



I Am a Strange Loop

By Douglas R. Hofstadter

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Can thought arise out of matter? Can self, soul, consciousness, “I” arise out of mere matter? If it cannot, then how can you or I be here?

I Am a Strange Loop argues that the key to understanding selves and consciousness is the “strange loop”—a special kind of abstract feedback loop inhabiting our brains. The most central and complex symbol in your brain is the one called “I.” The “I” is the nexus in our brain, one of many symbols seeming to have free will and to have gained the paradoxical ability to push particles around, rather than the reverse.

How can a mysterious abstraction be real—or is our “I” merely a convenient fiction? Does an “I” exert genuine power over the particles in our brain, or is it helplessly pushed around by the laws of physics?

These are the mysteries tackled in *I Am a Strange Loop*, Douglas Hofstadter's first book-length journey into philosophy since *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. Compulsively readable and endlessly thought-provoking, this is a moving and profound inquiry into the nature of mind.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, March 2007: Pulitzer-Prize winner Douglas Hofstadter takes on some weighty and wonderful questions in *I Am a Strange Loop*--among them, the "size" of a soul and the vagaries of thought--and proposes persuasive answers that surprised me both with their simplicity and their sense of optimism: a rare combination to be found in a book that tackles the mysteries of the brain. This long-awaited book is a must-have for avid science readers and navel-gazers. --*Anne Bartholomew*

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Hofstadter—who won a Pulitzer for his 1979 book, *Gödel, Escher, Bach*—blends a surprising array of disciplines and styles in his continuing rumination on the nature of consciousness. Eschewing the study of biological processes as inadequate to the task, he argues that the phenomenon of self-awareness is best explained by an abstract model based on symbols and self-referential "loops," which, as they accumulate experiences, create high-level consciousness. Theories aside, it's impossible not to experience this book as a tender, remarkably personal and poignant effort to understand the death of his wife from cancer in 1993—and to grasp how consciousness mediates our otherwise ineffable relationships. In the end, Hofstadter's view is deeply philosophical rather than scientific. It's hopeful and romantic as well, as his model allows one consciousness to create and maintain within itself true representations of the essence of another. The book is all Hofstadter—part theory, some of it difficult; part affecting memoir; part inventive thought experiment—presented for the most part with an incorrigible playfulness. And whatever readers' reaction to the underlying arguments for this unique view of consciousness, they will find the model provocative and heroically humane. (*Mar.*)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Though elegantly written, it is not surprising that Douglas Hofstadter's *I Am a Strange Loop* suffers a bit by comparison to his acclaimed *Gödel, Escher, Bach*: they both cover the same ground, with the more recent book elaborating on the ideas of the first one. However, *I Am a Strange Loop* is a much more personal effort, an "intellectual autobiography" (*Time*) of the last 30 years of Hofstadter's life. Critics agreed that Hofstadter is riveting when sharing his grief over the unexpected death of his wife and his conviction that part of her continues to live on in him. Some readers may not agree with his beliefs, and he draws little on findings in neurological science, but they cannot deny that *I Am a Strange Loop* is a heartfelt exploration of the human mind.

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