

From Panexperientialism to Conscious Experience: The Continuum of Experience



Dionysos, god of unbridled experience, sailing with grapes and dolphins
(Greek vase, attributed to Exekias, c. 530 BCE)

Gregory M. Nixon*

Abstract

When so much is being written on *conscious experience*, it is past time to face the question whether experience happens that is not conscious of itself. The recognition that we and most other living things experience non-consciously has recently been firmly supported by experimental science, clinical studies, and theoretic investigations; the related if not identical philosophic notion of *experience without a subject* has a rich pedigree. Leaving aside the question of how experience could become conscious of itself, I aim here to demonstrate that the terms *experience* and *consciousness* are not interchangeable. Experience is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down, but I see non-conscious experience as based mainly in momentary sensations, relational between bodies or systems, and probably common throughout the natural world. If this continuum of experience — from non-conscious, to conscious, to self-transcending awareness — can be understood and accepted, radical constructivism (the “outside” world as a construct of experience) will gain a firmer foundation, panexperientialism (a living universe) may gain credibility, and *psi* will find its medium.

* Correspondence: Greg Nixon, Associate Professor, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC, Canada. Email: doknyx@icloud.com Websty: <https://unbc.academia.edu/GregoryNixon>

Only then, when one has thrown light upon it and intellectualized it can one distinguish — and with what effort! — the shape of what one has felt. (Marcel Proust, 1934, p. 1014)

Among the many other binary forks in the road toward the *explanation* and *definition* of consciousness is the one in which some loosely identify consciousness with experience (and often, generously, with awareness too despite the fact that this term connotes less specificity and individually-limited attention), and others make a distinction between conscious experience and experience without the added quality of consciousness, i.e., *non-conscious experience*. It seems likely that the way we explain and define conscious experience directly affects the manner in which we consciously experience. Experience, *as we know it*, may well be a manifestation of our preconceptions of it. It is thus very important that we proceed cautiously when eliding similar definitions into one another.

Panpsychist philosopher Christian de Quincey (2002) calls the open or phenomenal understanding of consciousness the philosophical one: any microbiological twitch or sensation is understood as consciously experienced. The more closed (also known elsewhere as the subjective or cognitive) definition — in which consciousness is underlain by subconscious or unconscious mind or in which non-conscious or unconscious experience is reflected back upon itself through higher order processing and becomes conscious of itself — he calls the psychological one. (I'm applying my own terminology to what I take to be de Quincey's intent.) The psychological definition he calls self-reflective awareness, but then this implies there is awareness that is not self-reflective, or, in my terms, does not have a subject or self to do the reflecting.

He's right about the majority psychological practice here, but there are problems with his open philosophical definition of 'consciousness all the way down', including that many professional philosophers do in fact stand by what he calls the psychological definition, but also that the open 'philosophical' or phenomenal definition does not leave room for non-conscious, subconscious, or preconscious processing (which might be understood as purely organic or even inorganic experience). It should further be borne in mind that *human conscious experience* is all we *know* of experience, so, when we use the term 'consciousness' for all forms of awareness, we can only be assuming our own conscious experience as the referent for all the other forms consciousness may take.

There are those who equate conscious experience with experience in all forms while distinguishing reflective or self-consciousness from both. Then there are others who distinguish conscious experience from experience *in itself* but identify reflective or self-consciousness with conscious experience itself. The previous sentence is worth reading again if you don't quite get it because it summarizes the two major conceptual positions that still contend for the final word in defining

consciousness. A look at some of the publications that surround me illustrate these two contending sides in this subtle and important turf war of the mind.

Materialist-mysterian philosopher Colin McGinn (1999) defines consciousness as the property of any 'experiencing subject' and, for him, such subjectivity is present in dreaming states and in anything that experiences. So an entity such as a nematode that experiences momentary sensations, but does not have the capacity or symbolic tools to realize it is doing so, would nonetheless be understood as being conscious. The human capacity to become aware of one's own sensations and life in general adds nothing but reflection for McGinn; it is the experience not the knowing that counts: 'To experience those sensations is not the same as to think that you experience them, or to say that you do. We do often reflect on our own experiences and tell each other about them. So we should not confuse consciousness with self-consciousness' (pp. 2-3). Velmans (2000) siding with McGinn, simply states, 'A person, or other entity, is conscious if they experience something; conversely, if a person or entity experiences nothing, they are not conscious' (p. 6).

Contrarily, David Cohen (1998), in his illustrated attempt to speak for mainstream psychology, states:

Although no broad consensus exists as to the precise meaning of consciousness, it can be described as the state of mind that allows us to 'know' our own mind, to entertain thoughts about thoughts, to monitor our selves and our environments, and to use this information to make plans and formulate hopes and fears (p. 67).

Like Cohen, those of the 'higher order' thought (HOT) or perception school of philosophy insist that *knowledge of one's own experiencing* is one step removed from that experience in itself and precisely equate consciousness with self-consciousness, as do the symbolists and phenomenologists (see Zahavi, 2005). Tor Nørretranders (1998) agrees, adding the qualities of self-consciousness to consciousness itself: 'Consciousness is the experience of experiencing, the knowledge of knowing, the sense of sensing' (p. i).

Up to this point, it seems almost a matter of choice, with the slight problem that we can know nothing *certain* about the experience of non-human entities or infants. Language at least allows other persons to tell us of their experiencing. There are more considerations, however, that add a particular intensity to this question, since the uniqueness and autonomy of conscious experience are at stake.

