

00:24.05 Because it's described as unclear, subliminal but covering the whole body and so on, and it's not the sense of touch and all that. And I think with this kind of dialogue with Western ideas and Western neuroscientific practice, I think there is a lot to be learned about some of the more basic levels of the mind for all the sides. Ok.

GARY TUBB

00:24.32 Thank you very much. That was perfectly timed. And we'll be hearing next from Ned Block, who is Silver Professor Philosophy and Psychology at NYU.

NED BLOCK

00:24.45 Thanks, that was- I was very interested to read Professor Dreyfus's paper. It's the first thing I'd seen that explains Dharmakirti in terms that a contemporary philosopher or scientist, I think, can understand.

00:25.03 So, I- I'm gonna- Since I have very little time, I'm gonna make three very short remarks, which I hope will help in the discussion. The first one I'm going to introduce the idea of the hard problem.

00:25.22 Which probably many people here, since this is a conference on consciousness, have heard of. Well, so I'll just start with that. Ok, so the hard problem is the problem of how to explain conscious experience on the basis of its neural basis. The problem is that it seems that the neural basis of a conscious-

00:25.47 We don't understand why the neural basis of a conscious experience is the neural basis of that experience as opposed to some other experience or no experience at all. So, to be, just to get into the problem, let me notice first of all that the notion of consciousness is ambiguous. I think many ways ambiguous, but probably the most basic ambiguity is this:

00:26.10

On the one hand we have the content of an experiential state - that is, the content being red or being blue. So here I pictured it with a- well, I've got the person facing, perhaps the wrong way, but a person looking at a red fire hydrant and having an experience as a red.

00:26.37

And this experiential content, I believe, is what Professor Dreyfus says Dharmakirti refers to with the term, akara. It's the aspect of the experience that represents the outside world. Ok, a second- But he can tell me whether that's true.

00:27.00

A second component of the state of- the usual state of consciousness of a person anyway, is some kind of awareness of that content. So these things seem to me to be very basically different items. And I think if we don't distinguish them, we're gonna get in serious trouble.

00:27.18 The content itself and the awareness of that content, which I've symbolized with this second arrow. The content itself represents the outside world. The awareness of the content represents the content. Ok, so-

00:27.37 Now, so those are two different things. And I- what I think, I just might as well say in advance, what I think is what makes the hard problem hard is this thing in a cloud right here. It's the content itself. I think the awareness of the content is not - although it's mysterious, certainly, and difficult to understand - is not as mysterious as the content that it is awareness of.

00:27.59 So let me just saying something about why I think this content is, fits in the category of what Professor Dreyfus says Dharmakirti calls akara. He says that akara has a dual nature. Now, I'm not completely sure if I understand the dual nature, but it seems to me it's something like

this - it's the aspect under which experience represents the world, but it's also something that is part of consciousness itself.

00:28.30 It's part of the phenomenology of experience. So, it's those two things that seem to me to make the content of an experiential state fit in this category of akara.

00:28.45 Alright, so let me now talk about them separately - the content versus the awareness. Now, I think one way to get a handle on content of an experiential state as opposed to awareness of it is to notice that the content of an experiential state is something we might share with a lot of animals.

00:29.04 For example, a mammal like a mouse that shares a lot of our visual system. Or maybe better the smell system. So, I've got cheese and licorice here, so the smell of cheese and the smell of

licorice might be something we could perhaps share with a mouse.

00:29.26

Ok, let me move now to the awareness of a conscious state. So, that is another state that focuses on the experience. It's much less plausible that we would share that with a mouse. I mean, for all I know, mice have very rarely or maybe never have any awareness of their own conscious states. It seems a rather more sophisticated kind of thing.

00:29.49

Especially if you think that one of the standard theories of awareness is on the right track. One standard theory is that awareness of a conscious state has to do with some kind of thought that encompasses that conscious state.

00:30.08

So, the awareness of my experience of red might be a thought that you could put in English as I am experiencing red, but in which the red would be actually part of the thought. The redness

would be presented to the subject as part of a thought content.

00:30.29

Ok. I don't know to what extent mice have thoughts at all, but this is a rather sophisticated kind of thought, in which you categorize an experience in a thought as an experience. I doubt that mice could have that.

00:30.45

Now notice again, going back to Dharmakirti, I think that the content is something which I think in normal circumstances - as Professor Dreyfus said - is not conceptualized, but the awareness of it can be conceptualized. Because in thinking a thought to the effect that I'm experiencing a certain experiential state, you bring to bear a concept on it.

00:31.12

Again, another thing, reason to believe that it, at least can be, a much different kind of state from the content itself, one that we might not share with a lot of other animals. Another

account of awareness might be attention to the experience.

00:31.30

Now that might be a little, that might be somewhat less intellectual. Now, the key point I want to make is that actually science, especially cognitive neuroscience is making some progress on the nature of cognition and attention. And I think this has to be contrasted.

00:32.47

So we have, you know, perhaps two theories, maybe more theories of the nature of awareness. Or at least beginnings of theories of the nature of awareness in cognitive science and cognitive neuroscience. But I think if you ask the question what are the theories that are available on the nature of experiential content itself, the answer is zero.

