

Searle vs. Chalmers Debate, 8/2005 with Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

TecnoTut wrote:

Searle says of Chalmers' book, *The Conscious Mind*, "it is one thing to bite the occasional bullet here and there, but this book consumes an entire arsenal." The following link provides Chalmers' response to Searle accusations that Chalmers is a panpsychist and epiphenomenalist. It also provides us with a good understanding of what Chalmers is trying to get at.

<http://consc.net/book/searle-response.html>

They are both wrong.
By Andrew Saunders

TecnoTut wrote:

Care to explain why?

Chalmers cutting review of Searle is to the point and I agree with it -Searle provides no reason for any one to believe his claims, and often just says "that's absurd" ie just responds out of instinct. I am tired of talking about the many ways in which Searle is very wrong, so I am not going to write anything to that effect here.

Chalmers is wrong because of the following quote, on which he bases his entire position: "... the basic idea is simple: the physical structure of the world - the exact distribution of particles, fields, and forces in spacetime - is logically consistent with the absence of consciousness"

this is not true -at least, it is not agreed upon. Dennett would disagree with the above claim, as would I.

What Chalmers is saying is "zombies are possible", which many philosophers believe is not the case.
By Andrew Saunders

Muxol wrote:

Maybe you should pay closer attention to what is being said. Notice that he says it is "logically consistent with the absence of consciousness". That's right. Maybe you have something against the metaphysical, physical, or nomological consistency of those things--if so, take it up with someone other than Chalmers.

What if I disagree with the claim that it is logically consistent? If, as the physicalists argue, there is nothing more to consciousness than physical brain processes, then it clearly is *not* logically possible. So Chalmers' premise ends up being an implicit assertion that there *is* something more to consciousness than brain processes. You cannot simply assert "that's right" as though there were debate about the issue. Chalmers certainly hasn't presented any evidence to back up this assertion, and as far as I can see, nobody else ever has either.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

TecnoTut wrote

Chalmers' argument is based on conceivability. If it's conceivable that there can be brain processes without mental events, then it's logically possible there can be brain processes without mental events. If it's

logically possible that there can be brain processes without mental events, then mental properties are different from the physical-functional properties of the brain. Some philosophers deny the connection between conceivability and logical possibility, but they'll have to make arguments against the connection rather than simply wave their hands.

I know. This is one of the things that baffles me about Chalmers, because the argument against this link between conceivability and logical possibility is almost trivially simple. Conceivability does not imply logical possibility unless the person conceiving of the thing knows every logical implication of what he is conceiving.

There are plenty of examples of this problem. Consider Fermat's last theorem. Until recently (when it was finally proven true), it was conceivable that it could be false. But it was never logically possible for it to be false.

As a simpler example, to somebody who has not actually worked out the math, it may be conceivable to them that the laws physics are compatible with there being stars 100 times larger than our own. But this is not logically possible.

The point is that the only way we can know if something is logically possible or not is by working out all of the logical implication of it, and explicitly showing that there is no contradiction. Conceivability only means that *we do not know of any contradiction*. So conceivability does not imply logical possibility.

In the specific case of Chalmers' conceivability argument, saying that such a world is logically possible is *equivalent* to saying that there is no logical contradiction between having the same brain processes as a normal person, and having no mental events. The fact that Chalmers can *conceive* of this does not imply that there is no logical contradiction. It just means that if there is, Chalmers does not know about it. In order to claim that there is not any contradiction, Chalmers would, at the very least, need to know a lot more about both how the brain works, and the nature of consciousness, than *anybody* currently knows.

In effect, his argument amounts to nothing more than "I don't see any proof that it is *not* logically possible, therefore it is". This reasoning is clearly fallacious.

Note that it is also conceivable that there could be another universe in which the basic laws of physics are identical to this one, but the laws of chemistry are different. This is conceivable because we cannot logically deduce all of the laws of chemistry from the basic physical laws (the math is way too complicated), so we cannot prove that it is logically impossible. But this clearly does not imply that such a universe is *logically possible*, nor does it imply that the laws of chemistry are not, in fact, reducible to basic physical laws.

