

24.09 Minds and Machines

Fall 11 HASS-D CI

Valberg on the puzzle
of experience

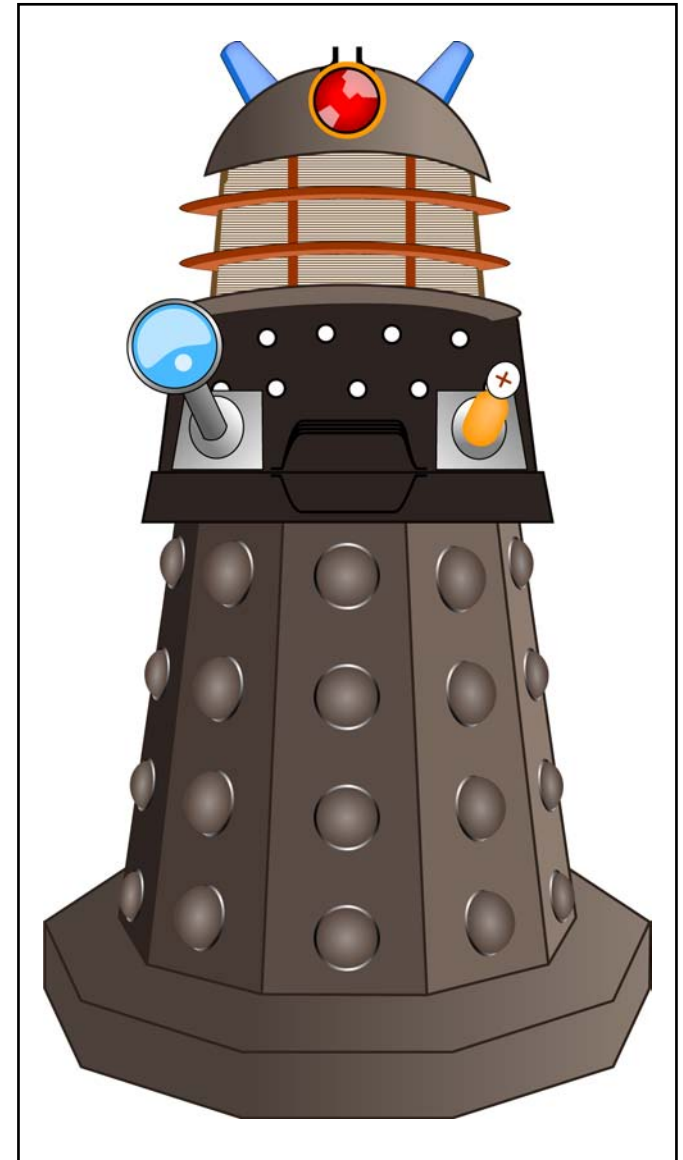


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Valberg on the puzzle of experience

the puzzle (closely related to the argument from illusion) is an antinomy

a plausible argument for p, and a plausible argument for not-p

p is (roughly) the claim that we do not perceive objects like books and daggers

as Valberg prefers to put it, p is the claim that ‘no **external object**, no part of the world, could ever be an **object of experience**. The

object of experience is, rather, always an **internal object**.’



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the object of experience

an **object of experience** is ‘something present in experience’

something present in experience is ‘right there, available to us’

‘an object which is present in experience is one with which we are acquainted’

so far, obscurum per obscurius (explaining the obscure by the more obscure)

the object of experience, contd.

if I can focus on (pick out) something, 'it must be present to me'

similarly, if I can demonstratively refer to something (i.e., refer to it by means of a demonstrative like 'this' or 'that'), 'it must be present to me'

'the fact of an object's presence...makes the object available to us to focus on, or pick out [and] makes the object demonstratively available'

external objects

an external object (thing) or part of the world is an object that has an existence that is independent of experience: that exists, or could exist, without being an object of experience

for example, a particular copy of Valberg's book *The Puzzle of Experience*, a particular H₂O molecule, and Iraq, are all external objects (or so Valberg is assuming)

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internal objects

an internal object 'is an object whose existence is not independent of its presence in experience. In this case, existence and presence collapse into one.'

