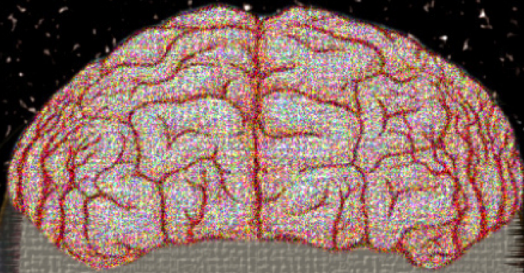# THE ORACLE

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*"Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore it if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world."*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who helped bring this journal to fruition. The Oracle is only made possible through the efforts of our contributors. I am especially thankful to my editorial team, who committed time out of their busy schedules to read, revise, and comment on the various submissions we received.

This year, our journal committee had the privilege to review several outstanding works composed by exceptional undergraduate students. Thank you to all the contestants for keeping our mission alive and congratulations to the winners—well done! It is an honour to celebrate your achievements.

I am also grateful to the executive team at Philosophia for believing in me and supporting my vision throughout this process. Thank you to all of Philosophia's general members who attend our events and nurture the spirit of philosophy on campus. Likewise, our events would not be what they are without the amazing professors who so graciously volunteer time out of their busy lives to teach us, guide us, and philosophize with us. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Department of Philosophy and Vanier College at York University for providing us with the means and resources to carry out our projects and events.

Finally, I want to thank my family. Mom, Dad, Irving, and Nathaniel—your unconditional love and support has always guided me in all my pursuits. Words cannot express how grateful I am to you for teaching me the value of knowledge and for always being accepting of the person that I am. To my dearest mother, thank you for all the sacrifices you have made for us and for always being there. Without all of you, none of this would be possible.

It is my pleasure to present to you the Spring 2019 Issue of The Oracle.

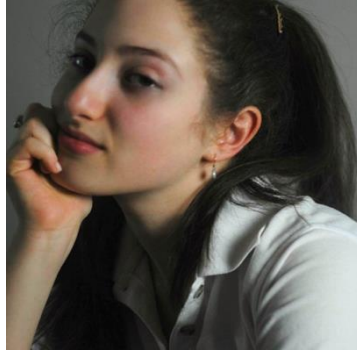Sincerely,
Anna Waisman
Editor-in-Chief

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

**Knowledge**. The pursuit of knowledge is the most primal of human endeavours. Coupled with our anxiety of the unknown, human creativity has marked our species' history with a unique trajectory of scientific discovery and innovation. As inhabitants of the modern age, we are all-too-familiar with the pressures of having to know as much as possible about everyone and everything around us— be it through our phones six hours a day or our textbooks six hours before a test. But in an era where scientific inquiry is emphasized to be the most reliable method for acquiring knowledge, many of us are understandably left asking, *what purpose, if any, does philosophy serve?*

**Wisdom**. Philosophy comes from the Greek word *philosophia*, which translates into love of wisdom. This love manifests through asking fundamental questions about knowledge, existence, reason, thought, and value. As philosophers, it is our duty (or curse depending on whom you ask) to question everything we know while also listening to and studying that which we know nothing about. And while practicing this way of thinking can feel enlightening, it often fills us with despair and leaves us envious of the ignorant person's bliss. However despite the

hardship, for better or for worse, our love prevails. And in the spirit of true love, we honour the vows we once took with wisdom.

Perhaps the function that philosophy serves will become more salient when we stop comparing its utility to other systems of thought and accept it as a way of life. A brief look at its origins reveals the promethean impulse to philosophize to be the root of all human moral and intellectual inquiry. This ancient process of questioning certainty and searching for meaning is something we engage in everyday—when we think about the person we wish to become, who we want to spend our lives with, and how we can improve the world. Evidently, to be human is to be a philosopher.

In a time of exponential scientific innovation, political division, and the uncertain trajectory of technology, philosophy is the antidote that many of us are searching for. It might not give us the answers we desperately seek, but it will equip us with the essential tools to approach, and furthermore, thrive in the lives we create for ourselves.

With that, I say it is time— now more than ever— to honour our roots and embrace the role of the philosopher.

I call upon you to reignite your love!

Anna Waisman
Editor-in-Chief

# THE NEUROPHENOMENOLOGY OF CONSCIOUSNESS: UNCOVERING THE HARD PROBLEM

## Harley Glassman

In this essay, I will explore the hard problem of consciousness and its implications for guiding neuroscience. Firstly, I will explicate how the zeitgeist of the twenty-first century is inevitably guided by philosophical assumptions in scientific disciplines such as cognitive neuroscience, while presenting how this field has fundamentally neglected the phenomenological discourse implicit in its assumptions of consciousness. Specifically, I attempt to show that the hard problem has an explanatory gap between associating the relationship of phenomenological aspects of experience to physical aspects of the brain, as described by David Chalmers. Then, I will describe the pitfalls of prior neurophilosophical models based on "neural correlates". Subsequently, I will examine novel models that may fulfill Chalmers' remedy of exploring the substrates of experience, which can be invariably tied to the brain. A systematic analysis of these novel models will be provided while assessing their strengths and limitations in order to push further toward closing the explanatory gap. Building on the strengths of these models, whilst bearing in mind their limitations, altered states of consciousness will be explored in the penultimate section to understand how phenomenological experience can be manipulated to produce changes in the brain. I conclude by providing directions from which the hard problem can be approached with the appropriate discourse between phenomenology and neuroscience.

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*"This is the way science works: Begin with simple, clearly formulated, tractable questions that can pave the way for eventually answering the Big Questions, such as 'What are qualia,' 'What is the self,' and even 'What is consciousness?'"*

*- V.S. Ramachandran*

**Introduction**

It has been argued that consciousness is one of the greatest mysteries known to mankind. The hard problem of consciousness raised by David Chalmers has hindered finding any promising inquiry into understanding this phenomenon. I claim that the reason for this hindrance is due to the disconnect between implementing objective phenomenological accounts of qualia and non-reductive neuroscientific explanations for how the brain gives rise to experience. In an era of broadened cognitive neuroscientific understanding, age-old questions regarding consciousness and the mind-body relationship are essential to quantify. However, many of these neuroscientific approaches have neglected the phenomenological perspectives proposed by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, who emphasize that the essence of experience cannot be reduced to discrete neural and computational processes. Neurophenomenology has been sensitive to this discourse – or lack thereof – and has aimed to address the hard problem by integrating these fields.[1] In this essay, I shall argue that the hard problem of consciousness can follow new approaches that move past prior assumptions of neuroscience by considering a phenomenology that can be transformed into an objective neuroscience. This approach follows Chalmers' prescription for crossing the explanatory gap between the experiential and neural substrates of consciousness. I do not claim at any point that the hard problem can be 'solved'. Instead, I propose that neurophenomenology can elucidate novel approaches to the hard problem that expand our conceptualization of consciousness by filling in the gaps between experience and the brain.

**Background on the Neurophilosophy of Consciousness**

The hard problem is one of the most perplexing philosophical questions in philosophy of mind. In consequence, this has led to a halt on current neuroscientific investigations of

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[1] Francisco J. Varela, "Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for The Hard Problem," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, no. 4, 1996, pp. 341-343.

consciousness. In *Facing Up to The Problem of Consciousness*, David Chalmers discerns between the easy and hard problem of consciousness. In the former account, it is considered easy because one can simply categorize a variety of states of consciousness into discrete states such as wakefulness, rest, arousal, and so forth. Whereas the latter view of the hard problem of consciousness holds that these simple distinctions break down due to *qualia* or the subjective feeling of experience that is unique to the individual. Qualia are the subjective, ineffable properties of how things feel to an individual such as the sensation of "redness" in an apple. Chalmers writes:

"The methods of cognitive science are well-suited for this sort of explanation, and so are well-suited to the easy problems of consciousness. By contrast, the hard problem is hard precisely because it is not a problem about the performance of functions."[2]

The central issue of the hard problem is that there is an *explanatory gap* between experience and the physical properties that may govern them. This view is one that is invariably tied to the philosophy of neuroscience, since the physical properties associated with consciousness are those that can only be traced to the nervous system. Opposing views state that a brain is not necessary for consciousness. However, this argument is dubious, considering that if one were to remove segments of the brain, then varying levels of consciousness would disappear with it. With that being said, neuroscience is guided by philosophical assumptions. When neuroscientists attempt to tackle consciousness, their framework is intentionally or inadvertently influenced by the hard problem. Therefore, the hard problem is ultimately an issue that pertains to the philosophy of neuroscience.