DM quote: "What if I disagree with the claim that it is logically consistent? If, as the physicalists argue, there is nothing more to consciousness than physical brain processes, then it clearly is not logically possible. So Chalmers' premise ends up being an implicit assertion that there is something more to consciousness than brain processes. You cannot simply assert "that's right" as though there were debate about the issue. Chalmers certainly hasn't presented any evidence to back up this assertion, and as far as I can see, nobody else ever has either."

Muxol wrote

That's absurd. Even if it turns out that mental states really are brain states (or processes or whatever), it is still logically consistent that mental states are not brain states--it's just not physically consistent that they are not brain states.

It would not be logically consistent that *both* "mental states are not brain states" *and* "the laws of physics are the same as in this universe", could be true for some universe. And that is what Chalmers is claiming is logically possible. It doesn't make any difference whether or not it is logically possible that in some other universe, where the laws of physics are different than in this one, mental states are not brain states. That

implies *absolutely nothing* about universes where the laws of physics *are* the same as this one.

Muxol wrote

Logic is ontologically neutral and as far as the nature of physical entities are concerned, logic does not decide what is the case.

Logic is ontologically neutral, but Chalmers' claim is not, since it *requires* that this zombie universe be *physically identical* to this one. If the laws of physics *in this universe* logically imply that mental states are brain states, then *any* universe in which the laws of physics are the same as this one, but in which mental states are not brain states, would be logically self-contradictory.

This is no different than pointing out that since the laws of quantum mechanics imply that single neutrons are unstable, it is not logically possible for there to be a universe in which the laws of QM are the same as here, but in which single neutrons are stable.

Muxol wrote

Chalmers may maintain that mental states are not brain states even if it is the case that in the actual world mental states are in fact brain states. All that entails is that it is not logically necessary that mental states are brain states, and last I checked, physicalists were not claiming that mental states are logically necessarily brain states (even if they are arguing that they are physically necessarily brain states).

But if they are physically necessarily brain states, *and* the laws of physics in universe X are identical to this one, then it is *logically necessary* that in universe X, they are also brain states.

Muxol wrote

If you wish to invoke some sort of modal argument, then please do, but there is always an equally strong counter-argument, and this is precisely because logic does not decide on ontological matters.

I agree. Logic does not decide matters about the actual world. That is why we need actual evidence showing that there is more to consciousness than just brain activity, rather than convoluted logical arguments.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

Muxol wrote

I don't know exactly what Chalmers' position is--I was just taking at face value the possibly-out-of-context quote: "... the basic idea is simple: the physical structure of the world - the exact distribution of particles, fields, and forces in spacetime - is logically consistent with the absence of consciousness". What is said in that quote is true and is a claim altogether different from the one you're attributing to Chalmers. What you are in fact claiming is that Chalmers is talking about nomological, not logical, possibility. As far as that quote is concerned, he is not.

I see what you are saying. In Chalmers' conceivability argument he makes it quite clear that he is talking about a world which is *physically identical* to this one. In fact, it is pretty clear that one cannot go from the logical possibility of such a world, to the claim that mental states are not physical states *in this* world, using the weaker interpretation you mention. He must use the stronger version in order to be able to reach his conclusion. That is why he appeals to the "conceivability" of such a world as an attempt to justify his assertion that it is logically possible.

Muxol wrote

If mental states just are brain states then for any nomologically possible world (i.e. one in which the laws of physics are the same as ours), mental states are brain states in those worlds too. That is what you seem to be

arguing. But first we have no proof that the antecedent is true.

I agree. We do not have such proof. It is just the simplest model currently available which fits with all currently known facts. If and when it is demonstrated to be incompatible with all known facts, a more complicated model will replace it.

