

# Why LLM-based AIs Cannot Be Conscious

by Jack Calverley

*(Condensed from Chapter One of “A Wave-Particle Theory of Conscious Awareness” Carter Blakelaw and Jack Calverley, 2025, The Logic of Dreams)*

A claim often made is that 'Consciousness is an emergent property of any sufficiently sophisticated system'.

The implication is that not only biological brains but also physical machines can achieve consciousness, if they are sophisticated enough.

In Chapter One of the book “A Wave-Particle Theory of Conscious Awareness” the argument against this notion of consciousness as an emergent property is made roughly as follows:

## 1. The Framing Argument:

If consciousness is an attribute that we evolved to benefit from, then being conscious plays a causal role in our lives, i.e. to provide a survival advantage.

If consciousness plays a causal role then it cannot be accounted for (emergently) by the mechanism of the brain *per se* because the physical brain would do whatever sophisticated (causal) thing it does with or without consciousness being present. I.e. if consciousness were an emergent property then consciousness would have to be supervenient on the brain and could not have played any role in evolution.

Three sub-arguments are now presented to make the case that we evolved to benefit from consciousness.

## 2. The Sub-arguments

### 2.1 The Weak Case:

Our brains solve the problem of the *homunculus*, which is to say, we have a unified sense of self and of the world around us, i.e. a single viewpoint. Our brains solve the problem of creating a viewpoint without infinite regression (i.e. without the need for an inner eye to provide the viewpoint, which itself would require its own inner eye, and so on *ad infinitum*).

The mechanism by which the brain solves the problem of the *homunculus* is not needed if consciousness plays no causal role in our behaviour.

Thus the mechanism is an overhead for the brain and for the organism possessing that brain.

Unless the overhead offers a survival advantage it serves only as a cost in terms of protein and calories for the organism.

Therefore the overhead must offer a survival advantage, therefore it must be causal, therefore it cannot be an emergent property of the physical brain.

## 2.2 The Strong Case:

The brain supplies and manages the contents of our consciousness.

We perceive the world as a unified, continuous and smoothly changing whole.

The brain ensures that our perceptions and transitions between those perceptions are smoothly experienced, even when we are not paying attention (e.g. who can ‘see’ the blind spot in their eye?).

If the brain were simply mechanically representing the world there would be no need for any smoothing.

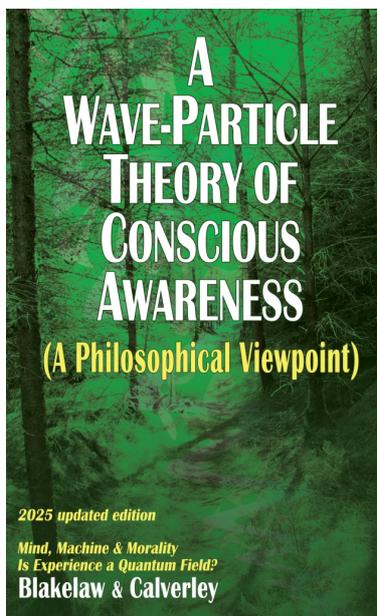
Smoothing requires an overhead in terms of brain functionality, requiring additional consumption of protein and calories by the organism. The need for additional (food) resources is an overhead which places the organism at an evolutionary disadvantage unless being conscious delivers an evolutionary advantage, in which case consciousness must be causal etc.

## 2.3 The Case From Feeling:

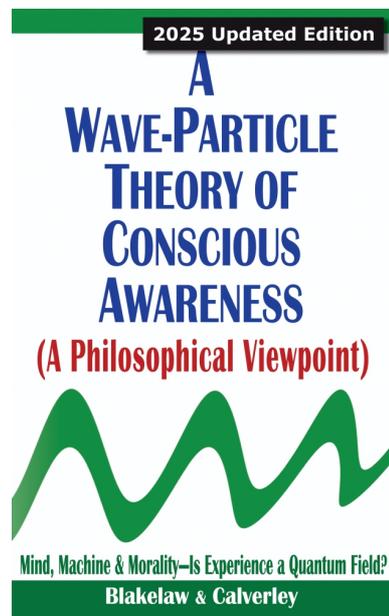
When we feel pain it is the piquancy of that feeling which forces us to react. The piquancy of that feeling is something extra, additional, above and beyond merely having some physical property ‘dialled up to eleven’.

Therefore pain (and consciousness in general) provides an additional causal impetus to act. Therefore consciousness cannot be an emergent property of the system that supplies and regulates its contents, to wit: the brain or any mechanical analogue of the brain.

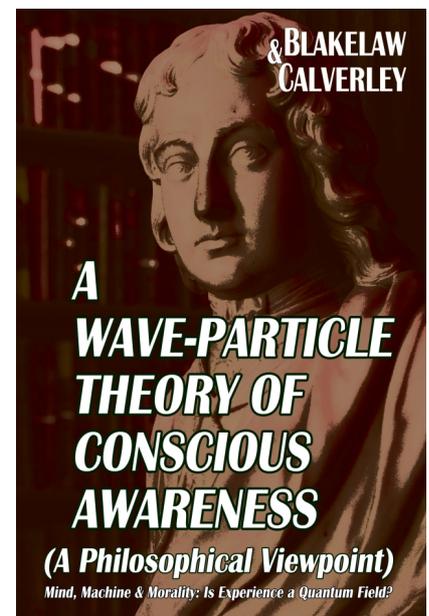
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