

## **The delusion of Unconsciousness: Forgetfulness of Consciousness**

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In *Delusions of consciousness*, Blackmore supports illusionism on consciousness, using a Humean approach toward "self." First, she tries to explain away the intuitive, realistic viewpoint on self-consciousness; she "explains why some the illusionary self-consciousness is so compelling" by claiming a "simple mistake in introspections" and tries to explain it away. Secondly, she concludes that the idea of *illusionary self-consciousness* shows the delusion of *consciousness* per se.

In this paper, first, I shall show that her explanation against realism on consciousness (in support of the illusion of self-consciousness) is not decisive; it can be formulated such that works against illusionism. Secondly, I show that un-consciousness is a delusion and explain it away, not in a Humean approach, but in terms of the semantics of "forgetfulness." Thirdly, I shall show that Blackmore wrongly concludes *delusion of consciousness*, on the basis of *illusionary self-consciousness*, while the latter doesn't necessarily entail the former.

### 1.1. Blackmore Humean explanation for illusionary self-consciousness

Blackmore supports illusionism on consciousness. She, explicitly and implicitly, mentions it in different parts of her paper. She says:

*"My aim, though broadly illusionist, ...."*

And,

"Frankish convincingly argues for taking illusionism seriously ..."

And,

"I refer to consciousness as illusory ...."

And still in another spot,

"Frankish asks why the illusion of phenomenality is so powerful. I would ask the related, but different, question of why this deluded theorizing is so tempting and so powerful. ..."

Therefore, she believes in illusionism; however, here, she aims at the delusion of consciousness. She confesses that the existence of consciousness is strongly intuitive; however, she says that our intuition is wrong about that. Using the concept of *introspection*, she tries to explain away our intuition on the existence of consciousness and claims that self-consciousness is an illusion. Her explanation is as follows: "One reason is a simple mistake in introspection. Asking [1-] 'Am I conscious now?' or [2-] 'What is consciousness?' makes us briefly conscious in a new way. The delusion is to conclude that consciousness is always like this instead of asking, [3-] 'What is it like when I am not asking what is it like?'" (Blackmore 2016)

In response, she says:[ There is]

"No clear distinction between conscious and unconscious ones. Consciousness is an attribution we make, not a property of only some special events or processes. Notions of the stream, contents, continuity, and function of consciousness are all misguided."

and

"We assume continuity and unity, which is simply not true. The illusion is powerful because it is so hard to answer a different question – what is it like the rest of the time? What is it like when I am not asking what is it like?" (Blackmore 2016)

According to Blackmore, whenever we are asked about consciousness or some relevant questions, we think introspectively and we remember some memories and experiences; then a temporal and fabricated unity comes up, which is constructed of our thoughts, impressions, perceptions, etc. This unity is "momentary and misleading," and we feel that this unity represents

a continuous self, who is always conscious. However, we know that, at least on some occasions, e.g., when we are not asked by "what is it like?" there is no clear response to "what is it like then?"

She called our attention to these occasions, which seem pretty "unconscious" state of our mind/self; and accordingly, claims that these occasions are real counterexamples for the "illusionary" idea of self-consciousness. Then, she prefers to believe that the true state of affairs at work is exactly the very "unconscious" occasions, and the so-called "conscious" occasions are just illusions.

Blackmore believes that she could explain away our "intuitive self" idea, which is based on our introspection, using a new second-order introspective speculation on our responses to some questions like 3. She says:

"There is thus something very curious about the nature of consciousness – that looking into consciousness reveals only what it is like when we are looking into it – and most of the time, we are not. So introspecting on our own minds is thwarted by the very fact of introspecting." (Blackmore 2016)

That is, here we have two levels of introspection as follows:

First-order introspection: in which we figure out what it is like to be conscious. This order would be clear in response to questions like [1-] 'Am I conscious now?' or [2-] 'What is consciousness?'

Second-order introspection: in which we introspect on our introspection about consciousness and it reveals that most of the time, we are not conscious. This order would be clear when we think on some questions like [3-] 'What is it like when I am not asking what is it like?'

She says that the result of our first order introspection would be thwarted by the result of our second order introspection.

