

## The Consciousness Conundrum

This is the title of the talk given to the Humanists on the 14<sup>th</sup> February by Peter Naish. Peter Naish is a senior lecturer in cognitive psychology at the Open University. Historically questions about the hard problem of consciousness have primarily been a topic for philosophers but advance in neuroscience are bringing us closer to a scientific understanding.

The human brain is large and uses 20% of our energy. It is made up of billions of neurons. The evolution of the brain is due to the ability of man to find and grow food, essential for the development of body and a complex brain. This enables man to be aware, to be conscious and self reflecting. Animals do not self reflect.

The pre frontal lobe cortex PFC is the link to the neurons in the basal ganglia, situated at the back of the brain. The PFC synchronises, joins up the thought processes. The PFC is the area of imagination recall and planning.

Peter Naish then gave us some exercises to test our ability to react and process information. A green spot rotated fast around a clock face at a certain number on the dial the spot changed to red. Almost everyone failed to note the correct number at which the colour changed .Another test was reading letters displayed for only 2 or 3 seconds on the screen .Some people noted 3 or 4 letters others only 2.

There are many developments in our efforts to unravel the mysteries of consciousness What is consciousness and how do physical processes in the brain give rise to the subjective life of a conscious mind?