

“Consciousness: Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist” - Christof Koch

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Cover of Consciousness by Christof Koch

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“Just as light presupposes its absence, darkness, so consciousness presupposes the unconscious.”

“... consciousness was resistant to rational explanation, immune to scientific analysis, beyond the ken of empirical validation.”

Christof Koch's *Confessions* reads much like a foray into a valley buzzing with life, tiny birds flit about, massive trees reach into the sky, and a stream runs through it, uninterrupted. Koch guides the reader through this world, his thoughts buoyant on the stream and his ideas flitting about. Ever so often, he pauses to marvel at a tree, the work of a past or contemporary thinker or scientist.

Koch is a neuroscientist and biophysicist, and also holds a minor in philosophy. He writes his book as a life story, detailing the curiosities of a precocious child and the explorations of a lifelong student. On his way, he joins forces with Francis Crick, of the legendary Watson-Crick duo who discovered the double helix structure of DNA. Koch collaborates with Crick and many other scientists throughout his journey of studying consciousness. Consequently, his research and hypotheses employ the scientific method, based on the indulgent musings of a scientist open to all theories. This allows the reading experience to be a multidisciplinary exploration, as Koch does not limit his perspectives about the brain and consciousness to neuroscientific inquiry alone. His valley is teeming with the great minds of philosophy, psychology, literature, biology, physics, among others.

This book is in all respects, highly interactive. The author posits piercing questions regularly: "*What is the function of consciousness?*"; "*Is the Internet, with its billion nodes, sentient?*". He encourages the reader to step into the valley, to follow whichever path they please, so long as they engage with the possibilities and roadblocks that pervade the path to understanding consciousness. It is a visceral experience, contrary to the concept of consciousness itself. This technique emphasizes the contrast between studying consciousness through neural correlates, and the phenomenon itself.

Consciousness: Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist is an exploration of the knowledge amassed throughout human existence on the matter of humans pondering their existence. It strives to answer the great *why* and indeed makes a valiant effort. However, it is most successful at offering tools to think scientifically and to wonder unabatedly, less so in truly explaining the supposed "epiphenomenon" that is consciousness. Regardless, it is a valley worthy of exploration and will leave a pertinent mark upon the reader.