

Could consciousness all come down to the way things vibrate?

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Why is my awareness here, while yours is over there? Why is the universe split in two for each of us, into a subject and an infinity of objects? How is each of us our own center of experience, receiving information about the rest of the world out there? [Why are some things conscious](#) and others apparently not? Is a rat conscious? A gnat? A bacterium?

These questions are all aspects of the ancient “mind-body problem,” which asks, essentially: What is the relationship between mind and matter? It’s resisted a generally satisfying conclusion for thousands of years.

The mind-body problem enjoyed a major rebranding over the last two decades. Now it’s generally known as the “hard problem” of consciousness, after [philosopher David Chalmers](#) coined this term in a [now classic paper](#) and further explored it in his 1996 book, “[The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory](#).”

Chalmers thought the mind-body problem should be called “hard” in comparison to what, with tongue in cheek, he called the “easy” problems of neuroscience: How do neurons and the brain work at the physical level? Of course they’re not actually easy at all. But his point was that they’re relatively easy compared to the truly difficult problem of explaining how consciousness relates to matter.

Over the last decade, my colleague, University of California, Santa Barbara [psychology professor Jonathan Schooler](#) and I have developed what we call a “[resonance theory of consciousness](#).” We suggest that resonance – another word for synchronized vibrations – is at the heart of not only human consciousness but also animal consciousness and of [physical reality](#) more generally. It sounds like something the hippies might have dreamed up – it’s all vibrations, man! – but stick with me.