

The question of the mind-body problem often challenges the balance of science and philosophy in our most mysterious and yet central aspects, our own minds. This essay will explore these very issues and examine whether Thomas Nagel's objections to the reduction theory are valid, and how if at all his explanation answers the mind-body problem.

It has been argued that the mind and the brain are correlated in such a way that the experiences of the mind are a result of activities within the physical brain. This implies that without a brain or working physical body, the mind would not exist. This argument can be furthered to state that the experiences of the mind can be reduced to mental processes.¹ This is the basic argument of "reductionism" which Thomas Nagel objects to in his article What Is It Like to Be a Bat? He breaks the mind down into two categories; the subjective and objective.² The subjective mind is connected to our consciousness, and inner processes, which he describes as what it feels like to be a certain organism. The objective mind which can be externally experienced or understood includes the physiological structure of the brain. Thomas Nagel examines the mind and brain of a Bat to argue that the reduction theory can not be true. He states that although we as humans can understand the intricate physical details of a Bat's brain we can not know what it would feel like to experience a physical environment the way they do. Through our own scientific discovery we know that Bats do not have visual perception. They send sound waves out into their atmosphere by making a high pitched squeaking sound by sensing how the bounce back to them they determine distance, size, shape and movement. We

¹ Nagel, Thomas *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?* (Broadview Press, 2002) 478.

² *ibid*

can easily understand this concept however it is hardly within the human realm of imagination to understand how it must *feel* to experience the world through the perception of a Bat.³ Thomas Nagel reverses this example to argue that no amount of scientific evidence about our own perception can shed light onto the *feeling* of experiencing the world through a human mind.

“This bears directly on the mind-body problem. For if the facts of experience – facts about what it feels like for the experiencing organism – are accessible only from one point of view, then it is a mystery how the true character of experience could be revealed in the physical condition of the organism.”⁴

Thomas Nagel does not make an argument for the dualist or the physicalist. He merely argues that as it stands the physicalist perspective can not be true due to a limited viewpoint. Because he does not take a strong position it is difficult to develop an opposing one. I agree with Nagel’s perspective that the mind can not be reduced to the purely physical level. I feel that it would not be possible to ignore the “subjective mind” because I have an aspect to myself which reacts based on what I feel at an emotional, not physical level. This aspect of me is what sets me apart from all others with the same basic physiological systems. In contrast the idea that a spiritual aspect of me could be sustained without the physical one is also equally improbable. I agree with the arguments presented by Thomas Nagel.

In conclusion, the arguments presented in Thomas Nagel’s “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” are valid, and disprove the possibility of reducing the mind to a purely physical level it does not answer the mind-body question, or present us with even another possibility for its solution.

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