## 1.2. Darkness example

Blackmore makes her explanation still more clear by the "darkness" example. She states that:

"Can feel like turning on a light, but is that light always on? And if not, then what is the darkness like? Can we take a different tack and look into the darkness personally, by training our introspection to look more carefully?" (Blackmore 2016)

She holds that it is a difficult question, and it is not easy to do that; however, she believes that we can find a solution through mediation. She also states:

"Every time I 'turn on the light' by asking myself what my consciousness is like, it seems to be a flowing stream of everchanging, unified contents, much as it was last time I looked. That's fine. That's how it seems, and how it seems is what we are trying to explain. The illusion is to leap from that repeated observation to the conclusion that consciousness is always that way; that the stream of contents continues without break when it does not." (Blackmore 2016)

Here, using a metaphor, Blackmore wants to show that self-consciousness is an illusion. She takes "light" as consciousness and "darkness" as unconsciousness. According to Blackmore, we intuitively feel that there is always a flowing stream of colorful and concrete objects there, and we believe that it is a unified feature of the external world due to the fact that we only think (or overthink) about it whenever there is light, which makes us enable to have this visual experience; and we entirely ignore another important question: that is, "what is the darkness like?" she says that we have to train our introspection (probably through meditation) to look more carefully on the dark side. Then, she claims, without proposing any argument, that if we do that, we will find that nothing is there in the external world, and all the content of our conscious visual experience is an illusion. She holds that the true belief is what we have in darkness; we have to think of consists of darkness. She holds that the existence of consciousness is so compelling, attractive, intuitive only like the existence of concert objects during a day, which is full of light; however, both consciousness and those visible objections in the external worlds are illusions and cause the wrong realist believes on the conscious and external world.

### ***Objection***

It might be said that rejecting of "Consciousness" experience isn't the same as being "Unconscious." She rejects the dichotomy between them, while she didn't say anything specifically on unconsciousness.

## ***Response***

The dichotomy in her language is a disjunction (and not a conjunction); otherwise, she has to believe in a mental state, which is both conscious and unconscious at the same time. It seems that she is not going to accept such a weird contradictory idea.

Yes, it is true that she seemingly rejects the dichotomy between conscious and unconscious states in her words; however, it is not the only thing that she has done in this paper. She arguably rejects the reality of one disjunct (that is, consciousness) as well. Actually, after rejecting the dichotomy, she argues that all the "mental states," which calls for an explanation should be considered as unconscious. That is, she first rejects the dichotomy, and secondly, rejects one disjunct (I know that such an approach might be pretty implausible; however, it seems that is what is done in this paper). She actually rejects one disjunct (i.e., consciousness) of the dichotomy, and it, logically, means that she will support the other disjunct (i.e., unconsciousness). She explicitly and specifically states her opinion on being "unconscious" in her paper. She says:

"While everything else remains 'unconscious.'"

And in another part, she rejects the reality of one disjunct, i.e., consciousness:

"I conclude that there is no intrinsic difference between conscious and unconscious processes, nor between conscious and unconscious actions or perceptions. Rather, consciousness is a fleeting attribution that we make if and when we ask about it, either when asking such questions as 'What am I conscious of now?' or in retrospect when we think about the past."

### 1.3. My response to Blackmore's illusionary self

Blackmore's arguments on the illusionary self remind me of Hume's argument about constructed illusory "I" base on human memories and impressions. Blackmore's Humean explanation against realism on consciousness (in support of the delusion of self-consciousness) is not decisive; her explanation can be formulated as an opposite explanation, such that functions against illusionism, and would support what I call *delusion of un-consciousness* – that is, the illusion of being unconscious on some occasion is to believe there is also a stream of un-consciousness state of affairs.

Notice that by *Unconsciousness*, I intend the idea that all things (specifically human beings) are concrete objective natural physical entities, which lack any phenomenal consciousness or conscious-like state.

