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PERSONAL MEANING IN SELF INTEGRATION: NEURAL CORRELATES OF EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY

Denis Larrivee

Loyola University Chicago, USA

Contemplative meditation reveals a latent capacity for personal integration that enhances mental health through relational and transcendent ordering. The role played by the brain and nervous system in assisting personal integration, however, is neglected in modern philosophy of science models of the nervous system. These models thereby introduce serious challenges to ethical practice that diminish the personal meaning of the human being. Personalist approaches to ethics and discoveries in empirical neuroscience, however, are together beginning to offer a synergistic view of integration that may help in revising these models and reinstating a more positive anthropological meaning of the individual as well as an improved understanding of existential psychotherapy. Psychotherapeutic analyses, historical reviews, and institutional experience, for example, all testify to a positive and direct relation between personal spirituality and the liberation and meaning endowed by it to mental health. In recognition of the significance of contemplative discipline for consolidating the neural architecture, the neural events facilitating enhanced mental well being have been extensively investigated. In the case of mindfulness meditation numerous studies have been conducted that reveal substantive effects on brain anatomy and function, leading the British Parliament in 2015 to issue its landmark report, *A Mindful Nation*. These show significant anatomical - major nerve tracts, for example, such as the corpus callosum, are significantly increased in size and myelination and physiological variation, these latter accompanied by distinct neural activity changes that are correlated with the duration and frequency of meditative practice. The extended intentional focus of contemplative meditation that has been acquired from the Christian legacy, and then evolved in its later development, implicates an even greater breadth of neural deployment that assists personal integration. They suggest, thereby, a scope of disciplinary consolidation that exceeds that of mindfulness and so likely activates a broader and corresponding range of integrative processes, that are, therefore, latent for implementation when exercised. This paper, accordingly, will emphasize these integrative and physical features of the neural architecture and their contribution to mental health.



Biography

Denis Larrivee has received his PhD degree in Neuroscience from the Purdue University multidisciplinary consortium and has held a dual fellowship at Yale University's Medical School Department of Ophthalmology and Yale's Department of Biology. He has been an Assistant Professor at Weill Cornell University Medical School in New York City, where he was a team member of Professor Bernice Grafstein, President of the Society for Neuroscience, Research Unit on nerve regeneration. He is now a Visiting Scholar at the Neiswanger Bioethics Institute of Loyola University Chicago. He is an International Neuroethics Society Expert, and has received top awards at their annual meetings in 2014, 2016, and 2017. His presentations have included venues in Europe, America, and the Middle East. He is the Editor of a text on Brain Computer Interfacing and Brain Dynamics, an Editorial Board Member of *EC Neurology (UK)* and *Annals of Neurology and Neurological Sciences (USA)*, and the author of more than 50 papers and book chapters in such journals as *Journal of Religion and Health*, the *Journal of Neurochemistry*, and the *Journal of Cell Biology*. He is a Member of a number of professional societies including the Society for Neuroscience, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Brain division, and the International Association of Catholic Bioethicists.

sallar1@aol.com