

A VERY BRIEF TOUR OF THE NONPHYSICAL UNIVERSE

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Introduction

I've really enjoyed the papers presented this year since joining the club, especially the breadth of interests within the group. So, I feel encouraged to talk about subjects that are considered pretty far out by most educated people. So-called New Age subjects that are too often presented with little basis in logic or supporting evidence. Yet, compelling evidence is accumulating from many sources to support a different way to understand our world. Different to us, perhaps, but not new, as this emerging world view dates back to the ancient wisdom traditions.

When I say "we" in what follows, I mean Susan and myself. For several years we've used our vacation time to attend conferences and seminars on these subjects. Basically, we're trying to put together our own working model of reality. By definition, a working model is open-ended -- that is, subject to change as experience accumulates. Some stuff is well grounded in theory and experience; some is highly speculative. But we think it is beginning to add up. It has also changed our lives.

A Hindu sage named Patanjali once wrote about the insights available through diligent practice of meditation: knowledge of past and future; knowledge of past lives; perception of the small, the concealed, the distant; knowledge about the stars and their motions; knowledge of the interior of the body, and so on. That was written in about 400 BC. His list more or less covers my topics today.

The Scientific Paradigm

The history of science in the Christian Era in Europe is almost nonexistent. The Church had the answers. They also had most of the people who could read and write, so it wasn't hard to control. But a few trouble makers surfaced in the 16th and 17th centuries.

One was Copernicus, the Polish astronomer who had some revolutionary ideas about the earth going around the sun. But he also knew which way the wind blew, so he did not release his manuscript until he was dying.

A turning point came in the 17th century when Descartes proposed that the world's knowledge and wisdom should be divided into two parts: matters of natural philosophy (i.e. science) and matters of the spirit (i.e. the Church). Little did the Church know that its authority had started on a long downhill slide, as Bacon, Newton, and the great thinkers of

the European enlightenment ran with this new freedom. We can say that science has had a 300 year run. In fact, it has become the principal belief system of the educated Western world, and increasingly now, the Eastern.

Let's put this 300 year period in the context of human history. Humans have exhibited some kind of reflective thinking ability for over 75000 years. About 2500 years ago there were some lasting philosophical changes as the major world religions began to form, and so on up to the last 300 years of scientific and industrial revolution. Some say we are now undergoing another revolution in spirit or consciousness.

A few words about scientific truth. In 1962 Thomas Kuhn wrote *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in which he described six stages of scientific paradigm shifts. A shift eventually occurs in an existing paradigm some time after an anomaly is recognized. Before that happens there are often years or decades of resistance, rejection, and attempts to fit the anomaly into the old paradigm.

A less elegant view was stated by the physicist, Max Planck, about 80 years ago. *A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die.*

An example of a long-standing paradigm was the place of earth among the heavenly bodies, where the motion of planets was the anomaly that concerned Copernicus. Today, the overriding scientific paradigm is that the real world is the material or physical world, described remarkably well by contemporary science. Consciousness does not fit in that paradigm; it has been recognized as an anomaly for some time. Nobody has explained how unconscious matter in the physical world as we know it gives rise to consciousness. So, it's mostly disregarded. One physicist put it this way: Give me one free miracle, and I can explain the rest.

One new paradigm, suggested by physicists such as the late David Bohm, Amit Goswami, and Peter Russell, defines the faculty of consciousness itself as the primary entity, more fundamental than space, time, and matter. Some scientists believe that consciousness is in everything from subatomic particles on up. Although a single cell has a billionth of the richness of our human life experience, there is no evidence that this single cell does not have some form of consciousness.

In the current paradigm, human beings are seen to be assemblies of subatomic particles, separate from one another and from the living and nonliving things around us. There are two important consequences of this paradigm that shape our beliefs.

The first is the notion that we are basically material beings, driven by our chemistry and biology. This tends to give us a material outlook on life -- not in the materialistic, greedy sense, but in the value we place on activity in the external physical world as opposed to a

more reflective, internal life. It's not likely you would say this about a Buddhist monk.

The second consequence is the belief in separateness, such that we can dispassionately observe the world around us in making judgments or doing experiments. We easily think of "I" and the object "it", and our Western languages support this. However, in many indigenous cultures where the scientific paradigm does not prevail, there is no way in the languages to distinguish "I" and "it", since they are part of the same whole. This is closer to the new paradigm.

