

Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind

Claude Levi Strauss the savage mind is a phrase that immediately brings to mind the profound exploration of human thought, culture, and mythology undertaken by one of the most influential anthropologists and structuralists of the 20th century. His seminal work, *The Savage Mind* (originally published as *La Pensée Sauvage* in 1962), challenges conventional notions of primitive versus civilized societies by revealing the complex, logical structures underlying what might appear to be "savage" or "primitive" thought processes. Levi Strauss's insights have reshaped how scholars understand the universality of human cognition, the role of myth and symbolism, and the underlying structures that govern cultural systems worldwide. This article delves into the core ideas of Claude Levi Strauss's *The Savage Mind*, examining its themes, methodology, and lasting impact on anthropology, philosophy, and cultural studies. We will explore how Levi Strauss dismantles stereotypes about "primitive" societies, introduces structuralist analysis, and highlights the continuity of human thought across different cultures.

Understanding the Central Thesis of The Savage Mind

The Concept of "Bricolage" and "Science"

One of Levi Strauss's key contributions in *The Savage Mind* is the distinction between two modes of thought: bricolage and science. These concepts serve as metaphors to understand how humans categorize and interpret

their world.

1. **Bricolage:** The term derives from French, meaning "do-it-yourself" or "tinkering." Bricolage describes a mode of thought characterized by improvisation, recombination, and the use of available resources. It is typical of traditional, myth-based, and oral cultures, where individuals create meaning by piecing together existing symbols, myths, and practices.
2. **Science:** In contrast, science is viewed as a systematic, analytical approach that seeks to understand the world through experimentation, classification, and logical reasoning. It is a mode of thought associated with modern, Western scientific methods.

Levi Strauss argues that bricolage is not inferior to scientific reasoning but is equally capable of producing complex, meaningful systems of thought. Primitive societies, often dismissed as "savage," employ bricolage to organize their worldview, myths, and rituals.

The Myth of Primitive Thought

Levi Strauss challenges the stereotypical view that "primitive" societies lack rationality or complex thought. Instead, he demonstrates that the logic underlying myth-making, classification, and ritual in these societies is sophisticated and systematic.

- Myths often function as a form of cosmological knowledge that explains the origins of the world, social structures, and natural phenomena.
- Cultural practices are based on logical classifications, such as the categorization of animals, plants, or social roles.
- Primitive thought employs binary oppositions—such as good vs. evil, life vs. death, nature vs. culture—to structure their worldview. By analyzing these patterns, Levi Strauss shows that all human thought, regardless of technological development or societal complexity, shares fundamental logical structures.

Structuralism and the Methodology of The Savage Mind

The Structuralist Approach

Levi Strauss's work is often regarded as a cornerstone of structuralism—a method that seeks to uncover the underlying systems of relationships that give meaning to cultural phenomena. - Structuralism posits that human cultures can be understood as systems of signs governed by rules and oppositions. - The focus is on deep structures, which are universal mental patterns shared across cultures. - By comparing myths, rituals, and classifications, scholars can identify common structures that reveal the universality of human cognition.

Analytical Techniques

Levi Strauss employs a comparative method, examining diverse myths, rites, and social patterns to identify recurring structures. Some key techniques include: - Binary Oppositions: Identifying pairs of contrasting elements that organize thought. - Myth Analysis: Breaking down myths into their constituent parts to reveal underlying patterns. - Classification Schemes: Studying how societies categorize natural and social phenomena. This systematic approach allows Levi Strauss to argue that "primitive" societies are not less rational but instead operate according to different, yet equally complex, logical frameworks.

The Significance of The Savage Mind in Anthropology and Beyond

Reconsidering "Primitiveness"

One of the most impactful aspects of Levi Strauss's work is his challenge to the notion that modern civilization is the pinnacle of human thought. Instead, he suggests that different societies employ diverse modes of reasoning, each with its own internal logic. - The Savage Mind demonstrates that what is called "primitive" is often more innovative and adaptive than previously thought. - It emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural logic on its own terms rather than judging it by Western standards.

