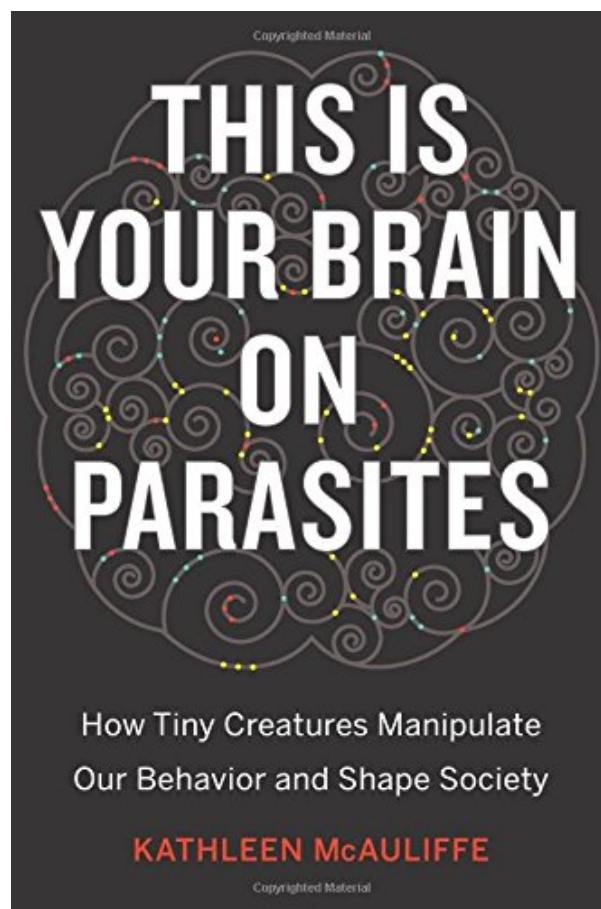


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TINY CREATURES MANIPULATE OUR
BEHAVIOR AND SHAPE SOCIETY BY
KATHLEEN MCAULIFFE**



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: MORE than just parasites

By Just Me

McAuliffe's article on toxoplasmosis in the 2012 Atlantic "How Your Cat is Making You Crazy" is probably the reason for the word parasites in the title, but the subtitle, "How Tiny Creatures Manipulate Our Behavior and Shape Society," is a more accurate portrayal of the topic of this excellent book. For example, the human gut microbiota (think probiotics) are well covered in this book, but they are certainly not parasites.

McAuliffe does a great job of introducing the reader to the major advances in this field. We meet a number of the scientists involved and learn about their findings. What is well accepted, what is still being studied, and what is controversial are clearly presented as such. The book is well footnoted, so you can look the research up yourself online.

Here's an overview of the chapters:

- 1 – The beginning of the study of parasites and microbes effecting the behavior of animals and humans.
- 2 – Malaria and other insect carried disease. Focusing on manipulations that get parasites where they need to go to survive.
- 3 – More manipulations, including caffeine in flower nectar to manipulate bees.
- 4 – Toxoplasma and humans. A look at what can happen when parasites get into the wrong host.
- 5 – Rabies; toxocara (roundworms), and other parasites that effect "our essential sense of self – our moods, appetites, behaviors, and reasoning abilities."
- 6 – Gut microbiota. Manipulations that are beneficial, mostly.
- 7 – How gut microbiota effect our weight.
- 8 – Behavioral immunity – things animals and humans instinctively do to heal our wounds and protect us from parasites.
- 9 – How the emotion of disgust helps protect us from parasites and disease.
- 10 – The relationship between disgust and prejudice.
- 11 – The relationship between disgust, religion, and politics.
- 12 – "Maybe we've underestimated parasites' political clout. Maybe they permeate our entire worldview. Maybe geopolitics should be taught from a parasite's point of view." Really. A look at how the prevalence of parasites and disease effects culture.

Some new and interesting research is presented here in a enjoyable (yes, really) manner. I would note that I have read several books and a number of research papers on gut microbiota, but McAuliffe still came up with very interesting research that I was unaware of. This book offers a lot to think about with far reaching impacts on our personal health and the state of the world.

21 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

Thank you, DISGUST!!

By kyounghwa esther sung

This book set me on the path to looking at the world in a different way: an unabashedly parasite-centric way. We are more microbe than humans! Some of our unconscious may be controlled by pathogens! Gut microbiome influences our brains, behaviors, and even personality!! Do you know how? Well... you can read it yourself.

Save for anthelmintic, how parasites affect you?

Are you happy to have high standards of hygiene?

What do you think about the stomach churning emotion, disgust: visceral vs moral disgust?

How politicians harness disgust sensitivity?

How about Hillary Clinton's extended bathroom break during a Democratic primary debate?

Do you wonder about whether you have the larger anterior insula relative to total brain size?

Do you want to get the answers? Read it yourself.

Remember the following tips:

(1) eat vegetables that have been scrubbed thoroughly;

(2) wear gloves while gardening;

(3) cook meat well or, if you prefer it rare, freeze it first to kill the microbe's cysts ?T.gondii produces thick-walled cysts in the animal's muscle

Ectoparasites and microscopic parasites may exist anywhere around you... and jeopardize you, your partner, and your offsprings.... So go get the book and read it yourself! Don't worry. I bet you will totally lose track of the time while reading. You will find yourself indulged in this a wee bit provocative topics. Well-written and very informative. I highly recommend this one to you.

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Fascinating read on what lives inside us...more than we care to think.

By K. L Sadler

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. With that title I was fully prepared for a bit of grossness...but I found the book to be a lot less gross and more of something to ponder about. In teaching microbiology, physiology, and pathophys I often have to tell my students about what normal people would consider to be disgusting, but which I am intensely interested in. It helps when I put things up that are kind of intense about diseases and medical situations to let my students figure out whether they have the stomach for this kind of thing. This book is an incredible boon to my knowledge on the bugs that impact our lives. I keep telling my students we have thousands of bacteria in our gut, but I'm going to have to expand that number. McAuliffe does an incredible research and writing job on the why, and when, and how microbes invade us humans. What's really interesting is how many of these microbes find ways to live with us commensally...they do get something from us, but we also get something from them.

I was actually very disappointed when the book ended earlier than I thought it would. I could have used a lot more info on various bacteria. Really though some of professional reviewers practically scare a person into thinking this will be a 'horrifying' ride...it isn't. It's a very thought-provoking one.

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