The ideas about the nature of reality that I'm discussing today are not currently part of the established scientific or religious worlds. We think they should be discussed, because they deal directly with the spiritual part of us. By spiritual, we don't mean people who meditate or pray or have out-of-body experiences. All of us are spiritual in the sense that we are also physical and intellectual. Physical is quite well understood at this time in history, down to our DNA sequences. Intellectual is well described but less well understood. Spiritual is vague. The reason is that our intellectual nature, partly, and our spiritual nature, almost entirely, are beyond the reach of the scientific models by which we are accustomed to explain things.

To put it simply, our models are based on the physical universe in which we live, governed by the science of the last 300 years. Yet there exists a very large amount of nonphysical data that doesn't fit the scientific paradigm of space, time, and matter. I'll talk about a few examples today, but it's fair to say that there are centuries of recorded observations and insights, and now over a hundred years of controlled, reproducible experiments demonstrating phenomena that do not fit. Either the data are faulty or the model is incomplete. We are convinced that the model is the problem.

My background is in applied science, and I retain a strong hope that science can move into these new areas and ideas with an open mind. I should also say that I have one basic belief that really keeps me chipping away at these things. That is, the universe, physical and nonphysical, is logical. That's certainly not provable. It's a belief.

In regard to scientific laws, William James phrased the problem succinctly when he said that in order to test the proposition that all crows are black, all you need is one white crow.

Out of all the current explorations of the nonphysical world, I've picked eight to mention today, eight stops on the tour. These are the kind of data that have convinced me that the paradigm should change. These are some of the white crows.

Stops on the tour

1. Intuition

We think that intuitive and psychic experiences, along with some elements of dreams, are essentially similar processes. Intuition usually refers to information received when needed, without forethought or preparation. Psychic experiences are usually sought and prepared for, such as prayer healing at a distance, or readings by psychic mediums.

The most common experience is simple intuition. You know when the phone's about to ring before it happens. You may also know who is calling, without caller ID. You sense danger around the curve and you slow down. Or more dramatically, your identical twin or your long-time partner in another city is injured and you feel it simultaneously.

We think intuition is associated with the nonphysical part of our world. We call it the universal consciousness, but you might want to think of it as a psychic internet that provides each of us, through our psyches, a direct link to the rest of the world -- the nonphysical part -- although some of the connections are very, very faint. There's no monthly charge, by the way, for logging on to the psychic internet.

Here's a simple image that we find helpful. Imagine that there is an aperture between your conscious mind and the unconscious, and the unconscious is open to the universal realm of information and wisdom. Most of the time, for most people, the aperture is very small. However, it can be enlarged through practice. If it is too large, we would have trouble functioning in the ordinary physical world. Examples might be certain artists and visionaries, and in extreme cases, people with abnormal psychological conditions. If the aperture is too small, we lose our access to intuitive information; it is reasonable to call that a life-threatening condition. We speculate that evolution may select against people with very large or very small apertures.

Another analogy describing the universal consciousness is a radio, where our brain is the hardware. In this view, we can tune into certain frequencies and not others. For instance, I am set up to tune in my own memories but not yours. However, we do have some ability to scan frequencies and pick up stuff that is not in our own memory data banks. That seems to be common in dreaming.

Incidentally, we've discussed this with two married couples where one of them frequently picks up images from the other's dreams. Talk about being on the same wave length!

One interesting issue of consciousness is the location of long-term memory. We have a neurological model that says memory resides inside our skulls. However, if the universal consciousness is a psychic internet of all information, we might ask why each of us would also have to carry images, sounds, odors, and detailed memories from 50 years ago around with us all the time. If you were designing the universe, would you make this duplication?

Perhaps our brains act more like highly developed addressing machines than as storage devices.

2. Species Consciousness

Earlier, I raised the question how consciousness, specifically human consciousness, could have arisen from unconscious matter. One simple and logical answer is that it has been present from the beginning of time. But let's stick to earth time for now.

For most of the first four billion years of earth's existence, the only living organisms were simple bacteria, one-celled entities with no nucleus. They essentially shaped the surface of our planet. In the course of the next billion years, more complex plants and animals evolved, with humans of some sort appearing 200 or 300,000 years ago. Lewis Thomas once suggested that we were invented by the bacteria as taxicabs to carry them around.

I'd like to call your attention to an innovative Greek-American scientist by the name of Elisabet Sahtouris, a post-Darwinian evolutionary biologist. She believes that the history of earth, and the living species on earth, parallel the history of the universe in being *self-organizing*. She uses the term intelligent self-organization, implying some kind of species consciousness. Thus, she disagrees with Darwin followers by rejecting accidents as a primary force behind evolution.

