

BOOK REVIEW

Prometheus and Atlas by Jason Reza Jorjani. Arktos Media, 2016. 468 pp. \$36.59 (paperback). ISBN 978-1910524619.

A few years ago, I received a manuscript for *Prometheus and Atlas* from Jason Reza Jorjani, who had then recently received his doctoral degree in philosophy from Stony Brook University. Jorjani particularly wanted me to review his treatment of my book *The PK Man* in his final chapter. I was happy to do so; for while *The PK Man* has received many positive reviews, it was rare that another scholar would endeavor to incorporate my decade-long, field research project into their own body of work.

As I read through Jorjani's manuscript, I was consistently pleased with the scope of his scholarship and the brilliance of his insights. I found that the treatment of my work was both fair and accurate. I was nearly overwhelmed by both the breadth and depth of Jorjani's erudition. I sent him several emails with positive feedback on his manuscript. These were eventually collated into the following blurb—and, today, I still stand behind these comments:

Prometheus and Atlas is the most brilliant treatise related to parapsychological material that I have ever encountered . . . it is also a very serious exploration of depth psychology and mythology. Jorjani's emphasis on what he terms "the spectral" affords us an opportunity to expand some of our existing models concerning psi. . . . Jorjani has written the definitive book regarding the proper place of psi phenomena in the history of philosophical ideas However, *Prometheus and Atlas* takes the argument much further and demonstrates that parapsychology and psi phenomena can be viewed, not only within the history of philosophy, but in the larger context of cultural history itself. Jorjani examines the mechanistic worldview [that] dominates science and has led to the marginalization of parapsychology (as well as many other cultural imbalances). The range of scholarship required to make this argument is, in my estimation, nothing short of awesome. . . . I don't think any other writer comes even close to tying things together the way Jorjani has done. The experience of reading it is rather like gazing out at a brilliant starry sky, with many interrelated constellations, stars, and planets. Each is beautiful and unique and, together, one senses a whole cosmos.

Another voice of praise for this book comes from Jeffrey J. Kripal, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Rice University, who served as an

outside faculty member on Jorjani's dissertation committee. Kripal wrote:

Jason Jorjani's *Prometheus and Atlas* is what profound philosophical writing used to be but has long refused to be: visionary in its method and content, sweeping in its scope, literally mythical, and above all, positive. That is a gross understatement, though. His notions of the paranormal as normal, of a coming spectral revolution, of a future spectral technology, and of a still unrealized but very real superhuman potential come together to form a coherent but still emerging worldview that is neither modern nor postmodern but something other and more.

Because of my early enthusiasm for Jorjani's manuscript, I nominated the book for the 2016 Book Award from the Parapsychological Association. *Prometheus and Atlas* received that award from a panel of independent judges.

I am aware of few books that have endeavored to place parapsychology within a global philosophical and cultural context. So, while many of Jorjani's brilliant and penetrating insights may be muddled, or even wrong, there are almost no other scholars with whom his work can be meaningfully compared. Perhaps the only comparable philosopher and writer has been Colin Wilson.

I am far from qualified to provide a scholarly analysis of the myriad interwoven arguments in *Prometheus and Atlas*. But at minimum I can say that until there are more serious efforts within the genre of cultural critique from a parapsychological perspective it will be hard to evaluate Jorjani's work. Furthermore, since Jorjani is the first academic philosopher within this genre, *Prometheus & Atlas* is, for now, the standard by which all other comers can be evaluated. But, the project undertaken here, to provide a relatively complete philosophical and cultural account of the paranormal, strikes me as essential if parapsychology is ever to achieve its revolutionary potential for future human development.

Prometheus and Atlas takes its departure from Martin Heidegger's prophecy of a return of the gods. As such, it is clear that he is writing in the tradition of European, continental philosophy that goes back to Nietzsche. This is a tradition that resorts to poetic metaphor and is, I gather, rather antithetical to the analytic style of American philosophy. Suffice it to say that this style of writing has both strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, it lends itself to a far-reaching penetration of thought. On the negative side, there is an inevitable tendency to over-reach. Also, one must be mindful that—for all his acclaim as a leading, twentieth-century, European philosopher—Heidegger remains a controversial figure as a result of his German National Socialist affiliation.

