

BOOK REVIEWS

CARTER, CHRIS. (2012). *Science and the afterlife experience*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions. xiv + 369 pp. ISBN 9781594774522, Paperback, \$18.95. Reviewed by *Stafford Betty*.

Chris Carter's *Science and the Afterlife Experience* is the last book of a trilogy designed to show the strength of substance dualism and its satellite claim that we survive death. His earlier works are *Science and the Near-Death Experience* (2010) and *Science and Psychic Phenomena* (2012). Carter is an Oxford-educated Canadian philosopher with an encyclopedic grasp of the history of psychical research and the philosophical skills to build imposing arguments around it. He enjoys the esteem of many of the world's foremost psychical researchers, some of whom think his marshalling of evidence deals a near fatal blow to materialism. He writes lucidly in the language of everyman.

What makes this book different from others is Carter's ability to expose the weak points of materialism and replace it with a dualist metaphysics built around what he considers to be near insurmountable evidence. He is convinced of the following:

1. substance dualism is no more improbable out of the gate than materialism, and Ockham's razor should not predispose philosophers to favor materialism;
2. careful analysis of paranormal phenomena leaves no doubt that materialism is at a loss to account for them, whereas dualism is consistent with them; and
3. the deceased have long been trying to tell us through mediums what life on the "Other Side" is like, and we have good reason to trust their accounts.

1. Materialists commonly use Ockham's razor to support materialism. "Why introduce an invisible factor like a soul when we have a body right in front of us? Keep it simple," they argue. "But reality is often not simple," Carter responds. Newtonian physics is much simpler than quantum physics, he points out, but becomes inadequate beyond a certain threshold and has to give way to the more complex, more comprehensive theory. Besides the understandable preference for things that can be seen, a deeper reason for the philosopher's opposition to dualism, Carter argues, is a fear that it will "usher in a return to an age of religious persecution and irrationality" (p. 15). Dualism, however, is not a religious doctrine, he responds, but a philosophical stance built around argument and evidence. It owes nothing to religion.

Materialists think that chemical processes in the brain produce qualia, or conscious experiences, and Carter grants that materialism works as a theory; it is plausible. But equally plausible, he says, is the theory that the brain is a 'receiver-transmitter' (p. 12) for the self. If so, "any change in brain

functioning, such as that resulting from intoxication or a stroke, should be expected to affect its capacity as a receiver-transmitter just as certainly as its capacity as a producer” (p. 13). In other words, the self depends on the brain, and a healthy one at that, for its proper functioning, but not for its existence. It exists even when its instrument, the brain, is impaired. In such a case the self is not impaired, the brain is; the self simply cannot express itself in the usual way.

Carter grants that substance dualism (from now on referred to simply as “dualism”) has its problems: How the self interacts with the brain is highly mysterious. But so is the production of consciousness from the dance of chemicals in the material brain—the equally mysterious explanation provided by materialists. Which is less mysterious? How can we decide between dualism and materialism? We would be left with a standoff if weighing these two mysteries against each other were all we had to go on. But that is not the situation at all, he maintains. The ever-growing mass of scholarship and research being done on paranormal phenomena breaks the tie.

2a. Reincarnation. In common with many parapsychologists, Carter regards “near-death experiences, deathbed visions, children who remember previous lives, apparitions, and communications through mediums” (p. 288) as the five most important types of phenomena pointing toward dualism and survival of death. He is impressed by how “vast and varied” the Big Five are, while all pointing in the same direction (p. 4).

In the present book, he dissects the last three. His method is to analyze cases of each type, show why materialism fails to account for them, then show why dualism does. He begins with children’s memories of what they take to be previous lives.

Ian Stevenson, a Canadian psychiatrist who worked for the University of Virginia School of Medicine for 50 years until his death in 2007, investigated over 2,500 cases suggestive of reincarnation. He devoted most of his career to the study of children, aged 2 to 5, who apparently remembered events from a previous life. Stevenson wanted to see if these memories matched real events. For example, did the village that an Indian four-year-old remembered by name, along with the names of her husband and children and other relatives and friends, fit a real place and real people? Moreover, did remembered events match the actual history of events in the village? His methodology was to record the speech of the child herself (ideally) or of the child’s parents who remembered what she said, then take the child to the village to meet the people she claimed to remember. In many cases, recognition was immediate and uncanny, with the child running up to her now older (and much bigger) children using the same terms of endearment once so familiar. Equally impressive was the child’s ability to navigate through the winding lanes of the village and reach her destination. These and similar ‘hits’ are a hallmark of Stevenson’s best cases, numbering in the hundreds. His colleagues continue the research, with similar results. Of special significance are cases, numbering over 200, of birthmarks that match the place on the former body of a fatal wound. Stevenson was a meticulous and wary researcher constantly on the lookout for

fraud (he found only one clear case) and paramnesia, or “unconscious distortions of memories regarding what the child actually said” (p. 45). He was also concerned that ESP might be a factor in the hits. Did the child for some reason gain information telepathically about the identities of her “former” family members and fake the relationship? Carter takes care to rule out such explanations. Carter also devotes a chapter to the objections brought against Stevenson’s research methods by the materialist philosopher Paul Edwards. Carter says he wrote the chapter to “illustrate the shallowness and poor quality of Edwards’s examination of the empirical evidence” (p. 63). There is not space here to summarize Carter’s analysis of the objections.

