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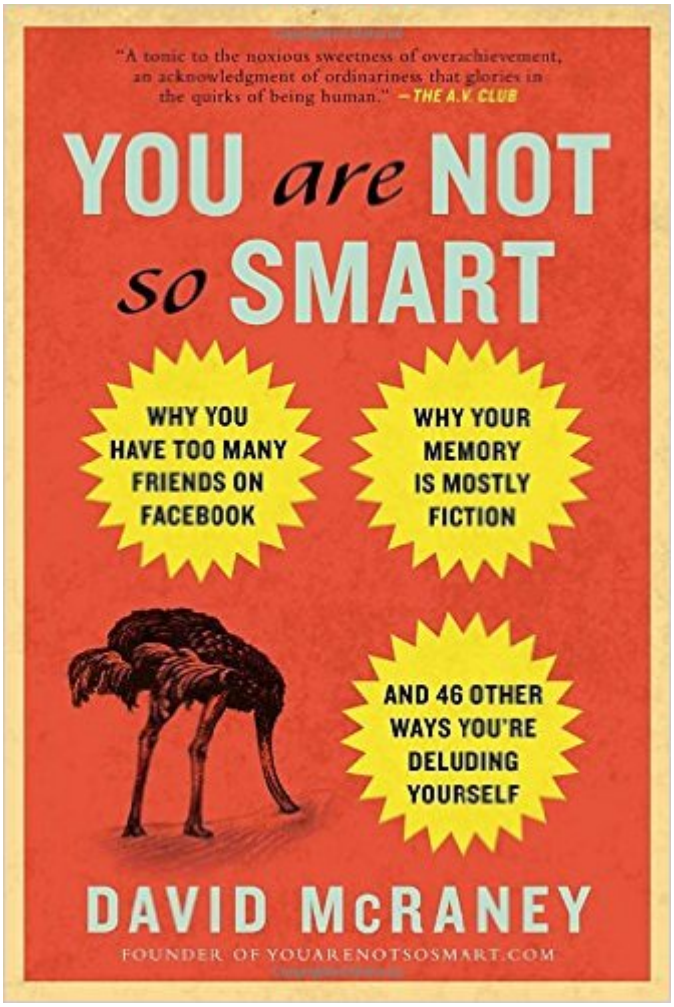
You Are Not So Smart: Why You Have Too Many Friends On Facebook, Why Your Memory Is Mostly Fiction, An D 46 Other Ways You're Deluding Yourself



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Synopsis

An entertaining illumination of the stupid beliefs that make us feel wise, based on the popular blog of the same name.Â Whether youâ ™re deciding which smartphone to purchase or which politician to believe, you think you are a rational being whose every decision is based on cool, detached logic. But hereâ ™s the truth: You are not so smart. Youâ ™re just as deluded as the rest of usâ ”but thatâ ™s okay, because being deluded is part of being human. Growing out of David McRaneyâ ™s popular blog, You Are Not So Smart reveals that every decision we make, every thought we contemplate, and every emotion we feel comes with a story we tell ourselves to explain them. But often these stories arenâ ™t true. Each short chapterâ ”covering topics such as Learned Helplessness, Selling Out, and the Illusion of Transparencyâ ”is like a psychology course with all the boring parts taken out.Bringing together popular science and psychology with humor and wit, You Are Not So Smart is a celebration of our irrational, thoroughly human behavior.

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Customer Reviews

I’m a clinical psychologist interested in neuroscience, so much of this material was already familiar to me. Most of the ideas can be found scattered through other books like The Winner’s Curse, The Happiness Hypothesis, Predictably Irrational, and others. I’ve read and admired all of those. I would gladly throw them all away if I could keep You are Not So Smart.The author understands the science and the facts, and conveys them quite clearly. I didn’t find a single error. He writes wonderfully. Crisp, clear, funny, casual, but not too casual. When I read it, I feel I’m chatting with a brilliant buddy. As I understand it, the author is not a professor or scientist. He’s certainly smart

enough to be one.In the 1970s and early 1980s, research psychologists generally believed that humans are more or less rational, most of the time. They believed that irrational thinking was caused primarily by disruptive emotions like anger or fear. We now know this is just plain wrong. During the last twenty years or so, research evidence against this view accumulated. Daniel Kahneman became the first psychologist to earn a Nobel Prize for describing the new understanding.Meanwhile, evolutionary psychology provided a new template for understanding the human mind. It evolved. We often see faces in clouds, but never see clouds in faces. We sometimes mistake a coiled garden hose or rope for a snake, but rarely mistake a snake for a garden hose. These tendencies, and many others like it, reflect our evolutionary history. The reproductive cost of jumping away from a coiled garden hose is very small. The reproductive cost of failing to recognize a dangerous snake is very high.You do not think rationally, nor does anyone else.

Not a five-star book, no. But so close! The chapters detailing scientific studies from neurologists and behavioral psychologists are, for this humanities guy, the meat of the book, and they make the book one I would recommend to anyone. A weakness: long about the middle of the book, we get several chapters rehearsing the logical fallacies of rhetoric (things like the ad hominem argument, or the bias for false authorities), and these are much less interesting, less compelling, and certainly less fresh than what comes before or after. Perhaps without them, the book would have seemed too short, but they nearly derailed the book for me. Another minor beef I had was that you can, at times, sense the author bending or massaging his data or his analysis to make subtle insinuations about whose politics are smart and whose politics are not. It becomes more overt near the end, and while I am certainly not outraged or offended that someone wants to suggest that smart politics tend to fall with one party and not the other, it wasn't the kind of move I tend to appreciate. (On the other hand, his interpretation of politics may flatter some readers, and they may like the book even better for that very reason... though wouldn't that itself be a cognitive bias?) Also, I think too often, to make his point, the author makes it seem as if a bias in one direction equals a kind of knee-jerk determinism to act a certain way under certain conditions. That is to say, if people tend to do something under certain test conditions, the author extrapolates that they will pretty much always act that way in the real world. I was often reminded of the notion in Quantum Theory that observation affects reality.

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