

Essay: Consciousness, Brain, and the Non-Dual Ground

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1 PREFACE

- It is highly recommended you read the PDF Version with this, so you can `biblatex` citations
- Overall, this was a very interesting conversation.
- This is a follow-up of Consciousness and the brain
- IN PROGRESS

This essay examines the claim that "emotions are biological feelings arising from brain processes" and that "without neural activity you cannot have experience; experience is neural activity". These claims emerge from a materialist/neuroscientific paradigm. From a nondual philosophical standpoint, however, these claims rest on unacknowledged ontological assumptions: namely, that brain and matter are prior to consciousness and that distinctions between brain/mind, urge/emotion, and human/animal are ontological real rather than conceptual.

2 INTRODUCTION

In the debates of philosophy of mind, two broad frameworks often emerge: the materialist/neuroscientific view, which holds that consciousness, emotion and thought are the products of biological brain processes; and the nondual view, which holds that consciousness (or awareness) is ontological prior, and that the brain, emotions, thoughts, etc., are appearances within that field of awareness rather than its generators. In what follows I will articulate the nondual position,

engage with key findings in neuroscience of consciousness, and show how the neuroscientific data are compatible with the nondual view when one attends to the difference between ontology (what things are) and correlation (how things behave).

3 The Nondual Framework

3.1 Definitions and presuppositions

Consciousness (awareness) is the basic (first-person) "knowingness" or presence in which all experience occurs. It is not one experience among others, but the ground in which experiences arise.

Thought, emotion, brain, body, world: these are considered appearances or phenomena within awareness, not fundamentally separate from awareness.

The fundamental reality is not a division between subject and object, mind and matter, brain and consciousness. All dualities are conceptual overlays. In this framework, the very impulse to categorize (urge vs emotion; brain vs mind; human vs animal; development vs immaturity) is itself a movement within awareness—an "urge for control," one might say.

3.2 The ontological order

3.3 The status of distinctions

4 Neuroscience of Consciousness: Findings and Limits

4.1 Neural correlates of consciousness (ncc)

4.2 Causal vs identity interpretations

4.3 The limits of empirical neuroscience

5 Integrating Neuroscience and Nondual insight

5.1 Accepting empirical constraint without reduction

5.2 Re-interpreting neural activity

5.3 Revisiting emotion, urge, thought

6 Implications for Self, Other, Ethics, and Science

6.1 Selfhood and maturity

6.2 Otherness and biologism

6.3 Science and philosophy

6.4 Practical life: awareness of distinction

7 Elsewhere

7.1 In my garden

Notes that link to this note (AKA backlinks).