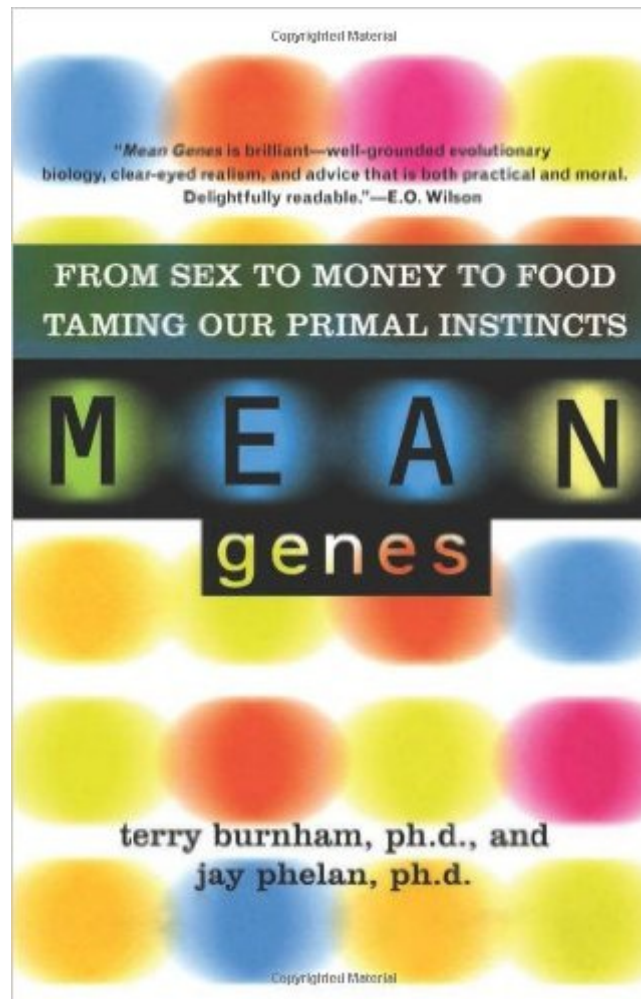


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Mean Genes: From Sex To Money To Food: Taming Our Primal Instincts



Synopsis

Why do we wantâ and why do we doâ so many things that are bad for us? And how can we stop? In *Mean Genes* economist Terry Burnham and biologist Jay Phelan offer advice on how to conquer our own worst enemyâ our survival-minded genes. Having evolved in a time of scarcity, when our ancestors struggled to survive in the wild, our genes are poorly adapted to the convenience of modern society. They compel us to overeat, spend our whole paycheck, and cheat on our spouses. But knowing how they work, Burnham and Phelan show that we can trick these "mean genes" into submission and cultivate behaviors that will help us lead better lives. A lively, humorous guide to our evolutionary heritage, *Mean Genes* illuminates how we can use an understanding of our biology to beat our instinctsâ before they beat us.

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Customer Reviews

I had the good fortune of being exposed to the *Mean Genes* argument over two years ago after having Dr. Burnham as a professor. With E.O. Wilson already weighing in on *Mean Genes*, I have no illusions what my opinion will mean to any still-skeptical .com customers considering a purchase. However, all I can say is that *Mean Genes* is a deeply important book and philosophy. If you compile all of the tacky self-improvement infomercials and combine them with every book on diets, relationships or money, they still don't address the basal forces that create the dysfunction in the first place. With *Mean Genes*, one is empowered to drop down below the self-help cacophony and begin to view and frame daily struggles in a beautifully logic, yet straightforward, humorous

manner. The book has radically enriched the quality of my life. I simply can't recommend Mean Genes highly enough.

Do you ever wonder why you do self-destructive or illogical things? Why it is so hard to resist fatty foods, drugs or running up credit card debt? Mean Genes shows that behavior that is bad for humans in today's society of plenty, is the same behavior, refined through tens of thousands of years of evolution, which allowed our ancestors to survive and flourish as hunter-gatherers. This book is filled with interesting and amusing studies done with animals, primitive cultures and modern humans that demonstrate that people haven't evolved much in the past 5000 years. But all is not lost. Burnham and Phelan point out that humans, unlike other species, have a capacity for self-control, and more importantly the intelligence to combat our destructive instincts and biology. And while they don't place much hope in an individual's will power, the authors offer creative ways to restrain our genetic desires. Mean Genes is an intelligent, fast reading and totally enjoyable book that makes us look at ourselves as the product of the 'survival of the fittest', and helps us deal with that in today's world.

Mean Genes does three things very well: it teaches you to control yourself, it educates you about evolutionary biology, and it makes you laugh. For the uninitiated, the basic premise of evolutionary biology is that all human behavior is driven by genetic traits, traits that are incredibly well-adapted -- for the desert humans evolved in 250,000 years ago. Burnham and Phelan take the human-as-cavemen-unadapted-to-the-modern-world view and illustrate why many of our common weaknesses are actually based on behaviors that were quite useful a quarter of a million years ago. When you view human nature this way, a few things will happen. First, you'll understand the persistence and prevalence of many seemingly self-destructive human idiosyncrasies (for example, adultery and gluttony). Second, you won't feel as bad about yourself! And third, and most useful, by understanding the roots of these common behaviors and by following Burnham and Phelan's recommendations, you'll have the tools to effect genuine self-improvement. Finally, the book is quick and entertaining, so it's a fabulous investment.

If you're struggling to make your characters real, Mean Genes helps you understand their primal motivations! Mean Genes wasn't intended to be how-to book for fiction writers, but it accomplishes that goal better than anything else out there. Addiction, violence, sexual attraction, greed-its all in here-and more. Make your characters real-give them mean gene motivations.

Evolutionary biology has uncovered truths about human nature that are as fundamental as anything coming out of the genome project. Burnham and Phelan distill all the insights of evolutionary biology into an incredibly readable and entertaining book. But equally important, they show us how to use this knowledge in practical and useful ways to improve our daily lives. I've had my share of trouble dieting, saving money, and attracting the opposite sex. Unfortunately, this book won't make you lose your appetite when you see your favorite sin food or make you better looking. But it does the next best thing. It makes you smarter in dealing with yourself. There's no gimmicks or tricks. It's like learning to ride a bicycle. Once you've learned how to control the machine you're the one who decides which way to go. Think of this book as training wheels for the human machine. But this isn't only a self-help book. It is also a book for anyone who wants to understand evolutionary biology, or human nature and behavior more generally, better. The authors wear their scholarship (and their Harvard Ph.D.'s) lightly, but underlying all the smart and funny prose is a bedrock of knowledge. Finally a confession: I've always been troubled when people start talking about human beings as though we are animals or machines that have only instincts and don't have free will. After reading this book, I've realized that we are all governed by our instincts more than we'd like to admit. But what raises us above animals is precisely that we are capable of using our minds to understand and conquer our instincts. This is a fun book, a useful book, a great book.

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