

THE NATURE OF ANGELS

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READINGS

First, three readings about angels or spirit beings.

Hildegard of Bingen (11th Century): According to their nature, angels are invisible, but they take their bodies from the atmosphere, and appear visible in the human form to those they are sent to as messengers. They also adopt other human habits. They do not speak to humans with angelic tongues, but instead with words that can be understood.

St. Thomas Aquinas (13th Century): Angels do not need bodies for their own sake but for ours.

Emanuel Swedenborg (18th Century): By spirits, human beings have communication with the world of spirits, and through angels with heaven. Without these communications, people could not live at all. Our life entirely depends on this conjunction, so that if the spirits and angels were to withdraw, we would instantly perish.

One more reading, this one in the words of an apparent spirit being. It's reported by *Jane Roberts*, in 1970 in "The Seth Material". Seth, a channeled entity, is speaking about consciousness through Jane Roberts in a session on July 6, 1964.

Chemicals themselves will not give rise to consciousness or life. Your scientists will have to face the fact that consciousness comes first and evolves its own form... All the cells in the body have a separate consciousness. There is a conscious cooperation between the cells in all the organs, and between the organs themselves... Molecules and atoms and even smaller particles have a condensed consciousness. They form into cells and form an individual cellular consciousness. This combination results in a consciousness that is capable of much more experience and fulfillment than would be possible for the isolated atom or molecule alone. This goes on ad infinitum... to form the physical body mechanism. Even the lowest particle retains its individuality, and its abilities, through this cooperation, are multiplied a millionfold.

INTRODUCTION

My first paper for this group was a personal tour of the nonphysical universe. I summarized some of the evidence of a larger reality that Susan and I find compelling. I talked about our adventures in remote viewing, medical intuition, and psychic

mediumship. I also touched on afterlife studies, communications between humans and animals, and similar topics. Since my background is in applied science, I look at these subjects from the viewpoint of data.

Today I want to examine some of the data about angels along with some remarks about quantum physics and consciousness. I'll suggest how these subjects might fit together in a modern picture of reality. But first, angels.

Angels have been dismissed by most Western scientific and religious authorities since the scientific revolution some 300 years ago. That includes the modern branches of the Roman Catholic church which, in medieval times, saw angels as the way God governed the world. So, angels are currently out. They're spiritually incorrect.

And yet... a Time Magazine survey in the 1990's found that two thirds of Americans believed in the existence of angels, and a surprising one third felt their presence in their lives. It's hard to throw out all that data.

A tragic newspaper story four years ago got my attention. Six teenagers lost their lives in an automobile accident near Medina in December, 2000. One 14 year old girl named Katie survived. A month later she was interviewed when leaving the hospital. She said she saw *ladies in pretty white robes* touch everyone but her, moments after the accident. The story put quotation marks around not only Katie's remarks, but later around the word *angels*, when relating how the vision comforted the families. Quotation marks or not, I have no question she saw what she said she saw.

TRADITIONAL VIEWS

Although we most easily may connect angels with traditional Christianity, all cultures have contained beliefs in spirits beyond human life experiences, and the similarities are much greater than the differences. Spirits are common in Jewish and Muslim traditions, and they abound in Eastern religions and primitive cultures. A case can be made that many of the spirits or gods of polytheistic religions were assimilated into the monotheistic religions as angels.

Medieval scholars, with a mindset much like modern scientists, were drawn to classification and ranking of angels as to their importance in God's scheme. The most popular number was nine types of angels, usually arranged in three levels of seniority. This was first written down by Dionysius the Areopagite in the 5th century. He lived in Syria and influenced centuries of theologians, including St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. Another theologian of great influence was Hildegard of Bingen in the 11th century. Angels were an important part of her cosmology, although she preferred a circular organization instead of a hierarchical one. Those of you who study male and female differences are probably nodding in agreement.

There is a significant difference between the visions of scholars such as these three and the experiences of millions of contemporary Americans. The scholars were concerned with the overall organization of the universe as they knew it, and the mechanism for transmission of God's will to humans. Angels were viewed as messengers and part of the cosmic government structure. In contrast, individuals usually feel a personal guidance or protection.

I want to be cautious in talking about the governing function. Perhaps I should say "suggesting" instead. In all traditions there is a common notion of free will for humans. That's why the idea of bad or shadow angels is important. We receive good, constructive suggestions as well as bad temptations, as did Dr. Faust in the legend. We must choose.

INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES

Most of the personal experiences of angels are about protection from injury or death in exceptional circumstances, attributed to the intervention of guardian angels. The most common experience is an intuitive message or feeling to duck just before a bullet comes our way, or to apply the brakes just before another car pulls into our path. It's reasonable to call these things good luck, and leave it at that... whatever you mean by good luck.

However, a smaller, but still very large number of people actually have experienced the presence of a spirit being, and some have had conversations with these beings. People who have such encounters often have no personal religious practice. That is, the experience of angels is spiritual, not religious. It's not associated with beliefs.

Most of the relevant research studies of experiences with angels or spirit beings in the last forty years have been about near-death experiences. There are hundreds of books and papers on this subject. These accounts are about the experiences of people who have survived after their heart has stopped for several minutes.

Perhaps the most well-respected person in our time to record these experiences is the late Elisabeth Kubler Ross, psychiatrist and author of *On Death and Dying*, whose life work was to assist the dying, over 20,000 individuals. Writing about terminally ill patients, she said, "All of these patients have experienced a floating out of their physical bodies, associated with a great sense of peace and wholeness. Most were aware of another person who helped them in their transition to another plane of existence." In an interview in 1992, she summarized her experience of death. "I don't believe. I know. I know that life does not stop at death. That's all. It is not a question of believing something but of knowing."

A few people in recorded history have claimed to have extensive contact with angels beyond occasional visions during crises or near-death experiences. The clear winner for duration was Emanuel Swedenborg, who had daily conversations with angels the last 27

years of his life, which ended in 1772. He carefully recorded all these conversations. Swedenborg was far from a lonely outsider. In fact, he was one of the towering geniuses of the European enlightenment: a mining engineer who wrote the first major text on mineralogy, a member of the Swedish parliament, a medical researcher, a theologian, and writer of dozens of books. Along the way, he designed an aircraft and machines for his country's military. He is revered by members of the Christian sect known as Swedenborgians to this day.

Swedenborg believed, through his conversations with angels, that we are spirits with bodies while on earth. After death, our spirits continue. He also taught that spirits exist in communities of similar values. They have busy existences, and are not always hovering about living people. They are particularly active with newborn children and at the time of death, and are available for guidance when asked. An important part of his message is the notion of free will -- that we are continually required to make choices during life on earth. But our physical life is just one layer of our existence.

Many others have reported conversations with angels, though not as long as Swedenborg's 27 years. Perhaps the most celebrated is Joan of Arc, who had two years of conversations with angels before her untimely end. She was advised to enter battle to save France in 1429, and she proceeded to do just that, at 17 years old.

SETH

One way people have experienced communications from spirit beings is through channeling, a popular source of instructional texts in the last fifty years. No doubt, some of the accounts are fabrications, at least in part. They are part of the so-called "New Age" phenomena that include a lot of silliness along with the profound. That is, it is both spiritual and commercial, like much of traditional religion. Channeling became a publishing success with two special works of 1960's America: *A Course in Miracles*, and the *Seth* books. Both are claimed to be channeled through the unlikely authors from spirit beings. The Course in Miracles has a strong Christian flavor, while the Seth books have a more scientific viewpoint. These books have sold millions of copies and are widely studied around the world. Whether or not we should pay attention to these sources, or even the Gospels for that matter, seems to come down to this. If there are spirit beings among us, why would they not see that a book of guidance is written, if it is needed? I quoted Seth on consciousness at the beginning of this talk, and will make a few comments on him.

Seth is the name of a nonphysical being that was channeled in the 1960's and 70's in Elmira, New York by a young woman named Jane Roberts, a poet and writer. Twice a week, for fifteen years, Seth spoke through Jane, while she was in a deep trance, or altered state of consciousness, and her husband wrote it all down. In many cases, other people attended the sessions, and some are recorded on audio tape and video. This led to 50 volumes of Seth material that are the basis of study groups around the world to this day. Over three million

copies of the Seth books have been sold. The material is quite remarkable.

Seth describes himself as a spirit entity with a teaching mission. He has lived on the earth plane in a number of incarnations, male and female. He speaks of consciousness, scientific theories, reincarnation, physical and psychological health, planes of existence, the meaning of time in different worlds, and hundreds of other subjects. He speaks in detail of the "inner self" of our personalities, that exists apart from our physical existence on the earth plane. In many ways, he outlined concepts in the 1960's that have become central to the extension of quantum physics into consciousness in the 1980's. He frequently stressed that consciousness characterizes the larger world, and that our physical world is one of many projections of consciousness into physical reality. Norman Friedman, a contemporary physicist, has written of the parallels between Seth teachings and quantum physics.

QUANTUM PHYSICS

Before I attempt to put angels in a modern framework. I want to say a few words about extensions of quantum physics into the nonphysical world.

