

Consciousness: Science's greatest mystery.

U3A Science and Technology Group

Susan Blackmore, November 2018

Everyone thinks they know what consciousness is. Surely I am right to think I have a stream of ideas and perceptions that pass through my mind, experienced by me - a conscious self who watches them and acts upon them. The trouble is, this cannot be true. There is no room in the brain for a conscious self, no role for it to play if there were one, not enough time for it to act on our conscious impressions, and no way of explaining why some brain activity should be conscious while most is not. The phenomenon of change blindness shows that the richness of our visual world must be an illusion: inattentional blindness shows that we can look right at something and not see it at all, and experiments on voluntary action cast doubt on the existence of free will.

With demonstrations, illusions and help from the audience I shall explore some of the ways in which we misunderstand our own minds. Perhaps if we could see through the illusion science might make more progress on this "greatest mystery".



Sue Blackmore is a psychologist, lecturer and writer researching consciousness, memes, and anomalous experiences, and a Visiting Professor at the University of Plymouth. She is a TED lecturer, blogs for the Guardian, and often appears on radio and television. *The Meme Machine* (1999) has been translated into 16 other languages; more recent books include *Conversations on Consciousness* (2005), *Zen and the Art of Consciousness* (2011), *Seeing Myself: The new science of out-of-body experiences* (2017) and a textbook *Consciousness: An Introduction* (3rd Ed 2018)