She makes a distinction between mature and immature species (bacteria and humans, for example). Mature species that have survived have worked through competition to a point where they cooperate and share -- in order to survive. Such activities imply some kind of shared consciousness. Humans have not reached maturity yet, but she sees the growth of the internet as a form of species sharing, and cause for some optimism about the future of our species. Of course, there are plenty of activities in the present world leading to pessimism. But we've only had 300,000 years.

A principal idea in Sahtouris's scheme is that the universe is a living entity, from the spiral galaxies in outer space down to the swirling subatomic particles. She reminds us that ancient bacteria created the first world-wide web in the form of a DNA exchange, cooperatively sharing genetic material and information needed for evolutionary development. She believes that this DNA information exchange could not have resulted from the random forces of nature, but from intelligent self-organization.

Rupert Sheldrake is an English biologist who is far from the mainstream in his profession. Like Sahtouris, he believes the universe is living and evolving. As in the hard sciences, biology still follows a mechanistic or material paradigm. For example, it is widely believed that the human genome holds the key to life -- that our genes determine our natures. Sheldrake believes that research attention would be better directed to such questions as how homing pigeons find their home, or why dogs know when their owners are coming

home.

First, a few words about his theory. Sheldrake believes that nature has a memory that is conveyed through time and space by *morphic* fields. These fields carry the information how a human, or a dog, or a tree looked and acted in the past. In this view, genes are not encoded with certain traits, but make it possible to tune in to the appropriate morphic channel. The process of converting the memory into the present is "morphic resonance", similar to the radio receiver's resonance with a selected frequency. More generally, morphic fields are the bonding mechanism that connect humans and animals to each other and between species. That is, the mind is spatially extended far beyond our brains via morphic fields.

The idea of morphogenetic fields goes back to the 1920's, but it has roots in Hindu thought. It's not stretching too far to connect it with the traditional European view, say of Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas, that all animals and plants have souls that organize their bodies and instincts.

Perhaps the most exciting feature of Sheldrake's work, to a scientist at least, is that he is an experimentalist. An entire book covers his study of dogs and other pets who go the door or window when their owners start home. An important qualification is that the pets studied have a strong bond with their owners. In hundreds of cases in which the owners were miles, even hundreds of miles away from home, he found that dogs responded as soon as the owner decided to return home. That is, the dogs sensed the intention of their owner, whatever the distance between them. Sheldrake believes this exhibits a morphic bond between dog and owner.

3. Remote Viewing

Susan and I have personal experience in remote viewing, a form of perception at a distance, or the psychic retrieval of information about a place distant from the viewer.

Remote viewing is a practice of meditation or quieting the mind, then concentrating on an arbitrary number that is intentionally connected, usually by a photograph or map, to some location in the world, in order to bring back definitive information about it, beyond what appears on the photograph or map. The viewer has no information about the location other than the number; only the test supervisor knows that this number designates Mt. Everest, for instance. The practice of remote viewing was sponsored by the CIA and US Military for 20 years as a means of gathering military intelligence; much of the work was done at the Stanford Research Institute. They had many successes in finding hostages and lost submarines, describing the interior of secret Russian installations, and much more.

Before I went to my first training session in remote viewing, I read some books on the subject and got intrigued. So late one evening I did what I was taught to do -- an

experiment. I pulled a three-month old *Newsweek* out of a stack, picked an arbitrary page number (28) out of the air, and set the magazine aside without opening it. After a few minutes of quiet meditation, but keeping the page number in mind, I took a blank piece of paper and sketched whatever came into my awareness without attempting any interpretation. There were five images, no words. Then I compared page 28 and my sketches. To my amazement, all five were elements of the photograph on the page. Since then, we attended training and did some practice viewing at home. Some were fairly successful, some not at all. We've not continued the practice in any disciplined way, since our goal is understanding the process, not becoming experts.

4. Spiritualism and the Afterlife

One of the less ordinary psychic practices is that of mediums or spiritualists -- people who bring messages from the dead. Since its high point in the late 1800's, mediumship has lost most of its following because of many exposed frauds. However, Professor Gary Schwartz at the University of Arizona recently did a careful study of mediums by assembling five American practitioners with the best reputations. He had them independently obtain information from the same deceased persons, and got quite astounding results that were consistent and accurate to a high statistical degree.