Quantum physics, as developed in the 20th century, is a remarkable intellectual endeavor. It started as a way to explain certain experiments indicating that fundamental units of matter and energy could be treated either as particles or waves, depending on the observer and the experiment. The resulting mathematical formulation is known as the wave equation. This essentially gives the probabilities of events yet to occur. The terminology is that the probabilities collapse into one actual event, but only when there is an observer.

The basic concept of quantum physics is well supported by experiment. For some time, physicists worked only with events on the scale of electrons and the simplest atom, hydrogen. The last fifty years have seen many extensions of the basic idea and many experiments. Inevitably some theoreticians have applied the ideas to the larger world, leading to such notions as parallel universes where certain probable events are played out in existences other than our familiar physical universe.

These last ideas are not mainstream, but they are creeping in, as theoretical physicists are essentially asking religious questions about nonphysical reality. There is a growing sense in some quarters that the larger universe, including the physical one, is inherently mathematical. That idea is not new, as the ancient Greek philosophers were inclined that way.

A few physicists have taken a considerable leap by postulating that the fundamental essence of the universe is consciousness. Our physical world is simply one manifestation of consciousness, essentially a projection on the physical plane of a larger, nonphysical entity. Seth used the analogy of the condensation of one's breath on a cold window pane to

describe our familiar physical world.

The exciting prospect is that these theories may eventually be testable. We are approaching a time when, against all expectations, theology may finally have a scientific basis. The two worlds of DesCartes may eventually become one.

WORKING MODELS OF REALITY

Traditional religions offer well-defined models of reality based mostly on ancient texts. Liberal religions, where I live, and the nonreligious, tend to reject traditional faith approaches as nonscientific, historically outdated, and authoritarian. We accept the human wisdom of figures such as Jesus, for example, because his teachings about behavior, except for the divine part, hold up well in the light of experience. We are likely to say that Jesus was exceptionally wise, just as Karl Jung and Einstein were exceptional. Strictly speaking, however, some of us might be uncomfortable with Jung's belief in a collective unconscious, or Einstein's belief, not in a personal God, but in a spirit manifest in the laws of the universe.

So we, i.e. the liberal religionists and the nonreligious, accept the teachings of Jesus but not his God-centered model of reality -- the source he claimed for the teachings. But what is our model? The central belief system of the modern educated world is physical science, whether or not we have much scientific training.

But what about religious questions? Contemporary science provides little basis for answering questions such as how the universe is organized beyond what our telescopes tell us, why are we born only to die, what is our purpose on earth, and on what basis should we make ethical choices about life and death. These eternal questions simply will not go away. I believe that science -- that is, a rational approach to life -- will eventually open these persistent questions to our understanding. But not the science of 2005.

Since I've climbed out on a limb, I might as well go a bit further and outline our working model of reality. To start, I believe that our familiar physical world, well described by contemporary science, is part of a much larger world which we call the nonphysical universe, mostly rejected by today's scientists. Yet, there is substantial evidence of this nonphysical world in phenomena ranging from simple intuition to controlled laboratory experiments. In between are volumes of experiential and anecdotal accounts of interactions between the physical and nonphysical realms. Many accounts are intrinsic to the ancient wisdom traditions. In the next two brief sections, I will comment on the notions of holarchies and parallel universes.

HOLARCHIES

One model of the universe that accounts for much of the nonphysical data is the idea of holarchies, a word popularized by the philosopher Ken Wilber. Holarchies are systems that

are nested within higher level systems like Russian dolls, each held together and energized by some form of consciousness, for lack of a better word. A holarchy is more than the sum of its parts by virtue of its consciousness. One can think of consciousness as a glue or energy that binds the system together.

A human being is a holarchy that is composed of smaller and simpler systems known as organs and cells. In turn, cells have components that are even simpler, and so on down through molecules and atoms and beyond. A general oversight is provided by the human brain, but it is not continuous nor dominant. For example, cells know how to obtain nutrients and expel waste without the brain getting involved in the details. The brain becomes involved when the whole system requires it. The language of communication, as far as we know, is through chemical messengers such as hormones, and electrical impulses. Our brains rely on the subsystems knowing what to do in normal operation, and it is unlikely that brains attempt to communicate directly with atoms within the cells. In fact, they probably don't have a suitable language to do so.

