

Philosophical Thought [Online edition]

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FACING UP TO DAVID CHALMERS' PHILOSOPHY OF MIND: The General Overview

1. Introduction

According to Frank Plumpton Ramsey, “we are driven to philosophize, because we do not know clearly what we mean; the question is always ‘what do I mean by x ?’” [Ramsey, 1950: p. 268] In my opinion, such x is consciousness, if we are talking about such philosophical tradition as *Philosophy of Mind*. We can agree with Patrick Grim that “contemporary philosophy of mind is actively interdisciplinary. A broad range of disciplines is involved in the ongoing attempt to understand what minds are and how they work: psychology, neuroscience, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, computer science, and even robotics. And goal here, as in all philosophy, is conceptual clarification and rational argument”. [Grim, 2008: p. 1] One of the most important philosophical questions is “What is consciousness?” There were a lot of attempts to answer it. This paper is a general overview of the answer to this question of one of the most influential modern philosophers of mind — the Australian philosopher *David John Chalmers*.

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2. The Easy Problems and the Hard Problem of Consciousness

What is consciousness? For Chalmers “conscious experience is at once the most familiar thing in the world and the most mysterious. There is nothing we know about more directly than consciousness” [Chalmers, 1996: p. 3] but “there is nothing that is harder to explain” [Chalmers, 1995: p. 200] It must be said that it isn’t the kind of “mysteriousness” like McGinn’s mysterianism, which rejects any attempts to solve the problem of consciousness. According to Chalmers, we are not “cognitively closed” in the respect of this phenomenon. Contrario, the Australian philosopher proposes “to confront it directly”. [Chalmers, 1995: ibidem] But simultaneously he states the obvious fact that “there is not just one problem of consciousness. “Consciousness” is an ambiguous term, referring to many different phenomena”. [Chalmers, 1995: ibidem]

The easy problems and the hard problem. It is a famous fact that David Chalmers entered into the world history of philosophy as a philosopher who divided the problems of consciousness into “the easy” and “the hard” problems. This was done at Tucson conference in 1994 and published in 1995 paper “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness”. [Chalmers, 1995]

So, according to Chalmers, the easy problems of consciousness deal with cognitive sciences and are those that “seem directly susceptible to the standard methods of cognitive science, whereby a phenomenon is explained in terms of computational or neural mechanisms” and “the hard problems are those that seem to resist those methods”. [Chalmers, 1995: p. 200] They include such cognitive phenomena as the reportability of mental states, the focus of attention, the deliberate control of behavior and others. The hard problem *par excellence* is the problem of *experience*. The latter means our *subjective* aspect, or as was noted by Thomas Nagel there is *something it is like* to be a conscious organism. [Nagel, 1974: p. 1]

The easy problems are ‘easy’ because they can be explained in terms of *abilities and functions*. (For the latter we just have to specify a *mechanism* that can perform the function) [Chalmers, 1995: p. 202] But the hard problem is really ‘hard’ because it goes *beyond* the performance of functions,

¹ In my opinion, ‘the hard problem of consciousness’ in the very meaning that was postulated by David Chalmers in his program works such as “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness” [Chalmers, 1995] and “the Conscious Mind” [Chalmers, 1996] is really possible on such terms:

1. The causal closure of the physical.
2. The inefficiency of consciousness to influence the physical processes.
3. Therefore, consciousness is a sort of *epiphenomenon* in respect of these processes.

From this, it follows *the* question like “Why does consciousness (or the phenomenal experience) *accompany* the physical processes?” when it is logically possible for it not to do it. But, if we endue consciousness with the *caus-*

because always remains the following question: *Why is the performance of these functions accompanied by experience?*¹ [Chalmers, 1995: p. 203] “Why doesn’t all this information-processing go on “in the dark”, free of any inner feel?”² [Chalmers, 1995: p. ibidem] The main conclusion of all this is that we “*can’t explain conscious experience on the cheap*”. [Chalmers, 1995: p. 208]

A catalogue of conscious experiences. Speaking about conscious experience, David Chalmers distinguishes such its components as: *visual experiences, auditory experiences, tactile experiences, olfactory experiences, taste experiences, experiences of hot and cold, pain.* Also, he invokes *mental imagery, conscious thought, emotions, the sense of self.* According to him, “in addressing the philosophical mysteries associated with conscious experience, a simple colour sensation raises the problems as deeply as one’s experience of a Bach chorale”. [Chalmers, 1996: p. 4] This brief outline must help us concentrate our attention in respect of the main talking point — i.e. *the conscious experience.*

