

BOOK REVIEW

John Tomlinson
American Institute of Health and Science

Where God Lives: The Science of the Paranormal and How Our Brains are Linked to the Universe, by Melvin Morse and Paul Perry. New York, NY: Cliff Street Books, 2000, 256 pp., \$22.00, hb.

Pediatrician Melvin Morse's newest book, *Where God Lives*, is a wide-ranging look at the new frontiers of science. By integrating vistas of plausibility from Mind/Body Medicine, the New Biology and the New Physics, Morse and co-author Paul Perry suggest that science is on the verge of coining a new version of reality, one that is decidedly more spiritual and belief-oriented. In their view, the history of science is closely linked to what society is capable of believing. As scientific beliefs about what is possible *in principle* evolved, scientists made discoveries that anchored humankind's augmented sense of what could be.

With this as their launching point, the authors attempt to convey what the New Science now suspects is possible. And we need look no further than the title to see where they are going. With their use of *paranormal* in the title, which refers to that which science cannot explain and generally refers to the supernatural and, by extension, the occult, they have already set the stage. What uninitiated readers are about to learn however, is that Morse and Perry use the word ironically—their hope being that, by the time they finish discussing the latest discoveries about our reality, it will hard to say just what paranormal is. Clearly, the more science probes the deepest reaches of reality with leading edge technology, the less it seems to know about nature's underpinnings. As a result, what we are capable of believing takes on an ever larger role in what undergirds our reality. And with this, the authors lead us right to the edge of faith-based science.

John Tomlinson is Director of the American Institute of Health and Science. Letters should be addressed to Mr. Tomlinson at the American Institute of Health and Science, 3106 Dearborn Avenue, Flint, MI 48507; e-mail: jtomlinson@comcast.net.

The first chapter begins with a picnic given by Morse to follow up on the lives of children and former patients who have had NDEs. These children seem far less surprised than adults generally are by the “paranormal” reality they encountered. It is as if their limited experience with the world, their wide-eyed innocence, gives them a heightened ability to see reality more clearly than the adults who study it for a living.

Morse draws upon this unjaded sense as he discusses with attendees some of the ideas and insights explored later in the book. Foremost is memory. If one’s consciousness can seemingly expand beyond the body’s bounds and remember exactly what it observed, the question becomes: How was that memory preserved? If experiencers were in fact outside their body, then memory cannot be exclusive to the brain. This leads to a discussion of consciousness itself and how the scientific view is evolving due to the inability of current mechanistic models to answer the bell.

But just before launch, Morse veers off to give us a rare personal glimpse into his own struggles. He relates how his life was out of control, with high blood pressure, compulsive eating, and bouts with acute anxiety. My first thought was that this has absolutely nothing to do with the track he just set up in the previous chapter, and furthermore casts doubt on the courage, strength, and hope that is supposed to stem from direct contact with the revelations brought back to us by those who have had near-death experiences.

Perhaps what Morse shows us with a frank discussion of his state of mind is this: If one of the world’s leading experts on the near-death experience, one who has heard as many compelling stories as anyone else on earth, can lose it, then we, who are less closely aligned with this mystical experience cannot hope to find salvation, that release from the human dilemma, by immersing ourselves in such knowledge. For me, this is the untold lesson of the book. Writers like Betty Eadie with her *Embraced by the Light* (Eadie and Curtis, 1992) have sold millions of books to seekers longing to assuage their fears of death and find new hope for living. And yet if someone at the very heart of the effort to chronicle this experience, one familiar with all the powerful anecdotes, can feel bereft of hope and happiness, how much can these anecdotes, however compelling, help the rest of us?

Perhaps the authors are tacitly illustrating the difference between what we can believe and what we should believe. That is, if all the secular knowledge we can muster about becoming one with the Light, and all the scientific facts and anecdotes at our disposal about the beyond,

cannot relieve the *angst* inherent in the human condition, what can? In the end, the most we can hope to get from these anecdotes is an undergirding of our determination to pursue those things that do put us right with our reality. At best, by verifying that we *will* in fact confront an afterlife and face our Maker when our body finally fails us, they confirm deeper views.

For Morse, the way out of his mess was to embrace what he terms the Ten Secrets of Happiness: (1) exercise, (2) pay attention to life patterns, (3) focus on family and relationships, (4) trust your inner vision, (5) do service to others, (6) do financial planning to reduce debt, (7) begin a healthy diet, (8) talk to God, (9) learn to love, and (10) become spiritually-minded. As I read Morse's basic principles of happiness, they sounded at first like the Ten Cliches found in every self-help book ever published. But as I explored them further, I realized that with these basic laws of human nature, Morse shows us how his work with children has molded his ability to garner poignant insights from the innocent minds he serves with such dedication.

Morse then returns for another glimpse at Where God Lives by discussing Rupert Sheldrake's ideas about universal memory, though without ever mentioning Sheldrake. He tells us how these ideas, if proven, could explain the apparent evidence supporting reincarnation, past-life regression, ghostly energy patterns, and a host of similar supernatural phenomena.

