

## *How Big is Our Umbrella?*

It is an honor to lead off this discussion celebrating ten years of excellence that is the Noetic Sciences Review. "Noetics"—consciousness, interiority, and awareness in the broadest sense—and "science"—empirical investigation based on reproducible evidence—are arguably the two most important branches of the human knowledge quest. The attempt to bring these often alien parties together into some sort of mutually enriching dialogue has motivated the Review (and its parent organization IONS) from the very beginning. It is therefore altogether fitting, on this tenth anniversary, that we come together to reflect on this dialogue. How is the integral quest coming along? How close are we to what David Chalmers has called "a theory of everything"—that is, a theory that would unite the hard realities of empirical science with the soft but irrefutable realities of the interior and conscious domain?

### **Pieces of the Puzzle**

Looking over the field of consciousness studies in the last decade, it becomes obvious that we have our task cut out for us. There are now at least a dozen major schools of consciousness studies, and, far from moving toward a convergence, they are often opposed, contradictory, and dramatically conflicting. Here is a very brief summary some of the major contenders:

1. *Cognitive science*, which tends to view consciousness as anchored in functional schemas of the brain/mind, either in a simple representational fashion (such as Jackendoff's "computational mind") or in the more complex emergent/connectionist models, which view consciousness as an emergent of hierarchically integrated networks. The emergent/connectionist is perhaps the dominant model of cognitive science at this point, and is nicely summarized in Alwyn Scott's *Stairway to the Mind*, the "stairway" being the hierarchy of emergents summing in consciousness.

2. *Introspectionism* maintains that consciousness is best understood in terms of intentionality, anchored in first-person accounts—the inspection and interpretation of immediate awareness and lived experience—and not in third-person or objectivist accounts, no matter how "scientific" they might appear. Without denying their significant differences, this broad category includes everything from philosophical intentionality to introspective psychology, existentialism, and phenomenology.

3. *Neuropsychology* views consciousness as anchored in neural systems, neurotransmitters, and organic brain mechanisms. Unlike cognitive science, which is often based on computer science and is consequently vague about how consciousness is actually related to organic brain structures, neuropsychology is a more biologically based approach. Anchored in neuroscience more than computer science, it views consciousness as intrinsically residing in organic neural systems of sufficient complexity.

4. *Individual psychotherapy* uses introspective and interpretive psychology to treat distressing symptoms and emotional problems; it thus tends to view consciousness as primarily anchored in an individual organism's adaptive capacities. Most major schools

of psychotherapy embody a theory of consciousness precisely because they must account for a human being's need to create meaning and signification, the disruption of which results in painful symptoms of mental and emotional distress. In its more avant-garde forms, such as the Jungian, this approach postulates collective or archetypal structures of intentionality (and thus consciousness), the fragmentation of which contributes to psychopathology.

5. *Social psychology* views consciousness as embedded in networks of cultural meaning, or, alternatively, as being largely a byproduct of the social system itself. This includes approaches as varied as ecological, Marxist, constructivist, and cultural hermeneutics, all of which maintain that the nexus of consciousness is not located merely or even principally in the individual.

6. *Clinical psychiatry* focuses on the relation of psychopathology, behavioral patterns, and psychopharmacology. For the last half century, psychiatry was largely anchored in a Freudian metapsychology, but the field increasingly tends to view consciousness in strictly neurophysiological and biological terms, verging on a clinical identity theory: consciousness is the neuronal system, so that a presenting problem in the former is actually an imbalance in the latter, correctable with medication.

7. *Developmental psychology* views consciousness not as a single entity but as a developmentally unfolding process with a substantially different architecture at each of its stages of growth, and thus an understanding of consciousness demands an investigation of the architecture at each of its levels of unfolding. In its more avant-garde forms, this approach includes higher stages of exceptional development and wellbeing, and the study

of gifted, extraordinary, and supranormal capacities, viewed as higher developmental potentials latent in all humans. This includes higher stages of cognitive, affective, somatic, moral, and spiritual development.

8. *Psychosomatic medicine* views consciousness as strongly and intrinsically interactive with organic bodily processes, evidenced in such fields as psychoneuroimmunology and biofeedback. In its more avant-garde forms, this approach includes consciousness and miraculous healing, the effects of prayer on remarkable recoveries, light/sound and healing, spontaneous remission, and so on. It also includes any of the approaches that investigate the effects of intentionality on healing, from art therapy to visualization to psychotherapy and meditation.

