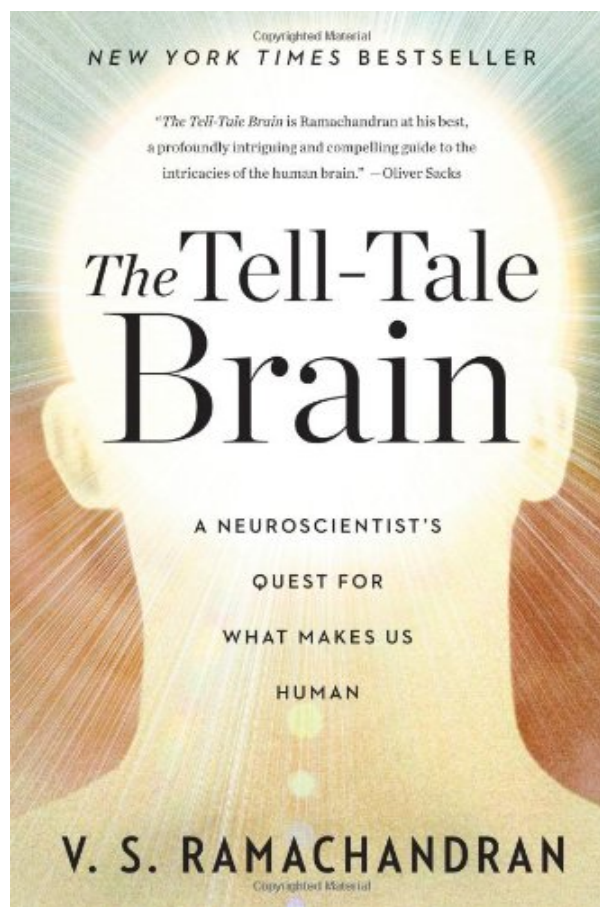
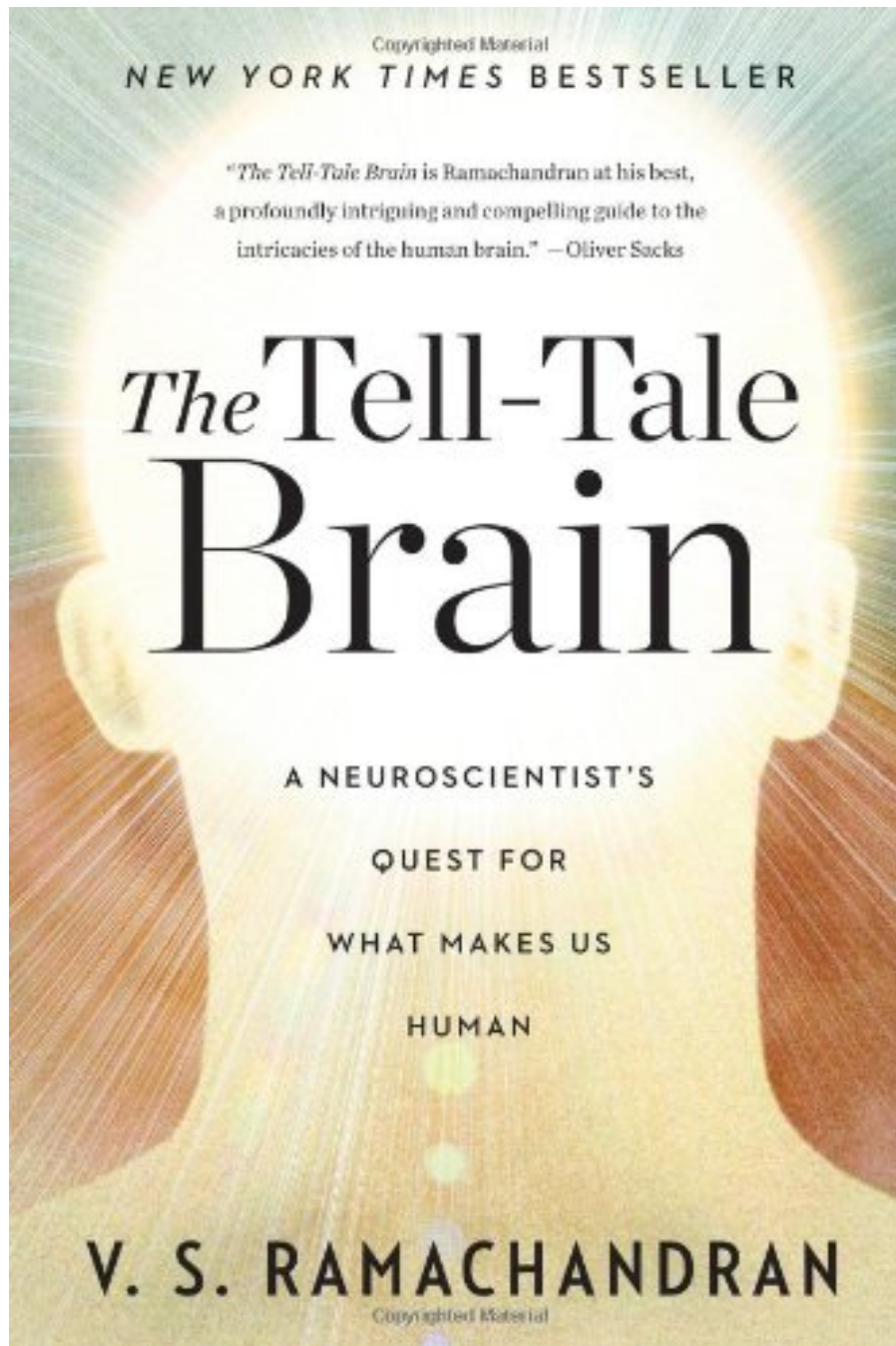


