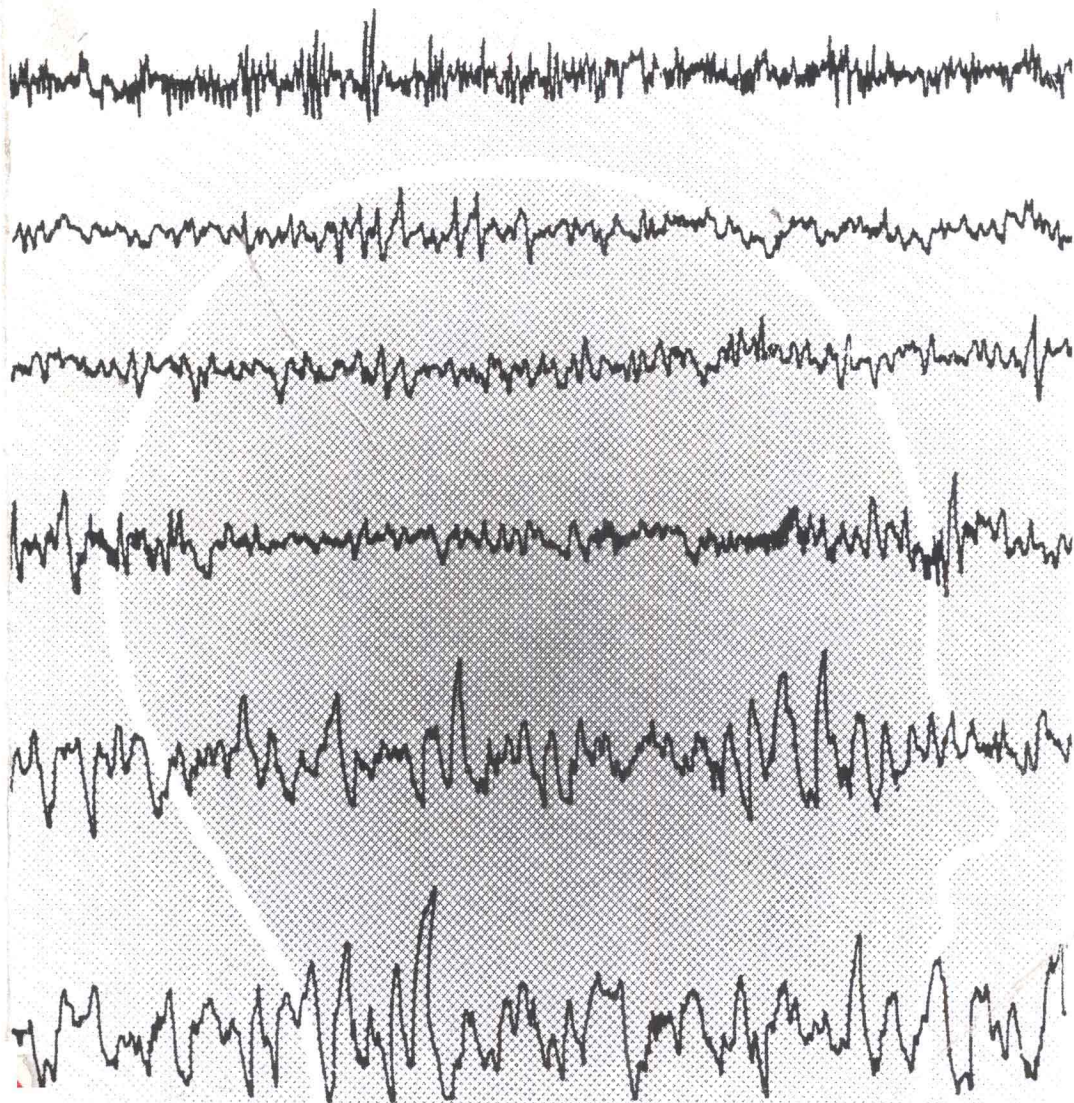


THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

G. WILLIAM FARTHING



The Psychology of Consciousness

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**To Carol
with appreciation and love**

Preface

The concept of consciousness has returned to a central position in psychology following a long period of banishment during the behaviorist era (Hilgard 1980). When I was an undergraduate in the early 1960s, introductory psychology textbooks made little or no reference to mentalist concepts such as consciousness, introspection, attention, mental imagery, dreaming, and hypnosis. Today most introductory textbooks include a chapter on states of consciousness and many colleges and universities offer courses on consciousness.

