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Jack Hunter

Introduction: Taking Experience Seriously

Jack Hunter

Consciousness is one of the great mysteries of contemporary science and philosophy (Nagel 2012:35), and is currently undergoing something of a resurgence of interest as a field of investigation (Zahavi 2005:3). Many commentators have noted, however, that the bulk of research into the nature of consciousness proceeds according to a fairly restricted idea of the types of approach that can be fruitfully applied to it (Jahn & Dunne 1997:204). Recently emerging as chief amongst the dominant approaches is the neurophysiological approach, which attempts to understand consciousness as either identical with, or as an epiphenomenon of, physical brain function (Churchland 1982). This kind of reductionism, often referred to as ‘mind/brain identity theory,’ that is the idea that consciousness and brain-function are synonymous, is becoming increasingly popular in both the professional academic literature and the popular science literature (Searle 1998:xii-xiii). Such reductionist accounts of consciousness have proliferated to the extent that philosopher and neurologist Raymond Tallis has coined the term ‘neuromania’ to refer to the belief that contemporary neuroscience proves that consciousness is identical with brain function and that free will is an illusion (Tallis 2012). The current debate over consciousness, and in particular the relation of consciousness to the brain (the mind/body problem), is therefore torn over the question of whether consciousness can be reduced solely to the functioning of the brain or whether it might be something more than this.

Whether consciousness can be reduced to brain function or not, however, the popular emphasis on quantitative, experimental, and neurophysiological approaches to the study of consciousness is not representative of the full spectrum of possible approaches. There are other means of investigation. Indeed, writing as long ago as the early Twentieth Century, psychologist William James (1842-1910) stressed the fact that any model of the universe that fails to take into account the complexities of subjective experience will ultimately

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be doomed to incompleteness (James 2004 [1902]:335). Echoing this sentiment more recently, Thomas Nagel has written that ‘[t]he existence of consciousness seems to imply that the physical description of the universe, in spite of its richness and explanatory power, is only part of the truth’ (Nagel

2012:35), the very existence of subjective experience implies that a purely physical explanation of consciousness is not possible. Consciousness is, after all, fundamentally entwined with experience (Blackmore 2005:5), and it would seem counterintuitively detrimental to attempt to divorce experience from the study of consciousness. Indeed the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology characterizes consciousness specifically as ‘the *experience* of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, awareness of the external world, and...self-awareness’ (Colman 2009:164). In the words of philosopher David Chalmers (1995) experience itself is the ‘hard problem of consciousness.’ It would seem reasonable, therefore, to take subjective experience seriously, and to explore what experience itself might tell us about the nature of consciousness.

Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches

Qualitative methodologies, defined as ‘forms of data collection and analysis which rely on understanding, with an emphasis on meaning’ (Scott & Marshall 2009:618), can provide a route towards investigating consciousness as experienced, and can reveal many aspects unobtainable through neurophysiological investigation. For example, an fMRI scan could not express the redness of a red apple, or the blueness of a blue sky, let alone what it is like to experience pleasure, pain, love or hate. This is not to deny the relevance and importance of quantitative neurophysiological research, rather it is a reminder that there is more in the way of richness and meaning to the experience of consciousness than is often presented in neurophysiological accounts. Again, echoing William James, the richness and significance of experience are just as much a part of the universe as any physical object, and as such demand to be taken seriously. In order to examine subjective experience it is necessary to take a qualitative, phenomenological approach.

The phenomenological method was first developed in a systematic way by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) as a means to investigate the ‘structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.’ In order to investigate first-person experience in a meaningful way, Husserl developed the notion of *epoché*, a process of observation whereby all assumptions about a phenomenon are ‘bracketed out’ in order to understand it as it is experienced (Ashworth 1996:2), as ‘pure consciousness,’ without a priori conclusions about the

ultimate nature of the experience, or biased interpretations of it (Heath 2000:56). Robert Sharf, for instance, writes of the aim of phenomenological bracketing in the study of religion:

If we can bracket out our own presuppositions, temper our ingrained sense of cultural superiority, and resist the temptation to evaluate the truth claims of foreign traditions, we find that their experience of the world possesses its own rationality, its own coherence, its own truth (Sharf 2000:268)

The phenomenological approach, therefore, aims to understand experience (or religion, culture, love, the paranormal, and so on) as experienced and understood by the experiencer, in its own terms. This is the qualitative nature of consciousness, what it feels like to experience consciousness.

Hillary S. Webb has used the analogy of ‘clock systems’ and ‘cloud systems,’ first employed by the philosopher of science Karl Popper, to illustrate the different aspects of consciousness illuminated by quantitative and qualitative approaches respectively. Quantitative approaches focus on the ‘clock systems’ of consciousness, which provide ‘insight into, and information about, the physiological and behavioral implications of consciousness,’ factors that can be recorded and analysed using the standard methods of experimental science. Such research is useful in demonstrating the physiological correlates of consciousness, but ultimately cannot provide insight into the lived experience of consciousness. Research on the ‘cloud systems,’ referring to those ‘aspects of consciousness that are unpredictable and free flowing,’ however, can begin to fill in the gaps left in our understanding by the quantitative methods (Velmans 2007a:724; Webb 2012:7). Qualitative data begin to fill the gaps left in the neurophysiological account. Without qualitative descriptions of conscious experiences the physiological description of brain states will forever remain incomplete.

The Explanatory Gap

The neurophysiological (quantitative) and phenomenological (qualitative) accounts of consciousness are two sides of the same phenomenon. Firsthand, subjective conscious experiences are undoubtedly corre-

lated with neurophysiological brain activity (Rees et al. 2002), and yet a so-called 'explanatory gap' persists because it is not yet clear how physical brain activity can be associated with subjective experience. In his famous article 'What is it Like to Be a Bat?' (1974), Thomas Nagel argues that:

...the subjective character of experience...is not captured by any of the familiar, recently devised reductive analyses of the mental, for all of them are logically compatible with its absence (1974:436)

According to the dominant materialist view, physical matter is essentially inert, possessing no form of consciousness, which, naturally, is incompatible with the phenomenon of conscious experience. This problem is, therefore, a deep one, and runs at the core of the debate over consciousness: how can physical matter (such as the stuff from which we are made) have subjective experience?

Max Velmans (2007b) recognises two distinct approaches to the issue of the relationship between matter and subjective consciousness, which he labels discontinuity and continuity theories. Discontinuity theories essentially take the physical materialist approach and suggest that consciousness emerged through the evolution of sufficiently complex biological systems (nervous systems and brains), and consequently is only found in sufficiently complex organisms, hence it is discontinuous in the universe - occurring only where complex organisms are found. Of course, this still leaves open the question of how and why matter, once it reaches a sufficiently complex state of organisation, becomes conscious. The alternative view, which Velmans feels to be the most parsimonious, is the continuity model, according to which consciousness is a fundamental property of matter itself. This is a perspective that might be termed panpsychism. Velmans writes that according to this view:

...all forms of matter have an associated form of consciousness, although in complex life forms such as ourselves, much of this consciousness is inhibited. In the cosmic explosion that gave birth to the universe, consciousness co-emerged with matter and co-evolves with it. As matter became more differentiated and developed in complexity, consciousness became correspondingly differentiated and complex...Its emergence, with the birth of the

universe, is neither more nor less mysterious than the emergence of matter, energy, space and time (Velmans 2007b:279)

Currently the explanatory gap that exists between the physical structure and functioning of our brains and the subjective nature of our conscious experiences remains open, though there are models that attempt to close it. Only time will tell which model will prove to be correct (if indeed any current model is correct). For the time being, however, research must continue, not just into the physiological structure of the brain but also into the nature of subjective experience in all of its varied forms, in the hope that such research might contribute to the solution of these long-standing problems.

Taking Experience Seriously: What Are The Consequences?

Taking experience seriously, and using it as a means to approach the nature of consciousness may present the researcher with novel aspects of consciousness that would otherwise go unnoticed. Indeed, there are many peculiar quirks of subjective experience that might point us towards unexpected facets of the nature of consciousness. For example, what might near-death and out-of-body experiences tell us about the nature of consciousness? What might the trance experiences of shamans and mediums, the visionary experiences of mystics, or paranormal experiences tell us about the nature of consciousness? What does the psychedelic experience tell us about consciousness? There are countless such questions, and we will briefly explore a few of them over the next couple of pages.

Near-Death Experiences (NDEs)

Near-death experience (NDE) researchers Sam Parnia and Peter Fenwick have argued that the NDE poses a significant challenge to the notion that consciousness and thought are 'produced by the interaction of large groups of neurones or neural networks' (2002:9 emphasis added). They write:

...the fact that [experiences recalled during periods of severely compromised cerebral functioning and no electrical activity in the cerebral cortex and deeper brain structures] raises some questions regarding our current views on the nature of human consciousness (Parnia & Fenwick 2002:9)

Parnia and Fenwick suggest that the NDE experience opens up the debate over the nature of consciousness to alternative theories of the relationship between consciousness and the brain. As examples of alternative scientific models they list Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff's theory of consciousness as a quantum process within neuronal microtubules (Hameroff & Penrose 1996), Rupert Sheldrake's notion of consciousness as a 'morphic field' (Sheldrake 1987), and the dualist idea that 'mind or consciousness may actually be a fundamental scientific entity in its own right irreducible to anything more basic' (Parnia & Fenwick 2002:9). Whether consciousness is any of these things or something else entirely, however, the important thing to note in the context of the theme of this anthology is that taking the phenomenology of the near-death experience seriously demands a reconsideration of the dominant mind/brain identity theory of consciousness, rekindles debate, and opens up new avenues for scientific inquiry.

Trance Experiences

As an illustration of the kind of insights that can come from taking the experiences of trance mediums seriously we now turn to recent fascinating neuroimaging research conducted by Julio Fernando Peres and colleagues (Peres et al. 2012). During the practice of automatic writing (psychography), mediums claim to enter into a trance state during which their physical body comes under the influence of a discarnate entity, which then uses the medium's body to write out messages using a pen and paper. During the trance the medium experiences a state of dissociation whereby the physical movements of their body are no longer felt to be under their conscious control. The standard materialist scientific approach to such claims is dismissal, because, according to the dominant materialist paradigm, mediumistic phenomena are impossible, therefore automatic writing must be fraudulent. Nevertheless, Peres' research team did take the experiences of mediums seriously and used single photon emission computed tomography to scan the brain activity of ten automatic writers (five experienced, five less experienced), while in trance. The research findings have been summarised as follows:

The researchers found that the experienced psychographers showed lower levels of activity in the left hippocampus (limbic system), right superior temporal gyrus, and the frontal lobe regions of the left anterior cingulate and right

precentral gyrus during psychography compared to their normal (non-trance) writing. The frontal lobe areas are associated with reasoning, planning, generating language, movement, and problem solving, perhaps reflecting an absence of focus, self-awareness and consciousness during psychography, the researchers hypothesize. Less expert psychographers showed just the opposite — increased levels of CBF in the same frontal areas during psychography compared to normal writing. The difference was significant compared to the experienced mediums (Thomas Jefferson University 2012).

The implication here is that during the trance state of the experienced automatic writers, activity is reduced in the areas of the brain usually associated with reasoning, planning, language, movement and problem solving, suggesting that the medium's dissociative experience during trance is far from delusional or fraudulent. Furthermore, the researchers conducted an analysis of the complexity of the writing and found that, contrary to what would normally be expected, the complexity increased as the activity in the areas of the brain usually associated with such complex behaviours was reduced. This raises the question of how, if the brain's functioning was reduced, such complex writing was possible. The spiritist interpretation suggests that it was spirits doing to writing while the medium's consciousness was absent, and the data could indeed be read in this way. More cautiously, however, Andrew Newberg has suggested that this research 'reveals some exciting data to improve our understanding of the mind and its relationship with the brain' and calls for further research in this area (Thomas Jefferson University 2012). Again we see that taking experience seriously, in this case the trance experiences of mediums, instead of dismissing them as delusional or fraudulent, opens up new avenues for inquiry and provides tantalising insights into the relationship between consciousness and the body that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Psychedelic Experiences

Interestingly, a recent functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies of the effects of psilocybin (the active compound found in magic mushrooms), has revealed similar patterns of deactivation of certain brain regions while under the influence of the psychedelic compound. The study, conducted by Robin Carhart-Harris and colleagues (2011), found

decreases of cerebral blood flow in the thalamus and anterior and postulate cingulate cortex after the administration of psilocybin to research participants. The researchers also found that the magnitude of the decrease in blood flow was correlated with the intensity of the subjective psychedelic experience, leading to the conclusion that the results 'strongly imply that the subjective effects of psychedelic drugs are caused by decreased activity and connectivity in the brain's key connector hubs, enabling a state of unconstrained cognition' (Carhart-Harris et al. 2011:2138). The association of heightened subjective experience with decreased neurological activity certainly poses interesting questions about the link between consciousness and the brain. Indeed these findings, amongst others, have led some researchers to suggest a 'filter theory' of consciousness, as originally suggested by Henri Bergson (1859-1941), and borrowing from Aldous Huxley's (1894-1963) conception of the brain as a 'reducing valve' for consciousness (Luke & Friedman 2010; Luke 2012:99; Kastrup 2012; see also Carter 2012 for an overview of the filter/transmission model). This position suggests that rather than producing conscious experience the brain acts as a receiver of consciousness, so that when, under certain circumstances (such as mediumistic trance states, or while under the influence of psychedelics), brain activity is decreased so conscious experience is increased, or expanded (Kripal 2011:). Once again, taking the psychedelic experience seriously has provided surprising insights into potential models of mind/brain interaction.

This Issue

The papers contained within this issue take a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of conscious experience, but all are united in their attempt to take experience seriously as a valid subject for inquiry.

Rather than attempting to present a unified approach, it is the editor's hope that the different perspectives presented in this issue (from the mystical to the neurological), will provide the reader with thought provoking material that might inform them in the development of their own particular approach to this fascinating aspect of existence.

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Biography

Jack Hunter is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Bristol. His research takes the form of an ethnographic study of contemporary trance and physical mediumship in Bristol, focusing on themes of personhood, performance, altered states of consciousness and anomalous experience. In 2010 he established 'Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal' as a means to promote an interdisciplinary dialogue on issues of the paranormal. In 2010 he was awarded the Eileen J. Garrett Scholarship by the Parapsychology Foundation, and in 2011 he received the Gertrude Schmeidler Award from the Parapsychological Association and a research grant from the Society for Psychical Research. He is the author of *Why People Believe in Spirits, Gods and Magic* (2012), an introduction to the anthropology of the supernatural.

Experience and Studying the Paranormal

Charles F. Emmons & Penelope Emmons



There is a great deal of doubt in mainstream science about the appropriateness of scientific research on the 'paranormal,' ranging from healthy skepticism to ridicule. Even some (many? most?) scientists who dare to study the paranormal display at least a healthy degree of skepticism themselves. Some of this is no doubt a reaction to the attack from mainstream science. However, keep in mind that scientists in general, no matter how mainstream or anomalous their subject matter, have not only been trained in the methods of science, but have also been socialized mostly in a Western cultural context that privileges science as a way of knowing. Even the Western spirit mediums we studied (Emmons & Emmons 2003) tended to be skeptical of their own work, often looking for 'confirmations' that their readings were evidential instead of something they were just making up in their heads.

Therefore, it often takes some kind of dramatic personal experience for a scientist to get past a materialist mindset and to become open-minded enough and curious enough to look into the study of anomalies. My favorite account of such an experience is Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer's (2007:2-4) adventure with her daughter's harp. The expensive, handmade harp had been stolen at a theater in Oakland, California, where she played in a concert. Having failed to find it after extensive help from the police, and media, Mayer reluctantly agreed to a friend's suggestion that she contact a dowser (a practitioner who allegedly finds things, underground or elsewhere, by means of dowsing rods).

Her friend directed Mayer to the president of the American Society of Dowsers, whom she then called on the phone. From Arkansas, the dowser paused briefly, then told her that the harp was still in Oakland and asked her to send him a street map of the city. Two days after she sent the map, the dowser called her back and told her, 'It's in the second house on the right on D_____ Street, just off L_____ Avenue' (Mayer 2007:3). Mayer located the house, then gave the address to the police, who predictably told her that 'a tip' was not enough

grounds to get a search warrant. Besides, they said, surely the harp had been fenced out of the area by then.

At this point Mayer put up flyers in a two-block area around the house, offering a reward for the harp. 'It was a crazy idea...[and] I was embarrassed enough about what I was doing to tell just a couple of close friends about it' (Mayer 2007:3). Three days later a man called saying that the harp described on the flyer he'd seen outside his house matched exactly a harp his next-door neighbor had recently acquired. After two weeks of 'a series of circuitous phone calls' it was agreed that she would meet a teenage boy in a store parking lot. Sure enough, it was her daughter's harp. 'Twenty-five minutes later, as I turned into my driveway, I had the thought, This changes everything...I had to face the fact that my notions of space, time, reality, and the nature of the human mind were stunningly inadequate' (Mayer 2007:3-4).

After that she began to delve into the literature on anomalies and started to share experiences with her psychology colleagues and others at the University of California, Berkeley, and elsewhere. She died just after completing her book *Extraordinary Knowing: Science, Skepticism, and the Inexplicable Powers of the Human Mind* (Mayer 2007), the source for the above account.

Fortunately we have more than just 'anecdotal' evidence for scientists changing their values or interests based on personal experiences (and not just on their knowledge of research findings). In a survey of elite scientists, McClenon (1984:162) found that 'belief in ESP is more closely related to personal experience [with paranormal events] than to familiarity with the research literature on psi.' In other words, it may be that research is less convincing than personal experience when it comes to 'things that aren't supposed to happen' (deviant knowledge).

This does not surprise me. In my study of 91 UFO researchers (84 of whom had advanced degrees, including 76 doctorates), the most important single reason they gave for wanting to (daring to) study UFOs was thinking that they had had a UFO

experience themselves (Emmons 1997:48-54). Altogether 48% thought they had had an experience, and another 8% thought they might have. This contrasts with polls of the general population in which only between 5% and 14% thought they had seen a UFO.

Although some of these ufologists kept their work secret, most of them had undergone risks to their careers by conducting UFO research. It often takes some kind of powerful personal curiosity to be willing to buck the social control system in academe and government (not so much in business). As one of the UFO researchers told me ('Dr. X,' Emmons 1997:52-54), after he and his wife and at least one other witness had experienced a brightly-colored low-flying ferris-wheel-shaped object that drove them off the highway, he no longer doubted that UFOs existed; he just had to find out what they were.

Lest you think that an experience always carries the day ('seeing is believing'), I should point out that I had some amusing interviews with astronomers for my UFO study in which they told me that they did not believe in ESP or other anomalies, then proceeded to relate to me their own strange experiences. On another occasion I watched a tape of a man describing his disturbing nighttime visitation involving what he interpreted as a ghost, at the end of which he stated, 'And I don't even believe in ghosts.'

Mayer (2007:108, 113) relates that Hal Puthoff, on the last day of the CIA-sponsored program in remote viewing that he and Russell Targ worked on at SRI, thought to himself, 'I can't be doing this. These data can't be real; it's simply not possible.' But the evidence was too strong. He said, 'The problem lay with my beliefs.' I don't want to make too much of this psychological issue, because I still think that the main issue is social organizational (the interests of the scientific establishment and of those who benefit from it), but Puthoff's case is still interesting. It shows how being socialized to the dominant paradigm makes it difficult even for scientists who dare to do the research not to be super-skeptical.

Even studying how personal experience impacts scientists' willingness to study anomalies is easier for the sociologist in me to accept when I think about my own 'experience with experience.' Here are a couple of examples (see also Emmons and Emmons 2003:93-109).

Before the age of 19 I never thought that I had experienced anything paranormal, until I took a psychology course run by Professor John Fleming at Gannon College. Although I was an atheist at the time, and felt sure that the universe could be ex-

plained entirely by the normal laws of physics, I was astonished to hear fascinating accounts of research on ESP and PK. Instead of taking an 'it can't be; therefore it isn't' attitude, however, I thought, 'It shouldn't be, but it seems to be, so I'd better check it out.'

I decided to try a study of my own, one in PK (mind over matter). In the following summer I rolled 3 dice at a time for a total of over 200,000 up-faces, 'trying for' a 5 on each one. The results were hits 11/2 to 2 percent in excess of the expected value, with odds billions to one against this outcome for the size of the sample. Professor Fleming consulted with J.B. Rhine on my data sheets, who said they contained typical 'decline effects' (very cold streaks after very hot streaks). Fleming also had my dice tested (rolled in a machine) in a lab setting without me present, and the dice appeared slightly biased against fives, meaning that the odds against my results were even greater than expected.

That hooked me for life, I think, but my first actual sociological/anthropological study of the paranormal didn't come until about 18 years later, in my book *Chinese Ghosts and ESP: A Study of Paranormal Beliefs and Experiences* (1982), in which I used social scientific techniques to compare ghost experiences, among other things, in Western and Eastern cultures. I found that apparition experiences were very much the same phenomenologically, in spite of significant cultural differences in beliefs (Emmons 1982). For example, firsthand reports of apparition experiences in both cultures almost never occurred simultaneously with physical effects, in spite of strong beliefs in Chinese culture that ghosts often attack people physically.

Although I have had many other personal experiences that have boosted my curiosity, probably the most significant set of experiences got me interested in the research on spirit mediums in the United States (Emmons & Emmons 2003). Most of these experiences connect to the death of my mother in 1993 (Emmons & Emmons 2003:101-107). I got the impression that I was communicating with my mother after her death, at first hearing her voice in my left ear. I could have chalked it up to my imagination, except that there were many evidential aspects to the communication. For example, on several occasions it appeared that she would help me find lost objects, or warn me about little accidents that were about to happen if I didn't avoid them (like a bike u-turning right back toward me, which oddly happened twice within about two minutes, with different riders on different streets). The warning was 'watch out,' which

I heard internally a few seconds before each bicycle event. It got to the point that it seemed to me to be unscientific not to see some significance in such unusual occurrences.

Fortunately I still retain the skepticism to consider other interpretations (like clairvoyance rather than spirit communication). Such experiences may or may not convince anybody else, but they have been enough to stimulate me to study paranormal issues (probably at a cost to my career). I also never want to lose my skeptical side. After all, my curiosity addiction is not satisfied by 'believing' (I don't believe in belief; I believe in evidence, which includes personal experience), and accepting things without adequate evidence would be like cheating myself, or cheating at solitaire.

Another interesting experience took place while at college in 1964, although I thought strongly at the time that it was probably a hoax: a table-tipping demonstration (Emmons & Emmons 2003:137-138). At a cast party after our final performance, four of us sat around a card table with our hands on top (no thumbs underneath, it appeared). The table rose a good foot and a half before I dropped under the table to investigate. I could discover no tricks, although I suspected two people who had whispered something to each other over the table before we started.

Stephen Braude, philosophy professor at University of Maryland (Baltimore Campus), and a prominent writer in the field of paranormal research, also had a 'table-up séance' experience in graduate school. He told me that several factors made it seem genuine: it was his table, the participants were not 'jokers,' and it was in daylight. The memory of this experience, which he thought needed confronting, stayed with him, but he waited until he was safely tenured as a professor before becoming involved in research on such matters.

Robert Waggoner (2009:4-7), a researcher in the field of lucid dreaming, had his own experiences with lucid dreams, precognitive dreams, and visions of his 'inner advisor' by ages 11 and 12. Then he read books by Carlos Castaneda as a teenager and continued to have lucid dreams, learning to practice staying aware within such dreams, which is still a practical focus of his research today.

Russell Targ, laser physicist and remote viewing researcher, told me about his childhood interest in trick magic, which led to his experiencing apparently real ESP while engaging in his performance tricks. His curiosity over his personal experience led him to build an ESP teaching machine involving a 4-choice

option, with the target selected by a random-number generator. People could learn from feedback, knowing what it felt like when they were successful.

By contrast some researchers have become interested in anomalies without first having personal experiences to motivate them. Other strong motivators come from reading and from social influences from friends and family (some of whom may have had their own experiences). Reasons given by UFO researchers are similar (Emmons 1997:51). This also parallels the reasons for spirit mediums becoming socialized into their role (Emmons & Emmons 2003:210-217). In other words, in spite of the socialization process and social control system in mainstream science (and religion), there are other ways for people to become socialized to 'deviant' knowledge.

For example, Dean Radin (1997:300), psi lab researcher at IONS (Institute of Noetic Sciences), writes about his curiosity stemming from reading science fiction stories, something Russell Targ did as well. Radin says that people in his family, including himself, did not have paranormal experiences when he was young. He never had a conversion experience and has been hooked on the data only (Mayer 2007:226).

Radin did tell us at a meeting of the Society for Scientific Exploration, however, that he tends to have precognitive dreams as an adult. Once he had a dream that he would be in a car accident the following day. 'Not wanting to be in a car accident,' he said, he decided to take a very circuitous route to work the next day, one that he did not take ordinarily, but then he was rear-ended. I couldn't help speculating on how a New Ager or Spiritualist might interpret such an experience. For example, maybe the Universe was having fun with him, Dean Radin the big psi researcher, who conducts lab tests for precognition. It raises paradoxical questions about such things as whether the future is predetermined and whether one could change it based on prior knowledge.

Darlene Miller, Director of Programs at The Monroe Institute (TMI), told me about a blend of social influence, reading, and personal experiences in her background. Having been raised a fundamentalist Christian, and switching to atheism in college, she was later introduced to ideas from TMI by business associates who had attended the institute. This, plus contact with The Course in Miracles material, changed her perspective on things. The same associates led her to try reiki healing, with which she had a dramatic experience involving intense heat that took her pain away in ten minutes. After that she took the

Gateway experience from TMI and moved to TMI the following summer.

Robin Wooffitt, head of the Anomalous Experiences Research Unit, a sociological research department at the University of York, England, had early reading influences, somewhat like Dean Radin. As a child he was interested in comics, pop novels, horror films and things generally related to the occult. These led him to the paranormal and the supernatural. Although he recalled no anomalous experiences of his own as a youth, and only a couple of things in the past few years that 'could be data,' he told me that nowadays he is primarily very skeptical, having been more open to such things as a child.

Al Rauber and Garrett Husveth, two paranormal investigators in the United States, both said in a joint interview that their earliest influences came from reading. Al read a book on ghosts as a sophomore in high school, then read everything he could find on the paranormal, hauntings and ESP. Garrett said that he became interested in ghosts at age five or six, then read all that he could about parapsychology, EVP (electronic voice phenomenon), ghosts and hauntings. The two of them started working together in the late 1980s. Both of them seem more focused on investigative methodology than on any personal experiences they might have had.

Mark Nesbitt, historian and writer of the Ghosts of Gettysburg series (1991), told me that he had been interested in ghosts as a kid, and later as a park ranger in Gettysburg he would ask people if they had heard about ghosts on the battlefield or in the historic houses there. Of course the official position of the Park Service (and of the Visitor's Center in Gettysburg, I might add, where I spotted nary a book about ghost experiences or ghost folklore), has been to deny or ignore ghost experiences, probably out of needing to appear 'respectable' I should think. However, Mark, wanting to be a writer, began to record the many experiences people reported to him, and in recent years he has had some experiences of his own.

Back to academe, let me relate the background of four graduate students in the UK who were involved in studying the paranormal when I visited in 2008. Madeleine Castro, a PhD candidate at the University of York, England, said that she was curious about the unexplained from about age twelve, and she 'questioned the God thing.' Activities with other youths at renewal camps and around the campfire, including shared extraordinary experiences, contributed to her curiosity about anomalous experiences, which she now studies in a sociological frame.

Sarah Metcalfe, also at the University of York, whose research involves a sociological and medical approach to spirit mediumship, was originally introduced to the subject by her best friend who was a spirit medium. Sarah also attended a Spiritualist Church 'for entertainment' rather than as a regular member. She started out believing in mediumship but is now agnostic about it, nevertheless retaining a research interest.

Hannah Gilbert, another sociology graduate student at the University of York, told me that she had had no anomalous experiences as a child, but that she did have an interest in such things that was supported by her father, an academic psychologist. They even did some work together studying spiritual healing. Eventually she ended up doing sociological research on the subjective experiences of spirit mediums.

Another graduate student, name omitted for confidentiality, was interested from an early age due to her grandmother who practiced mediumship, astrology, and tarot-card reading. As an adult she helped run a community group that held workshops in these same subjects. Although her perspective has changed from her younger years, when she 'used to believe everything,' she ended up studying Internet communities involved in neopaganism and Wicca.

