

Switched On

A Memoir
of Brain Change
and Emotional
Awakening

John Elder Robison

New York Times bestselling author of **Look Me in the Eye**

"Switched On is a mind-blowing book."
—Temple Grandin



Foreword by Alvaro Pascual-Leone, MD, PhD

Here's a very interesting book that's one part memoir, one part informative on the latest scientific research into TMS (transcranial magnetic stimulation) and its effect on the autism spectrum/depression/etc and one part philosophical query about the differences between people and what makes someone unique versus what makes someone broken? That's a lot of parts, but *Switched On* reads in a simple and direct manner. Author John Elder Robison is the older brother of Augusten ("Running With Scissors") Burroughs and both have written best-selling memoirs about their challenging, vivid childhoods. Robison's book "Look Me In The Eye" centered on growing up with undiagnosed Asperger's Syndrome, which was finally pinpointed well into his adult life. His book was a huge success and one unexpected result was being asked if he'd like to participate in a scientific experiment on TMS and its effect on people with autism. Despite a lifetime of insisting he didn't need "fixing" and wouldn't take a pill to cure himself, Robison was intrigued by pushing the boundaries of scientific knowledge and readily agreed. The result was astonishing: beyond the very real measurable effects of the experiment on what researchers were looking for, Robison had a profound experience in being "switched on," experiencing emotions and being able to "read" the facial and social cues of other people to a remarkable degree. Driving home from one session, he broke down in tears while listening to music. Repeated tests led to less vivid but more stable long-term changes, effects Robison chronicles with carefully judged caution as to why and how these experiences for him might have occurred. Robison's marriage is imperiled because his wife suffered from severe depression, a condition his autism "shielded" Robison from but with his seeming new sensitivity became overwhelming to him. His work suffered as Robison was plunged into advocacy and more speaking engagements and panels to oversee and approve new research. His people skills improved significantly, remarked on by people for years to come. His skill as a freelance photographer improved markedly. It's like "Flowers For Algernon," and that story's cautionary outcome (a mentally challenged person becomes a genius after medical treatment but then sinks back inexorably into his former state) is an ever-present concern for Robison. As with his first memoir, the insights he offers almost as an aside into how autism colors his view of the world is striking. Robison explains the science clearly, his personal story movingly and the ethical conundrums this research raises very convincingly. Remarkably, despite a lifetime of repeated success -- he designed audio equipment and specialty instruments for major musicians, including the flaming guitars of KISS; toys for major manufacturers; a long-running car repair and restoration company; author of best-selling books; lecturer -- Robison often doesn't quite see himself that way. I suppose another success won't change that, but he's got one anyway. -- Michael Giltz