

RECONFIGURING SUBJECTIVITY IN THE HARD PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS: VARELA'S NEUROPHENOMENOLOGY AND MULLĀ ṢADRĀ'S KNOWLEDGE BY PRESENCE



Abdurrahman¹, Mohammad Subhi², Dhea Dayuranggi Meghatruh^{*3}

*Correspondence:

Email:

dhea.meghatruh@gmail.com

Authors Affiliation:

¹ Universitas Paramadina Jakarta, Indonesia

² Sekolah Tinggi Ekonomi dan Bisnis Islam Global Mulia Cikarang, Indonesia

³ Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article examines the problem of subjectivity in David Chalmers' formulation of the hard problem of consciousness, particularly the difficulty of explaining subjective experience and *qualia* within a predominantly third-person scientific framework. The study argues that the exclusion or marginalization of the experiencing subject generates both a methodological limitation in investigating consciousness and an epistemic gap in explaining the structure and knowledge of subjective experience. To address this problem, the study comparatively examines Francisco Varela's neurophenomenology and Mullā Ṣadrā's metaphysical psychology, bringing them into dialogue with Chalmers' framework to develop a broader account of subjectivity in consciousness studies. Employing qualitative library research and in-depth analysis of relevant philosophical literature, the study investigates the methodological and epistemological contributions of these two approaches. The findings show that Chalmers' hard problem reintroduces subjectivity as a fundamental issue in the scientific study of consciousness; Varela's neurophenomenology provides a methodological framework for incorporating first-person experience through enaction and the embodied interrelation of mind, body, and world; while Ṣadrā's concept of *knowledge by presence* (*al-ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*) offers an epistemological account of how subjective experience can be accessed and understood from within. The study concludes that integrating neurophenomenology with Ṣadrā's epistemology can strengthen both the methodological and epistemological foundations of consciousness studies by connecting first-person inquiry with a deeper account of the structure of subjective experience and *qualia*.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji persoalan subjektivitas dalam formulasi hard problem of consciousness David Chalmers, khususnya terkait kesulitan menjelaskan pengalaman subjektif dan *qualia* dalam kerangka ilmiah yang didominasi perspektif orang ketiga. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa pengabaian atau peninggiran subjek yang mengalami pengalaman menimbulkan keterbatasan metodologis dalam penelitian kesadaran sekaligus kesenjangan epistemologis dalam menjelaskan struktur dan pengetahuan atas pengalaman subjektif. Untuk menjawab persoalan tersebut, penelitian ini memperbandingkan neurofenomenologi Francisco Varela dan psikologi metafisis Mullā Ṣadrā, serta mendialogkannya dengan kerangka Chalmers guna membangun pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif mengenai subjektivitas dalam studi kesadaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui studi kepustakaan dan analisis mendalam terhadap literatur filosofis yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hard problem Chalmers menempatkan kembali subjektivitas sebagai persoalan fundamental dalam studi ilmiah tentang kesadaran; neurofenomenologi Varela menyediakan kerangka metodologis untuk mengintegrasikan pengalaman orang pertama melalui konsep enaction dan keterjalinan antara pikiran, tubuh, dan dunia; sementara konsep pengetahuan dengan kehadiran (*al-ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*) Mullā Ṣadrā menawarkan landasan epistemologis untuk memahami bagaimana pengalaman subjektif dapat diakses dan dipahami dari dalam. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi neurofenomenologi dengan epistemologi Ṣadrā dapat memperkuat landasan metodologis dan epistemologis studi kesadaran dengan menghubungkan penelitian perspektif orang pertama dengan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai struktur pengalaman subjektif dan *qualia*.

INTRODUCTION

As the raised of modern materialism, the narrative of consciousness presented a conundrum among 20th-century scientists. Chalmers notes that since the 1860s, when materialism began to influence various fields of research – such as psychological behaviorism, cognitive science, and neuroscience – the term “consciousness” came to refer to phenomenal consciousness, or subjectivity. This consciousness is an experience that can only be perceived from the subject’s perspective, which is subsequently termed qualia (from “*quale*”: referring to the qualitative aspects of conscious experience) (Chalmers, 2020). The issue becomes elusive for science because consciousness is subjective, occurring within the subject as an inner process; therefore, consciousness cannot be observed as an empirical object. However, the scientific research method itself strictly relies on objectivity and depends on the observation of empirical objects. From this, Chalmers realized that the scientific method is not applicable to conscious experience, so he stated this mental-subjective aspect of consciousness as the hard problem of consciousness:

"The really hard problem of consciousness is the problem of experience. When we think and perceive, there is a whirl of information-processing, but there is also a subjective aspect". (Chalmers, 1995, p. 201)

Chalmers emphasizes that the hard problem refers to the problem of experience, which, although it is obvious, genuine, and unmediated experience, science lacks a framework for investigating this realm of subjective consciousness. Furthermore, the hard problem can be broken down into two aspects: (1) first, the explanatory gap – the inadequacy of arguments to explain how and why physical processes – as the fundamental reality upon which scientists rely – give rise to consciousness (Chalmers, 1996). The second (2) issue is how to explain the phenomenon of qualia, so that certain experiences feel the way they do in our subjective experience (Chalmers, 2003).

There are various responses to the hard problem, as Francisco Varela categorizes these perspectives into eliminative reductionists (Churchland, Crick-Koch), functionalism (Dennett, Baars), mysterianism (Nagel), and the phenomenological point of view (Searle, Varela, Chalmers) (Varela, 1996).

The Eliminative reductionist rejects the existence of the hard problem because, in their view, consciousness is not the real hard problem; rather, all forms of conscious experience can be explained through physical mechanisms – specifically, as a neurobiological reaction within the brain. However, the functionalist acknowledges that consciousness is more than just a physical feature. Consciousness is integrated into cognitive functions, so that consciousness can be understood through functional arguments regarding human cognitive activity. Furthermore, the mysterianism view holds that the hard problem cannot be fully explained due to the limitations of our knowledge and mental capacity to comprehend the phenomenon of consciousness. Meanwhile, the phenomenological school seeks to explain consciousness through a first-person perspective or subjective point of view. Chalmers himself initially aligned with the materialist, then shifted to functionalism. However, he later realized that subjective aspect of consciousness can only be understood through the subject’s perspective. Thus, based on this emphasis on the subjective aspect, Chalmers gives broader view to the phenomenological investigation (Varela, 1996).

Meanwhile, regarding the explanatory gap raised in the hard problem, there are a number of responses, both from perspectives that adhere to dualism and monism. The dualist itself is divided into three perspectives. First, the interactionist group holds that the (physical) brain and (mental) consciousness are involved in a two-way causal interaction, meaning that mental experiences and the physical mechanisms occurring in the brain are interrelated. Second, the epiphenomena holds that qualia, as the mental aspect of consciousness, truly exist, but their existence depends on physical processes. There is only one-way causality from brain activity to consciousness, but consciousness itself lacks the causal power to alter physical components. Third, the parallelism perspective holds that events of consciousness and brain events have no causal relationship, yet both proceed in perfect harmony to create the illusion of causality (Revonsuo, 2010).

