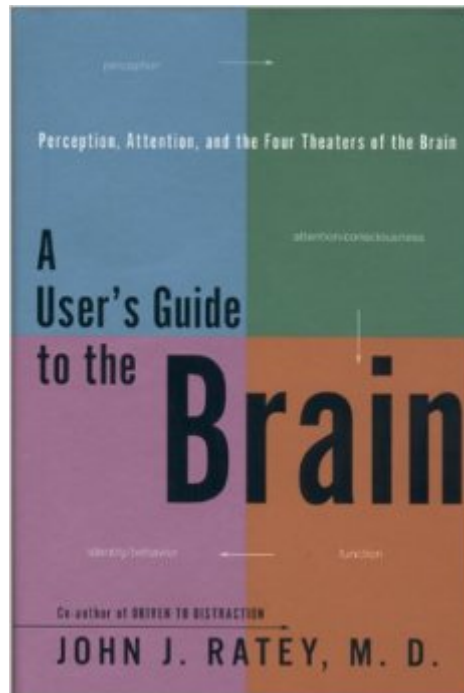


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A User's Guide To The Brain: Perception, Attention And The Four Theaters Of The Brain



Synopsis

For the first time ever, discoveries in our understanding of the brain are changing anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and psychology--indeed, the brain itself may become a catalyst for transforming the very nature of these inquiries. In *A User's Guide to the Brain*, Dr. John Ratey, best-selling co-author of *Driven to Distraction*, explains in lucid detail and with perfect clarity the basic structure and chemistry of the brain: how its systems shape our perceptions, emotions, actions, and reactions; how possession of this knowledge can enable us to more fully understand and improve our lives; and how the brain responds to the guidance of its user. He draws on examples from his own practice, from research, and from everyday life to illuminate aspects of the brain's functioning, among them prenatal and early childhood development; the perceptual systems; the processes of consciousness, memory, emotion, and language; and the social brain. As the best means for explaining the dynamic interactions of the brain, Ratey offers as a metaphor the four "theaters" of exploration: 1) the act of perception; 2) the filters of attention, consciousness, and cognition; 3) the array of options employed by the brain--memory, emotion, language, movement--to transform information into function; and 4) behavior and identity. Ratey succeeds not only in giving us a compelling portrait of the brain's infinite flexibility and unpredictability but also in demonstrating how our very understanding of the brain affects who we are.

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Customer Reviews

"Mental problems, from hot temper to laziness, from chronic worry to excessive drinking, all have roots in the biology of the brain." (p. 357) This is a report on a revolution taking place in neuroscience, psychiatry, psychology and kindred disciplines. The old paradigms are crumbling under the onslaught of a new understanding of how the brain really works. Harvard Medical School psychiatrist John J. Ratey's "guide" (it's more than that) is an admirable exercise in bringing us up to date on what is happening in brain science--what we suspect, what we know, and how this knowledge is affecting clinical practice. In a sense Ratey's book is a report on a new paradigm. It is biology-based and relies first and foremost on the physiology of the brain and body as they have developed over time. Gone are the artificial constructs of Freudian psychology and the very limited black-box psychology of behaviorism. The new psychology is based on opening that black box and looking inside. Of course what we find there is enormously complex, and we are, to use Ratey's expression (p. 124), "still on the first step of a very long staircase." Yet, because of the growing power of neuroscience to study and access the living brain in ways that were impossible just a few years ago, we are entering an exciting time, full of hope and wonder. As Dr. Ratey explains in "Acknowledgments," this book began as a cooperative research effort by many people toward writing a "primer on the brain for mental health professionals." Then it was suggested by Pantheon editor Linda Healey that a smaller version "that would try to instruct the public at large" be written. A professional science writer, Mark Fischetti, was hired and schooled.

Do yourself a favor and read this book. Even better, do your doctor a favor and give a copy of this book to her or him. It's your brain, and you want to know how to care for it, tune it, nurture it and protect it. This sophisticated book -- up to date in the year 2001 -- and in remarkably clear and plain English -- and in amazing detail -- will tell you much that you need to know. And provide you a framework within which you can integrate future knowledge. When the next edition comes out, within a few years, you will want to read that one too. January 1, 2001 marked the end of 'The Decade of the Brain' -- ten years of brain-based research focusing upon neuroscience, neuroanatomy, neurophenomenology, psychopharmacology, psychiatry and neural functioning. While this massive undertaking has been somewhat overshadowed by even more massive investigations of the human genome, it is likely that advances from brain research will have a greater impact on your life and your health. Dr. John Ratey, a Harvard Medical School professor and author or co-author of other well received previous books on neuropsychiatric conditions (eg, 'Driven to Distraction'), explains why and how, and in language that you can read even if you didn't study biology in college. Yet he never speaks down to the reader -- I am a professional medical

educator myself, and I am sufficiently impressed by the breadth and depth of this book that I will recommend it to my students and colleagues. Growing knowledge about the brain is transforming our understanding of ourselves and our world, and Dr. Ratey is able to convey this information to the reader through lively descriptions and stories and through enlightening clinical vignettes. The book is organized in a manner that is straightforward and incremental.

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