

## **The Schools of Thought Regarding Consciousness**

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### **Introduction**

Consciousness is often thought of as the state of being awake or aware, as compared to the physical state of being unconscious, or asleep or not cognitive. In terms of the realm of spirituality and metaphysics, consciousness is far more than that, and has recently been the study of modern day scientists in hopes of explaining with scientific clarity what it really consists of. His Holiness Maharishi describes Consciousness in the following way in his written work:

When the subtlest state of objective experience has been transcended, the subtlest state of consciousness is then said to be pure consciousness, the state of absolute Being. This is how, by bringing the attention to the field of the transcendent, it is possible to contact and experience Being. (2016, p. 29).

In the course of this short essay, we will discuss the theories of the three common schools of thought in regard to consciousness and their strengths and weaknesses. We will also explore the viewpoints of the author on these schools of thought, and determine which one resonates with the author the most. Truth, of course, can be gleaned from everywhere, but discovering what resonates on a personal level can help one understand themselves even more.

### **Scientific Materialism**

A scientific materialism thinker, according to a glossary term at Maharishi International University (MIU) is simply, “a thinker who holds that consciousness does not exist” (2023). Looking further into it from a video lecture from Professor J. Collins of MIU, scientific materialism suggests that consciousness does not actually exist. The lecture goes on to state that per this school of thoughts, consciousness is merely an illusion, and a by-product of the physical functioning of the brain (2023). A staunch atheist or scientist may feel that this school of thought

holds the most weight, as it is based on all things physical and tangible. This theory gives no room for spirituality or concepts of anything beyond the three-dimensional universe.

### **Scientific Materialism: Strengths & Weaknesses**

Understandably, the purpose of science is to seek truth and answers through cold, hard tangible evidence that can be tested and proven through experimentation. In this way, it may seem that scientifically, this might be the most sound, logical approach based on reason. This theory doesn't give room for feelings or personal belief systems. It asks for facts, and will be not be swayed without evidence. Truth be told, science and understanding is limited to the scope of current knowledge. What was once considered to be bonified science and understanding even 200 years ago has been proven incorrect by modern science.

In this way, truth and knowledge is always growing and expanding because the ocean of consciousness is everlasting and infinite. It is the viewpoint of the author that to set a limit to knowledge based on a lack of tangible evidence is very limiting. Discovery requires an open-mind and requires experimentation and study. As the saying goes, "Just because you can't see the wind, doesn't mean it's not there," so goes explaining Consciousness. The evidence of it's existence is truly quite all around us, even if it can't be seen through a mathematic formula.

### **Dualism**

Dualism, per MIU's glossary states that, "a dualist thinker holds that there are two very different phases of existence: physical and mental" (2023). This school of thought is much less rigid and limited than scientific materialism, and accepts the concept of consciousness and the physical world of matter coexisting together. (Collins, 2023). This theory allows for some middle ground between the physical realm we can see, and the realm beyond that we cannot. In

Maharishi's own book, he explores the dual realm by bringing up renowned physicist Albert Einstein:

Certainly, in his attempts to scientifically establish the unified field theory, Einstein seems to have been clearly aware of the possibility of one ultimate basis of all diversity, one common denominator of all creation. At least he was trying to establish one element at the basis of all relative existence. (2016, p. 14).

### **Dualism: Strengths & Weaknesses**

What is most fascinating about Maharishi is he is profoundly aware of the world of science, and does not shun or overshadow it with spirituality, but rather embraces it. Through several examples in his book, he uses real science to explain Transcendence, Being, Consciousness, and many other concepts that scientific materialism may reject all together. Earlier in the text, he stated the following on physical matter itself:

Fine particles give rise to neutrons and protons which build up into the nucleus of an atom, which in turn builds up into an atom. The atoms comprise molecules, and the molecules make up the different forms of phenomena and constitute the entire visible universe... Underneath the subtlest layer of all that exists in the relative field is the abstract, absolute field of pure Being which is unmanifested and transcendental. It is neither matter nor energy. It is pure Being, the state of existence (2016, p. 5).

What Maharishi is saying so elegantly kind of dismisses the idea of scientific materialism altogether. It is absolutely possible the realm of the physical to coexist because they both come from the same place. From Being comes atoms, which build the same things that build roads and buildings but are also the things that build the cells that are alive and well in the

human body. It is certainly possible, with this school of thought, for the physical and non-physical to coexist.

### **Monism**

Monism, which relates to the root word of mono or one, is roughly described per MIU's glossary as, "a thinker who holds that existence is entirely made up of one essential constituent" (2023). Professor Collins summarizes that this school of thought states that oneness is all there is, and that everything in existence is made up of the same thing. In the same lecture, it is shown that both mind and matter come from Being, which is the universal level of life (2023). This of course, aligns well with the above-mentioned quotes from Maharishi himself. Simply put by Dr. Tony Nader, a medical doctor and neurologist, "Our thinking is our conscious experience (0:46)...Consciousness is all there is (1:05)... Life is consciousness (2:54)" (2023). The teaching in this school of thought is that the physical and non-physical are all one in the same; they are not separate from one another, just different things being expressed from the same Infinite source.

### **Monism: Strengths & Weaknesses**

Monism may ring true for most spiritualists of any kind, but they may find truth in dualism as well. A monist may certainly clash with a scientific materialism line of thinking, as it leaves no room for anything other than the physical realm. For those who believe in beyond what they can see, it is possible to feel comfortable with monism because it leaves room for understanding. It acknowledges that everything comes from Being, whether it is seen or unseen. Even Biblical schools of thought resonate with the teaching of, "The Great I Am." which suggests a level of infinity. To exist doesn't mean that someone once was, or will be, but simply is. They exist, they existed, and they always will because we all return to Being which always Is.

The flipside of course is that in our current age of understanding, we can't prove everything quite yet on paper, but that doesn't mean we can't. Eventually, there will come a time where the science of today looks as rudimentary as it did back in the 1800's. When this time comes, Consciousness may very well have proven formulas to back it up scientifically.

### **Conclusion**

As can probably be postulated from the above paragraphs, it is the perspective of the author that although Dualism has its strong points, what seems to reverberate the most conclusively is Monism for its understanding that everything had to come from something. All that is physical was created by things that are non-physical, at least to the human eye. The same things that make up the stars are the same things that run in our veins, and they all come from Being. Scientific Materialism may scoff at the concept of things unseen or find thoughts to be simple firings of electronic impulses of the brain, but again, the body came from somewhere. The first person came from somewhere. In the same respect, those electronic firings in the human brain had to come from somewhere.

Maharishi states, "The Science of Being not only postulates a theory of one absolute element at the basis of the entire creation but also provides a systematic way whereby any man may have direct experience of the essential nature of transcendental absolute Being (2016, p. 27). The teachings of Maharishi and the concept of Transcendental Meditation provide a tangible explanation for Life itself in regard to what Consciousness is. "This state of unmanifested, absolute pure consciousness of Being is the ultimate of life," he states (2016, p. 29). It is in this way that we can achieve our highest level and state of Being while experiencing life itself. To begin living well, we must understand this basic principle and answer on how to live well.

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