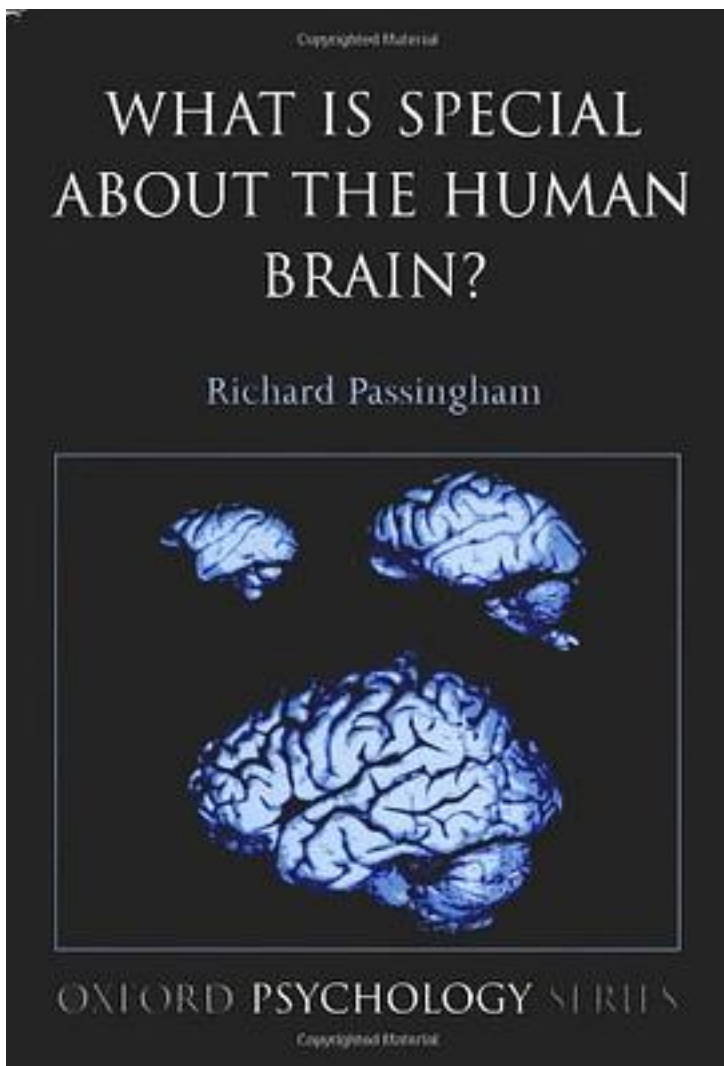


What is Special About the Human Brain?



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出版者:

出版时间:2008-9

装帧:

isbn:9780199230136

It is plausible that evolution could have created the human skeleton, but it is hard to believe that it created the human mind. Yet, in six or seven million years evolution came up with Homo sapiens, a creature unlike anything the world had ever known. The mental gap between man and ape is immense, and yet evolution bridged that gap in so short a space of time. Since the brain is the organ of the mind, it is natural to assume that during the evolution of our hominid ancestors there were changes in the brain that can account for this gap. This book is a search for those changes. It is not enough to understand the universe, the world, or the animal kingdom: we need to understand ourselves. Humans are unlike any other animal in dominating the earth and adapting to any environment. This book searches for specializations in the human brain that make this possible. As well as considering the anatomical differences, it examines the contribution of different areas of the brain - reviewing studies in which functional brain imaging has been used to study the brain mechanisms that are involved in perception, manual skill, language, planning, reasoning, and social cognition. It considers a range of skills unique to us - for example our ability to learn a language and pass on cultural traditions in this way, and become aware of our own thoughts through inner speech. Written in a lively style by a distinguished scientist who has made his own major contribution to our understanding of the mind, the book is a far-reaching and exciting quest to understand those things that make humans unique.

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