Before concluding this chapter on how experience spurs scientists into daring to research anomalous events, I should also point out that some people take the position that experience is actually more important than science, at least in terms of convincing people to accept the paranormal as real. Tami Simon, in the editorial introduction to *Measuring the Immeasurable: The Scientific Case for Spirituality* (2008:ix-x), states, 'I am not a person who needs science or research to convince me of the benefits of spiritual practice.' However, Simon continues to explain that science is useful for legitimating the use of spiritual practices in the work of medical professionals, and for refining such practices.

Paul Rademacher, director of The Monroe Institute, although supportive of the use of science at TMI, said to me that we tend to think that something is real if we can prove it by science, but experience comes first. In his case, when he had a construction accident as a young man, he had the experience of breaking through the pain and into a state of peace, in which he was surrounded by a being of light. Later, while in the ministry, he heard a clear, precise voice go off in his head, telling him of a book he must read. Through such spiritual guidance he ended up at TMI. Skip Atwater, also at TMI, had numerous

out-of-body experiences as a child. It was these experiences, plus his involvement with remote viewing in the military, that left him with little doubt about the reality of such phenomena.

Finally I am reminded of a Spiritualist who said to me, after hearing about this research of mine, 'Let's leave the scientists out of it.' As you might guess, I have no intention of doing that. However, as a (social) scientist, I am still very much interested in learning from people's subjective anomalous experiences.

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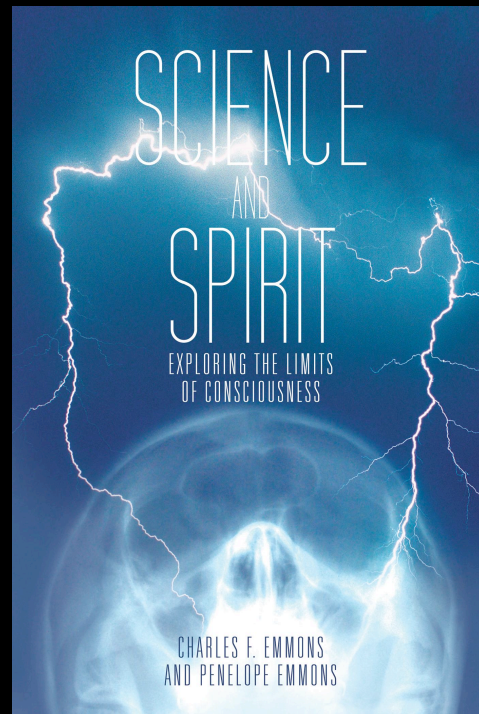
Biographies

Charles Emmons is a sociologist at Gettysburg College and author of books on spiritual and paranormal topics. His latest book, coauthored by his wife, Penelope Emmons, is *Science and Spirit: Exploring the Limits of Consciousness* (2012). They also collaborated on *Guided by Spirit: A Journey into the Mind of the Medium* (2003). Other publications by Charlie include



Chinese Ghosts and ESP: A Study of Paranormal Beliefs and Experiences (1982), and *At the Threshold: UFOs, Science and the New Age* (1997). **Penelope Emmons** is an ordained minister and medium. She has given spiritual counseling (readings) for more than twenty years. Penelope has a BS degree in Education and a Masters in Social Work from Temple University. She has a private counseling and coaching practice in Gettysburg, PA.

New Publication:



<http://www.scienceandnewage.com/science-and-spirit-exploring-the-limits-of-consciousness/>

Lord of the Flies: The Phenomenology of a Possession

Peter Mark Adams



There are few human phenomena that carry the complexity and ambiguity of possession: it challenges the notion of a unified, immutable self; of a facile distinction between “acting” and reality; of who or what is the source of one’s actions; even of humans as single isolated entities. (Cardena 1989)

If the eye could see the demons that people the universe, existence would be impossible.

Talmud, Berakhot 6

A comparison of the ‘inner experiences’ of people suffering from involuntary possession offers unique opportunities for cross-cultural investigation. By ‘inner experiences’ I mean those arising from states of “cognitive, empathetic engagement” (Bowie 2012) that typify healer-client relations, especially in the area of natural healing¹. Coherence across accounts dealing with similar cases and derived from a range of healers and their clients establishes a pool of experiences that can then be interrogated. Nevertheless, ‘inner’ accounts of possession will always seem fantastical, contrary to science and threatening to our notions of common-sense, personal identity and autonomy. And yet, it is only by exploring these subtler aspects of reality that we can make progress towards understanding the deeper significance of the phenomenon (as well as certain other anomalous experiences). From the perspective of practical experience possession manifests in five well-defined ways:

- (1) Infestation (indirect externalization of an entity’s presence).

- (2) Oppression (physical harassment by an entity).
- (3) Obsession (domination of a person’s thought processes and behavior by an entity).
- (4) Possession (forceful displacement of a person’s identity by an entity).
- (5) Subjugation (voluntary relinquishing of freewill to an entity).

(Amorth 1999:77)

Since full possession often involves total amnesia, the nearest that we can come to understanding the inner experience is through its lesser manifestation: obsession. What follows is the frank and disturbing inside account of such a case. To provide context I have framed it with my own experiences dealing with this client. The events took place outside the context of any religiously sanctioned exorcism and are therefore free of the totalizing worldviews of the various faiths.

The client was a happily married father of a new born, a business and information technology consultant with a major transnational company. He continued to maintain all of these multiple responsibilities throughout the course of his treatment, which lasted roughly eight months. He was also psychically gifted and therefore able to perceive the progress of his own case from a unique inner perspective. He had initially come to me to learn a range of energy-work techniques. As our work progressed he became increasingly aware of ‘blockages’ in his ‘energy anatomy.’ I therefore suggested that we conduct cleansing work on these. As the cleansing progressed the client began to psychically ‘see’ ‘black, grape-like attachments’ around his lower legs and feet. Each time I cleansed these attachments a week or so later he reported that they had returned. In addition his feet now became

¹ The intention and desire to facilitate healing provides the ‘navigation’, for want of a better word, that powers the shifts in awareness necessary to ‘read’ the client’s ‘field’ for relevant information. This is a reversed or goal governed process moving backwards from an intent to heal to the retrieval of the information that will facilitate it. This type of goal governed, retro-causal process is best described as teleological.

swollen and purple. The medical doctors he went to could find no medical cause for his problems.

From my perspective, the re-generation of the attachments was indicative of deeper problems and I decided to get a second opinion. Despite my urging him to consider how he may be contributing to his situation, up to this point he had been unwilling to share the crucial information that over a period of time he had been experiencing frequent erotic 'dreams.' While asleep, or in a dream-like state, he was approached by what appeared to be a beautiful woman who engaged in intercourse with him resulting in orgasm. Such recurrent 'dreams' are often associated with psychic 'parasitism,' and with a class of entities traditionally called 'succubi' (though 'djinn' encompasses parallel ideas). Such entities would be difficult enough to deal with, but this case was about to take an even darker turn. The following account, in the client's own words, is a rare description of the actual experience of the course of his possession perceived psychically.

"I had had strange sensations in my legs and feet. Whilst I was meditating all of the energy went to the soles of my feet, which felt as though they were burning in a fire. Each time I undertook energy work the burning sensation in my feet got worse. My feet became swollen and purple all over. I visited medical doctors who diagnosed me with swollen arteries, prescribed creams and told me not to walk on grass because I might be allergic to it. In short, they hadn't a clue what was going on. My awareness of my condition came about through a meditative state. It was extremely fluid, alive, colourful and yet painful at the same time. I was in a place like a museum. Standing in one of the rooms a mirror caught my eye. I stood in front of the mirror. Suddenly I felt as though I have been hypnotized and fixed in place. I felt as though two arms were holding me. Then I heard chanting and saw that a tattoo was being carved on my legs. I screamed in pain and tried to stop what was going on. I tried to use protective symbols and energy to stop the ritual. Luckily I was pulled out of this nightmare and back to reality by my wife. I knew that I had to seek help from someone who could undo or remove what had been done to me. Luckily I was referred to a lady who worked with higher beings who was able to help me. I don't want to go into much

detail but I realized that this was a recurring event in many past lives. I had been ritually pledged and sacrificed to a group of entities who used me to fulfil their own purposes. It was the fragments of these rituals that I had 'seen' so lucidly and re-lived during my meditation. The outcome was that I now realized that I had attachments all over my body and most of my energy was being sucked from me. I was able to see the entities, who were acting upon the orders of a higher being. They were very clever and cunning. They knew all my interests and weak points. The entity tricked me into opening myself to it by disguising itself as a beautiful woman and approaching me when I was at my most defenceless, during sleep. In a dream, or perhaps better to say, dream-like state, the entity tricked me into engaging in intercourse with it. I started going to the healer. During my treatments I saw that my legs were covered with what looked like black grapes. These were the larvae of the entity. From the energies and substance of our intercourse this entity bred new entities like itself. I can only describe these as insectoid or, more precisely, 'fly-like'. It was like a horror movie. When they were exorcised I saw thousands of these 'flies' being released and returning to their place of origin. Only our trust in God can help us through these times. Love of God and nothing else. I am sharing this information because I believe our relations with such entities are more common than most people suspect. We must open our awareness. Forgive ourselves and ask for help. If there is energy that can be collected and used as a breeding ground, anyone can become a target. Our relations with these entities can be understood by analogy with fungi. If you leave a place dark, damp and with no ventilation than you will attract fungi. Our bad habits and vices provide perfect breeding grounds for them. We need to get a grip on our animal desires, we are given an intellect to learn, synthesise information and determine how we are to go forward in our lives. We need the light of God, we need goodness and goodwill. We should stay away from the things that we know are bad. Do not tell yourself that it is harmless, that it is just 'one more glass', 'just a web site' or 'just a dream'."

Cases like this are often associated with a large amount of diverse and seemingly unrelated detail. Throughout this experience my client claimed that he was 'seeing' classic UFO-like craft. However, their scale was so miniscule that they were able to pass in and out of his body. He claimed to have seen typical 'grey' aliens in his house and to have discerned tube-like 'attachments' that connected him to distant destinations through which life-energy was being received and syphoned off. Bizarre as all of these details are, and no matter how out of place they may seem in the context of possession, they are nevertheless consistent with numerous independent accounts (Baldwin 1998). The description of the fly-like being, the extraction of energy and the manipulation of his awareness are also consistent with these accounts². Finally, during the healing sessions with the specialist, through her intercession he saw snake like entities emerge from her and enter his body to accomplish the healing work. Once more, this is consistent with accounts of neo-shamanic healing when working with a class of healing serpent-like entities traditionally known as 'Nagas'.

After eight months of intensive work with the specialist my client has been pronounced 'clear'. The possession itself and all of the accompanying phenomena (ETs, greys, larvae) have been cleared up.

Jacques Vallee has proposed a model for the interpretation of anomalous phenomena that employs six simultaneous dimensions or 'layers of interpretation' (Vallee 2003). Given this framework we can breakdown the various components of this account:

- (1) Physical: none
- (2) Anti-physical: Presence of 'Grey' aliens and miniscule UFO craft capable of moving through the body.
- (3) Psychological: Manipulation of the client's behavior to make him more physically responsive during sleep. Drawing upon unconscious images of idealized beauty to clothe the entity's appearance and stimulate sexual arousal.

- (4) Physiological: Continuing sexual predation. Swollen, discolored feet that defied medical explanation.
- (5) Psychic: Vision of a 'past-life memory' involving the ritual pledging of the client to the entities. Vision of the entity itself, its larvae. Vision of healing serpents.
- (6) Cultural: The information arising from this case can be interpreted from within a number of different worldviews including: a) psychopathology (e.g. dissociative identity disorder (DID) / possession trance disorder (PTD)); b) mainstream religious beliefs (it's the work of Satan & his minions); c) neo-shamanic 'perspectivism'³ (De Castro 1998); d) UFO studies (interpreting possession as a sub-set of the alien abduction phenomena).

We can appraise the variety of world views based on their economy and generativity: a) Psychotherapy has no one agreed approach to or understanding of such anomalous experiences. One the one hand they are seen as pathological symptoms of dissociation, alternatively as a result of temporary psychoses (e.g. Qi Gung Psychotic Reaction) or as a 'spiritual emergency' (Assagioli 1989). Based on their clinical experience a number of therapists and psychiatrists have shifted towards a neo-shamanic interpretation of spirit/entity possession (Fiore 1987; Modi 1988; Sanderson 2003); b) The idea that it is the work of Satan and his minions commits us to too much (neo-Gnostic worldview, elaborate cosmologies and spiritual hierarchies) and 'overdetermines' sensemaking with respect to the available evidence; c) Neo-shamanic perspectivism, "according to which the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects ... human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view" (De Castro 1998) provides the most economical and generative option. We can conceive such perspectivism as an exercise in 'worldmaking' (Overing 1998), an extension of the world view of consensual reality to takes account of the experiences reported worldwide by energy healers and their clients. These include multiple additional

² "There is another form of dark being. These are not created but spawned by the higher demonic beings and have no spark of Light within. These dark thought-forms are robot-like entities who do the bidding of the dark ones" (Baldwin 1995, p.341).

³ "humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators)." de Castro 1998.

subjectivities (gods, angels, spirits, deceased persons, other and higher dimensional beings) and a corresponding increase in the sources of agency affecting sentient life (spiritually and energetically as well as mentally, emotionally and physically) interacting via such distinctive roles as preserver/healer, shapeshifter/predator and prey.

The convergence of traditional folklore, cases of 'demonic possession', 'satanic ritual', 'UFOs' and 'alien abductions' have long been noted in the literature (Keel 1970; Vallee 1969; Vallee 1979; Baldwin 1998). The effects of these phenomena can be highly reminiscent of the threefold process of initiation the world over (Van Gennep 1960), and in particular of the experience of liminality (Turner 1987), something they share, along with a pronounced sexual element, with the alien abduction phenomena (Thompson 1989). It is as though the phenomena themselves exist in the conceptual overlap between these otherwise diverse domains of discourse, taking on the imagery and themes associated with them. Struggling with such fluid, multi-level phenomena we are, so to speak, victims of our own conceptual and linguistic prisons.

The consensual worldview tells us that what we see is all there is. But this narrowness derives from modernity's 'buffered self' (Taylor 2007 p.27), the self-segregated 'disenchanted' self (ibid p.31-32) emerging from a failure of empathic engagement. This experience stands in contrast to that of the 'porous self' (ibid p.38) that empathically (and psychically) breaches the walls separating itself from a broader range experience. "The enchanted:disenchanted distinction offers possibilities for better describing the ways in which different cultures experience this porosity. ... in some societies—and arguably for some people in all societies—lived experience does include the presence of spirits, gods, etc., as well as the possibility of being possessed by them. These might be accurately described as 'enchanted' cultures / societies or peoples." (Smith 2012, p.62 Note 7).

On a final note, my client's character changed completely through the course of these eight months. A completely different person emerged out of this encounter with the numinous. From an expansive, in your face, can-do presence emerged one graced with sensitivity, spirituality and insight. This is, perhaps, the outcome one would expect from having undergone the perils of such an initiation.

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Biography



Peter Mark Adams is a BA Hons Philosophy graduate with a special research interest in altered states of consciousness, epistemology and the philosophy of science. Peter is a professional energy worker and healer specializing in Rebirthing breathwork, energy psychology and

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Recognising the Voice of God

Tanya M. Luhrmann



I know what it is like to hear God speak. I am not a Christian. I am not even sure what I mean, speaking for myself, by the word 'God.' But for ten years I have been doing anthropological research among the sort of evangelical Christians who experience God as interacting with them. They believe that prayer is a conversation in which they talk to God and God talks back. They will say that God 'told' them to do something—to talk to the stranger next to them on the bus, or move to Los Angeles. To other Christians, this can seem incomprehensible, and even dangerous.

People often spoke to me about the first time they had recognized God's voice. Usually, this happened in prayer ministry. They realized that an apparently random thought or mental image was uncannily relevant to the person they were praying over, and they thought that God was telling them what the person they were praying for needed to hear. One woman remembered the first time this happened when she prayed for a stranger. 'I didn't know what to say. I was really scared. And then, I remember, I saw something. It wasn't a vivid picture. It was more like my words described the picture more than I saw clearly what the picture was. When I described it to the person I was praying for, he just started to cry. Then he explained why he was crying, and with that information, I was able to pray for him more. It was the most powerful thing.'

Once people began to feel confident that they heard God speak to them as they prayed for other people, they began to experience God speaking to them about their own lives. They would talk to God with their inner voice, about something that was vexing them, and they would wait for his response—some inner word or image that would give them guidance. Sometimes it came immediately; sometimes it took time. They call this practice 'listening.'

What I saw was that they were learning to pay attention to their inner world in a different way. The church taught that words from God should

feel as if they 'pop' into the mind, a spontaneous break from the flow of thought.

Let us put to one side the question of whether God is really speaking, and examine the practice anthropologically. The first thing to notice is that the practice takes advantage of what we might call the 'texture' of mental experience. We have thoughts that are more startling and surprising than others; thoughts that seem a piece of the psychic river of awareness and thoughts that seem to come out of nowhere. These Christians treat these contours as significant.

But they do more than attend to thought differently. The church teaches congregants to pay attention only to certain of these striking thoughts—to good thoughts, thoughts that are the kinds of things God should say. That is, those thoughts should be relevant, wise and loving. ('God does not tell you to hurt yourself,' people said.) You should feel good when you have them. When you hear God correctly, you should feel peace, and if you didn't feel peaceful, it wasn't God.

Doing this changes you. One man explained to me how much his experience of God had altered since coming to the church. 'God's voice is like a fuzzy radio station, 95.2, 94.9, which needs more tuning. You're picking up the song, and it's not so clear sometimes. It's clearer to me now.' That was why I say that I think I know what it is like to hear God speak. I worshipped with these charismatic evangelicals. I prayed with them. I read their books. I sought to pay attention to my inner world the way they did. As I did so, I began to have experiences like the ones they reported. I remember with clarity the first time it happened. I was trying to compose a note to someone—one of those complicated notes you need to send to someone you don't know well, when you want to be personal but not forward. I fretted about the note off and on for a few days. Then suddenly the sentences just came to me. I didn't feel that I had chosen them. They came to me and I wrote them down and they were perfect. To some extent, the

practice works. My ethnographic and experimental work confirm this again and again.

Religion demands of its followers that they understand reality to be different from the material world they live within—more fair, more good. It demands that they use their minds to present reality as different and as better. It is worth recognizing that this is as much skill as belief, a knowing how (to borrow from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle) as a knowing that. The skill is probably at the heart of what makes psychotherapy work when it works, and probably what makes placebo effective. It's a different way of thinking about God than the science-religion wars suggest, and possibly less divisive.

Biography

Tanya Marie Luhrmann is the Watkins University Professor in the Stanford Anthropology Department. Her books include *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*, (Harvard, 1989); *The Good Parsi* (Harvard 1996); *Of Two Minds* (Knopf 2000) and *When God Talks Back* (Knopf 2012).

In general, her work focuses on the way that ideas held in the mind come to seem externally real to people, and the way that ideas about the mind affect mental experience. One of her recent project compares the experience of hearing distressing voices in India and in the United States.



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From Sleep Paralysis to Spiritual Experience An Interview With David Hufford

John W. Morehead



David Hufford has been pursuing research on the “Old Hag” sleep paralysis phenomenon for quite some time. Perhaps his best-known work on this is *The Terror That comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press; 2nd ed, 1989). Hufford joined the faculty of the Penn State College of Medicine in 1974 in the Department of Behavioral Science. When he retired in 2007 he held a University Professorship and was chair of the Department of Humanities with appointments in Departments of Neural and Behavioral Science, Family & Community Medicine, and Psychiatry. Hufford is now University Professor Emeritus at Penn State College of Medicine, Senior Fellow for Spirituality at the Samueli Institute, and Adjunct Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Hufford is also a founding member of the Editorial Boards of *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing* and *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*.

John Morehead: David, thank you for your willingness to be a part of this interview. Your research on the sleep paralysis phenomenon is well known. How did you come to develop a personal interest in it, and how did your research on the “Old Hag” phenomenon in Newfoundland perhaps begin this process on an academic level?

David Hufford: That, John, is a very good question. It goes to the very center of my professional interests, values and goals. In December of 1963 I was a college sophomore. One night I went to bed early in my off campus room. I had just completed the last of my final exams for the term, and I was tired. I went to bed about 6 o’clock, looking forward confidently to a long and uninterrupted night’s sleep. In that I was mistaken.

About 2 hours later I was awakened by the sound of my door being opened, and footsteps approached the bed. I was lying on my back and the door was

straight ahead of me. But the room was pitch dark, so when I opened my eyes I could see nothing. I assumed a friend was coming to see if I wanted to go to dinner. I tried to turn on the light beside my bed, but I couldn’t move or speak. I was paralyzed. The footsteps came to the side of my bed, and I felt the mattress go down as someone climbed onto the bed, knelt on my chest and began to strangle me. I really thought that I was dying. But far worse than the feelings of being strangled were the sensations associated with what was on top of me. I had an overwhelming impression of *evil*, and my reaction was primarily revulsion. Whatever was on my chest was not just destructive; it was absolutely disgusting. I shrank from it.

I struggled to move, but it was as though I could not find the “controls.” Somehow I no longer knew how to move. And then I did move, I think my hand was first, and then my whole body. I leaped out of bed, heart racing, and turned on the light to find the room empty. I ran downstairs where my landlord sat watching TV. “Did someone go past you just now?” He looked at me like I was crazy and said “no.”

I never forgot that experience, but I told no one about it for the next eight years. There was no question of interpreting this experience, locating it within my cultural frame. There was no place for it there. Dream? I knew, absolutely knew, I had been awake. Hallucination? I was sure that I was not crazy, but I also knew this would not be convincing to others. The insane are, according to stereotype, the last to know. So the experience just hung there, unconnected. Disturbing.

In 1970 I traveled to Newfoundland, Canada, to do my doctoral dissertation fieldwork. I went to study supernatural belief. I was probably influenced by my bizarre experience, but I was also responding to a larger interest. In graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania I had been taught that supernatural beliefs are non-rational, unsupportable by proper reasoning, and that they are non-empirical, lacking any sound observational basis. This seemed too sweeping

and a bit arrogant, so in my research I proposed to ask whether traditional beliefs might have *some* rational and empirical elements. I went to Newfoundland because it is isolated and has a strong traditional culture, the kind of place where I had been taught one might find remnants of pre-modern belief. It proved to be a good choice.

While doing my research I taught at Newfoundland's Memorial University in the Folklore Department and worked in the department's extensive archive. Almost immediately I found the Old Hag, although at the moment it happened it felt more as if the Old Hag had found *me*—again. When you “have the Old Hag,” Newfoundlanders said, you awoke to find yourself unable to move. The *hag*, a terrifying something, could be heard coming, footsteps approaching your room. The hag would enter your room and press you, crushing the breath out of you. If the experience is not interrupted they said it could end in death.

The Old Hag presented me with a dilemma. I had been taught that stories about supernatural experiences confirming local traditions are produced by cultural influences, what I have called The *Cultural Source Hypothesis* (CSH). But the Old hag had come into my room in 1963 out of a cultural void. Tradition says, “We believe this because it has happened to us.” Modern scholarship reverses this and says, “You think this happens because you believe it.” My dilemma: I could explain the Old Hag based on cultural processes that confirm local cultural traditions—although I knew that my own prior experience flatly contradicted such explanations. Or I could develop an entirely new kind of explanation.

This all amounted to a stunning discovery. I now knew something about the Old Hag tradition that no one else seemed to know. But I was in no better position to proclaim this publicly than I had been to talk about my experience in 1963. I did not want to say, “Hey, that happened to me too! So that tells us that.... Trust me on this!” Personal experience lends authenticity and expertise to scholarly work, when the experience is granted to be real—experiences of illness, of being in prison, of being an artist, of gender, of race, of all sorts of recognized categories of experience. But contested experiences have the opposite effect; they are seen as pure bias, “Oh, he's a believer (and therefore not be trusted).” If I were to place my experience and my Newfoundland findings within a sensible cultural frame, it would have to be a frame partly of my own making. In that way the personal became professional, academic.

John Morehead: How has your academic discipline of folklore studies been important in your understanding of the phenomenon? And what do you think about the use of other disciplines, like anthropology, to help us understand it?

David Hufford: I entered the discipline of folklore in the mid-1960s because it included “folk belief” as a recognized topic for research, and because it had a populist orientation. In general it showed great respect for the views of ordinary people. In art, architecture, oral literature, agricultural methods, etcetera, folklore stood up for the worth of ordinary culture. But I quickly discovered in graduate school that unlike other cultural genres, folk belief and respect for the knowledge claims of ordinary people occupied structurally antithetical positions in the discipline. Although folk music scholars did not judge by the standards of classical composition, folk belief scholars did, in fact, judge “superstition” by its conformity to current scientific opinion. Considering that most folk beliefs had never been subjected to systematic scientific research this seemed pure, unjustified ethnocentrism. My anthropology training presented a related but more modern problem.

The Boasian turn from blatant ethnocentrism to a sort of protective hermeneuticism offered the kind of patronizing acceptance that a psychotherapist offers to a psychotic patient: I believe that your hallucinations are real *to you*. Finding internal consistency and rejecting evaluative comparisons to external knowledge, folk belief was accorded “its own logic.” This fit well with the 20th century scholarly resistance to comparative method. The post-modern turn rejected not only scientific reduction but also all other efforts to obtain objective knowledge through comparison. Scientific positivism reduced all sorts of folk beliefs to cultural fictions. Folklore and anthropology, in fact the social sciences and the humanities in general, were of little assistance as I wrestled with the “Old Hag.” In fact, with regard to “folk belief” I came to see these academic disciplines as functioning to protect modernity from being challenged by the knowledge of other cultures and times. Ironically, this is similar to the function of positivism, but it offers the advantage of apparently respecting the knowledge claims it rejects.

John Morehead: Can you summarize the basic elements that define the sleep paralysis phenomenon?

David Hufford: Sleep paralysis (SP) refers to the loss of voluntary movement either during the period just before sleep (hypnagogic stage or sleep onset) or just after (hypnopompic stage). The paralysis is produced by a cholinergic mechanism in the reticular activating system in the brain stem that functions to prevent the sleeper from physically carrying out actions occurring in dreams. This atonia-producing mechanism is a normal feature of rapid eye-movement sleep. In SP this mechanism intrudes into wakefulness. This might suggest that the “intruder” experience of SP is “just dreaming” while awake. The problem is this: dreams vary greatly from subject to subject and over time, and their content tends to reflect inputs from the dreamer’s waking life, together with aspects of the sensed environment (e.g., in a hot room one may dream of a tropical environment). The “Old Hag” is very different. It is as if dreamers all of over the world and throughout history report *the same dream*, and that repeated content does not require the subject’s prior knowledge! Furthermore the contents do not reflect the range of possible features that could arise from waking consciousness during REM sleep, rather being restricted to a very narrow spectrum; e.g., people do not experience the ceiling falling on them or terrorists entering their room, either of which would conform to the pressure and immobility of the experience.

John Morehead: In the 1980s you wrote *The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*. What types of conclusions did you come to about the phenomenon at that time?

David Hufford: My conclusions were data driven, and my data was especially rich, ranging from anthropological and historical documentation to phenomenology to medical and neurophysiological findings, because I employed mixed methods, including ethnographic interviews, surveys, and literature review. The ethnographic interviewing was phenomenologically oriented, aimed at developing a detailed description of the range of perceptual features of SP. These interviews began with open-ended questions such as, “Please tell me all that you recall about your experience.” No questions probed for the features with which I was familiar; e.g., I never asked, “Was there a presence in the room with you?” My research design predicted that “the Old Hag” could be explained by the cultural source hypothesis as cultural elaborations of SP (although my own experience had

already shown me that this was not possible), and asked whether objective findings conformed to that prediction. They did not.

My interviews revealed a stable phenomenological pattern very similar to what I had experienced in college. The surveys showed that this pattern did not depend on cultural input or prior knowledge of any kind. The literature review documented reports consistent with SP in cultures all over the world and throughout history, although such reports had not previously been connected with SP. The terms used for description in different traditions were obviously culturally determined, such as “Old Hag,” the Mara (Tillhagen 1969) of Sweden, the *da chor* (Tobin & Friedman 1983), *dab coj*, *poj ntsoog* (Munger 1986), or *dab tsog* (Adler 1991) in Southeast Asia, the sitting ghost or *bei Guai chaak* (being pressed by a ghost) (Emmons 1982) in China, *kanashibari* in Japan, and many more from around the world and throughout history refer to the same event characterized by paralysis, the conviction of wakefulness before or emerging from sleep. These cultural terms were associated with a variety of other details such as soft shuffling footsteps and the shadow man’ or misty presence, regardless of cultural context. A detailed review of modern scientific knowledge of SP found neither any awareness of this distinctive phenomenological pattern, nor any mechanisms that would account for it.

