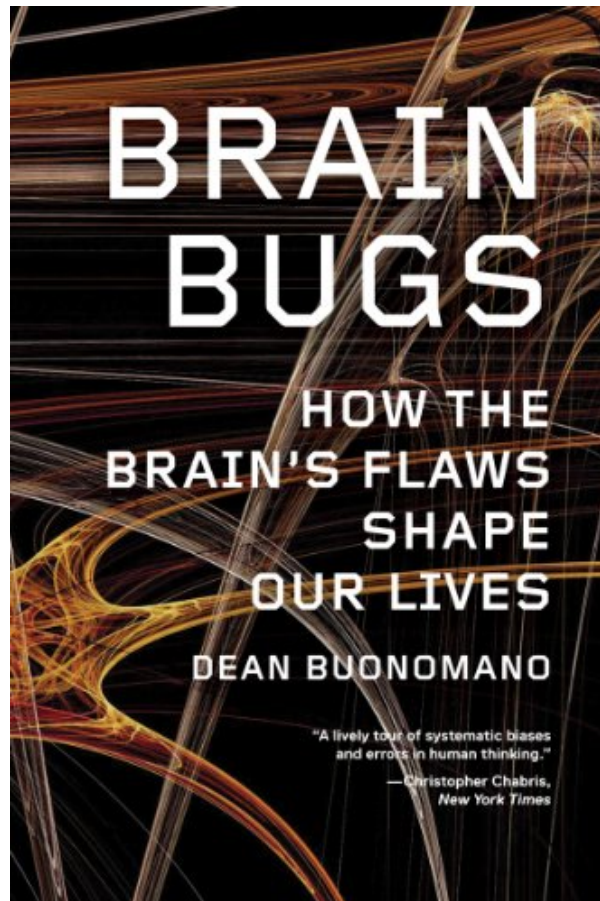
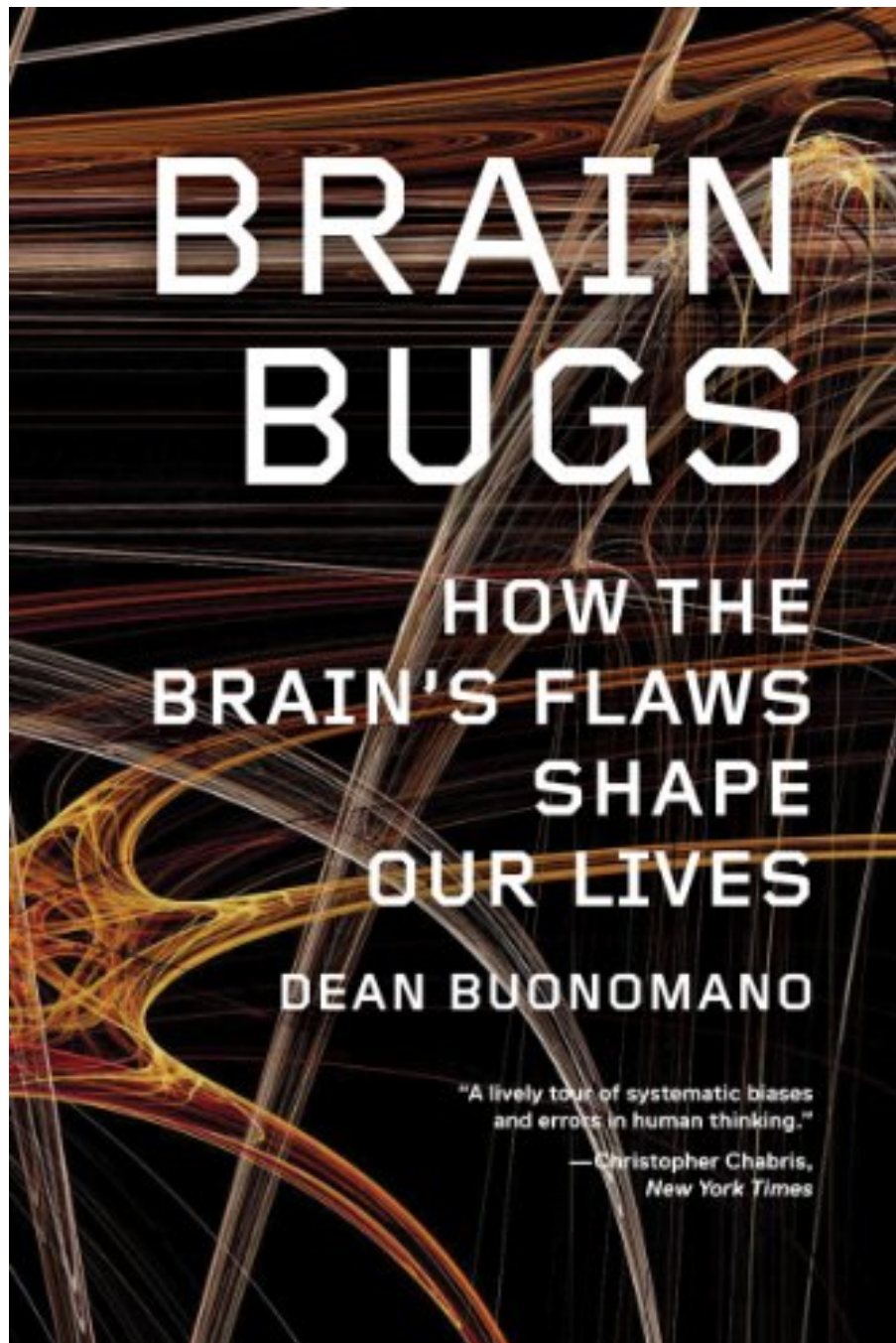


