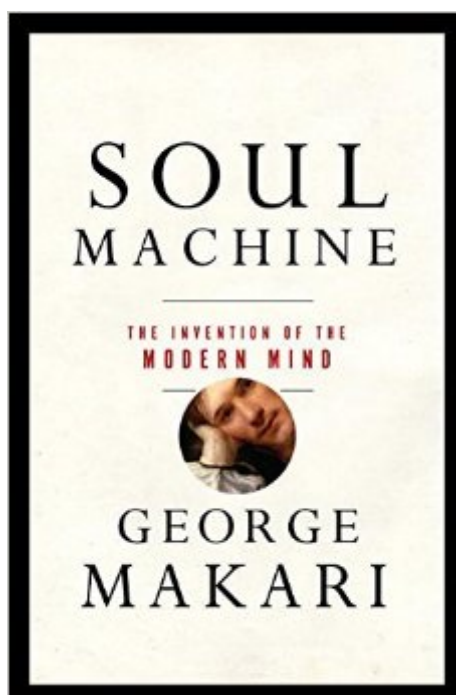


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Soul Machine: The Invention Of The Modern Mind



Synopsis

A brilliant and comprehensive history of the creation of the modern Western mind. *Soul Machine* takes us back to the origins of modernity, a time when a crisis in religious authority and the scientific revolution led to searching questions about the nature of human inner life. This is the story of how a new concept—the mind—emerged as a potential solution, one that was part soul and part machine, but fully neither. In this groundbreaking work, award-winning historian George Makari shows how writers, philosophers, physicians, and anatomists worked to construct notions of the mind as not an ethereal thing, but a natural one. From the ascent of Oliver Cromwell to the fall of Napoleon, seminal thinkers like Hobbes, Locke, Diderot, and Kant worked alongside often-forgotten brain specialists, physiologists, and alienists in the hopes of mapping the inner world. Conducted in a cauldron of political turmoil, these frequently shocking, always embattled efforts would give rise to psychiatry, mind sciences such as phrenology, and radically new visions of the self. Further, they would be crucial to the establishment of secular ethics and political liberalism. Boldly original, wide-ranging, and brilliantly synthetic, *Soul Machine* gives us a masterful, new account of the making of the modern Western mind. 44 illustrations

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Nature has played a grim trick on us humans. We are equipped with a mind and presumably a soul, but human reason is a meager instrument for answering life's crucial questions about them. Is the brain at birth endowed with trappings such as a conscience, a soul, and an inherent goodness, or are we condemned by original sin? More to the point, does the soul even exist or is it perhaps a

metaphor devised by theologians over the centuries to give us hope of immortality, fear of hell, and, not incidentally, to keep us properly submissive to the state? If we do have a soul, how does it differ from the mind, or are soul and mind synonymous? For centuries philosophers have debated the imponderable structure of the mind. What is the relationship between the brain and the mind? Is the brain simply the repository for the thinking mind? Is this lump of gray flesh a machine of some sort as it appears to be in most animals? Is the soul physically located in the brain? Can the answers to these questions best be found through philosophy, medicine, or theology? If you've pondered some of these questions you should find this book absorbing; not that the imponderables will be revealed, but the author has compiled a fascinating history of the mind and related issues covering a span of about three centuries. Before The Enlightenment theories of the mind and soul originated with the early Greeks, principally Aristotle, and later with theologians such as Aquinas and Augustine. Then in the mid-17th century Enlightenment philosophers began to question the appropriate relation between religion, medicine, the individual, and the state. Anyone who is intrigued by the theories of philosophers such as Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Spinoza, Hume, Voltaire, and the like will find this account fascinating.

By the end of George Makari's engaging "indeed monumental" *Soul Machine: The Invention of the Modern Mind* (W.W. Norton 2016: 652 pp.) one comes to understand that the modern mind is more ancient than most people believe and the ancient mind is more modern than one might have imagined. Makari works his way up to Johann Reil's (1759 - 1813) coining of the term "psychiaterie," Wilhelm Griesinger's declaration that all mental illnesses are localized brain diseases (1845), and Johannes Müller's (1801 - 1858) student Ernst Brücke (1819 - 1892), in whose lab Sigmund Freud would labor for many years dissecting the sexual organs of eels. Thus, Makari's latest contribution provides a pre-quel to his own Freud book (*Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis* (Harper Perennial, 2008, 613 pp.)). The distinctive contribution of Makari's *Soul Machine* is to explore the collision of scientific causality (mechanism) against religious doctrine, both committed to relieving the seemingly intractable forms of suffering that we today describe as "mental illness." Makari depicts a war between the proponents of religion authority and the advocates of mechanically scientific explanations of psychic dynamics. Just as in war, truth is the first casualty; sometimes in ministering to a soul dis-eased, the would-be patient gets lost in the shuffle - and suffers. The contribution of Michel Foucault in the debate is acknowledged but Makari parts company with him early on. The power structures of the prevailing episteme (or paradigm) have nothing to do with leveling the workforce to provide labor for

early industrial capitalism, according to Makari, but rather with a conflict of ideas between scientific mechanism and authoritarian religiosity.

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