

[PDF] Kluge: The Haphazard Construction Of The Human Mind

Gary Marcus - pdf download free book



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Description:

From Publishers Weekly Why are we subject to irrational beliefs, inaccurate memories, even war? We can thank evolution, Marcus says, which can only tinker with structures that already exist, rather than create new ones: Natural selection... tends to favor genes that have immediate advantages rather than long-term value. Marcus (*The Birth of the Mind*), director of NYU's Infant Language Learning Center, refers to this as kluge, a term engineers use to refer to a clumsily designed solution to a problem. Thus, memory developed in our prehomimid ancestry to respond with

immediacy, rather than accuracy; one result is erroneous eyewitness testimony in courtrooms. In describing the results of studies of human perception, cognition and beliefs, Marcus encapsulates how the mind is contaminated by emotions, moods, desires, goals, and simple self-interest.... The mind's fragility, he says, is demonstrated by mental illness, which seems to have no adaptive purpose. In a concluding chapter, Marcus offers a baker's dozen of suggestions for getting around the brain's flaws and achieving true wisdom. While some are self-evident, others could be helpful, such as Whenever possible, consider alternate hypotheses and Don't just set goals. Make contingency plans. Using evolutionary psychology, Marcus educates the reader about mental flaws in a succinct, often enjoyable way. *(Apr. 16)*

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From A university psychology professor who periodically writes for mass media, Marcus here punctures the high regard humanity has for its species-distinctive qualities. Whether it's memory, rationality, language, or free will, our noble human traits are hopelessly entangled with our baser drives, which have survived the dynamics of evolution. Blending discussion of experiments from cognitive psychology with speculation about why people are far less logical than they believe, Marcus latches onto the term kluge, which comes from the engineering world and is jargon for a fix that ain't perfect but good enough. It's a productive figure of speech for Marcus' argument that deliberative thinking probably had an evolutionary advantage (save seeds to plant next season), but seems in permanent conflict with reflexive impulses having more ancient evolutionary advantage (eat seeds now). Carrying the point across a gamut of behaviors, from money to mental illnesses to talking, Marcus develops his idea of the klugelike mind, in which emotion perpetually besieges the intellect, with appealing clarity. --Gilbert Taylor

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