

WEEK 6 CHANGING THE MIND  
STEP 6.1. WHAT THE MIND IS FOR

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So let's bring this all to a conclusion and take stock of the answers that we've come to to the question, what is a mind? There's also an implicit question. What's the mind for? Why do we need one? What I'm saying is that you are your mind. It's as simple as that.

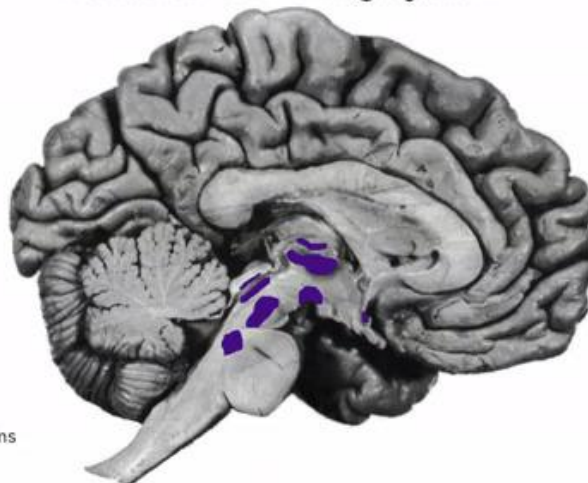
But you, of course, are also your body. The question then becomes, what is the difference between you and your body? The answer is you are the being of your body. You are the subjective aspect of your body. You are what it feels like to be your body from the inside, as opposed to looking at it, observing it, from the outside as an object. The mind is not an object. **It's a subject.**

But the fact that we also have an objective perspective on the mind, that we also have an organ of the mind, that the body is correlated with the mind, presents us with opportunities for understanding better what we mean by the "being" of your body.

Everything has a subjective aspect but not everything has a mind. Looking at your mind from an external point of view, at the bodily organ of the mind, gives us an opportunity to discern what aspects of the thing that you are are necessary for making it feel like something to be you, because that's the **second fundamental criterion of a mind**. It's not just a subject. It's a subject that **feels like something**.



Reticular activating system



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When we look at the brain, the objective organ of the mind, we find that it's in the upper brain stem in a set of nuclei called the root reticular activating system that the being, sentient, conscious part of your mind comes from. We can conclude that any organism that has those structures has consciousness. It feels like something to be a fish, to be a snake, to be a lizard, just as it does feel like something to be you. All of those organisms, which are vertebrates, all of them have a reticular activating system.

Looking at these facts enables us to learn something about that other question, what are minds for? Because we discern looking anatomically that the reticular activating system receives its inputs from body monitoring structures also in the brain stem.



### Body monitoring nuclei



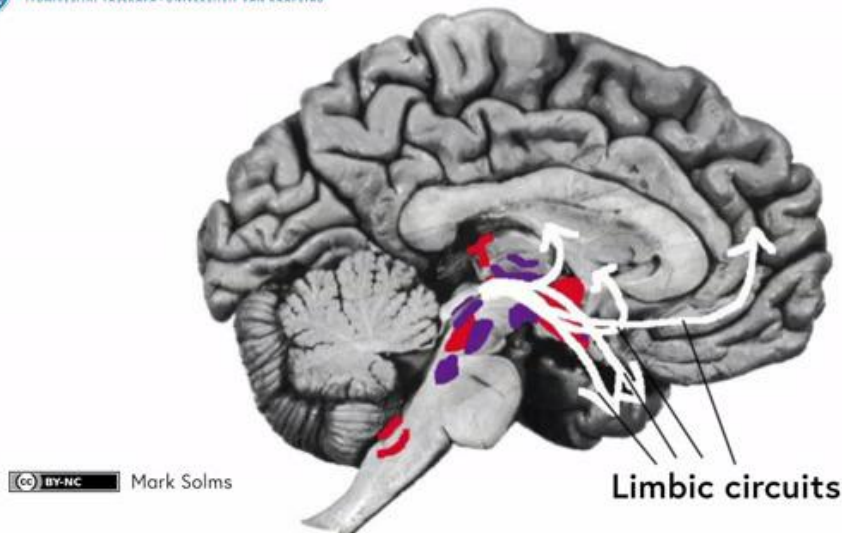
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This incidentally is why the mind is subjective. Consciousness is about you. It's about how you're doing. It's a monitoring of the state of your body, of the internal milieu of your body within a biological scale of values. Am I doing well? If I am, it feels good. Am I doing badly? If I am, it feels bad. Pleasure and unpleasure tells you in real time here and now how you're doing, in terms of the imperatives for survival and reproductive success.

