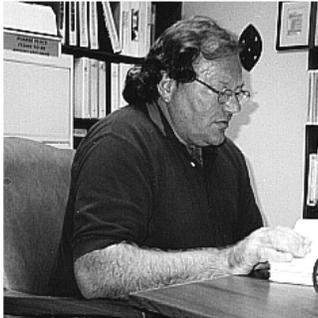


Consciousness and psychological type

An investigation into meaning and relationship



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Understanding consciousness may take us beyond general descriptions to understanding how individuals live their lives

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*She is susceptible; he is impossible ...
He has his contradicting views
She has her cyclothymic moods
They make a study in despair
Three of a perfect pair*

Adrian Belew

What is it to be ‘conscious’—or, for that matter, ‘unconscious’?

From a strictly behavioural point of view, this might seem a simple enough question for research purposes, at least, requiring observation and measurement, setting of appropriate tasks and so on. Experimental psychology and psychological instruments or tests of various kinds are examples of this atheoretical approach, based in a strict application of the ‘scientific method’, which implies sticking to observable facts.

A consequence of this approach is the denial of the necessity of a construct of the unconscious in either understanding or treating people and their behaviours (e.g. Miles 1966; Rachlin 1994). In the social sciences this has been extremely influential—if not the prevailing view—over the last century, punctuated by occasional outbursts of outright opposition, such as from Rychlak (1997).

This might usefully be interpreted as an urge to be ‘scientific’ according to a narrow definition, and so excluding important, scientific, data. In criticising this approach, the palaeo-archaeologist Steven Mithen has named it the ‘social sciences view of personality.’ Mithen prefers what he calls an evolutionary psychology perspective in explaining the development of the human mind over millennia (1996).

More pertinently, the respected researcher into early childhood development, Jerome Kagan, points out the fallacy of presuming that a behaviour is displayed for one reason only, even in rats. Attention is also drawn to the equally false presumption that a term used in one field (e.g. ‘fear’) means the same when used in another (2002; 2004).

Terms associated with C G Jung’s typology and the MBTI (e.g. *thinking*, *feeling*) are ready examples. While there are regular complaints about the different meanings associated with type constructs, defining your terms is a normal part of scholarship. In any case, too many new terms are not necessarily an aid to understanding or learning, although they might be useful for marketing a new ‘tool’, for instance.

What might, or might not, be ‘scientific’ with regard to human psychology seems to be confused generally. A perceived lack of scientific rigour in psychological investigations, including the use of the MBTI, has been identified and criticised—most recently by Annie Murphy Paul (2004), notwithstanding her critique being remiss on several fronts, including basic research methods (Geyer 2005).

What of *consciousness*, then? Like *emotion*, it has a few quite different meanings (Geyer 2001), although it might not be as unruly a category (Elster 1999).

From a *social* perspective, consciousness as a religious, or spiritual, view has a long history in American culture (e.g. Curti 1980; Hoopes 1989; Taylor 1999). This strongly informs contemporary Jungian and other ideas in that country—less so in others—to the extent that ‘consciousness’ in type terms is often incorrectly limited to just this perspective.

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consciousness is called
'the hard problem'

This particular view seems to be related to the idea of a 'transcendent' or higher plane of being—not necessarily associated with a deity, but sometimes with animist tendencies, in the way that consciousness is ascribed to non-humans.

In *science*, understanding human consciousness is focused on mind and brain, sometimes interchangeably. This ranges from researching the cognitive or emotional aspects of human beings (usually seen as opposites), including measuring and localising such events in regions of the brain, to the development of consciousness itself.

The latter is usually represented as what distinguishes humans from non-humans, in so far as being able to demonstrate a knowledge of self. There are boundary issues here, with primates and dolphins for instance, and it seems that part of the issue relates to older religious discussions on whether animals have souls, however defined.

In *philosophy*, discussions on consciousness circulate around the mind-body problem, or Cartesian dualism. Descartes' idea appears to be religiously based in some way; it does have similarities with the view expressed above, at any rate. The development of consciousness is generally called 'the hard problem' in both philosophy and neuroscience, as it's not known how the biological entity called the brain creates the behaviours and experiences that humans manifest, and that can be associated with consciousness and other states.

The rise of metaphors of computers and machines—and even Swiss Army knives—as ways of understanding the brain has not helped matters, as these have turned out to be too limiting and reductionist (Uttal 2001). The same can be said for the left-brain—right-brain analogies popular in adult learning and areas of psychology, but not with neuroscientists (Springer & Deutsch 1997).

The development and use of drug therapies depends on a chemical/mechanical view of the brain that presupposes that personality, if it exists, is similar enough for generalisations about treatment to be effective. This is notwithstanding scientific evidence to the contrary about individual differences

in brains, and the variety of human experience. In this way, by treating generalised symptoms for bipolar disorder for instance, the person under treatment may be at risk in other ways (Bentall 2004; Valenstein 1998).

In the cognitive field such approaches have given rise to Rational Choice Theory, which underpins contemporary economics, and choice theory in general, influential in areas including coaching. Both of these seem extraverted judging methods. In the first instance, there's a presumption that human consciousness involves objective logic of a particular kind, accessible to all.

For coaching and other applications, choice can involve the bringing to consciousness of a positive opportunity or alternative. Sometimes the notion is presented that there are always choices, a proposition that may be in the mind of the suggester, but not viable in the life of the person to whom the choice is suggested—and, accordingly, not a choice.

In passing, it's important to note here that Jung's theory of psychological types does not comprise a theory of cognition as defined in that field, notwithstanding its core processes of perception and judgement.

