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PHIL 400

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10/30/2010

Annotated Bibliography

Chalmers, David John. *The conscious mind: in search of a fundamental theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Print.

This is the book is probably the most influential piece of scholarship for those seeking to keep the possibility of *dualism* alive in academic study. In this book, Chalmers asserts a view of dualism called *property dualism*. In doing so, Chalmers' needs to make the case that consciousness cannot be explained via reductive methods. This means that he must at least refute that consciousness doesn't supervene on the physical *globally* (93). In Chalmers' book, he brings up 4 major arguments for this theory. However, the most important theory for Chalmers is also his most controversial: the zombie theory.

Chalmers' theory of zombies is called a "possible worlds" argument; a philosophical method that seems quite controversial in academia today. His argument can be summed up as follows: If we can *logically* conceive of a world in which all physical facts hold, but there is no consciousness, then consciousness is not contingent on the physical. Chalmers claims that all this argument needs to do is demonstrate the logically conceivability of this scenario in order to make his point.

This book has appeared in numerous articles, especially those focusing on theory of mind. It seems to have kicked up quite a bit of dust especially among those that take a more materialist or naturalist approach to the theory of mind question.

"Supervenience (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford, n.d. Web. 7 Nov. 2010. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/>Entri

This is an important article that gives some background on supervenience.

According to the article, supervenience is a concept that is used in a wide variety of philosophical discourse. However, what is most relevant to my area of research is what this article says about supervenience as an argument for reduction. This is relevant to me because the big argument of theory of consciousness right now is whether it is accountable via reduction. Hence, supervenience is important in proving/disproving this.

According to the article here, in order for something to be explainable reductively, it has to be *supervenient* on those properties being used to explain it. Now this is where it gets abstract and kind of complicated. Basically, say you want to explain A as being reductively explainable by B. This means that in order for change to occur in A, there must be changes in B. Hence, if changes occur in the qualities which A supervenes on (B) then there must be changes in B. That may not be a completely fair explanation of supervenience given the complexity of the idea, but I believe it should suffice for the purposes of this annotated bibliography.

This is relevant to Chalmers because his zombie argument essentially proves that Consciousness is irreducible. This is because the possible world of zombies makes it logically possible for fact about consciousness (A) to change without there being a change in physical facts (B). Hence, consciousness is not supervenient on the physical and therefore is not reducible to the physical.

"Impossible Worlds (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 Nov. 2010. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/impossible-worlds/>>.

This article provides a comprehensive understanding of how “possible worlds” work as logical arguments. This method of philosophical argument appears to be a highly controversial one given the numerous affirmative and negative arguments for it. Those arguments relevant to Chalmers’ and Dennett seem to be the arguments about how these worlds work logically.

According to the details in this argument, Chalmers’ possible worlds theory works because it allows us to conceive of a world that doesn’t have something. In Chalmers’ case, a world in which there is the same physical attributes, but no consciousness. Because consciousness can be theoretically “removed” from the equation, then it isn’t contingent on the physical.

This is relevant to Dennett because he uses the same method to refute Chalmers’ case. Dennett comes up with another possible world in which the opposite of Chalmers’ zombie is true. Thus, there is room in the system for logical contradictions among all possible worlds.

Dennett, Daniel C. "The Unimagined Preposterousness of Zombies." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 2.4 (1995): 322-326. *Philosopher's Index*. EBSCO. Web. 5 Nov. 2010.

“Philosophers ought to have dropped the zombie like a hot potato, but since they persist in their embrace, this gives me a golden opportunity to focus attention on the most seductive error in current thinking.”-quoted from Dennett’s “The Unimagined Preposterousness of Zombies”

Dennett launches what he thinks is a scathing and complete refutation of the Chalmers’ zombie argument for property dualist. As an unapologetic materialist, Dennett

believes that those holding on to the zombie argument are just desperately attempting to fend off the inevitable (i.e. The scientific understanding of consciousness).

Dennett is interesting in this article because he provides another “possible worlds” argument that allows him to refute the claim that consciousness is something independent from physical contingency. He does this by introducing the “zimbo.” The zimbo is basically the opposite of Chalmers’ zombie. In the world of zimboes, they are beings capable of “second order” beliefs. To Dennett, this scenario provides a counterexample that demonstrates the incoherence of Chalmers’ zombie argument. Basically, by arguing this way, Dennett is pointing to an equally conceivable world. This world contradicts Chalmers’. If both can exist, then one must be false because there is an inherent contradiction. Thus according to Dennett, the zombie argument of the dualist is inherently false.

Dennett, Daniel. *The Fantasy of First-Person Science*. Medford: Dennett, 2001. Print.

This is a fascinating written version of a debate. While the document is somewhat unclear, I believe that the debate was originally held between the author, Daniel Dennett, and David Chalmers at Northwestern University. The article contains the details of their argument as well as citations to supplement the topics discussed.