2b. Apparitions. Carter has a broad knowledge of what the ordinary person terms a ghost. Apparitions, he says, “may cast a shadow, and be reflected in a mirror. They typically show awareness of their surroundings, avoiding furniture and people, and they may turn to follow a person’s movements. Some are reported to speak, although this is not common; if the apparition does speak, there are usually only a few words” (p. 79). They tend to present themselves shortly before or after the death of the person whose apparition they are, and sometimes they haunt a place, in which case they are often seen by several persons. Carter addresses the usual objection brought forth by materialists: That all apparitions are hallucinations, and that in cases when many people see a ghost, the power of suggestion is the explanation. Such dismissals simply do not take into account the facts, Carter argues.

2c. Spirit Communication through Mediums. “We have done all we can when the critic has nothing left to allege except that the investigator is in [on] the trick. But when he has nothing left to allege, he will allege that” (p. xiii). Carter begins this section of the book, much the longest, with this quotation delivered by Henry Sidgwick, first president of the Society for Psychical Research, in 1882. Not much has changed, Carter concedes, in the last 130 years.

When a medium is “on,” she is able to come up with information she has no way of knowing normally. Mediums contend, of course, that they are merely the mouthpiece for the spirit coming through them, who typically uses either the medium’s hand (as in “automatic writing”) or her voice box (often while she is in trance). Carter analyzes the output of Mrs. Leonora Piper of Boston, made famous by William James, who sat through over a hundred séances with her; and the Englishwoman Mrs. Gladys Osborne Leonard, studied in detail by Sir Oliver Lodge. Carter concludes that “in many cases ... the amount of accurate, highly detailed information received far exceeded what could be expected from sheer guesswork” (p. 153). An example is the “book test.” In a book test, “the communicator has to specify the location of a book in a house to which the medium has no access but which was well known to the [alleged spirit] communicator while living. The communicator must also specify a page number of that book, on which will be found a passage that conveys some appropriate message he remembers writing down before his death” (p. 147). Leonard was involved in many successful book tests—so successful in fact that she was sometimes shadowed by detectives to make sure she did not gather information about the deceased communicator and perpetrate a fraud. Her

reputation remained untarnished. After taking us through the particulars of one such test, Carter concludes, “Conscious fraud seems completely out of the question in the most carefully documented cases. For all but the most paranoid conspiracy theorists, this explanation will seem completely inadequate” (p. 153).

Life on the “Other Side.” The last chapter (prior to an epilogue) draws from the testimonies of six mediums—or, depending on your preference, the spirit communicators speaking through them. They describe what it is like to be “dead.” It will no doubt seem strange if not absurd to many a reader that anyone should take seriously such accounts. Nevertheless, bear in mind that Carter has taken pains to show that some mediums are legitimate and gifted. So what is illogical, he asks, about their telling us about their world? We should expect them to. For those of us who can get past our “boggle threshold,” he argues, such accounts may prove to be of great consequence.

Carter analyzes several notable afterlife accounts, including one allegedly provided by Bertrand Russell. The one he draws on the most was ostensibly communicated by Frederic Myers, the “Freud” of psychical research. Myers the gifted Irish medium Geraldine Cummins as his mouthpiece. Their collaboration, *The Road to Immortality*, published in 1932, is widely considered the gold standard of the genre. In it Myers brings to life the various planes of existence, beginning with earth and extending all the way to realms far beyond his actual experience (he has been dead for only a little over twenty years when he first comes through Cummins). His description of the world he lives in is vivid and arresting, right down to the characters we are likely to meet over there and the astonishing colors of the flowers. He does not hesitate to describe the laws of the after-world and how it all works. The following is typical:

Myers tells us that communities of like-minded individuals with similar tastes come together and live in mutually constructed environments; those of a solitary nature may live in an environment completely of their own subconscious construction. Here, food and water are no longer required; sexual desires are in most cases still present, but women do not bear children. (p. 311)

Myers tells us that we are destined, if we desire, to “take on divine attributes. The reason, therefore, for the universe and ... the purpose of existence ... [is] the evolution of mind in matter” (p. 305).

