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The Conscious Semiotic Mind

The paper discusses possible roles of consciousness in a semiotic (meaning-making) activity of a cognitive agent. The discussion, we claim, is based on two related approaches to consciousness: on Chalmers' theory of phenomenal and psychological consciousness and on Damasio's neural theory, which draws a distinction between core and extended consciousness.

Two stages of cognitive-semiotic processing are discussed: the moment of perception of a sign as a meaningful entity and the metasemiotic processes understood as the human capacity to reflect on signs and their usage, analyse and control processes of recognition, interpretation of signs and to detect and correct errors in semiotic activity.

In the case of the first stage, it is argued that signs as meaningful entities have a distinctly experiential character. The feeling of meaningfulness is a result of phenomenal consciousness, in particular a result of the so-called valuation features of phenomenal experience. I claim that this aspect of cognitive-semiotic activity is possible owing to a special neural mechanism called a semiotic marker.

It is argued that semiotic systems have to be able to use signs as signs, i.e. they should display some metacognitive capacities, in particular an ability to analyse semiosis at a metalevel. It is argued that such metasemiosis is dependent on psychological consciousness (in Chalmers' terms: awareness) and is realized at the neural level in the form of extended consciousness.

The paper is based on a particular understanding of cognitive semiotics as a discipline involving analyses of cognitive processes as semiotic processes, i.e. processes requiring usage of signs.

Keywords:

cognitive-semiotic system, phenomenal consciousness, awareness, core consciousness, extended consciousness, valuation features, somatic marker, metasemiosis

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