



# The Birth Of The Mind: How A Tiny Number Of Genes Creates The Complexities Of Human Thought

By Gary Marcus

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In *The Birth of the Mind*, award-winning cognitive scientist Gary Marcus irrevocably alters the nature vs. nurture debate by linking the findings of the Human Genome project to the development of the brain. Startling findings have recently revealed that the genome is much smaller than we once thought, containing no more than 30,000-40,000 genes. Since this discovery, scientists have struggled to understand how such a tiny number of genes could contain the instructions for building the human brain, arguably the most complex device in the known universe. Synthesizing up-to-the-minute biology with his own original findings on child development, Marcus is the first to resolve this apparent contradiction by chronicling exactly how genes create the infinite complexities of the human mind. Along the way, he dispels the common misconceptions people harbor about genes, and explores the stunning implications of this research for the future of genetic engineering. Vibrantly written and completely accessible to the lay reader, *The Birth of the Mind* will forever change the way we think about our origins and ourselves.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

The Human Genome Project has revealed that we possess a surprisingly small number of genes, especially in light of our fairly complex bodies. In *The Birth of the Mind*, NYU psychology professor Gary Marcus brings together current research on how our genetic code assembles that most mysterious physiological structure, the brain. Readers fascinated by the works of Steven Pinker and other mind theorists will be fascinated by Marcus' descriptions of strange--and sometimes disturbing--sensory experiments carried out on chimps, ferrets, and kittens that show how the brain organizes itself in the presence or absence of external stimuli. Further, Marcus writes that there's nothing particularly special about how the brain is built and maintained.

What's amazing is how little of the overall scheme for embryonic development is special to the brain. Although thousands of genes are involved in brain development, a large number of them are shared with (or have close counterparts in) genes that guide the development of the rest of the body.

With plenty of evidence supporting the notion of multi-function "housekeeping genes," Marcus concludes that our hopes for finding single genes responsible for various brain disorders are likely unfounded. *The Birth of the Mind* offers an engaging and often witty look at how our genetic code can be simple enough to make basic proteins and complicated enough to help us learn languages. --*Therese Littleton*

#### From Publishers Weekly

NYU psychologist Marcus strikes a rare and delicate balance of scientific detail and layperson accessibility in this overview of an exploding field of inquiry. He traces a compelling story through the classic genetics and brain experiments of the past century up to present-day research, intriguingly illustrating how the human genome is intertwined with brain development, showing how the mechanisms that build brains are extensions of the mechanisms that build the body. Marcus dispels popular misconceptions of genes, showing, for instance, that most behaviors and disorders are much more complicated than headlines such as "gene for obesity discovered" would have us believe. Heavy explanations of complex results and abstract concepts are leavened by Marcus' upbeat, friendly writing style, which makes even the most arcane genetics principles a joy to read. Experiments with vision and language are particularly well-represented, with vivid descriptions adding color to the technical prose. If there is a fault here, it is that the book jumps around a bit too much, attempting to collect several decades of research and many threads of thought into a single slim volume. A lengthy glossary and bibliography, along with meticulous footnoting throughout, are helpful for those wishing to educate themselves further on the subject, but Marcus gives most readers more than enough to think about here.

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#### From [Booklist](#)

Psychologist Marcus provides an accessible discussion of genetic history and current research. Along the way, he disabuses readers of some common misconceptions about genes and alters the groundwork of the nature versus nurture debate. Marcus accomplishes these goals by reaching down to the molecular level of DNA, giving a crystal-clear explanation of how its information is manifested through cascades of protein activation and regulation. Marcus impresses upon readers the fact that there is only a tiny genomic difference between humans and primates, but an immense one between their minds. Marcus also convinces his audience

that there isn't one gene "for" some attribute, such as intelligence, which is implied when the human genome is compared to a blueprint. Instead, Marcus asserts, genes act in "exquisite harmony." A lucid, pleasing chronicle of how genes construct the human mind. *Gilbert Taylor*  
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