

# 11

## Epilogue

### **The Disturbing Part**

We ended Chapter 1 with the fundamental question: *What is consciousness?* Step by step we have developed the answer to this ancient riddle, as formalized in Chapter 9:

*Consciousness is the irreducible entity a computational machine perceives itself to be, as the result of (1) an ability to observe its own high level workings, and (2) an inability to observe its own low level workings.*

This is a far-reaching idea, capable of merging the many facets of the mystery into a unified framework. It defines what consciousness is from the third-person view, including how to classify nonhuman computational machines that we may encounter in the future. At the same time it describes the nature of the first-person experience, where we each see our own mind as a "thing" rather than mere computational activity. And most important, the Inner Light theory tells us why there should be a mind-body problem in the first place, why this paradox is an unavoidable result of the evolutionary process and the way that reality is experienced.

However, this step forward also has a dark side, an aspect that many will find distasteful and disturbing. Man has always believed that he holds a special place in the universe. Science has often had the unpleasant task of showing that this belief is mistaken, thereby demoting us to a lower status in the scheme of things. For instance, 500 years ago Copernicus showed that the earth revolved around the sun, thereby displacing man from

the center of the cosmos. Only 150 years ago, Darwin discovered that humans have a common origin with the other life forms on earth, thereby denying our claim of special birth. In the last century, science has shown that the universe is a hundred billion trillion miles across, and 10 billion years old. The sheer size of these numbers seems to reduce mankind to an insignificant speck.

But through these disappointments we have been able to cling to a reassuring fact, *we are conscious*. While the universe is vast and ancient, it is unfeeling and unaware. This means that our minds entail something that is rare and remarkable, something that we do not see in the largest galaxy or the most brilliant supernova. We are conscious, and that makes us special.

Now, the Inner Light theory does not deny that we are conscious. On the contrary, it provides a scientific explanation of the inner world that we each experience, showing how it is part of our physical universe. Likewise, the Inner Light theory does not question that consciousness is extraordinary; present day computer scientists are awestruck by the technical abilities of the human mind.

But make no mistake, the Inner Light theory does dispatch many of our long held beliefs. Specifically, consciousness is not some mystical entity above and beyond the machine-like operations of the brain. Likewise, it does not require physical structures or properties that are unknown or unreachable by science, be they from Quantum Mechanics or an unseen spirit world. But perhaps most disconcerting, the Inner Light Theory tells us that many revered aspects of our mind are *limitations*, not positive attributes. Such things as semantic thought, mental unity, and free-will arise from systematic inaccuracies in our observations. It is ironic that the things we have come to cherish the most are, in fact, the inherent deficits of our mind.

Herein lies the rub. If human consciousness is based on limitations, then we can imagine something greater than ourselves, a self-awareness that does not have these limitations.

Even further, we have every reason to believe that manmade computers will one day achieve this superior status, as may extraterrestrial beings, or altered humans. Consciousness can no longer be viewed as a pinnacle or crowning achievement, but must be accepted as merely one level in an infinite progression of computational complexity.

As with the work of Copernicus and Darwin in centuries past, the Inner Light theory displaces man from yet another special place in the universe. Science is often a cruel master, forcing us to accept that which we disdain. But the universe is what it is, and no amount of cursing at the round earth will cause it to become flat.

## Index

- Action potential, 24-30, 42
- Airy disk, 73-75
- Ambiguous figures, 130-131
- Aphasia, 37-38
- Assembly instructions (defined), 7-12
- Blind spot in eye, 106-109
- Bohr, Niels, 73, 76
- Boring figure, 131
- Brain in the vat, 87-91, 96, 99, 100, 105
- Broca's area (brain), 33-34, 37
- Candle flame example, 18-19, 71
- Cerebellum (brain), 33-34
- Cerebral cortex (brain), 32-34
- Chalmers, David J., 69
- Change blindness, 108-112
- Chinese box, 64-65
- Churchland, Patricia, 2, 62-63
- Classical physics, 54
- Collapse of the wave function, 75-79
- Color perception, 115-122, 164
- Communications channel, 12-14, 23, 57
- Corpus callosum, 32, 35-37
- Crick, Francis, 71
- Death, 154
- Dennett, Daniel, 67
- Descartes, René, 35, 83-88
- Deterministic, 54
- Dreams, 1, 17, 68, 99-105, 112-114, 138-140
- Drugs, 38, 40
- Dualism, 67, 68-69, 80, 86
- Edelman, Gerald M., 71
- Einstein, Albert, 15, 52, 60-61, 76, 81-83
- Elements-of-reality (defined), 11
- Emergence, 7, 17-20, 42, 67, 71-72, 80
- Emotions, 38, 40, 158-160
- Empedocles, 15
- Epileptic seizures, 36, 37
- Epiphenomenalism, 67, 69-70, 80
- Evil genius (Descartes'), 83-85, 88, 96, 99, 100
- Evolution, 115, 166-167
- Filtering (sensory analysis), 126-129
- First-person (defined), 21, 45
- Free-will, 2, 45, 53-55, 56, 59, 63
- Frontal cortex (brain), 33-36
- Fully-aware being, 150-151, 153-154, 156, 164
- Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), 3
- Functionalism, 43
- Gage, Phineas, 34-36, 41
- Galileo Galilei, 1, 54

