

A delicious vegan lunch got me — fittingly — ready for the afternoon tutorial on animal consciousness. It ran parallel to the tutorial on machine models of consciousness offered by **Igor Aleksander**, **Ron Chrisley** and **Murray Shanahan**; **Alan Cowey**'s tutorial on exploring aspects of consciousness by TMS; and **David M. Rosenthal**'s tutorial on higher order theories of consciousness.

In their excellent session 'A scientific framework for the study of animal consciousness' **David Edelman** and **Anil Seth** presented examples that show that primates, birds, dolphins, octopuses and other animal groups exhibit problem-solving and other behaviour that can be interpreted as cognitive or emotional. They pointed to the supporting data from anatomical, physiological and comparative psychological studies, briefly discussed seventeen what they called 'widely recognized' properties of consciousness and argued that a scientific framework for the study of animal consciousness can be established, a framework within which one need not seek proof but weight of evidence.

Their basic premises: (a) the benchmark of consciousness studies in humans is the *accurate report* of conscious experience, and (b) alternative strategies (based on evolutionary homologies and analogies in anatomical structures and physiological patterns) can be used for amassing evidence for consciousness in non-human mammals, birds and possibly other animal groups. Indeed! But even a method that allows monkeys to make a metacognitive comment on a previous discrimination (which is, according to the two speakers, consistent with consciousness) should not obliterate the fact that we humans posit what the properties of consciousness (higher order, sensory or other) are. These properties are supposed to be expressed in a way that makes sense to *us* — as if *our* way of making sense out of anything, and more particularly of consciousness, sensations, emotions and mental activities, was *the* reference for all other species.

Anil and David maintained that, given the nature of evolution and development, the dogma of corticocentrism must be abandoned. Yes! Even if an intact thalamocortical system may be an organism's means of interpreting/giving meaning to (being conscious of) the world, itself and its relation to it, we cannot be sure that it is the only possible means of consciousness in the animal kingdom and hence that it is necessary for consciousness in the above sense. Maybe one day we will have amassed enough knowledge to equally abandon the dogma of braincentrism and neurocentrism.

Four 'guest-speakers' (**Andreas K. Engel**, **Giorgia Mason**, **Ilya Farber**, **Thomas Metzinger**) made very short statements during the

tutorial. Metzinger briefly explained that ethical thought has to come to grips with the need for moral objects (i.e. ‘things or beings we have to be nice to’). This implies, Thomas said, that we then would have to establish a cut-off point between moral objects/beings and non-moral ones. But he did not specify where that would be.

But why does there have to be a cut-off point anywhere among living beings and for what reasons? Why are we so persistently eager to ‘cut ourselves off’ from other forms of life, to draw a borderline between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Aren’t all living beings at least sentient? And if not, what’s the point of being alive, when you are as sentient as dead matter supposedly is? All living beings, not only complex brains, have to confront — and survive in — an unlabeled world. And sentience is what they have in common for that job.

The tutorial on that very sensitive topic was definitely worth the money ... if you paid for it, that is. As there was no check at the entrance of the meeting rooms for the tutorials, some participants who had paid had to sit on the floor while others getting a free ride were comfortably seated.

#### *Tutorials or workshops?*

I take it that a tutorial is a meeting where one can learn about a topic one is not so familiar with. For that reason it has to be a more general, rather introductory event for ‘advanced beginners’.

If the ASSC wants to increase the number of its affiliate members among non-professionals interested in the scientific approach to consciousness it can use ‘easier-going’ tutorials as ‘attractors’ for a less specialized general public. In the tutorials offered at this and the past three ASSC conferences I encountered a few ‘lay’ people. Some of them felt that the tutorials prepared them well for some of the hardcore stuff in the plenary and concurrent sessions. I usually would see them again the next time around, which was not the case for those who found the tutorials as advanced and technical as the other sessions and of no help whatsoever.

#### *Opening remarks on an anniversary to be proud of*

Anniversaries are meant to celebrate the recurrence of important and meaningful events or to prevent them from sinking into oblivion. **Patrick Wilken**, a major driving force of the ASSC from its very start, was just the right person to present the birthday statistics. In a very easy going and humorous talk, Patrick, who with William Banks got ASSC1 off the ground in 1997, portrayed the ASSC’s