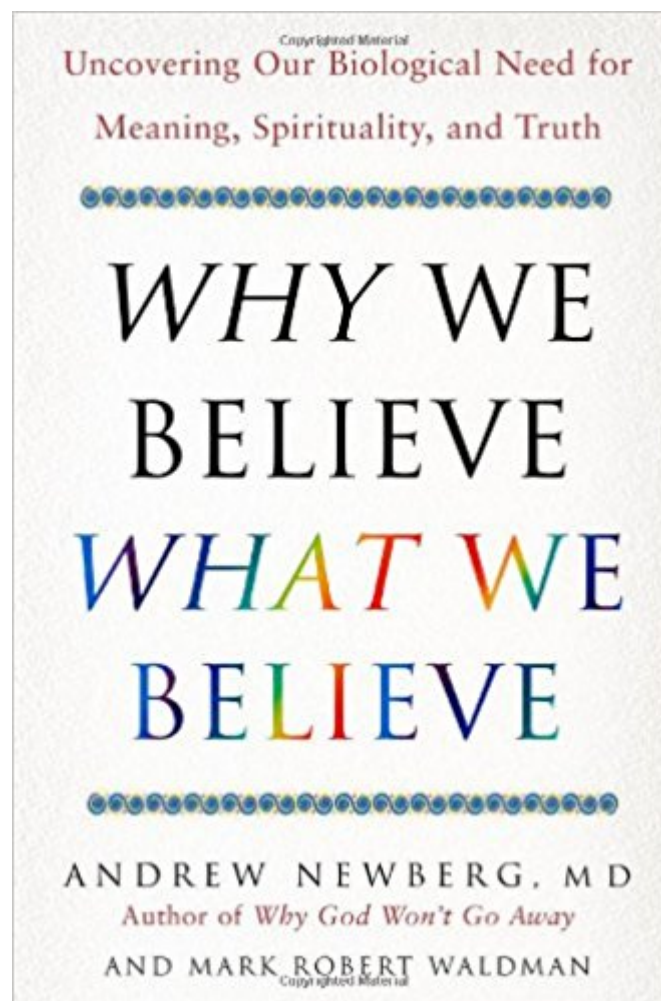




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# Why We Believe What We Believe: Uncovering Our Biological Need For Meaning, Spirituality, And Truth



## Synopsis

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE THE THINGS YOU BELIEVE? Do you remember events differently from how they really happened? Where do your superstitions come from? How do morals evolve? Why are some people religious and others nonreligious? Everyone has thoughts and questions like these, and now Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman expose, for the first time, how our complex views emerge from the neural activities of the brain. Bridging science, psychology, and religion, they demonstrate, in simple terminology, how the brain perceives reality and transforms it into an extraordinary range of personal, ethical, and creative premises that we use to build meaning, value, spirituality, and truth into our lives. When you come to understand this remarkable process, it will change forever the way you look at the world and yourself. Supported by groundbreaking research, including brain scans of people as they pray, meditate, and even speak in tongues, Newberg and Waldman propose a new model for how deep convictions emerge and influence our lives. You will even glimpse how the mind of an atheist works when contemplating God. Using personal stories, moral paradoxes, and optical illusions, the authors demonstrate how our brains construct our fondest assumptions about reality, offering recommendations for exercising your most important "muscle" in order to develop a more life-affirming, flexible range of attitudes. You'll discover how to: Recognize when your beliefs are altered by others Guard against mental traps and prejudicial thinking Distinguish between destructive and constructive beliefs Cultivate spiritual and ethical ideals Ultimately, we must always return to our beliefs. From the ordinary to the extraordinary, they give meaning to the mysteries of life, providing us with our individual uniqueness and the ability to fill our lives with joy. Most important, though, they give us inspiration and hope, beacons to guide us through the light and dark corners of the soul.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When Newberg, a professor of radiology, psychiatry, and religious studies, ponders the nature of reality, it makes fascinating, mind-bending reading. What is reality, he asks, but a combination of the subjective vividness of an experience (strengthened by the continuity and duration of that experience) and the consensus of others that it is so? Expanding on a thread picked up before in *Why God Won't Go Away* (2001), he and Waldman examine the Liar's Paradox, assert the likes of "Truth cannot be entirely known, for no matter how much evidence you collect, your knowledge will always be incomplete," and maintain that individual reality is exclusively guided by a combination of sensory perceptions (which are prey to any number of distorting influences) and beliefs. Heady stuff, but with extensive research and credible scientific resources to support it, enough to make a person rethink concepts of truth, reality, and belief. So rich a book that it begs to be read in small bites over a long time. Donna Chavez

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"Our beliefs are the most precious things we possess. But how do we get them? Newberg and Waldman propose a thoughtful, well-documented, biological hypothesis...[that is] fascinating for believers and nonbelievers alike." -- Dean Hamer, PhD, geneticist and author of *"Living with Our Genes"* and *"The God Gene"*

