## Section 2. What Consciousness Means in the General Sense

Before CUWF can offer its own interpretation of consciousness, the word consciousness must first be clarified in its ordinary and philosophical sense. This is necessary because consciousness is often used to refer to several related but not identical phenomena: being awake, being aware, perceiving the world, having subjective experience, feeling pain, thinking, remembering, possessing a sense of self, and knowing that one is situated within a world.

If these meanings are not separated carefully, the discussion can become confused from the beginning. One person may use consciousness to mean wakefulness. Another may use it to mean subjective feeling. Another may use it to mean self-awareness. Another may use it to mean the observer in physics. These meanings overlap, but they are not the same.

For this reason, Section 2 does not yet present the CUWF formalism. Instead, it establishes the ordinary meaning of consciousness in layers. This prepares the reader for the later CUWF claim that consciousness is not a single flat property, but a multi-layered regime involving awareness, subjective experience, selfhood, and self-world relation.

In the general sense, consciousness may be approached through four major dimensions:

1. consciousness as awareness;
2. consciousness as subjective experience;
3. consciousness as selfhood;
4. consciousness as an organized relation between self, body, world, memory, and action.

These four dimensions are not competing definitions. They are different entry points into the same problem. A complete theory of consciousness must eventually explain how they belong together.

## 2.1 Consciousness as Awareness

The most basic meaning of consciousness is awareness. In ordinary language, to be conscious is to be awake, responsive, and aware of something. A conscious person is not in deep anesthesia, coma, or dreamless unconsciousness. A conscious person can perceive, attend, respond, and maintain some relation to the surrounding world.

At this level, consciousness appears closely related to wakefulness, perception, attention, and subjective presence. Wakefulness refers to the general state in which the system is not unconscious. Perception refers to the registration and organization of sensory input. Attention refers to the selective focusing of processing on some objects, signals, thoughts, or bodily states rather than others. Subjective presence refers to the immediate sense that experience is occurring now.

This basic meaning is important because it distinguishes conscious systems from merely inactive or non-responsive systems. A sleeping person may still possess latent consciousness but not ordinary waking awareness. A person under deep anesthesia may have biological life and neural activity, but not accessible conscious awareness. A camera may register light, but it does not thereby become aware in the ordinary human sense. A thermostat may respond to temperature, but response alone is not awareness.

Thus, awareness cannot be reduced to mere reaction. A system may react without being conscious. A reflex may occur without full awareness. A machine may respond to input without subjective presence. Conscious awareness requires more than input-output behavior. It requires that the system's state is available within an organized domain of experience.

Even at this simple level, consciousness already implies an internal orientation: something is present to the system. The system is not merely changing; it is in a state in which something can be registered as occurring. This is why awareness is often treated as the first layer of consciousness.

However, awareness alone is not yet the whole problem. A system may be awake and responsive, but the deeper question remains: what is it like for that system to be aware? This leads to consciousness as subjective experience.

## 2.2 Consciousness as Subjective Experience

The second major meaning of consciousness is subjective experience. This is the dimension often summarized by the phrase “what it is like to be.” Consciousness is not only the fact that a system receives input or produces behavior. It is the fact that there is something it is like for the system to undergo an experience.

For example, seeing red is not merely the physical arrival of light at the retina. Hearing music is not merely pressure waves entering the ear. Pain is not merely nociceptive signaling. Fear is not merely autonomic arousal. Thinking is not merely symbolic processing. In each case, the conscious issue is that these processes appear from within as experience.

This subjective dimension is what makes consciousness difficult. A neuroscientist may measure brain activity correlated with pain, but the measurement itself is not the pain. A computer may classify the wavelength corresponding to red, but classification alone does not mean the system experiences redness. A machine may output the sentence “I am afraid,” but the output does not by itself prove that fear is present as a subjective state.

Subjective experience includes many forms:

seeing a color;
feeling bodily pain;
hearing a melody;
feeling fear or safety;
remembering a childhood place;
imagining a future event;
being aware that one is thinking;
feeling that an experience belongs to oneself.

These examples show that consciousness is not only sensory. It includes affective, bodily, imaginal, cognitive, temporal, and self-referential dimensions. A conscious experience may be visual, emotional, bodily, conceptual, or reflective. What unifies them is that each appears within a first-person domain.

This first-person character cannot be ignored. If a theory explains only external behavior or neural correlation, it has not yet explained why a state appears as experience. This is the root of what later sections will identify as the hard problem of consciousness.

For the purpose of the present paper, subjective experience can be stated simply:

Consciousness is not merely the processing of information. It is the appearing of information, sensation, feeling, memory, or thought within a domain of experience.

This does not yet explain how subjective experience arises. It only clarifies what must eventually be explained.

### 2.3 Consciousness as Selfhood

The third major meaning of consciousness involves selfhood. Consciousness is not only awareness of objects, sounds, colors, or bodily sensations. It also includes the sense that experience is happening to someone. In human consciousness, experience is usually organized around a center of ownership: “I am seeing,” “I am feeling,” “this is my body,” “this thought is occurring in me,” “this memory belongs to my past.”

