

DESIGNED MIND SYMPOSIUM 2017
CALL FOR PAPERS

Exploring the function, evolution
& implementation of consciousness

Informatics Forum, University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh, Scotland
8-9 November 2017

<http://designedmind.org>

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Daniel C. Dennett, Tufts University
Michael Graziano, Princeton University

REPRESENTING OURSELVES

The fact that I have subjective experience is quite mysterious. It seems to be a “further fact” about me, surplus to all the conceivable functional facts. I can imagine a machine with the same outward behaviour, yet lacking an inner life. These intuitions are compelling, and lead many to suspect that a theory of consciousness will require a new kind of science, perhaps one which posits consciousness as an all-pervasive feature of the universe. We may have to identify consciousness with some kind of information processing or informational complexity, with no real insight into why such an identification makes sense, or accept consciousness as an epiphenomenon, present whenever certain kinds of processes are present. Yet these prospects seem to offer little in the way of explanation, and relegate consciousness to a passive role, with not much to do except come along for the ride.

These intuitions also neglect a crucial fact about our behaviour, namely that consciousness is much of the **subject matter** of what we say and do. We describe the world *from a vantage point*, contrast how things *seem* from that vantage point with how we believe the world to be, summarise our goals and plans, explain the world around us in terms of possibilities for action, and justify the actions we take in terms of consciously held beliefs, desires and feelings. While we intuit strongly that such “consciousness talk” – elaborate behaviour oriented around an ostensibly private mental life – could somehow happen without “real” consciousness inside, we remain curiously oblivious to the fact that if our **own** consciousness talk is ever to be a consequence of our own “real” consciousness, then it can only be that the latter is in fact a psychological mechanism taking place in the physical world.

This has led some researchers to suggest that it is *these behaviours* that are the proper target, or explanandum, of a science of consciousness. Modern theories along such lines, developed by Daniel Dennett and others, propose that we understand conscious experience as the *content* of an internal self-model. What we intuit as a “private realm” is a control mechanism operating in the public world: a brain's way of representing the organism as a situated agent, a reflective self-representation designed by evolution to enable new levels of autonomy, self-monitoring and deliberative action. By representing not only the world and its affordances for action, but also ourselves as embodied agents in the world, and ultimately ourselves as *representers*, the evolving brain converged on the *self* as the solution to a control problem. We cannot easily appreciate the self-model-within-a-world-model **as** a model, because “we” only exist in virtue of the model, as its central feature.

The symposium is a forum to elaborate, discuss and critique this emerging scientific picture of consciousness as a form of reflective self-representation. We invite perspectives from philosophy, psychology, neuroscience and informatics.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We invite submissions of high-quality short papers for presentation at the symposium. Papers should be in PDF format and no more than 4,000 words in length. Please prepare your submission for blind review and submit via EasyChair at <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=dm2017>. Authors of accepted papers will have their registration fees waived.

After the symposium, there will be an open call for full-length (8,000 word) papers for publication as a collected volume or journal special issue (details forthcoming).

IMPORTANT DATES

Registration opens: 30 May, 2017

Submission deadline: 30 July, 2017

Notification of acceptance: 9 September, 2017

Early registration deadline: 15 September, 2017

Designed Mind symposium: 8-9 November, 2017

Expecting Ourselves workshop: 10 November, 2017

SPEAKER BIOS

Daniel C. Dennett, author of *Consciousness Explained* (Little, Brown and Co., 1991), *Freedom Evolves* (Viking Penguin, 2003) and *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (Simon & Schuster, 1995), is University Professor and Austin B. Fletcher Professor of Philosophy, and Co-Director of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University.

Michael Graziano, author of *Consciousness and the Social Brain* (Oxford University Press, 2013) is Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at Princeton University.

AFFILIATED WORKSHOP

The symposium will be followed by Expecting Ourselves: Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind, also in the Informatics Forum. Registration will be separate for this event. See <http://www.x-spect.org/first-project-workshop.html>.

ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Programme Chair: Roly Perera (University of Edinburgh)

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For general enquiries email info@designedmind.org.