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**Conscious Experience and the Human Brain**

[Lecture delivered during the 11th New Zealand Science Congress at Auckland Town Hall on  
15 February 1965.]

By J. C. ECCLES

I have chosen the expression "conscious experience" in preference to the simple term "consciousness" in order to stress the experienced character of consciousness in all its aspects. In recent decades the word "mind" or the term "concept of mind" has been philosophically unfashionable. Philosophers of great influence, such as Ryle and Ayer, have claimed that the problem of brain and mind is illusory and due to verbal confusions or category mistakes. Nevertheless neurophysiologists and neurologists have continued to wrestle with the problem of brain and mind, regarding it as the most difficult and fundamental problem confronting man; and now we can be encouraged by a recent book "The Existence of Mind" (Beloff, 1962) that certainly re-establishes the philosophical status of the brain-mind problem. In addition, I give two quotations from a recent lecture "Two Kinds of Reality" by Eugene Wigner, Nobel Laureate in Physics, in order to illustrate how important and urgent the problem of consciousness is to a theoretical physicist.

. . . "There are two kinds of reality or existence: the existence of my consciousness and the reality or existence of everything else. This latter reality is not absolute but only relative. . . . Excepting immediate sensations, the content of my consciousness, everything is a construct. . . . but some constructs are closer, some farther, from the direct sensations."

These constructs are, of course, the physical world.

. . . "As I said, our inability to describe our consciousness adequately, to give a satisfactory picture of it, is the greatest obstacle to our acquiring a rounded picture of the world."

Because conscious experience is the immediate and absolute reality, it is necessary that I base my account of it on my own experience, adopting a purely personal or egocentric method of presentation, which may be called methodological solipsism. My conscious experience is all that is given to me in my task of trying to understand myself; and it is only because of and through my experience that I come to know of a world of things and events and so to embark on the attempt to understand it. Furthermore, I have to consider the totality of my conscious experiences, not only here and now, but of all my past. Because of the experiences that can be recalled in memory, and so re-experienced, I recognise my unity and identity through all past vicissitudes; it is memory that gives me that continuity of inner experience which belongs to me as a self; and this inner experience comprises not only my memories,

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