

Essay

Does Consciousness Arise from the Brain?

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ABSTRACT

The most difficult aspect of understanding consciousness may possibly have arisen from the basic premise that consciousness is something which arises in the brain, and by inference that mind and consciousness are aspects of brain activity involving electro-chemical processes. With this premise came the requirement for any theory of consciousness to be based on existing scientific and philosophical knowledge. I take the view that consciousness is a fundamental of reality, a view suggested from my experiences while in the state of Samapatti. From this perspective I would assert that the issues surrounding our understanding of consciousness are more than those of how, or even whether, consciousness arises in the brain.

Key Words: Hard problem, consciousness, brain activity, Samapatti.

In this essay, I explore the problem of understanding consciousness and mention in passing what has become, for the philosophers at least, the Hard Problem of Consciousness¹, that is, why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all?

My goal is to take into account some of the complexity of the subject. This complexity lies beneath the basic question of what is consciousness because it is a word that in a context of a whole reality is more synonymous with praxis than with what we, as humans, mean in personal or even scientific conversation. Praxis² is a Greek term rendered as 'activity' which has its goal within itself. Hopefully, I will be able to cast some light on this novel use of that word, and show that the problem of understanding consciousness becomes more than an exercise in interpreting human brain activity.

For some time the problem of understanding consciousness has dogged researchers in the field, with the most difficult aspect has been one that may possibly have arisen from the basic premise which was made at the outset. From my view, this premise was that consciousness is something which arises in the brain, and by inference that mind and consciousness are aspects of brain activity involving electro-chemical processes. With the inference came the requirement for any theory of consciousness to be based on existing scientific and philosophical knowledge.

In parallel with this research was the pre-existing knowledge from Vedanta, a traditional Hindu understanding of consciousness based on experience from within a number of Hindu schools of thought. Now, as a private researcher with only experience and the Yoga Sutras to guide me, I offer my understanding of this problem. My gratitude to those early teachers from a time before western civilisation is based on their work, recorded over the centuries, which has provided me a description of how and why Samapatti happens. What teachers in the many schools of thought of their time also provided was a method of accessing their knowledge by students in future times.

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With a commitment to the study and the discipline of meditation a student can become a Sage, and in the highest state of Samadhi can access information from the whole reality. This knowledge is retained in the space of Akasha, and unlike the modern concept of knowledge as a commodity one can own through a patent, this knowledge is freely available to anyone who has the ability to seek it in the correct manner. What this means for all of us is that, should a catastrophe wipe out civilisation as we know it today, through this discipline and practice of meditation all of our knowledge of mathematics, sciences of medicine, chemistry, biology, philosophy and so on could gradually be recovered, probably within a few generations rather than thousands, even millions of years.

I take the view that consciousness is a fundamental of reality, a view suggested from my experiences while in the state of Samapatti. This view is supported by the expositions within Vedanta which, like those from Bohm and Hiley, have consciousness existing in all matter. For consciousness to be a fundamental of reality it was either created at the Big Bang or it pre-existed before that event. The opinion from Vedanta is most likely the latter, but either way it would co-exist with the precursors of matter at its most fundamental appearance within reality. In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, which I have mentioned in other articles with JCER, the writer states that the earliest masters had said that the smallest particle was simply a point without mass. They also said that where a conjunction of a number of points without mass can occur, a point with mass is created. What may have escaped readers of this statement is the fact that the early Sages from those Hindu schools of thought would have obtained this information from observations made in the state of Samadhi, something I have referred to as acognitive knowledge, which is to say this is knowledge gained independent of the mind. Science has knowledge of such points without mass and usually terms such points as massless particles. If such a particle is the minimum state of matter, then one can infer that a point with mass would be the point at which matter becomes real, albeit a momentary event in the evolution of matter, where particles can come and go across an inferred boundary state.

Applying the fundamental of consciousness to this state of particles moving in and out of what is termed real can suggest a model of consciousness that can accommodate a theory of how my experiences in Samapatti are possible in the context of the Yoga Model of consciousness entering matter. It might even have some parallels with Quantum Mechanics and biology.

