

Book Review

Daniel C. Dennett: *Kinds of Minds, The Origins of Consciousness*

A Phoenix Paperback, Orion Books Ltd. London, 1996.
Pp.244.£ 6.99 ISBN: 0 75380 043 8

The author is a well known philosopher with a number of books to his credit, such as *Consciousness Explained* (1991), *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (1996) etc. which can be followed by the general reader with profit and enjoyment. The book under review also is a highly readable book on the subject of mind. Dennett starts off by saying that he is a philosopher, not a scientist and that philosophers are better at asking questions than at providing answers. The reader, however, in going through the book will soon notice the vast knowledge that Dennett has of neuroscience, evolutionary biology as well as of the subject of artificial intelligence. In fact, Dennett is the Director of the Centre for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University, USA and he is connected with the research

project of constructing a humanoid robot named 'Cog', (a conscious robot) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Thus with a command of both philosophy and science, Dennett sets out to examine the concept of mind.

In an animal, the brain is a tangible organ which is the seat of all mental activity, thinking, feeling, desiring etc. In recent years much progress has been made in understanding how the brain works in the fields of neuroscience and experimental psychology. On the other hand, it is not easy to define the concept of mind or consciousness. Dennett does not give a clear-cut, definitive answer to the question what is a mind, but rather as a philosopher urges us to be careful about how to ask sensible (answerable?) questions and be comfortable

with the situation that certain questions cannot be answered (p. 17). In this book the author examines what properties one might expect to be fulfilled by the concept of mind such as goal directed activity (intentionality), self-replication etc.

Dennett, like most present day philosophers of mind, discards Descartes' dualism – separation of mind and matter into two different but interacting substances. Dennett also does not accept Descartes' view that animals are mindless. He (Dennett) concedes that it is not yet proven that animals have minds but states: 'We're pretty sure that dogs have minds, and we're dubious that oysters do' (p.5). However, does a 10 week old foetus have a mind? Does a robot have a mind? Do macromolecules like DNA which can selfreplicate and

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which in a sense are our remote ancestors, too have minds? Dennett discusses these questions from the viewpoint of Darwinian evolution, how conscious human beings have evolved over the aeons by natural selection. On p.73 he writes: we are descended from robots and composed of robots.

In this slim book the author *writes at length* about the philosophical concept of intentionality. Dennett explains what the expressions intentional stance and intentional systems mean.

The role of language in thought and communication are also examined. His lucid style enables one to learn without pain some of the interesting ideas of the modern philosophy of mind. The book shows us the sort of questions we need to ask if we are to find out what kind of minds other animals have.

At the end of the book the author cites a list of books for further reading. Among them he highlights two philosophical classics: *The Concept of Mind* by Gilbert Ryle (1949) and

Philosophical Investigations by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958). Both Ryle and Wittgenstein were known to be hostile to the idea of a scientific investigation of the mind and both were totally ignorant of biology and brain science, according to Dennett, but he (Dennett) recommends nevertheless not to ignore these two remarkable books in the current days of 'cognitive revolution'.

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