While it is taken to be a given in the modern scientific age, questions concerning the mind-brain relationship are worth reconsidering in order to truly evaluate the pivotal role they have

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[2] David J. Chalmers, "Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, no. 3, 1995, pp. 202.

on understanding the mind. We cannot take for granted the assumptions that have brought the scientific age to where it is today. I shall argue that it is a precondition for understanding consciousness to appreciate that there is a relationship between the mind and brain. The antithesis of this relationship would be Cartesian dualism, in which the mind is disembodied from the brain. Once we establish a basis for why there is a direct mind-brain relationship, we can understand what gaps have been missing in our neuro-phenomenological conceptualizations of the hard problem in order to better address it.

I purport that most neuroscientific theories have fallen short in their attempts to understand the mind-brain relationship in the hard problem as a result of trying to cross the explanatory gap. They neglect the overall assumption implicit in this phenomenology that experience does not account for why the brain gives rise to it. These theories have attempted to link brain regions or neural networks to experience, however consciousness and the properties of experience are far more complicated than what can be reduced to structural or functional elements. In contrast to relatively simple sensory and motor distinctions that can be made about the mind-brain relationship, most views about the neuroscience of consciousness are ultimately unsubstantiated. I will advocate for novel neurophilosophy models that attempt to overcome the hard problem by studying the largely unexplored substrates of experience. Then, I shall qualify their relationship to the brain. By understanding the advantages as well as limitations of these models, we can bridge together philosophical and neuroscientific explanations to provide a new paradigm. This paradigm will bring together our conceptualizations of consciousness toward having a more comprehensive understanding of the hard problem.

## Limitations to 'Neural Correlates' of the Hard Problem

One view in the philosophy of neuroscience that David Chalmers has been critical of is Crick and Koch's model of the

*Neural Correlates of Consciousness*. They purport that binding occurs when two pieces of information in experience are bound together with the same underlying mechanisms as experience. Namely, Crick and Koch hold that the frequency and phase of the neurons firing correspond to similar timings of presented stimuli. Hence, they claim that neural mechanisms correlate with experience.

Chalmers contends that this view still begs the question of 'why oscillations give rise to experience?' If Chalmers' supposition that there is still a disconnection between what occurs at the neural level and what happens phenomenologically is correct, then we need to account for *why* the brain gives rise to experience. When there are neural responses to experience, it is not as though one can directly perceive these neural changes. Similarly, top-down inferences made by the brain cannot directly explain how it forms experience. All that is known is that changes in the brain co-occur with changes in experience, however correlation does not imply causation.

More specifically, Crick and Koch have based their understanding of the neural correlates of consciousness by attempting to resolve the binding problem. The binding problem has multiple interpretations. To clarify, it can be broken down into two variants: the segregation problem and the combination problem. In the segregation problem, the question is 'which neural mechanisms within our brain sort through the properties of an object such as colour and shape to form discrete categories?' Whereas in the combination problem, the question is 'how do object properties combine to form a unique experience?', or in Crick and Koch's model, 'how do object properties that combine together in the brain form a unique experience?'[3]

While Crick and Koch's question probably points more to the combination problem, regardless of which interpretation one

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[3] Antti Revonsuo and James Newman, ""Binding And Consciousness". Consciousness and Cognition," *Consciousness and Cognition*, no.2, 1999, doi:10.1006/ccog.1999.0393.

decides to follow the outcome is still the same: a disconnect between explaining the relationship between the brain and experience. One method that Crick and Koch have used to overcome this is by demonstrating a relationship between the way the visual cortex maps properties of objects in the brain and the same way that those objects are represented physically. This includes motion, colour, and texture. They support this by noting the representation of certain brain regions or clusters of neurons that reproduce those properties in the environment.[4]

One problem with this view – as hinted at by Chalmers – is that because something looks the same and corresponds to a similar process does not explain how it is the same. One illustration of this is what I would refer to as the *"green-screen metaphor"*. A green-screen is a technique used in film whereby an individual moves across the background of a green screen and the screen is transformed into digital scenery completely different from its rudimentary green environment. Hence, the green-screen metaphor reveals that this technique captures one's motion fluctuation patterns with precise accuracy. However, this is not sufficient evidence for demonstrating that one is really in the same environment that appears on the screen. In the same regard, similar appearing fluctuations that can be observed in the brain when one is engaged in a task does not account for the entire spectrum of experience. Instead, neuroscience must be approached by starting at the level of phenomenological experience and then directly build upward to the brain.

Chalmers proposes that one of the most optimal strategies that researchers can use to deal with the hard problem is to isolate the substrate of experience. In this account, researchers must find a way to quantify experience as a physical system in the same terms that are used for understanding the inner workings of the brain. In contrast, many researchers such as

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[4] Francis Crick and Christof Koch, "Towards a Neurobiological Theory of Consciousness," *Seminars in the Neurosciences* 2, 1990, pp. 268-272.

Daniel Dennett take the approach of what Chalmers calls 'denying experience'. Dennett writes:

"Like other attempts to strip away interpretation and reveal the basic facts of consciousness to rigorous observation, such as the Impressionistic movements in the arts [sic] and the Introspectionist psychologists of Wundt, Titchener and others, Phenomenology has failed to find a single settled method that everyone could agree upon".[5]

Although proponents like Dennett do not necessarily deny the existence of experience, they overlook the significance of it as a tool for understanding consciousness. Although the phenomenon of consciousness does not have any prevailing tools to measure it, this does not necessarily refute its importance or capacity to be understood. It is an argument from ignorance to state that what cannot be readily measured cannot be understood. Experience is comprehended insofar as any sentient being can report it; thus it must occupy space in some predictable capacity.

Notwithstanding that, Chalmers resists this view and states that a full theory of consciousness requires an explanatory bridge to be crossed. Finding such an approach where the substrates of experience can be explained, while crossing the explanatory bridge between experience and the physical systems governing them should be the endeavor of neuroscientists – who are ultimately guided by these philosophical assumptions of consciousness. As we have seen, relying on neural 'correlates' of consciousness will not do any justice to crossing this bridge, nor will denying experience. I will argue in the next section that finding novel frameworks that start with the substrates of experience and then connecting them to the brain are necessary for crossing this bridge.

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[5] Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness* Explained, (New York: Little Brown & Co, 1991), 44.

**Alternative Neurophenomenological Frameworks**

Now that we have established the necessity for researchers to find a way to cross the explanatory bridge according to Chalmers' standard of isolating the substrates of experience, where do we turn to? One candidate of such an approach is *Integrated Information Theory (IIT).* IIT approaches consciousness by understanding the properties of experience: existence, composition, information, integration, and exclusion. Then it attempts to map these properties onto the brain in the hope of finding a process responsible for these experiences. What sets IIT apart from other neuroscience models of consciousness, including the Neural Correlates of Consciousness model previously discussed, is that it does not attempt to make assumptions about experience based on the brain. Rather, it first attempts to comprehend the more difficult undertaking of experience. Subsequently, it tries to reveal a direct relationship between those aspects of experience and the brain. In contrast, brain representations are already relatively easy to observe with the advent of neuroimaging and controlled lesion studies.

Before returning to IIT and affirming its potential as a desirable model for approaching consciousness with experiential substrates, it is first important to assess whether it is even possible to measure experience. Experience is a phenomenon that is by and large, subjective. In recounting an individual's experience of an event, object, or situation, we must consider that it can only be interpreted from the contextual standpoint of the individual who is experiencing it. If one were hypothetically able to isolate the individual components of an experience, the interpretation of those components could only be accurately considered by the agent who experienced them. For example, if an individual witnesses a family member dying and is saddened by it, in our hypothetical scenario it might be possible to keep track of the intensity of the sadness, the memories one has with the loved one, and the strength of their relationship. However, we could never truly re-experience the death of the loved one as the individual

did, since that would require us to literally become the individual experiencing the event. Similar to how a key only fits into a particular lock, experience can only fit into a particular individual. Therefore, the nature of experience itself is specific to the individual.

This presents a problem for objectively understanding the phenomenal qualities of consciousness. In Chalmers' view, in order to build a model of experience it is a requirement that nothing takes away from qualia. The very nature of this approach is tainted with reductionism. If we only consider a single experience, then it takes away from the collective experiences that shape the interpretation of that single experience. The alternative approach is to consider every single experience, which even if possible, would likely result in a combinatorial explosion of information for the observer of these experiences. With that said, this does not make the pursuit of isolating the substrate of experience entirely hopeless. Accumulating numerous qualities of an experience provides more information about one's experience than what was previously understood. For the sake of clarity, I must emphasize that I am not attempting to present a view that 'solves' the hard problem. My perspective, I believe, simply broadens our understanding of it, and the approach of isolating experiential substrates are one means of doing so. Considering experiential substrates in conjunction with their limitations, we shall now revisit IIT with a more informed understanding in mind.

IIT is constructed of particular axioms, which were mentioned earlier in this section: existence, composition, information, integration, and exclusion. These axioms are considered to be self-evident. Experience always exists, and it always consists of information that is integrated. To refute these axioms, individuals would have to contradict their own experiences that led them to refute it in the first place. More central is the question of whether these axioms are good at predicting anything about consciousness, and moreover, whether they can predict anything meaningful about the brain.

