

Chapter 7:2 What is consciousness?

⁶²³To address the question of the origins of humans' conscious mind it is obviously first necessary to explain what consciousness actually is, but as with the truths of our corrupted human condition, of Integrative Meaning, of what instincts actually are and of the nurturing origins of our moral sense, the truth about the nature of consciousness has been so unbearably condemning of our corrupted condition that we humans have had no choice but to deny it until the human condition was truthfully explained, which it now has been.

⁶²⁴The fact is, the subject of consciousness is *so* closely correlated with the unbearably depressing subject of the human condition that 'consciousness' has become synonymous with—indeed, code for—the problem of the human condition. The science writer Roger Lewin articulated the problem precisely when he described the great difficulty humans have had of trying to '**illuminate the phenomena of consciousness**' as '**a tough challenge... perhaps the toughest of all**' (*Complexity*, 1993, p.153 of 208), using the philosopher René Descartes' own disturbed reaction when he tried to '**contemplate consciousness**' to illustrate the nature and extent of the difficulty: '**So serious are the doubts into which I have been thrown...that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them. It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top**' (p.154).

⁶²⁵My professor of biology when I was at Sydney University, Charles Birch, also acknowledged the difficulty mechanistic science has had looking at the subjective, psychological, terrifying-'deep'-'whirlpool'-of-self-'doubts'-causing issue of the human condition dimension to the study of consciousness when, in an interview conducted in 2007 (two years prior to his death at the age of 91), he said: '**there are two aspects of consciousness— [mechanistic] science deals with the objective facts, in other words with what happens in the cells of your brain when you have a conscious thought, but it leaves unanswered the question about the feeling I have of consciousness; and there is a tremendous gap between what I experience and what science tells me, and this is the gap that somehow or other has eventually to be filled...Science has great difficulty in dealing with that [subjective side]. It is highly successful in dealing with the objective events in the brain, and an awful lot of people are working on consciousness right now, but they don't touch on the problem of the subjective side because it's too hard...you have to be a philosopher...[and be able to deal with] the metaphysical side of things...Biology is still a very mechanistic science... most scientists don't think at all, anyway [about the deeper subjective issues—the deepest of all being the issue of our horrifically corrupted human condition]; they think on their subject about as much as a bank clerk thinks about them!**' (*Religion Report*, ABC Radio National, 19 Dec. 2007). Yes, as the philosopher Benjamin Fong pointed out about all the 'brain initiatives' that are currently taking place, mechanistic science's '**synthetic**' focus on the '**organic**' rather than the '**psychological**' aspect of being conscious can only end in denying humans '**the possibility of self-transformation**' (see par. 605). These comments by Birch about the limitations of mechanistic science in understanding human behaviour, reinforce his other exceptionally honest comments that were mentioned in par. 225, specifically that '**[mechanistic] science can't deal with subjectivity...what we were all taught in universities is pretty much a dead end**'; and, '**the traditional framework of thinking in science is not adequate for solving the really hard problems**'; and, '**Biology has not made any real advance since Darwin**'; and, '**Biology right now awaits its Einstein in the realm of consciousness studies.**' Yes, progress in biology has been stalled at the

issue of human behaviour, because understanding our behaviour depended on confronting the psychological issue of the human condition that has arisen in humans' conscious brain.

⁶²⁶ So while anyone who has searched the term 'consciousness' on the internet will have found it to be a subject cloaked in mystery and confusion, it's *not* because consciousness is an impenetrably complex subject, as we may think—it is *because it raises the unbearable issue of the human condition* and, as a result, has been *deliberately* left in an obscure, cryptic state. Resigned, human-condition-avoiding humans simply haven't wanted to know what consciousness actually is.

⁶²⁷ There have been two particular reasons why the subject of consciousness raised the unbearable issue of the human condition and why, therefore, examination of it led to such a fearful, all-our-moorings-taken-from-under-us, '**deep whirlpool**' of terrible depression for upset humans—and why, it follows, the subject has been deemed a 'no-go zone'.

