The Brain that Changes Itself

Reviewed by Vincent Sicari
Author: Norman Doidge
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This is a truly awesome organ that each of us has within. Just how awesome and just how complex is the essay of Norman Doidge in his wonderfully written best-seller, The Brain that Changes Itself. But Norman Doidge is not merely trying to describe. He charts, he chronicles, he illustrates. His thesis is that the brain can learn new ways of doing things, that it can make up for its own defects, whether they be induced by injury, violence or the apparently chaotic and despotic nature of our inherited genes.

This book describes the journey of many individuals through their fascinatingly horrific life stories of injury and wholeness, of incompleteness and fulfillment, of incomprehension and knowingness. But it is a book that is truly inspirational, it is full of hope. It does not dwell on the macabre for its own sake, but it doesn’t hide the wondrous question of human pain.

In some ways Norman Doidge owes much to Oliver Sacks, that great neurologist and author who gave us such classics as The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat. For those who enjoyed his books, and I am one, this book by Doidge will be a wonderful new read. Popular science has always been a company of David Attenborough, Paul Davies or Stephen Jay Gould. But this kind of writing is a special genre that not only enjoy his books, and I am one, this book by Doidge will be a wonderful new read. Popular science has always been a company of David Attenborough, Paul Davies or Stephen Jay Gould. But this kind of writing is a special genre that not only.

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Through the work of brain science pioneers such as Paul Bach y Rita, Cheryl re-trained areas of her brain not previously devoted to balance to do the task that had been destroyed in her by the wrongful administration of a common drug. And that is what this book is really about. Doidge calls it the brain’s plasticity: how areas of the brain usually dedicated to certain specific functions can learn to perform new tasks. The brain’s plasticity: how areas of the brain usually dedicated to certain specific functions can learn to perform new tasks.

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I could never be a mass-murderer. Or could I? For me that is one of the questions posed by this fascinating study into the human condition. The movie by director Stephen Daldry is based on the novel of the same name by the German author Bernard Schlink. It is an exploration into the psyche of the heroine Hanna Schmitz played by Kate Winslet, who delivers an outstanding performance in her portrayal of the tortured soul. There are many questions posed by the movie. But the most disturbing one for me was the one I alluded to above. Could I have behaved like Hanna? Would I ever be able to do such a horrific thing?

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