

A Romp Through the Philosophy of Mind

**Session Four:
Are We Asking The Wrong Question?**

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Philosophers of Mind devoted a great deal of the 20th century to the attempt to demonstrate that mental states are, in some sense, identical to physical states.

None of these attempts was an unqualified success.

Or even, some would say, a success of any kind.

In the final quarter of the 20th century one philosopher, Hilary Putnam, came up with a possible explanation for these repeated failures.

Putnam put forward a thought experiment that seemed to show there might be a principled reason for our failures.

Could it be, he asked, that we were looking for the mind in the wrong place?

Maybe it simply isn't the case that the mind is *inside the head*?

To understand Putnam's thought experiment we should first understand 'Internalism'.

Internalism is the view that mental states are states of the sort that are *inside us*.

So the mind and all its mental states are *intrinsic properties* of a person.

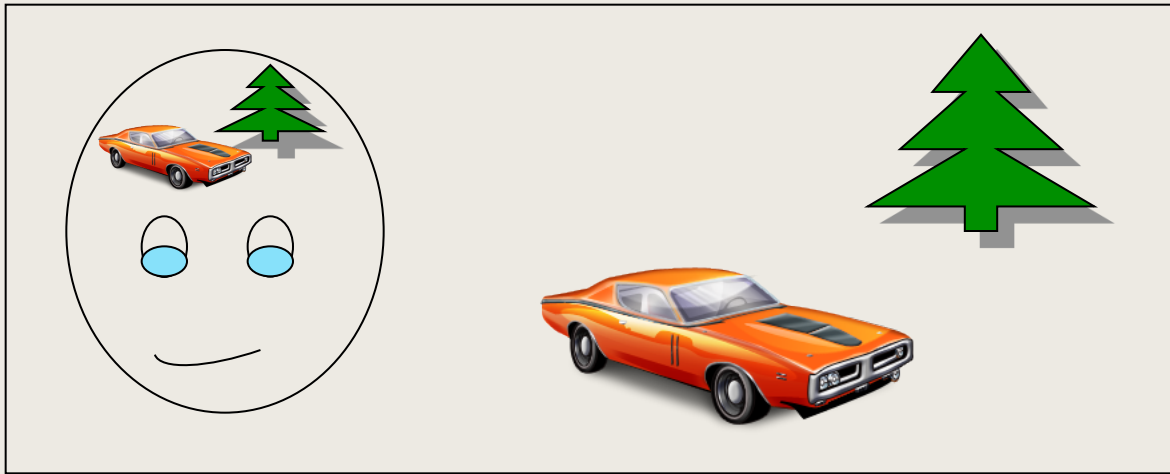
Descartes was an Internalist.

He believed that *all* our beliefs about the external world could be false.

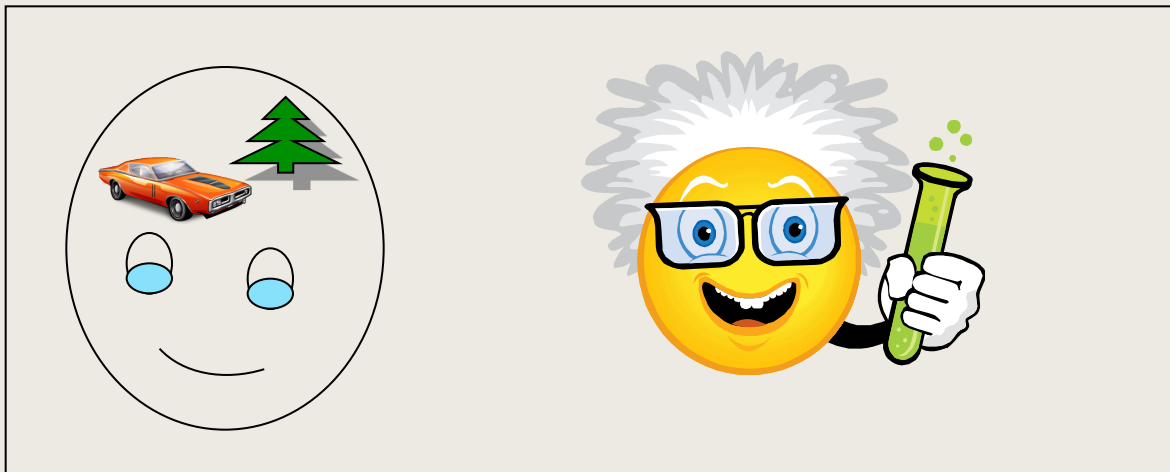
He argued for this by arguing that our beliefs would be the same even if the world was entirely other than we take it to be.