# **BRAIN BUGS: HOW THE BRAIN'S FLAWS SHAPE OUR LIVES BY DEAN BUONOMANO**



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### Review

"[An] intriguing take on behavioral economics, marketing and human foibles." (Kirkus Reviews )

"Writing a book about the hardware and software flaws of the human brain is an ingenious idea, and Buonomano has fully delivered on its promise. To a degree that is difficult for most of us to imagine, much less understand, our successes and failures, joys and sufferings, are the product of protein interactions and electrical changes taking place inside our heads. Brain Bugs is a remarkably accessible and engaging introduction to the neuroscience of the human condition."

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"Excellent. . . [Buonomano] reveals the intricate limitations and blessings of the most complex device in the known universe." The Atlantic

The human brain may be the best piece of technology ever created, but it's far from perfect. Drawing on colorful examples and surprising research, neuroscientist Dean Buonomano exposes the blind spots and weaknesses that beset our brains and lead us to make misguided personal, professional, and financial decisions. Whether explaining why we are susceptible to advertisements or demonstrating how false memories are formed, Brain Bugs not only explains the brain's inherent flaws but also gives us the tools to counteract them. 10 illustrations

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- 320 pages

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60 of 65 people found the following review helpful.

##### A Brief Summary and Review

By A. D. Thibeault

\*A full executive summary of this book is available at [newbooksinbrief dot com](http://newbooksinbrief.com).

The main argument: As much as we rely on our brains to navigate the complex world before us, anyone who has ever forgotten someone's name, or misread a situation, or made a poor decision in the heat of the moment knows that the brain does not always work as we would want. In his new book *'Brain Bugs'*, neurobiologist Dean Buonomano explores the brain's many pitfalls and mistakes (and how and why it makes them), and also offers up some advice on how we can best manage these so called *'brain bugs'* in our everyday lives.

Buonomano identifies 3 major sources whence brain bugs originate. The first has to do with the fact that our brains are the product of evolution, and have evolved as they have to answer the specific challenges that we faced in our evolutionary history; therefore, while our brains may be well adapted to perform functions that were particularly important in our survival and reproduction in the environment in which our species evolved, they may not do as well at functions which, though handy, did not figure as prominently in our evolutionary past (remembering names seems to fall under this category). The second source of our brain bugs may be attributed to the fact that while evolution has brought us a host of useful mental abilities that have allowed us to survive and thrive, it is still a rather clumsy process, and as such does not always offer up perfect, or even optimal solutions; thus the mental systems that we have are sometimes prone to error and quirky behaviour (hence optical illusions, the ever raging and somewhat awkward battle between our reason and our impulses, and a number of other interesting effects). Finally, the third source of our brain bugs stems from the fact that while many of the brain systems that we have inherited were well adapted to the environment in which our species evolved, this environment has changed considerably in the recent past, to the point where some of the adaptations themselves may be ineffective and even counter-productive today (our craving of sugary, fatty foods, for instance, would have been very useful in the environment in which we evolved--where starvation was much more of a threat than heart disease, but can be positively disastrous in the modern world, where the opposite is more often the case). A full executive summary of the book is available at [newbooksinbrief dot com](http://newbooksinbrief.com).

56 of 71 people found the following review helpful.