So, my conclusions in *The Terror* stemmed from the way that my research contradicted the Cultural Source Hypothesis as an explanation of “the Old Hag” and similar traditions. In its place I found that this phenomenon fit, instead, the Experiential Source Hypothesis: (1) many traditions of supernatural assault around the world refer the phenomenon known as sleep paralysis in modern sleep research, (2) scientific knowledge of SP lacks knowledge of its cross-culturally consistent phenomenology and has no adequate explanation for that pattern, (3) the cross-contextual perceptual patterning is what reason leads us to expect of accurate reports from independent witnesses, therefore (4) traditions of supernatural assault that contain the SP pattern are empirically based and rationally derived.

John Morehead: Of course, your research continued beyond the 1980s. How did this develop, and how did your understandings develop by 2005 when you wrote your essay “Sleep Paralysis as Spiritual Experience” for the journal *Transcultural Psychology*?

David Hufford: In 1974 I finished my Ph.D., returned from Newfoundland and accepted the position of Assistant Professor of Behavioral Science at Penn State's College of Medicine. I was offered this position based on the stance I developed in my doctoral dissertation, *Folklore Studies Applied to Health* (University of Pennsylvania 1974), which was focused on folk belief. I explored ways that the study of folk belief could serve medical research and care. Chapter 6 was devoted to the Old Hag and SP. I saw two major connections to medicine: (1) belief is a major determinant of health behaviour (from patients' beliefs about etiology and treatment to doctors' beliefs about patients), and (2) the fact that in the 20th century medicine, psychiatry in particular, had provided practically all explanations for "folk belief" (meaning false belief traditionally supported), especially experiential claims in support of folk belief, through psychopathology (wish fulfilment, unconscious sexual forces, delusions, hallucinations, etc.). The journey I embarked on in my Newfoundland research was perfectly suited to the medical context, although in a somewhat perverse way. I accepted the appointment to work to improve medical care and diagnosis, but to do that I would have to directly address the harm done by medical misunderstandings. Ironically, folklore and anthropology (et al.) had been complicit in those misunderstandings. So, I went to medicine to subvert the received worldviews of modern intellectuals, in order to advance medical care. *The Terror* was a major part of that program.

A central aspect of my subversive agenda was to pursue the extension of the Experiential Source Hypothesis beyond SP to other *spiritual experiences*. By *spiritual* I mean whatever refers to *spirit*, which in English means the immaterial part of a living being. Part of my subversion has involved constantly working against the academic misuse of the term *spiritual* to refer to whatever gives one meaning in life. That definition, rooted in Christian existential theology (for example, the work of Paul Tillich), is a misappropriation of the natural language word, reflecting the philosophical and theological inclinations of many academics. But it is a false and confusing characterization of the concept in common English. You should also note that *spiritual* in this traditional, non-material sense is at the heart of the word *supernatural*. The words are not identical in meaning, but believing in one entails believing in the other.

Anyway, in 1974 I had wondered whether SP with a presence was the only such anomalous experience giving rise to supernatural folk belief—belief in

spirits being the main such belief. Beginning in 1974 I searched for broader implications, lessons that Newfoundland's "Old Hag" might teach us about other supernatural traditions. Could other supernatural beliefs also arise from experience rather than vice-versa? In 1974, the year I returned from Newfoundland, Raymond Moody published *Life After Life* (1st edition, Atlanta: Mockingbird Books), "Actual case histories that reveal that there is life after death." Moody coined the term "near-death experience" and described the NDE as common among resuscitands. The immediate skeptical response, especially from the medical community, was that this could not be common or "we would have known about long ago!" My SP work showed me the flaw in this reasoning, and a little fieldwork quickly showed me that the NDE seemed to be another case of experientially based supernatural belief. Subsequent research reporting NDEs from other cultures and other times showed that it fit the Experiential Source Hypothesis in the same way that SP with a presence does. At about the same time I found the work of W. Dewi Rees, M.D., a Welsh physician whose study published in *The British Medical Journal* (1971) showed that visits from the spirit of a deceased loved one are common among the bereaved. Contrary to contemporary psychiatric thinking, which had labeled such experiences symptoms of pathological grieving, Rees showed that these visits (now called "after death contacts," ADCs) were consistently associated with less indications of depression and better resolution of grief! Continued research over the past 30 years has confirmed Rees' early conclusions, and the characterization of the experiences in the psychiatric literature has changed dramatically.

During my 30 plus years at the College of Medicine I made the study of modern resistance to the facts of what I came to call "extraordinary spiritual experiences" (ESE's, as opposed to ordinary experiences interpreted spiritually), as much a part of my research as the experiences themselves. I found the cultural context within which the experiences occur, dominated not by science *per se*, but by materialistic philosophical beliefs assumed to be inextricable from science, to be essential to the study of the experiences. Among my conclusions has been the conviction that science and well-established scientific knowledge do not contradict "folk beliefs," either those about spirits or folk medical beliefs such as those that underlie herbalism in the treatment of disease. I realized that what was at issue was the cultural authority of science, that that authority had been

excessively extended over the past century or so. This did not amount to a disagreement with either the scientific method or the well-established findings of science. In fact, I came to believe that what was needed to begin to appreciate the remarkable knowledge of folk traditions was *better* science, more rigorous and less biased.

John Morehead: What are the various interpretations that are brought to the phenomenon in the cultures in which it is found?

David Hufford: That's a really interesting question. There is variety, but a constrained variety. The interpretations center, as you might imagine, on the intruder. In almost all cases this entity is described as *evil* or at least threatening. It may be interpreted as a sorcerer or a ghost or demon or some other kind of supernatural, such as a vampire. In many locations it is assumed that more than one kind of creature can do this, such as both sorcerers and ghosts. The definitive characteristics of these categories, of course, are not unambiguously presented in the SP experience. If the intruder is recognized as a particular living person (which seems rare) then it is understandable that it will be interpreted as a sorcerer. If the attack is sexual, which seems infrequent but it does happen, and if there is a term such as incubus or succubus, that will be applied. If the attack occurs in a house believed to be haunted, which is common, then the intruder is generally assumed to be a ghost. When features of an attack do not obviously suggest one kind of entity or another, then local categories fill in, such as the *aswang* (Tagalog) in the Philippines. This remarkable consistency and similarity across cultures is a product, obviously, of the robust and consistent cross-cultural pattern of the phenomenology of SP.

John Morehead: Let's focus specifically on how the phenomenon is interpreted in Western cultures where secularism, advances in the neurosciences, and skepticism toward religious or spiritual experiences, are prevalent. How have paranormal or other spiritual interpretations been received in this context?

David Hufford: The conventional view in anthropology, folklore and other disciplines has always been that all experience is somewhat ambiguous, so the values and assumptions resident in one's culture will determine one's interpretation of events. This is the central understanding of the Cultural Source Hypothesis (CSH), and it extends even beyond interpre-

tation to perception in many theories (e.g., the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis). As you note, the conventional view in the modern academic world is philosophical materialism, especially with regard to matters of spiritual belief and religion, which are assumed to be very ambiguous. But ironically, the Cultural Source Hypothesis accounts for the academic interpretation of SP, not for the interpretations found among most that have experienced SP! Despite evidence to the contrary most academics assume that somehow prior learning, presumably through cultural processes, yields expectations that produce the content of all sorts of spiritual experiences. This is what has been called the universal hermeneutic approach; it is illustrated by the influential work of philosopher Steven Katz. Katz, who was most concerned with "mystical experiences," insisted that visionaries only experience what they have been taught to experience.

Contrary to modern intellectual assumptions, most subjects in the modern Western world, the *disenchanted* world to use Weber's term, interpret SP events as spiritual or "paranormal." This is because the events are, in fact, minimally ambiguous. And the available interpretations for an intruder who can walk through walls and paralyze its victim (etcetera) are very few: hallucination or something spiritual or "paranormal." The SP consciousness is very lucid, unlike dream consciousness, and many of the observations (e.g. the physical environment) made in this consciousness are veridical. This clear sense of reality warrants this interpretation for most subjects. Of course, there is also the fact that we now know that the "disenchantment" of modern consciousness has been greatly over-rated!

John Morehead: In the conclusion of your *Transcultural Psychiatry* essay you state, "that there is nothing specific within our scientific knowledge of [sleep paralysis] that contradicts spirit interpretations." Given our growing understanding of the brain through the neurosciences, can you expand a bit on what you mean and how there may be connections here between scientific knowledge of the brain in religious experience and a spiritual interpretation of that experience?

David Hufford: Another good question! In considering the relationship between scientific knowledge and spiritual belief we need to be scrupulous about the meaning of the term *contradiction*. Two propositions are contradictory only if they negate each other, that is, if it is the case that if Proposition 1 is true

Proposition 2 *must* be false, not just that Proposition 1 challenges Proposition 2 or *suggests* that Proposition 2 may be wrong. The scientific proposition “that the Earth is billions of years old” negates the Young Earth Creationist proposition “that the Earth is 6,000 years old.” If one of these propositions is true, the other must be false. Logical analysis requires that we understand the meaning of the terms involved. Therefore, the hermeneutical idea that “6,000 years” in scriptural terms might mean something very different from what we mean by it today removes the contradiction but makes the proposition rather meaningless.

A proposition that would negate the traditional interpretation of SP would be “that there are no immaterial spirits.” If that were true, it would negate the traditional idea “that the shadow intruder in SP is a spirit of some kind.” These propositions would contradict each other. But “that there are no spirits” is not a scientific proposition. There are no scientific experiments, nor can we easily imagine one, that would establish this proposition. If it were true “that the intruder in SP is a spirit” that would not contradict any scientifically established knowledge. It would not be relevant to the mechanistic REM explanation of the cholinergic “switch” for SP atonia. On the other hand, the knowledge that the SP phenomenology is independent of cultural context does contradict the conventional social science use of the Cultural Source Hypothesis (CSH) to explain SP. But this use of the CSH has no valid empirical base, being more a reflection of ideology than a scientifically derived conclusion.

Scientific method and scientific knowledge about sleep are very useful in understanding SP, but they do not include some crucial information that is widely available in folk tradition, and that can be checked empirically. In this sense the two traditions are complementary. But brain science at present no more explains the consistent phenomenology of SP than folk tradition explains its neurophysiology.

Common spirit experiences do not show that the Earth is flat, that germs do not cause disease, etc. They do not contradict and are not contradicted by modern knowledge. The observation that many people with modern knowledge reject these beliefs does not constitute a contradiction. Much more common than contradiction is the idea that modern knowledge makes supernatural belief unnecessary by providing superior explanations for the same observations. This is the argument from parsimony, or Occam's Razor. This claim has its roots in the old notion of super-

natural belief as consisting of primitive explanations for observations of natural phenomena.

The kind of direct perceptual “spirit experiences” reported in SP (and NDEs, ADCs, *et cetera*) do not inherently offer an account of any natural phenomena. If they did there would be the possibility of contradicting scientific knowledge. What they do offer is an account of some of the characteristics of spirits and their relationship to humans. All conventional theories of such experiences treat them as hallucinations or illusions and rely on assumptions of cultural sources to account for their patterning, because no psychological theories exist that explain (or even acknowledge the existence of) complex hallucinations having a broad, cross-cultural, perceptual stability. However, these experiences cannot be accounted for by cultural models because of their cross-cultural distribution. Therefore, even on grounds of parsimony, modern knowledge does not conflict at all with the most basic beliefs that follow from such experiences.

John Morehead: In your research you have noted similarities between the sleep paralysis phenomenon and out-of-body and UFO abduction experiences. Are there any similarities or parallels to other things, and what does this tell you about sleep paralysis?

David Hufford: One partial exception to the spiritual/“paranormal” interpretation, arising from modern ideas, is the notion that these events are “screen memories” for alien abduction. Contrary to what some researchers have claimed, this remains a minority interpretation, and it relies on the spurious idea that these “screen memories” conceal a forgotten scenario that can be retrieved through hypnotic regression. The prevalence and distribution of SP with a presence, historically and cross-culturally, is entirely at odds with this idea. The same is true for the tragic error of treating SP as a screen memory for repressed memories of sexual abuse, or as the root cause of Sudden Unexplained Nocturnal Death Syndrome (SUNDS) among Southeast Asian men.

The similarities in these cases come largely from the outside observer rather than the subject. In both alien abduction and sexual abuse scenarios the presence of a threatening intruder in the bedroom is similar. The pressure of someone lying on you may be similar to sexual abuse, and the feeling of leaving your body, present in a substantial minority of SP events, resonates with the alien abduction scenario. In SUNDS the impression of impending death common

in SP is a similarity. But these are tenuous similarities. In SUNDS, for example, the subject actually dies, but all epidemiological and medical evidence indicates that people simply do not die from SP. Also, SP OBEs do not involve trips to alien space ships, unless the SP experiencer is subject to extensive interrogation under hypnosis by a UFO researcher. And only a small—but important—fraction of SP cases involve sexual aspects. These and other misattributions of SP result from widespread ignorance of SP, and they can be VERY destructive. I have dealt with them at some length in my *Transcultural Psychiatry* article.

What we learn from the erroneous connections of SP with a variety of unrelated phenomena is that even robust, consistently stable classes of spiritual experience will be the subject of extreme efforts at assimilation to interpretations that seem more “modern” than the common understanding of subjects. Even alien abduction, as unconventional as it is, provides a modern sounding account in contrast to ghosts! These reinterpretations of SP are not so different from the interpretation of near-death experiences as delirium or after death contacts as hallucinations of pathological grieving. In all cases the fit of the data to the interpretation is poor, but the goal seems to be modernization rather than objective accuracy.

John Morehead: In your *Transcultural Psychology* essay you discuss “the persistence of spirit beliefs in modern society despite the cultural and social forces arrayed against them.” You argue that this may be accounted for due to “transcendent, spiritual experiences.” How do you see sleep paralysis functioning as a “core spirit experience?”

David Hufford: By *core spiritual experiences* I mean *perceptual* experiences that (a) refer intuitively to spirits without inference or retrospective interpretation, (b) form distinct classes with stable perceptual patterns, (c) occur independently of a subject's prior beliefs, knowledge or intention (psychological set), and (d) are normal (i.e., not products of obvious psychopathology).

Here *perceptual experiences* means episodes of awareness that subjectively appear to be observations rather than inferences or emotional states. Most SP experiences (about 80% in my survey data) include a “spirit (that is, an apparently non-physical) intruder,” and many develop into complex scenarios of assault.

It should be obvious, then, why I consider this a spiritual experience: it usually involves a spirit (the

intruder), and when SP produces an OBE it presents the experience of *being* a spirit. Despite the typically ambiguous meanings of *spirituality* so common among intellectuals today, lexical research has overwhelmingly shown that in English for many centuries *spirituality* refers to *spirits*. By *core* spiritual experience, I mean that such experiences provide a central (core) empirical foundation from which some supernatural beliefs develop by inference. You may recall that at the beginning of my career I set out to ask whether traditional supernatural beliefs might have *some* rational and empirical elements. The discovery of core spiritual experiences answers that question with a clear *yes*.

John Morehead: Are there any new trajectories in your research in this phenomenon? What can we look forward to in your future work in this area?

David Hufford: Remarkably it seems my original trajectory remains both viable and productive. I still want to assess and understand the empirical and rational grounds of widespread spiritual beliefs. I want to find additional core spiritual experiences. For example, in 1985 I collaborated with Genevieve Foster in the writing of her memoir of a particular kind of mystical experience (*The World Was Flooded with Light*, University of Pittsburgh Press). There is reason to believe her experience is a member of another core experience set, but we have very little relevant data. I would love to pursue that. I am trying to understand the common intellectual resistance to traditional spiritual belief both from the materialist side and from the theological side. Keep in mind, even though core spiritual experiences are found in most religious traditions around the world, they are either absent or severely constrained within modern, mainstream religion. I also want to understand fully the role of medicine, especially psychiatry, in stigmatizing and suppressing this topic in the modern world through psychopathological theories.

Out of each of those strands, my central desire is to facilitate a change in the modern understanding of spirituality, a change that needs to reform both science (including medicine) and religion. A change that recognizes that Weber's disenchantment of the world did not, in fact happen, and for good reason. The world we live in is far more interesting than we have been taught. The spiritual aspect of the world demands the attention of educated and sophisticated thinkers, not the kind of anti-empirical dogmatic denial of human spirituality that we see today. The pub-

lic needs to know that if they have a near-death experience or a visit from a deceased loved one that they have good reason to feel the consolation that comes naturally with such experiences, and not the anxiety imposed by modern sanctions against spiritual experience. They need to know that if they have a scary experience of SP it does not mean they are crazy OR that they can't tell the difference between waking and sleeping. Other cultures throughout the world have knowledge that helps to deal with SP. We should not be the only ones left in ignorance. The ignorant and irrational rejection of spirituality so common among intellectuals in modern society makes the public vulnerable to all sorts of cult claims and religious extremism. I would like to contribute to changing these things. I am far from alone in this, and I see the change coming. I hope to live long enough to contribute to reaching the turning point!

Biographies



John W. Morehead has an MA in intercultural studies from Salt Lake Theological Seminary. He applies his academic background in religion and cultural studies to his work in popular culture. In this area he has taught courses in theology and film, and contributed to various works including *Halos & Avatars*, *Butcher Knives & Body Counts*, *Horror Films of the 1990s*, an essay on Matrixism for *The Brill Handbook of Hyper-Real Religion*, and served as co-

editor and contributor to *The Undead and Theology*. He sits on the editorial board of *GOLEM: The Journal of Religion and Monsters*. In addition to his pop culture interests, he also conducts research, writes, and lectures on new religions, world religions, and interreligious dialogue. John also edits *TheoFantastique* (www.theofantastique.com).

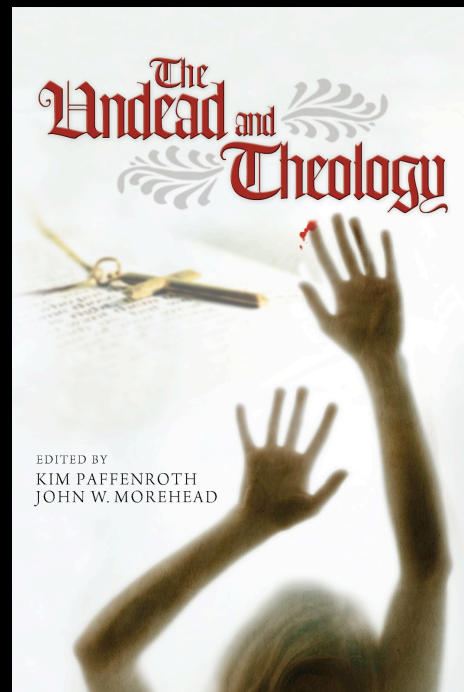
David Hufford is Professor and Director at the Doctors Kienle Center for Humanistic Medicine at the Penn State College of Medicine (Hershey), where he has appointments in Medical Humanities, Behavioral Science, and Family and Community Medicine. He is Adjunct Professor in the Program of Religious Studies at Penn and is currently providing leadership in an initiative to establish a center on Spirituality and Health in Penn's School of Medicine. His primary research interests, which incorporate perspectives on applied folklore and theory, are in the areas of alternative health systems and folk belief and practice. His book, *The Terror That Comes In The Night*, explores the experiential basis for belief in the supernatural. David teaches courses on the Ethnography of Belief,



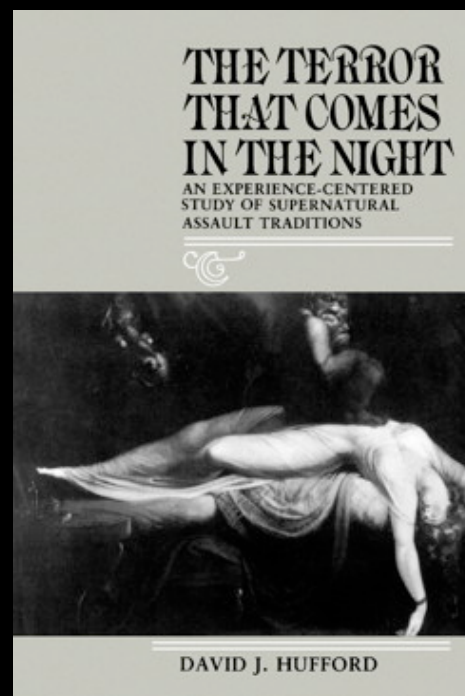
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Folk and Unorthodox Health Systems, and Human Diversity in Healthcare.

Publications:



https://wipfandstock.com/store/The_Undead_and_Theology/



<http://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/918.html>

The Experiencing Brain

Charles D. Laughlin



Sociocultural anthropologists typically ignore the brain. Whole books on anthropological theory are still written, many dealing with psychological issues, but which make no mention of the neurosciences, or neuroanthropology for that matter (e.g., Moberg 2013). This is a curious form of neglect considering that everything anthropologists talk about with respect to culture, enculturation and acculturation pertains to activities of neurophysiological systems. As a consequence of this neglect, anthropology fails to utilize the rich body of research that could inform them about their scope of inquiry. Among other things, any act of consciousness cannot be any more complex, any more intelligent, any more creative or insightful than the neurophysiology mediating the act. We cannot perceive anything that our senses cannot detect. We cannot understand more than our brain can model. We cannot experience anything that our brain cannot structure and comprehend. We cannot process information that our brain is not designed and prepared to process. The preparedness to experience is fundamentally ‘wired-in.’ Indeed, every moment of our stream of experience is being mediated by the cells in our brain that originate as inherited neural structures (neurognosis, or neurognostic structures; see Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquila 1990) which become altered and conditioned ‘socially’ in such a way that the experience or physical act can be produced and understood in local cultural terms.

The Brain World

In short, we experience between our ears. Our world of experience is constituted by and occurs entirely within our brain. Hence, our world of experience might as well be called our brain world. The extra-mental world – the world as it exists apart from our experience or knowledge of it – we may call the real world.

Our brain world consists of neural models of the real world that mediate experiences we project out upon the real world by way of our feed-forward cog-

nitions and actions. Interaction with the real world results in a feedback loop which our brain uses to correct its models. Models are made up of neural circuits by the tens of thousands that organize themselves in such a way that they mediate a percept, an image, a thought, a feeling to the ‘mind’s eye.’ The brain is both the producer and audience of the mind-movie that is our ongoing stream of experience – the producer and audience of our brain world.

Why didn’t I simply call the brain world the ‘internal world’ and the real world the ‘external world?’ The reason is because our brain and our body (apart from our modeling of them), are part of the real world. We are both beings in the real world and minds that experience and model both our inner selves, and happenings in the external world. We are, empirically speaking, a special object in the real world in that we may experience ourselves both from the outside in (I see my fingers moving over this keyboard) and from the inside out (I feel the pressure inside my fingers as they press against the keys). Only conscious beings can do that. Moreover I can only do it for myself. I do not have access to you from the inside out. The closest I can get to this is the experience of empathy.

When we think about things, reach conclusions, make judgments, have insights, feel things – the experiences and their mediating neural structures exist only within the confines of our bodies. The repercussions of these experiences occur in the real world, but are limited in their effects to that part of reality that is our self – our being. If I fantasize having a gourmet meal with Sharon Stone, the effects of this internal process remain internal to my body. But if I act upon it – say, I pick up the phone and make reservations for me and Sharon at Le Bec Fin, and then whip off an invitation by email to Sharon at www.hollywoodcelebrities.com, then the effects of my brain world activity transcend my body and have implications in external reality. Perhaps a while later several beefy men in white coats show up to escort me to a nice, quiet sanitarium. This was not my intended outcome, obviously. I had imagined that

Sharon would leap at the chance to have a super meal with someone who's intelligence, and humbleness for that matter, are equal to her own. Alas, the real world is such a tragic bummer!

The Real World

That's the hell of it! The real world is transcendental relative to my mind and will. That is, there is always in all things more to reality than I can know or control. While I am focused on this rather than that, reality is all happening all the time. While I am busy knowing this, there is a whole lot of that going on simultaneously. Meanwhile, reality has power over my body and my mind. Reality is forever resisting my will and conditioning my acts. That's called being 'realistic.' Being realistic means I realize that the real world is characterized by its obduracy relative to my intentions, and I act accordingly. If I try to walk through a wall without the benefit of a door, I will come up against the obdurate nature of reality. While I may imagine or dream that Sharon and I are having a jolly time discussing string theory over our terrine de saumon aux epinards, attempts to do so in reality may well prove disappointing, even disastrous for me. Also, if I try to solve a problem – like, try to recall all the movies Sharon has starred in – and I can't seem to do it, it is my brain itself that is the obdurate reality that is thwarting my will. Folks my age encounter that problem all the time. I am demanding more of my brain than it can accomplish at the moment. Assuming I am relatively sane, the feedback from reality will at least lead me to alter my expectations, and perhaps adjust my discernment between fantasy and reality. If I am not able to make those adjustments, then the fellows in the white coats may conclude, with good reason, that I am 'crazy,' 'out-of-it,' 'wacko,' so forth.

Neurocognitive adaptation has to do with our encounters with the obdurate nature of the real world – both physical reality and social reality (solid walls other people and social conventions). Indeed, much of early development in the baby has to do with exploring the somatic and sensory limits of obduracy – the obduracy of the baby's own body and its local environment.

Reality also impresses itself on our brain world through feedback about what is really possible. I like to use the term affordancy for this feedback, a term coined by the famous psychologist, James J. Gibson, to conceptualize the active interaction between experience and reality. Affordancy is what reality provides for our adaptation, whether the effects be 'good or ill'

– reality provides we critters both aliment and poison. The development of knowledge about the real world is the process by which the brain builds models from our stock of inherited neurognosis that match – that anticipate and accurately depict – what is afforded by the world. Over there I see an object that looks like a 'chair.' The range of objects that we recognize (literally re-cognize) as being chairs is vast, and are precisely those objects we interpret as 'sit-able.' Some objects are also 'stand-on-able.' Some 'chairs' are also 'stools' that are cognized as both 'sit-able' and 'stand-on-able.' Many 'chairs' do not afford 'stand-on-ability' and are thus not also 'stools,' and we would be silly to use them as stools. Learning all about that is a 'chair' and what is not is part of our development. So too is which women are 'date-able' and which are not. Alas, Sharon is, for me at least, not only 'un-date-able' but probably 'un-meet-able.' As the Buddha taught, life is dukkha, 'suffering,' 'struggle,' or as I prefer to translate it, 'a bitch.'

What is obdurate and affordant is not a quality of reality so much as it arises during the interaction between an animal and its environment. In other words, obduracy and affordancy depend upon the nature of the animal, as well as the nature of the environment of the animal. A stick lying over a stream may afford adequate support ('bridge-ability') for a colony of ants wishing to cross over, but not for a dog. Flowers afford information in the ultraviolet range for honey bees, but not for nearly hairless apes who cannot perceive in that range of the spectrum. A river may obdurately thwart our crossing, but not a beaver's or an elephant's. That rock may afford me a weapon, but not for my dog Toby who has no hands. A small body of water may be a puddle to an elephant that walks right through it, a pond for us nearly hairless apes who have to walk around it, and an ocean to an earthworm who may well drown in it.

Another way to see affordancy and obduracy is as the consequence of causation. As Arthur Peacocke (2010:254) has written, '...to be real is to have causal power' – the locus of control over what causes what in the interaction between a brain world and reality is external to the will of the animal. Our brain world is the result of our cognizing our real self and our real environment. Our world of experience is mediated by neural networks that are themselves part of real entities – real bodies – that are in turn embedded in a real world of systemic, causal efficacy (to use Whitehead's term). We know extramental reality because we run up against the causal efficacy of both our local environment and our own bodies. If we take our

next breath and all there is to breathe is water, then we will drown. The locus of control over causal efficacy is external to our brain world.

Brain World/Real World

The brain world/real world dynamic is a setup for several systematic epistemological and ontological errors frequently encountered among peoples across cultures.

1. Mangling the Brain World and Real World

First of all, obduracy and affordancy are really obverse qualities of reality in interaction with the developing brain world. Both our real body and the external world present, not only as sensory experiences (I see my hands, I hear my voice), but also as obdurate (I can't fly in air no matter how hard I flap my arms, but I can fly in water) and affordant (I can pick up and handle all sorts of objects – i.e., they are 'graspable' and 'manipulable') limits to our intentionality, and thus operate to guide the development of our knowledge about our physical being, our world and the interactions between the two. We encounter these qualities daily, as do all animals. We only become aware of them per se when we run up against either resistance to our intentions or new opportunities we had not recognized before. Once we have adapted to (adjusted our neural models of) obdurate and affordant features in the world, we generally 'adapt-out' and lose awareness of the distinction between our experience and extramental reality – the distinction between experience and real world fuzzes out and we assume our experience to be reality. We all remember when we learned to tie shoelaces and neckties, and how the actions became automatic once we had learned them. In a sense, we construct ourselves during the course of development and adaptation into a kind of automaton, a 'wet' robot who's will is to some extent autonomous from our consciousness.