This article helps further develop Dennett’s objections to Chalmers’ position. It contains many of the same objections that Dennett’s previous work has held. However, what is different here is the fact that Dennett focuses more on the raw implications of Chalmers’ position for science. According to Dennett, Chalmers is advocating a switch from “3rd person science” to “1st person science.” Dennett dismisses this as

preposterous and subsequently challenges Chalmers to provide a method that would fill this gap. According to Dennett, one of the central weaknesses of Chalmers' position is that it fails to provide any theory for how the study of consciousness *should* be approached.

"Consciousness (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 Oct. 2010. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/>

This is a comprehensive articles that gives a pretty good general sense of the landscape surrounding discussion of consciousness and the mind/body problem. Specifically relevant to this area of inquiry is what the article says about the “explanatory gap” theory of consciousness. This theory, commonly asserted by Joseph Levine, points out that there is some type of gap in the human ability to *understand* the relationship between the physical and phenomenal aspects of consciousness.

This theory is described as having different levels of “strength.” For example, a weaker explanatory gap claim will just assert that at the present moment, we lack the conceptual scientific framework in order to actually *understand* and explain consciousness. A stronger level of this position would argue that as humans we will *never* be able to explain it. Just as an insect cannot grasp mathematics, we cannot grasp those things are fundamentally beyond our capacity to understand, even through science.

This article also provides a “yellow pages” of sorts. It gives the names of those philosophers that support each particular view. In addition, it also points out where additional material can be found on each philosopher. For example, one particularly

interesting position on the theory of consciousness is Kim's criticism of those that attempt to account for consciousness using both non-reductive and physicalist methods.

NAGEL, THOMAS. "WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A BAT?." *Philosophical Review* 83. (1974): 435-450. *Philosopher's Index*. EBSCO. Web. 31 Oct. 2010.

Nagel provides an interesting account of consciousness. In this article, he essentially asserts an anti-reductionist view of consciousness. He does so by framing the problem of consciousness in a thought experiment. The question posed by this experiment is the question posed in the title of the article: *What Is It Like to be a Bat?*

Nagel points out that there is a fundamental subjectivity to our way of perceiving the world. This subjectivity is informed by the phenomenological way in which we view the world. He introduced the bat problem in order to demonstrate the exclusive nature of this subjectivity. Because we will never be able to understand the echo-locating way of experiencing the world, we will never be able to account for the bats consciousness on the level of true understanding.

This perspective provides a fascinating view of the mind/body problem as well. For Nagel, it would almost seem as if there is in fact a dual reality. There is the reality of the subjective experience, and the reality of the outside world. The world that the subject perceives by his/her own phenomenological means.

Levin, Janet. "Consciousness Disputed." *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 48.1 (1997): 91-107. *Philosopher's Index*. EBSCO. Web. 31 Oct. 2010.

This article is a review of Chalmers', *The Conscious Mind*. It does an excellent job of recounting Chalmers' theory of logical supervenience of the consciousness. Levin points out that for Chalmers' a reductive explanation of consciousness is impossible due to the supervenience of consciousness of the physical. Basically, he believes that consciousness is above or on top of the physical or psychological aspects of the mind. An idea that he believes is not at odds with a naturalistic account of the world.

Levin also does an excellent job calling Chalmers' conclusions into question. Especially the counterintuitive nature of his proofs, including his arguments about zombies. However, Levin offers no theory of her own. She just raises questions about Chalmers.

Yablo, Stephen. "Concepts and Consciousness." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59.2 (1999): 455-463. *Philosopher's Index*. EBSCO. Web. 31 Oct. 2010.

Yablo reviews Chalmers', *Consciousness Explained*, and in doing so, provides a much more critical take on it than Levin's review. Yablo begins the review by pointing out how well written and likable the book is. However, he regrettably turns to what he finds as the fundamental flaws of the book which make it ultimately unbelievable. The flaw which he refers to is the fact that Chalmers' entire theory rests on the assertion that zombies are conceivable. It is Yablo's assertion that conceivability evidence is fallible (456).

Yablo points out that the conceivability argument cannot be confused for an argument of *possibility*. It would seem as if Yablo is accusing Chalmers of using the

term possibility as a pun. This wouldn't be the first time that I have seen a philosopher accuse Chalmers of this.

Webster, W R. "Human Zombies Are Metaphysically Impossible." *Synthese: An International Journal for Epistemology, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* 151.2 (2006): 297-310. *Philosopher's Index*. EBSCO. Web. 31 Oct. 2010.

This article is a critical response to Chalmers', *The Conscious Mind*. First off, Webster does an excellent job reconstructing Chalmers' argument for zombies. Such a good job in fact, that it is worth placing here for reference:

1. In our world, there are conscious experiences.
2. There is a logically possible world physically identical to ours, in which the positive facts consciousness in our world do not hold.
3. Therefore, the facts about consciousness are further facts about our world, over and above the physical facts.
4. So, materialism is false.

Now, while there may be some aspects of this reconstruction that fail to fairly deal with Chalmers' view, it is still a good synopsis none the less. He does a good job at representing Chalmers' view that consciousness is essentially an *extra* fact about the physical world (298).