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Autore	MacMullen Ramsay <1928-2022, >
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Sommario/riassunto	Why we do what we do is a matter of great interest to everyone, and everyone seems to have had their say about it - philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, economists, and historians perhaps the most, case by case. Occasionally the specialists have offered their ideas to a general readership, but mostly they prefer to speak to and with their fellows in their particular disciplines. To evaluate and compare their findings in a cross-disciplinary way is now for the first time attempted, by Ramsay MacMullen. Emeritus history professor from Yale University, he is the recipient of various academic awards, including a lifetime Award for Scholarly Distinction from the American Historical Association