

## Daniel C. Dennett Introduction

by

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at

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- Good evening everyone and welcome. Tonight I have the pleasure of introducing our guest author Daniel C. Dennett, University Professor and Austin B. Fletcher Professor of Philosophy at Tufts University. He is also Director of the Center for Cognitive Studies there.
  - His major work, *Consciousness Explained*, was a national bestseller and one of the *New York Times* Best Books of 1991. In it, he theorizes that consciousness is an abstraction built from a linear narrative of one's life. The theory is based on a functionalist view of cognitive science. In lay terms: the human mind is a finely orchestrated computer capable of manufacturing “consciousness” from experience.
  - As a citationist, I could not resist looking up how often this work has been cited or quoted in the research literature. I was not disappointed. Close to 700 papers referred to it explicitly and this does not take into account citations in other books, newspapers, and on the web.

- In 1995, his book *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. This work has already been cited in 300 journal articles. Just reading that list of titles is an incredible smorgasbord of scholarship reflecting his impact.

As if to confirm that, I just received a new book by Henry Plotkin (*The Imagined World Made Real*, University College London) in which he refers to Dennett's book no less than six times.

- Professor Dennett was born in Boston in 1942 and received his B.A. in philosophy from Harvard in 1963. He then went to Oxford University to work with Gilbert Ryle, under whose supervision he completed his doctorate in philosophy in 1965. Ryle was also a highly-cited author. His 1949 classic, *Concept of the Mind*, is still widely cited.
- Professor Dennett taught at University of California, Irvine, from 1965 to 1971. He then moved to Tufts, where he has taught ever since, aside from periods visiting at Harvard, Pittsburgh, Oxford, and the Ecole Normal Superieure de Paris.
- He is the author of more than 100 scholarly articles on various aspects on the mind, published in journals including *Artificial Intelligence, Behavioral and Brain Sciences, Poetics Today*, and the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.
- His Fellowships include two Guggenheims, a Fulbright, and yet another at the Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Science. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1987.

- The Co-founder and Co-director of the Curricular Software Studio at Tufts, he has helped design museum exhibits for the Smithsonian Institution, and both Science and Computer Museums in Boston.
- He spends summers on his farm in Maine, where he harvests blueberries, hay and timber, and makes Normandy cider wine, when he is not sailing or sculpting.
- In his latest book, *Freedom Evolves*, Professor Dennett tracks the biological evolution of free will and morality in human beings.
- A review in the American Library Association's *Booklist* states: "Dennett...continues his quest to demolish metaphysical conceptions of human nature. Our cherished concept of free will is the subject of this work. It may relieve those delving into his dense Darwinian argumentation that Dennett decides that such an attribute of humanity does indeed exist, albeit as a product of aimless evolution.
- And in his review last month in the *New Statesman*, Philosopher Kenan Malik said of Dennett's new book: "Reading Dennett is a bit like watching a high-wire trapeze artist. You're forever on the edge of your seat, marvelling at the dextrousness of the amazing moves, but constantly fearing that he's about to fall off. It's exhilarating, but exhausting - as the best writing should be."
- He is here tonight to walk the high-wire with us... ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Daniel C. Dennett.