Composition is one of the axioms of the model which states that consciousness is structured, with each experience consisting of a combination of features such as colour, shape and direction. Using mathematical models, the developers of this theory have sought to figure out how elementary properties such as light exist in minimally conscious states, which can then be compared to other states of consciousness to understand their differences.[6] This is one concrete example of how IIT attempts to extrapolate states of the brain from experiential substrates.

While criticisms have emerged against the IIT framework for its panpsychist undertones, there are much more pressing concerns with it. The unit of measurement in IIT, phi, is said to represent a conscious state that can be present in any entity, organic or inorganic. This view is often refuted as panpsychism.[7] This criticism is one that most modern scholars are willing to accept; however, addressing the legitimacy of panpsychism goes beyond the scope of this essay. With that said, I do not believe that panpsychism is central to the underlying principle of the axioms and their relationship to experience. More importantly, this theory is limited in how readily it leaps from phenomenology to the brain. It has not reproduced sufficient evidence that would enable it to move beyond the assessment of basic features of consciousness such as elementary perceptual stimuli. A more crucial approach would be to examine how whole-brain representations can explain more complicated human tendencies such as feelings and beliefs. Only stimuli that occupy perceptual representations are mentioned in the IIT framework, whereas feelings are not. Unlike the perceptual processes that neuroscientists investigate, subjective internal states are mental phenomena that are of particular concern to philosophers. Hence,

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[6] Masafumi Oizumi et al., "From The Phenomenology To The Mechanisms Of Consciousness: Integrated Information Theory 3.0". *Plos Computational Biology*, no.5, 2014, doi:10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003588.

[7] Michael A. Cerullo, "The Problem with Phi: A Critique of Integrated Information Theory." *PLoS Computational Biology*, no. 9, 2015, doi:10.1371/journal.pcbi.1004286.

we must turn toward other models that can more readily cross the bridge into more holistic 'neural territory'.

An alternative model to consider that attempts to tackle the brain from the point of view of phenomenology is the *Operational Architectonic* approach. This view recognizes that the phenomenal level of consciousness must be understood before emphasizing its corresponding changes in the brain. Similar to IIT, it focuses firstly on the quality of experience and subsequently examines its relationship to the brain. In particular, Operational Architectonics is substantiated by investigating how altered states of consciousness such as hypnosis, neurological conditions, and drug-induced states produce changes in experience that can be observed in the brain. The strongest support for this approach is that the structural organization of the brain is *isomorphic* to experience. That is, experiences have a similar structure to that of the brain. One illustrative case for this is observing the effects of lorazepam – a benzodiazepine that alters cognition. This drug has been found to induce changes at the phenomenal level such as a slowness of thinking and cognition, which leads to simultaneous neural changes (i.e. slow brain waves) that are observed through neuroimaging. In other words, changes that happen at the phenomenal level of experience can be compared to changes that happen directly at the neural level and the two are known to share overlapping properties.

One appeal to this approach, that directly links back to Chalmers' concerns of finding a substrate of experience, is that it focuses on the quintessential properties of experience and its causal relationship to the brain. The Operational Architectonic model directly investigates how similarities in experience correspond – or are isomorphic – to brain changes.[8] This means that properties of experience have overlapping properties in the brain. However, this raises the question: how can we know that

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the changes occurring at the experiential level are really the same process occurring at the neural level? When we consider the "green-screen" metaphor that I alluded to previously, the underlying changes that we are examining experientially may *appear* similar, but actually be disconnected from their neural counterparts. Regardless of this concern, we can use statistical probabilities to consider what other influences might result in these neural changes. When one examines such probabilities, it may reveal what other factors can influence the experiential substrates. In this regard, the notion that an experience can shape one's neurology with the same patterns is unlikely to have happened by coincidence. If the association between experience and the brain can be described not only by a relationship in the neural correlates model, but also by the *same properties*, then it is likely that the same phenomenon or, at the very least, the essential properties of the same phenomenon are occurring.

Additional support for the isomorphic assembly between brain and experience is the observation that experience is not limitless. While every person has slightly different encounters with the world, the anatomy of the brain is predominantly structured the same way in every human. The universality of the human brain compared to other species suggests that similar experiences derive from similar brains. Considering this in tandem with the Operational Architectonics model, the structure of the human brain person-to-person is devoted to similar cognitive functions that comprise experience. It would be reasonable to assume that consciousness itself – while it cannot be localized to a single brain region – would operate based on the way the brain is structured. Let me falsify this statement by maintaining that this must still be considered an assumption. However, it is a reasonable one that is based on the probabilities of the similarity between each human's brain and their experiences. One example is that vision and motor skills involve very similar neural structures and result in similar experiential outcomes. More specifically, humans have shared experiences of visual illusions and motor patterns that are not present in other species. This

implies that there may be a uniquely human quality that reflects experience derived from the brain.

One way to examine the human qualities that reflect changes in experience is by inducing altered states of consciousness. Studying altered states of consciousness allows us to note how these induced changes in consciousness reflect commonly reported phenomena seen in self-report and introspection measures. If these changes reflect onto other self-reported experiences – revealing qualia – then it can be inferred that these changes are similar. One way to do this is by observing drug-induced states and neurological conditions from which we can extrapolate the changes from each state and their correspondence with the brain. The next section will cover how these altered states directly transform experience, which can provide additional support for the "other side" of the explanatory gap: the brain.

## Altered States: Experience-Induced Changes

Before understanding altered states of consciousness as an experiential substrate, it is important to first establish a concise definition. Revonsuo and colleagues make an imperative distinction regarding altered states: *primary phenomenal consciousness* and *reflective consciousness*.[9] Primary consciousness is the precept of consciousness that is based entirely on immediate input from external stimuli whereas reflective consciousness encompasses the cognitive processes that interact with primary consciousness to make judgments about stimuli. Clearly, the neuroscience-based models previously discussed by Crick and Koch, IIT, and operational architectonics are all entirely concerned with primary consciousness. However, altered states should also be investigated with reflective consciousness.

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[9] Antti Revonsuo et al. "What Is An Altered State Of Consciousness?" *Philosophical Psychology*, no. 2, 2009, doi:10.1080/09515080902802850.

Furthermore, in this definition, states of consciousness are differentiated from the contents of consciousness. States reflect an overall pattern of change to the contents of consciousness, whereas the contents pertain to the emotional and sensory qualities that arise with experience. Hence, altered states of consciousness are distinct representations of the world that can only be compared in relation to waking consciousness. In other words, they reflect distinct patterns of processing information in the world. These patterns can be attributed to a variety of states such as sleep deprivation, hypnosis, meditation, epileptic seizures, psychotic episodes, sensory deprivation, and even minimally conscious states such as vegetative states.

Understanding these distinctions of altered states of consciousness begins to shape the way we conceptualize how consciousness behaves phenomenologically. Altered states contain qualities that are exclusive to experience. By understanding the properties that embody these states, it allows us to see how inducing such altered states can elicit changes in experience that may help shed light on qualia. Although the hard problem is often discussed in terms of the differing qualities of experience *between individuals*, rarely is it tackled from the standpoint of how changes to experience occur *within the individual*. The individual is constantly undergoing new experiences, so the problem can be reframed from the following stance: how do I define *my own* experience as phenomenologically unique to me, when I encounter so many novel changes to my experience?

Altered states can elucidate this question by providing properties of consciousness through self-induced transformations such as hypnosis, meditation, and psychedelics as well as neurological changes such as schizophrenia and temporal lobe epilepsy. By understanding baseline consciousness in relationship to altered states, this provides a metric for understanding the 'ingredients' of consciousness. Even patients with neurological disorders who once lived with a relatively "stable consciousness"

but subsequently underwent a traumatic event that altered their consciousness, can still report these variations in their experiences – an observation that is reflective of changes of consciousness. These changes in experience within the individual allow us to study the properties of consciousness.

In the same vein, one should expect that altered states of consciousness reproduce these properties not only within individuals, but also between individuals. Since experience is isomorphic in that it has a fundamental property that is limited to instances of the brain, the effects of altered states of consciousness should correspond to these states between individuals. One example of this is psychedelic experiences. Often, reports of the experiential effects of specific substances such as LSD or psilocybin contain similar phenomenal characteristics: hallucinations, visualizations of geometric patterns, feelings of unity, thought connectivity, and even perceptions as specific as objects "breathing". On the other hand, meditative states produce feelings described as a loss of self, tranquility, and clear-mindedness. Complications can arise when both states combine into a synergistic interplay of multiple altered states. However, for all intents and purposes, the qualities in altered states overlap between individuals; therefore we can ascribe some sort of ingredient to altered states that are reflective of changes in qualia.

