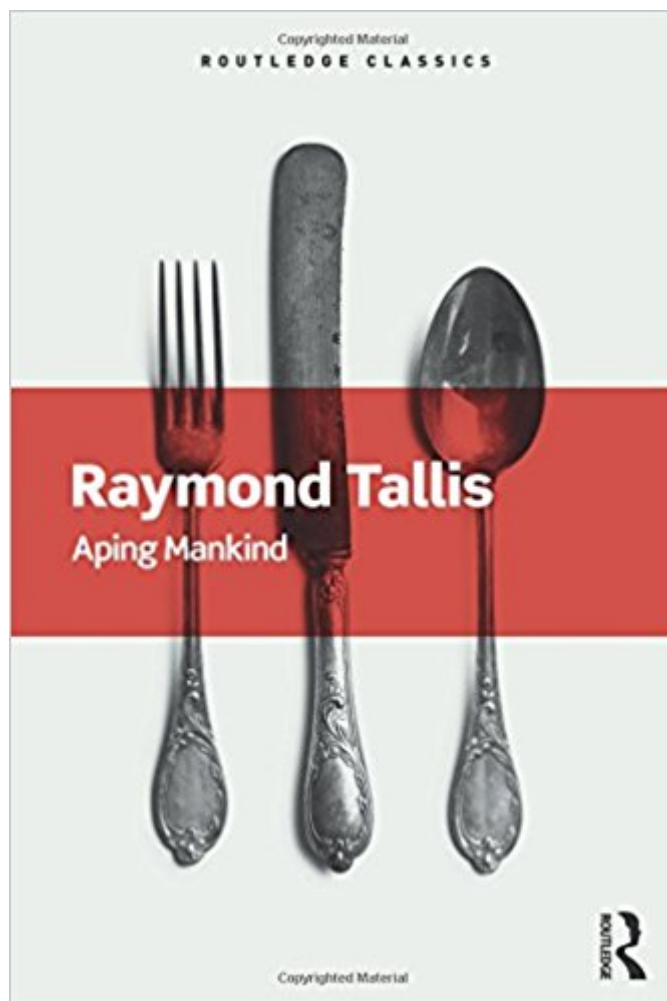


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# Aping Mankind (Routledge Classics)



## Synopsis

Neuroscience has made astounding progress in the understanding of the brain. What should we make of its claims to go beyond the brain and explain consciousness, behaviour and culture? Where should we draw the line? In this brilliant critique Raymond Tallis dismantles "Neuromania", arising out of the idea that we are reducible to our brains and "Darwinitis" according to which, since the brain is an evolved organ, we are entirely explicable within an evolutionary framework. With precision and acuity he argues that the belief that human beings can be understood in biological terms is a serious obstacle to clear thinking about what we are and what we might become. Neuromania and Darwinitis deny human uniqueness, minimise the differences between us and our nearest animal kin and offer a grotesquely simplified account of humanity. We are, argues Tallis, infinitely more interesting and complex than we appear in the mirror of biology. Combative, fearless and thought-provoking, *Aping Mankind* is an important book and one that scientists, cultural commentators and policy-makers cannot ignore. This Routledge Classics edition includes a new preface by the Author.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A trenchant, lucid and witty attack on the reductive materialism of many scientific accounts of consciousness." — David Lodge, *The Guardian*™s Books of the Year "Neuroscience, we are implausibly informed — will help dispense with evil. Who better to debunk its pretensions while

instructing us in its uses than wise, literate Raymond Tallis, a neuroscientist himself, in his entertaining *Aping Mankind*." — George Walden, *Evening Standard*'s Best Books of the Year "With erudition, wit and rigour, Tallis reveals that much of our current wisdom is as silly as bumps-on-the-head phrenology." — Jane O'Grady, *The Observer* "Impassioned and intensely erudite." — Dominic Lawson, *Sunday Times* "Raymond Tallis is one of the very few contemporary thinkers whom I would unequivocally call a genius." - *The Scotsman* on Sunday

Raymond Tallis trained as a doctor before going on to become Professor of Geriatric Medicine at the University of Manchester, UK. He was elected Fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences for his research in clinical neuroscience. He retired from medicine in 2006 to become a full-time writer. His most recent works include *Epimethean Imaginings* (2014) and *The Black Mirror* (2015).

It's very surprising not to see any reviews of this magnificent neuroscientist and philosopher, Raymond Tallis on . The main gist of this book - and this is coming from the perspective of an atheist, as Tallis calls himself - is that human beings are way more marvelous than whatever is revealed by neuroscience or natural selection. It's extremely important to note that Tallis is not depreciating the magnificent achievements of modern science at all. No, instead, what we get here is a vigorous defense of intellectual humility. There has been a decades-long obsession with neuroscience, which is extremely healthy, but this can often cause many people, including distinguished scientists and philosophers, to say that the brain does more than is actually warranted by the evidence. Tallis goes through extensive evidence and examples in a humorous and determined manner to show that the brain is not a human being and we simply cannot be reduced to neurons and electro-chemical processes in the brain, nor will the so-called 'hard problem' of consciousness (and it's not clear it should be called the 'hard problem', for reasons explained inside) ever be solved, so far as we have our current scientific method in mind, and even future breakthroughs in the field - seem to lack promise. The second focus of Tallis, has also been tackled by other distinguished philosophers like Thomas Nagel and Jerry Fodor, but none of these two, despite their lively styles, offer such obvious insights and clues as Tallis does. We can certainly try to understand some very basic phenomena through natural selection - elementary survival-related things mostly - but when it comes to issues of love, decision making, morality and many other topics natural selection is wrong... Well, perhaps 'wrong' is a misleading word, at these high levels of biological life, natural selection is guess work: one could easily use natural selection to explain why we like certain abstract paintings, like (insert your favorite painter here), and use the very same argument to show why this art is not compelling to

many people. The same problems arise in a plethora of cases. It would be hard to imagine some of the people reading this review not thinking that Tallis must be wrong because he does not understand neuro-science and natural selection well enough, or one could think that Tallis is right in one case (natural selection), but is wrong in the other (neuroscience) and vice-versa. If you think Tallis is plainly wrong, and want to find out who could believe this stuff, read the book. If you think Tallis may have some good points, then learn even more about them, read the book. If you, like me, always wondered how there could be so many science books claiming to explain human behavior via the brain or evolution, then no more persuasion is needed, read the book. There are also plenty of good sections that deal with some sensible areas in neuro-science, as well as some plausible accounts of the areas in which natural selection is a safe bet in explaining some human activities. A favorite chapter of mine has to do with scientists' and philosophers' own enchantment with certain contemporary paradigms like the current fascination with AI, and with certain words like 'information', which was really refreshing and intuitive. There is plenty, plenty more in this book, but this can be put aside. After giving so much praise to 'Aping Mankind', why am I not giving it 5 stars? The one flaw that I kept finding in Tallis's thought is a bit confused - though pointing in the right direction - is that Tallis often talks as if consciousness were some kind of separate phenomena from the physical universe, and he keeps repeating this point, without formally committing himself to a kind of Cartesian-like dualism.. I'm not denying that is an awesome phenomena, but to flirt so strongly with dualism hints that we know so much about bodies, or what the sciences study, than we are justified in believing. If it becomes so hard to think of consciousness as completely in touch with other phenomena in the world, though with some very special properties, then there is a risk of interpreting Tallis' informed critique as a call to empty spiritualism, which is an issue this author has tried to overcome, with mixed results. Other than this, this book is awesome, and should be read by anyone who has a remote interest on these topics. You should be interested, because, after all, we are A BIT more complicated than apes.

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