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The Nature of Consciousness

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## I. THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Until now, the nature of consciousness has presented unresolved contradictions. “Should we interpret it as a predicate in one position (X\_is concious) or in two positions (X\_is concious of\_Y)?”<sup>1</sup>

Is it explainable neurophysiologically<sup>2</sup> or is it something incomprehensible and beyond what we know today? If it is an experience, is it only human or is it also the experience of every living thing? What is its nature?

This thesis aims to investigate the purest states of consciousness on a phenomenological level, meaning what kind of consciousness can be experienced by humans on a sub personal level.<sup>3</sup> That is, by carrying out a phenomenological investigation from above in the first part to deduce ontological hypotheses on the nature of clear consciousness<sup>4</sup> and then on the nature of consciousness itself. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that consciousness leaves more unanswered questions than certain solutions.

In the second part, some hypotheses will be examined using two contrasting theories<sup>5</sup>. We will conclude by summarizing the focal points revealed through this investigation and identifying the open questions remaining, hoping that they can prompt future research.

## II. INTRODUCTION

Among the various phenomenological theories of consciousness, many have investigated the relationship qualia-consciousness<sup>6</sup>, which tries to solve the mind-body-consciousness problem.<sup>7</sup>

However, few theories investigate consciousness as a phenomenon in itself from one single position.<sup>8</sup> Cognitive neuroscience does.<sup>9</sup> Neuroscientists are convinced it is only a matter

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<sup>1</sup> T. METZINGER, *Coscienza e fenomenologia del sé*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 2014, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> T. CRADDOCK, *The biophysics of consciousness: a foundational approach*, in <https://www.arttv.ch/biennaleluzern/2020/>, utl. cons. 24 agosto 2020. (Contenuti a pagamento )

<sup>3</sup> T. METZINGER, *Il tunnel dell'io*, tr. it. di M. Baccarini, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano 2010, p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> By "clear consciousness" we mean the experience of consciousness itself.

<sup>5</sup> D.J. CHALMERS, *The character of consciousness*, Oxford University Press, New York 2010, D.C. DENNET, *Coscienza*, Rizzoli, Bergamo 1993.

<sup>6</sup> T. METZINGER, *Grundkurs Philosophie des Geistes – Band 1:Phänomenales Bewusstsein*, Mentis Verlag GmbH, Paderborn 2009, pp. 33-312.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. T. ALTER, S. WALTER, *Phenomenal concepts and phenomenal knowledge*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007.

<sup>8</sup> T. METZINGER, *Coscienza e fenomenologia del sé*, cit., p. 19

<sup>9</sup> In <https://humanbrains.fondazioneprada.org/it/>, ult. cons. 26 novembre 2020

of time until the “neurological correlate of consciousness”<sup>10</sup> is identified, which Giulio Tononi writes about in his articles, claiming that we are on a good path, but that the explanation of consciousness still would not explain the phenomenon of subjectivity.<sup>11</sup> This means that we are not far off from having a scientific explanation of the nature of consciousness. We do not know if reducing the experience of being conscious to a physiological level means we have truly understood consciousness itself or only its functions.<sup>12</sup> How can we understand the functions of the heart, such as rhythmic pulsing, pumping blood through veins, or distributing nutrients, if there is still no understanding of the phenomenon of being alive, being able to love, being empathetic or being able to feel compassion?

In the multidisciplinary commotion<sup>13</sup> that seeks answers on the nature of consciousness, the words of analytic philosopher Owen Flanagan give us a general orientation:

«Consciousness exists. It would be a mistake to eliminate talk of it because its semantic past is so bound up with ghostly fairy tales or because it names such a multiplicity of things. The right attitude, it seems to me, is to deliver the concept from its ghostly past and provide it with a credible naturalistic analysis».

Owen Flanagan

Even if we take his words as a guide, in his naturalistic analysis, Owen Flanagan, as in cognitive neuroscience, excludes the authentic value of subjective experience of the conscious being on the sub personal level. His markedly analytical-theorist gaze questions the veracity of the subjective account.<sup>14</sup> Owen Flanagan’s materialist reduction excludes the foundations of

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<sup>10</sup> G. TONONI, in [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/neuroscienze-coscienza\\_%28Enciclopedia-della-Scienza-e-della-Tecnica%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/neuroscienze-coscienza_%28Enciclopedia-della-Scienza-e-della-Tecnica%29/), ult. cons. 27 novembre 2020.

<sup>11</sup> G. TONONI, *Coscienza: le domande ancora aperte (due diverse prospettive)*, in <https://humanbrains.fondazioneprada.org/it/speakers/giulio-tononi/>, ult. cons. 27 novembre 2020

<sup>12</sup> G. Tononi writes: «The reason is that, if we could precisely locate the neural correlates of this or that perception, we would in no way be closer to a real scientific explanation of how the brain can generalize subjective experience», in [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/neuroscienzecoscienza\\_%28Enciclopedia-della-Scienza-e-della-Tecnica%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/neuroscienzecoscienza_%28Enciclopedia-della-Scienza-e-della-Tecnica%29/), ult. cons. 27 novembre 2020.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to cognitive neuroscience, we also have theories of consciousness from Karl Jaspers in his article “Psychopathology” and from language scholar Morgan J. Jaynes in “The Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind and the Origin of Consciousness”.

<sup>14</sup> O. FLANAGAN, *The Bodhisattva’s Brain*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2013, p. 214..

consciousness, namely the phenomenological level and the ontology, which for us serve as the starting point.

In the subsequent hypotheses, we find some assumptions that have already been preceded by Merleau-Ponty, such as, “Consciousness can arise at any moment and is independent of anything from the objective external reality.” Even the hypothesis that “The nature of consciousness is one,” can already be found in Ken Wilber’s theory<sup>15</sup> which was fashionable in esoteric circles of the 1980s. That “Consciousness is distinct from but not separate from mind” is rarely discussed in recent theories because it seems obvious, but it provides some interesting reflections on the notion of qualia.

Other hypotheses, however, are experimental, such as “Consciousness itself has no direction or intention” or “Consciousness naturally expands in relation to time that slows down and to space that extends” and have also required research in other sciences such as cognitive neurobiology, physics, or ancient Buddhist and Hindu religious writings, to find new philosophical insights.

To give these hypotheses the nuance of a more credible naturalistic analysis, I conducted a survey by administering a questionnaire to twenty-three people<sup>16</sup>, of which twenty-one answered that they have experienced clear consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

The experience, described as a first experience by the people interviewed, can be defined as the phenomenological content of non-representational character. Here, non-representational refers to the character of a new experience which has not yet been able to form internal representations<sup>18</sup>, as in the famous debate on the experience of color<sup>19</sup>, meaning that there is no other experience before the first one. For now, when we speak about first experience, we can

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<sup>15</sup> K. WILBER, *Halbzeit der Evolution*, Veröffentlicht im Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 1996..

<sup>16</sup> The "Consciousness Questionnaire" was sent to twenty-three people who underwent basic and advanced training for a total of ninety-four days of teachings over three years, carried out by the Maithuna srl research institute, <http://www.maithuna.it/>.