Going up the ladder of the physical universe, human families, clans, and belief groups form larger holarchies that communicate in ways beyond simple language. For instance, at the family level, it is well known that identical twins, mothers and children, or long-time partners sometimes obtain intuitive and immediate messages over great distances when one is injured. Jung's concept of the collective unconscious extends this idea to humankind in general. Rupert Sheldrake, the biologist I discussed in my first paper, speaks of morphic fields that connect us, and other living beings, in ways that allow us to develop our species characteristics and inter-communication.

Higher on the ladder of physical complexity, we humans receive a variety of communications from our environment and the planet as a whole in language as familiar as weather changes or as rare as earthquakes and tsunamis. Sometimes we pay attention, and sometimes we don't. We certainly get strong messages when our actions endanger the health of our environment and planet. Note that we do not need to invoke the idea of a God of all the universe to pay attention to our ecosystems.

What about holarchies greater than planet earth? Our solar system, our galaxy, and the universe beyond? If you agree with the scheme so far, it is logical that there are higher and higher levels of consciousness with the ability to communicate within these levels, but probably with very limited ability to speak directly to humans, just as we can not speak directly to the atoms in our bodies.

PARALLEL UNIVERSES

The idea of holarchies structuring our physical universe, with multiple levels of consciousness, can explain a lot of the nonphysical data available to us. It is an attractive

scheme for explaining nonphysical interactions among humans, or between humans and animals, or between humans and the environment. But it falls short of explaining things such as communications from the afterlife or reincarnation, to name just two well-studied phenomena. In order to delve into these things, we need to consider the idea of parallel universes, where our familiar physical plane is just one of many universes existing together.

Parallel universes are a tough subject, to be sure. We live and act in a physical universe and have no capacity other than inference and speculation as to any others. Our words limit us. But we keep trying. The religions of the world attempt to do this by invoking some concept of God or Gods. These traditional religious schemes are rooted in earlier times, before much, if any, of the relevant scientific data were known. Also, they tend to be anthropomorphic, projecting human characteristics onto the deities. In a similar way, perhaps, simple cells sense that they are simply part of a larger group of cells instead of something as complex as the human body with a much more elaborate consciousness. That is, we humans naturally picture the universe as human-like, while cells may picture it as cell-like.

What about interventions in our physical world from other sources of consciousness in the nonphysical universe? I believe that angels might be seen as a form of intervention that could make sense to many humans, whether their human-like form was imposed from the outside or from our own minds. Spectacular interventions from nonphysical sources occur infrequently, perhaps when most needed. These include unexplainable miracles and channeled texts, for example. Maybe the resurrection of Jesus was such an intervention. And why not? The resurrection story certainly underlined his important teachings, which have become codified in the human institution of Christianity.

SUMMARY

I certainly am not able to say there are beings known as spirits or angels who have human forms. However, millions of people have received important nonphysical communications in languages they understand, and they often have experienced a being with a more-or-less human form. Whether the form is created by their minds or by the nonphysical communication source is a minor issue. The major issue is the communication itself.

I do believe there exist higher -- and lower -- levels of consciousness than our own. This seems to be a consistent and simple explanation for numerous observations and human experiences -- data that just don't fit in the current scientific paradigm of space, time, and matter. These experiences include spectacular interventions as well as simple, everyday intuitive information.

The higher levels of consciousness intervene in our affairs from time to time through some means of communication we can understand, similar to the brain's oversight of the organs in our bodies. The traditional concept of angels or spirit beings as messengers fits this

model.

The communications arrive when needed, sometimes to protect us, sometimes to heal or teach us. They are transmitted intuitively for the most part. In much rarer cases, perhaps at times of greatest need, the nonphysical communications come in more specific and unusual forms: channeled texts, visual apparitions, or so-called miracles.

These higher levels of consciousness do not intervene most of the time for most of us, and we can choose to pay attention or disregard them. Their presence does not imply a fatalistic character to life on earth. Far from it. All traditions and our human experience teach that we must continually make choices. Some choices may be better informed than others if we pay attention to our intuition. To our common sense.

A POSTSCRIPT

I appreciate your courtesy in listening to my thoughts on angels, science, and a sampling of miraculous interventions from the nonphysical universe. Especially the many in this audience who are long-time skeptics of anything supernatural. If you wish to pursue these ideas for yourself, I recommend a three-step process.

First, decide whether there is anything in your own experience that supports the notion of a nonphysical universe beyond the limits of today's scientific explanations.

Second, form a hypothesis. Look for ways to prove to yourself whether such things exist. Do a simple test. Do an experiment. My first paper gave some of our personal experiences in steps one and two.

Third, rethink your own model of reality to include what you have discovered in steps one and two, that is, your data. If you get this far, you will be well along a voyage of exploration.

Finally, please give us a paper on your adventure!

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