

## **Interdisciplinary consciousness studies: what science and society stand to gain**

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This text outlines an initiative for the creation of inter-disciplinary consciousness studies, which will mediate both a more rewarding scientific endeavour and a more sanguine human existence than seem currently possible. The new discipline will differ from the others in one fundamental respect: it will bridge the age-old gap between subject and object. By definition consciousness cannot become an object of study without the investigator asking himself in the same breath what he invests in his study and why. If consciousness studies are to become a source of inspiration for science in particular and for society at large, they must start from a consciousness of their own criteria, qualities and methods of operation. The scientific claim to objectivity demands it.

Based on this all too obvious premise, the proposed new field of studies will engage in four successive interconnected activities.

The first is to catalogue and correlate information about which aspects of consciousness are being researched by the major sciences - and which aspects of it influence the sciences in return. Among the specific disciplines to draw from here are physics, neurophysiology, psychology, mathematics, anthropology, fuzzy logic, information science, linguistics, philosophy, history of art and ideas, epistemology, comparative religion, biology and the meditative traditions. The second activity is to encourage new research into consciousness once the pertinent information from the above disciplines has been properly assessed, correlated and catalogued. The purpose of this new research will be to explore the new perspectives offered by the now unified field. The third activity is to investigate the antiquity, awareness and influence of consciousness operations in the development of civilization. The fourth activity is to use the knowledge obtained from the previous three for wisely informing science and society.

Four particular reasons mitigate for the creation of the proposed new unified field of studies.

The first is to protect science against erosion from business interests, political agendas, self-reference, institutional prejudice, career considerations, paradigmatic bias, trivialization, scientism, conceptual stagnation, funding pressures and subconscious conditioning. Increased scientific awareness will allow the scientific community to serve both knowledge and society better than it does presently. Purer science will make for more humanity, not less. Becoming an integral part of the overall scientific enterprise, interdisciplinary consciousness studies will contribute in a very substantial way to the drafting of a new epistemology and social charter - by necessity. These will reflect not only the major scientific breakthroughs of the 20th century, but the above mentioned considerations for a purer science *per se* and a saner way of planning (and executing) public policy.

The second particular reason for the creation of an interdisciplinary science of consciousness is the multi-levelled, trans-qualitative, cross-functional and inter-dimensional understanding of reality, which has resulted from these significant 20th century breakthroughs. Because of its involvement with sensitive conceptual issues, this dynamic new picture doesn't depend only on objective observation. It depends equally on the observer as a *qualifying* agent. Unless we understand *how* we understand, we cannot understand *what* we understand. Neither can we understand why we should avoid getting trapped in what we do in fact

understand - or how we can remain open to what as yet we don't. Objectivity requires subjectivity, subjectivity requires direct personal experience and direct personal experience requires a willing reduction of the investigator to the ultimate inclinations of his biological substratum - and the ultimate intimations of the unique persona that has emerged out of it.

The third particular reason mitigating for the creation of the new unified field of studies is to meet in a radical manner the present ills of our civilization. Most of these originate in (and from) the mind. We cannot hope to understand them without studying it in depth. More importantly, we cannot hope to solve them without being willing to act on what we discover in the mind. Interdisciplinary consciousness studies are necessary to help plan a new self-regulating development, that is free from that type of current short term planning which undermines the prospects of long-term social and individual well-being.

The fourth reason for creating the new science is technology. Mechanical constructs should once again be experienced as mere extensions of natural human abilities, not as autonomous entities. This doesn't only demand greater familiarity with our defining traits as human beings. It demands in-depth knowledge of the particular quality woven into these traits. It also demands protection against the ever present danger of identifying with the mechanical constructs and thus abstracting their use from human criteria. Unwitting identification with the ways in which technology works and the principles that underpin it, is the principal instigator of the current ills. The more we develop technologically, the more must we develop humanly.

Some practical assistance and collaboration is needed to stimulate an initial interest in such a type of inter-disciplinary consciousness studies among target groups. An attractive brochure, video and e-mail feeler - all produced by top professionals - must be sent by a competent secretary to scientists, professionals, business people, academics, artists, intellectuals, doctors, cultural institutions, meditation teachers, select young people and private foundations. To the extent that sufficient intellectual support and funding interest is expressed among these, an institute will be established which will undertake to promote the proposed discipline in the spirit described above.

This institute will have four successive goals, which it will pursue when (and as) it acquires the means to do so. The first is to create an open-ended theoretical framework for the new field. It will be based on the understanding that consciousness constitutes a defining articulation of wholeness in and through physical fragmentation. The second goal is to advance the introduction of multi-layered consciousness studies in universities. It will entail special presentations to and private meetings with faculty members. The third goal is to make the educated public aware of the need to incorporate the consciousness component into future major decision making. It will materialize through articles, videos, TV documentaries and talk shows. Finally the institute will create an electronic data bank on consciousness, which will be accessible to all researchers.

Both the proposed new study field and the institute acting as its midwife will operate on the highest qualitative level. To secure this, the institute (and hopefully the faculty members of future consciousness departments) will consider their tasks, assess their findings and grow institutionally in the light of *inter-personal dialogue*. This is an ancient practice for getting collectively to the bottom of any issue, which works on the assumption that how a conclusion is reached matters more than what it *contains*.

Inter-personal dialogue sees to it that participants manage to tap into the particular information field in which their topic is rooted. This is achieved by way of mobilizing their interest in obtaining the best possible answers; their love of the truth; their need for self-respect; and above all, their willingness (and ability) to keep ego (and career preoccupations) out of the discussions. Inter-personal dialogue (now being adapted for modern use) isn't only capable of accessing hitherto unformulated knowledge. It is capable of maintaining high standards in assessing it, of drawing out its hidden potentials, of refining it and finally of determining its theoretical and practical implications. (The Dialogue Project at MIT has collected some impressive evidence for this.)

If there is a need for consciousness to be investigated by a science that is the finest of its kind, there equally is a need for science to be assessed by a consciousness that is the most alert possible. How consciousness treats science and society tomorrow will depend on how science and society treat consciousness today. If the goal is quality of life, as everybody maintains, then this conclusion becomes inescapable. A collective existence not consciously mediated is unworthy of a species that prides itself on being not only conscious, but self-conscious.