<sup>17</sup> If we take it for granted that consciousness comes in many variations, clear consciousness is an aspect of consciousness that is the purest state that can be experienced. We can define clear as a state beyond duality. The concept of clear consciousness in Vajrayana Buddhism is related to luminosity and is also translated as "clear light" in Tibetan Buddhist contexts, in [https://it.qaz.wiki/wiki/Luminous\\_mind](https://it.qaz.wiki/wiki/Luminous_mind), ult. cons. November 26, 2020. In James Low's book, *Being There*, Ubaldini Editore, Rome, 2004, clear consciousness is called "the mirror of clear meaning".

<sup>18</sup> W. SEAGER, *Theories of consciousness*, Routledge, Paignton 1999, pp. 146-158.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. T. ALTER, S. WALTER, *Phenomenal concepts and phenomenal knowledge*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007, pp. 65-75. The “Knowledge Argument” rejects the view that the world is merely physical. Also known as the "Mary’s Room" thought experiment.

speak about the phenomenological character of the perceived experience and what it is to have this experience.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, two people reported having read a lot about states of clear consciousness, but they found that the experience itself was not comparable to the mere knowledge of it.<sup>21</sup>

“Likewise, if something hurts me and another person says to me: 'It can't hurt you!’, I can always retort that he is wrong and that it really hurt me. My experience of color or taste or pain, the quality of those experiences, is indisputable: with respect to them I have what is called epistemic authority.”<sup>22</sup>

So, the information on which our hypotheses are based also has epistemic authority.

## 1. CONSCIOUSNESS TOP DOWN – THE HYPOTHESES

The formulated hypotheses are accompanied by an introduction to the topic and/or followed by arguments that support the hypothesis. They are in reference to the answers we received from the questionnaires and are aggregated in the appendix.

This first part is divided into three categories of questions:

- 1.1. What can we deduce, from the information gathered about the first experience, on the nature of clear consciousness and about consciousness itself?
- 1.2. What can we deduce about the relationships and connections that consciousness has with the contents, the body, and the mind?
- 1.3. What is the nature of consciousness?

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<sup>20</sup> Cfr. T. METZINGER, *Coscienza e fenomenologia del sé*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 2014, p. 20. Metzinger explains Nagel's conclusion that we can know everything about a bat at the molecular, cellular and neurocomputational levels, but we will never know what it is like to be a bat. This tells us that we cannot exclude subjectivity in our research, because it is part of the experience of being conscious.

<sup>21</sup> From the answers to question no. 46 of the "Consciousness Questionnaire". Participant no. 007 writes: «I have read a lot in my life and mental understanding is one thing that has been useful but is not decisive (...)» and the no. 011 writes: «I had lessons in Buddhism but then the experience was different from the descriptions». Nineteen people responded that their experience was unaffected by what they had previously read. The question did not specify why, i.e. it could be that the experience itself differs from mere knowing and reading, or because they had not read anything before or because it differed in some other way. The question in the questionnaire was unspecific and information is missing.

<sup>22</sup> T. METZINGER, *Coscienza e fenomenologia del sé*, cit., p. 21.

## **1.1. What can we deduce from the information gathered about the first experience, on the nature of clear consciousness and consciousness itself?**

From the responses, we can deduce that states of clear consciousness occur spontaneously despite one's will and are identified by a mind that is absent from thoughts. Clear consciousness depends not on the environment/reality, nor on other people or prior knowledge<sup>23</sup>, nor on gender, age, a practice/activity or a certain lifestyle.

### **1.1.1. First hypothesis: clear consciousness can occur at any moment and is independent of anything we understand as external or objective reality.**

In fact, the answers have completely different circumstances and predispositions, there is no common denominator between the experiences of when, how, or under what conditions it occurs. In 76% of the answers, they have an experience that they identify as spontaneous. In the other 24%, it was sought after, and the respondents say that this intent is an impediment to having the experience. That is, the experience itself does not depend on the undertaking.<sup>24</sup>

The debate on the existence of phenomena without representation, or if every experience is followed by an internal representation, or whether the representation precedes the phenomenon, is still open. Here, we are most likely dealing with a weak form of representationalism as defined by Torin Alter<sup>25</sup>, which could exclude a first representation. If we instead include a possible representation, it could not have been formed on an experiential level or an objective reality.

### **1.1.2. Second hypothesis: Consciousness itself has no direction or intention.**

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<sup>23</sup> Prior knowledge is understood as knowledge from books, religious texts, scriptures and through stories.

<sup>24</sup> In the discussion with the participants after the delivery of the questionnaire, it emerged that there could be an intention "to want to have an experience of clear consciousness", but that exactly this intention subsequently prevented them from being able to have it. This aspect is not specified in the questionnaire. This topic could be explored in a future investigation.

<sup>25</sup> T. HALTER, S. WALTER, *Phenomenal concepts and Phenomenal knowledge*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007, p. 72. ««Weak representationalism is the same thesis without the “without reminder” clause: on this view, although “experiences must by their very nature present”, their representational character is not “the sole determinant of experimental nature”»».

When I feel pain and my intentional mind and consciousness go towards the pain, I become conscious of the pain. I can have a thought in the same moment (for example, nonsense or blasphemy) and my perception of space, both external and internal, is reduced because all my attention is directed towards the pain. Ordinary, quotidian consciousness is limited compared to clear consciousness but is focused on the same thing the mind is focused on. In comparison, according to answers to the questionnaire, clear consciousness only occurs if the mind is not intentional.<sup>26</sup>

We could infer that consciousness shows itself through our mind in different ways depending on what the mind grasps, what it is attracted to.

So, we have two modes of mind, intentional and unintentional, and only one mode of consciousness. This causes consciousness to show itself once focused on an event-perception, or in a completely different and broader light. Formulated otherwise: our perception of consciousness is conditioned by our mind. That might explain why it is so difficult to classify it. It is not beyond the capabilities and functions of our mind, but simply has characteristics that do not belong to the mind, which it is contained by.