In that context I am suggesting that a massless particle would also be the minimum quantum of consciousness and would also meet the requirement of purusha, in that it has no distinguishing mark in a real sense, i.e. mass, charge or identity, and therefore such a quantum of consciousness would be at the level of purusha. Where a number of massless particles combine to become real (with mass) they would have the minimum real identity. However, a potential for a form of life would set that possibility in train with a potential identity at Buddhi or Mahat on the diagram. A greater combination of particles with mass can be a molecule of a specific type with specific properties or a body with a real sense of identity such as one finds in a mind residing in a brain. There the experience of the whole person is retained as memory while the consciousness of the massless particle without an identity is able to observe the experience of the whole collective of particles we call a person. And at the boundary mentioned above we would find the consciousness of an identity (Ahamkara on the diagram).

Having moved in Samapatti to the Buddhi/Mahat level, one is able to experience the pain or emotion of the subject without generating a real memory of that experience in her/his brain. I can accept the views of some authors who can provide a scientific theory of this process, while at the same time accepting that the earlier Sages from the Vedanta schools can have described the same process though their access to a far from normal state of consciousness.

As all attempts by scientists and philosophers to formulate a theory of consciousness rely on assumptions about what brain activity constitutes the presence of consciousness, any assumption I might make based on my experiences in the Samapatti state can be as valid as those of the scientists and philosophers. What I find of particular interest is that from what I have said about a massless particle being the smallest (Yoga says the finest) particle, it would be reasonable to suggest that such a particle would lack any of the conventional dimensions of place and time. In other words, it would be non-local, or even simply a potential within Bohm's Implicate Order, which is of course the purest state of Prakriti. And when I relate this concept to the consideration of a massless particle in terms of consciousness it would be fair to say that a quantum of consciousness in that non-local or potential state would also have no identity. Indeed, as my Samapatti experience has shown me, identity in its context of mind does not exist at that level of awareness/being.

In respect of the quantum state, I have none of the theoretical knowledge of a scientist or philosopher, yet it does seem at my layperson's level of understanding that as least some of the difficulty in achieving any consensus about gravity as it acts at that particular level of reality would probably need to take some of the above into account when the presence of the observer impacts on a measurement. In an earlier paper I mentioned an experiment of the late Dr Bevan Reid, in which he was able to 'capture' an image of a cell on a slide coated with styrene. This was able to be done with a number of new coated slides over two to three weeks after the initial event. He was quite adamant that the whole physical layout of the original experiment needed to be precisely replicated to give this result. I wonder if his memory of the original image had played an equally important part in obtaining this particular result.

Returning to the Yoga diagram we find matter becoming atomic is mentioned at the bottom of the diagram, which infers that the final evolute of consciousness is physical reality. Another way of saying this can be to say that, rather than massless particles there would be real particles capable of evolving into a living form. What that process would be is hypothetical, but it could be reasonable to think there would be a transition from a nonlocal state into the reality of spacetime. Such a transition would be the result of consciousness as a free agent rather than being something arising from a brain which, at what could be a time before any appearance of life for argument's sake, would obviously not even exist at that point.

Taking this conversation back to living forms it becomes evident that real particles evolved into the chemical configurations we know today are the direct result of gravity, and the other fundamental forces of physics. Of course the Yoga diagram shows a fifth fundamental force, space, which is called Akasha. This is not space as we know it in a physical sense but a space which contains information, including experience. At its highest level this information is what I referred to earlier as Akasha. The simplest forms of life and the complex forms we know today would have all been influenced by the presence of information from Akasha. I am suggesting

that in every living form consciousness is present, and its presence is what maintains the life in each and every form, be that animal or vegetable. It is likely that the first appearances of life were short lived as the material of the structure was at the mercy of the boundary between real and potential (massless and real). As evolution changed to provide replacement components a lifespan was able to be extended. Today we find science seeking ways to further extend our own lifespan, but nonetheless, if consciousness within the tissue is withdrawn that life would end as the tissue reverts to its former dust.