Do these altered states overlap between individuals on a one-to-one basis? Most likely not. Experience is too vastly intertwined with countless factors that cannot all be considered; however, these states can provide a direct window into changes in consciousness, which are reflective of qualia. Indeed, one cannot discount the element of shared experience that occurs following such changes. Many of the individuals who encounter others experiencing such altered states of consciousness resonate with the experiences so deeply that they become integrated into each other's experiences. Support groups for patients with psychotic disorders and group meditation are one instance where individuals have common experiences provoked by altered states

of consciousness. Humans are social creatures, and as such, sharing these experiences shapes the individuals involved. This is not an empirical claim; however, it is one that is legitimized by reports of the shared experiences in conjunct with our understanding of the brain as isomorphic to experience. Thus, altered states provide an understanding of changes in experience that can be observed within individuals and between individuals.

Now that we have recognized the phenomenological changes that are provoked by altered states of consciousness, it is important to consider how we can measure and observe this relationship in the brain. There are various concerns with using self-report inventories as a methodology for describing experiences with altered states because the subjective elements of experience are difficult to delineate within the parameters of objective science. This appears to be one crossroad where philosophy and neuroscience diverge. However, one way to overcome the challenges of self-reports is by creating a scale that contains distinct measures for feelings, perceptions, and expectations which are in a standardized format to account for all the changes that occur in altered states of consciousness. This allows us to have some objective measure for considering a variety of states of consciousness and the ways in which they influence experience.

Self-report scales can contain properties that allow researchers to objectively study experience. These properties include asking an individual to report feelings, decisions about feelings, beliefs and expectations about a particular event or situation. These measures also allow people to describe traits that they ascribe to themselves and other people in their lives. Abdoli-Sejzi and Pey-Yuh have adapted such a scale for patients with psychogenic disorders, which quantifies their experience of a particular situation and then transforms it.[10] By noting the distinct

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[10] Abbas Abdoli-Sejzi, and Pey-Yuh Chan. "A Female Case Study on Altered States of Consciousness towards Providing a Personal Iceberg Metaphor and Family of Origin Map." *IJERED*, no.6, 2014, pp. 62.

properties of experiences and ways to transform them, it not only allows one to discover the substrates of experience, but also provides a priori knowledge of how one can alter pre-existing states of consciousness.

Consequently, these self-report scales cover the phenomenological component of altered states of consciousness; however a neural component is also necessary. One means of studying this is through *event-related potentials* (ERP). Unlike traditional neuroimaging, ERPs allow one to study changes in experience that co-occur with real-time brain activity. ERPs are often monitored while an individual is undergoing a task through a neuroimaging device known as an *electroencephalogram* (EEG). ERP tasks comprise a range of experiences that can be reported and tracked temporally under various altered states of consciousness. These altered states of consciousness can be measured with EEGs in disorders ranging from epilepsy, blindsight and comatose to self-induced states such as sleep and anesthesia. The participant under these altered states can undergo command-following exercises that involve mental processes which can be recorded simultaneously with ERP responses.[11] While this entire procedure has not been tested, the theory behind it shows an isomorphic relationship between experience and neurology – pushing the frontiers of the explanatory bridge further than what has come before.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I hope to have reformulated a convincing direction by which the hard problem can be approached through neurophenomenology. While Chalmers has dispelled reductive views of the Neural Correlates of Consciousness, along with denials of the hard problem, further neuroscientific and phenomenological work is still needed to cross the explanatory

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[11] Quentin Noirhomme, and Steven Laureys. "Consciousness and Unconsciousness". *Clinical EEG and Neuroscience*, no. 1, 2014, doi:10.1177/1550059413519518.

bridge between experiences and the physical systems that they arise from. Following Chalmers' prescription for isolating the substrates of experience and its connections to the brain, several novel neurophenomenological frameworks have emerged. One framework is IIT, which shifts from phenomenological axioms of conscious experience to the neural postulates that unite them. While IIT has recognized the essential axiomatic properties of conscious experience, it has not produced adequate evidence for how these axioms map onto higher mental processes in the brain. In contrast, the Operational Architectonics framework has found some compelling neuroimaging support for the isomorphic relationship between the structure of experience and the brain under different states of consciousness. In this vein, I have proposed that studying altered states of consciousness and quantifying them experientially, while ascribing them to a nonreductive view of the brain are the necessary steps for bridging together phenomenology and neuroscience. This is a view that may lead to unique and novel inquiry of the mind-body problem that has mystified philosophers from David Chalmers to René Descartes for centuries.

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# MEMETIC INTENTION AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR AGENCY

## Emily Davidson

The mind-body dilemma has historically been one of the more pernicious problems plaguing philosophers' intent on solidifying the mind as a construct for empirical inquiry. Thomas Nagel so aptly stated, "Consciousness is what makes the mind-body problem really intractable."[1] The areas of focus in mind research that deal with the essential foundations of consciousness, like our sense of agency, often find themselves mired in conceptual elements; they are unable to produce lasting, universal, operational definitions because the mind-body problem frames the issue as unwaveringly abstract from its inception. While certainly ambitious, my hope is that my endeavours here may be useful in framing a dialogue about elements of consciousness in a familiar, scientific framework that help to, at minimum, narrow the impact of the mind-body problem on the study of consciousness. In order to accomplish this, I will first attempt to tether pre-existing filaments to create a workable analogy between evolutionary biology and the study of the mind. With such a paradigm established, I will then elaborate on the idea of the meme as being analogous to the gene by introducing the concept of memetic alleles. I will then attempt to demonstrate how this type of bottom-up approach can be useful by demonstrating its applicability to the thorny philosophical realm of intention. Finally, I will attempt to show how this can formulate the necessary infrastructure to bring seemingly unfalsifiable arguments like the hard problem of consciousness within the realm of scientific exploration. This inquiry will by no means be exhaustive, but will act as an initial step in the direction of creating falsifiable parameters in areas previously thought to hold little room for systematization.

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[1] Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like To Be A Bat?" *The Philosophical Review*, no. 4 (1974), doi:10.2307/2183914.

**The Evolutionary Analogy and The Mind**

In 1959, Karl Popper re-published his own book, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, in English which had such a pervasive influence on European scientific thought. While the work itself was filled with incredible insights, one of the novel and ingenious theses put forward was one that would continue to spark creative philosophical insights in even Popper himself for decades to come. He argued that scientific theories operated under the same selection principle as genetic evolution: trial and error. This process consisted of two parts in the Darwinian sense: variation (the production of genetically different individuals) and selection (the survival and reproductive success of those individuals).[2] Similarly, scientists form conjectures (analogous to variation) which are then subject to falsification (analogous to selection).[3]

Over the years, Popper continued to build on the notion of thought as an analogous model to Darwinian evolution until the torch was picked up by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins who inadvertently (and often to his own chagrin) founded the science of memetics. In taking up the project, he coined the term 'meme' to further flesh out the analogy's ideological equivalence to the gene. The meme is a unit of behaviour or thought that exists in the minds of individuals and can replicate by moving from one mind to another. Though limited to a single chapter of his magnum opus *The Selfish Gene,* the premise put forward in favour of memes as replicators was revolutionary. Dawkins argues that despite being foundational to biological science, genes are not fixed units that can be easily measured in exact detail. Rather, they are abstract units that vary in length and in the number of constituent alleles (alternative forms of a gene) depending on the borders the examiner sets for discussing the phenotype in question. Nonetheless, these units can be used for empirical inquiry despite such abstract parameters. The only unwavering

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[2] Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, (London: Routledge, 1959), 89-84.
[3] Bence Nanay, "Popper's Darwinian Analogy." *Perspectives on Science*, no. 3, 2011, 337-354.

criteria Dawkins cites as being paramount to the essence of a gene is that the unit is a replicator. Memes, he argues, also propagate as they leap from brain to brain:

"When you plant a fertile meme in my mind, you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell...belief in life after death is actually realized physically, millions of times over, as a structure in the nervous system of individual men the world over."[4]

Dawkins further argues that not only do memes share the necessary trait of replication, but they also share the same criteria for success: fecundity, longevity and copying fidelity while additional factors like self-perpetuation and mutually-reinforcing memes, or memeplexes provide greater benefit. He has made a compelling case for the analogy, but it raises the question of how a conceptual schema of selection affects the mind-body problem. Popper argued this very problem to be the solution.[5] Dawkins, however, was far more skeptical. While the analogy may not be an unconditional solution, it does nonetheless craft a framework in which the mind can be dissected using the same rigorous and empirical methods that are employed in the "hard" sciences (i.e. biology, chemistry, and physics). At the very least, it can act as a bridge for understanding the mind and its components through the lens of similarly viewed biological components. It is worth noting that with Dawkins' argument there is *potential* to solve the various mind-body dilemmas, however, this is a topic of discussion for another time.

