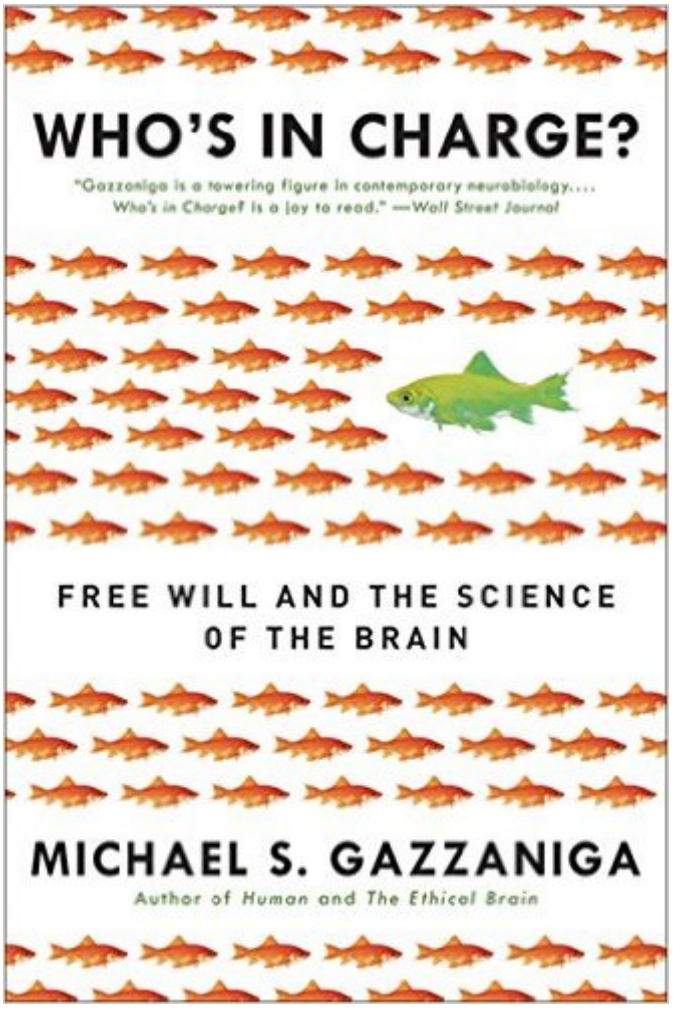
Who's In Charge?: Free Will And The Science Of The Brain



Synopsis

â œBig questions are Gazzanigaâ ™s stock in trade.â •â ”New York Timesâ œGazzaniga is one of the most brilliant experimental neuroscientists in the world.â •â ”Tom Wolfeâ œGazzaniga stands as a giant among neuroscientists, for both the quality of his research and his ability to communicate it to a general public with infectious enthusiasm.â •â ”Robert Bazell, Chief Science Correspondent, NBC News The author of Human, Michael S. Gazzaniga has been called the â œfather of cognitive neuroscience.â • In his remarkable book, Whoâ ™s in Charge?, he makes a powerful and provocative argument that counters the common wisdom that our lives are wholly determined by physical processes we cannot control. His well-reasoned case against the idea that we live in a â œdeterminedâ • world is fascinating and liberating, solidifying his place among the likes of Oliver Sacks, Antonio Damasio, V.S. Ramachandran, and other bestselling science authors exploring the mysteries of the human brain.

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Ecco; Reprint edition (September 11, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0061906115

ISBN-13: 978-0061906114

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (107 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #48,127 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #26 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Free Will & Determinism #35 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Psychology > Neuropsychology #39 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Basic Sciences > Neuroscience

Customer Reviews

This easy-to-read book is skilfully written for a lay readership by a veteran cognitive neuroscientist, famous for his work on split brain patients. The elogious reviews of Alan Sewell, J. Gomez and others spell out in detail its numerous merits. I agree with many of those positive comments, but rather than repeating them I would like to focus on three weaknesses.First, in tackling a subject at the intersection of neuroscience and philosophy, the author needed to draw on modern scholarship in both areas. But he fails in this. He describes the work of dozens of modern neuroscientists and

psychologists, and briefly mentions a few classical philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Locke), but has nothing to say about modern philosophical scholarship. There is no mention at all of the contributions of philosophers such as Dennett, Van Inwagen, Kane, Kim, Murphy and Miele, who have all written extensively on the philosophical questions that the book attempts to address (free will, emergence, selfhood, complementarity and downward causation).Second, Gazzaniga fails to define what he means by "free will". This is a serious defect, because the definitional problem is central to the modern debate about free will. I'm not by any means a Dennett fan, but the subtitle of Dennetts's 1984 book Elbow Room was a true aphorism: "The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting". Some varieties don't exist but others do, and those are in Dennett's view (and mine) the ones worth wanting.Third, in introducing chaos and quantum indeterminism as a defence against hard determinism, Gazzaniga attempts to guide the unsophisticated layman through a deep and difficult controversy, all in eight pages.

