



# A Review of David J. Chalmers' Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings

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David J. Chalmers “Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings” is an extensive book that offers a thorough exploration of the complex landscape of Philosophy of Mind. Published by Oxford University Press in 2002, this book is structured into four sections: “Foundations”, “Consciousness”, “Content” and “Miscellaneous”. Each section presents a selection of works from both classical and contemporary philosophers, addressing core debates on dualism, consciousness, intentionality and personal identity. Through his insightful introduction, Chalmers provides us with a contextual understanding of these philosophical discussions which make this book a crucial resource for students, scholars and anyone interested in Philosophy of Mind. The study’s breadth and depth allow for a nuanced understanding of the evolution of thought in this field, offering a balanced perspective on the ongoing debates that continue to shape the discourse on the nature of the mind. This book serves as both an introduction and an in-depth guide to key philosophical debates surrounding the mind, consciousness and personal identity with its wide range of selections from both classical and contemporary sources. The systematic explanation in the book allows for a clear and distinct exploration of the key debates and ideas that have shaped the field. In the Preface, Chalmers outlines the focus of each section, setting the stage for a deep dive into the philosophical issues that have puzzled thinkers for centuries.

The first chapter, “Foundations” is fundamental for understanding the metaphysical questions that underlie Philosophy of Mind. Chalmers begins with Rene Descartes “Meditations

on First Philosophy” where Descartes introduces his famous dictum, “Cogito, ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am). This forms the basis of his dualist perspective, which posits that the mental and the physical realms are fundamentally distinct yet interact with each other. Descartes dualism is contrasted with Thomas Huxley’s arguments against the reduction of animals to mere automations, emphasizing that animals possess consciousness and cognitive capacities that make them more than just machines.

Gilbert Ryle’s critique of Cartesian dualism in “Descartes Myth” is also significant contribution to the 1st Chapter of the book. Ryle argues against the separation of mind and body, proposing instead that mental processes are inseparable from physical actions and environmental interactions. This perspective challenges the traditional view of the mind as a distinct inner realm, suggesting instead that what we consider “mental” is merely a manifestation of observable behaviors. Rudolf Carnap’s theory of the compatibility between psychological and physical languages, Hilary Putnam’s rejection of both dualism and classical materialism and U.T. Place’s hypothesis that consciousness is a process in the brain all contribute to a nuanced discussion on the nature of the mind. Chalmers also includes J.J.C. Smart and Herbert Feigl’s materialist arguments which assert that sensations are identical to brain processes, emphasizing a strict identity between the mental and the physical. C.D. Broad’s mechanistic view of the mind and Jaegwon Kim’s Multiple Realizability Thesis add further depth to the discussion highlighting the diversity of views within the materialist perspective.

The second chapter, “Consciousness” delves into one of the most enigmatic phenomena in philosophy. Ned Block’s distinction between phenomenal consciousness (the subjective experience of mental states) and access consciousness (the cognitive availability of mental states) sets the stage for a detailed exploration of consciousness. Chalmers

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categorizes consciousness into six types, ranging from reductive views that explain consciousness as a physical process to non-reductive views that suggest that consciousness may transcend physical explanations. Chalmers critiques materialistic approaches to consciousness with arguments such as the explanatory argument which states that physical explanations can account for structure and function but not the qualitative aspects of experience. The conceivability argument further complicates the materialist perspective by suggesting that it is conceivable for beings physically identical to us to exist without consciousness implying that consciousness is non-physical. Frank Jackson's knowledge argument, introduced in his article "Epiphenomenal Qualia" suggests that physical facts alone cannot lead to an understanding of subjective experience, particularly qualia. David Lewis in "What Experience Teaches" argues for the indispensability of direct experience in understanding new phenomena suggesting that theoretical knowledge is insufficient on its own to understand experiences. David M. Rosenthal's classification of consciousness into creature consciousness and state consciousness helps to clarify different aspects of the phenomenon, contributing to a more detailed understanding of consciousness. Christopher Peacocke and Michael Tye's discussions on sensations and visual qualia along with Sydney Shoemaker's exploration of the phenomenal character of experience further enrich this chapter engaging with deep philosophical questions about the nature of Consciousness.

The third chapter, "Content" focuses on the concept of intentionality which refers to the "aboutness" or representational nature of mental states. Chalmers begins with Franz Brentano's introduction of intentionality in "Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint" where Brentano explores how mental content can represent states of the world. Roderick M. Chisholm's analysis of "Intentional Inexistence" further examines the idea that mental states can be directed towards non-existent objects, challenging traditional views of intentionality and highlighting the unique nature of mental phenomena. Fred Dretske's "A Recipe for Thought" challenges the notion that understanding is necessarily tied to the ability to create or build something, arguing that comprehension can exist independently of construction. Ruth Garrett Millikan's "Biosemantics" critiques causal or informational theories of mental content, emphasizing that the function of representations should ground content-fixing circumstances. Her work addresses the naturalistic and teleological perspectives on mental content, offering a sophisticated analysis of how semantic content is determined. Robert Brandom's distinction between Sentience and Sapience in "Reasoning and Representing" is another key contribution to this chapter. Brandom argues that propositional content plays a crucial role in our cognitive processes, highlighting the social articulation of thought. Wilfred Sellars argument against

reducing thoughts to immediate experiences suggests that thoughts are complex episodes to which individuals have privileged access, though this access can be fallible. Paul M. Churchland's "Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes" introduces the provocative idea that folk psychology may eventually be replaced by neuroscience, challenging traditional views of mental content and intentionality. The 3rd Chapter concludes with Andy Clark and David Chalmers "The Extended Mind" which challenges traditional notions of cognitive boundaries by proposing the perspective of active externalism. This view suggests that cognitive processes can extend beyond the confines of the brain, encompassing the environment in which a cognitive agent operates. Clark and Chalmers argue that external tools are integral to cognitive processes and should be viewed as extensions of the mind rather than mere aids, impacting moral and social considerations, such as how we perceive the significance of environmental interactions and the nature of personal and collective cognitive abilities.

In the final chapter, "Miscellaneous" Chalmers addresses a variety of philosophical issues related to personal identity, free will, and the nature of the mind. Derek Parfit's "Reductionism and Personal Identity" explores the complex nature of personal identity through philosophical analysis using thought experiments like Teletransportation to challenge our understanding of what it means to be the same person over time. A.J. Ayer's "Freedom and Necessity" addresses the tension between determinism and free will by emphasizing that the mere feeling of freedom does not prove that a person is acting freely. Bertrand Russell's "Analogy" uses analogy to infer the existence of other minds, suggesting that our understanding of other minds involves both subjective experience and observed behavior. The final chapter of the book concludes with John Searle's critique of "Strong Artificial Intelligence" in "Can Computers Think?" where Searle argues that while computers can simulate human-like processes, they lack the semantic understanding inherent in human thought.

In the end it can be said that David J. Chalmers book "Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings" is a well-structured and comprehensive book that effectively captures the evolution of thought in Philosophy of Mind. By including influential works from both classical and contemporary philosophers, Chalmers provides readers with a deep and balanced understanding of the field. The book's strength lies in its breadth and depths, making it suitable for both newcomers to the field and seasoned philosophers. Further, the book's extensive and detailed content can overwhelm readers unfamiliar with dense texts. It is comprehensive range, though impressive, demands careful attention and deep reflection. This complexity may limit accessibility and deter some potential readers of the book. But, despite this, "Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary

Readings” will be a valuable resource that will continue to inform and inspire those interested in the field of Philosophy of Mind for years to come.

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