**Updating the Analogy**

Dawkins himself cautioned against following the analogy of genes too rigorously, and yet despite being met with great

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[4] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 4th ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 249.
[5] Popper, "Natural Selection and the Emergence of Mind," 8 Nov. 1977. Lecture.

controversy in the scientific realm (which has certainly not been helped by pop culture's hijacking of 'memes'), memetics nonetheless resonated with many academics. In fact, using the notion of memes as a framework for systematizing Theory of Mind is not new and has been artfully elaborated by philosophers such as Daniel Dennett who furthers the inquiry of "mind-viruses", and Susan Blackmore, who integrated technology into the memetic picture. Truly, the idea of the idea has gained momentum.

Though memetics has taken off, it is surprising that what can only be described as the Achilles' heel of the analogy upon which memetics rests remains unaltered. Dawkins himself stated "Memes have...nothing equivalent to alleles" and while proposing a solution of mental capacity as an expedient, acknowledged the lack of analogy as a potential problem.[6] This need not be one, however, as alleles have specific characteristics that are reflective of those that apply to the realm of the mind. First, they are foundational units that are combinatorial, where any viable pairing is both necessary and sufficient for a gene.[7] Second, alleles are competitive, and thus, the actualization of a single allele forces out competing ones. Similarly, various foundational units of the mind can be seen to meet these same criteria. Take for example, beliefs. The belief that mixing yellow and blue produces green can be combined with the belief that paint has the capacity to be mixed. The resulting belief is that if one acquires blue paint and yellow paint, it is then possible to create green paint. The idea that it is possible to create green paint is a meme that may consist of any number (hundreds or even thousands) of foundational beliefs. However, those elementary beliefs are the instrumental data points that facilitate the meme in much the same way alleles determine the parameters of a gene.

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[6] Dawkins (2016), *The Selfish Gene*, 255.; Mental capacity here is referring to both storage capability and processing time constraints.

[7] This is true when we keep in mind that the term 'gene' does not denote how many pairs of alleles are required.

Do beliefs compete? Absolutely. Much like alleles adhere to inherently consistent laws constrained by biology, beliefs must follow the logical rules of rationality. This is not to say beliefs must be rational by objective standards, but rather, rational based on the subjective rationality of the individual holding the beliefs. For example, one cannot believe both, that green is a colour and not a colour while remaining rational by the standards of deontic logic. Therefore, this rationality paradigm supposes that when a certain belief prevails, competing beliefs are expelled.

There are two caveats to this view of memetic alleles that I wish to address. First, if one is to accept such an analogy, then he or she must be prepared to reconsider the definition of the meme as espoused by Dawkins. In this instance, a meme would be the product of conceptual fragments rather than the foundational unit itself. Second, it is evidently true that this view of memetic alleles is not perfectly analogous because, for example, memetic alleles can pair with each other (similar to beliefs). Furthermore, belief pairings can produce a belief that can then become a meme, and in turn, when paired with another belief meme, can become a memetic belief pairing, forming yet a greater belief meme. Nevertheless, the comparison between the two still stands, and though it is yet to be determined what sorts of conceptual elements can constitute a memetic allele, it seems that there are some natural candidates.

## Application to the Philosophy of Intention

The philosophy of intention presents itself as one of the more difficult philosophies of mind because there seem to be only scraps of cognitive and neuroscientific research upon which to rely. This makes the task of defining what constitutes an intention somewhat difficult. Nevertheless, this has not stopped philosophers from engaging in rigorous, ongoing dialogue, and while there appear to be very few widely accepted theories, Michael Bratman's belief-desire model of intention seems to be a critical tether in merging intention with Theory of Mind. The

theory, extracted from Bratman's original work, "Intention, Plans and Practical Reason,"[8] can be reduced to its simplest form in the following way: intention is forged in the conflux between beliefs and desires.[9] It should be evident how this corresponds to the notion of memetic alleles as discussed earlier. If we can accept beliefs to be an example of such a concept, then we ought to explore whether desires can fit the two criteria in the same way as beliefs. If they can, then it is important to explore the implications of the potential success of such a framework. To demonstrate that desires may fit into our framework we must first show that they are combinatorial. Then, it should stand true that they are competitive. The first premise is relatively easy to contend with. It is readily apparent that desires are combinatorial: for instance, if one desires something sweet as well as something healthy, a person may then desire an apple.

The second aspect proves to be more difficult to address because the logical limitations are not so simple, as demonstrated by the belief schema (one cannot rationally believe both B and ~B). This occurs because insofar as desires are concerned, it *is* possible, and often considered rational, to desire mutually exclusive outcomes. Take the example of an individual on a diet. It is entirely reasonable for this individual to desire a piece of chocolate cake while also desiring to refrain from eating the cake. At first glance, this may seem to be a fatal flaw in the analogy. Upon closer inspection, however, rational contradictions in desires are still consistent with the biological framework if they pertain to one of two categories of essential components: independent or dependent components. Independent components are those that dictate the outcome of a pairing, and

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[8] Michael Bratman, *Intention, Plans and Practical Reason*, (Harvard: CSLI Publications, 1999).

[9] While this seemingly discounts the issue of cognitivist and non-cognitivist views on intention, it is also true that cognitivism operates on something similar to a beliefs-desires model, but rather than beliefs being distinct concepts, they are conflated with intention. This does not detract from my argument, but it would require the assumption that memes are both essence and product, thus forcing some further deviation from the analogy. However, I do not view the cognitivist case to be very compelling and therefore, omit the discussion of the topic from my paper.

dependent components are those that either must match the independent component or be rejected from the pairing. For example, in transcription, strands of RNA have sequences of nucleotides called codons (the independent component) that dictate which complementary sequence, known as an anticodon (the dependent component), it can pair with. Put simply: the parameters of the first component dictate the appropriate pairing. Likewise, we can see how this applies to desire. In our previous example of the dieter, the belief that her blood sugar is low, represented in her subjective memetic makeup, might consequently be followed by the belief that she ought to eat the piece of cake. If, however, contiguous alleles (those which are in close proximity to each other) were to dictate the belief-desire pairing, "I can lose weight/I desire to follow through on my diet" and "there is an apple in the refrigerator/I desire to eat the apple" then these belief-desire pairings may have greater power in "coding" for the intention. In contrast, it would be irrational for a person to have the belief "I like apples" and to subsequently state, "I do not wish to eat an apple" without other corresponding beliefs pushing them in this direction. This becomes obvious when applied to our everyday psychological interactions. Suppose, for example, someone stated, "I absolutely adore the ballet!" and in response, we offered them an extra ticket to accompany us. Were they to answer, "No, I do not wish to go to the ballet," we might be perplexed but assume that this is explicable based on the weight of other beliefs the person holds. For example, we might ask them something akin to, "Why not? Do you have other plans that day?" Therefore, beliefs can dictate possible desires in a similar fashion to guanine nucleotides paring with cytosine nucleotides. The only significant difference is that instead of four or five possible components there are a near infinite number of potential belief pairings. Which belief is present, however, will limit the parameters of the possible desire pair. Thus, in this way desires too are exclusionary. When one belief is present, certain desire pairs defy the internal logic of the system and, as a result, would be precluded from occurring.

Despite differing views on how it works the notion that there must be internal rationality and belief-desire consistency is more or less axiomatic among intention researchers. Gertrude Anscombe, for example, notes how simple it is for us to infer from behaviour what the intention was.[10] Even children show a capacity to distinguish between an intention that was successfully accomplished and one that was not, and what action had been intended, even when it was not successful.[11] This is because most humans are privy to the same rationality parameters and though beliefs and desires may differ, we are acutely aware that they are related. Anscombe also notes the fact that beliefs and desires have different "directions of fit" in that when an error occurs in a belief-desire pairing or belief-desire-action pairing, it is not the belief that we take issue with. The belief is the subject of the intrinsic system of rational logic as touched on above, and thus fits with an individual's experience of the world. A desire's direction of fit must conform to beliefs in order to be rationally reflective of the world.[12] The philosophical case made for rational intention is compelling and fits well with the analogy for memetic alleles. Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue that beliefs dictate one's desire and that the collection of related belief-desire confluences can be described as the meme we informally call intention.

## Implications for Agency

Memetics has in many cases successfully trudged forward unfettered by the absence of a robust analogical foundation. The concept is of such a nature that the argument itself does not require this foundation. Then it is reasonable to ask what good does further parameterizing such an analogy do, other than act as a constraint on possible memetic explanations and arguments? I argue that refining this analogy between the gene and the meme

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[10] Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 7-9.
[11] Andrew N. Meltzoff, "Understanding the Intentions of Others: Re-Enactment of Intended Acts By 18-Month-Old Children." *Developmental Psychology*, no. 5 (1995), doi:10.1037//0012-1649.31.5.838.
[12] Anscombe, *Intention*, s. 32.

would not necessarily serve to benefit the study of memetics but rather, be advantageous for the empirical study of consciousness. It was not so long ago that scientists treated all genes as a single entity defined by the shape of a double helix. It was not until the constituent parts were broken down and the effects of different genes were sequenced that the scientific method demonstrated something spectacular: different segments have different effects on phenotype. I believe that when it comes to the study of consciousness, real progress in understanding cannot be made until the term ceases to be used as a generalization untouchable by scientific methodology.

