

# Self Comes to Mind

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Constructing the Conscious Brain



Antonio Damasio

“The marvel of reading Antonio Damasio’s book is to be convinced one can follow the brain at work as it makes the private reality that is the deepest self.”

—V. S. Naipaul, Nobel laureate and author of *A Bend in the River*

“Damasio makes a grand transition from higher-brain views of emotions to deeply evolutionary, lower-brain contributions to emotional, sensory, and homeostatic experiences. He affirms that the roots of consciousness are affective and shared by our fellow animals. Damasio’s creative vision leads relentlessly toward a natural understanding of the very font of being.”

—Jaak Panksepp, author of *Affective Neuroscience* and Baily Endowed Chair for Animal Well-Being Science, Washington State University

“I was totally captivated by *Self Comes to Mind*. Damasio presents his seminal discoveries in the field of neuroscience in the broader contexts of evolutionary biology and cultural development. This trailblazing book gives us a new way of thinking about ourselves, our history, and the importance of culture in shaping our common future.”

—Yo-Yo Ma

“The epicenter of *Self Comes to Mind* concerns the neurological basis for cognition and the issue of the superposition of a ‘self’ onto the construct which we address as reality. In very characteristic style, Damasio is both eloquent and scholarly. His command of the themes he approaches is impressive, as is the vigor with which he tackles such recondite issues as the elusive ‘self’ inside the head. A wonderful read, and a recommended one!”

—Rodolfo R. Llinás, Chair and Professor of Physiology and Neuroscience, New York University

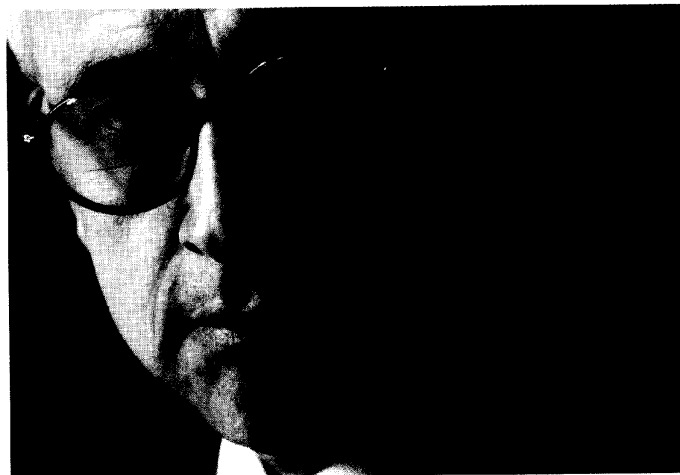
“In this astonishing work, Damasio puts his years of investigation into the processes of the brain to open the impenetrable mysteries of self and mind, where all the contradictions of human experience unite in the ultimate unknown: consciousness.”

—Peter Brook, film director and author of *The Empty Space*

From one of the most significant neuroscientists at work today, a pathbreaking investigation of a question that has confounded philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists for centuries: how is consciousness created?

Antonio Damasio has spent the past thirty years studying and writing about how the brain operates, and his work has garnered acclaim for its singular melding of the scientific and the humanistic. In *Self Comes to Mind*, he goes against the long-standing idea that consciousness is somehow separate from the body, presenting compelling new scientific evidence that consciousness—what we think of as a mind with a self—is to begin with a biological process created by a living organism. Besides the three traditional perspectives used to study the mind (the introspective, the behavioral, and the neurological), Damasio introduces an evolutionary perspective that entails a radical change in the way the history of conscious minds is viewed and told. He also advances a radical hypothesis regarding the origins and varieties of feelings, which is central to his framework for the biological construction of consciousness: feelings are grounded in a near fusion of body and brain networks, and first emerge from the historically old and humble brain stem rather than from the modern cerebral cortex.

Damasio suggests that the brain's development of a human self becomes a challenge to nature's indifference and opens the way for the appearance of culture, a radical break in the course of evolution and the source of a new level of life regulation—sociocultural homeostasis. He leaves no doubt that the blueprint for the work-in-progress he calls sociocultural homeostasis is the genetically well-established basic homeostasis, the curator of value that has been present in simple life-forms for billions of years. *Self Comes to Mind* is a groundbreaking journey into the neurobiological foundations of mind and self.



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**ANTONIO DAMASIO** is David Dornsife Professor of Neuroscience, Psychology, and Neurology, and director of the Brain and Creativity Institute at the University of Southern California. Damasio's books include *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*; *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*; and *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*. He has received the Pessoa, Signoret, and Cozzarelli prizes (shared with his wife, Hanna), and the Prince of Asturias Award for Technical and Scientific Research. Damasio is a fellow of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. He lives in Los Angeles.