The psychology of consciousness covers a wide range of topics related to normal waking consciousness and altered states of consciousness, including: characteristics of consciousness, factors that influence the stream of consciousness, the distinction between conscious and nonconscious mind, the relationship between the brain and consciousness, introspection, daydreaming, sleep, dreams, hypnosis, meditation, psychedelic drug states, and other topics listed in the first chapter.

I approach the psychology of consciousness from a natural science and cognitive psychology viewpoint. In this view, consciousness is a natural phenomenon—a product of the brain's functioning. I emphasize research on topics of interest to cognitive psychologists, cognitive neuropsychologists, and personality and social psychologists. I also discuss clinical applications for a number of topics, such as hypnosis and meditation. And although the emphasis is on research and theoretical interpretations, important concep-

tual and philosophical issues of consciousness are also discussed, particularly in the first four chapters.

The incentive to write this textbook developed over a period of years during which I have taught a course on the psychology of consciousness at the University of Maine. The reading assignments have come from a variety of short paperbacks and reprinted journal articles. The reading list has never been satisfactory because it has been hard to find materials with the right breadth and depth of coverage while also being up-to-date. It became apparent that a comprehensive textbook on the psychology of consciousness was needed. Thus, the major reason for writing this book is to provide, in a single volume, a review of research and theory on the psychology of consciousness at a level suitable for advanced college courses.

A second reason for the book is to introduce psychologists to the psychology of consciousness. Many of today's academic and clinical psychologists went through graduate school without having any systematic exposure to these topics. I hope that the book will stimulate interest in teaching and research on topics of consciousness.

In order to make it easier for teachers to adapt the book for their courses, I have broken the material for some topics into two or three chapters. In these cases the first chapter covers the most basic and essential material, while additional interesting material is covered in the second (and third) chapter(s).

I would like to hear about reactions to this book from teachers, students, and other readers. In particular, I would like to know which chapters teachers assign in their courses, and which topics they would like to have greater or lesser emphasis on in future editions. Please write to me at the address listed below.

Acknowledgments. This book has been improved with the help of many people. I thank the following people for commenting on one or more chapters in their area of expertise: John Antrobus, David Foulkes, Michael Gazzaniga, Irving Kirsch, William McKim, Richard Nisbett, Alan Rosenwasser, Nicholas Spanos, Peter Suedfeld, Timothy Wilson, Michael West, and Lawrence Weiskrantz. Thanks to Ernest Hilgard for helpful and encouraging comments on early versions of three chapters. Also, thanks to the following people for correspondence regarding their work: David Holmes, Eric Klinger, Daniel Schacter, and Endel Tulving. Students in recent sections of my psychology of consciousness course have read most of the chapters and offered helpful comments. I would also like to thank the following reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions: Daniel Kortenkamp, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point; and Robert C. Webb, Suffolk University. Any remaining errors of fact or judgment are, of course, my own responsibility.

Thanks to Susan Finnemore, psychology editor at Prentice Hall, for her support for this project, and to Mary Anne Shahidi for guiding the book through the production stage.

Thanks to my friend Fred Pratt for introducing me to the topic of hypnosis about fourteen years ago. Our conversations were one of the important factors that swayed my interests in a direction that ultimately led me to write this book.

Thanks to my parents, Gene and Nancy Farthing, for their encouragement throughout my education and career.

And, last but not least, special thanks to my wife, Carol, for her patience and support over the five years that I spent working on this project. With appreciation and love, I dedicate this book to her.

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chapter 1

The Concept of Consciousness

The first and foremost concrete fact which everyone will affirm to belong to his inner experience is the fact that *consciousness of some sort goes on*. “States of mind” *succeed each other in him*. If we could say in English “it thinks,” as we say “it rains” or “it blows,” we should be stating the fact most simply and with the minimum of assumption. As we cannot, we must simply say that *thought goes on* (William James 1892/1984, p. 140).

Consciousness is the fundamental fact of human existence, from the viewpoint of persons examining their own experience. Taking the viewpoint of outside observers, scientists have concentrated on studying the human brain and behavior objectively. In doing so they have largely ignored consciousness, since they cannot directly observe other people’s conscious experience. Yet the fact of consciousness remains, and no account of human life can be complete if it ignores consciousness. It is psychology’s particular responsibility, among all the sciences, to try to come to grips with the fact of consciousness. What is it? What are its forms? What does it do? What is its origin?

In their research and clinical practice, psychologists have learned a great deal about various *aspects* of consciousness, such as perception, mental imagery, thinking, memory, and emotion. But in most of the theoretical discussions of these topics, the concept of consciousness has been merely im-