Dictionaries, even specialist dictionaries, are not going to be of much help since they merely reflect the contraries of common usage. It may be a point worth noting, however, that the etymology of the term 'conscious' indicates its origin in the Latin *consciūs*: 'knowing with others, participating in knowledge' and is in accord

with the first definition given by the Houghton-Mifflin Dictionary of the English Language (Morris, 1982) for 'Conscious: Having an awareness of one's own existence, sensations, and thoughts, and of one's environment.' Not only does this etymology suggest that consciousness implies knowing *of* one's own somatic feelings, sensations, and experiencing, but also knowing *with* others: *com-* together + *scire-* to know, suggesting the intersubjective intermingling of conscious selves. Non-*consci*us experience is left as possibility in this definition. Needless to say, dictionary definitions indicating otherwise can be found.

Experience is another term so many of us assume to understand but which, on the contrary, proves to have a long history of variable meanings. Cultural historian, Martin Jay, recently did a history of philosophy survey of these often contentious meanings in western culture called *Songs of Experience* (2005). To frame his study, Jay early on explores the two German words with slightly different meanings that are both translated into English by the word 'experience'. One of them suggests 'raw' or 'pure' experience, unmediated by language or subjectivity so it remains unconscious of itself. The other equates more readily with the common English assumption that experience always implies conscious experience.

Erlebnis contains within it the root for 'life' (*Leben*) and, according to Jay, 'is often taken to imply a primitive unity prior to any differentiation or objectification. ... Although *Leben* connotes the entirety of a life, *Erlebnis* generally connotes a more immediate, pre-reflective, and personal variant of experience...' (p. 11). This implies a meaning for experience that does not necessarily accord with our assumed meaning for *conscious* in that *Erlebnis* is 'immediate, pre-reflective, and personal...'. In this case it can be seen that *Erlebnis* as *experience simpliciter* is not the same as reflective *conscious experience*. Like the unconscious of psychoanalysis, it may be thought of as non-conscious experience.

Erfahrung, the other German term we translate as experience, is on the other hand more associated with differentiating sense impressions or making cognitive judgments about them. 'But,' says Jay, 'it also came to mean a more temporally elongated notion of experience based on a learning process, an integration of discrete moments of experience into a narrative whole or an adventure'. Its roots are found in the German word for journey (*Fahrt*) that may connote a journey into the unknown (*Fahrt ins blaue*), like the journey through life: 'As such, it activates a link between memory and experience, which subtends the belief that cumulative experience can produce a kind of wisdom that comes only at the end of the day' (p. 11). *Erfahrung* seems to be more in accord with our common understanding of experience, as 'the best teacher' or as the remembered present, which equates roughly with the consensus understanding of *conscious experience* (or consciousness, if you must).

Though Jay does not deal directly with the question of how *experience* and *conscious experience* may be related, if at all (which is a major lapse in a book whose

intention is to explore all meanings of the term *experience*), some of the authors he reviews do take a stand for direct, non-conscious experience as the precursor and foundation of subjective consciousness. Jay refers to the ‘paradoxical notion’ (p. 129) of *experience without a subject* (or, sometimes, from another angle, *post-epistemological experience*) and notes the idea has been posited approvingly by no less than Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Benjamin, Adorno, Bataille, Foucault, Barthes, and possibly Oakeshott, Dewey, and the trickster of text, Derrida. Experience without a subject of that experience cannot easily be subsumed under the label of *consciousness*. It may be more along the lines of the non-subjective yet relational and experiential interaction between organism and environment (cf. Järvillehto, 2000, 2004).

Finally, some of the poststructuralist or deconstructive authors cited like Jacques Lacan insist that experience, as such, cannot be posited as a meaningful term at all. As Lacan’s translator, Alan Sheridan (1977) put it: ‘What is prior to the assumption of the symbolic, the real in its “raw” state (in the case of the subject, for instance, the organism and its biological needs), may only be supposed, it is an algebraic x ’ (pp. ix-x). This simply implies that we cannot be conscious of non-conscious experience.

Another point toward considering conscious experience as distinct from experience *per se* is that we have by now much evidence for non-conscious experience and widespread — dare I say *subliminal*? — acceptance of it. Literary history is replete with finely drawn characters thinking they were guiding their lives by their rational conscious choices but were actually being driven by emotions or even instincts beyond the ken of their own subjective awareness, as the astute reader would observe. Other times, we all have witnessed characters — both in literature and in life — who have struggled mightily to avoid disturbing truths they sense subconsciously (as we say) or who overcompensate for certain semi-conscious deficiencies, e.g., the braggart or bully. (See appendix.)

For experience to become conscious, it must be readied for intellection. It must be sliced, diced, and made an object of the mind, as Marcel Proust (1934), that indefatigable investigator of memory, well knew:

One experiences, but what one has experienced is like those negatives which show nothing but black until they have been held before a lamp, and they, too, must be looked at from the reverse side; one does not know what it is until it has been held up before the intelligence. Only then, when one has thrown light upon it and intellectualized it can one distinguish — and with what effort! — the shape of what one has felt (p. 1014).

It’s hardly fair to say that Sigmund Freud (e.g., 1965) *discovered* the unconscious at the beginning of the last century. He did, however, bring it into the lexicon of daily human speech. Equating symbolic culture and cognition with consciousness, Freud’s deeper epigone, C.G. Jung (1971), who expanded the idea of the un-

conscious into the collectivity of all life, flatly declared: 'It is just man's turning away from instinct — his opposing himself to instinct — that creates consciousness,' adding, significantly, 'Instinct is nature and seeks to perpetuate nature, whereas consciousness can only seek culture or its denial' (p. 3). The term is misleading, however, in that *unconscious* has the connotation of a coma-like state, lacking both consciousness and experience.