a comparison with Berkeley's view: 'To exist is to be present (or as Berkeley puts it, 'to be is to be perceived' [esse est percipi]). I mention Berkeley's view not because we are going to take it seriously, but simply to place the contrast we are trying to explain in a familiar historical perspective. In Berkeley's kind of Idealism, we might say, there are no external objects; all objects are internal.'



the first stage of the problematic reasoning

‘everyone...knows he has eyes and a brain, and that light is reflected from objects and then travels to his eyes, and that because of what happens after that—because, i.e., of what happens in the nervous system and brain, he then has the kind of experience he then has...I shall call this the causal picture of experience...[it] is not in any sense a ‘philosophical’ view or theory’

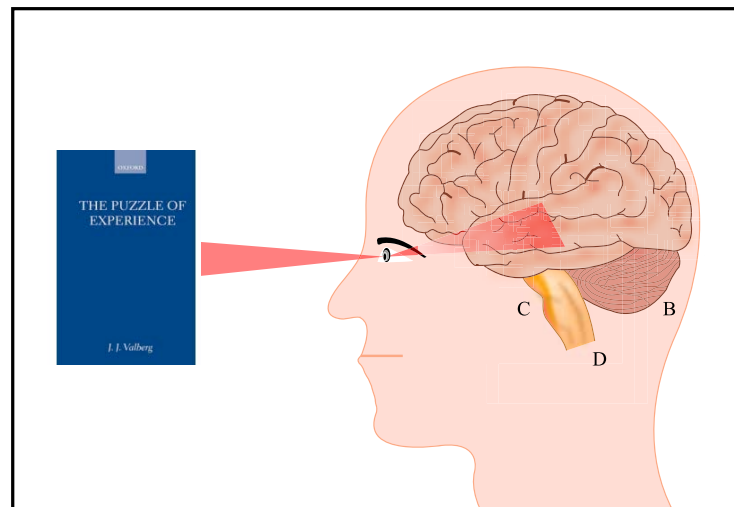


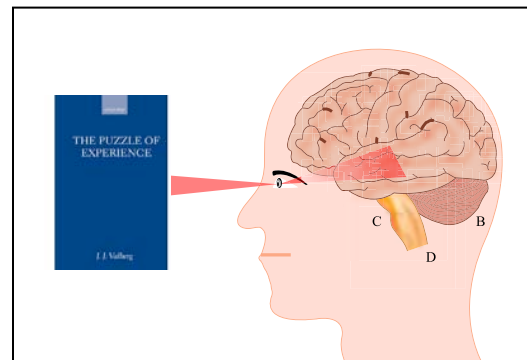
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the causal picture and the causal theory

the causal picture: as a matter of empirical fact, if S sees a book, then the book causes certain events to occur in S's retina, optic nerve, etc., resulting in S's having a certain visual experience
'part of everyday knowledge'

the causal theory: necessarily, S sees a book iff the book causes (in such-and-such ways) S to have (so-and-so kind of) visual experience

the causal theory is very controversial



the second stage

‘if the activity in my brain could somehow be held constant, the earlier parts of the causal chain might somehow be eliminated without this having any effect on my experience’

‘This possibility...might be summed up by saying that the external thing, the object in the world, is ‘potentially irrelevant’ to experience’

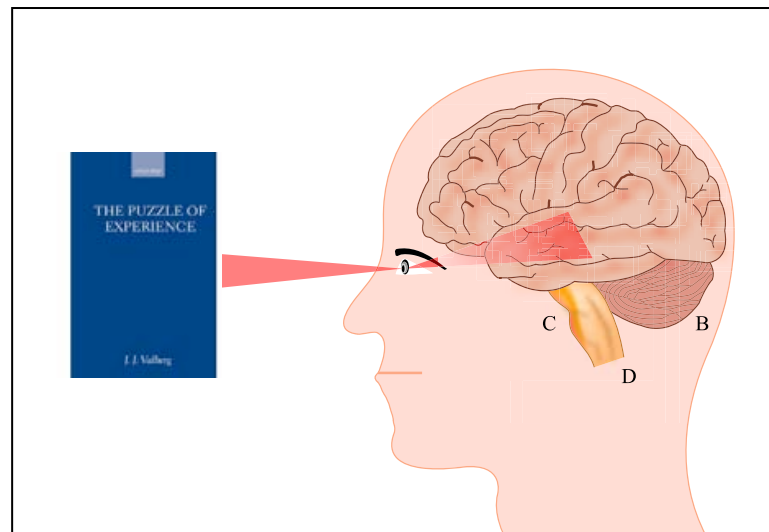


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'it is handy to bring God in here'