We humans love our dualisms: good or evil, hot or cold, free or determined. Who's in Charge?, a book extrapolated from the author's 2009/10 Gifford Lectures, is a book that questions that last dualism. Given what we know about the brain, Gazzaniga writes, it is not quite clear whether the idea of 'free will' really makes sense (as generally conceived) or if determinism really has the implications we usually think it does.Here is the picture Gazzaniga (roughly) paints. Marshaling much evidence from his and others' studies, it appears that our brain is something like a collection of modules performing different functions WITHOUT that 'central command' module that is supposed to approximate the free will (like a president who has final signing or veto power over bills). Moreover, that feeling we have of a unified conscious experience is most likely the result not of a 'central commander' module, but a module (appropriately) referred to as 'the interpreter,' whose role is to construct (somewhat) post hoc explanations of why we did what we did AS IF we were really conscious in doing it. Here, Gazzaniga draws on research of split-brain patients, whose corpus collossums are severed, disallowing their left and right brain hemispheres from talking to each other. Studies show that when the right hemisphere is told to do something (say, the left eye is shown a word and the patient is asked to grab the object that they are shown from an array of objects), the left hemisphere (where the interpreter is) will often construct a rationale for why the patient grabbed the object (that has nothing to do with the instructions to the right hemisphere). For a simpler example of the interpreter in action, think about when you hit your thumb with a hammer.

The first question is whether a layperson can enjoy this book about such a profoundly complex

subject as the human brain and its relationship to sentient consciousness. The answer is YES! Not because the hyper-complex nature of the subject is "dumbed down" but because Michael Gazzaniga is a gifted writer talented in expressing the most complex ideas in easy-to-understand sentences. He has a most delightful sense of humor that conveys his insights in a light-hearted and enjoyable manner.Let me also say up front that this book is useful in explaining how the brain operates on two levels. Gazzaniga explains how the "right brain" is driven by the senses and acts on an immediate, subconscious level. The "left brain" applies a conscious after-the-fact reasoning that attempts to make sense of the actions that the subconscious mind has already taken. The left-brain's "interpreter module" is always at work inventing theories to "explain" what the right half of the brain has already "decided" on the basis of reflexive subconscious instinct.Gazzaniga gives powerful examples of how easily the "interpreter module" can be deceived into coming to false conclusions. Suffice it to say that our brains can work against us by making poor decisions on the basis of perceived information that is false or unreliable. Understanding how the conscious mind rationalizes decisions that the subconscious mind has already acted on has relevance in helping us to make better decisions in every aspect of life. The book should be read for this reason alone. It explains how our conscious mind is far more fallible than we ever imagined.

Power and Improving Your Memory (Brain exercise, Concentration, Neuroplasticity, Mental Clarity, Brain Plasticity) Brain Training: Power Brain! - Secret Techniques To: Improve Memory, Focus & Concentration (Brain teasers, Improve memory, Improve focus, Concentration, Brain power) Gluten-Free, Wheat-Free, Dairy-Free, Sugar-Free, Caffeine-Free?.Are you kidding me?: All natural and 99% organic recipes that are quick and easy to prepare. The Healthy Gluten-Free Life: 200 Delicious Gluten-Free, Dairy-Free, Soy-Free and Egg-Free Recipes! Gluten Free: Gluten Free Quick-start Guide To Living A Gluten-Free and Wheat-Free Diet (Over 100 Gluten-Free Recipes) Eat Weird. Be Normal.: Med Free Brain Diet & Cookbook for Bipolar, Memory & Everyone who wants a Better Brain (Med Free Method Book Series 2) NLP: Neuro Linguistic Programming: A Practical Guide To Taking Charge Of Your Life By Changing Your Brain And Mind Why Isn't My Brain Working?: A revolutionary understanding of brain decline and effective strategies to recover your brain's health BRAIN: 51 Powerful Ways to Improve Brain Power, Enhance Memory, Intelligence and Concentration NATURALLY! (MEMORY, Memory Improvement, Learning, Brain Training) Grain Brain Audiobook: David Perlmutter GRAIN BRAIN Audio CD: Grain Brain David Perlmutter Brain Games #1: Lower Your Brain Age in Minutes a Day (Brain Games (Numbered))