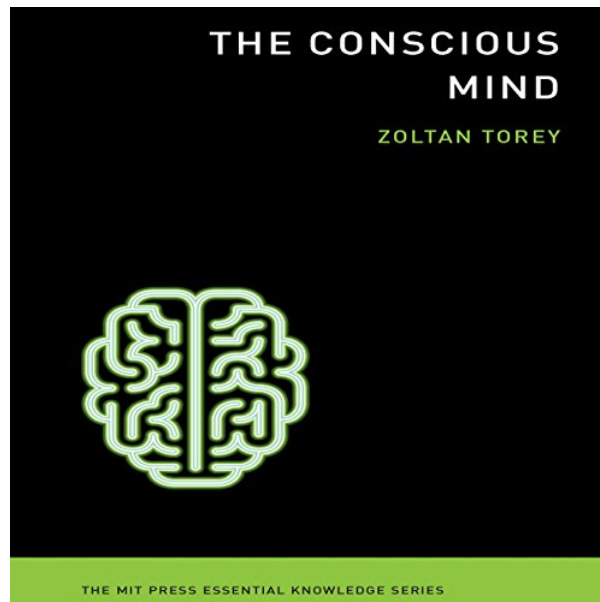


THE CONSCIOUS MIND BY ZOLTAN TOREY



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THE CONSCIOUS MIND BY ZOLTAN TOREY PDF

How did the human mind emerge from the collection of neurons that makes up the brain? How did the brain acquire self-awareness, functional autonomy, language, and the ability to think, to understand itself and the world? In this volume in the Essential Knowledge series, Zoltan Torey offers an accessible and concise description of the evolutionary breakthrough that created the human mind. Drawing on insights from evolutionary biology, neuroscience, and linguistics, Torey reconstructs the sequence of events by which *Homo erectus* became *Homo sapiens*. He describes the augmented functioning that underpins the emergent mind - a new ("offline") internal response system with which the brain accesses itself and then forms a selection mechanism for mentally generated behavior options. This functional breakthrough, Torey argues, explains how the animal brain's "awareness" became self-accessible and reflective - that is how the human brain acquired a conscious mind. Consciousness, unlike animal awareness, is not a unitary phenomenon but a composite process. Torey's account shows how protolanguage evolved into language, how a brain subsystem for the emergent mind was built, and why these developments are opaque to introspection. We experience the brain's functional autonomy, he argues, as free will. Torey proposes that once life began, consciousness had to emerge - because consciousness is the informational source of the brain's behavioral response. Consciousness, he argues, is not a newly acquired "quality", "cosmic principle", "circuitry arrangement", or "epiphenomenon", as others have argued, but an indispensable working component of the living system's manner of functioning.

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- Format: Unabridged
- Original language: English
- Running time: 212 minutes

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6 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

like the endograms that serve as the domain for a ...

By Josh R.

A remarkable book that makes a compelling case for the fact that we do, in fact, know what consciousness is and how it evolved historically and how it works, computationally and biologically. I would have preferred to have more experimental evidence for the existence of certain features, like the endograms that serve as the domain for a mental motor function.

14 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

Blind on Blind

By Les Gapay

By Les Gapay

The blind writing about the blind. I never thought it would come to that. But here I am reviewing a new book

by my late cousin, a Hungarian-Australian expert on human consciousness.

Bad luck must run in our family. Zoltan Torey was born in Budapest in 1929 and grew up in a privileged family. His father was head of a movie studio and also of the Hungarian Film Bureau. Zoltan fled Hungary in 1948, seeing no future under communism after his father's land and house were taken away and he was branded a "class enemy." Ending up in Australia, Zoltan was blinded in both eyes in an industrial accident in a battery acid plant in 1951. He didn't let this deter him and became a clinical psychologist. Later, he took on researching and writing about human consciousness, a subject that fascinated him. His latest book was just released by MIT Press, "The Conscious Mind." Previously, he wrote "The Crucible of Consciousness" published by Oxford University Press in 1999. He also wrote a memoir in 2003 on growing up in Hungary and his blindness with a forward by author and neurologist Oliver Sacks. "Out of Darkness" was published in Australia and Britain (Picador and later Macmillan).

I had just found Zoltan in July of 2013 while doing genealogy research on our connected families. His Hungarian grandmother was the sister of my paternal grandfather. So we were second cousins. I was born in Hungary in 1943 and ended up in America with my parents in 1951. Zoltan used a typewriter though blind. He wrote me long letters about his recollections of our mutual relatives, as well as emails with help of his wife. He also mailed me a copy of his memoir, which tells stories about our ancestors and their high society lives. Zoltan died in January of a heart attack at age 84.