A friend of ours, a minister, took a mediumship course at Lilydale Assembly, a Spiritualist camp near Lake Chautauqua in New York. She found the experience to be very positive. In fact, when doing memorial services, she now routinely asks the deceased what they want said.

So, in 2001 I also took a course at Lilydale over three weekends, ending up with 20 minute readings of two strangers. Although I may be slightly above average in psychic ability, I'm no medium. Yet I came to respect those who have this unusual talent, including some in my group. I also found that training is very similar to what we learned in remote viewing. That is, the major effort is to clear your conscious mind through meditation, and let the information come through to you.

I want to return briefly to Gary Schwartz. Schwartz is a behavioral psychologist and physicist who taught at Harvard and Yale before going to the University of Arizona. He has proposed a theory which attempts to apply scientific ideas to his findings that there is some kind of afterlife. The theory is based on the logical idea that all information stays around forever, just as we still see light from stars that died billions of years ago. The energy of this information is very faint, of course, but still present, and according to Schwartz, still evolving. Some of us apparently can gain access to some of it. If this is true, then we might expect to create instruments someday that can detect these subtle energies and make creative use of them.

5. Distant Healing

Medical practitioners are held in high regard in our culture, as in all human history. So it's no surprise that new findings about prayer healing at a distance have caused much excitement, not only in medical circles. Distant healing is a phenomenon that seems to exhibit nonlocality and transmission of thoughts through the psychic internet.

You probably have heard about Larry Dossey, a medical doctor who has written and spoken about this for the last 10 years, especially the beneficial effect of prayer. The studies of special interest are those where the patients do not know they are being prayed for, the praying people are a long way distant, and they have no personal interaction with the patients. Dossey has remarked that the time is not far away when doctors who do not call for prayer intercession for serious illness may be sued for malpractice! I'll summarize one of the many published studies of distant healing.

Forty AIDS patients in San Francisco were divided into target and control groups. Forty experienced healers around the country took part, from Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Native American, and shamanic traditions. Each patient was treated by prayer, long distance, by ten different healers, one hour a day for six consecutive days. The patients did not know whether they were in the target or control group. At the end of the study the target group experienced significantly better medical and quality of life outcomes on many measures, including fewer outpatient visits, fewer days of hospitalization, less severe illnesses acquired during the study, and less emotional distress. This was published in 1998 in the *Western Journal of Medicine*.

6. Medical Intuition

Another psychic phenomenon that we have seen up close is medical intuition, where the practitioner can make medical diagnoses at a distance by interpreting his or her sense of energy signals or fields from different parts of the body. We saw Caroline Myss in action, doing medical readings on dozens of strangers at a distance of fifty feet, given only their name and birth year. For example, someone would say, "I'm Mary Jones, born in 1950." Myss responded, "Let me pull up your file", and then took about twenty seconds before starting the reading. She picked up and reported accurate information about Mary's current medical condition and history, or a major life problem, or issues of her close family members. We were astonished, to say the least. Myss has done hundreds of medical diagnoses via long distance telephone, with an accuracy over 90%.

In 2000, I experienced medical diagnosis myself in a small way. I attended a workshop in New Jersey with a psychic healer. The first exercise was to pair up with someone we did not know and attempt to read each other, following the psychic's instructions. My partner was a woman in her forties. I went through a series of steps to clear my conscious mind and then imagined shining a light through her body in order to note any dark spots. Needless to say, I had very little confidence in the results. I told her I found two dark areas, in her left hip and left foot or ankle. To the amazement of both of us, she said yes and yes. She had

recently seen medical professionals for both of those problems, and she did not know of any other current medical problem.

Our psychic experiences in remote viewing, mediumship, and medical intuition were done on purpose with help from experienced people. It seemed clear that the more we practiced, the easier such exercises would become. The main element of practice is learning to clear our conscious minds out of the way; there are many known ways to do that, from meditation to drugs.

7. Brain Waves and Altered States of Consciousness

The correlation between brain waves and states of consciousness may be the best known connection between scientific measurement and psychic activity. When we dream, meditate, or engage in many types of psychic activity, an EEG device hooked up to our head will show a significant fraction of theta waves of 4 to 8 cycles per second. Right now, unless you are bored and daydreaming, you and I would show a preponderance of beta waves, over 14 cycles per second. In between is alpha, where our ability to learn and absorb is high. The lowest frequency is delta, which we exhibit when deeply asleep.

The altered state of theta brain waves is not all that mysterious. We experience it every day as we fall asleep on our way to deep sleep. This is when we dream. This also seems to be when we gather and process information and guidance that helps us solve ordinary problems.