⁶²⁸ The first particular reason is that even beginning to *vaguely* contemplate the nature of our human situation invariably led to the initial obvious question of 'What makes humans unique?', with the answer clearly being that we are conscious—but thinking about *that* marked the start of a very slippery, dangerous slope because it quickly led to the depressing accusation: 'Well, if we are such a clever species why do we treat each other and our planet so appallingly?' Yes, trying to think about consciousness meant trying to fathom what—when we humans are the only fully conscious, reasoning, intelligent, extraordinarily clever, 'can-get-a-man-on-the-Moon' animal—is so intelligent and clever about being so competitive, selfish and aggressive; in fact, *so* ruthlessly competitive, brutal and even murderous, that human life has become all but unbearable and we have nearly destroyed our own planet?! It is worth recalling here the powerful words of the polymath Blaise Pascal and the playwright William Shakespeare that were included in chapter 1:2. When it came to articulating the bewildering dichotomy of our species' condition, neither man minced his words, with Shakespeare writing, '**What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty!...In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? [Brutal and barbaric] Man delights not me**' (*Hamlet*, 1603)!! Pascal followed suit, despairing, '**What a chimera then is man! What a novelty, what a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy! Judge of all things, imbecile worm of the earth, repository of truth, a sewer of uncertainty and error, the glory and the scum of the universe!**' (*Pensées*, 1669). Each was daring to ask the same unbearable question: how is it that humans can be the most brilliantly clever of creatures, the ones who are '**god**'-like in our '**infinite**' '**faculty**' of '**reason**' and '**apprehension**', a '**glor**[ious]', '**angel**'-like '**prodigy**' capable of being a '**judge of all things**' and a '**repository of truth**', and yet also be *so* mean, *so* vicious, *so* capable of inflicting pain, cruelty, suffering and degradation? *Why* are humans so choked full of volcanic frustration, anger and hatred—the species that behaves *so appallingly* that we seem to be '**monster[s]**', '**imbecile[s]**', '**a sewer of uncertainty and error**' and '**chaos**', the '**essence**' of '**dust**', '**the scum of the universe**'?

⁶²⁹ Yes, the unbearable prospect that our intelligent, rational, insightful, aware, understanding human mind has, it seems, unintelligently, irrationally, thoughtlessly, indifferently and stupidly almost destroyed the whole planet we live on and brought human existence to a state of unbearably lonely, alienated, selfish, aggressive and egocentricity-crazed dysfunctionality has been an *extremely* confronting matter to think

about. While our fully conscious, intelligent mind *is* surely the culminating achievement of the grand experiment in nature that we call life, it *also* appeared to be to blame for all the devastation and human suffering in the world! Rather than being wonderful, our conscious mind appeared to be the plague of the planet! *That* is how ‘serious are the doubts’ that thinking about consciousness produced within us! *And*, our inability—until now—to understand this dichotomy of being the most clever and brilliant but also the most apparently destructive, evil and stupid force to have ever appeared on Earth has meant that we humans have, understandably, been *extremely* insecure and defensive about, and thus hesitant to explore the inner workings of, our supposedly wonderful conscious mind.

⁶³⁰The second particular reason why the subject of consciousness has been so confronting is because thinking about the nature of consciousness quickly brought us into contact with the truth of the selflessness-dependent, loving, integrative meaning of existence, the unbearably depressing implications of which were described in chapter 4. The explanation of what consciousness actually is will reveal the problem because, as we will see, while there is a simple and obvious explanation for consciousness itself (like there is for the human condition, the meaning of our existence and the origin of our moral soul), that explanation has had very confronting implications.

⁶³¹As briefly described in chapter 3:3, humans can be distinguished from other animals by the fact that we are fully conscious—that is, sufficiently able to understand and thus manage the relationship between cause and effect to wrest management of our lives from our instincts, and even to reflect upon our existence, specifically the issue of our immensely upset human condition that wresting management from our instincts brought about. This consciousness is a product of the nerve-based learning system’s ability to remember, for it is memory that allows understanding of cause and effect to develop.

⁶³²To elaborate, nerves were originally developed as connections for the coordination of movement in multicellular animals. An incidental by-product of the development of nerves was that of memory. While the actual mechanism by which nerves are able to store impressions is not yet fully understood, we do know it involves chemical processes. What is important, however, is that nerves have the capacity for memory because once you have the ability to remember past events, you are then in a position to compare them with current events and identify regularly occurring experiences. This knowledge of, or insight into, what has commonly occurred in the past enables the mind to predict what is likely to occur in the future and to adjust behaviour accordingly. Thus, the nerve-based learning system (unlike the gene-based learning system) can associate information, reason how experiences are related, learn to understand and become CONSCIOUS of the relationship of events that occur through time.

⁶³³In the brain, nerve information recordings of experiences (memories) are examined for their relationship with each other. To understand how the brain makes these comparisons, think of the brain as a vast network of nerve pathways onto which incoming experiences are recorded or inscribed, each on a particular path within that network. Where different experiences share the same information, their pathways overlap. For example, long before we understood the force of gravity we had learnt that if we let go of a weighted object it would invariably fall to the ground—falling to the ground was a shared characteristic. The value of recording information as a pathway in a network is that it allows related aspects of experience to be physically related. In fact, the area in our

brain where information is related is called the ‘association cortex’. Where parts of an experience are the same they share the same pathway, and where they differ their pathways differ or diverge. All the nerve cells in the brain are interconnected, so with sufficient input of experiences onto a nerve network of sufficient size, similarities or consistencies in experience show up as well-used pathways, pathways that have become highways. (In terms of illustrating the brain’s capacity to associate information, it has been found that in the convolutions of our brain’s cerebral cortex there are about 20 billion nerve cells with 10 times that number of interconnecting dendrites which, if laid end to end, would stretch at least from Earth to the Moon and back.)