According to Chalmers, the precise synonyms of the latter are such notions as: “experience”, “qualia”, “phenomenology”, “phenomenal”, “subjective experience”, and “something it is like”. Any differences in these notions are not noteworthy. Therefore, talking about consciousness, we are talking about the subjective quality of our experience: *something it is like to be a cognitive agent.* [Chalmers, 1996: p. 6]

3. Phenomenal and psychological concepts of mind

At the bottom of this lies the distinction between the two concepts of *mind*: the phenomenal and psychological concepts of mind. The former deals with *conscious experience.* The latter deals with the *causal role* that mental state plays in cognitive structure. [Chalmers, 1996: p. 11] The *conceptual* distinction between them is the following: the phenomenal mind is characterized in that it is *experienced,* the psychological — in that it *does.* At a first approximation, the phenomenal concept of mind deals with the first-person data, and the psychological concept deals with the third-person data. [Chalmers, 1996: p. 16] For the reason that psychological and phenomenal exhaust the mental, they are the central aspects of the mind [Chalmers, 1996: pp. 17, 22]

al force in respect of the physical, namely the *original* ‘hard problem’ will slip out of existence. So, I think that Chalmersian ‘hard problem’ of consciousness is based on the *epiphenomenalist* doctrine. (Of course, then we’ll have other ‘hard’ questions like “how can something nonphysical like consciousness influence the physical?” However, it will be rather the sphere of *interactionism* than of epiphenomenalism.)

² I think that it is another way to say “Why aren’t we zombies?”

On a basis of such distinction, David Chalmers separates the mind-body problem into two parts: the easy and the hard ones. The first part deals with the psychological aspects of the mind and isn't so hard to be explained because it poses only *technical* problems for cognitive sciences and some difficult tasks for the philosophical investigation. The second part of the mind-body problem is one that poses the deep philosophical *mysteries*. The deepest question of this problem is the following: *How can the physical system give rise to the conscious experience?*

Also, Chalmers proposes to divide the *link* between the physical and the mental into two parts: the link between *physical and psychological*, and the link between *psychological and phenomenal*. According to Chalmers, the first link is partially solved and we have all the resources to solve it completely. But the second link is really ill understood, because always remains the further question: *Why are the psychological properties accompanied by phenomenal properties?* Together with Ray Jackendoff, David Chalmers proposes to call such-like problem *the mind-mind problem*. [Chalmers, 1996: p. 25]

Together with psychological and phenomenal mind and psychological and phenomenal properties, Chalmers also divides consciousness into two parts: *the psychological and phenomenal* consciousness. The latter is the key-value sense of the consciousness and means to instantiate some *quality*. The former is related to such phenomena as *awakeness, introspection, reportability, self-consciousness, attention, voluntary control, knowledge*. The psychological property that is directly associated with phenomenal consciousness is called *awareness*³. Awareness is the most common name of the psychological consciousness and therefore is a precisely functional notion⁴. According to Chalmers, “wherever there is phenomenal consciousness, there seems to be awareness. The fact that any conscious experience is accompanied by awareness is made clear by the fact that conscious experience is *reportable*.” [Chalmers, 1996: p. 28]

4. Supervenience

David Chalmers defines his position towards consciousness in the following way: “Consciousness supervenes naturally on the physical, without supervening logically or ‘metaphysically’”. [Chalmers, 1996: p. 162] For him, the notion of supervenience is the central notion in his explaining of the structure of consciousness. It is used directly to clarify the idea of reductive explanation which is not the “be-all and end-all” explanation. [Chalmers, 1996: p. 43]

³ I have to note that in the ordinary English it means just ‘consciousness’. But in Chalmersian philosophy it is a technical term.

⁴ Very close to Chalmersian awareness/consciousness distinction is the distinction of A-consciousness/P-consciousness, made by Ned Block in his 1995 paper. [Block, 1995: p. 230]

In general, according to Chalmers, the notion of supervenience is needed to illuminate the dependence *relations* between the *low-level* and the *high-level* properties: A-properties (intuitively, the former and, used to be the *physical* properties) and B-properties (respectively the latter).

