

## What is the slippery notion of ‘consciousness’?

As humans, we know we [are conscious] but haven’t a clue how it arises. It’s a facet of intelligent life so nebulous that it stretches both science and philosophy to their limits.

When something is this maddening, it helps to break it up into simpler parts. Christopher Tyler, a visual [neuroscientist](#) at the Smith-Kettlewell Brain Imaging Center and a [Professor](#) at the City University of London, outlined ten properties of human consciousness in a [recent paper](#) published to the journal [Frontiers in Psychology](#).

According to Tyler, consciousness’ first property is privacy. Simply put, there is no way (outside of science fiction) for any conscious being to completely share the conscious experience of another.

The second property is unity. As Tyler wrote, consciousness must “occur either in a single brain site or in a unified neural net of some kind in the brain, rather than in multiple independent brain sites.”

A third property is interrogacy: the ability to formulate questions.

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Consciousness’ final property is self-referentiality. Our conscious selves refer to consciousness as a fundamental component of our experience. Consciousness can recognize and refer to itself.

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In the end, Tyler seems to ascribe to the notion that consciousness’ ultimate function is to be a “gatekeeper for memory storage”. Consciousness sorts, files, and recalls our experiences, using them to mold us over time into the beings that we are.

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