

## Book Reviews

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***The Spiritual Anatomy of Emotion. How Feelings Link the Brain, the Body, and the Sixth Sense.* Michael A. Jawer with Marc S. Micozzi. (2009). Rochester, VT: Park Street Press. 558 pages. ISBN-10: 1594772886; ISBN-13: 978-1594772887 (pb). \$AUD28.69.**

I found this book to be a very honest one, except, perhaps, for the title: readers interested in the topic of spirituality should be warned that they will find little of relevance apart from a handful of references (literally, five) in a text which exceeds 400 pages. Furthermore, the notion of spirit as some principle that stands apart from the body—the mind is something different from the brain and can perhaps exist distinctly from it—does not seem to be a position that this author subscribes to. Jawer is a resolute physicalist:

It is increasingly apparent that our very definition of mind must change. Science and society continue to speak of the mind-body relationship; that hyphen, alas, perpetuates the outmoded distinction assumed by Descartes. A view of mind and body as two divergent categories is not just inaccurate but decidedly unhelpful if we wish to truly progress in understanding the human animal. Ader puts it this way: “Nobody working in this field believes there’s any separation between [mind and body]. It’s all one.” (p. 56)

And later,

The mind, let us say, is the combination of brain and body, including every aspect of us and everything we feel, think, know, intuit, remember, or have forgotten. Within this conceptualization, the body is central to the mind and so are feelings. (p. 56)

Thus Jawer sometimes makes what some may view as philosophically huge statements, such as “Montague had identified a neural signature betokening the sense of self: a pattern of activity in the cingulate cortex” (p. 272). At the same time, and in a way potentially confusing, Jawer concedes the *possibility* of the existence of a soul, which he re-identifies as a “consciousness field” (p. 427) that sees the brain and consciousness as being like a TV set or a mobile phone in relation to invisible

electromagnetic radiation—as a *receiver* of consciousness rather than its generator.

In a manner and to an extent to which I cannot do justice, Jawer proceeds to describe in great and loving detail the bodily and social context in which myriad feelings and emotions occur, sometimes sounding like a medical textbook (the real “anatomy” of his title). This is the main thrust of his book. So what, then, is the interest of it for readers of this Journal, over and above psychophysiological description?

Just this, that Jawer constantly hints that his “bodymind” model can be used to understand anomalous experiences. For a physicalist, he is remarkably open to the possibility of such things as apparitions, precognitions and birthmark cases: he suggests early on that “the frozen energy of the stress reaction, *combined with issues or preoccupations held in the brain*, can generate the phenomena we know of as ghosts, poltergeists, and similar haunts” (p. 155, italics in original). And later, “the body is a significant player in anomalous experience because the bodymind—not just the brain—is the seat of feeling” (p. 194).

Jawer is an expert in environmental sensitivity and he suggests that such sensitivity is a neurobiological marker for anomalous influences, assuming they do exist. He conducted a survey (previously published as Jawer, 2006) that examined 62 people who, on the basis of their responses, were classified as “sensitives”, and 50 people who did not meet sensitivity criteria. For example, the sensitives were considerably more likely to report a traumatic childhood event. Jawer (2006) gives, in his Table 1, the respondents’ medical self-profile, comparing the high incidence of such things as allergies and electrical sensitivity in sensitives as opposed to non-sensitives. But this is almost certainly a mistake, because participants were allocated to their respective groups *based in part on their responses to such a profile in the survey* (question 26). The same problem occurs with Table 3: “sensitives” are reported to have a higher incidence of apparitions, but a person was placed into the sensitive group *based partly on his or her response to a question on apparitions* (question 44). It’s no wonder, then, that the sensitive group reports more apparitions. This methodological flaw seems to have passed by the Journal reviewers unnoticed. What is needed to remedy it is a way of specifying that a person is sensitive that is *a priori independent* of the variables that are going to be examined in relation to sensitivity (some of Jawer’s qualify, such as handedness and childhood trauma). Alternatively, if Jawer’s selection criteria *are* independent he needs to explicitly show this in his procedure.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Since writing this I have discovered that Donnay (2006) makes similar criticisms, to which Jawer (2007) responds, in my opinion inadequately. See also Roe (2007).

It also occurs to me that a useful multivariate statistical technique that could be applied to Jawer's data is factor analysis, which might indicate how many clusters of sensitivities existed in the data (sensitives and non-sensitives combined) and might show a single neurobiological sensitivity factor on which anomalous experience loaded. But if I am correct in my critique of this survey, and until such further analysis is conducted, then it is premature to say that apparitional experience correlates with environmental sensitivity.

