CHAPTER VI

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From the foregoing study of some of the contemporary views of consciousness, it is difficult on our part to come to any definite conclusion on the highly controversial subject. I, therefore, intend to conclude this paper by bringing to light some of the main arguments used by contemporary philosophers in favour of the existence of consciousness. Hence I can add nothing more than make some casual and general observations on the topic discussed. My task till the end remains expository, that is, exposition together with critical comments.

The word consciousness is commonly used in psychological and philosophical literature in a variety of senses. In popular language it is used to mean generally a sort of awareness of something, which is internal. The most current way in which we speak of consciousness is in the sense of awareness, as when I speak of my awareness of my mental processes. In the expression 'I am aware of my thoughts, feelings and desires', what we really mean is that there is a form of cognition in me, and that I am cognizing my own thoughts, feelings and desires. Awareness is an essential stage of cognition. All my mental processes along with this cognition are processes of consciousness.
Another group of psychologists identifies consciousness with one of the mental processes. As we have seen, in the
nineteenth century, James Mill identifies consciousness with our experiencing a feeling. As when I experience a feeling of
pleasure, there happens a certain occurrence of which I am aware, viz: it produces pleasure in me. Here, in this process
the state of my experiencing a feeling is a state of my consciousness. But here we can say that my desires and thoughts
are equally states of consciousness. Herbert identifies consciousness with the mental processes as a whole, and such a
notion is accepted by almost all contemporary psychologists. The empirical conception of consciousness was developed by
Wundt more consistently, and according to him consciousness is equivalent to the mental processes taken as a whole in their
co-existence and continuity.

Here one may legitimately ask what do we mean by mind, because mind is not any substantial unity behind the different
mental processes. Rather we can say that it is a sort of an organic unity of mental processes in an individual. If this is
what we mean by mind, there is no need to postulate a 'consciousness' which also must stand for the sumtotal of all
our individual mental states. Mind and consciousness become identical and if mind can signify the sumtotal of our mental
states why should we employ the word 'consciousness' to serve the same purpose? Mind is itself an abstract term, and
Stout's distinction that mind is concrete while consciousness is abstract does not appear to hold good. Prof. William James, in his article "Does Consciousness exist?" declares "I believe that 'consciousness' when it has evaporated to the estate of pure diaphaneity is on the point of disappearing altogether. It is a name of a non-entity, and has no right to a place among first principles. Those who still cling to it are clinging to a mere echo, the faint rumour left behind by the disappearing soul upon the air of philosophy". James denies consciousness as an entity but he insists that it stands for a function, the function of knowing. "'Consciousness' is supposed necessary to explain the fact that things not only are, but get reported, are known."  

Bertrand Russell also, as we have seen, denies the fact that consciousness is of the nature of essence of mind. We know everything mental is also a process of consciousness. With regard to the view of B. Russell we find that for him 'whatever may be the correct definition of "consciousness", "consciousness" is not the essence of life or mind'.

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2. Ibid., p. 4.
Thus we find that to regard consciousness as standing for the sumtotal of our mental processes leads to confusion in psychology. Hence consciousness is not another word for 'mind' or the totality of our mental processes. If it is neither awareness of something, nor awareness of the self, nor the sumtotal of our mental processes, should we give up using the term? Many leading writers in contemporary psychology are in favour of this view.

Discussing the concept from the contemporary point of view we find that though there are many who affirm the existence of consciousness as a positive fact there are some important theories which have reduced it to some more objective entities. E.B. Holt, the American neo-realist, for example, holds that consciousness is not a new substance and can be readily and completely defined in terms of the entities that have appeared before. Rejected materialistic monism he states both mind and matter are deducible from a common source, viz., a few logical-mathematical entities which are neutral in character. A new form of organization among a number of neutral entities gives rise to a new whole exhibiting the new property that we call consciousness. This new property is not an emergent quality, but it is only a resultant, for the whole itself is a complex aggregate analyzable into its constituents. G. Ryle denies