Science and the Afterlife Experience has received high marks from those laboring in the trenches with the Big Five, including near-death researchers working in hospitals with patients close to death, lab-coated parapsychologists running telepathy tests on gifted subjects, psychical researchers analyzing sudden changes in brain wave patterns of mediums when they “make contact” with a communicator, and a few philosophers who study these phenomena for hints about the nature of persons. They see Carter’s work as the new benchmark for comprehensive, in-depth presentation and analysis of their subject. Their conclusions are the same as his: That a materialist metaphysics can be defended only by ignoring facts that need to be heeded.

Carter wants to understand where we humans stand in the grand scheme of the universe. For him there is no question more important than the nature of human destiny—whether it ends at death or continues into other realms. He believes that a careful study of paranormal phenomena decisively tilts the balance away from materialism and back toward dualism.

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The Author

Chris Carter, M.A., MBA, is the author of several articles and three acclaimed books that examine controversial issues in science and philosophy. Educated at Oxford University, he currently teaches internationally.

The Reviewer

Stafford Betty, Ph.D., is a professor of religious studies at California State University, Bakersfield, where he specializes in death and afterlife studies. His most recent books are *The Afterlife Unveiled* (2011), *The Imprisoned Splendor* (a novel set in the afterlife, 2011), and *Heaven and Hell Unveiled: Updates from the World of Spirit* (2014).

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SACKS, JONATHAN. (2011). *The Great Partnership: Science, religion, and the search for meaning*. New York, NY: Schocken Books. x +370 pp. ISBN 978-0-8052-4301-7, Hard cover, \$28.95. *Reviewed by Kyriacos C. Markides*.

Neo-atheists like Richard Dawkins, the late Christopher Hitchens and Ed Harris have made a major contribution to modern civilization and culture. Their frontal assault on religion as “the source of all evil” has triggered the emergence of a cottage industry of first-rate scholarly and readable works aiming to debunk their sophomoric view of the subject of their ire. One such work is certainly the latest by Dr. Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Great Britain and the Commonwealth and a current member of the House of Lords. Even though his book, *The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning*, does not directly address transpersonal themes, his work nevertheless is very relevant to the

overall thrust and aims of transpersonal psychology and transpersonal theory in general.

Rabbi Sacks (2011) thunders that, “Atheism deserves better than the new atheists whose methodology consists of criticizing religion without understanding it, quoting texts without contexts ... confusing folk belief with reflective theology, abusing, mocking, ridiculing, caricaturing, and demonizing religious faith and holding it responsible for the great crimes against humanity” (p. 11).

The neo-atheists’ claim that religion and science are incompatible with each other, that religion breeds violence and ignorance, and that it “poisons everything,” is masterfully exposed by Rabbi Sacks as a grotesque distortion and over-simplification of reality. Without denying the negative role that religion has often played in history, he demonstrates convincingly that the opposite situation is closer to the truth: The absence of religious anchoring has created far worse calamities for humanity. He mentions the unrestrained slaughter that was unleashed during and after the militantly anti-religious revolutions that took place since the Enlightenment. On this score, his views are similar to the work of sociologist of religion Peter Berger in his book, *Pyramids of Sacrifice*. If one is to contemplate a calculus of pain, secular ideologies have caused much more horrendous harm than any fundamentalist religion.

“The cure for bad religion,” Rabbi Sacks (2011) insists, “is good religion, not no religion, just as the cure for bad science is good science not the abandonment of science” (p. 11). It is an axiom for Rabbi Sacks that religion and science complement and need each other. Right at the start of his book, he frames his study within the parameters of the well-known aphorism by Einstein that, “Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind” (as cited in Sacks, 2011, p. 6). He hastens to add that one need not be religious to be an ethical and honorable person. In fact, he refers to several of his atheist professors of philosophy at Oxford that inspired him and sharpened his own ethical sensibilities. He does add, however, that overall, and in the long run, the takeover of a civilization by a purely secular worldview invites sooner or later a nihilistic outlook and a vacuum of meaning that can lead more often than not to collective phenomena of unspeakable evil: The French Guillotine, the Stalinist Gulags, the slaughter houses of Maoist China and Pol Pot’s Cambodia, and of course the archetypal horror of the Holocaust, “rationally” planned and scientifically executed by the Nazis.

Rabbi Sacks repeatedly reminds us that the proper sphere of science is explanation, the uncovering of the laws that govern the physical universe. Religion, on the other hand, focuses on meaning and interpretation. Science takes things apart to find out how they work. Religion puts things together to find out what they mean. In this context, Sacks rejects Stephen Gould’s notion of the “non-overlapping magisteria,” that religion and science must be kept separate as a way of solving the conflict between them. Instead, he argues that as Einstein pointed out, religion and science need each other. Sacks argues for a creative partnership of the two. He, in fact, views the essence of Western Civilization as the synthesis between Hebrew monotheistic religion and Greek

