

CONSCIENCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

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The word *consciousness* came into the English language with Descartes, in the 17th century. *Conscience* evolved nearly three centuries earlier, in the 14th century. Few of us realize that the noun consciousness and its adjective conscious are relatively new words in our language.

This we learn by referring to the *Oxford Universal Dictionary* (Onions, 1933), but we can read about it in C. S. Lewis's *Studies in Words* (1967, pp. 181-213) where a section is devoted to these two words, conscience and consciousness.

My concern, of course, is not with the literal use of these words, but with the truth that no other two concepts have such profound significance in Western culture. The one, conscience, hides within it the West's humanities and inhumanities alike. The other, consciousness, split the world of modern knowledge into two apparently irremediable parts, of objective science which has solved the problem of life and the universe, and of mind which remains a mystery in spite of every endeavor to explain it, not even, as Koyré (1965) said, by calling it "subjective." If we could solve, or resolve the latter, perhaps some-

thing might be done--say three centuries ahead if our culture lasts so long--to mitigate the terrifying one-sidedness of objective science with balm from a new subjective science. No less is involved in the thesis to follow.

THE TWO WORDS

The villain was Descartes, first to make regular use of the word consciousness with the modern meaning *conscious of something*. Before that, down the centuries from ancient Greek and Roman days, there was only one connotation, *conscio* in Latin and *sunoida* in Greek, meaning "sharing knowledge."

In Latin, *scio* is "to know," *con* is "with." So there is the Latin noun *conscientia*, and the adjective *consciūs*, meaning...

I know together with (someone)...or,
I share (with someone) the knowledge that...

Words, as we all know, change in usage. From *conscientia* there came the word *conscience* in Middle English (c. 1350); and then, much later, the word *consciousness* (c. 1650, with Descartes).

Lewis found it helpful, for good reason, to restore the word *conscire* to use, to cover "sharing knowledge": the hint was enough for me, too, and a recent paper has the title, "Consciring: A General Theory for Subjective Communicability" (Stephenson, 1980).

Consciring has the meaning of sharing knowledge between two or more persons, or with oneself self-reflectively. However, it is a frailty of mankind, apparently, to want to share only *unusual*, *secret*, or *surprising* things. So today a housewife is implored to share her secret recipe; and the daily news is made up of factualities on murders, accidents, catastrophes, and every sensation or oddity, but not (as is often remarked) the everyday ordinary things

of life. Thus, in classical languages the root *consci-
scius* was quickly attached to secret knowledge (of
conspiracies and the like), and the words *conspiring*
and--by guilt--*conscience* were early in common use.
The secrets were usually of the conspiratorial kind;
but lovers also shared secrets, and even Sophocles
could accept "goodness" ("be valiant, he is *conscious*
to himself") while Shakespeare remarks that "con-
science makes a man a coward": *conscious to*, in So-
phocles, not *conscious of*, i.e., *conscious with him-
self, not conscious of himself*.

The classical usage appears in English literature
even into the 19th century. In Jane Austen's *North-
anger Abbey* (1818), Mrs. Morland is introduced to
Henry Tilney by "her conscious daughter," meaning
that daughter and Henry were privy to a secret they
were sharing. In *Sense and Sensibility* (Ch. 14),
Mrs. Jennings is sure that Colonel Brandon's letter
had something to do with Miss Williams, "because he
looked so conscious when I mentioned her"--meaning
conspiratorial, not conscious of, or self-conscious
about, but *conscious with* Miss Williams. Earlier, in
the 17th century, Sir John Denham, in his poem *Coop-
er's Hill*, sings of the hunted stag, flying through

...the conscious groves, the scenes
of his past triumphs and loves....

The meaning is that of the classics, of knowing se-
cret things, shared with a few others only, in this
case the silent onlooking groves.

There is also Milton's use of *conscience* in *Para-
dise Lost*: Eve drew back from Adam's suite, impelled,
Milton says, by...

her virtue and the conscience of her worth,
that would be wooed, and not unsought be won....

Eve's beauty is her own guilty secret, as *worth* woo-
ing, a *conscientia* of secret wishes.

According to Lewis, the meaning of conscious in the modern sense is difficult to find in the classics. It is hinted at by Tertullian, in *De Testimonio Animae* V (c. 150-230), who speaks of convictions lodged in our "innate conscientia," with something therefore of the sense of "mind," or "awareness," or "understanding." But this was rare, and for more than a thousand years, conscientia developed only in relation to *sharing knowledge with someone*, coming down the centuries untouched by the meaning given to conscientia in modern times.

DESCARTES' BLUNDER

The problem is, why the delay in forming consciousness from conscientia? And, why did it split astonishingly from its roots, and become a figment of mind?

Lewis proposed that the common things and events of daily life pass us by without mention, i.e., without entering into consciring. The root, therefore, never took shape with respect to everyday things, whereas it sprouted abundantly for human affairs of a conspiratorial nature, the word *conscience* following suite, since guilt and secrecy go hand in hand. Lewis gives a fascinating account of this development in his *Studies in Words*.

Be this as it may, there can be no doubt that man has always known more than he has been given credit for: even today, we pay little heed to man's astonishing ability for *recognition* of things seen. A study by Shepard (1967) of 600 items (pictures, words, sentences) shows a remarkable recognition of having seen them, a recovery rate of 98% for pictures, 90% for words, 80% for sentences. Our skill for *recognition* never gets due reward! But throughout time, man must have conscired with respect to the grasses, trees, animals, stars, storms, stones, people, etc. all around him, in infinite and familiar abundance. That there was shared knowledge about all such can scarcely be doubted, at best at a common sense level of sharing, a matter of common knowledge.