9. *Nonordinary states of consciousness*, from dreams to psychedelics, constitute a field of study that, its advocates believe, is crucial to a grasp of consciousness in general. Although some of the effects of psychedelics—to take a controversial example—are undoubtedly due to "toxic side-effects," the consensus of opinion in this area of research is that they also act as a "nonspecific amplifier of experience," and thus they can be instrumental in disclosing and amplifying aspects of consciousness that might otherwise go unstudied.

10. Eastern and *contemplative traditions* maintain that ordinary consciousness is but a narrow and restricted version of deeper or higher modes of awareness, and that specific injunctions (yoga, meditation) are necessary to evoke these higher and exceptional potentials. Moreover, they all maintain that the essentials of consciousness itself can only be grasped in these higher, postformal, and nondual states of consciousness.

11. What might be called the *quantum consciousness* approaches view consciousness as being intrinsically capable of interacting with, and altering, the physical world, generally through quantum interactions, both in the human body at the intracellular level (e.g., microtubules), and in the material world at large (psi). This approach also includes the many and various attempts to plug consciousness into the physical world according to various avant-garde physical theories (bootstrapping, hyperspace, strings).

12. *Subtle energies* research has postulated that there exist subtler types of bioenergies beyond the four recognized forces of physics (strong and weak nuclear, electromagnetic, gravitational), and that these subtler energies play an intrinsic role in consciousness and its activity. Known in the traditions by such terms as prana, ki, and chi--and said to be responsible for the effectiveness of acupuncture, to give only one example--these energies are often held to be the "missing link" between intentional mind and physical body. For the Great Chain theorists, both East and West, this bioenergy acts as a two-way conveyor belt, transferring the impact of matter to the mind and imposing the intentionality of the mind on matter.

### **Premature Cognitive Commitment**

What I have observed in the field of consciousness studies (as elsewhere), is that consciousness researchers tend to chose one or two of those approaches very early in their careers, usually under the influence of a significant mentor, organization, or academic department. And, human nature being what it is, it is then extremely difficult for them to embrace, or sometimes even acknowledge, the existence of the other approaches.

Evidence that supports their position is avidly accumulated; evidence that does not is ignored, devalued, or explained away.

But what if, instead, we make the following assumption: the human mind is incapable of producing 100 percent error. In other words, nobody is smart enough to be wrong all the time.

That would mean, very simply, that each of those dozen approaches cannot contain only error; put positively, each of them has something extremely important and valuable to say. And that means, inescapably, that we will measure our progress toward a truly integral orientation based precisely on our capacity to include, synthesize, and integrate all twelve of those important approaches. It is clearly a daunting challenge; but it is equally clear that anything less than that simply cannot claim the adjective "integral."

How, then, are we actually doing? How far down this integral path are we? And, just as important, what are some of the steps we might take in the immediate future in order to further this noble quest?

### **The Hard-Headed and the Soft-Hearted**

From the view of empirical science, we might note that the dozen approaches span the spectrum from the very hard to the very soft. At one end are the "harder" approaches, approaches that attempt vigorously to ground themselves in empirical observables. These include cognitive science, neuropsychology, and clinical psychiatry. These "harder" views shade into a softer range of approaches that begin to give a substantial weight to interiority and consciousness--including psychosomatic medicine,

quantum approaches, individual psychotherapy, developmental psychology, and social psychology. And these shade into the "very soft" approaches that stress the fundamental priority of consciousness itself—including subtle energies, nonordinary states, and contemplative endeavors.

Surveying the various directions in consciousness studies in the past decade, several strong trends stand out. To begin with, substantial strides have been made by all three "camps." At the harder end of the spectrum, cognitive science (and its many offshoots and affiliates) has come to define the mainstream of the "science of consciousness studies," at least in Anglo-Saxon countries. While the other approaches might feel that cognitive science and neuropsychology take much too narrow a stance, nonetheless the strides these fields have made are indeed most impressive—starting with the simple fact that they have at least begun to introduce the study of consciousness as a "respectable" and "scientific" endeavor, after what amounted to several decades of positivistic and behavioristic denial that consciousness even existed! This feat alone is something of a historical breakthrough that has especially come to fruition in the last decade.

