Buddhism: Where and What is Consciousness

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The “Hard Problem” of Consciousness

• David Chalmers

• Why is it that when our cognitive systems engage in visual and auditory information-processing, we have visual or auditory experience: the quality of deep blue, the sensation of middle C?
Psychology

• Freud

• Gestalt (Berlin School of)

• "The whole is other than the sum of the parts"
Buddhism

• "What is the All? Simply the eye & forms, ear & sounds, nose & aromas, tongue & flavors, body & tactile sensations, intellect & ideas. This, monks, is called the All."

• Sensory and mental consciousness is the totality of human experience.

• Salayatana Vagga
Psychology

• The time seems to have come when psychology must discard all reference to consciousness; when it need no longer delude itself into thinking that it is making mental states the object of observation.

— Psychology as the Behaviorist Views it.

• John B. Watson (1913).
Buddhism

• Consciousness is a mental construct that is changing every moment depending on conditions.

• It is not a “thing” that exists as an independent entity
Buddhism

- Consciousness arises dependent on conditions...

- Feeling, perception, volition, sensory-contact, and attention

- Cougar/Puma/
- Mountain Lion
Behaviourism

• attempt to uncover laws describing the relationship between stimuli and responses, without reference to inner mental phenomena

• science of behavior like defining physics as the science of meter reading.

• Noam Chomsky
Appearance
Epiphenomenon

• Is consciousness one?

• can be caused by physical phenomena, but cannot cause physical phenomena
ālaya-vijñāna

• “Store House Consciousness”

• Filled with bija ... the seeds for future experience.

Hume and Buddha

The world is nothing but our internal and external experience

Experientialism: Buddha/Hume

Beyond Realism and Idealism?
Rejection of subjectivism & objectivism

Whitehead’s Actual Occasion
Buddhism

• Without consciousness there can be no sentient being

• Without body (materiality) there can be no sentient being
Cognitive Revolution

- Awareness and subjectivity are network effects involving many millions of nerve cells in the cortex and thalamus.

- Theoretical models can be tested by computers.
Cognition

- The term "cognition" refers to all processes by which the sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used. It is concerned with these processes even when they operate in the absence of relevant stimulation, as in images and hallucinations.

- Ulric Neisser
Buddhism

- Pratyaksa

- First moment of impulse of sensory data on the brain.
Artificial Intelligence

- Alan Turing
Who’s in charge?

- Automatic car takes blind man to destination.
Stalinesque Paradigm

- All decisions have been pre-made and the trial is just a fiction of justice.
• Daniel Dennet

• Brain is an information processor.

• There is no internal conscious experience
Buddhist Consciousness

- Consciousness is not an agent
- It is a process of a system....
Predictive Coding

• Karl Friston

• The brain is an inference machine...providing probabilistic representations of what caused its sensory input.
THE FACT THAT YOUR MIND IS CAPABLE OF TAKING A CIRCLE, TWO DOTS AND A LINE AND TURNING THEM INTO A FACE IS NOTHING SHORT OF INCREDIBLE!

BUT STILL MORE INCREDIBLE IS THE FACT THAT YOU CANNOT AVOID SEEING A FACE HERE. YOUR MIND WON'T LET YOU!
Plasticity

• "neurons that fire together, wire together"/"neurons that fire apart, wire apart."

• Medical students' brains were imaged during the period when they were studying for their exams. In a matter of months, the students' gray matter increased significantly in the posterior and lateral parietal cortex.
Plasticity

- Buddhist meditation
• What comes to an end when *Nibbana* is attained is not the world, rather a wrong interpretation of the world.

• Y. Karunadasa