The basic definition of *supervenience* is the following: “B-properties *supervene on* A-properties if no two possible situations are identical with respect to their A-properties while differing in their B-properties.” [Chalmers, 1996: p. 33]

Chalmers divides supervenience into two subgroups:

1. *Global* and *local* supervenience (if we consider situations with worlds or individuals);
2. *Logical* and *natural* supervenience (depending on how we construe the notion of *possibility*). [Chalmers, 1996: *ibidem*]

Global and local supervenience. According to Chalmers, “B-properties *supervene locally on* A-properties if the A-properties of an individual determine the B-properties of that individual—if, that is, any two possible individuals that instantiate the same A-properties instantiate the same B-properties”. And “B-properties *supervene globally on* A-properties, by contrast, if the A-facts about the entire world determine the B-facts: that is, if there are no two possible worlds identical with respect to their A-properties, but differing with respect to their B-properties”. Local supervenience implies global supervenience, but not conversely. But, more important is the distinction between *logical* and *natural* supervenience. [Chalmers, 1996: pp. 33-34]

Logical and natural supervenience. “B-properties *supervene logically on*⁵ A-properties if no two logically possible situations are identical with respect to their A-properties but distinct with respect to their B-properties”⁶. Logical supervenience means the logical possibility in the broadest sense”. [Chalmers, 1996: p. 35]

“B-properties *supervene naturally on* A-properties if any two naturally possible situations with the same A-properties have the same B-properties”. Naturally possible situation is possible when there is no natural laws’ violation. Such a situation means the real *empirical* possibility. Natural supervenience holds when A-facts *naturally necessitate* B-facts. [Chalmers, 1996: pp. 36-37]

⁵ Although, *supervene on* in general means *depend on*, there is the strict technical difference between their usages. For example, *supervenience* (as opposed to *dependence*) is not a relation of ontological priority: the *supervenience* of B on A does not guarantee that A-properties are ontologically prior to B-properties. [McLaughlin B., Bennett K., 2005] Also, *supervenience* is a polysemic term which is mainly not used outside of the philosophical society, as opposed to *dependence* which is an ordinary term.

⁶ We can also add the definition given in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “there cannot be an A-difference without a B-difference.” [ibidem] ⁷ The argument for conceivability of zombies can be put in such ways:

1. Zombies are conceivable.
2. Whatever is conceivable is possible.
3. Therefore, zombies are possible. [Kirk, 2003; Kirk, 2005: p. 27]

According to Chalmers, consciousness just *naturally* but not logically supervenes on physical. It is because the necessary connection between physical structure and experience is provided only by the laws of nature and not by any conceptual or logical force.

5. Zombie and zombie world. Chalmers-zombie

According to David Chalmers, the logical possibility (or *conceivability*) of a zombie is “the most obvious way (although not the only way) to investigate the logical supervenience of consciousness”. [Chalmers, 1996: p. 94] His formula of zombie’s notion is⁷ classical: “someone or something physically identical to me (or to any other conscious being), but lacking conscious experiences altogether”. [Chalmers, 1996: *ibidem*] Also, he proposes to consider the logical possibility of a zombie world: a world physically identical to ours but without conscious experiences altogether. A world where everyone is a zombie.

From henceforth, Chalmers offers us to consider and imagine his zombie twin or *Chalmers-zombie*⁸. As before, this creature is in all senses identical to the original philosopher except that it wholly lacks the conscious experience. Chalmers-zombie will also be identical *psychologically* and *functionally*. It will have the same high-level information processing and the behavior, but all its functioning won’t be accompanied by any *phenomenality*: inside of him *all will be dark*⁹. Such-like zombies are called *phenomenal zombies*, as opposed to psychological zombies (which may or may not lack phenomenal consciousness). [Chalmers, 1996: p. 95]

⁷ The argument for conceivability of zombies can be put in such ways:

1. Zombies are conceivable.
2. Whatever is conceivable is possible.
3. Therefore, zombies are possible. [Kirk, 2003; Kirk, 2005: p. 27]

1. It is conceivable that there be zombies
2. If it is conceivable that there be zombies, it is metaphysically possible that there be zombies.
3. If it is metaphysically possible that there be zombies, then consciousness is nonphysical.
4. Consciousness is nonphysical. [Chalmers, 2002: p. 249]

⁸ I think that in the heart of the ‘hard problem of consciousness’ lies the conceivability and logical possibility of zombies.

