

# Consciousness I

## A Hard Problem

Carlotta Pavese

11.19.13

# Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Consciousness & The Hard Problem
- 3 Chalmers' Approach & Discussion

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# David Chalmers

## Cast of Characters



- Ph.D. Philosophy & Cognitive Science, Univ. of Indiana 1993
- Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Centre for Consciousness Studies at Australian National Univ., and Visiting Prof. at NYU
- Well-known for work on consciousness, AI & meaning
- Author of *The Character of Consciousness* (OUP 2010) & *The Conscious Mind* (OUP 1996)

# The Study of Mind

## Historical Outline

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  - Problem: ? (aside from embodiment)

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Consciousness: first person experience

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  - “Behaviorism was a self-conscious revolution against consciousness” (David Cohen, Watson’s biographer)

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# What is Consciousness?

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"Consciousness poses the most baffling problems in the science of the mind. There is nothing that we know more intimately than conscious experience, but there is nothing that is harder to explain."

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## The Easy Problem (Chalmers)

Access consciousness is **not** particularly baffling or hard to explain. Explaining it is the **easy problem**.

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- For the **Hard Problem** this is not true

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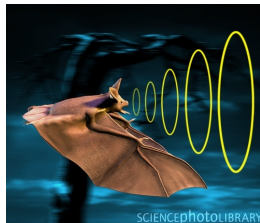
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- Nagel: there's something it's like to be a bat
- Until we've explained that, we've left something out

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- Sounds, sights & their combinations too:  
<http://youtu.be/tPxgi-PiNFE>

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### Driving Home the Hard Problem

How can we explain what it is like and why there is something it is like to have a given experience?

- Yes, it arises from physical processes
- But how and why?
- Why isn't information processed 'in the dark'?

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Why is it So Hard?

## Facing the Hard Problem (James Quoting Spencer)

“Suppose it to have become quite clear that a shock in consciousness and a molecular motion are the subjective and objective faces of the same thing; we continue utterly incapable of uniting the two, so as to conceive that reality of which they are the opposite faces.” (See Blackmore p.15)

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- “A metaphysical gap between physical phenomena and conscious experience.” (Levine)

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## The Explanatory Gap

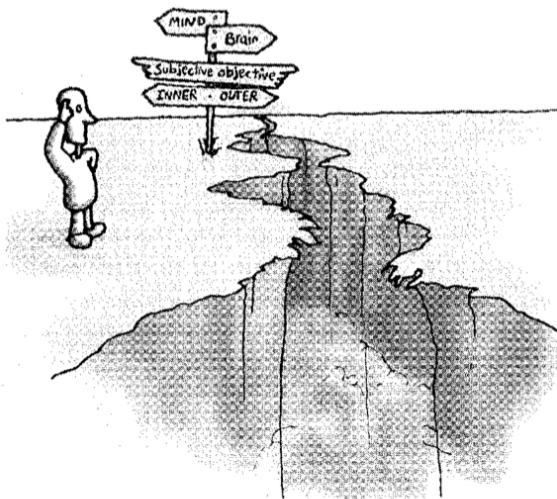


FIGURE 1.5

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  - There is nothing left to say
- Same for genes et. al. throughout high-level sciences

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## Mechanism and Function Fail

### Mechanism, Function and Conscious Experience

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- This still seems to leave open the question of what it's like to see color in that way and why it looks that way

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- “To explain experience, we need a new approach. The usual explanatory methods of cognitive science and neuroscience do not suffice.” (Chalmers p.9)

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Dramatizing it with Jackson's Thought Experiment



Jackson's Thought Experiment: Mary and B&W room

# The Hard Problem

## Dramatizing it with Chalmers' Zombies



FIGURE 2.4 • Which is which? Can you tell? Can they?

- “A zombie is just something physically identical to me, but which has no conscious experience – all is dark inside” (Chalmers *The Conscious Mind* p.96)



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- Once they've described the mind, there will still be an open question about experience

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- He goes on to propose three laws (next class)

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- Compare **vitalism** prior to biochemistry

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- So we should only accept this theory if given very strong arguments for it



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# Chalmers' Fires Back

Dear Mr. Dennett

- Imagine just how grand an illusion it would be if conscious experience didn't really exist
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- Again, there's nothing that we seem more intimately familiar with than what it feels like to be us
- So we should only accept this theory if given very strong arguments for it
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- Dennett has done neither

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- 4 Either this is an illusion (Dennett, Others)
- 5 Or we need a view of the universe that makes room for experience as fundamental (Chalmers)