

BOOK REVIEWS

Biological Anomalies: Humans I. compiled by William R. Corliss. (The Sourcebook Project, P. O. Box 107, Glen Arm, MD 21057, 1992.)

W. R. Corliss is the anomalistician or anomalist of the century. To support this evaluation one can hardly improve on the entire preface of this book but I shall quote just the following few sentences:

After more than twenty years of scouring the scientific and semi-scientific literature for anomalies, my major conclusion is that this is a most fruitful activity. In fact, organized science should have been compiling such information over the past 200 years. It is surprising that a Catalog of Anomalies does not already exist to guide scientific thinking and research. It is at least as important to realize what is anomalous as it is to recognize the well-explained facts of nature. With this outlook, here is the twelfth volume of such a Catalog. It is largely the product of one person's library research, carried forward entirely through the sale of these Catalogs, Handbooks, Sourcebooks, and related books on anomalies.

Under the aegis of the Sourcebook Project, I have already published 28 volumes, totaling roughly 10,000 pages of source material on scientific anomalies. As of this moment, these 28 volumes represent only about 40% of my data base. New material is being added at the rate of about 1,200 new items per year, about 500 of which come from the current scientific literature.

After the Preface the author explains:

The Catalog of Anomalies is designed to collect and categorize all phenomena that cannot be explained readily by prevailing scientific theories. Following its definition, each Catalog anomaly is rated in terms of: (1) its substantiating data; and (2) the seriousness of the challenge the anomaly poses to mainstream scientific theories. Next, all examples of the anomaly discovered so far are recorded, some of the more interesting ones in more detail. Finally, all examined references are listed.

The anomalies are obtained from scientific journals not from the National Inquirer! The flavor of the book can perhaps be gleaned from a couple of examples.

1. *Anomalous Human Odors.* "Apparently, no systematic, scientific effort has ever been made to categorize or discover the precise causes of human odors." Perhaps one reason is that scientists might be worried in case Senator Proxmire turns up his nose. But the reviewer believes that such research might well have important applications in medical diagnosis, in forensic science, in the perfume industry, and in match-making. The classification of odors is also important in the study of tastes of food, a study that deserves a name such as *saporology*.
2. *Eminence in Sports Champions Correlated with the Position of Mars: the "Mars Effect."* Many anomalists know of Gauquelin's neo-astrological work on the Mars Effect which is the alleged "tendency of sports champions to be born either as Mars rises in the sky or passes culmination." The effect is highly significant from a statistical point of view but almost inexplicable. As the author says "If the Mars Effect *is* real, it implies the existence of bizarre, unrecognized forces or influences in the cosmos." For the reviewer's comments on the Mars Effect see Good (1982, 1987).
3. *Gradations Between Male and Female.* Possible explanation: "Chromosomes other than the Y chromosome, as well as extra-chromosomal factors are involved in the determination of sex." A suggestion of the reviewer's is that athletes should be handicapped in accordance with their degrees of masculinity, as chemically determined. Then the number of events in athletic contexts could be halved (Good, 1960). A further advantage is that it would decrease the incentive for women athletes to take male hormones, an unhealthy practice according to Leerhsen & Abramson (1960).

In summary, this is a fine book for browsing, interesting in every part, and it stimulates speculations by the reader.

References

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 Good, I. J. (1987). *Review of Michel Gauquelin, birth-times: a scientific investigation of the secrets of Astrology.* New York: Hill and Wang (1983). In *J. Amer. Statist. Assoc.*, 82, 692-698. (There are two unpublished errata.)
 Leerhsen, C. and Pamela Abramson (1960). The new flex appeal. *Newsweek*, May 6, 82-83.

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