### 1.1.3. Third hypothesis: Consciousness is distinct but not separate from the mind.

We have two separate entities that are somehow associated. Consciousness is present, whether or not there is mental activity when we feel pain, and whether the mind is intentional or unintentional. That is, consciousness does not depend on mental activity, but somehow keeps it company, like a biologist who observes the behavior of a spider. The difference is that the biologist studies behavior by his own motivation, which perhaps consciousness does not. We know from Heisenberg that observation influences the observed. Let us say that consciousness itself does not affect the mind, so what is its function? Does it have a motivation to “be with the mind”? Let's take the case that it does not have motivation, nor function, nor the function of motion. So why does it stay with the mind? What kind of relationship is it? It's hard to imagine that there is something that we can experience but that serves no one and nothing. We also know, from Einstein onwards, that we cannot find the solution on the same level from which the problem arose. If there is a relationship between consciousness and the mind, neither mind nor

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<sup>26</sup> We have only one answer/questionnaire number 016 witch is different, answer number 15: “ there are thoughts but there is no impulse nore necessity to express them or giving them attention. “ So, also in this case we can talk about “non intentional”.



consciousness can give us one clear answer about their relationship. But it could give the perception of the body that could function as an element on another level, even if considered inferior from Plato onwards.<sup>27</sup> We constantly make gestures and have experiences that are not conscious. Indeed, most of the actions we perform are not conscious, but we have seen how bodily presence, which implies an attention directed to the body, is fundamental to experience an expanded consciousness such as clear consciousness. We could say that this presence in the physical body serves as the basis for becoming or being conscious. We could hypothesize that qualia is an essential ingredient of consciousness on the existential level, which can be experienced by every living thing. Is its function no more than to become conscious of the physical being? That is, does consciousness use the mind to send a signal of its existence through qualia?<sup>28</sup>

1.1.4. Fourth hypothesis: Consciousness shows itself according to the container it has available and can be either expansive, unidirectional, or fully retracted.

We said before that consciousness is capable of being expanded when the mind is receptive, or it can be focused on something specific and unidirectional - in the case of pain. We also know that we are not conscious during sleep, and so it retracts. We could say that if consciousness is associated with the mind, it takes the dimensions of the mind and if it is associated with the body takes on other dimensions. And if we are neither present in the body nor in the mind, as happens during sleep, consciousness withdraws. Is it perhaps presence that creates the relationship between mind and consciousness?

## **1.2. What can we deduce about the relationships and connection that consciousness has with the contents, the body and the mind?**

It seems that states of clear consciousness are not as pure as I imagined when I first learned of Edmund Husserl's pure consciousness. Our states of clear consciousness still have

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<sup>27</sup> In [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corpo\\_\(filosofia\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corpo_(filosofia)), ult.cons.29 novembre 2020, Plato writes in Phaedo 66b, that the body is the grave of the soul. Then in the Middle Ages the body becomes an instrument, and with Descartes res extensa, separate and automaton. Only since Bergson, in phenomenology, is the body a living experience.

<sup>28</sup> Exposed in this way, the qualia make me think of a desperate cry of someone drowning in the open sea, that is, an aid to not drown in a sort of collective unconsciousness.

content that we could judge, even if they vary a lot, like "beautiful, harmonious, positive". The responses to the questionnaire do not include content that is unpleasant or that we can interpret as negative.

However, if we take into account the fact that many people (30% of respondents) claim to have difficulty putting the experience into words or finding the adequate words, and we simultaneously consider that it is a particular experience from which we cannot rule out that they had expectations, it could also be that emotions and feelings such as joy, happiness, love or peace are "secondary companions" and not the experience of clear consciousness itself. That is, could it be that consciousness itself has no content, and so it is impossible to describe?

«The sound of the valley streams are its long broad tongue,  
the form of the mountains are its pure body,  
at night I heard the 84,000 verses,  
how can I relate to others what they say?»

Su Shi (Dongpo)<sup>29</sup>

William Edelglass, scholar of Chinese Buddhist poems, clarifies that through this poem Su Shi's master, Dogen, recognized his disciple's state of clear consciousness. There, poetry serves as a means of expressing a state of consciousness which, according to Buddhists, it is not expressible through words.<sup>30</sup>

Language does not seem to be an adequate means of expressing the nature of clear consciousness, nor any of its content.

If instead, feelings and perceptions were part of the experience itself, then consciousness would still have contents, therefore there must be a link that binds content to consciousness. We can ask, what is conscious of this content? And if there are many connected parts, how many are there? Without going into "via infinitum",<sup>31</sup> let us examine some elements that can guide us in the jungle of posed questions.

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<sup>29</sup> W. EDELGLASS, in <https://www.arttv.ch/biennaleluzern/2020/>, ult. cons. 20 novembre 2020, "libera traduzione personale" di Su Shi vissuto dal 1037 al 1101 in Cina.

<sup>30</sup> W. EDELGLASS, in <https://www.arttv.ch/biennaleluzern/2020/>, ult. cons. 20 novembre 2020. For Buddhists, language is a paradox and words are traps.

<sup>31</sup> L. CIMMINO, tempo ed esperienza - Internazionalità, azione, filosofie del tempo, Aguaplano - Officina del libro, Passignano s.T. 2019, p. 158.

We can say that space, in some form, appears in every experience, and that the areas of the body that are most often described are the chest, with thirteen responses, and the mind, with ten. The chest is described as the body area most present/conscious in an expansive or spacious way during and after the experience (seventeen responses), and while recalling the memory of lived experience (fifteen answers). We can affirm that consciousness, clear in our case, is and remains in some relation to the mind, the chest, and the whole body. Therefore, there is a connection between the body, mind, heart, and consciousness. These links could open doors to a wider or clearer consciousness. Like the description of the “Anschauung” by Meister Eckhart<sup>32</sup>, seven people mentioned amazement, three mentioned gratitude, and four mentioned joy that accompanied the experience of clear consciousness. But we also have people who did not experience emotions or feelings along with clear consciousness. All of this seems to indicate that emotions and feelings occur after and are not contents of clear consciousness. However, we have no trace of any content of consciousness if it exists. We only know that it is accompanied by perceptions of an enlarged space and of time that is not given by the clock.

#### 1.2.1. Fifth hypothesis: clear consciousness is equally tied to time and space.

This hypothesis seems like tautology at first sight, because every experience is inevitably linked to time and takes place in a space. But clear consciousness seems to be linked not as an experience that is formed within space or time, but, from the answers we received, an equal relationship with these two dimensions. That is, a peer relationship.

This hypothesis sounds at first glance very improbable, but in an ancient text, we find:

"When your body is fully penetrated by consciousness,  
the unidirectional mind dissolves into the heart and  
then you enter reality."

Vijnanabhairava tantra<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> M. ECKHART, *Einheit im Sein und Wirken*, Walter Verlag, München 1986, p. 106-110.

<sup>33</sup> D. ODIER, *Tantra Yoga - guida alla pratica del tantra e della conoscenza suprema*, Neri Pozza Editore, Parigi 1998, p. 16.

From this ancient poem, we can deduce that there is an experience in which the whole body is conscious, as also described by our interviewees. In other words, the present body<sup>34</sup> is essential for clear consciousness to show itself, and only then the mind, which normally has one intention after another, dissolves into the space of the heart. At the same time, unidirectional intentions also dissolve – a state of mind which we have previously called receptive. This dissolving in the heart could have the effect described in the responses as “without thought, spacious, present, relaxed, etc...”. The penetration of reality could mean an understanding of the actual nature of reality and not that which is perceived and observed through the mind but indicates that there is a reality beyond what we know as an objective reality, as understood by the empirical sciences. We have not investigated it, but it emerges in question no. 30, to which many respond as having had useful understandings in the most varied moments of their life because of a different perspective.

