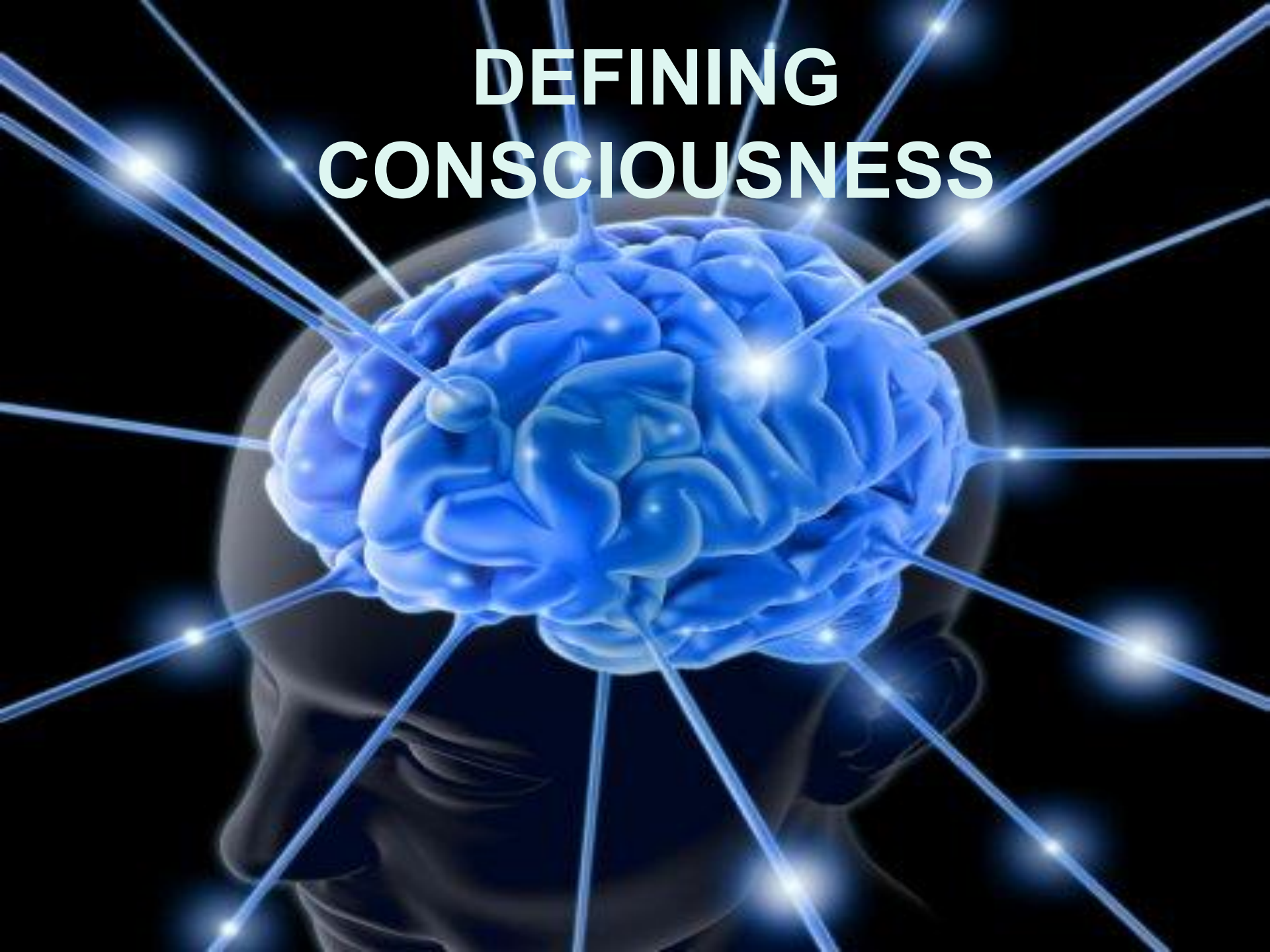


# DEFINING CONSCIOUSNESS



# Such a Simple Thing

- At first thought, defining consciousness seems so easy.

But when pressed for a more precise definition, consciousness is a term that seems intent on escaping one's grasp.

Can a definition capture consciousness?