philosophical thought. His understanding is reminiscent of the yin and yang of Taoism as well as the much used metaphor of the left and right side of the brain. Ancient Greece planted the seeds of left-brain rational thought that eventually gave birth to the scientific revolution and contemporary secularism. Judaism, from its very beginning, represented the right side of the brain, the meaning side. These two pillars of western civilization need each other for a proper apprehension of reality and a right attitude towards the world in which we humans find ourselves. An interesting part of his work is the contrast he juxtaposes between Athens and Jerusalem as the two “pillars” of the Judeo-Christian civilization. Athens gave birth to tragedy and the notion of fate. Judaism offered hope and trust in an all-loving Creator and, therefore, ultimate freedom and meaning to individual existence. The God of Aristotle is framed in terms of an impersonal unifying principle of the One, the Unmoved Mover, indifferent to the fate of human beings and their tragedies. The God of Israel is the personal reality that interacts, speaks and makes covenants with humanity, starting with Abraham and the other prophets. It is a God who revealed Himself as a loving and compassionate Father, who created human beings in his own image, bestowing spiritual dignity to all humanity. It is the God who listens to prayer and who was inherited by the West through Christianity.

Rabbi Sacks offers us an accessible work that is very enjoyable to read, pollinated with a string of meaningful insights about the relationship between religion and science. His deep knowledge of the subject is awe inspiring, and one feels compelled to re-read his work time and again to benefit from the wisdom it unfolds. It is a real page-turner. Although he approaches his study from a global, non-denominational perspective, his focus and preference, understandably, is grounded almost exclusively within Judaism. The examples he offers in relating science to religion are drawn almost entirely from the Old Testament, which he insists must not be read literally. A literalist approach to religious scripture, in fact, unavoidably leads to distortions, the bread and butter of the religious fundamentalists and the neo-atheists.

One does, however, get the feeling that his deep love for Judaism and the Torah leads him to over-interpret, perhaps, certain aspects of the tradition that may indeed need to be rejected rather than interpreted. A similar approach surely applies to all other religions when scrutinized in light of contemporary vantage points of understanding. How can we “interpret,” for example, God’s injunction to Joshua to kill everything alive in Canaan? How else can we interpret it other than to simply consider it a form of genocidal tribal lore mixed in with authentic divine wisdom as conveyed to humanity via the mystic experiences of the great prophets? Leaving intact violent parts of what passes for inherited scripture by simply re-interpreting them offers fodder to the neo-atheists who debunk religion in its totality, good and bad. Did God actually give such a command to Joshua for mass slaughter or a similar command to Abraham to kill his own son? Can anyone in his right mind today consider such blind obedience as an exemplary form of perfect faith and trust in God?

Another possible and perhaps minor limitation of the work is Rabbi Sacks’ lack of consideration of the religious experience as a central factor in the

emergence and maintenance of religious worldviews; that in fact, contrary to the fervent wishes and beliefs of the neo-atheists, secularization may be impossible in the long run. It may be so because the religious experience is an integral aspect of human nature itself, and therefore will always pop up under diverse cultural and historical conditions. The prophetic stream is always present within any human population and in any historical period. In short, prophets and saints will always be around, even in the most atheistic and secular times.

The above-mentioned possible limitations do not diminish in any way the brilliance of Rabbi Sack's passionate and scholarly exposition on how to think about the relationship between religion and science. I have no doubt that it will establish itself as a classic.

The Author

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Ph.D., has been Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Great Britain and the Commonwealth, and has received honorary degrees from universities around the world. He is the award-winning author of more than twenty books, including *To Heal a Fractured World* and *Future Tense*. He writes frequently for *The Times* of London and other periodicals, and is heard regularly on the BBC. He was made a Life Peer and took his seat in the House of Lords in October 2009.

The Reviewer

Kyriacos C. Markides, Ph.D., is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Maine, and author of several books on religion and mystic Christianity, such as, *The Mountain of Silence*, *Gifts of the Desert*, and his latest *Inner River: A Pilgrimage to the Heart of Christian Spirituality*, all three published by Random House/Image Books. Several of his works have also been translated and published in twelve other countries and languages. He is also the author of an article in this Journal: Markides, K. (2008). Eastern Orthodox mysticism and transpersonal theory, *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 40(2), 178–198.

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MOREIRA-ALLMEDIA, ALEXANDER and SANTOS, FRANKLIN SANTANA (Eds.). (2012). *Exploring frontiers of the mind-body relationship*. New York, NY: Springer. xx + 243 pp. ISBN 978-1-4614-0646-4, Hardback, \$129.00. *Reviewed by David Lukoff*.

