

Review of: "The Study of Consciousness Is Mired in Complexities and Difficulties: Can They Be Resolved?"

Pierre Mazzega¹

¹ French National Centre for Scientific Research

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

General remarks

1. J. Nash's article highlights the vagueness and dissonances surrounding the definitions and uses of the terms "conscious" and "consciousness" through a lexicographical survey and analysis. The proposal is very interesting, and the article deserves publication. However, some points could be explored in more depth, and the article could be expanded. I have decided not to "evaluate" the article, but rather to raise questions relating to the author's discourse. Answering these questions, or, on the contrary, not taking them into account, is left to his discretion.
2. I recommend the publication of this article. However, it is likely to be explored in more depth on several points that would increase its scope (in which case I suggest rereading a new version).

Specific remarks

1. It is unusual in a scientific paper for the author to provide "personal" information (e. g. *I support the theory...*, "*a confession*", etc.). This clarification is welcome in this specific context of study. But then a question arises: is the disclosure of this biographical information made necessary by the theme of "consciousness", by a kind of reflexivity effect?
2. To what extent does the author's expectation of a "*a cogent and measurable operational definition of the target of investigation*" coincide with a "*a functional consensual definition of exactly what is (and what is not)*"? How can a definition be "*measurable*" (even if I think I understand the epistemological intention behind this formulation)? Should a definition be consensual? If so, at what level: for the entire community working on this theme? at the level of each discipline? Or just between the reader and the author of each article ("local consensus")?
3. The article offers a list of definitions proposed by various authors. It is not surprising that their formulations differ depending on the authors who venture to propose a definition. Could the author explain what seems to him to distinguish, in substance and not in form, these definitions or groups of definitions (groups whose formation process would then remain to be justified)?
4. p.4: Shouldn't the differentiation of the contexts of use of the term "consciousness", between medicine/physiology on the one hand and psychology on the other, result - and be justified - on the basis of the analysis of the definitions, and not be posed *a priori* as the starting point of the differentiated analysis of the definitions? Are the definitions at the basis of epistemological distinctions or (inclusive) is it the opposite? The stakes are high...
5. The 4 definitions of Chatbot AI (P.6) show an even greater dispersion of responses. How do they position themselves

in relation to the other definitions? How can we explain this gap with the “dispersion” of the definitions noted by the author (if it deserves an explanation, which seems to me to be the case).

6. P.7: What is the reasoning that allows us to put in the same list (points 1 to 6) terms “equated” with *C* and terms “associated” with *C*? The semantic association mainly depends on the context, the discipline, and the objectives of an analysis, without necessarily revealing a difference in definitions, much less in the conception of *C*. Could the author either justify this connection (“equated” and “associated” with *C*) in his list, or separate it into two, but in any case, explain the rationale for his choice?
7. I am not sure that translations (Google or otherwise) of an English sentence into other languages teach us anything about the “notion” of consciousness or notions that could be related to it in other cultures. Let’s just say that I am not convinced that this is a relevant way to illustrate this problem (which dulls its relevance). If an author described experiences of consciousness in his language and this text were translated into English, would this not be likely to produce results without nuance, or even meaningless or erroneous? The history of thought and the social history that nourishes the context in which these experiences are recounted may be devoid of common anchoring with that of the Western type culture(s) and thus make translation perilous. Isn’t the Tower of Babel rather the fact of a literature that favours English as a vehicle for international scientific exchanges? That said, all in all, I agree with conclusion 6 P.12.
8. Is it certain that an author who is “*embellishing the noun with adjectives, hyphenating the noun, attaching prefixes and suffixes*” (P.11) claims to define the essence of *C* (P.9) rather than intending to study a specific class of phenomena related to consciousness? If this question makes sense, should we not add a seventh point in the list of the conclusion (P.12) aiming for each author to make a sort of declaration of intent allowing to put his work into perspective with the research of other authors and to better understand the ambitions of this or that study?
9. Could the author elaborate and clarify this assertion: “*I would argue that within the constraints of the scientific method, each of these aforementioned elements offers a more tangible, specific, and definable target for neuroscientific research than the nebulous premise of ‘C’ as a thing.*” (p.11). In particular (perhaps with examples) how it is possible to identify more precise “targets for research by following scientific methods” (in the sense of the second point proposed by the author P.2, “*I give credence to the scientific method...*”)?
10. Point 5 of the concluding list (P.12): do not the works that rely on the idea that *C* is a ‘thing’, that can somehow be found in a single locus of the brain” contribute, in their own way, to a multifactorial approach to ‘C’ as ‘process’ whose synthesis and conclusions should emerge step by step, without adopting the normative position that this 5th point supports?
11. P. 12. In the sentence “*Perhaps we should humbly accede to the possibility that, for the vast majority of us, certain metaphysical aspects of human existence are beyond the grasp of language...*” is the adjective “*metaphysical*” necessary, optional, or counter-productive (as if suggesting the reference to a particular philosophical culture)?