The point here is that people everywhere quite naturally mangle the distinction between brain world and real world – regardless of cultural background. We normally operate as though the world of our experience – the movie in our head – is reality, when it is never more than an adaptational rendition of reality. Our world of experience is, and can only be, reality as depicted by our brain world for the consumption of our brain world. Our world of experience can only be our particular point of view. After all, I am looking at this bright monitor while typing and quite naturally – and falsely – assume that the light is 'out

there,' when it is in fact 'in here,' inside my brain world. Light and color is how my brain world interprets and presents to itself electromagnetic energies of a particular range of the visible spectrum to my mind's eye. A congenitally blind person cannot normally experience light and color. His or her brain world is devoid of light, just as the normal human brain world is devoid of ultraviolet images that are part of the honeybee's perception, or the electromagnetic images apparent in the electric eel's perception.

2. The Brain-World and the Transcendental Nature of Reality

Second of all, because we normally and quite naturally project our brain world onto reality, we thereby lose track of the fact that the real world is always transcendental relative to our models, comprehension, perception and intentions. With respect to self-awareness and self-understanding, we experience ourselves as we think we are, as we imagine we are, as we feel we are. We always know our self from a point of view, and that point of view is always partial. I can see the front of this monitor, but not the back. In fact I cannot see all the sides of anything at the same time. The great painter, Pablo Picasso played with this natural limitation to perception in many of his cubist works, like seeing a woman's face from both the front and side at the same time. By the same token, I can never experience my entire being. Most of the real me is hidden to my perception or introspection. My being is forever a transcendental mystery unto myself.

Naturally, if we were to change our point of view on ourselves, our model of ourselves would likely change. For instance, if we make a study of our body scientifically, we soon discover we are less a 'person' than we are an ecosystem, a foraging ground for our microbiome (Wilson 2004; Marples 1965). Few of us take into account the fact that trillions of microorganisms live on us and inside us, and make our real body their home. Just which organisms live where on us depends on many factors that affect locations on and in our bodies as niches. Temperature variation, moisture, pH, chemicals present and absent, available forage, access to light, how often and with which products we wash, and so forth. Different places on the skin have different populations of different microbes. So too in our gut. It is estimated that something like 100 trillion microbes live on us and in us. There are roughly 10 times the number of microbes on and in us than we have cells in our body! In one study of 26 adult humans, it was found that an aver-

age of 46,000 living organisms dwell under each fingernail. [Ha! Think about that next time you scratch an itch!] Yet we never think about our self as an ecosystem. Again, our own body is a transcendental object to our brain world. Even our brain is a transcendental object to our brain world. We could spend the rest of our lives studying the human body – including our own body and its brain – and never come to the end of knowledge about our being.

It does not matter what aspect of reality toward which we turn our attention, there is more to it than we can ever know – and it is all happening all the time. We can study baseball, ceramics, nematode worms, black holes, ocean tides, legumes, robotics – it really doesn't matter, for we will never come to the end of it unless our brain world stops the process of inquiry. Stopping the process of inquiry is precisely what the brain world is designed to do. We naturally will turn toward, and become interested in novelty until at some point our urge to understand the novelty wears thin, and then we 'close' our model and carry on. It does not matter that there is an endless amount of information yet to be learned, our brain is designed to stop inquiry when it has adapted to the novelty and rendered it redundant and sufficiently meaningful. The more intelligent the animal, the longer and more energetic will be our scrutiny of novelty. Chimps will study a novel object longer on average than will a baboon or other monkey. Humans will study novelty longer than will a chimp. But inevitably we lose interest and our model of the previously novel object or happening closes. We have adapted to it. We have modeled its obdurate and affordant nature.

There is an interesting Buddhist meditation that teaches one a lot about this process. In some circles it is called 'doing a Patthana' (named for the last book of the Abhidhamma Pitaka). The Patthana is a lengthy discourse on causation, and isolates through contemplative methods some 24 types of causality (paccaya) that are involved in any and all experiences. Doing a Patthana involves meditating upon any phenomenon – the simpler the better, like an apple standing on a table top – and parsing out all the causal relations necessary for that experience to be occurring before the mind at that moment. Like any meditation of substance – and this one gets really complex, really quick! – one has to actually do it to really understand the point of it. Suffice to say, no matter what phenomenon you meditate upon, you end up with the entire universe, as well as its history and to some extent its future. In other words, you

never come to the end of the causation. This is one of the powerful meditations that can lead eventually to the realization of totality – the realization that everything is causally interconnected, and that nothing whatever is separate or independent of the All. This is a very rare level of systemic comprehension. Very few people anywhere are able to comprehend their world in such terms.

3. Invisible Causation in the Real World

To repeat: the real world and everything in it is transcendental relative to our ability to model it within our brain world. Another reason that this is the case is that most of the causality operating in the real world is hidden from us – invisible to our senses. This is especially true of causal relations between otherwise visible things and events. If a causal relationship is very proximal both in space and time, then we can be accurate in our understanding of many of its elements. The other car ran a red light and T-boned us. I throw a stone and a few moments later see the splash in the lake. But most causation in the real world is relatively distant from our point of observation. We adapt to gravity, but we can neither see gravity nor can we totally comprehend gravity. What we actually do is fill in the gaps with concepts and theories. I don't mean just scientific ideas and theories here. I mean stories and explanations developed in each and every culture on the planet to account for the invisible aspects of the world. This is the stuff myths are made of.

For instance, the Navajo people of the American southwest hold that all perceivable things in the world have normally invisible, causative, spiritual aspects that are imagined as 'Holy People' – for example, the Mountain People, the Star People, the River People, the Rain People, the Corn People, and so on. For sophisticated Navajo thinkers, these Holy People are anthropomorphized symbols for the usually hidden and vital element within all things, and which traditional Navajo philosophy equates with 'Wind' (nilch'i; see McNeley 1981). People themselves also have such a hidden dimension called 'the Wind within one' (nilch'i hwii'siziinii). All these Winds are really part of the one all-pervasive, all-encompassing Holy Wind. Winds are never distinct entities and there is energy flowing in and out of even the most enduring and solid objects. It is the coming and going of wind that accounts for the tapestry of reciprocal causation typical of their understanding of the cosmos. The choice of 'wind' as the central metaphor is an explicit recognition – common to many cultures on the planet –

that there are forces that normally cannot be observed, save by inference from their effects. You cannot see the wind, but it can blow your house down in a storm.

It is very much the function of myth in more traditional societies like Navajo to reveal and explicate the invisible dimensions of the world. The hidden energies that are the essence of the world are given a face – a countenance that may be contemplated, that is ‘pleasing to the mind,’ that may be enacted in ritual (like mystery plays and healing ceremonies) and that may be imagined in daily life as the efficient cause of significant phenomena and events (see Davis-Floyd and Laughlin 2013). For those members who are well versed in their society’s mythological system, the core myths and their various symbolic extrusions are all-of-a-piece. They form a single, ramified ‘cognitive map’ within the context of which events – even events in the modern world of global politics and economic affairs – make sense and are easily related to both other events in the contemporary world, and archetypal events that unfold in that timeless era of mythological mysteries.

4. Finite Brain-World, Infinite Real-World

The relationship between our brain world and the real world is thus one of a model to the real thing being modeled. Only, in this case, the model is very finite, much localized and very simplified, and reality is transcendental and infinite. As I have said, our brain world, by way of its nature of sometimes being conscious, tends to be focused on this rather than that, while reality is happening all the time – and incidentally reality never sleeps. Moreover, most of what is happening in reality is invisible to our brain world. Those trillions of microbes just keep foraging about our body-ecosystem, doing their individual and collective thing –which, by the way, keeps our body-ecosystem healthy most of the time – and we are blissfully unaware of it. Those vast hoards of microbes might as well not be there, for all the attention we pay them. Yet their existence and their activities are real and they have real effects in the real world. Some NASA scientists have wondered whether we humans can actually live permanently in space colonies because of our dependence upon microorganisms that we can only see under powerful microscopes (check out Pyle et al. n.d.).

The real world isn’t localized. Locality is defined by conscious beings mentally adapting to their environment. Reality on the other hand has no center, no focus, no locality. Modern physicists will tell you that

the entire universe is implicated in every event, no matter how small or large. We come to know and model our world from our being outwards. We are the center of our own self-constructed universe. When a newborn baby focuses on objects in her environment, they are objects that are very close. Newborns cannot see clearly beyond a few feet. Only gradually do their senses extend outwards in their quest for sensory patterns to identify and store in memory. When a new worker honeybee begins to forage outside the hive, she does so in gradually increasing circles outward from the hive, going no further afield than she can cognitively map and find her way back home. Meanwhile, the real world is all there all the time, a plenum void with infinite dimensions and literally mind-boggling complexity.

Conclusion

One of the implications of this neuroanthropological view of experience is that ‘relativist,’ or ‘constructivist’ theories of culture simply won’t wash anymore. The brain world is never a blank slate. It is exquisitely structured from fetal life onward. Cultures are variations on a theme. Most of the essential elements of experience are the same for every normal human on the planet. Interpretations will vary locally, as will emphasis upon this or that state of consciousness. Some cultures like ours will typically ignore their dream life, while other cultures consider dreaming essential to their way of life (Laughlin 2011). Yet everyone on the planet dreams every night, and the structural properties of dreaming are universal. Anthropologists continue to ignore the neurosciences at their peril, for as the burgeoning neuroscience disciplines emerge and master their scopes of inquiry, anthropological theory will be left further and further behind.

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Biography

An anthropologist by trade, education and inclination, **Charles Laughlin** taught the subject at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, for 25+ years. He retired in 2001. Among other things, being an anthropologist allowed Charlie to live with different peoples all over the planet, including African pastoralists in East Africa, Tibetan lamas in Nepal and India, and Navajo Indians in the American southwest. He naturally learned lots of things, including how cultures influence the states of mind of people, and how culture is both an adaptational strength and a trap for individual minds seeking the truth of being and existence.



News & Recent Publications of Interest

"Painful and Extreme Rituals Enhance Social Cohesion and Charity"

<http://www.psypost.org/2013/06/painful-and-extreme-rituals-enhance-social-cohesion-and-charity-18516>

"Vatican to Announce John Paul II 'Miracle'"

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/vaticancityandhollysee/10129593/Vatican-to-announce-John-Paul-II-miracle.html>

"Heartbeat Used to Generate Out-of-Body Experience"

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn23694-heartbeat-used-to-generate-outofbody-experience.html#.UcLv2BZ8eN>

"Shaman 'Rainmaking' Center Discovered in South Africa"

<http://news.yahoo.com/shaman-rainmaking-center-discovered-south-africa-114745962.html>

"Dreams Cloud Brings IASD's Annual Psi Dreaming Contest Online"

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2013/6/prweb10792903.htm>

"Is Spirituality the Result of a Combination of Hallucinations and Happiness?"

<http://wikkorg.wordpress.com/2013/06/12/is-spirituality-the-result-of-a-combination-of-hallucinations-and-happiness/>

"'Neurons to Nirvana' Makes the Case for Deeper Scientific Research into Psychedelics"

<http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/neurons-to-nirvana-filmmakers-talk-about-scientific-research-into-psychedelics>

"Prehistoric Rock Art Maps Cosmological Belief"

<http://phys.org/news/2013-06-professor-prehistoric-art-cosmological-belief.html>

"The Greeks who Worship the Ancient Gods"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22972610>

UFOs and Other Anomalous Phenomena Connections, Beliefs and Perspectives

Jose Banuelos



Abstract

Anomalous and often perplexing phenomena that have not been explained in a conclusive manner have been a part of human experience for a long period of time. Through this time such phenomena have been interpreted in different frameworks (supernatural, paranormal, religious, magical, etc.), this has contributed to the formation of various beliefs and fields of study that have individually dealt with and advanced theories and “refined” interpretations. Historically a few researchers have endeavored into the unknown with an open mind and have found parallels between some manifestations and events, although the contribution from those researchers has been a valuable one, it must also be acknowledged that it has been limited, a comprehensive or holistic perspective to the anomalous phenomena and its relationship to humanity and the environment has yet to appear. The way we [humans] tend to form and hold on to our beliefs appears to be deterring our progress towards a solution. The purpose of this paper is to encourage an open-minded, inclusive, and multidisciplinary approach to anomalous phenomena.

Ideas and Beliefs

Humanity harbours the most various opinions and fantasies about Truth, morality and Beauty, even about prosperity and (most curious) even about health (Koneczny 1962:153).

Before an adequate and reliable approach to the anomalous and paranormal can be developed, it is important to consider a fundamental, influential and often overlooked aspect: belief. The manifestations of the phenomena (anomalous aerial objects, strange creatures or beings, visions, abductions, etc.) can be traced back to at least the beginning of recorded history. It appears that in early times the phenomena were not really considered to be unexplained, on the contrary, they received numerous interpretations that found a place in the beliefs of the times, or gave way to new ones (although mainly of a religious or spiritual nature).

Until fairly recently some interesting events have taken place: 1) there has been an increase in openness and tolerance towards alternative ideas, 2) beliefs that were once confined to certain geographical areas have found their way unto others, 3) a more objective and historical approach to these subjects has been

taken by a few researchers, and 4) technology has facilitated the communication of recent phenomena. This series of events have encompassed religion, spiritualism, occultism, witchcraft, paranormal phenomena, etc. resulting in a surge of alternative ideas and beliefs that are more or less revivals and amalgamations of “ancient knowledge” tailored according to the intellectual, technological and social conditions of the present, but ones that do not necessarily represent reality in a more profound or complete way. However, closer or farther from the mystery as they may be, these new beliefs are bound to influence and change our future conditions, just as ancient religions and beliefs greatly shaped history through a subtle influence upon human thought and (consequently) human action. Our first observation is that the interpretations that have been attributed to anomalous phenomena have (directly or indirectly) influenced humanity at least since recorded history began, and the way we interpret anomalous phenomena today can have an effect on our future.

Humanity has reached an intellectual and technological level that allows us to communicate over vast distances in real-time, gather great amounts of information from worldwide sources, analyze the data and make inferences based on what was gathered. In

view of these circumstances it would seem that greater discussion, proposal and objective research looking for conclusive data on anomalies would take place, but this has seldom occurred, it seems as if open-mindedness is still scarce. Meanwhile, research of related topics is becoming more strenuous, tedious and sometimes even confusing due to the overwhelming amount of information that is becoming available. This information has not facilitated the explanation of the phenomena, but according to Horgan:

The perennial philosophy, postmodernism, negative theology, transpersonal psychology, neurotheology, gnosticism, and neo-shamanism all insist in their own ways that there is an irreducible mystery at the heart of things. So does science (2003, p.218).

Although no discipline has unveiled this mystery yet, they all have evoked one recurring element: believers and skeptics, but where are the unbiased and open-minded who dispassionately and carefully consider the alternatives? Even with the “pseudo-sciences” where one would think researchers would keep an open-mind, many have comfortably settled for a view that has remained unaffected by other equally or even more plausible alternative explanations, the extraterrestrial origin as an explanation for UFOs is an example, in his investigation on this subject Keel noticed that:

Man’s tendency to create a deep and inflexible belief on the basis of little or no evidence has been exploited. These beliefs have created tunnel vision and blinded many to the real nature of the phenomenon (1970, p.7).

Even though Keel observed this in the 70s it can be argued that it still applies in the present. There are probably just a few ufologists who would consider an alternative explanation to the phenomenon, Randles suggested that they should end their search for ‘beings that, in the end, appear to be illusory’ (2013, p.31). But even if the various anomalous phenomena or their interpretations were all but illusory, the effects on humanity are certainly not. ‘I have come to see that the abduction phenomenon has important philosophical, spiritual, and social implications’ (Mack 1995, p.3), the same can be said about experiences of a religious, mystical, psychedelic and paranormal nature.

Approaching the Unknown

In certain ways the study of the anomalous or paranormal has followed a similar approach as science; it has been divided into “sub-disciplines” that are differentiated by the type of manifestation and/or their given interpretation. Variability has mostly been taken to represent distinct and unrelated phenomena. Each discipline has been further fragmented by different theories that are backed by advocates who dedicate substantial time and effort to advance a theory. The content that has been derived from such theories and research has (for the most part) been less than scientific, in the sense that it has not been based on rigorous and unbiased investigation and/or reporting. This has mostly led to speculation, controversy and to further obscure that which was already a mystery.

With the anomalous it seems that a reductive approach does not seem very favorable as it has not yet been determined how much the phenomena encompasses and/or how far it permeates, yet, the reductive approach is the road most researchers have taken. Few have considered the idea and investigated the phenomena with the possibility that the various kinds of manifestations could represent parts of a whole, a single source or coordination between sources. Some researchers are not even interested in the various types of phenomena (Mizrach (2013) noted this about many ufologists), Cannon wrote about this division within ufology:

Many investigators study only sightings and physical traces such as landings, and stop there. Other investigators study only abductions and stop there (1999, p.8).

Others (although open to some paranormal phenomena) would appear have a limit to what they will believe to be possible, of the 1966 Mothman sightings of West Virginia, Bishop comments:

There was so much weirdness connected with this story... that many UFO investigators and historians refuse to take the case seriously. That is a shame, as there may be keys here to unlocking the interconnected nature of the UFO phenomena with other fortean issues (n.d.).

Considering that humanity could be dealing with a ‘level of thought that is superhuman’, Aimé Michel

pointed out that ‘neither the absurd nor the contradictory must ever be excluded as such’ (Bowen ed.1969, p. 255)

Researchers that have looked at variability as separate parts of one “system” have gone on to uncover some interesting parallels. It is important to remember that open-mindedness and knowledge in other fields have played a significant role in discovering these similarities. In the paranormal field, Keel was one of those researchers, he wrote:

History, psychiatry, religion, and the occult have proven to be far more important to an understanding of the whole than the many books which simply recount the endless sightings of aerial anomalies (1970, p.6).

At some point it starts to become apparent that (as Michel so aptly stated): ‘the rule is to think of everything and to believe nothing’ (Bowen 1969, p.253).

Making Connections

We have already seen that one of the most frequent consequences of anomalous phenomena has been the creation of beliefs. But belief has not always come from the interpretation of the events; it has also come from supposed communication. In ancient cultures it is said that shamans and priests received messages from their deities, people that reported to have had direct contact with angels or messengers of god abound in religions and spiritual beliefs, numerous are the cases of automatic writing and mediums that have received information, and the UFO contactees/abductees who have received messages from “interstellar beings.” These are all examples of supposed communication with some sort of supernatural being, intelligence or mind. Many cults, spiritual movements and religions have been established by direct instruction or inspiration from this contact. Sociologists Glock and Stark stated:

All religious experiences, from the dimmest to the most frenzied, constitute occasions defined by those experiencing them as an encounter between themselves and some supernatural consciousness (quoted from Vallee 2008, p.14).

It is worth noting that it does not appear to be the case that the purported contactees of “otherworldly

beings,” “ascended masters” and “messengers of god” have doubted the information they have received.

Physical, psychological and physiological similarities in the experiences of the anomalous can be found by researching the many cases through history. For example, parallels have been identified in the kidnapping stories of fairy tales, “alien” abductions, witches meetings with the devil, and various other ‘mythical’ stories, even the religious stories of angels taking people to mountains or heaven (Bejarano 2013; Keel 1970). Vallee wondered why the supposed aliens behaved ‘like the denizens of fairy tales and the elves of ancient folklore?’(2008, p.6). Mack also noticed the similarities, he stated:

The UFO abduction experience, while unique in many respects, bears resemblance to other dramatic, transformative experiences undergone by shamans, mystics, and ordinary citizens who have had encounters with the paranormal (1995, p.441).

Time and its influence on space have always been of importance to humanity and it appears to play an important role in the experiences of anomalous phenomena as well. In various cases of UFO encounters, alien abductions, fairy kidnappings, time does not seem to elapse in the ordinary manner in which we are accustomed to, it would seem more analogous to dreams and some psychedelic experiences.

Sound and light are also important elements of the anomalous. There is the whistling, swishing, humming, hissing, or eerie throbbing sound that is usually described in close encounters with UFOs and abduction cases. In religious/spiritual literature and art we find a parallel in the angels and messengers of god who were depicted as luminous beings, sometimes with a sounding trumpet, as well as the chariots or clouds from which some of them came. In the fairy stories there is the singing that was used to enchant humans, fairy circles have become crop circles. Strange sounds and lights are also part of the poltergeist phenomena.

The study of close encounters with ‘aliens’ and abduction cases has shown that many people who had this experiences often reported other parapsychological, psychic or poltergeist phenomena: hearing voices speaking from within oneself, unexplainable sounds, rapping, lights flickering, locked doors

opening by themselves etc. (Fowler 1982; Mack 1995; Keel 1970).

Cryptozoology and ufology are usually considered as separate and unrelated, yet, there have been many encounters with strange creatures and beings (not associated with the usual description of 'aliens') in relation to UFOs which could suggest a link between both types of phenomena (Bowen 1969, Keel 1970). Curiously, Mack (1995) noticed that to many abductees, 'aliens' first appeared as animals, and that 'the connection with animal spirits is very powerful for many abductees' (1995:18).

During an investigation into SPH (spontaneous human combustion), Randles and Hugh were 'led, somewhat unexpectedly, into contact with UFOs' (2013, p.31), they associated the physical/physiological effects of the UFO phenomena with energy (especially static charge), effects that in the 70s Keel attributed to electromagnetism. The malfunction of electronic and mechanical equipment has been connected with various anomalous phenomena.

It is also interesting to note that many of the patterns and consequences on humanity that can potentially be attributed to anomalous phenomena have been discerned through the meticulous examination of worldwide historical events, it seems as if the phenomena becomes more apparent through its long term effects (social consequences) only long after they have influenced human action. This in itself should be a very important aspect for research as we may be dealing with a subtle but potent influence on humanity (no matter what the source may be). For this reason Vallee repeatedly urged scientific research into the UFO phenomena.

At this point there is one aspect that could link shamans with enlightened people, abductees, fairy stories, psychedelic experiences and paranormal phenomena: a profound change in perception. Through history some people have looked for it, others have suddenly been exposed to it, and most have had their attention swayed towards it (whether they have noticed it or not) by curiosity or some kind of association.

Hide and seek

Through history the different phenomena has apparently been manifesting, leaving just enough amount of evidence (be it visions, signs, etc.) so as to evoke certain interpretations that led to various beliefs, manifested with enough variability and confusion so

as to avoid arousing investigation towards itself, but inducing an impact so great that myths and beliefs based on the events have endured for centuries. In his investigation on mysticism Horgan mentions:

Even the most fantastical ghost stories, including the old stories of religion, can serve a purpose... [They] can remind us of the unfathomable mystery at the heart of things (2003, p.235).

Be it by accident or design, the manifestations of and the beliefs that the anomalous phenomena evoke do not shed light on the mysterious source and its intentions (if any). It tends to avoid objective explanation in a way that one could seriously conclude (but not reliably prove) that there is intelligence behind it; we are left with "coincidences" and "absurdities."

History has taught us that when an idea turns into an inflexible belief and open-mindedness ceases, human action can be controlled (for better or worse) by authority, paradoxically, it could also be true that a vast amount of information based on so many alternative ideas can make objective research very difficult or next to impossible (even with the technology available today), therefore, one important consideration in the study of the anomalous phenomena is that of consciously keeping check on our own beliefs, their influence on our view of reality, and our expectations when doing research, because to some degree our published or communicated views and results (whether they are correct or not) can contribute to the ideas and beliefs of others, and we as researchers/authors could be somehow influenced and used for this purpose. 'There are times when coincidental circumstances make me feel like a pawn in some complex but predetermined chessgame' wrote Fowler (1982, p.131). When investigating the Mothman sightings, Keel realized he could be manipulated by the phenomena, he termed this aspect of it the "reflective" effect (1975). We can also hint at a more subtle yet interesting occurrence with Mack:

I will devote more attention in this book to the transformational and spiritual growth aspects of the abduction phenomenon... There are several reasons for this decision... most interesting, I think, is my personal experience as a psychiatrist dealing with abductees: I seem to receive more information of this kind in my work with abductees than, apparently, do other

investigators. It is not altogether clear why this is so (1995, p.31).

In 1988, long before writing her book about the abduction phenomena, Cannon also had a 'strange occurrence':

During the night I had the distinct and unfamiliar feeling that an entire block of information had somehow been inserted into my head... I knew the concept dealt with the explanation that should be included in my book on UFO cases, which had not yet even started (1999, pp.12-13).

It took ten years for Cannon to accumulate enough information to form a book, yet she affirmed that: 'it definitely followed the concept given to me in 1988' (1999, pp.14).

In light of these incidences it might also be important for authors and researchers of these topics to consider the events in their own lives and look for subtle but certain influences that have led them to an interest in these topics, as well as the circumstances that have led to the information and ideas they seek to convey to others. We might find some interesting parallels and "coincidences" in our personal history.

Conclusion

Regrettably, anomalous phenomena has been for the most part researched and analyzed partially and with much bias, yet, in the process many strong ideas have been formed and currently prevail. The average person tends to associate UFOs with extraterrestrial life, poltergeists with ghosts, ghosts with deceased people, cryptozoology with undiscovered or ancient creatures, fairies and elves with myth, etc.

It should be clear by now that the study of the anomalous requires (among other things) impartial researchers who are dispassionate towards the result as long as the truth is revealed, who are unbiased towards alternative explanations, capable of admitting errors and adjusting research efforts accordingly, who are familiar with different anomalous phenomena including historical events and are knowledgeable in as many "scientific" fields as possible.

The anomalous phenomena have proven that humanity is most vulnerable in one area, in its need for belief. Humanity can prosper or decay based on its beliefs and anomalous phenomena has been

shown to be at the core of various (if not all) of them. It is time we look at all manifestations and events with an open and unbiased mind, trying to uncover what has been behind our very own ideas and motives, and for what purpose.

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Jose Banuelos has been interested in ancient cultures, science, art, and anomalous phenomena since he was ten years old. In his early 20s he searched for a central truth in various esoteric disciplines and teachings, later his interest in archeology brought him in contact with various alternative theories regarding the source of ancient culture and myth. His recent look into the UFO and abduction phenomena has culminated in a reflection upon all his previous explorations. He has learned that an unprejudiced and inquisitive mind is fundamental in approaching mysteries.

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The Culture of War, “Afterlife Conscious Minds,” & Morphogenetic Fields: The Past Soundscapes of an American Civil War Battlefield

John G. Sabol



Introduction

In this paper, I will present a particular society, the “culture of war” of the American Civil War period, where, in a particular situational setting (a battlefield), the sense of hearing (and directed listening) dominated the external sensory experience of men, and directed their actions in specific spaces. This sensing, defined as the “bodily” means of gathering information, was an acoustemology of experience, a particular way of knowing the external environment as one experienced “seeing the elephant” on an American Civil War battlefield.”? According to Clinton (2009), “the deathbed of a loved one was perhaps the most hallowed of Nineteenth Century ritual settings” (2009:4). The “Good Death” was a prepared death, surrounded by family at home, and a burial in the family plot. The American Civil War battlefield changed that. The ritual was never completed, in many instances, for the soldiers who fought and died on these American Civil War battlefields.

In an important ethnographic study in the anthropology of the senses, Kathryn L. Geurts (2003) investigated the cultural meaning system and sensorium of the Anlo-Ewe-speaking people of Southeastern Ghana. In her book, she introduces a new aspect of embodiment as a paradigm for anthropological fieldwork. In Anlo culture, there is little relevance for the five-senses model that pervades Western Euro-Anglo-American cultural traditions. Geurts’s work documents the Anlo culture’s use of sensory experience, and involves a theory of inner states, and their particular way of defining external experience. On an American Civil War battlefield, where I have conducted ethno-archaeological “ghost excavations” for a number of years, this theory of “inner states,” as a way of defining “external experience,” comes into focus for my research on “apparitional experience” as it is perceived today on the Civil War battlefield. The lack of the “good death” was a contributing factor, I

propose, to this contemporary “apparitional experience.” This paper concerns one such investigation, the engagement at Burnside Bridge on the Antietam Battlefield near Sharpsburg, Maryland.

