



# Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious

By Timothy D. Wilson

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**Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious** By Timothy D. Wilson

"Know thyself," a precept as old as Socrates, is still good advice. But is introspection the best path to self-knowledge? What are we trying to discover, anyway? In an eye-opening tour of the unconscious, as contemporary psychological science has redefined it, Timothy D. Wilson introduces us to a hidden mental world of judgments, feelings, and motives that introspection may never show us.

This is not your psychoanalyst's unconscious. The adaptive unconscious that empirical psychology has revealed, and that Wilson describes, is much more than a repository of primitive drives and conflict-ridden memories. It is a set of pervasive, sophisticated mental processes that size up our worlds, set goals, and initiate action, all while we are consciously thinking about something else.

If we don't know ourselves--our potentials, feelings, or motives--it is most often, Wilson tells us, because we have developed a plausible story about ourselves that is out of touch with our adaptive unconscious. Citing evidence that too much introspection can actually do damage, Wilson makes the case for better ways of discovering our unconscious selves. If you want to know who you are or what you feel or what you're like, Wilson advises, pay attention to what you actually do and what other people think about you. Showing us an unconscious more powerful than Freud's, and even more pervasive in our daily life, *Strangers to Ourselves* marks a revolution in how we know ourselves.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Freud introduced the West to the unconscious, but the last half-century of psychology has reinvented it, argues University of Virginia psychology professor Timothy D. Wilson. In *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*, Wilson attempts to explain why there's so much about ourselves that we fail to understand, which can lead to misdirected anger. He points to a revised, post-Freudian understanding of how the mind works: the reason that their own judgments, feelings, [and] motives remain mysterious to people is not repression, as Freud argued, but efficiency so that the mind can process and analyze multiple things at once. Wilson looks at ways that readers can probe their unconscious, suggesting that soliciting the opinions of others is actually more valuable than introspection.

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From Library Journal

How well do we really know ourselves? How well can we know ourselves? Wilson (psychology, Univ. of Virginia) convincingly argues that our conscious minds are but the tip of the iceberg in deciding how we behave, what is important to us, and how we feel. Surveying a variety of contemporary psychological research, this book describes an unconscious that is capable of a much higher degree of "thinking" than previously supposed by adherents of either Freudian or Behaviorist branches of psychology. Capable of everything from problem solving and narrative construction to emotional reaction and prediction, the adaptive unconscious is a powerful and pervasive element of our whole personalities. Indeed, it may be the primary element of our personalities, controlling our real motivations, judgments, and actions. Wilson examines the evolution of the idea of the unconscious, the various ways in which it operates within us, and how we can look at our actions--rather than our thoughts--to truly know ourselves. A fascinating read; for large public libraries.

*David Valencia, King Cty. Lib. Syst., Seattle*

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Review

*Strangers to Ourselves* is a rare combination of lucid prose, penetrating insight, and cutting-edge research. Wilson uses modern science to examine a problem that has troubled philosophers for millennia--how and how well can we know ourselves?--and concludes that people rarely know the causes of their own behavior. Anyone who still believes that they know what they want, feel, or think, should read this fascinating book, which is sure to stimulate research in laboratories and debate around water-coolers for decades to come. (Daniel Gilbert, Professor of Psychology, Harvard University)

Timothy Wilson tackles one of the central questions in psychology: can we truly know ourselves? Drawing on a career of thoughtful research, Wilson takes the reader on a fascinating journey through a wonderland of studies and ideas in contemporary psychology, with side trips into anthropology, medicine, and philosophy. *STRANGERS TO OURSELVES* is a book of great breadth and depth that will captivate anyone with an interest in consciousness, self-knowledge, and the very essence of being human. (James W. Pennebaker, author of *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*)

Tim Wilson's book covers many diverse areas of psychology in a very accessible style, with compelling examples from life and literature, to make a radical argument: that for the most part we have very little real understanding of how we work, or why we do even the most ordinary things. This is a very original and

provocative work--and lots of fun to read, too! (John Bargh, Jules Silver Professor of Psychology, New York University)

Wilson convincingly argues that our conscious minds are but the tip of the iceberg in deciding how we behave, what is important to us, and how we feel. Surveying a variety of contemporary psychological research, this book describes an unconscious that is capable of a much higher degree of "thinking" than previously supposed by adherents of either Freudian or Behaviorist branches of psychology. Capable of everything from problem solving and narrative construction to emotional reaction and prediction, the adaptive unconscious is a powerful and pervasive element of our whole personalities. Indeed, it may be the primary element of our personalities, controlling our real motivations, judgments, and actions...A fascinating read. (David Valencia *Library Journal* 2002-09-01)

Timothy Wilson...offers a charming, talkative and yet authoritative review of how it became clear that most of what happens inside us is not perceptible by us. In fact, other people often know more about events inside [us]...because they can monitor [our] actions and body language better than [we] can...*Strangers to Ourselves* is certainly worth reading and reflecting upon. (Tor Norretranders *New Scientist* 2002-10-05)

This book offers an intricate combination of page-turning reading, cutting-edge research, and philosophical debate. At some level, Wilson points out, individuals know that processing and decision-making go on below the threshold of awareness; if every decision had to reach consciousness before action could be initiated, people would not be able to respond as promptly as some situations dictate. How does this processing occur? What standards are employed in reaching "less than" conscious decisions? Wilson explores these questions with penetrating clarity, impressively integrating literature from a variety of professions and disciplines including psychology and business...Wilson does an excellent job of covering research that addresses factors (internal and external) influencing decision-making processes that may appear to be unconscious...Highly recommended. (R. E. Osborne *Choice* 2003-02-01)

[Wilson's] book is what popular psychology ought to be (and rarely is): thoughtful, beautifully written, and full of unexpected insights. (Malcolm Gladwell *New Yorker* 2004-09-20)

There is much here to arouse interest and provoke thought in any reader, and the book does not outstay its welcome...The writing is clear and engaging, and the subject matter is illuminating and entertaining. Though Wilson insists that introspection is limited in its ability to reveal our true selves, it would be a very dull reader who was not roused by this book into a close self-examination. (Jo Lawson *Times Literary Supplement* 2004-08-13)

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Jessica Peacock:**

The experience that you get from *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* is a more deep you excavating the information that hide inside words the more you get considering reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to comprehend but *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* giving you excitement feeling of reading. The article writer conveys their point in a number of way that can be understood by anyone who read that because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. This book also makes your personal vocabulary increase well. It is therefore easy to understand then can go to you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We highly recommend you for having this particular *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* instantly.

**Lillie Moreland:**

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**Oscar Jackson:**

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**Anthony Muller:**

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