Lecture 28-29

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND PHENOMENAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Overview

David J. Chalmers in his famous book '*The Conscious Mind*'[1] tries to establish that the problem of consciousness as the 'hard' problem of consciousness. In order to establish this theory, he criticizes the materialistic theory of mind and establishes dualism between the conscious mind and the non-conscious matter. He calls this dualism as 'naturalistic dualism' because it is based on the premise that matter and consciousness are ultimately explainable by appealing to natural laws. In this section, we shall discuss Chalmers's non-mechanistic conception of mind. First, we will discuss Chalmers's two conceptions of mind, i.e., psychological and phenomenal. Second, we will focus on the two perspectives of mind, i.e., the first-person and third-person perspective of mind. Lastly, we will establish that the notion of phenomenal consciousness is non-computational.

Key words: Phenomenal Consciousness, Psychological Consciousness, The First-Person and Third-Person Perspective of Mind

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND PHENOMENAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Psychological and Phenomenological Concepts of Mind.

Conscious experience not only refers to the psychological concept of mind but also refers to the phenomenal concept of mind. According to Chalmers, the phenomenal concept of mind is the concept of mind as conscious experience, and of a mental state as a consciously experienced

[1] Chalmers, David J., *The Conscious Mind*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996.

mental state. And the psychological concept of mind is the concept of mind as the causal or explanatory basis of behaviour. But, according to the psychological concept, it matters little whether a mental state has a conscious quality or not. Here, we find a fundamental distinction between both the conceptions. According to the phenomenal concept, mind is characterized by the way it feels and on the psychological concept of mind is characterized by what it does. For Chalmers, this distinction between psychological and phenomenal mind is absolutely necessary. He remarks, "I will sometimes speak of the phenomenal and psychological 'aspects' of mind, and sometimes of the 'phenomenal mind' and the 'psychological mind'. At this early stage, I do not wish to beg any question about whether the phenomenal and the psychological will turn out to be the same thing'."[2]

According to Chalmers, every phenomenal state is a psychological state, in that it plays a significant role in the causation and explanation of behaviour, and every psychological state has an intimate relation to the phenomenal. Accordingly, there is a conceptual distinction between the two notions; what it means for a state to be phenomenal is for it to feel a certain way, and what it means for a state, to be psychological is for it to play an appropriate causal role.

The distinction between the phenomenal and the psychological has a long history. According to Chalmers, Descartes is partly responsible for this. Because Descartes held that every event in the mind is a *cogito*, or a content of experience. To this class he assimilated volitions, intentions, and every type of thought. He assumed that everything psychological that is worthy of being called mental has a conscious aspect. That is, whatever is a mental content is necessarily, according to Descartes, a content of conscious experience. Therefore, for him, the notion of an unconscious method state is a contradiction in term.

[2] *Ibid*., p.12.

After Descartes, a new 'objective' brand of psychological explanation was developed, with no room for consciousness in its explanations. This mode of explanation had only partial success, but it established the idea that psychological explanation can proceed while ignoring the phenomenal.[31] But behaviourists differed in their theoretical positions; some recognized the existence of consciousness but found it irrelevant to psychological explanation, and some denied its existence altogether. Many went further, denying the existence of any kind of mental state. Behaviourists in general accepted that the mental states are irrelevant in the explanation of behaviour, which could be carried out entirely in external terms.

The move from behaviourism to computational cognitive science for the most part preserved the idea that there are no intentional mental states. Although the move brought back a role for internal states, which could even be called 'mental' states, there was nothing particularly 'phenomenal' about them. These states were admissible precisely on the grounds of their role in the explanation of behaviour. The concept of the mental therefore was taken to be synonymous with the psychological.

According to Chalmers, this explanation of phenomenal concepts leaves it unclear why there is anything phenomenal at all. According to him, there is no great mystery about how a state might play a causal role, but what is truly mysterious is why that state should feel like something; why it should have a phenomenal quality at all. In Chalmers words, "there is no great mystery about how a state might play some causal role, although there are certainly technical problems there for science. What is mysterious is why that state should feel like something; why it should have a phenomenal quality. Why the causal role is played and why the phenomenal quality is present are two entirely different questions. The functionalist analysis denies the distinctness of these questions, and therefore to be unsatisfactory."[3]

[3] *Ibid*., p. 15.