**THE TELL-TALE BRAIN: A
NEUROSCIENTIST'S QUEST FOR WHAT
MAKES US HUMAN BY V. S.
RAMACHANDRAN**



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From Publishers Weekly

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Drawing on strange and thought-provoking case studies, an eminent neurologist offers unprecedented insight into the evolution of the uniquely human brain.

V. S. Ramachandran is at the forefront of his field—so much so that Richard Dawkins dubbed him the "Marco Polo of neuroscience." Now, in a major new work, Ramachandran sets his sights on the mystery of human uniqueness. Taking us to the frontiers of neurology, he reveals what baffling and extreme case studies can teach us about normal brain function and how it evolved. Synesthesia becomes a window into the brain mechanisms that make some of us more creative than others. And autism?for which Ramachandran opens a new direction for treatment?gives us a glimpse of the aspect of being human that we understand least: self-awareness. Ramachandran tackles the most exciting and controversial topics in neurology with a storyteller's eye for compelling case studies and a researcher's flair for new approaches to age-old questions. Tracing the strange links between neurology and behavior, this book unveils a wealth of clues into the deepest mysteries of the human brain. 15 black-and-white illustrations

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Ramachandran Raises the Bar - Yet Again!

By Amazon Customer

The preeminent neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran has, without a doubt, raised the bar in this, his newest book, *The Tell-Tale Brain*. He states in the preface, “Readers who have assiduously followed my whole

oeuvre over the years will recognize some of the case histories that I presented in my previous books, *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind* and *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness: From Impostor Poodles to Purple Numbers*. These same readers will be pleased to see that I have new things to say about even my earlier findings and observations. Brain science has advanced at an astonishing pace over the past fifteen years, lending fresh perspectives on - well, just about everything. After decades of floundering in the shadow of the "hard" sciences, the age of neuroscience has truly dawned, and this rapid progress has directed and enriched my own work." And what an enriching book this is!

In a nutshell, what Ramachandran does is to discover how the normal brain works by studying individuals with abnormal neurological conditions. In this respect, his books are similar to Oliver Sacks (*The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat: And Other Clinical Tales* and *The Mind's Eye*). Some of the disorders Ramachandran discusses are: Agnosia, Anosognosia, Autism, Capgras Syndrome, Cotard Syndrome, and Synesthesia, to name a few. However, one of the finest things about Ramachandran's book is that this doesn't account for everything in the book; it's not simply Ramachandran rolling out one bizarre disorder after another. He hits the subject matter from every angle - anatomically, evolutionarily, psychologically, and philosophically. It's exceedingly evident that Ramachandran knows all of the topics - inside-and-out - in regards to mind, brain, and consciousness. And still, the writing was never over my head. It was just as Ramachandran said it would be, "I presume some degree of interest in science and curiosity about human nature, but I do not presume any sort of formal scientific background or even familiarity with my previous works. I hope this book proves instructive and inspiring to students of all levels and backgrounds, to colleagues in other disciplines, and to lay readers with no personal or professional stake in these topics."

Ramachandran states in the Epilogue, "One of the major themes in the book - whether talking about body image, mirror neurons, language evolution, or autism - has been the question of how your inner self interacts with the world (including the social world) while at the same time maintaining its privacy. The curious reciprocity between self and others is especially well developed in humans and probably exists only in rudimentary form in the great apes. I have suggested that many types of mental illness may result from derangements in this equilibrium. Understanding such disorders may pave the way not only for solving the abstract (or should I say philosophical) problem of the self at a theoretical level, but also for treating mental illness."

