

On Human Consciousness Part 1 of 2

These days it is hard to avoid reading about human consciousness. It has become a buzz word in intellectual as well as popular discussions about human mind, life, and mankind's future. Though consciousness has been a subject explored in distant antiquity, but it got a strong impetus after 1935 with the advent of Quantum Mechanics (QM), a branch of physics dealing with elementary particles.

What is human consciousness? An intelligent lay man would say that it nothing but the workings of human brain. That is an answer which cannot be dismissed. Afterall if there were no brain there would not be a consciousness as we know it.

But the consciousness that philosophers and scientists are talking about is not just the workings of human brain, but a specialized product of it. It is a fundamental awareness of his existence that every human being carries with himself. It has nothing to do with his worldly life, other human beings, fear of death, etc. But it is his awareness of his existence in the universe. What is his relationship with the physical universe, what is he doing in it, who drives him, where does he end? What is the essence of his existence? This is what we mean by human consciousness. This perception is not continuously present in him, but can be easily summoned by him at times, and at other time it requires effort.

The problem of the human consciousness is how it is produced? Can it be controlled?

These questions have been asked since homo sapiens developed consciousness, after the significant cognitive expansion 70,000 years ago. The questions asked were: who he was, was he being directed by someone or something? The idea of God emanated from this mystery surrounding him, which is still the most popular

answer to it.

Human mind is developmental, which can be easily seen from the thinking of man thousands of years ago compared to his thinking now on virtually everything. Thinking on survival, child rearing, physical and social surroundings, etc. These changes have been brought about by his experience leading to knowledge. We continue to learn. Knowledge leads to ideas. Idea is conceptualization of experience, where it is possible to do so. Modern man is a store house of knowledge. So, we cannot say that a foreign agent or agents control human mind.

Spiritualists are people who believe a foreign force is responsible for the creation and workings of human mind. This is because, they argue, you cannot otherwise explain where human mind came from and how it works. But that is fallacious as human mind is evolutionary and it is a developable resource. Ideas are the key elements of its developments. It is conceivable that after some time no new ideas are developed, as they have all been exhausted. This we are talking about man's ideas about himself. For the ideas about things outside himself, like the physical world surrounding him, the ideas have still a long way to go before they are exhausted.

So, human consciousness has developed over thousands of years, and is still developing. The machine that helps in the production of ideas, the primary elements of consciousness, the brain, must have also evolved. The most significant milestone in its evolution came some 70,000 years ago when its cognitive abilities enlarged significantly.

One of the upshots of Quantum Mechanics (QM) is that physical reality exists only when human beings make an observation of it. That is, without the observation, and human beings are the only observers that we know of who exist in the universe at this time, there is no reality. This is a huge condition to prescribe, as the development of science is based on the basis that physical universe exists

independent of human beings. It is understandable that at elementary particle level we may not be able to clearly and precisely make observations, but we cannot say that they do not have a past, present, and future. We may have to rely on statistical methods to get some information on these conditions, but there is no denying that these properties do exist.

QM's strange assumptions have encouraged spiritualists in thinking that human beings play a part in prescribing what physical reality is and where it is. Although QM has nothing to do with spiritualism, but spiritualists have taken QM's outlook on physical reality to endorse that universe and human mind are made from the same stuff. They have gone as far as believing that man's consciousness creates physical universe. That is, matter is created just by man's apprehension of it. Einstein, who was one of the founders of QM, could not reconcile with its latter developments. Since QM uses statistical methods to determine some of the physical attributes of elementary particles, he created the famous expression, "God does not play dice." Meaning that the fundamental laws of nature cannot be statistical. Universe exists independent of man by its own laws.

Many thoughtful men, since time immemorial, have ascribed man a spiritual dimension. Not that there was ever a proof for that, but the thought that he has an ability to understand universe so he must have a universal dimension to him. The concept of cosmic consciousness ingrained in man has roots in that thinking. Hinduism is explicit in according him a Brahman potential. Brahman is universal consciousness. That is, beyond his worldly and individualistic soul, encapsulated by *atman* concept, he has the scope of attaining the universal self. The problem with such concepts is that not everyone has the inner framework to embody them.

So, human consciousness is a general self-awareness, which not everyone is aware of. In the hands of ambitious, thoughtful, and imaginative people it can lead to a high-level experience of life. In India there are ascetics who go through established programs to develop a higher level of consciousness. But it must not be easy, as I have never met a man who achieved it. Even if getting there, holding on to it must be challenging. Even an inferior state of higher consciousness is

better than its common level.

The basic consciousness a human being is born with, after growing up and some introspection, points toward something larger than oneself. This is what most of the human beings possess. But it does not become something of a force until it is worked upon. Then again due to an individual's potential it may never flower into something significant.

(To be continued in Part 2)

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