Influence on Structuralism and Post-Structuralism

Levi Strauss's ideas laid the groundwork for later developments in structuralist and post-structuralist thought. - His emphasis on underlying structures influenced theorists like Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. - The notion that cultural phenomena operate within systems of signs foreshadowed semiotics and literary theory.

Applications Beyond Anthropology

The principles outlined in The Savage Mind extend beyond anthropology into fields such as: - Literary criticism - Cultural studies - Psychology - Philosophy - Cognitive science By revealing the universality of mental structures, Levi Strauss provided tools to analyze texts, media, and social institutions through the lens of binary oppositions and systemic relationships.

Critical Perspectives and Legacy

Criticism of Levi Strauss's Approach

While widely influential, Levi Strauss's structuralist methodology has faced criticism: - Some argue that it overemphasizes universality at the expense of cultural specificity. - Critics suggest that his focus on binary oppositions can oversimplify complex cultural realities. - Others question whether the emphasis on underlying structures neglects historical context and agency.

Legacy and Continuing Relevance

Despite critiques, Levi Strauss's *The Savage Mind* remains a foundational text in understanding human cognition and culture. - It shifted the paradigm from viewing non-Western societies as less developed to recognizing their equally complex systems of thought. - His concepts of bricolage and binary oppositions continue to influence fields like semiotics, myth theory, and cognitive anthropology.

Conclusion

Claude Levi Strauss's *The Savage Mind* offers a transformative perspective on how humans think, categorize, and create meaning. By demonstrating that primitive societies employ logical, systematic thought processes akin to modern science, Levi Strauss bridges the perceived divide between the "savage" and the "civilized." His emphasis on the universality of mental structures and his innovative methodological approach have left an indelible mark on anthropology, philosophy, and cultural theory. Ultimately, Levi Strauss invites us to reconsider notions of rationality, progress, and cultural superiority, recognizing that beneath diverse cultural expressions lies a shared human capacity for thought and imagination—an eternal "savage mind" that is fundamentally human.

Claude Lévi-Strauss and *The Savage Mind*: A Deep Dive into Structural Anthropology

Introduction: The Significance of The Savage Mind

Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (originally *La Pensée Sauvage*, published in 1962) stands as a pivotal work in the landscape of anthropology, philosophy, and cognitive sciences. This book challenges conventional Western notions of rationality and uncovers the profound complexity of indigenous thought systems around the world. It serves as a cornerstone in understanding how human cognition, regardless of cultural context, operates through underlying structures and patterns.

Background and Context

Who Was Claude Lévi-Strauss?

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) was a French anthropologist and ethnologist renowned for developing structuralism—a methodology that seeks to understand the underlying systems that shape human culture and thought. His approach emphasized that all human societies, regardless of technological development or complexity, organize their worldview through shared mental structures.

The Evolution of His Thought

Lévi-Strauss's earlier works, such as *The Raw and the Cooked* and *Structural Anthropology*, laid the groundwork for *The Savage Mind*. These works examined myths, kinship, and cultural practices, revealing that beneath surface differences lie universal mental structures. *The Savage Mind* consolidates and broadens these ideas, focusing specifically on the way indigenous and "primitive" peoples categorize and interpret their worlds.

Core Themes of The Savage Mind

1. The Concept of "Bricolage"

One of Lévi-Strauss's most influential ideas is that of *bricolage*—a mode of thought characterized by *bricolant* (DIY) approaches, where individuals use available tools and symbols to solve problems and create meaning.

1. Definition: Bricolage is a form of thinking that relies on recombination, improvisation, and the use of familiar elements to generate new ideas.
2. Implication: It contrasts with the Western notion of science as a systematic, rational pursuit based on abstraction and deduction.
3. Examples: Indigenous myth-making, religious rituals, and folk practices often exemplify bricolage, where symbols and myths are recombined in innovative ways.