As someone who has been both excited about the rapid expansion of the scientific knowledge base in areas such as neuroscience, physics, biology,

consciousness, as well as philosophy, but also overwhelmed at the explosion of publications, this book is a godsend. In this edited book, leading researchers and scholars who are experts in these areas have written succinct, yet in depth summaries and reflections about their relevance to understanding the human mind. It is self-consciously in the tradition of William James's radical empiricism, and the editors, Alexander Moreira-Allmeida and Franklin Santana Santos, follow their own admonition to researchers about the, "need to enlarge timid scope and deal with a much wider range of phenomena if they in fact wish to make a truly significant contribution to the understanding of mind and its relationship with the brain ... specifically experiences called 'anomalous' and/or 'spiritual'" (p. xv). Experts from many areas are brought to bear on these questions to facilitate and integrate competing research paradigms. This collection grew out of a conference, thus providing the authors with a chance to refine their reflections based on dialogue with their co-presenters as they wrote their chapters.

The first three chapters set the philosophical context for the entire book project by bringing into question the domination of reductionistic materialism in mainstream science, particularly when applied to understanding mind-body topics and issues such as anomalous experiences. This articulates the evolving postmaterialist psychology approach spearheaded by Lisa Miller and Len Sperry. The next two chapters examine the contributions of physical and biological science to the understanding of the mind. The authors of these are physicist Chris Clarke and physician Deepak Chopra, who are experts in their own areas as they venture thoughtfully into this new territory. The support for nonlocality of both matter and mind is, "building a bridge between spirituality and science" (p. 91). The next two chapters present a lucid overview of neuroimaging, which is certainly one of the most exciting areas currently in contributing to the understanding of mindfulness as well as mental functioning more broadly, and is graphically illustrated with brain image findings. It provides a good antidote to the simplistic positing of and search for a 'God spot' in the brain. In addition, it highlights the limitations of the 'brain as computer' models of mind.

Anomalous experiences have been a focus in my own research (Lukoff, 2007), and I think that their study has important implications for both transpersonal therapeutic approaches and understanding the mind-body relationship. There are at least 10 well-established anomalous experiences (Cardena, Lynn, & Krippner, 2000), of which this book has chapters on near-death experiences, mediumship, and past lives. Additional anomalous experiences, such as mystical experiences and psychic experiences, are covered in other chapters.

Collectively, these perspectives highlight the possible avenues for unmasking and understanding transcendental realities, which are notoriously difficult to research (as William James also pointed out in his work on empirical radicalism). Moreira-Allmeida and Santos describe theirs as a balanced psychobiological approach, with which I would concur.

I found myself actively involved while reading this book, as I was underlining sections, marking some areas for PowerPoint slides in my own courses and

workshops, and writing down references to retrieve. This recently published work (copyright 2012) is a tour de force of contemporary scholarship, so do not wait until used copies are available for a few dollars. By then, these authors will undoubtedly have moved on to new territory and vision. This is a book by the cutting edge thinkers and researchers of consciousness in our times. I personally believe we have a plethora of contemporary Einsteins addressing these topics, whose contributions to this book make it a wonderful selection to aid in one's ongoing reflection.

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The Editors

Alexander Moreira-Allmeida, M.D., Ph.D., was trained in psychiatry and cognitive-behavioral therapy at the Institute of Psychiatry of the University of São Paulo, Brazil, where he also obtained his Ph.D. in Health Sciences investigating the mental health of Spiritist mediums. Formerly a postdoctoral fellow in religion and health at Duke University, he is now a professor of psychiatry at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora School of Medicine and Founder and Director of the Research Center in Spirituality and Health, Brazil (www.ufjf.br/nupes-eng). His main research interest involves empirical studies of spiritual experiences, as well as the methodology and epistemology of this research field. His publications are available at www.hoje.org.br/elsh.

Franklin Santana Santos, M.D., Ph.D., was trained in geriatrics at Clinical Hospital of the University of São Paulo, Brazil, where he also obtained his Ph.D. in Health Sciences investigating delirium in elderly patients. Formerly a postdoctoral fellow in cognitive disturbances at Karolinska Institute (Sweden), he is now Professor of post-graduate program of University of São Paulo School of Medicine and collaborator researcher of Laboratory of Neuroscience (LIM-27) at the Institute of Psychiatry of the University of São Paulo, Brazil. He is a leader in the studies in issues related to death, dying and Palliative Care in Brazil. His main research interests involve cognitive disturbances, thanatology, palliative care and medical education, and he has published several articles and books about these topics.

The Reviewer

David Lukoff, Ph.D., is a Professor of Psychology at Sofia University and a licensed psychologist in California. He is the author of 80 articles and chapters on spiritual issues and mental health (several in this journal) and co-author of

the *DSM-IV* category Religious or Spiritual Problems. In addition, he is currently Co-President of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology.

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MENON, SANGEETHA. (2014). *Brain, self and consciousness: Explaining the conspiracy of experience*. New Delhi, India: Springer. ix + 214 pp. ISBN 978-81-322-1580-6, Hardcover, £90 (Approximately \$129). *Reviewed by Brian Les Lancaster.*

“In my end is my beginning.” Questions ... and more questions about the status of self in the age of neuroscience.

