

Book Review

The Spiritual Anatomy of Emotion

By Michael A. Jawer, with Marc S. Micozzi, MD, PhD

Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press; 2009

Reviewed by John Freedom

This is a time for bold attempts, not worrying overmuch about proving each conjecture along the way, but rather getting enough of a story clearly out on the table to suggest tests, and the inevitable further refinements. . . . It requires a mixture of global vision and detailed knowledge, and lots of imagination.

So wrote Dennis Dennet in his review of Antonio Damasio's *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. It seems that Michael Jawer and Marc Micozzi have taken his advice to heart in *The Spiritual Anatomy of Emotion*. *Anatomy* reads like a scientific detective story, weaving clues and insights from neurology, biology, psychology, and parapsychology in an attempt to answer questions about some of the most puzzling aspects of human behavior. These include sensitivities, allergies, autism, dissociation, somatization, and "anomalous phenomena."

Jawer began his long investigation into the neurobiology of sensitivity while working as a consultant on sick building syndrome in Washington, DC. While interviewing environmentally sick people, he wondered how much of their illness was due to their physical environment and how much to their "felt environment." He began to suspect that their issues were neither entirely "in their minds" nor entirely external. Many of the people he interviewed could apparently see, feel, and react to stimuli imperceptible to "normal" folks. Among the stimuli that these more sensitive people sometimes experienced were apparitions and anomalous phenomena (eg, ghosts, poltergeists, "presences").

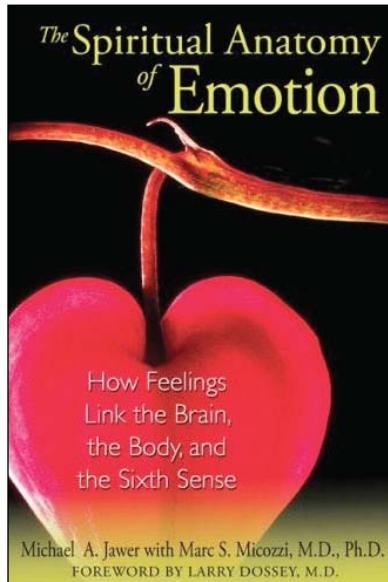
Jawer theorizes that different forms of subjective experience share a common neurobiological basis. In a fascinating chapter in *Anatomy* titled "Sensitivity, Personality Traits and Anomalous Perception," he argues that anomalous talents may be associated with specific personality traits. Elsewhere in the book, he presents a long and impassioned argument for the central role of sentience, feeling, and emotion in human experience. Building on the work of Damasio, J. Allan Hobson, and Joseph LeDoux, he marshals evi-

dence for the contention that feelings are intimately connected with the body and constitute the basis for cognitive thought processes: "From the physical, feeling foundation of the mind stems not only the core human experiences of laughing and crying, but all of our capacities up to thought, insight, and advanced reasoning." He further argues that the ego itself (which he terms the "self") develops out of the sensory foundations of feeling. To paraphrase Descartes, "Sentio, ergo sum."

Extending this line of reasoning, Jawer points to emotional arousal as underlying many hitherto unexplained phenomena. He suggests that the dissociation of repressed energies, combined with mental preoccupations, may set the stage for experiencing apparitions, ghosts, "presences," phantom limbs, and the like, and takes the reader through a long discussion of the connections between anomalous experience and emotional energy, dissociation, sensitivity, electromagnetic phenomena, and atmospheric influences.

Though *Anatomy* provides fascinating reading and the author's prose is both poetic and persuasive, Jawer goes out on a limb in several places. He is particularly prone to broad-reaching statements, and I'm concerned that Jawer, in arguing for the primacy of feeling in human experience, may be making a similar error as those theorists who assert the primacy of reason and cognitive processes. In addition, though *Anatomy* is thoroughly researched and meticulously documented and footnoted, it's worth noting that the author dances too fluidly from citing solid neurological research to psychological case studies to anecdotes without distinguishing the relative validity of these different kinds of evidence.

That said, anomalous phenomena need to be acknowledged and included in any truly comprehensive theory of both human behavior and consciousness. Jawer points to feelings, emotions, and sentience as the Rosetta stone of understanding various illnesses, psychological sensitivities, and the paranormal. Though I cannot agree with all his conjectures and conclusions—much of the evidence is not in yet—I admire his courage in broaching and exploring a very controversial subject. Clearly, more research, study, and discussion are needed, and this powerful and provocative book opens the doors to that discussion.



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