Jorjani, in fact, does not back away from this controversy. He makes a point of noting that—at the end of his life—Heidegger affirmed that German National Socialism, for all its many grievous faults, “represented the most profound reckoning hitherto with ‘the situation of man in the world of planetary technology . . .’” Why is this important? Because, Jorjani agrees with Heidegger that technology itself is a spectral agency that acts upon the world through demonic possession.

This is a provocative idea. We normally think of demonic possession as a rare event to which only particular, unfortunate individuals are subject. Here, Jorjani proposes that entire cultures are subject to a form of possession of which they are almost completely unaware. When one observes the absurdity and madness of many aspects of the human project (in spite of the age-old, selfless wisdom traditions), the notion finds some resonance. I find that it is also akin to the idea presented by Charles Musès to the American Anthropological Association meeting in San Francisco in 1975 that all of human acculturation is a hypnotic process.

Jorjani maintains that possession by this demonic agency (whom Jorjani also equates with the Greek Titan, Prometheus, as well as the apocryphal figure, Lucifer) leads humans to project the mechanistic principles of technology on to nature herself. This distorted view of nature leads to many horrible consequences. Jorjani states that it “diabolically uproots man and renders him homeless in any and every land in which modern technology essentially takes root.” I agree with Jorjani that a mechanistic picture of nature is woefully inadequate, and is largely responsible for the mainstream rejection of the important psi research data. However, he clearly goes so much further that, in my opinion his argument has become one-sided. After all, rationalistic and mechanistic thinking has also freed humankind from the perverse cruelty of many primitive superstitions. His bias here, as I see it, seems to reflect his felt necessity to have enemies against whom he can struggle. This, perhaps, is the major weakness of an otherwise wonderful book.

Another of Jorjani’s key ideas is that humans, like all other life forms, battle one another to maintain access to that which is of vital concern. Jorjani sees this struggle as primary and claims that there is no objective Nature “prior to, or outside of, this historical struggle.” This is a controversial idea and it strikes me as muddled, and actually unnecessary to Jorjani’s main thesis as I see it (to which we shall come). It is, however, consistent with the main claim of post-modernism itself that, in effect, all our concepts of reality are socially constructed and there is no such thing as an objective truth apart from social reality. Of course, this notion is inconsistent with the thinking of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth century philosophers of

the European Enlightenment—who argued that Nature obeyed rational principles. It is also inconsistent with the thinking of Platonists who believe that mathematical and geometrical abstractions have an eternal existence, prior to and outside of our historical dramas.

I do not think it is logically possible to resolve these disputes among metaphysical postulates. In fact, by invoking the notion of the “spectral” as a core idea throughout his book, Jorjani is, in spite of himself, clearly imputing certain “irrational” propensities and attributes to Nature.

Nevertheless, Jorjani’s description of this battle for survival strikes a resonant chord. After all, nature feeds upon itself. Every form of natural life requires the subjugation and digestion of other life forms for its survival. The only possible exceptions to this principle are the most primitive lichens, and perhaps the earliest life forms that survived only by ingesting minerals.

However, once again, I find this idea one-sided and incomplete. There is much to say about cooperation and symbiosis in nature. A worldview based upon the core notion of psychic battles is, in my view, narrow and unhealthy. Jorjani pushes the argument even further, maintaining that—in the struggle of ideas—“the spectral essence of Technology has a unique power to assimilate all others.”

The opening chapter of *Prometheus and Atlas* focuses on scientific research in parapsychology. Wisely, Jorjani notes how many of our vital interests (such as the right to privacy) are threatened by a mainstream acknowledgment of the paranormal. He also makes the interesting observation in the second chapter that “mainstream scientific recognition of the paranormal could in itself amplify manifestations of it.” I am in full agreement with these points. There are some who will maintain that Jorjani’s review of this material is too uncritical and too prone to assume that greater magnitudes of psi are possible than are generally found in the laboratory. Yet, my own field research, and that of others, frequently exposes levels of psi—and psychokinesis in particular—that exceed laboratory observations.

