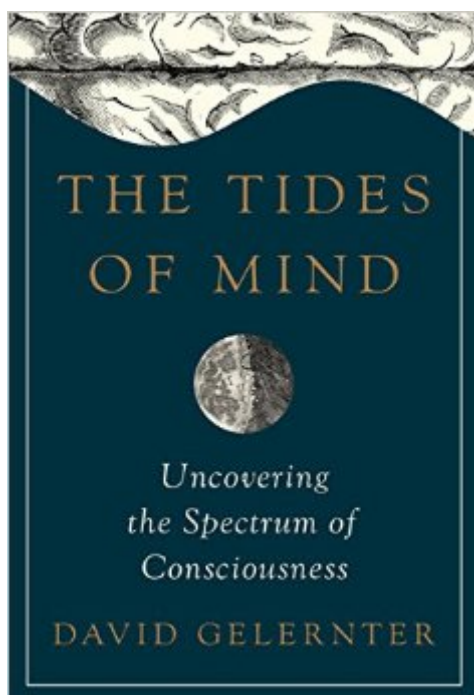


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The Tides Of Mind: Uncovering The Spectrum Of Consciousness



Synopsis

A *New York Times* bestseller of the computing world provides a radical new work on the meaning of human consciousness. The holy grail of psychologists and scientists for nearly a century has been to understand and replicate both human thought and the human mind. In fact, it's what attracted the now-legendary computer scientist and AI authority David Gelernter to the discipline in the first place. As a student and young researcher in the 1980s, Gelernter hoped to build a program with a dial marked "focus." At maximum "focus," the program would "think" rationally, formally, reasonably. As the dial was turned down and "focus" diminished, its "mind" would start to wander, and as you dialed even lower, this artificial mind would start to free-associate, eventually ignoring the user completely as it cruised off into the mental adventures we know as sleep. While the program was only a partial success, it laid the foundation for *The Tides of Mind*, a groundbreaking new exploration of the human psyche that shows us how the very purpose of the mind changes throughout the day. Indeed, as Gelernter explains, when we are at our most alert, when reasoning and creating new memories is our main mental business, the mind is a computer-like machine that keeps emotion on a short leash and attention on our surroundings. As we gradually tire, however, and descend the "mental spectrum," reasoning comes unglued. Memory ranges more freely, the mind wanders, and daydreams grow more insistent. Self-awareness fades, reflection blinks out, and at last we are completely immersed in our own minds. With far-reaching implications, Gelernter's landmark "Spectrum of Consciousness" finally helps decode some of the most mysterious wonders of the human mind, such as the numinous light of early childhood, why dreams are so often predictive, and why sadism and masochism underpin some of our greatest artistic achievements. It's a theory that also challenges the very notion of the mind as a machine—and not through empirical studies or "hard science" but by listening to our great poets and novelists, who have proven themselves as humanity's most trusted guides to the subjective mind and inner self. In the great introspective tradition of Wilhelm Wundt and René Descartes, David Gelernter promises to not only revolutionize our understanding of what it means to be human but also to help answer many of our most fundamental questions about the origins of creativity, thought, and consciousness.

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Customer Reviews

In the first chapter, David Gelernter cites one of my favorite passages from an essay of Ralph Waldo Emerson in which he responds to what had become "the grossly unfashionable practice of introspections." Here it is: "In silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction, let him hold by himself; add observation to observation, patient of neglect, patient of reproach, and bide his own time, happy enough if he can satisfy himself alone that this day he has seen something truly." For the instinct is sure, that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks. He then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind he had descended into the secrets of all minds. In this thoughtful and thought-provoking book, Gelernter takes his reader on an extended exploration of what is generally referred to as "depth psychology." As I understand it, it consists of approaches to therapy that are open to the exploration of the subtle, unconscious, and transpersonal aspects of human experience. A depth approach may include therapeutic traditions that explores the unconscious and involves the study and exploration of dreams, complexes, and archetypes. What intrigues me is the fact that depth psychology is an interdisciplinary endeavor, drawing on literature, philosophy, mythology, the arts, and critical studies. Concepts and practices at the core of depth psychology are central personal growth and professional development. These are among the passages of greatest interest and value to me, also listed to suggest the scope of Gelernter's coverage in Chapters One-Five:

- o Mind from Inside (Pages 9-11)
- o The "Little Room of Man" (12-17)
- o How Can We Know the Mind from Inside? (17-19)
- o Spectrum View 1: The Transformation in How We Make Sense of the World (21-27)
- o Spectrum View 2: The Transformation from Acting to Being the Main Focus of Mind (27-39)
- o Spectrum View 3: The Transition from Outer to Inner Field of Consciousness (39-46)
- o From the Top: Dreaming That Is More Than Wish Fulfillment (56-58)
- o Travels Across the Spectrum,

and, Two Fields of Conscious (63-67) o The Liberation of Emotions (68-75) o Strange Thoughts (84-85) o Approaching the Hallucination Line (91-92) o Dreams: Remembrance, Predictions, and the Only Protection (96-103) o Thinking, and, Sensing and Emotions (110-114) o Thinking and Feeling: Parallel Minds (115-121) o Summarizing Conscious Mind (123-124) o Making Templates (136-138) o Learning by Forgetting (138-141) o Enter Reasoning (142-146) o Exit Reasoning (146-148) Also, be sure to check out Chapter Nine, The Basic Points.

*To what does the title refer? Gelernter observes, The mind does protect us from frightening content of dreams, by the only means it has: making us (or letting us) forget. There is nothing else it can do. On the other hand, the mind *can* reverse time, unwritten unreality, and under narrow but important circumstances, foretell the future. He then adds, The mind, in sum, follows a great tidal motion. At its logical peak, reality and self are two separate things. Our reflective selves and the reality on which they reflect are different. But from there start of our journey down-spectrum, the borders begin to blur, And at the end of the trip, our real selves have been absorbed into dream reality, and only our hollow unreflecting dream selves are left on the narrow edge of consciousness and the place the remains after dreaming has taken what it needs. Reality and self have both changed radically from what they were. These brief excerpts can only suggest albeit brilliantly the as yet unfulfilled potentialities of a self, of a mind, that can not only be compatible but also interdependent with both its conscious mind (now) and its unconscious mind (then). Gelernter discusses all this in great detail and, thank heaven, in mostly layman's terms. In this context, I am again reminded of this passage from T.S. Eliot's poem Four Quartets: We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. David Gelernter nails it: Nothing is more beautiful than the human mind.

Beautifully written, David Gelernter articulates a model of consciousness along a spectrum from low (nearing sleep, deep meditative, or dream state) to high (the alert, reasoning, problem-solving mind), while relating types of experiences encountered all along this spectrum. None is superior to the other necessarily, the lower spectrum for example provides us access to deep memory, emotions, and creativity, as evidenced by many people across time who've experienced gnosis in states of deep trance or dream. While the upper spectrum brings focus, self-awareness, and rational thinking. Each has a role, and ignoring one (or spending too much time in one) for the other is imbalanced and dangerous. David also reminds the reader that consciousness and mind is not

purely a function of the physical brain, and that this type of perspective is problematic to how we view the mind."Post-Turing thinkers decided that brains were organic computers, that computation was a perfect model of what minds do, that minds can be built out of software, and that mind relates to brain as software relates to computer - the most important, most influential and (intellectually) most destructive analogy in the last hundred years (the last hundred at least)." [end of chapter 5, p. 147]Consciousness is bigger than just the brain. "The body makes the mind" [John Donne, p. 64], it's what makes us human. Though I would suggest it's also the other way around - the relationship between mind and body being reciprocal in nature. No one can claim to understand it, why we have it, where it comes from, or how it works, but we can certainly understand that it's not 'just brain'.The content never gets dry, David weaves stories and poems from Shakespeare, Shelley, Blake and more, along with some of his personal experiences, to keep a nice rhythm and flow. Great editing as well, I haven't noticed any errors. My only problem with the content is that David is a Freudian and not a Jungian, so there's no direct consideration given to Jungian ideas of the unconscious mind, self and ego.I also questioned David's knowledge of dreaming as he seemed too simplistic in some descriptions. There was attention given to awareness in dreams but not to the phenomenon of lucid dreaming, which modern fMRI and subjective study shows would put one's mind in multiple positions on his spectrum - both at the highest and lowest degrees - simultaneously, something I didn't see acknowledged. Other than that this is a good read for anyone who studies aspects of consciousness or philosophy of mind. And it should serve as a good counterweight to any trans-humanist line of thinking that's forgotten what makes us human, as disembodied consciousness can never be human consciousness, or mind.

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