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PHILOSOPHICAL SKETCHES:
PROLEGOMENA TO A STUDY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

I am delighted to be a part of this gathering. There is nothing more dear to me than the study of consciousness and the means by which we study it. I'm here to help initiate dialogue on the topics rather than make and defend claims. I hope our collective efforts will make us all a bit more conscious about what is to be a conscious human being in the world.

My suggestions, though sometimes odd, won't seem out of place. The literature in a variety of relevant fields contains a wealth of material along just these lines. There's a lot of literature I don't know or know well, so I expect to gain valuable information and insights from all of you.

What follows I need to say, and I say in the way I do because healthy, critical dialogue about the issues of consciousness, especially, cannot avoid confronting the pre-scientific and philosophical premises which support empirical and theoretical inquiry.

I am also prompted to express these ideas because they represent 30 years of examining Western and Eastern, theoretical and clinical views of consciousness as well as the methods thinkers and practitioners use to discover, articulate, modify and apply such views.

My own work has been strongly influenced by William James Ludwig Wittgenstein, Medard Boss, German and French Phenomenology, and Indian and Buddhist sciences of man.

I'll be blunt. I have serious doubts about whether there can be a scientific study of consciousness, given our conceptions of science and confusion about what constitutes the proper object and field of investigation. I am equally skeptical about the possibility of meaningful psychological and philosophical models of consciousness as well as the modeling processes themselves. The lack of consensus here regarding the phenomenon and phenomena we model seriously concerns me.

I find myself agreeing with Psychiatrist-Philosopher Medard Boss (Dasein Analysis), who says of Western Psychology, that it

Tells us absolutely nothing about the subjectivity of the subject, the personality of the person and the consciousness of the mind in a manner that would actually enable us to understand the connexion between these, the environment and our real selves. (A Psychiatrist Discovers India)

Boss' insights arise from his intensive work as a Psychiatrist and Therapist. Therapeutic considerations compelled him to put aside virtually all theory.

Science, Psychology, and Philosophy need to revise their underlying premises regarding the nature of the man being (or even acknowledge that investigation cannot occur in absence of self-consults, self-critically articulated views about the human being.

For example, researchers and theoreticians should reexamine the status of subjective experiencing and discover ways to introduce conceptual and theoretical symbolizations which refer to such experiencing (not "experience", which is a theoretical term already). Philosopher-Psychotherapist Eugene Gendlin offered a fresh and productive approach to this question 25 years ago in **Experience and the Creation of Meaning**. Subsequent work has refined and expanded those initial investigations. Boss' work, which depends heavily on the Phenomenologists (Heidegger in particular), represents a radical but fruitful revisioning of the human sciences and their practical application to therapy and education.

As it stands now, most research and modeling exclude subjective experiencing or symbolizations-conceptualizations based immediately or mediately upon experiencing. Instead, external, third person observations and theoretical constructs are the currency of research, theorizing, and discussion. As a result, the conclusions of scientific, psychological, and philosophical studies of consciousness are remote from the immediacy of human life and awareness, or what Husserl calls the **Lebenswelt**, the pre-reflexive, pre-scientific, pre-philosophical world of purposive human action that guides scientific and philosophical reflections. And they are largely irrelevant to the clinician, therapist, and educator.

Wittgenstein makes a provocative remark in the **Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus**. It bears repeating in this context.

We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer. (6.52)

I embrace and celebrate the achievements of science. The work done charting features of the human being in the world commands our respect. We possess a wealth of information about brains and behavior, perception, sensation, and learning. The study of man in the last two or three generations has produced a revolutionary revisioning of earlier sciences of man.

"We know so much," my neuroscientific colleagues often say to me when I ask them about the meaning of their work. And they add, "We know so little."

It isn't really what you are doing that troubles me; it's the meaning of what you are doing, or are saying you're doing, that concerns me.

When I review the findings of science and the proposals made by philosophers and psychologists, I never had the sense that the picture includes me, or even the people who create the pictures and make the proposals. The domain of subjective experiencing or felt meaning which constitutes so much of my personal and social life doesn't appear to be mirrored in either descriptions of external observations of behavior, or in systems of interconnected theoretical constructs intended to explain behavior.

Then I consider our ignorance about the substantive connections between language, concept, and experiencing. Symbolizations exist to express, evoke, and describe. Yet I find that although I live, feel, think, and experience, I am often mute regarding my own consciousness. I can't even tell myself, or others how I am doing what

I am doing right at this instant, although I have to say I am acutely, self-attentively aware as I write. Augustine wrote 1500 years ago, "If no one asks me what time is, I know perfectly well what it is; but as soon as someone asks me what it is, I have no idea." I feel that way about virtually all conceptualizations and symbolizations relative to direct experiencing.

I struggle to find conceptualizations, which incarnate my felt experiencing (so I really **feel** what I mean and can **mean** what I feel). Conceptualizations somehow associate with words which I can use to express for myself and others what I actually feel, as I feel it. But words don't often seem to "fit" the felt experiencing and I know almost immediately when words do or not "fit" the experiencing. Words and experienced meaning seem to occupy different worlds; they are somehow incommensurable, much as are brain processes and subjective experiencing.

