



The Physics Of Consciousness: The Quantum Mind And The Meaning Of Life

By Evan Harris Walker

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

It's not every day you hear a physicist ask what happens when we die. Evan Harris Walker, sparked by the early, tragic loss of his love, does just that and more in *The Physics of Consciousness*, a book in the same vein as Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics*, but with a firmer grounding in scientific understanding. Walker marries the traditions of Southern literature--a longing for the past, a resignation toward the present, and a determined optimism about the future--to a technical explanation of the limits of materialism; a weird synthesis, certainly, but charming and engaging nonetheless. Since his primary topic is consciousness, Walker turns to neuroscience and Buddhism (its spiritual equivalent) for inspiration. His quantum-mechanical approach to synaptic transmission and "the speed of consciousness" are difficult to evaluate and seem a bit overstretched, but his discussions of the history and current events of physics are lucid and ironically lend weight to his antimaterialistic arguments. Is this, as he hopes, another step toward 21st-century religion, or just another New Age reinterpretation of the spooky world of the ultrasmall? Don't bet on either--*The Physics of Consciousness* will jog your brain in new ways and, if nothing else, you'll find a new appreciation for how little we really know about ourselves. --Rob Lightner

From Publishers Weekly

Walker's ambitious, unorthodox treatise attempts to outline the basis for a new physics, one that recognizes consciousness as a fundamental part of reality. A widely published physicist, mostly in scientific journals, he reports having had a Zen enlightenment experience in 1966 while walking in an open field at the University of Maryland. This propelled him on a quest to rethink quantum mechanics, which he, like Einstein, found incomplete in its picture of an indeterminate cosmos. Electrons tunneling across the human brain's 23.5 trillion synapses create a vast network of potential interactions according to quantum mechanics, so neural impulses are generating our thoughts, emotions and perceptions, according to Walker's theory. Here, he sets forth what he claims is the cornerstone for a science of mind, complete with equations about the brain's workings. The most accessible, core part of the book is its juicy, vigorous account of the revolution in physics engendered by quantum theory and its replacement of the classical Newtonian worldview. Obsessed with mortality and whether the soul survives death (he believes "something of us must survive"), Walker lightens the load with personal interludes in which he reminisces about his high school girlfriend, who died of leukemia very young. Though deeply felt, these at times maudlin recollections feel out of place and detract from his presentation. This digressive, maverick tome, which opens the door to paranormal phenomena and God as "Quantum Mind," will appeal more to serious investigators and philosophical types than to general readers seeking the purported spiritual implications of the new physics. (Feb.)

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From Library Journal

The nature of consciousness, which perennially troubles the minds of scientists and philosophers, is the subject of an ever-growing body of literature. Two of the latest entries approach the topic from different perspectives. Glynn, a professor of physiology and head of the Physiological Laboratory at Cambridge, offers a comprehensive summary of what we know about the brain--both its evolution and its mechanisms. Among the topics he covers are natural selection, molecular evolution, nerves and the nervous system, sensory perception, and the specific structures responsible for our intellect. Using the mechanisms involved in vision and speech as models, Glynn skillfully describes various neurological deficiencies that can lead to "disordered seeing" and problems with the use of language. He carefully distinguishes what we know through experimental evidence from what we know through the observation of patients with neurological

damage. He also describes some of the major theories that attempt to explain why these structures arose. While his book concentrates on the structures that make up the mind, Glynn is well aware that some physical events appear explicable only in terms of conscious mental events--a situation that conflicts with the laws of modern physics. Only briefly, however, does he consider the various approaches that have been taken to deal with the issues of mind/body and free will. In contrast, this is the primary focus of *The Physics of Consciousness*. After reviewing the fundamentals of classic physics, Walker (who has a Ph.D. in physics) summarizes elements of the new physics in which our knowledge of space, time, matter, and energy are all dependent on the moment of observation. Walker explores the meaning of consciousness as a characteristic of the observer. In this context both the observer and the act of measurement are critical. In essence, Walker leads his reader on a journey through his concept of a "quantum mind," which can both affect matter (including other minds) and can be affected by other distant matter/minds. To break up what would otherwise be an extremely dense text, Walker also relates the very touching story of the loss of his high-school sweetheart to leukemia. Indeed, it is his memory of their relationship that drives Walker to seek an understanding of ultimate reality. At times, he has a tendency to be dogmatic--as when he concludes, "our consciousness, our mind, and the will of God are the same mind." While *An Anatomy of Thought* is appropriate for most academic libraries, the *Physics of Consciousness* will be most accessible to readers with some knowledge of advanced physics.

-Laurie Bartolini, Illinois State Lib., Springfield

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Users Review

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Paul Williams:

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