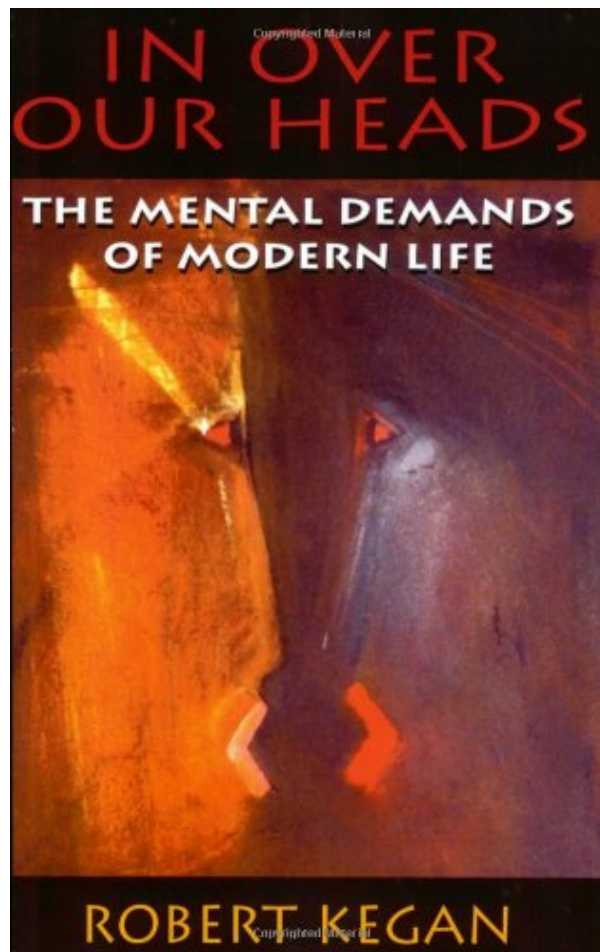
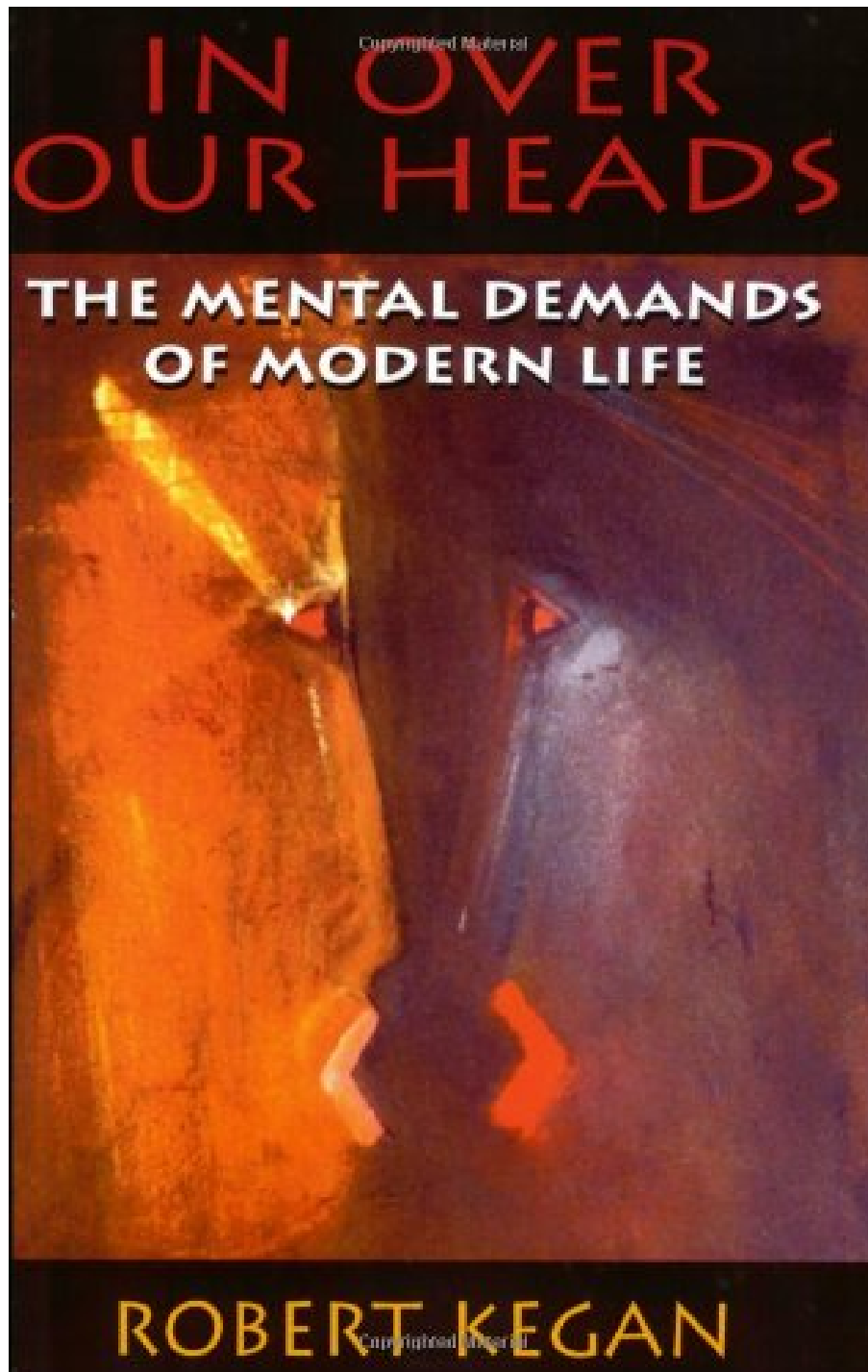