The next response stems from the monism perspective. The monism materialist is divided into three views. For eliminative materialism, consciousness is merely an illusion and does not truly exist; therefore, the concept of qualia must be rejected. Furthermore, reductive materialism holds that consciousness is merely a reaction to specific brain activity; for example, pain is the activation of C-fibers in the nervous system. Thus, according to this group, qualia can be reduced to a physical explanation. Meanwhile, the emergent materialist group considers consciousness to emerge as a new property of the functional level of the complex nervous system within the brain. Finally, neutral monism asserts that both physical matter and consciousness are based on a substance more fundamental than matter or consciousness itself. This view seeks to transcend dualism by stating that consciousness and matter are merely two aspects of the same fundamental substance in the universe (Revonsuo, 2020).

Furthermore, there is also the idealist view, which offers a counterargument to materialism. This view holds that everything is fundamentally composed of mental substance, so the existence of qualia as a mental aspect of consciousness poses no difficulty. Consequently, the explanatory gap raised by Chalmers need not exist. Furthermore, functionalism does not identify consciousness with any specific type of matter, whether mental or physical, but rather with abstract causal, computational, or input-output relationships, which can be realized in almost any type of matter as patterns of causal roles (Revonsuo, 2010).

The various accounts of monism and dualism outlined above are unsatisfactory to Chalmers. In his view, materialist monism reduces consciousness too much, confining it solely to physical-neurological processes. Neuroscience provides only an objective perspective on the brain, and that does not automatically explain consciousness (Chalmers, 1995). Meanwhile, according to Chalmers, the idealist argument does not support the naturalistic principles that govern the natural world. Chalmers believes that consciousness is a natural phenomenon just like light, waves, and so on. Therefore, any explanation of consciousness must satisfy naturalistic principles (Chalmers, 1996).

Chalmers also rejects the argument for substance dualism, because if mental substance is an independent entity, then — just as in idealism — the argument used to explain consciousness is detached from the laws of nature. This would also create difficulties in explaining the relationship between the two: namely, how the substance of the mind is connected to the physical if the two are separate entities (Chalmers, 1996).

Criticism has also been directed at the functionalist argument because, like reductive materialism, functionalism is only capable of explaining the functions and roles of a system, yet fails to capture the qualitative essence of experience itself. The zombie hypothesis is a thought experiment used to demonstrate that functional organization does not in itself guarantee the existence of consciousness. If a zombie is functionally identical to a human, that does not necessarily mean those functions give rise to internal experience (subjectivity) (Chalmers, 1996).

In response to these criticisms, Chalmers formulated his own view, known as naturalistic dualism. This dualism differs from the substantial dualism of Descartes, which is a property-based dualism. The aim is to ensure that consciousness cannot be reduced to purely physical processes in the brain, while at the same time not disregarding the existence of mental properties (qualia) that differ from physical properties. Naturalism means that consciousness remains part of the nature and is subject to the laws of nature. Chalmers rejects supernatural or mystical explanations; he believes that there are Psychophysical laws governing the relationship between physical processes and conscious experience that can be systematically studied (Chalmers, 1996).

When it comes to Chalmers' naturalistic dualism, it becomes clear that the dilemma we face is this: (1) the status of consciousness must be recognized as fundamental and undeniable, and (2) an explanation of consciousness cannot be separated from natural laws, because if it were separated from these laws, any explanation of consciousness would descend into supernatural speculation.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the hard problem of consciousness is a debate that takes place not only at the methodological level, but also at the ontological and epistemological levels. This is evident from the ongoing debate between monism and dualism and the explanations offered by each perspective regarding the relationship between consciousness and the physical world.

This study argues that the explanatory gap in the hard problem of consciousness stems from ontological assumptions; therefore, resolving it requires a shift in ontological perspective, as demonstrated by Chalmers through his naturalistic dualism. Meanwhile, the impasse in explaining subjectivity or qualia stems from the limitations of the foundational epistemological framework in contemporary philosophy and science, which recognizes only one form of epistemology—namely, representational knowledge. Subjective consciousness or qualia, however, exhibits non-representational characteristics. Therefore, there is a need for an epistemological framework capable of elucidating the mechanisms of knowledge acquisition that align with the characteristics of qualia as direct experience within the subject.

The two issues mentioned above—the explanatory gap and qualia—are consequences of science's demand for objectivity, which seeks to eliminate the subject's perspective in order to achieve objective results. However, since consciousness is, by definition, subjective, any attempt to understand it objectively would actually eliminate the very thing we seek to study. Therefore, consciousness remains "the hard problem" due to constraints inherent within science itself.

Based on the research questions outlined above, the objectives of this study are (1) to examine the influence of David Chalmers's concept of "the hard problem" on the development of science regarding the issue of subjectivity; (2) to compare the phenomenologically thought

of Francisco Javier Varela (1946–2001), as a response to the unresolved methodological gap in Chalmers' formulation, and (3) the psychology of Mullā Ṣadrā (Sadr al-Din Shirazi) (1572–1641) to provide a broader metaphysical framework regarding consciousness and subjectivity. The reason for juxtaposing these three schools of thought is that all three share seemingly similar views on consciousness, namely regarding the properties of immediacy, non-reducibility, immediateness, self-evident truth, and privacy. Chalmers is the most systematic figure in formulating the hard problem, followed by Varela, who responded to this perspective (Varela, 1996; Martiny, 2017), and finally Mullā Ṣadrā, who is considered to possess a holistic understanding of consciousness relevant to the hard problem (Mohammed, 2025; Toresano & al-waliod, 2023; Fuady, et. al., 2025).

Current scholarship on Mullā Ṣadrā's psychology and modern consciousness studies operates within two dominant tracks. The first track, pioneered by Ibrahim Kalin (2010), focuses on the epistemological dimension of *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah*, systematically mapping the non-representational mechanics of knowledge by presence (*al-ilm al-hudhuri*) (Kalin, 2020). However, Kalin's treatise remains historical-philosophical and does not interface with contemporary empirical cognitive frameworks. The second track, represented by Wa Ode Zainab Zilullah Toresano and Kholid al-Walid (2023), elevates Sadra's soul-body paradigm to an ontological critique against David Chalmers' "hard problem of consciousness" and Western physicalist reductionism. Yet, their framework remains strictly theoretical, lacking a functional, first-person methodology capable of operationalizing subjective experience within empirical research.

While Kalin establishes Sadra's *epistemological depth* and Toresano & al-Walid assert his *ontological relevance*, no study has systematically synthesized Sadrian metaphysics with an empirical first-person apparatus to decode the pre-reflective architecture of qualia.

This study directly bridges this critical lacuna through a dual-level cross-cultural synthesis: 1) Methodological level. Moving beyond Toresano & al-Walid's purely ontological critique, it utilizes Francisco Varela's neurophenomenology (phenomenological reduction and reciprocal constraints) to establish a concrete, validated space for first-person data in consciousness studies (Toresano & al-Walid, 2023). 2) Epistemological level. Moving beyond Kalin's theoretical mapping, it applies *al-ilm al-hudhuri* and *ittihad al-aql wa al-ma'qul* to articulate how the pre-reflective "I-ness" of *qualia* is structured as a performative reality prior to intentional representation.⁴ Consequently, this paper transforms Sadrian philosophy from a passive historical critique into an active, functional remedy for the hard problem of consciousness.

