

# Analysis of the human mind and the philosophy of consciousness thesis

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



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Philosophy of consciousness, undoubtedly, takes a leading position in Anglo-American philosophical thought of 20th and the beginning of 21st century. Numerous publications, devoted to the problems of consciousness are an indicator of that. Philosophy of mind is a branch of analytical philosophy, which studies philosophical aspects of consciousness problem. The central theme of philosophy of consciousness is relationship between consciousness and brain. In this context brain poses a problem of mind-body, while consciousness is understood as either the aggregate mental states, accessible only to the living being experiencing them, or as a state of monitoring internal processes by this subject.

Throughout the history theorists of equality claimed that mental states can be directly identified to brain states, which lack its own independence, in spite of the fact that both kinds of state seem dissimilar. For decades this problem of seeming difference between mental and physical remained unsolved. One of the theories to resolve the problem of equality was

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eliminativism, which claimed that in order to successfully get rid of the mental, it is imperative to acknowledge it as a verbal illusion (Dennett 459). In the beginning of 21st century one of the most influential representatives of this trend was Daniel Dennett, who described his point of view in the book “Conscious Explained”, 1992. However, defenders of conceptual analysis did not agree with Dennett’s vision. For example, David Chalmers, an Australian philosopher, who openly declared himself as a property dualist, developed his own project of mind theory (164). According to his theory in the book “The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory”, mental states are irreducible, and the mind cannot be analyzed purely physically. This paper will analyze and compare theories of both philosophers.

### **Dennett’s Eliminativism about Consciousness**

In order to prove his eliminative thesis stating that people are in fact no different than zombies, Daniel Dennett created a whole system of argumentation (72). In particular, he showed that intentionalism, which is considered to be an irreducible mental property by anti-physicalists, can be interpreted in a physical meaning as a certain characteristic of material systems. Intentionalism is a function where all attributes of consciousness are based on understanding functional roles of separate units, correlative to biological structure of an organism or a robot (Dennett 76). The characteristic of material systems appears as a result of the survival of the fittest, strengthening patterns of reasonable behavior in these systems. In other words, behavior is intentional because is aimed at achieving a certain

goal. Therefore, Dennett's strategy implies explaining mind phenomenon in terms of intentionality, by relating to evolutionist theory of natural science.

The starting point of Dennett's theory is a claim that the main operation of a brain is development, improvement, and clarification of our sensitivity to meanings we demonstrate in our everyday life. Due to evolution, brain does right things with a high level of reliability. Brain reaction to any situation is conditioned by current, local, and mechanical circumstances as a reaction to the meaning of concomitant situations of semantic factors. This kind of understanding shows that consciousness is linguistic (Dennett 231). From his point of view brain is a syntax machine, trying to imitate abilities of a semantic machine.

## **Decentralized Model of Consciousness**

Another component of Dennett's system demonstrates the illusory nature of ordinary understanding of a person's mental life. In his book Dennett was trying to prove that the "I" idea as the center of mental life must be replaced by decentralized model of consciousness, which in a better way corresponds to the parallel architecture of brain, regarded as a special biological computer. Dennett explains, that "I" illusion is a result of cultural influence (187). Although, it cannot totally disappear, but in the future this illusion will become less "toxic", as he says. It is toxic because this illusion pushes towards defeat dualism, which restrains the development of experimental neuroscience. According to Dennett, philosophy of mind must not present itself as an autonomous field. Its goal is to clear the territory to

scientific discoveries by models, metaphors, and imaginative experiments (235). It can raise provocative questions, to make scientists answer them.