To see how this might be relevant, let us switch from the bottom-up approach employed thus far and begin to appraise the notion of consciousness from more of a top-down perspective. Perhaps these conceptual landscapes can meet somewhere in the middle. If, for example, we look at consciousness and attempt to determine an area that is inherent to most people, we may stumble upon the realm of human agency. This temporary sensation of being a pilot navigating one's unique biological vessel is a feeling that is endemic to the human condition. However, where does this feeling of agency stem from? Certainly, most people (unless they are of a fatalist bent) believe their actions are within their volitional control. Even the most determined determinists cannot completely slough off the sensation of agency. But what can be said about thoughts? While you may encounter a few stragglers who would argue that thought remains within the realm of our control, this myth can readily be dispelled. Simply try to predict your next five thoughts and you will immediately find yourself at the mercy of your mind's whims. If thoughts, then, are not under our control, what can be said of desire? It seems not; as even the layperson is well-versed in wanting what they believe they ought not to have. What of desire's prerequisite, belief, then? After all, we often hear the phrase "choose to believe". It is important to recognize that beliefs rely on information about the world. Consequently, when we know

that a person holds maladaptive beliefs due to a lack of exposure to critical information, we often become reluctant to blame him or her for having those ill-informed beliefs. For example, we do not make the argument that Ptolemy was stubborn for clinging to the belief that the Earth was the center of the Universe; we instead acknowledge that the information he was exposed to at the time led to him formulating this belief, and that competing information was not sufficiently accessible. For this reason, it is understandable why individuals who lack certain types of information hold the beliefs that they do.

If thoughts, beliefs and desires are not within our control, what of their progeny, the intention? This seems to be where the view of agency arises from. Moreover, this of course raises the question, what is it about intention that instills a sense of agency into the conscious mind and culminates in the perception of choice between following through on an action and opting out? The current view posits that there is some criteria inherent in all intention that can explain this. I find this generalized treatment of intention to be the Gordian Knot of agency that, if cut, could lead to real progress both philosophically and scientifically. However, it is first necessary to acknowledge that intentions and their corollaries are not unique states of mind, but rather, combinations of non-volitional events that can be measured. When approaching memes of intention in the same way as genes, it becomes evident that all types of intention are different and ought to be treated as such. We can then do away with this obfuscating problem of "pure will" debated by intention philosophers and realize that intentions all have differing degrees of strength psychologically.[13] For example, the statement "I will sit in a chair while I work" does not carry the same psychological depth as "I will be a better father than the one I had". With the memetic allele model, differentiation and testing can yield results in a similar way to what previously ensued following genetic testing. This would be done by correlating

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[13] Outlined by Donald Davidson as the problem of intentions purely in the mind, in which no steps are taken in any capacity to act upon them (2001).

specific brain activity with constrained belief-desire amalgamations. This can ultimately lead to a refined understanding of the phenomenon of human agency which in turn, can piece together the great puzzle of our species—What is consciousness?

## Conclusion

This paper attempted to propose an introductory look at a systemization of the impalpable realm of human consciousness. Philosophical puzzles of this nature are sufficiently shaky to eliminate most bottom-up approaches at their outset. I believe this is unnecessary and that there are ways to apply tried-and-true experimental frameworks onto areas originally thought ethereal. The connection between an idea and a biological unit are more similar than they might appear at the outset: both are replicating forms of information. Thus, there is good reason to believe that applying similar testing paradigms might yield promising results. I attempted to demonstrate here how this can be applied to notions that are often excluded from scientific study. Humans once perceived outer space to be the realm of the gods and unknowable to mere mortals. It turned out that the laws of science worked there too.

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# FREE WILL REIMAGINED

Emily Sweet

God is omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipotent, which means he is all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful, respectively. A common objection to the existence of God is the existence of evil, because it implies that God is not all-good. However, the problem of evil can be explained by his desire for humans to be free moral agents. This paper will discuss how free will justifies the existence of evil and how this kind of free will can occur alongside a limitless God. These points will be understood by examining Immanuel Kant's views on moral freedom, J. L. Mackie's objections, Richard Swinburne's defense of free will, John Hick's arguments about divine guidance, and how these theories relate to modern monotheistic religions.

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One of the common beliefs among theist philosophers and many religions is that God is omniscient (all-knowing), omnibenevolent (all-loving) and omnipotent (all-powerful). In J.L. Mackie's *Evil and Omnipotence*, Mackie argues that if God exists, he can only possess two of these three properties.[1] He reasons that if God were all-knowing he would know how to prevent evil, if he were all-loving he would want to prevent evil, and he could do both if he were all-powerful. Mackie concludes that the existence of evil suggests that God is either unwilling or unable to prevent it or he is unaware of its future emergence.[2]

This is a compelling argument that some theist philosophers like Richard Swinburne, a professor of Philosophy of Christian Religion at Oxford University, try to make sense of from

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[1] J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence." Mind, vol. 64, no. 254, April 1955, 200-202. *Oxford University Press*, doi:10.1093/mind/lxiv.254.200.
[2] Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 203.

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a theological perspective. Swinburne partially accepts this concept in his defense of free will. He argues in his book, *The Existence of God*, that God is omniscient with one limitation: he does not know the future acts of a free agent.[3] Therefore, God is unable to interfere in free will because he does not contain the necessary foreknowledge.[4]

Several concerns come to mind with this perspective. If God is unable to perceive the future, then he cannot be considered all-knowing because this means he lacks knowledge surrounding future events. This absence of foreknowledge conflicts with how most major religions view God. For example, Jews, Muslims, and Christians all have prophecies written into their holy texts. For many theists, the fulfillment of prophecy seen in many religions acts as evidence that God is able to predict what people will choose. In the Old Testament, for example, God warned the ten tribes of Israel that they would succumb to immorality and sin upon arriving at the Promised Land, and they did.[56] A Christian then would be unable to simultaneously accept Swinburne's interpretation of free will and the teachings of the bible which include God's predictions about the future. Therefore, it is a logical contradiction to believe in the bible, including God's ability to see what will happen, while also believing that humans have free will due to God's lack of foresight.

Another concern is that if God is unable to see the future and thus cannot control it, he is not only limited in knowledge, but in power as well. Swinburne's God cannot control the future due to a lack of knowledge.[4] If God is unable to see or change the future, and unable to know and do everything, then he is neither omniscient nor omnipotent. If God has these limitations on his

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[3] Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 210.
[4] Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion. 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 1993, 33-34.
[5] *King James Bible*, Isaiah 7:8
[6] *King James Bible,* Deuteronomy 28.

power and knowledge, can he truly be the same all-powerful and all-knowing God that many theists perceive him to be?

One response to the stated problems is to view free will as God's choice rather than as a limitation of his perfect properties. Observe the following example: A man comes to a fortune-teller who is never wrong and asks if he will receive a promotion at work. She responds with confirmation that he will be given one the next day. She accurately describes the event, predicting the exact time, location and conversation that is to take place. The fortune teller does not exert a direct influence over the future, but instead views it from the stance of an observer. In this example, the fortune teller is analogous to an all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving God who consciously chooses to view the future passively without interfering in it. This version of God has the ability to know and change the future but decides not to, consequently allowing us to exercise our free will. It is also more consistent with the all-seeing God depicted in religious texts. Moreover, this God is also omnibenevolent because, according to the free will defense, which is employed by thinkers like St. Augustine, if God were to thwart evil actions and outcomes, he would be interfering with free will.[7] Based on this line of reasoning, God can be omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient, despite the existence of evil, because of his deliberate plan for free will.

Mackie argues that because people can choose good on multiple occasions, God could logically allow people to choose good on every occasion.[8] Since this is not the case, this means that God is either unable to force people to always choose good or He is not all-loving and all-knowing. In addition, Immanuel Kant argues that freedom does not exist unless there is an ability to choose evil and that people are unable to choose evil or good consistently.[9] Therefore, whether a person is morally corrupt or

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[7] Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2001, 40-45.
[8] Burgess-Jackson, *Free Will, Omnipotence, and the Problem of Evil*, 182-183.
[9] Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 533-534.

commendable depends on the frequency with which they consciously choose good or evil. Even though there is no logical contradiction to Mackie's argument that God should only allow positive choices, Kant would argue that without the option to choose evil, there can be no freedom;[10] God would have to force the consistently good choices that Mackie is referring to. By removing the possibility of evil, God would be infringing on free will. Ultimately, free will ceases to exist in the face of explicit divine intervention.

