

## Chalmers' Zombie Argument

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In the late twentieth century, zombies began to play an important role in philosophical discussions about consciousness. But unlike the zombies of Hollywood, philosophical zombies are very much alive – or at least, they would be were they to exist. As philosophers use the term, a zombie is a creature that is microphysically identical to a human being – and thus produces behavior that is indistinguishable from that of a normal human being – but lacks any sort of consciousness in the phenomenal sense. Zombies behave as if they are in pain when you stick them with a pin, and they will report that they are in pain, but they don't experience any painful sensations.

Many philosophers have recently claimed that we can coherently imagine the existence of zombies. This claim is taken to imply the possibility of zombies, a claim that in turn is taken to imply the falsity of physicalism. The zombies, after all, are by definition exactly like us physically. But if

two creatures alike physically can differ with respect to consciousness, then it seems to show that consciousness is something over and above the physical. The zombie argument is one of a class of arguments in philosophy of mind often referred to as “conceivability arguments.” Such arguments start by claiming that some scenario is conceivable. The conceivability of the scenario is taken to imply that it is possible, and this is then supposed to show something about the actual nature of the mind. With respect to conceivability arguments in general, each of these moves is controversial, and the zombie argument is no exception. Some philosophers have questioned whether zombies are really conceivable. Others grant that zombies are conceivable but deny that it is appropriate to move from a claim about their conceivability to a claim about their possibility. Yet others grant that zombies are possible creatures but deny that this shows anything about physicalism.

[I]t is conceivable that there be a system that is physically identical to a conscious being, but that lacks at least some of that being’s conscious states. Such a system might be a *zombie*: a system that is physically identical to a conscious being but that lacks consciousness entirely. It might also be an *invert*, with some of the original being’s experiences replaced by different experiences, or a *partial zombie*, with some experiences absent, or a combination thereof. These systems will look identical to a normal conscious being from the third-person perspective: in particular, their brain processes will be molecule-for-molecule identical with the original, and their behavior will be indistinguishable. But things will be different from the first-person point of view. What it is like to be an invert or a partial zombie will differ from what it is like to be the original being. And there is nothing it is like to be a zombie.

There is little reason to believe that zombies exist in the actual world. But many hold that they are at least conceivable: we can coherently imagine zombies, and there is no contradiction in the idea that reveals itself even on reflection. As an extension of the idea, many hold that the same goes for a *zombie world*: a universe physically identical to ours, but in which there is no consciousness. Something similar applies to inverts and other duplicates.

From the conceivability of zombies, proponents of the argument infer their *metaphysical possibility*. Zombies are probably not naturally possible: they probably cannot exist in our world, with its laws of nature. But the argument holds that zombies *could have* existed, perhaps in a very different sort of universe. For example, it is sometimes suggested that God could have created a zombie world, if he had so chosen. From here, it is inferred that consciousness must be nonphysical. If there is a metaphysically possible universe that is physically identical to ours but that lacks consciousness, then consciousness must be a further, nonphysical component of our universe. If God could have created a zombie world, then (as Kripke puts it) after creating the physical processes in our world, he had to do more work to ensure that it contained consciousness. (Chalmers “Nature,” 249)

- P1. I can conceive of zombies; that is, creatures that are microphysically identical to conscious beings but that lack consciousness entirely.
- P2. If zombies are conceivable, then they are metaphysically possible.
  - C1. Zombies are metaphysically possible (*modus ponens*, P1, P2).
- P3. If zombies are metaphysically possible, then consciousness is nonphysical.
  - C2. Consciousness is nonphysical (*modus ponens*, C1, P3).

Alternatively:

- P1. I can conceive of a zombie world; that is, a world physically identical to ours but in which there is no consciousness.
- P2. If a zombie world is conceivable, then it is metaphysically possible.
  - C1. A zombie world is metaphysically possible (*modus ponens*, P1, P2).
- P3. If a zombie world is metaphysically possible, then facts about consciousness are facts over and above the physical facts.
  - C2. Facts about consciousness are facts over and above the physical facts (*modus ponens*, C1, P3).
- P4. If physicalism is true, then there are no facts about consciousness over and above the physical facts.
  - C3. Physicalism is false (*modus tollens*, C2, P4).