



Yo soy yo y mis parásitos (Indicios no ficción)

Kathleen McAuliffe

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Una apasionante investigación periodística sobre los últimos descubrimientos acerca de los parásitos y otros microorganismos que influyen en como actuamos, sentimos y pensamos. Muchas enfermedades mentales, incluso la esquizofrenia pueden tener en los parásitos su origen.

También pueden llegar a influir en el tipo de cultura, costumbres y tabúes que desarrollan determinadas sociedades.

Una vez que leas este libro ya no volverás a verte como antes.

Un libro que continúa la tradición de grandes clásicos como “Armas, Gérmenes y Acero” de Jared Diamond y de “Tu pez interior” de Neil Shubin.

Yo soy yo y mis parásitos (Indicios no ficción) Details

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Migl? says

Parazitai gyveno su žmon?mis VIS? LAIK? ir gali labai stipriai paveikti žmones tiek individualiai, tiek ištis? visuomeni? lygiu. Parazitai man labai ?domu, o žmon?s ir visuomen?s - nelabai, tod?l gal??iau sakyti, kad labai patiko tik dalis šios knygos.

Kaip pop-science knyga ji yra tikrai gerai parašyta (ir t? aprašym? apie mokslininko gyv? žvilgsn? ar plauk? spalv? kuo toliau, tuo mažiau buvo) ir, manau, tur?t? patikti žmon?ms, kurie m?gsta labai bendras, "daug k? paaiškinan?ias" mokslo populiarinimo knygas (kaip pvz Harari "Homo Deus"). Daug šioje knygoje aprašyt? tyrim? rezultat? n?ra iškalti akmenyje - ir kai kuriuos sunku daryti, d?l to, kad negali surinkti grup?s žmoni?, dalies j? apkr?sti parazitais, ir steb?ti, kaip kinta j? elgesys lyginant su kontroline grupe. Bet autor? aiškiai pasako, kuris tyrimas replikavosi, kuris ne, kur tr?ksta ?rodym?, kur gal šiaip koreliacija etc.

Tai ?ia gerai, bet šiaip aš m?gstu konkretesnes knygas, kur eina giliau ? tem?, o ne pla?iau ? "visuomen?". Knygoje apie parazitus tik??iausi atrasti daugiau parazit? klasifikacijos, ?domi? atvej? analiz?s, skirting? parazit? evoliucijos bruož? etc.

Buvo, tiesa, labai fain? pamin?ta, bet daugiau kaip iliustracijos vieno ar kito principo, pvz: tarakonai n?ra visai durni, t.y. jie ne tik reaguoja ? stimul?, bet ir kažkaip j? apdoroja, t.y. priima sprendimus, tod?l juos taip sunku pagauti. Bet štai yra parazitini? vapsva (šiaip yra žiauriai daug nuostabi? parazitini? vapsv?, gal??iau vien apie jas knyga skaityti), kuri tarakon? gaudo gaudo ir pagauna, o kai pagauna, ?kiša geluon? jam ? galv? ir labai atsargiai suleidžia nuod? ? b?tent t? smegen? dal?, kuri "priima sprendimus". Tada tarakonas pasidaro žiauriai ramus ir tiesiog eina paskui vapsv?, kai ta pa?musi už antenos nuveda j? ? kok? plyš? ir ten palieka j? gyv?, dar sud?jus kiaušinius, kad vapsvy?iams b?t? k? valgyti.

Dar labai faina paskaityti apie *toxoplasma gondii*. Tai parazitas, kur? šiaip turi daug žmoni?, nespoilinsiu, bet verta paskaityti, o tada prisikabinti prie kokio žmogaus bare ir pasakoti jam apie toxoplasma gondii, kol tas žmogus visai užsikonf?zins d?l savo tapatyb?s.

Jau buvau skai?iusi kažkiek straipsni? apie tai, kaip žarnyno mikrobiomas veikia m?s? nuotaikas (+daug daug kit? dalyk?), ir apie fecal transplants, kas yra b?tent tai, kaip ir skamba - transplantuojamas kito - sveiko - žmogaus š?das. Apie fekalini? transplant? man labiausiai patiko sakinyss "Not just anal but also oral delivery systems might be possible - for example, pills that you swallow ("crapsules", as scientists are fond of calling them)".