consciousness as a separate entity through his mind-involving statements and like the neo-realists he also tries to oppose the cartesian dualism of mind and body. According to Ryle, mind is nothing but a name for dispositional behaviour. Ryle interprets all words and phrases regarding mind in terms of behaviour and disposition to behave; thus he rejects introspection. Mind here is understood to exist as the way the human body functions. He expresses this fact by saying that just as the University does not exist as a separate entity but as only the way how its different organized units, e.g. the Senate, Registrar's office the different constituent colleges work in coordination, so the mind is a name for the various organized functions of the body. It may be claimed that though Ryle strongly denies the idea of consciousness or mind as a separate ontological entity yet he is not a kind of behaviourist, who denies consciousness altogether. Ryle again wants to establish the fact that mind is only a name for typical human behaviour, so that there is no privacy of inner life. S. Alexander, as an advocate of emergent evolution had rejected introspection as an appropriate method for knowing consciousness. But this rejection does not pre-suppose any rejection of the idea of privacy of mind. He recognises consciousness as distinguished from any physical objects and emphasises the need of a unique method for the study of conscious phenomena, which is not in his opinion introspection. He is substituting the notion of 'enjoyment' for 'introspection', enjoyment being understood as a direct mode of being conscious of one's self.
Husserl expresses his affirmation of consciousness more emphatically than any other present-day philosopher advocating the existence of consciousness. Of course the germ of this thought lay embedded in the Cartesian maxim 'Cogito-ergo-sum'. Instead of trying mental experiment of suspending all beliefs as Descartes did, Husserl begins by suspending all judgements about the natural world, by adopting the technique of 'bracketing'. 'Bracketing' as we have pointed out means an act of disconnecting from the world of discourse. Husserl asserts that consciousness in itself has a being of its own which in its absolute uniqueness of nature remains unaffected by any phenomenological disconnection. Husserl looks upon consciousness as essentially intentional, i.e. directed meaningfully towards its object. He speaks not of 'cogito' alone but of 'ego-cogito-cogitatum', that is to say, consciousness-of-the-world. Consciousness is, thus, seen to receive a new turn in phenomenology, where the essence of mind is shown to be intentional. In consciously imagining, judging, desiring, loving or hating there is always something upon which the conscious processes are directed. Consciousness is never anything unmeaning. Like the phenomenologists, existentialists also have affirmed the reality of consciousness. Karl Jaspers holds that the absolute reality is a conscious self-conditioning existence of the human selves and the other things
of the world in which consciousness is said to lie implicitly. Jean-Paul-Sartre, another existentialist thinker, makes a distinction between the material object which he calls 'being-in-itself' and the conscious subject which he names 'being-for-itself'. He thinks consciousness is always consciousness of something. The very nature of consciousness is intentional, it is always directed towards something. Consciousness is described as a negation of the unconscious matter. The reality of the conscious person, as revealed to himself in the acts and states of which he is conscious, is not denied.

Hence from our foregoing discussions it follows that there is a diversity of opinions regarding the nature of consciousness. As a matter of fact, we have no strong philosophical ground for either asserting or denying its existence as a distinct entity. It cannot, however, be denied that my thinking, my feelings and my desires are all processes of consciousness. If I am not conscious, I can have neither thoughts, nor feelings nor desires. It may be pointed out that it is not a faculty in addition to other faculties but it is implied in the functions of my mind - an essential property of every processes that goes on within my mind. Without consciousness there will be no mental life, and a psychical fact is only a fact in consciousness. It is the same thing as regards the self or the subject, without which we cannot explain our mental life. An analysis of our experience shows that we cannot deny the experience of the
subject, although we may not be able to say what it is. The same must be said about consciousness. It is undefinable, and like all ultimates we simply accept it as the condition of the explanation of everything else. Further it is never discovered as one thing as opposed to other things which are not already its content. Consequently it is futile to suppose that it is a distinct entity, and then formulate a theory about it.

It is not an object like other objects which appear as its content, though it is a pre-condition of all objective experience. By its very nature it does not lend itself to any empirical study like the data of physical sciences. We cannot perhaps know what it is. We have to remain content by describing what it does. Hindu philosophy of Yoga claims that its true nature can be realised in a profound state of meditation in which consciousness is completely abstracted from all its objective contents. But that lies beyond the scope of our present investigation.