

WE ENJOY CONSCIOUSNESS

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We enjoy consciousness. But, of course, many conscious states and processes are not by themselves the states and processes we call joy or happiness or elation, for example, as they are pleasurable emotional states but I claim that we (can) enjoy in many other states as well in some indirect sense (if we only turn a little attention to them to see how very special they are). I think that vast majority of beings which have consciousness e. g. which are capable of undergoing conscious mental states, enjoy these conscious states. Of course, some qualification has to be given what does it mean to enjoy consciousness or to enjoy conscious mental states.

By enjoying conscious states and processes I do not mean just *having them*, of course. I *mean* that they are pleasurable. I do not also mean only those states and processes we directly call joy or happiness or pleasure which are emotional states or feels and which we feel sometimes as a direct consequences of some e.g. fulfilling of desire, getting suddenly a present, etc. etc. I mean that vast majority of pretty simple and frequent conscious states and processes which we undergo in moment to moment of everyday life are beautiful and pleasurable; perceiving just ordinary shapes, colours, sounds, seeing golden sun on the grass, falling snowflakes, seeing the same scene every morning after we look out from the window after awakening etc. etc. We have just to turn to basic “qualia” a little, and just a little attention to them shows us how we can enjoy these everyday contents of consciousness in themselves and in unity which they provide in perception, and then as a kind of input for conscious (cognitive, propositional) thinking. Of course, there are sufferings and unpleasant conscious states and processes, both for animals and human beings, but it seems that the most of their life, animals enjoy themselves and that humans do (or can do) the same.

First of all, we may ask what beings have consciousness. We assume that airplanes, sea beds, mountains, stars and plants do not have consciousness and are not capable of undergoing conscious mental states. On the other hand, beside human beings, we assume that horses, monkeys, camels and other animals have consciousness. Their conscious capabilities can vary in degree, of course, and we can even question whether there are animals which do not have

capability for conscious states. Some deny consciousness even to fish, some would deny consciousness not to fish but to flies, mosquitos and to individual ants and most people would surely deny consciousness to corals. These are interesting questions, whether there is a borderline which differentiates conscious animals from non-conscious, and, if it exists, where it is; but for our purposes these do not matter. We accept that, even if not all animals are capable for undergoing conscious mental states, vast majority is capable of having, and does have, conscious mental states.

On the other hand, consciousness could be mysterious entity from the standpoint of evolutionary theorists. How did it happen that something as consciousness arise at all? For what purpose there is consciousness? What is a function of consciousness? What is the survival value of consciousness? These questions are hard to answer because it seems, from evolutionary theory, that everything, in natural history, could be the same even without the existence of consciousness. Just to remind that evolution operates on plants as well, and they do not have conscious properties; plants do not have conscious states; (and even if plants do have some kind of consciousness, it causes nothing on which evolution on plants operates because plants do not exhibit complex behaviour for which it would seem, in animal and human world, that consciousness is the cause). On the other hand, it seems that brain, as a physical device, can do all the causing without conscious properties. To move the body, it seems that physicality of “gray matter” of the brain as a physico-chemical entity is enough. There is no need for phenomenal aspects or “what it is like” features and for conscious thinking and reasoning. So why consciousness?

Well, I claim that we have consciousness just to enjoy. We have consciousness because it's beautiful. It's beautiful to be conscious being. So, something else than blind nature provided animals and humans with consciousness. And that providing should be intentional providing – so *someone* did this. Plausible hypothesis here would be that that someone is God. God had given animals and us additional property – consciousness. Just because it's beautiful.

In consciousness, there is all the difference there is. It is almost the difference between existence and non-existence. For an airplane there is nothing it is like to be an airplane. We can also be for some periods in the similar state - for example, when we are in a dreamless sleep. Dreamless sleep is nothing it is like to be in it. If all your existence would be such it would be as a non-existence. It would not matter, even to you, whether you do exist or not.

It seems that physics, chemistry, biology cannot explain, at least at present, how something subjective could arise from «deadpan» physico-chemical processes in the brain. It is not understandable how just physical processes in the brain can also be subjective and have qualitative properties. But maybe there is nothing to understand here. Maybe consciousness is immaterial and it is additional to physical processes in the brain. If it is so, then it is understandable why physics chemistry, biology cannot account for consciousness. God provided animals and us with something which is not quite natural in the sense how all other states, processes and events in the universe are.

It seems also that this thesis could be run even if consciousness is materially realized as a physical property of the brain. Vast majority of very complex physico-chemical processes in the universe are not such that they have conscious properties or such that they give rise or constitute consciousness. It seems that only processes in the brain (and nervous system) have conscious properties or that they give rise or constitute consciousness. But we said that it seems that brain can do all the causing (of behaviour) without any consciousness or conscious properties. All other physical events and processes, which are not brain states and processes, however complex - for example, the collisions of galaxies - have their causality without consciousness. But we have consciousness. Why should certain classes of brain states and processes (not all, of course) be conscious? Again, it could be just for pleasure. God can make universe to be such that only brain physical structure can have conscious properties. So there would be no explanation in terms of evolutionary advantage or function or survival value.

Perhaps someone would object that then we are perhaps just passive observers if consciousness does not have any causal influence. Even if this is so, it is nicer to be a passive observer than not to be observer at all.

So, let's conclude very informally:

Consciousness is of a special kind
Some wings it can always find
I am a being with a joyful mind.¹

Note

1. As reader has already seen, in this text I do not provide a fully developed argument; I put some hints for discussion, so comments and criticism are welcomed in order to see if an argument along these lines could be worked out at all!

Bibliographical Note

For animal consciousness and for a discussion of borderline cases – where consciousness begins or ends, see Michael Tye, “Qualia”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 1999 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall1999/entries/qualia/>, Colin Allen and Marc Bekoff, *Species of Mind*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997; see also Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, chapter 9, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. This chapter of Swinburne’s book provides also some other interesting points significant for what is said here, beside a look on animal consciousness. I recommend reading it. Reader will find influences, too. For notions of biological function, survival value, evolution and natural selection good start can be the following: articles Evolution, Function, Natural Selection and Survival Value, all in David McFarland (ed.): *The Oxford Companion to Animal Behaviour*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. If someone is concerned about compatibility of theism and evolutionary theory then I recommend to consider very good arguments in favour of this compatibility in John Lemos, “Rachels on Darwinism and Theism”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 77: 399-415, 2003 though I do not rely on something like this here. For philosophical account of possible function of consciousness, see Michael Tye, “The Function of Consciousness”, *Noûs*, vol. 30: 287-305, 1996. Excellent full-length naturalistic account of consciousness can be found in Owen Flanagan, *Consciousness Reconsidered*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992. Naturalistic skepticism – that we are cognitively closed for understanding consciousness at all, though it should be some or other *natural physical* property of the brain – see Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame*, New York: Basic Books, 1999.

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