Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat”

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33.0 Thesis:

An organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something it is like to be that organism—something it is like for the organism.

This ‘subjective quality of experience’ is not captured by any of the familiar versions of the physicalism.

The claim is that functionalism exhausts the analysis of this subjective quality of experience.

34.0 The argument

In short, it is that every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected to a single point of view, and it seems implausible that any objective, physicalist explanation could explain this single point of view.

the example is that of a bat. I cannot imagine what it is like to be a bat, as my imagination is limited by my experience, and I have no experience being a bat. I can imagine what it is like to be me as a bat, but I cannot imagine what it is like to be a bat.

In other words, I cannot imagine what it is like to adopt the bat’s point of view.

If facts relevant to the mental life of the bat that essential to the explanation of that bat’s mental life are accessible only to the bat, any explanation that I offer will miss those facts. Therefore, any explanation that I offer will miss facts that are essential to the mental life of the bat, and the my explanation will be incomplete.

That’s the argument. Simple, ain’t it?