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**Joe Dispenza, *BECOMING SUPERNATURAL: HOW COMMON PEOPLE ARE DOING THE UNCOMMON*, New York: Hay House, 2017.**

This book promises to initiate you into doing impossible things: heal from a life of psychological and physical stress and start embodying a future self who you always wanted to be but kept deferring for until you score that dream job, have a fulfilling relationship or live in a healthier way. Brace yourselves because proposing no less than such an empowering “biological upgrade” is not your run-of-the-mill self-help manual, but a philosophy and practice that thrives at the intersections of neuroscience, epigenetics, spirituality and quantum physics, and cannot be nonchalantly dismissed by sceptics – not by those who are open to listening. Leading up to his fourth book, Dispenza decided to trade in the urge to spend possibly decades trying to publish his research in peer-reviewed journals to persuade critics who would consider it pseudo-science, in favour of organizing and leading meditation workshops across the globe for doers whose embodiment of change is the best legitimisation one could hope for. Dispenza seems to have recently become somewhat of a celebrity on the alternative podcasts for spiritual healing and life-coaching,<sup>2</sup> but remains humble in declaring that he allows up to two meditative hours at the break of dawn each day to go beyond himself, and the greatest lie we have ever been told – that we are “linear beings living linear lives” – when we are in fact “dimensional beings living dimensional lives.”<sup>3</sup> His passion to transform other people’s lives through this insight, which led him to publish also *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself* (2012) and *You Are the Placebo* (2014), was triggered by a wake-up call, that most people unfortunately wait for before they are motivated enough to make a significant change. That is, at a young age Dispenza was involved in a traffic accident which damaged his spine and was to leave him not being able to walk again unless he went through a complicated surgical procedure. He decided against the surgery, spent some excruciating weeks lying down and trying to mentally reconstruct his spine, and when his body eventually

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see the podcasts *London Real* (UK; <https://londonreal.tv/>), *Guy Lawrence* (Australia; <https://www.guylawrence.com.au/>) or *Inspire Nation* (USA; <https://inspirenationshow.com/>).

<sup>3</sup> Dispenza, 1.

started healing, he decided to spend the rest of his life studying the mind-body connection and helping others.

*Becoming Supernatural* is an ambitious yet well-grounded and sophisticated effort to “bridge the world of science with the world of mysticism.”<sup>4</sup> The scientific-mystical model is premised upon a simple yet powerful idea that biological organisms, and humans in particular, are highly amenable and adjustable to their environment, possess high levels of neuroplasticity and an innate capability for self-transformation and healing, as recent neuroscientific and epigenetic research demonstrates. Un/surprisingly, however, most people spend their whole lives without consciously tapping into that potential because we are creatures of routine and habit, conditioned by our personal and sociopolitical contexts. That is, most of the time, our patterns of behavior and emotional response follow an unconscious program that has congealed over time as a result of our earliest childhood experiences and later significant, frequently traumatic, events. This can easily slip into a life run on autopilot, without a real sense of accomplishment or contentment, or worse yet, one overwhelmed by psychological or physical stress. But imagine if we could take the red pill, enter the operating neurosystem and tune it in such a way that it starts manifesting the greatest expressions of ourselves that we always wanted to be. As Dispenza argues, taking the red pill is equivalent to what gurus and monks of different spiritual traditions have known for thousands of years: becoming conscious of what the mind is processing and then gradually muting the chatter (of self-doubt, self-criticism and guilt) *and* the toxic emotion (of resentment, fear, anger, etc.) to bring the mind and body back to “the sweet spot of the generous present moment”<sup>5</sup> which is the source of creativity and unpredictability.

The above is, of course, much more difficult than it sounds, and it is not simply a matter of spiritual and scientific knowledge, but rather of persistent and painstaking daily training, which will fire and wire new neurocircuitry in preparation for the future unknown (and away from the past conditioning). In meditation practice, the person trains themselves, as Dispenza proposes, to combine a clear intention with the elevated emotions of gratitude, love and joy, *before* the desired event actually occurs – which eventually starts manifesting as bringing the event forth to them (a healing or noticing new life opportunities) and which conventionally might have been considered a synchronicity or “supernatural.” But the scientific underpinning of this is in fact an elegant slippage out of the old, Newtonian model of reality, in which body needs to traverse space in a certain time to get a result, and into the quantum consciousness field of endless possibility, in which past, present and future do not exist in the same linear fashion. To grasp this in an intuitive way, just think of one of those

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<sup>4</sup> Dispenza, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Dispenza, 11.

moments when you were so engrossed in an activity (perhaps singing or writing) that you completely lost track of time yet you were at your absolute creative best. When such states are recreated through meditation, as numerous brain scans that Dispenza conducted have shown, the brain waves slow down and go from beta to alpha to theta patterns, entering the subconscious mind and thereby regulating the autonomic nervous system towards coherence and wellbeing – such is the biology of the red pill. But the trickiest bit yet, on top of the persistent and disciplined daily practice, is developing an ability to ride that flow of energy of gratitude, creativity and trust, released usually during the early morning retreat at the boundary between consciousness and subconsciousness, alpha and theta, into the waking life of likely stressful and unpleasant events and encounters. Mastering that ability lets one become “supernatural” in the new sense of the creator and no longer the victim of their life.

Finally, how do we contextualize and assess such inspiring philosophical, scientific and practical work across the academic fields of not only science and culture studies but also natural sciences? The book is not primarily targeted at academic audiences but popular ones, who are interested to implement the principles. The writing style is therefore readily accessible, ranging from the storytelling of successful healing cases to the effective explanations, accompanied by illustrations, of complex scientific concepts, to the descriptions of, and further Internet links to, specific guided meditations. Beyond the popular and practical engagements, I would suggest that Dispenza’s well-researched work deserves much wider attention in academia, across the natural sciences and science studies, because it provides refreshing and challenging insights to push at the assumed scientific boundaries and advance the interdisciplinarity between spirituality and science, as well as the decolonization of scientific epistemologies. At the same time, the proposed scientific-mystical model seems to open up the questions of ethics, towards both humans and non-humans (as has been the focus of recent scholarship). It simply begs the question whether the individual’s biological-spiritual upgrade, which essentially manifests through gratitude and trust towards others, in fact constitutes that underlying medium that the philosophical traditions of theorising self-other relations and encounters tend to easily overlook.