With apologies to T.S. Eliot, I shall start this review at the end of Sangeetha Menon’s book, for the essence of her book is captured in these closing words: “Is there a core-self somehow hidden and which master-controls the living self through the body and the brain? Is that pure consciousness? Is the existence of pure consciousness unhindered by the birth and death of the body?” These are profoundly challenging questions, and they serve to establish here at the opening of my review the rich area of human experience that Menon has chosen to explore. She is to be congratulated for raising her head above the parapet in the general consideration of neuroscience, self, and consciousness to which her book is directed, and to stand up for those core values including free will and the recognition of our potential to embrace higher, perhaps transcendent, realms of being that dignify humanity.

Questions are good ... and indeed Menon asks many questions in the course of her writing. What about answers? Well, expecting answers to these questions may be overly simplistic. Menon’s final words that follow the above questions (“A short response is that the core-self is beyond the binary of birth and death of the body, and it is the central key to resolve the puzzle of consciousness”) assert a strong position—that our understanding of self can never be complete if our horizons extend only to the brain and body. Indeed, the very asking of the questions seems to be a stylistic device that Menon uses throughout the book to imply her own position. The questions *are* her answers: There *is* a core-self which master-controls ‘us,’ and this core *is* pure consciousness, which actually *does* exist beyond the physicality that arises and decays in birth and death.

The end is in the beginning since these are essentially the questions that launch Menon’s enquiry. Already on page 2 she writes that “Self is the puzzle for twenty-first century biology,” and page 5 includes a list of 26 questions that distil the book’s substance. Would we not expect answers by the book’s close? Here is the reason why I have commenced my review in this fashion. It seems to me that the reason why Menon closes with questions, is that it is the appropriate, perhaps gentle, way of reminding those whose horizons seem to

end with the physicality of embodied consciousness that there is more to us than that. There is a mystery at the core of our being. It is not available to even the most sophisticated external instrumentation, and yet ignoring or denying it carries consequences.

The fundamental question that interests me concerns the *approaches* we adopt in engaging with the wealth of research into the nature of consciousness—especially the dominant strand deriving from cognitive neuroscience—whilst remaining faithful, as it were, to that mystery at the core of being. Is the person who lives and breathes that mystery condemned to be on the outside of the coterie of those who see themselves at the forefront in the challenge to understand the nature of consciousness? This I believe is the subtext of Menon’s book. As she writes, “All through the discussion, I underline the importance of considering brain-self interrelations, and also of separating the fleeting self of the cognitive and social sciences from the core-self that is deeply ontological” (p. 5). By “deeply ontological” she seems to be emphasizing that the core-self is “un-ideated” and “non-located” (p. 4), meaning that its presence cannot be detected by the methods of neuroscience. And here is the nub, for it remains unclear as to how a research-based approach might substantiate Menon’s proposals about a core-self that is not dependent on a physical base. I would argue that we need greater clarity here. Indeed, let me put this more strongly: I believe that this—in the more general sense of articulating the epistemological basis whereby we might satisfactorily demonstrate the value of mystical ideas that do not fit into the dominant physicalist paradigm—is the greatest challenge to which we as transpersonal psychologists are called at this point in our discipline’s development.

Let me briefly say more about this challenge before returning to Menon’s work. The notion that spirituality has a role in relation to psychology is no longer the challenge that it was in the early years of the transpersonal movement. However, I have argued that transpersonal psychology remains the only sub-discipline of psychology that can engage with spiritual and mystical traditions on terms that do not squeeze those traditions’ core values and ontological convictions out from any dialogue. The huge explosion of research into mindfulness and its applications, for example, rarely acknowledges the broader context of the role mindfulness might play in an individual’s journey to developing wisdom, attaining more enriching states of being, and engaging with non-physical realms. Whilst this is not the place to go into detail, it is important to acknowledge the deleterious consequences of such emaciation of spiritual and mystical notions for individuals and for our culture more generally.

Menon’s approach is one way of redressing the balance. She endeavours to engage with those who espouse a purely physicalist worldview seemingly *on their own terms*. By embedding her notions of the core-self and the spiritual perspective that ensues from it in the context of a wealth of neurocognitive research into self and consciousness, she gives the impression that those notions might be evaluated by the criteria of cognitive neuroscience. However, I am not so sure that this particular strategy is the most appropriate. Menon’s book includes valuable overviews of many of the avenues that cognitive neuroscientists have explored in

attempting to understand the role of brain systems in relation to self and consciousness. And she emphasizes what appears to be lacking:

At some point we will have to greet the idea that knowledge of causal connections is trivial as far as the ontology of consciousness is concerned. Otherwise, in spite of amazing neurobiological developments, as persons, we will stay where we started. Inadequate and parochial problematization of consciousness, without considering its ontological nature, will lead to inadequate conceptualization. Such conceptual frameworks might very well throw light on certain biological and cultural traits. However, to believe that the door will open to show the true nature of consciousness is doubtful. (p. 55)