Paskui, kaip jau min?jau, yra daug apie infekcijas ir psichologij?, kod?l vienos kult?ros taip m?gsta visk? prieskoninti, o kitos - ne, apie pasišlykšt?jimo emocijos svarb? ir kaip ji susijusi su organizuot? visuomeni? ir religij? susik?rimu, bet kuo trukdo šiuolaikiniame pasaulyje ir daug kit? labai bendr? dalyk?.

Žodžiu, knyga n?ra bloga, bet, mano galva, per daug "visko paaiškina" ir per mažai pasakoja apie parazitus - nors, kita vertus, paantrašt? kaip ir pasako, apie k? bus ši knyga, tai nelabai turiu kuo sk?stis.

Lea says

This one is a must read, especially for fans of writers like Mary Roach. Lots of science, but broken down to be understood by the layman. Truly fascinating subject.

Aerin says

This started out pretty interesting, focusing on *Toxoplasma gondii* and rabies and other microorganisms that affect human behavior in completely bizarre ways. But much of the second half was devoted to sociology *about* parasites - surmising, for instance, that some forms of bigotry can be traced to a fear of contagion. That's interesting, I guess, but pretty simplistic and speculative. And there were bizarre detours into the psychology of disgust and such random topics as trypophobia (fear of clusters of small holes) that made me wonder if I was even reading the same book.

Then at the end, the author descended into some hallucinogenic navel-gazing about whether all of *us* might just be parasites in some massive being we can't possibly understand, *maaaaaaan*, and I said "What?"

Kristen says

This book is an excellent example of why journalists shouldn't write about parasites. She lost me in chapter 2 when she repeatedly called Guinea Worm a tapeworm! (It's a nematode just to set the record straight.)

Caro M. says

So this was really interesting and pretty much a fast read. It started with parasites and ended with, uh, social parasitology? I hope I can call it this way?

The main idea of the book is as suggested by author - parasites, big and small with their beyond understanding biochemical genetic mechanisms of adaptation/manipulation can force us into things we don't really want to do, but that are convenient/life saving for them. And it's not just toxoplasmosis that makes us fall for cats (that's a blasphemy IMHO, cats were cool long before toxoplasmosis!.. or idk anymore), but also all kinds of tapeworms, virus diseases, etc etc. Yes, she also talks about ebola and AIDS and I'm not sure if we're still talking about parasites, but I guess I get her point? Many interesting researches are presented by author, some of them quite shocking, and their results sound too sci-fi to be true.

This whole parasite thing was just plain and simple scary at times. Was it all really true? Only researchers can answer, because journalists tend to over react sometimes, it seems.

I really liked this book, especially when it was more into science and less into magazine journalism.

Tim Poston says

A great book near the beginning. As it approaches the end, about humans and human society, it gets more speculative -- and more parochial. Maybe Americans would never buy a dark toothpaste, but what about Indians who brush with charcoal? And when it comes to food, beetroot and chocolate are pretty dark! The later chapters reveal more about the current preoccupations of non-Trump America than anything deep or lasting about our brains.

Ron says

Are you interested in learning about zombified cockroaches? How about suicidal ants? Or maybe cat-loving mice? Round worms in human, anyone? If you answered yes any of these question or you just want to find out what is going on inside your body, read *This Is Your Brain On Parasites*. You will be informed, maybe entertained, and likely creeped out.

McAuliffe opens the book with an Introduction on how she stumbled on this topic. It was an Internet post about a single-celled parasite that targets rat brains and reverses their innate fear of cats into an attraction to cats. The first five chapters concentrate on the negative affects parasites can have on their hosts. These are the chapters that deal with zombified cockroaches, suicidal ants, cat-loving rats, and possible effect on humans. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 examine gut bacteria and its effect on weight and emotions. The final four chapters delve into more esoteric concerns such as disgust, prejudice, piety, and free will.

This Is Your Brain On Parasites is an interesting grab-bag of parasitical science research. McAuliffe provides a readable discussion not just on the negative effects of parasites, but also how they benefit their hosts and maybe have shaped human society. If you are intrigued or freaked out by this research, read and become informed.

Barbara says

Imagine a disease causing organism - like a parasite - that needs to pass from one host to another to survive and reproduce? How does it make sure it gets where it wants to go? Well one way is to manipulate the behavior of its host. Certain parasitic liver flukes (flatworms) for example - which reproduce in sheep - must pass from sheep, to snails, to ants, and back to sheep to complete their entire complicated life cycle. These clever flukes have found a way to induce infected ants to forego retiring to their comfy nests come evening and instead climb up stalks of grass - where they're easily eaten by grazing sheep. Then snails eat the sheep poop, ants munch on the snail slime, and the cycle goes on.

