

Chalmers: “The Puzzle of Conscious Experience”

There are two kinds of problems associated with consciousness:

Easy problems (how do input/output functions in the brain work? How does language work? How does the brain integrate and order its experiences?)

The Hard problem: How do physical processes give rise to *subjective* experience? Why do we have this experience at all? Couldn't an unconscious automaton run these brain processes just as well?

The hard problem is hard not because the easy problems take little effort (they're very difficult problems in a certain respect). It's hard because we *don't immediately know how to answer it*, while we can trust that established methods of scientific investigation can address the “easy problems”.

What is this conscious experience we're talking about?

Mary experiment: If there's something that Mary doesn't know (and it seems there is), *that's* what we're trying to explain

The hard problem goes beyond problems about how functions are performed

If consciousness *can't* be explained by a set of physical laws, then physics (however complete) can't explain consciousness. This means that some other fundamental features of the world must be proposed to explain consciousness.

The suggestion: Conscious experience is a fundamental, irreducible feature of the world

This is not substance dualism, *per se*. Maybe consciousness is an irreducible kind of some more fundamental substance: INFORMATION

Could consciousness arise in an artificial system—in a non-natural brain? *Sure, why not?*

Thought experiment: Assume that a silicone brain copy does *not* have the same kind of consciousness that I have (because, let's say, it generates different experiences (rather than none at all))

Now suppose I build an *auxiliary* silicone visual system and hook it up to my neural cortex with a two-way switch. I look at a patch of red, and start flipping the switch back and forth. By definition of our assumption, the resultant “brains” must have different conscious experiences. But because the *organization* of the

brain hasn't changed (the two brains are functionally isomorphic), there can't be any behavioral or belief change—I'll keep saying I'm seeing red, and insist I'm seeing the same color all along, and *believe it*.

But this is crazy (says Chalmers). It doesn't make sense to say that I'm really having *different* conscious experiences, but maintain that I'm *not aware* of the difference. So this shows that I'm not really having different conscious experiences in the case—the silicone-based brain can have conscious experiences *just like* yours and mine.