



# The Puzzle of Left-handedness

*Rik Smits*

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## **The Puzzle of Left-handedness** Rik Smits

Left-handedness seems to be no big deal. Many of us are left-handed and those of us who aren't don't tend to give left-handedness much thought. Yet throughout history left-handers have been associated with clumsiness, untrustworthiness and insincerity. The Latin word for left, sinister, is redolent of all kinds of ominous connotations.

Rik Smits uncovers why history has been so unkind to our left-handed forebears. Through an array of historical anecdotes, strange superstitions and old wives' tales, Smits explains why left-handedness continues to be associated with maladies of all kinds, including mental retardation, alcoholism, asthma, hay fever, diabetes, insomnia, suicidal urges, criminality and shorter lifespans.

But apart from folklore and myth, the notions of left and right have a real and deep influence on the way we experience the world. These influences show up everywhere, from engineering and architecture to music, painting, photography, film and comics. This book shows how, contrary to what many might think, left-handers can write just as well as the rest of us, and explores how and why we came to prefer one hand over the other and how left- and right-handedness are represented in the brain. The greatest puzzle is why in every country one in ten people favours the left hand. It is a mystery as yet largely unsolved, whose solution may very well lie in the secrets of twinning.

The Puzzle of Left-handedness is an enlightening and entertaining odyssey through the enigmas and paradoxes, theories and experiments surrounding the left-handed among us.

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