

Review of: "Social context of the brain and law: Is consciousness social?"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I was interested to read this paper as I have had some thoughts about the matter of the impact of neuroscience research in legal systems and law in general, in fact we wrote a chapter in one of my books on this topic of the impact of neuroscience in criminal justice (chapter 17 in 'Being and Becoming-- A guide to act in the theatre of existence'). But I found that the text is mostly a discussion, many times hard to follow either because some particular sentences are, to me, incomprehensible, or because of the logic of the text. To start with, I have not understood why talk about decolonising in this topic about law and neuroscience.

Much of the text is devoted to the issue of defining consciousness, and to relate this phenomenon to social phenomena. But I don't see much reference to the wide neuroscientific research being done on how social systems/ecosystems have an impact in the development of consciousness and self-awareness. And on this topic of defining consciousness, again I did not grasp why it has to be decolonised...

As an advise, I suggest the author to think more clearly his message and re-write the text so that it can be followed easily, without mixing many levels of description: sometimes paragraphs mix psychology, basic neuroscience research, philosophy and legal systems. I also would advise to consider that what we call consciousness is a term that encapsulates a constellation of psychological and neurophysiological phenomena; and also consider that we know quite a lot about these phenomena, perhaps not all the mechanistic details (e.g., all the molecular mechanisms of memory formation) but at a certain high level of description we understand quite a lot about these features we encapsulate in the term consciousness, features which start with sensory perception, continue with action, and at higher levels we find things like self-awareness. In the aforementioned book, chapter 7 deals with demystifying consciousness, which is not as mysterious as many think, and suggests a solution to the conundrum of finding a strict sentence to define consciousness, which consists in defining it by the enumeration of features.

To sum up, I think the text needs to be rewritten with a clear logic and without mixing at the same time very different levels of description. For sure one can talk how one level, say the social level, impacts the neurophysiology of the brain, but this has to be done carefully presenting data that support one or another thing.