There is not the space here to explore the great divide that allowed embodied experience to become conscious of itself, but Jung's suggestion is worth noting: The cultural communion of language is precisely the condition of applying symbolic categorizations to experience to make it seem objective to conscious subjectivity. Human culture is dependent on relationships in which those attaining conscious selfhood expect others in their culture world to do so too. This relationship is intersubjective in that it both sustains and draws forth conscious subjects of experience. We simply are not conscious of non-conscious experience until we, via the relationships of cultural intersubjectivity, make it so.

In his watershed book, Julian Jaynes (1976) made the point even more simply: 'Consciousness is a much smaller part of our mental life than we are conscious of, because we cannot be conscious of what we are not conscious of' (p. 23). He continued with an apt metaphor:

How simple that is to say; how difficult to appreciate! It is like asking a flashlight in a dark room to search around for something that does not have any light shining up on it. The flashlight, since there is light in whatever direction it turns, would have to conclude that there is light everywhere. And so consciousness can seem to pervade all mentality when actually it does not (p. 23).

It should be noted that no one is implying the line between the light of conscious apprehension and experiencing 'in the dark' is sharp or apparent or that there are not important degrees of difference within what I am calling non-conscious experience and conscious experience. Experience is a continuum, as Alfred North Whitehead explained. Neither between human individuals nor amongst species can the line of distinction be clearly drawn.

As one of the first philosophers (as distinct from psychoanalysts and literary authors) to make use of the distinction, Whitehead (1978) wrote:

Consciousness flickers; and even at its brightest, there is a small focal region of clear illumination, and a large penumbral region of experience which tells of intense experience in dim apprehension. The simplicity of clear consciousness is no measure of the complexity of complete experience. Also this character of our experience suggests that consciousness is the crown of experience, only occasionally attained, not its necessary base (p. 267).

As Whitehead indicates, consciousness is the proverbial tip of the iceberg of a whole world of experiencing whose bottom or origin, if there is one, is shrouded in mystery and must be, by definition, unknowable. Consciousness itself, as self-consciousness, may be ‘the crown of experience’ since it is *that which knows* and seems to guide long term planning. However, whether the consciousness we daily experience is the ‘crown’ of all potential experiencing remains to be seen.

Uncomfortable as it may be to some, there is wide evidence that the conscious does not direct decisions in the immediate present. Not only current behaviours but even the flow of individual thoughts may be ignited from a source whose origin disappears beyond the light of consciousness. This is to say that the process of consciousness may less determine what we do or experience, even in the future, than it (consciousness) is itself determined by pre- or non-conscious experience. Non-conscious experience, unlike *the unconscious*, includes the term ‘experience’ because it is responsive and effectual (if not exactly efficient). In the end, however, the cycle must be mutually creative, consciousness taking aim and the unconscious powers working toward or against it in the present, the dialogue of how we become.

Arguments against distinguishing between experience as such and experience that has become conscious of itself have been stubborn and steadfast. They usually insist that experience *means* consciousness in everyday speech, and that’s that. I hope I have shown that the historical use of the term is not nearly so consistent. If something is experienced, it must have been consciously attended to, so the argument goes, otherwise it is merely something like autonomic activity. But non-conscious experience is not just autonomic. Non-attended (non-subjective) experience has *affect* — that is, it disturbs or creates emotions — and it has notable *effects*, too, on actual behaviour or on thought.

The late, highly respected physiology researcher Benjamin Libet noted this as early as 1965:

It has become generally accepted that a large, perhaps even a major part of our mental activities can take place without our being consciously aware of them. Though apparently unconscious, they are nevertheless part of significant mental experience since there is evidence that such activities can participate in later mental and behavioral manifestations — cognitive, affective, or conative. (Benjamin Libet (1965), ‘Cortical activation in conscious and unconscious experience’, *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 9 (Autumn), pp. 77-86, p. 77).

Consciousness is certainly dependent on the animal capacity for experience. If it were not, consciousness could not be experienced and consciousness without experience is difficult to conceive (though this may be the goal of AI research). Conversely, experience without consciousness — that is, experience as responsive in-

interactions within an ecosystem or perhaps any complex system (as opposed to a culture) but without any sort of awareness of that experience — is less difficult. Experience without knowledge or conceptual cognition throws into doubt the whole assumption of there being any sort of internal, centralized experiencer (or subject of experience, the *homunculus*) in other natural organisms as we imagine there being in ourselves. Is there a little experiencing *bat-munculus* within bats?

Despite what many would argue, experiencing interaction with an environment in no way necessitates there being an inner representation of such an environment: The interaction may itself be the mutual moment of experience, existing like a flash of electricity between entities not within them (or not necessarily in one centralized subjective location within). Experience may be modular and not centralized in 'lower' organisms but occurring in, say, a limb. Without memory or anticipation, the experience would consist only of the second or so of interaction in itself. (Louis Gidney, 2007, offers a more sophisticated version of this 'relational existing'.) We are not in the position to assume an organism is a self-contained monad warring with nature instead of it being *an aspect of nature experiencing itself* (as a sentient response system — or *systems*). As the cliché goes, the lights might be on, but there may be *no one* (no self or subjective centre) home. The body is the entity itself, one pole of dynamic sentient experience.

What we are conscious of is experience. The world is the experienced world, not a mechanical-material objective entity that is the same for all who experience it, perceptively or otherwise. Raw experience is changed when it attains the quality of being conscious of itself. It changes from a blindly felt reality process into an object of knowledge, an artifact of memory. By knowing it, we interpret it; we change it into symbols; we stabilize its dynamic mutability. We re-cognize it and make it our lived reality. Experience is divided into subject and object.