Another compelling aspect of free will is how God balances his desire for us to be free agents with the expectation that we will eventually seek faith in him of our own volition. The intention that God has for people to find him, understand him, and worship him is taught in many monotheistic religions. However, free will and God's divine desire have potential to conflict. According to John Hick, if people come to the realization that God is, "...the infinite divine being and glory, goodness and love,"[11] then they would no longer have free will. In other words, if God were to reveal himself and make his presence ubiquitous in the world, evidence of his existence would be disambiguated. People would no longer need to worship God or find him through their own accord, because his existence would be interpreted as truth. Challenging the existence of God, if his being were universally observable, would be a denial of reality. However, by disguising himself from plain sight and attenuating the transparency of his existence, God's ambiguous nature prevents atheism and theism from being definitively proven. This preserves free will because logical arguments can be made for and against theism and beliefs can be chosen without divine coercion. Therefore, according to Hick, God has to hide his true

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[10] Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason,* 533.
[11] Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 33-35.

nature from society so that people can exercise their free will and seek him through their own accord.[12]

Similar to Hick, who advocates that the revelation of God's true nature (revealed through his obvious existence) would hinder free will,[13] Swinburne likewise argues that a verbal message from God is sufficient to diminish free will.[14] If God gave verbal confirmation about the truth of reality, including the consequences of our actions and how to rectify them, then it is likely that people would have no choice but to accept his existence and the potency of free will would consequently diminish. Take radios, for example: if everyone in the world were to have a radio that they would listen to daily, it would be illogical and unlikely for someone to assert that the message delivered through the radio does not exist. In a similar way, Swinburne posits that if everyone were to receive consistent verbal direction from God, it would be illogical and unlikely to be an atheist or to doubt his abilities. His verbal descriptions of precise causes and effects would confirm his powers and diminish doubt. The belief in God would become universal, and as a result counter one's will to choose atheism. Therefore, according to Swinburne, the ability to seek God without his guidance is a necessary component of free will.

Swinburne claims that if God came out and revealed everything, from the true nature of reality to the purpose of evil, this revelation would tamper with free will.[15] Take a thief for example: part of his thrill is trying to get away with stealing. If the probability of his success were minimal, the thief probably would not even make an attempt to begin with. Now consider that God tells the criminal that if he is to proceed with his crime, then he will be imprisoned for five years. Swinburne argues that such verbal guidance would hinder the burglar's ability to choose freely

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[12] Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 33-35.
[13] Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 33-35.
[14] Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 34.
[15] Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 34.

because he would be influenced by the definite consequence of incarceration as revealed to him by God.[16] Therefore, Swinburne's point emphasizes that in order to have free will, humans should gain wisdom through the process of induction, rather than gaining knowledge through persistent and explicit revelation from God. This approach to learning requires humans to be morally free agents. Without free agency, free will is not possible.

Hick and Swinburne are correct in asserting that if God were to provide too much divine guidance, as discussed in Swinburne's idea of concise verbal guidance and Hick's too-obvious God, we would no longer have free will. Hick extends this argument by stating that the present purpose of evil is that adversity often leads to moral learning and growth: "A world without problems, difficulties, perils, and hardships would be morally static. For moral and spiritual growth comes through response to challenges; and in a paradise there would be no challenges." Therefore, while Swinburne posits that verbal guidance about the nature of evil would inhibit true moral agency, Hick on the other hand advocates that evil serves an important purpose; without evil, there can be no spiritual growth and thus it is necessary for free will.

Kant claims that humans will always be forced to choose evil because human nature prohibits them from only choosing good.[17] It seems cruel for God to provide ways of understanding the consequences of evil, while simultaneously instilling within us a nature that forces us to sometimes choose evil depending on our circumstances. According to Kant, a moral evil would still exist in the world depicted by Swinburne, where God outlines what we should do to avoid pain and evil. Therefore, Hick's idea of creating a worthwhile purpose for evil seems plausible.

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[16] Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 34.
[17] Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason,* 534.

In Swinburne's world the consequences of people's actions would already be known as a result of divine guidance. Considering that God's guidance is assumed to never be wrong, the thief in the previously stated example would know that if he were to steal after God informed him that he would end up in jail, then indeed, the thief would go to jail. Therefore, in this context, humans would always know the consequences of their errors, without actually having to make those mistakes in the first place. As a result, they would be stripped of the opportunity to learn from the immoral actions they commit, because God would already have revealed the outcome beforehand. Without the process of learning, the result might serve less of a teachable purpose. In such a world, evil has no function other than to solely elicit suffering. However if free will does exist, then humans must have the option to choose evil, or as Kant asserts, we cannot refrain from occasionally being immoral.[18] Creating a world where immorality has no benefits, such as moral growth from suffering, seems unjust and inconsistent for an omnibenevolent God. This is because being able to experience the consequences, as opposed to receiving divine verbal confirmation of what is to happen, allows humans to learn more profound lessons of a higher caliber.

God only has two options: either to remove evil and thus free will or to take an uninvolved approach where people can learn from their suffering and choose to seek him of their own volition. If moral responsibility is to be meaningful, then free will must exist. Thus, personal experience with evil provides humans an opportunity to make good and bad moral decisions. Making these sorts of decisions is an act of free will, which can further promote personal growth and allow the individual to seek faith in an omnibenevolent, omniscient and omnipotent God.

As an omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipotent being, God is expected to be able to see and do everything,

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[18] Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason,* 534.

especially that which can be understood within the parameters of human intelligence. God's inability to know the future, as Mackie and Swinburne describe, conflicts with the monotheistic teachings that also stress the existence of free will. From Swinburne's perspective, this is logically inconsistent since any evidence of divine guidance would create bias and hinder free will. Thus, God is indeed able to see and change the future, but in order to allow for the existence of free moral agents, he consciously decides not to interfere. He allows evil to play an uncomfortable but purposeful role in humanity that encourages spiritual and moral growth and acts as a prerequisite for free will.

If humans were to comply with their nature by choosing evil but at the same time were unable to learn from it because of access to clear verbal foresight from God, then human existence might prove to be very frustrating. While the natural tendency would be to experience evil, humans would not be able to learn any moral lessons from those experiences because they would be made aware of the consequences prior to their occurrence. However, one of the benefits of making mistakes and committing wrongful acts is having the opportunity to experience the consequences and subsequently learn what is right. Seeing as divine guidance would reveal the outcome of an act prior to its manifestation, committing the act would no longer provide people with any more insight than what they had before. Not only is evil necessary for free will to exist, but it allows us to grow spiritually and forces us to seek God independently without being coerced by him. Being able to triumph over evil and learn from our mistakes is a virtue that gives us a reason to live— theists and atheists alike.

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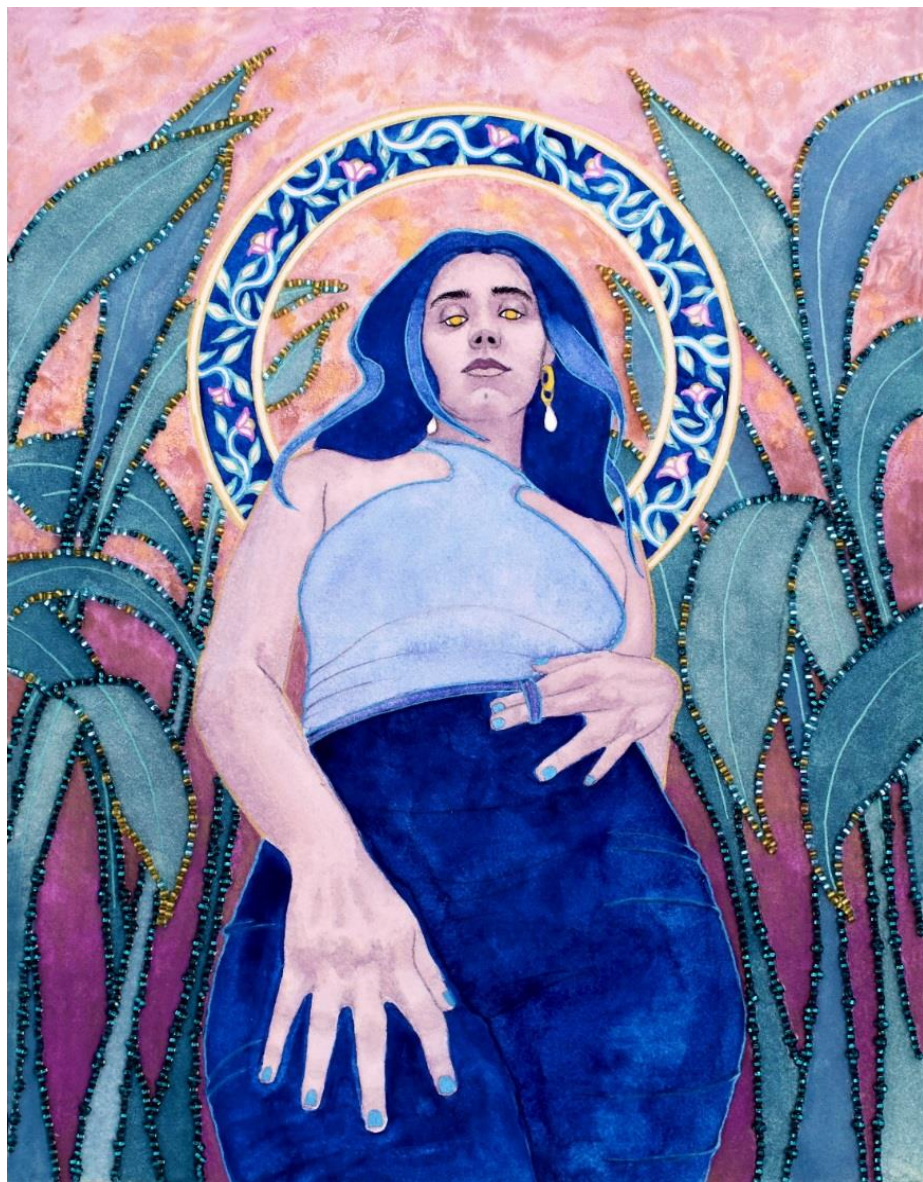
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**Title**: "DFWM" (Don't F\*ck With Me)
**Artist**: Khadija Al-Yousifi
**Medium/materials**: watercolour, ink, ~1700 beads.

