

Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind

Simon Baron-Cohen , Leda Cosmides (Foreword by) , John Tooby (Foreword by)

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In *Mindblindness*, Simon Baron-Cohen presents a model of the evolution and development of "mindreading." He argues that we mindread all the time, effortlessly, automatically, and mostly unconsciously. It is the natural way in which we interpret, predict, and participate in social behavior and communication. We ascribe mental states to people: states such as thoughts, desires, knowledge, and intentions. Building on many years of research, Baron-Cohen concludes that children with autism suffer from "mindblindness" as a result of a selective impairment in mindreading. For these children the world is essentially devoid of mental things. Baron-Cohen develops a theory that draws on data from comparative psychology, from developmental psychology, and from neuropsychology. He argues that specific neurocognitive mechanisms have evolved that allow us to mindread, to make sense of actions, to interpret gazes as meaningful, and to decode "the language of the eyes."

Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind Details

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Sandee Clemons says

I have read this book and I found it very hard to understand. I am aware that people on the autism spectrum do have trouble with mind blindness, but this book could have been written without all the *BIG* words that make it too hard to understand!

Ally says

I think I finally 'get' Theory of Mind now. A good introduction, comprehensive and accessible. Good for anyone interested in autism or social cognition in general

Jane Lebak says

A *lot* to think about in this book. Baron-Cohen handles the development of human beings' perception of self in relation to other selves and then analyzes what's different in individuals with autism. This wasn't quite the book I expected (when I see "essay" I think "introspective ramblings" not "heavily footnoted scientific paper you'll have to read in total silence in order to comprehend") but it was really good and challenging in many ways.

I got about a page into the introduction and then skipped the rest because it rapidly got incomprehensible, but the essay itself is eminently readable by non-academics.

Patrick says

I'm not prepared to review this one, in all honesty. Too close to the issue, perhaps? A bit overwhelmed by the terminology? Dunno. Maybe someday.

However, the only passage I want to note for myself (and found a bit startling, candidly) was the section on pp. 94-95 of the edition I read relating that it is no longer in dispute that autism is a form of brain damage, simply that the area or areas damaged have not yet quite been nailed down. If Baron-Cohen has stated similar ideas elsewhere, I've missed them. And if the exact area or areas have been found, I've not heard of that, either.

Robert Stojnic says

The book is more about Baron-Cohens theory of the mind, which he himself described as "not very convincing" than autism.

Jeremy says

A fair amount of data about autism is gone over but the author overstates the extent to which it supports the details of his view. The overall picture seems right.

Kayla says

This was great! I can't wait to read all of his work!

Marisa says

It's about autism. Mr Baron-Cohen is one of those "I'm going to think hard about how the brain must work from a few psychology experiments" guys. In this case, though, at least he did a bunch of such experiments himself. The book is designed to be readable for those without specialized knowledge of the field but is still interesting to someone, like me, who has moderate background in neuroscience. Essentially, he proposes a set of neural mechanisms which would suffice to explain how people develop and maintain representations of the mental states of others, and how he thinks specific deficits in those mechanisms explain autism. The weak link here is how all that relates to the actual brain, but likely the parsing of mentalization into specific mechanisms is needed before we can get anywhere with how the brain actually does it.
