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Book Review

Review of *Who You Are: The Science of Interconnectedness,* by Michael J. Spivey. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020. 359 pages + xiv.

In this book, Michael Spivey addresses a central problem and approaches it in a unique fashion. Instead of searching within for the meaning of who we are, Spivey describes us in an interconnected complex system which involves our brains, body, and all living matter and non-living matter in the earth. This process of realization of our true nature is developed in layers of argument which are richly supported by the science of the mind and consciousness. The organization of the book is much like a self-help manual with exercises to assist the reader in developing the final state of what he calls Unity Consciousness – feeling of oneness with the Universe. In this state, one does not set boundaries between what is self and non-self.

This expansive view of who you are enables one to bridge difference and appreciate one's role in the world. It is interesting that the goal of meditation in the Buddhist tradition is to reach a similar state with compassion the result. Since the mind is the object in both approaches, this is not surprising.

There are always two questions that arise in reviewing any book. First, what is the motivation of the author to write this book and secondly, who is the intended audience. The motivation of the author, as a social scientist, seems to be to illustrate that the current state of scientific understanding allows a description of the interconnected systems and how they are connected in the complex-system that is who you are. The interaction of these systems with the world gives rise, through self-organization, to create the unique individual of who we are. It is instructive to consider how this complex system is constructed, by considering the infant to adult development in this structure. Each of us starts with genetic structures and physical body. As this body interacts with its environment and others, connections are created, that are deconstructed and remodeled as the child matures. Adulthood is marked by a slowing of this process. It is impossible to look at the adult and deduce the interactions, or even the sequence of the interactions that gave rise to the adult. One can, as Spivey has done, note that those interactions must have happened and were reflected in the complex system. To address the intended audience, this reviewer sees that those of scientific background who are interested in understanding the current state of science, say to study the question of consciousness.

Spivey discusses "free will" in the context of whether it exists or not given that you are this complex system of connected systems. He states that "gently relaxing your grip on free will as the evidence for a person's autonomy

and self-actualization is empowering for all society." (p. 40). He notes that one can adjust the environment so the context of decisions is changed so that your complex system can make different choices. The action to change the environment can be seen as the result of free will, which results in new knowledge, new experiences and the possibility of transforming ourselves. (p. 292). If this potentially transforming process were not available, one can see that the whole process of development would be to build an automaton that can mimic the responses of a human – making appropriate responses to the environment.

The book contains extensive notes by the author which are an essential aspect of the structure of the book in addition to complete references to the expansive literature, and an index. This is an important and thought-provoking work by an expert in the field.

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