Jacket design by Peter Mendelsund



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*Self  
Comes to Mind*

CONSTRUCTING THE  
CONSCIOUS BRAIN

Antonio Damasio



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My soul is like a hidden orchestra; I do not know which instruments grind and play away inside of me, strings and harps, timbales and drums. I can only recognize myself as a symphony.

—FERNANDO PESSOA, *The Book of Disquiet*

What I cannot build, I cannot understand.

—RICHARD FEYNMAN

# CONTENTS

## PART I / STARTING OVER

1. Awakening 3  
*Goals and Reasons • Approaching the Problem •  
The Self as Witness • Overcoming a Misleading Intuition •  
An Integrated Perspective • The Framework • A Preview  
of Main Ideas • Life and the Conscious Mind*
2. From Life Regulation to Biological Value 31  
*The Implausibility of Reality • Natural Will • Staying Alive  
• The Origins of Homeostasis • Cells, Multicellular Organisms,  
and Engineered Machines • Biological Value • Biological Value  
in Whole Organisms • The Success of Our Early Forerunners •  
Developing Incentives • Connecting Homeostasis, Value, and  
Consciousness*

## PART II / WHAT'S IN A BRAIN THAT A MIND CAN BE?

3. Making Maps and Making Images 63  
*Maps and Images • Cutting Below the Surface • Maps and Minds  
• The Neurology of Mind • The Beginnings of Mind •  
Closer to the Making of Mind?*
4. The Body in Mind 89  
*The Topic of the Mind • Body Mapping • From Body to Brain  
• Representing Quantities and Constructing Qualities •  
Primordial Feelings • Mapping Body States and Simulating  
Body States • The Source of an Idea • The Body-Minded Brain*

|                            |   |     |
|----------------------------|---|-----|
| 5.                         | Emotions and Feelings   | 108 |
|                            | <i>Situating Emotion and Feeling • Defining Emotion and Feeling • Triggering and Executing Emotions • The Strange Case of William James • Feelings of Emotion • How Do We Feel an Emotion? • The Timing of Emotions and Feelings • The Varieties of Emotion • Up and Down the Emotional Range • An Aside on Admiration and Compassion</i> |     |
| 6.                         | An Architecture for Memory  | 130 |
|                            | <i>Somehow, Somewhere • The Nature of Memory Records • Dispositions Came First, Maps Followed • Memory at Work • A Brief Aside on Kinds of Memory • A Possible Solution to the Problem • More on Convergence-Divergence Zones • The Model at Work • The How and Where of Perception and Recall</i>  |     |
| PART III / BEING CONSCIOUS |   |     |
| 7.                         | Consciousness Observed  | 157 |
|                            | <i>Defining Consciousness • Breaking Consciousness Apart • Removing the Self and Keeping a Mind • Completing a Working Definition • Kinds of Consciousness • Human and Nonhuman Consciousness • What Consciousness Is Not • The Freudian Unconscious</i>  |     |
| 8.                         | Building a Conscious Mind   | 180 |
|                            | <i>A Working Hypothesis • Approaching the Conscious Brain • Previewing the Conscious Mind • The Ingredients of a Conscious Mind • The Protoself • Constructing the Core Self • The Core Self State • Touring the Brain as It Constructs a Conscious Mind</i>  |     |
| 9.                         | The Autobiographical Self   | 210 |
|                            | <i>Memory Made Conscious • Constructing the Autobiographical Self • The Issue of Coordination • The Coordinators • A Possible Role</i>  |     |

|                                    |  |     |
|------------------------------------|--|-----|
|                                    | <i>for the Posteromedial Cortices • The PMCs at Work • Other Considerations on the Posteromedial Cortices • A Closing Note on the Pathologies of Consciousness</i>   |     |
| 10.                                | Putting It Together  | 241 |
|                                    | <i>By Way of Summary • The Neurology of Consciousness • The Anatomical Bottleneck Behind the Conscious Mind • From the Ensemble Work of Large Anatomical Divisions to the Work of Neurons • When We Feel Our Perceptions • Qualia I • Qualia II • Qualia and Self • Unfinished Business</i>                      |     |
| PART IV / LONG AFTER CONSCIOUSNESS |  |     |
| 11.                                | Living with Consciousness  | 267 |
|                                    | <i>Why Consciousness Prevailed • Self and the Issue of Control • An Aside on the Unconscious • A Note on the Genomic Unconscious • The Feeling of Conscious Will • Educating the Cognitive Unconscious • Brain and Justice • Nature and Culture • Self Comes to Mind • The Consequences of a Reflective Self</i> |     |
|                                    | <i>Appendix</i>  | 299 |
|                                    | <i>Notes</i>   | 319 |
|                                    | <i>Acknowledgments</i>   | 343 |
|                                    | <i>Index</i>   | 345 |