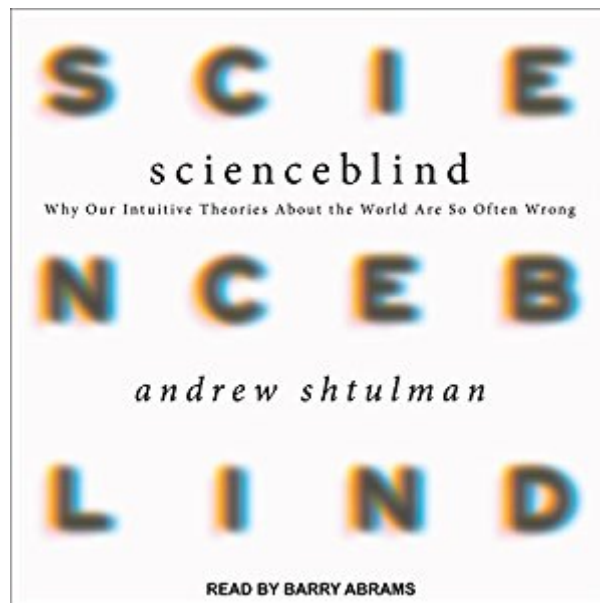




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Scienceblind: Why Our Intuitive Theories About The World Are So Often Wrong



Synopsis

Humans are born to create theories about the world - unfortunately, they're usually wrong, and keep us from understanding the world as it really is. Why do we catch colds? What causes seasons to change? And if you fire a bullet from a gun and drop one from your hand, which bullet hits the ground first? In a pinch, we almost always get these questions wrong. Worse, we regularly misconstrue fundamental qualities of the world around us. In *Scienceblind*, cognitive and developmental psychologist Andrew Shtulman shows that the root of our misconceptions lies in the theories about the world we develop as children. They're not only wrong, they close our minds to ideas inconsistent with them, making us unable to learn science later in life. So how do we get the world right? We must dismantle our intuitive theories and rebuild our knowledge from its foundations. The reward won't just be a truer picture of the world, but clearer solutions to many controversies - around vaccines, climate change, or evolution - that plague our politics today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Interesting perspective on the intellect (or the lack thereof) of the US populace.

Anyone who relies on intuitive deduction (and there's a lot about intuitive theories in this book), will instantly surmise that I am related to the author, Andrew Shtulman. That much is true: Andrew and I are cousins (although Andrew might argue that all humankind is composed of cousins, even if it's thirty times removed). What is also true is that even if we

were not, I would still 5-star this book because it's thought-provoking, intelligently written, fascinating in parts, and also carries an important message: we are squandering our future by turning our collective backs on the knowledge of science. Andrew's premise is this: intuitive theories impede not just how much we think but how we live—the choices we make, the advice we take, the goals we pursue. The problem with relying on intuition, instead of research-based evidence, is two-fold: first, intuitive theories are usually wrong. And second, they can actually cause harm, as is evidenced by a distrust of pasteurization or vaccination because they're not "pure" or not taking action on climate change because "it doesn't feel warmer." The book is divided into two parts: intuitive theories of the physical world and intuitive theories of the biological world. Here is where I need to interject that I have an atrophied left brain, and have never had a firm understanding of "all things logical", including the sciences and math. Fortunately, the exposition is very accessible without feeling dumbed down. Take matter, for example. The subhead is: What is the world made of? How do those components interact? Or take gravity: What makes something heavy? What makes something move? While the first half of the book was more of an expository nature, the second half really ignited my imagination because it touches on questions like: what makes us alive? Why do we grow older? Why are there so many life forms and how do they change over time? I had to question my assumptions of why one thing (say, a plant) is alive and another (say, the sun) is not and how we evolve and grow. Most importantly, in this era of religion-led anti-evolution fervor, I recognized what's really at stake: nothing less than understanding and accepting the trajectory of life/death and recognizing why living things are so exquisitely adapted to their environments. By recognizing the nuances, we can accept that aging, for example, is one continuous change rather than a series of discrete changes rather than one continuous change and that inheritance is the reproductive transmission of genetic information, not just a consequence of nurture. Yes, scientific knowledge complicates our understanding of the world rather than dumb it down or force us to believe a magical force will keep us safe in times of trouble. But with so much at stake "from stem cell research to life-saving antibiotics, from nuclear energy to climate change" how can we afford to continue to live blindly? Reevaluating our intuitive theories is a major step in helping guide us not only to how we live, but why we live.

This book provides a clear and convincing explanation for a question many of us have asked ourselves at some point: why is it so difficult to understand and accept scientific concepts? Dr. Shtulman identifies the root of the difficulty: starting in childhood, we come up with intuitive (but

incorrect) theories to explain the unexplainable. The problem with these theories is that they feel very real - they give us false confidence about how much we know; we will stubbornly deny evidence that contradicts our beliefs. In other words, we are denying science in favor of intuitive theories. The large-scale implications of science denial make this book unsettlingly timely and relevant; it reminds us to trust evidence over intuition. I highly recommend this insightful and entertaining read.

I picked up this book because I am familiar with the author's work and have always been impressed by the clarity of his writing. Although just a chapter into this book, I am really enjoying it. Shtulman's writing style continues to impress, with well-supported research explained as well as demonstrated with engaging anecdotes. As a developmental psychologist, I'm hoping to include this text in a course as a supplement for my undergraduate students. As a parent, I will recommend this text to my friends who want to understand their children's thinking (or even the roots of their own).

As someone who has studied cognitive psychology (with Professor Shtulman), I went in very confident that my intuitive theories about the world did not cloud my judgement about various scientific topics. And with (almost) every example given in the book, I was humbled by the fact that my intuitive theories are just as strong as anyone else's. For anyone, regardless if they have studied psychology or not, it is a great read to demonstrate how often we overestimate our knowledge of the world around us, and how hard we must work to overcome these intuitive theories. Especially now, in the times of climate deniers, and parents against vaccination, it is an important book to read. Additionally, for those who have little or no knowledge of psychology, every topic is broken down in a way that is easy to understand, and filled with examples to demonstrate relevance in everyday life. A must read for anyone interested in learning about the foundations of our beliefs, and how those foundations continue to make an impact throughout adulthood.

This book is fascinating, important, and often very funny. The approach of identifying and targeting the intuitive conceptual errors that lead us to stupidity is enlightening. A real pleasure to read.

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