

## Foreword

*Daniel C. Dennett*

There are lots of books on consciousness being published these days, and I end up skimming most of them and reading a few of them. Reading somebody else's take on the whole set of issues is often frustrating and depressing: *they just don't get it*. Other times it is tantalizing; they start on the right foot, in other words, where I start! and they get lots of it, and clear up some of the fog and even shine some light on part of the terra incognita, but then wander off into some unlikely and unconvincing blind alleys. Rarely, something much better happens: I encounter somebody who starts in quite a different place, with a different agenda and different presuppositions, but who eventually arrives in my own neighborhood having blazed some new trails. Zoltan Torey is such a pathfinder. And surprisingly, the disagreements I still have with some of his ways of putting things, and even with some of his main verdicts, don't disturb me at all. On the contrary, I find it powerfully reassuring that two such different perspectives can home in on so much common ground. Like everybody else who works on the perplexing problems of the mind and consciousness, I have always had a sense that my own vision, while fundamentally correct, of course could be improved upon, and Torey's book contains quite a few suggestions worth further reflection and research.

Torey firmly roots his theory of consciousness in evolution by natural selection, as do I, but he comes at the issues with some strikingly different emphases. He sees that human consciousness is profoundly unlike the consciousness of all other species, and that language is the key to understanding this difference—another point of deep agreement between us—but he has a usefully different account of what kind of difference language makes and how. Much of this I will happily adopt from now on. He and I agree on the utter misguidedness of those who worry about the possibility of zombies and “the Hard Problem” but he has some novel ways of showing what is so bizarrely wrong about it. The greatest point of disagreement between

us is on the power of the computational perspective. By my lights, he has been misled by a few other would be pathfinders—the usual suspects: Edelman, Penrose, Searle, Fodor—into a pinched and unrealistic caricature of artificial intelligence. If AI were what they say it is, I too would turn my back on it. But unlike these, and other, anti-computational ideologues, Torey surefootedly picks his way to a suitably astringent and non-miraculous, non-romantic vision of how the brain works its “magic.” He is, I insist, computationalist *malgré lui*. As such, his ways of putting things often shed new light on just what is going on in the “computational” brain, since he has to find alternative metaphors to stand in for the now somewhat overworked comparison with computers. Just as poets often find that the constraints of rhyme and meter force them to discover strikingly apt expressions of their thoughts, it turns out that couching a computational theory of the mind in resolutely noncomputational terms pays dividends.

There is much to repay readers in this book: to the uninitiated, it is a graceful and wise introduction to many of the central problems and arguments; to the veterans, it is a quite bountiful source of arrestingly different slants on familiar topics. Does some of this originality stem from the fact that the author has been blind for a half century, and has developed his skills of visual imagination to an uncanny degree? Perhaps this too has been a constraint turned into a blessing. Food for thought, well served.

# **The Crucible of Consciousness**

**An Integrated Theory of Mind and Brain**

**Zoltan Torey**

**with a foreword by Daniel C. Dennett**

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