



Book Review

The Conscious Mind : In Search of a Fundamental Theory

David J Chalmers :

Oxford, 1996, Pp 414, ISBN 0-19-511789-1 (Pbk.) £ 9.99

When I took my copy of the book to the author for an autograph, Professor Chalmers felt a little embarrassed over the superlative praise on the cover : *an outstanding contribution to our understanding of consciousness*. There were other equally flattering blurbs by Douglas Hofstadter, Roger Penrose and others. After reading the book I can say that it was a most enjoyable and instructive experience and I too can wholeheartedly recommend it to an inquisitive reader. I must, however, point out that the book is intended as a serious work of philosophy, but the author has tried in a clear language to make it accessible to non-philosophers.

What is Consciousness? Conscious experience is at once the most familiar thing in the world and the most mysterious. There is nothing we know about directly than consciousness, but it is far from clear how to reconcile it with everything else we know. This is how the book begins and goes on in a pleasant style till the end. Consciousness and the mind-body problem has not only a popular appeal but is also a staple topic of modern philosophy of mind often full of

technical jargon, eg, supervenience, qualia, property dualism. A lively debate has been raging on the subject of consciousness among philosophers ranging from the view that consciousness does not exist (Churchland) to a view that consciousness is not a natural phenomenon and is not explainable in terms of science at all. (Flanagan). Chalmers leads the reader through the whole territory of the science of mind, examines the various important philosophical positions from Descartes to Kripke, Searle, Dennett and others, and proposes a theory of his own which he calls **naturalistic dualism**. Since dualism is quite out of fashion, Chalmers meticulously puts up arguments to defend his position. He is modest enough to say that *In this book I do not solve the problem of consciousness once and for all, but I try to rein it in*. He also apologizes for giving up a materialistic reductive explanation of consciousness. *Materialism is a beautiful and compelling view of the world, but to account for consciousness one has to go beyond the resources it provides*, he writes. [Materialism or physicalism holds that everything in the world is physical or that there is nothing over and above the physical.]

Chalmers argues that the standard methods of reductive analysis cannot account for consciousness. He further argues that

materialism is false and a form of dualism is true. There are both physical and non-physical features of the world. Speaking technically, consciousness does not supervene *logically* on the physical, but might do so *naturally*. Consciousness is a feature of the world over and above the physical features of the world. This is not to say that it is a separate substance. The dualism implied here is a kind of property dualism (p 125). Chalmers' theory is naturalistic because it posits that everything is a consequence of a network of basic properties and laws, and because it is compatible with all the results of contemporary science. This view allows that we can explain consciousness in terms of basic natural laws. Chalmers writes defensively: to embrace dualism is not necessarily to embrace mystery (p 128). In the naturalistic dualism advocated by

Chalmers consciousness is governed by natural law. There may eventually be a reasonable scientific theory of it. All natural laws need not be physical laws. To deny materialism is not to deny naturalism. A naturalistic dualism expands our view of the world, but it does not invoke the forces of darkness, says Professor Chalmers (p 170). Towards the end the author writes: I resisted mind-body dualism for a long time, but I have now come to the point where I accept it.... I think dualism is very likely true. (p.357)

In this short review I have tried to indicate the flavour of the book so that those who are interested in the subject can decide about reading it.

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The following printed materials have been obtained by January 2000 :

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| 1. World Science Reports, 1998
UNESCO Publishing / Elsevier
ISBN : UNESCO 92-3-103446-4
Elsevier : 2-84299-044-7
UNESCO 1998 | 3. World Social Science Report 1999
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| 2. World Education Report
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