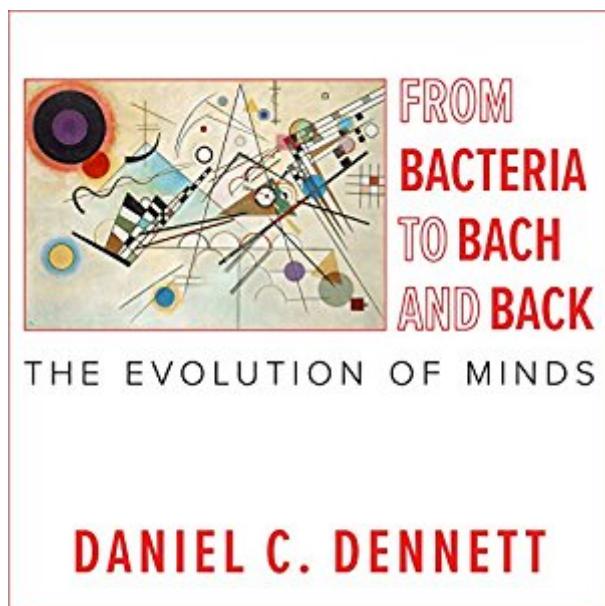


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From Bacteria To Bach And Back: The Evolution Of Minds



Synopsis

What is human consciousness, and how is it possible? This question fascinates thinking people from poets and painters to physicists, psychologists, and philosophers. From Bacteria to Bach and Back is Daniel C. Dennett's brilliant answer, extending perspectives from his earlier work in surprising directions, exploring the deep interactions of evolution, brains, and human culture. Part philosophical whodunit, part bold scientific conjecture, this landmark work enlarges themes that have sustained Dennett's legendary career at the forefront of philosophical thought. In his inimitable style - laced with wit and arresting thought experiments - Dennett shows how culture enables reflection by installing a bounty of thinking tools, or memes, in our brains. Language, itself composed of memes, turbocharged this interplay. The result, a mind that can comprehend the questions it poses, emerges from a process of cultural evolution. An agenda-setting book for a new generation of philosophers and other researchers, From Bacteria to Bach and Back will delight and entertain anyone who hopes to understand human creativity in all its wondrous applications.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is typical of Daniel Dennett's other offerings. It's extremely meaty, rich in metaphor and analogies, often deep and remarkably thought-provoking, linguistically clever, wide ranging to the point of being distractingly digressive and covers a remarkable swathe of intellectual ground, from computers to neurobiology, from word acquisition to elevator design, from computer bugs to biological viruses, from Charles Darwin to Alan Turing. That being said, it's hard to say what this book is really about since it's about so many different things. As another reviewer pointed out,

Dennett's digressions can sometimes be distracting and it is difficult to see the central point in his argument. The book also doesn't seem to present a novel hypothesis *per se*. Its ostensible purpose is to describe the evolution of human minds and thinking and what makes them special. It succeeds in this endeavor to a large extent, but still doesn't end up really explaining key concepts like consciousness (which Dennett thinks is an illusion). The main device that Dennett uses for unraveling intelligence and minds is the concept of memes which was introduced by Richard Dawkins. According to Dennett, the co-evolution of genes and culture through memes is what makes human minds special. Again, gene-culture co-evolution is not a new concept, but Dennett explores it with verve and insight. I think the main function of this book is to serve as a springboard for exploring some very clever analogies between software and biology and for appreciating the naturalistic evolution of human language and thinking. There are gems scattered throughout the text: for instance, the concept of "competence without comprehension" which is a version of Dawkins's "blind watchmaker" analogy, and the very revealing insight that simple things like nail cutters might be impossible to imagine arising through natural selection while complicated things like human minds can well be imagined evolving this way. There are also excellent discussions on how children acquire words and how these words then interact with genetics and culture to produce very human features of the brain like foresight, introspection and planning for the future. Some of this material constitutes an argument against intelligent design. The analogies are elegant and often clever and Dennett's play on words can be very subtle; for this reason several paragraphs may have to be read a few times to really grasp their essence. In this sense the book has to be savored and resampled like fine wine. In general then, I enjoyed the book but found it too digressive and slow-going in parts. On several occasions I found Dennett slipping into academic language, with the academic references and jargon to boot. Reading this volume requires patience and careful study, and this patience will often be rewarded. But it's not what you would call an introductory or popular treatment: if you are not familiar with standard popular works on evolution, language and psychology by writers like Richard Dawkins, Steven Pinker, Matt Ridley or Daniel Kahneman it would likely be pretty hard going. But as a sampling of scattered gems which reveal themselves through rumination and constant reflection, it's hard to find a writer as clever and insightful as Daniel Dennett.

