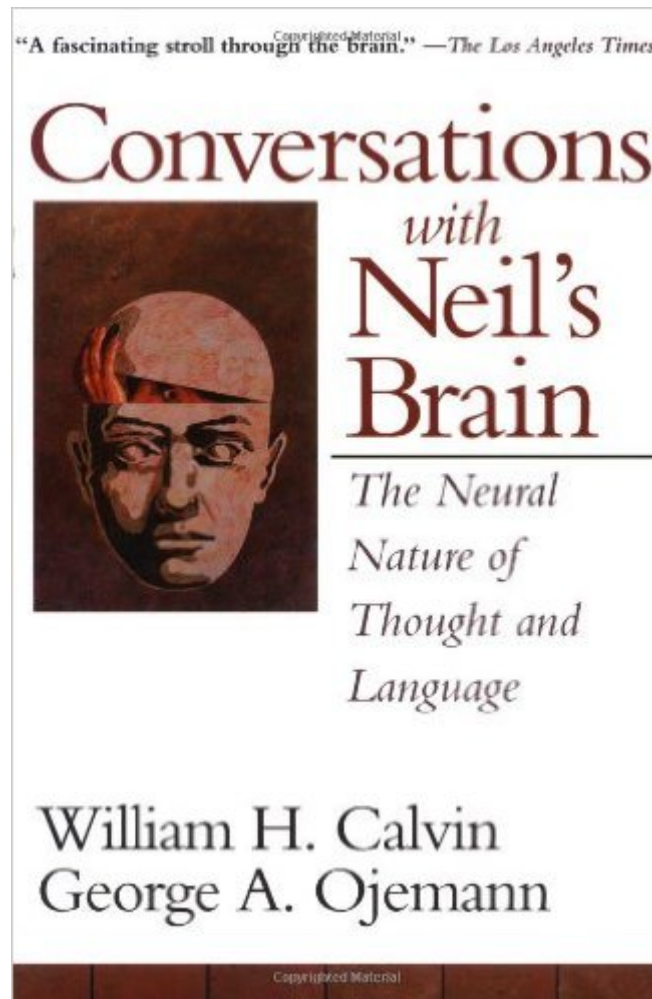


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# Conversations With Neil's Brain: The Neural Nature Of Thought And Language



## Synopsis

In a series of stories before, after, and even during neurosurgery, an epileptic patient, Neil; his surgeon, George Ojemann; and neuroscientist William Calvin work together to remove a portion of Neil's temporal lobe. If they do it right, they will have a good chance of putting an end to Neil's seizures. If they slice too far to the left or right, they will wipe out essential parts of Neil's memory, or his ability to follow a joke to the punch line, or maybe his ability to recognize his wife's face. In essence, they can erase or alter parts of Neil. Conversations with Neil's Brain takes us inside the operating room and allows us to be part of this eerie process of discovery, using it to provide a unique window on human consciousness and the nature of human identity. The mapping of Neil's brain brings to life as never before the astounding specificity by which the brain operates, making clear why language, memory, and decision making are so complex, and why the cures for such ailments as learning disabilities, mental disorders, Alzheimer's, and strokes continue to elude the world's best medical efforts. In the context of this unique surgical drama, Conversations with Neil's Brain unfolds as an intensely compelling read.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

William H. Calvin (born 1939) is a professor at the University of Washington in Seattle, and a well-known popularizer of neuroscience and evolutionary biology (e.g., see his books *The Ascent of Mind: Ice Age Climates and the Evolution of Intelligence*, *Inside the Brain*). George Ojemann is a neurosurgeon, who collaborated with Calvin on the 'Inside the Brain' book. They wrote in this 1994

book, "rather than consciousness or awareness, neurologists prefer to talk about something they can objectively measure: levels of arousability... Arousal is not the same as attention, another aspect of consciousness. Arousal is general, not specific like attention... But equating 'conscious' with 'arousable' creates appalling problems. It tends to be interpreted as ascribing consciousness to any organism that has irritability. And irritability is a property of all living tissue... With so many major synonyms... you can see why everyone gets a little confused talking about consciousness." (Pg. 22-23) They observe, "Somewhere... during the 6 million years since we last shared a common ancestor with our chimpanzee cousins, our predecessors appear to have minimized a system that assigned meaning to individual sounds... How and when and where was this conversion done? That's the big question of anthropology and linguistics. It appears that much of it probably happened in the last 2.5 million years... because that's when hominid brain size and its surface infolding pattern were also changing..."

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