Conscious experience is understood here as a threshold that, once crossed, cannot be uncrossed without losing, in essence, consciousness. As Ernst Cassirer (1944) put it, noting that the threshold of the symbolic leads away from natural processes:

Yet there is no remedy against this reversal of the natural order. Man cannot escape from his own achievement. He cannot but adopt the conditions of his own life. No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experience. (p. 25)

One may wonder, finally, what difference this distinction makes. When we already have terms like the unconscious mind or the convoluted *panprotopsychism*, what need have we to stress non-conscious experience? This question alone is worth another major essay to consider the options. As I indicated above, I see experience as Whitehead did, not really consisting of just two types, but as a

continuum from momentary flashes into existence of ‘occasions of experience’ (probably related to quantum fluctuations) to the boundaryless experience which blossoms into transpersonal awareness. Many of us would not be willing to grant consciousness to a nematode or to a paramecium, much less to a subatomic pilot wave collapse, yet the former two at least are living entities that respond to changes in their environment. In fact the changes of one part of an ecosystem, in this case, an individual organism, cause changes in the entire ecosystem, so interrelated and connected are all the parts. Such responses by both organism and environment can be parsimoniously imagined as most likely concurrent with experiencing; this would explain the incredible balance and coherence of living and other systems. It also suggests that coherent systems, especially ecosystems, are harmonized by their multi-centric experiencing. Sub-atomic occasions of experience I leave for Whiteheadians and quantum physicists like Henry Stapp (1979) to explore, though this is a rich field for speculation.

Radical constructivism has suffered criticism because naïve skeptics ask, ‘You mean the world out there is like that because we make it so? We could just change it at will?’ Some constructivists have tried some interesting contortions to explain why, if reality is a construction of conscious experience, we cannot just wish it to be what we want. Non-conscious experience better fits the explanation of our lived world being a world conditioned by experience, perceived as the result of past experience — and this would include the experience of species and all that evolved into our species and all that went before that and is still unfolding today.

The need of *psi* or so-called extra-sensory perception for non-conscious experience should be self-explanatory. In this view, *psi* phenomena probably happen to everyone all the time, since we are mimetic, relational, interconnected cultural creatures. This is denied by various attempts to demonstrate conscious control over such paranormal apperceptions or activities. But if the receiving, sending, sharing, or actively applying of paranormal *psi* phenomena is accepted within non-conscious experience both its elusiveness and reality can be explained.

The point here is that experience without consciousness or a subject of that experience opens the door to filling a major lacuna in the theorizing of panpsychists and radical constructivists, not to mention *psi* researchers. Panpsychism is related to animism, the ancient sense of a cosmos alive with minds in all entities and phenomena. A humanlike mind in all things is too much for most of us today to accept but a form of non-conscious experience may not be. David Skrbina (2009) has recently published a collection of philosophy essays mostly supporting panpsychism, but my review (2009) points out how pre-conscious panexperientialism would solve much confusion. This seems to be the idea of what the neologistic construct *panprotopsychism* (Chalmers, 2013, 2017) was attempting to conjure. A better suggestion is *panexperientialism*, apparently first used by D.R. Griffin (1977, 1998a) with reference to Whitehead’s process cosmology, though Whitehead himself might be best described as a panentheist because of his implied Godism. If panexperientialism seems to grant too much to sensation, try the

agonized panprotoexperientialism so the presumed mechanical rudiments of experiencing appear everywhere on the scene first. Ned Block's (1995) concept of *phenomenal consciousness* also seems similar to non-conscious experience or at least non-self-conscious experience. However, only panexperientialism implies straightforwardly that the entire universe is in some way alive or has the potential of becoming so at any time anywhere.

One can see that the implications of universal experiencing are startling, perhaps even awe-inspiring. If rudimentary experience began with sensations derived from relational encounters between two fundamental entities, which later became internalized within each entity as its own via physiological memory traces (thus, in essence, creating an experiencing entity), as Deiss (2009) has suggested (though he still equates experience with consciousness), it seems to me some potential for such experience must precede or surround it. I suggest such a potential for relational experience pre-exists as universal awareness-in-itself, a sort of background radiation of the psyche that is without objects of awareness, intentionality, or self-direction (indeed *without self*). Any way we conceive of this unconscious yet aware potential existence must be insufficient, though I must suggest any awareness without content cannot really be said to even *exist* as any sort of active principle or entity. Perhaps it is nearest to the void consciousness of the mystics that is without attributes, so about which nothing sensible can be said (and 'it' certainly resembles no known conceptions of God or gods). Yet from this slumbering source somehow spring both rudimentary entities and their experiential interactions (which thus incarnate this empty awareness-in-itself). Some few in science have also seen the need to conceive of this inconceivable semi-existent source. This fundamental, essential, yet invisible bond — the source, foundation, and end of all things — is thought to 'exist' as infinite energy potential everywhere in what has been called the quantum vacuum, quantum flux, quantum foam, ZPE, dark energy, Erwin Laszlo's Akashic Field (2004), Hu and Wu's (2010) pre-spacetime, and so on. Needless to say, such an invisible pan-present non-presence as *experience-in-waiting* (awareness-in-itself) would have zero dimensions (0-D) and remain at time-zero in the eternal present.

With this in mind, I suggest the distinction between conscious experience (aka consciousness) and *experience as such* is well worth making. If the terminology offends, call it unconscious experience, consciousness without mind, core consciousness, or experience without a subject, as others have. The idea remains the same. What is it like to be a bat, to have non-conscious experience? We do it all the time, but we return with no memory of it or, at best, a shudder, a fading sensation, an evanescent image, a fleeting dream in the hollows of memory.