Let me be honest in this philosophical review: I *feel* more of a fanatic than an academic professional, yet there is something alluring about Dennett's style of progress as he arrives at ideas surrounding the

mindÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢s factory. He speaks of the consciousness IÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢m not afraid of, since it can be my job as a poet to express whatever Dennett indicates in special analysis- the progressive character humanity achieves at getting without really obvious beliefs. In fact, religious philosophy may be possible although a thinker of such a category turns out to be a victim of hallucinations and practical schizophrenia. When Dennett serves as a remarkable spectator of enthusiasm on YouTube and exclusive video sources, I tend to agree on his notion that consciousness is not so mysterious. Maybe we often say consciousness is mysterious because humans have so many kinds of competences on their languages, although- as IÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢ve discovered from determining quality and parental affordances in my poetry- itÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢s important to nourish our minds by not being so explicit about comprehension. (So in other words, how can philosophers not be mean when they ÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã Å“meanÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã Â• something on their meaning?) You can take the same image, such as the image of the fictional flag, and see some different things if you continue on DennettÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢s eyesight-experiment. Perhaps itÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢s possible to order up on words with mistaken definitions; in fact, Japanese writing is practically like making art since IÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢ve seen Japanese paintings with fancy-looking kanji. Images can be mistaken; they can act like a mirage, turning and twisting in the light before we realize, ÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã ËœOh, imagination is powerful.ÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢ Are mistaken ideas exactly like imagination or just specific hints related to intellect? Dennett doesnÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢t think that sleeping people influence energetic people, not even on their communication, which leads me to believe that culture can be such a picky thing as people get aroused or bored from their affordances. You see, Dennett is pretty wild and happy when it comes to George CarlinÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢s words. I get afraid of his situation. Little, quick words tend to act as operating features from the speakers, who in turn act as operators because of their words. George CarlinÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢s schooling was pretty minimal and IÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢m not sure if I wouldÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢ve allowed that kind of operator to perform surgery on me or to ask his own consciousness for the humorous approval. Nonetheless, Dennett is very light on his treatment of a comedianÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢s alluring ideas. So whatÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢s my goal if IÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢m not an official philosopher? Reading books and the importance of studying canÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢t be understated unless we donÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢t realize enough words. Dennett expresses so much in his varying opinions that I begin to wonder why the survival of humanity is such mandatory phenomena; if we look at DennettÃfÃcÃ â ¬Ã â„¢s book with unrestricted theories and some priorities, our words will seem to come out of nowhere.

Excellent book, mind and thought sort of provocation. Worth every line and chapter. I would recommend to read Intuition Pump first.

Not an easy read-but so what! Dennett is a modern philosopher who tackles some tough but very interesting stuff. Evolution of consciousness material is extremely interesting.

Another advancement on many fronts. Interesting read, many riverrs of thought come together very well.

Most informative book in Philosohy I have read in a long time.

Loved this. Classic Dennett masterpiece. Summarizes his life's work and pushes into brand new territory. If you like Deacon, you will love this.

This is not simple reading, but worth the effort.

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