'half way through the last five seconds God...eliminated the book but maintained the activity in my brain just as it was when the book was there'

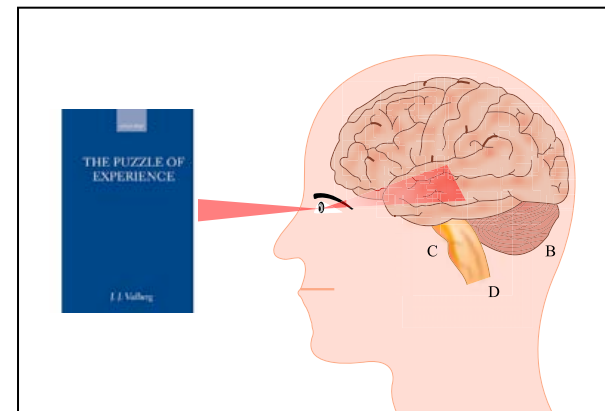


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the third stage of the problematic reasoning

‘I focus on something, on this object...and stay with it, with this object, for a brief period of time...I focused on whatever object it was that was present in my experience when I looked at the book, and I remained carefully focused on that object for five seconds...the crux of the matter is the assertion that had God intervened, this object would have remained (just as it has remained) present in my experience’

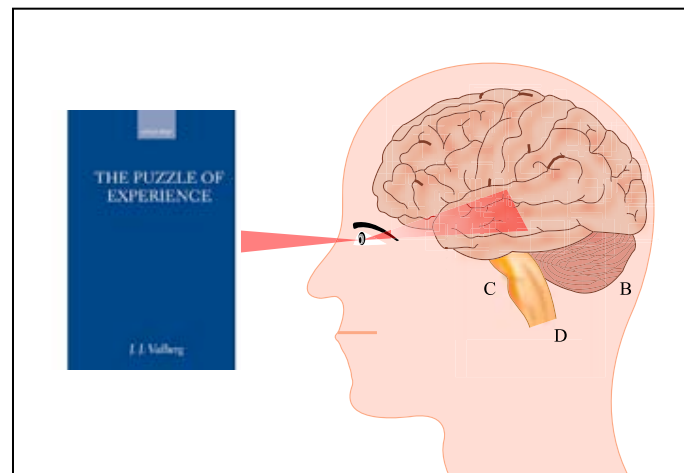


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the conclusion of the problematic reasoning

‘What follows? It follows (plainly) that this object, the object on which I have actually been focused for the last five seconds, is not the book...With respect to anything present in my experience, then, I can reduce to absurdity the assumption that it is part of the world’

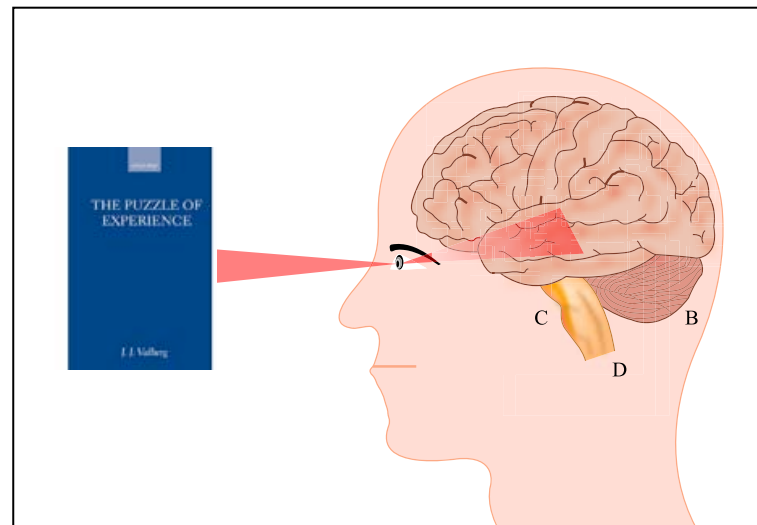


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the second half of the antinomy

by the problematic reasoning, 'I conclude that this object, the object present to me when I look at the book, cannot be the book...so it, this object, is an internal object, something which exists in so far as it is present in my experience. But wait, this object is a book.'