This assumes that our thoughts are the thoughts they are solely because of properties *intrinsic* to us

INTERNALISM



World One in which our thoughts about the external world are (mainly) true



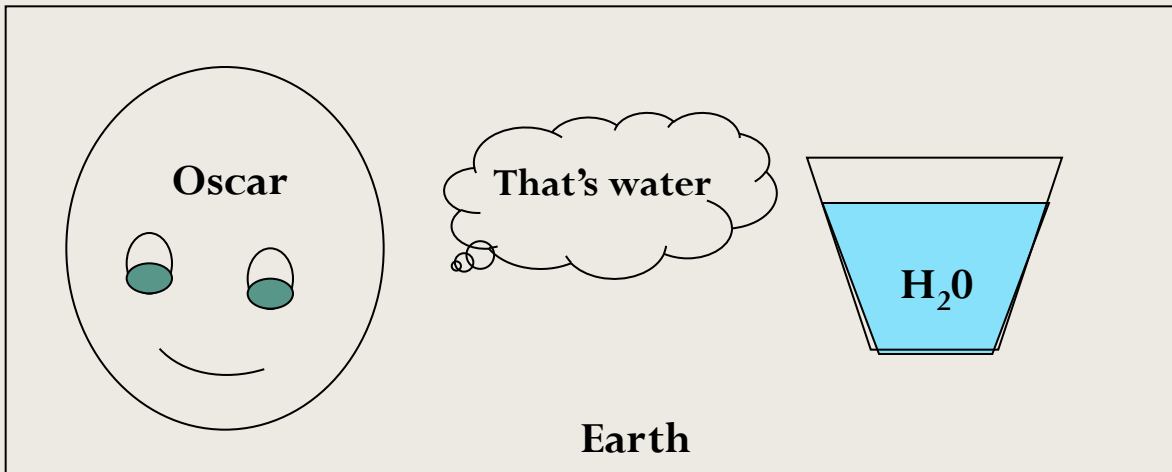
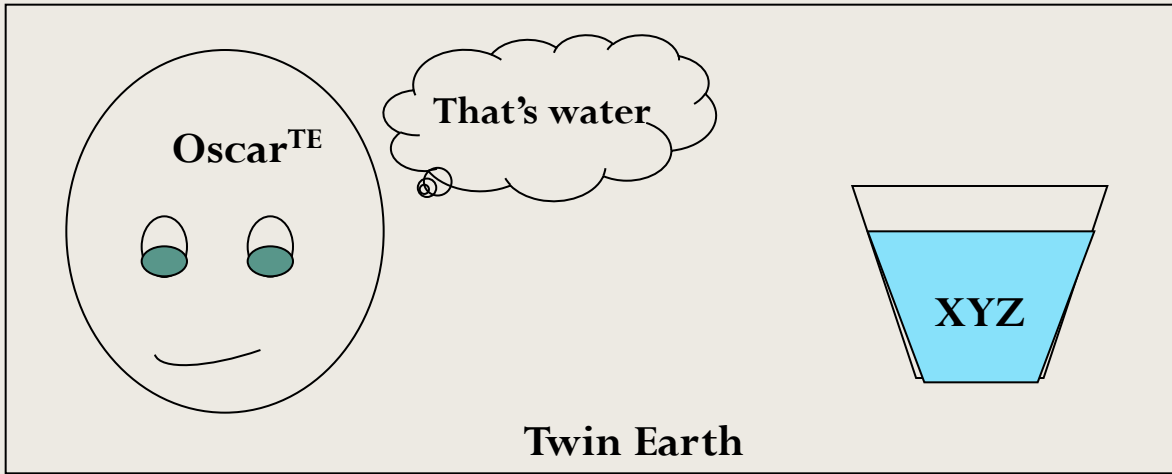
World Two in which our thought about the external world are all false

