



The Decisive Moment: How the Brain Makes up Its Mind, by Jonah Lehrer (Canongate, £8.99)

Plato likened the mind to a chariot: the rational brain was the chariot-eer keeping the unruly horses of the emotions in order with his whip. As Lehrer argues in this elegantly written survey of neuroscience, this is a false dichotomy: “If it weren’t for our emotions, reason wouldn’t exist at all.” After brain surgery, a man found he was “devoid of emotions”. To the surprise of his doctors he was unable to make decisions: “A brain that can’t feel can’t make up its mind.” Lehrer offers a compelling account of the brain as a system in constant flux, rewiring itself to better identify patterns in the world. Feelings and emotions are signals from the brain that should not be ignored: “Even when we think we know nothing, our brains know something.” The lesson of this fascinating users’ guide to the mind is don’t be afraid to trust your emotional brain. From corporate executives to poker players, making complex decisions is never just about rational analysis. As a poker player tells Lehrer: “Poker is a science but it’s also an art.” Your feelings know more than you think. Trust them.

PD Smith