

# The Believing Brain By Michael Shermer

The Neuroscience of Fantasies, Fears, and Convictions  
 From Spiritual Faiths to Political Convictions – How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths  
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## JORDAN AMIYA

**The Neuroscience of Fantasies, Fears, and Convictions** Henry Holt and Company  
 “Fascinating. Doidge’s book is a remarkable and hopeful portrait of the endless adaptability of the human brain.”—Oliver Sacks, MD, author of *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* What is neuroplasticity? Is it possible to change your brain? Norman Doidge’s inspiring guide to the new brain science explains all of this and more An astonishing new science called neuroplasticity is overthrowing the centuries-old notion that the human brain is immutable, and proving that it is, in fact, possible to change your brain. Psychoanalyst, Norman Doidge, M.D., traveled the country to meet both the brilliant scientists championing neuroplasticity, its healing powers, and the people whose lives they’ve transformed—people whose mental limitations, brain damage or brain trauma were seen as unalterable. We see a woman born with half a brain that rewired itself to work as a whole, blind people who learn to see, learning disorders cured, IQs raised, aging brains rejuvenated, stroke patients learning to speak, children with cerebral palsy learning to move with more grace, depression and anxiety disorders successfully treated, and lifelong character traits changed. Using these marvelous stories to probe mysteries of the body, emotion, love, sex, culture, and education, Dr. Doidge has written an immensely moving, inspiring book that will permanently alter the way we look at our brains, human nature, and human potential.

[From Spiritual Faiths to Political Convictions – How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths](#) Univ of California Press

A new book about brain chemistry, neural systems, and the formation of beliefs from the scientist who brought to light serotonin's many crucial roles in human behavior. Beliefs: What are they? How have evolution and culture led to a brain that is seemingly committed to near endless belief creation? And once established, why are most beliefs so difficult to change? Believing offers answers to these questions from the perspective of a leading neuroscientist and expert in brain-behavior research. Combining personal anecdotes and the latest research, Dr. McGuire takes the novel approach of focusing on the central and critical role of brain systems and the ways in which they interact with the environment to create and maintain beliefs. This approach yields some surprising and counterintuitive conclusions: • The brain is designed for belief creation and acceptance. • It is biased in favor of its own beliefs and is highly insensitive to disconfirming evidence. • It prefers beliefs that are pleasurable and rewarding to those that are unfavorable. • Beliefs are "afterthoughts" of unperceived brain activities; they don't cause behavior. • Our consciousness has minimal influence on the neural systems that create beliefs. Based on these observations, McGuire concludes that for the foreseeable future people will continue to hold a multitude of beliefs, many of them intransigent.

[The Moral Arc](#) Henry Holt and Company

Recent polls show that 96% of Americans believe in God. Why are people turning to religion in greater numbers than ever before? In *How We Believe*, Michael Shermer presents the results of an exhaustive empirical study in which he asked 10,000 Americans how and why they believe and about details of their faith. The result offers fresh and startling insights into age-old questions.

**God's Brain** Robinson Publishing

The best-selling author of *Why People Believe Weird Things* offers a revealing study of the influence of evolutionary theory on the modern economy, as well as the evolutionary roots of human economic behavior, bringing together the latest research in neuroeconomics, psychology, biology, and other fields to analyze the economics of everyday life. Reprint. 40,000 first printing.

[The Case Against Intelligent Design](#) Prometheus Books

Taking a perspective rooted in evolutionary biology with a focus on brain science, two distinguished

authors radically alter the fractious debate on the existence of God and the nature of religion. Two distinguished authors, renowned anthropologist Lionel Tiger and pioneering neuroscientist Michael McGuire, elucidate the perennial questions about religion: What is its purpose? How did it arise? What is its source? Why does every known culture have some form of it? Their answer is deceptively simple, yet at the same time highly complex: The brain creates religion and its varied concepts of God, and then in turn feeds on its creation to satisfy innate neurological and associated social needs. Brain science reveals that humans and other primates alike are afflicted by unavoidable sources of stress that the authors describe as "brainpain." To cope with this affliction people seek to "brainsoothe." We humans use religion and its social structures to induce brainsoothing as a relief for innate anxiety. How we do this is the subject of this groundbreaking book. In a concise, lively, accessible, and witty style, the authors combine zoom-lens vignettes of religious practices with discussions of the latest research on religion's neurological effects on the brain. Among other topics, they consider religion's role in providing positive socialization, its seeming obsession with regulating sex, the common biological scaffolding between nonhuman primates and humans and how this affects religion, and evidence that the palliative effects of religion on brain chemistry are not matched by nonreligious remedies. In a new preface to the paperback edition, Lionel Tiger discusses the paradoxical effects of religion--on the one hand, producing masterpieces of art and architecture and, on the other, fueling violence throughout history and into the present. This fascinating book provides key insights into the complexities of our brain and the role of religion, perhaps its most remarkable creation.