Putnam's thought experiment questions Internalism by asking us to imagine:

- Our planet Earth
- a person, Oscar
- Another planet, Twin Earth
- Oscar's doppelganger Oscar^{TE}

Two important things to note:

1. Twin Earth is exactly like Earth except the stuff that runs in rivers, that they drink and shower in, has the chemical composition XYZ instead of H_2O (we'll call this water^{TE})
2. Oscar^{TE} is identical to Oscar with respect to his physical properties, his phenomenological properties and his behavioural dispositions (i.e. all his intrinsic properties)



The next thing we have to imagine is that Oscar is overnight transported to Twin Earth.

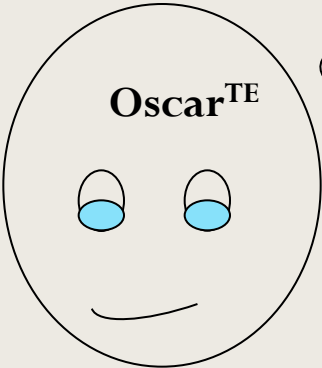
He finds himself in the same room with Oscar^{TE}...

...both of them are looking at a glass of water^{TE}...

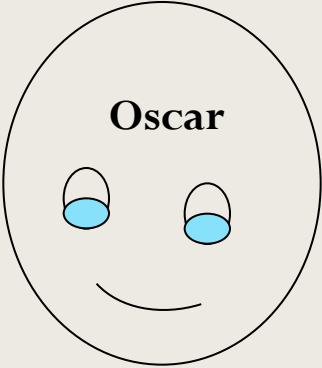
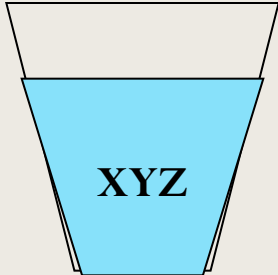
...and both of them are thinking *that's water*

The question we must answer is 'are the twins thinking the same thought?'

Twin Earth



That's water



That's water

Question: Are the twins thinking the *same* thought?

If you are an Internalist you *have* to say that the twins are thinking the same thought.

The twins are identical with respect to all their intrinsic states (ex hypothesi).

As an Internalist you believe that the twins' thoughts are wholly and solely determined by these intrinsic states.

So the twins *must* be thinking the same thoughts.

But we might want to insist that the twins
thought are *different*.

One reason for thinking this is that Oscar's
thought is *false*.

Yet Oscar^{TE}'s thought is *true*

When Oscar thinks about water after all
Oscar is thinking about H_2O .

But the liquid he is thinking about on Twin
Earth is *not* H_2O , it is XYZ.

So his thought *that's water* is a thought
about something that is *not* water.

It is therefore false.

But when Oscar^{TE} thinks *that's water* he is thinking about water^{TE}.

And water^{TE} is XYZ.

When both the twins are on Twin Earth Oscar^{TE}'s thought *that's water* is a thought about something that *is* water^{TE}.

It is therefore true.

But if their thoughts were the *same* thoughts...

... entertained in the *same* circumstances...

...then surely their thoughts would have to have the same *truth value*?

It is the content of a thought that...

...relative to a specific context...

...determines its truth value...

...for example the content of the thought *it's a cat*...

...entertained whilst looking at a dog

...would generate the truth value *false*

So if the twins' thoughts differ in their truth value...

...then this can only be because their contexts differ...

...or because the contents of their thoughts differ...

...and *ex hypothesi* they are embedded in the *same context*...

...so it must be the *contents of their thoughts* that differ.

This means they are *not* thinking the same thought

Putnam argues that the twins' thoughts do differ in content...

...and that as they are identical with respect to their intrinsic properties...

...i.e. in respect to all their *internal* properties...

...this means that 'thoughts ain't in the head'...