Muxol wrote

Second, it is possible that there is a nomologically possible world in which mental states are brain states and some sort of nonphysical state. In such a case, the brain states in the actual world that are our mental states are also present in this nomologically possible world but there is also copresent some nonphysical state. Mere nomological necessity does not entail metaphysical necessity--it only entails that certain physical properties are necessary but not sufficient in nomologically possible worlds. So brain states might be necessary but so might some other nonphysical states.

If brain states are mental states in this world, and some other world is physically identical to this one, then while it is possible that something you could call a "mental state" in that world would be both a combination of the brain states and some non-physical thing, what you are calling "mental states" in that world is *not* what you are calling "mental states" in this world. On the contrary, it is a combination of what we call "mental states" in this world, and some additional non-physical thing.

Muxol wrote

(This is a rejection of your claim that "But if they are physically necessarily brain states, and the laws of physics in universe X are identical to this one, then it is logically necessary that in universe X, they are also brain states".)

As far as I can see, it is nothing more than relabeling "mental states" to refer to different things in the two universes.

Muxol wrote

In any case, I agree that we cannot decide the matter without scientific investigation. It doesn't make any sense to give only logical arguments or analyses of concepts--these could only tell us what the words and concepts mean and not what the nature of their referents are.

I agree completely.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

DM quote: "In any case, I agree that we cannot decide the matter without scientific investigation."

TecnoTut wrote

Are you saying scientific investigation is needed in order for us to know whether conceivability entails possibility

No. It is quite clear that conceivability does not entail logical possibility. It is clear because it is incredibly easy to show numerous counter-examples.

TecnoTut wrote

or it's needed in order for us to know what properties our concepts refer to?

Neither. I am saying that it is needed to decide what the nature of consciousness is, and what its relationship to brain activity is.

TecnoTut wrote

If you mean the former, then I have to disagree. After all, isn't it possible for the color of grass to have been blue?

Is it *logically* possible that the color of grass could have been blue? The question, as phrased, is meaningless. You need to specify under what conditions you are asking whether it could have been blue or not. If the answer can be derived logically from the definition of those specific conditions, then the answer is an a-priori judgement, and can be determined through logical alone. If not, then only empirical observation of grass in a world where those conditions obtain, will suffice.

TecnoTut wrote

I don't see how, e.g., the knowledge (or lack thereof) of photosynthesis could affect this possibility.

It doesn't affect the possibility. It affects the conceivability. If your make the question into the more specific question "Given the same basic biological processes, such as photosynthesis, isn't it possible for the color of grass to have been blue?", then the answer to the question depends on how photosynthesis actually works. Let's say, for arguments sake, that the nature of photosynthesis is such that it is *not* possible. If you knew this fact, then it would be inconceivable that grass could have been blue. But if you *don't* know this fact, then it is conceivable that grass could have been blue.

Again, conceivability does not imply logical possibility. It just implies that you do know that it is logically impossible.

In any event, I fail to see why you would attempt to argue that conceivability *does* entail logical possibility, without at least *addressing* my counter-example. I'll repeat it again:

Consider Fermat's last theorem. Until recently (when it was finally proven true), it was conceivable that it could be false. But it was never logically possible for it to be false.

Do you agree that this is a clear example of conceivability *not* implying logical possibility? If so, do you agree that even a single counter-example refutes the claim that conceivability does imply logical possibility?

TecnoTut wrote

Well, there is still the issue of whether distinct concepts pick out distinct properties which I think is a philosophy of language issue, not an empirical one. Property dualists will say that two distinct concepts (e.g. the feeling of a headache and C-fibers firing) will pick out two distinct properties. Some physicalists will deny this and hold, instead, that we cannot know a priori whether different concepts pick out different properties or the same property. So the property dualists believes in the Different Sense Principle (DSP), which is the following: If there are two terms T1 and T2 such that (i) T1 refers to the same thing as T2, yet (ii) "T1 is identical with T2" is not analytic, then: there is some property PT1 that is the sense of T1 and some property PT2 that is the sense of T2, and PT1 is not identical with PT2. The classic example of this are the concept of the morning star and the evening star. While both the morning star and the evening star are identical to each other (both are Venus), the property of being the first heavenly body seen during the evening is a different property from the property of being the last heavenly body seen during the morning.