By chance, I was permanently blinded in the right eye Aug. 24 in an attack by three men in a Wal-Mart parking lot in Missoula, Montana, while they were fleeing after a shoplifting spree. My eyeball was ruptured and much of the contents pushed out including the retina. An eye surgeon said it was unrepairable and pushed back in what he could including the retina and sewed the eye shut. He said I would never see with that eye and was focusing in saving the eyeball and hoping I wouldn't lose sight in the good eye from a rare condition after eye trauma called sympathetic ophthalmia in which the immune system attacks the good eye. I am writing this while recuperating in a motel where I have been since being released from the hospital. I read Zoltan's book here. I had always planned to review it, but not from the point of view of our joint blindness and bad luck.

I'm no expert on consciousness. But had a layman's interest in it. Once, before a knee surgery under general anesthesia the surgeon told me, "They don't know where you go when you are under." Years later at surgery for the other knee I asked the anesthesiologist about this. He said, "We turn off the conscious parts of the brain with chemicals." How it actually works and what happens is not well understood. Zoltan Torey made a career of figuring out human consciousness. Largely self taught, after 12 years he came up with his theories in "The Crucible of Consciousness" in 1999 to acclaim and some controversy. He took a detour with his memoir in 2003 at the urging of Oliver Sacks. In 2009, the paperback of "Crucible" was published by MIT Press. Now his sequel on consciousness published in August is part of MIT Press's series on "essential knowledge" topics by leading thinkers.

A slim volume, it's complex, difficult to read in parts and outlines Torey's model of what consciousness and the mind are and how they work. Zoltan's views on the topic are completely science based, with the brain the cause and mechanism for both consciousness and the mind. He makes strong scientific cases for his theories and refutes some ideas of other experts. In his view, everything in the universe comes from the Big Bang and evolution brought it along. He leaves no room for anything but a material world and debunks religion, the supernatural, God and creation. He uses science to fairly convincingly theorize that the mind and human consciousness are biology based in the brain. He says humans made the breakthrough from Homo Erectus to Homo Sapiens with the advent of language. Then came consciousness and the mind, both brain based. He says the physical mind is a subsystem of the brain. He says the brain acquired self awareness and the ability

to think and to understand itself and the world. "Human consciousness is a neurobiological process and not an ephemeral quality as some believe." Further, Torey says free will is an illusion. The physical mind, he says, generates options but the brainstem does subconscious decision making or selection. It just feels like free will to us because it is done so fast. He further adds that what we feel as self is not a soul, spirit or other nonmaterial manifestation but "a natural byproduct of the language equipped brain's routine functioning."

Zoltan doesn't stop with science but concludes that the mind's physicality "leaves no gaps for gods or for mythological narratives." It's a product of 13.7 billion years of cosmic evolution, he says, with no creator. To speak of a creator, he says, is outside what can be legitimately thought. In fact, he says the universe is self created. I think my cousin should have stopped with science. My personal views are far from Zoltan's. I don't dispute the evolution or the Big Bang theories. Zoltan was raised Lutheran but apparently didn't practice it as an adult. I am Catholic and practicing. That church has no problem today with evolution or science. It says religion and science are compatible, but that there is a creator behind it all. I was disappointed in Zoltan's conclusions. What's the point of our existence if this is all there is? Then we are like advanced self-replicating robots, as a scientist once speculated to me, when I was a daily journalist, that we are, perhaps put here by advanced beings from another planet. My view is that we are on a material plane and are beings using senses. I think it makes sense that there are also nonmaterial or supernatural planes of existence and beings. Why not? Maybe thinking we are all that there is could be another illusion of our self like Zoltan claims free will is. It seems self centered to think we humans are the top of the living order because we can't see other possible realms of existence.

What I want to personally take away from my cousin's books is Zoltan's perseverance under his blindness. He continued his work despite obstacles that would have stopped or slowed many. I plan to continue my writing. I have an interest in religion and spirituality and have written several unpublished essays. I plan to use Zoltan's example to continue my writing and other life despite the recent blindness in one eye and persevere. God willing. Perseverance is a strong Hungarian trait in face of centuries of obstacles for its people. Good thing for that. Zoltan and I would agree there.

(Les Gapay is a retired newspaper reporter.)

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

The Brain Puzzle

By Bruce Henricksen

This book is an excellent introduction to neuro-science, focusing on the question of whether the mind and the brain are one and how they/it became self-aware. Written in short chapters that keep jargon to a minimum.

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