



Intimately conscious

Description

Sentience draws attention to feelings and sensations. *Consciousness* is more cognitive. It derives from Latin *conscius*, which is “sharing knowledge.” In my previous post I searched key texts for occurrences of “intimations of sentience” which yielded very little. A similar search on *consciousness* is more instructive.

Intimations of consciousness

“It takes a thief to catch a thief” and an intimate of his own consciousness to catch the **intimations of consciousness** in others” (63).

That’s a sentence from a book by psychologist Nicholas Humphrey called *Consciousness Regained*. In the chapter Humphrey describes a poem about sexual intimacy by John Dryden (1631-1700), arguing that the language “speaks only to those in whom the relevant concepts have been planted by their own experience” (63). In this light, only someone acutely aware of their own consciousness can assume (intimate v.) consciousness in others. Helpfully for an argument I am developing, the passage associates consciousness with intimacy.

Other earlier writers address the instinctual belief in consciousness in ourselves and others.

“And does not a child, who has no idea of the moral attributes of God believe the **intimations of consciousness** as firmly and as warrantably as the most enlightened philosopher” (382).

That’s from a 19th century book review in the *Canadian Journal of Industry, Science, and Art*. The review *intimates* the instinctual character of a belief in consciousness. In a book of the same period on mind and emotions, William Llyal refers to *intimations* of duty, matter, qualities, externality, and consciousness,

“We may remark the superior certainty that moral **consciousness**, the **intimations** of duty, give to our feelings, while we had no such tendency to let go the external world, merely from the difficulty of passing from a state of **consciousness** to one of actual cognition or belief while to our minds the **intimations of consciousness** in every state of it was regarded as decisive or irresistible” (476).

The belief in consciousness is irresistible. In his seminal book on mind, philosopher Gilbert Ryle stated at the conclusion of a discussion on emotions:

“Motives and moods are not the sorts of things which could be among the direct **intimations of consciousness**, or among the objects of introspection, as these factitious forms of Privileged Access are ordinarily described. They are not ‘experiences’ any more than habits or maladies are ‘experiences.’” (111)

He here privileges intimations of consciousness above moods and motives.

Intimations of collective consciousness

In a recent book on creativity and altered states of consciousness, artist and psychologist Tobi Zausner affirms the wide ranging attributions of consciousness. Some think it is everywhere and in all things.

“Scientists have found **intimations of consciousness** ranging from the intergalactically enormous to the microscopically minute” (25).

She refers to claims about ‘minded or volitional stars, which appear to regulate their galactic trajectories,’ and cells that ‘arrange their genomes in a sentient manner.’ These claims (which she neither endorses nor derides) seem to stem from panpsychism, which I attempted to address in earlier posts. See posts tagged [panpsychism](#).

More important to the theme of this post, she raises the prospect of ‘intimations of intersubjectivity,’ of consciousness as a collective experience.

“Humans are social beings, who tend to produce emergent order through interactions with each other. Influencing other consciousnesses and being influenced by them in return **intimates intersubjectivity** and a deep capacity for connection. By studying the neural basis of these relationships, social neuroscience is now proposing that consciousness may not only be an individual experience but also a shared experience” (36).

References

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Category

1. Artificial Intelligence

Tags

1. consciousness
2. intimacy
3. sentience

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