A physicalist would not claim that "the feeling of a headache" and "c-fibers firing" are properties at all. They are not properties. They are processes. The physicalist would claim that the feeling of a headache is a set of brain processes. Just as the single planet Venus can have multiple sets of descriptions attached to it, so can those brain processes.

Which brings me to my second point, in your Venus example, what you are calling properties of the planet are not properties of the planet at all. They are properties of how we perceive planet.

Anyway, such word games tell us nothing more about the actual nature of consciousness, than they do about the actual nature of Venus. The fact that we unknowingly imagined Venus to be two completely

different things, did not mean that it was. And likewise the fact that you imagine consciousness and brain activity to be two completely different things, does not mean that it is.
By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

Muxol wrote

You're advocating a theory of rigid designation with respect to at least mental state terms. While appealing because of its formal simplicity it is less appealing philosophically. Suppose in this world that mental states are brain states and imagine another world that is identical to ours except that mental states are, along with the same brain states here, some nonphysical property. In the other world they call the brain states + nonphysical states "mental states" just like we call the brain states "mental states". Wouldn't we also be inclined to call them "mental states"? And wouldn't they be inclined to call our brain states "mental states" too?

I would say that it really doesn't make any difference what we choose to *call* them. The point is that *we* call "mental states" in *this world*, would also exist in *that world*, and would still just be brain states *in that world*.

And of course, this is completely ignoring the issue of whether people in that world *could* use a word or phrase to refer to something different than what we use it to refer to, without that, itself, being a physical difference between the two worlds. After all, if the two worlds are truly physically identical, then it is also logically possible that at some point in time, some non-physical aspect of this other world could change. If the people of that world are aware of this change, then that will alter their behavior. That would mean that the supposedly non-physical difference was physical after all. If they are unaware of the change, then they could not be using the term "mental states" to refer to those non-physical aspects.

Put another way, if we imagine some set of logically possible worlds, all of which are physically identical to this one (and thus to each other), then it is impossible, even in principle, for us to know which (if any) of those worlds this one actually is. Because if it *were* possible to know, then the knowledge of people in one of those possible worlds would differ from that of people in the other worlds, and that would result in different behavior, which contradicts the claim that they are all physically identical to each other.

The only way around this problem would be to assert that it is possible to be aware of something without the fact that you are aware of it affecting your physical behavior *in any way*. I suppose such an idea might even have been conceivable some time in the past, but it is simply not consistent with what we now know about how *thinking* and *knowing* actually *work*. There is no question that brain activity is, at the very least, *involved* in these processes. If you know something, then that knowledge is *physically* represented in your brain. This makes it impossible for two people (meaning corresponding people in two of these universes) with identical brain states to be thinking about, to be aware of, or to know, different things.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)

DM quote: "Is it logically possible that the color of grass could have been blue? The question, as phrased, is meaningless. You need to specify under what conditions you are asking whether it could have been blue or not. If the answer can be derived logically from the definition of those specific conditions, then the answer is an a-priori judgement, and can be determined through logical alone. If not, then only empirical observation of grass in a world where those conditions obtain, will suffice."

TecnoTut wrote

Yes, I meant logically possible. I thought we can stipulate that's the sense we mean when we say "possible"

since that's the issue at hand. I don't think anyone actually believes that it's physically possible grass can be blue given the facts of photosynthesis (but we can imagine it as blue).

Then as I said, the question as phrased is meaningless.

DM quote: "Consider Fermat's last theorem. Until recently (when it was finally proven true), it was conceivable that it could be false. But it was never logically possible for it to be false."

TecnoTut wrote

True enough. There's also Goldbach's conjecture (GC) which still hasn't been proven (or disproven). At first, it seems as if we can conceive of the denial of Goldbach's conjecture since it is still unproven that every even number is obtainable as the sum of two primes. But this appearance proves to be illusionary according to the above constraint. In order to imagine a world in which there is a counter-example to Goldbach's conjecture I have to imagine all the details of the proof of this counter-example; and this seems to be impossible as long as we do not actually possess such a proof.

