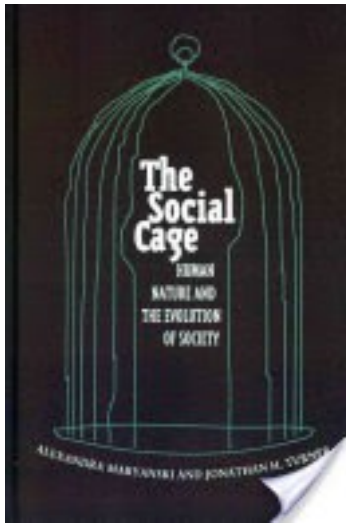


The Social Cage



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A wide-ranging and provocative new interpretation of the biological foundations of sociocultural evolution, this book is a challenge both to the extremes of sociobiology and to traditional sociological assumptions about human nature and modern societies.

The authors' central argument revolves around a re-analysis of human nature as it evolved over millions of years of primate history and a re-assessment of societal evolution in light of the primate legacy of humans. They convincingly demonstrate that sociobiology overemphasizes selection at the genic level and underemphasizes the emergent dynamics of social structure and culture, that sociological thought assumes humans are more social than is warranted by the empirical evidence on primates, and that critiques of modern social forms are largely incorrect and misguided.

The authors assert that traditional sociological theories of human nature and society

do not pay sufficient attention to the evolution of "big-brained hominoids," resulting in assumptions about humans' propensity for "groupness" that go against the record of primate evolution. When this record is analyzed in detail, and is supplemented by a review of the social structures of contemporary apes and the basic types of human societies (hunter-gathering, horticultural, agrarian, and industrial), commonplace criticisms about the de-humanizing effects of industrial society appear overdrawn, if not downright incorrect.

The book concludes that the mistakes in contemporary social theory - as well as much of general social commentary - stem from a failure to analyze humans as "big-brained" apes with certain phylogenetic tendencies. This failure is usually coupled with a willingness to romanticize societies of the past, notably horticultural and agrarian systems. If the evolutionary record and data on contemporary primates are taken seriously, the modern industrial system is seen as far more compatible with humans' primate legacy than either horticultural or agrarian systems. This legacy clearly indicates that humans are far more individualistic than most social theory assumes and that humans definitely prefer situations allowing autonomy, freedom, and choice.

作者介绍:

目录: Humans Are Animals
1
The Origins of Human Culture
33
Hunters and Gatherers
69
Horticultural Societies
91
Agrarian Societies
113
Industrial Societies
139
The Overly Social Conception of Humans and Society
163
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