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Objectivity's Misplacement in the Conscious World
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Introduction

What we regard as conscious thought guides our every perception and we move through our lives. Everyone views the constructs of consciousness and sentient thought in different manners as they will always entail subjective bias. Philosophical thinkers are always aiming to present their own viewpoint on these matters in order to make us as members of our existence question why we act with specific patterns. Recently I have been aiming to question what it really is to exist within our own reality. Is carrying out our every day lives enough to really call ourselves conscious or is what we do daily just another facet of our subconscious which we believe to be our awoken state. Often it appears to myself that exploring this subject can lead to dark thoughts if perceived in the wrong way, however it merely seeks to explore our somewhat close minded nature as humans. If we create a metaphor where our life is a box and we reside, pressed against one wall. Exploring what it means to exist is to pull the camera of our existence to the point where we can see the entire box, and the form it possesses in order to further comprehend it. In movies we often see this acted out through the breaking of the fourth wall where the characters express their understanding that they are puppets within an acted scene. It seems somewhat ironic that within a movie scenario, this act is viewed commonly in a comical light, yet when done to our own lives, reveals a fear of the unknown we often push out of our minds.

I am going to focus my source review on books written by a range of philosophers who all explore different sections of mental philosophy, especially relating to the link between our physical experiences and our conscious and subconscious mind's roles in driving them. I feel this ability to conjoin the material world with mental space in a definitive way is so troublesome. Therefore exploring the intent behind these texts should help me to form clarity and further understanding of how our subconscious states are formed. I am going to closely analyse the following texts with this intent: *Beyond Fate*¹ by Margaret Visser, *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*² by José Luis Bermúdez, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experiences*³ by Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, *Living Sentionally Understanding Your Senses*⁴ by

¹ Visser, Margaret. *Beyond Fate*.

² Bermúdez, José Luis. *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*.

³ Varela, Francisco J., et al. *The Embodied Mind*.

⁴ Dunn, Winnie. *Living Sentionally: Understanding Your Senses*.

Winnie Dunn and *The Joke and its Relation to the Unconscious*⁵ by Sigmund Freud. I want to examine how each text questions the inner workings of our minds and then use this information to fuel my future critical thinking. Our mental state is so significant to all the work which I generate that I see these sources as being highly progressive to my working ideology and practice. Once I have explored the message of each work, I want to collate my findings in order to realise what answers they provide me with moving forward

Source 1

What forms our nature as humans is questioned so often it feels intrinsic to our existence itself. Fate is determined by many forces which bind our lives and leave us unable to control our existence. *Beyond Fate* is a book which discusses this topic to a heavy degree and questions how much we can consciously change and alter our fate beyond our predetermined state at birth.

I am focusing on several extracts from the book which focus on different aspects of the idea of fate, and our individual minds' ability to lead ourselves. The chapter *Free Fall* is centred around the idea of fate as a whole, and how limited our ability to move within our modern society really is:

In an addicted society, we are about as free to roam as a goat tethered to a pole: wander as we may, and constantly do, but it won't get us very far. And there are consequences, always: chance is determinism, remember. The results may escape predictions, but they are ineluctable - so says the oracle of chance.⁶

This extract explains the notion of perceived freedom within an addicted society. Every mechanism that we generate within a capitalist society relies upon escapism and the perceived ability to break free from our bonds if only for a moment. I think this puts into question our entire idea of consciousness. Even when we realise this bizarre notion, do we really seek to accept it, as doing so flattens our entire reality rendering it futile. The chapter continues to analyse all the mechanisms we create which only further our addicted state of mind:

Let us now take technology, fate, chance - all things mechanical and inhuman that rule us, although we ourselves both created them and gave them their power over

⁵ Freud, Sigmund. *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*.

⁶ Visser, Margaret. *Beyond Fate*. pg.82, 83

us - let us contemplate them as one and then dream. What we behold is a new monster in the ancient tradition of gorgons, beasts, Furies and dragons.⁷

This book not only forms a good starting point to begin to analyse other sources, but makes the viewer, in this case myself, further question every notion presented to them. Once this questioning practice is applied, it could be perceived that you have indeed gained a small elevation to the level of conscious thought you generate.