The intermediate range approaches—exemplified by developmental psychology and social psychology—have also made substantial (and in some cases paradigmatic) breakthroughs. Following in the wake of the Piagetian revolution (which I believe will be ranked as one of the two or three greatest psychological revolutions of the modern era), the notion of higher stages of consciousness unfolding has been given strong empirical and phenomenological grounding, and has been backed by cross-cultural studies in social

psychology. Abraham Maslow, the cofounder of both Third Force (Humanistic) and Fourth Force (Transpersonal) psychologies stands here in an absolutely pivotal role, and numerous studies in the past decade have continued and greatly refined this Piaget/Maslow line of research.

The approaches at the tenderest end of the spectrum have likewise reported equally impressive advances. At this moment, we have more access to more contemplative traditions than at any time in history. Beginning roughly two or three decades ago, an unprecedented number of young Americans took up advanced contemplative studies, ranging from Zen to contemplative prayer, from Kundalini yoga to vipassana, from Vajrayana to Sufism, from Vedanta to Kabbalah. Many of these students have now "graduated" and are themselves gifted and inspiring teachers, calling us all to recognize the primordial and sacred nature of consciousness itself, by whatever name.

In addition to the individual advances in each of the camps, we might note two important overall or "mega-trends" in consciousness studies as a whole. On the one hand, there has occurred something of a consolidation and entrenchment of the "harder" approaches: in the Anglo-Saxon mainstream view, cognitive science, neuroscience, neuropsychology, and clinical psychiatry are the "real" approaches to consciousness, with everything else relegated to "unscientific" (translation: not real) status. Compared to the softer approaches, this hegemony of the hard-headed is perhaps unfortunate; but let us remember that, compared with positivism and behaviorism, this is a major and massive advance! Some of us might even like to see this as an evolutionary or developmental advance, but a step up from positivistic flatland it is indeed.



The other mega-trend simply leans into this advance even further: although the harder views have become the institutional mainstream, nonetheless the intermediate and softer approaches are making substantial headway. There has been, in the last decade, a general, subtle, but unmistakable "softening" toward the tender end of the spectrum.

Perhaps this softening is due to a general evolution of consciousness itself. Perhaps it is due to the massive accumulation of data that gives very hard evidence for very soft realities. (One major but often overlooked reason for this softening? The college kids who did inhale and who are now department heads of psychology and psychiatry know from first-hand experience that there are softer realities than are dreamt of in hard-headed science.)

But whatever the reason, this second mega-trend—a drift toward the tender—seems undeniable. Indeed, "noetic studies" has come to mean something of an emphasis on the softer end of the spectrum, grounding itself in introspectionism and contemplative studies to complement the harder approaches. Of course, how much impact this second mega-trend will have (a shift toward the noetic) remains to be seen. Indeed, one of the items we will want to examine is how to further this particular avenue of research--the uniting of the hard-headed and the soft-hearted, which is simply another way to think of the integral approach (I will return to this notion in a moment).

### **The Pieces Prevail**

Thus, in surveying the field of consciousness studies in the last decade, I am both heartened and saddened. There has been an unprecedented explosion of interest in

consciousness studies on the whole, evidenced in such superb magazines as The Journal of Consciousness Studies and the Noetic Sciences Review. We have witnessed the publication of numerous and quite significant books on consciousness itself, and they come not merely from "alternative" education centers or publishers, but rather from the likes of Oxford University Press, MIT, Praeger, and Harvard. We have seen increasing empirical research on everything from the effects of meditation on psychological health to the effects of prayer on heart patients. Combined with the wealth of information from Eastern and contemplative approaches, we very likely possess, in these closing years of the second millennium, more sheer data on consciousness studies than at any time in humankind's history.

And yet, and yet... the pieces prevail. Although there are numerous important exceptions, for the most part the research remains "one-approach" bound. Dennett takes a functionalist cognitive stance (#1); Searle stresses intentionality (#2). Systems theorists (#5) resort to a holistic view, but it is an exterior holism only, grounded in monological and process it-language, devoid of an "I" or a "we." Neuropsychology (#3) races toward the day when the beauty of a sunset will be described in terms such as "dopamine," "serotonin," and "synaptic re-uptake." Quantum consciousness (#11) breathlessly announces that human free will resides in the collapse of the Schroedinger wave equation. Exceptional healing (#8) looks for consciousness in the display of the miraculous, while social constructivism (#5) maintains the entire show is a facade of ideology and power parading as knowledge itself.