**IN OVER OUR HEADS: THE MENTAL
DEMANDS OF MODERN LIFE BY ROBERT
KEGAN**



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Review

A stimulating tour through the modern mind in society... In Over Our Heads is full of insight; it reflects broad learning and enormous intellectual effort. (David Mehegan Boston Sunday Globe)

[This book] is intellectually exciting and far-reaching in its implications... Kegan's writing has much to offer developmental psychology, which suffers from a dearth of theoretical frameworks in the area of adult development... This book invites readers to work hard but rewards them greatly. There are foundation-shaking theoretical and research challenges here for mainstream psychology, especially behavioral and social learning approaches that focus on skill training and cumulative (quantitative) change... I thoroughly recommend this exciting book... It has the potential to transform our texts on life span development. It is a book that opens up whole new vistas for developmental researchers, as well as psychologists whose practice includes adult clients. (Marie R. Joyce Contemporary Psychology)

A dazzling intellectual tour... In Over Our Heads provides us with entirely fresh perspectives on a number of cultural controversies?the 'abstinence vs. safe sex' debate, the diversity movement, communication across genders, the meaning of postmodernism. (Health and Recovery)

From the Back Cover

As parents and partners, employees and bosses, citizens and leaders, we constantly confront a bewildering array of expectations as well as a confusing assortment of expert opinions on what each of these roles entails.

About the Author

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IN OVER OUR HEADS: THE MENTAL DEMANDS OF MODERN LIFE BY ROBERT KEGAN PDF

If contemporary culture were a school, with all the tasks and expectations meted out by modern life as its curriculum, would anyone graduate? In the spirit of a sympathetic teacher, Robert Kegan guides us through this tricky curriculum, assessing the fit between its complex demands and our mental capacities, and showing what happens when we find ourselves, as we so often do, in over our heads. In this dazzling intellectual tour, he completely reintroduces us to the psychological landscape of our private and public lives.

A decade ago in *The Evolving Self*, Kegan presented a dynamic view of the development of human consciousness. Here he applies this widely acclaimed theory to the mental complexity of adulthood. As parents and partners, employees and bosses, citizens and leaders, we constantly confront a bewildering array of expectations, prescriptions, claims, and demands, as well as an equally confusing assortment of expert opinions that tell us what each of these roles entails. Surveying the disparate expert “literatures,” which normally take no account of each other, Kegan brings them together to reveal, for the first time, what these many demands have in common. Our frequent frustration in trying to meet these complex and often conflicting claims results, he shows us, from a mismatch between the way we ordinarily know the world and the way we are unwittingly expected to understand it.

In Over Our Heads provides us entirely fresh perspectives on a number of cultural controversies—the “abstinence vs. safe sex” debate, the diversity movement, communication across genders, the meaning of postmodernism. What emerges in these pages is a theory of evolving ways of knowing that allows us to view adult development much as we view child development, as an open-ended process born of the dynamic interaction of cultural demands and emerging mental capabilities. If our culture is to be a good “school,” as Kegan suggests, it must offer, along with a challenging curriculum, the guidance and support that we clearly need to master this course—a need that this lucid and richly argued book begins to meet.