This information is part of what is called consciousness in its most general sense because it relates to the entity's experience as well as its potential. So one could take note of the complexity of that word since it calls into question what exactly is science seeking to define as The Hard Problem? I believe that what Hu and Wu³, and Hari⁴, said in their respective papers, providing different models of consciousness being *in* the brain and not necessarily *of* the brain is valuable to answering questions related to the Hard Problem. From this perspective I would assert that the issues surrounding our understanding of consciousness are more than those of how, or even whether, consciousness arises in the brain.

Finally, when we consider the article by Syamala Hari⁴, and in particular what the author had to say about mind and memory as an analogy of how data is processed in a computer, there is a process of relating a piece of information to another piece of information within a context we call a program, a process with some similarity to how the same process functions in the mind/brain. In the whole reality in living entities, but not solely confined to just living entities, we find a process which, in Yoga and specifically in Samapatti is called 'being in the presence of'. In earlier works I have discussed this process within Samapatti but it can also fit to being aware of any experience for any living entity. At a more basic level of matter electrons are in the presence of a nucleus, atoms in the presence of another atom can become a molecule. More importantly, throughout the whole of chemistry there are specific outcomes from specific relationships and the same can be said in biology. Not with the same kind of information transfer as one finds in a human experience, but in terms of information it is the same process, and it fits the term praxis in that it is both the action (a transfer of information) and its' goal (within that transfer of information).

This information transfer is not what we call consciousness in a general sense of the word, but it does exist in the space called Akasha and, as mentioned at the start of this essay this information can be accessed by anyone in the right state of being. Another label for Akasha is Bohm's Implicate Order, and the word, Order, relates to the predictable outcomes from something specific, being in the presence of another specific something, in a specific environment. Admittedly, in the human condition our minds are rarely sufficiently disciplined for anything to become specific for more than one in any given circumstance. So I respectfully suggest that while the activity and its' goal may not be immediately recognisable in the general use of the word consciousness, it is there in plain sight and we call that goal meaning. This is demonstrated in a Sutra in the third series of Patanjali's Sutras which states that "The sound, the message within the sound, and the idea behind the message, all exist within the sound in a confused state. Contemplation upon the sound will make clear all three components within the sound" (my recall of that Yoga Sutra). I wonder how the philosophers and neuroscientists can do that with brain imaging. There really is a lot more to consciousness than our conscious awareness.

Note: Many systems of belief centre on a just and judgemental God and the laws supposedly communicated by that God are absolute. Others say it is a loving and forgiving God, male in gender. My view from experience at the level of consciousness below that of a notion of God is that God does not have a gender, does not judge and therefore has nothing to forgive. Even so, I do believe that there can be an impersonal supreme level of consciousness, a view in many of the Hindu schools of thought. In the long run, how far an individual may wish to go in her/his search for meaning must be an individual choice, one that we as fellow seekers should respect the individual's right to make such a choice without a judgement from anyone else.

Reading even a relatively small sample of the thinking behind any of the ancient Hindu texts I would say that anyone from a western culture would recognise that some of the basic themes are echoed in religions of the early western cultures. This is hardly surprising; information would have flowed through the ancient trade routes and was interpreted by whoever heard that information. The underlying thought in the Vedanta has some resonance in what the Greeks brought back from Alexander the Great's excursions into Asia but few would deny that the original knowledge was far more detailed before its translation by the Egyptian and Greek scholars and subsequent reinvention by the Judeo/Christian/Muslim scholars. All seem to have accepted without question the notion that God created the world 'out of nothing'. Even science and philosophy takes a similar approach in the concept of the Big Bang.

It is only in the Hindu texts that we can get a clue of the role of Consciousness being a fundamental of creation and what preceded that state we call reality. And of course that is something we might have to address in our search to understand anything and everything. There is certainly a need to question what, specifically or generally we mean by nothing.

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