In another passage from the same text, we find: «When you grasp the luminous spatiality of your body radiating in all directions, you free yourself from duality and merge into space.»<sup>35</sup>

This indicates that, once the bodily perception of the space that is still part of the body but is no longer just the body itself «in all directions»<sup>36</sup>, an even wider perception of space is possible. Simultaneously a state “beyond the duality,” which could simply mean what we previously called a receptive and unintentional mind.

However, we have not yet examined how consciousness, space, and time interact, or how or why they attract each other.

It could be that the consciousness, since it feels attracted to receptive elements (mind) or spacious (body), has in turn a receptive nature. However, we know from physics that two receptive bodies by themselves, without a third element, do not attract each other. So, if we wanted to examine this possibility, there must be another element that attracts it, as in Newtonian gravity. If it is not like gravity, which is the subtlest attraction<sup>37</sup> that we know, could it be like a magnet, or like a black hole that devours a star when it gets close? Or what if the attraction

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<sup>34</sup> Does it leave one wondering if presence and consciousness are the same phenomenon? In the book *Einführung in die Integrative Körper-psychotherapie IBP* (KAUL E., FISCHER M., Hogrefe Verlag, Bern 2016;) presence is defined as “being aware of one's own bodily perceptions, emotions and breathing”. It seems that the word presence appears concurrently with the appearance of the psychological sciences.

<sup>35</sup> Ivi, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. And therefore also above, below, in front and back and so on.

<sup>37</sup> Personal conversations with Dr. Elmar Zadra

occurs through an unidentifiable third element? Would it be possible that this attraction was not an attraction, but a synthesis that takes place, as in a quantum leap?<sup>38</sup>

Let us examine two elements with more caution, spatiality and the absence of time, which accompany almost all experiences of clear consciousness.

We can say that although time flows as defined by the clock, people do not perceive time in the same way. So, we have two different perceptions of the same phenomenon occurring in the same place. In other words, the perception of time, whether it is or is not there, does not depend on its place in space. So, what is contingent on the fact that time dilates?

In his studies, Marc Wittman argues that the experience of variable time depends on the experience of bodily presence.<sup>39</sup> Being aware of the present goes concurrently with the subjective perception of time slowing down. Future orientation is always associated with a faster subjective perception of time.

On the other hand, spatiality, which is described in the answers as openness, breadth, and expansion, is a perception that is more associated with the chest area and/or the whole body, in addition to beyond the body.<sup>40</sup> How is it possible to perceive space in the chest area, and beyond the boundaries of the body? Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of perception*, argues that the body is the subject of the perception of space and is endowed with a primordial perceptive consciousness which allows us a consciousness and human communication with the world that is older than the thought:

«Le corps propre est dans le monde comme le cœur dans l'organisme».<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A. PLOTNITSKY, *The Principles of Quantum Theory, From Planck's Quanta to the Higgs Boson*, Springer International Publishing, Svizzera 2016, pp. X-XXII.

<sup>39</sup> M. WITTMAN, in <https://www.spektrum.de/news/wie-unser-gefuehl-fuer-die-zeit-entsteht/1309744>, ult. cons. 30 novembre 2020: «The experience in the Floating Tank. The feelings described at the beginning of the isolation tank indicate the answer: It is the perception of the body that underlies the consciousness of time. In the tank you hear nothing, see nothing, hardly smell anything; gravity is greatly reduced. And yet you can feel the time directly. Because the body feeling cannot be switched off. Neuroscientific studies help to understand the experience of floating. Accordingly, a very specific region in the brain - the insular cortex, Latin: insula - is particularly active when perceiving periods of time in the range of seconds».

<sup>40</sup> The phenomenon of being able to perceive space beyond the body deserves further investigation. Apart from studies on mirror neurons, we know of nothing that could be able to perceive the large space described.

<sup>41</sup> M. MERLEAU-PONTY, in <http://philocite.blogspot.com/2016/12/le-corps-propre-est-dans-le-mondecomme.html>, ult. cons. 29 novembre 2020. M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Fenomenologia della percezione*, Giunti Editore S.p.A./Bompiani, Milano 2014, p. 243.

We could say that the body, which according to Merleau-Ponty inhabits space,<sup>42</sup> in the answers we received, becomes part of the space and therefore perceives the space as its own. Or in other words, spatial perception is intrinsically connected to the perception of the body as being present. And it seems that this perception of “being spacious” increases if the silence between one thought and another increases.

If we now put these two elements together, that is the perception of spatiality and time that doesn't exist and/or is slowed down, could we have fertile ground in which consciousness expands naturally?

### 1.2.2. Sixth hypothesis: clear consciousness naturally expands in conjunction with time slowing down and space extending.

Here we are talking about a consciousness that expands through these perceptual conditions of space and time.

But is this really how consciousness expands? We saw earlier that a favorable condition for the expansion of consciousness is an inactive mind. Could it be that consciousness is always expanded, but the perception of it changes according to the different perspectives of the perceptions?

From the questionnaires, it appears that the expansion of consciousness can take place both gradually and in jumps, and that this process may not always be synchronous. These possible processes could explain the fact that we can perceive different forms of consciousness, depending on the entity from which the consciousness feels attracted, in which moment, and whether it occurs gradually or in jumps. We could say that there are many possibilities in which this expansion of consciousness can take place, and for now we have no criteria to be able to say precisely why it happens in one way rather than in another. Similarly to what happens with the "uncertainty principle"<sup>43</sup>, we cannot define when a gradual process occurs and when the process performs in jumps.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> In [http://www.analisiqualitativa.com/magma/0203/articolo\\_01.htm](http://www.analisiqualitativa.com/magma/0203/articolo_01.htm), ult. cons. 29 novembre 2020.

<sup>43</sup> A. PLOTNITSKY, *The Principles of...*, cit., p. 8. Arkadi Plotnitsky explains the main concepts and principles that led to the quantum principles and talks about Heisenberg's "uncertainly relations" (in [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principio\\_di\\_indeterminazione\\_di\\_Heisenberg](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principio_di_indeterminazione_di_Heisenberg), last cons. November 30, 2020) and of the impossibility to reconcile them with the concept of "quantum phenomena".

<sup>44</sup> Ivi, pp. 53-106. In quantum physics we speak of the observer, both in the form of light / the quantum, and in the form of the scientist who rages on the observed. In our case it would be both the basic mental condition and that of the precise moment in which it affects the observed (the consciousness) and the observer (the mind itself).

However, we cannot say with certainty that it is consciousness that expands through time and space. Could it also be that perception expands? Following this thinking, we come across the question of what comes first, perception or consciousness?

A. Damasio, a world-renowned scholar, shows through his studies that prior to consciousness there is the perception of emotion.<sup>45</sup>

Certainly, we cannot perceive what is before our existence and therefore we cannot state that consciousness existed before us in case that it existed before. But we find some interesting ideas about what happens after our existence in the Tibetan book of death. According to Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the only faculty that guides us and remains active even after death is love.<sup>46</sup> It is surprising that even in our answers, 62% of people perceive a large space in the chest. Curiously, the percentage increases as time passes after the experience.<sup>47</sup>

Could the heart be the place that "remembers" the experience but not the explicit memory? Could it be the meeting place between consciousness, time, and space because it has the characteristics to be able to perceive spatiality and "out of time" in a natural way?<sup>48</sup>

We will return to the topic of the heart later.

