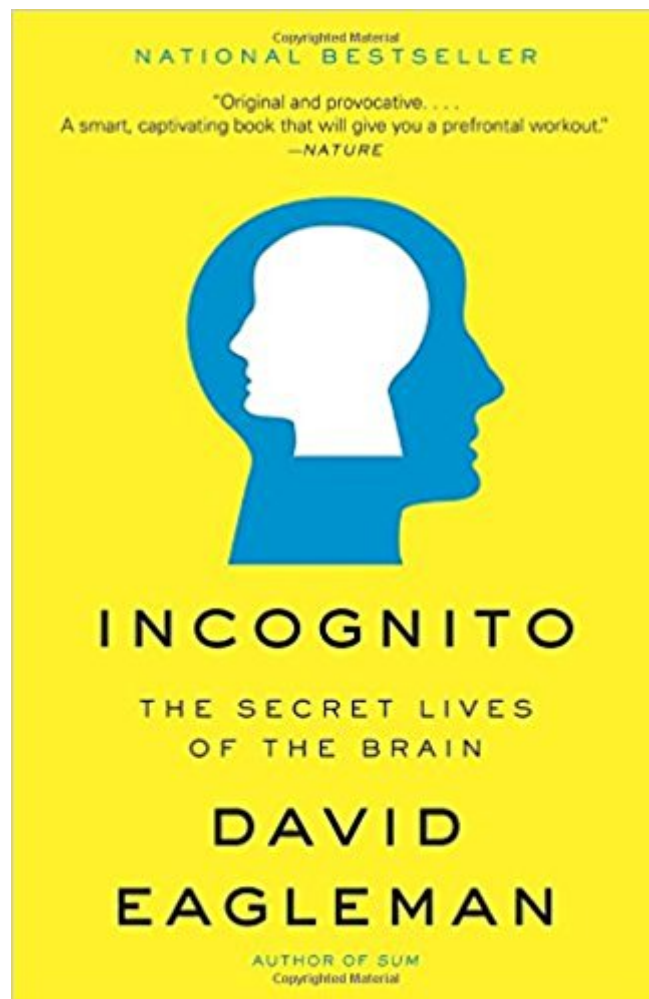




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Incognito: The Secret Lives Of The Brain



Synopsis

If the conscious mind--the part you consider to be you--is just the tip of the iceberg, what is the rest doing? In this sparkling and provocative book, renowned neuroscientist David Eagleman navigates the depths of the subconscious brain to illuminate its surprising mysteries. Why can your foot move halfway to the brake pedal before you become consciously aware of danger ahead? Is there a true Mel Gibson? How is your brain like a conflicted democracy engaged in civil war? What do Odysseus and the subprime mortgage meltdown have in common? Why are people whose names begin with J more likely to marry other people whose names begin with J? And why is it so difficult to keep a secret? Taking in brain damage, plane spotting, dating, drugs, beauty, infidelity, synesthesia, criminal law, artificial intelligence, and visual illusions, *Incognito* is a thrilling subsurface exploration of the mind and all its contradictions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A Boston Globe Best Book of the Year “Original and provocative. . . . A smart, captivating book that will give you a prefrontal workout.” • Nature “A popularizer of impressive gusto . . . [Eagleman] aims, grandly, to do for the study of the mind what Copernicus did for the study of the stars. . . . Incognito proposes a grand new account of the relationship between consciousness and the brain. It is full of dazzling ideas, as it is chockablock with facts and instances.” • The New York Observer “Eagleman engagingly sums up recent discoveries about the unconscious processes that dominate our mental life. . . . [He] is the kind of guy who really does make being a neuroscientist look like fun.” • The New

York Times

“Although Incognito is fast-paced, mind-bending stuff, it’s a book for regular folks. Eagleman does a brilliant job refining heavy science into a compelling read. He is a gifted writer.”

•Houston Chronicle

“Eagleman has a talent for testing the untestable, for taking seemingly sophomoric notions and using them to nail down the slippery stuff of consciousness.”

•The New Yorker

“Incognito does the right thing by diving straight into the deep end and trying to swim. Eagleman, by imagining the future so vividly, puts into relief just how challenging neuroscience is, and will be.”

•The Boston Globe

“Appealing and persuasive.”

•The Wall Street Journal

“Your mind is an elaborate trick, and mastermind David Eagleman explains how the trick works with great lucidity and amazement. Your mind will thank you.”

•Wired

“A fun read by a smart person for smart people. . . . It will attract a new generation to ponder their inner workings.”

•New Scientist

“Fascinating. . . . Eagleman has the ability to turn hard science and jargon into interesting and relatable prose, illuminating the mind’s processes with clever analogies and metaphors.”

•Salt Lake City Weekly

“Touches on some of the more intriguing cul-de-sacs of human behavior.”

•Santa Cruz Sentinel

“Startling. . . . It’s a book that will leave you looking at yourself—and the world—differently.”

•Austin American-Statesman

“Sparkling and provocative. . . . A thrilling subsurface exploration of the mind and all its contradictions.”

