Editorial:
Towards a Scholarship of Consciousness

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Guest Editors

In conversation, “facts” appear only to be resolved once more into the possibilities from which they were made; “certainties” are shown to be combustible, not by being brought in contact with other “certainties” or with doubts, but by being kindled by the presence of ideas of another order; approximations are revealed between notions normally remote from one another.

Michael Oakeshott, 1959

When scholars from different disciplines come together to address a common issue such as consciousness, the interaction often reduces to an argument in which participants work to persuade each other that their particular take on the issue is the correct take or, in a truly sophisticated crowd, the least incorrect take. The following collection of papers came together as the result of an interdisciplinary workshop held in Chicago in the Spring of 2016, that was devoted to creating a forum for sustaining the scholarly conversation on consciousness.

The workshop The Reality of Experience was co-sponsored by the Society for Mind-Matter Research and the Institute for Prospective Cognition, and sought to explore consciousness, with a focus on lived experience and the various ways we might account for the fact that consciousness involves something it is like to be conscious. Thus, in the spirit of Michael Oakeshott, these scholars present their various “facts” and “certainties” in the hope of generating a context in which the inconsistencies between “facts” and “certainties” can become apparent, and, in the end, potentially utilized as a means of resolving certainties into possibilities.

Williams Seager’s piece, Could Consciousness Be an Illusion?, starts us off with a discussion of the ontological status of consciousness. He begins by arguing for the existence of consciousness by way of what he calls “the obvious argument”. He then considers and rejects the two main arguments against the existence of consciousness: Dennett’s intentional irrealism, and indexical irrealism. As he concludes, “the two ways of arguing that consciousness is illusory do not seem at all promising. Consciousness remains in existence and remains problematic for physicalism.”

Jeffrey Yoshimi’s piece, Modeling Consciousness using Cognitive Maps, takes an exploratory approach to describing the qualitative structure of lived experience. The question Yoshimi sets himself is: how is the nature
and structure of lived experience related to the dynamics and structure of neural activity? He responds to this question from a neurophenomenological paradigm and shows how the use of cognitive maps “makes it possible to pursue neuro-phenomenology in a more precise, empirically tractable, and visually intuitive way than has previously been possible”.

Luis Favela’s piece, *Consciousness Is (Probably) Still Only in the Brain, Even Though Cognition Is Not*, proposes that although the data seem to indicate that cognition is causally distributed across the brain, the body, and the world, consciousness (i.e., a system having phenomenal character), is not. Favela reviews recent attempts to argue that consciousness is, in fact, extended beyond the brain. He then presents phenomenological and neurophysiological evidence that support the assertion that consciousness is located in the brain.

David L. Anderson’s piece, *The Role of Valence in Intentionality*, challenges the view that for a mental state to be an intentional state it must have phenomenality. Rather, he proposes that more is needed for a mental state to possess intentionality: intentionality also requires valence. As he states, “the kind of phenomenology necessary for intentionality is the possession of conscious states with a valence not states characterized by a conscious awareness of content.” Intentionality, thus, involves more than there being something it is like to perceive or believe x, it also requires a positive or negative character.

Lana Kühle’s piece, *The Subjectivity of Experiential Consciousness: It’s Real and It’s Bodily*, begins with the idea that consciousness is characterized by subjectivity, the idea that there is something it is like to be a particular subject. She then argues that given our status as embodied beings, consciousness should be understood as a bodily subjectivity. Such a starting point should then turn our attention toward describing consciousness in terms of interoception.

Harald Atmanspacher’s piece, *Contextual Emergence in Decompositional Dual-Aspect Monism*, utilizes the notion of contextual emergence as a means of addressing the metaphysics of consciousness. Specifically, contextual emergence is a non-reductive yet well-defined relation between different domains of description, while double-aspect monism treats the physical and the mental as epistemic aspects of one underlying reality that itself contains no mind-matter split. Atmanspacher proposes that contextual emergence allows one to see the mind-matter relation in terms of a relation between different domains, or as a relation between the mental and physical on one side, and the ontologically neutral base on the other.

And finally, J. Scott Jordan and Georg Franck’s piece, *Wild Presence*, makes a case for the reality of experience by seeking to understand organisms as self-sustaining embodiments of context that gives rise to presence. Doing so, they argue, avoids the traditional problems associated with frameworks that hold strongly to physical/mental, or objec-
tive/subjective distinctions, and instead allows us to explain experience as embodied aboutness that involves “the persistent now that runs through all our experiences”.

In contrast to the diversity expressed in the enclosed papers, some may believe that the scholarly approach to consciousness will ultimately be told in the voice of one discipline and, as a result, the conversation will, in fact, end. We believe the conversation will only end when we accept all the implicit assumptions of one discipline and, as a result, quit. For us, such capitulation is not only inconsistent with the scholarly creed, it is inconsistent with lived life.

In scholarship and in life we must necessarily generate assumptions about ourselves and our world in order to move through both. When we promote those assumptions to the status of truth and certainty, however, we dampen our ability to see them as assumptions and become trapped. The present collection of papers, and the conference that inspired them were specifically engineered to offset such dampening. For Oakeshott, keeping the conversation open was essential to the sustainment of culture. For us, it is essential to the sustainment of scholarship on consciousness.