I can't deny the immediacy of experiencing any more than Descartes could deny his existence in the act of doubting it. Subjectivity is manifest. It exemplifies itself. It is the **first-person point of view** (perhaps a theory-laden expression itself). Subjectivity, as primary matrix of the **Lebenswelt**, is the source of science, philosophy, and dreams. We never leave it; we always come back to it after conceptual and linguistic flights of imagination and theory; even such forays are themselves occurring in this matrix.

I think researchers and philosophers have to acknowledge this immediacy and its significance for their work. Their lives are played out within its boundaries. Their work presupposes it. It is the medium within which they conjecture and operate, asserting or denying the truth or adequacy of theories, models and pictures. The criteria of truth and evidence are themselves a function of conscious performances within the same medium.

If we were to reduce our performances to brain states, or sensations, or behavior then we would undercut the meaning of truth and criteria of rationality.

Methodologically, conjectures and theories must begin with personal and social immediacy. They must return to this base if they are to have relevance and meaning for any of us. Theories are empty exercises in absence of phenomena about which they are theories. Phenomena and theory work together to help us understand what there is in the world, how we know it, and how we fit into it.

When we forget to "count" ourselves while "counting" objects in the world, we generate puzzles, paradoxes, and problems we seem incapable of solving. I'll consider a few examples.

The pictures of consciousness (or its non-existence) scientists and philosophers construct are never self-referentially complete. Satisfying this completeness condition seems crucial for models of consciousness and conscious human beings. It is an instance of the completeness criterion, which requires us to account for all phenomena (or data) in the file of class we are investigating. I'm applying it to our models and modeling instead of objects we model.

Any comprehensive theory which attempts to describe and explain the general scope of human knowing and being must exemplify itself and its creation/creator within its own conceptual boundaries.

No traditional or current pictures I'm aware of appear sufficiently rich in concepts, systematic interconnections, and conceptual bridges to first **and** third person experiencing and experience to account for themselves or for the theorizer's actions in creating them.

It seems intuitively (a word I use cautiously) obvious to me that pictures of consciousness should incorporate the activity of picturing itself, not to mention they myriad other projects in which human beings are engaged. What seems more natural and significant that a philosopher, for example, creating a portrait of himself creating a portrait of himself (maybe a philosophical Escher could)?

I don't think we can accomplish this "bootstrapping" magic. Hence, the paradox. It may be possible to demonstrate this consequence in a way analogous to Goedel's demonstration of the indemonstrability of a particular proposition in his arithmetized syntax. But that's another story I'm still writing.

In any case, the emergence of paradox can force us to consider entirely different premises, substantive and methodological, to deal with human consciousness. The paradox can't be resolved by creating another language because that is not the problem level, although it's implicated. Indian and Buddhist thinkers confronted and dealt with the paradoxes millennia ago. However, their premises don't arise out of the drive to conceptualize, describe, and explain all nature. But that, too, is another story.

A second puzzle arises for me in considering problems of objectivity and bias in the application of scientific methods to the study of consciousness. Here, as I write, I am once more acutely self-aware of the fact (in immediacy) that I'm struggling with **myself** because **I** am creating and framing the problem. What I say exemplifies itself in the doing of the saying. Wittgenstein's often-quoted remark is apt here: "Philosophy is the disease of which it is the cure." A related remark seems significant too: The aim of authentic Philosophy is to "mean and unspeakable by clearly displaying the speakable."
(Tractatus)

The achievement of objectivity and the avoidance of bias are the marks of good scientific inquiry. Intrusion of observer-experimenter-theorizer into the field of inquiry must be kept to a minimum (it's impossible to eliminate it entirely). But what happens when we ourselves are the objects of investigation?

Conscious investigators interrogating the phenomenon and phenomena of consciousness, whether in first or third person frames, has always struck me as peculiar, to say the least. Both the determination and the use of relevant variables in empirical research are functions of the human process, which is itself under investigation. I'm not saying we can't do the research--our sciences are potent testimony to the fact that we can. But are our results reliable, relevant, and meaningful? Are they relatively free of bias? I don't think so.

In most research we wouldn't tolerate the introduction of the experimenter's view and roles into the field of phenomena. We have devised the most ingenious ways of avoiding such sources of bias and interference.

Yet how are we to free consciousness research from the context of the consciousness we live and out of which our inquiries come, i.e., how do we objectify it? The definitions and concepts of consciousness which form the starting point of research are evaluated and appropriated by standards which are outside the scope of research. The context of experiential immediacy will often determine which definition and concepts are appropriate. This depends on consensus, which itself depends upon the phenomena about which we are trying to reach a consensus, which themselves depend on the context of immediate, subjective experiencing.