⁶³⁴ An ‘idea’ represents the moment information is associated in the brain. Incoming information could reinforce a highway, slightly modify it or add an association (an idea) between two highways, dramatically simplifying that particular network of developing consistencies to create a new and simpler interpretation of that information. For example, the most important relationship between different types of fruit is their edibility. Elsewhere, the brain has recognised that the main relationship connecting experiences associated with living organisms is that they appear to try to stay alive, at least for a period of time. Suddenly it ‘sees’ or deduces (‘tumbles’ to the idea or association or abstraction) a possible connection between eating and staying alive which, with further experience and thought, becomes reinforced as ‘seemingly’ correct. ‘Eating’ is now channelled onto the ‘staying alive’ highway. And it is at this point of information association that the issue of the human condition appears, for any subsequent thought would try to deduce the significance of ‘staying alive’ and, beyond that, the meaning of life and the relevance of selfishness and selflessness. Ultimately the brain would arrive at the unbearable truth of Integrative Meaning, which, as explained in chapter 4, upset humans have not wanted to face because it confronted us with our *lack* of integrativeness, with our divisiveness.

⁶³⁵ The process of forgetting also plays a part in forging the relationship between experiences. Since duration of nerve memory is related to use, our strongest memories will be of those highways, those experiences that have the greatest relativity. Our experiences not only become related or associated in the brain, they also become concentrated because the brain gradually forgets or discards inconsistencies or irregularities between experiences. Forgetting serves to cleanse the network of less consistently occurring information, preventing it from becoming cluttered with meaningless (non-insightful) information.

⁶³⁶ Once insights into the nature of change are put into effect, the self-modified behaviour starts to provide feedback, refining the insights further. Predictions are compared with outcomes, leading all the way to the deduction of the meaning of all experience, which, as emphasised, is to order or integrate matter.

⁶³⁷ Our language development took the same path as the development of understanding. Commonly occurring arrangements of matter and commonly occurring events were identified (became clear or stood out). Eventually all the main objects and events became identified and, as language emerged, named. For example, we named those regularly occurring arrangements of matter with wings ‘birds’ and what they did we termed ‘flying’.

⁶³⁸ Consciousness, therefore, is the ability to understand the relationship of events sufficiently well to effectively manage and manipulate those events; it represents the point at which the confusion of incoming information clears, starts to fit together or make

sense and the mind becomes effective, a master of change. Chimpanzees, for example, demonstrate consciousness when they effectively reason that by placing boxes one on top of the other they can create a stack that can then be climbed upon to reach a banana tied to the roof of their cage. It should be pointed out, however, that it is one thing to be able to stack boxes to reach bananas—to manage immediate events—but quite another to effectively manage events over the long term, to be secure managers of the world. In fact, as will be explained in chapter 8, bonobos (and, to a lesser degree, the other great apes) demonstrate the same degree of consciousness that humans exhibit during infancy, the stage between the ages of two and three when we develop sufficient consciousness to recognise that we are at the centre of the changing array of experiences around us. It is when we become aware of the concept of ‘I’ or self and discover conscious free will, the power to manage events. This is followed by the childhood stage, during which we revel in this free will, ‘play’ or experiment with it, while adolescence is when we encounter both the sobering responsibility of free will and the agonising identity crisis brought about by the dilemma of the human condition—of whether or not we are meaningful beings. Adulthood, it follows, is the mature stage that humanity is now in a position to enter, for we finally have the understanding of the human condition that allows us to end our species’ insecure state of adolescence forever.

⁶³⁹In summary, ‘insight’ was the term given to the nerve highways, the correlation our brain made of the consistencies or regularities it found between events through time. Once humans could deduce these insights—these laws governing events in time past—we were in a position to predict or anticipate the likely turn of events. We could learn to understand—be conscious or aware of—what happened through time. Our intellect could understand the design inherent in, and the process behind, changing information; it could *learn* the predictable regularities or common features in experience, and thus ultimately distil the integrative theme or meaning or purpose or direction of existence.