I very much share Menon's view, and applaud the way she confronts the generally received wisdom that consciousness is to be understood within the confines of a physicalist ontology. The generally-agreed approach within cognitive neuroscience by-passes the so-called hard problem of consciousness (i.e., how physical processes may relate to phenomenal experience) and simply assumes that more of the same will solve the problem. As Crick and Koch express it, "It appears fruitless to approach this problem head-on. Instead, we are attempting to find the neural correlate(s) of consciousness (NCC), in the hope that when we can explain the NCC in causal terms, this will make the problem of qualia clearer" (Crick & Koch, 2003, p. 119). Are "hopes" enough however? And might it not be the case that addressing the hard problem could provide a more appropriate context within which neuroscientific data should be viewed?

As I have already illustrated, Menon's approach proposes an extra ingredient that needs to be incorporated within our view of self and consciousness, namely the *core-self* that is *pure consciousness*. The problem here is that there is no evidence that would, I think, convince those who hold sway in the areas of research she reviews. How could there be, given the non-physical nature of that extra ingredient as conceptualized here? Indeed, the crucial question, I feel, concerns establishing the line of reasoning that might be expected to lead in the direction of incorporating such constructs in the neurocognitive narrative. This is a question about the way we bridge disciplinary boundaries, and is, I believe, critical to the challenge Menon is addressing. In my view her book would have benefitted from more consideration of such epistemological matters.

Again and again in the book, Menon gives a fine review of relevant research, raising poignant questions. But these questions are simply followed by assertions that introducing this core-self answers the questions: (p. 101: "The puzzle is solved only when it is conceded that the core-self is not another experiential ... feel alongside taste, smell, etc., but an ontologically different entity;" p. 104: "In order for cognitive processes to be embodied in bodily experiences and actions, and for interactions with the environment, firstly a core self-sense is to be conceptualized;" p. 107: "The minimal self has to be a core, ontic self that could be described as non-structured, non-intentional, substantive, pure consciousness."). These phrases, "... it is conceded that...", "... is to be conceptualized ...," "... has to be..." are problematic, for much has to be taken on trust. I wanted Menon to go further; I felt that she could

have developed the ideas, which she asserts are needed, in greater detail. And she does not really grapple with this issue about which lines of evidence might support the proposal of a core-self that exists in some sense beyond the brain.

To be sure there will be many (especially amongst the audience of this review) who rejoice in Menon's liberating perspective. I have already indicated that I count myself amongst this group. But in reviewing the book I have to ask this key question: Within which scholarly tradition(s) should the arguments be contextualized? In my view, Menon's perspective brings a refreshing addition to the narrative that arises from the cognitive and brain science, but crucially her ideas cannot be substantiated from those areas. On several occasions, she draws on material in the traditions associated with Vedanta, and it seems clear that the key notions of a core-self and pure consciousness derive substantively from her knowledge and practice of these traditions. It is a great shame therefore that nowhere in the book is the Vedantic material elaborated. We have brief allusions only.

The strength of transpersonal psychology and its contemporary importance lies in its capacity to integrate across scholarly divides. This is where I would situate Menon's book: it is clear that she is fully at home in two scholarly areas—cognitive neuroscience and Vedanta—which gives her an authoritative voice. I feel that she could have built a richer integration had she developed the input from the latter further. Again, it is not that I would have the book be something the author had not set out to achieve—that would be unjust. It is that the arguments she builds seem to be lacking without a more substantive base.

To follow further this point of criticism I would have to raise a concern over the treatment of ideas having roots in Vedanta. There is, for example, a large literature critical of any notion of pure consciousness. Where is Menon's reply? What about contemporary scholarship into Vedanta—if a work such as this is going to build the kind of bridges that I for one would very much like to see, then the author must engage with the scholarly treatment of the material drawn from spiritual and mystical traditions just as she engages critically with the theories of cognitive neuroscientists.

And, given the context, I would like to have seen a further consideration discussed. Menon criticises the view advanced by most cognitive psychologists today that there is no coherent and continuing self, that self is a narrative constructed from moment to moment (e.g., Bruner, 1997; Dennett, 1991; Gazzaniga, 2013). By contrast, Menon asserts the continuity of self: "Experience itself is influenced by the continuity of the experiencer as a continuing self The self is not a point of awareness that exists for a moment..." (p. 172). Now, those with an understanding of the historical roots of Buddhism will know that this debate is not new; notions of the impermanence of self (or perhaps better expressed—the impermanence of the immediate sense of 'I') is one of the divergences that led to Buddhism arising as a tradition separated from its Hindu backdrop. It would have been stimulating to see this modern tension contextualized against the Hindu-Buddhist background (especially since the Buddhist view is one that has influenced some key thinkers in contemporary psychology).

