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▼ **The problem of consciousness**

Søren Ventegodt, Mohammed Morad and Joav Merrick (3 February 2006)

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consciousness](#)

EDITOR--- The editorial in this week's BMJ (1) is asking how much our moral values influence clinical decisions. Seen from a holistic perspective, the human being is much more than his body. Mind has psychic dimensions difficult to measure and turn into science, especially the soul, the spiritual level of man, that is normally acknowledged to be a wordless domain of our existence.

Unfortunately, consciousness is a soul-thing. The place within our self, where we take the final judgment of our life values and major decisions in life, is hidden, unpredictable, and un-material (2).

Consciousness is the source of our being and the way we deal with our own consciousness often become our destiny, also concerned with our physical and mental health. The Danish existential philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (3) recommended to always make the most arduous and difficult choice, when confronted with a choice of something easy or something challenging.

The physician (usually the family physician) will often be the person discussing these life-forming decisions with the patient. Unfortunately, the modern physician is so absorbed in his own profession that it can be very difficult to understand how it is to be a truck driver, a cleaner, or a shopkeeper. Often the physician is not really taking the hardest of alternatives himself in his own personal life.

So the person that the patient is most likely to entrust his or her life to might be the person least able to give the inspiring advice of seeking the challenge and running the risk. In life the real emotional risk is to lose yourself. To put your own existence to the test. To go beyond your own limits. To upgrade your attitudes and personal belief system. This is the game of consciousness in which every physician should be involved for the sake of his or her patients. This is what creates the real, full and rich life. And this is also what creates health and prevents diseases according to our research from

the Copenhagen Prospective Birth Cohort (4).

How can medical students be taught this? Well, it is not too complicated. In the recently published first and second volumes of our new book series "Principles of Holistic Medicine" (5,6), we have dealt explicitly with the philosophy of life needed for being able to handle these difficult aspects of medicine.

Philosophy can be read and understood, and it can be taught at medical school. Allow us to recommend that all medical students get such training.

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