Chapters III–VI provide the reader with a detailed history of philosophical encounters with various aspects of the paranormal, the spectral, and the irrational. He particularly covers the thinking of Descartes and Kant. But, this grand tour of philosophy also includes Schelling, Bergson, Heidegger, and William James. The exposition is fascinating and well worth reading. At the end of this journey, Jorjani concludes that all philosophical model-building concerning the paranormal “covers over or filters out certain ‘irrational’ aspects of Nature.”

Chapter VII makes the important claim that “our task is to become consciously aware of our hitherto unconscious and unique historical relationship to the world-colonizing essence of Technology . . .” Who

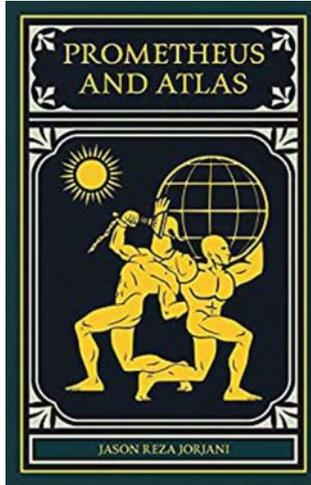
could disagree? In my view, the over-arching project of humanity is to achieve greater consciousness of unconscious processes.

In Chapters VIII and IX, Jorjani explores the aesthetic ideas of Prometheus and Atlas. It is important to note that, as Greek Titans, they were locked into conflict with the Olympian deities, and Zeus, in particular. By elevating these mythical figures as the tutelary deities of a new age, Jorjani is implicitly invoking teachings of the Iranian mystic, Zarathustra, who elevated an “ashura” or demon to the status of the highest deity—Ahura Mazda—the bringer of light. This is a deep idea, as it entails rebellion against the highest god of one’s age.

Just as Hesiod portrays the Olympian gods overthrowing the era of the Titans, Jorjani is arguing for rebellion against the autocratic rule of the father-god, Zeus. Similarly, he argues that Jahweh, the father deity of the Abrahamic traditions, should also be overthrown, as his demand for absolute obedience is detrimental to humanity. Lucifer/Prometheus should, instead, be restored to his proper role as the god of light (just as Zoroaster/Zarathustra restored the “demon” Ahura Mazda).

By invoking Atlas, Jorjani is suggesting the necessity for a new world order that will, indeed, be worldwide and unified. In effect, technology and commerce have already been achieving this end—but doing so destructively in a manner that uproots traditional cultures. He sees the potential for a new, global civilization that will be less destructive and harmful—one that will be, in the words of the French writer Guillaume Faye, “archo-futuristic”—free from the demonic possession by technology, and thereby able to consciously incorporate the parapsychological into a new understanding that is both highly technical and yet appreciative of the irrational in nature.

In Chapter IX, Jorjani also explores the legend of Atlantis and emphasizes his willingness to assume that it represents traces of an authentic, prehistorical civilization that achieved many advances and that passed its knowledge on to the ancient civilizations in Egypt, the Americas, and elsewhere. This proposition is highly speculative and likely incomplete or incorrect. One might as well cite the legend that the arts of civilization originated with a fishlike being, as was claimed by the ancient Sumerians according to the historian Berosus. These tales regarding the earliest history of humanity are fascinating. However tantalizing, they are far too tenuous



at this point in time to serve as the foundational ideas of a new human era.

Chapter X contains an exegesis of the relationship between the earliest fragments of Western philosophy (i.e. Heraclitus) and the comparable writings of the Chinese sage Lao Tzu. Jorjani, however, is highly critical of the “dangerous political naïveté” of the Taoists. So, his attention shifts to Japan as a unique culture, largely free from the stranglehold that he believes the revealed religions in the Abrahamic lineage have upon humanity. He also points out that in contemporary Japanese anime, “visionary artists have best crystallized transformative images of the coming metamorphosis of the merely human being into a more diabolically daring and dynamic superhuman race, destined to liberate a capriciously ruled cosmos and conquer the inner space of latent psychic powers.” Here I disagree. I think that visionary artists in the West, such as Alejandro Jodorowsky, are producing work comparable to the best Japanese anime.