[Science Friction](#) Vintage

Who is the 'Devil'? And what is he due? The Devil is anyone who disagrees with you. And what he is due is the right to speak his mind. He must have this for your own safety's sake because his freedom is inextricably tied to your own. If he can be censored, why shouldn't you be censored? If we put barriers up to silence 'unpleasant' ideas, what's to stop the silencing of any discussion? This book is a full-throated defense of free speech and open inquiry in politics, science, and culture by the New York Times bestselling author and skeptic Michael Shermer. The new collection of essays and articles takes the Devil by the horns by tackling five key themes: free thought and free speech, politics and society, scientific humanism, religion, and the ideas of controversial intellectuals. For our own sake, we must give the Devil his due.

**Rewire Your Brain** Simon and Schuster

"In an account chock full of real-world examples reinforced by experimental research, Hood's marvelous book is an important contribution to the psychological literature that is revealing the actuality of our very irrational human nature." — Science In the vein of Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*, Mary Roach's *Spook*, and Dan Ariely's *Predictably Irrational*, *The Science of Superstition* uses hard science to explain pervasive irrational beliefs and behaviors: from the superstitious rituals of sports stars, to the depreciated value of houses where murders were committed, to the adoration of Elvis. *From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies---How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing

A scientific exploration into humanity's obsession with the afterlife and quest for immortality from the bestselling author and skeptic Michael Shermer In his most ambitious work yet, Shermer sets out to discover what drives humans' belief in life after death, focusing on recent scientific attempts to achieve immortality along with utopian attempts to create heaven on earth. For millennia, religions have concocted numerous manifestations of heaven and the afterlife, and though no one has ever returned from such a place to report what it is really like—or that it even exists—today science and technology are being used to try to make it happen in our lifetime. From radical life extension to cryonic suspension to mind uploading, Shermer considers how realistic these attempts are from a proper skeptical perspective. *Heavens on Earth* concludes with an uplifting paean to purpose and

progress and how we can live well in the here-and-now, whether or not there is a hereafter.

*The Case against Life After Death* Simon and Schuster

Science has never been more crucial to deciding the political issues facing the country. Yet science and scientists have less influence with the federal government than at any time since Richard Nixon fired his science advisors. In the White House and Congress today, findings are reported in a politicized manner; spun or distorted to fit the speaker's agenda; or, when they're too inconvenient, ignored entirely. On a broad array of issues—stem cell research, climate change, evolution, sex education, product safety, environmental regulation, and many others—the Bush administration's positions fly in the face of overwhelming scientific consensus. Federal science agencies—once fiercely independent under both Republican and Democratic presidents—are increasingly staffed by political appointees who know industry lobbyists and evangelical activists far better than they know the science. This is not unique to the Bush administration, but it is largely a Republican phenomenon, born of a conservative dislike of environmental, health, and safety regulation, and at the extremes, of evolution and legalized abortion. In *The Republican War on Science*, Chris Mooney ties together the disparate strands of the attack on science into a compelling and frightening account of our government's increasing unwillingness to distinguish between legitimate research and ideologically driven pseudoscience.

*The Republican War on Science* Oxford University Press

From the physician behind the wildly popular NutritionFacts website, *How Not to Die* reveals the groundbreaking scientific evidence behind the only diet that can prevent and reverse many of the causes of disease-related death. The vast majority of premature deaths can be prevented through simple changes in diet and lifestyle. In *How Not to Die*, Dr. Michael Greger, the internationally-renowned nutrition expert, physician, and founder of NutritionFacts.org, examines the fifteen top causes of premature death in America—heart disease, various cancers, diabetes, Parkinson's, high blood pressure, and more—and explains how nutritional and lifestyle interventions can sometimes trump prescription pills and other pharmaceutical and surgical approaches, freeing us to live healthier lives. The simple truth is that most doctors are good at treating acute illnesses but bad at preventing chronic disease. The fifteen leading causes of death claim the lives of 1.6 million Americans annually. This doesn't have to be the case. By following Dr. Greger's advice, all of it backed up by strong scientific evidence, you will learn which foods to eat and which lifestyle changes to make to live longer. History of prostate cancer in your family? Put down that glass of milk and add flaxseed to your diet whenever you can. Have high blood pressure? Hibiscus tea can work better than a leading hypertensive drug—and without the side effects. Fighting off liver disease? Drinking coffee can reduce liver inflammation. Battling breast cancer? Consuming soy is associated with prolonged survival. Worried about heart disease (the number 1 killer in the United States)? Switch to a whole-food, plant-based diet, which has been repeatedly shown not just to prevent the disease but often stop it in its tracks. In addition to showing what to eat to help treat the top fifteen causes of death, *How Not to Die* includes Dr. Greger's Daily Dozen—a checklist of the twelve foods we should consume every day. Full of practical, actionable advice and surprising, cutting edge nutritional science, these doctor's orders are just what we need to live longer, healthier lives.

