



Soul Dust: The Magic of Consciousness

Nicholas Humphrey

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How is consciousness possible? What biological purpose does it serve? And why do we value it so highly? In *Soul Dust*, the psychologist Nicholas Humphrey, a leading figure in consciousness research, proposes a startling new theory. Consciousness, he argues, is nothing less than a magical-mystery show that we stage for ourselves inside our own heads. This self-made show lights up the world for us and makes us feel special and transcendent. Thus consciousness paves the way for spirituality, and allows us, as human beings, to reap the rewards, and anxieties, of living in what Humphrey calls the "soul niche."

Tightly argued, intellectually gripping, and a joy to read, *Soul Dust* provides answers to the deepest questions. It shows how the problem of consciousness merges with questions that obsess us all--how life should be lived and the fear of death. Resting firmly on neuroscience and evolutionary theory, and drawing a wealth of insights from philosophy and literature, *Soul Dust* is an uncompromising yet life-affirming work--one that never loses sight of the majesty and wonder of consciousness.

Soul Dust: The Magic of Consciousness Details

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Kassandra says

This was difficult to follow in a number of places, probably necessarily so considering the subject matter. However, the basic premises made a lot of sense to me from evolutionary and practical perspectives. Very interesting on the whole, and also entertaining; I haven't seen consciousness discussed in quite this way before.

Andreas says

Amazingly well thought out book, filled with all sorts of great explanations for the objects in conscious awareness - thoughts, sensations, what it is like to be. However, the author never touched on the problem he proposed to solve - the hard problem of consciousness. The machine was explained wonderfully, but the ghost was never touched on. He never explained how an aware observer could arise out of a material reality instead sticking to the observed objects off awareness. Despite my disappointment regarding this failure, the explanations he does make for the rest of consciousness are fascinating.

Vegantrav says

I've read some of Humphrey's earlier books on consciousness, and he has an interesting approach to trying to understand and explain the mystery of consciousness. *Soul Dust* really doesn't contain much that cannot be found in his previous works, but it is a good synopsis of his ideas.

If I can be overly simplistic, his basic idea is that the brain creates, within the brain itself, a model of the external world. This model includes various internal monitoring systems, and it is from these internal monitoring systems that the self derives: the self is the aspect of the brain that monitors the internal model of the external world.

Now, Humphrey's model leaves many questions unanswered, especially explaining how the raw feel of qualia could arise from completely materialistic processes, but he provides an interesting foundation from which philosophers and neuroscientists might begin to try to answer the hard problem of consciousness.

Ian Pattinson says

Part of my research on consciousness for an upcoming project. This was more of a philosophical read on the definition of consciousness, and its benefits and problems, than about the process that may have brought it about.

Lots of interesting ideas, and the book is sprouting many coloured bookmark tabs where I found ideas worth exploring further, or springboards for ideas to put in the story.

Neil says

A bit complex at times, but overall this phenomenal (literally!) text presents a largely interesting perspective on the evolutionary role human consciousness plays. Very well thought out arguments just seem to make perfect sense upon reflection; particularly when Humphrey discusses why evolution might have come to be, and what purpose it serves in increasing our fitness in terms of natural selection.

Humphrey's writing is as clear as possible with such complex subject matter. In many ways, this book is incredibly uplifting, as its basic idea is a very positive one about the nature of human existence. If you're interested in philosophy and up to a challenging read at times, this is a worthwhile text that could easily change your perspective on life itself.

Mark Valentine says

Each day we awake we experience a new miracle: consciousness. Every sleep cycle testifies to a letting go, maybe some dreams, and then reappears with a familiar recognition that I am the same person I was before my journey but awake now, aware now, and alert now.

Humphrey's book has changed the game for me. My conscious capacities become a magical loop of spiral experience and the illusion of self shimmers in iridescence like dew in a sun ray.

Steve says

Tries to explain what consciousness is and how it evolved. I'm not sure I followed it all, and I'm also not sure that there weren't some unfollowable gaps in the reasoning. But there were some very interesting ideas and most of the writing was clear, if you can keep track of the few words that he invents. A fascinating subject!

Pamela says

This is a subject that interests me, as a psychologist and a person. The author suggests that life is a show we stage for ourselves. He presents some of the recent developments in the field of study of consciousness and also makes his own hypothesis about what it is all about, including that "consciousness is an entertainment to help you survive...it stems from inner monitoring." I enjoyed it.

By the way, I don't read 3 or 4 books in a few days; I read 3 or 4 books for weeks and then often finish around the same time.

Subowal says

Don't be misled by the title. Nicholas Humphrey is not a new age Guru. He is a hardcore scientist and philosopher. He does not ask us to believe in the existence of spirit beyond the physical body. Consciousness, he claims, is a very much a creation of the neurophysics of the human brain.

Humphrey begins by putting forward a theory as to how consciousness could be realized in the brain. This part of the book is rather difficult to read, and even more difficult to understand. I can't claim to have understood it. But it does not matter, as the important part of the book is not dependent on the mechanism that gives rise to consciousness.

The question Humphrey asks is whether consciousness adds to evolutionary fitness in any way? Does a conscious organism have a better chance of surviving than an automaton? His answer is a resounding yes. He takes into account the criticism that consciousness does not add to the organism's skill at dealing with the environment and does not refute it. However, consciousness gives the organism a higher stake in surviving. A conscious individual lives a more interesting, more meaningful life, and therefore strives to continue the interesting 'show'.

With this as the basic thesis Humphrey delves into poetry, art, spirituality and soul. All these are outcomes of our enjoyment of conscious living and our desire to enrich the experience further. His quotations from works of literature are very apt and beautiful. They helped me appreciate the beauty of these works a lot better.

The downside of this rich conscious life is that human beings are the only species who know that they will die. The fear of death and the attempts to cope with it form the subject matter of the penultimate chapter that goes into the very meaning of life.

This book takes up an interesting thesis, develops it well in a readable manner and helps us gain a new perspective on art, spirituality and the meaning of life. It is one of the most meaningful books I have read. Strongly recommended.

Lynn says

Does conscious organism have a better chance of surviving than an automaton?

The author believes that conscious individuals live a more interesting, more meaningful life and therefore strives to continue the interesting "show". The book takes up an interesting theory and helps us gain a new perspective on Art, spirituality and the meaning of life.

Natalie says

As wonderfully complicated as our mind itself, yet simple once you get the mechanisms behind it. I had to think a lot about the complex premises to draw my conclusions out of it. But it was definitely worth it.

Dion says

I was not nearly as impressed with the author's genius as the author seemed to be.

Matt says

Nick Humphrey's take on the origins and role of consciousness in humans and other animals, of interest to anyone with an appetite for contemporary philosophy of mind, in particular the relationship between the internal world of mental experience and the so-called neurological correlates of consciousness. Humphrey's main message, after presenting his own functionalist (or functionalist-inspired) view, is that consciousness is evolutionarily adaptive in humans and, to a lesser extent, nonhuman animals with less-developed self-awareness.

I found it an enjoyable exploration of that line of thought.

Tommy says

[We have argued that all this is based on a contrived illusion: the sensory ipsundrum, which, as an evolutionary development of sentition, has been designed to appear to the subject to have surreal phenomenal properties. Consciousness is an impossible fiction, or, perhaps be

Deborah says

I dont know where to begin. This book discusses a tbeory of how evolution promoted consiousness and why. It puts forward the idea that it was evolution that gave us our souls and how the human race was spiritual long before god & religion appeared.it was fascinating!
