



How to Be Human: Consciousness, Language and 48 More Things that Make You You

New Scientist, Jeremy Webb (Editor)

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What is it that makes us human? Is it language, imagination, morality, or is it that we cook and wear shoes? Or perhaps we are less human than we think (Neanderthal and Denisovan genes can be found within all of us!).

Once again, *New Scientist* have all of the fascinating and unexpected answers, and—just as they did for the universe in *The Origin of (Almost) Everything*—in *How to Be Human* they take us on a tour around the human body and brain, taking in everything from evolution to email, from the Stone Age to Spotify.

How do languages change the way our brains are wired? What can evolutionary theory tell us about who we are attracted to? How does your voice give away clues about your political views, your sexual allure and even your salary? Why is gossip the human version of a gorilla picking fleas from its mate? And how can you live to 100?

From the body to language, through emotions and possessions, to the five things that make all of us unique (it isn't just fingerprints), *New Scientist*'s witty essays sit alongside enlightening illustrations that range from how your brain creates the illusion of 'self' to the allure of body odor.

How to Be Human: Consciousness, Language and 48 More Things that Make You You Details

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Angelique Simonsen says

A few fascinating few facts but some of it not so much. A little disappointed

Kara says

Do you ever wonder what happens after we die? Or what makes men and women different? Or why teenagers are unfathomably moody? This book holds the key (or at least tries it's hardest to) to human existence.

It is a compelling and fascinating read that concentrates on everything it means to be a human; emotions, sex, development and health. The only real downside is that it reads very much like a school textbook. Yet, irrespective of this I cannot recommend this book enough. It's insightful and genius and rather charming all things considered.

Adam says

Utterly brimming in interesting facts, without reading like a set of bullet points as so many books of this genre often do. Well worth the read but I do have a few issues:

1. It claims monogamy was born in humans because of shared parental investment. Maybe the author just meant that it is the cause of it. If not, then you only need to google primates to see that it is wrong. I am inclined to think the author meant the former, but just in case...
2. It is claimed that epigenetics describes modifications that are etched on your genes and hence are not genes nor environment. If you reset the clock to when you were conceived and ran your life over and over you would turn out different despite having the same genes and environment. This isn't true and people need to stop making this mistake. To take an example, if you add a methyl group to the DNA such that you modify its expression, you are modifying the environment of the genes such that the DNA is getting methylated. It shouldn't be phenotype = genome + environment + epigenetics. Epigenetics come under the environment.
3. This is another claim that just misses the point: the sex of an individual is a terrible predictor of behaviour. Wrong. If you want to claim 'behaviour in general', as in, the sum total of all the different things someone does, then that is probably a fair statement to make. But what if I was just looking at one behavioural trait at a time? What about, 'prefers sexual intercourse with women'? You'd get it right most of the time if you tried 'men'. What about someone who plays videogames like Rainbow Six Siege for 10 hours a day? Of course it could be a woman, but 90% of the time, if you guess male, you're going to be right. What about a sleepover where you do each other's hair? Are you really going to guess male? It's certainly possible but would you make a better prediction if you guessed female?

David says

This is a well written and illustrated book that answers many questions you might have about being human that you might have thought you would never find an answer to. Would be a good reference for questions children ask or need for school reports.