The moral philosopher Mary Midgley has critiqued consciousness as a 'hard problem', suggesting that the wrong definitions are used and the wrong places are searched (2002, 2004a, 2004b). In particular, she points out that the (incorrect) notion of the brain simply as inert matter, in the physics sense, leads to incredulity that consciousness can rise out of it. Midgley argues for a biological approach that is more likely to see consciousness as a natural part of complex organisms operating in their environment.

This view of consciousness, with its lack of metaphysics, is more or less compatible with Jung's view of the historical development of consciousness over time, and his understanding of 'primitive' cultures in this regard. However, it's important to recognise that Jung is talking here about psychological consciousness, rather than the broader definitions of consciousness investigated by scientists and philosophers.

Jung views consciousness as more of an individual process: ‘the function of activity which maintains the relation of psychic contents to the ego’ (1970). Samuels, Shorter and Plaut explain that:

Attainment of consciousness would appear to be the result of recognition, reflection upon, and retention of psychic experience, enabling the individual to combine it with what he has learned, to feel its relevance emotionally, and to sense its meaning for his life. In contrast, unconscious contents are undifferentiated and there is no clarification about what belongs or does not belong to one’s own person. (1986)

Accordingly, a person may be conscious according to science, but not according to Jung: a similar idea to his view of personality as a vocation or calling (1977). One may be engaged in society in a conventional way, but not be conscious *per se*.

This view has significance for Jung’s psychological types, and the MBTI. In theory, type preferences are a bridge between the psychological conscious and unconscious. Development of preferences implies that they become more conscious, and therefore under more control, in that the person concerned can impose their will on the construct and it will work more or less in their interest. This is an abstract from reality, of course; no-one spends their time saying to themselves ‘I’m going to use x function’ day in, day out (although some seem to have made deliberate attempts to do so).

John Beebe and John Giannini have sought to relate type functions and archetypes—Beebe through identifying specific archetypes with the eight functions; Giannini through claiming the types as archetypes in themselves. To my mind, Beebe’s view seems the more plausible, notwithstanding a tendency for some users to want to quantify with specific behaviours what is at its core a therapeutic model, where the *reason* for the behaviour is more important than what the behaviour actually is.

The MBTI was never intended to be a measure of consciousness, simply a sort for preference. Barbuto’s curious suggestion (1997) that this is, or should be, the

case is yet another example of published articles being unfamiliar with the MBTI’s history and theory, combined with a lack of understanding of the cognitive and intellectual boundaries surrounding psychometric measurement. There’s not much point critiquing an instrument or idea for not doing something it does not say it does, anyway. But this occurs quite often.

Isabel Myers, the outsider, was never in doubt about her indicator being just that. It did not matter whether the person completing the MBTI had ever done the tasks or activities they were asked to choose between. As she wrote, in about 1950:

One thing not required is for questions to be overtly descriptive of the testee’s behaviour. Nowhere do we assume that a given answer is objectively true of the person giving it.

Myers understood that *preference* (or personality) and *behaviour* are not necessarily the same. Older MBTI forms advised that ‘the questions are not important in themselves, but the answers point to certain likes and dislikes that *are* important’ (Form F answer sheet, 1977).

One of the reasons Isabel constructed an *indicator*, not a *measure* claiming exactness, was because she understood Jung’s typology was about more than behaviours. Hence the innovative allowance of omissions—sadly, not taken up by developers of other instruments, who prefer to force respondents to answer often irrelevant questions. It’s unfortunate that, over time, the MBTI’s instructions on the meaning of the questions and the permissibility of omissions have become less clear, or have even disappeared.

The notion of consciousness in type theory makes the provision of adequate feedback on MBTI results more important than a protocol or professional advice. This is because it’s in this process that consciousness, this particular personal attribute, is more likely to appear. A person might say, for instance, *Is this me?*, or be unaware of similarities and differences between their own and others’ personalities. This is not necessarily pathological; simply how people

One may be ‘conscious’ according to science, but not according to Jung

have lived. There may have been no need to develop in type terms, for instance.

Sometimes this relates to close scores, and sometimes not. Because of the temptation to look at expression of type as literal behaviour, not in terms of what people might express themselves, personal feedback is more relevant for computer-printed MBTI results, particularly Step II. Group processes may not provide sufficient insight for people to decide, whether or not there is interest in the idea of type itself.

For instance, *sensing* types are attracted to facts, but clearly not every fact: nor, sometimes, what might seem like relevant facts. In this case, the preference might not be consciously developed, or the fact might be associated with another preference for the person concerned. Gardening can be easily identified as a sensing pursuit, but may be loathed by people of that preference. Internet engagement might be dominant function for one and inferior for another of the same type: control or entrapment.

Preference is also not *skill*. Not only are there other psychological factors involved, but the person might want to express their preferred functions and development differently: environment, family, opportunity, and so on are relevant, as well as talent. Some people like to be handy around the home, but they may not be good at it.

I may also identify with a type, but still be unconscious of its meaning or relevance. Paradoxically, MBTI qualifying workshops are one place where the meaning of type can be lost on people: sometimes due to method or knowledge, at other times due to the limited amount of consciousness involved. Paul's book can be profitably mined for such examples (2004).

So, in looking at consciousness and psychological type, we're observing and engaging with an *individual* approach to the world. The examples above suggest that an understanding of consciousness is a crucial part of teaching and learning about type.

That may take us away from generalised descriptions, to an understanding of how individuals conduct their lives, in the context of C G Jung's psychological types and the MBTI. ❖

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