1. The Distinction Between Classificatory and Mythical Thinking

Lévi-Strauss distinguishes between two modes of thought prevalent in human cultures:

1. Classificatory Thinking:
 2. Involves categorizing and organizing the world based on observable traits.
 3. Example: kinship systems, taxonomy, and classification of plants and animals.
 4. Characterized by logical, systematic structures that are often pragmatic.
1. Mythical or "Savage" Thinking:
 2. Engages with the world through storytelling, symbolism, and metaphor.
 3. Often seeks to explain origins, natural phenomena, or social order.
 4. This mode is more fluid, creative, and non-linear.

Lévi-Strauss argues that both modes are fundamental to human cognition, and what Western rationalism tends to dismiss as primitive or irrational is, in fact, a different but equally complex form of reasoning.

1. The Role of Binary Oppositions

A central idea in the book is that human cognition is structured around binary oppositions—paired concepts that organize thought.

1. Examples include:
 2. Life / Death
 3. Good / Evil

4. Nature / Culture
5. Male / Female
6. These oppositions are not merely linguistic but form the mental framework through which societies interpret the world.
7. Such structures are found universally, indicating an innate aspect of human cognition.

1. The Logic of the "Savage Mind"

Lévi-Strauss emphasizes that what he calls the savage mind—a term describing the thought processes of indigenous peoples—is not "less rational" but operates according to its own internal logic.

1. The "savage mind" employs analogical reasoning and reduction rather than the deductive reasoning typical of Western science.
2. It seeks coherence within a symbolic universe rather than objective empirical validation.

Deep Analysis of Key Concepts

Bricolage vs. Science

Lévi-Strauss contrasts bricolage with scientific reasoning:

Aspect	Bricolage	Science
Approach	Recombining familiar elements	Abstracting and generalizing from data
Mode of Thought	Intuitive, improvisational	Systematic, logical
Goal	Make sense of the world through symbols	Discover universal laws or truths
Examples	Myth creation, folk practices	Physics, biology, formal logic

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While science seeks truth through rigorous experimentation, bricolage

reflects a cultural process of making meaning that is equally valid within its context.

Myth and Classification

Lévi-Strauss reveals that myths serve a classificatory function, helping societies organize their knowledge:

1. Myths classify natural phenomena, social roles, and origins.
2. They often involve binary oppositions, providing a framework to interpret the world.
3. Example: The myth of the origin of fire in some cultures explains the transition from darkness to light, symbolizing knowledge and civilization.

The Universality of Mental Structures

Lévi-Strauss argues that:

1. All human societies, regardless of technological development, organize their worldview through shared structures.
2. These include binary oppositions, mythical narratives, and classification systems.
3. This universality points to an innate human mental architecture, akin to the universal grammar in linguistics.

The Methodology and Approach

Structuralism as a Method

The Savage Mind exemplifies Lévi-Strauss's structuralist methodology:

1. Goals:
2. Uncover the deep structures underlying cultural phenomena.
3. Demonstrate that diverse cultural expressions are variations on common themes.
4. Techniques:
5. Analyze myths, kinship, and language for recurring patterns.
6. Identify binary oppositions and symbolic logic that structure thought.

Cross-Cultural Analysis

Lévi-Strauss emphasizes the importance of comparative analysis:

1. Comparing myths from different cultures reveals universal patterns.
2. For instance, myths about cosmic origins often involve dualities, such as chaos/order or darkness/light.

Critical Reception and Impact

Contributions to Anthropology

1. The book revolutionized perceptions of "primitive" societies, demonstrating their complexity and rationality.
2. It challenged ethnocentric biases that viewed indigenous thought as irrational or simplistic.

Influence on Other Disciplines

1. Linguistics: contributed to the development of structural linguistics.
2. Literary Criticism: influenced narratology and analysis of myth and folklore.
3. Cognitive Science: inspired theories about the universality of mental structures.

Criticisms and Limitations

While groundbreaking, *The Savage Mind* has faced critiques:

1. Overgeneralization: some argue Lévi-Strauss overemphasizes structural similarities, risking neglect of cultural differences.
2. Western Bias?: despite efforts to be non-ethnocentric, critics question whether his framing still reflects Western conceptual categories.
3. Reductionism: some see structuralism as reducing complex cultures to mere patterns, ignoring historical and political contexts.