'Where is the argument? There is no argument. The arguments are all on the other side..the book is all I find when I am open to how things are in my experience.'

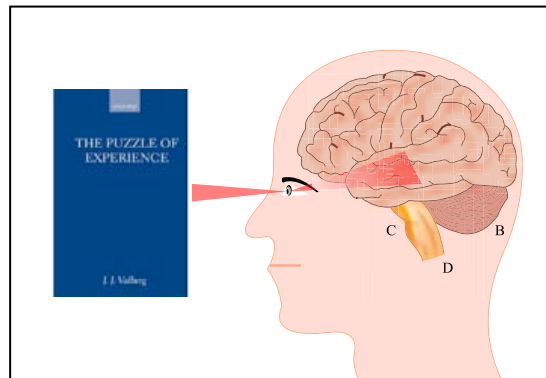


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the antinomy is produced by...

‘...the fact that my experience is a subject-matter on which I can reflect in two very different ways. There is the indirect way: reasoning, in terms of the causal picture of experience, to a conclusion about how things are in my experience. And the direct way: simply being open to how things are in my experience.’

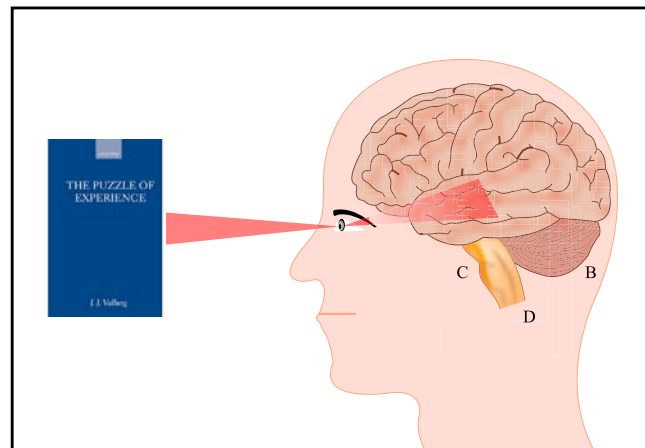


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being open to our experience

‘We do not go around in life being open to our experience...I pick up what looks like a box of cigars...To my surprise, it is not a box of cigars. ‘This is a book.’ We can agree...that this thought would not be philosophical...it would not involve my being open to my experience.’

so what’s the difference between this thought and the thought (‘this is a book’) in the second half of the antinomy?



being open to our experience

two differences

first, the overthrown thought in the cigar store ('this is a box of cigars') is specific to the perceptual situation in the cigar store—but the problematic reasoning applies to every situation

second, I discover something new when I realize in the cigar store that this is a book—but when I am open to my experience I discover nothing (I already knew that this—*The Puzzle of Experience*—is a book)



a comparison with Hume

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A Treatise of Human Nature by David Hume.

‘Hume too speaks of a transition in which the conclusion of his reasoning gets overthrown, but it is a different kind of transition...Hume knows that it will not be long before nature and everyday life reassert their hold over him, and the deliverances of his philosophical reflections fall by the wayside.’

