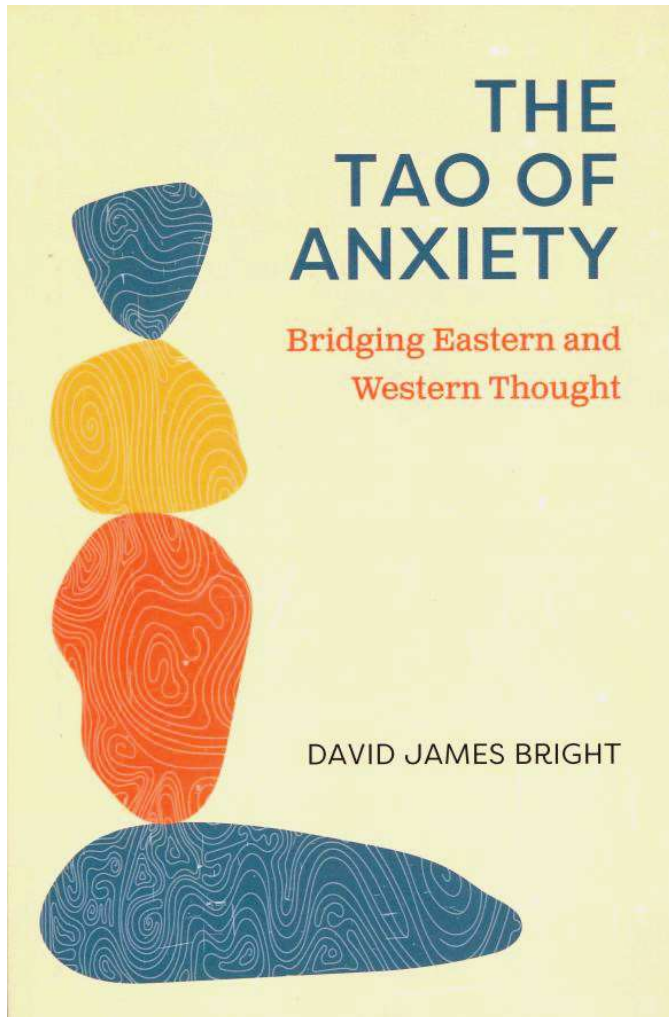


## ‘The Tao of Anxiety’ examines tools for anxiety management

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“*The Tao of Anxiety: Bridging Eastern and Western Thought*” by David James Bright. San Diego, CA: Cognella, Inc., 2023, 118 pages, \$28.95 (paperback).



“The intent of this book is to provide individuals a clear and deeper understanding of how philosophical schools of thought guide anxiety management techniques in clinical and everyday life,” David James Bright explains in the preface to “The Tao of Anxiety: Bridging Eastern and Western Thought,” his groundbreaking new treatise on a fact of life many of us confront on a daily basis. “As an experienced counseling professor and mental health professional, I find that theory becomes accessible through clear examples of real-life situations.”

“I have drawn these examples from my own life and experience with anxiety as well as situations encountered in my work as a mental health professional,” the author continues. “Anxiety is not simply experienced by those of us with diagnosable conditions – anxiety is a normal part of human life. By recognizing how anxiety manifests in each of us, and by utilizing guiding principles of both eastern and western philosophies in conjunction with modern management techniques, it is my hope that each reader gains greater insight, self-awareness, and emotional management after reading this work.”

I am happy to report, after making my way through this relatively transparent and straightforward volume, Bright succeeds in what he set out to accomplish. He meticulously describes the differences as well as the similarities between the ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ ways of conceptualizing the world and then demonstrates conclusively how those perspectives are more complementary than divergent, as many who see everything through a dichotomous lens tend to assume. Language can be a barrier to understanding; one of the author’s key strengths is showing how many times we are talking about the same underlying notion, we are just using different terminology that is often linguistically shaped by culture and a shared sense of our personal identity.

“Success, failure, win, lose, right, wrong – these all are words we use to bracket reality and navigate through it,” Bright observes in “Our Anxiety Society,” the inaugural chapter that foreshadows what’s to come in the subsequent pages. “These words impose concepts and ideas on us from an early age, lenses through which we view the world, and strangely, not everyone tends to view it the same way. What one word means to you may mean something entirely different to another.”

Structurally, the book consists of a preface followed by eight fairly succinct chapters. Bright's writing style is fluid, especially for an academic – meaning those with a background in the subject matter being dissected will definitely see things in the content that the more general reader will perhaps overlook. Still, the manuscript is purposefully written for a broad audience and those unfamiliar with many of the concepts and applications covered in the book will nonetheless be able to glean a myriad of insights and acumens from the prose.

Those in the helping professions will appreciate the author's discussion of the strengths and limitations of cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, as they relate to the topic at hand. "While this approach is evidence-based and commonly used in therapy," he notes in "CBT Can Let Us Be," the fifth chapter and one of my favorites, "it can be more difficult to pull off with young children given their (understandable) challenge in logically picking out and analyzing their own thought patterns."

Bright is an assistant professor of counselor education at the State University of New York. His resume includes stints working as a school, career, and mental health counselor in New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont. This is his second book; the first being "Context Is Everything: How to Navigate Life in Multiple Realities," which was published in 2022.

Honestly, one of the reasons I found "The Tao of Anxiety" so appealing relates to the way I was able to instantly recognize so much of myself in the various metaphors and allegories liberally populating this exquisite primer. In some instances, it was as if Bright were directing his analyses and interpretations directly toward me. Then it occurred to me this was by design; most readers will no doubt have a similar reaction. The themes broached by the author are somewhat universal. Everyone who really reflects upon the central tenets of the book will see themselves in the narrative.

This realization also helps to further explain how the 'eastern' and 'western' traditions are so intricately intertwined at the subatomic level.

"We live in a society where it is difficult to not make ourselves the main focus," Bright notes in "What It All Means," the concluding chapter. "It is no surprise that anxiety and depression levels have consistently risen throughout the proliferation of social media. Research has supported that across all age groups, and particularly teenagers, social media use has resulted in higher levels of anxiety, depression, anger, negative self-image, and even suicidal ideation."

"How could this not occur?" he adds. "If we have a system that allows us to constantly compare ourselves to others, encourages us to shout out to be heard, encourages us to misrepresent ourselves, and makes us all too aware of those who are politically and socially different from us while bombarding us with every negative news story, how could one not be impacted?"

Books in this genre generally fall into one of three categories: self-help, college textbooks, or psychology/philosophy. "The Tao of Anxiety" would legitimately fit into all three, which makes it a rather unique offering. Individuals who read it to enhance their own wellbeing will not be disappointed; faculty who want to use it as the primary - or as a supplementary – resource in their graduate courses will be pleased, and those among us who are just trying to figure out what it means to be human will also find it enlightening.

Not only is "The Tao of Anxiety" an interesting book filled with solid recommendations for better negotiating the contemporary world, it is also an important book that could potentially save your life or that of someone close to you. Highly recommended.

*Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*