Our human sciences have taken flight away from first person contexts in order to find objectivity and surety in third person external observational accounts. But even the researchers can't avoid studying the properties of their consciousness in the examination of the attributes of an experiential subject's consciousness. The examination of the other is always an examination of self. Consider studies, which explore the psychology of scientific creativity, or those which examine the ways in which bias and interference enter experimentation. They highlight the problems and paradoxes while making useful contributions. And with respect to the paradoxes, we seem to be in untenable and curious position. I'm reminded of Otto Neurath's reflexive epistemology and his illuminating metaphor of the ship in need of reconstruction on the open sea.

The role (and the problem) of experimentation with human subjects (who know they are subjects and know the experimenter knows they know) is akin to what we find in therapeutic situations. Therapy is always difficult and problematic because of the relationships and **shared knowledge** (one of the root meanings of "consciousness"). The best therapy occurs when the therapist self-consciously acknowledge and allows for his presence and roles. Freud, for example, developed the technique of unobtrusive listening to deal with just this problem.

There are ways around the problems I address. For instance, clinical and therapeutic literature abounds in discussion (and experiential findings) about the interference difficulties (transference is once example) as well as methods to overcome (or creatively use) them. The business of helping people, like the enterprise of scientific investigation of consciousness, carries on, though, even in the absence of consensus or serious interrogation of foundational underlying premises.

There are to other examples I want to briefly consider before closing.

Years ago when I began reading the work of Lashley, Penfield and others, particularly the accounts of work with conscious patients, I was struck by something I've never forgotten. My familiarity with Indian and Buddhist Psychologies probably had a hand in this I'll distill the observation and idea in a few sentences.

I noticed, as I am sure many researchers have, that while the content of awareness for the patient varied, often dramatically, during brain stimulation and testing, the patient's first person point of view did not. That focal point of awareness, the **I** or **Impersonal witness** (often described as being behind the eyes or at the back of the head, remained unaffected. It seemed to be invariant through all transformations in the content of awareness. It's clear that organic deficiencies, medication, bodily states (disease states and conditions which affected mentation), and introspective or reportorial sophistication (or lack thereof-- Luria's work is relevant here) influenced ability to articulate. But the "I" was undeniable and seemingly independent. I am not sure we've given enough attention to this phenomenon. Any account of consciousness has to at least acknowledge it. And it may have some interesting consequences for our research. It will certainly have an impact upon the underlying premises about what constitutes human consciousness.

This observation leads to my final point about how adequate and inclusive are the pictures of consciousness underlying and embodied in research and theorizing. I'll illustrate with a single example, though what I suggest encompasses much more.

Medard Boss, in the work cited above, quotes an Indian Sage with whom he had extensive discussions. The Sage had a comprehensive knowledge of western Philosophy and Science.

Western Philosophy and Psychology ... have always concerned themselves with but a portion of the total human phenomena. But how is the full truth about any kind of being to emerge, when all its manifestations are not studied? Western sciences have, basically confined its explorations solely to the **waking state** of human life and has been interested only in the phenomena observable in the state.

The Sage goes on to emphasize dreaming and sleep dreamless states. He acknowledges that Western Psychology has undertaken studies of states occurring during sleep. But he charges that we are biased in favor of the waking states, so much so, that the latter state becomes the basis for all knowledge and reality claims.

The Indian Science of Man respects the integrity and function of all states. Indian and Buddhist Psychologies contain some of the most detailed and sophisticated descriptions and analyses of human consciousness I've ever read. Indian approaches emphasize human consciousness I've ever read. Indian approaches emphasize the importance of **lucid** non-waking states in revealing the deeper dimensions of being and consciousness. In any case, each state is evaluated relative to its own standards rather than negatively or neutrally compared with some state, which is considered primary, i.e., the waking state for Western thinkers. It's notable that Western Depth Psychology, particularly the Jungians like James Hillman and **DasinAnalysts** like Boss, strongly urge analysts and others to avoid applying naturalistic, waking-world categories to dreams and other non-ordinary states.

This really isn't the place to make a case for Indian views of consciousness. We do, however, have a great deal to learn from them, but learning how to learn from them is the subject of other papers and books. Western biases against Far Eastern Philosophy and Science remain strong.

But looking at our science and philosophy of consciousness from the vantage point of the Indian (and Buddhist) science of a man (as I do because of my training), allows me to highlight deficiencies, which might not otherwise be seen. Raising questions about the adequacy and inclusiveness of our Western views, research, and thinking is an inevitable consequence.

The other deficiency I want to point to here takes us back to the beginning of this Prolegomenic effort. We have a strong tendency to separate Science and its philosophical premises. In the drive toward precise, comprehensive and fruitful explanations of phenomena, we drift away from problems and puzzles about human beings, which gave, rise to our empirical quest in the first place. And as we increasingly turn to science and technical philosophy to resolve our conceptual and life problems, we begin to break contact with the larger metaphysical domain, which makes our activities meaningful. I'll quote Boss once again:

Never, in fact, has there been a physical medicine, let along a psychotherapy, nor will such scientific disciplines ever be possible in the future, without a pre-given specific philosophical first premise concerning the actual nature of man, his world and the inherent relationship between man and his world

Finally, I close with a quotation from David Hume's **Treatise**:

It is evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that, however, wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even **Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion**, are in some measure dependent on the science of MAN; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties.