

Essay

## The Brain as a Receiver and Consciousness as a Fundamental

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### ABSTRACT

In this essay, I argue that there is no science that invalidates the model of the brain as a receiver and there is no proof that the brain generates consciousness and, because consciousness cannot be equated with physical matter, another model is necessary. I further argue that consciousness is unique and fundamental and consequently cannot be declared as physical or reduced to mere physical processes no matter how complex those processes.

**Key Words:** brain, receiver, consciousness, fundamental, physical matter, physical process.

Is the brain a machine that manufactures consciousness? Materialist science claims that the brain itself generates consciousness locally from physical stuff only. Materialist theories propose that consciousness is a product of neuronal activity and arises somehow at the synapses, or somehow through synchronous activity among neuronal networks, or somehow as a novel property of computational complexity among brain cells.

These theories propose pathways that may mediate consciousness, but they do not answer the fundamental question of how consciousness or subjective experience may arise from physical phenomena. The theories do not account for how a chemical or electrical event in our brain that is not conscious becomes conscious, except to say that it happens ‘‘somehow’’ at a critical point.

Materialist science promises that the ‘‘somehow’’ will be revealed in due time and in accordance to the materialist view. The premises of materialism require that everything be physical. This view is therefore defined more by its underlying philosophy than by evidence. However, under scrutiny the theory that matter can generate consciousness leads to numerous absurdities.

Consciousness and matter cannot be equated. Consciousness is not physical. Consciousness may have physical correlates but consciousness itself is entirely nonphysical. Neurotransmitters, neurons, brain chemistry, loops, circuits, ionic flux, electrical interference patterns, etc., are all physical correlates of consciousness but not consciousness itself.

Unlike physical things, consciousness itself is not measurable. Consciousness has no mass, no location, no boundaries, and does not occupy physical space. But matter has location, mass, and physical dimension that can be measured. To clarify this, you may ask yourself, ‘‘What are the dimensions of my perception of yonder tree? What is the height of my perception of that tree in feet or inches?’’ Or, ‘‘What is the weight or length of my thought?’’ The contents of consciousness are simply not in the physical world as we know it. One can discover no units of measure for any aspect of consciousness.

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Unlike the physical, consciousness itself is not directly observable. No instrument or technology can detect consciousness. Brain imaging devices measure such correlates as blood flow or oxygen consumption in a specific area of the brain. But this is not consciousness, awareness, or subjective experience. Furthermore, if the activity imaged in a specific area is to be considered a conscious or subjective awareness it would still require a unified self or observing homunculus somehow or somewhere in the brain. But neuroscience cannot trace the presence or absence of this kind of consciousness to any area of activity. There is no homunculus in the premises.

Consciousness itself then seems to fall outside the domain of science. Science is about what is measurable or quantifiable. There is nothing that can be measured. There is nothing that can be observed. There is no evidence for the existence of consciousness in the physical world except by subjective report. And subjective report is consciousness reporting itself. Under the prevailing jurisdiction of materialist science, subjectivity is forbidden.

If everything must be measurable, observable, and objective, then what is a materialist to do about the undeniable reality of consciousness? To succeed in its quest the materialist paradigm must find that critical point where a mind state and a brain state are identical. It is self-evident this is impossible within materialism's own definitions.

That does not mean consciousness is not real, nor does it mean consciousness is transcendent in some unknowable religious, philosophic, or spiritual sense. It does not mean that it is inaccessible to an inclusive empirical science. It simply means that consciousness is an integral and fundamental aspect of the universe, real, but immaterial and nonphysical.

Consciousness is often described as "emergent". A magnetic field generated by an electric current in a copper wire is not considered emergent. It is considered a physical reality in its own right. We do not insist that the magnetic field be reducible somehow to copper. If, as materialists claim, consciousness is generated by the brain, then to be consistent, materialists should give consciousness the status of existence in its own right, just as it became necessary to give the magnetic field an irreducible status. Magnetism is not considered a newcomer in the universe dependent on the advent of the copper wire. But consciousness is considered as an "emergent" phenomenon never before found in the universe until the advent of the brain. Consciousness, however, cannot be reduced to the brain. We cannot segregate reality. Consciousness is not a stellar intruder or the accidental consequence of a genetic algorithm gone wild. Everything that comes out of the universe belongs to the universe, including our consciousness. Consciousness is a cosmic property and will not go away.

