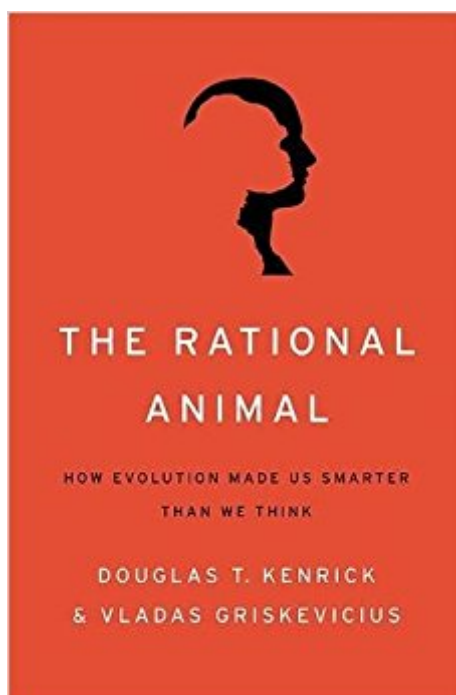


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# The Rational Animal: How Evolution Made Us Smarter Than We Think



## Synopsis

Why do three out of four professional football players go bankrupt? How can illiterate jungle dwellers pass a test that tricks Harvard philosophers? And why do billionaires work so hard only to give their hard-earned money away? When it comes to making decisions, the classic view is that humans are eminently rational. But growing evidence suggests instead that our choices are often irrational, biased, and occasionally even moronic. Which view is right or is there another possibility? In this animated tour of the inner workings of the mind, psychologist Douglas T. Kenrick and business professor Vladas Griskevicius challenge the prevailing views of decision making, and present a new alternative grounded in evolutionary science. By connecting our modern behaviors to their ancestral roots, they reveal that underneath our seemingly foolish tendencies is an exceptionally wise system of decision making. From investing money to choosing a job, from buying a car to choosing a romantic partner, our choices are driven by deep-seated evolutionary goals. Because each of us has multiple evolutionary goals, though, new research reveals something radical; there's more than one "you" making decisions. Although it feels as if there is just one single "self" inside your head, your mind actually contains several different subselves, each one steering you in a different direction when it takes its turn at the controls. *The Rational Animal* will transform the way you think about decision making. And along the way, you'll discover the intimate connections between ovulating strippers, Wall Street financiers, testosterone-crazed skateboarders, Steve Jobs, Elvis Presley, and you.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Sheer stupidity is what economic rationalists see when Elvis Presley buys 100 glitzy Cadillacs, when New York governor Eliot Spitzer pays as much as \$80,000 for escort services, and when Steven Spielberg invests with Bernie Madoff. But Kenrick and Griskevicius see something more complex. In these apparently stupid decisions, they discern the results of an evolutionary history that impels men and women to ignore their own immediate self-interest in ways that ultimately foster the biological success of the species. That biological success, the authors argue, depends on a human identity that evolution has partitioned into seven separate subselves, each serving a different fundamental human need: self-protection, disease avoidance, affiliation, status, mate acquisition, mate retention, and kin care. When the environment triggers behaviors inscribed in any of these subselves, economic rationality may go out the window. Some readers may protest that the authors are offering biological justifications for foolishness. But the authors actually provide readers with helpful strategies for managing their evolutionary subselves prudently. A persuasive and entertaining look at the Darwinian dynamics of decision making. --Bryce Christensen

The Rational Animal is a fun romp through the comedy of human errors. Again and again, the authors find, evolutionary urges and hardwired brains explain behaviors rational economists cannot. Humans just don't make sense, it seems, unless you expect them not to. Mother Jones; [An] entertaining and informative book. Minneapolis Star-Tribune; A persuasive and entertaining look at the Darwinian dynamics of decision making. Booklist; Vigorously investigated.... Sharp, piquant science/behavioral-economics writing. Kirkus Reviews; Why do we overspend, underinvest, and make seemingly poor decisions? The Rational Animal shows that the answer comes from a simple, but often overlooked place: Our animal ancestors. Whether we like it or not, evolution has shaped who we are today. But rather than making us foolishly irrational, looking deeper inside ourselves reveals a surprisingly brilliant beast. Jonah Berger, author of Contagious: Why Things Catch On; Kenrick is one of evolutionary psychology's alpha males, a grizzled veteran of many battles against the Blank Slate dogma. Griskevicius is the field's most brilliant and productive young star, whose ingenious research proved the transformative power of Darwinism for understanding business and marketing. Together, they make a fascinating, compelling, and fun case that people's decision-making embodies a deep evolutionary rationality rather than a superficial economic rationality. If you want to take the Red Pill and really understand