Or what about the hairworm - which reproduces in fresh water - but has to pass from a mosquito to a cricket and then back to water to make more of its kind. These cunning operators force infested land-dwelling crickets to (uncharacteristically) jump into a lake or pond. The worms then escape, reproduce, latch onto mosquito larvae, and get back to land in airborne mosquito adults - which make a nice meal for hungry crickets...and so forth.

In the early chapters of her book, Kathleen McAuliffe presents many examples of infectious organisms manipulating their hosts in this fashion - from impelling fish to wiggle their bellies to attract peckish birds; to forcing spiders to spin 'nursery webs' for wasp larvae; to making crabs sprout brood pouches for baby

barnacles; and so on. The manipulator's methods may involve forming cysts in the brains/nervous systems of their victims, producing chemicals, activating/inactivating hormones, making proteins, altering DNA, etc. Whatever works for them.

You might think....well....those are 'lowly' invertebrates. Advanced animals, like mammals wouldn't succumb to this kind of tampering. But you'd be wrong. For instance, *Toxoplasma gondii* ('toxo') is a protozoan parasite that lives and reproduces in cats, forming cysts that are shed in cat feces. When a rat consumes the cat turds the parasite induces the rodent to engage in risky behavior - like purposely cavorting in the path of a hungry feline - so the toxo can get into another cat and continue to propagate its kind.

As it happens toxo can also infect humans, who contract them from litter boxes, unwashed produce, or contaminated water. The protozoans then make themselves at home in the victim's brain where (as in rats) they induce 'risky' behavior. In people this might be dangerous driving, antagonizing enemies, reacting slowly to hazardous situations, perhaps even attempting suicide. Moreover, scientists have found that the parasites may hasten the development of schizophrenia in susceptible persons.

Parasites aren't the only organisms that alter human behavior. Pathogens (disease causing microbes) - which have probably been around since life evolved - also manipulate their hosts. Anecdotal reports, for example, suggest that terminal aids patients develop fierce cravings for sex - presumably to help the HIV virus find new hosts. And people recently infected with a flu virus may get the urge to go out and socialize - inevitably spreading germs - before aching muscles and a runny nose sends them to bed.

Even organisms that are essential parts of the human body, like gut microbes that help us digest food, can adversely influence our behavior. For instance, patients with gastrointestinal disorders - possibly caused by too many 'bad bacteria' - are more likely to suffer from bipolar disorder, anxiety, and depression. Researchers have shown that probiotic remedies (similar to the ingredients in some kinds of yogurt) can boost the gut's 'good bacteria' population and help alleviate these symptoms.

Of course host organisms aren't going to let parasites and pathogens have it all their own way. They're going to fight back! Thus, animals have evolved a variety of self-protective behaviors. For instance, many species - including primates - perform grooming behavior that removes parasites from the skin; herds isolate or shun sick individuals; animals eat or use medicinal plants; organisms avoid vomit and poop (don't shit where they eat); and most creatures strive to find healthy partners for sex. This explains the appeal of attractive partners with an appealing aroma, who are less likely to have health issues that affect their appearance and smell.

With regard to human avoidance of parasites and pathogens, McAuliffe describes our "behavioral immune system." To put it simply, this is a repertoire of behaviors that helps us avoid 'disgusting' things that (we instinctively feel) may make us ill. This growing field of study is called disgustology and its proponents are dubbed disgustologists. (ha ha ha). Scientific studies (and everyday observations) demonstrate that people are often repulsed by: cockroaches; rats; spiders; worms; people with bad hygiene; individuals with skin rashes; things that smell bad; revolting foods (which vary with culture); and - oddly enough - clusters of little holes...which apparently remind us of insect eggs.

In fact people's avoidance of pathogens and parasites may have led to the development of culture, religion, racial prejudice, dislike of foreigners, liberal or conservative leanings, and so on. These latter speculations are interesting and provide a unique perspective on human history.

I enjoyed the book, which I found very enlightening. My major criticism would be that the topics range all over the place, with some explanations being better than others. Still, I'd highly recommend the book. If

nothing else, it will give you a little insight into what people feel and do....and provide some excellent conversation starters for social gatherings.

Thanks to Netgalley, the author, and the publisher for a copy of this book.