⁶⁴⁰So, yes, consciousness has been an immensely difficult subject for humans to investigate—not because of the practical issues involved in determining how our brain works, but because *resigned humans didn’t want to know how it worked*. While we couldn’t explain our divisive, psychologically upset state of the human condition we had to avoid admitting too clearly how the brain functions because admitting that information could be associated and simplified—admitting to insight—was only a short step away from realising the *ultimate* insight of Integrative Meaning, a truth that immediately confronted us with our own inconsistency with that meaning.

⁶⁴¹As emphasised in chapter 4, to admit to Integrative Meaning meant having to face the fact that our competitive and aggressive behaviour is seemingly totally at odds with the integrative direction of life, no less. The development and maintenance of the order of matter requires that the parts of developing wholes cooperate *not* compete. *Integrative* Meaning confronts us squarely with our *divisive* human condition. Better then to evade the existence of purpose in the first place by avoiding the possibility that information could be associated, refined and simplified. It is the same reason we sidestepped the term ‘genetic refinement’ for the process of the genetic refinement of the integration of matter on Earth, preferring instead the much vaguer term ‘genetics’. We had to evade the possibility of the refinement of information in *all* its forms because, again, admitting that information could be simplified or refined was admitting to an ultimate refinement or law, confronting us

with our inconsistency with that law, namely with the law of Integrative Meaning, against which we previously had no defence.

⁶⁴²In fact, not only have we avoided the idea of meaningfulness, we have also shied away from any deep, meaningful thinking that might *lead* to confrontation with Integrative Meaning—as Birch said, **‘most scientists don’t think at all, anyway; they think on their subject about as much as a bank clerk thinks about them’!** But while ensuring deeper insights remained elusive may have saved us from exposure, in the process we buried the truth, becoming, as a result, *extremely* superficial in our thinking. In short, we became masters of *not* thinking—deeply-alienated-from-the-truth beings. Demonstrating our masterful evasion of the nature of consciousness we used words like ‘conscious’, ‘intelligent’, ‘understanding’, ‘reason’ and ‘insight’ regularly without ever actually identifying what we are conscious of, intelligent about, understanding, reasoning or having an insight into, which is how events or experiences are related. The conventional obscure, evasive definition of intelligence is **‘the ability to think abstractly’**. The other imprecise, obscure, evasive phrase used whenever we wanted to refer to the uniqueness of our intelligence without actually saying what our conscious, understanding, insightful intelligence is, was to say that ‘We are the species that is able to reflect upon itself.’ So to name the area of the brain that associates and simplifies information as the ‘association cortex’ was, in fact, a slip of our evasive guard. Of course, when we weren’t ‘on our guard’ against exposure few would deny that information can be associated, simplified and meaning found. In fact, most of us would say we do it every day of our lives—if we didn’t, we wouldn’t have a word for ‘insight’. That is the amazing aspect about our denial of anything that brings the dilemma of the human condition into focus: it is not unusual for resigned humans to accept an idea up to a point, but as soon as it starts to lead to a confronting conclusion, pretend it doesn’t exist—and do so without batting an eyelid.

⁶⁴³To illustrate how we avoided acknowledging the fundamental ability of the brain to associate and reduce information to essentials (and thus be forced to deduce the integrative meaning or theme or purpose in experience), consider the following case from my files of a *Newsweek* magazine cover story (7 Feb. 1987). While the title and subject of the nine-page article raised the crucial question of ‘How the brain works’, the author referred to the association capability of the brain in such an unnecessarily complicated way it was effectively buried: **‘Productive thought requires not just the rules of logic but a wealth of experience and background information, plus the ability to generalise and interpret new experiences using that information.’** The **‘ability to generalise and interpret’** is the ability to associate information, but the meaning is all but lost in the sentence.

⁶⁴⁴In case it is thought this convoluted description may have been due to poor expression rather than deliberate evasion on the part of the author, it should be pointed out that apart from a mention of **‘chunking or grouping of similar memories together’** and one unavoidable mention of the **‘association cortex’**, the article contains no other reference to the brain’s fundamental ability to associate information. The entire nine-page piece, on how our brain works, hangs on this one inept sentence. If you are not intending to be evasive it is not difficult to clearly describe the mind’s ability to associate information, as has just been done.

⁶⁴⁵More recently, *National Geographic* magazine’s February 2014 edition carried a feature story on **‘how the human mind really works’**, but, again, the article didn’t go

anywhere near the issue of **‘how the human mind really works’**. Titled **‘Secrets of the Brain – New technologies are shedding light on biology’s greatest unsolved mystery: how the brain really works’**, the article referred to **‘President Barack Obama’s ‘BRAIN Initiative’** and mentioned **‘disorders such as schizophrenia, autism and...depression’**, however, there was not even an *attempt* in this article to address and explain the all-significant feature of **‘the human mind’** of consciousness; in fact, there was no mention of **‘consciousness’**, and certainly not of the dilemma of the human condition associated with being a conscious species. The article was completely mechanistic, totally evasive of any even oblique reference to the crippling psychosis and neurosis involved in the **‘disorders’** now plaguing our conscious **‘human mind’**. The denial practised in the 1987 *Newsweek* story is chicken feed compared to the level of denial in this 2014 story. Benjamin Fong was certainly right when, as mentioned in par. 605, he predicted that **‘The real trouble with the Brain Initiative’** would be its **‘synthetic’** focus on the **‘organic’** rather than the **‘psychological’** nature of mental problems.