This study employs a qualitative method in the form of a literature review (library research). The approach used is synthetic-comparative approach. The research procedure was conducted in three main stages: (1) an in-depth description of the thinkers' ideas, (2) a comparative analysis to identify similarities and differences between their ideas, and (3) a synthesis of the ideas of Chalmers, Varela, and Mullā Ṣadrā related to consciousness and subjectivity.

The main components under comparison are (1) the physical-consciousness relationship, which constitutes the explanatory gap (the ontology-epistemology argument), and (2) the concept of subjectivity, particularly regarding qualia as a form of conscious experience. However, before comparing the thoughts of Valera and Mullā Ṣadrā, this study explains how

subjectivity lies at the root of the philosophical problem within the discourse on the hard problem of consciousness. As an introduction, it was stated above that the hard problem arises from within the scientific paradigm that emphasizes the principle of objectivity, so that science lacks a compatible investigative framework to subjective aspect. Therefore, this study will first elaborate on how this process of subject alienation occurs within the modern knowledge system.

ALIENATED SUBJECT AS A CORE PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUE ON DAVID CHALMERS' HARD PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

This section explains that the hard problem of consciousness is an implication of the crisis of subjectivity within epistemological processes and scientific methodology. David Chalmers's introduction of the hard problem marked a turning point in the return of subjectivity to a scientific narrative that had previously been oriented toward the realm of objectivity. Therefore, it is not surprising that the discourse on the hard problem centers on the investigation of the subject as the locus of consciousness. The following section will outline two perspectives that both seek to explore the realm of subjectivity but assign the subject different roles. On one hand, Francisco Varela views the subject as a co-creator who enacts the world through the act of giving meaning to the experiences, while Mullā Ṣadrā positions the subject as both the agent who initiates and the object of consciousness itself, occurring within the simultaneity and unity of consciousness. However, before delving into a discussion of these two schools of thought, we must first address the issue of the "hard problem" related to subjectivity.

The main challenge of the hard problem is qualia – the intrinsic and subjective qualities of experience. The difficulty in investigating qualia is closely tied to the standards of objectivity in scientific research, whereas qualia constitute an inner world that is not at all an object of empirical observation (Chalmers, 1996). If the investigation of qualia employs these standards of objectivity, then qualia cannot be further explained, as there is no physical object that can be observed from them (Parildar, 2021). Although not an object of observation, qualia are undeniable and can be experienced as subjective experiences (Chalmers, 1996).

Chalmers argues that qualia are a fundamental reality and require a more philosophical explanation—one that addresses their origin and nature (ontology), as well as the extent to which we know or understand such consciousness (epistemology). The two problems mentioned go beyond the realm of science, because such knowledge transcends all research tools or measurements conceivable by modern science (Revonsuo, 2010).

"The problem is that science builds exclusively on a third-person's objective perspective. Only entities that can be somehow studied from that perspective are treated as "real". Phenomenal consciousness cannot be observed either directly or with the help of any research instruments such as functional brain imaging" (Revonsuo, 2010).

Subjectivity, the realm of qualia, is a domain beyond the reach of science; consequently, subjectivity becomes an alien reality. This occurs in tandem with the demands of positivism and scientism, as the subject becomes alienated from the epistemic structures that constitute knowledge. The alienation of the subject occurs in four stages: (1) the stage of secularization, in which science is emptied of its transcendent vision and metaphysical dimension; (2) the phase of scientism, which holds that science is the only way to understand reality—a belief

that fundamentally destroys the subject; (3) the stage of reification and fetishism, which views science and its products as material objects detached from human creativity; (4) the stage of skepticism and nihilism, namely the loss of faith in humanity's ability to understand reality or improve human conditions (Heeriyanto, 2022).

The alienated subject impacts the formulation of knowledge, including the science of consciousness. From ancient times through the Middle Ages, consciousness was discussed as a living soul. Discussions of consciousness (the soul) were still grounded in human direct experience. Although Aristotle and the Scholastic philosophers attempted to categorize the functions of the soul, they continued to view it as an integral part of the organism's life. Consciousness was understood in relation to meaning and purpose (*telos*). Then, a major turning point occurred in the 17th century; as nature was quantified into mathematical language, subjective phenomena such as color, taste, emotion, and consciousness itself began to be regarded as secondary qualities that were less tangible because they could not be incorporated into mathematical formulas (Husserl, 1970).

Edmund Husserl argued that during the time of Rene Descartes, a form of psychological objectivism emerges, in which consciousness was treated as an internal realm that could be studied like a physical object, yet was disconnected from the reality of the world we inhabit. The process of objectification continued into the era of modern empiricism and positivism, where psychology – as a discipline of the mind – viewed consciousness based on observable empirical data, the result of neural or physical processes (naturalism), or something that must submit to the laws of mechanical causality (cause and effect) (Husserl, 1970). Thus, this trend of objectification is a process of alienating consciousness from what was originally an integral part of life (*Lebenswelt*), experience, or the living soul, turning it into an object of observation or research.

Chalmers also notes that there has been a shift in the meaning of consciousness throughout the history of philosophical thought. From ancient times through the Middle Ages, consciousness encompassed phenomenal consciousness, understood as lived experience. However, from the 17th to the 18th century, the concept of consciousness was emphasized more on reflective (Cartesian) consciousness, no longer on phenomenal consciousness or subjectivity (Chalmers, 2020). Yet, reflective consciousness is a higher-order consciousness that is further processed, while subjectivity is pre-reflective self-consciousness. Unlike reflective consciousness, subjectivity is a transitive consciousness, meaning that (1) consciousness does not require an act of reflection or introspection, but occurs simultaneously with consciousness of intentional objects; (2) it does not involve the formation of beliefs or decision-making; and (3) it is 'passive' in the sense of being spontaneous and unconscious (Hanna & Thomson, 2014). Therefore, if consciousness is understood as limited to reflective consciousness, then subjectivity – which is pre-reflective consciousness – is treated a priori in the process of knowledge (Chalmers, 2020).

The conclusion of the discussion in this section is as follows. Consciousness is essentially a concept that has evolved throughout the history of thought, yet its meaning has shifted over time. The objectivism of consciousness, which has led to the materialization of consciousness, coupled with the secularization of science (the emptying of the transcendent vision), has separated the discourses of consciousness and science from the subject. This is what reduces

consciousness to objective—physical properties, leaving it disintegrated with the inner life experienced by the subject.