You can read my book reviews at:

<http://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot.com/>

Atila Iamarino says

Saudades desses livros de bio integrativa interessantes. Kathleen McAuliffe faz um passeio por várias doenças famosas por manipularem o cérebro dos hospedeiros (como Cordyceps e toxoplasmose). Mas trazendo uma série de descobertas novas, a bioquímica que foi descoberta por trás dessas interações e consequências enormes, de sociais a evolutivas da nossa convivências com essas doenças.

Fácil, fácil entre os livros biológicos que mais gostei de ler, pelas curiosidades, coisas nojentas e pela abrangência do que é coberto. Adorei a discussão sobre como organismos lidam com as doenças, incluindo nossa sensação de nojo e o apreço por temperos.

Daphne says

Totally fascinating book. This really is the current cutting edge of biological and evolutionary sciences. I feel so lucky to live in a time where we have wonderful minds figuring this stuff out and then sharing with us.

I wish daily we put more of our world's wealth into pure scientific inquiry.

Rossdavidh says

So, midway through the first chapter of this book, I realized that it was probably going to creep me out. Moreover, I resolved to only read it during the daytime, as it was definitely not good preparation for a trip to dreamland. Forget about cinematic zombies and vampires, this book has the real thing, across multiple species, and raises some awkward questions about humans and free will. Not good topics for late night thinking.

The author began with an article on toxoplasmosis gondii, a parasite that has a complex life cycle. It goes from rats, to cats, to cat feces, and then back to rats. Two of these steps are pretty easy, but one of them is harder because rats have a natural instinct to avoid cats. Of course, perhaps a cat will eventually catch it anyway, but perhaps not, and that's a chance that toxoplasmosis gondii is not going to take.

Instead, it alters the behavior of the host rat. Instead of avoiding the smell of cat urine, it begins to seek it out. Obviously, a rat which seeks out the smell of cat urine is a lot more likely to end up eaten by a cat, than one which avoids it. It all makes sense, from the point of view of toxoplasmosis gondii. It doesn't make so much sense from the point of view of the rat, but it appears that toxoplasmosis gondii gets into the brains of their hosts, and alters their neurons in a way to make them act against their own interests.

This is creepy enough, but it turns out that *Toxoplasma gondii* are able to live in humans as well. We don't end up eaten by cats all that often (nowadays), but it appears that at least sometimes we end up changing our behavior as well. In addition to impacting our ability to smell cat urine (which is an oddly gender-dependent effect), it alters our willingness to take risks. People with *Toxoplasma gondii* infections do not normally end up showing obvious signs, but it has been linked to increased levels of depression, suicide, schizophrenia, and even traffic accidents.

From there, we go on to learn about numerous other parasites that have the ability to manipulate their host's behavior. For example, fungus that makes ants climb up a plant, hang from the bottom side, and then die there with their jaws locked on so that the fungus which sprouts from their body will rain spores down on other ants. Or the wasp that performs brain surgery on a cockroach (admittedly, not a large brain), and then has a compliant zombie which will allow its antennae to be yanked off and will go wherever the wasp steers it to, and stay there. Like, say, in a chamber waiting for the wasp's egg to hatch so the next generation wasp can eat it. It's hard to feel sorry for a cockroach, but that's pretty horrifying.

It gets worse: they are starting to find evidence of more parasites that live in humans, and alter our behavior (hopefully not resulting in any of our limbs being yanked off, though). It gets even worse: with the rapid drop in the price of DNA sequencing, we are able to find out about non-human DNA inside us at an ever-accelerating rate. We may find out about a lot of parasites inside us, that we never knew were there, in the near future. They may live in our gut and make us crave the foods they want, instead of what we should eat. They may do things we haven't even guessed at yet.

Just when you think the book is headed down into a nightmarish melange of uncomfortable science that leaves our concept of free will a bloody pulp, McAuliffe takes a sharp turn, and we start talking about non-parasites. Not everything that lives on us and in us is a parasite, not even if we're just talking about the ones that influence our behavior. Lab mice who are purged of absolutely all microbes, turn out not to be healthier or smarter. Instead, they turn out to be listless, reckless, unable to learn as well, unable to avoid predators. Most of those microbes living inside us do NOT want us to get eaten by a cat, because their lifecycle involves getting passed on to a baby human (or lab mouse, as the case may be), and they need us alive and well to do that.