Appendix

TWENTY-ONE INDICATORS of Non-Conscious Experience

EMPIRICAL ABNORMAL

1. Blindsight. This is the premier example in the science community. When one feels oneself to be blind (in fact consciously blind) yet responds appropriately to certain visual stimuli, what can be said about that one's responses? How can we account for readings that indicate a brain in action, a body galvanically responding? Most important, how can we account for knowledge gained and displayed yet consciously denied? Must it not be said that one has seen non-consciously and that one has gained knowledge non-consciously? Of course. On the other hand it is clear that the total person has had a visual experience and can in some sense recall and refer to the information gained. To deny that one has *experienced* those visual impressions would be to deny that any information processing has occurred, which is clearly not the case. Ergo, the person has experienced non-consciously. (See, e.g., *Blindsight* (May 1999); Stoerig & Cowey, 1997; and of course Weiskrantz, 1986.)

2. Anton's Syndrome, the denial of blindness, almost the opposite of above, a type of anosognosia. Anosognosia 'denotes the inability to recognize a state of disease in one's own organism' (Damasio 1999, pp. 209-10). This is the situation where a person has become physiologically blind yet still consciously experiences a world of sight. The visual world is, apparently, projected from memory. This is hardly enough to deal with the real world, so despite conscious denial, soma moves about, bumping into things, stumbling, falling, not sharing in the perceptions being discussed. The conscious mind continues to believe it is seeing, but here the living body is doubtlessly experiencing blindness and its the effects.

3. Prosopagnosia, the most dramatic form of anosognosia (a symptom of severe mental illness experienced by some that impairs a person's ability to understand and perceive his or her illness.), facial anosognosia. Here consciousness can no longer recognize faces, even those once intimately known. Yet cases abound where brain activation and skin galvanization reveal that on some level the face is being recognized. In some cases, there are even strong emotional responses to the 'forgotten' face but the subject does not know why. In one case, a stroke victim with facial anosognosia was confronted with his brother with whom he had been very close. He sadly shook his head, asking the doctor who this person was. *But* his galvanic response became electric, nasal passages flared, eyes dilated, breathing became laboured, body temperature rose, he flushed, and his heart beat more rapidly. His non-conscious being — his body! — experienced full recognition. His conscious mind did not. Obviously, recognition is being non-consciously experienced. When one's physical being is obviously experiencing a response, it would be sheer dualism to say *the person* is not, since it would exclude the body from the person! (See, e.g., Sacks 1985.)

4. Amnesia. Similar to the above, there are cases of physiological and emotional responses to people not consciously remembered. There are also confirmed cases of procedural memory recalled and acted upon though the conscious mind denies such acts are possible. Learning itself, in these cases, often takes place non-consciously. (See, e.g., Rosenfield, 1992; Schacter, 1987, 1996.)

5. Split Brain Experiments. After the division of the corpus callosum, most subjects function normally. As is well known, however, consciousness — according to the conscious subjects themselves — most often resides in the symbol processing left hemisphere. It does no good to explain the perception, learning, and responses centred in the right hemisphere as another sort of consciousness when the subject denies any sort of awareness of such experiences. Again, physiological and emotional response readings indicate that subjects are experiencing, but are not conscious of it. (See, e.g., Gazzaniga, 1970; Sperry, 1965, 1983.)

6. Sleepwalking. People will do things in a state of somnambulism — deep, non REM sleep, non-insane automatism — and later have no memory of such actions. Sleepwalkers encountered, however, sometimes appear to be perceiving and even feeling emotions (though they probably also look *absent*). Ken Parks, a Canadian, was found not guilty of murder for rising, driving his car 23 kilometres away, maiming his father-in-law and killing his mother-in-law because he was sleepwalking. However, Scott Falater, an Arizonan with a history of sleepwalking, who knifed his wife to death in the family pool in 1997 was found guilty as charged (see [Homicidal Somnambulism](#) in Wikipedia).

7. Dream Effects. There are many anecdotal reports of people's moods being altered by dreams of the night before, none of which have contents that can be explicitly recalled. There are after-effects & after *affect*. Were the dreams then not experienced? Dream effects are not abnormal, but they are not *normally* considered an aspect of daily consciousness. (*cf.* Hillman, 1979; Laberge, 2004)

8. Alcohol/Drug Effects. There are *many* cases of someone being so bamboozled by drugs (including alcohol) that they walk, talk, emote, & suffer but the person everyone knows simply is not present. The lights appear to be on but there is nobody home, and later the individual retains no conscious memory or only fragments thereof. Obviously, somatic experience of some sort is occurring but to the conscious person, later, such experiences are dismissed as blackouts. Blacked out people are sometimes able to drive, travel, work and generally function in society, all the while operating without forming memory. Others are more obviously in a zombie state yet still moving about. (See, e.g., Sweeney & Liston, 2004.)

9. Post-Hypnotic Suggestion. People will do actions or experience feelings they have not consciously instigated under post-hypnotic suggestion. In fact consciousness reveals itself as the great rationalizer or excuse maker here: When a person suddenly awakes from a hypnotic suggestion to discover herself running down the hallway of a crowded auditorium, she improvises explanations on the

spot for her actions, for she clearly has no idea why she was doing the action. Was she not experiencing but unconscious when under the influence of post-hypnotic suggestion?

EMPIRICAL NORMAL

10. Implicit Memory/Learning/Knowledge or Priming. Getting away from somewhat aberrant forms of experience, research in cognitive science has confirmed that there is a whole field of knowledge that is non-conscious but which continues to have effects on behaviour and cognitive associations. The knowledge is known, the memories remembered, the learning learnt — but implicitly, that is, non-consciously. These, and much more, are part of what has been called the ‘cognitive unconscious’ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Even a hardline neurologist like J.A. Hobson (1999) accepts this. Subliminal memory priming should be included here (*cf.*, Schacter, 1987, 1989, 1996; Thomas, 1997). Polanyi (1958) called his epistemological version *tacit knowing*.

