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The Philosopher's Stone

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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The Philosopher's Stone

The Newsletter of The Philosophical Debate

Is Consciousness the mechanism of receiving and processing data, the ability to ask why, or both?

Some things to consider...

Is [consciousness](#) an unanticipated result of intelligence? Is it something inherent to human nature? Is it something culturally learned? If it is culturally learned, how would this explain cross-cultural coincidences of ideas--the myth of the vampire, for example, appears in almost every culture in some form or another. [Carl Jung](#), a metaphysical idealist, says that this may be a result of a communal pool of conscious and subconscious thought. [David Hume](#) also had an argument to this end; we are all constituted the same way in our natures, and therefore come up with similar ideas. Would the validity of these theories undermine our suppositions of individuality?

Is consciousness the awareness of others as well as of the self? Is our sense of morality a by-product of consciousness?

Hive Mind...

A bee as an individual does not appear to have intelligence, but the community of bees does. Behavior patterns observed in these minor beings reflect harmony, communication, and intellect when viewed collectively. Alone, a bee will sting out of fear even at the expense of its own life; as a collective mind, when the bees are together, they will not attack out of fear, only out of self-defense. This concept of a hive mind can also be observed in ants. As more and more ants join together they form an increasingly more complex colony. Is this colony a community? What is a community? Can it be defined as a group of individuals living, working,

communicating, and interacting with one another? Does this constitute the collective conscious?

Highlights from the last meeting...

Consciousness. . . what is it? On one hand, people perceive consciousness as being very basic and fundamental; we all think, therefore we say that we all have it. But does this [Cartesian](#) model mean simply the receiving and processing of data? If so, then consciousness is reduced to a reaction to our environment, which leads to the possibility of controlling people through the manipulation of input received from the environment. This is what subliminal advertising is all about. Also, if it is just a reaction to environment, then plants can be defined as having consciousness. They react to their environment, for example, by turning their leaves toward the sun. If they have consciousness, can they feel pain? If they can feel pain, are they then self-aware, with the ability to ask, "why am I here?"

This raises the question of degrees of consciousness. If there are degrees, by what criteria are they to be defined? One theory is related to intelligence. This would mean that man has a higher degree of consciousness than a dog. But does this mean that man has the highest degree of consciousness? A dolphin can understand what a human is saying, but humans cannot understand what the dolphins are saying. Is the dolphin comprehending language or recognizing simple sound patterns as associated symbols? What is intelligence? We defined it as the ability to understand the processed data in an abstract manner, which is what [John Locke](#) would call a "labeling function."

Another theory of degree of consciousness is self-awareness; the ability to say "I." Some primates have been observed recognizing themselves as a "self," but how can we know that they are seeing a "self"? Some primates in captivity, having been taught to use sign language, have asked researchers questions such as, "Why am I here?" Are they simply mimicking, or are they really self-aware?

Is the unconscious a part of your conscious, or is it something separate and distinct? They do work together, but can they work independent of one another? Can your conscious mind do something without your unconscious knowing? Is the unconscious mind the solution to the mind-body problem? When you pick up a cup, your conscious mind wants the cup to be moved, but does not direct the plethora of muscle movements necessary for the action to take place. Is this the work of the unconscious mind? If so, then your unconscious mind is the medium through which the mind

directs the body. To be able to communicate with both realities, would it not need to be both corporeal and incorporeal? What is a dream?

A Gathering. . . The academic year is coming to a close. The Philosophical Debate Group will hold a final gathering on Friday, June 7th, at 7:00pm at Dr. Cooksey's house. We will have a pot-luck dinner and discussion of whatever topics arise. This is a wonderful opportunity to get to know other people who are interested in Philosophy. For directions and information about what to bring for the dinner, contact Dr. Cooksey in the English Department, or Tiffanie Rogers, student tutor, c/o ASC Learning Support Office or through e-mail at nordener@pirates.armstrong.edu.