

Susan Blackmore

Susan Jane Blackmore (born July 29, 1951) is a British freelance writer, lecturer, and broadcaster, perhaps best known for her book *The Meme Machine*.

Career

In 1973, Susan Blackmore graduated from St. Hilda's College, University of Oxford, with a BA (Hons) in psychology and physiology. She went on to do a postgraduate degree in environmental psychology at the University of Surrey, achieving an MSc in 1974. In 1980, she got her Ph.D. in parapsychology from the same university, her thesis being entitled "Extrasensory Perception as a Cognitive Process".

She has done research on memes (which she wrote about in her popular book *The Meme Machine*), evolutionary theory, consciousness, and the paranormal.

She has also appeared on television a number of times, discussing such paranormal phenomena as ghosts, extra-sensory perception, intelligent design, the multiverse, and out-of-body experiences, in what she describes as the "unenviable role of Rentaskeptic", and she has also presented a show on alien abductions. Another programme which she has presented discusses the intelligence of non human apes. She also acted as one of the psychologists who featured on the British version of the television show "Big Brother", speaking about the psychological state of the contestants.

She was on the editorial board for the *Journal of Memetics* (an electronic journal) from 1997 to 2001, and has been a consulting editor of the *Skeptical Inquirer* since 1998.

Doctor Blackmore is a Distinguished Supporter of the British Humanist Association.

Her latest book, *Consciousness: An Introduction* (2004), is a textbook that broadly covers the field of consciousness studies. In it she covers a wide variety of topics such as the mind-body problem, the hard problem of consciousness, philosophy of mind, God's existence, Cognitive neuropsychology, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, evolution, intelligent design, parapsychology, altered states of consciousness, phenomenology, Buddhism, and meditation. In sidebars of her book she has written brief profiles about various notable contributors to the field such as Daniel Dennett, John Searle, David Chalmers, Patricia Churchland, Francis Crick, Antonio Damasio, V.S. Ramachandran, John Carew Eccles, Rodney Brooks, Alan Turing, Francisco Varela, René Descartes, David Hume, William James, and the Buddha.

Memetics

Susan Blackmore has made contributions to the field of memetics. Her clearly written works are aimed at a wide readership. The term meme was coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* and although the term has been widely used it is often misunderstood. Blackmore's book *The Meme Machine* is perhaps the most thorough introduction to Memetics available. In his foreword to this work, Dawkins said "Any theory deserves to be given its best shot, and this is what Susan Blackmore has done for the theory of the meme." Other treatments of memes can be found in the works of Robert Aunger - *The Electric Meme*, and Jon Whitty - *A Memetic Paradigm of Project Management*

Blackmore's treatment of memetics insists that memes are true evolutionary replicators, a second replicator that like genetics is subject to the Darwinian Algorithm and undergoes evolutionary change. Her prediction on the central role played by imitation as the cultural replicator and the neural structures that must be unique to humans necessary to support them have recently been confirmed by research on mirror neurons and the differences in extent of these structures between humans and our closest ape relations.

In her work on memetics she has emphasized the role that Darwinian mechanisms play in cultural evolution and has helped develop the field of Universal Darwinism.

Personal life

In 1977, she married fellow academic Tom Troscianko, and they had two children: Emily Tamarisk Troscianko (born February 20, 1982), and Jolyon Tomasz Troscianko (born May 17, 1984). She is now the partner of the television presenter and scientist Adam Hart-Davis with whom she lives in Bristol.

Blackmore is an active practitioner of Zen, although she identifies herself as "not a Buddhist". Blackmore is an atheist who has criticized religion sharply, having said, for instance, that "all kinds of infectious memes thrive in religions, in spite of being false, such as the idea of a creator god, virgin births, the subservience of women, transubstantiation, and many more. In the major religions, they are backed up by admonitions to have faith not doubt, and by untestable but ferocious rewards and punishments."

Quotes

* "Parapsychology seems to be growing further away from the progress and excitement of the rest of consciousness studies".

* "If everyone understood evolution, then the tyranny of religious memes would be weakened, and we little humans might find a better way to live in this pointless universe".

Books & Websites

* *Beyond the Body: An Investigation of Out-Of-The-Body Experiences*, Academy Chicago Publishers, 1983, ISBN 0-586-08428-2 (first edition), ISBN 0-89733-344-6 (second edition)

* *In Search of the Light: The Adventures of a Parapsychologist*, Prometheus Books, 1987, ISBN 0-87975-360-9 (first edition), ISBN 1-57392-061-4 (second edition, 1996)

* *Dying to Live: Near-Death Experiences*, Prometheus Books, 1993, ISBN 0-87975-870-8

* *Test Your Psychic Powers*, with Adam Hart-Davis, Thorsons Publishing, 1995, ISBN 1-85538-441-8, ISBN 0-8069-9669-2 (reprint edition)

* *The Meme Machine*, Oxford University Press, reprint edition 2000, ISBN 0-19-286212-X

* *Consciousness: An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2003, ISBN 0-19-515342-1 (hardcover), ISBN 0-19-515343-X (paperback)

* *Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2005, ISBN 0-19-280585-1

* *Conversations on Consciousness* Oxford University Press, 2005 ISBN 0-19-280622-X

* Susan Blackmore's website... <http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/>