*The "God" Part of the Brain* MIT Press

A polymath philosopher shares lighthearted examples of humanity's unspoken instinct toward favoritism to argue against zealous pursuits of fairness.

**Viewing the World with a Rational Eye** Penguin

Bestselling author Michael Shermer delves into the unknown, from heretical ideas about the boundaries of the universe to Star Trek's lessons about chance and time. A scientist pretends to be a psychic for a day—and fools everyone. An athlete discovers that good-luck rituals and getting into "the zone" may, or may not, improve his performance. A historian decides to analyze the data to see who was truly responsible for the Bounty mutiny. A son explores the possibilities of alternative and experimental medicine for his cancer-ravaged mother. And a skeptic realizes that it is time to turn the skeptical lens onto science itself. In each of the fourteen essays in *Science Friction*, psychologist and science historian Michael Shermer explores the very personal barriers and biases that plague and propel science, especially when scientists push against the unknown. What do we know and what do we not know? How does science respond to controversy, attack, and uncertainty? When does theory become accepted fact? As always, Shermer delivers a thought-provoking, fascinating, and entertaining view of life in the scientific age.

*Abominable Science* Columbia University Press

From bestselling author Michael Shermer, an investigation of the evolution of morality that is "a paragon of popularized science and philosophy" *The Sun* (Baltimore) A century and a half after Darwin first proposed an "evolutionary ethics," science has begun to tackle the roots of morality. Just as evolutionary biologists study why we are hungry (to motivate us to eat) or why sex is enjoyable (to motivate us to procreate), they are now searching for the very nature of humanity. In *The Science of Good and Evil*, science historian Michael Shermer explores how humans evolved from social primates to moral primates; how and why morality motivates the human animal; and how the foundation of moral principles can be built upon empirical evidence. Along the way he explains the implications of scientific findings for fate and free will, the existence of pure good and pure evil, and the development of early moral sentiments among the first humans. As he closes the divide between science and morality, Shermer draws on stories from the Yanamamö, infamously known as the "fierce people" of the tropical rain forest, to the Stanford studies on jailers' behavior in prisons. *The Science of Good and Evil* is ultimately a profound look at the moral animal, belief, and the scientific pursuit of truth.

*How We Believe* Simon and Schuster

Synthesizing thirty years of research, psychologist and science historian, Michael Shermer upends the traditional thinking about how humans form beliefs about the world. Simply put, beliefs come first and explanations for beliefs follow. The brain, Shermer argues, is a belief engine. Using sensory data that flow in through the senses, the brain naturally looks for and finds patterns—and then infuses those patterns with meaning, forming beliefs. Once beliefs are formed, our brains subconsciously seek out confirmatory evidence in support of those beliefs, which accelerates the process of reinforcing them, and round and round the process goes in a positive-feedback loop. In *The Believing Brain*, Shermer provides countless real-world examples of how this process operates, from politics, economics, and religion to conspiracy theories, the supernatural, and the paranormal. Ultimately, he demonstrates why science is the best tool ever devised to determine whether or not our belief matches reality.

**The Mind of the Market** Holt Paperbacks

A creationist-turned-scientist demonstrates the facts of evolution and exposes Intelligent Design's

real agenda. Science is on the defensive. Half of Americans reject the theory of evolution and "Intelligent Design" campaigns are gaining ground. Classroom by classroom, creationism is overthrowing biology. In *Why Darwin Matters*, bestselling author Michael Shermer explains how the newest brand of creationism appeals to our predisposition to look for a designer behind life's complexity. Shermer decodes the scientific evidence to show that evolution is not "just a theory" and illustrates how it achieves the design of life through the bottom-up process of natural selection. Shermer, once an evangelical Christian and a creationist, argues that Intelligent Design proponents are invoking a combination of bad science, political antipathy, and flawed theology. He refutes their pseudoscientific arguments and then demonstrates why conservatives and people of faith can and should embrace evolution. He then appraises the evolutionary questions that truly need to be settled, building a powerful argument for science itself. Cutting the politics away from the facts, *Why Darwin Matters* is an incisive examination of what is at stake in the debate over evolution.