**Description**: My personal journey of unlearning the expectation to yield to societal forces inspired the rebellious themes of "DFWM": Resolution and empowerment. Both the pose and perspective are meant to signify an ever-growing and unwavering strength in both my personhood and womanhood.

**Title**: "Currents"
**Artist**: Khadija Al-Yousifi
**Medium/materials:** watercolour, gouache, ink, ~1660 beads.

**Description**: Ever-inspired by the fluidity and encompassing power of water, this piece represents an integration of myself and my favourite element. It means to capture a feeling of synchrony between myself and the currents both within and around me.

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# Twin Souls

## Free Verse by Karen G. Bishop

i'm in love now
and she is fine
not physically
her insides are pure

cuz' she knows who she is

i'm in love with
her ability
to strive
after hardship
i've watched her growth

we met a few years ago
in passing
i was too young
we didn't talk much
i wasn't ready
for someone like her

she scared me
she was smart
intelligent
confident

she learned
to hold back
analyze, assess
the inner being
of every individual
she connected with

she stopped the love train
if love wasn't returned

she being comfortable
in her skin
gave me butterflies

as we lay
I asked
why she was
content with life
and her being

she said…

i genuinely loved, those
who didn't genuinely
love me

i've fed individual souls, nurtured their bodies
who struggled to do the same

i've mended hearts with my twin-soul
10,000 times over

i've learned

there is a beauty in wisdom
beauty to life
the beauty to learn, is my ability to remember

remember that, we are souls
walking a path, with little guidance
having to maneuver
among the living and the dead inside

we are all
finding our way

and I cried...

that woman, i fell in love with
is me, the new me,
the healed me, the conscious me
the growth of me, kind to myself me
the acceptance of me

i am in love

# Mind Oh Mind

## Free Verse by Alexandra Vesia

Opening the mind,
pondering the possibilities,
questioning reality,
and soaring through your universe.

Letting ourselves be open to the nature of our inner
mental power,
Promotes a sense of liberation and infinite curiosity
For the wondrous possibilities
Of our existence.

The power of the mind,
To bring just about anything into fruition,
Allows us to alter reality with our presence.

But do we contemplate this inherent gift we all have?
You change a universal reality just by being here, now.

We may see it in others,
but do we acknowledge it within ourselves?
"I am powerful" we must tell ourselves,
Reminders in every waking moment, that we can do
what we set our minds to.

But we can't do it alone.

Sometimes we may need help from those around us.
Often just an inkling that the universe
and all the forces within it
Are on our side.
That should do the trick.

Reminding ourselves
that our emotional and mental states are transitory,
One may even regard them as illusory,
But those feelings do have real consequences.
Feeling love may help us sense true boundlessness,
Soaring with endless potentials.

Love can allow us to see ourselves in a new light,
through a new lens, from an alternate perspective.
Whereas feeling fear may restrict our mobility,
or trigger a response that harms
the inner workings of our body
with significant exposure.

You can be bitter and hold onto it,
or you may decide its worth more to let it go.
Sometimes it may seem that
our ability to make the choice is out of our power,
within another's control.

Their choices effect you, there is no doubt about that.
But a choice is present for us to follow suit
or revolt, treading a previously unprepared path

Fear seems to build walls around our inner freedom
to do and be and choose as we please.
We must remain steadfast and persist
with our obligation to release our inner selves
and explore who we all are.

As one perfect system,
synchronized in interconnected actions.
The process of life is sustained by our whole planet,
working together in unison.
You and I are now aware of it all.

How seemingly miraculous it can be.
To think, to be, to reflect on thinking and being.
And even more extraordinary
is the gift of our presence and awareness,
Allowing us to experience the wonder of it all.

We are all so unique and diverse.
Each mind has its own particular individualized features.
Each person is a puzzle we may ponder.
To ponder the puzzles that each person presents is our universal gift.
Yet our differences can lead us astray,
Feeling lost and lonely within the infinite abyss of an internal universe.

Who are you, apart from those qualities and attributes
you identify as your own.
Despite those activities that shape what you do.
Besides the people you associate your "self" with.
Who is it that you are deep down when everything else is removed?

Are you nothing?
Are you everything?
Are you connected to all of life,
all of nature,
every aspect of everything that exists or could ever possibly exist?

These kinds of questions
make us puzzle the power of our presence;
Preparing you for the purpose of your persistent power.
Question the content of your consciousness.
Realize you can revamp your role in this world.
Remember and recall the remarkable nature of your ruthless mind.
Speak through your soul and sensationalize your spectacular essence.
Think those thoughts that fuel the thematic reflection of nature.
This tempting truth is what we can teach.
By undoing constructs and allowing our undying spirits to be unleashed.

What we see when we look outside of ourselves
Is a direct reflection of how we feel internally,
So how we perceive the world around us
Is dependent on the inner workings
of our emotional and mental states.

We are learning that physical observations
of the apparent existence of things
Do not encompass all that contributes
to the workings of life.
Although some things seem better left unknown,
How can we know anyways.
To know is to acquire knowledge.
To understand is to find the knowledge to be useful.

We're on the cusp of exploring this phenomenal mind
An emerging feature of the brain some would say.
It's real because you believe.
You believe because you think it's real.
Who's to say; a general consensus among those who voice their opinions.
What about those ideas and reflections left unsaid;
Do these notions contribute
to our notably all-encompassing belief system
That has been conditioned by those who take care of us?
Resistant forces are engrained
in the lessons we've been brought up with.

I encourage you to take care of your powerfully sweet mind.
It is needing your patience and presence,
requiring evaluation,
demanding reflection,
Screaming for serenity.
Inner calm is inner control.
Inner control facilitates a powerful mind.
Fostering freedom takes determination and acknowledgment of inner
power.

They say that seeing is believing, but when we believe,
we may not actually see.
Following blindly leaves you susceptible and vulnerable
To forces outside of your awareness
Although there can be traps and dangers lurking around the sidelines,
Hoping to conceal or steal the natural essence of your power,
**Offering ourselves to the mystery of the mentally powerful
potentials**
**Which may be questionable to some yet quizzically real,**
**We will realize the substantial satisfaction for the universal you.**

Open your eyes to your deepest and inner-most highest self
      To your power
           To your mind
               here, you will always be free.

# ABOUT THE ORACLE

The Oracle is York University's undergraduate philosophical review journal, recognized by the American Philosophical Association (APA). It is published once a year with the efforts of York University's Undergraduate Philosophy Student Association (Philosophia), York University's Department of Philosophy, and York University's printing services. The journal's primary aim is to promote philosophical discourse on campus, especially among undergraduate students. Printed copies are distributed at our end-of-year undergraduate conference and remaining copies are available at our office.

Works are accepted year-round, however, the deadline to submit for the upcoming issue is sometime during the Spring term (exact dates are determined by the editorial board at the start of the academic year).

All works appearing in the journal are submitted and reviewed by undergraduate students.

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Essays must be typed, double-spaced, properly cited, and MLA formatted. The maximum length should not exceed 5000 words. Self-identifying information should be removed from the essay to allow for a blind review process. When submitting your manuscript, please attach a separate document that states your full name, email address, university, year of study, and program.

Poems should not exceed 900 words. All written work should be submitted as a (.doc) or (.docx) file.

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