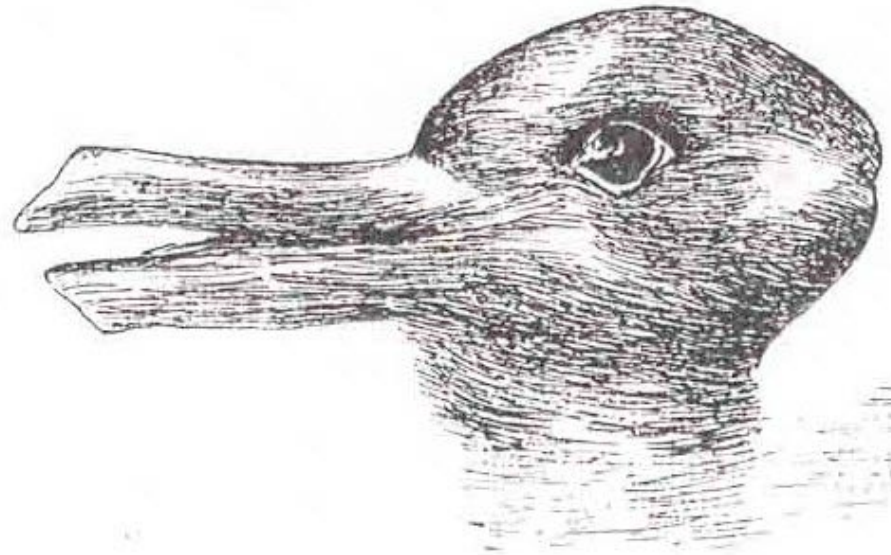


Hume on philosophical reasoning

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther. (*Treatise of Human Nature*)

the difference, as Valberg sees it

‘Here the transition is not something which occurs when I cease philosophising; it is part of the philosophical enterprise...Before, the conclusion seemed true; now it seems absurd. It is like a change of aspect, except for one thing—there is no surprise.’



Heidegger's (?) 'solution'



reject the causal picture of experience:
'there is one thing our scientific study of ourselves cannot (legitimately) include, viz. our experience—that from 'within' which we are faced by the world, the object of our scientific studies.'

but, Valberg says: 'I cannot persuade myself that it is illegitimate to extend the concept of causation to how things are within my experience...Here, as I see it, is where all the argument comes to rest.'

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Martin Heidegger (1889 - 1976).

summary

presumably (!), the faulty half of the antimony is the first, where we conclude:

C. no external object is an object of experience

but we haven't explained what is wrong with the argument for (C)

a question for discussion:

are the first half of the antinomy and the argument from illusion basically the same argument, differently presented?

Tye and Nagel

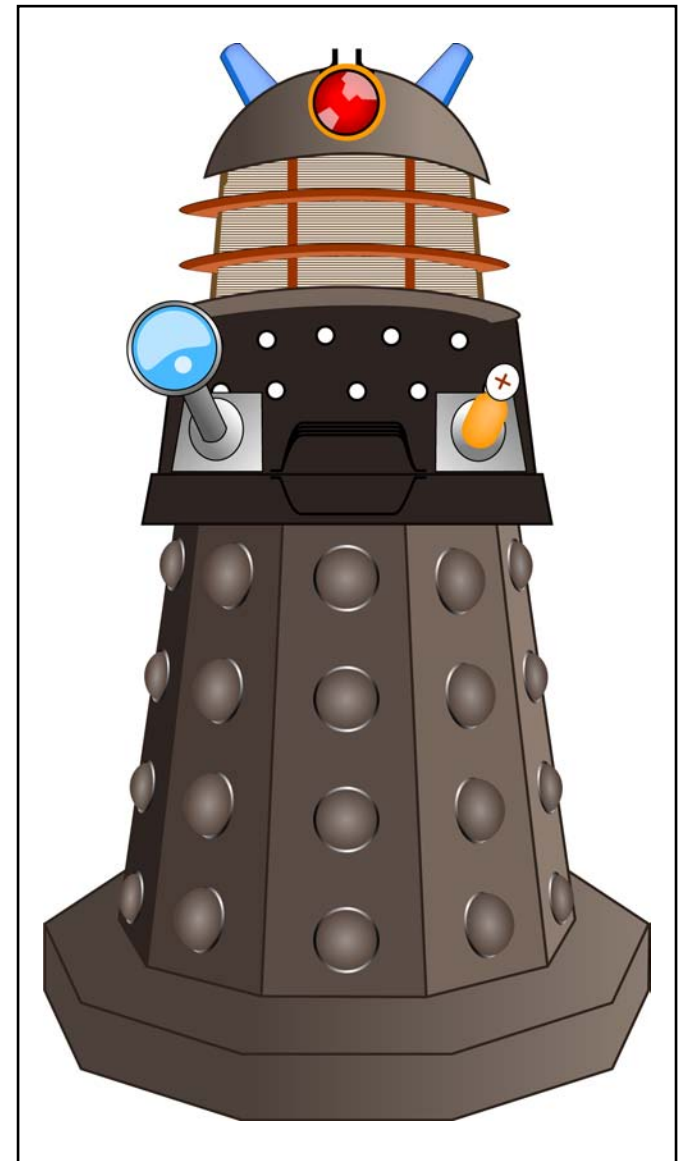


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