She states:

"I suggest that consciousness appears as a stream only when we reflect on it as such. The rest of the time, multiple parallel processes carry on, .... When we ask 'What am I conscious of now?' or 'What is it like being me now?' some are gathered together, and the answer appears stream-like. There are memories of recent perceptions and thoughts and, if we remain mindful for a few moments, a changing array of new perceptions and thoughts coming along. There is a powerful sense of someone who is experiencing this stream. The illusion is to believe there is also a stream like this when we are not inquiring (Blackmore 2002, 2016)"

I have a question for Blackmore. What is the response when we ask, 'Am I unconscious on some occasions?' High probably she will answer "Yes" (otherwise, it is against some premise she used in his argument, which says we are not always experiencing "consciousness" ). If so, I can explain way her being "unconscious" is a constructed illusory one, as follows:

"I suggest that [un]consciousness appears as a stream only when we reflect on it as such. The rest of the time, multiple parallel processes carry on, .... When we ask [Am I unconscious on some occasions?] or 'What is it like [not]being me now?' some are gathered together, and the answer appears stream-like. There are memories of [lack of] perceptions and thoughts and, if we remain mindful [of] a few moments [in which we were not mindful], a changing array of [lack of] perceptions and thoughts coming along. There is a powerful sense of someone who is experiencing this stream [i.e., being unconscious on some occasions]. The illusion [of being unconscious on some occasions] is to believe there is also a stream like this [i.e., being unconscious] when we are [] inquiring (Blackmore 2002, 2016)

By quoting her arguments and changing it using []s I wanted to show that the same argument seems to work against being unconscious or non-I. If it works well, it shows that her explanation doesn't support believing in the "delusion of consciousness" against believing in the "delusion of unconsciousness"(i.e., a delusion that says all things are concrete objective natural unconscious physical facts.).

The idea of "unconsciousness" and its continuity can be as illusory and fabricated as the idea of "consciousness," based on Blackmore's explanation. However, in what follows, I will present a new intuitive (and

not counter-intuitive like Blackmore's) explanation, based on the concept of "forgetfulness" to show that the former is true; that is, the idea of unconsciousness and its continuity is an illusion.

## 2. Delusion of Un-consciousness: Forgetfulness of Consciousness

Consider Blackmore's questions again:

2- 'Am I conscious now?'

3- 'What is it like when I am not asking what is it like?'

She says that 2 "makes us briefly conscious in a new way." And it causes an illusory continuous experience, which we call self-consciousness; then she says that we have to focus more on 3, and then we will find that unconsciousness is the real state of affairs. (and she didn't argue for this claim unless we count *explanation away* as a kind of argument). In the following experiment, I will focus on similar questions.

### 2.1. Experiment

Let's consider two similar questions:

4- Are you self-conscious now?

5- What about a couple of minutes ago? Were you self-conscious at that time?

And,

6- Please explain in some words the difference between your feelings on/understanding of self-consciousness, which is referred to in questions 4 and 5 (or in your responses to 4 and 5)?

I asked these questions from ten participants, and you will see their responses below. (I put SC for self-conscious or self-consciousness)

Participants	Response to 4	Response to 5	Response to 6
1	Yes	Yes	SC in 4 is more clear and exact. It was vague in 5.
2	Yes	No	I noticed SC when you asked me 4. I was heedless in 5.

3	Yes	I don't know	I noticed the border of my SC when you asked me in 4.
4	Yes	Yes	I am always conscious without any difference between 4 and 5.
5	Yes	It is a difficult question.	SC was neglected in 5. I was distracted by other things. Now I am more aware of it.
6	Yes	Yes, a little bit	I was not aware of SC a minute ago; however, when you asked me 4, I became aware of it.
7	Yes	Yes	I was SC at 5; however, I was not aware of SC then.
8	Yes	Yes, but it was not as strong as now.	My mind was distracted a minute ago (5); I was less aware of it then.
9	Yes	Yes, but not that much	I didn't think about it minutes ago (5).
10	Yes	Yes	I was not paying attention to it a minute ago (5). It was forgotten; however, now I am (4).

## 2.2. Data Analysis

All 10 participants said "Yes" to question 4, and it is not surprising. All of them feel that they are conscious when I asked them "are you self-conscious now?"

7 out of 10 participants said "Yes" to question 5. They hold that they, strongly or weakly, were self-conscious a few minutes ago. 2 participants said that they don't know the exact response. It was not clear for them. And one person said, "No." So, most of the participants believe that they were self-conscious a few minutes ago; however, they disagreed on the quality or features of these two states of "consciousness" at 4 and 5. It might be said that even that person who said "No," still wanted to refer to the significant difference between two states in 4 and 5; that is, she wanted to deny the similarity between the clear state in 4 (which we call consciousness) and what she felt in 5. Accordingly, almost all the participants believe that there is some kind of difference between these two states and concepts of consciousness in 4 and 5.



