

A Marvel, not a Mystery – Jonathan Harlow

I have shaped my talk to address Chalmers' concerns. My own view comes out fairly clearly, I hope, but for the record: -

I reckon there are dangers of reification in the word 'Consciousness'; and prefer 'conscious' and 'consciously'. If Consciousness is a state, it is one like medieval England with wide borderlands, not like the UK with linear frontiers.

As far as I am concerned all the things I do consciously, as well as all those I do unconsciously, are physical processes. I hold this because (a) I find nothing that can't be so explained and (b) I am not aware of any alternative that makes any sort of sense.*

Accordingly, I regard the study of conscious activity as a field for scientists: neuroscientists, psychologists, and biologists. Philosophers may possibly assist by reframing vague or metaphysical questions in operational terms, so that evidence can be brought to bear. I think mine is among what Chalmers calls 'reductive' theories, lumping them in classes of his own and finding flaws in each class (2002). His own preference seems to be for a theory in which Consciousness is a 'fundamental' like 'matter': but not in fact material (as indicated in the title: 'Naturalistic Dualism' 2017). Although he appears to consider the possibilities of scientific investigation here, it is not clear how these are to apply to non-physical entities. He himself is much happier with the philosophic investigation, analysing the 'concept' of consciousness (1995), and trying to describe the 'content' of consciousness (2006).

I find Dennett's view generally the most appealing: i.e. Consciousness as a User Interface. I go perhaps a little further than he does in regarding the Self who seems to be the User of conscious thinking as not merely the 'centre of narrative gravity', but itself an edited version of a very complex biological organism. So when we are conscious, our neurones organise a sort of story in which the representation of a protagonist, the Self, interacts with representations of a changing natural and social environment. The representations here are edited, simplified, versions. So we humans can deal in real time with new situations and find new solutions – and become the most versatile and inventive of all animals.

See Chalmers & Dennett sources in the programme, plus:-

Chalmers 'Facing up to the problem of consciousness' (*Journal of Consciousness Studies* 2(3)1995, 200-19) in eg *Philosophy of Mind ed Heil* (2004) 617-640, and in shortened versions in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness* 2nd edn (1917)[†] 'The Hard Problem of Consciousness' 32-42 and 'Naturalistic Dualism' 363-373. Introduces 'the hard problem'.

Chalmers 'Perception and the Fall from Eden' in *Perceptual Experience* ed Gendler & Hawthorne, (2006) 49-125.

Dennett *Consciousness Explained* (1991).

Also recommended especially for its comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography Blackmore & Trocianko *Consciousness: an Introduction* 3rd edn (2018).

* On this view, Zombies are nonsense. Any exact physical replica of me is me, consciousness, memories and all, at the moment of twinning. The standard zombie concept simply assumes the opposite, ie begs the question.

[†] 'The Hard Problem of Consciousness' 32-42 and 'Naturalistic Dualism' 363-373. Introduces 'the hard problem'. [†] 54 articles, and not one by Dennett (an ace communicator), but one by an editor purporting to represent his views based on work up to 2005. Weird or what?