Further Book of Note


Few high-achieving scientists have also given as much thoughtful attention as Peter Sturrock has to things that science doesn’t know. In this book, Sturrock describes fifteen “questions to which I do not have answers, to which I would like to have answers.”

Those are: ball lightning; the Allais effect (pendulums and eclipses); low-energy nuclear reactions (“cold fusion”); intriguing properties of beta decays (one of the mechanisms of radioactivity); precognition; clairvoyance; remote viewing; psychokinesis; anomalous healing; out-of-body experiences; reincarnation; permanently unidentified flying objects; crop circles; Tunguska; Shakespeare authorship.

The rigorous empiricism and intellectual clearheadedness Sturrock brings to bear is illustrated by some of these, for instance permanently unidentified flying objects, which immediately forestalls the typical “Skeptic’s” enumeration of all the UFO reports that turned out to be planets, satellites, etc. The problem for the pseudo-skeptics is that the weirdest sighting reports seem to be also the best-documented from the most reliable sources.

Again, empirical and evidence-based are distinctions that most people would probably not make, among the topics often grouped together as “psi.” But Sturrock is determined not to pre-judge, so he recognizes that the evidence for precognition is not at the same time evidence for clairvoyance, and that neither is inherently or necessarily related to out-of-body experiences or reincarnation; nor are the latter two necessarily related to one another, no matter how likely such a relationship might seem.

Questions about the authorship of “Shakespeare’s” plays are not usually included in compendia of mysteries or anomalies, but this topic is a natural one here because the general approach Sturrock takes and proselytizes for, the Bayesian approach and consideration of multiple hypotheses, can...
serve wherever one seeks to be as strictly evidence-based and bias-free as possible.

This is a marvelously instructive as well as interesting book. While you’re at it, in case you missed them, don’t fail to read Sturrock’s *A Tale of Two Sciences: Memoirs of a Dissident Scientist* (2009) and *AKA Shakespeare: A Scientific Approach to the Authorship Question* (2013).

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