

The hard problem

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The conscious mind is our life as we experience it: we see the world, feel our emotions and think our thoughts, thanks to consciousness. Yet, for 21st century science, one of the greatest challenges is to explain *what consciousness really is*. Consciousness is currently one of the hottest topics in psychological science, neuroscience, and philosophy. How does consciousness, our subjective self or soul, arise from the activities of the brain? Why is consciousness such a difficult phenomenon to explain scientifically? Firstly, the legacy of Descartes' "*Cogito*"-argument forces us to accept that consciousness is something very real, something that really exists and whose existence we cannot possibly deny or even coherently doubt. Secondly, despite the certainty and the importance of consciousness, there is so far *no known mechanism* by which neural activities (or any purely objective physical processes) could be converted to subjective experiences or consciousness. Many current philosophers claim that there cannot even be any *imaginable* mechanism mediating between the brain and consciousness. The lack of any conceivable mechanism between the brain and the conscious mind is labeled *the Hard Problem*, also known as *the Explanatory Gap*. In this lecture, I will first define the problems and then discuss what are the prospects for solving them. Does the Hard Problem force us back into some kind of Cartesian Dualism, or is it possible to explain consciousness neuroscientifically without seriously challenging the standard physicalist scientific worldview?