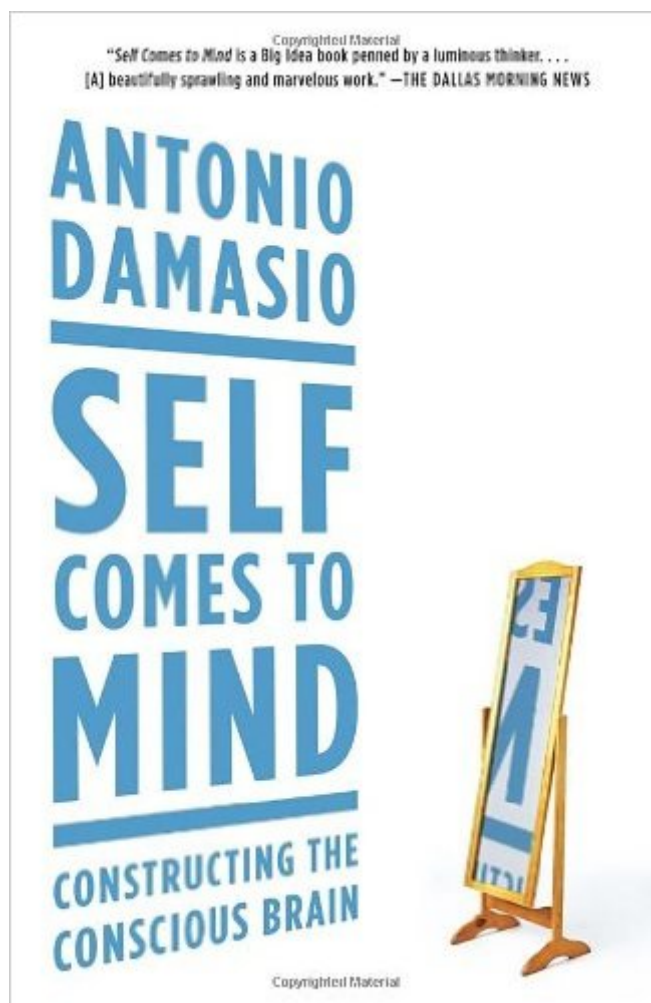


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Self Comes To Mind: Constructing The Conscious Brain



Synopsis

A leading neuroscientist explores with authority, with imagination, and with unparalleled mastery how the brain constructs the mind and how the brain makes that mind conscious. Antonio Damasio has spent the past thirty years researching and revealing how the brain works. Here, in his most ambitious and stunning work yet, he rejects the long-standing idea that consciousness is somehow separate from the body, and presents compelling new scientific evidence that posits an evolutionary perspective. His view entails a radical change in the way the history of the conscious mind is viewed and told, suggesting that the brain's development of a human self is a challenge to nature's indifference. This development helps to open the way for the appearance of culture, perhaps one of our most defining characteristics as thinking and self-aware beings.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The deep enigma of consciousness has been explored from many directions, including contributions by neuroscientists, psychologists, philosophers and a few physicists (both quantum and complex systems scientists). An important study area consists of injuries or diseases that destroy specific brain structures; these clinical events are often closely correlated to nuanced effects on selective aspects of consciousness. Professor Damasio's book makes good use of these data to describe many known neural correlates of consciousness. For purposes of this book, he adopts the working hypothesis that mental states and brain states are essentially equivalent. While many (including this reviewer) find this idea questionable, such tentative hypothesis is quite appropriate for a book of this

kind. In science we often adopt useful, if highly oversimplified, models in the early stages of our studies with no illusions that they are perfectly accurate. In this manner "Truth" is (hopefully) approached in a series of successive approximations. Thankfully, Damasio does not claim to "explain" consciousness. The book's title is based on Damasio's suggestion that our evolutionary history reveals many simple creatures with active "minds" (defined broadly), but only much later did self (awareness) develop; in other words the human self is built in steps grounded in the so-called "protoself." An essential step is the development of homeostasis (life regulation needed to survive) in single cell creatures like bacteria, followed by progressively more complex "societies of cells" in more complex creatures like insects, reptiles, and mammals. Thus consciousness, rooted in our evolutionary past, helps to optimize our responses to the environment so that we may continue our existence.

Dr. Damasio says that, "This book is dedicated to addressing two questions. First: how does the brain construct a mind? Second: how does the brain make that mind conscious?" Do I think he does an exceptional job of tackling these two questions? Yes, I do. I believe the greatest strength of this book lies in Dr. Damasio's capacity to take account of vast amounts of information and viewpoints related to mind and consciousness. He has included large swaths of issues that are usually books in and of themselves (Body Maps - The Body Has a Mind of Its Own: How Body Maps in Your Brain Help You Do (Almost) Everything Better, Extended/Embodied Cognition - The Extended Mind (Life and Mind: Philosophical Issues in Biology and Psychology), Efficient Computational Theory of Mind - Your Brain Is (Almost) Perfect: How We Make Decisions, Selfhood - The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self, Free Will -

Just came across an excellent review of Self Comes to Mind by Steven Rose for The Guardian.[...]Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain by Antonio Damasio - reviewSteven Rose examines a neurologist's attempt to explain why we have conscious selvesSteven RoseThe Guardian, Sat 12 Feb 2011 00.05 GMTConsciousness has become a hot topic for brain scientists. Once, we were content to leave the interminable mind/brain problem to philosophers and theologians. Speculation remained a CLM - a career-limiting move -- for ambitious young researchers. No longer. Armed with novel tools, from genetic manipulation to brain imaging, flush with funding, and convinced that neuroscience has the key to the human condition, the hunt is on. Experiments, conferences and books proliferate, and philosophers of mind can no longer be taken seriously until they have done an internship in a neurophysiology lab.Neuroscientists,

especially those of us trained in the Anglo-American tradition, tend to be as mechanically materialist as was "Darwin's bulldog", Thomas Huxley, in the 19th century, when he remarked that mind is to brain as the whistle is to the steam train - a mere epiphenomenon. Thoughts, feelings, intentions, reasons - all are causally generated by brain processes, and it is these latter that do the real business. Hence for Francis Crick, "you are nothing but a pack of neurons", free will is located in the cingulate gyrus, and consciousness in the claustrum - two small regions of the human brain's massive cerebral cortex.

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