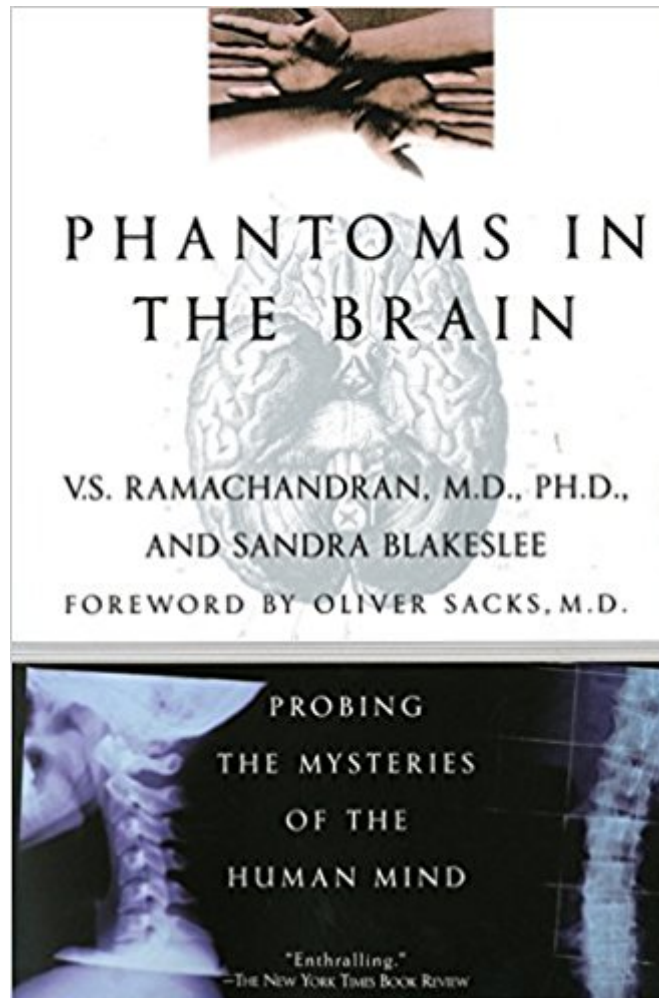




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Phantoms In The Brain: Probing The Mysteries Of The Human Mind



Synopsis

Neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran is internationally renowned for uncovering answers to the deep and quirky questions of human nature that few scientists have dared to address. His bold insights about the brain are matched only by the stunning simplicity of his experiments -- using such low-tech tools as cotton swabs, glasses of water and dime-store mirrors. In *Phantoms in the Brain*, Dr. Ramachandran recounts how his work with patients who have bizarre neurological disorders has shed new light on the deep architecture of the brain, and what these findings tell us about who we are, how we construct our body image, why we laugh or become depressed, why we may believe in God, how we make decisions, deceive ourselves and dream, perhaps even why we're so clever at philosophy, music and art. Some of his most notable cases: A woman paralyzed on the left side of her body who believes she is lifting a tray of drinks with both hands offers a unique opportunity to test Freud's theory of denial. A man who insists he is talking with God challenges us to ask: Could we be "wired" for religious experience? A woman who hallucinates cartoon characters illustrates how, in a sense, we are all hallucinating, all the time. Dr. Ramachandran's inspired medical detective work pushes the boundaries of medicine's last great frontier -- the human mind -- yielding new and provocative insights into the "big questions" about consciousness and the self.

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Customer Reviews

What would you say about a woman who, despite stroke-induced paralysis crippling the entire left side of her body, insists that she is whole and strong--who even sees her left hand reach out to