⁹ It seems like, in that a zombie twin has the same information-processing, he will also have the same phenomenal experience because of the fundamental principle “where there is simple information processing, there is simple experience, and where there is complex information processing, there is complex experience.” [Chalmers, 1995: p. 217] But, according to Chalmers, the fundamental laws in a zombie world are different from ours. The same also goes for the psychophysical laws. [letters to the author of a paper dated back to 14 and 15.08.2014]

According to Chalmers, it is not a question whether zombies are naturally possible. The question is whether zombies are *logically* possible and *the* notion is *conceptually coherent*. Because of logical possibility of a zombie, the supervenience of consciousness on *physical*¹⁰ fails and so does the reductive explanation in general. [Chalmers, 1996: pp. 96-97]

6. In search of a nonreductive theory

As noted above, finding the hard problem really ‘hard’ and mysterious, Chalmers leaves no doubt about its solving eventually. By virtue of the fact that the reductionist (functionalist, physicalist) methods failed on the way towards explaining consciousness, we have to find our way in the pipeline of the nonreductive theory. This theory must be based on the principles of *structural coherence* and *organizational invariance* (which are *nonbasic* ones) and on *the double-aspect view of information* (which is a *basic* principle).

To start with, David Chalmers proposes to take consciousness as a *fundamental* feature of our world along with such fundamental world features as mass, charge etc. This follows from the examples of physics’ history when some entities that cannot be explained in terms of something simpler must be taken as something fundamental (e.g., as Maxwell did). This helped to expand the ontology of physics. And, according to Chalmers, we have to do the same in respect of our ontology relating to consciousness. Given that all in the physics is compatible with the absence of consciousness, we have to build the *psychophysical* laws that will *bind* physical and experience. Physical theory explains the physical processes, and the psychophysical theory must explain how these processes are associated with consciousness. [Chalmers, 1995: pp. 209-210] Chalmers proposes to call his position *naturalistic dualism*. It is a variety of dualism, but “it is an innocent version of dualism, entirely compatible with the scientific view of the world”. [Chalmers, 1995: p. 210] The difference is that it postulates its basic properties *over and above* the laws of physics. According to Chalmers, naturalistic dualism is more related to the physics than to the biology, because of the latter has less in common with fundamental entities than the former¹¹. [Chalmers, 1995: *ibidem*] For now, it must be said a few words about the *psychophysical principles* mentioned above.

1. The principle of structural coherence

It is a principle of *coherence* between the structures of *consciousness and awareness*. [Chalmers, 1995: p. 212] There is a sort of *isomorphism* between them. [Chalmers, 1995: p. 213] This principle isn’t logically necessary principle (e.g., because we can imagine a zombie who has

¹⁰ According to Frank Jackson, under ‘physical’ are meant phenomena that are associated with physical, chemical and biological sciences. [Jackson, 1982: p. 127]

¹¹ I think, this view is a bit controversial, because biology also deals with fundamental principle of the living world like evolution.

phenomena associated with awareness but has no phenomena associated with consciousness). If we accept such-like principle, it follows that the most *direct physical correlate* of consciousness will be awareness. [Chalmers, 1995: p. 214]

2. The principle of organizational invariance

This principle postulates that the systems with the same *functional organization* will have the same qualitative experience. [Chalmers, 1995: ibidem] The appearance of consciousness depends rather on the system's *organizational* properties (based on a causal interplay of its components) than on its physical structure. [Chalmers, 1995: pp. 214-215]

3. The double-aspect view of information

It has to be said that previous principles were not basic ones. But for building of a fundamental theory of consciousness it is needed to use a *basic* principle. The basic principle involved by Chalmers invokes the notion of *information*. The information has two aspects: *physical* and *phenomenal*. And there is the direct isomorphism between them. [Chalmers, 1995: pp. 216-217] According to Chalmers, it is this principle that can be considered as a basic one: "experience arises by virtue of its status as one aspect of information, when the other aspect is found embodied in physical processing." [Chalmers, 1995: p. 216] The complexity of experience depends on the complexity of the system's information-processing: "Where there is simple information-processing, there is simple experience, and where there is complex information-processing, there is complex experience". [Chalmers, 1995: p. 217] From this principle it follows that "*phenomenal properties are the internal aspect of information*". [Chalmers, 1995: ibidem] We can say that the double-aspect principle gives us a *link* between experience and physical processes on the fundamental level. Of course, David Chalmers admits that this principle is "extremely speculative" and it can be ignored for the scientific methods, "but in addressing some philosophical issues it is quite suggestive". [Chalmers, 1995: ibidem]

7. Conclusion

In general, it must be said that this analysis does not pretend to be something be-all and end-all in respect of David Chalmers' philosophy of mind. It can be considered as a kind of preliminary canter to the deeper research and understanding of the latter.