Enacting Subject on Francisco Varela's Neurophenomenology

This section explains the concept of enaction in the phenomenologically approach proposed by Francisco Varela, particularly as it relates to the formation of the subject and consciousness. Enaction serves as the ontological foundation Varela employs to understand subjectivity, and this concept subsequently forms the basis for the neurophenomenology research program he formulated to understand the structure of human experience. Based on the principle of action, Varela demonstrates that consciousness is an embodied act, and the sense of self (the awareness of one's existence as a subject) is the result of the mental construction arising from this process. Varela's progressive approach successfully applied phenomenology to practical research methods. In neurophenomenology, the subject plays a crucial role as a primary data source in research on consciousness, alongside objective data from empirical observations. Below, we will first discuss the concept of the enacting subject according to Varela, followed by an explanation of neurophenomenology, which can address several issues related to the hard problem. In the end of this part, we will outline several criticisms of Varela, particularly regarding the structure of qualia as the central issue of the hard problem, which he did not explore further in his work.

To address the first issue, this study draws heavily on "The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience" (1991), written by Varela in collaboration with Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch. This book was published before "Facing Up to the Hard Problem" (1995) and "The Conscious Mind" (1996), written by Chalmers as a response to the hard problem of consciousness. Thus, if Neurophenomenology—which was later developed as a response to the hard problem—frequently refers to this work, this indicates a parallel line of thought between the functionalist camp, such as Chalmers, and the phenomenological tradition that forms the basis of Varela's thinking.

Enaction is a central concept in Varela's thought. This concept offers two ways of understanding the subject: (1) first, the subject as a mental construction arising from an ongoing process between the body, the mind, and the external environment; and (2) second, the subject as a meaning-maker that brings forth a world. Both of these places the subject within a unified consciousness that unfolds continuously as a dynamic process—that is, as a conscious moment that is produced, while simultaneously serving as the agent that generates that consciousness itself. Varela explains that enacting refers to consciousness in the sense of embodied action, wherein an organism "presents" or "brings forth" (enacts) the world based on the history of its body's interactions with the environment. Consciousness does not present a pre-existing representation of the world, but rather helps to bring the world into being through enaction (Varela et.al., 2016).

The explanation of the principle of action outlined above resolves the mind-body dualism within the hard problem. Consciousness did not suddenly emerge at the pinnacle of evolution, but is instead inherent in physical matter in the form of autopoietic systems capable of self-organization and self-maintenance to ensure the continued existence of their own life system (Varela et.al., 2016).

Varela posits enaction as the ontological foundation for understanding consciousness, emphasizing embodied processes and enaction itself—that is, the action that brings the world

into being through mind and body. Therefore, consciousness, in Varela's view, is not brain-centered, unlike Chalmers's conception of consciousness as the result of physical processes occurring within that organ (Varela et.al., 2016). Consciousness, understood as embodied action, is a phenomenon produced by a series of interactive systems comprising the brain, the body, and the world (Varela et.al., 2016).

The moment of consciousness gives rise to self-identification and distinguishes that sense of self from the environment. The emergence of the sense of self as a conscious subject is the moment of consciousness; thus, in this sense, the subject is nothing other than conscious experience itself. Consciousness enables the self to be aware of subjectivity within itself, while simultaneously recognizing objects outside the self – namely, the environment. Consciousness gives rise to a sense of separation between the inner world, represented by the sense of subjectivity, and the objective external world. Therefore, consciousness, in the sense of its implementation, cannot be limited by the subject-object dichotomy, since it is consciousness itself that gives rise to this sense of duality (Varela et.al, 2016).

According to Varela, consciousness is a unified process between the subject who is conscious and the object of consciousness. However, on the other hand, the subject's awareness of its own existence is also the result of a self-conscious moment. Therefore, Varela believes that subjectivity, or conscious experience, must not only be understood through its functions and mechanisms but also experienced directly firsthand, for the subject that is aware is consciousness itself (Varela et al., 2016).

Building on the principles of enacting and embodiment discussed above, Varela believes that direct descriptions of subjective experience through a first-person perspective correlate with empirical data on consciousness within a relationship of reciprocal constraint. On the one hand, phenomenological descriptions provide an explanation; on the other hand, biological findings regarding neural mechanisms can clarify the phenomenological descriptions provided. It is this reciprocal constraint that forms the fundamental principle of the phenomenological approach. According to Varela, the structure of conscious experience has a reciprocal constraint relationship with the objective data provided by cognitive science (Varela, 1996).

Neurophenomenology is a research program developed by Varela in 1996, the same year Chalmers' "The Conscious Mind" was published. Varela proposed this idea as a methodological framework for consciousness research, which he believed was not clearly articulated in Chalmers' writings when discussing the hard problem of consciousness. Neurophenomenology integrates the first-person perspective – a method that allows subjects to provide detailed first-person accounts of the subjective experiences they undergo. The goal is to create experimental situations that generate reciprocal constraints between first-person phenomenological data and third-person cognitive neuroscience data. This also aims to bridge what is known as the explanatory gap between the first-person perspective of subjective experience and the third-person perspective of cognitive neuroscience (Varela, 1996).

Varela applies several of Husserl's phenomenological principles to the neurophenomenology approach. These principles primarily emphasize the subjective aspect, which ultimately provides a description of the experience of subjectivity. Two fundamental principles in neurophenomenology are phenomenological reduction (PR) and its variants. PR involves suspending all forms of judgment regarding experience, which can be achieved

through three methods: suspension (bracketing), redirection, and letting go. Meanwhile, in variants, variants represent an effort to move experience from the subjective realm into the subjective realm. Here, the activity of ‘describing’ experience through language or other forms of visualization becomes crucial in shaping the experience itself, for the process of inscribing vague experience into structured knowledge is the process of embodying that experience within the thought process, thereby forming knowledge (Varela et.al., 2016).

Neurophenomenology has received a mixed reception among cognitive scientists. Enaction itself has become a new scientific foundation, particularly in fields dealing with experience and the first-person perspective. In her foreword to the 2016 revised edition of “The Embodied Mind”, Eleanor Rosch states that the idea she formulated with Varela has become increasingly relevant in an era increasingly dominated by machines and technology, where consciousness is observed and measured through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalogram (EEG). The principle of action and the phenomenologically approach emphasize that the observed body differs from the bodily experience lived directly. Both are equally important in building an understanding of consciousness (Varela et.al., 2026).

In addition, Kristian Moltke Martiny also noted that neurophenomenology represents a radical breakthrough, as the concept drives a transformation in the culture of science, including changes in publication standards, scientific training, and the willingness to seriously engage with the intersection of first-, second-, and third-person perspectives. Martiny highlighted that the investigation of cognition cannot be separated from the fundamental principle of circularity – that is, the recursive nature of scientific research, in which the subject must be understood both as the subject conducting the investigation of consciousness and as the subject experiencing consciousness. Therefore, the research process must incorporate the aspect of subjectivity that directly experiences that consciousness (Martiny, 2017).

In the scientific world, which is rigidly committed to the principle of objectivity, the subject tends to be overlooked, and people are unaware that they are involved in the scientific process. As Martin notes in response to Varela’s ideas, the foundational principle of “enacting” in neurophenomenology at least makes us aware that while science demands objectivity, as long as the process is carried out by a subject who enacts consciousness into the world, it cannot be denied that subjectivity has intervened in that scientific formulation.