- Gestalt, 17  
 Godel, Kurt, 93  
 Godel Incompleteness Theorems, 93  
 Grandfather clock example, 7-8, 16-17  
 Gravity, 11, 82-83  
 Gray matter (brain), 32, 35
- Hameroff, Stuart, 78  
 Herbert, Nick, 76  
 Heisenberg, Werner, 73, 76  
 H.M. (medical case), 36, 41  
 Heschl's gyri (brain), 33-34  
 Hippocampus (brain), 35-36  
 Hourglass example, 12-14
- Idealism, 67-68, 77, 80  
 Information (defined), 11-14  
 Information-Limited Subreality (defined), 91-94  
 Inner Light episode, 5, 94-97, 99, 100  
 Inner observer (defined), 91-92  
 Inner reality (defined), 92  
 Interference (sensory analysis), 126, 129  
 Introspection, 2, 21  
 Irreducible (defined), 11, 45
- Jackson, Frank, 64
- LaBerge, Stephen, 102  
 Language, 36, 37-38, 104  
 Life, the problem of, 58  
 Lucid dreams, 102-104
- Magneto-Encephalography, 3  
 Major Teachings  
 #1. How We Understand Reality, 20  
 #2. Definition of the Mind-body problem, 66  
 #3. The Principle of Relative Reduction, 98  
 #4. The Subreality Machine in the Brain, 102  
 #5. The Origin of our Conscious Experience, 114  
 #6. The Function of the Subreality Machine, 136  
 #7. Definition of Consciousness, 155
- Mary, color blind scientist, 64  
 Matching (sensory analysis), 126-133  
 Materialism, 67, 80  
 Memory, 31-32, 40, 41, 104, 134-135, 136-138  
 Mental unity, 45, 50, 59, 63, 146  
 Mind-body problem (defined), 2, 62  
 Mona Lisa, 106-107  
 Motor cortex (brain), 32-33  
 Multiple sclerosis, 26  
 Myelin, 26, 32
- Nagel, Thomas, 63  
 Neural correlates of consciousness, 3  
 Neural network, 30, 32, 40, 71, 162  
 Nerve cells (neurons), 24-30  
 Neurotransmitter, 28, 38  
 Nodes of Ranvier, 26  
 Noise, 127, 129
- Observer (defined), 81-83, 92, 146-147  
 Occipital lobe (brain), 33, 35  
 Outer observer (defined), 91-92  
 Outer reality (defined), 92
- Paradox vs. simple ignorance, 57-58  
 Parkinson's disease, 35  
 Penrose, Roger, 78, 79  
 Phase lock loop, 128-130  
 Pineal gland (brain), 35, 86  
 Present tense, 45, 52-53, 56, 59

- Principle of Relative Reduction, 5, 96-98, 153
- Positron Emission Tomography (PET), 3
- Principle of Relative Reduction, 96-98, 143-144
- Quantum-gravity, 78
- Quantum Mechanics, 5-6, 17, 54-55, 67, 72-79, 80
- Quarks, 15
- Qualia, 45, 47-49, 56, 59, 63, 146
- Reality (defined), 11
- Reduction, 7-22, 42
- Relativity, 5-6, 17, 60-61, 81-83
- Religion, 69
- Rubin's vase, 131
- Sagan, Carl, 68
- Scott, Alywn, 71
- Searle, John R., 64-65
- Self-awareness, 141
- Semantic thought, 45, 50-52, 56, 59, 63, 65, 146
- Sensory cortex (brain), 32-33
- Special child, 148-149, 154
- Split-brain patients, 36, 37, 41
- Star Trek, 5, 94-97, 99, 100
- Strings, 15
- Subreality machine, 102, 105-106
- Substantia nigra (brain), 35
- Synapse, 24, 26-32
- Synaptic weights, 30-32, 162
- Synesthesia, 38-40
- Taylor, John G., 71
- Thalamus, 35
- Third-person (defined), 21, 23
- Time, 11, 52-53, 88
- Twin paradox, 60-61
- Unconscious, 100-101, 105
- Ventricles (brain), 35
- Vital force (of life), 58
- Von Neumann, John, 77, 78
- Wave function, 75
- Wernicke's area (brain), 33, 37-38, 41
- White matter (brain), 32, 35