I think that philosophy is something that works with the mere *evidence* — that is with such things that at first sight seem even trivial and not noteworthy. But here appears the main difference between philosophical thought and everyday one — the former sees the problem in those places where the latter doesn't. Philosophical thought is one that "stumbles". A philosopher can't just say "It is plain to see and I've got it all!" and with this just finish his reasoning. It won't be philosophy at all! Claiming for clearness and preciseness, the philosophical thought cannot be satisfied with this. Always there is something that is *over and above*. Rather than anywhere else here is contained

the very sense of the philosophy — to question while leading up to the boundaries of existence and mind, and so, because of such-like new boundaries' opening, more and more to move away from them.

Nevertheless, philosophy must be supported with the mere *common sense*¹², because otherwise, it can pass to complete speculation. Common sense must be a great constraint on a way toward philosophizing.

¹² By 'common sense' I mean the ability of our mind to estimate adequately any given situation and come to right conclusions on a basis of such estimation. So here, I'm talking about self-evident things. But also, I have to say that 'common sense' isn't 'common'. In my opinion, the Ukrainian equivalent «zdorovy hluzd» (здоровий глузд), which would be more literally conveyed in English as "sound reason" far better shows the real meaning of the English phrase 'common sense' I'm talking about here. E.g., psychotics, on the one hand, can have 'common sense' (e.g., they can admit that the Earth is round and orbits around the Sun), on the other hand — they cannot (e.g., when they are sure of having a squirrel in their heads). According to 'common sense', for example, we can think that to bring money in the evening is a bad sign, but according to the 'sound reason' such belief is nothing but a kind of superstition.

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According to Tim Crane, “the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness is supposed to be the real heart of the mind-body problem in today’s philosophy”. [Crane, 2000: p. 2] The idea of *the* problem can be expressed in the following way: *Why are the physical processes in our brain accompanied by the qualitative (or phenomenal) feel?* The mere qualitative feel or *qualia* are those to be explained. The originator of the problem’s name is the Australian philosopher David Chalmers

who divided the problems of consciousness into the ‘easy’ problems and the ‘hard’ problem. The former are ‘easy’ because they can be functionally explained. The ‘hard’ problem, in its turn, cannot. From this, it follows that the explanation of the hard problem of consciousness must be found elsewhere. Chalmers’ nonreductive theory of consciousness (or *naturalistic dualism*) is a serious candidate for a such-like explanation. In general, it suggests *conscious experience* as one of the *fundamental* features of our world, together with such fundamental world features as mass, charge etc. It is a general overview of David Chalmers’ philosophy of mind that is carrying out in the proposed paper.

Key words: the ‘easy’ problems and the ‘hard’ problem of consciousness, the phenomenal and psychological concepts of mind, awareness, experience, something it is like, qualia, supervenience, zombie, naturalistic dualism, the principle of structural coherence, the principle of organizational invariance, the double-aspect theory of information.

Андрій Леонов

НАЗУСТРІЧ ФІЛОСОФІЇ СВІДОМОСТІ ДЕВІДА ЧАЛМЕРСА: ЗАГАЛЬНИЙ ОГЛЯД

Згідно з Тімом Крейном «важка проблема свідомості» вважається справжнім серцем психофізичної проблеми у сьогоденній філософії. [Crane, 2000: р. 2] Ідея самої проблеми може бути виражена наступним чином: *Чому фізичні процеси у нашому мозку супроводжуються квалітативним (чи феноменальним) відчуттям? Саме квалітативне відчуття чи кваліа і є тим, що має отримати пояснення.* Винахідником назви цієї проблеми є австралійський філософ Девід Чалмерс, який розділив проблеми свідомості на «легкі» проблеми та «важку» проблему. Перші є «легкими», оскільки вони можуть бути пояснені функціонально. «Важка» проблема, в свою чергу, не може отримати такого пояснення. З цього випливає, що пояснення важкої проблеми свідомості має бути знайдено деінде. Чалмерсова нередуктивна теорія (чи *натуралістичний дуалізм*) є серйозним кандидатом для такого роду пояснення. В цілому, вона пропонує прийняти *свідомий досвід* у якості однієї з фундаментальних характеристик світу, таких як маса, заряд ітд. У цій статті пропонується загальний огляд філософії свідомості Девіда Чалмерса.

Ключові слова: «легкі» проблеми і «важка» проблема свідомості; феноменальні та психологічні поняття психіки; сприймання; досвід; дещо, як воно; кваліа; супервенція; зомбі; натуралістичний дуалізм; принцип структурної узгодженості; принцип структурної незмінності; двохаспектна теорія інформації.

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