11. Subliminal Perception. Related to the above. In an infamous Republican ad from the U.S. Bush/Gore presidential election, the word ‘Democrat’ was shown then quickly the last three letters of the word were zeroed in on (RAT), magnified and flashed briefly across the TV screen too quickly to be consciously perceived by most. The hope, apparently, was that viewers would unconsciously connect ‘democrat’ with ‘rat’. The subliminal perception and response is non-conscious experience. (See, e.g., Kunst-Wilson and Zajonc, 1983; Merikle & Daneman, 1998.)

12. Habitual Behaviour. When one behaves automatically from behaviours so well learned that conscious attention is not necessary, one may be said to be experiencing the actions non-consciously (e.g., highway driving, riding a bicycle). Procedural memory itself often becomes unconscious. One need merely reflect upon one’s lived experience or see again, for example, Schacter, 1987, 1989, 1996.

13. Reflex Actions. Both the kind the nervous system does spontaneously — i.e., blinking, pulling back a digit from something hot — and the unusual reflex actions of someone in crisis. It would also include the best athletes who act before consciousness can process a plan or remember clearly such actions later. In the latter case, it may be said that non-conscious experience is an achievement. (See, e.g., Williams, 2004.)

THEORETICAL

14. Pre-Conscious and Feral Humans. Humans who have not learned any form of symbolic communication may be said to be experiencing non-consciously. There is no doubt of their somatic perceiving or their raw emotions, but mental experience, for them, verges on being contentless. As Helen Keller spoke about her state before awakening to other minds through symbolic communication: ‘I cannot hope to describe adequately that unconscious, yet conscious time of nothingness’ (1910, p. 113). Obviously an ‘unconscious, yet conscious time of

nothingness' is not unconscious like a rock, but it clearly is not consciousness as she came to it later. Were she here, I'd wager that Ms Keller would be grateful for the reconceptualization of 'non-conscious experience'. This semi-neologism applies to infants as well. (Also see Candland, 1993; Shattuck, 1994.)

15. Non-Human Animals. In this way, the experience of infrahuman animals may be conceived. Though it cannot be proven since they refuse to talk to us, it appears non-mammals and mammals with limited cerebral cortices experience 'in the dark'. Their experiencing, feeling, and acting may well be driven only by the evolved instinctual wisdom of their species. Complex nonhuman mammals may experience anomalous blips of individualized conscious awareness, especially those living in highly social environments with elaborate communication systems, e.g., cetaceans, or those brought up by humans. (See Budiansky, 1998; Kennedy, 1992.)

16. Psychoanalysis. Though Freudian theories and therapies have been much disparaged, they remain noteworthy for introducing the concept of the *unconscious mind* to a wide audience. There is little doubt that all of us suppress and even repress unpleasant memories and disguise our less pleasant motivations even from our selves (ego consciousness). Such repressions and disguises continue to affect us, so the non-conscious mind consists of experiences. Freud's *epigoni* have not abandoned this central concept. For Lacan (1977), the unconscious is structured like a language, and Kristeva (1982) feels our repressed horror is the loss of Mother. (See, e.g., Freud, 1965; Brown, 1959; Sayers, 1993.)

17. The Collective Unconscious and Mythic Memory. Mythic images and tales tell of the creation of personhood and self-agency, whether these myths are heroic (Promethean fire-theft) or punitive (Adam and Eve's expulsion). Some of Jung's progeny like Neumann (1954) call upon world mythology as testimony to the defeat of non-conscious instinct (the *uroboros*) by culture-bringing heroes. Myth and language have been seen as 'twin creatures' which together have allowed us to symbolize our own experience and thus re-present it to ourselves consciously by such as Cassirer (1946). Here non-conscious experience would naturally arise from the archetypes of the collective unconscious (i.e., the *experience of the instincts*), and conscious experience from the symbolization and communication of such primary experience as art, myth, narrative, exposition, and culture.

18. Panexperientialism. This theory derived from Whitehead posits that fleeting moments of experience occur 'all the way down' in Nature, right into momentary 'occasions of experience' in sub-atomic interactions. As evolution becomes more complex, experience is extended by compound organic entities. Only humans, however, have the freedom to become conscious of their own experiencing and to more or less control it. Also known as panprotopsychism (e.g., Chalmers, 2013, 2017). (Also see Griffin, 1977, 1998b; de Quincey, 2002; Skrbina, 2009). Some panexperientialistic *Journal of Consciousness Studies* articles include

Burns & Engdahl, 1998; Griffin, 1998a; de Quincey, 1994; de Quincey, 2000a; de Quincey, 2000b; and Seager, 1995.)

19. Physics and Quantum Potentia. Edging into more rarified theory yet related to the above, many of those who equate quantum phenomena with consciousness see non-conscious experience as the state of the organism before the *collapse* of the wave function (or before the backaction of the pilot wave in Bohm or before the opening of the quantum gate in Eccles) which leads to the enhancement of experience into conscious experience of a solid 'external' world. (See, e.g., Bohm, 1980; Stapp, 1979; Hameroff & Penrose, 1996; Penrose, 1994.)