- Sales Rank: #55510 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Harvard University Press
- Published on: 1998-07-21
- Released on: 1995-07-14
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.21" h x 1.07" w x 6.14" l, 1.31 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 396 pages

Features

- Used Book in Good Condition

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Most helpful customer reviews

96 of 100 people found the following review helpful.

How Do You Think?

By Marcy L. Thompson

I was amazed by this book. I was reading it when we left for a two-day driving trip. Even though I am unable to read in a moving car, I kept it near at hand to read whenever we stopped at a rest area or gas station. It was so compelling that when I finished it, I immediately tossed it back near the top of my to-read pile. The second time through, I found that it had just as much to offer (if not more) as it had the first time.

Every once in awhile, I run across a book that helps me reorganize the way I think about the world. This is such a book. Through the use of examples and detailed examination of various aspects of modern life, Kegan considers what kinds of demands the world puts on us for thinking and relating. He makes a very solid case that cognitive development does not end after one passes through the developmental stages of childhood and adolescence (magical, concrete and abstract).

By carefully considering what it is exactly that we ask adolescents to do in making the transition from concrete to abstract cognition, Kegan sets the groundwork for a careful explanation of what the next order of thought is, what it looks like, and how the modern world demands that we master it. he looks in detail at just what we ask from adults in the areas of parenting, partnering, work, dealing with difference, healing and learning. In each case, he shows that the modern world is set up so that people thrive best if they can use what he calls a fourth-order way of relating to the world, other people, and oneself.

This book helped me understand observations that had puzzled me, and suggests ways in which adult education theories (which generally drive me crazy) need to be expanded to explain what really happens when adults come together to learn.

One very interesting thing about this book is that Kegan is able to report on research studies that support his theory. Probably the most important thing this book does is to provide a framework for considering people in the context of how they individually construct the world and their relationship to it, which allows me to judge whether a person is authentic, courageous or generous on his own terms, not on mine.

89 of 93 people found the following review helpful.

An Incredible Book

By disco75

This tour-de-force does much to explain how people's interactions are affected by their developmental stage and goes a long way toward fleshing out adult developmental theories. It hypothesizes that mental development is intricately entwined with world view and one's understanding of events and roles. It explains relations between romantic partners, family members, communities, and cultures. Kegan's hypotheses are informed, but not limited, by existing psychological frameworks. He is like a sociologist in his outlook and a psychologist in his theorizing. He writes about sophisticated ideas and complex topics in a clear and approachable way. His conception of mental development is not easy to grasp in its entirety but pondering it is well worth the effort. The book is one of the best written in the last 20 years in any field.

59 of 63 people found the following review helpful.

Kegan is in over my head...

By Chad Oberholtzer

I will begin by simply admitting that of all the books that I have read in my life, this was one of the most laborious for me to finish. The first several chapters were rather grueling, I settled into things a bit in the middle, and the end was downright painful. I am not conceited enough to think that no book should ever be written that might challenge my mind, but I am also not some sort of mental misfit.

My frustration centers around the fact that Kegan's writing was so dense. Some of his sentences were whole paragraphs long, with multiple parenthetical phrases. I realize that Kegan is an intellectual giant and works in academia, but it seems to me that his greatest weakness (and the most significant barrier that prevents his ideas from reaching a broader audience) is his inability (or refusal, whichever the case may be) to write in a more accessible style. He mentioned in his Prologue that he apparently received considerable criticism about his earlier book, "The Evolving Self," for its inaccessibility. If "In Over Our Heads" is an improvement, I shudder to think about reading its predecessor.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that Kegan doesn't have some helpful things to say. In fact, the overarching premise of the book (that modern life demands adults to process on a fourth level of consciousness, which is all too rare and leaves many people struggling to keep their heads above water) is solid and makes sense. And the anecdotes and stories that he includes are helpful in clarifying his points. But I just didn't think it was worth the effort to try to wade through his writing style. I'm sure that many social scientists have been captivated by this book, but for the general population, only the rarest of readers will find Kegan sufficiently engaging to endure this beast. I'm glad that I got through it, but I'm hard-pressed to recommend it to others.

See all 20 customer reviews...

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