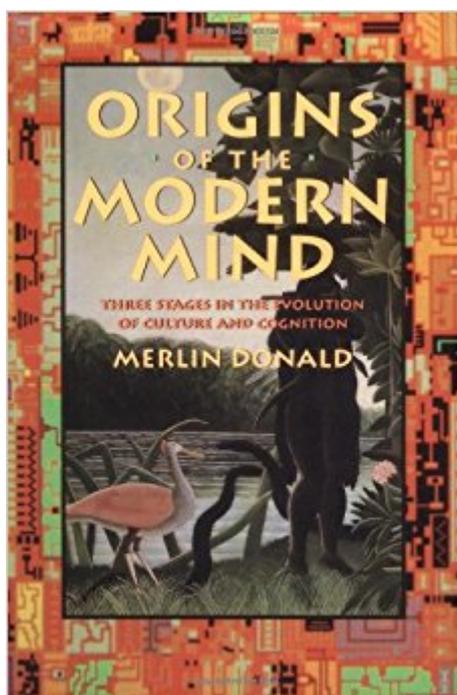


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Origins Of The Modern Mind: Three Stages In The Evolution Of Culture And Cognition



Synopsis

This bold and brilliant book asks the ultimate question of the life sciences: How did the human mind acquire its incomparable power? In seeking the answer, Merlin Donald traces the evolution of human culture and cognition from primitive apes to artificial intelligence, presenting an enterprising and original theory of how the human mind evolved from its presymbolic form.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a book that will forever change your view of what it means to be a human being. It is a work of enormous scope, from the minutiae of neurophysiology to archaeology and anthropology to the curriculum of mediaeval schools and modern systems theory, and everywhere closely researched with evidence weighed with care and insight. The argument is broadly this: our evolutionary cousins, the apes, have brains which enable them to represent to themselves and remember "episodes" or events, something which their evolutionary predecessors either do not have or have only in a limited form. Homo erectus, the evolutionary link between us and the apes, extended this ability to perceive events, into "mimesis", a capacity to reproduce events they have perceived by use of their own body. Donald shows how this ability, which involves no modifications of the body and relatively modest changes in the brain, allows for the voluntary representation and communication of events of the past and emotions not actually felt concerning things not actually present, a foundation for the later development of symbolic action. Homo erectus dominated the hominid world for a million years, adapting themselves to this "mimetic" culture. According to Donald, mimetic representation

remains with us as a vestige of our homo erectus ancestry, as a fully functioning, underlying mode of representation and intelligence. Homo sapiens in turn developed this ability into speech, with a radical adaptation which occurred about 500,000 years ago. According to Donald, homo sapiens had a "mythic" culture hinged around the ability to tell stories, and this ability provided a means to make sense of the world and create a shared understanding of the world.

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