In conclusion, I strongly recommend reading this book. The writing is great, the style is flawless, and Ramachandran's self deprecating humor really keeps the material lively. Every issue in contemporary Mind/Brain/Consciousness literature has been addressed in one way or another and I think everyone would have something to gain from reading it. I would put this book right on par with Antonio Damasio's, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*, and Paul Nunez's, *Brain, Mind, and the Structure of Reality*. Along with V.S. Ramachandran, these men, each in his own way, is pointing the way for the entire Neuroscientific community..."The question of how neurons encode meaning and evoke all the semantic associations of an object is the holy grail of neuroscience, whether you are studying memory, perception, art, or consciousness." Ramachandran's book is not to be missed!

53 of 56 people found the following review helpful.

Snarky but Satisfying

By kellerbellerful

V.S. Ramachandran owns a variety of distinctions. He is director of the Center for Brain and Cognition, Distinguished Professor at the University of California, San Diego, and Adjunct Professor of Biology at the Salk Institute. He has written or co-written a number of popular-science works including *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind*, *The Encyclopedia of the Human Brain*, and *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness: From Impostor Poodles to Purple Numbers*. His most recent work is *The Tell-Tale*

Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Makes us Human. This book, rehashes much of the material discussed in his previous work, *Phantoms of the Brain*, but also presents many new and untested ideas and hypotheses. Despite a few off-color remarks that are peppered throughout the work, and some wild assumptions that are used to support untested hypotheses, *The Tell Tale Brain* proved to be a satisfying and entertaining read. It presents tough material on a very wide spectrum of topics in a thorough and easy to read manner.

A majority of fault found within *The Tell Tale Brain* can be attributed to personality. Besides a general haughty overtone that can be easily explained by his success, Ramachandran makes a few snide remarks in reference to women, religion and politics throughout the book that are unwarranted. They serve only as insults, and have no purpose in supporting the subject of the book. Another weakness in Ramachandran's writing is oversimplification of the material. This can be justified by recalling the intended purpose of the book, and remembering that it is difficult to provide a satisfying explanation without getting too technical for a wide audience. However, defending the book in this manner does not stop the reader from wondering whether they are sitting for story time, or reading something of substance. Additionally, at many times throughout the book it seems as though Ramachandran uses the shield of popular science writing to make assumptions with abandon. It seems as though he has forgotten where his expertise lies. Many of his hypotheses, especially in the sections about beauty and aesthetics are based in assumptions that quickly raise objections. In figure 7.5 of the book, Ramachandran presents two images, and designates one to be more aesthetically pleasing. He gives no reference to an authority on art, or even a survey of popular opinion. It can be assumed that this judgment of artistic value is based only on his authority and that he believes that his scientific reputation renders him an art authority. Unfortunately the reader is unable to further entertain Ramachandran's speculations on these topics because of a disagreement over the extent of his expertise. Ramachandran defends himself from further criticism against the wild assumptions in his later chapters by acknowledging several times that much content of these chapters is speculative. Despite being a little flighty and a little insulting, the author's failures in art criticism and courtesy do not outweigh his scientific success. *The Tell-Tale Brain* remains a worthwhile read.

One of the greatest strengths of the book is its organization. The chapters are clearly separated by topic, and the information presented in the earlier chapters clearly builds a foundation to allow for better understanding of the content in the later chapters.

The first chapter focuses on phantom limbs, or sensation and pain that amputees often feel in their removed limbs. It also addresses plasticity, or the brain's ability to change. The next chapter discusses the way the brain processes visual information with a specific focus on how humans process this information differently from other animals. Chapter three discusses synesthesia, a phenomenon where sensory information is mixed. The following chapter introduces mirror neurons. These are neurons that allow humans to adopt another's point of view, and may have been a primary factor in the development of culture. The fifth chapter discusses the possibilities that autism is partially a result of dysfunctional mirror neurons. The sixth chapter addresses language, and the role mirror neurons and other factors may have played in its development. The seventh and eighth chapters address beauty. Chapter seven especially focuses on the ways our concept of beauty could have evolved and discusses two of nine laws of aesthetics that Ramachandran produces. Chapter eight discusses the remaining laws of aesthetics. The final chapter of the book considers the daunting concept of self-awareness.

Besides the nine chapters of the book, the volume has an introduction that includes Ramachandran's initial discussion of human uniqueness, a glimpse of the fascinating case studies discussed throughout the book and an overview of brain anatomy. The work also includes an epilogue which serves to unify the work, and a helpful glossary of terms. The introduction, epilogue, and glossary play a large role in the organizational

strength of the book. They serve as a helpful reference throughout the reading of the book, and prevent much of the discussion from becoming a confusing jumble of words.