Legacy and Continuing Relevance

The Savage Mind remains a foundational text for understanding human

cognition and cultural diversity. Its emphasis on the universality of mental structures encourages scholars to view indigenous and "primitive" cultures as rational and sophisticated in their own right.

In contemporary anthropology and cognitive sciences, Lévi-Strauss's ideas serve as a reminder that:

1. Rationality manifests in diverse forms.
2. Cultural expressions are deeply rooted in shared human mental architectures.
3. Understanding these patterns fosters cross-cultural appreciation and dialogue.

Final Reflections

Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* is more than a mere academic treatise; it is a profound exploration of the human condition. By unveiling the intricate structures underpinning thought across cultures, Lévi-Strauss invites us to reconsider notions of rationality, belief, and knowledge. His work underscores that the savage mind—far from being primitive—is a testament to the universality and diversity of human ingenuity. Whether analyzing myths, classification systems, or symbolic practices, *The Savage Mind* remains a seminal work that challenges us to see the complexity and sophistication inherent in all forms of human thought.

Learning no longer follows a single path. In today's digital environment, people absorb knowledge in ways that are flexible, personal, and often spontaneous. Within this shift, the ability to download ***Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind*** plays a quiet but powerful role. It allows information to move freely, fitting into real lives rather than forcing readers to adjust their routines around physical limitations.

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At the same time, digital tools add a new layer of engagement. Readers can highlight meaningful passages, write personal notes, bookmark important sections, and search for specific terms instantly. These features turn ***Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind*** into an interactive workspace rather than a static document. Learning becomes active, reflective, and

deeply personal.

Search functionality deserves special attention. When working with longer texts, the ability to locate information quickly can transform the reading experience. Instead of scanning page after page, readers can focus on understanding and analysis. This efficiency benefits students, researchers, and professionals who rely on precise information.

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Digital access also reflects a broader cultural shift toward lifelong learning. Education is no longer confined to formal classrooms or specific life stages. People learn continuously—out of curiosity, necessity, or personal interest. Having ***Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind*** readily available supports this ongoing process, making learning feel natural rather than obligatory.

Self-directed learning thrives in this environment. Readers choose their pace, their focus, and their depth of engagement. Some may read cover to cover, while others return to specific sections as needed. This flexibility respects individual learning styles and encourages sustained interest over time.

Critical thinking also benefits from digital accessibility. When multiple resources are easily available, readers can compare ideas, question assumptions, and develop informed perspectives. Engaging with **Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind** alongside other materials fosters analytical skills and deeper understanding, which are essential in both academic and professional contexts.

Digital formats encourage exploration across disciplines. A reader interested in one topic can quickly branch into related areas, discovering connections that might otherwise remain hidden. This freedom supports creativity and innovation, as ideas often emerge at the intersection of different fields.

For students, downloadable books provide practical advantages. Offline access ensures uninterrupted study, while annotation tools simplify note-taking and revision. Digital organization makes it easier to manage multiple subjects and materials, reducing stress and improving focus.

Educators also benefit from digital availability. Sharing resources becomes simpler, and materials can be updated or supplemented without logistical challenges. Access to **Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind** allows instructors to adapt content to different learning environments, including remote and hybrid settings.

Accessibility is another important consideration. Digital readers often include features such as adjustable text size, night mode, and text-to-speech options. These tools help accommodate diverse learning needs,

ensuring that **Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind** remains accessible to a broader audience.

Environmental impact adds another dimension to digital learning. While technology is not without cost, distributing content digitally often requires fewer physical resources than printing and shipping books. Over time, this approach contributes to more sustainable knowledge sharing.

Organization also improves with digital libraries. Files can be categorized, backed up, and retrieved instantly. Readers can build personal collections that grow without clutter, making it easier to revisit **Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind** whenever needed.

Perhaps most importantly, digital access changes how people feel about learning. When information is easy to reach, curiosity feels welcome rather than inconvenient. Readers are more likely to explore new ideas, return to old interests, and continue learning simply because the barriers are low.