⁶⁴⁶I should emphasise that our evasion and denial is often obviously false and yet we believed it, because we had to. For instance, in the case of Integrative Meaning, we are surrounded by examples of integration everywhere we look—every object, enduring or otherwise, is a hierarchy of ordered matter, testament to the development of order of matter—and yet we have denied it, just as mechanistic science couldn’t even provide a definition for two of humanity’s most commonly used and important words/concepts: **‘love’** and **‘soul’**. The hypocrisy inherent in denial is palpable yet understandable.

⁶⁴⁷The most honest and yet still somewhat intellectually evasive description I have found in the denial-complying mechanistic paradigm of what gives rise to consciousness is one that appears in Wikipedia: **‘Memory...allows sensory information to be evaluated in the context of previous experience...and...allows information to be integrated over time so that it can generate a stable representation of the world’** (see <www.wtmsources.com/128>). Yes, consciousness *is* the ability to **‘generate a stable representation of the world’**, the ability to generate a representation of the world that is accurate and can therefore be effectively used to base anticipations of future events upon.

⁶⁴⁸So it’s not difficult to explain consciousness if you are not needing to avoid what it is. To look at someone with a track record of thinking truthfully, it was mentioned in par. 187 that the naturalist Eugène Marais wrote these amazingly insightful words about the human condition: **‘The highest primate, man, is born an instinctive animal. All its behavior for a long period after its birth is dominated by the instinctive mentality...it has no memory, no conception of cause and effect, no consciousness...As the...individual memory slowly emerges, the instinctive soul becomes just as slowly submerged...For a time it is almost as though there were a struggle between the two.’** Notice the ease with which Marais describes consciousness—**‘memory’** makes possible **‘conception of cause and effect’**, which gives rise to **‘consciousness’**. It really is as obvious and straight forward as that! Indeed, when the writer Aldous Huxley commented that **‘Non-rational creatures do not look before or after’** (par. 250), or when Plato referred to our original innocent pre-conscious ancestors as **‘having no memory of the past’** (in par. 170), they were simply stating the obvious truth that to be **‘rational’** is to have the ability to **‘look before or after’**, to have **‘memory of the past’**, in order to make sense of cause and effect. Which again raises the question: **‘Why on earth was this not explained to us by science, why weren’t we taught this at school?’** But as has now been explained, the issue of our conscious intelligent mind prompted the unbearable self-realisation, **‘Well,**

if I'm so cleverly insightful why can't I manage my life in a way that is not so mean and indifferent to others; indeed, why, if I am such a brilliantly intelligent person, am I such a destructively selfish, angry, egocentric, competitive and aggressive monster?' And as was emphasised, the other problem was that explaining the nature of consciousness very quickly brought us into contact with the unbearably depressing truth of Integrative Meaning. An appropriate definition of 'consciousness' is 'the ability to make sense of experience', but applying such a definition immediately highlights the problem with the issue of consciousness, because, due to the depressing implications, we humans haven't wanted to 'make sense of experience' because we have not wanted to recognise the truth of Integrative Meaning. So, to ask people to look into the issue of consciousness was to expect them to confront the issue of their own less-than-ideal human condition, which is why 'consciousness' has become a code word for the issue of the human condition. We can, therefore, appreciate why, when Descartes tried to '**contemplate consciousness**', it caused him such fearful depression that he said, '**It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top.**'

⁶⁴⁹The great psychiatrist R.D. Laing acknowledged both the importance of the issue of consciousness (the human condition), and how truly difficult a '**realm**' it has been for upset humans to study when he wrote (the underlining is my emphasis): '**The requirement of the present, the failure of the past, is the same: to provide a thoroughly self-conscious and self-critical human account of man...Our alienation goes to the roots. The realization of this is the essential springboard for any serious reflection on any aspect of present inter-human life** [pp.11-12 of 156] **...We respect the voyager, the explorer, the climber, the space man. It makes far more sense to me as a valid project—indeed, as a desperately urgently required project for our time—to explore the inner space and time of consciousness. Perhaps this is one of the few things that still make sense in our historical context. We are so out of touch with this realm [so in denial of the issue of the human condition] that many people can now argue seriously that it does not exist. It is very small wonder that it is perilous indeed to explore such a lost realm** [p.105]' (*The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise*, 1967).

