Contemporary Philosophy of Mind

The Teaching Company

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Consciousness and Its Implications CD 2007

In a 12 lecture course, *Consciousness and Its Implications*,1 Professor Daniel Robinson discusses what is called the "problem" of Consciousness, being an embarrassment to both scientific materialism (physicalism) and dualism, which asserts two types of stuff; matter and mind.

He explores the difficulty of science in explaining how neurobiological processes of the brain produces consciousness, and dismisses epiphenomenalism,2 which sees consciousness as only an incidental by product of physical processes.

He notes George Berkeley's assertion that the real material world requires for its manifestation a representation in mind, and subsequent denial of the independent reality of matter

His book, Consciousness and Mental Life*, 3 covers much of the same material. Several on line reviews are possible, including one by a proponent of monistic materialism.4*

NOTES

Lec 1: Zombies

Lec 2 Self Consciousness

What past thinkers have written

Locke's thinking on consciousness

Lec 3: The Problem of Consciousness

It is the opinion of the leaders in the field of philosophy of mind, the main problem today is consciousness:

John Searl says the most important scientific discovery of the era will be when some one or some group is able to explain how the neurobiological processes of the brain causes consciousness.

It is the most taken for granted phenomena.

Dilemma caused by the fact of consciousness.

Enlightenment's confidence: LaPlace said if we knew all present forces and positions, using newton's laws we could predict perfectly every future event "on probabilities"
"laplaces demon"

"physics is complete" notion of many physicists
Adapt "ism": physicalism: the only and ultimate reality is physical:
"Substance"

Metaphysics: origin: book after Aristotle's "physics": simply meant "after physics'
But this was an important work: it defined "real being":
Describes an immovable unchangeable substance, in addition to material substance.

Material cause, formal cause, efficient cause, final cause (blueprint)

George Barkley defies material existence; the outside world is only properties in consciousness.

Lec 4: the explanatory gap. of consciousness

Of how the neurobiological processes of the brain causes consciousness.

Lec 5: Mental Causation:

Lec 7: physicalism refined
Identity theory

Only material or physical entities are real
assumes monastic physicalism (includes non tangible fields such as gravity and EM)
identity of meaning
identity of reference
mental states refer to physical processes in the brain; they are identical
Leibniz test of identity: can substitute one with the other
samanthas tooth ache is her brain processes

supervenience: mental processes are dependent on physical events

Lec 8: Physics and Consciousness

Oxford mathematician Roger Penrose's two books: The Emperors New Mind; 1989, and Shadow Of The Mind; 1994: both seek to set limits on the extent to

which contemporary physical science may be viewed as promising in relation to the “problem” of consciousness .

As Galen Strawson, he agrees we do not know enough about matter itself. Further, after extensive analysis of physics and its mathematical foundations, Penrose reaches the conclusion that mental life may require a science which does not yet exist.

Why? Reasons include:

Incompleteness theorem by Kurt Godel: proof. On Formally Undecidable Propositions. 1931.

Any math system will be based on axioms or theorems which cannot be proved within the system itself. ie, the system is logically incomplete, and some external accepted fact must be brought in to make it complete. Penrose concludes that the proper model of human cognition could not be computational. We are able to reflect on our own problem solving, and do not need to import any axioms to make sense of what we are thinking.

This means the process of consciousness is non-algorythmic.

Is human thought the only form of non-algorythmic process? No. There are random processes.

Some invoke the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics to try to rule out processes other than physicalism.

First Law expresses conservation of energy; establishes equivalence of heat and work.
Change in internal energy equals heat added plus work done.

Could there be some type of non physical energy, and could this energy be used in first law of thermodynamics? Yes, Why not?

Second law of TD:

Maxwell summarized the second law of TD:
It is impossible in a closed system to form any inequality of temperature or pressure without the expenditure of work.

Another form of second law:
In closed system, entropy must increase.

Richard Feynman description of entropy

Must Work be supplied, in the form of Mental energy to affect a physical change?

Laws of TD must be obeyed, and can be obeyed for mental systems

Model of living creature being represented by closed system obeying first & second laws of TD is hopelessly simplistic.

Ilya Prigogene: open systems; increased complexity and stability; increased organization

Growth and Evolution defies entropy version of thermodynamics.

Quantum physics and consciousness interdependent.
Copenhagen interp: Niels Bohr and Warner Heisenberg
QM can only be understood in terms of the act of observation.

Consciousness is required to collapse uncertainty

This model turned out to be too stable

Multiple states at same time

Measurement collapses multiple states

Eugene Wigner speculated on consciousness and quantum physics.

David Bohm pressed on; applied Wigner type observations directly to functions of the brain and the problem of consciousness.

With student, developed Aharonof Bohm effect, [which has subsequently been proven]

Violates core canons of classical quantum physics:
“There exist potentials on charged particles even in the region where all the fields, and therefore the forces on the particles vanish”

Bohm pulled together the theory and math of the hologram; and advanced the thesis that the brain, at the micro level, at the quantum level, is an informational system such that the mental and material merge.

Mind and matter “are two aspects of one whole, and are no more separable than form or content. …Deep down the consciousness of mankind is one.”

One of the more accessible of his books: *Science, Order, and Creativity*, with David Peat
Agrees is conjecture.

Through his wife, Bohm came to see quantum physics as Compatible with Buddhist thought.

Robinson believes achievements of quantum physics have made us skeptical of skepticism;

Even if the Copenhagen interpretation is correct, that the quantum world needs measurement and observation, the details of the interaction between consciousness and the quantum world are not clear; one thing is clear: Information seems the key (?)

We are still no closer to solving he problem of consciousness than we were a century ago.

QM is statistical; overturned the absolute; contingent

Mental process is logical, analysis, necessity ; the two seem incompatible to Robinson.
[try emergent properties; also observe that the “public” behavior of humans often seems random]

Course follows the ideas in the book:

Consciousness and Mental Life

Daniel N. Robinson, Consciousness and Mental Life, Columbia University Press, 2007, 264pp., $29.50 (hbk), ISBN 9780231141000.

Review:

http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=14906

Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews
Reviewed by Sam Coleman, University of Hertfordshire
Exerpt:

Robinson's core philosophical thesis: he appears as an unapologetic substance dualist, and has only short shrift to offer modern physicalism and its main drivers, such as the much-vaunted idea of the 'completeness of physics', as he terms it. Robinson presents himself here as arm in arm with his protagonist: Descartes, we are told, inclined strongly towards materialism, but found himself forced to

give it up in the face of the palpable failure of objective, scientific endeavour to capture the nature of mind. Modern philosophers of mind, Robinson feels, are criminally close to eliminating this nature, such is the thrall that they are held in by scientism.

The completeness of physics is the doctrine that if an event occurs that is describable in the language of physics, then it has a sufficient cause that's also describable in the language of physics. How does this doctrine figure in closing the case for physicalism?

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1 The Teaching Company, 2007.
2 http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epiphenomenalism/
3 Daniel N. Robinson, Consciousness and Mental Life, Columbia University Press, 2007, 264pp.
4 http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=14906