The trouble came with modern science, and with a profound blunder for which Descartes can be held responsible. With modern science, common sense was replaced by rationality and objective fact. But this did not deal with common knowledge. Its fruits, moreover, were essentially non-secular; scientific knowledge became secret knowledge about the world "outside," as it is now about much of nuclear theory. Modern science cannot explain a white table (Popper, 1959) except to decimate it into molecules. It was Descartes who divorced matter and mind. God exists, he proved to his own satisfaction: mechanical matter "outside," however, and mind "inside" were separated by edict--and only knowledge of God's wisdom could join them. *Cogito*, Descartes said, *ergo sum*: I think, therefore I am.

The blunder was to define *Cogito* as "I think." It was not "I" who thinks, but *me sharing knowledge*. That "I" exist, as anything else in the universe does, is acceptable. But it is "me" who enters into shareable knowledge with self reference, and there was nothing but this *conscio* for anyone to consider as "mind," whether as *conscience* where conspiracy and secrecy are involved, or with everyday *conscire* where there is no secrecy, but knowledge common to everyone and never mentioned. That something was radically mistaken should have been obvious, because the ultimate of secrecy was put by Descartes into mind, locked for ever inside each person's own mind, *where there had been no secrecy whatever before the blunder was made!*

AN END TO CONSCIOUSNESS

What is basically at issue is simple. Everyone can enter into conversation (or be communicable in whatever way one cares to define) about the common things and events of the day, not as matters of fact, but as "presentations," i.e., by way of *self reference* (Ward, 1886, 1920). Consider, for example, a rain-storm in ancient Rome on a feast day: it was easy to validate that it was indeed raining. The priests

would no doubt credit it to their rites, as scientists today will explain it in terms of low pressure systems, high humidity and dust particles for droplet formation, etc. Such is the way of explanation, by "outside" forces, whether rites of priests or methods of objective science.

But who asked the Roman bathers what "it is raining" meant to them? If sophisticated, no doubt, they would make reference to the priestly rites. And no doubt a physicist today will make reference to pressure, humidity, and droplet formation. But the ordinary Roman bather would probably have danced for joy, rubbed the rain into his or her nakedness, drank it as it dropped, and ruminated on the washing down of filthy streets, and monuments, on the refreshing of shrubs and flowers, on children skipping nakedly in the rain, of urns being filled with rainwater... and so on...*ad infinitum*...every such statement being a self imposition, every statement a matter of common experience in the culture, none of it learned (as priestly rites, pressure, humidity and droplets have to be), all of it knowledge in common usage.

It is from this abundance of self-referent possibilities that a genuine science of *consciring* had some day to evolve about familiar everyday things.

We now know what steps to take in this connection. About every event, every concept or object, there is *concourse* (Stephenson, 1978), i.e., large numbers (statistically) of self-referent possibilities. It was on this basis that I began with Q technique in 1935 (Stephenson, 1935) and Q methodology (1953), by defining the possibilities as statistical "populations" or "universes." But at that time, in 1936-39, I was saying that a child at 18 months, just beginning to speak, was subject to such concourse--my daughter called all dogs of whatever shape, size, breed, age, disposition, "bow-wows" (Stephenson, 1938); and Rosch (1973) has recently called attention to the same phenomena as "natural categories"--children at age three have such for *clothing, furniture,*

people's faces, and *vehicles*. The statements for "it is raining," which were shareable knowledge for Romans, would constitute a *concourse*. The significance of this abundance of self-referent possibilities has never been grasped, except in Q methodology. It is with some wonder that one can look back at the hundreds of "populations" of things, events, and statements used in Q methodology over the past four decades, all *shareable knowledge*, all immediately known to everyone for whom the Q samples were drawn, and with which everyone at issue could project *feelings* with no doubt crude, but sufficient verisimilitude to make discoveries possible (Stephenson, 1953).

It was on this foundation, of *concourse*, that what Descartes relegated to "mind" should have been pursued. The core is *shared knowledge*, something known to everyone at an appropriate functional level in a culture--as every child "knows" pictures and portraits of all other children, as every Roman "knew" what rain meant in common terms. *What everyone "knows" already could have been the foundation of much of everyone's education*, as I have indicated elsewhere (Stephenson, in press), instead of, as now, having to learn what no one knows beforehand! There is nothing remarkable about this, except the insight that we can make all shareable knowledge self referent.

This will seem enigmatical. But it is now certain that in the context of *concourse*, important laws have come to light. There is now a theory of *meaning* (Stephenson, 1975-76), of *self reference* (Stephenson, 1938, 1953, 1954, 1979b), of *abduction* (Stephenson, 1954, 1961), and a solution for Sir Isaac Newton's Fifth Rule of Reasoning (Stephenson, 1979a). There is also the remarkable law, that all subjectivity, everything self referent, is transformable to operant factor structure, in universal quantal units (Stephenson, in press).

These advances have been available to science since I broke with Cyril Burt on this very matter, of

study of *mind*, not *minds*, and acceptance of *synthesis* in science, as distinct from mere reductionist analysis (Burt & Stephenson, 1939). Burt, and modern psychometry about which he was authoritative (unhappily fraudulent in his later years), took any study of "mind" to be metaphysics (Burt, 1940). I held, instead, that it was what psychology should be about. The outcome to which I am drawing attention is remarkable: the symmetry and form of modern physics (Torrance, 1976; Handler, 1972) is now matched by comparable forms of subjectivity. This ends Cartesian dualism, *on empirical grounds*, replacing the Cartesian Godhead by *form*, and bringing objective and subjective together again as mere conscurring, both subserved by inherent form of nature.

It may be asked, is this all there is to conscurring, that shareable knowledge is all there is to consciousness? The answer is that concepts like consciousness, self-consciousness, the unconscious, and introspection, are themselves subject to concourse, and to the new science of subjectivity.

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