Be that as it may, we can examine how Jawer's theory works. To take an apparitional case first. Passengers and crew on Eastern Airlines L-1011 fleet of jets during 1973 and into 1974 allegedly saw, heard, and spoke to solid-looking apparitions of two crew members, Captain Bob Loft and Second Officer Don Repo, who died following the crash of Eastern Airlines Flight 401 into the Florida Everglades on December 29, 1972. It is said that passengers who did not know either of the men identified them without hesitation from photographs. Loft and Repo did not die immediately, but were conscious of their condition. "Repo, in particular, evidenced anger and a determination to fight. As we know, anger can mobilize a considerable reserve of energy in the fight for survival." (p. 209)

It's likely that each man harbored a sense of responsibility for the fate of the plane and the well-being of the passengers and crew. Their injuries, however, prevented them from doing anything about it. This constitutes the sort of neural dilemma—with activity crossed between the fear- and anger-generating limbic system and the more deliberative prefrontal cortex—that is of interest to us. (p. 209)

Jawer supposes that there is a *direct* causal connection between the neurobiological state of the dying men and the subsequent apparitions, without postulating a surviving conscious component of those men. He admits that he cannot say more about the cause, except that it is "anomalous".

Similarly in the case of unusual birthmarks that have been identified in a third of children who claim to remember previous lives. These markings are said to correspond to the locations of wounds suffered by the deceased person whose life a given child claims to recall. "When the person was said to have died from a gunshot wound, for example, the child would often have *two* birthmarks, perhaps corresponding to a bullet's entry and exit" (p. 351). Jawer again avoids postulating the existence of a surviving personality:

I won't posit that the entire personality is reborn in a new body—only that the emotional energy that went unreleased in its time obeys

the first law of thermodynamics and, *through unknown means* [my emphasis], is effectively transferred to a new residence. In this conception, what survives is the *impulse to express intense feelings* that have been frozen, held in, or repressed. (p. 352)

This model is clearly applicable to such phenomena as poltergeist cases, where repressed hostility on the part of a troubled teenager is often found to be the cause of outbreaks. Jawer even applies his model to cases of precognitive dreams, where it is the element of time that is anomalous.

One of the strengths of Jawer's approach is that he is constantly aware of the need to test his theory, and as a result of that awareness he brings together a startling number of different ideas from his encyclopedic reading. In the present case he predicts neurobiological sensitivity to be found amongst not only children or young adults who claim to remember details of a previous life, but also children who are gifted or prodigies and people who have received organ transplants who show indications of the organ donor (such as personality traits). Another prediction he makes concerns the distinction between people who have what psychiatrist Ernest Hartmann calls "thick" boundaries and those who have "thin" boundaries, saying that the former will be most likely the "projectors" of anomalous phenomena, the latter, the receivers of them.

In his closing chapter, Jawer gives a nice summary of his point of view:

Just as nature is said to abhor a vacuum, so too the mind (what the Greeks termed the psyche) is not meant to be divided against itself. Psychic phenomena, which are so often derided as unreal, are actually the manifestation of processes in the bodymind that have been short-circuited. For those experiences that are genuine, the term "psychic" is accurate, because they stem from perceptions and knowledge that seeks to be made conscious and brought into the open. A dis-integrated mind is one that is ripe for psychic (one might equally say psychosomatic) disturbance. (p. 455)

This slightly pathological view of the paranormal is perhaps what is behind such statements by Jawer as "Ideally, people would be persuaded to simply live their lives, without seeking the anomalous for its own sake" (p. 454). Presumably this does not apply to parapsychologists!

Jawer's work is to be welcomed by those seeking to understand anomalous experiences, for the way he champions the scientific respectability of those experiences, and for the novel hypotheses he has devised about how they function. He has not *explained* anomalies, but he has perhaps thrown light on some of their causes.

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***The Psychology of Paranormal Belief. A Researcher's Handbook.* Harvey J. Irwin. (2009). Hatfield, Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press. 213 pages. ISBN 978-1-902806-93-8 (pb). £16.99.**

On Monday, October 12, 2009, I went for an interview for a job I very much wanted. However, I felt it went poorly, and I was consequently very anxious afterwards. Now the reader should know that for the previous year, following a trauma, I had been agnostic—almost “atheistic”—about the existence of psi. Thus it was uncharacteristic of me at the time to contemplate, on the way home from the interview, consulting the Chinese method of divination the *I Ching* to try and set my anxieties at rest as to the outcome of the interview, to be known in four days. An odd aspect to this incident was that, upon this contemplation, I had a mental image of the hexagram “Danger” (#29 out of 64 possibilities). As it happened, the hexagram that came up was in fact the one called “Danger” (a 1 in 64 chance of this occurring by chance), and seemed to bode poorly for getting the job. And, as it happened, I did *not* get the job.

It is to Harvey Irwin's credit that I believe his book gives a satisfactory explanation of all but one aspect of my behaviour as a paranormal believer (or better, re-convert). I will return to this success in a moment.

The mind-numbing ugliness of the cover of this monograph should not deter the researcher from appreciating this very comprehensive