- At first thought, defining consciousness seems so easy.

But when pressed for a more precise definition, consciousness is a term that seems intent on escaping one's grasp.

# Who Cares?

- The significance of looking at consciousness through such a specific lens is due to the human tendency to classify objects and events via the use of definition.

Definitions of 'gravity' and 'energy' are very similar to those found for consciousness.

- The significance of looking at consciousness through such a specific lens is due to the human tendency to

# What is the Difference?

- So why does consciousness seem so much harder to get a handle on than gravity and energy?

Gravity and Energy are understood in Physics terminology.

It seems that the same cannot be said of consciousness

- So why does consciousness seem so much harder to get a handle on than gravity and energy?

Gravity and Energy are understood in

# Why Not?

- Theories of Distribution  
Theories of Emergence  
Denial of Existence  
Not a full understanding  
Widespread disagreement
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# Lets Go Back in Time

- Descartes:
  - Mind is immaterial and totally separate from Body
    - Minus the Pineal Gland meeting ground
- Hume:
  - Mind is not divine, but natural and physical.
- Kant:
  - Mind is physical, but has intuitions (Space and Time)
  - Mind processes and orders experience (Unity)

# Some Attempts at Defining

- Merlin Donald Class-Interpretations:
  - Consciousness as a state
    - Awake, Asleep
  - Consciousness as a place in the mind
    - Physical Location
  - Consciousness as representational
    - Symbolism
- Steven Rose
  - Far-reaching definition of consciousness is required to cover all of the aspects of the term's use.

# Counters to the Attempts

- It appears that most researchers have taken the position that definitions simply won't work.
- Why?
  - Human language seems poorly formed to define more complicated and perhaps abstract terms such as consciousness.



# Steven Rose

- Defining consciousness within limited bounds is of no benefit to research.
  - Understandings are lost when reduced to such varied worlds to that of being aware, being awake, being unanaesthetised.
  - “Being conscious is being aware of one’s past history and place in the world, one’s future intents and goals, one’s sense of agency, and of the culture and social formations within which one lives” (Rose 166)

# Daniel Dennett

- “Many people are afraid to see consciousness explained because they fear that if we succeed in explaining it, we will lose our moral bearings” (Dennett 448)

# Merlin Donald

- We cannot be satisfied with a narrow definition of consciousness:
  - It is, by its very nature, an inclusive concept
  - But it is also a scientifically necessary concept, without which we would have to invent another term with a similar function.

# Why Defining Doesn't Work

- “Trying to define conscious experience in terms of more primitive notions is fruitless. One might as well try to define *matter* or *space* in terms of something more fundamental” (Chalmers 4).

# Ambiguity Wins Out

- Consciousness is one of those “suitcase-like” words that we use for many types of processes, and for different kinds of purposes (Minsky 95).  
It’s the same for most of our other words about minds, such as awareness, sentience, or intelligence
- Consciousness is one of those “suitcase-like” words that we use for many types of processes, and for different kinds of purposes (Minsky 95)

# Alternatives to Definition

- Donald suggests a more open-minded resolution to the problem:
  - “Like the physical notion of energy, consciousness has several distinct meanings and requires several different operational definitions” (Donald 98)

# Scientific Analysis

- The idea that consciousness is a *mode of action* of the brain rather than a *subsystem* of the brain has much to recommend it.
- Such mode shifts can presumably be timed by outside observers, providing, in principle, a unique and determinate sequence of contents attaining the special mode (Dennett 166)

# Chunking

- Marvin Minsky
  - Break the big problem of consciousness down into smaller and smaller chunks by breaking the brain down into smaller parts.
  - Chunk the brain itself into understandable pieces and perhaps a larger understanding will emerge.



# Summary

- Attempts have been made to define consciousness.  
I know of no definitions that are readily accepted by any researcher.  
Energy and gravity are definable.  
Therefore, definitions as we know them may fail to grasp consciousness now, but could in the future.
- Attempts have been made to define consciousness.  
I know of no definitions that are readily

# Conclusion

- Definitions are not the be-all and end-all for creating a foundation when studying consciousness.
- However, acknowledging the strange and unique nature of consciousness is important.
- Choosing a specific method, such as definition, is useful for gaining insights into such unique topics.

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