

Daniel C. Dennett would answer “**yes, but not in any metaphysically spooky way**”—and he would be very careful about *why* and *how*.

His view is shaped by **naturalism, evolution, and functionalism**, and by his resistance to what he calls “*skyhooks*” (mysterious, non-natural explanations).

1. No metaphysical specialness

Dennett would firmly reject the idea that humans are special because of:

- An immaterial soul
- Non-physical consciousness
- Libertarian free will
- Intrinsic, built-in cosmic purpose

He argues that invoking such things is an illusion born of bad metaphysics and intuitive psychology.

Humans are not *ontologically* special.

We are fully continuous with the rest of nature.

2. Yes, design-level specialness

Dennett’s key move is to shift the question from **ontology** to **design and function**.

Humans are special because we are:

- **Language users**
- **Reason-givers**
- **Culture-dependent minds**

But these are not miracles. They are **evolutionary achievements** built from simpler parts.

He famously distinguishes:

- **Skyhooks** → imaginary, top-down explanations
- **Cranes** → real, bottom-up evolutionary processes

Human minds were built by cranes, not skyhooks—but the result is still extraordinary.

3. Consciousness: special, but not magical

Dennett denies that consciousness involves private, ineffable qualia in the traditional sense. Instead:

- Consciousness is a **set of cognitive competences**
- The “self” is a **center of narrative gravity**

- First-person experience is explainable in third-person terms

Humans are special because we are especially good at **self-interpretation**, not because we possess a metaphysical inner light.

4. Free will: worth wanting, not metaphysical freedom

Dennett's compatibilism reframes free will as:

- The ability to anticipate consequences
- To respond to reasons
- To shape behavior through reflection and social norms

Humans are special because we have **evolved the kind of freedom that matters**, not because we escape causation.

We don't have the free will we *thought* we had—but we have the free will worth wanting.

5. Moral specialness: earned, not given

Dennett would say humans are morally special **because of what we can do**, not because of what we *are* at some deep metaphysical level.

We are:

- Capable of justification
- Accountable to norms
- Participants in moral practices

Moral status emerges from these capacities—it is not stamped into reality in advance.

6. Culture as the real turning point

One of Dennett's most distinctive contributions is his emphasis on **memes** and cumulative culture.

Language, institutions, science, and morality evolve **faster than genes**, and they reshape human cognition itself.

This makes humans:

- Evolutionary hybrids (genes + culture)
- Creatures whose minds depend on social scaffolding

That, for Dennett, is where our real specialness lies.

7. So Dennett's answer, condensed

Humans are special in exactly the way a chess-playing computer is special compared to a calculator—by virtue of what it can do, not because of what it's made of.

- No metaphysical privilege
- No cosmic centrality
- No immaterial essence

But:

- A uniquely powerful kind of mind
- Produced by ordinary processes
- With extraordinary consequences

If you'd like, I can contrast Dennett's view with Nagel, Chalmers, or MacIntyre—or trace how his answer evolved across *Consciousness Explained*, *Freedom Evolves*, and *From Bacteria to Bach and Back*.