The book is actually the first edition of BORN TO BELIEVE. I do not know why they changed the title, why cant they just retain the same title. The table content is so identical, so much so, at a glance I don't see any different. However, since this is the first edition, there are facts that the new edition have, are not written in this book. Anyway, I got this book in excellent mint condition, I love the hardcover, love the contents, sadly I also love the first ed title. I also have the new BORN TO BELIEVE as well, but, in paperback. So in case people want to borrow this book, I will not hesitate to lend them the hardcover one, and the paperback remain permanently on my bookshelf. In term of content, I have been trying to find neurotheology book with mild philosophical view and more into factual evidences; and this is just the book. Although, Yes! like many others, one can always question/argue the methodologies that they use to address difficult/ sensitive questions and whether their methods are sufficient enough to give such concrete suggestions or conclusions, but that's

normal... at least, their methods are not insanely ridiculous off the topic, they are on the right track but require more work. But need I remind you that this is not scientific journalistic writing, this is a neuroscience pop culture book. If you are requesting for more, might as well, just read scientific journals, no need neuroscience pop books, as they will never satisfied your crave. Anyway, the book was pleasant enough to be read by layman readers, thus I can recommend this book to just about any readers. Needless to say, I do enjoy the content and find their writing interesting and stimulating. I just wish they don't change the title, or maybe perhaps that the second title (BORN TO BELIEVE) is more suitable and befitting to its content....but, o well. This book is written by atheists, they did try hard to discuss unbiasedly. Perhaps to them, the closest they can get to belief is meditation, (which explain alot why the book has disproportionate amount of meditation in it, maybe because they perceive meditation as the basis of belief/religion?)... but to me, meditation is only a teeny weeny tiny part of religion. My religion is a way of life, it surpasses beyond the act of prayers on prayer mat/ altar/in religious building, every actions deem to have cost and effect consequences that are tangible with my spiritual growth as well as my contribution in life as a whole, individually and in society and environment. Thus, I think, for those readers with Judaism and Islamic background and even Christianity, might feel this book has limitation. I think, Buddhist followers can relate more to this book. Having said all the above, this is a positive book that emphasize the important/benefit/consequence of having belief especially for those who worship the Good Loving God. They also speak about the effect of having worshiping the Angry God. In a sum, this is a not an anti-religion book written by atheists. For that, I am happy with my read. To me, the writers, being atheists, project a sense of being respective and sensitive to those who have religion and at the same time try not to be biased, unlike some writer like Sam Harris (so much negative perception towards religion especially Islam, and worst when the perception is judge based on bogus facts and poor muslim?! erghh...) Anyway, the writers of this book deserve much respect and appreciation in their work :)

I just finished reading this book last week and it is amazing. My world has been turned upside down for the better. I have often contemplated the concept of God as something that the human brain has made up over the millions of years of evolution and while this book is not biased in that sense by any means it has helped me to become much more open minded and understanding of why people believe what they believe. I come from a highly conservative family of Mennonite descent. I dissented from them when I got to college as my mind began to wander on the existence of God, myself, and if anything was really real or if we were just playing one gigantic game. One of my

favorite parts of the book is in the last chapter of the book in which it talks about all the biases that we encounter when forming beliefs. It's astonishing and I sincerely wish that I could even have my own brain scanned to understand better why I might believe what I believe. 'Why We Believe What We Believe' gives you a look at spirituality and religiosity through the inner workings of the brain and specifically through neurotheology, a topic I'm quickly becoming intrigued by. It explains how we form beliefs and morals based off our culture, the way we are raised, the social scene the set for ourselves, and much more. It gives me a much clearer understanding rather than listening to a religious person simply say, "We get our morals from God." This is simply not provable. There is an awful lot of talk about our brain system between the frontal lobes, thalamus, hippocampus, and other areas where neurotransmitters intertwine to help formulate beliefs and make sense of the outside world we consider reality. "The brain believes what makes the most sense." This book is so in depth that I will be reading it again. It touches on so many different areas and uses a lot of research to explain things. I loved the section on Kevin, the ATHEIST, who meditated to an image of God. Ironical, huh? Well this section also talked about nations where atheism was abundant and the majority, that they were happier and lived with less conflict. Now they did have their downsides too, but it just goes to show that a person can be just as happy and fulfilled without being a religious person. This book also reiterated my passion for asking questions and pondering reality, God, myself; and why people do the things they do, say the things they do, and believe what they believe. Dr. Newberg did a great job of relaying this information from as much of a non-biased way as possible. He does not take sides and is incredibly open-minded as is seen by his experiments with religious people from conflicting religious doctrines. The next day I bought 'Why God Won't Go Away' and had already bought another one of his books, 'How God Changes the Brain' last summer while buying this book. Some of the best purchases I've made in the last year. I'm even biased in writing this review, but would highly recommend it to anyone that is open-minded and looking for a deeper explanation as to why we believe what we believe. Also...check out Dr. Newberg's scene in "Religulous," a documentary about religion by Bill Maher, which takes place in a train station (I want to say in New York? Haven't watched it in a while). Amazing stuff.

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