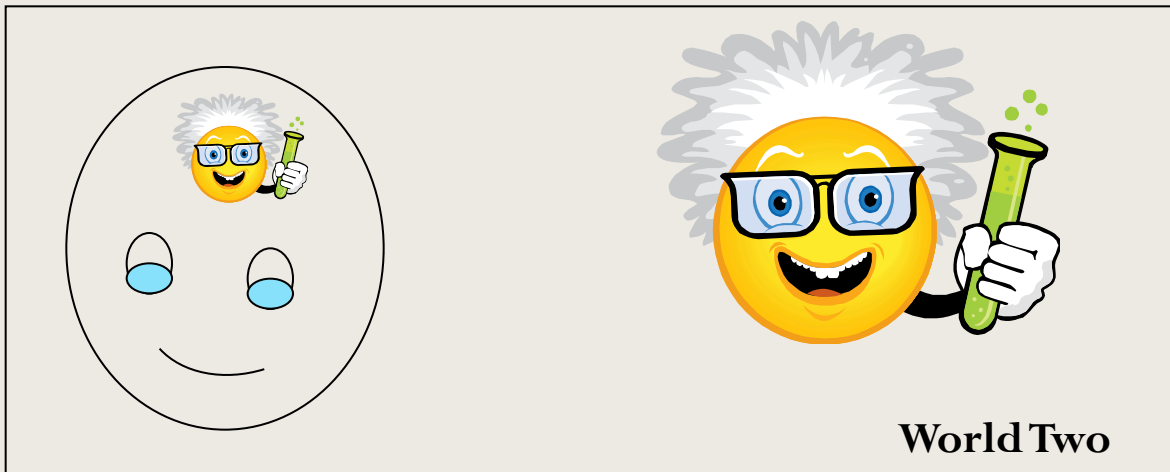
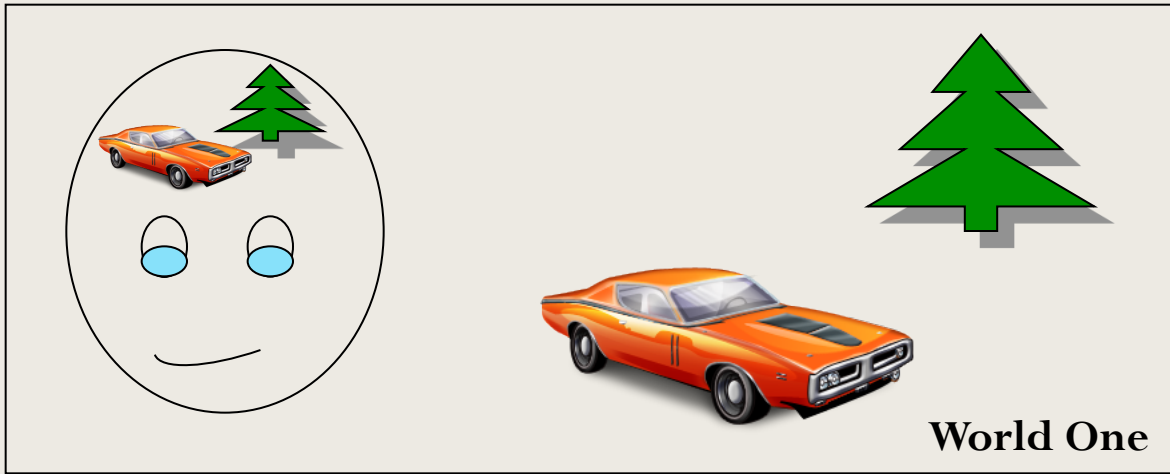
...they must instead be determined by the environment, or rather by the subject's relations to things in his environment

Internalism, therefore, is false...

...says Putnam...

...and Externalism is true

EXTERNALISM



If Externalism is true...

...then mental states that have contents...

...are not 'inside the head'...

...they are not determined by states intrinsic to the subject...

