

## Introduction to Dialogues on Consciousness:

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It was a great pleasure to help organize and moderate the March discussion on "Mind, Brain, and Consciousness". During the event one enjoyed the sense of hearing both similarities and differences between the speakers' views. But comparative points were often muted with subtleties so that afterwards one did hear the comment repeated "I can feel differences but I am not clear as to what they are."

Let me then, as moderator offer some thoughts in overview. These comments are not offered with any sense of completion, but rather represent my sense of sorting out the differences one hears.

The term "consciousness" becomes attached to different levels of meaning. There are four perspectives I wish to compare here. To help distinguish them I will use the term "awareness" for one of these levels. By awareness I will mean "consciousness" as used in a more-or-less common or dictionary sense; that is, a dualistic experience consisting of a 'delineated object-subject' (i.e. a 'something'), simultaneous with an 'implicative self-subject' or 'witness'. By this description is meant any experience having a perception-like quality; namely an object and a sense of viewpoint (oneself). The object may be a dream image, my own inner voice in thinking, or a real apple sitting on a table. "Awareness", used here, would be of similar use to "consciousness" when one speaks of, and distinguishes, consciousness from subconsciousness -- for example, "Consciousness is the tip of the iceberg."

In both the neuroscience and psychological areas (See papers by Mark Rosenzweig and Steven Joseph), consciousness seems used in this above sense. Subconsciousness cannot be subsumed under a broadened meaning of consciousness, but rather "what/who we are" are *complex states of combined conscious and subconscious*.

Neuroscience attempts a measure of these states as cellular and brain level processes, and therefore at the level of the individual organism. One finds a correlate (at the least) of cell activity and subtle physical changes which arise synchronous to mental processes, i.e. to experiences and behaviors which include self-reported awareness. However, at this level one cannot define the meaning of a transcendent mental state, nor even talk directly about an ego, although it does not preclude compatibility with the notion of ego. Rather, at the cell process level, ego or self-awareness cannot be (yet) defined by a marker activity.

From within a neurological perspective, a definition of consciousness itself must address biological purpose or function. For example, as Mark states in his talk, blind-sight (a form of blindness in which the person is able to fairly accurately replace seeing with a feel/guess that "I think something is in front of me") leads to the question of "What is consciousness adding to the ability to discriminate?" -- a question as to why consciousness exists as a biological function or purpose.

Integrative function and purpose are faced in psychology. This is the second perspective I will consider. In our dialogue it is fair to say that at its own starting point, Jungian psychology takes consciousness as a given. The meaning of "consciousness" remains consistent to awareness defined above, but now, rather than awareness being approached as correlate to a physical substrate, awareness is approached at the level of the *experience* of experience, i.e. of mind addressing its own self-experience within the larger frame of awareness plus subconscious.

The arena of focus is that of integrative meaning and purpose -- the mental level of self-awareness and integrated self-sense. The ego is not questioned or denied, but is to be strengthened and healed by its extension to the transpersonal -- to an infused (informed) union with the collective subconsciousness of the human psyche. Herein lies personal value and meaning. In comparison to the perspective of neuroscience, consciousness is the *experience* called awareness. Ego (the self-subject term) remains fundamental, but attributes of the mental experience are not only specific to the individual but are grounded in, or need be also recognized as, fundamentally transpersonal.

In transcendence, psychology enters the realm of spiritual experience. The third level I will point to is the heights of spiritual perspective. The "end point" of this transcendence is spoken of in mystical experience, for example as described in the metaphysics of Advaita Vedanta (See article by Swami Prabuddhananda). In Advaita Vedanta, consciousness becomes not only profoundly spiritual in its own nature, but also the ultimate term of reality itself. That is, Consciousness is the source and sink of the universe and all that Is, including our ego-selves. Clearly now, awareness is only a small reflection of Consciousness as pointed to in this perspective. Ego-self is only a small reflection of the Self -- that profoundly impersonal Self of impersonal Consciousness. Psychological transcendence is only a small reflection of that Transcendence termed Samadhi-without-attribute. (*nirvakulpa samadhi*)

As in the first two perspectives brought to dialogue, this description of Consciousness is also the result of a methodology, that of focusing mental concentration inwardly, deeply, in yogic practice. Perhaps this perspective can be highlighted by summarizing the last steps described in *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* which are the steps of concentration, meditation, and samadhi. Concentration is a practiced awareness, with awareness as defined above. From practiced and maintained concentration on an object, one enters meditation, and the self-subject dissolves, the self becoming fully focused, with the object alone. In samadhi, object also vanishes but not a Conscious state that is devoid now of both object-subject and self-subject.

It is of interest to note at this point that Mark Rosenzweig points out in his talk that the cognitive sciences began to develop measurement techniques after finding that even trained introspectors could not answer simple questions on the process steps and brain functioning in awareness -- too much remained subconscious and out of sight. Measurement grew from attempts to find ways to formally trace this hidden realm of process.

Psychology is introspective, as the primary tool of analysis, but now one sees mental states rather than brain processes. The centrality of self-experience is to be maintained. In Advaita Vedanta, even this centrality is dropped. Across all this then is applied the word "consciousness."

To complete this overview, it is instructive to look on the notion of consciousness as implicative in the physics of quantum mechanics and relativity. This is the fourth level. Here one encounters a strange hybrid of awareness or consciousness. Again, its nature is defined by a methodology -- but it is a methodology originally set up to purposefully exclude awareness or consciousness or subconsciousness as anything but the most peripheral and extraneous of its concepts.

But now, as is now commonly understood in physics, the notion of a physical event, or objective reality is no longer divorceable from the act of "observation." And since we are the observers doing the experiments, observation seems to imply mind, or a knowing that is akin to awareness. Note that arising as it does in completing an "event", that the notion of consciousness appears compatible to that defined as awareness above. But arising as it does in the physics, there is no need for it to be familiar or similar to our common definition of daily consciousness. There is no implication for a subconscious or ego attribute to the "observer." The observer need not have a personal quality. Also the "observer" seems profoundly related to the interrelation between causality and local reality to the non-locality and holisticness of whatever

the "real variables" of physics are. Such an "event-consciousness" must also have a relationship to our human awareness – whether consciousness is understood as a biological process or as mental experience. In his talk, Geoffrey Chew addresses the problem of developing an "event" physics and notes its relation to questions of consciousness and free will. Starting from his methodology, he finds "that consciousness relates to electromagnetism," a possibility which I know has been raised by others on other grounds of reasoning. This nature of "observer," if taken as a consciousness and postulated as a deep structure of the universe reflects many of the impersonal aspects of consciousness stated at the extremes of the global level by Advaita Vedanta and at the biological level by neuroscience, but it cannot assert either the Shunyata of Buddhism or the Brahman of Vedanta.

This then is the sense of the dance we enjoy in these discussions. Perhaps we should, in the end, not seek resolution of the problem, as a reduction to one's description/definition, but as a multi-dimensional complementarity. Maybe in time, we will see a greater truth in this complementarity.

*Adapted from What Can Be Said of The Mind Knowing Its Own Basis? (Nik Warren)  
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