

Book Review

With the Eyes of the Mind: An Empirical Analysis of Out-of-Body States,

by Glen O. Gabbard and Stuart W. Twemlow. New York: Praeger Scientific, 1984. 273 + xii pp.

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With the Eyes of the Mind is the first book on OBEs written by practicing psychiatrists; a fact which is both its strength and its weakness. It is full of interesting survey results as well as fascinating case material, but its theoretical contribution is narrowly psychoanalytic and displays little understanding of broader psychological and parapsychological perspectives.

The book is in four parts; beginning with useful definitions and descriptions of OBEs, together with an account of the authors' large survey carried out through a national periodical. A prototypical kind of OBE is outlined but the most important finding is that people who have OBEs are psychologically very healthy with no signs of mental illness, psychotic thinking or deviant characteristics. In other words there is nothing wrong with you for having an OBE!

The second section usefully differentiates the OBE from pathological states of de-personalization, autoscopy and schizophrenic body boundary disturbances and compares it with dreaming, daydreaming, lucid dreaming and hypnagogic and hypnopompic states. The "realness" and clarity of the OBE state is emphasised.

Part 3 provides an overview of the near-death experience and various explanatory hypotheses. The authors then return to their survey data; comparing the features of the experiences across the contexts in which they occur. They conclude that demographic and cultural variables have little effect on the kind of experience but people prone to NDEs have a different cognitive—perceptual style. There is also a fascinating chapter on NDEs in children showing, with several case studies, the similarities to adult NDEs.

Section 4 is entitled "Understanding the Out-of-Body Experience" and ends with "The Mind/Body Trap"; arguing that human beings naturally tend to divide the world into mind and matter, but this division is false and the question of whether anything leaves the body is unanswerable. The authors finally offer their own theory of the OBE.

I find it very hard to criticise this book because it is such a mixture of good and bad. Generally speaking the book is well produced but there are wildly inaccurate quotes,

contradictions between tables and text and the index is inaccurate and patchy.

The section on NDEs makes a real contribution to the literature, especially in its analysis of the survey data and the fascinating section on children's experiences.

The section on dreams is varied. The authors emphasise the claims that OBEs are "more real than a dream" and they make a convincing case that we should take these claims seriously. However, they make some odd and unsubstantiated statements such as "In a dream one does not dream about being in one's bedroom looking at one's body...it is not common to even see oneself in a dream" (p. 95). No evidence is cited to back up these statements, but they are certainly false since several studies have shown large proportions of people claim to see themselves during ordinary dreams.

There is a short but somewhat confusing section on lucid dreaming. For example early on the authors say "...lucidity in dreams is probably quite common, based on our informal surveys of students and on our clinical experience." Only later do they go on to give a fair discussion of evidence on the incidence of lucid dreams.

But by far the weakest part of the book is the theoretical section. Throughout the book the authors tend to interpret every experience in psychoanalytic terms. Some readers will enjoy this, but for those unfamiliar with psychoanalysis, or those who need to be convinced of its value, the authors provide no clear explanations and no convincing argument that this interpretation has any advantages. To make matters worse their treatment of some other theories is almost derisory. Parapsychological and occult theories of the ODE are barely considered and "psychological theories" are given two pages into which are crammed brief comments on Ehrenwald, Jung, Greyson and Noyes, Blackmore, Palmer and Honegger. All are briefly dismissed and none well explained. My own theory is completely misrepresented. I have often criticised the 'Ulmagination plus ESP' theory as just a catch—all of no explanatory value (Blackmore, 1982). And yet Twemlow and Gabbard say the "Blackmore...asserts that the out-of—body experience is a combination of imagination and extrasensory perception" (p. 189)!

But I shouldn't let this unduly influence my opinion of the book — more generally I found myself irritated by their criticisms of other viewpoints, including Jungian analytic ones, while endorsing uncritically their unexplained Freudian concepts.

Coming to their own theory, Gabbard and Twemlow attempt two contributions. First they align several experiences along a continuum of altered mind/body perception; going from the OBE at one end, through depersonalization in the middle, to schizophrenic body disturbances at the other. However, this continuum is not defined by any simple variable of mind/body perception (other than increasing pathology) and many experiences which are clearly related to the OBE find no place along it -like many kinds of NDE and lucid dreams; both of which Gabbard and Twemlow stress are closely related to OBEs. Their

second contribution is the “ego—uncoupling model”. Briefly it suggests that the OBE occurs when “cathexis is withdrawn from the bodily ego feeling and the mental ego cathexis is experienced as separate from the body”. In other words they suppose a separation of bodily and mental ego. For some readers this may be meaningful; it may even fit with their experiences, but frankly, it leaves me baffled as to its value. A theory of OBEs can be useful in many ways; by accounting for existing knowledge about the OBE, by providing a coherent account which seems meaningful to people who have the experiences or by providing testable predictions for the future. I don’t think this theory does any of these adequately.

However, I may have misjudged Gabbard and Twemlow’s theory. I would certainly recommend those interested in lucidity to read this book and make up their own minds. In its survey work and cases it provides an important contribution to the literature and some readers may find value in the theories which I totally missed. Most importantly this book provides an entirely new approach to OBEs and NDEs and as such it is to be welcomed.

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