00:32.08

None. There are no scientific theories that - at least, that's what I believe - that get to first base as theories of the nature of experiential

content. And this is the thing I mentioned, the hard problem, or sometimes called the explanatory gap.

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Just to remind you - why is the neural basis of a given experiential content - that of red, for example - the neural basis of that one rather than another one or not. And David Chalmers has called it the problem of how to explain the content of a conscious experience in terms of its neural basis.

00:32.42

The hard problem of consciousness, as opposed to the easy problems. Well, people have bristled at that a bit - easier problems might have been a better name. Problems that have to do with the function of consciousness. So, we can look at proposed neural correlates of consciousness and see something about their functions.

00:33.03

So, we have some handle on that, but so far, there've been no proposals - in my opinion - that

get to first base on the question of what consciousness is, what experiential content is in itself. So, what that suggests is that making this distinction between the content and the awareness of the content - it's the content that makes the hard problem hard.

00:33.26

So that's my, that's the first of my three points. It's the content, not the awareness that makes the hard problem hard. Let me move to a second and related issue about physicalism and scientific naturalism.

00:33.43

So this connects more closely with things that Owen was talking about. So, I think that we see from areas of science that in many cases we can understand what some property or object or phenomenon that we encounter in the world, we can understand what it is in scientific terms, even in physical terms.

00:34.09 So, water, for example, I think Owen mentioned, we understand that that is H₂O. Light, we know, we've found out, is electromagnetic radiation of certain wavelengths. Heat turns out to be molecular kinetic energy.

00:34.28 I think the scientific point of view suggests - although, we haven't gotten very far in investigating what experience is in the brain - that we will find the same thing. The same line of thought will apply to our experience and to the brain.

00:34.47 So for example, it may turn out that the experience of green is a certain neural property. However, there is a problem about how that could be true that is connected with this idea that I mentioned of the explanatory gap and the hard problem. The problem is how could something subjective, like an experience, literally be something objective, like a neural property, in

the way that water can be H₂O or light can be electromagnetic radiation. How could that be?

00:35.23

Well, so this seems like a paradoxical- It seems like the scientific world view just clashes with some obvious fact about our experience. Now, there is a way around this, which actually, which is I think fairly widely accepted among philosophers these days, which has its origins in some points made by my colleague at NYU, Tom Nagel, in a famous paper called "What It's Like to Be a Bat."

00:35.53

And, the basic idea of the resolution is this: We could put it in terms of an analogy that Nagel makes between our situation with respect to the physical nature of our conscious experience and the problem that a pre-Socratic philosopher would have had if someone tried to explain to him how heat could be molecular kinetic energy or light could be-

00:36.23 Actually I think he had- Well, it doesn't matter. He had a somewhat different analogy, but anyway. How heat could be molecular kinetic energy. The problem is you need a concept, you know, that's saying heat is a kind of motion. It doesn't seem like motion. So what you need is a concept of heat and a concept of kinetic energy that makes it intelligible that these concepts pick out the same thing.

00:36.45 So the crucial thing here is to distinguish between our concept, which is an idea in the mind about some reality, and the reality itself. So we have two different concepts of red. We have- or of heat. We have a subjective concept in terms of our experience - the thing that feels like this. In the case of heat, it's the thing that feels warm.

00:37.12 And then there's an objective concept, which is a concept of - we believe - the very same thing in objective terms. Molecular kinetic energy. So the

idea is that the same methodology can be applied to the mind. Subjective concept of an experiential state versus an objective neuroscience concept of that same state.

00:37.37

And the idea is that the mystery can be shoved off onto the concepts from the- Instead of thinking about it as a mystery of how experience could be something physical, the real mystery is how a certain subjective concept and a certain objective concept really pick out the same thing.

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Now you may wonder what concepts have to do with it. Well, I could appeal to a particular episode in the history of science in which people thought it was impossible that, at least one person thought it was impossible that, reproduction could take place because of the problem that we could now call - using the analogy with the Xerox machine - the Xerox effect.

00:38.28 Which is if you make a Xerox of a Xerox of a Xerox, after a hundred generations, it becomes very fuzzy. Now, at one point, it seemed impossible that creatures could reproduce because they copy themselves over and over again for many generations without becoming fuzzy copies.

00:38.49 So- And this has been known for a very long time. So, what they needed was a concept of DNA. And that's what Watson and Crick discovered - a concept that is, allows us to see how all these different generations without change are possible.

00:39.12 So, the idea is to substitute a conceptual dualism for a dualism of ontology. So, the idea is we can see how the experience of green is a neural property. We can satisfy the physicalistic world view and we can also accommodate the fact that there is an explanatory gap and the mystery of consciousness.

00:39.36 The idea is that the different concepts- It's hard for us to understand how those concepts are concepts of the same thing, but that's because we don't have the concepts well enough spelled out. Now, I have another point, but I think I don't have time, so I think I will stop.

SUSAN CAREY

00:39.54 I need your-

APPLAUSE

GARY TUBB

00:40.00 Thank you very much. Our next response will come from Susan Carey, who's a Professor in the Laboratory for Developmental Studies at Harvard University.

SUSAN CAREY

00:40.13 I want to thank the organizers very much for inviting me. I knew nothing of the fascinating Indian philosophical tradition and was really