In question 6, I asked about the differences, and there are very interesting words in their responses. Their descriptive opinions about the two states are as follows:

Consciousness in 4: more clear, more exact, just became aware of it, more aware of it now.

Consciousness in 5: neglected, not aware of it, distraction, it was not thought then, it was forgotten, less aware, unaware, heedless, vagueness

(Notice: The most interesting, and maybe helpful, response proposed by participant 7. She says: "I was SC at 5; however, I was not aware of SC then." According to her report, there are some situations, e.g., a minute ago, in which we are self-conscious; however, we are not (fully) aware of our being self-conscious.)

Question 5 (in my experiment) is pretty similar to questions 3 (which is proposed by Blackmore.) However, Blackmore didn't respond to that question. Rather, she wanted to cast doubt on the intuitive response of people to question 2 on the existence of consciousness. In my experiment, I tried to get some real responses from 10 participants for question 5. As you see, they used some semantically similar words, e.g., "neglected," "distracted," "forgetfulness," "heedless," "don't remember," etc., in their responses to question 5.

I take "forgetfulness" as a representative word here for the participant's response and define it by referring to "neglected," "distracted," "heedless," and "don't remember," etc., That is, by "forgetfulness," I refer to a state of mind in which a human agent is not (fully) aware of something, which is neglected, or he/she is heedless about it or his/her mind is distracted by some other thing (in multi-tasks situations.)

This data enables us to explain away the un-consciousness delusion, not in a counter-intuitive approach, but in the intuitive and commonsensical terms of "forgetfulness." That is, whenever I say, "I was unconscious a moment ago," I am saying that "I had forgotten myself a moment ago [but not now]." Or "I was not fully aware of myself a minutes ago" or "it was neglected a minutes ago" or "I was distracted of my self a minutes ago," etc. Our mind is such that can not focus equally on many things at the same time; thus whenever we have focused on something (e.g., other things), we have forgotten some other thing (here, ourselves) to some extent.

Therefore, the idea of unconsciousness is an illusion, which comes from a fabricated continue of some occasions in which we are less aware of our selves, or our self-conscious is pretty neglected in those occasions because

our mind is distracted by other things or we are more aware of others than ourselves. (The illusion is that) then, we generalized this state of neglect, forgetfulness, heedlessness to all the occasions and coined the term "unconsciousness;" while, whenever we are fully aware of ourselves and our minds are not distracted by other things; we strongly and intuitively feel that we are conscious agents, and it is the most significant difference between us and unconscious wall, table, chair, etc.

### *Objection*

It might be said that using data analysis is not helpful in response to Blackmore because she believes that we all are deluded, and it is the case with all participant in the experiment.

### *Response*

I would say two things:

First, commonsense matters and intuition play a central role in analytic philosophy. (See Moore, 1925) Referring to the data helps us to learn more about the commonsensical meaning of the concepts and enables us to have a stronger intuition on the problem, whether or not Blackmore likes it.

If Blackmore, or any other philosopher, is going to put the commonsense and intuition aside and defend something which is strongly counter-intuitive, it would be okay; the only point is that they have to clarify their source of epistemic justification in knowledge formation. What are the sources and criteria of their knowledge about some concepts like "conciseness" or "unconciseness"?

Notice that, when we, i.e., the analytic philosophers talk about "commonsense" or "intuition," it doesn't mean that these sources, which have been broadly used in analytic philosophy, are against scientific methods or empirical inquiries. It might be pretty the same or compatible with the scientific and empirical outcomes. That is, we have a variety of commonsensical and intuitional meanings relevant to different contexts. The scientific intuition between scientists is only one of them, while, Philohocal intuition is prevalent between philosophers, and so on so forth. However, there is a meaningful connection between different contextual intuitional and commonsensical knowledge. Some scholars tried to show that variation in intuitions in different contexts would undermine the validity of intuition (Swain 2008, Weinberg 2001); however, as Sosa (2007) says:

"Well, maybe, to some extent. But surely, the effects of priming, framing, and other such contextual factors will affect the epistemic

status of intuition in general, only in the sort of way that they affect the epistemic status of perceptual observation in general. One would think that the ways of preserving the epistemic importance of perception in the face of such effects on perceptual judgments would be analogously available for the preservation of the epistemic importance of intuition in the face of such effects on intuitive judgments. The upshot is that we have to be careful in how we use intuition, not that intuition is useless. It is, of course, helpful to be shown how intuition can go astray in unfavorable conditions, just as perception can go similarly astray."

