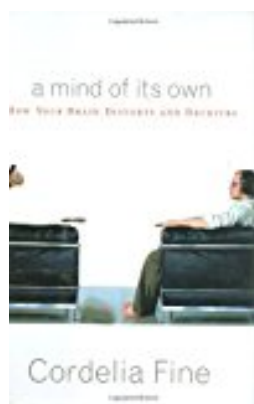


[PDF] A Mind Of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts And Deceives

Cordelia Fine - pdf download free book



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Description:

From Publishers Weekly Vain, immoral, bigoted: this is your brain in action, according to Fine, a research associate at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at Australian National University. Fine documents a wealth of surprising information about the brain in this readable account that adopts a good-humored tone about the brain's failings without underestimating the damage they do. The brain, she shows, distorts reality in order to save us from the ego-destroying effects of failure and pessimism. For example, an optimist who fails at something edits the truth by

blaming others for the failure and then takes complete credit for any successes. The brain also routinely disapproves of other people's behavior (how could he do that?), while at the same time interpreting one's own actions in the best possible light (I would never do that!). The brain also projects stereotypes onto others that reflect prejudicial beliefs rather than objective reality. Despite the firm hold these distortions have on our brains, Fine is not a pessimist. The path to overcoming stereotypes and other distortions of the brain, she says, may be gained through self-awareness and knowledge provided by experimental psychology, a field that explores and exposes unconscious mental influences. *(July)*

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From Scientific American Many psychological studies show that on average, each of us believes we are above average compared with others—more ethical and capable, better drivers, better judges of character, and more attractive. Our weaknesses are, of course, irrelevant. Such self distortion protects our egos from harm, even when nothing could be further from the truth. Our brains are the trusted advisers we should never trust. This "distorting prism" of selfknowledge is what Cordelia Fine, a psychologist at the Australian National University, calls our "vain brain." Fine documents the lengths to which a human brain will go to bias perceptions in the perceiver's favor. When explaining to ourselves and others why something has gone well or badly, we attribute success to our own qualities, while shedding responsibility for failure. Our brains bias memory and reason, selectively editing truth to inflictless pain on our fragile selves. They also shield the ego from truth with "retroactive pessimism," insisting the odds were stacked inevitably toward doom. Alternatively, the brain of "selfhandicappers" concocts nonthreatening excuses for failure. Furthermore, our brains warp perceptions to match emotions. In the extreme, patients with Cotard delusion actually believe they are dead. So "pigheaded" is the brain about protecting its perspective that it defends cherished positions regardless of data. The "secretive" brain unconsciously directs our lives via silent neural equipment that creates the illusion of willfulness. "Never forget," Fine says, "that your unconscious is smarter than you, faster than you, and more powerful than you. It may even control you. You will never know all of its secrets." So what to do? Begin with self-awareness, Fine says, then manage the distortions as best one can. We owe it to ourselves "to lessen the harmful effects of the brain's various shams," she adds, while admitting that applying this lesson to others is easier than to oneself. Ironically, one category of persons shows that it is possible to view life through a clearer lens. "Their self-perceptions are more balanced, they assign responsibility for success and failure more even-handedly, and their predictions for the future are more realistic. These people are living testimony to the dangers of self-knowledge," Fine asserts. "They are the clinically depressed." Case in point.

Richard Lipkin

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