From the above discussion, it is evident that Varela made a breakthrough that transformed the culture of naive objectivity in science by highlighting the inevitable intervention of the subject through the act of action. Also of interest is Varela’s concept of subjectivity, influenced by Buddhism, in which the sense of self is a mental construct that arises instantaneously as a product of consciousness. Through this, Varela seeks to assert that there is no essential, fixed self, but rather only an impression emerging from the very process of consciousness itself. This is intriguing, but regarding the formation of the “I” – structure that makes the entire experience feel like “my” experience, Varela does not explore it further. Self-consciousness – or the sense of “I” as a subject – is simply taken for granted, and Varela focuses on how this realm of subjectivity is externalized into the intersubjective realm so that experiences can be shared and understood together.

In his explanation of the enaction, Varela adheres to the principle of intentionality, as in the phenomenological tradition. Therefore, it would be interesting to see whether Varela would apply the same principle to self-knowledge. Does Varela also think that qualia, as a form

of self-consciousness, constitute intentional consciousness? Of course, since Varela doesn't delve further, the issue of qualia and self-knowledge will borrow from another perspective, namely the metaphysical psychology of Mullā Ṣadrā, as will be explained below.

Performative Subject on Mullā Ṣadrā's Metaphysical Psychology

This section outlines the fundamental principles of consciousness and the process of the formation of subjectivity in Mullā Ṣadrā's metaphysical psychology. Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy (c. 1571–1640) must first be understood as a body of thought born from a discourse, tradition, and era vastly different from the emergence of the “hard problem of consciousness” in the era of Chalmers-Varela and other philosophers of consciousness. It is important to state this at the outset to show that these two bodies of thought do not directly influence or respond to one another's ideas. The rationale for including Sadra's metaphysics within the discourse surrounding the hard problem in this paper is that the breadth of his philosophical framework—encompassing metaphysics, epistemology, and psychology—provides a conceptual framework for addressing the unanswered questions regarding consciousness.

Sadra's thought will be used as a metaphysical framework, particularly regarding qualia, which are not further explained by Chalmers or Varela. To arrive at subjectivity, the following outlines several of Sadra's main metaphysical pillars, starting with the ontological argument of existence (*asalat al wujud*), the matter-consciousness argument (*al harakat al jawhariyyah*), and the epistemic argument of qualia (*ittihad al 'aql wa al ma'qul*). From this description, it is concluded that consciousness occurs at the moment of the subject's self-objectification of his or her own existence. This is a form of unification between the known subject and the known object within a single realm of subjectivity. This then gives a sense of self to every conscious experience (qualia) we experience, because the act of giving form, name, and meaning to experience occurs within the realm of subjectivity. Even though it seems that both have the same role in giving form (through naming, assessing, giving meaning) to an experience, the difference between the subject in Varela's and Sadra's views is, firstly, in the explanation of the sense of self that makes an experience feel like it belongs to the 'I'.

In fact, this is the key explanation of qualia. Varela simply assumes that experience belongs to the 'I,' while Sadra explains the process by which the sense of selfhood from experience, or the sense of subjectivity, is formed. The second difference is that the subject, in Sadra's view, is always in an active-performative act, meaning that the subject is not an agent that gives form, but rather the subject itself is a form of conscious experience.

Moving on to the discussion of the first pillar, namely the *asalat al wujud* (the primacy of existence), which is Sadra's ontological view. Through this doctrine, Sadra states that wujud (existence) is the primary and clear reality in itself. All reality is a unity of *wujud* (existence), but differs in the intensity of its existence (*taskhik al wujud*). This intensity is graded from the most imperfect and full of potential (matter) to the most perfect and fully realized (spirit) (Mohammed, 2025). The principle of the unity of *wujud* and the gradation of the intensity of these forms can be called the monism of existential-dualism of essential view. Existential monism refers to the principle of the unity of existence, from matter to soul. In the context of existence, all of this diversity is one. Meanwhile, it is called essential dualism because, in the context of essence, matter and soul are separate, which are caused by the different intensity/quality of existence (Toresano & al-Walid, 2023).

The monism of existential—dualism of the essential above can be an argument for the emergence of consciousness, which is one of the issues of the difficult problem. In its dictum, which reads *jismaniyyat al-huduth, ruhaniyyat al-baqa* (corporeal in origination, spiritual in subsistence), consciousness emerges from matter through a continuous evolution towards the perfection of existence. The change from matter to consciousness involves a change in the mode of existence, where the emergence of consciousness is the actualization of the existence of that consciousness, which was previously contained in matter in the form of potentiality, so that its emergence is the movement of perfecting its substance to become completely immaterial (Mohammde, 2025).

Regarding consciousness, the principle of *asalat al wujud* needs to be understood in conjunction with the second principle, namely *al harakat al jawhariyyah*. This principle is one of the arguments that can support Chalmers' non-reductive approach to consciousness. First, consciousness is a reflection of a substance that is immaterial but bound to matter in its activity (al-Walid, 2024). Second, the existence of a substance is independent in the sense that its existence outside does not depend on the existence of other substances. Third, initially, consciousness exists in a potentiality intrinsic to physical matter. However, later, through knowledge, noble actions, spiritual practices, and experience, consciousness undergoes further substantial transformation, realizing its intellectual and spiritual potential (al-Walid, 2024).

Qualia, in relation to a number of arguments about consciousness above, is the intensity of *wujud*. As a subjective experience, qualia is not an external existence (extra-mental object) that can be observed. Its existence is pure existence, because its existence is completely integrated within the subject's consciousness. The moment of qualia's occurrence can be explained through the third principle, namely *ittihad al 'aql wa al ma'qul*. *Ittihad* (reunification) is a key principle in Mullā Ṣadrā's *hudhuri* epistemology which requires the existence of two things facing each other, then the two entities unite. The concept of unification in question is that the unity between the subject (*'aql*), object (*ma'qul*), and intellect (*'aql*) occurs because of the existential unity between the subject who perceives the object being viewed, and the relationship between these subjects and objects embodies knowledge (Toresano & al-Walid, 2023). Subjective experience or qualia, for example in self-knowledge, is a form of knowledge in the form of a union between the subject (*'aql*), object (*ma'qul*), and intellect (*'aql*) as mentioned above.

Adding Sadra's metaphysics related to qualia in this study is because the principle of subjectivity in Varela's neurophenomenology is not enough to fulfill the characteristics of qualia stated by Chalmers in the hard problem of consciousness. In neurophenomenology, Varela treats conscious experience as an intentional experience or phenomenal experience, while qualia, as stated by Chalmers in the hard problem, is a moment of consciousness that occurs before the phenomenal experience appears. Qualia is the structure of subjectivity that underlies the occurrence of phenomenal experience, so in neurophenomenology, Varela actually does not deepen his discussion of qualia, and instead, this moment of qualia consciousness has been simply assumed.

Why does this research suggest that qualia do not fulfill the requirements of intentional phenomenal experience? First, intentional consciousness in phenomenal experience requires at least the elements of a knowing subject and an object of knowledge that is the target of

intentionality, while qualia do not. Qualia are better understood as a moment of simultaneity, which occurs instantly. Therefore, within the framework of phenomenology, qualia are considered as a moment that already exists as the subject of experience. However, when the moment of quality consciousness is felt by the self, the subject, who is the actor of the 'I', does not stand alone and static. The subject 'I' is composed of components of interrogation and simultaneity of the subject's self-objectivation moments that make themselves the object of knowledge. However, all these moments occur in one subject's domain so that it seems to have automatically become 'I' (Yazdi, 1992). This unified sense of self is a form of qualia that determines the self-nature of conscious experience, and makes the experience feel like it belongs to 'I'.