Such connections highlight how closely linked the human mind is with past, present, and future occurrences. Coupled with this, the authors cover Larry Dossey's work on the power of prayer. With the growing number of double-blind scientific studies being done to determine the efficacy of prayer, we can now say with some certainty that the mind does have an undetected, nonlocal link with whatever healing agent permeates our reality.

Yet their discussion fostered for me a laundry list of unanswered questions. For example: Is it the mind acting directly upon another mind in a quantum way, or are our prayers inducing an intercessory agent to act? Obviously, this has yet to be answered and may never in fact be answered by science. Certainly, Morse could have asked this: What does it say scientifically about the very existence of God that more than 250 studies have been done in a laboratory setting demonstrating the efficacy of prayer by having subjects pray to God for another's healing and having their prayers answered?

Is God's existence a given? Clearly, according to the title, there is no doubt. But while Morse and many readers of this Journal may have

no doubt, it certainly is not a given within the scientific community at large. Should the science-minded consider these test results direct evidence of God's existence? After all, if subjects can sit in a laboratory and pray to God for another's healing, and those prayers are answered, does it not imply: (1) that there is in fact a God, (2) that He hears us and answers our prayers, and (3) that He is not an impersonal force, but cares so much about each of us that He is willing to reroute the current course of the universe just to help a human in need? Obviously it does. And to Morse's credit, although he did not ask it, he could have.

With the ensuing two chapters, Morse and Perry continue to discuss questions taken up in the first chapter regarding memory, the big question being: Is memory stored in the brain, as modern science supposes? Or, is it stored in some type of holographic field overlaying the body that connects the mind with the fabric of space? As the discussion unfolds, they present powerful evidence that the latter may in fact be the case, the first of which is work being done with laboratory rats. With 90 percent of their brains removed, rats can still remember the correct path through the maze. By remembering the path without their brains, these rats provide ostensible evidence that memories are not necessarily stored in the brain.

Another line of evidence is the work of noted neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield in direct brain stimulation. Using electric probes during brain surgery, he elicited powerful memories from patients. They were reported to be so vivid that patients felt they were actually reliving the experience. But he could not induce the same memory by stimulating the same place twice. This suggests to the authors that it is not the memory itself that resides there, but only its retrieval mechanism. It could also mean that memories float in fields superimposed upon the body and that Penfield's probe randomly tapped into it.

In reading this, I immediately thought of Paul Pearsall's book *The Heart's Code* (1998) and his recent article in this Journal (Pearsall, Schwartz, and Russek, 2002), wherein he discussed startling findings in this regard. Apparently, the medical community is increasingly becoming aware of the fact that transplant recipients find themselves with some of their donors' memories after the surgery. This would reinforce the authors' contention that memory is stored in fields permeating the entire body.

What is fascinating about this growing realization is the long-term implication it has for our health. If memories are stored in fields surrounding vital organs, then it is possible that our organs could be

impacted by the quality of stored memories. Constantly rehashing bad memories could actually be damaging our organs, precipitating disease. If so, this augers well for the notion that it is healthy to let go and move on, choosing instead to dwell on happy, joyous memories that renew us.

With this idea of memories in fields surrounding the body now broached, the authors attempt to explain reincarnation memories. Drawing upon Ian Stevenson's famous work, they present possibilities that explain the phenomenon without an actual reincarnation event taking place. The authors believe the sense of having been reincarnated would be possible if memories were actually imprinted permanently upon the fabric of space, becoming a part of our collective consciousness. If this were so, and minds somehow had the ability to access these "memory fields," then people could conceivably "collide" with memories implanted by another during a previous time. In this way, the person could actually have another's memory and yet genuinely believe it to be his or hers. And since it was from a former time and in a remote place, it would be only natural to believe it was acquired from a former life, when in fact nothing could be further from the truth.

The authors also covered *cryptomnesia*, the unconscious gathering of material from reading and experience. An example would be a person at the tender age of one watching a television show that graphically depicts some event or location and having it vividly implanted in his or her mind, only to be recalled later as a real memory. This has been shown to happen and could explain a great deal. In the end, the authors make no judgment about the veracity of the reincarnation event. They simply leave readers with evidence for reincarnation and provide reasonable alternatives that adequately explain the phenomenon.

Once through all this, the book finally begins to address the ideas behind the title, *Where God Lives*. Morse and Perry start with the often-discussed idea that the right temporal lobe is the "God spot" within our brain, that this part of the brain is like a crystal radio set that tunes in various energy patterns and interprets them for us. But instead of the physiological evidence that I had anticipated for this claim, we are presented with a study of ghosts: *The History of Ghosts, Consistent Stories [of ghosts], Past Life Ghosts, and the Modern Ghost*. The idea is that we see these recurrent localized apparitions because our temporal lobe tunes into the energy pattern they represent.

After this discussion of where God lives, the authors seek bigger game. With Chapter Six ambitiously entitled "Unraveling The Fabric of The Universe," I expected something Einsteinian. But what the authors

had in mind is not that complicated. Beginning with a brief discussion of synchronicity, we are led to holograms, remote viewing, the paranormal, the universal mind, hedging our bets, energy in action, and predicting the future. I did not notice any fabric actually unravel.