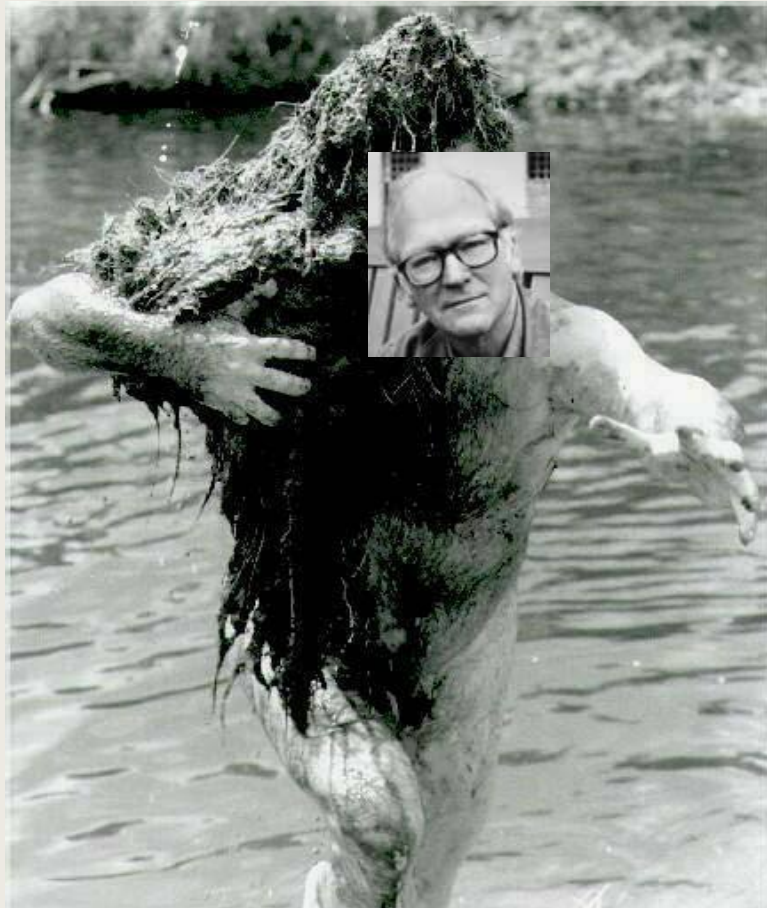
..but by the subject relational states

Another argument for Externalism is offered by the philosopher Donald Davidson.

Davidson imagines that a cosmic ray hits him and reduces him to ashes.

By – er - coincidence another cosmic ray creates a physical replica of him a nano-second later.

The question to ask is are the thoughts of the ‘swampman’ the same as the thoughts of Davidson?



Swampman: a physical, phenomenological and behavioural replica of Donald Davidson

**Again if you are an Internalist you would have to say ‘yes’,
the Swampman does have the same thoughts as Davidson.**

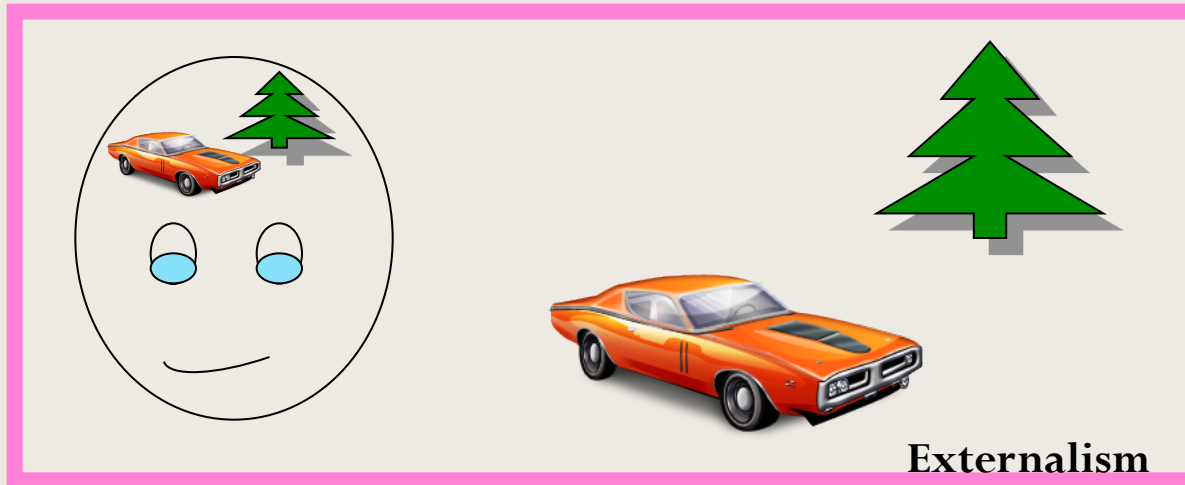
**But would Swampman be able to have the thoughts about
Davidson’s children that Davidson himself had?**

