

WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS?

In today's scientific domain the word **consciousness** is not defined unanimously. A lot of work has been devoted to different facets of consciousness, such as the mind and its pathology, conscious awareness, levels of psychological development, impact of transcendental meditation on brain's activity, and so on. Historically, researches tried to locate consciousness in various parts of the human body, ecology or even social systems. Regrettably, it also happens that some scientists still have a habit of swapping the terms 'brain' and 'mind' as if they meant the same thing.

*"Yet the cruel truth is that the central objective of the now majestic research program in neuroscience remains beyond reach: there is only **the most shaky understanding of how the brain, and the human brain in particular, engenders mind** – the capacity to reflect on past events, to think and to imagine.*

That is not a scandal. The question is truly perplexing. Since Aristotle's time, people have been asking what mind consists of, but without much success.

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*For most of the past century, these questions have been considered as distractions from the investigations of the nervous systems of animals and how they function. Only since the late 1980s, for example, has the question "**What is consciousness?**" been regarded as a legitimate challenge for neuroscience. Instead, investigations have been centred on simpler questions such as how an animal uses its nervous system to direct the movement of its limbs and how signals from the outside world collected by the sensory organs – eyes, ears, noses and fingertips, for example – are processed within the head, usually stimulating an appropriate response. ... Even after a century of remarkable discoveries about the cellular components of animal brain, their interconnections and the behaviour of the species of animals in which they are embedded, not even the nervous system of the simplest creature is yet fully understood. It may have become permissible to ask **what and where consciousness is**, but it is too soon to expect a detailed answer."¹*

¹ "What remains to be discovered" by John Maddox, 1999, p. 276, Simon & Schuster, New York.

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Consciousness has no form and is not a space-bound 'substance'. The notions that Consciousness is located inside a person or outside or anywhere else, are not strictly valid, although they are not totally incorrect. Yes, we can talk about, and understand, the concepts such as social conscience or personal awareness, etc., and we may have ideas that the whereabouts of social conscience are somewhat more dispersed than the personal awareness. But these notions can pinpoint to no exact location of Consciousness, because there is no such one place in reality.

As once we thought of atoms as the building blocks of the material world, so now perhaps it is timely to accept Consciousness as the 'stuff', the building block, of the entire Universe. This means that the subtle and gross, thoughts, feelings, and the material objects are all made of Consciousness, and that this Consciousness manifests in different forms, depending on the sophistication of the conveying medium. Human beings think of themselves as the centre of the Universe and an apogee of the universal evolutionary process. So, in this frame of mind, it is natural to think that Consciousness belongs to a human person, or belongs to other physical manifestations such as animals or society or culture, etc. Thinking, that we belong to Consciousness, and not vice versa, cannot occur to beings imagining themselves to be the masters, the pinnacle of all development. So, let us understand that although Consciousness is not located in any particular part of the human body, our bodies are made of Consciousness, as well as the air we breathe and the environment we live in.

Consciousness is the fabric of the Universe, which is a conscious, living Being. Similar to the concept of the living planet Gaia, the Universe is alive; it is breathing, thinking, feeling and is conscious of itself. These attributes of the Universe may not appear evident for people whose only tools of perception are the five physical senses. The five physical senses can only **see** Earth, Sun and stars, can only **hear** sounds or silence, can only **touch** material objects, can only **smell** and **taste** foods and smells. The five physical senses cannot detect the processes of thinking or feeling which are continually taking place in the universal body of God, because the perception of these phenomena comes through non-sensory tools hibernating in every human being—tools, which can be awakened.

The claim of the physical sciences for the measurability and repeatability of the experiment in such cases as spiritual experiences cannot be fulfilled for a number of reasons. In most situations the recipients of spiritual experiences cannot predict when these will happen. Often, when they try somehow to repeat the experience, it is very difficult to obtain it, unless someone is very well trained in certain yoga or contemplative practices. The obvious impossibility of the measurement does not need to be expounded on. If we cannot measure feelings manifested here in the physical dimension (for example, we cannot measure love—no such instrument exists to measure love), we are not in a position to

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measure feelings in the subtle dimensions of the Universe. The best our scientists can do is to embark on a personal spiritual development path and perhaps such experiences will be granted to them.

The Universe exists in an eternal cycle of waxing and waning, which is valid for all its dimensions. So, the expansion and growth is followed by a decline in the physical dimension, but also in the dimension of life, mind, emotions, and higher spiritual dimension. The Universal Consciousness manifests during those various phases of existence only if suitable vehicles are present to convey this force. So, when life on Earth was in a nascent form, the only Consciousness that could manifest at that time was the one demonstrated, for example, by simple cellular forms. We cannot claim that higher Consciousness did not exist then. There simply were no suitable vehicles to process and convey the Universal Consciousness in its entire capacity.

Life is a stepping stone from inanimate expressions of Consciousness in the physical dimension to the increasing organisational complexity levels of awareness in the direction of liberation from the necessity of appearance in this dimension. Man, as a cosmic being, represents a certain level or range of the universal spectrum of Consciousness. We know that there are lower levels of Consciousness manifesting here on Earth and in the Universe. But we also ought to know that there exist higher, much higher forms of Consciousness, exponents of which may or may not appear in the physical dimension we experience.