### **1.3. What is the nature of consciousness?**

From the answers to the questionnaire, it seems that there is nothing in common between all experiences, that nothing can give us a clue about the nature of clear consciousness except that it is related to space and time. Yet they all agree that it was an experience of clear consciousness. What makes them so sure? Some answers to question no. 24 do not agree at all, except that they are all certain that it was an experience of clear consciousness.

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<sup>45</sup> The entire book is dedicated to demonstrating that emotion resides in us before consciousness and thought, and that emotion determines our behavior more than the mind. «Consciousness is useful for extending the scope of the mind and consequently for improving the life of the organism that possesses that mind» (A.R. DAMASIO, *Emotion and consciousness*, Adelphi Edizioni Spa, Milan 2000, p. 363). Among other things, he is also convinced that understanding consciousness is only the sunset in understanding the functioning of our mind.

<sup>46</sup> S. HODGE, M. BOORD, *Das illustrierte Tibetische Totenbuch*, "libera traduzione personale", Urania Verlags AG, Neuhausen am Rheinfall 2000, p.18.

<sup>47</sup> The fact that the percentage increases with distance could also mean that the chest-heart supplements the experience. Additional questions could be introduced in the questionnaire to deepen this remaining question.

<sup>48</sup> E. ZADRA, M. ZADRA, *Tantra per due - Una guida per la felicità sessuale della coppia*, Best Sellers 21° edizione, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A., Milano 1999, pp. 115-117.

Are we faced with the phenomenon that Owen Flanagan described as “positiv metafisical Hallucinations”?<sup>49</sup> Are we faced with a form of fundamental authenticity, or did we forget a supplementary or essential element? How does a new experience, not yet inserted and settled into habitual mental patterns, immediately become one sure thing, without even presenting a contradiction? Sadly I have to say that data is missing here. I had not predicted this certainty. For now, we can only say that the experience of clear consciousness leaves no doubts or insecurities. We might as well see this strange fact as a possible clue that we are dealing with an entity, a universal, primitive notion, or a property of consciousness itself.

Michael Polany speaks of a tacit knowledge,<sup>50</sup> “a meaning that is formed through a triad (the subsidiary particulars, the focal point and the knower joining the first with the second) where meaning is lost in the moment, if we focus on a subsidiary”.<sup>51</sup>

If we assume that the subsidiary particulars are physical perceptions and feelings, the focal object is consciousness itself, and the knower which joins them is the mind, then we could have a meaning of “existing”. If in this case, however, we focus only on the perceptions or qualia (subsidiaries) then we lose the meaning of our existence.

If, on the other hand, we take our ingredients from before: the subsidiary details in this case are the receptive mind which therefore captures, records, or observes what is there, that the focal objective is consciousness itself and the knower is the heart, then we could have an experience of the meaning of truth that leaves no doubt. But we could also look at it another way: that contemporary presence in the spacious body, receptive mind, and open heart allow us to experience consciousness as it is.

What can we infer from this about the nature of consciousness itself?

### 1.3.1. Seventh hypothesis: the nature of consciousness is one.

Is there a first consciousness? Does consciousness have boundaries and if so, what kind? How can we grasp this singular consciousness?

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<sup>49</sup> O. FLANAGAN, in <https://www.arttv.ch/biennaleluzern/2020/>, ult. cons. 20 novembre 2020.

<sup>50</sup> M. POLANY, H. PROSCH, *Significato*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 2016, p. 113.

<sup>51</sup> Ivi, p. 130.



With these questions, we come to the furthest point that today's phenomenology has arrived to.<sup>52</sup>

Let us examine the answers<sup>53</sup> to the questionnaire:

Five people report having experiences of clear consciousness in their childhood that they only recognized after having similar, conscious experiences in adulthood<sup>54</sup>. One of these five answers says: «I was convinced that I had my first experience at the age of 25 in a Vipassana retreat, but actually there was first a spontaneous one at age 15.»<sup>55</sup>

How can it be that a state we call clear consciousness can exist without our mind registering it as such? Can experiences of clear consciousness be unconscious? We have found, even in our interviews, that language is not very good for expressing this kind of experience. But if we call “being conscious” what we manage to name because we have inserted it into our cogito, and clear consciousness flees exactly from that cognitive capacity, then we cannot grasp it with our cognition. And if we don't grasp it with our cognition, then with what do we grasp it? If there are already experiences of clear consciousness at an early age, could it be that consciousness is part of us from our beginning, regardless of our mind?

We said earlier that the responses to the questionnaire identify the chest as the most involved area of the body, both during experience and in memory of it. Could it be that this area has the ability to remember or grasp clear consciousness?

We know that the faculties of the heart are to unite, transform, be in tune, perceive meaning, make sense of the ordinary, connect, and that it is connected with perceived space.<sup>56</sup> But can it grasp and memorize the experience? Even if that were the case, what can it say about the nature of consciousness itself? Maybe the heart is the only element in the human being that can see, hear, perceive, or intuit on a different plane from the mind the unity and the clarity of consciousness.

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<sup>52</sup> T. METZINGER, *Grundkurs Philosophie...*, cit. Il libro è un'introduzione alla fenomenologia della coscienza. In 534 pagine spiega tutte le teorie importanti di oggi.

<sup>53</sup> Question no. 4 of the "Consciousness Questionnaire" which asks about age during the first experience of clear consciousness.

<sup>54</sup> The data they had refers to the "Consciousness Questionnaire", the data they remembered only in adulthood does not refer only to the questionnaire, but also to the discussions that arose after the delivery of the questionnaire.

<sup>55</sup> It is the answer to question no. 11 of questionnaire no. 001, which was the first questionnaire/test, which I subsequently improved and thus became no. 45.

<sup>56</sup> E. ZADRA, M. ZADRA, *Tantra - La via dell'estasi sessuale*, Best Sellers 28° edizione, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A., Milano 1997, p. 241.

Romano Guardini writes: «Love is a fundamental ingredient for recognizing what has value and morality».<sup>57</sup> And he does not mean a doctrine, but an experience prior to the doctrine. In this, Guardini agrees with Scheler, but also with Pascal for whom "le coeur" is what intuitively grasps the axiological character of being.<sup>58</sup> So, is the heart the right place to grasp the nature of consciousness? If so, what does it capture in the moment of clear consciousness? The only phenomena common to all experiences were: more space than usual in the body or chest and a slowed or absent perception of time. But it was not only perceptible in the chest. The state of clear consciousness was no longer an observation of the mind, directed or focused, but became an experience of "being immersed in what is." The experience was no more than a "that what is". This was not only perceived in the heart, or the mind, or other parts of the body, but in all of them as a unit. We could say that the nature of consciousness has a unifying quality. Merging and assembling what is. And maybe it can belong to anyone or anything that can experience life. The heart could serve as a receptacle for consciousness, and only those living can have it. Plants, for example, may have other receptors.

### 1.3.2. Eighth hypothesis: consciousness is universal.

If everything that lives can be conscious, then animals, insects, and plants can have consciousness. Any living thing could have, within its family, different receptors for absorbing consciousness.

## 2. THE COMPARISON OF MATERIALISM AND ANTIMATERIALISM

The second part compares the posed hypotheses with two theories of consciousness in opposition. We cannot address all the themes, because this thesis has a limit to respect, therefore I have chosen some of the most poignant ones. Let us first compare the posed hypotheses with the rationalistic theory from D.C. Dennett, and then with the theory from D. Chalmers.

### 2.1. Comparison with the theory from D.C. Dennett

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<sup>57</sup> R. GUARDINI, M. BORGHESI, *Dialettica e antropologia*, Edizioni Studium, Roma 1990, p. 115.

<sup>58</sup> Ivi, p. 107.

The comparison to D.C. Dennett's theory immediately presents a fundamental problem. For him, every phenomenon is only a physical effect of an action in the brain. Dennett is defined by Chalmers as a "type A materialist".<sup>59</sup>

For Dennett, the resistance that scientific explanation meets when trying to explain consciousness is fear, as has happened to other demystifications throughout history.<sup>60</sup> For him, consciousness was born through evolution and has no destination, but is the continuous flow to various places in the brain according to different narratives.<sup>61</sup> The mind, which for him is conscious, is a virtual machine ineffectively installed on parallel hardware that evolution has given us.<sup>62</sup>

In our arguments regarding our hypotheses, we have seen that the brain is not able to grasp what clear consciousness is, nor are we able to express it through the means available to the mind. We can agree with Dennett that the brain really does not seem "designed" to fully grasp consciousness. But it seems impossible that it is only the software of the brain-machine, since the whole body is involved in the experience of clear consciousness. But if even for him, a materialist, the whole body depends on the brain, we must ask: how do you explain a perception of space much larger than one's own body? How do you explain that experiences of clear consciousness leave no doubt and provide a truth and clarity that the mind cannot express?

For Dennett, consciousness was conceived during evolution, like language.<sup>63</sup> Among our hypotheses, we have not investigated the origin of consciousness, we have only exposed that consciousness is universal, which assumes that it has the same value as time and of space. There is no doubt that its existence has a beginning and therefore its own evolution, but it is beyond the possibility of being an epistemic truth, much less phenomenological. Dennett is aligned with evolutionary psychologists, he also takes his cues from biology and proposes a meme, similar to the gene, which transports consciousness, but it is a mental exercise, rather than one based on the whole existence. From our observations, however, we can at least develop a coherent thought that leads to think that it could be universal because we include ontology, which Dennett does not.

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<sup>59</sup> D.J. CHALMERS, *The character of consciousness...*, cit., p. 29: «The type A materialist (...) denies that there is any phenomenon that needs explaining...once we have explained how the functions are performed, we have thereby explained everything».

<sup>60</sup> D.C. DENNET, *Coscienza*, cit., p. 35.

<sup>61</sup> Ivi, p. 129. Lui lo chiama il "modello delle molteplici versioni" della coscienza.

<sup>62</sup> Ivi, p. 254.

<sup>63</sup> Ivi, pp. 195-255.

For Dennett, consciousness is not one moment but a continuous flow. We could agree with this statement, if we did not have the data that during the event of "being only conscious," there is nothing else. If this was a flow, it would happen in a span of time as in all experiences. A stream of something is always given by something that flows, that exists and then goes away, which therefore implies time. But in our experiences of clear consciousness, we also have a timelessness and an absence of any kind of flow. So, I exclude that consciousness is a flow, but rather that it simply is, or perhaps has, all-intrusive and unifying qualities.

Dennett argues that each property is linked to brain processes. I could agree with this statement, but we have seen that meanings are formed within experiences, which are not formed in the brain. The heart itself appears to contain phenomena of meanings that are fully "in accord" with external reality, yet they can be perceivable only by the heart with an immediacy to which the thought sometimes seems too slow to integrate them. So, I exclude that consciousness is exclusively hooked to the mind. It could be that it seems so to man, due to his mental structure. But it is, according to Damasio,<sup>64</sup> also included in people who have brain injuries and still have an emotional experience and can distinguish between good and bad. These are criteria which could be perceptible, as we have seen, by the heart.

Dennett does not explain the qualia but denies them. He claims they will be explainable neurophysiologically and that they belong to the physical like any experience and any other perception. For him, qualia are a philosophical invention that we can do without. It could even be so, philosophers named them first. However, there is a clear difference between repetitive and unconscious physical activity, and physical activity that is accompanied by consciousness. Even during sleep, if a qualia surfaces, for example the annoying pinch of a spider in one's ear, we immediately become conscious and wake up. So we cannot deny qualia, nor can we equate them with all sensations, perceptions or emotions. Therefore, with respect to qualia, Dennett behaves as a mysterian<sup>65</sup> that does not want to see the difference that seems obvious to us.

The rest of his book, *Consciousness Reconsidered*, is a collection of short stories, excursions into other fields and comparisons. Here we have only discussed the topics that most interest us. In summary, Dennett's arguments are not strong enough to collapse our hypotheses.

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<sup>64</sup> A.R. DAMASIO, *Emozione e coscienza*, Adelphi Edizioni S.p.A., Milano 1999, p. 362.

<sup>65</sup> L. CIMMINO, *Introduzione all'epistologia della mente*, Rubbettino Editore, 2012, p. 209.

## 2.2. Comparison of the theory from D. Chalmers

Chalmers rejects reductionism and is an anti-materialist. For him, consciousness is a real phenomenon.

He divides problems into easy and difficult.<sup>66</sup> In easy problems, we find cognitive and psychological contents, and difficult problems include the problem of qualia, the qualitative and phenomenal level. It is immediately apparent that we have not considered the easy problems in our hypotheses and focused instead on the so-called “hard problems”. He himself says that by solving the difficult problems, one consequently also solves the easy ones.

Let us first look at the problems he considers difficult and see if we can answer them based on our hypotheses. After, we will see if the easy problems, as Chalmers says, consequently solve themselves.

“The hard problem”<sup>67</sup> would be to explain the relationship between consciousness and the physical and how experience arises from the physical process.

We have seen that experience does not guarantee consciousness, because it could also be unconscious. We hypothesized that clear consciousness shows itself if we are in direct contact with other universals such as space and time, which are exclusively experienced in a present and extended body. We have exposed earlier that consciousness puts in motion a mental act of addressing something, for example something physical. The physique seems like, by itself and in itself, it does not have the possibility of accessing consciousness without the help of the mind, but at the same time it is on the physical plane that we experience what it is to exist. (Here “exist” it is not as in Heidegger a metaphysical concept, but it is an experience in the body as it is for Merleau-Ponty).

It seems that mind and body are both necessary and dependent on each other in order to experience what we call being, or becoming, conscious.

If consciousness has the property of being all-invading, it invades both the mind and the body. Neither the body nor the mind have an exclusive relationship with the consciousness. The body can perceive through perceptions, the mind through grasping its contents, but we can

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<sup>66</sup> D.J. CHALMERS, *The character of...*, cit., pp. XIV-XVII, 3-28, 96-97, 105-106, 111-113.

<sup>67</sup> Ivi, p. 105. «The hard problem of consciousness is that of explaining how and why physical process give rise to phenomenal consciousness. A solution to the hard problem would involve an account of the relation between physical process and consciousness, explaining on the basis of natural principles how and why it is that physical process are associated with states of experience».

consider both elements as subsidiary. We have seen that considering one of them alone takes us off track. Only when all the "ingredients" are united it is possible to discover the nature of clear consciousness, which in turn gives us a meaning about one's own existence and a look at consciousness itself. We examined this joining through two other components: time and space. We considered them "universal siblings" of consciousness but not ingredients of the conscious being. They become ingredients the moment we have an experience, but we have seen that to be "in clear consciousness," the experience is not a fundamental ingredient, because it might as well not be there! The experience takes place over time, that's why!

So Chalmers is asking the wrong questions, if he postulates that to explain consciousness it requires an explanation on the emergence of an experience or we must inevitably explain it in terms of a physical process or natural principles. The natural principles and experience with consciousness may have nothing to do with it! Also the question: "what is the relationship between physical and attention?", cannot provide us with any data on consciousness, because it only examines a single relationship that is misleading to discover the nature of consciousness that most likely has more relationships than just this one. If we must talk about relationships, Chalmers completely excludes the heart, which we have seen seems to be the place that captures meaning by bypassing the mind. We could say that Chalmers is right that if we solve the hard problems, we solve the easy ones too. But solving them focuses on some aspects of the problem, that probably does not indicate the road that can lead us to an answer.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In these pages, we have centered the state of clear consciousness, through which we have proposed some "top-down" hypotheses on its nature and consciousness itself.

Some hypotheses have led to new questions and still need more insights, like the consciousness-love relationship, how space and time flow together in the experience of clear consciousness, or the way in which ordinary consciousness is shown. We have not really touched on other themes: objective reality, different forms of representations, possible expectations, and feelings and emotions. Several shortcomings have surfaced with respect to the questionnaire that could be addressed next time, such as adding a few questions about the expectations and the terms and quality of sleep to delve into the matter of unconscious consciousness. Questions to

deepen knowledge about the state of clear consciousness itself and love, which seems like an essential ingredient, at least for humans, are also missing.

Despite the shortcomings, this adventure towards the nature of consciousness has brought us into a phenomenological field, or phenomenological world,<sup>68</sup> which has provided us with a wealth of information about the state of clear consciousness. The total conscious state that seems easy, light, and simple, is actually terrifyingly complex. We ventured across ontological, metaphysical, and epistemic planes. We took inspiration from ancient texts, theories and approaches from contemporary scientific philosophers, articles, and debates to explain the eight hypotheses. We have seen that the hypotheses can resist Dennettian materialism and the critical analysis of Chalmers.

But in all this work, we have forgotten one fundamental fact: humans are part of nature. We breathe the same air as many other living things, we feed on nature, all that we derive is from nature. We are an integral part of a larger whole that we call nature, that is, this earth. By forgetting this foundation, we forget our limits, which are also limits in understanding consciousness itself. There is no “red line” or border, which indicates that humanity ends here and reality or nature begins there. This distinction is made by the human who, in doing so, separates and isolates himself from his being. Only humans understood as part of nature can realize that they have limits. And just by seeing, accepting, and living within these limits, humans will be able to cross them conscientiously and discover others living in our consciousness.

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<sup>68</sup> Ivi, p. 538. «(...) the phenomenal field or even phenomenal world». «(...) is analougous in some respects to Schaffers priority monism (2020) with holds that the universe as a whole is fundamental and its parts are derivative».

### III. APPENDIX

Here is a summary of the answers to the questionnaire.

I have grouped the answers into five categories, to give a concise overview:

- A. Information on the first experience of clear consciousness;
- B. Information on after the first experience of clear consciousness;
- C. Information on further experiences of clear consciousness;
- D. General information;
- E. Other.

#### **A. Information on the first experience of clear consciousness:**

- a) In four answers, the first experience dates back to an average age of 8.3 years; in twelve answers to an average of 45 years;
- b) For sixteen people it happened spontaneously, for three it was sought after. In eleven responses it sprang from itself, in thirteen it sprang from something;
- c) Circumstances vary a lot. For six people it occurred in nature, for another six during meditation, but we also find some who have had it during sex, sports, a concert or at school. Nineteen people were aware of what was happening in their environment and seventeen people had an amplified perception. Eight people were in the company of other people;
- d) Twenty people say they had some physical perceptions during the experience. Eight people say the chest area was most involved, while thirteen people say the whole body was involved equally. Thirteen people felt expansion and/or spaciousness in the chest, while four people felt presence/liveliness;
- e) The emotions that most accompanied the experience were: joy for four people, awe/wonder for seven and gratitude/bliss for three;
- f) The duration of the experience varied from one minute to seventy-two hours;
- g) For ten people the mind was in a state of wonder, for eleven receptive, for thirteen peaceful, for ten spacious, for eight empty, for three active, and for none concentrated.
- h) The perception of time was absent for eighteen people, slowed down for four, no one describes it faster, while one person declares: «The people who were around me moved with



clarity, there was a sequence of movements and actions, however I did not perceive that the time passed»;

- i) Thirteen people reported that they had no impulse to act, while eight did. For nineteen there was no intent during the experience. For fourteen it was not possible to talk during experience, while for eight yes. For sixteen of them, thoughts were suspended/they weren't there/they were volatilized.

**B. Information on after the first experience of clear consciousness:**

- a) After the first experience, twelve people did not experience difficulties, five report nostalgia/desire for repetition, and three had difficulty integrating it into their lives;
- b) Time slowed down for nine people;
- c) The mind after the experience was peaceful for thirteen people, spacious for another thirteen, empty for four, receptive for eight, active for two, and none were hyperactive;
- d) In seventeen people, the sensation of a large, expanded and spacious chest remains;
- e) For fourteen people it was not possible to put the experience into words. For those who were able to put it into words, the time before they were able to varies a lot: from a few hours, 20 years, until today;
- f) The effects of the experience are long-lasting (from many months to "still now") and are described as improvements and understandings in various areas of daily life;
- g) The area of the body most involved in the memory of the experience is the chest area with eleven answers;
- h) Twenty people have lost the desire to relive it.

**C. Information on further experiences of clear consciousness**

- a) Eighteen people had other experiences of clear consciousness, 8.5 on average;
- b) Eight people reported that the was during the retreat "The inner master";
- c) The common denominator in all experiences of clear consciousness were inner space as outer/breadth/expansion for eight people, refined senses/hyperesthesia for two, the mind as receptive/absent/clear, empty, or thoughtless for six. They in intensity for five of them, in duration for four and under the circumstances for two.

**D. General Information**

- a) Twenty-one people do daily meditative practices (such as Thai Chi, Pranajama, Chakrabreathing, Vipassana, Zazen and Micromeditations);
- b) Two people claim to belong to a religious group;
- c) The average age of the respondents is 53.3 years. There are twelve women and eleven men.

**E. Other**

- a) Fifteen people remember more moments of infinite joy in childhood, accompanied by openness. Five of them, on the other hand, do not remember similar moments of happiness in childhood.

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## VI. CONSCIOUSNESS QUESTIONNAIRE

### Questionnaire on the states of consciousness

Below I use the words “consciousness”, “clear consciousness” and “intention” and would like to clarify their meaning:

- "Consciousness" has two meanings: the first concerns an inner moral voice that tells you what is good and what is bad. The second is a synonym for awareness. In the questionnaire we mean the latter.
- “Clear consciousness” is defined as a state of consciousness devoid of mental content.
- Usually "intention" is a synonym of will. Here we mean a signal or a push that leads to the initiation of something.

Multiple answers are allowed for all questions.

### Questions about your experiences:

1. Do you have different types of consciousness?

Yes       No

If yes: how would you describe the type of consciousness that you find yourself in most often?

And how would you define the type of consciousness you find yourself in most rarely?

2. If you think about your consciousness in general, do you get the impression that there are different levels of consciousness among them?  Yes     No

If yes, how would you define these levels?

- On distinctly separate levels, like jumps
- Gradual
- Waves
- Alternating
- I do not know

In another way, specify:

3. Have you had experiences of clear consciousness in your life?  Yes  No

If "Yes" continue to question n. 4

If "No" skip to question n. 39

4. At what age did you have your first experience of clear consciousness? \_\_\_\_

It was sought after

It happened spontaneously

In what circumstances did this first experience take place?

In nature

At school

In bed

During a concert

During sports

During dance

During meditation

On a retreat

During sex

Alone

With companions

With your partner

Other:

5. Was the experience of clear consciousness accompanied by physical perceptions?

6. Was the experience of clear consciousness accompanied by emotions?

7. How long was the experience itself?

Less than a minute

- Between 1 and 2 minutes
- Between 2 and 5 minutes
- Between 5 and 10 minutes
- More than 10 minutes
- I do not remember
- I was told it lasted \_\_\_\_ minutes/hours

8. What characteristics do you attribute to the mind during your experience?

- Hyperactive
- Activated
- Amazed
- Receptive
- Peaceful
- Careful
- Spacious
- Focused
- Empty
- Other, please specify:

9. Which parts of the body were involved during the experience:

- Heart
- Belly
- Genitals
- Head
- Neck
- Legs
- Hands
- None in particular
- All equally
- I do not know
- If other, please specify:



10. What body parts were you not aware of at all?

11. During the experience, did you also perceive your surroundings and the environment?

Yes    No

Did your senses perceive the environment differently than usual?

Yes    No

If yes, how?

12. What did you feel in your chest area during the experience?

13. How did you perceive time during the experience?

- Slowed down
- There was no time
- Infinite
- Timeless
- Time passed faster than usual
- Time was a single point

Other. Specify:

14. During the experience, did you follow any impulse to move, to say, to act?

Yes    No

If yes, do you remember where this impulse started (for example: from a thought, from a part of the body, from a memory, externally, etc.)?

15. Was it possible to talk during the experience?

Yes    No

If yes, do you remember what you said?

What triggered the words?

16. Was there an intention during the experience?

Yes    No

What was it?

If so, where did this intention come from?

17. In your opinion, what happened to your thoughts during the experience?

18. How would you describe the thing that consciously observed the experience?

Internal observer

Clear mirror

Other (specify):

19. This thing that observes experience, where do you think it resides? (if it is in the body, indicate the body area):

20. According to you, the clear consciousness that manifested itself the first time, was it born from something?

• Did it occur by itself?  Yes    No

• Was it triggered by something?  Yes    No

If yes, from what?

• From something else?  Yes    No

If yes, from what?

21. Did clear consciousness, during its first manifestation, have a shape? An outline? A color? A smell? A sound?
22. What else did you notice during your first experience of clear consciousness that was not contemplated in the questions above?

**Questions regarding the period after the first experience:**

23. What did you feel, feel, think or notice in the moment, or immediately after the experience ended?
24. How did you recognize that it was an experience of clear consciousness?
25. Were there one or more difficulties following the experience?
26. How did you perceive time immediately after the experience?
- Slowed down
  - There was no time
  - Infinite
  - Timeless
  - Time passed faster than usual
  - Time was a single point
  - Other. Specify:
27. How would you describe the mind immediately after the experience?
- Hyperactive
  - Activated
  - Shocked
  - Slowed
  - Receptive
  - Peaceful

- Spacious
- Empty
- Other, please specify:

28. What characteristic did you attribute to the chest area after the experience?

29. Immediately after the experience, was it possible to put it into words and tell it to someone?

- Yes       No

If yes, how long did it take until you were able to describe the experience?

30. Has the experience left an effect on your life? If so, what is it? And in which area of your life (at work, in intimate relationships, with family, in your relationship with the world, towards death, towards knowledge in general ..)?

31. How long did it last?

32. If you think about this past experience now, which areas of the body are more involved? (in other words: where you most feel a reflection of this experience in the body?)

33. Did the experience leave a desire to relive it?

- Yes       No

34. After this first experience of clear consciousness, have you had any others?

- Yes       No

If "Yes", go to question no. 35

If "No", go to question no. 47

**Questions regarding subsequent experiences of clear consciousness:**

35. How many other experiences of clear consciousness have you had?
36. Which was the most profound/significant?
37. Under what circumstances? (Alone, in a group, with friends, in nature, making love, during a spiritual retreat, in church, during sports, during a trip to the mountains, on vacation, ... )
38. Were the experiences the same as the first?  Yes  No
39. What were the common denominators?
40. How did they differ?
41. Were the effects of the experience the same?  Yes  No
42. What parts of the body were more involved in the subsequent experiences?
43. What parts were unaware the next few times?
44. What parts of the body are most involved in remembering now?
45. What else do you want to communicate that is not covered in the questions above about the subsequent experiences of clear consciousness?
46. In your opinion, are your experiences of clear consciousness influenced by things you have read or heard before experiencing clear consciousness yourself?  
 Yes  No

If yes, what have you read or heard?

47. If you practice meditation regularly, has the practice changed after the experience of clear consciousness?

**Questions about you:**

48. Do you practice meditation in your daily life?  Yes  No

If yes, please describe the practice:

49. Did you grow up in a religious environment in your childhood?  Yes  No

If yes, what religion is it?

Did religious experiences in childhood influence your experience(s) of clear consciousness?

50. Do you now belong to a religion, sect, spiritual or esoteric group?

51. Do you remember moments in your childhood of light-heartedness, of infinite joy accompanied by openness?

52. Your Current Age:

53. Your Gender:

54. Anything else do you want to add:

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE!**