Burnside Bridge: An American Civil War Battlefield Engagement

The battle of Antietam was fought on September 17, 1862. It was the single bloodiest day of combat in American history with more than 26,000 casualties. The engagement at Burnside Bridge, fought on the southeastern part of the battlefield, was a horrific engagement which lasted for five hours on the morning and early afternoon of the 17th. At Burnside Bridge, more than 11,000 Union troops assaulted the bridge five times before occupying the Confederate positions on the opposite bank of Antietam creek. That bridge was defended by less than 300 Confederate soldiers. Because of the heroics of the Confederate defenders, the engagement at Burnside Bridge has been called the “Thermopylae of the Civil War” (Tucker 2000:154):

“At Antietam a relative handful of ragged and barefoot 2nd and 20th Georgia soldiers performed one of the most important military feats of the war by defending Rohrbach’s Bridge (later called “Burnside Bridge”) for most of 17 September 1862. These Georgians were truly Spartans in gray, who fought against impossible odds.....(Tucker 2000:154).

Because of this highly emotional defense, the large amount of Union casualties (600), in a narrow and confining space, and the time period involved, it was thought that the landscape in and around Burnside Bridge was a good site to explore the possibilities of recording the “remains” of any sonic elements of a Civil War soundscape that may have been recorded

onto the environment. The landscape has received little change since the Civil War. It is protected by employees of the National Park Service, and access into and out of the area is controlled by park rangers. Special permission was needed to conduct an investigation there at night.

The stone bridge itself afforded a possible recording device, and Antietam creek was another possible source. There have also been numerous reports of people experiencing “anomalous” manifestations in the area (“voices,” “shadow figures,” other “visual” anomalies), as well as having personal “apparitional experiences.” During our non-evasive “ghost excavation,” we hoped to record some of these “residual” elements. What we did record, however, was far more than a “residual” soundscape. We have recorded, in context, the possible “voices” of specific soldiers who fought and died at Burnside Bridge on September 17, 1862.

Social and Mental Fields: Are These Evidence of an “Afterlife Conscious Mind?”

How we make ourselves human, be human, and remain human even, perhaps, after the physical death of the body and brain, was (is), in one particular “culture” (the “culture of war” of the American Civil War), through an acoustemological means. In this context, I agree with Geurts’s assertion that “a culture’s sensory order is one of the first and most basic elements of making ourselves human” (2003:3). If sensory order is a patterned field that gives relative importance to different senses through which a society learns to perceive and experience the world, then the Civil War soldier learned a particular modality of sensing and interacting in this “culture of war.” That particular modality was acoustemological, forming a particular and learned way of knowing how and when to move and act on a battlefield. It is this learned pattern of knowing that may survive, I propose, after physical death.

An American Civil War battlefield was primarily a soundscape, not a landscape, for the common “foot” soldier. The intense (and blinding) firepower that was generated onto the environment, in mostly restricted spaces, obscured the vision of the landscape setting. This battlefield soundscape was linked to particular “external experiences” (hearing specific “soundmarks” in particular spaces/temporalities). This “audio-vision” (Chion 1994) prompted a specific “inner state” which Jordania (2011) has termed “bat-

tle trance.” This “battle trance,” I propose, created specific cultural and mental “fields” (Sheldrake 2012) of the “culture of war” of the American Civil War, imprinting these “fields” onto the physical environment.

As part of the “culture of war,” these soldiers developed their sonic abilities as a means to know the “external experience” of combat on a Civil War battlefield. This knowledge not only served them well in combat, it created a sociocultural “tradition” that involved a sensibility and sensitivity to particular contextual sounds or “soundmarks” that were recognized by the soldier in combat situations. This “cultural sense” has been described by anthropologist Robert Desjarlais as “a lasting mood or disposition patterned within the workings of a body” (1992:150).

Does this “lasting mood” that became patterned in Civil War combat also last after the death of the physical body? Does it become a fundamental social and mental field of an “afterlife conscious mind” that survives today on a Civil War battlefield? Does it form an historical field pattern of individual (and collective) social habits that remain as vestiges and traces of the “culture of war”? If so, do these fields become expectations (and manifestations) of what it is to remain human in a given time and place from a particular time and place?

I propose that the “auditory streams” that we have recorded during extensive fieldwork at Burnside Bridge on the Antietam battlefield in Maryland (USA) might indicate the survival of some form of social/mental field as patterned acoustemological presences of this “culture of war.” If this acoustemological modality, as a sensorial battlefield “external experience,” did become encoded as a field pattern, then it should manifest as a unique auditory repertoire and configuration of the soundscape in particular battlefield spaces. This additional acoustical element should, to use Steven Feld’s terminology, “lift up over” the “soundings” of contemporary sonic elements and vocalizations of the soundscape, and be contextual to the “soundmarks” and auditory streams that would have occurred on the battlefield (in particular spaces) in 1862.

These “fields” (as “acts”), if they continue today, were first developed by “habitual” drilling off the battlefield. They were re-established in the battlefield soundscape by auditory cues which repeated the sounds and behaviors of “habitual” drilling (prompted by bugle calls/drum rolls/commands (such as “roll-call”), etc.). These “fields,” as memory “tracks,” surfaced in battle and produced Inherent

Military Probability (I.M.P.) behaviors, or what the soldier would have done in particular situations on the battlefield. It is these cultural (I.M.P. behaviors) and mental (“battle trance”) fields of the “culture of war” (as “inner states” and “external experiences” in combat) that survive, I propose, as “forms of life” of an “afterlife consciousness” on these battlefields.

These “cultural and mental fields,” learned from habits (“drilling”), and reinforced on the battlefield (through sensory cues/“soundmarks”), begot a relationship between the acquisition of cultural knowledge (I.M.P. behaviors of the “culture of war”) and a focus on a particular human sensory modality (auditory). This acoustemological sense of knowing how to act became a natural (albeit habitual and mundane) process, even in battle, and it became an essential part in creating a specific human “community” (a Civil War “company” of soldiers) who identified themselves as a “band of brothers” (both literally and figuratively).

The acquisition of these “social and mental fields” (I.M.P. behaviors/“battle trance”) involved a process, I propose, of “self-resonance” (cf. Sheldrake 2012) in combat, repeating past behaviors learned in drills and cued to particular “soundmarks.” Geurts (2003:238) states:

“Self-processes, including those of sensory attention and orientation, require effort or agency and intentionality....The sensorium helps assure that notions of the person both differ culturally, yet appear natural to those who hold them.”

This “self” process creates, I propose, a tangible link between shared cultural practices (I.M.P. behaviors of the “culture of war”), through physical training of bodily experience and auditory flow (drills/soundmarks), and our contemporary performances of these traditions (cultural resonance) in a “ghost excavation” that utilize the repetition of acts of past behaviors (I.M.P.) in particular battlefield spaces (or K.O.C.O.A.).

According to Geurts (2003), there is a “cultural installation” (2003:85) inside the sensing body that reaches far beyond the individual (or the cultural group itself). Do the “cultural and mental fields” of I.M.P. behaviors of the “culture of war” reach beyond the physical death of individual soldiers, the mid-19th c. “culture of war” itself, and what (who) remain on the battlefield as both residual and interactive presences? Does a Civil War “mentality” (as a

state of mind) survive? I propose that it does, and involves a learning process of “self-resonance” as developed by Rupert Sheldrake (cf. 2012).

Recognition and Recall of Consciousness: Past to Future

Our recent fieldwork at Burnside Bridge on the Antietam battlefield has recorded a series of audio streams that may be indicative of these sonic elements of an “afterlife conscious mind” of the “culture of war” of mid-19th c. America. These audio streams were recorded in specific battlefield spaces (K.O.C.O.A.). Doing research, as Rupert Sheldrake states, “we should make as few assumptions as possible” (2012: 12). During our extensive fieldwork at Burnside Bridge, we have reiterated the same investigative (resonating) practices of I.M.P. behaviors, and have recorded the same “voices” responding to these contextual scenarios, even though these scenarios were performed months apart (and with different investigative teams) who had little prior knowledge of the historical record of the battle and the men who fought there.

In each subsequent “excavation” at Burnside Bridge, we have encountered (and interacted with), I propose, what Sheldrake has termed “evolving habits” (2012:85), as a kind of memory. These habits, according to Sheldrake, “grow stronger through repetition” (Ibid: 97). Does a manifestation become present as a consequence of (and influenced by) what happened before? Did past drills influence some future behavior on the battlefield? Does present investigative acts (that are culturally-resonant to a particular space and time) influence and cause the manifestation of past Inherent Military Probability (I.M.P.) behaviors of the “culture of war” in the form of contemporary intentional acts of an “afterlife conscious mind” of a Civil War soldier? I propose that they do!

This process of habit formation, what Sheldrake calls a “morphogenetic field,” includes these social and mental fields. They are defined as:

- Social fields: These “co-ordinate the behavior of social groups”; and
- Mental fields: These “shape the habits of mind” (Sheldrake 2012:100).

Do these social and mental fields survive as sonic elements of interactive “traces” of the “culture of war” of the American Civil War, and manifest at

Burnside Bridge today as I.M.P. acoustic behaviors of soldiers that died in battle more than 150 years ago?

If a Civil War consciousness survives the physical death of men who fought at Burnside Bridge, and we repeat elements of their “culture of war” during “ghost excavation,” then these fields (social/mental) could become increasingly habitual as resonating behaviors (present to past) are repeated. The recording of these “repeating” audio manifestations are not “paranormal” events, since the “pattern” (as social/mental fields) was already present here in the past. The “field pattern” was not “beyond normal” (“paranormal”) since it was originally created in drills, and subsequently enacted on the battlefield.

A “haunting pattern” (the manifestation of these social/mental fields), normally “absent,” becomes actual, given the reiteration of appropriate circumstances (cultural resonance to past fields of the “culture of war” through our performance practices). The “patterns” of auditory streams that manifest today may be the social and mental fields that already existed as habits of the “culture of war” in the past (during drills and subsequent battles in the American Civil War).

Sheldrake suggests that mental causation, the field that shapes the habits of mind, runs from the present into the past (2012:121). Do our field acts, in specific battlefield K.O.C.O.A. spaces (tied to situational I.M.P. behaviors), and cued by specific “soundmarks,” “trigger” the actualization of the past social fields of I.M.P. behaviors at Burnside Bridge? If an “afterlife conscious mind” survives the death of the physical body/brain, then our audio recordings of the Burnside bridge soundscape might reflect this. If “minds choose among possible futures” (Sheldrake 2012:129), then these manifestations (coming immediately following our contextual acts and documented on RT-EVP audio recorders) may be purposeful past acts that become present as a response to these contemporary “cues” (i.e. habits of past minds cued to present acts).

According to Sheldrake, “minds are closely connected to fields that extend beyond brains in space....and....in time, linked to the past by morphic resonance (2012:229). These “minds” as “afterlife consciousness” remain attached to the social fields of I.M.P. behaviors of the “culture of war” which may remain in contemporary space and time due in part, I propose, to the retention of residual elements that have been recorded onto the Burnside Bridge landscape from the battle that was fought there on Sep-

tember 17, 1862, and survive as a Civil War “soundscape” today.

There is no overt_response to those “soundings” that remain in the form of “residuals” by this “afterlife conscious mind” that we have recorded. Perhaps, this is because these residuals are not “live” actors. However, our “ghost excavation” performance practices (as a form of morphic resonance) appear to “unearth” a “live” responding presence from the past. Is it because we are not perceived as “residuals,” but rather “live” performers in the (contemporary) “culture of (the) war”?

In the sense of “external experience” as “apparitional experience,” does “normal” become the manifestation of past_and habitual_acts in the present_due to morphic resonance? Does this interact, with both residual and interactive presence, as resonance, to existing and pre-established and past social fields? If so, this “normal,” then, is not “paranormal.” It is what actually happens in the present based on what had occurred in the past in particular battlefield spaces (K.O.C.O.A.).

If this hypothesis is correct, can we then predict when, where, and how these manifestations will occur again in the future? If, as philosopher Henri Bergson (1946) states, memories are direct connections across time, then these manifestations may be the memories of I.M.P. habits, “unearthed” during a “ghost excavation,” since the enacted (contemporary) scenarios incorporate resonating acts of I.M.P. habits that “awaken” past memories that were habitual acts in the past.

If these memories depend upon morphic resonance, as Sheldrake suggests, then this “afterlife conscious mind” (as entities with memories of habitual I.M.P. acts) is influenced by the morphic resonance from their own past (as well). This is the “self-resonance” of habitual drills transferred to the battlefield, and retained in memory after physical death. Thus, the “afterlife conscious mind” is awakened in the future_by a similar resonance (our contextual scenarios) that “target,” during a “ghost excavation,” this already_existing past and habitual memory surviving as social and mental fields of I.M.P. behaviors of the “culture of war.”

The manifestation of memory (as remembrance) occurs as a two-fold process (Sheldrake 2012: 204-06):

- Recognition: This is a “similarity between past experience and previous experience” ; and
- Recall: This is an “active reconstruction of the past on the basis of remembered meanings.”

Morphic resonance is seen to connect these two processes, and this connection forms the basis for our “ghost excavation” methodology, and its application at Burnside Bridge:

- Recognition: This helped the Civil War soldier in battle. He recognized the “soundmark” cues learned from drills, taking appropriate actions on the battlefield (I.M.P.). These remain as “vestiges” and “traces” of the “culture of war” at Burnside Bridge;
- Recall: This allowed us to “unearth” this pre-established memory of social and mental fields in specific battlefield spaces (K.O.C.O.A.) by using appropriate behavioral acts (I.M.P.), cued to particular soundmarks.

These recall acts were recognized by the “afterlife conscious mind” of these remaining entities as learned past acts. They manifest on the contemporary battlefield where they were previously recognized by these soldiers in battle from previous habits learned in drills.

Sheldrake believes that “self-resonance from an individual’s own past is more specific and...more effective” (2012:211). In locations that contain “vestiges” (“residuals”) of the “culture of war” (such as those we recorded along the Rohrbach Farm Road, an avenue of approach for combat advances in K.O.C.O.A. space), as elements of “self-resonance,” could also account for the continuing presence of interactive manifestations there in the form of an “afterlife conscious mind” that survived physical death.

The recognition of these residual battle sounds (perhaps related to the topography: water, and the stone bridge) could enable a recall of memory of I.M.P. behaviors, in this (and other) K.O.C.O.A. spaces, by those entities who survive as an “afterlife consciousness.” Our contextual scenarios, as the use of this recognition of I.M.P. behaviors, would also

resonate and serve as the stimulation for the recall of these behaviors in battlefield spaces.

How can manifestations, such as this “afterlife consciousness” and related “residuals” (perceived as “ghosts”), exist in contemporary reality 150 years after the battle? Sheldrake states that “minds are closely connected to fields that extend beyond brains in space....and....in time, linked to the past by morphic resonance” (2012:229). When these soldiers died, their “mind” as a self-organizing system of I.M.P. behaviors that remain on the battlefield, became “re-animated” by “self-resonance” from their own past (the residual sounds recorded on the landscape) and from the future: the “ghost excavation” practices that we enact there. This “presence,” as sonically recorded, has manifested, time and again, during our performance practices in “ghost excavations” on this battlefield.

I propose that a mutual learning process (their recognition/our use of recall) is evolving and transforming the contemporary soundscape at Burnside Bridge. This process includes:

- A past recognition of habits established in drills;
- A past recall that is reinforced by continuing present manifestations of residuals that are recognized;
- A present performance practice that recognizes the importance of resonating acts in specific battlefield spaces (K.O.C.O.A.); and
- A past recognition of these practices as similar to those that occurred at Burnside Bridge in battle on September 17, 1862, and in drills that recall I.M.P. behaviors of the “culture of war.”

Those manifestations that occur in conjunction with investigative resonating acts, in particular K.O.C.O.A. spaces, is, I propose, a form of learning. Do the increase in the frequency of these manifestations, during subsequent “ghost excavations,” attest to this learning process? Does the use of contextual “soundmarks,” as “triggers,” reinforce this learning process? Do our contextual acts, portraying those in command of troops in particular K.O.C.O.A. spaces, identify us as “instructors” in the principles of I.M.P. behaviors in the “culture of war”? Julia Hendon is an archaeologist, whose book (2010) examines the

connections between social identity and social memory using archaeological research, states that there is a “close connection between identity and memory, once the one (identity) becomes something recreated over time” (2010:14). She shows how “memory communities” assert connections between the past and the present. Has our “identity” been established by continuously repeating the contextual acts (and associated soundmarks) learned in drills and repeated on the battlefield in continuing “ghost excavations there? Has our resonating acts linked to a past “memory community” of the “culture of war” of the American Civil War?

A morphogenetic field has been established, I propose, through this learning and “excavation” process, and the “field” spreads through time to other presences, becoming a multi-layered “memory community” that may remain, and may be expanding, at Burnside Bridge. This means that these other manifestations, during subsequent “ghost excavations,” may be a result of recognition and recall as an expanding morphogenetic field which further extends the contemporary reality of what (and who) remains at Burnside Bridge as “this happens here” now from what happened there on September 17, 1862.

This possible learning in the “afterlife” is not, I propose, “paranormal” or “supernatural,” but learning within the framework of what these “ghosts” already know: the “culture of war” of the American Civil War. Their manifestations are not confirmation bias as an expectation of what should occur when resonance is used as an investigative practice. It is a pre-disposition, a form of “self-resonance” from a pre-established “field” laid down in battle, and in prior drilling. Do these aural responses and “questions” (such as our recording of “Captain, Is that You Captain?”) represent “learning”? I propose that they most certainly do! You can hear these audio tracks at www.ghostexcavation.com (Antietam audio).

Conclusion

Our continuing fieldwork at Burnside Bridge, and other sites, is an “audiography” of the “culture of war” that remain as vestiges and traces on battlefield soundscapes today. These “soundings” are embedded, as part of a layering of presence, a continued being in the world in the form of an expanded reality in these landscapes. It is a “normal” ethnographic sensorium of an “afterlife consciousness” that is im-

printed on these battlefield spaces. This has created a “hauntscape” of multiple immiscible social and mental fields that potentially can only be accessed, on a consistent basis, through cultural resonance. This assumption implies “the existence of an essential and fundamental relationship between ghosts, mind, and consciousness” (Beichler 2011:30).

Finally, one may ask why these “ghosts” (as an “afterlife consciousness”), if they exist, remain on the battlefield where they died on September 17, 1862. There are several possibilities. I will only mention (briefly) a few here. These include the following:

- Military Orders;
- The concept of the “Good Death”

Standard military orders are significant, but often overlooked in a battlefield “apparitional experience,” especially the following:

- “to quit my post when properly relieved”;
- “to be especially watchful at night”; and
- “to talk to no one except in the line of duty.”

Do our “ghost excavation” performance practices at night, and contextual to “identities” affiliated with commanding officers, allow for the manifestation of an “afterlife consciousness” because soldiers, those who remain “attached” to their duties, communicate with us “in the line of duty”? Do these soldiers remain because they were not accorded the rites and rituals of the “Good Death”? According to Clinton (2009), “the deathbed of a loved one was perhaps the most hallowed of Nineteenth Century ritual settings” (2009:4). The “Good Death” was a prepared death, surrounded by family at home, and a burial in the family plot. The American Civil War battlefield changed that. The ritual was never completed, in many instances, for the soldiers who fought and died at Burnside Bridge. Are these manifestations the “afterlife conscious minds” of those soldiers who remain on duty, are vigilant at night, only communicate to individuals they identify as their comrades and/or officers, and who never experienced the “Good Death”? This is the theory that I am currently working with, as we continue to investigate the manifestations of past presence, as “afterlife conscious mind”

of the “culture of war” at Burnside Bridge and other battlefields.

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Biography

John Sabol is an archaeologist, cultural anthropologist, actor and author. As an archaeologist, he has documented and recorded the manifestations of past soundscapes at haunted ruins. As an actor, he has appeared in many movies, TV series and educational TV programming, including the Sci-Fi classic, *Dune* (1984), and the A&E TV series, *Paranormal State*. He has written 16 books on his fieldwork, methodology, and his personal experiences on location filming and his work at haunted ruins around the world.



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Processes of Experience

Donnalee Dox



In contemporary, vernacular practices from shamanic drumming to contemplative dance, the process of integrating mental and physical capacities is often the first condition for opening to extraordinary experiences. This chapter approaches experience through processes by which people identify and cultivate experiences as special (Taves 2009). The chapter first sets out methodological considerations for studying experiences cultivated in contemporary, vernacular practices, and then focuses on the process by which a conceptual metaphor intertwines with physical action in the experience of ‘opening the heart center’ in Anusara yoga.

Modern yoga presents innumerable ways of parsing and problematizing the experience of mind-body integration. An ethnographic study would reveal the range and nuances of individual experiences. A review of yoga styles would compare the experiential goals and processes of different yoga styles—from relaxing the body, to deep meditation, to mental control over the body. This chapter isolates one specific experience to access the processes at work in its cultivation.

Inside Knowledge

The subjectivity of experience—the inner life of the mind and the body—has long challenged the critical distance required of scholarly approaches to observable phenomena. How can we know the insides of other people (Taves 2009:63; Slingerland 2008:27, 151, 304)? The inaccessibility of inner experience has proved formidable even in the humanities, which long ago exposed the dark ambiguities of the Romantic soul to the light of identity politics, and showed the workings of discourse in the poetics of mysticism.

Without representational images, neuroscience attempts to explain experience by its physiological correlates, the gaze of critical scholarship turns to social and cultural forms with which people shape experience. Expressive forms become the decipherable effects of experience, the sites available for analysis and discussion: descriptions, narratives, art,

music, dance, and rituals. Practices are especially valuable sites because they encompass expressive forms and are the very means by which people cultivate experience. Modern hatha yoga is one such practice. Yoga’s status as a cultural phenomenon has focused critical attention on social, economic, and cultural aspects of its popularity. Less attention has been given to how the practice of yoga identifies and cultivates special experiences.

Approaching Yoga as a Cultural Phenomenon

The sheer number of yoga studios, training programs, websites, classes, styles, popular market books, academic studies, and films about yoga affirm yoga’s status as a cultural phenomenon. As a fitness and exercise regimen, yoga is taught in health clubs and gyms and the purported benefits to psychological wellbeing have moved yoga into schools, prisons, and businesses. Yoga has been a flashpoint for Christian sects in America, which may reject yoga in rhetoric reminiscent of Nineteenth Century colonialism, or refashion yoga postures to align with Christian themes (Jain 2010). Appropriations of yoga have motivated concerns over its origins in Hinduism (Vitello 2010), while magazines such as *Yoga Journal* promote yoga as a modern lifestyle. Yoga crosses multiple cultural registers.

Yoga’s popularity has also prompted numerous scholarly studies. These trace the complex routes yoga has traveled and the ways its associations with Indian culture have been deployed, adapted, and imagined (Singleton 2010; Love 2010; White 2009; Singleton and Byrne 2008; De Michelis 2004; Alter 2004; Symon 2011). Parallel to this culturally-oriented research, experimental research corroborates many of the anecdotal benefits to physical and mental health that draw many people to yoga (Hasselle-Newcombe 2005:311-2). In particular, the calming effects people experience suggest the effect of yoga practice on the autonomic nervous system, with therapeutic applications ranging from reducing in-

flammation of blood vessels to relieving depression and extending lifespan (Streeter et al. 2012). The absorption of yoga into psychology raises concerns about the universalizing tendencies that posit the human mind as a cross-cultural constant.

Yoga is big business and its commercial success has prompted critiques of yoga's failure to affect Western materialism (Philip 2011). Yoga offers a 'pacific spirituality' in the image of ancient Eastern cultures, which is projected back into Western minds and bodies (Bender & McRoberts 2012:14). Critical studies investigate how the quest to de-stress the mind and sculpt the body serves the goals of consumer capitalism, and study how consumerism drives the branding of yoga styles, the corporatization of yoga studios, and yoga-related products from mats to jewelry (Philip 2011).

Yoga as Experiential Practice

The complexities of cross-cultural transmission and trans-religious syncretism continue to motivate critical inquiry into how the image of an exotic, passive East shapes the appeal of yoga in a marketplace of easy spirituality (Carette & King 2005:119). However, as Paul Heelas observes, 'it could well be the case that what is taking place within a yoga group, for example, is too 'rich' for the language of consumption to handle' (2008:98). What is taking place may also exceed taxonomies that situate yoga (and similar practices) only in social and economic domains. While all experience is arguably constructed by social environments and discourses (such as 'lifestyle' or 'health'), inquiring directly into experience may yield potent reformulations of the boundaries those taxonomies proscribe.

Yoga's place in the 'subjective turn' of the early 21st century is less well researched than its social, cultural, and therapeutic aspects (Partridge 2005). However, its contemplative potential remains vital to the experiences cultivated in its practice (Richards 2010). Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe's (2005) sociological study of Iyengar style yoga in Britain suggests that for the majority of practitioners doing yoga constitutes 'a unique act of withdrawing energy from work and family responsibilities' (311). This experience of inwardness can be taken as evidence of the focus on the self that characterizes a modern 'culture of well-being' (Heelas 2008). Yet even in its recontextualization from an ancient ascetic tradition to a modern social phenomenon, yoga seems to retain its function as 'a distinctive space for introversion and reflection'

(Hasselle-Newcombe 2005:311). Against the demands for self-presentation, socializing, and rapid cognition that characterize modern, technologically-oriented cultures, yoga identifies interiority as a special kind of experience, and cultivates it.

Maria Kapsali calls for a theoretical framework 'that could take into account both the various ideologies within/according to which yoga currently operates, as well as the personal psychophysical experiences that practitioners may have' (2012:176). Amid the appropriations and distortions wrought by yoga's situation in Western cultural norms, how do the experiences cultivated in its practice press against normalizing frameworks for experience such as psychology, consumerism, and therapeutics? Psychology may be the most familiar model for inner experience in modern Western cultures. However, whereas psychology processes experience through language, yoga reverses that direction by cultivating experience at the intersection of physical and conceptual processes. By what specific processes do practices like modern yoga intertwine people's bodies and minds in and as experience? To what extent are the tools of consciousness, especially language, part of experience rather than mediating experience? What methods might pursue these questions, and what knowledge would such investigation yield?

Entering Experience

Critical inquiry relies on a cerebral orientation to experience. The question of experience may require a bodily-engaged approach. 'We must not assume cognition to be purely internal, symbolic, computational, and disembodied,' writes cognitive scientist Raymond Gibbs, 'but seek out the gross and detailed ways that language and thought are inextricably shaped by embodied action' (2005:9). This porous interaction between mental and physical activity constitutes the corporeal ether of awareness, which people press into the forms (language, performances, visual art, practices) that articulate experience. Applied to methods of inquiry, this interaction suggests fluid movement among first-person descriptive accounts of experience, second-person observation of effects of experience, and third-person analysis and representation.

Kristy Nabhan-Warren asks scholars investigating religious experience to 'turn to their bodies as sources of deep knowledge' and 'take embodied ethnography seriously when they write up their findings,' without privileging 'mind knowledge over body knowledge'

(2011:385). Kimerer LaMothe suggests that the lack of bodily investment in scholarship hinders approaches to religious experience. She advocates for critical sensibilities that go beyond reading bodies as texts to engage bodies in motion. LaMothe argues, 'in order to advance attention to the bodily dimension of religious life, scholars must be willing to acknowledge the role played by their own bodily lives in the process of studying religion' (2008:574). For anthropologist Thomas Csordas, this stance posits embodiment as 'an indeterminate methodological field' in which bodily experience is 'the existential ground of culture and self' (2002:219). Csordas calls for suspending reliance on either biology or culture as frameworks for understanding bodies to take embodiment as 'an experiential understanding of being-in-the-world' (2002:241). These approaches open space for attending to the corporeal, affective, sensory, and imaginative components of experience in contemporary practices.

Even as current research situates modern yoga's popularity in Western cultural norms, (namely consumerism, psychology, and therapeutics), yoga in practice negotiates those norms. The triangulation of mind, body, and spirit in contemporary, vernacular practices identifies an experience that collapses this three-part linguistic formulation. The question is, how? Approaching experience as a process does not reduce experience to social constructions or physiological explanation. This approach neither advocates for the phenomenological status of experience nor denies it. Rather, it seeks the ways practices like modern yoga shape the integration of mental, physical, and spiritual capacities as registers of experience, and identify that integration as a special kind of experience.

Experience in Word and Action

The metaphor of 'opening the heart center' in Anusara yoga articulates a particular interplay between mental and physical capacities. It joins physical sensation to mental receptivity. An 'open heart center' can manifest as emotion, a feeling of the physical body coming into alignment, heightened awareness or insight, suspension of judgment, a shift in perception, feeling a part of the body previously not available to consciousness, telepathic sensitivity to other people, feelings of gratitude or compassion. The metaphor also identifies 'the heart center' as the experience of a self that is not bound by external norms (social roles, identity, culturally imposed concepts).

The next two sections focus narrowly on the process of 'opening the heart center.' In practice, the 'heart center' structures a bodily experience, which gives rise to the descriptive metaphor. However, rather than make the body an object of consciousness or seek pre-linguistic consciousness, this process reorganizes people's conceptual, corporeal, and meta-physical capacities into registers of experience. A close reading of Anusara's Teacher Training Manual shows how this metaphor shapes and becomes part of corporeal experience. An embodied reading of the physicality involved in cultivating the 'open heart center' shows the concept and the body intertwined in the experience of 'opening the heart center.'

Close Reading: The Metaphor of the Heart Center

The Manual defines Anusara as a system that aligns the physical body with 'a non-dual Tantric philosophy that is epitomized by a 'celebration of the heart'' [italics added] (Friend 2009:20). With regard to experience, the metaphor of the heart center functions in multiple, sometimes contradictory or tautological, ways. The heart is variously a container for the self, an object that can be experienced, a conduit for experience, the site of experience, and experience itself. By doing yoga people express their 'specific heart qualities or virtues' (Friend 2009:93). The heart center contains three aspects of a person's essence: personal moral qualities (modesty or steadfastness), spiritual ideals (union with the divine; 'Shakti' energy), and emotions (anger, love). Postures are a way to 'experience joy in the heart' [italics added] (Friend 2009:93). The heart has 'two fundamental states,' which are 'happiness and unhappiness' (Friend 2009:27). Understanding the postures as 'heart-oriented' suggests that the heart center itself becomes a sensory organ with access to a particular kind of experience, or that the heart becomes its own kind of consciousness (Friend 2009:21). The Manual identifies an experience of being 'in the flow' which 'is simply to open our hearts with love to the present moment without clinging or pushing' [italics added] (Friend 2009:20). These ambiguities blur physical feeling with an intellectual concept.

In practice, body and mind are reciprocal capacities. The physicality of the postures opens 'the heart center,' but practitioners have agency and responsibility. Bodies respond to a disposition of mind ('intention' or 'Attitude'). With the intention to 'soften and expand' the heart, a person can 'release or dissolve

self-induced [physical and mental] tensions and [physical and mental] limitations, and to open to the greatness and the tremendous divine potential within' (Friend 2009:104). A 'pure spiritual expression from the heart,' according to the Manual, gives a posture 'its power for deep inner transformation' (Friend 2009:26). That transformational 'power of the heart' relies as much on a person's intention as the physical effort of the practice. According to the Manual, the 'power of the heart' is the force behind every action or full expression of a posture (Friend 2009:26).

There is, thus, a paradox built into the metaphor of the 'heart center.' The agency that affects the heart also comes from the heart. In describing Anusara yoga as a 'heart-oriented' practice, the Manual holds out the potential for 'inner transformational power' when the heart center is physically expanded in a posture and when a practitioner is mentally receptive to the effects of the physical practice (Friend 2009:106). At the same time, the physical effort that holds a body in any posture requires a practitioner's 'surrender or open-heartedness' for the posture to be effective (Friend 2009:28). In this way, the physical practice is invested with a metaphysical, quasi-spiritual sensation of an open heart (Friend 2009:101).

Anusara's metaphor of the 'heart center' strips away overtly religious, meditative, or spiritual contexts for yoga, though the valence remains in the language of transformation, spirituality, and metaphysical power. Equating the heart with a sense of self has an obvious resonance with the popular construction of the modern self as a site of transformation and healing, with the added ethical imperative of aligning the physical body with social, as well as individual, wellbeing. The lack of explicit reference to Hindu sources in the Manual distances Anusara from its Indian roots.

Selective references to Hinduism, however, provide a conceptual backdrop, they contextualize 'opening the heart center' as a special experience. Allusions to Tantra, Shavism, and Bhakti elide spirituality with feeling good as a timeless quality of experience rather than specifically Hindu. Traditional Anusara classes, for example, begin with chanting in Sanskrit the 'Anusara Yoga Opening Invocation' (Friend 2009:iii). The Manual's translation renders the original text's reference to Lord Siva in the phrase *namah shivaya* gurave as 'luminous Teacher within and without' (Friend 2009:iii). The words come from the *Niralamba Upanishad*, a minor or general Upanishad from the *Sukla Yajur Veda* (Pradeep 2008:124). What

Anusara practitioners chant is half of the first short section of the *Upanishad*, and not included in most translations. The words, intended for people on a renunciant yogic path who lack a guru, introduce forty-one questions about the nature of Brahman. This excerpt out of context is inconsistent with Anusara's purportedly Tantric emphasis on non-dual embodiment. In my observation, however, the inconsistency is not important to practitioners. Rather, the words function as inspiration to pursue self knowledge through the yoga practice.

The metaphor of the 'heart center' raises the spectre of exoticization and the problem of perennialism. Though they are not studied in the practice, Anusara's identification of the heart center as the site of self knowledge resonates with traditions in classical yoga. Compilations of source texts, as well as Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* (200 BCE) and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (14th c. CE), are readily available in English translations often sold in studios. Most prominent are those by George Feuerstein (1947-2012), a practitioner and translator based in Canada who grounded his yoga teaching in Hindu traditions, and Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), whose scholarship at the University of Chicago mapped religious experience as an academic field. These compilations do not require a specialists' knowledge Sanskrit or Hindu traditions, or the ability to parse Vedic thought, Tantra, Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Bhakti as historical developments. Drawing indirectly on these complex philosophical traditions and distilling them into a simplistic formulation, Anusara's metaphor of the 'heart center' shapes the aspirations of the practice as experiential, not intellectual: a felt sense emanating from and animating the center of the chest.

Embodied Reading: Physical Movement and The Heart Center

The body is the site for a register of experience that is simultaneously conceptual and corporeal. Anusara's approach is biomechanical. The 'heart center' refers not to the heart muscle but the center of the chest between the sternum and the spine, the mediastinum where the bones and muscles of the ribcage encase the organs of oxygen exchange (Abrahams 2010:186-87). The bottom of this physical area, roughly the lateral plane of the relaxed diaphragm, is considered a place of physical and psychic or spiritual power. A practitioner is taught to draw kinesthetic energy inward toward this center and radiate non-

physical energy outward as the body moves into a posture (Friend 2009:31). Practitioners learn to 'soften' or 'melt' the heart center from within the body and 'open' or 'lift' the heart center. These are the subtle, internal moves that may prompt release of emotions, relaxing of mental concepts, feelings of receptivity, or a sense of receptivity.

Mechanical actions broaden the ribcage, which creates the physiological context for internally melting, softening, lifting, and opening the heart center as well as for sensing the heartbeat and breath. This process of moving consciousness into the body as the body emerges as a kind of consciousness has the potential to shift practitioners' conventional organization of self as mind and body. The 'heart center' takes on the capacity for consciousness, which conventionally belongs to the conceptualizing, narrative capacities of the mind. An embodied reading of how one posture works cannot take us directly into people's experience, but it can illustrate one process by which this yoga practice identifies 'opening the heart center' as special for practitioners.

The backbend is familiar to gymnasts, dancers, and other athletic performers as well as to yoga practitioners. Yoga names this basic posture 'upward bow' or *Udhrva Dhanurasana*. From a supine position, the feet and hands press the chest, abdomen, and hips upward, into the shape of a bow with the floor as the bow's taut string. Beyond the mindful engagement with the body required to hold the posture, the metaphor of the 'heart center' organizes the integration of mental and physical capacities, which distinguishes yoga's 'upward bow' from a contortionist's or gymnast's backbend.

'Upward bow' can produce a range of sensations that might be experienced as revealing a deep and profound part of the self. Practitioners are taught to pull the heads of the upper arm bones (humerus) into the shoulder sockets toward the heart center. In an upside down orientation, working against gravity, this kinesthetic action can release the upper palate in response to the pull of the trapezius muscles. One response to this physical change can be a relaxation in the forehead, or a sense of light in the region of the light-regulating pineal gland and which the yogic chakra system identifies as the 'third eye' (Maxwell 2009). 'Upward bow' pushes the thoracic vertebrae, which are the least amenable to flexion toward the sternum, and extends the top of the sternum through the shoulders. This action can release the internal intercostals, which are less accessible to conscious control than the back, arms and legs. This unfamiliar

release can produce a shift in awareness (Kaminof 2007:203).

'Upward bow' also disrupts the familiar autonomic patterns of breathing. It expands the mediastinum front to back and side to side, changing the familiar feeling of expanding with an inhalation and contracting on an exhalation. With the top of the head parallel to the floor and the ribcage inverted, the flow of the breath feels reversed—inhalation moves the breath up (toward the ceiling) rather than in the familiar downward direction. Extending the spine moves the ribs farther apart, even as exhalation draws the ribs together (Coulter 2001:281). This position also orients the eyes so that no part of the body may be visible, disorienting familiar perceptual patterns and the ability to conceptually orient the environment around the body which can prompt shifts in perception. Extending the psoas muscle, the longest muscle of the body running from the bottom of the thorax through the pelvis to the thighs, can have the effect of releasing tension in the organs protected by the rib cage and yield a sense of the entire 'heart center' relaxing, metaphorically 'opening.'

Postures that open the front of the thorax and shoulders are particularly likely to generate experiences such as sudden rushes of emotion, and the Teacher Training Manual gives guidance for dealing with emotional responses to postures (Friend 2009:80). Whether or not practitioners connect these experiences to traditions of the heart as a source of illumination described in source texts on yogic meditation, in this practice the 'heart center' takes on experiential significance in this practice in a language of inner transformation, celebration, knowing a pure or true self, and openness to divinity.

Opening Experience

In numerous vernacular practices—yoga, t'ai chi, contemplative dance, martial arts, shamanic drumming are but a few—people cultivate registers of experience that are neither neurologically top-down nor bottom-up and which do not conform to conventional organizations of experience as mental or bodily activity. A process approach to these experiences opens a range of questions into the subtleties of experience. How do practices differ in the ways they constitute mind and body interaction? Modern yoga, the example presented here, has been analyzed for its appropriation of Indian religious culture and history even as yoga is critiqued for its investment in Western culture. How do those cultural and discursive influ-

ences shape experiences as special? When does experience resist those shapes and create new shapes?

There are always gaps between the social and economic contexts that proscribe meaning and the internal sensations people experience. What is the process between the act of putting the body in a yoga posture and identifying the experience of an illuminating 'opening'? How do special experiences such as 'opening the heart center' become the basis for knowledge, social interaction, discourses, and institutional organizations? How might special experiences morph into ideologies, possibly transforming liberatory experiences into mechanisms of control? How do these experiences challenge models in which the mind acts on the body or the body influences mental capacities?

Finally, what epistemological queries might such practices be making? David Maxwell asserts that there is 'valid truth in the experience of yogis that can provide important information concerning complex aspects of our human condition' (2009:819). The experience of an 'open heart center,' for example, like the proposition of a 'heart chakra,' asks how non-physical properties (for Anusara 'Shakti energy') interact with physical bodies (Maxwell 2009:809). What might such a proposition offer taxonomies that distinguish mental from physical activity, or between scholarship and embodied practices? In what ways does language participate in experience, rather drive a wedge of critical distance?

The intertwining of corporeality and consciousness in the construction of knowledge so prominent in vernacular practices distorts the boundary between constructing knowledge from observation and deriving knowledge from experience. Maria Kapsali summarizes the challenge this distortion presents specifically with regard to Modern Postural Yoga (MPY): 'the number of discourses, psychophysical possibilities, and metaphysical expectations that operate not only within the space of practice, but in a number of similar disciplines, point toward a need to reconfigure these terms that MPY loves to employ but hates to define' (2012:176). Observation and practice meet in a reciprocal desire for knowledge of experience and the experience of knowledge. The task now is to better understand the processes that constitute special experiences and embrace the challenges these experiential practices might pose to conventional models of cultural analysis.

Biography

Donnalee Dox received her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1995. Her primary research area is European theatre in the 10th-15th centuries, and her secondary area is contemporary religious performance practices. Dr. Dox has published on music, dance and theatre in journals such as *Theatre History Studies*, *Theatre*



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New Publication of Interest:
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Brian P. Levack



<http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/book.asp?isbn=9780300114720>

The Brain and Spiritual Experiences: Towards a Neuroscientific Hermeneutic

Andrew B. Newberg



Spiritual experiences are fundamental to the human interpretation of the world around us. Historically, spiritual experiences appear to have laid the foundation for religious belief systems, as well as moral, political, and cultural systems. In the past twenty years, an expanding amount of research into the brain mechanisms of spiritual experiences has provided scholars with new information about the nature of these experiences. But this research also continues to propel us towards the development of a neuroepistemological perspective on human experience, and particularly the experience of reality. Hybrid fields such as neurotheology have arisen in order to better assess the implications of studying spiritual experiences from a neuroscientific perspective. Neurotheology argues that combining science with religious and spiritual phenomena can provide a variety of new approaches to the study of human experience and its implications for our ability to understand reality. This might lead to a parallel philosophical field that could be referred to as a neuroscientific hermeneutics. Such a neurohermeneutics argues that human experience, including spiritual experience, is highly influenced, although not necessarily caused, by the brain. Thus, developing an understanding of the relationship between the brain and subjective experience will help us to better understand how we interpret experiences, make meaning, and relate that meaning through abstract thought and language.

This paper presents an overview of some of the research on spiritual experiences that myself and other colleagues have been pursuing over the past two decades. But, more importantly, this paper will also consider a neurohermeneutical approach to human experience. We will reflect on the ontological status of human subjective experience in general, and spiritual experiences in particular. It must be noted at the outset that while some of this discussion will appear to involve a materialistic reductionism, the implications of such a methodology, in the light of neurohermeneutics and neuroepistemology, leaves us

with an ontology that is anything but reductionistic. These considerations, however, must await the conclusion of this paper.

The Neuropsychology of Spiritual Experience

There is clearly a wide variety of spiritual experiences. Ninian Smart distinguished between the experience of Rudolf Otto's 'wholly other' and the internal sense of ineffable unity defined as a mystical experience, predominantly although not exclusively, in Asian traditions. Ninian Smart (1969; 1978) has argued that certain sects of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism differ markedly from prophetic religions such as Judaism and Islam and from religions related to the prophetic-like Christianity, in that the religious experience most characteristic of the former is 'mystical' whereas that most characteristic of the latter is 'numinous.' Of these two terms, it is the numinous that Smart seems to have an easier time explaining since it obviously arises more spontaneously out of Western religious traditions. W.T. Stace (1961) went further by distinguishing between what he calls extrovertive mystical experiences and introvertive mystical experiences. Extrovertive mystical experiences are distinguished by a unifying vision in which all things are perceived as one and there is an apprehension of the One as an inner subjectivity, or life in all things. Introvertive mystical experiences are distinguished by including a unitary consciousness or awareness which is nonspatial and nontemporal.

With regard to the continuum of spiritual experiences, and based upon a neuropsychological analysis, unitary states appear to play a crucial role and we will consider this in more detail below. While it is difficult to define what makes a given experience 'spiritual,' the sense of having a union with some higher power or ultimate reality seems a crucial part of spiritual experiences. To that end, this union helps reduce existential anxiety as well as provide a sense of control over the environment (d'Aquili 1978; 1998). Import-

tantly, describing the phenomenology of subjective spiritual experiences includes a sense of the unity of reality that is at least somewhat greater than the baseline perception of unity in day to day life (d'Aquili 1986). This may be related to altered functioning of the brain structures typically involved in helping to construct the self/other dichotomy. Usually the self/other dichotomy functions to help us distinguish our self from the rest of the external world. I have suggested that the left superior parietal lobe may play a critical role in establishing the self/other dichotomy (Joseph 1996). This dichotomy is normally based upon input from all of the sensory systems. In cases of meditation, my colleagues and I have suggested, and found brain imaging evidence for, a differential blocking, or 'deafferentation,' of input into the superior parietal lobe which progressively diminishes the strength of the self/other dichotomy (d'Aquili and Newberg 1993; Newberg et al. 2001). Thus, if the continuum of spiritual experience heavily relies on the progressive sense of unity, this should be associated with progressive blocking of input into the superior parietal lobe. Such a physiological change should be associated with an increasing sense of unity over multiplicity. In addition, the right superior parietal lobe is involved in orienting ourselves within three dimensional space (Newberg 2010). The blocking of sensory input into this structure may result in the alterations in the sense of space and time that are often described during spiritual experiences. Thus, both the left and right superior parietal lobes are likely involved in spiritual experiences.

At the extreme end of the continuum of spiritual experiences is the state of Absolute Unitary Being which is described in the mystical literature of all the world's great religions (d'Aquili and Newberg 1999). When a person is in that state he or she loses all sense of discrete being and even the difference between self and other is obliterated. There is no sense of the passing of time, and all that remains is a perfect timeless undifferentiated consciousness. When such a state is suffused with positive affect (i.e. emotional content), there is a tendency to describe the experience, after the fact, as personal. Such experiences are often described as a perfect union with God (the *Unio mystica* of the Christian tradition), or else the perfect manifestation of God in the Hindu tradition. When such experiences are accompanied by neutral affect they tend to be described, after the fact, as impersonal. These states are described in concepts such as the abyss of Jacob Boeme, the Void or Nirvana of Buddhism or the Absolute of a number of

philosophical/mystical traditions. There is no question that whether the experience is interpreted personally as God or impersonally as the Absolute, it nevertheless possesses a quality of transcendent wholeness without any temporal or spatial division whatsoever. We have postulated that these rare states of Absolute Unitary Being are associated with the total blocking of input into the superior parietal lobe (d'Aquili and Newberg 1993).

Due to connections between the superior parietal lobe and the limbic system, the structures that subserve emotional responses, it may be that the more blocking of input into the right superior parietal lobe, the stronger will be the associated emotional discharge in the limbic system. The involvement of the limbic system in such experiences is supported by studies in which electrical stimulation of two limbic structures, the amygdala and hippocampus, has resulted in various sensory experiences, visions, and emotional discharges similar to some of those that occur during spiritual experiences (Penfield and Perot 1963; Valenstein 1973). Limbic stimulation during spiritual experiences may be modulated by activity in the superior parietal lobes as well as the frontal lobes since these structures are all intimately interconnected (Joseph 1996). During practices such as meditation, stimulation of the limbic system may result from activity in the frontal cortex which is known to modulate emotional responses through its connections with the amygdala and hippocampus. Increased frontal lobe activity has been shown to occur during meditation and likely occurs during other types of spiritual practices (Lazar et al. 2000; Newberg et al. 2001; Herzog et al. 1990-1991). Thus, in any perception, such as a piece of music, a painting, a sculpture, or a sunset, there is a sense of meaning and wholeness which transcends the constituent parts.

In aesthetic experiences such as those just described, this transcendence is mild to moderate. The overarching sense of unity between two persons in romantic love might represent the next stage in this continuum. Feelings of numinosity or religious awe occur when there is a very marked sense of meaning and wholeness extending well beyond the parts perceived, or well beyond the image generated, but in a 'wholly other' context. It is often considered (although not necessarily correctly) to be the dominant Western mystical experience. It is experienced when an archetypal symbol is perceived, or when certain archetypal elements are externally constellated in a myth. As one moves from numinosity along the continuum, one can reach the state of religious exalta-

tion characterized by a sense of meaning and wholeness extending to all discrete being whether subjective or objective (d'Aquili and Newberg 1999). The essential unity and purposefulness of the universe is perceived as a primary datum despite the perception and knowledge of evil in the world. During this state, there is nothing whatsoever that escapes the mantle of wholeness and purposefulness. But this state does not obliterate discrete being, and it certainly exists within a temporal context. This roughly corresponds to Stace's extrovertive mystical experience.

From a neurohermeneutical perspective, how can we begin to interpret all of these different experiences and their meaning? It would be helpful to determine if there are particular neuropsychological constructs that help towards understanding these experiences. Furthermore, it will be helpful to utilize this information in a way that contributes something to epistemology. Let us explore in more detail how we might be able to construct a neurohermeneutical approach towards spiritual experiences.

The Beginnings of a Neurohermeneutic

In the above section, we have begun to see how brain functions might be related to specific components of spiritual experiences such as unity or emotions. This raises the larger consideration that the brain affects all of our perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. To some degree, the brain may augment or create our experiences, thoughts, and feelings, and to some degree, the brain may receive them. Furthermore, whether causing or experiencing our world, the brain likely restricts or constrains the ways in which we experience the world. Thus, when applied to philosophy and epistemology, such an analysis can lead to a new hermeneutical approach in which we consider the influence of the brain on a variety of ideological positions. It would seem appropriate to consider this approach as a neurohermeneutic – how the brain influences human experiences and ideas about reality (Newberg 2010). It should be clear though, that what we are exploring through this neurohermeneutical analysis is how a given individual experiences some aspect of neuropsychological function, which ultimately is associated with a specific idea or concept about the universe. In essence then, we are constructing a neurohermeneutic regarding how the brain is related to our experiences and how these experiences affect, alter, and constrain the human ability to think specific theological and philosophical thoughts. We

are also developing, in some regard, a new philosophical system which might be called 'experientialist' such that all thinking, emotions, and ideas, are tied to human experience. This is akin to the Kantian position that the external world is only known to us through our perceptions and ideas. However, neurotheology has the potential to take this notion further since 'experience' in this context does not refer only to sensory experience, but the experience of our own internal cognitive, emotional, and perhaps, spiritual processes. Finally, a neurohermeneutic also offers the potential for obtaining empirical data to support or refute specific ideas.

In addition to empirical data that might be obtained through some scientific method, neurohermeneutics argues for obtaining the equally important data from subjective experience. This might not be too dissimilar from Husserl's phenomenology, but certain distinctions should be identified as we proceed through this neurohermeneutical analysis. The purpose of our experientialist analysis is to determine exactly what parts of the human being allow us to have experiences so that we may understand the subjective nature of the experiences as ascertained through a phenomenological analysis. In this way, neurohermeneutics might actually be a blending of Kantian philosophy with phenomenology. As we will see, such an analysis may have profound implications for theological and philosophical thought, hermeneutics itself, and phenomenology. This will be particularly the case in the analysis of epistemological issues pertaining to the experience of reality and the identification of the characteristics by which we define reality.

A neurohermeneutical approach argues that we should strive to understand all of reality from the cognitive, emotional, and perceptual processes associated with the brain. But, if neurohermeneutics is to be a true hybrid approach, there should be a comparable contribution of science and various aspects of human experience, including spiritual experiences. Thus, a neurohermeneutic must recognize that this approach may prove useful for understanding the basis of the scientific disciplines as well as religious ones. Can we not ask why science has developed in the current manner? How much of science is based upon what makes sense to our brain? How much of science is based upon the ways in which the brain has shaped the ways in which we conceive of the reality of the world? This suggests a need to more clearly determine how the brain perceives reality utilizing this neurohermeneutical approach.

Spiritual Experiences as Primary Epistemic States

When evaluating how we come to know the external world, we must begin with how we come to know anything at all. A neurohermeneutical approach would acknowledge that the only way in which human beings come to know what is real is through the various senses and the brain's processing of that sensory input. The brain takes all of the sensory input, utilizes its cognitive and emotional resources, and puts together a 'rendition' of the world with which an individual can interact. Outward actions or behaviors then have consequences in the world that are perceived in addition to whatever was already out there in the external world. The external world is what is actually objectively real regardless of human perceptions and cognitions. It would seem almost impossible to completely get at what is ultimately, objectively real because any information or sense that is received about this objective reality necessarily must come through the human brain.

But we must now ask another question – Why does something feel real to us at all? In other words, when we perceive a table, listen to someone talk to us, or even have a spiritual experience, we have the strong tendency to perceive these things as real. Is the sense that something is real based upon perceptions only, consistency of time, emotions, logic? Regardless, neurohermeneutics would also remind us that however the brain comes to perceive something as real has no clear bearing on what is actually, absolutely real, but rather relates to our experience of whatever is real. This issue will be addressed more at the end of this article. For now, though, let us explore how the brain does experience reality and more specifically, how it informs us what it thinks is real. At this point then, we are forced to explore only the sense of reality that is created for us by the brain. We have nothing more to go on, at least yet.

In fact, we may find ourselves contemplating the notion that what we use to assess if something is real ultimately comes down to our profound sense that it is real. This is certainly not a very satisfying conclusion. But from a neurohermeneutical perspective, we may find no other clear way to assess how real something is. It seems that any criteria we might use is ultimately reducible to our sense that it is real. Typically, we cite criteria such as vividness, persistence, cross reference, logicalness, or any other criteria, they all seem to collapse into the sense of realness. After

all, each criteria represents some aspect of reality that we also must sense. Thus, vividness refers to a clarity of perception. But a perception is also sensed as being real. If we perceive the persistence of an object over time, that too is a qualia that requires our sense that the persistence itself is real. And if we ask for cross referencing with other individuals, their responses are sensed as being real. How do we know which of these senses of reality are actually real? We have no way of knowing other than by trying to assess the strength of the sense that something is real. Again, though, this is not necessarily comforting epistemologically since it does not tell us what external reality actually is like. We are trapped within our brain peering out into the world and reconstructing it the best we can. We inherently experience a 'second-hand' rendition of the world.

A substantial additional concern regarding our reliance on the sense of realness we experience is that this approach might result in relativism or solipsism. After all, if everything in reality is at best experienced as a perception by the brain, then there might be no absolute. Or at least, there is no absolute that our brain can determine. In addition, it must always be remembered that the perceptions of reality and reality itself are not necessarily commensurate. Relativism might apply to human perceptions, but it does not necessarily apply to actual reality. Similarly, solipsism would suggest that the self is the only reality and the self is the only thing that can be known. While these notions might be true on one hand, they too are perceptions of reality and thus, even a solipsistic stance must be regarded as a perception of the brain in much the same way as any other experience of reality.

Can there be some way around this paradoxical problem in which there is a fundamental disconnect between our perceptions of reality and actual reality? Although such a problem might be unresolvable, neurohermeneutics would suggest that we should begin by exploring our perceptions of reality since we have no choice but to begin here. In the reality that we perceive on a daily basis, what might be called 'everyday' or 'baseline' reality, there is a very strong sense that what is perceived is, in fact, real. One might call this sense of reality a Primary Epistemic State of the brain (Newberg 2010). It should be mentioned that such a state is to some extent a brain state and to some extent a phenomenological state. It is the brain that enables that experiential state that subsequently enables an individual to perceive that experience as real. The primary epistemic state of baseline

reality, however, is only one way in which the brain can perceive reality. Thus, there may be a number of epistemic states. Further, these states might be considered 'primary' because they are not derived from sense perception per se, but rather define the form and understanding of that perception. Theoretically, they also would not be reducible into each other.

Why are primary epistemic states important to spiritual experiences and the development of neurohermeneutics? One of the most important points is that understanding such states will be crucial for helping develop a nomenclature for various religious and spiritual states, particularly mystical ones. It is in these spiritual or mystical states that individuals often recount the realness of the experience, and the divine or absolute nature of the experience. For many, such an experience lies at the heart of their religious or spiritual expression. Furthermore, an epistemological analysis of different epistemic states might be crucial for determining which view – scientific, religious, or otherwise – has the best perspective on the true nature of reality even if distinguishing our perception of reality from reality itself is a difficult task.

What makes any primary epistemic state define reality for a particular person is the individual's sense, when they are in one of these states, that what they are experiencing is fundamentally or ultimately real. This is a crucial aspect since it would seem essential that when one is in a primary epistemic state, it is perceived as if that state represents what is actually real. Once the person leaves a state and settles into a second one, they typically perceive the original state to no longer represent actual reality. In this case, any other perception of reality is considered to be an illusion or deception. Other than baseline reality, the other epistemic state that most people are familiar with is dreams. During a dream, everything that is experienced is usually treated as real even when things do not follow logical ordering or do not appear vivid. The point here is that a dream is perceived to be real during the dream, and then recognized as 'just a dream' upon awakening. Once back in baseline reality, there is the perception that the dream state, or any other for that matter, does not represent actual reality.

In order to determine what is really real and the characteristics of these primary epistemic states, neurohermeneutics can attempt to derive the nature of these states based upon both human experience and the functioning of the brain. A neurohermeneutical approach should typically include several important elements with regard to primary epistemic states.

These elements are determined primarily by how human beings sense and make sense of reality. This requires sensory elements, cognitive elements, and emotional elements. In fact, it might be helpful to break down the primary epistemic state into three parameters, each of which relate not only to the experience but to brain functions (Newberg 2011): (1) perceptions of objects or beings which can be manifested as either multiple discrete things (i.e. more than one), or as a holistic union of all things (a unitary reality in which everything is one), (2) relationships between objects or things that are either regular or irregular, and (3) emotional responses to the objects or things that are either positive, negative, or neutral.

Each of these parameters is well known to our own perceptions of the world. Human beings appear to only perceive the world as consisting of either multiple discrete objects or as a unity. We are born with the neurological capability to observe, name, and manipulate multiple objects as discrete things. The abstract and reductionist processes of the brain help in that regard. Language too is essential in labeling objects and categorizing them. Thus, we distinguish between a spruce tree, a mountain, and a dog. We have extensive nomenclature for naming animals and plants, atoms and molecules, and ethical and religious frameworks. The areas of the brain involved in categorization and naming have been studied in the field of cognitive neuroscience and lend support to the importance of these structures and their associated functions in establishing our perceptions of reality.

If there is the perception that there are absolutely no discrete objects, the person experiences the state of absolute unity which we considered above. There may be a variety of states with an increasing sense of unification of things, but philosophically speaking, it would seem that there could only be one state in which there is a complete and absolute unity of all things. This experience includes the sense that the individual is part of the unity such that there is no self and no other. Otherwise, there would be discrete objects, namely the self and the other. Evidence from brain imaging supports the notion that parts of the brain that typically integrate sensory information into a sense of self and an orientation of that self with respect to the world might be affected during spiritual practices that lead to unitary states (Newberg et al. 2001). However, it may be impossible to scientifically measure the changes associated with absolute unitary states since there is no clear way to know when someone else is actually in such a state. It is impossible for an individual to report that they are having an experience

rience of absolute unity, it is likely that it will never be known what pattern of brain activity is associated with this experience.

In our perceptions of the world, there are also important causal and logical relationships between the objects we perceive in the world. When such relationships appear to make sense to us, we refer to them as regular. The causal processes of the brain play a critical role in the ability to evaluate relationships between objects and triggers a response in us when unexpected things occur. When causality seems disrupted, we experience an emotional response that alerts us to the disruption. When relationships are irregular, we note that they do not appear to follow established pathways based upon our prior experiences of reality. Research on infants to adults shows that we respond differently, and activate different parts of the brain, when confronted with irregular relationships whether they are grammatical, musical, logical, or any other type of relationship.

Emotional responses (or affect) in humans are far ranging in their composition. However, they appear to eventually be classified into three broad categories – positive, negative, and neutral. Positive emotions include happiness, joy, elation, love, and contentment. Negative emotions include fear, sadness, depression, anxiety, anger, and melancholy. The absence of either positive or negative emotions would be categorized as neutral. Many cognitive neuroscience studies have evaluated how the brain processes positive and negative emotions with the realization that emotions can be compared to a neutral state. The emotional responses in primary epistemic states, however, do not refer to the usual feelings of happiness and sadness that most people refer to, but to the overall emotional approach of the person to their reality. In other words, the whole world is viewed as positive or negative rather than feeling positive at some points and negative at others.

It is also important to mention that each of these parameters is most likely set along a continuum. Thus, one may have an experience of reality that is based primarily on having multiple discrete objects, but may also have some unitary attributes. Similarly, there may be some regular and some irregular relationships between objects. However, this notation allows for an overall perspective from which more specific elements of primary epistemic states can be elaborated. Based upon these parameters there appear to be nine possible primary epistemic states that are internally consistent, and should have neurological and phenomenological correlates. It should also

be noted that an individual might enter into many different states during their lifetime. They may remain in one state briefly, for many years, or for their entire life. But they might also shift from one primary epistemic state to another, and sometimes quite frequently.

As an example, in addition to the primary epistemic state of everyday reality, there are other states such as dream states, psychotic states, and drug induced states that contain multiple discrete objects that we appear to respond to. And each of these states may include positive, negative, or neutral emotions. Importantly, when an individual is in one of these states, they act as if that state is the true reality at the moment. For example, when a person is dreaming, their reactions to the events in the dream do not take into account everyday reality. The person responds as if the dream state represents the real reality. It is only upon awakening from the dream that we relegate it to an inferior perception of reality and now treat everyday reality as the real reality. This is true of each of these epistemic states in which there are discrete objects. This is also true for states in which there is a progressive sense of the unity of all things. This can include profound spiritual or mystical experiences in which the whole world is perceived to be one with God, Christ, or some other Divine entity. However, there is still one or more objects in that perception of reality (i.e. the universe and the Divine entity).

Absolute unitary states form a fundamentally different type of primary epistemic state. In unitary reality, there is no perception of discrete, independent objects that can be related to each other so there cannot be any relationships (regular or irregular). As mentioned, there may be many other states, especially spiritual ones, that have a significant degree of unitary experience even though the totality of everything is not considered to be completely unified. Unitary states other than absolute unity most likely represent a number of spiritual or mystical states, but probably lie along the continuum of primary epistemic states between those that involve the perception of multiple discrete objects and those in which there is the perception of a unity without discrete objects. The absolute unitary state referred to in this discussion represents a state described in many religious and philosophical perspectives. Thus, Nirvana, Absolute Reality, the Oneness of God, Absolute Unitary Being, and a number of other terms all refer to this complete and total unitary experience of the universe (d'Aquili and Newberg 1999). The exact physiology

of such a state is also an interesting issue since a researcher can never know when such an experience is being perceived. However, research has suggested some possible correlates. Most likely, areas that subserve the sense of self and the sense of space and time are affected. It may be that activity inherently within these areas is substantially decreased, or perhaps neuronal activity going into or coming out of those areas is blocked (i.e. these areas are cut off from the rest of the brain's functions).

It might be argued that the unitary reality state is associated with three possible emotional states which contain either positive, negative, or neutral affect, similarly to the states in which there is the experience of discrete objects. If unitary reality is associated with positive affect it is perceived as an undifferentiated oneness which is totally joyful and overwhelmingly good. The experience of unitary reality with neutral affect is very similar to the experience of unitary reality with positive affect such that the universe is directly understood as being an undifferentiated oneness. However, with neutral affect the oneness is understood on a very impersonal level. Unitary reality is not viewed as good or bad or anything – it just is. Thus, the state of unitary reality with neutral affect would more likely be referred to as the void or infinite nothingness in religious literature. This is particularly the case in Buddhist philosophy. It is interesting to note that, to date, there are no clear references to an experience of a unitary reality when perceived with a negative affect. It may be that such a state simply is not possible. Perhaps it cannot come about because the experience of all things as an undifferentiated oneness is so powerfully positive and integrative, that it cannot be perceived in negative terms. It may be argued that such an experience of unitary reality with negative affect is even incompatible with life, the brain, or the mind.

An important point about the unitary epistemic states is that it could be further argued that the unitary reality state should actually include all three possible emotional states together, since even affect should be experienced as a unity. In other words, this state cannot even be considered to have different affective components. This might also be the case since the perceiving self is not separate from the rest of the universe in the unitary epistemic state, and thus, any emotion can theoretically only be felt after the person is no longer in the epistemic state. They can only reflect on the emotional response they have as the result of being in the unitary epistemic state since there is no self to have the emotion during that state. It is not

clear what the experience of positive, negative, and neutral emotions all combined into one would actually feel like. Arguably, it might be experienced as neutral since the positive and negative would cancel out. But since the positive and negative would theoretically be included in the neutral, it still might be a different experience from a state which is simply neutral. It is also not clear how such a state might correlate with neurological functions although it may be possible for structures that are associated with positive affect and those associated with negative affect to be activated at the same time. Descriptions of such unitary states do utilize a wide variety of emotions, sometimes together, ranging from fear and awe to joy and utter contentment. However, in the end, it might be argued that unitary reality should not be differentiated, even by affect.

The most important aspect of the primary epistemic state of unitary reality is that unlike other primary states, when an individual 'comes out of it,' evidence suggests that the person does not perceive it or the memory of it as an illusion, hallucination, or delusion (Newberg and Waldman 2009). Once a person has been in the state of unitary reality, they understand it to exist even though the person may not be in those states at some later time. Thus, the state of unitary reality appears to violate the rule of primary epistemic states, that they are real when in them and are perceived as not real when in another primary epistemic state. When reality is experienced as unitary, the person believes this state to be fundamentally real regardless of which other state they are in. In fact, the sense of reality is so strong during the experience of unitary reality, that when a person comes out of this experience and enters into another primary epistemic state, the new state is often perceived as a mere reflection or distortion of the unitary reality. Thus, unitary reality is perceived as real beyond all other primary states even when a person is in those other states. This property is unique to the experience of unitary reality since no other primary epistemic state is perceived of as ultimate reality once one has moved from it to another primary state.

Conclusions: Implications for Consciousness

This chapter explored the nature of spiritual experiences from a neurohermeneutical and neurotheological perspective. The result is a multidisciplinary approach that combines phenomenology, neuroscience, spirituality, anthropology, and theology. The result is

an analysis of human experience that provides information on how we perceive reality itself and make meaning about that reality through the processes of the brain. What is also intriguing about such an analysis is the place the consciousness has in all of this. On one hand, it might be argued that consciousness is an essential part of all experiences of reality and hence all of the primary epistemic states. This typically refers to a type of 'everyday' consciousness that human beings have. We all feel that we are conscious, have subjective awareness about the environment around us, and have an awareness of our internal state that responds to the external environment. This type of consciousness is often considered from a more materialistic perspective in that it derives in large part from the functioning of the human brain. As the brain processes information about the world, it provides a sense of awareness. Of course there are some fundamental philosophical and scientific problems with this notion of consciousness since it is not clear how a set of non-conscious biological processes can produce consciousness, let alone subjective awareness if we define these two concepts separately.

This is what scholars studying consciousness (Chalmers 1995) have come to call the 'hard problem' – How does the brain function in such a way as to produce consciousness? Of course, part of the issue is that there is a presumed causal arrow from the brain to consciousness. This is consistent with the current paradigm of Western thought and science. However, there may be a different perspective to take. It may be that consciousness does not derive from biology, but rather, the other way around. Perhaps consciousness is the primary 'stuff' of the universe from which material reality is derived. This is certainly consistent with Eastern traditions which hold consciousness to exist beyond simply the biology of the brain. What is also interesting in this regard is that the primary epistemic state of absolute unitary being is frequently experienced as a kind of universal consciousness. Such experiences contribute to the notion of a universal consciousness which is not produced via the biology of the brain. The notion of how different philosophical concepts arise and are attributed to an explanation of reality may be directly related to the primary epistemic state in which the notion arises. For example, an individual who resides in the everyday reality epistemic state is more likely to find a materialistic cause of things. However, and individual who has experienced absolute unity may

be more likely to comprehend a spiritual or consciousness basis for reality.

Neurohermeneutics and neurotheology are perspectives that would argue for a careful analysis of epistemological claims and claims about the true nature of reality. Further, such a perspective would argue that an individual's primary epistemic state, including the brain states involved, are a crucial piece of information that leads to the nature of any person's beliefs about reality. But neurohermeneutics and neurotheology also remind us that every belief, concept, or experience we hold about the world is processed in some way through the human brain. Therefore, we can never know if our ideas about reality, or our experience of a primary epistemic state is more or less real than any other. This fundamental problem lies at the heart of epistemology, spirituality, religion, and science. Neurohermeneutics and neurotheology, recognize this problem and try to offer a multidisciplinary approach that might get us closer to resolving this problem than any singular approach. But the ultimate answers to these questions for now remain elusive.

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Biography



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In particular, his research has focused on the development of neurotransmitter tracers for the evaluation of religiosity as well as neurological and psychiatric disorders including clinical depression, head injury, Alzheimer's disease, and Parkinson's disease. Because of his work in the intersection between religion and the brain, he has become an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. From 2005 to 2010 he was also the Director of the Center for Spirituality and the Mind.

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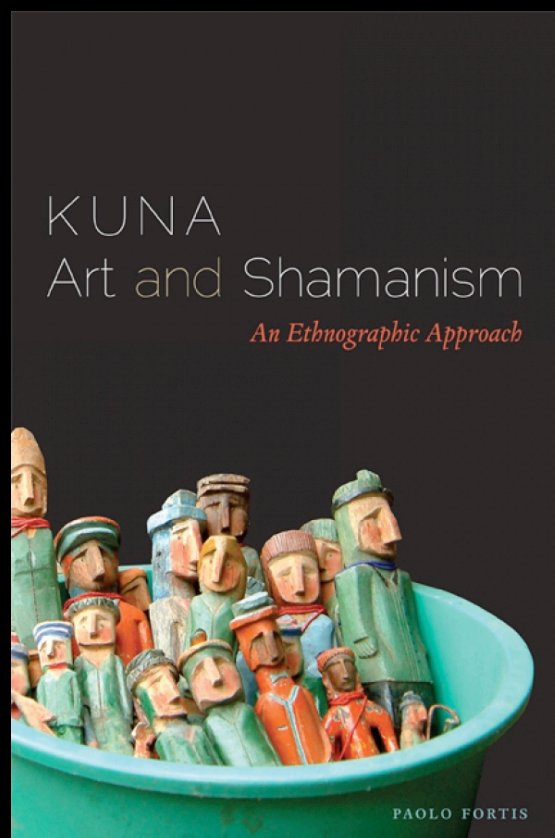
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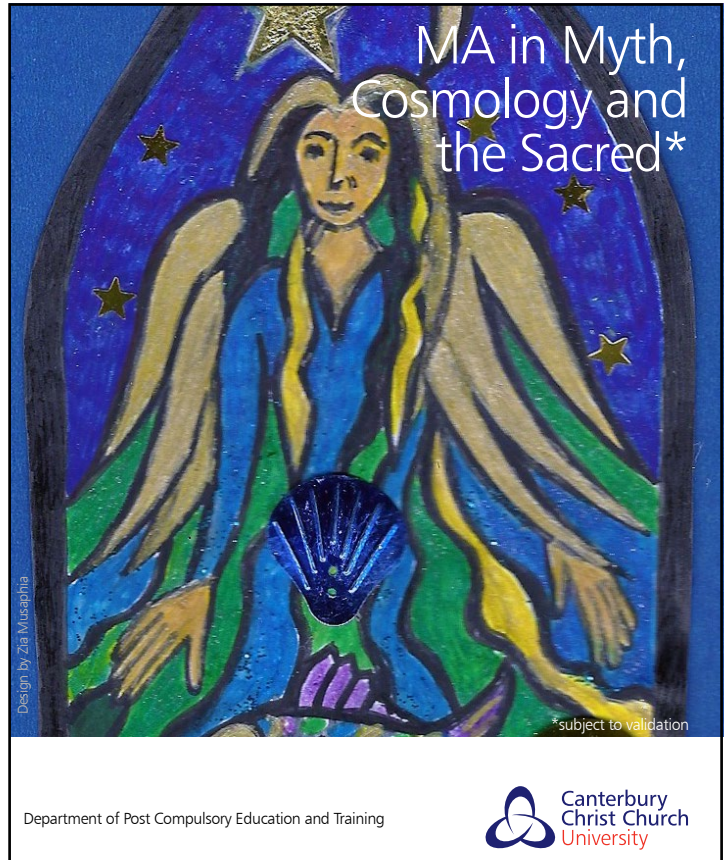
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Ultra-Terrestrials and the UFO Phenomenon: A Response to Steven Mizrach

Jason Colavito



In the previous issue of this journal (Vol. 4, No. 2), Steven Mizrach discussed “The Para-Anthropology of UFO Abductions: The Case for UTH,” or the “ultra-terrestrial hypothesis.” This is an idea put forward by Jacques Vallée, the famed ufologist, that the phenomena associated with UFOs and alien abduction could be explained by the actions of intelligent beings from another dimension manipulating human consciousness. In this, Vallée was preceded by science fiction writers like H. P. Lovecraft who used the same conceit in stories like “The Dreams in the Witch House” (1932) and “The Dunwich Horror” (1928), and earlier by the Victorian-era Spiritualists and Theosophists who argued that beings from other dimensions played a direct role in human affairs. For the Spiritualists, these were four-dimensional beings whose actions had consequences in three dimensions, while the Theosophists posited myriad parallel dimensions centred on other solar system bodies and populated by beings that moved into and out of this dimension to induce evolutionary change on earth.

Mizrach evaluated three competing explanations for the UFO phenomenon: (a) the traditional view that UFOs are nuts-and-bolts spaceships (the extra-terrestrial hypothesis, or ETH), the more recent view that UFOs can be explained as modern folklore (the psychocultural hypothesis, or PCH), and the UTH. Mizrach, however, said that he was unsatisfied with the folklore explanation because for him it failed to explain the power of the UFO phenomenon and its effect on the lives of those who encounter alien beings.

Thus, Mizrach concludes that the UTH is the best remaining explanation for the UFO phenomenon, following Sherlock Holmes’ fictional dictum that eliminating the impossible leaves by default the truth:

The one thing I am sure of, however, is that there is an intelligence behind the phenomenon [...] The ETH fails, but I also find the ‘pure’ form of the PCH insufficient, so I turn

to Vallée’s UTH (sometimes also known as the EDI, or extra-dimensional intelligence theory), as the best model, for now.

Mizrach also asserts that modern science has discounted the possibility of the UFO phenomenon providing important or even interesting scientific data, and he claims that the United States government exerted influence in discounting the value of UFO research.

In this article, I would like to challenge both of these views, beginning with Mizrach’s argument that science sees no value in UFO research.

The Condon Report

Mizrach’s argument in support of the UTH as the best model for the UFO phenomenon is predicated upon the supposition that the University of Colorado UFO Project’s Air Force-funded 1969 Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects, better known as the *Condon Report*, acted as a mission statement for scientists, and that it discounted the value of UFO research. The Report wrote that those scientists who studied UFOs concluded “that UFO phenomena do not offer a fruitful field in which to look for major scientific discoveries” (1969:2).

This is Mizrach’s warrant for suggesting that three “alternatives” to mainstream science (the ETH, PCH, and UTH) are therefore plausible avenues for research given the silence from science, which has declared UFOs incompatible with physics:

I mean, even if the essential model is correct, science could still learn something from studying UFO reports. Perhaps we could learn more about human misperception of stars and planets, the inability for people to correctly estimate the size or distance of aerial objects, or even the mechanisms behind the confabulation of false stories. Yet, that is the mantra of the

1969 report, that nothing of scientific value can be gained from studying UFO reports, and therefore the Air Force and other branches of government have no need to investigate them.

However, Mizrach has misrepresented the *Condon Report*, for, while the report opens with the conclusion that UFOs have nothing to teach about extraterrestrial beings, just a few paragraphs later, the report directly contradicts Mizrach's version of its contents:

As the reader of this report will readily judge, we have focussed attention almost entirely on the physical sciences. This was in part a matter of determining priorities and in part because we found rather less than some persons may have expected in the way of psychiatric problems related to belief in the reality of UFOs as craft from remote galactic or intergalactic civilizations. We believe that the rigorous study of the beliefs—unsupported by valid evidence—held by individuals and even by some groups might prove of scientific value to the social and behavioral sciences. There is no implication here that individual or group psychopathology is a principal area of study. Reports of UFOs offer interesting challenges to the student of cognitive processes as they are affected by individual and social variables. By this connection, we conclude that a content-analysis of press and television coverage of UFO reports might yield data of value both to the social scientist and the communications specialist. The lack of such a study in the present report is due to a judgment on our part that other areas of investigation were of much higher priority. We do not suggest, however, that the UFO phenomenon is, by its nature, more amenable to study in these disciplines than in the physical sciences. On the contrary, we conclude that the same specificity in proposed research in these areas is as desirable as it is in the physical sciences.

Given that the report which Mizrach says determined the scientific view of UFOs asserts the value of social and behavior sciences for understanding the UFO phenomenon, it is therefore not permissible to classify the PCH as an “alternative” viewpoint tacitly coequal with the ETH and UTC. Rather, the PCH should be seen as the default (social) scientific explanation for the UFO phenomenon insofar as such a phenome-

non exists (a point to which I will return). Thus, the work of Thomas E. Bullard (1989) in locating alien abduction claims in the context of traditional supernatural abduction narratives, and the work of Susan A. Clancy (2005) probing the psychological origins of abduction narratives are not “alternatives” to consensus science but rather are operating entirely within the mainstream. If the “hard” sciences conclude that UFOs are impossible under the laws of physics as currently known, it does not follow that no scholarship emerges to explain why such claims persist.

It is therefore not nearly as surprising as Mizrach claims that U.S. government agencies continued to record UFO sightings after the *Condon Report*. They did not “ignore the findings of the report” but rather followed its broader view. Or, more likely, they monitored such reports for what they could tell the government about Soviet aircraft and public perception of secret American craft. The American government, after all, is documented to have planted a fake UFO report in the Soviet press in connection with U.S. efforts to monitor Soviet activity in a strategically valuable Norwegian island in the Arctic (U.S. Dept. of State 1968; see also Colavito 2013). In other words, UFOs held interest for the government, just not in the context of extraterrestrial (or ultra-terrestrial) visitors.

The Ultra-Terrestrial Hypothesis

Strictly speaking, scientific research into PCH cannot preclude UTH. Even if it can be shown that alien abduction reports emerge primarily in the context of altered states of consciousness (ASC), typically during the transition between waking and sleep, this cannot categorically exclude the arrival of trans-dimensional intelligences at precisely that moment, nor can it preclude the idea that our dreams are excursions to the otherworldly beings' homelands. However, by the same token, science cannot categorically exclude phlogiston, pink elephants, or the Greek gods, no matter how vanishingly remote the possibility of their existence.

The better question is: With what warrant do we propose the existence of ultra-terrestrial beings? For Mizrach, summarizing Vallée, and to a lesser extent Carl Jung, the answer is that PCH explanations are “unsatisfying” for two reasons: (a) alien encounters are too powerful and emotionally moving to be explained as the product of the human mind, and (b) UFO reports have physical correlates in the material world that cannot be explained by appeals to mental

events. I would submit that both of these claims are false, though for different reasons.

The question of the reality of mental events is a qualitative judgment. Mizrach recognizes that abduction reports are nearly identical to shamanic encounters with the gods in ASC, yet he “struggled with this as an explanation of sufficient power” to account for abductees’ changes in personality and ideology, as well as the appearance of the aliens to multiple witnesses. Multiple witnesses, however, he illustrates with the Travis Walton case, which skeptics have debunked quite clearly as a combination of financial desperation on the part of a group of failing loggers (he and his fellow witnesses would owe a significant financial penalty unless an “act of God” intervened) and a convenient viewing of NBC’s TV-movie about the Betty and Barney Hill abduction just two weeks earlier. A second case Mizrach cites, the Allagash “abduction” of four men, is similarly suspect due to the use of dubious regression hypnosis to generate the abduction report. Surely a hypothesis as radical as UTH requires evidence with firmer foundations.

That leaves the question of the intensity of the experience. Surely this is an exquisitely subjective question, for there is no reliable way to judge whether a mental phenomenon is sufficiently intense to objectively warrant a change in behavior. Schizophrenics, of course, experience intense auditory hallucinations sufficient for them to justify changes in their behavior in response to these self-generated stimuli; however, very few even among fringe researchers consider this evidence of schizophrenic brains tuning in to alien wavelengths. In 2002, David Lewis-Williams proposed that modern human consciousness emerged during the Upper Paleolithic in connection with ASC, that the neurology of the human brain generated stock images in responses to ASC, and that culture defines how the individual experiences those stock images—as vortexes, tunnels, gods, monsters, aliens, etc.

For Lewis-Williams, the intensity of these ASC experiences is what drove the emergence of higher order consciousness, and since each piece of the ASC experience can be induced experimentally by stimulation of the brain, the phenomenon as a whole is therefore reducible to the neurological function of the brain. Lewis-Williams and David Pearce (2005) later expanded this argument to show how the same processes are reflected in Neolithic culture, centered on a belief in the ability of the individual to travel through a vortex to meet with the ancestral spirits or the gods. The authors then connected this to modern

cultures’ experiences and experimental laboratory results. Thus, from the earliest human cultures, all of the elements of the classic alien abduction were in place, and they could be demonstrated to draw from neurological—that is material, earthbound—sources. As I noted above, this cannot be strictly proved since the trans-dimensional aliens might well use ASC as a gateway from their dimension, as advocated by Graham Hancock (2007) in adapting Lewis-Williams work, but like phlogiston to the flame, the trans-dimensional beings become somewhat redundant for explaining alien abductions in the wake of neurological evidence.

Is There a Singular UFO Phenomenon?

A complicating factor that Lewis-Williams’s work creates for the UTH is the fact that shamanic ASC and historical “abduction” experiences, cited by Vallée and other UTH speculators, do not conform to the full narrative of the modern UFO phenomenon, as developed after the Betty and Barney Hill abduction claim (Fuller 1966) and J. Allen Hynek’s (1972) classification of three types of UFO encounters, culminating with contact. Prior to this, strange lights in the sky were not generally found in conjunction with other staples of the narrative, such as abduction, sexual experimentation, and cattle mutilation, a fact even the credulous Vallée (2009) himself seemed to concede in cataloguing the “best” evidence for prehistoric UFOs and finding no unambiguous evidence for a complete UFO narrative prior to the modern era, only fragments that paralleled portions of the modern narrative. This might mean that the trans-dimensional beings first emerged into our dimension only in 1947, 1961, or some other date, but this would not explain those partial parallels.

I have previously traced the Hill abduction to alien encounter and medical experimentation motifs derived from three consecutive episodes of *The Outer Limits* (1964), airing over the three weeks prior to Barney Hill’s first hypnosis session, including the slanted-eyed aliens and their distinctive clothing, the invasive probing, the backwoods setting, and even an interracial narrative paralleling the Hills’ own romance (Colavito 2012). It is noteworthy that the Hills originally only reported to *Project Bluebook* seeing a flying saucer until they were placed in an altered state of consciousness three years later and began recalling abduction imagery exactly paralleling *Outer Limits* episodes in both plot and aesthetics from the weeks before hypnosis. This origin point for the classic ab-

duction narrative strongly favors the PCH over the UTH if this order of events is correct. Given that high profile abduction cases that followed, including the Travis Walton incident, can be shown to reproduce ideas and imagery appearing originally with the Hill case, this again favors PCH over UTH.

Since Mizrach cited Sherlock Holmes about acceptance of the improbable, it is only fair to mention Occam's Razor in defense of the idea that the hypothesis with fewer assumptions is more likely to be correct; in this case, the proposal of an unseen and unattested alternative dimension of reality, populated by multiple beings of near-supernatural intelligence, who are capable of interacting with this dimension in fixed ways across time and space is vastly more complicated than the alternatives. The only serious support for this claim is the contention that the UFO phenomenon encompasses physical phenomena—such as UFOs that can be tracked on radar—that preclude a purely mental explanation. Indeed, this is Mizrach's primary objection to PCH. This leads to my final question: Is the UFO phenomenon singular?

The modern UFO phenomenon is composed (roughly) of four parts: UFO sightings, crop circles, cattle mutilation, and alien abduction. Ufologists disagree on whether crop circles and cattle mutilation should be considered part of the phenomenon, and alternative explanations exist even among believers. Cattle mutilation, for example, was traditionally ascribed down to the Twentieth Century to the evil power of the goatsucker (nightjar), a (real) bird whose mythology was reapplied to the Chupacabra, whose name (literally: "goat sucker") belies its origins (see my chapter on the Chupacabra in Colavito 2013), and provides an equally incredible explanation for something science recognizes as natural decay. Similarly, prior to the modern UFO myth, lights in the sky were treated as a distinct class of "prodigy" from nocturnal visitation by strange visitors such as incubi and succubae, whom Vallée and Bullard both see as analogous to UFO denizens. These visitations, however, were not associated with spaceships or intense light, just kinky sex. Additionally, the first reported alien encounters—those from before the Hills like George Adamski's—were wildly diverse, including civilized diplomatic meetings with Nordic-looking aliens from Venus, like those of Golden Age science fiction, as filtered through Theosophy. It is only after the 1960s that these threads come together in the modern UFO myth.

Because we find the various elements of the UFO myth in isolation throughout history, the logical conclusion is that the four facets of the myth were originally separate and brought together because of the UFO myth and the UFO phenomenon is not the cause of the four facets. In this an instructive parallel can be found in the ancient Greek myth of giants who (a) built the massive Mycenaean ruins, (b) left behind their gigantic bones, and (c) performed magic from their underground tombs and rose to communicate with those who sacrificed to them. The myth emerged from mistakes (about the origin of ruins and about the giant bones, really those of extinct Pleistocene mammals—see Mayor [2000]), and religious ideology, but it seemed supported by facts which were forever after linked to the myth. In the same way, the modern UFO myth is leading researchers down the path of proposing elaborate explanations for a phenomenon that cannot yet be proved to require a singular explanation.

