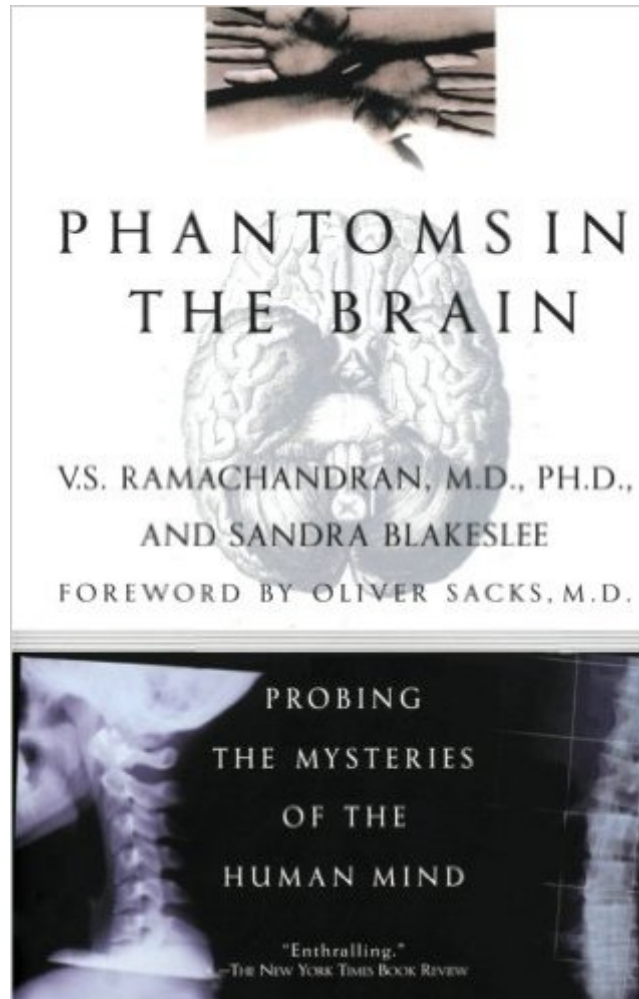


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Phantoms In The Brain: Probing The Mysteries Of The Human Mind



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.

Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks (August 18, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0688172172

ISBN-13: 978-0688172176

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.9 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (183 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #37,939 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in [Books > Science & Math > Experiments, Instruments & Measurement > Methodology & Statistics](#) #131 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling > Neuropsychology](#) #231 in [Books > Science & Math > History & Philosophy](#)

Customer Reviews

...I think Ramachandran is the most brilliant, creative Neuroscientist in the field. Sure, he is very popular, along with many other science writers. But if you aren't paying attention, you might not see

that he is to our field what Mozart, Picasso, and Einstein were to theirs. And this book is both a masterpiece and a magnum opus. Here are some reasons to be so keen on Ramachandran: Many, many neuroscientists pick "safe" topics and stick with variants upon a theme all their lives. The work is often valuable, but it is not exactly akin to a spectator sport. Ramachandran, in contrast, chooses "sexy" topics to study. Most neuroscientists write primarily for their scientific peers. Ramachandran (with Blakeslee) has written a book that is at once valuable to his peers and fascinating to everyone. And if you've ever seen Ramachandran speak (either to scientists or the general public), you know what I'm talking about, and you know that the book is not a fluke. Ramachandran does not think like other neuroscientists. Most neuroscientists pick a topic or area of the brain, and then do systematic, parametric, sensible experiments to map and test the minute details of their theory. There's usually lots of data collection and data analysis. But Ramachandran has a knack for creating "breakthrough" experiments routinely. In these experiments, the answer to a sexy question comes instantly, dramatically, and powerfully. Such creative, intuitive genius is extremely rare. Trust me, we'd all like to do science this way. I hope that we can appreciate that Ramachandran incorporates a wide variety of worldviews as he creates gem after gem.

Phantoms in the Brain is not only a marvelous narrative of the quirky facets of the brain and the mind, it is also a good illustration of the advances made in neurology over the past 30 years. Indeed if you take into account the extensive career of Freud, who was himself a neuro-anatomist prior to pursuing his medical profession, neurology and neuropsychology have well over a 150 years behind them. In the book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, written in the 1970 and reprinted a number of times since, Oliver Sacks illustrates peculiar neurological deficits arising from various insults to the brain, from tumors to strokes and seizures. Although he can pinpoint the areas of brain compromise that cause the patient's problems and, like Freud, give the reader some theory as to what aspect of the "self" is effected, he does little beyond this. In *Phantoms of the Brain*, Ramachandran recounts numerous colorful stories, but develops a theory of what level of brain function is the cause of the observed deficits, then proceeds to test his theory with further study, making the "self" a topic of research. In the true spirit of scientific research he publishes his findings and elicits input from fellows in the field. Where there is a discrepancy, he and others conduct further research to illuminate the findings and integrate the data into the overall theory. While he freely admits that a true science of the mind is in its infancy, he also points at the major advances made since Freud's work. One of the things I found most unique about the author's style is that he points out the pertinent contributions in the works of other, often earlier researchers, particularly

Freud.

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