

## Parallel Thinking Part 32: The Enigma of Consciousness IV

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The last article discussed Quantum mechanics, the theory which describes motion and interaction of sub-atomic particles smaller than an atom. One of the astonishing results from Quantum mechanics

experiments, repeated in the laboratory many times, is that unless particles are detected by a human observer, their location and velocity are undefined. In other words, the particles which are the building blocks of the physical world only have a definitive existence when they are observed by a conscious human mind.

Philosophers have understood the importance of the conscious human mind for centuries. In 1637 the French philosopher René Descartes (d. 1650) published his '*Discours de la Méthode*' (Discourse on the Method) which has been dubbed one of the most important philosophical works ever written. He sought to address the question of whether it is possible to prove that the reality we experience is in fact real. Our senses are often wrong and mislead us. Worse still, while asleep Descartes himself once dreamt that he had woken up and believed that he was awake. Perhaps, he mused, we are all dreaming or are simply part of some elaborate illusion. Descartes could not even be certain of absolutes such as mathematics; maybe an evil demon was manipulating his mind to make errors in his calculations. All he had left were his doubts.

However, there was one thing he could be certain of. He realised that even if his doubts were true, at the very least he knew that he was actually thinking. The inner consciousness of his thoughts was all that he had, proving at least that he existed as a thinking being. Descartes famously concluded with the words "*Je pense, donc je suis*" – 'I think, therefore I am', or in Latin, '*Cogito, ergo sum*'.

In a feature article for the *New Scientist* (26 September 2012), science journalist Michael

Brooks noted that due to the importance of the conscious observer in Quantum mechanics, it is not just a case of "I think therefore I am" as Descartes concluded, but "I think therefore you are". Our consciousness appears to hold reality together.

The American physicist John Archibald Wheeler (d. 2008), compared reality to an elaborate *papier mâché* construction supported by a few iron posts. Those posts are only nailed in when human consciousness observes that reality.

When discussing the nature of human existence, the Torah says that mankind is made "in the image of God" (Bereishit 1:26). Our experiences as humans are a metaphor which can give us an insight into the mechanics of God. For centuries, Jewish philosophers have described how the physical world requires God's constant creative input.

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin (d. 1821) explains that God is "the Place which bears and maintains all the worlds and creations, that if He would, Heaven forbid, remove His creative energy from it for even a moment, the maintenance and life-force of all creation would cease".

The link is more apparent when we consider that our conscious experience derives from our Divine soul, which in turn is rooted in God. Our consciousness describes our true inner essence, yet our very existence, and the whole of reality we experience, is entirely dependent on God.



Portrait of René Descartes, after Frans Hals, c. 1649-1700