

Commentary 22 on
Karl Jaspers Forum, Target Article 22, 2 November 1999
MENTAL ACTIVITY AND CONSCIOUSNES...
By Timo Jarvilehto

ON MILITANT IGNORANCE

by Paul Jones

10 May 2000

Sue Pockett's commentary (TA 22 C08) is a regrettable example of a narrow-minded approach to a problem that is obviously far from being solved in the past, and possibly in the nearest future. Declaring that she had "always been an opponent of calls for a definition of the word consciousness," she plays hypocrite, since it is only the others' attempts of comprehending consciousness that she derogates, thus defending the mystical attitude to consciousness as somewhat incomprehensible.

It is utterly insolent of her to claim for being a representative of the absolute majority of the humanity in understanding consciousness:

"No wonder Jarvilehto thinks that consciousness is not located in the brain. He's right – what he calls consciousness clearly isn't. But what the rest of us call consciousness almost certainly is."

Who are those "rest of them"? Primitive mystics like Bucke, whose classification is nothing but a pale vulgarization of Hegel's system? A couple of Sue Pockett's friends of whom we know nothing? I even doubt that "psychologists like Baars and philosophers like Chalmers, Dennett and Searle" would greet Pockett's attempts to sneak in their company, though I would not assert that just a few interesting observations made by the above writers make them the ultimate authority to judge on what conscious is. There are other thinkers who have much more right to be consulted on such matters, including K. Marx, of whom S.P. seems to know very little.

That T. Jarvilehto tries to suggest his own definition of consciousness is quite normal for every conscious person, who attempts to understand the idea rather than obscure it. Even if Jarvilehto's suggestions had been "ill-defined" (which they are certainly not), it would have been much better than the refusal to know anything at all advocated by Pockett.

A narrow circle of the so called "neuroscientists" (S.P. proudly adds: "like me") have created a pseudo-science of their own, which has nothing in common with consciousness studies; they have never suggested any hint to what consciousness really is, they simply do not know that, and they do not want to know anything but their arbitrary decision that it is something in the brain. One could justify the attempts of different schools (materialism, idealism, constructivism etc.) to formulate their views on the subject – all of them contribute into the understanding of consciousness to be virtually spread – but the propaganda of ignorance cannot be tolerated.

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