what is going on in modern consumerist capitalism; if you want to dive deeper into our paleo-rationality than Dan Ariely or Daniel Kahneman have dared to go, you must read this book. — Geoffrey Miller, University of New Mexico, and author of *The Mating Mind* and *Spent*; Do you want to understand all kinds of human judgment errors that seemed inexplicable before? And do you want to be able to profit handsomely from that new and deep form of understanding? Then don't miss the profound insights of this groundbreaking book. — Robert B. Cialdini, author of *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*

This book gives great understanding and insight into why we often make decisions and take actions we ourselves don't understand in retrospect, and the people around us, that know us, definitely think we lost it! The idea that we have sub personas, deeply vested in our ancient past makes a lot of sense to me and fits well with our observed behavior. As a manager of a large team, and working in a company where I need to influence many people that do not report to me understanding these sub personas and what drives them is very helpful. This knowledge can and will change how I approach getting difficult messages across, especially when consequential action is needed. By bringing a persona to the forefront that has behaviors sympathetic to the specific issue, you can more easily get decisions made, ideas accepted, and action taken. I highly recommend reading this book, whatever you do in life. If nothing else it will give you new perspectives on why people do the things they do!

This is truly a great read for anyone interested in the human mind in general and human decision making in particular. In recent years we've already witnessed a major shift from a rational-economic model of the human mind to a more psychologically based irrational and intuitive model of human decision making, in which biases, heuristics, gut feelings, and habits are at center stage. Kenrick and Griskevicius, both eminent evolutionary social psychologists, now provide us with a view on where this hot new field of scientific research and debate should be heading: towards an evolutionary understanding of where those biases, heuristics and gut feelings come from, how they contribute to deeply rational (that is, fitness enhancing) decisions most of the time, and truly moronic decisions sometimes, and how they are dependent upon which of your seven subselves is currently activated. I am convinced that this book may be the start of a new and massive research program that will help us come to a full-blown science of human decision making. Patrick Vyncke, professor of communication management at Ghent University (Belgium)

As a classically trained economist and someone who has gotten into Psychology and Behavior Economics, I learned a great deal reading this book. It changed the way I looked at human behavior. I never knew the evolutionary perspective on human behavior existed. I was reluctant to read this book given Taleb's negative review. However, I am glad I read it. Maybe Taleb's criticism is higher level stuff, but for ordinary readers like me, I think the information in Rational Animal is great. I now understand why Robert Cialdini, the author of "Influence," recommends this book.

Helpful explanations of our seemingly irrational human behavior. Helps you have even more empathy for the flawed human condition. The model is easy to understand and remember in terms of our priorities:- evading physical harm- avoiding disease- making friends- gaining status- attracting a mate- keeping that mate- caring for family

This book is an interesting, well-written, and well-thought-out. It's a great introduction to the principles of evolutionary psychology, and it's an entertaining and light read. A recommended buy!

Having the chance to hear Vladas (co-author) speak himself about the book inspired me to buy it. I didn't realize that the 7 sub-selves were going to have such a profound effect in the way that I would perceive motivations (situational, and evolutionary explained).

This book has generally good reviews and it has noble intentions, but I'm afraid I just don't get it. The sub-title reference to evolution is a complete misnomer. This book is really just a collection of poorly-connected short stories with no serious basis in physical or psychological evolution. Summarizing various published research papers and connecting them with well-known public figures or newspaper stories does not make this a coherent book about evolutionary psychology. I was truly disappointed with "The Rational Animal".

I do not often give bad ratings to books because writing a book is a very hard task, and if I like it or not is secondary to the effort that it took to write. However, some books need a poor rating to warn readers about what they are about to encounter. I am not alluding that the book should not be read, simply, it has some dangerous naiveness. The book is a series of narratives about evolution and behavior in humans, this would not be a problem but the authors go through great lengths to give their narratives the illusion of scientific fact. Most of the support they give was work done by other behavioral psychologist or scientists. Narratives and theories are fine, it is why essays are

interesting but the authors do not call this book an essay, they call it a scientific book. It lacks scientific rigor. In addition, their narrative on the refusal of food aid by Ethiopia as "irrational" is so full of problems, assumptions, and bad understanding of probability it is really disturbing to read. To use that as a case study of some evolutionary reason of why humans may seem irrational is known as journalism, not science.

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