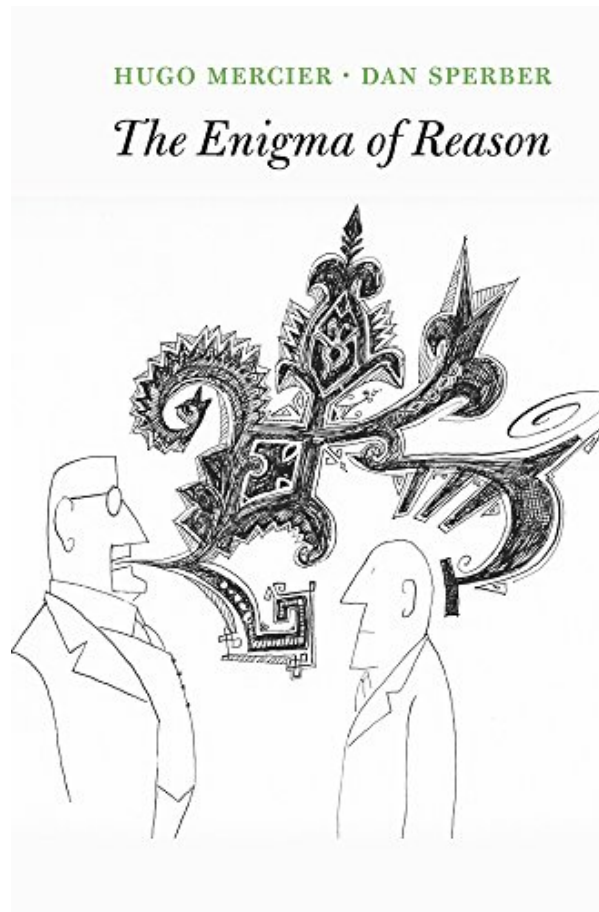


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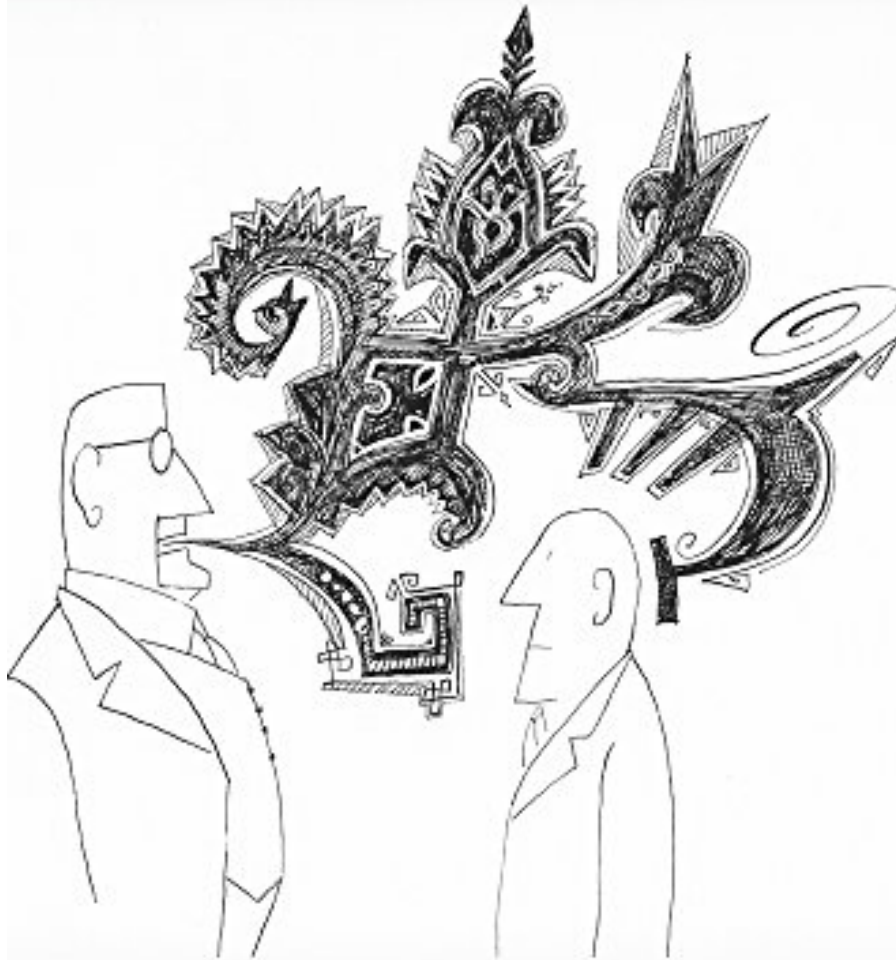


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Review

As evolutionary psychologists, Mercier and Sperber ask what might have been adaptive for our ancestors and thus built into our brains. Some have argued for modules specialized for reasoning about particular topics. But Mercier and Sperber argue for a single module that can frame an argument and its conclusion: the former aids cooperation and the latter communication. So, the ultimate goal of reasoning is persuasion. It's an extraordinarily ambitious theory presented with brilliant insights, profound scholarship, and entertaining anecdotes. (Philip Johnson-Laird, Princeton University)

This is a terrific book. The best thing I have read about human reasoning. It is extremely well written, interesting, and very enjoyable to read. (Gilbert Harman, Princeton University)

Original, persuasive, and deftly argued, The Enigma of Reason puts forward a new and rather surprising thesis that the proper (evolutionary) functioning of reasoning is to persuade others via argumentation. This book will challenge your preconceptions about the mind's internal logic and why it exists. A compelling read and a novel contribution to the literature on reasoning. (Clark Barrett, University of California, Los Angeles)

About the Author

Hugo Mercier is a researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research, working in the Cognitive Science Institute Marc Jeannerod in Lyon.

Dan Sperber is a researcher in the Departments of Cognitive Science and of Philosophy at the Central European University, Budapest, and in the Institut Jean Nicod at the École Normale Supérieure, Paris.

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Reason, we are told, is what makes us human, the source of our knowledge and wisdom. If reason is so useful, why didn't it also evolve in other animals? If reason is that reliable, why do we produce so much thoroughly reasoned nonsense? In their groundbreaking account of the evolution and workings of reason, Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber set out to solve this double enigma. Reason, they argue with a compelling mix of real-life and experimental evidence, is not geared to solitary use, to arriving at better beliefs and decisions on our own. What reason does, rather, is help us justify our beliefs and actions to others, convince them through argumentation, and evaluate the justifications and arguments that others address to us.

In other words, reason helps humans better exploit their uniquely rich social environment. This interactionist interpretation explains why reason may have evolved and how it fits with other cognitive mechanisms. It makes sense of strengths and weaknesses that have long puzzled philosophers and psychologists?why reason is biased in favor of what we already believe, why it may lead to terrible ideas and yet is indispensable to spreading good ones.

Ambitious, provocative, and entertaining, *The Enigma of Reason* will spark debate among psychologists and philosophers, and make many reasonable people rethink their own thinking.

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