The same problem exists for the conceivability of a zombie world. If you stipulate as a requirement of conceivability of X that we must actually be able to logically deduce all of the implications of X, then the zombie world is clearly *not* conceivable, because that would require that we not only know *everything* about the laws of physics in this world, but also that we be able to logically derive all implications of those laws. We don't, and we can't.

TecnoTut wrote

Let's make a natural distinction between negative conceivability (NC) and positive conceivability (PC). NC simply means something is not ruled out. The truth or falsity of GC is not ruled out, so GC is NC (this is true because it's still undecidable whether GC is true or false absent a proof (or disproof)). But GC is not PC. We can not positively imagine how GC is true (or false) because we cannot imagine all the details of the proof (or disproof).

This is exactly the distinction I was talking about when I said that conceivability only implies that *as far as we know* it isn't *impossible*. What you call "positive conceivability" is nothing less than a formal proof that X is logically possible.

Again, this has clearly not been provided for the zombie world.

TecnoTut wrote

Whereas we can imagine all the details of photosynthesis and simultaneously imagine grass as being blue.

Actually, we can't. Photosynthesis, like pretty much all organic chemical reactions, is *far* too complicated for us to be able to logically deduce all of its implications. Clearly for grass to be blue instead of green *something* about the laws of physics would have to be different. We cannot even begin to try to deduce whether they could be changed in such a way as to make grass blue, without changing the world so much that what we call grass would not exist at all.

DM quote: "A physicalist would not claim that "the feeling of a headache" and "c-fibers firing" are properties at all. They are not properties. They are processes. The physicalist would claim that the feeling of a headache is a set of brain processes. Just as the single planet Venus can have multiple sets of descriptions attached to it, so can those brain processes."

TecnoTut wrote

Why do you insist on the incompatibility for something to be both a property and a process?

Because processes are actions which things perform, not characteristics of things. The fact that the brain *does* perform certain types of processes, would be a property of the brain. The process itself is not a property of anything. It is something which happens.

TecnoTut wrote

But assume they're processes. A property dualist would simply say that each concept picks out a distinct process. Hence they're distinct.

He can *say* that all he wants. Where is the evidence? Why multiply entities unnecessarily?

DM quote: "Anyway, such word games tell us nothing more about the actual nature of consciousness, than they do about the actual nature of Venus. The fact that we unknowingly imagined Venus to be two completely different things, did not mean that it was. And likewise the fact that you imagine consciousness and brain activity to be two completely different things, does not mean that it is."

TecnoTut wrote

I don't think the argument is that Venus is two different things. The argument is that our two different concepts of Venus picked out two different properties.

Yes, and likewise our conception of "brain process" and our conception of "mental process" both pick out different *high-level* descriptions of the same set of processes.

TecnoTut wrote

The point is that we don't know a priori that distinct concepts pick out the same property (or as DM prefers to say, "processes"). DM argues that we do know that they pick out the same property. But it's quite possible that the Different Senses Principle (DSP) is true.

It is quite possible that *everything* we know is wrong. It is quite possible that the laws of chemistry aren't reducible to fundamental physical laws too. Dualists make such a big deal about our inability to *derive* consciousness from basic physical laws, but seem to fail to realize that this problem is not specific to consciousness. It applies to *all* complex systems.

Fortunately, there is no need in science to *prove* that our theories are *true*. Science is concerned with finding the simplest model possible which accurately describes the phenomena being investigated. If and when it is *demonstrated* that the brain process model of consciousness is not consistent with the facts, it will be replaced with a new model. So far, the model is doing just fine, and a huge amount of supporting evidence has been gathered for it. Meanwhile there is still zero supporting evidence for the hypothesis that brain states and mental states are distinct things.

By Death Monkey (Kevin Dolan)