20. H.O.T. and Speech Theorists. Higher Order Thought or Higher Order Perception philosophers have long insisted that self-consciousness is not a specialized form of consciousness but is, in reality, consciousness itself. That leaves a whole realm of fauna from those who indulge in lower order cognition down to those who have no cognition at all that must be considered to be experiencing their existence non-consciously. (See, e.g., Carruthers, 1996; Gennaro, 1996; Lycan, 1997; Rosenthal, 1993.) Dewart (1989) and Kerby (1991) well represent other yet similar positions – *voluntary* speech assertion and narrative subjectivity respectively – which hold that some form of language use brings experience across the threshold into conscious agency. Daniel Dennett (1991) sees selfhood as but a *narrative center of gravity*. It is not too far a stretch from here to the linguistic deconstructionists for whom all our conscious knowledge is but the play of language. As Émile Benveniste (1971) put it: 'It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone constitutes the concept of "ego" in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being' (p. 224).

21. Psi, otherwise known as supersensory or extra-sensory perception. In the main, our culture denies this possibility so our experiences of extraordinary awareness are mostly left non-conscious. Most research (as well as countless everyday anecdotes) suggests everyone experiences veridical intuitions at least some of the time. Rarely are such insights given conscious attention, however. In this light Radin's (1997) superlative study of *psi* phenomena, *The Conscious Universe*, might better have been called *The Experiencing But Only Occasionally Conscious Universe*. (Also see, for example, Tart, Puthoff, & Targ, 2002; Schmicker, 2002.)

References

- Benveniste, Émile (1971), *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. M. Meek (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press).
- Blindsight (May 1999): *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6(5).
- Block Ned (1995). 'On a confusion about a function of consciousness'. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18:227–287.

- Bohm, David (1980), *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul).
- Brown, Norman O. (1959), *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press).
- Budiansky, Stephen (1998), *If a Lion Could Talk: Animal Intelligence and the Evolution of Consciousness* (New York: The Free Press).
- Burns, Tom and Engdahl, Erik (1998), 'The social construction of consciousness, Part 1: Collective consciousness and its socio-cultural foundations; Part 2: Individual selves, self-awareness, and reflectivity', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 5(1), pp. 67-85, and 5(2), 166-84.
- Candland, Douglas Keith, (1993), *Feral Children and Clever Animals: Reflections on Human Nature* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Carruthers, Peter (1996), *Language, Thought and Consciousness: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).
- Cassirer, Ernst (1944), *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press. Copyright renewed 1972, H. Cassirer & A. Applebaum.)
- Cassirer, Ernst (1946), *Language and Myth*, trans. S.K. Langer (New York: Dover).
- Chalmers, David (2013), 'Panpsychism and panprotopsychism', Amherst lecture in philosophy, <<http://consc.net/papers/panpsychism.pdf>>
- Chalmers, David (2017), 'Panpsychism and panprotopsychism' (pp. 19-47), in Godehard Brüntrup & Ludwig Jaskolla (Eds.), *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives* (Oxford University Press).
- Cobb, John B. Jr. & David Ray Griffin, eds. (1977), *Mind in Nature: Essays on the Interface of Science and Philosophy* (Washington, DC: University Press of America).
- Cohen, David (1998), *The Secret Language of Mind: A Visual Enquiry into the Mysteries of Consciousness* (London: Duncan-Baird).
- Damasio, Antonio (1999), *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace).
- Deiss, Stephen (2009), 'Universal correlates of consciousness' (pp. 137-158), in David Skrbina (Ed.), *Mind that Abides: Panpsychism in the New Millennium* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins).
- Dennett, Daniel (1991), *Consciousness Explained* (Boston/Toronto: Little, Brown).
- de Quincey, Christian (1994), 'Consciousness all the way down? An analysis of McGinn's critique of panexperientialism', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 1(2), pp. 217-229.
- de Quincey, Christian (2000a), 'Conceiving the inconceivable', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7(4), pp. 67-81.
- de Quincey, Christian (2000b), 'The promise of integralism', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7(11-12), pp. 177-208.
- de Quincey, Christian (2002), *Radical Nature: Rediscovering the Soul of Matter* (Monpelier VT: Invisible Cities).

- Dewart, Leslie (1989), *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).
- Freud, Sigmund (1965), *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. & trans. J. Strachey (New York: Avon). Original in German 1900.
- Gazzaniga, Michael S. (1970), *The Bisected Brain* (New York: Basic Books).
- Gennaro, Rocco (1996), *Consciousness and Self-Consciousness: A Defense of the Higher-Order Thought Theory of Consciousness* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins).
- Gidney, Louis (May 2007), 'Relational existing, internal relations and sentience', online: <http://neohylozoism.org/gidney_v108.pdf>
- Griffin, David Ray (1977), 'Whitehead's philosophy and some general notions of physics and biology'. In J. Cobb & D.R. Griffin (eds.) *Mind in Nature*. University Press of America.
- Griffin, David Ray (1998a), 'Panexperientialist physicalism and the mind body problem', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4(3), pp. 248-68.
- Griffin, David Ray (1998b), *Unsnarling the World-Knot: Consciousness, Freedom, and the Mind-Body Problem* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Hameroff, Stuart, & Penrose, Roger (1996), 'Conscious events as orchestrated space time selections', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 3 (1), pp. 36-53.
- Hillman, James (1979), *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper & Row).
- Hobson, J. Allan (1999), *Consciousness* (New York: Scientific American Library). [Homicidal Somnambulism](#), online in [Wikipedia](#). Accessed April 7, 2010.
- Hu, Huping, & Wu, Maoxin (2010), 'The principle of existence: Toward a science of consciousness'. *Journal of Consciousness Exploration and Research* 1(1), 50-119.
- Järvilehto, Timo (2000), 'Feeling as Knowing: Part I. Emotion as Reorganization of the Organism-Environment System'. *Consciousness & Emotion* 1(2), 53-65.
- Järvilehto, Timo (20 Nov 2004), 'IS there AN ultimate essence of matter?'. Target Article 77, Karl Jaspers Forum, online: <<http://www.kjf.ca/77-TAJAR.htm>>
- Jay, Martin (2005), *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Jaynes, Julian (1976), *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin).
- Jung, C.G. (1971), 'The stages of life'. In J. Campbell, ed., *The Portable Jung* (pp. 3-22), trans. R.F.C. Hull (Harmondsworth: Penguin). Originally in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche: Collected Works* 8, para 749-795, 1930; later, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, 1933.
- Keller, Helen (1910), *The World I Live In* (New York: Century).
- Kennedy, J.S. (1992), *The New Anthropomorphism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).
- Kerby, A.P. (1991), *Narrative and the Self* (Bloomington /Indianapolis: Indiana University Press).

