

# HANDOUT FOR CONSCIOUSNESS SECTION

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What do folk mean by ‘consciousness’?

1. **Sentience** — A creature is receptive to its surroundings and it can act in an intelligent way
2. **Wakefulness** — Not asleep or otherwise incapacitated
3. **Access consciousness** — A thought that is widely broadcast in a creature’s brain and guides many of its actions
4. **Phenomenal consciousness** — Subjective feelings that accompany many episodes in our mental life

**Our focus** is phenomenal consciousness.

The **hard problem of consciousness** is to explain what it is about us, as physical beings, that produces phenomenal consciousness.

We have **two** main ways of accessing facts about our mental life:

1. Introspective reflection on our own experience (**‘phenomenology’**)
2. Examination of our brains and behaviour from outside (**psychology, neuroscience**)

Why is the hard problem so hard?

There is a **gap** between our two perspectives on phenomenal consciousness: phenomenology and neuroscience.

Science has good track record at unifying knowledge. But explaining how subjective feelings (accessed by phenomenology) are brought about by our brains and behaviour (studied by the natural sciences) is a particularly difficult problem. The philosophers Frank Jackson, David Chalmers, and Thomas Nagel have argued that this, the hard problem of consciousness, will never be solved.

Frank Jackson’s argument that the hard problem will never be solved is called the **Knowledge Argument**. Imagine that a brilliant neuroscientist, Mary, who knows all there is to know about brain function, has never seen colour. One day, Mary does see colour: she sees a red rose. Jackson argues that at this point Mary learn something new: *what it is like to see red*. If Jackson is right and Mary does learn something new then the hard problem of consciousness will never be solved. Even if we are in the lucky position of Mary — having a completed neuroscience — we could still not be able to predict or explain the phenomenal feelings that accompany seeing colour.

See the references for the full version of Jackson’s argument and some interesting responses.