



REFLECTIONS

Nonlocal Mind: Curing the Fear of Death

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Nonlocal
Mind
Consciousness
Myths
Brain
Soul
Subtle worlds

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to critique the contemporary scientific reduction of mind to brain, a dogma which is shown to be philosophically unsound and empirically unproven. The world of physical phenomena is understood to be encompassed by other subtle transphysical worlds accessed after death of the physical body.

Make no mistake: the fear of death is humanity's Great Disease, the terror that has caused more suffering throughout history than all the physical diseases combined. Nonlocal mind is a Great Cure for this affliction, because it assures us that the most essential aspect of who we are cannot die, even though the physical body perishes.¹

—Larry Dossey

The modern myth of consciousness

"To begin at the beginning, we should remind ourselves of some simple conceptual truths...It is not the brain that is conscious or unconscious, but the person whose brain it is."²

In an article entitled 'Consciousness and the Mythologies of Society,' pioneering psychologist Stanley Krippner wrote, "we are called upon, individually and collectively, to change the myths that are leading us toward extinction"³ One of these destructive myths, which has gone largely unquestioned in contemporary culture, is that 'mind is what the brain does.' Psychiatrist Stan Grof has outlined how this modern myth has led to the "massive denial of death" in Western industrial civilization:

According to Western neuroscience, consciousness is an epiphenomenon of matter, a product of the physiological processes in the brain, and thus critically dependent on the body. The death of the body, particularly of the brain, is then seen as the absolute end of any form of conscious activity. Belief in the posthumous journey of the soul, afterlife, or reincarnation is usually ridiculed as a product of

wishful thinking of people who are unable to accept the obvious biological imperative of death.⁴

Today most scientists share this view and the majority of the neuroscientific community believe in it as fervently and tenaciously as any religious dogma in the past. American author Richard Grossinger has warned: "The notion that consciousness must reduce entirely to functions and fluctuations of the brain, hence of matter...is not some transparent verity or impartial statute. It is propaganda."⁵ Grof made the further, generally unrecognised, observation:

Very few people, including most scientists, realize that we have absolutely *no proof* that consciousness is actually produced by the brain and not even a remote notion how something like that could possibly happen. In spite of it, the basic metaphysical assumption remains one of the leading myths of Western materialistic science and has profound influence on our entire society (*emphasis added*).⁶

The metaphysical absence

The reduction of mind, along with the denial of soul and spirit has dominated much of contemporary culture generating what historian, Theodore Roszak, described as "the despair born of diminished consciousness."⁷ Adherents of this harsh secularization of consciousness proclaim the universe to be mindless – devoid of soul, spirit, purpose or intelligence. Biologist Jacques Monod famously proposed the "postulate of objectivity" in his influential 1972 book, *Chance and Necessity*. "The

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2024.103074>

Received 9 October 2024; Accepted 16 October 2024

Available online 24 October 2024

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scientific attitude,” said Monod, “implies what I call the postulate of objectivity—that is to say, the fundamental postulate that there is no plan, that there is no intention in the universe.” For Monod this is “the essential message of science,” that scientific reasoning is founded on the firm belief in the “uncaring emptiness of the universe.”⁸

Philosopher Mary Midgley has commented on Monod’s postulate, “This modern claim is, of course, chiefly intended to get rid of God, but it is just as fatal to the rest of life around us.”⁹ It has spawned the existential crisis and ecological devastation of the modern world. Cultural historian, Richard Tarnas, concludes: “We live in a world in which mainstream, conventional modern science has essentially voided the cosmos of all intrinsic meaning and purpose.”¹⁰

The metaphysical absence and loss of transcendent awareness is widespread in contemporary society. Yet this dominant humanist/scientific view that there can be no such thing as consciousness beyond the human brain has been exposed and dismissed by Oxford philosopher Peter Hacker as so much conceptual confusion, prevalent amongst the neuroscientific community with adherents committing major philosophical category errors and basically talking nonsense.

On the current neuroscientist’s view, it is the brain that thinks and reasons and calculates and believes and fears and hopes. In fact, it is human beings who do all these things, not their brains and not their minds. I don’t think it makes any sense at all to talk about the brain engaging in psychological or mental operations.¹¹

As well as the conceptual and philosophical problems of the reductionist claim, there is also a massive body of experimental evidence that continues to grow supporting the nonlocality of consciousness. As consciousness researcher and author, Stephan Schwartz reports:

The evidence that consciousness is fundamental and enduring is just going to keep accumulating. It is not a question of whether it will be addressed, only of how long the old physicalist paradigm hangs on.¹²

Subtle worlds right here

While Bennet and Hacker see the gap between brain and consciousness as an illusion for linguistic and semantic reasons, and the neuroscientists see it as non-existent because they have conflated the two realms and squeezed out psyche or soul, Nobel prize-winning neurobiologist, George Wald, expresses humility in the face of the mystery of consciousness.

I have spent most of my scientific life studying the mechanism of vision... One can put together everything we have learned, and add to it everything that workers in this area hope to learn; and none of it comes anywhere near, or even aims in the direction of what it means to see. That is the problem of consciousness... Seeing—the event in consciousness—*seems to lie in another universe, unapproachable by science (emphasis added)*.¹³

Perhaps this is because science is limited to dealing only with a universe that can be measured, while the “event in consciousness” is immaterial and cannot be measured. What enables us to “see” exists within *another order of reality*—‘elsewhere’—yet paradoxically in the ‘*here and now*.’ The 20th century philosopher, P.D. Ouspensky, in his magisterial work, *Tertium Organum*, makes the vital distinction between our physical world and another world *right here* which encompasses it.

We may say—not as an assumption, but as an affirmation—that the world of physical phenomena in itself represents the section, as it were, of another world, existing *right here*, and the events of which are proceeding *right here*, but invisibly to us... Therefore we have a full right to regard the visible phenomenal world as a section of some other infinitely more complex world, manifesting itself at a given moment in the first one.¹⁴

Author and philosopher Eric Weiss advances a similar view, known

as the Doctrine of the Subtle Worlds, which “was held by all premodern civilizations” and holds that the physical world is a small cross-section of the real world: “...the real world is composed of several different, separate but partially overlapping realms of being, each with its own unique characteristics...” Weiss points out that

The physical is only a small part of the actual. We have fallen in to the idea that what is ultimately real is that which scientists can measure. But to assume ...that measurements reveal the ultimate foundations of reality is foolish.¹⁵

For Weiss the world described by science is not the real world:

And if we pull out of scientific trance, and actually look at the real world of our experience, we can see that it is pervaded through and through by transphysical worlds.¹⁶

Weiss notes that we already live in multiple worlds without really paying attention to them. For example, whilst reading a paper, a person might start day-dreaming and imagining something they want to do or see. They are imagining another world and their attention might get completely absorbed into it so that it becomes like a dream. Weiss sees these many imaginary worlds as real worlds perceived through our ‘imaginal body’ which we never leave even when we are awake. Just by shifting our attention we are accessing subtle worlds. When we dream at night we are shifting into the subtle body that is always here all the time. When we ‘die,’ we die into our various subtle bodies by letting go of the physical one.¹⁷ That realm of the subtle bodies – the imaginal realm – is *real* and interpenetrates all aspects of life, giving it life and meaning; and while it may not be approachable by science, it has been approached since the dawn of time by human beings in the guise of artist, seer, and especially the shaman, who has undertaken the magical flight into other potent worlds on behalf of their tribe.

A refocussing of consciousness

Austrian mystic and spiritual philosopher, Rudolph Steiner also ‘saw’ that world we enter through the portal of death encompasses the physical world:

This ...world actually always livingly surrounds us in our sensory existence, although it is not discernible to someone who is strongly attached to the life of the senses because he is insufficiently attentive to it.¹⁸

The materialist fear of personal annihilation at death is not justified by Steiner:

When someone passes through the gate of death, he does not have a lack of consciousness but lives initially in a consciousness that is much richer and more full of content than the consciousness here in physical life...what a person carries across the threshold of death does indeed have a wider consciousness.¹⁹

With death there is simply a refocussing of consciousness, and an expansion into one’s wider, deeper, broader self. This post-mortem expansion of awareness was reported by researcher and author Rosalind Heywood in her book, *The Infinite Hive: A Personal Record of Extra-Sensory Experiences*. Initially she was sceptical regarding survival after death of the body; yet her unexpected meeting with an old friend, Vivian, recently deceased but now “most joyfully and most vividly alive,” forced her to re-consider:

He conveyed in some fashion so intimate that the best word seems to be communion, pretentious though that sounds, that he had been entirely mistaken in expecting extinction at death. On the contrary, he now had scope, freedom and opportunity beyond his wildest dreams. The emphasis was not merely on being alive but on this magnificent expansion of opportunity.²⁰

The discarnate populace

Steiner points out that those of us in incarnation need to be more aware of the discarnate populace:

We must learn to regard the dead not as people who are dead but as those who live and act creatively among us, just as we live together with those who live in a physical body.”²¹

Steiner was delivering his lectures during the first world war when thousands of young men were losing their lives *en masse* on both sides. He was concerned about the wellbeing of those discarnate young men, suddenly waking up, most likely very confused, after losing their lives:

In a time such as ours, we must be especially conscious that it is necessary to bridge the abyss that in a materialistic age increasingly opens up between the human souls that live incarnated here in a physical body and those that have already passed through the gate of death.²²

Richard Grossinger goes further: “The dead must be consulted. The dead can no longer be allowed to slip away. The dead *must not* be neglected. Despite what has happened they are still members of our community.”²³ This of course echoes the spiritual culture of indigenous peoples who since time immemorial have communicated with their dead usually via their tribal shamans. Grof points out that “Pre-industrial societies...seemed to agree that death was not the ultimate defeat and end of everything, but an important transition.”²⁴

The ‘dead’ are not dead. In fact we all make a category mistake when we say ‘X has died’ when in fact X has *not* died. ‘X has died’ suggests and implies extinction of that person. Yet it is their physical body that *has* died. It is discarded, perhaps like an old worn out article of clothing that is no longer of use. When its owner wakes up, the soul is clothed in its new ‘resurrection’ body as it prepares to embrace its “magnificent expansion of opportunity” and continue its journey into eternity.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Barry Cottrell: Writing – original draft.

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