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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness by James H. Austin

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music, so we must make the social and moral decision to will ourselves to learn to appreciate and be together with the diverse Other. And Wu has shown us a way, a hermeneutic, as few others have.

Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness. By James H. Austin. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998. Pp. xxiv + 844.

Reviewed by **Ashok Malhotra** State University of New York at Oneonta

A great deal has been written by medical doctors on the functioning of the brain, and by meditators on the effects of meditation on the human personality. Medical researchers, who have attempted to bridge this gap through scientific studies on the efficacy of meditation in bringing about physiological and mental changes in the human personality, have been downright skeptical concerning meditation's positive efficacy. However, serious meditators have enthusiastically cited the history of the Eastern and Western meditation tradition as a justification for their claims. One of the major hurdles in this fascinating area of research has been the fact that very few medical researchers have had any personal experience with meditation while the vast majority of meditators have had no training in the neurology of the brain.

James Austin is among a rare breed of scholars who, as a trained neurologist, is thoroughly knowledgeable about the anatomy, physiology, and chemistry of the brain, and as a Zen practitioner he is fully familiar with the meditative experience. In his book *Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness*, Austin makes a bold attempt at bringing together these two diverse disciplines, the twain that are not supposed to meet. Austin attempts to accomplish two major tasks in the eight parts of his book: (1) to describe in a clear fashion the often confused topic of Zen and its close links to the brain, and (2) to venture into the discussion of his personal encounters with the Zen masters, zazen training, and the meditative experience.

Part 1, "Starting to Point toward Zen," offers a brief outline of the history of Zen and Zen's relationship to the brain, mysticism, religion, schizophrenia, narcissism, and depersonalization. Part 2, "Meditating," presents the physiological mechanisms of meditation including Zen meditative techniques and skills, zazen, kōans, physiological changes during meditation, the effects of sensorimotor deprivation, brain waves, and the meditative approach to the dissolution of the self. Part 3, "Neurology," describes the most recent research on the nature of the brain. Here Austin devotes more than 150 pages to the exploration of the various lobes, higher functions, remembrances, attention, memories, and biological theories about the causes of mystical experiences.

Part 4, "Exploring States of Consciousness," delves into problems associated with the word "mind," and describes in detail the ordinary and extraordinary states of consciousness, sleep, dreams, conditioning, emotions, pain, pleasure, and the relationship of the two hemispheres of the brain. Parts 5, 6, and 7, respectively titled

"Quickening," "The Absorptions," and "The Awakenings," investigate alternate states of consciousness and "how, when and where they arise in the depth of the brain." Discussion centers on the side effects of meditation, phantom limbs, the roots of laughter, the effects of psychedelic drugs, near-death experiences, the semantics of samādhi, the construction and dissolution of time, the death of fear, emptiness, absorption, and insight-wisdom.

Part 8, "Being and Beyond: To the Stage of Ongoing Enlightenment," explores the permanent stages of enlightenment. Here Austin offers a clear analysis of the nature of the ultimate being, the power of silence, compassion, the aging of the brain, and the celebration of nature. Austin concludes by describing the still-evolving brain in the still-evolving societies and forecasts the positive social consequences of the advanced stages of ongoing enlightenment.

Zen and the Brain is a groundbreaking work that bridges the gap between the fields of religion and science. The presentation of the typography of the brain here is rigorous and comprehensive, and Austin's discussion of the intimate connection between meditation and the states of consciousness is clear and inviting. Austin's work belongs to a unique class of books that demand a special kind of training and discipline from the author. Austin understands this challenge and states: "in the future, whoever writes such a book should be a fully enlightened Japanese master, fluent in English; a person who has both a doctorate degree in neurophysiology, hands-on experience in psychophysiological research, years of intercultural teaching experience; and a physician whose training in both neurology and psychiatry has been doubly certified."

Zen and the Brain will appeal to both undergraduate and graduate students as well as to scholars in the areas of comparative philosophy, religion, and science. The book's attraction is due to its being a rare kind of "clinical autobiography," which started as an excursion into the mysterious world of Zen but changed into the account of a Western-educated neurologist who became the subject of his own investigation. The book is long, running to 844 pages, but each page is clearly written and fully engages the reader with an exposition that is both simple and profound. Once you start reading it, you will find it hard to put down.

Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective. By Wm. Theodore de Bary. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. Pp. 196. Hardcover \$27.95.

Reviewed by **John Trowbridge** University of Hawai'i and the East-West Center

Wm. Theodore de Bary's *Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective* is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the question of how the notion of human rights might be adapted to any of the East Asian cultures. This book is a discursive exploration into some of the issues that surround this question, rather than a polemical defense of a particular point of view forcefully