



The Incredible Shrinking Mind: What Happens When The Human Equation Gets Lost

Gerald Alper

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Within the last few decades a dizzying array of scientific disciplines and "explanations" of the motivating forces behind the profound enigmas of human behaviour have emerged: sociobiology, cognitive psychology, game theory, experimental psychology, neurobiology, evolutionary psychology, "existential" neurology, social psychology, genetics, and other attempts at interdisciplinary thinking. Each, according to its own reductive approach, strives to separate, isolate, examine in laboratories and through experiments extracted from real-life experience, and thereby "understand" the most complex aspects of being human - including our subjectivity; morality and altruism; our economic survival and our irrational biases that affect it; our innate need for religion and wonder; and the cross-cultural stalwart, humour. But as Gerald Alper argues in his exciting and challenging new work, this sort of contemporary balkanization of the human mind actually achieves the opposite of its purpose. Rather than unraveling and illuminating the Ur source of a particular behaviour or mindset, it merely shrinks the richly threaded tapestry to a single frayed thread dis severed and abstractly disconnected from the everyday experiential realities of human existence. Examining the assertions and fallacies of the theories conceived (or contrived) by some of today's most brilliant scientists and thinkers (including Dan Ariely, John Barrow, Pascal Boyer, Frank Close, Nicholas Humphrey, Richard Dawkins, Stanley Milgram, Oliver Sacks, and Carl Sagan), Alper explores why these varied attempts at joining the world of experience and the world of measurement so regularly fail, how consciousness explained is really a concentrated effort to explain away the subjective phenomena of consciousness. From the psychic rat to the gorilla in the room, from British double-agent Kim Philby to comedian Steve Martin, *The Incredible Shrinking Mind* not only offers a provocative and entertaining critique, but also a profound and practical solution: the psychodynamic approach, which takes seriously the question of meaning and not solely observable behaviour, which combines the quantitative and the experimental with the human and multidimensional, which seeks to understand not just how but why. No single equation, no theory, no dazzling fMRI image of the hidden brain can ever accomplish this for us. It must be patiently done, one person at a time.

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