According to Chalmers, the phenomenal concepts deal with the first-person aspects of mind, while psychological concepts deal with the third-person aspects. The dualism between the phenomenal and the psychological is the fact that dualism between the first-person and the third-person perspectives of the mind.

The First-Person and Third-Person Perspective of mind

According to Chalmers, the double aspects of mental terms are psychological and phenomenal. The concept of 'pain' provides a clear example. The term is often used to name a particular sort of unpleasant phenomenal quality. On the other hand, there is also a psychological notion associated with the term, the concept of the sort of state that is causally connected with the damage to the organism, the relation of the organism and so on. Both of these aspects are central to the commonsense notion of pain.

The reason why phenomenal and psychological properties often run together is clear: It is because the relevant properties tend to co-occur. When the processes resulting from tissue damage leading to discomfort take place, some sort of phenomenal quality arises. That is, when psychological pain is presented, some sort of experience of pain is also present phenomenal. Chalmers says that it is not a conceptual truth that the processes should be accompanied by the phenomenal quality, but it is a fact about the world. Once we have this sort of co-occurrence of properties in everyday situations, it is natural that our everyday conception of things will bind them together.

From the above discussion, we find that many mental concepts lead a sort of double life. For example, perception can be taken as a psychological process involving cognitive response to the environment. On the other hand, it may also be taken phenomenally involving the conscious experience of what is perceived. Chalmers holds that some of these concepts lean more strongly toward the phenomenal and some lean toward the psychological. According to him, the concept

of sensation, which is close to the concept of perception has both phenomenal and psychological components. The phenomenal component is more prominent in 'sensation' than in 'perception'. Sensation is something like perception's phenomenal counterpart.

Now, the questions arise: can there be a mental concept which is psychological but not phenomenal? That is, is it the case that the psychological and the phenomenal are factually co-occurant, but are independent causally? Chalmers endorses the factual co-occurance of the psychological and phenomenal but not their necessary relation. It is evidenced in his analysis the propositional attitudes like beliefs, desire, etc. In the case of propositional attitudes the central feature of these mental states is their semantic content, or intentionality. Phenomenal experience thus is not directly associated with a propositional attitude. However, a belief, though psychological, is still a state unconsciousness such that, as Searle says, "the intentional content of a belief depends entirely on the associated state of consciousness that the belief can bring about. Without consciousness, all that is present is 'as if' intenationality."[4]

What Searle intends to say is that the belief is always associated with consciousness because non-conscious machines have no beliefs. A conscious mind alone has the capacity of intentionlity about the world. Chalmers argues with Searle on the analysis of propositional attitudes. However, he has shown that all mental states have a psychological and a phenomenal aspect, and we need not legislate which is primary, although a strong case might be made for a psychological analysis. There is no aspect of this state that outstrips both the psychological and the phenomenal. Thus, psychology and the phenomenology together constitute the central aspects of the mind.

[4] Searle, John, "Consciousness, Explanatory Inversion and Cognitive Science", quoted by David J. Chalmers, in his *The Conscious Mind*, p.19.

Inspite of togetherness between phenomenology and psychology, Chalmers holds that we cannot identify the phenomenal with the psychological. There are two distinct aspects of the mind. Therefore, the phenomenal is picked out as 'the experience that tends to accompany psychological'; we can coherently imagine a situation in which the phenomenal quality occurs without the psychological property. This distinction between the phenomenal and the psychological is source of the distinction between the 'easy' and the 'hard' aspects of the human mind.

The Phenomenal Consciousness is Non-Computational

As we have seen mental terms are dual in nature. There are two concepts of consciousness i.e., psychological consciousness and phenomenal consciousness. One may put forward an explanation of consciousness by emphasizing the phenomenal quality of consciousess, but will end by giving an explanation of some aspects of psychological consciousness, such as the ability to introspect, to think and to perceive, etc.

