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## Prologue

In the first days of April of last year a young philosopher, Miranda Sharpe, was tempered in the furnace of extraordinary events. Beginning with a breach in her professional relationship with her graduate advisor, Sharpe found herself cast as the main actor in a drama that became both sinister and perilous. Thirty-six fateful hours derailed the life of at least one nationally prominent media figure, seriously strained U.S.-Russian diplomatic relations, and threw two institutions of higher education into a frenzy of self-examination—all in addition to the narrowly averted devastation of the Internet. At first, reports of these events were fragmentary and peripheral. A few articles appeared in the campus newspaper at Sharpe's university; on my own campus, the Sharpe saga ignited astonishment and dismay behind closed doors. With these disjoint sketches the matter might have ended, except for the appearance of a now-notorious exposé in *Lingua Franca* ("Through a Glass Sharpely: The Plot to Unweave the World Wide Web"). With that, the Miranda Sharpe story, notwithstanding all its gaps and distortions, took on a life of its own. By the summer of last year, Sharpe found herself, or at least her image, emerging as an icon representing, in various contexts, feminism transgressed, Generation Z redeemed, graduate study glamorized, the Internet made intimate. . . . It was only a matter of time before her face would promote animal rights or running shoes.

The *real* story, however, was slighted. This book tells its untold core. As a player in the pyrotechnic denouement of Sharpe's adventure, I was aware of the intellectual dimension of her sleuthing, and I felt that the world could use a full report of her discoveries. I first thought that Sharpe and I might collaborate, but when I approached her with this idea, she informed me that she was determined to write her own narrative, with the working title "The Thrill of Phenomenology." This story, in her own words, became the first part of this book. Her polyphonic narrative revealed, on one level, the depth of pain and terror she had experienced in April. But on another level, the real-life whodunit was interwoven with a re-alignment in the twenty-first-century view of the mind. This re-alignment occurred in Sharpe's thinking through the very encounters that embroiled her in a murderous drama. This, then, is the story that all the other stories have missed.

*In early April, as Miranda Sharpe struggled to solve an apparently grave crime, she also discovered a new theory of human consciousness.*

Scholarly books usually begin by announcing their conclusions, and follow with the support. But the process of *discovering* a new theory—of anything, but especially of consciousness—runs the other way. Like a detective solving a crime, discovery begins in the groping murk of half-thought doubts, and gestates in chance conversations, nagging metaphors, and backhand revelations. Halting soliloquy and endless side-trips hide its growth. Yet the discovering mind is easing itself into a new mold, foreshadowing the moment when the discoverer hews a roughcut keystone, and with its help the jumble of obstinate rock pulls itself into an unmistakable arch, still imperfect but intimating the vaults of a new science. From that climax all the switchbacks remap as the steady ascent of fate, a path that could not but lead to a new way of seeing. So it is with Sharpe's narrative as well.

And the new arch—should it turn out to bear the load of critique that will follow the publication of Sharpe's memoir—will span one of the great chasms of our world, the gulf between mind and brain. Our conscious mind is the great quaking stage of experience from first step to first kiss to last word. No place could seem less its home than that gelatinous organ known as the brain, a place of perfect darkness and bare chemical murmurs. For decades the drumbeat of philosophy, psychology, and neuro-

science has insisted that mind is brain, and brain is mind. It *could* be so; it *must* be so. But *how* is it so? Not in snail brains or rat minds, nor in computer models nor other shadows of our selves, but in *us*. In you, in me. Sharpe's story culminates in a vivisection of consciousness. She offers us a rough sketch of the anatomy of the mind, the whole human show. As the police, the media, and public memory close the books on this very strange case, what should endure is a new way of thinking about thinking.

Some colleagues have suggested that credit for the new theory should be shared between Sharpe and myself. Although it is true that Sharpe found an important clue in a "virtual world" I had constructed to illustrate in three dimensions the high-dimensional space traversed by the thinking brain, I had never seen in my construct anything but a representation of the neurobiology of cognition. Sharpe recognized that the construct was also a theory of consciousness, and in a long conversation convinced me of the viability of her view. In recent months, as I've spackled the bullet holes in my living room wall, and repainted it to match the new rugs, I've often reflected on that dialogue in a diner, and I remain convinced that much of what is important and interesting in the theory is due to Sharpe alone. Nonetheless, I will plead guilty to having taken her insights and run with them. Accordingly, this volume has emerged as a different sort of collaboration. Its main text is Sharpe's tale, in which she not only makes clear what really happened during those freak snowstorms of last April, but fills in a rich memoir of her thinking as it moved so rapidly and so far. But in the second part, I have contributed some philosophical and scientific elaborations of Sharpe's theories, for those with an interest in the details. Miranda is also planning to contribute an epilogue, bringing the story up to date. [Editor's note: The epilogue, added in press, has been appended to "The Thrill of Phenomenology."] We hope that this combination offers something for readers of varying interests. By the way, the Web addresses Sharpe mentions late in her story remain operational as of this writing, and the reader is cordially invited to visit the sites and participate in the ongoing discussions there.

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