In his discussion throughout the work, Ramachandran uses interesting case studies to illustrate how functions can be localized in the brain. Additionally, in his discussion of each of these areas, Ramachandran pays special attention to the evolutionary development of the structures and functions involved. He imparts the idea that evolutionary development of the brain structure is central to truly understanding the function. In addition to focus on evolution, Ramachandran centers almost repetitively on the idea that humans are unique. He constantly refutes the idea that humans are "just another species of ape," and stresses the astonishing intellectual differences that arise between humans and other primates as a result of small differences in brain structure.

Another strength of the book is the background information provided for each chapter. Ramachandran is usually careful to give credit where it is due and cites the discoveries and innovations made by various scientists as the basis for much of his work. In addition, Ramachandran is careful to provide clear background information to a topic where it is needed. The chapter on the development of language is a particularly good example of this. Consistent with his theme of human uniqueness, Ramachandran is careful to go into detail to describe what precisely it is that makes human language different from that of other animals. Furthermore, he clearly describes the structure of language, and its many facets and thoroughly introduces the ground-breaking work done by pioneers in the field of linguistics. He then builds on this groundwork to discuss how language could have evolved, and how its different functions are believed to interact within the brain.

All in all, *The Tell Tale Brain* is a good introduction to the field of neuroscience. It covers various topics in which significant ground has been gained, and it addresses topics where hardly any groundwork has been laid. It does all of these things in a casual tone that still challenges the reader to wonder about the vast complexities of the brain. For these reasons, it earns 4/5 stars.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

A Quest for Knowledge

By Book Shark

The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Makes Us Human by V.S. Ramachandran

"*The Tell-Tale Brain*" is an insightful look into the intriguing world of neuroscience and what makes us uniquely human. Accomplished neuroscientist and author of "*Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind*" takes the reader on a ride of his life's work inside the connections between brain, mind and body. Using an approach that involves studying patients with damaged parts of their brains that lead to peculiar behavior; Dr. Ramachandran shares what he has learned from countless examples of brain disorders. This enlightening 384-page book is composed of the following nine chapters: 1. Phantom Limbs and Plastic Brains, 2. Seeing and Knowing, 3. Loud Colors and Hot Babes: Synesthesia, 4. The Neurons that Shaped Civilization, 5. Where Is Steven? The Riddle of Autism, 6. The Power of Babble: The Evolution of Language, 7. Beauty and the Brain: The Emergence of Aesthetics, 8. The Artful Brain: Universal Laws, and 9. An Ape with a Soul: How Introspection Evolved.

Positives:

1. Engaging writing style and great insights into neuroscience at an accessible level.
2. The fascinating world of neuroscience through personal case studies.
3. Good use of charts and diagrams.
4. Thought-provoking questions and answers based on a combination of sound science and educated

speculation.

5. The author is candid on the limited knowledge we have in this young field but provides countless tidbits that whets one's appetite for more research.
6. Many thought-provoking ideas, "When informed that their conscious self emerges 'simply' from the mindless agitations of atoms and molecules in their brains, people often feel let down, but they shouldn't."
7. The brain's amazing capacity for change (plasticity). How culture and evolution provided the impetus for change.
8. What makes the human brain truly unique; a look at how the brain processes visual information. Great Stuff!
9. Many great case studies; one of the most intriguing, synesthesia.
10. Mirror neurons at the heart of empathy. An evolutionary key to full-fledged culture.
11. Interesting insights into autism.
12. Explores how mirror neurons may have played a pivotal role in the development of language.
13. The brain's response to beauty and art. The author speculates on the possibility of real art (aesthetics). The nine laws of aesthetics.
14. The nature of self-awareness. Consciousness. The seven aspects of the self.
15. A look at disorders that create a sense of embodiment.
16. An interesting spectrum of mental disorders. Cotard and Capgras syndromes to name a few.
17. An excellent glossary of terms.
18. Links to notes and a formal bibliography.

Negatives:

1. Some of the attempts of humor fell flat. I would advise a neuroscientist to stay away from political and any type of humor that can be misconstrued as sexist.
2. The author gives the impression of reading his own press (egotistic). Honestly, it doesn't bother me too much but I can see it being annoying to others.
3. A basic refresher on evolution and how it relates to the brain would have added value to the book.
4. For the sake of clarity, scientists need to be clear on what the current scientific consensus is. There are times when the author tells you when he is speculating but there are also times when I'm not clear what the current scientific consensus is and it needs to be clearly pointed out.

