

WEEK 1 ANSWER TO QUESTION 1  
STEP 2.3 ASK MARK

00:00:00

Hello. Welcome to this course entitled *What is a Mind?* I'm Mark Solms, and I'm the lead educator on this course.

What you're now looking at is a session we run weekly called “Ask Mark”, and what it consists in is me responding to questions or comments that have come up in our online forums. The mentors normally choose three or four questions for me, and I answer them like this. Today's four questions begin with the following.

Question 1: “What is the difference between awareness and subjectivity?” Now, subjectivity is, in fact, the main topic for next week's lessons, so some of what I'm going to say now, I'll elaborate upon next week.

The word subjectivity refers really to a point of view, or observational starting point, if you will, by which I mean everything has a subjective aspect. That is to say, it makes sense to speak of being anything – being an armchair, being a shirt, being a necktie, and being Mark Solms. All of us have a subjective aspect. It refers simply to the being of the thing, as opposed to its objective aspect – which is observing it from the outside – which is why I say it's a matter of observational perspective.

So the question being asked is about the difference between subjectivity and awareness. I'd like to start off by pointing out that, although everything has a subjective aspect, not everything *feels* like something. So to be an armchair doesn't *feel* like anything, whereas to be Mark Solms does. And so there is a radical distinction between the word subjectivity on the one hand and awareness on the other.

There's no question of the armchair having awareness, but there's every reason to speak of the subjectivity of the armchair. So I think that that's-- although, the starting point for considering what a mind is *is* the fact that it's something subjective. Not everything has a mind. As I said, I am going to elaborate on that next week, so I won't say more about that point for now. But I do want to dwell a little bit on this word awareness.

I guess the way that the participant has framed the question - subjectivity versus awareness - that they were using the word awareness in a loose sense, nothing wrong with that. But I must point out that in cognitive science today, the word awareness has become quite a-- it has attached quite a technical meaning, which alludes to the fact that when we speak of consciousness, nowadays, almost anyone who writes on the

topic of consciousness differentiates between two levels of consciousness. They use different words for it, primary and secondary consciousness or phenomenal consciousness versus reflective consciousness. And that secondary type of consciousness or reflective consciousness, normally the word awareness is reserved for that type of consciousness.

And what it refers to is this: that there are raw feelings – raw sentient being – and then there is a reflecting upon those feelings, those mental states. Not all creatures are capable of that reflective type of consciousness, that second order thinking about your thoughts or reflecting upon your feelings.

And the word awareness normally is reserved for that. It's a big problem in cognitive science generally, in fact, that we don't have consensus about words which we bandy about that have colloquial meanings, and then they also have very specific technical meanings. And so unless we're clear about that, we can have a little Babel. So that's why I wanted to clarify it.



Mark Solms 2015

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