And it is understandable why this is so. For although the fabric of space is a threadbare cliché, nobody as of yet has any idea what it is. First discussed as part of Einstein's General Theory, it would seem to be the consummate antimaterialist stuff. Presently, it is undetectable. Yet it possesses the ability to warp and stretch, and more importantly, it undergirds the action of all the matter in the cosmos. It could be the most plentiful nonstuff in the universe if we could only find it. But alas, we cannot. However, this fabric nevertheless appears to hold the key to all the authors' questions. They believe it to be a root factor in parapsychology, the flow of time, light, energy, and our mind/body connection to the beyond.

They then take us off in completely a new direction: healing. While still in search of *Where God Lives*, the authors lead us on an exploration of the mind's heroic feats on the health front. No one can doubt that what they say here is completely true because their examples have been used so many times, in so many books, they are now "givens." Yet in their repetition, they serve great purpose. As an entry-level book for those interested in some of the more startling occurrences within the New Science paradigm, this book delivers.

With the connection between belief and healing apparently no longer in doubt, the authors bring on the last two chapters of the book: "Becoming Your Own Healer" and "Trusting Your Feelings." The idea of self-healing is quite old and has been long sought by the ill. But Morse and Perry go deeper. They see the mind as the ultimate healing agent because it would appear to have no bounds. And while we have no idea how it happens, a growing sense is in fact sweeping medicine that the penultimate answer does lie within the mind.

The problem for us is that such mental feats, while amply documented, are inconsistently demonstrated. As the authors tell us, we do not get an owner's manual for our brain. So we struggle with the controls. Consequently, until we find *Where God Lives*, and learn to tap into the power He is purported to make available, we are almost forced to continue supplementing our self-healing efforts with medical practitioners, as I am sure Morse would agree.

Fortunately, however, the authors do offer a way to begin training the mind to improve its ability to heal. They present Paul Pearsall's *Six Laws of Healing*: (1) develop oneness, by realizing that we all share a

piece of the energy governing the cosmos; (2) develop our perceptions of the many sense-realms in which we coexist; (3) grasp our simultaneity of the past, present, and future happening as one; (4) forceful fields, the morphic fields that shape our lives; (5) divine dynamics, the constantly changing flow of infinite energy that recreates order; (6) and miracle makers love chaos, that is, chaos is ultimately healthy because it leads to new order.

From these, the authors deduce their Ten Rules To Live By: (1) have friends and connect to a social network; (2) turn off the verbal mind for a while; (3) use patterns and habits to influence your life; (4) have absolute faith in a belief system; (5) stress is not a health risk; (6) anger kills and love heals; (7) do regular hugs and touches; (8) don't learn to be ill, but teach yourself and your children to be well; (9) learn to meditate or pray regularly; and (10) practice optimism.

In Morse and Perry's defense against the accusation that these are simplistic answers, sometimes the simplest truths can be the most profound. In our sophisticated, high-tech world it is often hard to believe that the secrets to life could be so simple. We search far and wide, strive to penetrate the mysteries of the universe, and hope finally to discover the secrets locked away in some secret enclave known only to the ancients, when in reality God gave us the secret "In the beginning..." The problem is that we too often take it for granted. Tragically, we have become inured through constant repetition.

The final chapter treats us to Morse's suppositions about all the things the right temporal lobe of the brain, where God lives, can do. Intuition is considered by the authors to be one of the lobe's chief functions. How do we know that? Perhaps by intuition itself, since the authors did not present evidence for these suppositions.

But Morse and Perry go one step further: They provide an outstanding bibliography for those interested in a continued pursuit of the ideas touched upon in the book. I have read most of them myself and can say from first-hand experience that there are some real gems on the list.

Interestingly, however, the first time I read this book I often had thought, while running across important, yet unattributed ideas in the text: "I wonder if he's familiar with Sheldrake's (or some other author's) work?" And this points out, to my mind, the single greatest weakness of the book. Morse and Perry take the ideas from authors in the bibliography and write about them without mentioning who is actually responsible for them. Those readers already familiar with many of the books in the bibliography would be better served to pursue those authors directly.

But for all that, the book does have its strengths. And the diversity of great ideas is a big one. As an entry level book, it is engaging and easy to read. A regular reader can get through it in a few hours and when finished will feel like he or she has seen the leading edge. Although I did not feel that the authors made the case for the right temporal lobe as the place Where God Lives in the human body, they do put forth some interesting conjecture.

Yet in the final analysis, perhaps the chief strength of the book is that my wife really liked it—and she passed it along to their friends, and they liked it. Having just finished writing my own book on a similar topic, I have great familiarity with the material to which the authors refer. However, when my wife (a mainstream reader) read my manuscript she found it taxing with “way too much science.” So it is clear to me that if Morse wrote this book for mainstream audiences interested in the New Paradigm, he knows his audience. *Where God Lives* will hold their interest and fascinate them.

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