

CONTACTS:
Suzanne Williams
Shreve Williams Public Relations
908.375.8159 / Suzanne@shrevewilliams.com
Brian McLendon, Twelve
212.364.0509 / brian.mclendon@hbgusa.com



DENIAL

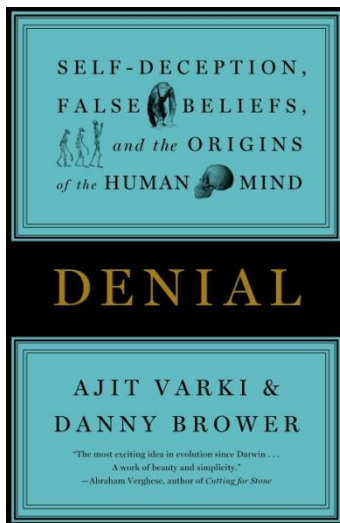
Self-Deception, False Beliefs, and the Origins of the Human Mind Ajit Varki and Danny Brower

"This is perhaps **the most exciting idea in evolution that I have read since Darwin**. Danny Brower's manuscript survived his untimely death and how it came to Ajit Varki's hands is an evolutionary story in itself. Varki is a renowned physician-scientist, and what Ajit is doing is to take this manuscript and reworking it, producing **a work of beauty and simplicity. It is the tale of the very thing that makes us human. A marvel.**"

— Abraham Verghese, author of *Cutting for Stone*

"Denial isn't often regarded as a positive thing, but according to this stimulating speculation on consciousness and evolution, it could be **the key to human intelligence**... An engaging tour of evolutionary biology, anthropology, and cognitive psychology, touching on everything from animal intelligence to autism, religion, and extraterrestrial life. Theirs is **a provocative and philosophically rich... account of human origins.**"

—Publishers Weekly



"Groundbreaking new ideas often come from the most unexpected sources. Here is such an instance, wherein two scholars from disparate disciplines unrelated to human origins have come up with **a completely novel theory—to explain one of the most fundamental of human questions: where did we humans come from, and how did we get here? A must read for anyone interested in this age-old quest.**"

— Peter Agre, winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry,
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

"Quite a book, with a revolutionary point of view that I find critically interesting. An enormous effort—an intriguing message and a major contribution."

— Roger Guillemin, winner of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine;
Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla, CA

The history of science abounds with momentous theories that disrupted conventional wisdom and yet were eventually proven true. Ajit Varki and Danny Brower's "Mind-Over-Reality" theory is poised to be one such idea—a concept that runs counter to commonly held notions about human evolution, but which may hold the key to understanding why humans evolved as we did, leaving all other related species far

behind. In **DENIAL: Self Deception, False Beliefs, and the Origins of the Human Mind** (Twelve Hardcover and Ebook; June 4, 2013; \$27.00), which has advance quotes from two Nobel prize-winning scientists and various bestselling writers, Varki and Brower offer us their revolutionary theory that alters our understanding of human evolution.

At a chance meeting in 2005, Danny Brower posed an unusual idea to Ajit Varki that that he believed could explain the origins of human uniqueness among the world's species in a revolutionary way. Haunted by this encounter, Varki tried years later to contact Brower, only to discover that he had died unexpectedly. Inspired by an unfinished manuscript Brower left behind, **DENIAL** represents a unique collaboration that integrates Varki's own knowledge on human origins to explain what sets us apart from other animal species: our ability to fully understand the minds of others. This single evolutionary leap, they argue, required crossing a psychological barrier: giving us the uniquely human ability to deny reality in the face of inarguable evidence—including the willful ignorance of our own inevitable deaths. However, our unique instinct for denial will also be our undoing, if we continue to disregard the consequences of unrealistic approaches to everything from personal health to financial risk-taking to climate change. Only in understanding this radical new idea can we hope to tackle the many vexing issues facing us today, and to imagine where our species might go from here.

Presented in homage to Brower's original thinking, **DENIAL** offers a powerful warning about the dangers inherent in our remarkable ability to ignore reality—a gift that will either lead to our downfall, or continue to be our greatest asset.

About the Authors

AJIT VARKI is a physician-scientist who is currently Distinguished Professor of Medicine and Cellular and Molecular Medicine, Co-director of the Glycobiology Research and Training Center at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), and co-director of the UCSD/Salk Center for Academic Research and Training in Anthropogeny.

DANNY BROWER, an insect geneticist, was Professor and Chair of Molecular and Cellular Biology at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He died in 2007.

* * *

DENIAL Self-Deception, False Beliefs, and the Origins of the Human Mind

Ajit Varki and Danny Brower

TWELVE

On Sale Date: June 4, 2013

Hardcover ISBN: 9781455511914; \$27.00; 368 pages

EBook ISBN: 9781455511921; \$12.99

Audiobook ISBN: 9781611137606; \$24.98; Unabridged

www.twelvebooks.com



You Think You'll Live Forever: PW Talks with Ajit Varki

By Will Boisvert | May 03, 2013



Photo by Linda Nelson

*Biologist Ajit Varki, coauthor (with the late Danny Brower) of *Denial: Self-Deception, False Beliefs and the Origins of the Human Mind*, argues that the defiance of mortality is what makes us human.*

You write that the evolution of human intelligence required the crossing of a “death anxiety barrier.” What do you mean by that?

