point of view. We ought, in other words, to be able to think of ourselves from outside—but in mental, not physical terms. Such a result, if it were possible, would qualify as an objective concept of mind.’ —*VN*, 17



# A Kind of Proposal

- \* Do *not* start with the assumption that all forms of experience must be like my (our) forms of experience.
- \* Instead, imagine that our forms of experience are but one kind of form of experience; then step further to the thought that there may well be kinds of life and kinds of experience we are incapable of identifying by any manifest behavior.
- \* Then we might appreciate that just as physical reality outstrips our ability to describe it, so too does mental reality.
- \* We might then return these highly general features of experience to ourselves, from the outside as it were, rather than beginning from within and trying to transcend.



# Heading Out/Heading In

- \* How to bring together the objective and subjective?
- \* If we start from within, we run towards scepticism, idealism, solipsism.
- \* If we start from without, how are we to accommodate, in the idiom of the centerless world, the self, points of view, judgments emanating from situated awareness (even like, e.g., something as quotidian as color perception)?