In summary, I really enjoyed this book. Dr. Ramachandran's writing style and fascinating topic makes for a fun even though his overinflated ego can be distracting. That being said, neuroscience is a fascinating field and the author presents many interesting case studies to light on what makes our brains exceptional and thus human. A young field in the quest for answers, I highly recommend it!

Further suggestions: "Subliminal" by Leonard Mlodinow, "The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies---How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths" by Michael Shermer, "The Scientific American Brave New Brain: How Neuroscience, Brain-Machine Interfaces, Neuroimaging, Psychopharmacology, Epigenetics, the Internet, and ... and Enhancing the Future of Mental Power" by Judith Horstman, "The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature" by Steven Pinker, "Who's in Charge?: Free Will and the Science of the Brain" and "Human: The Science Behind What Makes Us Unique", by Michael S. Gazzaniga, "Hardwired Behavior: What Neuroscience Reveals about Morality 1st Edition by Tancredi, Laurence published by Cambridge University Press Paperback" by Laurence Tancredi, "Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality [BRAINTRUST: WHAT NEUROSCIENCE TELLS US ABOUT MORALITY BY Churchland, Patricia S. (Author) Aug-26-2012" by Patricia S. Churchland, "Paranormality" by Richard Wiseman, and "The Brain and the Meaning of Life" by Paul Thagard.

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THE TELL-TALE BRAIN: A NEUROSCIENTIST'S QUEST FOR WHAT MAKES US HUMAN BY V. S. RAMACHANDRAN PDF

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From Publishers Weekly

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From Booklist

Starred Review The twentieth was the century of physics, with the grand unified theory its quest and goal. The twenty-first is shaping up as the century of neuroscience, with its quest and goal the reaffirmation of human exceptionalism. Boldly asserting, right off the bat, that *Homo sapiens* is "no mere ape," Ramachandran tells us why the day of neuroscience has dawned. The discovery of mirror neurons (see Marco Iacoboni's exciting *Mirroring People*, 2008) has made a real science out of psychology, for it gives the study of consciousness and the host of mental states contingent on it something physical to theorize about and experiment with. A physician (like Oliver Sacks, a neurologist) as well as a researcher, Ramachandran uses his neurology patients' predicaments to inspire inquiries into how we see and know, the origins of language, the mental basis of civilization, how we conceive of and assess art, and how the self is constructed. Always careful to point out when he is speculating rather than announcing research findings, he is also prompt to emphasize why his speculations, or theories, are not just of the armchair variety but can be put to the test because of what neuroscience has already discovered about the active structures of the human brain. --Ray Olson

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“Ramachandran is the modern wizard of neuroscience. In *The Tell-Tale Brain*, we see the genius at work, tackling extraordinary cases, many of which mark turning points in neuroscientific knowledge. We see him hypothesizing, experimenting, failing, having epiphanies, experimenting, succeeding. In this utterly entertaining account, we see how these fascinating cases fit together, and how he uses them to explain, from a Darwinian point of view, how our brains, though evolved from those of other animals, become neurologically distinct and fundamentally human.” (Norman Doidge, M.D., author of *The Brain That Changes Itself*)

“Ramachandran has written an astonishing book. His humanity, humor and scientific genius inform every passage. *The Tell-Tale Brain* is a veritable *Voyage of the Beagle* through the terrain of brain science and psychology.” (Nicholas Humphrey, author of *Seeing Red*)

“A masterpiece. The best of its kind and beautifully crafted. Alluring story telling, building to a penetrating understanding of what it is to be uniquely human. Ramachandran is the foremost pioneer—the Galileo—of neurocognition.” (Allan Snyder, FRS, Director of the Centre for the Mind)

“No one is better than V. S. Ramachandran at combining minute, careful observation with ingenious experiments and bold, adventurous theorizing. *The Tell-Tale Brain* is Ramachandran at his best, a profoundly intriguing and compelling guide to the intricacies of the human brain.” (Oliver Sacks, author of *The Mind's Eye*)

The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest For What Makes Us Human By V. S. Ramachandran. Is this your downtime? What will you do then? Having spare or cost-free time is really fantastic. You can do everything without force. Well, we intend you to spare you few time to review this book *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest For What Makes Us Human By V. S. Ramachandran* This is a god publication to accompany you in this leisure time. You will certainly not be so tough to know something from this publication *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest For What Makes Us Human By V. S. Ramachandran* A lot more, it will certainly aid you to obtain far better details as well as experience. Even you are having the terrific jobs, reviewing this publication *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest For What Makes Us Human By V. S. Ramachandran* will not include your mind.