

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

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I would like to express my sympathy with the author. His approach is sympathetic, and his undertaking is useful. The paper is more about language than about consciousness, which is appropriate as his struggle with consciousness is largely a language problem, as I will try to explain.

The author sometimes comes close to the linguistic scepticism of Fritz Mauthner when he makes clear how all who write about consciousness mix their definitions. He then proposes "semantic lucidity" to solve this problem while he at the same time realizes that 'a consensual operational definition remains elusive'. While Mauthner was extreme in that he at the end of his life stopped talking altogether as he found it a useless exercise, his ideas influenced many. Wittgenstein, for instance, 'borrowed' his ideas of the language game (Mauthner, 1906, Pisano, 2016). But neither Wittgenstein nor Mauthner solved the problem of thinking itself, which they mistakenly assumed to be a verbal phenomenon. Thought is a neural process, and what we become conscious of is its translation into conscious sensory images, as I discuss at length in my three papers on consciousness, thought, and language (Peper, 2020, 2022, 2024).

My last paper states: It is generally assumed that verbal communication can articulate concepts like 'fact' and 'truth' accurately. However, language is fundamentally inaccurate and ambiguous, and it is not possible to express exact propositions accurately in an ambiguous medium. Whether truth exists or not, language cannot express it in any exact way.

What holds for truth holds for consciousness. Consciousness cannot be understood; it is a property of biological sensory information, that's all there is to it. In this respect, it is much like, for instance, gravity or magnetism. Nobody really knows what gravity or magnetism is. We do know the laws of Newton and Maxwell, but they only tell us what happens when we drop a stone or hold a steel nail near a magnet. The laws describe the trajectory of the objects, nothing more. We will never understand what gravity or magnetism is; we only know what they do (see: Smale, 2001). Likewise, the only thing you can say about consciousness is what its effects are; there will never be any understanding of consciousness itself. So, for all practical purposes, consciousness is what the senses incite when they make their efforts known to the living organism they are part of. My papers describe in detail how thoughts are made conscious by a translation of the neural cognitive activity into conscious sensory images. Humans then translate this very complex and detailed information into the unreliable and ambiguous medium of language and then complain that others do not understand them.

As said, the problem the author indicates is not something only consciousness suffers from; it is basic in verbal

communication (see especially Peper, 2022). Language is fundamentally inaccurate and ambiguous. In addition, that we speak to ourselves in language makes everything even worse. All living organisms think in sensory images, but only humans (most humans; there are those who think in sensory images, they are called visual thinkers, see e.g., Grandin, 1995) translate their thoughts into the utterly inadequate medium of language to make them conscious. The result is confusion at every level.

There is no way to prevent misunderstanding in verbal communication; it is inherent to the method. The extreme complexity of neural cognitive processes cannot be expressed in simple verbal communication. And that humans assume it can is due to a religious-like belief in the possibilities of language.

Again, I welcome the attempt of the author to untangle the absurd knot of consciousness, but the fact is that it can't be untangled, and it is certainly not possible in language. So, when the paper asks whether in the study of consciousness the complexities and difficulties can be resolved, the answer is: they cannot. In language, difficulties are made; they are seldom solved.

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