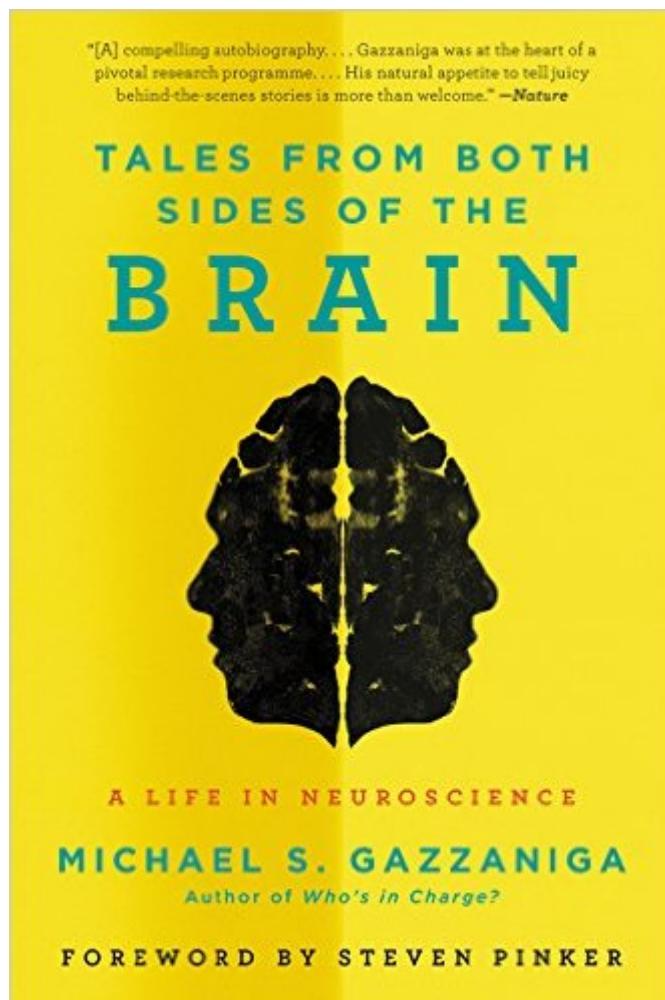


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Tales From Both Sides Of The Brain: A Life In Neuroscience



Synopsis

Michael S. Gazzaniga, one of the most important neuroscientists of the twentieth century, gives us an exciting behind-the-scenes look at his seminal work on that unlikely couple, the right and left brain. Foreword by Steven Pinker. In the mid-twentieth century, Michael S. Gazzaniga, the father of cognitive neuroscience, was part of a team of pioneering neuroscientists who developed the now foundational split-brain brain theory: the notion that the right and left hemispheres of the brain can act independently from one another and have different strengths. In *Tales from Both Sides of the Brain*, Gazzaniga tells the impassioned story of his life in science and his decades-long journey to understand how the separate spheres of our brains communicate and miscommunicate with their separate agendas. By turns humorous and moving, *Tales from Both Sides of the Brain* interweaves Gazzaniga's scientific achievements with his reflections on the challenges and thrills of working as a scientist. In his engaging and accessible style, he paints a vivid portrait not only of his discovery of split-brain theory, but also of his comrades in arms—the many patients, friends, and family who have accompanied him on this wild ride of intellectual discovery.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most of the great works of non-fiction are evidence- and/or experience-driven and usually involve a journal of personal discovery. That is certainly true of this book in which Michael Gazzaniga shares dozens of "tales" from his life and career in neuroscience, thus far. Gazzaniga is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he heads the new SAGE Center for the Study of the Mind. His primary focus in this book is on six patients whose treatment -- varying

somewhat in nature and extent -- involved experiments in split-brain research that generated revelations of historic significance. As Gazzaniga explains, these were founding cases from CalTech (identified as W.J., N.G., and L.B.) and the East Coast series (P.S., J.W., and V.P.). "While some have died, others live and remain very special people. They are the story and in many ways give the story its structure. Even with their brains divided for medical reasons, they conquered life with singular purpose and will. How they did this reveals secrets about how those of us without the operation accomplish this as well." These are among the dozens of passages of greatest interest and value to me (in Parts 1 and 2), also listed to suggest the scope of Gazzaniga's coverage:

- o Discovering Caltech (Pages 17-26)
- o Science Then and Now, and, Origin of Split-Brain Research (40-46)
- o Dr. Sperry, and, Discovery and Credit (46-54)
- o Establishing the Basics (of scientific exploration), Pages 55-58
- o Wait: How Does Sensory-Motor Integration Work?

Tales from Both Sides of the Brain is an autobiography of Michael Gazzaniga with an emphasis on his professional career exploring the properties of the two hemispheres of the brain. The brain science is fascinating and I am inclined to go back and read his other popular science books but this book is a definite mixture of the science results intertwined with his life story. Michael Gazzaniga has had a distinguished career in neuroscience both working with the pioneers of the subject as well as being a one himself. He started out in graduate school in Caltech where he first did work on split brain subjects. Split brain subjects had the left and right hemispheres severed from one another due to surgery in patients with extreme epilepsy. Our anatomy is such that each hemisphere of the brain (left,right) controls the opposite eye, ear and limbs though there are remnants of control for things like limbs. As a result a split brain patient can be forced to respond to stimuli while using only one side of the brain by carefully constructed experiments. Tales from the brain explores the evolution of the author's career and the experiments and results that he did as a graduate student as well as while he was mentoring his countless graduate students. The author discusses how the brain adapts to a split brain via queuing mechanisms and how there are aspects of brain plasticity as well. He discusses later in the book the results of experiments with partially severed brain hemispheres. The results of all the experiments are fascinating and the unfamiliar reader will consider their concept of self in a new light. We learn that we are not really one person and our narrative of our own life can even be fabricated by our more literary left half.

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