**Would Swampman be able to have the thoughts about
Davidson’s past actions and experiences that Davidson
had?**

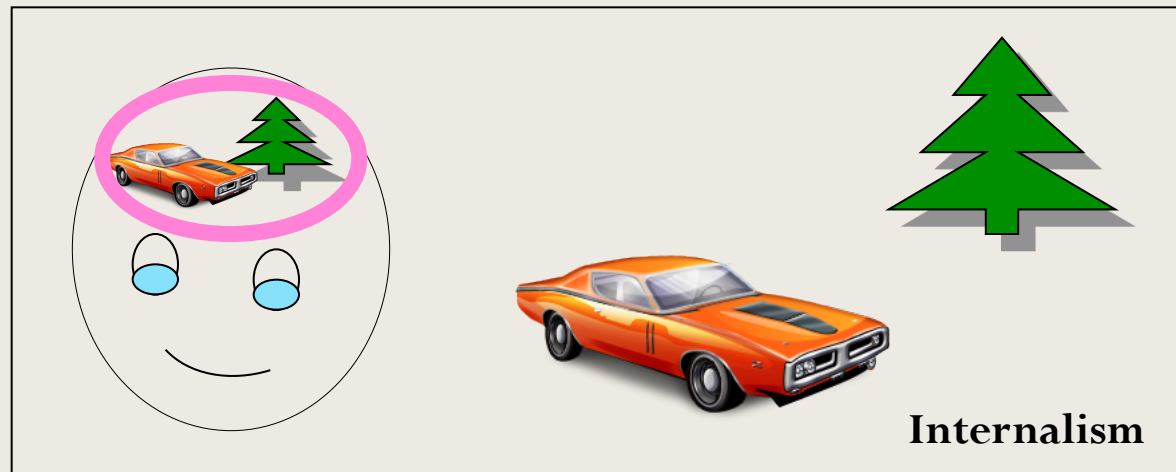
**If you think not then you might prefer to reject
Internalism and embrace Externalism**

To embrace Externalism is to embrace the idea that mental states are the sort of states that *we get into...*

...not the sort of states that get into us...



Mental states as the sort of states *we get into*



Mental states as the sort of states that *get into us*

If mental states are the sort of states that we get into...

...rather than the sort of states that get into us...

...then all our attempts to construct an account of the relation between...

...mental and physical states have been based on a false premise...

...the premise that mental states are states of the sort that *get into us*

Identity Theory argued that mental states were *states of the brain*.

Functionalism argued that mental states are states that play a certain sort of functional role, and that all such functional roles are played by *states of the brain*.

Anomalous Monism argued that all causally efficacious mental states have physical descriptions, and implied that all such physical descriptions would be descriptions of states of the brain.

Interestingly though embracing Externalism should not cause us to turn our backs on either Functionalism or Anomalous Monism.

Both theories can be modified to embrace Externalism.

The only one of the theories we've examined that can't be modified to embrace Externalism is Identity Theory.

Functionalism would merely have to widen functional roles to include roles that go beyond the bounds of the brain/body.

Anomalous Monism would merely have to widen the physical descriptions that might hold true of mental states to include relational descriptions.

But if Externalism is true...

...then it seems clear that no matter how much neuroscience can tell us about the brain...

...there is a limit to what it can tell us about the mind...

...on this story even if the mind *is* in some sense physical...

...mental states are not states of the brain.

References:

Chalmers, D: **Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings** (2002
Oxford University Press) papers in section 3C

Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: Entry on Externalism

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/content-externalism/>

Podcast: Rupert Sheldrake on Empirical Evidence on the ‘Extended Mind’

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnA8GUtXpXY>

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