

Naked Scientist Book Reviews



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Right Hand, Left Hand,
Chris McManus

Wiedenfeld & Nicholson

Mark ★★★★★

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Right Hand, Left Hand : The origins of asymmetry in Brains, Bodies, Atoms and Cultures, by Chris McManus, Professor of Psychology at University College London and winner of the Wellcome Trust Prize, is undoubtedly one of the best science titles to come out this year.

Many science books follow an unoriginal and well-trodden path through their subject, dishing up facts along the way without any real need for thought on the part of the reader. But this book is clearly different. Richly endowed with examples from everyday life including where to find left handed screws and lightbulbs, and why spiral staircases turn left, it will make you look at the world around you in a totally new way. Why is your heart on the left side of your body ? Why are only 10% of the human population left handed compared with the majority of the muppets, and why is language processed in the left side of most peoples' brains ? In fact, why do we write from left to right in the west, and why should clocks go 'clockwise' ? Are left handers really better at sport, and did you know that even the molecules that are the building blocks of life on earth exist in both left and right handed forms ? Indeed, is it a coincidence that the same molecules with the same handedness have been discovered in material from outer space, perhaps where life began ?

Drawing together threads of evidence from the worlds of nature, science, medicine, art, history, and human nature, *Right Hand, Left Hand* will appeal to anyone, from teenagers upwards, with a healthy interest in science. If it fails to leave you thirsty for more, and asking more questions than it answers, then you didn't read the book !

(Professor Chris McManus also joined The Naked Scientists to discuss the complex story of left and right handedness. [>You can watch and listen to Chris's interview by clicking here.<](#)

If you would like to submit a book review, or suggest a title for reviewing, please email bookreviews@thenakedscientist.com