This does not necessarily mean that the self is a fixed, permanent entity. It means that conscious experience is commonly organized through a self-model. The system does not merely register events. It interprets events in relation to a self-domain.

Several simple examples reveal this point.

When pain occurs, the experience is not merely “pain signal.” It is usually experienced as “I am in pain” or “this part of my body hurts.” When one raises a hand intentionally, the event is not merely movement. It is experienced as “I am moving my hand.” When one remembers a childhood event, the memory is not merely stored data. It is experienced as “that happened to me.” When one thinks, there is often a reflective sense that “I am thinking.”

These examples show that selfhood includes at least four components.

First, there is bodily ownership: the sense that this body or this bodily state belongs to me. Second, there is agency: the sense that I am the one performing or initiating an action. Third, there is memory continuity: the sense that the present self is connected to a past self. Fourth, there is reflective awareness: the sense that I can become aware of my own thoughts, emotions, and perceptions.

Selfhood is therefore not an optional decoration added to consciousness. In many forms of consciousness, especially human consciousness, selfhood organizes the field of experience. The world appears not only as a neutral field of objects, but as a world encountered by a body, interpreted by a memory, and responded to by an agent.

At the same time, selfhood must be handled carefully. If one says that a self observes experience, one may accidentally create the problem of a hidden inner observer: a small self inside the mind watching experience from behind the scenes. This does not solve the problem. It only moves the problem inward.

A stronger theory must explain how the sense of self is generated without assuming a separate inner subject. CUWF will later address this by treating the self as a dynamically stabilized self-model or self-OS within a living domain, rather than as a separate entity hidden inside the body.

For now, the important point is that consciousness in the general sense includes the feeling of being a self. Consciousness is not merely that something is happening. It is often that something is happening to me, from here, within this body, across this continuity of memory and action.

### 2.4 Consciousness as a Self-World Relation

The fourth major dimension of consciousness is the relation between self and world. Consciousness is never merely a point of awareness floating in isolation. It is an organized relation between self, body, world, memory, and action.

This point is essential. A conscious system does not experience itself alone. It experiences itself within a world. The body is located somewhere. Objects appear near or far. Events appear as relevant or irrelevant. Other beings appear as threatening, safe, familiar, strange, loved, or ignored. Actions

appear as possible or impossible. Memories shape what the present means. Expectations shape what the future may become.

Thus, consciousness is not simply awareness of internal states. It is a structured self-world interface.

The self-world relation includes several dimensions.

First, there is spatial relation: the system experiences itself as located in a world. Second, there is bodily relation: the system experiences the world through the body and the body through the world. Third, there is affective relation: events are not neutral, but meaningful, pleasant, painful, threatening, beautiful, familiar, or important. Fourth, there is temporal relation: the present is interpreted through memory and expectation. Fifth, there is action relation: the world is perceived not only as something seen, but as something that can be approached, avoided, changed, used, or responded to.

This is why the same external situation may generate different conscious experiences in different individuals. The world is not simply copied into consciousness. It is rendered through a self-world relation. A song may bring joy to one person and grief to another. A place may feel safe to one person and threatening to another. A criticism may feel useful to one person and humiliating to another. The external input may be similar, but the self-world relation is different.

In this sense, consciousness is not only internal and not only external. It is relational. It arises in the organized relation between a living body, its internal state, its memory, its self-model, its actions, and its world.

This general insight will later become important for CUWF. The CUWF interpretation will not treat consciousness as a private object hidden inside the brain, nor as a passive reflection of the outside world. It will treat consciousness as a domain-rendered relation: a self-world interface generated by a living wave-system through its own self-model and operating configuration.

The guiding sentence of this section is therefore:

Consciousness is never merely a point of awareness; it is an organized relation between self, body, world, memory, and action.

## 2.5 Summary

This section clarified the general meaning of consciousness before introducing the CUWF interpretation. Consciousness is not a single simple concept. In ordinary and philosophical usage, it includes several related dimensions.

First, consciousness means awareness. A conscious system is not merely inactive or unconscious. It is awake or present enough for something to be registered within its domain.

Second, consciousness means subjective experience. It is not merely the processing of information, but the appearing of perception, sensation, feeling, thought, memory, or imagination from a first-person perspective.

Third, consciousness includes selfhood. Experience is often organized through the sense that “I am aware,” “this is my body,” “this is happening to me,” and “I am continuous with my past.” This selfhood does not need to be treated as a permanent substance, but it must be explained as a structural feature of conscious experience.

Fourth, consciousness is a self-world relation. It is not merely an isolated point of awareness, and not merely a set of internal states. It is the organized relation between self, body, world, memory, and action.

These four dimensions can be summarized as follows:

1. awareness;
2. subjective experience;
3. selfhood;
4. self-world relation.

A complete theory of consciousness must explain how these dimensions arise, how they integrate, and how they relate to physical and biological processes. The next section will therefore examine the major problems that any theory of consciousness must face: the hard problem, the binding problem, the self problem, the observer problem, and the body-mind problem.