*Think Your Way to a Better Life* Prometheus Books

This book is your chance to learn the specific Rich Habits you must have in order to succeed as well as the Poor Habits that you must avoid at all costs. Read it to unlock the secrets to success and failure, based on Tom Corley's five years' study of the daily activities of 233 rich people and 128 poor people as the authors expose the immense difference between the habits of the rich and the poor. Learn the proven strategies of Michael Yardney, Australia's leading authority on the psychology of success and wealth creation and American co-author, Tom Corley, who's internationally acclaimed research on the daily habits of the rich and poor has changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of ordinary people around the world. This book has been written for people who...- Are living from month to month but want to get out of the rat race and become rich- Are financially comfortable, but aspire for more- Want to create lifetime wealth- Want to teach their children how to become rich and leave a legacy

**How the Developing Brain Creates Supernatural Beliefs** Macmillan

Because every single one of us will die, most of us would like to know what—if anything—awaits us afterward, not to mention the fate of lost loved ones. Given the nearly universal vested interest in deciding this question in favor of an afterlife, it is no surprise that the vast majority of books on the topic affirm the reality of life after death without a backward glance. But the evidence of our senses and the ever-gaining strength of scientific evidence strongly suggest otherwise. In *The Myth of an Afterlife: The Case against Life after Death*, Michael Martin and Keith Augustine collect a series of contributions that redress this imbalance in the literature by providing a strong, comprehensive, and up-to-date casebook of the chief arguments against an afterlife. Divided into four separate sections, this collection opens with a broad overview of the issues, as contributors consider the strongest evidence of whether or not we survive death—in particular the biological basis of all mental states and their grounding in brain activity that ceases to function at death. Next, contributors consider a host of conceptual and empirical difficulties that confront the various ways of "surviving" death—from bodiless minds to bodily resurrection to any form of posthumous survival. Then essayists turn to internal inconsistencies between traditional theological conceptions of an afterlife—heaven, hell, karmic rebirth—and widely held ethical principles central to the belief systems supporting those notions. In the final section, authors offer critical evaluations of the main types of evidence for an afterlife. Fully interdisciplinary, *The Myth of an Afterlife: The Case against Life after Death* brings together a variety of fields of research to make that case, including cognitive neuroscience, philosophy of mind, personal identity, philosophy of religion, moral philosophy, psychical research, and anomalistic psychology. As the definitive casebook of arguments against life after death, this collection is required reading for any instructor, researcher, and student of philosophy, religious studies, or theology. It is sure to raise provocative issues new to readers, regardless of background, from those who believe fervently in the reality of an afterlife to those who do not or are undecided on the matter.

**The Belief Instinct** McGraw Hill Professional

Why does the human brain insist on interpreting the world and constructing a narrative? Michael S. Gazzaniga shows how our mind and brain accomplish the amazing feat of constructing our past—a process clearly fraught with errors of perception, memory, and judgment. By showing that the specific systems built into our brain do their work automatically and largely outside of our conscious awareness, Gazzaniga calls into question our everyday notions of self and reality. The implications of his ideas reach deeply into the nature of perception and memory, the profundity of human instinct, and the ways we construct who we are and how we fit into the world around us. Gazzaniga explains how the mind interprets data the brain has already processed, making "us" the last to know. He shows how what "we" see is frequently an illusion and not at all what our brain is perceiving. False memories become a part of our experience; autobiography is fiction. In exploring how the brain enables the mind, Gazzaniga points us toward one of the greatest mysteries of human evolution: how we become who we are.

*Believing* Henry Holt

Collected essays from bestselling author Michael Shermer's celebrated columns in *Scientific American* For fifteen years, bestselling author Michael Shermer has written a column in *Scientific American* magazine that synthesizes scientific concepts and theory for a general audience. His trademark combination of deep scientific understanding and entertaining writing style has thrilled his huge and devoted audience for years. Now, in *Skeptic*, seventy-five of these columns are available together for the first time; a welcome addition for his fans and a stimulating introduction for new readers.

**The True Story Behind the Vaccine-Autism Controversy** Sourcebooks, Inc.

Bestselling author Michael Shermer's exploration of science and morality that demonstrates how the scientific way of thinking has made people, and society as a whole, more moral. From Galileo and Newton to Thomas Hobbes and Martin Luther King, Jr., thinkers throughout history have consciously employed scientific techniques to better understand the non-physical world. The Age of Reason and the Enlightenment led theorists to apply scientific reasoning to the non-scientific disciplines of politics, economics, and moral philosophy. Instead of relying on the woodcuts of dissected bodies in old medical texts, physicians opened bodies themselves to see what was there; instead of divining truth through the authority of an ancient holy book or philosophical treatise, people began to explore the book of nature for themselves through travel and exploration; instead of the supernatural belief in the divine right of kings, people employed a natural belief in the right of democracy. In *The Moral Arc*, Shermer will explain how abstract reasoning, rationality, empiricism, skepticism—scientific ways of thinking—have profoundly changed the way we perceive morality and, indeed, move us ever closer to a more just world.

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