⁶⁵⁰Clearly, the need to find a way to avoid confronting what consciousness entailed was immense, and the initial obvious excuse that mechanistic science devised to do so was to simply assert that the phenomenon of the human mind is just too extraordinary for science to be able to explain; that, as a mechanistic scientist might say, 'While science might expect to be able to explain the physical mechanisms operating in our brain it is beyond our present powers of explanation to account for how a collection of neurons could produce the subjective, uniquely personal experience of the human mind.' Viewed superficially, it *is* incredible that the mental state, where we have our own personal feelings and particular sense of self, can arise from a bunch of nerves, but really it is simply a consequence of there having been sufficient development of nerves' ability to understand cause and effect. In the same light, it *is* amazing that 92 elements operating under the law of Negative Entropy could give rise to the amazing variety and complexity of life that we see around us, or that the simple combustion engine could give rise to the amazing phenomenon that is a Ferrari sports car, but they have. We can try to argue that knowing how the combustion engine works doesn't explain the mystique that surrounds a Ferrari, but, in fact, it does. Consciousness *is* amazing but it is simply a result of memory which allows us to understand cause and effect. So while the claim that it was beyond

our current powers to explain the phenomenon of consciousness no doubt helped upset humans avoid the issue of the human condition, the argument was in truth nothing more than intellectual bluff.

⁶⁵¹ Given his aversion to the subject, it is not surprising that the whole body-mind dichotomy excuse for not being able to explain consciousness appears to have begun with Descartes when, in 1641, he wrote that the mind was **‘entirely and truly distinct from my body’** (*Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation VI, Part 9). This idea of consciousness as a sort of **‘ghost in the machine’** (Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 1949, p.15 of 334) of the brain, which could not be explained in physical terms, was embraced by scientists such as Thomas Huxley, who in 1868 wrote, **‘how it is that any thing so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about as the result of irritating nervous tissue, is just as unaccountable as the appearance of the Djinn when Aladdin rubbed his lamp’** (T.H. Huxley & W.J. Youmans, *The Elements of Physiology and Hygiene: A text-book for Educational Institutions*, 1868, p.178 of 420). By the 1990s this excuse that the state of consciousness cannot be accounted for had become so established it was actually referred to as the **‘hard problem’** of consciousness, as distinct from the **‘easy problem’** of explaining the brain’s neurological circuitry and activities. The philosopher who coined these terms, David Chalmers, wrote that **‘It is widely agreed that experience arises from a physical basis, but we have no good explanation of why and how it so arises. Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all?’** (*Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness’*, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 1995, Vol.2, No.3); and, **‘How does the water of the brain turn into the wine of consciousness?...How is it that all of this matter adds up to something as complex, as interesting and as unique as consciousness?’** (*David Chalmers: The Conscious Mind’*, *Thinking Allowed with Jeffrey Mishlove*, TV series and DVD collection, #H230). In contrasting the **‘easy problem’** with the supposed **‘hard problem’** of explaining our subjective mind, the cognitive scientist Steven Pinker wrote that **‘The Hard Problem...is why it feels like something to have a conscious process going on in one’s head—why there is first-person, subjective experience...The problem is hard because no one knows what a solution might look like or even whether it is a genuine scientific problem in the first place...To appreciate the hardness of the Hard Problem, consider how you could ever know whether you see colours the same way that I do. Sure, you and I both call grass green, but perhaps you see grass as having the color that I would describe, if I were in your shoes, as purple’** (*The Brain: The Mystery of Consciousness’*, *TIME*, 29 Jan. 2007). In truth, it is intellectual nonsense to argue that we can’t reach a shared understanding of the nature of our world. The philosopher John Searle spoke honestly about consciousness when he wrote that **‘Brain processes cause consciousness but the consciousness they cause is not some extra substance or entity. It is just a higher level feature of the whole system’** (*The Problem of Consciousness’*, *Social Research*, 1993, Vol.60, No.1).