•The Courier-Journal

“After you read Eagleman’s breezy treatment of the brain, you will marvel at how much is illusory that we think is real, and how we sometimes function on autopilot without consciously knowing what is happening. . . . This is a fascinating book.”

•The Advocate

“A pleasure to read. . . . If a reader is looking for a fun but illuminating read, Incognito is a good choice. With its nice balance between hard science and entertaining anecdotes, it is a good alternative to the usual brainless summer blockbusters.”

•Deseret News

“Incognito is fun to read, full of neat factoids and clever experiments. . . . Eagleman says he’s looking to do for neuroscience what Carl Sagan did for astrophysics, and he’s already on his way.”

•Texas Monthly

“Eagleman presents difficult neuroscience concepts in an energetic, casual voice with plenty of analogies and examples to ensure that what could easily be an overwhelming catalog of facts remains engaging and accessible. . . . The ideas in Eagleman’s book are well-articulated and entertaining, elucidated with the intelligent, casual tone of an enthusiastic university lecturer.”

•TheMillions.com

“Written in clear, precise

language, the book is sure to appeal to readers with an interest in psychology and the human mind, but it will also please people who just want to know, with a little more clarity, what is going on inside their own skulls.

• Booklist

“A stunning exploration of the we behind the I. Eagleman reveals, with his typical grace and eloquence, all the neural magic tricks behind the cognitive illusion we call reality.”

• Jonah Lehrer, author of *How We Decide*

“A fascinating, dynamic, faceted look under the hood of the conscious mind. . . . Equal parts entertaining and illuminating, the case studies, examples and insights in *Incognito* are more than mere talking points to impress at the next dinner party, poised instead to radically shift your understanding of the world, other people, and your own mind.”

• Brain Pickings

“Eagleman engagingly sums up recent discoveries about the unconscious processes that dominate our mental life.”

• The New York Times Book Review

“Fascinating. . . . Eagleman has the ability to turn hard science and jargon into interesting and relatable prose, illuminating the mind’s processes with clever analogies and metaphors.”

• Salt Lake City Weekly

“A great beach read.”

• Philadelphia City Paper

“*Incognito* feels like learning the secrets of a magician. In clear prose, Eagleman condenses complex concepts and reinforces his points through analogies, pop culture, current events, optical illusions, anecdotes, and fun facts.”

• Frontier Psychiatrist

“One of those books that could change everything.”

• Sam Snyder, blog

“Buy this book. The pithy observations, breezy language and wow-inducing anecdotes provide temporary pleasure, but the book’s real strength is in its staying power.”

• Science News

“A whirlwind, high-definition look at the neural underpinnings of our everyday thinking and perception . . . fascinating.”

• Brettworks.com

“Eagleman embodies what is fascinating, fun, and hopeful about modern neuroscience.”

• Brainstorm.com

“After you read Eagleman’s breezy treatment of the brain, you will marvel at how much is illusory that we think is real, and how we sometimes function out autopilot without consciously knowing what is happening. . . . This is a fascinating book.”

• The Advocate

“Funny, gripping and often shocking . . . Eagleman writes great sentences of the sort that you might be inclined to read to those in your general vicinity.”

• bookotron.com

“*Incognito* reads like a series of fascinating vignettes, offering plenty of pauses for self-reflection. Eagleman’s anecdotes are funny and easily tie to the concepts he explains. Moreover, his enthusiasm for the subject is obvious and contagious.”

• Spectrum Culture

“*Incognito* is popular science at its

best . . . beautifully synthesized. — Boston Globe — Best of 2011

DAVID EAGLEMAN is a neuroscientist, a Guggenheim Fellow, and a New York Times bestselling author. His books have been translated into 27 languages. Eagleman heads the Laboratory for Perception and Action at Baylor College of Medicine, and is the founding Director of the Initiative on Neuroscience and Law. He is the author and presenter of the PBS series *The Brain*.

I liked this a lot. Pretty clear that we are finally getting a handle on our brains really work. It's a contest in there! And WE are not really in charge of it. Now, if someone could just give me a way to "paternalistically" update the brains of those around me so they are not so STUPID, we might have something worthwhile. Just kidding. If you read in this literature, we ALL think we are right and they are wrong - no matter what the topic.

Though a book related to *The Brain* is not an easy read, I understood and enjoy reading every chapter. Looking forward to read more of this author's books since knowing how, why human beings act and all in spite of the important discoveries of this century is amazing.

There are some interesting ideas in this book. He introduces a paradigm where the brain is analogous to a democracy as many different inputs weigh in on decisions. Some of what he says about perception is new, but if you read about neuroscience somewhat often, a lot of it will be review. He spends some time exploring criminal justice. It's not the best part of the book. He's right that most courts operate as if free will is a thing while most scientists see free will as an illusion. But his suggestions for reform are pretty unrealistic. Also, I've seen others make the same point better. If you get the Kindle version, you might be surprised by how short the book is because when your Kindle says 68%, you'll be done with book (except for footnotes).

One of the most interesting books I've ever read. The chapter on culpability is a total mindf**k.

