

Figments of Reality: The Evolution of the Curious Mind

By Ian Stewart, Jack Cohen

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Peppered with wit and controversial topics, this is a refreshing new look at the co-evolution of mind and culture. Bestselling authors Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen (The Collapse of Chaos, 1994) eloquently argue that our minds evolved within an inextricable link with culture and language. They go beyond conventional views of the function and purpose of the mind to look at the ways that the mind is the response of an evolving brain that is constantly adjusting to a complex environment. Along the way they develop new and intriguing insights into the nature of evolution, science, and humanity that will challenge conventional views on consciousness. The esteemed authors tantalize the reader with these bold new outlooks while putting a revolutionary spin on such classic philosophical problems as the nature of free will and the essence of humanity. This clearly written and enjoyable book will inspire any educated reader to critically evaluate the existing notions of the nature of the human mind.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
In *Figments of Reality*, mathematician Ian Stewart and biologist Jack Cohen's thesis (or schtick) is that human minds are produced by complicity between human brains and culture. In their earlier book *The Collapse of Chaos*, Stewart and Cohen used the power of Humpty Dumpty to redefine *complicity* to mean properties that emerge from the mutual interaction of complex systems. "Our minds, our societies, our cultures, and our global multiculture, are all evolving within a reality that we mould in images of our own creation. We are a figment of reality--but reality is increasingly a figment of us."

Reality is not the only figment in the book. Stewart and Cohen use a group of eight "weird alien beings from the planet Zarathustra, resembling fluffy yellow ostriches but with much stranger habits" as a sounding board, as comedy relief, and as a philosophical-experimental playpen. To quote:

> "Ringmaster: What is this?
> Liar-to-children [=teacher]: A continuing educational narrative of some kind, Ringmaster. Based upon a revered/reviled (delete whichever is inapplicable) ancient text. [Watches the screen and interprets the tale that unfolds--a long and dramatic story of an exploding universe, elements born in stars, complex carbon-based molecular machines, a doubly-helical genetic molecule, the origins of life, evolution, sense organs, brains, minds, and intelligence.]
> R: What a fascinating narrative.
> LtC: And such a convincing story.
> Destroyer-of-facts [=scientist]: Such vigor and power! Such unified scientific insight!
> R: Not a word out of place, no loose ends--amazing!
> ALL: [In unison] Must be wrong, then."

Read it and think, read it and giggle, read it and come back for more. At long last, a worthy successor to *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, updated, twisted, and put through a Monty Python filter.

From Library Journal
Mathematics and geometry professor Stewart, who writes the "mathematical recreations" column in Scientific American, and biologist Cohen are witty, erudite, clever, at times funny, and generally clearheaded in this rationalist's view of the universe and human evolution. Their thesis is that the human mind evolved in response to the complexity of the world and that language?and, indeed, culture?are inextricable parts of this process: there could be no mind without evolution but no evolution without mind. As is apparently mandatory in books on this subject, the authors include examples, anecdotes, and samples from literally every field of human and animal endeavor to illustrate, illuminate, and elucidate their thesis, making their case by seemingly having on hand millions of bits of information. A delightful but heavy read that is excellent for academic collections and general collections with a highly literate readership.?Mark L. Shelton, Univ. of Massachusetts Medical Ctr., Worcester
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Review
"One of the most heartening and innovative books of the year...This kind of book explodes the notion of the imminent and final theory of everything; by the same token, it shows that the death of science has been greatly exaggerated." The Sunday Times of London

"[The authors] are witty, erudite, clever, and generally clear-headed in this rationalist's view of the universe and human evolution...delightful..." Library Journal

"It analyzes the evolution of mankind's consciousness from a new and intriguing perspective. It argues that the mind evolved in the context of culture and language, aiding survival in a complex and competitive world." Biology Digest

"The most thought-provoking book I've read all year." Terry Pratchett, author of the Discworld series

"A stimulating theory of how mind, consciousness, and culture have coevolved to create our species by two masters of informed, scientific speculation. Try it...you'll learn a lot. Who could ask for more?" John L. Casti, Santa Fe Institute and Technical University of Vienna, author of Would-Be Worlds

"Figments of Reality is highly recommended for college-level collections and any non-specialist general reader." Bookwatch

"A delightful read that is excellent for academic collections and general collections with a highly literate readership." Mark L. Shelton, Library Journal

"Stewart and Cohen show how intelligence and extelligence interact by way of language and how the end product formulates culture...the authors are quick-witted and provide a lively exposition." Science News

"While the subject matter is rather heady, the authors are quickwitted and provide a lively exposition." Science News Books

"It analyzes the evolution of mankind's consciousness from a new and intriguing perspective. It argues that the mind evolved in the context of culture and language, aiding survival in a complex and competitive world." Biology Digest

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kathleen Owens:

What do you about book? It is not important with you? Or just adding material when you really need something to explain what you problem? How about your time? Or are you busy man or woman? If you don't have spare time to do others business, it is make one feel bored faster. And you have free time? What did you do? Every person has many questions above. They must answer that question because just their can do which. It said that about book. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is suitable. Because start from on guardería until university need this Figments of Reality: The Evolution of the Curious Mind to read.

Carol Elliott:

The guide with title Figments of Reality: The Evolution of the Curious Mind has lot of information that you can study it. You can get a lot of benefit after read this book. This particular book exist new know-how the information that exist in this reserve represented the condition of the world currently. That is important to yo7u to understand how the improvement of the world. This book will bring you throughout new era of the

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Irving Carlin:

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