Source 2

My second source contrasts quite strongly with my first. *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness* doesn't question our ability for individualism in the same light, but instead questions what it means to be conscious of the self. The writer expresses the opinion passively that any person can think for themselves, but to really do so, a person needs to be able to consider their own existence from an external standpoint. What this means, is the ability to critique and consider their own existence outside of the perspective they view the world from:

At the core of the notion of broad self-consciousness is the recognition of what developmental psychologists call self-world dualism. Any subject properly described as self-conscious must be able to register the distinction between himself and the world. Of course, this is a distinction that can be registered in a variety of different ways. The capacity for self-ascription of thoughts and experiences, in combinations with the capacity to conceptualise the world as a spatial and casually structured system of mind-independent objects, is a high-level way of registering this distinction.⁸

From this source, I see an alternative point of view. The self isn't fixed in the same system as the book *Beyond Fate* seems to elude to. Instead the self is driven via it's own mind, and thus becoming aware of the self and even understanding the concept of somatic proprioception only heightens the persons own self-consciousness and therefore their conscious mind also:

What is significant about the notion of a nonconceptual point of view is that it manifests an awareness of the self as a spatial element moving within, acting upon, and being acted upon by the spatial environment. This is far richer than anything available through either somatic proprioception or the self-specifying information available in exteroceptive perception. Nonetheless, like these very

⁷ Visser, Margaret. *Beyond Fate*. p.84

⁸ Bermúdez, José Luis. *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*. p.149

primitive forms of self-consciousness, a nonconceptual point of view is largely awareness of the material self as a bearer of physical properties.⁹

Both sources I have currently looked at contrast strongly in some lights. One alludes to understanding the self as a spacial object allow further self-consciousness while the other reasons that we are tethered within an addicted society. I perceive both as subjectively true, yet when combined, they allow us to question our fixation in every day ritualisation.

Source 3

The third source I want to analyse is *The Embodied Mind*, a text which to me seems to constantly question different aspects of the way we understand mental space. I chose this in collaboration with the other sources because it questions the rhetoric constantly used to describe mental space. The two previous sources explain concepts which I myself have come across before, yet explain them in a complex series of analogies and metaphors. This book, to me appears to challenge the very foundation the other sources lie upon:

When the notion of objectivity becomes problematic in this way, so too does the notion of subjectivity. If everything is ultimately specified through its appearance to us, then so is the knowing subject. Since the subject can represent itself to itself, it becomes an object for representation but is different from all other objects. Thus in the end the self becomes both an objectified subject and a subjected object. This predicament discloses the shiftiness, the instability of the entire subjective/objective polarity.¹⁰

The concept of objectivity is always put into question in philosophy. Since every piece of information that we know about the world is provided by our senses, how can we know the meaning of an objective reality. All information is subject to our senses and mind, and therefore all we know is a subjective experience. The Embodied Mind questions this ideology and in doing so, questions all that we know within our philosophical thought. It questions the thoughts behind *Beyond Fate* by posing the question of whether that perception of a tethered existence would purely be within our mind. Meanwhile a self-self-conscious existence seems to only be further affirmed by this text as being able to understand how subjective the world can be is only furthering our ability to analyse our own self.

⁹ Bermúdez, José Luis. *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*. p.273

¹⁰ Varela, Francisco J., et al. *The Embodied Mind*. p.242

Source 4

I wanted to escape from the entanglement of questioning what it means to be conscious for a moment while still looking at the idea of self and how we experience. Therefore I decided to delve in the book *Living Sensationally* because it seemed to pose a vastly different slant on many of the same concepts. With this text rather, than questioning every perception, the writer aims to ask the viewer how they sense the world to some extent. She does this by categorising people by their need and usage of sensory experiences. This entails four categories, bystanders, seekers, sensors and avoiders each having their own preference for receiving sensation and experiencing life:

As you can see, sensation is part of everything we do. Our daily decisions about what to wear or eat, where to sit in a group, or how to complete our errands are related to the amount and types of sensory inputs we can manage. This may not have been part of your awareness until now, but now that you are considering the power of sensation in your everyday experiences, you will be able to make more informed decisions about how to harness sensation to your advantage no matter what you are doing.¹¹

Unlike the other texts, this source remains remarkably interesting while avoiding the profound. The writer explains our world with intrigue and aims to help us find our way to enjoy it. Space is categorised in a subjective form while linking back to our senses. For example one excerpt helps us understand how we form our sense of space through sound alone, similar to echolocation used by animals:

As our sound memories collect, we begin to associate distance with sound. We can tell if a car is coming towards or away from us. We can make a good guess about how far away a construction site is by the way the machine sounds. Sounds travel across distances, so we can associate distance with sounds we hear.¹²

As presented here, the book looks less on why or what this means on a global level, but instead regards us as more instinctual beings. This can in some ways seem less vivid, but also allows us to understand how our existence should remain grounded. Being conscious doesn't always have to mean understanding the reason for our life. It merely needs to entail the enrichment and involvement we have in our own world. Experiencing senses actively is a large portion of what allows us to be conscious. Realising we are akin

¹¹ Dunn, Winnie. *Living Sensationally: Understanding Your Senses*. p.27

¹² Dunn, Winnie. *Living Sensationally: Understanding Your Senses*. p.26

to tethered animals may be mind opening, but understanding how conscious basic senses allow us to be can be much more enriching to us.

Source 5

Most of my chosen sources take dark hard edged approaches to philosophy which allow reveal fathoms of depth to our existence, can often be incredibly sceptical of society and its systems. *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* somewhat shifts from this paradigm. Not only does it seek to reveal deeper facets of our mind in its unconscious state, but it looks at this space through the use of humour. It is certainly the most positive source I have chosen and allows me to regard the concept of consciousness in a less negative light because of this. Even *Living Sensationally* doesn't reflect on emotions in a strong way, with the other sources generally taking a more negative slant, although this could just be my subjective opinion of them:

Jokes also display a curious behaviour in respect to associations. Frequently they are not at the disposal of our memory when we want them but turn up at some other time as if inadvertently, at places in our train of thought where we do not understand how they come to butt in. Again, these are only minor feature, but all the same they do indicate that they came from the unconscious.¹³

This quote allows me to understand and realise a few things. Firstly, it made me realise a little more about how my mind functions associatively. Often someone will ask for me to tell them a joke, and my head feels empty, yet mid conversation I find myself smiling at a humorous memory because of some estranged link to the current experience. This alludes to our strange cognitive network and how it allows us to possess extreme consciousness for during moments of enriched sensation. A feeling can remind us of a memory. Sound of smell, sight of happiness or any other combination. This links heavily to the previous source further validating it.

¹³ Freud, Sigmund. *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. p.165

Conclusion

All of the sources I have chosen regard our relation to the world around us through the use of our minds. For many, this alone forms the definition of consciousness. I wanted to review the sources in order to attain a greater understanding of the links between different philosophical viewpoints of mental space and all the encloses our conscious disposition. Through doing this, I feel I have deepened my understanding of what being conscious is. From my understanding of reading the sources, contrasting understandings of awareness appear to be able to co-exist. Often alluding back to the reality where our only viewpoint is based upon perspective and subjectivity.

The world as we perceive it is the only one we know, and therefore, studying alternative philosophical viewpoints can only further allow us to understand the world and view it in a more objective sense. I respect the theory behind all the sources, and feel they can be compiled to form a model for our existence. In reading them, I have not only become more conscious of the reality beyond my viewport, but also realised that becoming more aware doesn't always rely upon questioning our very reality. Instead we can often enrich ourselves further through sensation and humour, which both can allow us to further understand our own minds. Reality doesn't have a definitive answer, just as no two minds can be alike. Therefore moving forward in my practice and research, I want to focus less upon finding answers to the deeper questions I often pose to myself. Instead I want to look deeper into how perspective can shift the viewpoint of someones mind, and therefore how rethinking from another persons perspective can enrich our own subjective reality.

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