

The Mind-Brain Problem and Consciousness

A Summary by Jay Gould (10/18/06)

What is the mind and how does it relate to the brain?

The monistic emergent property position is the one held by most western scientists today:

The *brain* is the physical locus of the operations of the *mind*.

The *mind* emerges from the *brain* at work.

Hence, *mental activity* is *brain activity* (but only some of it).

Consciousness is *awareness* of a portion of one's mental activity, most of which we are unaware.

It is awareness of our *perceptions*, our *thoughts*, our *feelings*, our *motivations*, and of a unique *self* having those experiences.

We are largely unconscious of the *computations* carried out by the brain; instead, what we are consciously aware of, at times, are the *results/products/outcomes* of those computations.

Moreover, we are only consciously aware of that part of mental activity that at any given moment is in working memory.

Due to changes in attention we can become conscious of some of the *mental content* that at other times is in the *unconscious/preconscious*.

Consciousness is an *emergent property* of a nervous system that is sufficiently complex and appropriately organized.

Exactly how this occurs, however, is not yet understood.

Nevertheless, with regard to the relationships between brain, mind, and consciousness, it has been said that:

“There is only one world, with lots of *translation barriers*.”

(Ramachandran, V.S. *Phantoms in the Brain*. 1998, p. 232.)