The key to human intelligence is our “theory of mind,” our genetic ability to be aware of ourselves as individuals and also of the self-awareness of others. Imagine that you’re the first human with this ability, and then one of your friends dies. Because you can identify with the dying friend, you would be the first person who truly understands death and that everyone dies, and you would retreat into a fearful, anxious state.

What would the consequences be?

Terror would have made you dysfunctional in passing your genes on. You would be scared to fight another caveman for a mate. If you were a woman who had just watched another woman die in childbirth, you would say, “I don’t want that!” and you would avoid procreation. So at the same time in our evolution we had to come up with a compensating psychological trick: the ability to deny the reality that we will all die.

You contend that the primordial phenomenon of men lying about themselves to impress women was one of the key processes in that evolving denial of reality. How so?

With a theory of mind, a male will present himself as having all sorts of abilities and knowledge and resources he may not have. Conversely, the female has to use her theory of mind to be a good lie detector. To convince women of the lies they’re telling, it helps if men believe their own lies—if they evolve an ability to deny reality to themselves. So you’ve got pathological lying going on; meanwhile, you’ve got depressed people who are committing suicide.

It sounds like a Stone Age existentialist novel!

We’re not yet fully adjusted to all this. One of the theories about major depression is that depressed people are the true realists—if you really want to know the facts, talk to them. The rest of us, fortunately, are in a state of denial and optimism. What is optimism? Denial of reality. What is extreme optimism? Extreme denial of reality.

Yet you feel that the denial of reality that enabled our species to survive and flourish could now be threatening our collective future.

And at an individual level, too. We know what we are supposed to do in terms of exercise and diet, yet most of us ignore it; we have this magical way of thinking, of denying the reality we face. Look at our national debt: we just ignore it and somehow imagine it’s going to go away. Our failure to do anything about climate change is the ultimate form of denial—now, of course, that reality is staring us in the face.

Permalink: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/57072-you-think-you-ll-live-forever-pw-talks-with-ajit-varki.html>

More Praise for **DENIAL**

"A tremendously engaging story—full of human interest, wit, scientific detective work, and imaginative speculation. It's great to see Varki and Brower pushing the limits. It makes us fellow-travellers into the field of the known unknowns."

—Nicholas Humphrey, author of *Soul Dust* and *The Mind Made Flesh*

"This book answers the never-ending quest of what sets our species apart with a delightful suggestion. It is not so much our awareness of mortality that is special, the authors claim, but rather our ability to push this awareness to the farthest recesses of our minds. The ostrich has nothing on us."

— Frans de Waal, author of *The Bonobo and the Atheist*

"I found **DENIAL** intriguing at first, while perusing it. It soon became fascinating as I started to read it in earnest. I have long held that once they acquired the advanced intelligence characteristic of *Homo sapiens*, our ancestors became aware of their mortality. Anxiety about death leads to belief in the afterlife and other religious and ethical tenets. That is what I had learned from philosophers, theologians and others. **DENIAL** turns these ideas on their head. **DENIAL** forcefully argues that it was awareness of mortality and its ensuing denial that prompted the evolution of our exalted intelligence.

Original, engaging, and beautifully written."

—Francisco J. Ayala, University Professor and Donald Bren Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of California, Irvine; recipient of the National Medal of Science and the Templeton Prize, author of *The Big Questions: Evolution*.

"A magnificent scholarly work, both in terms of the science and the manner in which Varki has ethically tackled a gigantic path opened up by Brower. Wherever one dips into it, one gets involved almost immediately in some fascinating question. A superb book."

— Derek Denton *FRS*, University of Melbourne, Author of *Primordial Emotions*

"Engaging and intellectually exciting. Almost as fascinating as the novel ideas of Brower on the evolutionary origins of a distinctly human consciousness is Varki's story of how he stumbled upon them, and became preoccupied with their potentially profound implications about what differentiates humans."

—Sanjay Nigam, author of *Snake Charmer* and *Transplanted Man*

"A highly readable manifesto for anthropogeny (the study of human origins), **DENIAL** is written in a lively and engaging style that communicates the excitement of asking the big questions: how are humans different from all other species, and why did other species not evolve a full theory of mind, given the wide-ranging benefits that this brings to humans? Issuing a provocative challenge to future scientists, Ajit Varki's scholarly journey leads him to speculate about the role of our awareness of our mortality, and our simultaneous tendency to live in denial of it."

— Simon Baron-Cohen, Director, Autism Research Centre, Cambridge University

"A surprising and stimulating book that explores a deep insight into those psychological innovations that make us human."

— Peter Lawrence, Cambridge University, Darwin Medalist of the Royal Society.

"A gifted scientist with an encompassing humanitarian vision, Ajit Varki suggests that our blithe but false supposition that we will just go on living, day after day, is an evolutionary adaptation—one that has played a crucial role in the evolution of the human brain. Clear, cogent and compelling, *Denial* makes you ponder our habitual death-denial and why it is so robust. Does this hypothesis convince me? I am constitutionally a tough sell, especially when it comes to big ideas. Still, I do take this one very seriously.

The more I kick its tires, the more sturdy it seems."

— Patricia Smith Churchland, MacArthur Fellow, University of California Presidential Professor of Philosophy, Author: *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells us About Morality*