There are varieties of psychological consciousness such as awareness, introspction, self-consciousness, attention, voluntary content, knowledge, etc. Chalemrs holds that these are all largely functional notions and this can be seen from a psychological perspective, although many of them are associated with phenomenal states. It is clear that there is a phenomenal and a psychological property in the vicinity of each of these concepts. The phenomenal and the psychological properties in the vicinity of these notions tend to occur together, but as with other mental concepts, they should not be conflated. We should also be careful not to conflate the phenomenal sense of these terms with phenomenal consciousness in general.

According to Chalmers, we may point out that the psychological perspective of consciousness can be analyzable in terms of phenomenal perspective, but phenomenal consciousness cannot be explained in terms of psychological perspective because of its

irreducibility and non-computational nature. For him, reductive explanation of consciousness is not possible because consciousness cannot be logically supervene on the physical. This non-reductive aspect of consciousness is 'naturally supervenient', but not 'logically supervenient'. Chalmers writes, "To make the case against reductive explanation, we need to show that consciousness is not logically supervenient on the physical. In principle, we need to show that it does not supervene globally –that is, that all the microphysical facts in the world do not entail the facts about consciousness. In practice, it is it is easier to run the argument locally, arguing that in an individual, microphysical facts in the world do not entail the facts about consciousness. When it comes to consciousness, local and global supervenience plausibly stand and fall together, so it does not matter much which we run the argument if consciousness supervenes at all, it almost certainly supervenes locally. If this is disputed, however, all the arguments can be run at the global level with straightforward alterations."[5] This is because the phenomenal property of consciousness makes it different from all other properties.

If phenomenal consciousness would have been logically supervenient on the physical body, then it would have been functionally identical with the latter. In that case, consciousness would be explained completely in terms of the physical properties. As Chalmers argues, "Of course, there is a sense in which the physics of the universe must entail the existence of consciousness, if one defines physics as the fundamental science from whose facts and laws everything else follows. This construal of physics, however, trivializes the question involved. If one allows physics to include theories developed specifically to deal with the phenomenon of consciousness, unmotivated by more basic considerations, then we may get an 'explanation' of consciousness, but it will certainly not to be a reductive one. For our purpose, it is best to take physics to be the fundamental science developed to explain observations of the external world. If this kind of physics entailed the facts about consciousness, without invoking consciousness itself

[5] Chalmers, David J., *The Conscious Mind*, p. 93.

in a crucial role, then consciousness would truly be reductively explained. For the reasons I have given, however, there is good reason to believe that no such reductive explanation is possible."[6]

Therefore, one cannot reduce facts about consciousness to physical facts and cannot explain the occurrence of consciousness. Chalmers argues that there is little hope that a purely physicalist or materialist theory can explain consciousness at all, especially the phenomenal or qualitative aspects of consciousness.

We may say that our knowledge of consciousness comes from our experience and not from external observation. The existence of the external world is not enough for us to assume the existence of conscious experience. It is only the first-person experience of consciousness, which poses the problem of non-computability in consciousness. Therefore, it is subjective character of experience, which is not analyzable through any explanatory system of functional states or human behaviour. As Chalmers remarks, if it is logically supervenient, there would be no such epistemic asymmetry, a logically supervenient can be detected straightforwardly and there is no special role for the first person case.

Chalmers shows that consciousness is a first-person phenomena and cannot be inferred or defined from the physicalist or computationalist point. This is because there is 'gap' between physical level and level of conscious experience. Consciousness cannot be explained reductively, but can be explained in its own terms. Because the conscious mental states as distinguished from the physical facts have a subjective aspect. For example, the mental state of pain which is not the same as the state of the brain, since there is subjective experience of pain is not explainable in terms of the computational functions of the brain. Thus conscious experience cannot be reductively explained in terms of physical and functional laws of the brain.

[6] *Ibid*., pp. 65-66.