



**The Biological Mind: How Brain, Body, and
Environment Collaborate to Make Us Who We
Are**

Alan Jasanoff

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A pioneering neuroscientist argues that we are more than our brains

To many, the brain is the seat of personal identity and autonomy. But the way we talk about the brain is often rooted more in mystical conceptions of the soul than in scientific fact. This blinds us to the physical realities of mental function. We ignore bodily influences on our psychology, from chemicals in the blood to bacteria in the gut, and overlook the ways that the environment affects our behavior, via factors varying from subconscious sights and sounds to the weather. As a result, we alternately overestimate our capacity for free will or equate brains to inorganic machines like computers. But a brain is neither a soul nor an electrical network: it is a bodily organ, and it cannot be separated from its surroundings. Our selves aren't just inside our heads--they're spread throughout our bodies and beyond. Only once we come to terms with this can we grasp the true nature of our humanity.

The Biological Mind: How Brain, Body, and Environment Collaborate to Make Us Who We Are Details

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Soren says

Not the best book I've ever read, but the subject matter was pretty interesting. That last chapter was pretty weird.

Erin says

This book is more of a thought experiment than your typical popscience book. It's a lot more conjecture and theory than fact. The ideas posed are fairly common sense and I felt that the source material was limited severely by modern doctrine. The largest barrier to scientific breakthrough today remains political correctness. In some places, I felt like I was being lectured by a dinosaur with no knowledge of genetic breakthroughs and what they mean about brain function and intelligence.

Don Kent says

This is a well written and construed book that carefully explains the interrelationships and science that regulates who we are and how the stated interrelationships make it so.

Cheryl says

There were some very interesting parts of this book, and I did learn a few new things, but overall it was very dry. The last chapter was also particularly strange.

Christopher L. says

An excellent book about the neuroscience of how the interactions between what we think, how we move (or not), and who we socially engage with create the individuals we are becoming. Jasanoff's argument, in brief, is that "who we are" is the result of "the interdependent nature" of our brain, body, and environment (p. 3).

Two of my favorite quotes are:

(1) "Our brains are not mysterious beacons, glowing with inner radiance against a dark void. Instead, they are organic prisms that refract the light of the universe back out into itself" (p. 170).

(2) "...the most fundamental lesson of neuroscience: that our brains are biotic entities woven organically into a physical world from which they cannot be extricated without grave loss" (p. 234).

All I'll say about the final chapter is that it is a wild ride and reads like an episode from "Black Mirror."
