

5. THE GREAT SCIENTIFIC QUESTIONS

WTM FAQ 5.4 What is consciousness? / Why is it that humans became conscious while other animals haven't? / How did consciousness emerge in humans?

'Consciousness' has been a subject cloaked in mystery and confusion, but *not* because it is an impenetrably complex subject, as we may think—but *because it raises the unbearable issue of the human condition*, and so we humans have had no choice but to deliberately leave it in an obscure, cryptic state until the human condition was truthfully explained. Now that biologist Jeremy Griffith has explained and defended human's upset angry, egocentric and alienated condition, consciousness can now be explained. (For the explanation of the human condition, see [Video/Freedom Essay 3*](#) or [chapter 1*](#) of Jeremy's definitive work *FREEDOM: The End Of The Human Condition*.)

What is consciousness?

Nerves were originally developed for the coordination of movement in animals, but, once developed, their ability to store impressions—what we refer to as 'memory'—gave rise to the potential to develop understanding of cause and effect. If you can remember past events, you can compare them with current events and identify regularly occurring experiences. This knowledge of, or insight into, what has commonly occurred in the past enables you to predict what is likely to happen in the future and to adjust your behaviour accordingly. Once insights into the nature of change are put into effect, the self-modified behaviour starts to provide feedback, refining the insights further. Predictions are compared with outcomes and so on. Much developed, nerves can sufficiently *associate* information to *reason* how experiences are related, learn to *understand* and become *conscious* of, or aware of, or *intelligent* about, the relationship between events that occur through time. Thus consciousness means being sufficiently aware of how experiences are related to attempt to manage change from a basis of understanding.

What has prevented the development of consciousness in other animals?

The answer to this question begins by first recognising that the meaning of existence is to develop the order of matter, the explanation for which is presented in [Freedom Essay 23*](#). The second requirement is to recognise that, as a tool for developing order, the gene-based natural selection process (which has developed the great variety of life we see on Earth) has one great

limitation. That limitation is that it normally can't select for unconditionally selfless, altruistic, self-sacrificing behaviour because altruistic traits tend to self-eliminate—they tend not to carry on and so normally can't become established in a species.

This is significant because for an arrangement of matter or whole to form and hold together, the parts of that whole must consider the welfare of the whole above their own welfare. Put simply, selfishness is divisive or *disintegrative* while selflessness is *integrative*. The problem for the gene-based natural selection process is that while altruistic, unconditional selflessness is the theme of existence, the glue that holds wholes together, it normally cannot develop this 'glue' of unconditionally selfless behaviour—again because altruistic traits tend to self-eliminate and therefore cannot normally become established.

In fact, the gene-based natural selection tool for developing the order of matter on Earth normally actively *resists* self-sacrificing, altruistic behaviour. It is against altruism. It follows then that in terms of the development of consciousness, the gene-based natural selection process is, in effect, totally opposed to any altruistic, selfless thinking, and since altruism is the very theme and meaning of existence, such opposition blocks the development of honest, sound, effective thinking. Indeed, it makes sense that the gene-based natural selection process will and does develop instinctive blocks in the minds of animals to prevent the emergence of such truthful, selflessness-recognising, effective thinking. And it is this block against truthful thinking in the minds of almost all animals that prevents them from becoming conscious of the true relationship or meaning of experience. They are prevented from thinking effectively and thus from becoming conscious of the true relationship of events that occur through time.

How were our ancestors able to overcome the blocks that prevented other animals from becoming conscious?

Understanding how the nurturing process was able to develop selfless, moral instincts in our ape ancestors (see [Freedom Essay 21*](#)), allows us to answer this crucial question. The reason we were able to become fully conscious is that, quite by accident, the nurturing of selfless instincts breached the block against thinking truthfully by superimposing a new, truthful, selflessness-recognising mind over the older, effectively dishonest, selfless-thinking-blocked one. Since our ape ancestors could develop an awareness of cooperative, selfless, loving meaning, they were able to develop truthful, sound, effective thinking and so acquired consciousness.

Consciousness is explained in more detail in [Freedom Essay 24*](#) and fully explained in [chapter 7 of FREEDOM*](#).

And as is explained here, in order to understand how consciousness arose in our ancestors and not in other animals, it is necessary to understand that there is an integrative direction, purpose and meaning to existence, which you can read about in [Freedom Essay 23*](#); and it is also necessary to understand how our ancestors acquired our all-loving, unconditionally selfless moral conscience that is in line with this integrative direction, which you can read about in [Freedom Essay 21*](#).

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