⁶⁵² The cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett was approaching the truth about the real problem surrounding consciousness when he wrote that **‘With consciousness, however, we are still in a terrible muddle. Consciousness stands alone today as a topic that often leaves even the most sophisticated thinkers tongue-tied and confused. And, as with all the earlier mysteries, there are many who insist—and hope—that there will never be a demystification of consciousness’** (*Consciousness Explained*, 1991, p.22 of 528). Yes, the psychologically upset and insecure human race hasn’t wanted to know what consciousness is, because it didn’t want to confront the human condition! What was required for humans to tolerate the **‘demystification of consciousness’** was for the human condition to be compassionately explained, at which point the contrived **‘muddle’** could be resolved; as Pinker wrote, **‘I admit that the theory [that consciousness is beyond our powers of explanation] could be demolished when an unborn genius—a Darwin or**

Einstein of consciousness—comes up with a flabbergasting new idea that suddenly makes it all clear to us. Whatever the solutions to the Easy and Hard problems turn out to be, few scientists doubt that they will locate consciousness in the activity of the brain’ (‘The Brain: The Mystery of Consciousness’, *TIME*, 29 Jan. 2007). When Birch observed that ‘**Biology right now awaits its Einstein in the realm of consciousness studies**’, he too was referring to the need for a biologist to find understanding of the human condition. But as I explained in par. 479, it wasn’t ‘genius’ in the sense of extreme cleverness, a high IQ, that was required to ‘**suddenly make...it all clear**’ and explain how consciousness arose from the basic ‘**activity of the brain**’, namely memory, it was simply a sound, denial-free, honest approach to thinking about the human condition. Indeed, as will now be explained, focusing on the need for a high IQ to solve problems was just another expression of the insecurity surrounding the whole issue of consciousness—just another way to laud our intelligence and gloss over its corrupting effects.

⁶⁵³The response taken by adolescents when faced with the unbearable issue of the human condition perfectly illustrates the response virtually all humans have had to confronting the nature of consciousness—so, if the reader will bear with me, I will now briefly reiterate just how determinedly adolescents blocked out the issue of the human condition.

⁶⁵⁴When the concept of Resignation was explained in chapter 2:2 it was described how when upset humans were around 14 or 15 years of age they each tried to face down the issue of the imperfection in the world of humans around them and in their own behaviour—the issue of the human condition—only to find it a suicidally depressing exercise. As Carl Jung said, ‘**When it [our ‘shadow’, the negative aspects of ourselves] appears... it is quite within the bounds of possibility for a man to recognize the relative evil of his nature, but it is a rare and shattering experience for him to gaze into the face of absolute evil.**’ To avoid subjecting themselves to that ‘**shattering experience**’ ever again, adolescents were forced to resign themselves to never revisiting the issue of the human condition. In fact, every moment thereafter was spent carefully avoiding any encounter with the issue, and denying any truths that brought it into focus. What was not described in chapter 2:2, however, was the strategy a resigned person adopted after Resignation. While living in denial of their corrupted condition brought some relief, resigned humans still needed to find ways to feel good about themselves. Yes, not only did resigned humans have to find ways to avoid and deny the issue of the human condition, they also had to find ways to convince themselves they were the opposite of flawed and corrupted and, it would seem, ‘**the face of absolute evil**’. So, unable to refute the negative view of themselves with compassionate understanding, they became focused on emphasising and developing whatever positive views of themselves they could find or create. In practice this meant they became preoccupied competing for power, fame, fortune and glory. Winning a football match, or behaving in some way that brought praise—basically carrying out any activity that would relieve the insecurity of their condition—became all that mattered. Once the full extent of the imperfection of their corrupted condition became apparent at the time of Resignation, the need for reinforcement to counter that uncertainty about their worth became extreme, desperately so for those who were more insecure. So after Resignation, the ‘ego’, which the dictionary defines as ‘**the conscious thinking self**’ (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 5th edn, 1964), became extremely selfishly focused or centred on the need for reinforcement and relief from criticism. Thus, in addition to practising complete denial of any confronting

truths, and becoming very angry towards any criticism, extreme ego-centricity was one of the main characteristics to come out of Resignation. Basically after Resignation, the angry, egocentric and alienated responses to the dilemma of the human condition that had emerged in infancy and which had been gradually developing throughout childhood and early adolescence suddenly greatly amplified. Indeed, the extremely self-worth-embattled, heroic mantra of the resigned person became one of, as the adages go, **'Give me liberty [from criticism] or give me death'**, **'No retreat, no surrender'**, **'Death before dishonour'**; in essence, 'I don't believe the criticism is deserved, and in any case it's too unbearable to accept, so I will *never* tolerate any insinuation that I am a bad person'! (A more complete description of the process of Resignation can be found in *Freedom Expanded* at <www.humancondition.com/freedom-expanded-resignation>.)

