

COMMENTARY

Mind-Boggling Chicks: Response to Broderick

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We very much appreciate Damien Broderick's kind comments about our book (Barušs, I., & Mossbridge, J. (2017). *Transcendent Mind: Rethinking the Science of Consciousness*. American Psychological Association) in his Commentary in this issue of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, and for this opportunity to engage in a discussion of its substance.

Each person has a boggle threshold, which we define in *Transcendent Mind* as “the degree to which a person is willing to deviate from normative beliefs” (p. 24). In Damien's case, that threshold appears to lie somewhere beyond laboratory-verified psi phenomena, but on this side of some of the more outrageous phenomena that have been observed in field studies, such as some of the phenomena ostensibly produced by Thomaz Coutinho. So let us start by saying a little bit about the inclusion of the Thomaz material.

Members of Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE) might remember that a number of years ago Canadian psychologist Lee Pulos gave a talk at an SSE Annual Meeting about his investigation of Thomaz that he and American journalist Gary Richman had conducted. As we point out in *Transcendent Mind*, they were careful to rule out conventional explanations for the phenomena produced by Thomaz. In addition, at the time we wrote the book, one of us (I. B.) called Lee Pulos on the phone, who verified that the phenomena were authentic. I. B. also contacted Thomaz's wife in Germany, where she and Thomaz were living at the time, to try to acquire additional confirmation. (Thomaz does not speak English but his wife does.) She referred I. B. back to Lee Pulos. We wanted to fly to Germany to witness the Thomaz phenomena for ourselves, but (as SSE members will know all too well) the funding for such an excursion was just not available. We could find no reason to discredit Gary Richman's account. (He is now deceased so that we could not speak to him directly—or at least, not through any ordinary means). So the only reason left for not taking these

reports seriously was that what happened cannot possibly have been what happened. In other words, the Thomaz phenomena fall way above or beside or outside or underneath (depending on the metaphor one chooses) most people's boggle thresholds. So we decided that we would include that material, with all the proper caveats, to give people's boggle thresholds a little exercise. The implications, of course, if these phenomena occurred as they appear to have occurred, are profound, including providing support for the primacy of consciousness.

For the purposes of our initial Book Prospectus which we sent to APA Books, we used "Transcendent Mind" as a placeholder for the title of the book with the intention of coming up with something "better" as we actually wrote the book. Over the next several years, we could not come up with anything "better" so the initial title stuck. It is worth remembering that metaphors are just metaphors, and that some version of dialectical reasoning is necessary to extract the meaning of juxtapositions of metaphors from any written text. I. B. is reminded that the Casimir effect has sometimes been "explained" as the action of waves but, at the subatomic level, "waves" are no more appropriate than "particles." Also, there was the handwringing in the 1960s about whether "transhumanistic psychology" should be associated with "height" or "depth." In the end it became "transpersonal psychology."

For the purposes of clarification, the billiard-ball model of the universe is just one of 4 definitions of materialism that we introduce in *Transcendent Mind*. Damien Broderick knows that physical reality does not conform to such a model, but we would like to assure him that students sure think it does. I. B. has now used *Transcendent Mind* twice as a textbook for his third year undergraduate Consciousness course, and when he goes over the physics, the students are shocked. They cannot believe what they are learning.

A second point that we raise in the book is that the billiard-ball model has become introjected into people's psyches so that it functions as a nonconscious schema that helps them to organize their experience. Such nonconscious schemata set boggle thresholds. The implication of this is that while there are certainly some people who know that the universe does not function like a set of billiard balls, those same people can often use the billiard-ball assumption as a basis for their reasoning. So that makes it difficult to imagine that, within minutes, chicks could hatch from unfertilized eggs and run around. I. B. had this same conversation with co-author J. M. multiple times, until J. M. realized that giving their readers exercises for their boggle thresholds when there was no reasonable reason to exclude data was a noble thing to do. We all need practice grappling with the fact that, at least historically, reality has always ended up being more interesting than we think it is.