Several psychopathology studies consider this structure of the self to be crucial. For example, in the case of Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID), a mental condition that causes a person to experience bodily detachment, making them feel that one part of their body does not belong to them. However, the sense of body and the 'I' should be a single, connected conscious experience. Another example is in the delusion of thought insertion (TI), where thoughts are not perceived as part of the 'I' as the agent who owns those thoughts (Gold & Howhy, 2000), or in depersonalization disorder, where a person feels uprooted from the unity of their identity (Sass, 2001). The sense of 'I' that makes someone feel that their experiences are their own (mine-ness) is closely related to the consciousness of qualia, especially regarding self-knowledge.

The second reason why qualia do not meet the characteristics of phenomenal consciousness is because phenomenal experience requires intentionality, which refers to external objects (extra-mental objects). Unlike this, qualia are not intentional acts, and the existence of objects of knowledge is a mental object. Chalmers often uses the term phenomenal consciousness to refer to qualia, but in further descriptions, qualia do not provide the characteristics of phenomenal consciousness at all.

If qualia truly constitute phenomenal consciousness, then at the very least, such consciousness possesses the characteristics of intentionality, or directness toward external objects. However, Chalmers's characterization of qualia is closer to the experiential qualities of presence in Mullā Ṣadrā's terminology. In "Puzzle of Consciousness Experience," for example, Chalmers explains that consciousness is a subjective experience that makes something felt by the subject. This conscious experience can take the form of visual sensations, suffering, pain, pleasure, joy, a meditative state of daydreaming, a quality of depth, and so on (Chalmers 2002, p. 92-93). Chalmers also emphasizes the privacy of conscious experience, which resides within the subject, making it impossible for others to observe it. He adds that to understand qualia, one must be the subject possessing the qualia (Chalmers 1995, p. 3), because experience is something directly experienced by the subject, its truth cannot be denied, and it does not require proof (Chalmers, 1996).

From Chalmers's descriptions of qualia, this study provides insight into qualia as a form of knowledge by presence (*al ilm al hudhuri*) in Mullā Ṣadrā's terminology. Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi explains that knowledge by presence is free from the dualism of right and wrong, as it is not related to the notion of correspondence. Thus, it is also free from conceptual bias (*tashawwur*) and confirmation (*tashdiq*). This knowledge is a direct experience (unmediated), pre-reflective, and non-intentional (Yazdi, 1992).

On the other hand, Chalmers's notion of qualia consciousness fulfills the characteristics of knowledge by presence. According to Chalmers, access to qualia is direct and private. Our knowledge of what it is like to see the color red is derived not from external data, but from the presence of experience itself in our consciousness. While many philosophers argue that mental states are merely representations of the external world, Chalmers argues that phenomenal content (qualia) does not necessarily correspond to external objects.

THEORITICAL SYNTHESIS

Ontological Foundations: Between Enaction and *Asalat al-Wujud*

Discussions regarding the structure of consciousness and the constitution of the subject demand a radical investigation into their ontological foundations. On one hand, Francisco Varela proposes the concept of enaction as a grounding framework for understanding human subjectivity. Enaction asserts that consciousness is not a static entity contained within the brain, but rather an embodied action through which an organism brings forth or enacts (enacting) its own world based on the structural history of its bodily interactions with the environment. Consciousness does not display a pre-given representation of a ready-made world; instead, it actively participates in bringing it forth through action (Varela et.al, 2016).

Varela rejects the mechanistic views of extreme materialism. Varela counter the mechanistic tenets of radical materialism by framing the living body as a self-organizing entity rather than a biological machine. Unlike deterministic mechanisms that require external programming and inputs to function, a living organism continuously reorganizes its internal structures to ensure survival and uphold its own homeostasis.

Across a different historical timeline and philosophical tradition, the metaphysical psychology of Mullā Ṣadrā offers a parallel ontological anchor, yet one that operates at the level of a particular metaphysics through the doctrine of *asalat al-wujud* (the primacy of existence). For Sadra, *wujud* (existence) is the foundational, singular reality that nonetheless graduates in its existential intensity (*tashkhik al-wujud*). This systematic gradation extends from the most potential mode of being (matter) to the most actualized mode (spirit) (Mohammed, 2025). This structural framework delineates a model of existential monism coupled with essential dualism. Existentially, it is monistic because matter and consciousness reside within a singular continuum of existence; essentially, however, it remains dualistic due to the qualitative variances in their existential intensity (Toresano & al-Walid, 2023).

At this juncture, a critical interrogation can be directed toward how consciousness emerges (emergentism). Varela's enactive approach overcomes the mind-body dualism by treating consciousness as something inherent in physical matter in the form of an autopoietic system capable of self-organization. Sadra reinforces this non-reductive thesis through his famous dictum *jismaniyyat al-huduth, ruhaniyyat al-baqa* (corporeal in origination, spiritual in subsistence). Consciousness evolves from matter toward the substantial refinement of an entirely immaterial entity (Mohammed, 2025).

However, while Varela conceptualizes cognition as a tripartite functional interaction among the brain, the body, and the world as he explicitly emphasizes: "...the body plays a constitutive role in cognition, that is, cognition depends directly on the body as a functional whole and not just the brain." (Varela et.al, 2016)

Sadra advances a step further through the principle of *al-harakat al-jawhariyyah* (substantial motion). Sadra concurs that consciousness initially resides as an intrinsic potentiality within physical matter; nevertheless, he maintains that through actions, knowledge, and spiritual practices, the substance of consciousness itself undergoes a substantial transformation independently of physical organs (al-Waliod, 2024).

The Construction of the Subject: Enacting Subject vs. Performative Subject

The subsequent synthesis centers on the ontological status of the "subject". For Varela, the enacting subject is understood in two ways: first, as a mental construction arising from the continuous circular processes between the body, mind, and the external environment; and second, as a meaning-maker that brings forth a world. The subject is situated within a dynamic unity of consciousness: it is simultaneously the conscious moment produced and the very agent producing that consciousness (Varela, 2026). The sense of self (self) within this Buddhist-influenced enactive perspective is not an essential or permanent entity, but rather an instantaneous impression emerging from the continuous stream of consciousness. It is consciousness itself that gives rise to the subject-object dichotomy: "...consciousness is composed of a seer (the subject) who sees (the relation) a sight (the object); in a moment of anger consciousness, the one who is angry (the subject) experiences (the relation) anger (the object)." (Varela, 2016, p.221)

Conversely, Sadra proposes the concept of the performative subject through the epistemic argument of *ittihad al-'aql wa al-ma'qul* (the union of the intellect, the intelligizer, and the intelligible). The subject in Sadra's view does not merely undergo or mentally construct meaning; rather, it acts in an active-performative manner. The subject is not an external agent imparting form (*forma*) onto an experience; instead, the subject itself is the very *forma* of the conscious experience itself.