This book was great, I learned a lot from it. Easy to read and well written. You don't need to be a neuro scientist to understand the material. Doesn't take long to get through it at all.

This book is the most intelligent treatment of the fit between neuroscience and human agency that has been published to date. The author thoroughly understands the dimensions of his subject and understands, too, what we do not yet understand well enough. It is an inspiring treatment of the problems presented.

This book should be read by everyone interested in religious experiences and true believers. They will find out how the subconscious brain is in control and creates its own version of reality, not angels, and demons.

IntroductionIncognito, The Secret Lives of the Brain by David Eagleman, a neuroscientist at Baylor College of Medicine, explores the hidden aspects of the brain. The premise of the book is that the conscious mind is the tip of the iceberg, and that the unconscious brain is an incredible complex and multilayered organ responsible for the vast majority of our actions, outside our willful control. By analyzing the various methods our unconscious brain dictates and influences our behavior, Eagleman seeks to introduce the reader to the vast world of cognitive neuroscience and psychology. Although there are many aspects of the brain that are not fully understood, Eagleman presents his ideas clearly along with research and observations from other scientists.**Style and Structure**Overall, Incognito was an interesting read. The style of the book is that each chapter explores a facet of the unconscious brain, from our senses to what your name might do with your personality to how our brain adapts automatically to new situations. Eagleman explains concepts using simple to understand comparisons and bases his ideas in real world incidents. For example, Eagleman discusses the idea of the brain consisting of rival components. He used Mel Gibson's drunken anti-Semitic controversy throughout Chapter 5, which I talk about later in this review, as an example of whether there are separate yet connected parts of our mind that rival the personality that we normally show to the world. However, I felt at some parts that there were too many anecdotes in a chapter and I felt disconnected from the overall concept. This book is written like a collection of short stories, and is very slim on technical jargon so the reader will not feel too encumbered or lost.**Chapter 2 "The Testimony of the Senses: What Is Experience Really Like?"**"Your brain is in the dark, but your mind constructs light." In essence, this is the purpose of all our sensory systems. Eagleman discusses such concepts like vision, perception, and illusion in order to describe the way our brain transforms the electrical signals from our receptor cells into a vivid environment. Eagleman begins the chapter by investigating the difference between seeing and vision. What you see is not decided by your eyes, but you see with your brain instead. He also talks about active vision, where

your brain actively seeks to extract information from the world. The concept of active sensing also can apply to the other senses, as well as time. As a result, people who were blind can still perceive the world through the other senses, such as touch or sound. I liked the example of Bach y Rita's experiments and about Mike's experiences with regaining his lost sight.

Chapter 3 "Mind: The Gap"

In this chapter, Eagleman discusses the role of implicit memory in affecting our actions. An example that I found to be very relatable was when he explained how the brain initially devoted many resources to learn a new activity, but after repeating the activity, the brain devoted little energy to it. The brain developed new machinery in order to efficiently complete the task. He used a new video game as an example. At first, you concentrate very hard in order to learn the controls. However, after you know the ropes, your brain does not devote as much energy to that particular task. This ultimately shows the adaptability and plasticity of the brain.

Chapter 5 "The Brain Is a Team of Rivals"

The central concept of this chapter is how your brain is in conflict with itself. Eagleman suggests that the brain is always debating with itself in determining the decisions and actions that you take. There can be several factions with different opinions that must work together to reach a solution, so called a "team of rivals". One analogy that Eagleman used was the jury from 12 Angry Men. He discusses the idea of multiple opposing systems in the context of desire, morality, and emotions vs. rationality. In addition to generating conflict, the "team of rivals" exists to help reach a more robust and flexible solution to problems. For example, people who have challenged their brain through old age are able to stave off the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease due to their brain forming many alternate neural pathways that are required to solve complex problems. The lack of a clear and simple solution to puzzles and similar games forces the brain to argue with itself, increasing the flexibility and strength of the brain; this whole idea is called cognitive reserve. The primary lesson from this chapter is that the brain is a collection of systems that work together to drive our actions, as well as cause us to think that we are in control of most of what we do. In fact, the brain functions mostly free from our conscious input, but in the end, our conscious mind is what ultimately prevails. I thought this chapter was the best in the book.

Overall Opinion and Recommendations

In conclusion, Incognito reveals the depths and diversity of our brain. After reading it, I felt awed by how vast the role of the unconscious brain is. Despite what we presently know, there are still many things that are unknown. In the scope of things, the three pound wrinkled gooey organ is the culmination of us as a species, and for every new connection we make, a thousand more mysteries reveal themselves. The quote at the beginning of Incognito, "Man is equally incapable of seeing the nothingness from which he emerges and the infinity in which he is engulfed" from Blaise Pascal, aptly describes the current state of humans. For people who are not studying neuroscience, this is an excellent book to

gain a basic understanding of how the brain works. For students or scientists who have had previous experience with neuroscience topics, this book can serve as an excellent refresher. Unfortunately, for those looking for a difficult or more detailed discussion, this book may be simplistic. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the way Eagleman explained complicated ideas so the average person can understand.

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