



Consciousness Explained

By Daniel C. Dennett

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"Brilliant...as audacious as its title....Mr. Dennett's exposition is nothing short of brilliant." --George Johnson, *New York Times Book Review*

Consciousness Explained is a full-scale exploration of human consciousness. In this landmark book, Daniel Dennett refutes the traditional, commonsense theory of consciousness and presents a new model, based on a wealth of information from the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and artificial intelligence. Our current theories about conscious life--of people, animal, even robots--are transformed by the new perspectives found in this book.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Consciousness is notoriously difficult to explain. On one hand, there are facts about conscious experience--the way clarinets sound, the way lemonade tastes--that we know subjectively, from the inside. On the other hand, such facts are not readily accommodated in the objective world described by science. How, after all, could the reediness of clarinets or the tartness of lemonade be predicted in advance? Central to Daniel C. Dennett's attempt to resolve this dilemma is the "heterophenomenological" method, which treats reports of introspection nontraditionally--not as evidence to be used in explaining consciousness, but as data to be explained. Using this method, Dennett argues against the myth of the Cartesian theater--the idea that consciousness can be precisely located in space or in time. To replace the Cartesian theater, he introduces his own multiple drafts model of consciousness, in which the mind is a bubbling congeries of unsupervised parallel processing. Finally, Dennett tackles the conventional philosophical questions about consciousness, taking issue not only with the traditional answers but also with the traditional methodology by which they were reached.

Dennett's writing, while always serious, is never solemn; who would have thought that combining philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience could be such fun? Not every reader will be convinced that Dennett has succeeded in explaining consciousness; many will feel that his account fails to capture essential features of conscious experience. But none will want to deny that the attempt was well worth making. --

Glenn Branch

From Publishers Weekly

Tufts University cognitive scientist Dennett claims to have developed a major new theory of consciousness, yet his view of the brain as a massive parallel processor is a familiar one. What is different in his counter-intuitive theory is the claim that human consciousness, rather than being "hard-wired" into the brain's innate machinery, is more like software "running on the brain's parallel hardware" and is largely a product of cultural evolution. Author of *Brainstorms* , Dennett leads the adventurous gently through thought experiments, metaphors and diagrams in a treatise keyed to the serious, diligent reader. He presents a plausible evolutionary scenario of how consciousness could have emerged from the hominid brain. Dennett's audacious, tantalizing foray into the mind's inner workings ties up loose ends at the interface of cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, neuroscience and biology.

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From Kirkus Reviews

Maybe not explained. But explored, analyzed, examined from an extraordinarily rich perspective. Here, as in other philosophical work (Elbow Room, 1984, etc.), the Director of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts Univ. states that he aims to dethrone the ``Cartesian Theater'' of the mind--that central screen with its implied ``Central Meaner'' who attends to the ``contents of consciousness'': the ghost in the machine with all its implied infinite regress and mind/brain dichotomy. Instead, Dennett posits ``multiple drafts'' of the real world, the product of parallel processing of perceptual and cognitive subsystems compiled by independent ``demons'' vying with each other, with now one or another gaining ascendancy--the whole a form of ``pandemonium'' that results in consciousness. In arriving at this model, Dennett reviews the extensive literature of neuroscience, artificial intelligence, neurology, cognitive psychology, speech and language studies, thought experiments, and the philosophical tradition itself. This discourse is well worth the price of admission to Dennett's own theater of the brain: He is a gifted expositor with a marvelous sense of humor, and, typical of philosophers, ever eager to persuade, answer the reader's objectives, and strike down rival

theories. Does he succeed? Not completely. One suspects that metaphors based on artificial intelligence, ``virtual'' machines, and computer technology are just this culture's mind-set at this time. Dennett also pays scant attention to the role of emotions (in comparison to Robert Ornstein, see below), nor for that matter to the emerging concept that the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems should be considered in any schema of consciousness. Nevertheless, Dennett's analysis is so often brilliant, so witty, and so informed by contemporary culture as to make pleasurable the reading of what is truly a complex and demanding text. --
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carol Elliott:

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