⁶⁵⁵We can visualise the situation faced by resigning adolescents by imagining them in a room, with one end containing all manner of depressing truths about the world of humans around them and, most depressing of all, about their own lives, and the other end the few positive thoughts and views about the world and about themselves. Well, not surprisingly, resigned humans chose to live entirely at the end of the room where they could be surrounded by the few positives they could identify or develop—especially positive reinforcements for themselves gained through achieving power, fame, fortune and glory. And not only did they stay jammed right up against the wall at that positive end, as removed as humanly possible from any negative truths, they made sure they stood with their nose flat against the wall so they couldn't even *see* the other side of the room. That is how narrow and limited the existence of a resigned human has been. The upset, resigned mind has been fixated on a few positives about themselves while blocking out a whole 'room'—in fact, a whole universe of subjects and thoughts and awarenesses. In this light, we can appreciate the accuracy of Plato's analogy of humans **'enshrined in that living tomb which we carry about, now that we are imprisoned' 'a long way underground'** in a cave where all they could see were shadowy illusions of the real world.

⁶⁵⁶This 'jammed-down-one-end-of-the-room' analogy of how the upset, resigned human race has had to live in denial of the whole issue of the human condition also applies to the aspect of the human condition that involves our species' apparently destructive conscious intelligence. Unless we were exceptionally free of upset behaviour, exceptionally nurtured with unconditional real love in our infancy and childhood and thus exceptionally secure in self and thus able to avoid Resignation, thinking truthfully about what consciousness is was only ever going to raise the question of why aren't we cognisant of change and insightful enough to behave in an ideal way? And so to avoid raising those depressing questions resigned humans had to avoid any truthful analysis of what consciousness actually is. And not only that, they needed to shift their focus *entirely* away from the issue of what consciousness entails onto any positives they could find about their intellect. The resigned mind had to focus on convincing itself that its intellect is a brilliant talent, capable, for instance, of inventing a machine to send man to the Moon and back. To cope with the whole issue of the goodness or otherwise of their intellect resigned humans maximised all the positive aspects about their conscious intellect, which is their cleverness, and minimised all the negative aspects, which is their state of alienation—namely the extent of their soundness or lack thereof—with the best method of doing so to simply not think about and acknowledge what the nature of conscious intelligence really is.

⁶⁵⁷ And so in keeping with that methodology, the resigned world started to regard, or more specifically, measure, people according to their level of mental dexterity, with the creation of IQ tests and societies whose membership was restricted to the most clever, such as Mensa. The resigned world only allowed people into university who had high IQs and could pass exams that tested for a person's intellectual brilliance, never for their soulful soundness. It tested children for their ability to remember endless streams of ridiculously superficial and irrelevant facts such as Queen Isabella the 5th married King Arnold the 12th in 1522 and together they fought The War Of The Itchy Armpits in 1591, or something like that; never asking the *real* questions of why there were kings and queens and poor people—selfishness, inequality and indifference to others—and why humans fought and killed each other in wars. And it created game shows that glorified those with the best memories for mundane, superficial facts or for successfully spelling words or completing mathematical sums. It was an extremely escapist, evasive *intellectual* world, not a sound, soulful *instinctual* world. The emphasis was entirely on intellectual brilliance, not on soulful soundness. It never measured people for how alienated they were, or for the speed at which their minds could block out confronting truth, or the speed at which they could override their instinctive moral sense and exploit others, or for how mentally insecure and thus egocentrically self-preoccupied and thus indifferent to others they were. It only stressed how smart you were, never how corrupted and destructive your intellect was. And it wasn't as though the resigned world didn't know who was soul-corrupted, upset and alienated and who was innocent; after all, to ignore, deny, repress and, in the extreme, persecute to the point of, in the case of Christ, *crucifying* honest, truthful innocent soundness because it found it too confronting, it had to first be able to recognise it. It would have been as easy—indeed, probably much easier—to design exams that tested a person's level of alienation or soundness or soulfulness quotient, their SQ, than it was to design exams that tested their intelligence quotient, or IQ.

⁶⁵⁸ The truth is, our intelligence has been an *extremely* insecure and defensive entity. It has been an instrument of dishonest denial, not of honest thoughtfulness. It has been preoccupied with escapist, superficial, 'phony', 'fake', sophisticated intellectualism, not with confronting, penetrating, truthful, thoughtful instinctualism. Such has been the human condition. Thank goodness then that it has at last been explained and the horrifically debilitating practice of denial can end.

Chapter 7:3 Why, how and when did consciousness emerge in humans?

⁶⁵⁹ As stated at the beginning of this chapter, our self-adjusting conscious mind is a 'fabulous' phenomenon, the culminating achievement of the grand experiment in nature that we call life. Unlike the gene-based natural selection system of processing information, where different arrangements of matter with their different properties are compared for their integrative potential, the conscious mind is able to make these comparisons with the information abstracted from its source. The gene-based natural selection process *is* a form of thinking, of comparing the integrative potential of different arrangements of matter which can be thought of as different 'ideas'—but that 'thinking' or 'learning' or 'refinement', that experimentation, that 'selection' of one 'idea' over another, has to be carried out in practise. The conscious mind, however, has the incredible capacity to be