

# What is Consciousness

( psychological and philosophical views)

## Abstract

This paper, based on many sources (psychology, physiology, neuroscience, analytic philosophy of mind), reviews theories and hypotheses on the quiddity of consciousness. The consciousness term is understood generally as an awareness or knowledge, but internal "engine" of it is a riddle or mystery and has been interpreted in many controversial ways from the ancient time until now. Despite many attempts research on that topic seems to be at a provisional stage yet.

## I. Psychological view

Consciousness in psychology could be defined simply as an awareness and understanding. In more precise interpretation *consciousness is an individual awareness* of unique thoughts, memories, feelings, sensations, and environments. The awareness of memories, attuned to the present moment in the here and now, means the control of behaviours and tells how responsive is a person. Shortly, consciousness is an awareness of self and the world around, is subjective and unique to each person.

*S.Freud* divided human consciousness into three levels of awareness: the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. Each of these levels corresponds to and overlaps with ideas of the id, ego, and superego.

- *Conscious* was defined as a part of the mind that contains all the thoughts, sensations, emotions, and experiences you're aware of in the present moment. When you're conscious of something, you can think about it logically and talk about what you're experiencing.
- *Preconscious* was indicated as all the memories you have that you can access easily. You aren't aware of them in the present moment, but you can call up those memories whenever you choose to do so.
- *Unconscious* was place where emotions, ideas created conflicts, anxiety, pain, fears, immoral and sexual urges, violent motives, irrational wishes, selfish needs, and shameful experiences.

*There are several categories of consciousness:* sense of self, time perception, mental unity, volition ( control of actions), perception of reality, body image, emotions.

Consciousness can be fixed at following *states*: ordinary wakeful consciousness, hypervigilance, lethargy, sleep, dreaming, hypnotic state, drug-induced states, meditative state, dissociative states, lack of consciousness (can happen during coma or brain death), partial epileptic seizures, death.

## II. Philosophical view

Philosophers sometimes view conscious mental states as having qualitative properties called “qualia” as the felt properties or qualities of conscious. Generally they have used the term 'consciousness' for such topics as knowledge in general, intentionality, introspection and phenomenal experience.

- In the scholastic-Aristotelian theory a consciousness may be related to a soul as an immaterial substantial form of soul-body union.
- Kant argued that conscious experience must be the product of the synthesizing work of the mind
- Descartes concluded that mind and body are distinct (mind-body dualism), could be separated and the union of mind and body results in one complete substance or being through itself.
- Dennett's *Multiple Drafts* model specifies memory criterion for consciousness: that is *what it is* for the "given" to be "taken". The consciousness is not to be found in a specific part of the system, but in the actions of the whole.
- Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy concerned with the ultimate nature of reality. There are two broad traditional and competing metaphysical views concerning the nature of the mind and conscious mental states: dualism and materialism. The dualism generally holds that the conscious mind or a conscious mental state is non-physical in some sense, whereas the latter holds that the mind is the brain, or is caused by neural activity. Mind and body are the metaphysical parts (incomplete substances in this respect) that constitute one, whole human being, which is a complete substance in its own right.
- *Mysterianism* - McGinn claims that we are cognitively closed as to how the brain produces conscious awareness. He concedes that some brain property produces conscious experience, but we cannot understand how this is so or even know what that brain property is.
- *Analytic philosophy of mind* says that consciousness as a cooperative phenomenon of the whole brain or mind is a degree of coherence of the mind.
- The organism conscious mental states, are having qualitative properties called “qualia”.
- Teilhard de Chardin's *concept of the noosphere* is the concept of a planetary global brain and planetary consciousness. A self-awareness can be effectively explained as a result of the interaction of three processes: *feeling of qualia*, *activity of neural circuits realizing the self-image* (recall from memory in the form of imagery), *the formation of the brain's electromagnetic field*. This allows to consider whether it is possible to find analogical elements and processes on a planetary scale.
- “*Mysterians*” (e.g. McGinn 1989, 1991, 1995) believe that hard problem of consciousness can never be solved because of human cognitive limitations and the explanatory gap that can never be filled.
- *Self-representational theory* of consciousness (called “Neo-Brentanian theory”) claims that conscious mental states are reflexive or self-directed and that conscious mental states represent themselves, just not a distinct or separate state. For example, when one has a conscious desire for a cold glass of water, this conscious desire represents both the glass of

water and itself. Kriegel has used different names for his “neo-Brentanian theory” such as the SOMT (Same-Order Monitoring Theory).

- *A one version of representational theory* holds that the meta-psychological state in question should be understood as intrinsic to (or part of) an overall complex conscious state. This stands in contrast to the standard view that the HO (Higher Order) state is extrinsic to its target mental state. These various hybrid representational theories can be found in the literature. Gennaro (2002) holds that conscious mental states should be understood as *global brain states* which are combinations of passively received perceptual input and presupposed higher-order conceptual activity directed at that input. Higher-order concepts in the meta-psychological thoughts are presupposed in having first-order conscious states. Most contemporary theories of consciousness are aimed at explaining what makes a mental state a conscious mental state. State becomes conscious partly due to the implicit self-awareness. Gennaro and Van Gulick have suggested that conscious states can be understood materialistically as the first-order state of the larger complex brain state. Van Gulick explored the alternative that the HO state is part of an overall global conscious state and calls such states “HOGS” (Higher-Order Global States).