Then, we go into even stranger ground, and here McAuliffe (by her own admission) is getting a little ahead of the evidence (but not much). There are starting to be more and more researchers looking at whether or not the presence of more or fewer dangerous microbes, has impacted how human cultures evolved. What is the best attitude towards a stranger who shows up? Should marriage outside of the culture you're in be allowed? Is it ok to eat new foods? How should we regard people who travel a lot, and adopt strange practices from other places? McAuliffe thinks it may have something to do with whether there's more or less risk of a new plague showing up with that stranger, or that xenophile from your own tribe who travels abroad and then comes back. The greater the risk of a culture-obliterating parasite, the less the potential payback of new ideas and new friends is worth it. If you don't think it can happen, read up on the fate of the Native American city-based civilizations. Had they been more culturally xenophobic, they might still be here.

Well, maybe. It's certainly an intriguing idea, but lots of intriguing ideas turn out not to be true. On the other hand, the idea that *Toxoplasma gondii* can alter human behavior seemed pretty wacky twenty years ago, and it's now been supported by multiple studies in different countries by different researchers. When McAuliffe points out that we are apt to underestimate the impact of microbes simply because they are not seen, I am reminded that much of the history of the clash between Native Americans and Europeans is pretty much beside the point. If every European settler had been peaceful, and every Native American friendly, the end result would have been much the same, because smallpox, measles, cholera, and a host of other diseases

didn't want to play nice. It was really the microbes that dictated how the West was won, and the humans involved were mostly just vessels, and all the wars fought between them were sideshows that had little impact on the end result.

So McAuliffe's book may or may not be getting the details right, but the underlying message is surely on target. We may not be paying attention to parasites, but they are paying attention to us, and they have been for a long, long time. It's very likely that we are underestimating their impact.

Jen says

My thanks to NetGalley and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt for an eARC copy of this book to read and review.

I just don't know if I can trust any of the information in this book or not. First of all, parasites play a part in about the first half of the book, then the author goes into the gut biome and how society might have been shaped due to communicable disease, which while interesting, takes the focus off of parasites, which due to the title, this reader assumed would be the star of the show. Not exactly as advertised. Not horrible, but not what I was expecting.

Politics also get delved into, pitting liberal versus conservative, which I didn't fancy too much and didn't see much of a connection to re; parasites.

And what made this only two stars for me, the information that I already came into the book knowing, highlighted where the author was either wrong, misinformed, or withholding full information about certain topics. That made me question the information presented that I didn't already know. What was I missing? What was the author leaving out? What was the author misdirecting, either purposefully or by misunderstanding, the reader about?

Two stars because it was an interesting book, but the lack of adhering to the topic at hand, as presented by the title and subtitle of the book (yes, I know author's don't always have control of that, but boo to the person who had the final decision on that) and the lack of information with certain topics causing the veracity of the whole to come into question, makes this two stars.

If you know a lot about the topics of parasites, gut biome and society re: diseases and how they react to them, you might get something out of this book. If you are a newbie, you might also get something out of it, but there are better books out there on these topics, many of which the author used in the creation of this book. I recommend going to the sources, rather than this distillation of them.

Recommended: Parasite Rex by Carl Zimmer, Guns, Germs and Steel and Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed both by Jared Diamond and anything on Paleo by John Durant, Robb Wolf or Loren Cordain.

If you've read all of those and you are looking for something new, published more recently, so it has more recent studies in them, then you may get something out of this.

j_ay says

As I'm finding with most non-fiction books of late, the author entirely loses their thesis somewhere around halfway through the book.

Here we go through the interesting readings of stomach bacteria and toxoplasmosis...then things radically shift to the subject of "disgust". While still somewhat interesting (the birth of religion as seeing these things as punishment, etc)...it is completely off topic.

What is it "editors" do again?

Charlene says

Extremely broad approach to parasites.

This author examines viruses and genes as parasites, as well as tiny creatures we easily identify as parasites. She looks at how all types of parasites might have contributed to building animal bodies and even the cultures in which we live. McAuliffe also provides some of the most up to date information on gut microbes and disgust research.

Sinovera says

Fascinating book! Tons of interesting information that made me very eager to see where the study of parasites will lead us in the future. Admittedly, a lot of extrapolations and assumptions were made in the book but I think that was part of what made it interesting. As parasitology is still a relatively new study, there exists a wide variety of possibilities for the field to take us and I think the book does a great job in showing how important parasitology can be for us. The author herself admits fully that the book is biased to see the world in terms of parasites but, again, I liked that about it. It's a new perspective on society that is very much worth considering.