- Kristeva, Julia (1982), *Powers of Horror*, trans. L.S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Kunst-Wilson, W.R., & Zajonc, R.B. (1980), 'Affective discrimination of stimuli that cannot be recognized', *Science* 207, pp. 557-8.
- Laberge, Steven (2004), *Lucid Dreaming: A Concise Guide to Awakening in Your Dreams and in Your Life* (New York: Harcourt).
- Lacan, Jacques (1977), *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton).
- Lakoff, George & Johnson, Mark (1999), *Philosophy in the Flesh* (New York: Basic Books).
- Laszlo, Ervin (2004), *Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything* (Inner Traditions: Rochester, VT).
- Libet, Benjamin (1965), 'Cortical activation in conscious and unconscious experience', *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 9 (Autumn), pp. 77-86.
- Lycan, W.G. (1997), 'Consciousness as internal monitoring'. In N. Block, O. Flanagan, G. Guzeldere, eds., *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press).
- McGinn, Colin (1999), *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books).
- Merikle, Philip M., & Daneman, Meredyth (1998), 'Psychological investigations of unconscious perception', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 5(1), pp. 5-18.
- Morris, William, ed. (1982), *The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language* (Markham ON: Houghton Mifflin Canada).
- Neumann, Erich (1954), *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Bollingen Foundation/Princeton University Press).
- Nixon, Gregory (Sept 2009), Book Review: David Skrbina, ed., *Mind that Abides: Panpsychism in the New Millennium*, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16 (9), pp. 116-121.
- Nørretranders, Tor (1998), *The User Illusion: Cutting Consciousness Down to Size*, trans. Jonathan Sydenham (New York: Viking Penguin).
- Penrose, Roger (1994), *Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Polanyi, Michael (1958), *Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).
- Proust, Marcel (1934), *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 2, trans. C. K. S. Moncrieff (New York: Random House).
- Radin, Dean (1997), *The Conscious Universe: The Scientific Truth of Psychic Phenomena* (San Francisco: HarperCollins).
- Rosenfield, Israel (1992), *The Strange, Familiar, and Forgotten: An Anatomy of Consciousness* (New York: Vintage/Random).
- Rosenthal, David (1993), 'State consciousness and transitive consciousness', *Consciousness and Cognition* 2, pp. 355-63.
- Sacks, Oliver (1985), *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (New York: Harper & Row).
- Sayers, Janet (1993), *The Mothers of Psychoanalysis: Helen Deutch, Karen Horney, Anna Freud, and Melanie Klein* (New York: Norton).

- Schacter, D.L. (1987), 'Implicit memory: History and current status', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 13 , pp. 501-518.
- Schacter, D.L. (1989), 'Memory'. In M.I. Posner, ed., *Foundations of Cognitive Science*, pp. 683-725 (Cambridge MA: MIT Press).
- Schacter, D.L. (1996), *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York: Basic Books).
- Schmicker, Michael (2002), *Best Evidence*, 2nd ed. (Writers Club Press).
- Seager, William (1995), 'Consciousness, information and panpsychism', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 2(3), pp. 272-288.
- Shattuck, Roger (1994), *The Forbidden Experiment: The Story of the Wild Boy of Aveyron* (Kodansha Globe).
- Skrbina, David, ed. (2009). *Mind that Abides: Panpsychism in the New Millennium* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins).
- Sperry, Roger (1965), 'Brain bisection and mechanisms of consciousness'. In J.C. Eccles, ed., *Brain and Conscious Experience* (London: Springer Verlag).
- Sperry, Roger (1983), *Science and Moral Priority: Merging Mind, Brain and Human Values* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Stapp, Henry (1979), 'Whiteheadian approach to quantum theory and the generalized bell's theorem', *Foundations of Physics* 9(1/2), pp. 1-25.
- Stoerig, P., & Cowey, A. (1997), 'Blindsight in man and monkey', *Brain* 120, pp. 552-9.
- Sweeney, Donal, & Liston, Robert (2004), *The Alcohol Blackout: Walking, Talking, Unconscious & Lethal* (Mnemosyne).
- Tart, Charles, Puthoff, Harold, & Targ, Russell, eds. (2002), *Mind at Large: IEE Symposia on the Nature of Extra-Sensory Perception* (Charlottesville VA: Hampton Roads).
- Thomas, Nigel J.T. (1997), 'What does implicit cognition tell us about consciousness?' *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4 (5/6), pp. 393-6.
- Velmans, Max (2000), *Understanding Consciousness* (London & Philadelphia: Routledge).
- Weiskrantz, L. (1986), *Blindsight: A Case Study and Implications* (Oxford: Clarendon).
- Whitehead, Alfred North (1978), *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Corrected edition. D.R. Griffin & D.W. Sherburne, eds. (New York: Free Press). Originally published 1929.
- Williams, Mark (2004), *Skill Acquisition in Sport: Research, Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge).
- Zahavi, Dan (2005), *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

© Gregory M. Nixon, 2010