This is why those structures, the reticular activating system that generate consciousness, that generate feelings, activate the forebrain, activate the higher brain, which is in touch with the outside world. It's because feelings are not just there for themselves. Feelings are there to tell you how you're doing, in terms of your vital needs. And your vital needs can only be met in the outside world. That's why life's difficult and that's why our feelings intend toward objects, intend toward our perceptions and our representations of objects.

That's the **third fundamental feature of a mind**. It is **intentional**. It's motivated. It has a purpose, a biological purpose at bottom. That's another criterion for determining a mind, in the sense that no table or computer has biological needs. The mind is for the meeting of your needs in the outside world. And feelings, that is, consciousness, tells us about the problems that we have inside of ourselves that we have to now solve in the outside world, which is, as I said, the only place where you can solve them.

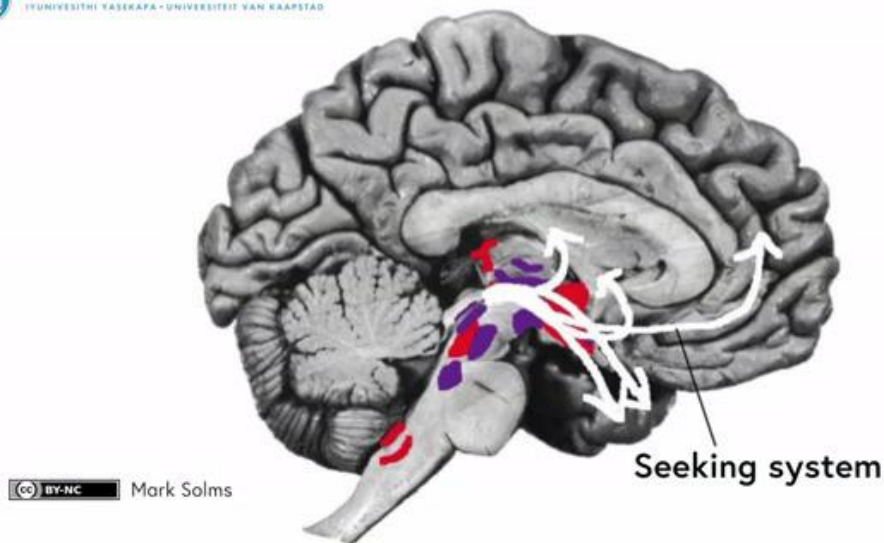
So we have instinctual mechanisms built on top of the reticular activating system in what's called the limbic system, which direct us toward the outside world of objects. And there are different ways in which we have to deal with the world of objects and instincts have different feelings like fear and rage and sexual desire and so on for dealing with those different aspects that we have to deal with in the outside world.



On top of those instincts, we learn that instincts are too simple. We need to then learn about what happens when we engage with the world on the basis of these instincts. And that's what these representations, what cognition is all about.

Now, you can't be conscious of everything you've learned. You needn't. You shouldn't be conscious of everything that you learn. There's no purpose to that. So most of your cognition, most of your representations, most of what you've learned about the world is unconscious.

And that points to another very important thing about the mind, which is that not all of it is conscious, which begs the question, what makes the unconscious parts of the mind mental? And I'm saying what makes them mental is that they're intentional. That is to say that they're driven by needs which would give rise to motivations in the outside world. And whether your intentional mental acts are conscious or not is not the main point. The main point is that they are intentional. Tables and computers have no intentions, conscious or unconscious.



Now, on top of that, leading to the **last feature of the mental**, we have what's called "**agency**". And agency comes in degrees. Not all animals are equally complicated. Very simple creatures with very simple consciousness only have feelings. I feel like this. Pleasure and unpleasure and the things that are impacting on them direct the actions-- approach, avoid. Learning on top of that makes for more nuanced kinds of actions. And then, you have to think on the basis of experience, what should I do here? Selectivity giving rise to free will or free won't, which is the ability to inhibit instincts.

## prefrontal lobes



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That's what agency is. **Agency is based on inhibition and on the capacity to decide whether I will or won't do that.** Thinking is representing yourself in your mind. Rather than actually acting in the world, it's in the virtual world of your mind. That's what thinking is. If I were to do this, what would happen? In order for you to think about yourself like that, you have to have a representation of yourself, just as you do of other objects.

That's what the agent of the mind is. It's turning yourself back into an object so you can think about yourself. And that brings us full circle, back to the relationship between you and your body.



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