Algorithms to Live By: The Computer Science of Human Decisions

By Brian Christian, Tom Griffiths

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A fascinating exploration of how computer algorithms can be applied to our everyday lives, helping to solve common decision-making problems and illuminate the workings of the human mind

All our lives are constrained by limited space and time, limits that give rise to a particular set of problems. What should we do, or leave undone, in a day or a lifetime? How much messiness should we accept? What balance of new activities and familiar favorites is the most fulfilling? These may seem like uniquely human quandaries, but they are not: computers, too, face the same constraints, so computer scientists have been grappling with their version of such problems for decades. And the solutions they've found have much to teach us.

In a dazzlingly interdisciplinary work, acclaimed author Brian Christian (who holds degrees in computer science, philosophy, and poetry, and works at the intersection of all three) and Tom Griffiths (a UC Berkeley professor of cognitive science and psychology) show how the simple, precise algorithms used by computers can also untangle very human questions. They explain how to have better hunches and when to leave things to chance, how to deal with overwhelming choices and how best to connect with others. From finding a spouse to finding a parking spot, from organizing one's inbox to understanding the workings of human memory, *Algorithms to Live By* transforms the wisdom of computer science into strategies for human living.

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Algorithms to Live By: The Computer Science of Human Decisions By Brian Christian, Tom Griffiths Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

"A remarkable book... A solid, research-based book that's applicable to real life. The algorithms the authors discuss are, in fact, more applicable to real-life problems than I'd have ever predicted.... It's well worth the time to find a copy of *Algorithms to Live By* and dig deeper."
?Forbes

"By the end of the book, I was convinced. Not because I endorse the idea of living like some hyper-rational Vulcan, but because computing algorithms could be a surprisingly useful way to embrace the messy compromises of real, non-Vulcan life."
?*The Guardian* (UK)

"I absolutely reveled in this book... It's the perfect antidote to the argument you often hear from young math students: 'What's the point? I'll never use this in real life!'... The whole business, whether it's the relative simplicity of the 37% rule or the mind-twisting possibilities of game theory, is both potentially practical and highly enjoyable as presented here. Recommended."
?*Popular Science* (UK)

"An entertaining, intelligently presented book... Craftily programmed to build from one good idea to the next... The value of being aware of algorithmic thinking?of the thornier details of 'human algorithm design,' as Christian and Griffiths put it?is not just better problem solving, but also greater insight into the human mind. And who doesn't want to know how we tick?"
?Kirkus Reviews

"Compelling and entertaining, *Algorithms to Live By* is packed with practical advice about how to use time, space, and effort more efficiently. And it's a fascinating exploration of the workings of computer science and the human mind. Whether you want to optimize your to-do list, organize your closet, or understand human memory, this is a great read."
?Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit*

"In this remarkably lucid, fascinating, and compulsively readable book, Christian and Griffiths show how much we can learn from computers. We've all heard about the power of algorithms?but *Algorithms to Live By* actually explains, brilliantly, how they work, and how we can take advantage of them to make better decisions in our own lives."
?Alison Gopnik, coauthor of *The Scientist in the Crib*

"I've been waiting for a book to come along that merges computational models with human psychology?and Christian and Griffiths have succeeded beyond all expectations. This is a wonderful book, written so that anyone can understand the computer science that runs our world?and more importantly, what it means to our lives."
?David Eagleman, author of *Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain*

About the Author

Brian Christian is the author of *The Most Human Human*, a *Wall Street Journal* bestseller, *New York Times* editors' choice, and a *New Yorker* favorite book of the year. His writing has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Wired*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, and *The Paris Review*, as well as in scientific journals such as *Cognitive Science*, and has been translated into eleven languages. He lives in San Francisco.

Tom Griffiths is a professor of psychology and cognitive science at UC Berkeley, where he directs the Computational Cognitive Science Lab. He has published more than 150 scientific papers on topics ranging from cognitive psychology to cultural evolution, and has received awards from the National Science Foundation, the Sloan Foundation, the American Psychological Association, and the Psychonomic Society, among others. He lives in Berkeley.

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Ronald Hopkins:

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