

The Distinction Between the Easy Problem and the Hard Problem of Consciousness

What easy problems concern?

- Abilities
- Functions

What hard problems concern?

- Experience
- Perception

How can easy problems be explained?

- Mechanisms that perform a function
- Cognitive Science
- Awareness
- Reaction to environmental stimuli
- Ability to access internal states
- Reportability of mental states
- Controlling of behavior
- Physical affects of mental states
- Neurophysiology

How can hard problems be explained?

- Qualia
- Subjectivity
- ‘Something it is like’

What do easy problems ask?

- What arises physically

What do hard problems ask?

- Why and how it arises

Chalmers’ suggestion distinguishing easy and the hard problems, is by assigning the term ‘consciousness’ to refer only to the hard problem and use ‘awareness’ for the easy problem. By doing so, we will be avoiding the explanations of the easy problem to account for the hard problem, eliminating ambiguity.

- Consciousness is not functionally definable, where awareness is.
- Reduction can be used for derivation of awareness but it fails explaining consciousness.
- We can explain our existence, yet we cannot explain how we experience our existence.

Case-studies

Neurobiological Theory of Consciousness (binding): explaining experiences in functionalist terms, addressing the easy problem not the hard problem

Cognitive Theory of Consciousness (accessibility): explaining the functional correlation of conscious experience, but not the experience itself

Philosophical strategies handling consciousness

1. Explain Something Else: avoiding experience and explaining awareness with cognitive science
2. Deny the Phenomenon: taking the stance that there is no phenomenon beyond the easy problem
3. Claim to be Explaining Experience: incomplete explanation, functional side of conscious experience
4. Explain the Structure of the Experience: takes experience for granted, accounts for the structure, yet cannot go beyond the physical aspects of experience

5. Isolate the Substrate of Experience: explains which processes give rise to experience does not answer why and how