

Prof. Dr. Markus Gabriel  
 Chair in Epistemology, Modern  
 and Contemporary Philosophy  
 Director of International Center  
 for Philosophy  
[www.izph.de/en](http://www.izph.de/en)  
 gabrielm@uni-bonn.de

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## **How to Conceive of the Human Mind After Naturalism's Failure**

### Abstract

In my talk, I will first reconstruct some recent arguments designed to show that the naturalistic world-view fails. It is not the case that we have to integrate all phenomena in a causally closed universe or nature which is fundamentally material-energetic and, as such, does not contain mental states or events. However, this train of thought naturally raises the question of how to think of the human mind after naturalism's failure. Some prominent philosophers (such as David Chalmers and Thomas Nagel) believe that we need to revise our understanding of nature so as to be able to integrate the mental into the natural order after all. However, it has rightly been objected that their respective forays into the dark regions of speculative (meta-)physics are no more plausible than the original naturalistic world-view they reject for very good reasons.

Against this background I will argue that the human mind (a "Geist," as I will say with reference to a venerable tradition of conceiving of the specifically human mind) is an explanatory structure that makes no reference to mind/consciousness as a natural kind, that is, as an entity that is present in the cosmos in the way in which, say, physical forces or molecules are supposed to exist. Naturalism and speculative (meta-)physics fail on the level of their description and analytical conception of what it is for something to be a human mind.

The view I advocate (which comes by the name of "Neo-Existentialism") has significant consequences for our contemporary world-view, as it comes with a host of wide-ranging restrictions of the explanatory value of evolutionary psychology/biology for human behavior and thinking.

**Standard Naturalism** is a conjunction of claims:

1. (SN1) Metaphysical naturalism (materialism): everything which (really) exists is ultimately material-energetic and therefore woven into the causal web studied by our best natural scientific practices.
2. (SN2) Epistemological naturalism: everything which (really) exists can best be explained with recourse to the standards of theory construction definitive of our best natural scientific practices.
3. (SN3) Biological Continuity: the human brain/the human mind is part of the natural order. It is a natural kind located on a specific branch of evolution.
4. (SN4) Methodological Continuity: every genuine explanation has always been governed by the standards made explicit by modern science.

### I. Naturalism's Failures

(Q1) "In short, the mind is the brain. According to the materialists, we can (in principle!) account for every mental phenomenon using the same physical principles, laws, and raw materials that suffice to explain radioactivity, continental drift, photosynthesis, reproduction, nutrition, and growth."<sup>1</sup>

(Q2) "One should be leery of these possibilities in principle. It is also possible in principle to build a stainless-steel ladder to the moon, and to write out, in alphabetical order, all intelligible English conversations consisting of less than a thousand words. But neither of

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<sup>1</sup> Dennett, Daniel: *Consciousness Explained*. New York 1991, p. 33.

these are remotely possible in fact and sometimes an *impossibility in fact* is theoretically more interesting than a *possibility in principle*<sup>2</sup>.

David Chalmers unequivocally argues “that materialism is false and that a form of dualism is true”<sup>3</sup>. He defines **materialism** as (Q3) “the widely held doctrine [...], which is generally taken to hold that everything in the world is physical, or that there is nothing over and above the physical, or that the physical facts in a certain sense exhaust all the facts about the world.”<sup>4</sup>

#### (Simplified) Conceivability Argument:

- (i.) Zombies are conceivable (the concept of a zombie does not harbor any *logical* contradiction).
  - (ii.) If zombies are conceivable, they are possible (there is a possible world where everybody is a zombie = a zombie world).
  - (iii.) If the brain-mind-link is metaphysically necessary, there is no zombie world.
  - (iv.) If materialism is true, the brain-mind-link is metaphysically necessary.
  - (v.) There is a zombie world.
  - (vi.) The brain-mind-link is not metaphysically necessary.
- ∴ Materialism is false.

**Speculative (meta-)physics** consists in postulating additional material-energetic structures/forces in order to integrate mind into the natural order despite appearances.

Recent prominent case: Thomas Nagel in *Mind and Cosmos*.<sup>5</sup> Nagel’s starting point is a version principle of intelligibility. The **principle of intelligibility** generally holds that reality has to be intelligible to such an extent that we can rule out *a priori* that any far-fetched hypothesis holds which makes reality in principle inaccessible to human inquisitiveness.

## II. Geist as an Explanatory Structure

Dennett as a surprising road to *Geist*. There are “phenomena that *depend on their concepts*”: “On the view of consciousness I will develop in this book, it turns out that consciousness, like love and money, is a phenomenon that does indeed depend to a surprising extent on its associated concepts.”<sup>6</sup>

*Geist* is not a natural kind or complicated structure of natural kinds, but precisely something that does not even exist independently of the specific descriptions used in order to point out phenomena whose very existence depend on mutual ascriptions of tokens of mental states such that their accuracy-conditions presuppose anchoring both in the external natural world and a linguistic division of labor (cf. Hilary Putnam on externalism).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Chalmers, David: *The Conscious Mind. In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. Oxford 1996, p. xv.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., o. 41. He adds an important specification: “In our language, materialism is true if all the positive facts about the world are globally logically supervenient on the physical facts. This captures the intuitive notion that if materialism is true, then once God fixed the physical facts about the world, all the facts were fixed.” (ibid.)

<sup>5</sup> Nagel, Thomas: *Mind and Cosmos. Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. Oxford 2012. Typically, speculative (meta-)physicians resort to their favorite interpretation of quantum mechanics as a justification for enlargening our ontology of the universe, as does Chalmers too. A prominent representative of this trend is Penrose, Roger: *Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness*. Oxford 1994. Remarkably, Erwin Schrödinger argued against this strategy in his Turner Lectures *Mind and Matter* (delivered 1956).

<sup>6</sup> Dennett, *ibid.*, p. 24.

Dennett on **dualism**: “The idea of mind as distinct in this way from the brain, composed not of ordinary matter but of some other, special kind of stuff, is *dualism*, and it is deservedly in disrepute today”<sup>7</sup>.

**Neo-Existentialism** is the view according to which *Geist*, the specifically human mind, consists in a capacity to create institutions in light of our socially mediated imagery of how our actions and their explanations fit into a larger context. Neo-Existentialism is an anti-materialist position, as it denies that the largest possible frame where all phenomena are supposed to take place is identical to the natural order.

The ideology of **neurocentricism** is a hybrid of:

*Neuromania* = the attempt to identify the brain or rather its neural circuits as the natural kinds corresponding to a purified mentalistic vocabulary.

*Darwinitis* = the associated attempt to explain all human behavior in terms of evolutionary biology or psychology.<sup>8</sup>

From a meta-metaphysical point of view, Neo-Existentialism is **deflationary**. A view in – meta-metaphysics is called “deflationary” if it does not proclaim to be a profound insight into the furniture of reality or the ultimate structure of nature/the world/the universe/the cosmos. In general, I deny that there is such a thing as a profound metaphysical insight. Any insight into the actual composition of natural order will be straightforwardly empirical. As Wittgenstein, one of the most prominent deflationary philosophers has put it in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*: “*The riddle* does not exist.” (TLP 6.5)

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<sup>7</sup> Dennett, *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Tallis, Raymond: *Aping Mankind. Neuromania, Darwinitis and the Misrepresentation of Humanity*. London 2011.