Dennett's decentralized model is a so called multiple drafts model of consciousness (111). The best way to understand this model is to compare it with traditional model, or Cartesian theater, as the philosopher calls it (Dennett 113). According to the traditional point of view, all received information is stored until the entire raw material, acquired through sensory canal, will not be digested appropriately, and sent to the central managing organ. The entire sensory information goes to a single point of a brain, where the flow of consciousness is generated. Mental aspects are hidden in the deepest parts of the brain, far away from "entrances" and "exits" (Dennett 120). In multiple drafts model this whole data is separated and scattered in cerebral space and real time; problems solved by consciousness are fragmented and distributed for micro data processing. There is no common point where all mind data is gathered. The flow of consciousness is a multitude of parallel streams of conflicting content fragments such as projects, meanings, or narratives, and none of them is an absolutely veritable version (Dennett 134). For instance, different areas of brain react on different visual stimulus (shape, color, motion), there is no such place where all the reactions come together. Thus, there is no line separating the end of preconscious processes and the beginning of conscious processes. According to multiple drafts model many traditional philosophical assumptions on perception phenomenology find themselves simply false, regardless their seeming obviousness.

## **Hard Problem of Consciousness**

David Chalmers is one of the followers of conceptual analysis, who do not agree neither with elimination of the mental, as a special reality, nor with identification of mental states with brain processes. He proves ontological irreducibility of mental to physical. In the beginning of 90s, Chalmers proposed an idea of differentiating “hard” and “light” problems of consciousness (22). Light problems, as he claimed, were connected to building models of various cognitive operations and seeking neuron correlates of consciousness. They can be solved with the help of standard methods of experimental sciences. While hard problem of consciousness is a question why brain functioning is at all accompanied by subjective experience, and why it is possible. According to Chalmers, particularly the hard problem of consciousness is a core of classical mind-body problem (24). In his book “The Conscious Mind”, the philosopher resolves this hard problem by postulating fundamental reality of the mental: brain functioning is accompanied by subjective experience because subjective experience itself presents the base or the carrier of structural physical properties (Chalmers 196). However, Chalmers refused to acknowledge a possibility of direct influence of mental states on physical processes.

## **Chalmers’ Naturalistic Dualism**

In order to clarify the connection between mental and physical, Chalmers uses the term of supervenience. Supervenience is described as relations of dependence between two types of diverse level properties. The author distinguishes natural or empirical, as well as logical or conceptual

supervenience. In his opinion, consciousness is natural, rather than logically supervenient to the physical. Logical supervenience implies emergence of certain physical facts leads to emergence of consciousness' facts (Chalmers 71). Therefore, for example, Creator would not create two types of facts, but only physical fact, while facts of consciousness would come to existence as a spontaneous addition. In view of this fact, consciousness would be easily explained by the use of its reduction to brain.

On the other hand, natural supervenience implies that physical facts are accompanied by conscious facts only in our actual world with its laws (Chalmers 88). Thus, Creator would have to create not only physical facts, but additional facts of consciousness, as well as laws regulating their correlation. It means that consciousness is irreducible and cannot be explained by the means of its reduction to brain. To support his claim, Chalmers uses five arguments: arguments of logical opportunity of a zombie, knowledge and epistemological asymmetry, and lack of analysis argument (94). These arguments help him conclude that consciousness cannot be explained reductively, and that it is of unphysical nature.

Rejecting Cartesian dualism, Chalmers creates his own kind of dualism called "naturalistic dualism". He emphasizes that his theory is in accordance with contemporary science and does not imply anything that can contradict it (Chalmers 168). The author hopes that in the future a new non reductive theory will be developed, and will take its honorable place in the fundamental theory.

## **Conclusion**

Two philosophers, Daniel Dennett and David Chalmers, present their different views on the human mind and consciousness in their books. Dennett's theory is characterized by mind and body dualism refusal, and is largely supported by Darwin's evolutionist theory. He demystifies consciousness and creates consecutive materialistic theory. While Chalmers' discussion does not present ready solutions. He believes that studying nonphysical properties of matter can explain consciousness, and that mind-body problem is in fact a problem of cognition-consciousness (Chalmers 172). Nevertheless, Chalmers' philosophical doctrine is in the state of formation. The philosopher is yet to find solutions and overcome obstacles preventing the development of his theory into a consecutive system of views on the nature of consciousness.

## **Works Cited**

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