A sharp divergence emerges when analyzing the "sense of I-ness" (I-ness). Varela takes for granted that phenomenal experience automatically belongs to an 'I' (mine-ness). In contrast, Sadra deconstructs the internal architecture of this moment. According to Sadra, consciousness occurs at the precise moment of the subject's self-objectification toward its own existence.

The 'I' subject is not a single, static entity, but is composed of intercorrelative components and the simultaneity of self-objectification that turns the self into an object of knowledge within a unified domain of subjectivity (Yazdi 1992). While Varela views consciousness through the lens of phenomenological intentionality (object-directedness), Sadra dissects it as an existential union that births an authentic sense of I-ness.

Methodology and Anatomy of the Hard Problem: Neurophenomenology and *Al-Ilm Al-Hudhuri*

In the methodological domain, Varela formulates Neurophenomenology (1996) as a critique of the impasse in addressing Chalmers' "hard problem of consciousness". Varela asserts the necessity of integrating the first-person perspective (first person perspective) into cognitive science. The objective is to establish reciprocal constraints (reciprocal constraint) between descriptive phenomenological data (first-person) and empirical neuroscientific data (third-person), thereby bridging the explanatory gap. According to Varela's (1996) neurophenomenological framework, a dual-directional constraint characterizes the relationship between the structural mapping of experience in phenomenology and

corresponding empirical data in cognitive science, allowing both domains to mutually validate and inform one another

To operationalize this, Varela borrows from Husserlian phenomenological reduction (Phenomenological Reduction) through three steps: suspension (suspension/bracketing), redirection, and letting go, alongside the search for invariants to transition experience from a subjective domain into an intersubjective one.

It is precisely here that the crucial point of contention arises, necessitating a synthesis with Sadrian metaphysics. The fundamental limitation of Varela's neurophenomenological approach is that it treats all conscious experiences as intentional (phenomenal) experiences. However, *qualia*—the core of Chalmers' hard problem—is a pre-reflective moment of consciousness that occurs before intentional experience arises. Intentional consciousness requires a separation between the cognizing subject and the extra-mental object, whereas *qualia* does not.

This comparative synthesis finds that the *qualia* described by Chalmers actually fulfills the characteristics of what Mullā Ṣadrā terms knowledge by presence (*al-ilm al-hudhuri*). The characteristics of *qualia* according to Chalmers—such as the private experience of "what it is like" to perceive the color red, its unmediated immediacy, its indubitability, and its independence from external verification are identical to the structure of *ilm hudhuri*. Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi explains that knowledge by presence is unmediated, pre-reflective, non-intentional, and entirely free from the truth-falsity dualism of correspondence, as well as free from the biases of conception (*tashawwur*) and judgment (*tashdiq*). *Qualia* is not an external object to be observed, but pure non-material existence completely unified within the subject's consciousness.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCIENTIFIC VALIDITY AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

The comparative dialogue between Varela's enactive circularity and Sadra's metaphysical psychology offers significant contributions to interpreting contemporary realities. The epistemic necessity of Varela's fundamental circularity is corroborated by cognitive scientists such as Martiny (2017), who underscores that any scientific inquiry into cognition is invariably mediated by the investigator's own cognitive architectures. This reflexive entanglement implies that while researchers attempt to map the biological, social, and cultural frameworks that condition human cognition, the very postulation of this conceptual background is inherently executed by scientists who are themselves already situated, embodied, and experiencing subjects.

This circularity effectively deconstructs "naive objectivity" within mainstream science. It highlights that no matter how rigorous the objectivity demanded by modern instruments like fMRI or EEG, the scientific process remains invariably intervened by the subjectivity of the researcher who enacts that consciousness into the world.

On the other hand, when the structure of I-ness and mine-ness analyzed by Sadra undergoes an existential rupture, its implications become clearly visible within modern psychopathology. In cases of Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID), patients experience a profound estrangement from their own limbs, feeling they do not belong to them due to a severed unity of embodied experience. A similar phenomenon occurs in the delusion of thought insertion (TI), where external thoughts are perceived to infiltrate the mind without

being recognized as belonging to the self as the agent of those thoughts (Gold and Howhy 2000), or in depersonalization disorder (Sass 2001).

Through this synthesis, Varela's neurophenomenology provides a practical-empirical methodology that bridges first-person and third-person data, while Mullā Ṣadrā's metaphysical psychology supplies the theoretical-metaphysical framework explaining how the sense of subjective I-ness (qualia) operates at a pre-reflective level before intentional cognition occurs. Together, they offer a more comprehensive explanation for resolving the mystery of the hard problem of consciousness.

Completion on the Hard Problem and Subjectivity

Several reflective notes can be drawn from the explanation of the three views on subjectivity in the hard problem of consciousness above. First, regarding the concepts of consciousness from Chalmers, Varela, and Mullā Ṣadrā. A comparison of the three perspectives on consciousness can be seen in the table below.

Tabel 1. Comparison of the nature of consciousness between Chalmers, Varela and Mullā Ṣadrā.

The Nature of Consciousness	Sadra	Varela	Chalmers
Intensional vs non-intensional consciousness	Non-intentional	Intentional	-
Pre-reflective self-consciousness	+	+	+
Transitive consciousness vs intransitive consciousness	Intransitive	Transitive	-
First-order consciousness (unmediated)	+	+	+
Representational vs non-representational consciousness	Non-representational consciousness	Non-representational consciousness	Non-representational consciousness

In a number of literature and studies, the concept of consciousness is widely used (Hanna & Thompson, 2014), as in the table above. Consciousness in Varela's phenomenological description shows the characteristics of intentional consciousness indicated by the nature of action, where consciousness is always directed towards the object of its intentionality. Although Varela formulated that subjectivity is part of the mental construct of the work of consciousness, he did not explain how the mechanism of acquiring the experience of 'I' as a subject is formed through the principle of intentional consciousness. On the other hand, the concept of consciousness in Sadra's philosophy has two different modes related to consciousness in the context of acquiring experience. The structure of 'I' or what is called qualia by Chalmers, is formed through the mechanism of non-intentional consciousness shown through the character of self-object knowledge or knowledge by presence. This mode of consciousness is fundamental in Sadra's epistemology and is the basis of various other experiences (modes of knowing) that are representational in nature. This representational mode of knowledge is then intentional, as is the nature of consciousness in Varela's enaction.

Furthermore, Chalmers, Varela, and Sadra all share the same understanding of the pre-reflective nature of consciousness, where the subject's qualities or experiences are experienced before cognitive, reflective recognition. Consequently, the understanding of consciousness in

these three figures' thinking falls under first-order consciousness, while reflective consciousness is consciousness that occurs at a later stage, called second-order consciousness. First-order consciousness is unmediated, without conceptual intermediaries. Likewise, the three figures' thinking above explains that the nature of consciousness is non-representational, meaning without intermediaries.