In the end, downloading **Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind** represents more than a technological convenience. It reflects a shift toward accessible, flexible, and thoughtful learning. When used responsibly through trusted platforms, digital books become reliable companions—supporting curiosity, critical thinking, and continuous personal growth in a world that never stops changing.

Questions & Answers About claude levi strauss the savage mind

No	Question	Answer
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1	What is the main thesis of Claude Lévi-Strauss's 'The Savage Mind'?	Lévi-Strauss argues that indigenous peoples' thought processes are structurally similar to those of Western societies, emphasizing that all human minds operate through similar binary oppositions and classifications, challenging the idea of 'primitive' versus 'civilized' thinking.
2	How does Lévi-Strauss define 'the savage mind' in his book?	He defines 'the savage mind' as the way indigenous peoples organize their knowledge and culture through myths, classifications, and binary oppositions, demonstrating that their thought processes are as complex and systematic as those of Western cultures.
3	Why is 'The Savage Mind' considered a foundational text in structuralism?	'The Savage Mind' is considered foundational because it introduces the idea that human thought, regardless of culture, shares universal structures, making it a key text in understanding structuralist anthropology and semiotics.
4	In what way does Lévi-Strauss challenge Western notions of progress and civilization in 'The Savage Mind'?	He challenges the idea that Western civilization is superior by highlighting the sophistication of indigenous thought processes and demonstrating that 'savage' cultures possess complex, logical systems comparable to Western ones.
5	What role do myths play in Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the savage mind?	Myths are central to his analysis as they reveal the underlying structures of human thought, showcasing how myths serve to organize and interpret the world through binary oppositions and symbolic systems.
6	How does Lévi-Strauss's concept of binary oppositions relate to the 'savage mind'?	He posits that the 'savage mind' constructs reality through binary oppositions such as life/death, nature/culture, and good/evil, which are fundamental to human cognition across cultures.

7	What impact did 'The Savage Mind' have on modern anthropology and social sciences?	The book revolutionized the understanding of indigenous cultures, emphasizing the universality of human thought and laying the groundwork for structuralist approaches in anthropology, linguistics, and psychology.
8	How does Lévi-Strauss's 'The Savage Mind' address the concept of classification in different cultures?	He explores how diverse cultures classify the world around them through systems of thought, showing that classification is a universal feature of human cognition, not limited to Western scientific methods.

structuralism, myth, binary oppositions, anthropology, culture, mythology, cognitive structures, symbolism, cultural analysis, literary theory

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Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind eBooks are suitable for learners at different experience levels.

Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind eBooks reduce time spent validating information sources.

As digital learning expands, Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind eBooks maintain relevance.

Sharing and Collaboration

Sharing and collaboration are increasingly important aspects of how Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind is used in modern digital environments. Whether for academic study, professional projects, or group learning, the ability to share content responsibly and collaborate effectively enhances understanding and productivity. However, it is essential that sharing practices always comply with legal and ethical standards, particularly regarding copyright and licensing.

When sharing Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind with peers, users should ensure that the copy being shared is legally permitted for distribution. Public domain works, open-access materials, or files explicitly licensed for sharing can be distributed freely. For paid or copyrighted editions, sharing should be limited to official links, publisher platforms, or access methods allowed by the license. Respecting copyright protects creators and ensures the continued availability of high-quality content.

Collaborative annotation is one of the most valuable features of digital documents. Using cloud-based PDF readers or note-sharing applications, multiple users can highlight text, add comments, and discuss specific sections of Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind in real time or asynchronously. This approach is particularly effective for study groups, research teams, and classroom environments, where shared insights deepen comprehension and encourage critical discussion.

Cloud platforms enable version consistency across collaborators. When everyone accesses the same file stored online, updates and annotations remain synchronized, reducing confusion and duplication. Clear communication about annotation conventions—such as color coding or labeling comments—further improves collaboration and keeps discussions

organized.