Intuition matters, and If someone, like Blackmore, wants to defend an idea which is pretty against a majority of intuitional and commonsensical knowledge in a majority of contexts, then it is not plausible to still claim that the justification source of her/his theory comes from commonsense; and she didn't do that.

That being said, she owes us a response to the following question: What are the sources and criteria of their knowledge about some concepts like "conciseness" or "unconsciousness"?

Imagine that she says, "my response is the empirical methodology and science like what goes in neuroscience." If so, I would say that empirical science works well in supporting some empirical theories like physiological or biological theirs; however, it is clearly fallacious to use an empirical method to responses a metaphysical or epistemological question. I believe that all the famous response to the Positivism movement and their verification principle will work here again Blackmore (Given that she respond like this "my response is an empirical science")

Moreover, even in the empirical fields, I believe that science usually can support the positive claims about the existence of some physical entities, and not vice versa (i.e, negative claims). Imagine that consciousness is a pretty physical feature. If so, using empirical methods, we can show that there are such things as consciousness in the actual physical world; however, it is much more difficult (if possible) to prove some probable physical tings doenst exits in the actual world because it calls for a complete inductive inquiry about all the things which exists in the word. Seemingly, we can claim that X doenst in the world, only if we can inductively explore its existence between all the existence and things in the world, and then if we could find it, we might be justified to inductively claims that X doesn't exist in the world. However, it is not still known. Becue maybe X does exist in t1 when we were exploring it in the world, but it might come to exist in t2. Therefore, it seems that it is almost impossible for empirical scientists to claim some negative propositions on the existence of some physical entities.

Secondly, I would say, in response to this objection, that Blackmore herself used data in her paper when she says:

"Ask yourself this question: 'Am I conscious now?' I guess that your answer is 'yes.' "

If data is not helpful and is not a reliable source for knowledge, then it would not be reliable for her argument as well.

### 3. Another objection: from self-illusion to the illusion of consciousness

Blackmore argues that the idea of *self-consciousness* is an illusion, and then she wrongly concludes that it shows the delusion of *consciousness* per se; the former doesn't necessarily entail the latter.

Blackmore says:

"A temporary unity of a set of thoughts and perceptions is constructed and is linked to a representation of self as a continuing observer (Metzinger 2009). This we call the contents of our consciousness while everything else is called 'unconscious'..... I conclude that .. consciousness is a fleeting attribution that we make ..."

And also says :

"The illusion is to believe there is also a stream like this [that is, consciousness]"

Blackmore begins with arguing against self and shows that it is nothing than an illusion; then, she concludes that consciousness is an illusion as well. She, high probability, right in the idea that "self" in "self-consciousness" is illusory; however, it doesn't necessarily entail the "delusion of consciousness." In the last sentence of her paper, she correctly denies the "duality of self and other"; however, she wrongly concludes that it shows "delusion of consciousness."

She doesn't elaborate on an argument for this transition from self-illusion to the illusion of consciousness, and it seems that it is a pretty false idea. "consciousness" is not necessarily dependent on the limited illusory self. I am inclined to the idea that *self* is constructed, and I believe that Blackmore is right in that; I believe that after deconstructing the illusory "self", we will figure out some interesting things. However, it might come up with

something like an "absolute consciousness"<sup>1</sup> or "conscious about others," etc. If so, it leads us to two plausible ideas at the same time: "illusion of self" and "delusion of un-consciousness" in the universe.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper, I showed that Blackmore's explanation away against realism on consciousness is not decisive; I have formulated the same explanation against illusionism. I also proposed the alternative idea of "delusion of unconsciousness" and tried to explain the *illusionary unconsciousness* away based on the concept of *forgetfulness*; I have supported this alternative idea using some experimental data. Moreover, I showed that Blackmore wrongly transmits from self-illusion to the illusion of consciousness. Even if we assume the idea of self-illusion (as it seems to be true), it doesn't logically leads us to the idea of illusion consciousness. There might be some more plausible and interesting ideas.

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<sup>1</sup>. I wish to elaborate more on the idea of "absolute consciousness"; however, I am not equipped well with the required appropriate concepts to do that. Hopefully, in the future, I can formulate it philosophically.

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