Ironically, Jorjani’s focus on both Atlantis and on Japan suggest a thread in his thinking that is reflected in his political activities (for which he has achieved some notoriety). His writings suggest an inclination toward Aryan supremacy. His interest in Japanese Buddhism is, in part, due to his understanding that Mahayana Buddhism was influenced by the Persian (Aryan) Zoroastrian tradition. While I am fascinated by Jorjani’s scholarship in this area, I find these hints of Aryan supremacy to be unnecessary, unwarranted, and potentially damaging to his larger and more important points (if not to the entire field of parapsychology). I also find them to be inconsistent with the humanitarian spirit that pervades his work. However, I support his celebration of his Aryan heritage and, in particular, his elucidation of how the ancient Persians influenced Greek philosophy.

Chapter XI reintroduces the philosophy of William James, with an emphasis on his pragmatism and on his radical empiricism. This is counterbalanced by a discussion of the Abrahamic religious traditions. Here Jorjani makes the daring move of suggesting that certain biblical accounts entail an encounter with a homicidal, spectral being who demands absolute obedience. He notes the striking similarity between various biblical accounts and reports in more recent times of UFOs. While I find this chapter to be both visionary and important, his treatment of the Abrahamic traditions is rather one-dimensional. There is much more to be said about the teachings and laws of Jahweh/Allah than merely the demand for obedience. In fact, as I view the Jewish tradition, the primary requirement is not to “obey” but to lovingly “wrestle” with god as did the patriarch Jacob, who wrestled with an angel all night long and was then given the name Israel.

Jorjani’s final chapter introduces the important work of Jacques Vallee, linking the fields of parapsychology and UFOlogy. It is here that he also

draws upon my decade-long investigation of “The PK Man,” Ted Owens, who demonstrated that he could produce UFO sightings. Jorjani cites Ted Owens himself, who equated his psychokinetic demonstrations with the feats of the Biblical Moses. Here Jorjani introduces the notion of “Mercurial hermeneutics,” suggesting that the trickster god, Mercury, is the spectral agency behind both contemporary UFO appearances and Biblical accounts of Yahweh.

The importance of this final chapter is in its emphasis on our need to digest and come to understand material of high strangeness. Jorjani’s analysis may be muddled and even wrong-headed, but it is an honest effort to come to terms with some of the most bizarre findings in the paranormal arena. For this alone, I highly recommend this book—even though the Mercury = Yahweh equation strikes me as a rough heuristic at best.

Jorjani concludes his epic by referencing William James’ essay on ethics, wherein James invokes the necessity of a deity to inspire humans to shift into a strenuous mood. He brings up James’ shamanic reference to the “alpine eagle” who calls us to a higher destiny. He then suggests that Prometheus and Atlas are the “finite gods” whose “infinite demands” can lead us to greatness, once we liberate ourselves from demonic possession by them and then join them in rebellion against the “one true god” of the Abrahamic faiths. In my view, this partial conclusion, requiring an enemy, epitomizes a weakness of Jorjani’s otherwise magnificent book.

After all, the alpine eagle (a metaphor Jorjani favors) was also, in Greek legend, the torturer of Prometheus and, thus, “the minister” of Zeus. Perhaps, Prometheus and his torturer are like Yin and Yang. They are incomplete without each other.

To Jorjani’s credit, he is a scholar with a subtle and sophisticated mind who enjoys exploring ideas that are antitheses of each other. His thinking may be more Taoist than even he suspects. In his concluding paragraph, he acknowledges that Prometheus and Atlas are postulates he has evoked in order to summon the strenuous mood that he believes is now required of humanity. Jorjani’s most important concluding thought is that William James, through his shamanic metaphor of the alpine eagle, is echoing the Nietzschean call to develop a non-mechanistic science of the future and to cultivate the superhumans of tomorrow.

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