Better popular science books to be had out there.

By Kindle Customer

While covering a very interesting topic by a undoubtedly talented author, the book falls short of other similar books in the field of psychology. The author's writing is very slow to start, dancing around the same topic endless without exploring it in depth or giving concrete real world examples. This is somewhat remedied near the end of the book but 70 pages could be cut from the book and express the same ideas clearly.

As regular reader of popular science psychology books, I thought my opinion of the book might have been tainted by nostalgia and familiarity with the concepts but upon rereading passages from previous books I found that this was not the case. If you are looking for more enjoyable books in the same area I suggest reading:

Stumbling on Happiness

The Paradox of Choice

How we Decide

Spent: Sex, Evolution, and Consumer Behavior

All of the above provide a more enjoyable experience by engaging the reader with interesting in-book activities and well paced writing.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Brain Bugs; an overview and assessment

By Christoph Stephenson-Moe

In this review I plan to give a brief overview of the content of BRAIN BUGS, some of the author's stylistic choices and opinions, and my reactions to them. As well, an overall opinion of the book.

Buonomano explores the nature of the human brain and its most apparent flaws, separating the book into 9 chapters 7 of which are devoted to specific "brain bugs", or in other terms, common pervasive cognitive mistakes that affect all of us in ways ranging from funny and annoying to downright deadly. The first chapter is simply an introduction into the associative architecture of the brain and the last chapter serves as a conclusion.

Despite the author's categorization of this book, I break the book into two basics categories. The first category (the one I prefer) is where the author actually tries to teach the reader about brain structure and function. He dives into Hebbian plasticity, action potentials, synapses, and neurotransmitters. Best of all, he creates really great analogies throughout that make these concepts more tangible and easier to process. I'll give an example (other than comparing a brain to a computer). The author illustrates the concept of a synapse as akin to a game show where the contestant has to decide between two answers and is allowed to poll the audience. "Some members of the audience have louder voices than others, or some are known to be more reliable. The behavior of a given neuron is determined by the net sum of what thousands of presynaptic neurons are telling it". This analogy the author makes in the first chapter "The Memory Webb" helped me understand that Hebbian Plasticity was sort of like a contestant yelling out an answer and then the contestant immediately listening and answering the question, and increasing the likely hood that this would happen in the future, "cells that wire together fire together". The entire book is full of helpful comparisons such as these. and to the author's credit with every analogy he makes he clearly states its shortcomings and how in some cases it defiantly is not a good representation of neural anatomy or biology.

The second category that i break this book into (a significantly smaller portion) is where the author sheds his role of helpful instructor and takes on the role of opinionated scientist who takes for granted that any kind of religious belief is illogical and that having one is evidence of maladaptive neural circuitry caused by the



evolutionary process. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions and Buonomano makes (for the most part) a very logical case for what he says, but I felt much of what the author says about religion (there is a surprisingly large amount) had no place in this book. He devotes an entire chapter to it entitled "The Supernatural Bug". The farthest I think the author should have gone on this topic is to investigate the tendency of people to believe in things that are not scientifically provable. The route he takes is a bit more offensive. As I am writing a review and not a rebuttal I won't go to much into this, I just think that anyone who is considering reading this book should know that the author spends a considerable amount of time making a case for atheism. I was not expecting this when I started reading this book and was sort of blind sided by it.

The most interesting part of this book by far is chapter six entitled "Unreasonable Reasoning". In this chapter the author touches on manipulative psychological techniques such as framing, Anchoring and Loss aversion. The truly fascinating part of this chapter however is the part that deals with probability blindness. Essentially all the tricks that a casino uses in order for people to think that games aren't as unfair as they actually are and other things of that nature. To illustrate his points he poses a few statistical questions to the reader that seem quite obvious, I got literally every one of them wrong. Perhaps most interestingly, he explains the Monty Hall Problem in a way that actually makes sense. For those who don't know the Monty Hall problem is essentially a problem where someone has to guess between three containers to find one prize. After guessing Monty Hall reveals that there is no prize in one of the unpicked containers, the person is then asked if they would like to change their choice and statistically speaking the answer should always be yes. I won't spoil the explanation, but trust me its great.

All in all this book is well written, informative, and interesting. If you don't hold any strong religious views or like learning about the points of view of people who disagree with you I recommend this book. If I am to be brutally honest though, this book is really just a less awesome version of BRAIN RULES (written by John Medina), and because it focuses solely on the brain's flaws its kind of a bummer.

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