The correlation between brain waves and states of consciousness has been studied for 30 years or so. In one line of research started by Robert Monroe, it has been found that by sending audio waves of slightly different frequencies into a subject's two ears, the brain picks up the difference and exhibits increased brain waves of that frequency difference. For example, if audible signals of 200 and 205 cycles per second are sent to earphones, the subject exhibits an increase of brain waves around 5 cycles per second, or theta. Consequently, one can voluntarily enter an altered state rather quickly, and experience the state as if you had gotten there by meditation. This is the basis for some devices on the market for improving relaxation, learning ability, and so forth.

8. Guidance

When we seek guidance through prayers or meditation, or just by sleeping on a problem, where do the answers come from? Is there a Wisdom Central in the universal consciousness, or do we need to search even higher on the ladder? This seems to be a step beyond just considering the universal consciousness to be a psychic internet of information.

In the past 40 years there have been at least two well known cases of guidance in this country, where apparently randomly selected individuals had multiple volumes of

thoughtful text channeled through them, in English, ready for publication. One is *A Course in Miracles*, brought to light through two New York psychologists in the 1960's. The other is a series of papers and books channeled through a California woman named Jane Roberts by a being named Seth, also in the sixties. Between them they have sold over a million volumes and have led to study groups around the world. *Miracles* has a strong Christian flavor, and presents an intensive spiritual training program focusing on love and the presence of the divine. Seth discusses transcendence, altered states of consciousness, and different realities. One physicist (Norman Friedman) believes that Seth's concepts are consistent with modern quantum physics ideas.

Too much material, too little time. In the longer, deluxe tour, we might visit some other stops such as the extension of quantum physics to the nonphysical world, some well-documented studies of reincarnation, and psychokinesis or mind/matter interactions. Maybe another time.

For now, I'd like to summarize with three rhetorical questions.

Summation

1. How can we probe this vast subject for ourselves?

First, I've suggested a few books on the sheet I distributed. Second, you can do your own experiments such as I described in remote viewing. Sheldrake discusses several in his books. Of course, you first need to unlock your thinking from the current scientific paradigm. That's the hardest step, because it's a very attractive and comfortable paradigm.

If you set upon your own path of exploration, let me offer one caveat. One of the functions of the conscious mind is to keep us safe to function in the physical world. It drives us to find causes for things, and it even rewrites experience to fit present ideas and needs, to the extent of revising memories if necessary.

The conscious mind also resists our moving into an altered state of consciousness, such as when we enter intuitive or psychic activity. But it can be fooled -- for a while. In fact, we experienced "beginner's luck" in our own psychic experiences. We had very clear experiences the first time, before the conscious mind took control. It is very difficult to bypass the conscious mind on a regular basis. Thus the need for discipline and practice, as in meditation.

2. Can these subjects be treated with the scientific method?

I've tried to show that they are, right now, being addressed by a few competent scientists. I'm convinced we are at an early stage in understanding the nature of nonphysical reality. I expect the subject to be in standard textbooks within 25 years, inevitably followed by departments of consciousness at many universities. Perhaps my grandchildren will see the formation of a National Academy of Consciousness.

After one presentation, I asked Gary Schwartz whether his conclusions about the existence of an afterlife had shaken his strong belief in science. On the contrary, he said, he thinks it is just a matter of time before we develop instruments capable of measuring the subtle energies that underlie communication in the nonphysical world. Maybe, maybe not.

3. Why bother?

Life is busy enough. Why should I spend time trying to fathom the nonphysical world, if there is such a thing? Good question. I'd like to conclude with some thoughts from a scientist, philosopher, and economist named Chris Thomson.

Like many others in the field of consciousness, he speaks of the metaparadigm we are living in, 20th century science. The basic claims of this paradigm are that the physical world is primary, everything can be explained in terms of the physical, and there is probably no greater intelligence than ours.

These beliefs have consequences. One is the predominance of material values. Second is a tendency to ignore other ways of knowing such as intuition or telepathy. Third is a disregard for important content beyond current scientific boundaries.

His prescription is to value all forms of knowing, strive to develop the less familiar ways, and integrate them into your life. Not surprisingly, listen to your common sense. The use of all forms of knowing can also guide the way we practice science, health, and education. The result will be a fuller engagement with the whole world, leading to more open-mindedness, less exploitation of nature and people, and a richer life.

I'd like to finish with a quote from Albert Einstein. *There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is. I believe in the latter.*

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