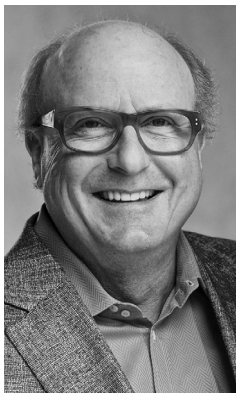


# Toward a Science of Consciousness



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**W**hy does it feel like anything to be you? Is it like anything to be your cat, your dinner or your smartphone? What if someone built a robot that looked and behaved so exactly like you that nobody could tell you apart? Would that robot be conscious? Is subjectivity an emergent neurobiological effect or is it something metaphysical, like an immortal soul? These are the most important of all possible questions, right? A significant part of human history has been devoted to pondering these questions and acting out the answers that different philosophical,

religious and political communities have come up with over the ages. The fact is that motivated people will eventually answer *every* question they consider, whether there is any genuine information on which to base their answers or not. In the case of consciousness there is no objective information available at all, other than the raw fact that it feels like something to be you, so all these answers have been cooked up in a vacuum and sustained for centuries without any feedback. This accounts for the mind-boggling array of contradictory opinions about what consciousness is and what that says about our identity and fate.

Until very recently consciousness appeared to be the same as intelligence, which led to what philosophers call *The Mind/Body Problem*. But in the same way molecular biology and genetics finally explained life as a chemical process, neuroscience and the cognitive sciences are now explaining intelligence and mind in ordinary physical terms, but not subjectivity itself. Philosophers call this *The Hard Problem* and no real scientific progress has yet been made on it. Don't believe *any* of the opinions you hear about what it means to be conscious; they are all wrong or hopelessly simplistic. This means that you are not *necessarily* just a machine hurtling toward death, which is as good as it gets. It may not be clear at first why this is good news, but it is. Trust me. Call me.

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