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Toward a Theory of Mind

Efforts to cope with problems of mental experience in the bisected brain have led to a modified interpretation of consciousness. The current concept departs from prevailing materialist approaches of 20th century neuroscience in postulating that conscious phenomena play an active directive role in shaping the flow pattern of cerebral excitation. Instead of being parallelistic and noninterventionist, consciousness in the present scheme becomes an integral part of the brain process itself and an essential and potent constituent of the action. Consciousness is put to work and given a use and a reason for having been evolved. Subjective experience in this interpretation is conceived to be an emergent dynamic property of cerebral excitation, inseparable from the material brain process, but different from, and more than, the collected sum of of the physicochemical components. Compared to the elementary physiological properties, the conscious properties are more molar; they encompass and transcend the details of nerve impulse action in the same sense that cellular properties transcend the molecular, the molecular transcend the atomic, etc. The mental forces do not violate or intervene in neuronal activity; however, they do *super*vene. The brain process must accordingly detect and react to the pattern properties of its own excitations, responding to the gestalt qualities and forces of a given excitation pattern as an entity rather than to its individual excitatory elements. It follows that a full explanation of a conscious sequence of cerebral activity would not be possible solely in terms of the biochemical and electrophysiological data; the pattern-derived qualities that constitute conscious experience must be included.

ROGER W. SPERRY
California Institute of Technology