

The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul

By Mario Beauregard, Denyse O'Leary

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Do religious experiences come from God, or are they merely the random firing of neurons in the brain? Drawing on his own research with Carmelite nuns, neuroscientist Mario Beauregard shows that genuine, life-changing spiritual events can be documented. He offers compelling evidence that religious experiences have a nonmaterial origin, making a convincing case for what many in scientific fields are loath to consider—that it is God who creates our spiritual experiences, not the brain.

Beauregard and O'Leary explore recent attempts to locate a "God gene" in some of us and claims that our brains are "hardwired" for religion—even the strange case of one neuroscientist who allegedly invented an electromagnetic "God helmet" that could produce a mystical experience in anyone who wore it. The authors argue that these attempts are misguided and narrow-minded, because they reduce spiritual experiences to material phenomena.

Many scientists ignore hard evidence that challenges their materialistic prejudice, clinging to the limited view that our experiences are explainable only by material causes, in the obstinate conviction that the physical world is the only reality. But scientific materialism is at a loss to explain irrefutable accounts of mind over matter, of intuition, willpower, and leaps of faith, of the "placebo effect" in medicine, of near-death experiences on the operating table, and of psychic premonitions of a loved one in crisis, to say nothing of the occasional sense of oneness with nature and mystical experiences in meditation or prayer. Traditional science explains away these and other occurrences as delusions or misunderstandings, but by exploring the latest neurological research on phenomena such as these, *The Spiritual Brain* gets to their real source.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Following C.S. Lewis's dictum that to 'see through' all things is the same as not to see, neuroscientist Beauregard and journalist O'Leary mount a sweeping critique of a trend in the pop science media to explain away religious experience as a brain artifact, pathology or evolutionary quirk. While sympathizing with the attraction such neurotheology holds, the authors warn against the temptation to force the complex varieties of human spirituality into simplistic categories that they argue are conceptually crude, culturally biased and often empirically untested. In recently published research using Carmelite nuns as subjects, Beauregard's group at the University of Montreal found specific areas of brain activation associated with contemplative prayer. But these patterns are quite distinct from those associated with hallucinations, autosuggestion or states of intense emotional arousal, resembling instead how the brain processes real experiences. Insisting that we have never entertained the idea of proving the existence of God, the authors concede that the results of our work are assumed to be a strike either for or against God and that on the whole, we [don't] mind. Never shrinking from controversy, and sometimes deliberately provoking it, this book serves as a lively introduction to a field where neuroscience, philosophy, and secular/spiritual cultural wars are unavoidably intermingled. (*Sept.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Neuroscientist Beauregard is no flighty New-Ager or Creationist but, he says, one of a minority of neuroscientists who don't adhere to strictly materialist interpretation of the human mind. He and his ilk believe that scientists who strive to explain the mind as an illusion created by the brain's chemical reactions ignore or vastly miscalculate the expanse of all that goes on in the universe. That is, it is too limiting to strictly confine the origin of all human thought to material or chemical interactions. In this complex tome, he describes the intricacy of his work and proposes that humans don't so much generate as transmit thoughts, and that by virtue of human ability to mentally interconnect with a higher consciousness, the actions of the mind become distinct and separate from, though observable by means of, the brain. He set out to prove his theory by studying a group of Carmelite nuns as they experienced God in prayer and meditation. Beauregard would be the first to note that, while his work doesn't ipso facto prove the existence of God, it does lend scientific credence to the existence of a higher or universal consciousness. Chavez, Donna

Review

"A very important book, clearly explaining non-materialist neuroscience in simple terms appropriate for the lay reader." (Jeffrey M. Schwartz, MD, Research Psychiatrist, UCLA, author of *The Brain Lock* and *The Mind and the Brain*)

"The *Spiritual Brain* is a wonderful and important book...a necessary read for both the scientist and the religious person." (Andrew Newberg, M.D. Associate Professor of Radiology and Director of the Center for Spirituality and the Mind at the University of Pennsylvania and co-author of *Why We Believe What We Believe*.)

"A refreshing antidote to the arguments offered by some scientists who insist that their minds, and yours, are meaningless illusions." (Dean Radin, PhD, Senior Scientist, Institute of Noetic Sciences and author of *The Conscious Universe* and *Entangled Minds*)

“A sweeping critique of the trend to explain away religious experience as a brain artifact, pathology, or evolutionary quirk.” (Publishers Weekly)

In clear, readable prose, avoiding highly technical language, neuroscientist Beauregard argues merely physical explanations for religious experience are insufficient. Recommended.” (Library Journal)

Lends scientific credence to the existence of a higher or universal consciousness. (Booklist (starred review))

Drawing on Beauregard’s own research into religious experiences, a researched case for the nonmaterial—and ultimately spiritual—nature of man. (World Magazine)

Beauregard uses evidence to show that the self or soul is not simply locked inside the skull. (Philadelphia Inquirer)

I heartily advocate the purchase of this book (Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith)

Mario Beauregard and Denyse O’Leary have produced a provocatively titled book covering an equally provocative topic. (Christian’s Scholar Review)

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