

The Nature of Mind: Parapsychology and the Role of Consciousness in the Physical World by Douglas M. Stokes, Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1997, 259 pp., \$39.00. ISBN 0-7864-0344-6. Hardcover.

Anyone wishing to read surveys of modern investigations of paranormal phenomena has a choice of several that I have read or examined. This is the best. Why do I say that? First, because it provides the widest review of all segments of the field, and second, because Stokes includes an evenhanded discussion of the controversies that the study of paranormal phenomena generates.

I can best convey a sense of the wide breadth of this work by listing the titles of a few of its chapters: Spontaneous Psi; Chasing the Poltergeist; Healers, Shamans, Saints, and Seers; Is Psi Real?; Reincarnation; The Mind's Fate Upon Death. Stokes's discussion of these and other topics contrasts favorably with the narrowness shown in some other surveys whose authors seem to suggest, or even openly state, that the only investigations worth studying are those under controlled conditions in a laboratory. Stokes has not forgotten that the spontaneous paranormal phenomena of the past — and that we can still investigate — provide the only grounds for believing that useful knowledge may come from laboratory experiments.

Unlike some other authors who argue, sometimes whiningly, with skeptics, Stokes brings his own skepticism to bear on the various topics he addresses. Perhaps he can show more detachment than most other authors of surveys like his, because he is not himself, and does not claim to be, a practicing investigator. He treats skeptics with the respect he wishes they would show toward investigators. In a few places he seems to me too indulgent of the skeptics. For example, in reviewing the occasion when the magician James Randi planted fraudulent subjects in a parapsychology laboratory, he leaves the last word to Randi, who widely proclaimed a victory; Stokes does not mention that the victimized investigators had never claimed that the cheating subjects had produced paranormal phenomena they found satisfying.

I particularly commend Stokes's thoughtful attention to the mind/brain problem. In this he shows a wide knowledge of philosophical and scientific works bearing on the question. He does not facily accept the suggestion that paranormal phenomena will be subsumed under a future physics. On the contrary, he believes they "suggest that we possess mental abilities that cannot be explained on the basis of current theories of physics. It appears that human beings are more than just physical bodies..." (p. 216).

This book has extensive notes, a long bibliography, and a comprehensive index. It provides an excellent introduction to someone approaching the study of paranormal phenomena for the first time; and persons already versed in this field will find it a valuable work of reference.

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