However, Varela and Sadra appear to have differing views regarding the transitive and intransitive nature of consciousness. Varela describes transitive consciousness as a consequence of enaction, namely the intentionality of that consciousness. Unlike Varela, the self-objective nature of the performative 'I' indicates more immediacy and the unification of subject and object rather than directional. Therefore, conceptually, the subject's consciousness or sense of self occurs within intransitive consciousness or is realized within itself. Second, each figure's basic assumptions regarding the ontological status of consciousness, the acquisition of knowledge or conscious experience (epistemological argument), and the status of subjectivity are the main issues of this study. A comparison of the three schools of thought can be seen in the table below.

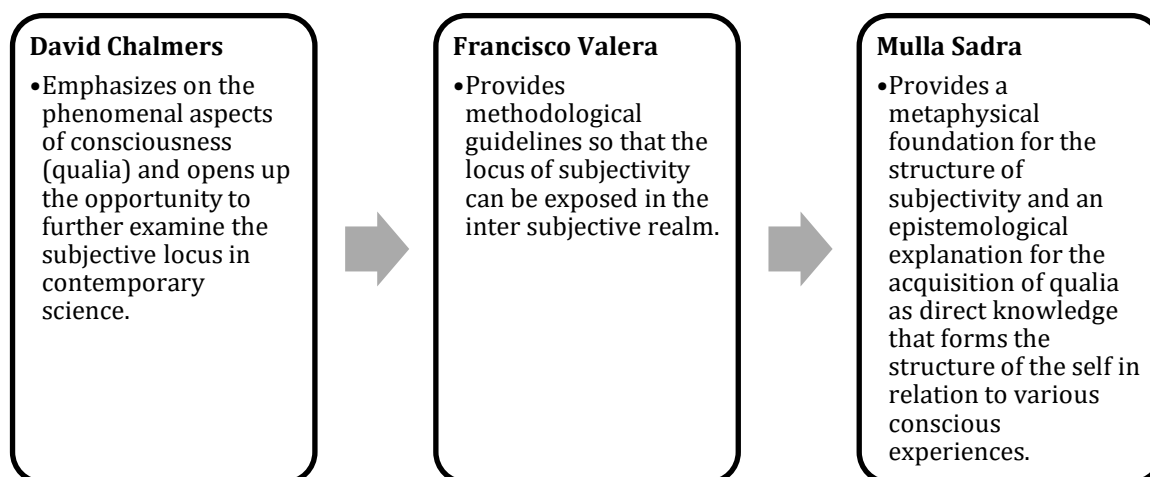
Tabel 2. Comparison of the ontological assumption, explanatory gap, and concept of subject between Chalmers, Varela and Mullā Ṣadrā.

Thinkers	Ontological assumption	Explanatory gap	Subject
David Chalmers	Naturalistic dualism	Property Dualism	qualia
Francisco Varela	Enaction	Embodiment	Embodied
Mullā Ṣadrā	Monism of existential-dualism of essential	Jismaniyyat al-Huduth	Performative "I"

Chalmers' ontological assumption regarding consciousness is naturalistic dualism, namely that consciousness is inherent, as a second aspect of the basis of reality besides the physical aspect. Therefore, the relationship between the physical and consciousness can be explained as a duality of properties contained in one basic substance. Meanwhile, Varela's basic assumption of consciousness is action, namely relational consciousness, so the concept of the subject in his thought is an embodied subject. Embodied means that the subject is not solid, static, centered, but is always in a dynamic and relational state with the world. The relationship between consciousness and the physical is described as a process of embodiment, in which the physical body becomes the embodiment and shape of consciousness. Both are in an inseparable relationship. Meanwhile, Mullā Ṣadrā's ontological view is monism, but in viewing the physical-consciousness relationship, his view is called Monist Existential-Dualism Essential (Toresano & al-Walid, 2023). Basically, in terms of *wujud*, the soul (consciousness) and the physical body are one (monism), but the nature of the soul and body is recognized as two different qualities (dualism). The acquisition of conscious experience or subjectivity, which Chalmers calls qualia, uses the principle of knowledge through presence in a process *ittihad al 'aql wa al ma'qul*.

Third, the progressiveness and contribution of each figure's thinking in the discourse of consciousness can be described in the following table.

Tabel 3. The progressiveness of each thinker and their contribution to the hard problem discourse



CONCLUSION

The conclusions that can be drawn from the above description are as follows. Initially, the study identified the alienation of subjectivity from scientific narratives as the root of the hard problem of consciousness. While qualia (the subjective aspects of experience) were recognized as the core issue of the hard problem, mainstream science lacked a methodological framework to examine them. This led to an epistemic ignorance of the structure of subjective experience. Therefore, the emergence of the discourse on the hard problem of consciousness has essentially returned subjective narratives to the scientific realm as an integral part of the construction of knowledge.

Against this backdrop, this study conducted a comparative study of the thoughts of Francisco Varela and Mullā Ṣadrā to gain alternative perspectives on consciousness and subjectivity from two different traditions. The intersection of the three schools of thought—Chalmers, Varela, and Sadra—is a shared fundamental view of conscious experience, namely the immediacy, immediateness, non-reductiveness, self-evident truth, and privacy of consciousness. Based on this, the study identifies the differences between the three to gain a new perspective.

As a result, Francisco Varela bridges the issue of subjectivity with a phenomenologically approach. The goal is to understand experience directly from the subject's perspective, then match it with objective data computed by machines. However, this approach still tends to be trapped in functional explanations and does not fully answer why consciousness arose in the first place. This study observes that although Varela views consciousness within the framework of action in principle, in the application of neurophenomenology, it has only recently become apparent that the basic structure of conscious experience for Varela is intentional and transitive consciousness. This is interesting because, in the principle of action, the subject is understood in two ways: the subject as the result of mental construction, and the subject that gives birth to (enacts) the world. Neurophenomenology explains the second principle. Therefore, in understanding the subject, Varela needs to exteriorize the subject's domain to the subjective realm. Meanwhile, the first principle, namely how the subject's construction is formed within the mind, is not explained in more detail despite its importance

in forming the structure of the self-conscious experience. If the principles of intentionality and transitive consciousness are also applied to the aspect of self-knowledge/self-consciousness, then the intentional object of self-consciousness is questionable.

Therefore, the research continues on the thoughts of Mullā Ṣadrā. The concept of self-consciousness, in Mullā Ṣadrā's view, is non-intentional. Sadra discusses consciousness as the performative of the subject, where before consciousness carries out its intentionality on external objects, the subject has first carried out an act of self-knowledge of itself, but not within the framework of intentional consciousness, but rather an act of self-objectivation, namely the simultaneous union between subject and object (*ittihad al 'aql wa al ma'qul*). This principle differentiates the basic nature of the structure of consciousness in the thoughts of Sadra and Varela, namely between intentional and non-intentional consciousness; transitive consciousness and non-transitive consciousness.

However, in reality, the concept of performative in Sadra's thought shares the same characteristics as the concept of action in Varela's view. According to both concepts, the subject or self is not a static, ready-made entity, but rather a process that continuously exists and acts (Sadra: performative; Varela: enact). Therefore, consciousness cannot be discussed in terms of its objectivity, because consciousness is an active act born of the subject.

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