Thus, even though each of these approaches has made impressive advances in the last decade, and even though an important mega-trend has been the softening and more inclusionary stance of various tender approaches, and even though there is a concerted effort on the part of some researchers to create inter-disciplinary dialogue, I still find that this is by far the weakest link in the chain of consciousness studies. In other words, I find that there is a palpable absence of a concerted effort to study and advance, not just the dozen or so major approaches, but the ways in which they all, without exception, intrinsically fit together as part of the unbroken Kosmos. And so perhaps I might close with a few thoughts on just that topic.

### **The Challenge**

Given the above factors, I believe that three major steps, in particular, are necessary for the future of consciousness studies.

1. Continue research on the various particular approaches. That is, continue to refine our understanding of the many pieces of the puzzle of consciousness. The twelve approaches I briefly outlined are twelve significant pieces to this extraordinary enigma; each is profoundly important; each deserves continued and vigorous research and development.

2. Confront the simple fact that, in some cases, a change in consciousness on the part of the researchers themselves is mandatory for the investigation of consciousness itself. Some aspects of consciousness can indeed be accessed by conventional, empirical, scientific methodology. But, as numerous approaches (e.g., #7, 9, 10) have pointed out,

the higher or postformal stages of consciousness development can only be accessed by those who have themselves developed to a postformal level. You can master systems theory without necessarily developing postformal awareness; you absolutely cannot master Zen without doing so. You can understand Dennett without transforming consciousness; you cannot understand Plotinus without doing so. If you are therefore investigating postformal domains, then postformal injunctions are mandatory.

Thus, some consciousness studies can indeed be continued by doing "business as usual," and it is important to acknowledge that. But some of the pieces of the puzzle of consciousness cannot be grasped without postformal development on the part of participant-observers. This deepest of taboos, and deepest of myths--namely, the sanctity of the detached observer--does not insure objectivity in postformal studies: it insures failure to grasp the data at the very start.

Given the two mega-trends that we noted (the entrenchment of the harder cognitive sciences, and yet a discernible shift toward the softer and noetic end of the spectrum), this would specifically mean: let us continue to work to especially advance noetic studies as a counterbalance to the harder mainstream views. Not anti-mainstream, not against, not denying, not denigrating, not deconstructing, but rather complementing, supplementing, completing and fulfilling: transcend and include mainstream, not transcend and deny.

3. Continue to grope our way toward a genuinely integral theory of consciousness itself. The mere claim to be "integral," as we have seen, is virtually meaningless, since most of the various approaches sincerely believe they are covering all the really important

bases, and thus most of them implicitly claim to be as integral as one can be. In the last decade, although there have been some significant exceptions, we have mostly had twelve pieces all claiming to be the whole pie.

In a series of books (including *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality; A Brief History of Everything*; and *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad*), I have attempted to outline one version of an integral theory of consciousness that explicitly includes those twelve major approaches. In this short space I cannot even begin to give an adequate summary, and I don't think it would be appropriate to do so in any event. What is important is not, I think, my particular version of an integral view, but rather that we all begin to enter into this extraordinary dialogue about the possibility of an integral approach in general, an approach that—we can say this in several different ways—integrates the hard-headed with the soft-hearted, the natural sciences with the noetic sciences, objective realities with subjective realities, the empirical with the transcendental. Is this not the enduring stance of IONS itself and the worthy mission of the Review?

And so let us hope that a decade from now somebody might spot a third great mega-trend in consciousness studies—namely, the truly integral—and let it start right now with all of us who share this concern for holism, for embrace, for synthesizing, for integrating: let this outreach start with us, right here, right now.

Is a genuinely integral theory of consciousness even possible? Well, that would be my question to you all, and that would be my challenge. How big is our umbrella? How wide and how deep can we throw our net of good will? How many voices will we allow

in this chorus of consciousness? How many faces of the Divine will smile on our endeavor? How many colors will we genuinely acknowledge in our rainbow coalition?

And when we pause from all this research, and put theory temporarily to rest, and when we relax into the primordial ground of our own intrinsic awareness, what will we find therein? When the joy of the robin sings on a clear morning dawn, where is our consciousness then? When the sunlight beams from the glory of a snow-capped mountain, where is consciousness then? In the place that time forgot, in this eternal moment without date or duration, in the secret cave of the heart where time touches eternity and space cries out for infinity, when the raindrop pulses on the temple roof, and announces the beauty of the Divine with every single beat, when the moonlight reflects in a simple dewdrop to remind us who and what we are, and when in the entire universe there is nothing but the sound of a lonely waterfall somewhere in the mists, gently calling your name—where is consciousness then?

"An Integral Theory of Consciousness," *The Journal of Consciousness Studies*.