Menon articulates her view forcefully:

I would think that this [the view that there is no continuous self] is a dangerous and exceedingly superficial view ... a serious blunder to commit if one is interested in the character of the person, and deeply philosophical views such as freedom and moral choices. I will not attribute the finer values of human pursuit such as freedom and universal love to a fleeting self ... But in absolute terms these are values that can only originate from the ‘core-self’, which is the seat of the body-sense and the self-sense. (p. 173)

I certainly agree, and again congratulate Menon on flying her colours with a flourish. But the Hindu-Buddhist backdrop could have been instructive here. After all, a great tradition such as Buddhism never abandoned the value of moral choices. It would, I feel, have been instructive to chart the course taken when momentariness was asserted over continuity; embedding the contemporary debate in the context of such a background could enlighten us.

As it stands, Menon’s position is open to challenge. One of the authors whose views Menon addresses in this context is Metzinger (2009) who has argued forcefully that there is no-one within ‘us,’ as it were. And the evidence from cognitive studies such as those of Gazzaniga (2013) and Wegner (2002) is compelling. Weighed against this we have a series of questions posed by Menon:

Is the brain being taken to be the grand organ that masterminds one’s mind, mental life and experiences? Is the singular attention on brain, at the cost of dumping the self, on overrated position? Would considering the brain not as the lone, grand organ but as a ‘mediating organ’ be a plausible option? (p. 101)

Again, I am sympathetic to Menon’s perspective here, but I would like to have seen more substantial argument. There is little doubt that Metzinger’s answers to the above would be “yes, no, and no;” and I suspect that Menon’s are “no, yes, and yes.” But couldn’t there be more nuanced positions, and how does Menon’s position accommodate the empirical data? Similarly when addressing the plasticity of the brain, she challenges the universally held view amongst those taking a biological perspective that the brain is a self-organising structure (under environmental influence) when she asserts that “There is something that ‘tells’ the brain to change according to altering conditions” (p. 132). How do we know? Again, it is not that I wish to deny Menon’s convictions—on the contrary, I want to see them leading to influential dialogue and not being casually dismissed by those who argue that the empirical data cannot support the view of something beyond the brain.

Ultimately, in Menon’s scheme the core-self holds the strings. “The core-self is the adherent base of all subjective experiences, that shines up our discrete states of mind and body, giving immediate knowledge and awareness” (p. 134). Yet there are a number of paradoxes: The core-self is the “deep organic self” (p. 194) but it is non-embodied—how do we reconcile its organic nature with its being non-embodied? The core-self is at the root of our character, yet it is pure consciousness—how do we reconcile the contentlessness with the core

patterning of character? These are not paradoxes that can be addressed from the context of psychology and neuroscience. They are aspects of the mystery at the core of our being that is explored in the discourse of mysticism and religion.

Again, I return to the fundamental challenge—the challenge for transpersonal psychology—that of recognizing the complementarity of mysticism and scientific psychology, and drawing on both to build a rigorously-researched extended science of being. Menon’s exploration of the self in relation to cognitive neuroscience is a timely and worthy contribution to meeting the challenge.

I say ‘timely’ since re-evaluating what we mean by ‘self’ and the values we ascribe to personhood seems to me to be overdue. Menon uses a plethora of adjectives to specify the nature of self in its many guises: we have “spiritual self,” “experiential self,” “minimal self,” “extended self,” “lasting self,” and “deeply placed self” in Chapter 1 alone! And maybe this itself reflects a problem: self is the proverbial elephant that eludes full description without a higher overview. I believe transpersonal psychology is the discipline that can provide that overview, and works such as this book certainly move us in the right direction. Menon’s measured and illuminating reviews of key topics at the forefront of contemporary neurocognitive science show the value that can be added when notions of a core, integrative self are introduced. The evidence for such a ‘higher’ dimension of self is not to be found within the remit of “brass instrument psychology” (even when James’s characterization is updated to include PET, fMRI and the like). It is only when authors like Menon pose deeper questions about meaning, the refinement of emotions, and our sense of agency that the inadequacy of the current cognitive orientation in psychology is highlighted.

And I refer to ‘extended science’ not only to mean that we should incorporate a rich and diverse range of methodologies in our quest to understand spiritual and transpersonal issues (Anderson & Braud, 2011), but also to recognize the moral impact of scientific theorizing. For example, a view of consciousness which holds that it is essentially limited to physical computing power—whether in brains or super computers—is not only a wild extrapolation on the basis of inadequate data but also an insidious assault on humanity’s long-cherished values. Where data alone are inadequate to generate a water-tight model, scientists promoting *extended science* will incorporate moral and other spiritual implications in their speculations. Menon’s work exemplifies such a responsible approach, and should be on the reading list for anyone genuinely interested in a transpersonal approach that engages constructively with the science of consciousness.

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Editor's Note: As a tribute to scholarly dialogue, watch for a response by the author (Sangeetha Menon) in the next issue of the Journal

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