

# Can Evolutionary Theory Explain the Existence of Consciousness? A Review of Humphrey, N. (2010) *Soul Dust: The Magic of Consciousness*. London: Quercus, ISBN 9781849162371

Velmans, Prof Max (2011) Can Evolutionary Theory Explain the Existence of Consciousness? A Review of Humphrey, N. (2010) *Soul Dust: The Magic of Consciousness*. London: Quercus, ISBN 9781849162371. [Journal (Paginated)]

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## Abstract

This review summarises why it is difficult for Darwinian evolutionary theory to explain the existence and function of consciousness. It then evaluates whether Humphrey's book *Soul Dust* overcomes these problems. According to Humphrey, consciousness is an illusion constructed by the brain to enhance reproductive fitness by motivating creatures that have it to stay alive. Although the review entirely accepts that consciousness gives a first-person meaning to existence, it concludes that Humphrey does not give a convincing account of how this can arise from random variations in the genome. Nor does he demonstrate how first-person experiences might enter into or be reducible to third-person functioning. The review concludes that Humphrey's case is unconvincing, and goes on to suggest that an entirely different, non-reductive approach may be required to understand consciousness.

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**Keywords:** evolutionary theory, evolution, consciousness, illusion, Humphrey, Darwin, Dawkins, reproductive fitness, science, reductionism, doctrine, faith, soul

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## References in Article

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