

Part One: Answer the following questions in 1-2 paragraphs each.

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1. Why does Schwitzgebel believe that theories of consciousness, when applied to other species, are inevitably question-begging? How does this relate to his view on antecedent and posterior plausibility?

Different authors start from such distinct assumptions about what objectively verifiable features correspond to phenomenal consciousness, that it's hard to convince those who don't already share one's views without the perception of "begging the question" (circular reasoning).

Schwitzgebel thinks that antecedent & posterior plausibility don't diverge too much — a view about which things are conscious in what ways that superficially seems like it could be right will probably mostly still seem like it could be right after a more detailed empirical investigation.

The use of the word "posterior" suggests a Bayesian interpretation: Schwitzgebel is effectively saying that the available evidence does not admit large likelihood ratios, such that hypotheses with a high prior probability will also have a high posterior probability.

For example, if someone has a theory of consciousness that supposes that language is integral to human consciousness, & therefore contends that turtles aren't conscious on the basis of evidence about their lack of language faculties, that would not be persuasive to someone who never bought that theory in the first place.

2. How do Birch et al. analyze consciousness in animals? Explain the 5 dimensions. Describe how their theory understands consciousness in elephant, cephalopods, or corvids (choose one). Give examples of the evidence they provide.

Birch et al.'s dimensions of consciousness are selfhood, temporality, perceptual richness, evaluative richness, & integration. The authors cite evidence about corvids (crows &c.) to justify their evaluation of crow consciousness.

For example, crows have a very discerning sense of vision (perceptual richness), & engage in play behaviors (which is evidence of evaluative richness). Crows learn from experience about their environment (e.g., caching food specifically in a room where it won't be provided), which is evidence of temporality — a sense of past & future. Experiments about whether information presented to one eye or in one part of the visual field are reflected in the animals' behavior, are evidence about integration.

3. According to Roelofs and Buchanan, how can panpsychism be weakened in order to accommodate the great chain of being intuition? How can the Great Chain of Being intuition be modified to accommodate panpsychism?

A weaker form of panpsychism concerns itself with fundamental consciousness & not the particular integrated mental capabilities that we associate with consciousness in "higher" animals on the great chain of being. For example, the idea that atoms are conscious (which holds some theoretical appeal by avoiding biting the bullet of physicalism when it's not obvious how subjective phenomenal consciousness is reducible to physics) need not entail that atoms can be angry or feel pain. On the other side, the great chain of being intuition can be modified—interpreted—construed—to refer only to familiar types of consciousness (in animals like us), while remaining silent on the issue of whether different kinds of consciousness could occur in plants, ants, thermostats, etc. This is a "paraphrasing" construal of the great chain of being intuition rather than a "debunking" construal—arguing not that the intuition is simply wrong per se, but that its domain of application is somewhat narrower or otherwise different than one might naively think.

4. What are the ethical implications of panpsychism? Why think that panpsychism implies it is unethical to eat plants? Why think that panpsychism implies it isn't unethical to eat plants?

It depends. If panpsychism is true & plants are conscious, one might think it's unethical to eat plants for reasons analogous to why ethical vegans & vegetarians don't eat animals: animals are presumed to be moral patients on grounds of their consciousness. (Consider Bentham on "Can they suffer?") On the other hand, if everything is conscious, that makes it harder to single out consciousness as special. (If everything is special, then nothing is.) If panpsychism is true, then not only are plants conscious, but so are the atoms making up the plant—maybe it's not bad for the conscious atoms to get rearranged into a non-plant form.

5. Explain the concept of "what it's like." How is it relevant for our understanding of consciousness? What conclusion does Nagel draw about our ability to know the experience of bats?

"What it's like" is an attempt to gesture at the subjective nature of phenomenal consciousness. It's relevant because functionalist accounts of consciousness in terms of perception, self-modeling, etc. seem to overlook the seemingly necessary subjective element.

Nagel is skeptical that we can know what it's like to be a bat, because our attributions of consciousness are generalized from our own experiences, & bats have such a different array of sensory apparatuses. Even if immersion in virtual reality can give us a sense of what it might be like to fly, or echolocate or even have a bat's body in perfect detail, that would only be an account of what it's like for us to be embodied as a bat, not what it's like for a bat to be a bat.

Part Two: Answer the following yes/no questions.

1. Panpsychism entails that AI is already conscious. ☒ Yes ☐ No
2. Roelofs and Buchanan argue that our mindreading abilities play a key role in shaping our intuitions about which beings are conscious. ☒ Yes ☐ No
3. The texts agree that as we move further from the human case, reliance on introspection becomes less reliable. ☒ Yes ☐ No
4. Birch et al.'s multidimensional model allows for a single, overall score of animal consciousness. Yes ☒ No
5. Nagel argues that the explanatory gap between brain processes and subjective experience is unique to consciousness. ☒ Yes ☐ No
6. Schwitzgebel leaves open the possibility that even organisms with simple nervous systems might have minimal phenomenal consciousness. ☒ Yes ☐ No
7. Roelofs and Buchanan argue that panpsychism forces a reexamination of our usual moral hierarchy. Yes ☒ No
8. Schwitzgebel argues there are six dimensions of sparseness and abundance. ☒ Yes ☐ No
9. Philosophical zombies are used as an argument against physicalism. ☒ Yes ☐ No
10. All the readings agree that objective, physical descriptions alone cannot completely capture the nature of phenomenal consciousness. Yes ☒ No
(I think Blockmore is a physicalist)