Best practices for collaborative use

To ensure smooth collaboration, users should define roles and expectations in advance. Establishing guidelines for who can edit, comment, or view the document prevents accidental changes or conflicts. Regular reviews of shared annotations help maintain clarity and ensure that discussions remain focused and productive.

Finding Updates

Staying informed about updates to *Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind* is essential for users who rely on accurate and current information. Unlike printed books, digital editions can be revised and updated without requiring a full reprint. Publishers may release corrected versions, expanded content, or supplemental materials that enhance the value of the original work.

Checking official publisher websites is the most reliable way to find updates. Publishers often announce new editions, revisions, or errata directly on their platforms. Subscribing to newsletters or update notifications ensures that users are alerted when new versions become available.

Digital marketplaces and eBook platforms may also provide update notifications. Some services automatically update purchased digital copies, while others allow users to download revised editions manually. Understanding how a particular platform handles updates helps users maintain the most current version of *Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind*.

In academic and professional contexts, using the latest edition is particularly important. Updated versions may include revised data, corrected errors, or new chapters that reflect recent developments. Relying on outdated information can lead to inaccuracies in research, teaching, or decision-making.

Managing multiple editions

When multiple editions of Claude Levi Strauss *The Savage Mind* are available, proper version management becomes crucial. Clearly labeling files with edition numbers or publication dates prevents confusion and ensures that references remain consistent. Archiving older versions separately allows users to retain historical context without cluttering active working files.

Device Flexibility

One of the greatest advantages of digital Claude Levi Strauss *The Savage Mind* is device flexibility. Users can access content across a wide range of devices, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, desktops, and dedicated e-readers. This flexibility supports learning and productivity in various environments, from classrooms and offices to travel and home settings.

Mobile devices offer convenience and portability, making it easy to read Claude Levi Strauss *The Savage Mind* on the go. Tablets provide a larger screen for comfortable reading and annotation, while computers offer advanced tools for research, editing, and multitasking. Dedicated e-readers deliver a distraction-free experience with long battery life and eye-friendly displays.

Format compatibility plays a key role in device flexibility. PDFs are widely supported across platforms, ensuring consistent formatting. ePub formats adapt to different screen sizes and allow customizable text settings. If a device does not support a particular format, conversion tools can bridge the gap and enable access without sacrificing usability.

Synchronizing progress across devices enhances continuity. Cloud-based reading apps often track bookmarks, highlights, and notes, allowing users to resume reading exactly where they left off. This seamless transition between devices improves efficiency and reduces friction in daily workflows.

Optimizing cross-device experiences

To maximize device flexibility, users should keep reading applications updated and ensure that files are properly synced. Testing Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind on multiple devices helps identify formatting or compatibility issues early, preventing disruptions during critical use.

Security and access control across devices

Accessing Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind on multiple devices also requires attention to security. Using secure accounts, strong passwords, and trusted networks protects files from unauthorized access. Logging out of shared or public devices prevents accidental exposure of personal or proprietary information.

Encryption and secure cloud storage further enhance protection. Many platforms offer built-in security features that safeguard files while allowing convenient access across devices. Understanding and configuring these options helps balance accessibility with data protection.

Collaborative learning across platforms

Device flexibility supports collaboration by allowing participants to contribute using their preferred hardware. A student on a tablet, a researcher on a laptop, and a reviewer on a smartphone can all engage with Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind simultaneously. This inclusivity enhances participation and ensures that collaboration is not limited by device constraints.

Long-term usability and adaptability

As technology evolves, device flexibility ensures that Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind remains usable across new platforms and operating systems. Choosing widely supported formats and maintaining updated software extends the lifespan of digital content and protects long-term investments in learning and research materials.

Final thoughts on sharing, updates, and device flexibility of Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind

Effective sharing and collaboration, awareness of updates, and flexible device access significantly enhance the value of Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind. By sharing responsibly, collaborating thoughtfully, staying current with revisions, and leveraging cross-device compatibility, users can fully integrate Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind into modern digital workflows. These practices support ethical use, accurate knowledge, and seamless access, making Claude Levi Strauss The Savage Mind a powerful resource for individual and collective growth.