

The Inner Light Theory of Consciousness

About the Front Cover

The front cover illustrates the image detected by your right eye as you stand a few feet from the Mona Lisa. The gray filaments are regions where you are totally blind, a result of blood vessels in the retina blocking the detection of light. Likewise, the large rectangular region is where the optic nerve connects with the retina, where humans are also sightless. This is called the *blind spot*, and is really quite large, about the size of an apple at arm's length. As long as your eye remains fixed on the center of the painting, these gray regions are totally blocked from your gaze; you perceive nothing about the image in these areas.

When you first looked at the cover, you probably wondered what the gray spider-like pattern represented. It probably struck you as quite odd, like something out of a bad science fiction movie. It was totally unfamiliar and foreign to your conscious experience. But how could this possibly be? This pattern has been superimposed on your visual field since you first opened your eyes as an infant. Even as you read this paragraph the pattern is present. It should be more familiar to you than anything you have ever seen. How is it possible that our conscious experience knows nothing of these blind areas?

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by
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California Technical Publishing
San Diego, California

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San Diego, CA 92150-2407

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ISBN: 0-9660176-1-7

Printed in the United States of America

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- ✓ Comments and complaints!
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Preface

My Search to Understand Consciousness

The problem of consciousness has gnawed at me for twenty-five years. It started when I was an undergraduate in college, leading me to study three diverse areas, *Physics*, *Psychology*, and *Philosophy* (the three “P”s, as I called them). While each of these gave me a different perspective on the human mind, they did not provide an acceptable answer to the fundamental question: *what is this strange thing we call consciousness, and how is related to modern science?*

This dilemma fell to the back of my mind when I entered my doctoral program in Electrical Engineering. For the next two decades I put this mystery on hold, turning my attention to such things as medical imaging and digital signal processing. But as I became increasingly comfortable with computers and the methods of science, I became less comfortable with the nature of the mind. It seemed that the more I learned, the more intractable the problem of consciousness became. Of course, I wasn’t alone in this distress; scientists and philosophers have long pondered this mystery without relief.

In the 1990s, the study of the brain rapidly expanded, primarily due to the arrival of three new medical imaging techniques, fMRI, PET and MEG. These devices are capable of monitoring the activity of the living brain, greatly expanding the ability of science to study this complex organ. Many began to feel that the time was right to finally solve the age-old mystery

of consciousness. Dozens of books on the topic were published in the popular press. Some described the latest scientific work on the operation of the brain. Others presented philosophical arguments claiming that science alone cannot account for consciousness. Still others speculated on a “magic ingredient” in consciousness, such as Quantum Mechanics, emergent properties, and pseudoscientific explanations. But these efforts fell short of the goal; the problem of consciousness remained and became even more elusive than before.

It was in this environment that I renewed my study of consciousness in 1999. Fittingly, many of the ideas in this book came together over the New Year’s Day holiday, the dawn of a new millennium.

I am convinced that the *Inner Light Theory* is the solution to the problem of consciousness. The ideas presented in this book help me understand the world. They might help you. They might even be true.

Science versus Religion

I am frequently asked how the *Inner Light Theory* relates to the human soul. The answer is, I don’t know; I don’t have the vaguest idea. This is a book of science, and science knows nothing of the metaphysical concepts taught by religion. The *Inner Light Theory* is to the human soul, as *evolution* is to the biblical story of Genesis. If evolution offends you, then the ideas in this book will probably offend you as well. If evolution is compatible with your religious views, then a scientific theory of consciousness will probably also be acceptable. In the end, the compatibility of science and religion is an issue that must be decided by religion, not science. And I certainly can’t tell you what your religious beliefs are.

Acknowledgments

A special thanks to the reviewers who provided comments and suggestions on this book, Dan Reinecke, Eric Duff, Andy

Berg, Jenny Smith, Cory Sinclair, and other reviewers who wish to remain anonymous. Their generous donation of time and skill has made this a better work. Of course, none of the opinions expressed in this book necessarily reflect those of the reviewers.

Now the book is in the hands of the final reviewer, you the reader. Please take the time to give me your comments, be they ideas, complements or complaints. All it takes is a two minute e-mail from the book's web site, www.InnerLightTheory.com. Thanks for your time; I hope you enjoy the ideas, and find them as enlightening and satisfying as I have.

Steve Smith
October, 2001