grasp objects? Freud called it "denial

In these unsettling tales from a neuroscientist every bit as quirky as the more famous Oliver Sacks, Ramachandran sets out his beliefs that no matter how bizarre the case, empirical, strikingly simple testing can illuminate the ways brain circuitry establishes "self." In a chatty, nearly avuncular style, he (along with his coauthor, a New York Times science writer) snatches territory from philosophers on how we think we know what we know. In one experiment, stroking an amputee's cheek produces sensations in his "phantom limb" because the part of the brain's map that once related to the lost limb has "invaded" the adjacent brain area that relates to the cheek. Unafraid to speculate, Ramachandran then moves a step closer toward indicating that the brain is not only a busy lump of genetically deemed-and-dying hard-wiring but an organ that can continuously "re-map" in response to new sensory information from the outside. Equally fascinating are Ramachandran's "mirror tricks" on amputees and paralyzed patients that begin to reveal how much the brain relies on context and comparison as well as on "inside" neural connectivity to form self. Perhaps most disquieting are beginnings of proof that much brain activity, including what we like to think of as uniquely human behavior, happens unbidden. There may be no escape from the un-Western conclusion that self is only a limited illusion. "De-throning man," as the author points out, is at the heart of most revolutionary scientific thought. Regrettably, his book sags in the middle as it drifts from these deft experiments into generalized musings on idiot-savants and phantom pregnancies, detracting from what is otherwise entertaining, tip-of-the-neurological-iceberg sleuthing. Photos and line drawings throughout. Author tour. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I am a recent amputee, who like so many other amputees has had the strange experience of a "phantom" leg--ie: a feeling that there is still a leg and a foot where the leg and foot were pre-amputation. I saw an article by a well-known doctor who recommended the book "Phantoms in the Brain" by Dr. V.S. Ramachandran to help explain some of the mysteries of this phenomenon. I have not finished reading the book as yet, but what I have read is very interesting. If you have interest in this phenomenon, I believe this is a worthwhile book to own.

This author is someone I had heard about for his work on Phantom Limbs. He seems to be getting closer to understanding the mind and how we "work" better than any other researchers out there. He has a curious mind and thank God for the environment Salk/ UCSD which allows him free reign

to explore his curiosity and hunches. This is how science should be investigated.. simply and without massive expensive set ups, yet using innovative ideas to find REAL answers. I love the style of writing. It is fast paced and never boring, even though it is about medical issues, it still reads like "Sherlock Holmes" wrote it... this is Dr. Ramachandran's nick name. There are case stories in this book that will keep you in cocktail chatter for months. Every page is a little more incredible than the previous one. All is written for the lay reader, without condescension. Highly recommended and just be warned--it is hard to put it down.

Excellent, well-written science book about the human brain and some of its intricacies and quirks. Amazing information about how normal "crosswiring" can trigger various interests, impulses, obsessions. The author even suggests a fascinating hypothesis for the origin of foot fetishism, why it's so wide spread, and how it really is just a normal human thing. Other topics explored make for good reading. Highly recommended!

It is a very similar to the writing by Oliver Sacks book "Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat" which described cases of some of his patients but fail to have theoretical conclusions.

Q How do you eat an elephant?A One bite at a time.Q How do you explain a system that is complex, convoluted and adaptive.A Test small bites of stimulus and reaction to confirm or contradict your hypothesis.Ramachandran and Blakeslee created this delightful book using humor, logic and simple tests to illuminate how the brain works and doesn't work. Readers are even invited to run their own test at home to confirm Rama's (his term) conclusions.Why does an amputee deny her left arm is missing or her paralyzed arm belongs to her brother?Such examples offer fertile areas to explore to find what specific brain cells seem related to such behavior.Could we alter the perception of a missing arm using mirrors? The answer is "yes" and by doing so we learn a little more about our brain's adaptivity.So what's going on when a person can square a fifteen digit number as fast as he can say the answer?While these small bites offer small answers, many such bites shed light on big answers.While I want to learn more about the brain, I suspect whatever book I select will be way too technical so I will just reread PITB again.It's that good.

If you have struggled with trying to control your mind/brain/thoughts/actions and been frustrated, this book can be a helpful guide in understanding how the brain works and consequently lend relief or support in being with yourself :) If you are not bothered by such things but are enthusiastic about

how things work, this then is again a wonderful reading on the nature and substance of one of the most complex phenomena in this Universe - the human brain. I gave 4 instead of 5 stars because the last few chapters do not make their case as clearly or strongly as the rest of the book does. In addition, even though the author touches on the subject of spirituality, god, consciousness, and its probably connections to the brain structure and experience, he does not mention anything about simple practices such as meditation and deep breathing and its influence on the brain. I did not expect these to be covered in the book but since the author ventured out of what I did expect and towards this field, it would have been good to see something mentioned to this effect.

I value Dr. Ramacgandran's perspective of neurological conditions and diseases. He is clearly an expert in his field. He is both a clinician and a scientist- an extremely difficult task & a feat! He dissects case studies and proposes logical reasons behind odd and often overlooked symptoms. I recommend this book for those interested in neurology (both clinical and research). I also recommend this book for those interested in bio psychology. I believe his work quesrtions clinicians review of symptoms in patients who have neurological conditions that may present with paculiar and seemingly 'crazy' symptoms.

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