There is certainly ample precedent for the inclusion of new fundamentals in the cosmic inventory. Gravity, space, and electromagnetism were all introduced as new irreducible fundamentals that challenged prevailing models of reality.

In an entirely different way, mathematics sets a precedent for a reality that is intangible, nonphysical, nonlocal, and seemingly transcendent to the physical world. Mathematics is real and yet immaterial. This is self-evident, and we accept the existence of mathematics on its own terms. Mathematics is undeniably present without any physical correlate, yet it has a relationship

to the physical world. Pi, for example, requires no round or circular objects for its existence or its truth.

Likewise, consciousness may be conceived as having no physical dependence, yet having a relationship to the physical. Consciousness can be considered to be as self evidently nonphysical and ontologically fundamental as mathematics, and not merely derivative of the physical.

Any attempt to equate consciousness with the physical results in absurdity. Consciousness requires no red atoms for red to exist. Given our knowledge of the process of perception, the idea of a colored atom is absurd. It is always and only consciousness that gives the quality of red to anything physical. And this applies to any and every quality in our subjective experience, whether red, pain, pleasure, thought, emotion, etc.

To say these qualities are “emergent” and derived from computation or complexity explains nothing. The parts of the system are still physical and the gap from unconscious to conscious must still be crossed. Stating consciousness as emergent has some limited descriptive value but has no more explanatory value than claiming divine causes.

Materialism promises that future science will reveal an answer consistent with its philosophical premise, that everything is ultimately physical. When it says “somehow unconscious matter becomes conscious at a critical point,” an explanatory gap is created. This gap can only be bridged by promises, premises, assumptions, definitional fiat, and appeals to consensus.

To say that consciousness is nothing but atoms in motion is like saying that love, beauty, and music are nothing but atoms in motion, and we are nothing but a set of equations: that the entire cathedral of consciousness we live in is nothing but molecular activity. This is absurd. Our subjective experience is everything but atoms. We are everything that atoms are not.

If consciousness is not an irreducible fundamental in the universe, then the very thoughts you have at this moment, your very sense of self, your deepest emotions, your memories, your noble thoughts, are all nothing but a user illusion. It is a user illusion of your illusory self. You are an illusion having an illusion. Your sense of self and all its contents are no more than atoms, fields, chemistry, computation, spin, forces, all just inert, unconscious, nonliving, dead physical matter. Not only is God dead, but now you are too!

Compounding the hubris of materialist reductionism is the very uncertainty of what atoms themselves are. We know consciousness itself directly, but everything we know about atoms is an inference. Our categories of matter and energy are derivative of our perceptions and our measurements. The more we know about atoms, the less physical, the less objective, and the less tangible they seem to be. Under classical physics the atom was a solid, objective, separate and respectable particle. But with quantum physics it has become an enigmatic mathematical potential whose very manifestation is related to a conscious observer. We don't know what matter is, and we don't know what consciousness is. The claim that everything is physical is absurd and extreme, and based on a particular philosophy rather than empirical science.

There is an alternative to the insolvent paradigm of materialist monism. The brain may be considered as a receiver of consciousness rather than a generator of consciousness.

Consider the TV device as an analogy. Wherever you look inside the cabinet you cannot find the show. You can't find Oprah in some diode or transistor. You can't find color in some electrical circuit or logic gate. You can't find any trace of the show anywhere in the TV device. There is nothing within this device that would enable you to calculate the program. You can influence the transmission of the program by turning knobs or by damaging internal parts. You can create static and distortion. You can unplug it and it will be dead. But this still does not prove the program was internally generated or emerges somehow from the complexity of the parts. The program persists independently. There is a correlation, but the TV device is not the program, just as the mind is not the brain.

Mainstream science clings to its materialist explanations because its assumptions allow for no alternative ...the brain must generate consciousness. Science continues to look for the origin of consciousness in the brain and within the conceptual framework of classical Newtonian physics. Meanwhile, consciousness itself remains like a ghost in our midst, an unexplainable seemingly supernatural presence of being that defies materialist analysis and materialist science.

An understanding of consciousness as fundamental, elemental and irreducible, as belonging to and inherent in the universe would be revolutionary. It would open consciousness research to vast new areas of investigation. It would replace the materialist paradigm of the universe as lonely, dead, meaningless matter. It would change the way man views himself as deeply and fundamentally as the Copernican Revolution. Matter would be dethroned as the one ultimate reality, and consciousness would be given its true stature and significance in the Cosmos.