Daniel Dennett. Reconciling Science and Our Self-Conception. **By MATTHEW ELTON. (Oxford: Polity Press, 2003. Pp. xiii + 296.)**

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Over 35 years, Daniel Dennett has articulated a rich and expansive philosophical outlook. There have been elaborations, refinements, and changes of mind, expository and substantive. This makes him hard to pin down. Does he, for example, think intentional states are real? In places, he sounds distinctly instrumentalist; elsewhere, he avows realism, "sort of". What is needed is a map, charting developments and tracing dialectical threads through his extensive writings and the different regions of his thought. This is what Matthew Elton's impressive book supplies. Accessibly written, with a useful glossary and detailed guides to the literature, it will be extremely helpful to students and professionals alike.

For Elton, Dennett's agenda is set by the following question: can core elements of our self-conception, such as agency, intentionality, consciousness, and freewill, be reconciled with science? (Really, the putative tension derives not from science alone, but from a naturalist understanding of science's ontological significance.) Reconciliation is the aim of reductionism, which Elton apparently takes to include any account of ourselves framed in non-intentional terms. But reconciliation is rejected by dualists and eliminativists, who renounce naturalism and our self-conception respectively. For his part, Dennett advocates reconciliation, but without reduction.

Elton's book sympathetically unpacks this idea. I shall focus on three of Elton's themes. The first is Dennett's "intentional systems" account of agency and intentionality. The familiar idea is that what it is for a "system" to be the subject of intentional states is for it to be such that its behaviour is most appropriately predicted from the intentional stance. Adopting that stance involves predicting that the system will think and do what it is rational to think and do in the circumstances. The underlying point, which Elton brings out well, is that the behaviour of agents instantiates kinds and patterns that can be expressed, predicted, and explained only in intentional terms, and not the terms of the physical sciences; moreover, the generalisations expressing those patterns are anomalous, in the sense that they fall short of causal laws.

So expressed, Dennett's reconciliation without reduction can seem to involve too little reconciliation. Discernible only from the intentional stance, and lacking even the tenuous foothold in the causal-nomological realm that Donald Davidson's token identifications would give them, Dennett's intentional states begin to seem either eliminable or dualistically removed from the natural world. Elton traces more and less concessive strains in Dennett's response to this worry. The more concessive includes Dennett's doubts that intentional terms refer, his

flirtations with instrumentalism, and his comparisons of intentional states to "abstracta", not "illata". The less concessive, which Elton prefers, involves Dennett's rejection of a too narrow naturalism. For Elton's Dennett, intentional states and kinds are real, and belong to the natural world, not in virtue of their being governed by causal laws, but rather in virtue of their figuring in illuminating explanations. Should this step away from eliminativism seem a step towards dualism, Elton reminds us of two characteristically Dennettian strategies. Deploying his "flipping strategy", Dennett oscillates between the intentional and physical stances as therapy for the nagging feeling that magic must be involved in the production of the anomalous intentional patterns. Deploying his "deflationary strategy", he emphasizes that the patterns are only imperfectly rational anyway. This is Elton's Dennett, whose clear depiction is a helpful antidote to the anxiety, felt by many commentators and perhaps sometimes by Dennett himself, that his commitments leave no room for realism.

Elton's second theme concerns another incarnation of Dennett's differentiation of stances: the distinction between *personal* and *sub-personal* levels of explanation. Though Dennett rarely uses this terminology anymore, and occasionally appears to conflate levels, the distinction is central to his approach. So it is helpful that Elton keeps it firmly in the foreground, and refines it, drawing attention to three dimensions of contrast: whole agents versus their parts, rationalising versus non-rationalising explanations, and different styles of rationalisation. Hence personal-level explanations focus on what the whole agent does, are rationalising, and can be cited *by the agent* in justifications of her actions, whereas sub-personal explanations focus on parts of agents and are not rationalising. But at an "intermediate level", between the personal and sub-personal, there are also explanations that focus on whole agents without being personal-level, either because they are not rationalising, e.g. "I'm thinking unclearly because I'm tired", or because they are not citeable by the agent, e.g. "The plover distracts the predator to protect her eggs".

Dennett exploits this apparatus in his approach to consciousness, which is Elton's third theme. Here Elton foregrounds another Dennettian distinction that has become implicit in Dennett's own work: the distinction between what Elton calls "narrative awareness" and "behavioural awareness". Narrative awareness is manifest in behaviour that can be rationalised at the personal level, since it involves agents themselves *reporting* how they take their environments to be. The behaviour in which behavioural awareness is manifest, by contrast, need only admit of rationalisation at what I called the "intermediate level". For behavioural awareness simply involves agents acting reasonably in relation to their environments. The plover exhibits behavioural awareness. So does the hiker who, engrossed in conversation, "unconsciously" adjusts her gait because of a stone in her shoe. However, when she *reports* the stone, or the pain it causes, this is narrative awareness. Dennett's representationalist claim is that narrative awareness accounts for "what it is like" to be aware. Being phenomenally conscious is

being disposed to report the content of one's intentional states. Dennett adds much detail about the sub-personal mechanisms underpinning consciousness. For Elton, insisting on the distinction between rationalising and non-rationalising levels, the value of this empirical information is its use both in the flipping strategy and in the premises of anti-reductionist arguments.

Elton's final two chapters concern Dennett's accounts of Darwinism and freewill. These are less illuminating than the others, particularly the discussion of Darwinism, which falls short of its aim of clearly delineating the battle lines between Dennett and Steven Jay Gould.

The preceding chapters, however, not only cover a lot of ground lucidly; they rigorously engage with the issues. Perhaps inevitably, there remain important concerns that are treated at best cursorily. Here are two. First, Dennett is often characterised as excessively liberal, since his bar for intentionality is not only vague, but set very low. Elton reminds us how one-sided this characterisation is, since Dennett's bar for phenomenal consciousness is separate and cleared only by those who can *report* their intentional states. But anyone who shares Thomas Nagel's intuition that there is something it is like to be bat will now find Dennett not too liberal, but too chauvinist. What is needed is some clarification of the very notion of phenomenology, and a defence of Dennett's restriction on its application. Elton lacks the space in which to do more than touch on these two matters. Second, even if Dennett's broader naturalism defuses the direct threat that anomalism poses for realism, Elton neglects a further, indirect threat. For Dennett, mindedness consists in being "interpretable" by an "interpreter". Arguably, anomalism renders the interpreter not merely an expository device, but a way for Dennett to build the uncodifiable norms of rationality into his account. But Elton does not register the worries the interpreter creates: that intentionality is not real but projected, and that in the figure of the interpreter Dennett invokes the very idea of intentionality that he is out to explain.

Though major issues, these are minor gripes. Elton's book will be an invaluable companion for anyone hoping to get to grips with Dennett's rich and expansive vision.

David Bain