

## Exploring the mystery of consciousness: Is it everywhere in nature?

Accounting for the nature of consciousness appears elusive, with many claiming that it cannot be defined at all, yet defining it is actually straightforward. Here goes: Consciousness is experience.

That's it. Consciousness is any experience, from the most mundane to the most exalted... Collectively taken, then, consciousness is lived reality. It is the feeling of life itself.

...

Every living organism descends in an unbroken lineage from the last universal common ancestor (abbreviated to a charming LUCA) of planetary life. This hypothetical species lived an unfathomable 3.5 billion years ago, smack at the center of the tree-of-life mandala. Evolution explains not only the makeup of our bodies but also the constitution of our minds — for they don't get a special dispensation.

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Given the similarities at the behavioral, physiological, anatomical, developmental, and genetic levels between *Homo sapiens* and other mammals, I have no reason to doubt that all of us experience the sounds and sights, the pains and pleasures of life, albeit not necessarily as richly as we do. All of us strive to eat and drink, to procreate, to avoid injury and death; we bask in the sun's warming rays, we seek the company of conspecifics, we fear predators, we sleep, and we dream.

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