If treating sightings, abductions, mutilations, and crop circles as distinct events yields productive explanations for each (as skeptics contend), then the UFO phenomenon as a whole may be considered as a modern myth and the UTH can be discarded as redundant, though as with phlogiston and unicorns, it cannot be conclusively proven wrong, only unnecessary. This then frees the researcher to examine multiple causes for various phenomena, from ASC for most abduction cases to a wide range of events that yield lights in the sky. By discarding the strictures of forcing all of the factors of contemporary UFO mythology to conform to a single hypothesis, the truth may in fact emerge more fully and brilliantly than ufologists suspect.

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Biography

Jason Colavito is an author and editor based in Albany, NY, whose books include *The Cult of Alien Gods: H.P. Lovecraft and Extraterrestrial Pop Culture* (Prometheus Books, 2005); *Knowing Fear* (McFarland, 2008); and more. Colavito is internationally recognized by scholars, literary theorists, and scientists for his pioneering work exploring the connections between science, pseudoscience, and speculative fiction. His investigations, which have appeared on the History Channel and were cited in publications like *The Atlantic* and *The Huffington Post*, examine the way human beings create and employ the supernatural to alter and understand our reality and our world.



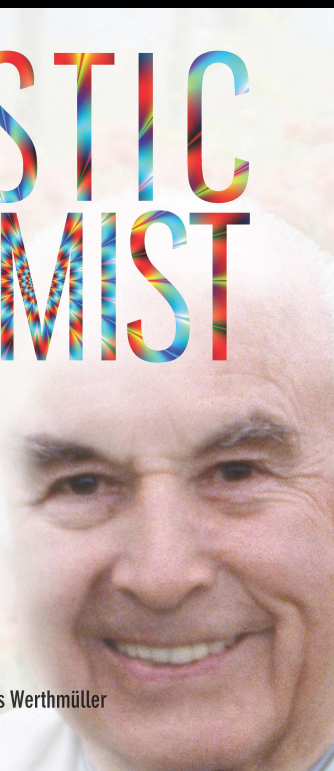
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Musings on Good, Evil and the Conquest of Mexico

An Interview With Graham Hancock

William Rowlandson



That's what demons do – multiply human misery.

In frosty February I visited Graham Hancock in his house in Bath to interview him for *Paranthropology*. I had met Graham and his wife Santha at the conference on psychedelics, *Breaking Convention*, in 2011, and towards the end of a long conversation over coffee Graham mentioned that his new work – a series of novels – would be about Cortés and Moctezuma and the daimonic/demonic forces urging them towards their explosive encounter. Intrigued, I made contact with Graham some months later to suggest an interview and to seek a review copy of the novel.

War God is a gripping and frank depiction of the very real horror that accompanied this period, and the reader is not shielded from visions of this harsh reality. There is a confident balance between historical realism: conversations, sights, smells, sounds, gore – and inspired imagination: Moctezuma's mushroom-fuelled relationship with the hummingbird god Huitzilopochtli, and Cortés' dream-dialogue with St Peter. Importantly, Graham presents with candour and a genuinely open enquiry the very plausible possibilities of this communication between humans and deities. Making no categorical statements about the ontological nature of these entities, i.e. whether empirically distinct beings or complexes of the unconscious, the novel demonstrates that the sheer scale of slaughter and destruction was inseparable from the religious fervour of all parties. Something drove these historical figures beyond simple lust for power. This mystery is explored in *War God*.

Of all the many questions that I was keen to pose, it became clear that the depiction of violence and the sense of relentless brutality were the matters that most preoccupied me. Graham had told me that his first work of fiction, *Entangled*, had been inspired by some visions during ayahuasca sessions, and that he had experienced similar visions of the historical period of Cortés and the Aztecs. Neither *Entangled* nor *War God* shirk from presenting horrific cruelty perpetrated by humans as well as by entities of the spirit

world who exert their malevolent influence over humankind. In this respect, acts of love and compassion, in opposition to acts of hate and horror, are woven into the fabric of reality as part of a cosmic conflict between good and evil. There is thus a meta-physical, perhaps theological, aspect to these novels, and I was intrigued to seek correlatives between Graham's fiction and his other works concerning ancient architecture, lost civilisations, occult gnostic thought, shamanism, psychedelics, and political power. Over the course of the interview, it became clear that what to some readers may appear as a radical departure from his investigative, non-fiction work was in essence an integral component of a larger vision presented throughout his works of this ancient confrontation of forces. It is also noteworthy that whilst the interview lasted over two hours and covered matters as diverse as ayahuasca-inspired artwork, the Jesuits, Aztec sacrifices, the War on Terror, drone strikes, cannabis and megaliths, Graham chose to post on YouTube a 20-minute segment of the interview in which he discusses precisely this matter of dualism, which he entitled 'Graham Hancock on Good and Evil.' This topic was clearly at the heart of the interview.

To begin the interview, I asked what role ayahuasca had played in providing the visions for the novels. A great deal, was his response, and in particular, he explained that the narrative of *Entangled* appeared almost complete in a vision with a core sense that he had been mistaken about the Neanderthals, and that, importantly, he felt emboldened to present them in the true nature that he had sensed in the vision:

Graham: *I can't paint. In my case I have a gift of writing. Ayahuasca did directly influence me, partly because I asked it to. I published Entangled in 2007. I went to Brazil with the intention of seeking a novel – it's useful to have some intention – let the vine show me what it wants to show me – or – I said that I would like to be given a vision. I felt tired of non-fiction – footnotes, etc. – rigorous defence of arguments against attack – I wanted freedom – I was also getting older and wanted something new. Ayahuasca gave me an instant answer – the*

story across time – good against evil. Two entangled women – one in the past one in the present – are brought together across time by this angelic being, an entity whom I associate with Mother Ayahuasca. She could be real, she could be in our mind – who cares – most people experiencing ayahuasca see her. The Blue Angel is the benign supernatural force – who brings the two women together to do battle against the demon who wishes us to take a dark and evil path. And role of women is to resist. They have to resist as they understand that some force in the universe wants us not to recognise that we have a divine spark. I was shown scenes, battles and episodes, and I was told ‘Hancock you were wrong about the Neanderthals’.

I first drank ayahuasca when researching for the book Supernatural as I had wanted to experience first-hand these shamanic altered states of consciousness rather than just reading about them. In that book I had misrepresented the Neanderthals. I was persuaded by what was then the mainstream academic line – that they were not symbolic creatures – that yes they had big brains – bigger than ours – yes they had been in command of Ice-Age Europe for 200,000 years – but they were stupid, brutish, no symbolic or spiritual life – their burials were unimportant – their culture was accidental, etc. And I had thought ‘fair enough’ and I depicted them that way. But what I was shown in my ayahuasca visions was that it was not so – they were creative, spiritual creatures. Our ancestors would not have survived had they not learnt from the Neanderthals. It was a revelation to me that I got it all wrong, that I had done them disservice. Entangled was my opportunity to put it right – to show that Neanderthals were good and decent people – they were pure love and goodness who communicated telepathically – and that although they left little cave painting, they painted their bodies. Furthermore, they taught our ancestors how to paint. Researchers have shown that origin of modern human behaviour may well have been brought about by assimilation. Terence McKenna even thought this in Food for the Gods. It came to me in inspiration that the Neanderthals introduced our ancestors to sacred visionary medicines, from which they understood about painting. There may even have been interbreeding, and current research is investigating that. The Neanderthals taught our ancestors all this, and I feel I’ve done them justice in the novel. I’ve portrayed them as my vision – as goodness and love – and now academic research is proving this theory right, that they may have even interbred. All this I received in the vision, and it makes me quite emotional. I got many insights in the visions – at the heart of it is the dualistic view of the universe – battle of good and evil and the importance of humans to choose. A catch line – evil may not always be defeated, but it will always be resisted.

William: Human life has always been about territorial conflict, battles, skirmishes. Why the need to present it as a choice between good and evil rather than

many cultural, social even biological polarities that do not imply such value?

Graham: *50 to 40,000 years ago the first anatomically modern humans arrived in Western Europe. I see no evidence for violent, negative, aggressive behaviour. The fundamental question in Entangled is what actually happened to the Neanderthals? This is a mystery of prehistory. One theory is that our ancestors, having co-existed with them for 20,000 years, ended up wiping them out. Perhaps something in them changed – some influence – that caused them suddenly to turn on the Neanderthals. That possibility is left open in Entangled – but it is presented. This is the crux of Entangled. Over 24,000 years the two girls become entangled, and Ria feels that it is her duty to prevent our ancestors wiping them out, in order to pay off some karmic debt for having done so. The demonic form gains his psychic charge by encouraging the humans to wipe out the Neanderthals. What emerges in the sequence of novels is that annihilation by anatomically modern human beings is stopped, that they die out for other reasons, and that we don’t incur this karmic debt. Something changes in humans from the end of the upper Palaeolithic into the Neolithic – we become violent. And that’s where I entertain the notion of dark entities at the spiritual level, and positive energies of resistance. And the human dilemma is always to choose.*

A friend of mine calls this world of ours ‘a university of duality.’ I think this is interesting. A lot of people reject the idea of duality and would like everything to be one – that it is all beautiful and good – and that all duality is projection. But I’m not sure how much we would have to learn in a world like that. I think that duality is a very useful teaching tool, and that without it is difficult to make choices. In this particular experience duality has very important lessons to teach us – and if it were taken away what choices would we have to make?

William: But is there not a danger that a choice might be made in the assumption that it was good, and that history shows it not to be so? Does duality not go against mystical traditions of unity – that the good and the bad are always together – a harmony of polarities?

Graham: *Interesting points. In ancient Egypt the duality was Horus versus Set. Horus and Set in the same head. I don’t disagree that there isn’t an overarching oneness, but I still feel that if you remove the duality you remove a useful teaching tool.*

Science tells us that it is all but an accident, a random processes. There is no such thing as the spirit. When we die we die. End of story. There is no transcendent purpose. Science may be right. But it may be wrong – and another possibility must be considered. Consciousness may be a part of the universe rather than an epiphenomenon of brain activity. Our incarnation may

be an opportunity to learn and to choose. Perhaps, as many spiritual traditions show, we have many opportunities; and consequently we have the choice – and yes, one culture's good may be another culture's bad. Few people would dispute, for example, that there are cases when the killing of a person may be justified. Does the action that I'm about to take add or reduce misery? If we ask ourselves those questions, what is good and evil become clearer to define. In the case of Hitler, had someone killed him in 1937, they would have prevented the transgression of the sovereignty of millions of people.¹ Very fine distinctions are to be made. But if we examine our hearts, we have some kind of compass on this – and that we do know the good and the bad – and that it is not entirely culturally constrained.

William: In your novels, investing so much narrative space to the darkness, are you in some way exorcising? Is your choice here to focus on the darkness a means to open it up? Is there some purpose?

Graham: Yes, in the novels I do dwell to some extent on negative human behaviour. As a human and a writer it is difficult, it causes me pain, but I feel it is essential. Why? Because as a species we have a capacity for denial. When something is bad we look away – and by looking away we allow the evil to flourish. We need to focus on it. Many people who don't like *Entangled* don't like it because of the violence. I've received many letters. They say that it is all goodness and light and we must focus on it. I respond that nothing in the novel is made up by me. All the darkness, such as the castration of one's enemies and the wearing of the genitals on one's head; all of this has happened. There are other forms of human sacrifice, some of which are still being practiced by humans today. If we turn away and concentrate only on goodness, we allow such matters to continue. So what I'm doing with this writing is to focus precisely on these matters. To put it right up front. Here it is. This happens. Deal with it. If we're going to move on – and at the moment the world is in a dark place – horrendous things are happening – we're not going to solve the problems by pretending they don't exist. And in order to confront them we have to express them.

And my writing expresses this – not with a sense of reveling in the horror, but to show the reader what these things are, and hopefully raise the opportunity to address them in the future. I also show goodness. I show choice. Cortés could have made different choices. Moctezuma could have made different choices – and I'm intrigued to think what could have happened to the world had Cortés not made the decisions he made. It seems implausible that Cortés should have achieved what he did with so few men. This gigantic and truly violent state of the Mexica

(Aztecs) was immensely violent, practising human sacrifice. How could the bunch of freebooters overthrow this? I try to show how they managed it. Had Moctezuma acted with compassion and diplomacy towards his fellow peoples; had he shown more tolerance and not acted as he did then they would not have allied themselves to Cortés. All these folk detested the Aztecs, and so it is very reasonable that these folk joined Cortés. Had the Aztecs made that choice, then Cortés would have been presented with a united front on the shores of eastern Mexico. Consequently the entire venture of European colonialism would have had to have been rethought. Had they been greeted by a powerful and united force in Mexico, I feel that it would have affected the entire way the Europe operated elsewhere. It's obvious with the conquest of the Inca. It is also obvious more widely around the world that European powers were persuaded that they could easily destroy these so-called primitive societies.

William: But in *War God* there seems little hope of any redemption, of any light that will resist this incredible force of darkness. Can we assume this light will come? Will it come through Tozi and Malinal, or through a spiritual force like the Blue Angel in *Entangled*?

Graham: Yes – absolutely – there will be redemption. This is very much a part of books 2 and 3. Goodness is through Tozi, Malinal and Pepillo. What I'm trying to show is that even in the worst circumstances – in the midst of overwhelming wickedness – it is possible for goodness and love to thrive and prevail. World War Two shows this to be the case: in the midst of the worst atrocities there were examples of goodness. I don't want to turn away from the darkness of the period. Even if goodness didn't win, it did speak out for what we can achieve – and yes – perhaps through supernatural intervention.

William: You suggest in *Heaven's Mirror* and *Fingerprints of the Gods* that the Mexica inherited from previous cultures a religious practice of sacrifice that had been symbolic, and that, unable to relate to this symbolic perspective, they twisted and distorted the practice into the very literal and real practice of human sacrifice. Have you developed this line of enquiry in your research and writing of *War God* and its sequels?

Graham: Yes – my research over the years leads me to believe the appearance over the world of similar spiritual traditions, especially manifested through archaeology – pyramids, for example. This planet is a theatre of experience in which man has the opportunity to grow and learn – as the hermetic texts put it

¹ This is a big canard – as Graham argued that one might have justified the murder of Hitler before the war. Is this not preventative warfare? Pre-emptive strikes? This is problematic on theological, philosophical and practical grounds.

– to tend the material world – but also to grow at the spiritual level – and in order to do so we need to detach from the spiritual world. One has to pay attention to the material world, but it is not everything. There is a need to earn a living and put food on our table. But that is not what we are here to do. We are here to perfect the spirit. The ancient Egyptians knew this. They knew that we have to grow spiritually. It's not about accumulating material growth and many ancient cultures – including Christianity – knew this. It has a shamanistic element also. We are dealing with spiritual and physical realms. Even Christianity has this idea. If you look deeply you find a shamanistic trend within Christianity – especially with the Gnostics – who to my mind were keeping alive an ancient Egyptian tradition. What happened was that the bureaucrats and moneymen came in and changed Christianity to the notion of obedience to the priests. And this brings me back to the Gnostic idea that the priestly class – and the church itself – are a demonic force...

If you go back to the Gnostics of the early Christian era they have a radical and disturbing view to any person of the three Abrahamic faiths: that Yahweh, familiar to Christianity, Judaism and Islam, is the Demiurge. He is demonic – evil. He has imposed himself and seeks to be worshipped. That's how you start to understand the horrific actions of Yahweh. He is a brutal being. The Gnostics understood this. But they believed that the demiurge was involved in the creation of humanity, and that the divine spark is in man. The whole Gnostic project is to liberate that spark in man. So the Gnostics turned the garden of evil around – the serpent is good – the Tree Of Life can be reached – the demiurge wants you not to eat – and this is profoundly disturbing for Christians. Indeed in the mediaeval times it led to horrendous persecution of such a heresy.

My feeling is that there was a lost civilisation and a spiritual tradition that taught us to focus on spiritual development. This was expressed through metaphors, such as the sacrifice of the body as a means of not focusing on the body too much, of not being distracted from the spiritual. There was a whole range of metaphors. What I think happened as this system devolved was that later traditions misinterpreted this, and where sacrifice was metaphorical it was taken literal – like the Aztecs – and was taken as an instruction to sacrifice bodies. This became part of the ritual of human sacrifice being somehow pleasing to the gods. This is a perverted interpretation of an ancient teaching

William: Were the Christians *autos-da-fé* sacrifices also?

Graham: Indeed. The humbug of the Christians! It was indeed a sacrifice when someone was burnt at the stake; to save the soul through murder. Humbug! I make this point in *War God*. It is no different.

The point that Graham raised led me to a question that I have presented to my students, and which often taxes me. Can we understand, and even forgive, the actions of the brutalising colonists and the inquisitorial clerics if we understand their ideological background? Can we enter their mind-set and consider that they earnestly believed that the Indians were damned souls because of their savagery and ignorance, and that therefore if they can convert them to Christianity they are rendering them the most blessed of gifts, salvation of their eternal souls! Likewise with heresy. If heresy is a mortal sin, then by torturing the heretic you are encouraging him to renounce the heresy. You are thus trying to save him. If heresy, furthermore, is a disease that may be spread amongst the populace, then the Inquisitors are acting in the public interest by rooting out the heretics, and thus saving the people's eternal souls. From our modern perspective such a position is unequivocally atrocious, and I often observe members of the class horrified by the thought that one might *even permit a justification* for this abuse. Can one forgive, or, as many of my students would aver, is it more likely that such persecution was merely a theological justification for territorial land-grab, a smokescreen for empire-building, conquest and plunder?

Graham: Good point. I have no doubt that some of the Inquisitors believed that they were doing the right thing, that they were saving the soul of the individual being consigned to the flames. Whilst this excuses nothing, it does explain how someone was able to do horrendous acts while believing they were doing good things.

William: And the same could be said of Moctezuma?

Graham: Indeed. As I investigate this period it has become clear to me that individuals who today we would classify as psychopaths were drawn to these roles, as it gave them the justification to do what they really loved doing – namely inflicting pain and suffering on their fellow man. There are too many inquisitors who quite clearly gained pleasure from this. This must be taken into account. Secondly we are shaped by cultural context. But there is too much of a tendency of our modern world to contextualise and to think that it is all a product of our conditioning. I disagree with this. We are responsible for our actions.

Serendipitously, the interview with Graham ties in well with a Masters project I am supervising concerning cultural interchange between Europe and Mexico – *transculturation* – focussing on the Christians who were desperately trying to bring peace and love and good blessing, and who rose up and shouted out against the brutality of their countrymen. Not only well-known cases like the friars Montesinos, Bernardino de Sahagún and Bartolomé de Las Casas – but also poor mendicant friars who entered villages with nothing but a bible, who learnt the indigenous languages, who translated sacred texts into and from these languages, who saw indigenous people as fellows. We owe much to these folk for helping to restrain the excesses of conquest and helped to preserve some of the indigenous languages, texts, mythologies and cosmologies.

Graham: *Indeed. Take, for example, the case of Bartolomé Olmeda, who urged Cortés not to destroy the idols and not to impose Christianity, maintaining that there is no point in forced conversion. Cortés was a man with a fanatical streak which made him excessive. Consider Las Casas and Sahagún: these guys had been through the cultural conditioning, and yet they had the courage to resist it and to say, No! This is wrong. We condemn it. We will expose the horror of this. They detested what was being done. Amazing that Las Casas was never executed. He seems like a modern human rights activists – what courage! It was possible even then to rise above cultural conditioning*

We do have choice. This is the issue. We may be constrained by circumstances, but we can always make a choice not to inflict suffering on others. Most people in the Sixteenth Century didn't make this choice. They may not have been allowed to, but they still could have done so.

That is the other side of my novels. I talk about Aztec wickedness and I talk of Spanish wickedness and I show the opposition, like Olmeda. I focus on Muñoz in order to show the reality of the Inquisition – this horrendous destruction of pre-existing knowledge – the codices – the horrible murder of people under the pretext that they were heathens. The population of Central America plummeted from 30 million to 1 million in 50 years. This is demonic however you look at it.

Such a position helps us understand Cortés. It's not so long ago that the cultural model of territorial appropriation was still present. It is how it still is today. I mean frankly, when a drone kills 190 people at a blow, none of whom having performed any act of violence against the West, this is sacrifice, murder, just like the Aztecs or the Inquisitors. We likewise today have our own mechanisms for justifying our actions of aggression. Before we condemn those in the past we should look closely at ourselves.

William: *Certainly – and one method by which I relate the past with the present in class is to call the Valladolid Debate of 1550 – in which the churchmen Las Casas and Sepúlveda debated the treatment and enslavement of the indigenous Americans – an 'enquiry.' We are familiar with the Hutton Enquiry (which failed to reach any firm resolution on the atrocities of the invasion of Iraq). Well, if we take the royal debate as being a public view of the horrors of a so-called 'just war' then we can see the parallels with today. A scrutiny of the underlying notion that 'our values are right – theirs are wrong.' There *was* resistance at the time of Cortés. There *is* resistance today.*

Graham: *Right – and at least today we're not burnt at the stake for resisting. But still the powerful state apparatus uses our money to brutalise people, to impose their will on other cultures and upon us. The internet is a tool and a forum for resistance. However, nothing has really changed. The state still imposes its will, with the same belief that our system is the right one, others are false. This is utter humbug and totally disrespectful for other ways of life. And our job in the present age is to resist that tooth and nail and to prevent it happening whenever we see it.*

William: You have talked recently about the 'reverse missionary movement', in which *ayahuasceros* and *curanderos* of the Amazon are reaching out to the West – to the gringos who have traditionally persecuted them – in order to spread the word of Mother Ayahuasca – in order to instil a vision of nature, peace, harmony, and in order to demonstrate to western collective consciousness the gradual suicide of the human race that is currently taking place under the stewardship of western governance. Do you think this reverse missionary movement is gathering momentum? Is the pay-off not immense, in that the gringo culture may well appropriate ayahuasca traditions, debase them, commercialise them, demonise them, etc.? Is the impact of ayahuasca tourism a concern?

Graham: *This is a complex issue. Firstly, the experience of contact with an entity or a spirit, that ingestion of ayahuasca induces – nobody could fault me for saying that this experience is widespread – that people who have drunk ayahuasca all around the world experience an entity whom they name Mother Ayahuasca. She might be a serpent, which alarms fundamentalist Christians. Sometimes she comes as a beautiful woman. But in all cases she comes to teach us something. And those teaching are at many levels. People might receive teachings about their*

own lives, about the mistakes they may be making, and I recently published an article about this – about how Mother Ayahuasca stopped me in my tracks with a 24 year cannabis habit. I have nothing against cannabis – nothing at all. It has creative and healing properties, and I highly respect the medical marijuana movement. However, there is the question of our individual relationship with cannabis. As a 24-year smoker I realised that I needed to change, as it brought on paranoia. It made me jealous of my wife and partner. And what I was shown in the ayahuasca sessions was that all of this was connected to my servitude to cannabis. I needed to stop; otherwise I would fall into an abyss from which my soul would never recover. All of this was shown to me terrifyingly starkly in the ayahuasca visions. So much so that when I returned from those sessions in Oct 2011 after those five sessions in Brazil, I couldn't smoke again. No withdrawal symptoms – no irritability – nothing – all gone from my life. I received a teaching in those visions that was important to me. Folk who have been addicted to heroin or cocaine have reported similar experiences when working with ayahuasca.

And I can't prove anything about the spirit of the vine – about any of this – but all I can say is, until you have drunk ayahuasca, hold back your judgments. Have a few ceremonies and then see how you feel about this entity. And then consider that your understanding of reality may not be as you thought – and that there may be another realm of reality in which such beings do exist.

Personally, I think that there's an intelligence there, an entity who cares for us and for our species. This is what I've felt after fifty or so ayahuasca sessions. But I can prove nothing.

Secondly, in ayahuasca sessions, folk report an intense feeling of sadness about the environment – particularly about the rain forests. Something has gone terribly wrong about the human relationship with the planet. The destruction of the forests is a dreadful, dreadful mistake that is contrary to what we should be here for. A huge opportunity to learn from nature is being taken away from us. It has to stop. This is a repeated experience of drinkers.

And so it is an interesting coincidence that just as the Amazon is being destroyed, this spirit that has always been confined to the jungle is moving around the world to deliver these teachings.

I feel that there is some intentionality behind this.

In the Amazon they always talk about the intelligence in the vine. How it grabs the leaves in order to gain access to the human mind. If there is a goddess or entity, it is pretty clear that this entity cannot intervene on this material plain. But it can intervene through affecting human consciousness. That's what is happening. And people are receiving these teachings, which leads to a wish to change the direction of humanity.

William: Will ayahuasca endure the capitalist urge to commercialise and commodify? Is she doing a job beyond that which can be sullied?

Graham: *Yes – I feel that the job she is doing will rise above this. And, of course, there are people preparing ayahuasca for purely commercial gain, people who don't really understand how to work with her. As such I would urge anybody who wants to work with ayahuasca to do their research – to use word of mouth. A bit like Gnostic sects in the early Christian era – underground, illegal, disrespected and discredited. Learn from the experiences of others and rely on their anecdotes.*

William: But deeper than that, are there not some shamans working for nefarious goals? Something you explored in *Entangled*. And further to that question, you recently submitted that: “It would be a good thing, I couldn't help thinking, if every military leader, every religious fanatic, every president, every prime minister, every dictator presently exercising power in the world were to be required to undergo ten sessions of Ayahuasca before being allowed to make a single other decision.” How, from this perspective, do you imagine the great circus of geo-politics would be different were such leaders to experience the brew? How do we know that if Dick Cheney drank the brew, he would not simply gain more power towards his power-hungry goals?

Graham: *Good question. Firstly, with the brew, a door into another dimension is opened. What's out there isn't only mother ayahuasca – there are other entities out there as well. I believe in some sense that the duality of good and evil in this realm is driven by the good and evil in the spirit realm. And there are entities that seem to thrive in a vampire-like way on human suffering and misery and on negative human behaviour.*

William: Like Moctezuma and mushrooms

Graham: *Absolutely. The Aztecs went down a dark path with mushrooms, opening a channel between Moctezuma and Huitzipolochi.*

William: Or Charles Manson and LSD

Graham: *Yes. Some people make these choices in this realm and in that realm. People have actively to want to be attracted to this negative aspect. Therefore if we gave ayahuasca to a power-hungry man could he simply become more powerful? Perhaps. But, what can control against that is the set and setting in which the experience is followed. We call them shamans, and our job is to develop a form of shamanism relevant to our culture. Some brujos – sorcerers – are doing the opposite of*

protecting this space, but are opening the door to negative influences. I actually believe that were Cheney given a series of sessions in the right protected space with a skilled and experienced shaman – then it is my belief that he would undergo a profound spiritual transformation. So I believe the teaching needs to be handled in a wise and guided way.

William: Has your relationship with the craft of writing changed since engaging in the process of fiction writing?

Graham: *I'm enjoying writing fiction. Not so much the scenes of violence, but the exercise of not defending every argument and writing footnotes for every assertion. It is liberating to be free of that. In the case of War God I have done much research into the history, and I do refer to that reading. This has allowed me to get into the heads of the characters. Once you start to get inside the head of Cortés, you start to understand things better about these historical characters. The whole historical canvas has opened up for me in a way like never before. The first responsibility as a writer of fiction is not to bore the reader.*

William: As for non-fiction

Graham: *Ok, but it is different. There are different arguments conveyed in non-fiction. Ultimately fiction is about the experience more than non-fiction. It's about not delivering everything at once – about trying to immerse the reader in a visceral way in the historical period. It's been an interesting experience for me to try to portray these scenes, especially the battles.*

But the second thing is about having something to say, about doing something more than merely entertain the reader. The writer must give the readers the sense that they have found something out – something of value that they didn't know before. That's why I think I will continue fiction, as I can explore extraordinary ideas with a freedom that I didn't have before. There is of course a need for scholarly criticism – for conservatism even – as the fire of criticism of new ideas is fundamentally a good thing. We can't naively accept every thought put out there as fact. Indeed, if an idea survives that fire then something is in the theory. But, there's a history of throwing the baby out with the water with the rejection of ideas. The gate keepers are so furious that they look always for what is weak and not looking for the strengths.

William: Every new generation needs to start from scratch. Myers wrote a century ago in *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*: "Now it is that we feel the difficulty of being definite without being trivial; how little of earthly memory persists; how little of heavenly experience can be expressed in terms of

earth; how long and arduous must be the way, how many must be the experiments, and how many the failures before any systemised body of new truth can be established. But a sound beginning has been made, and whatever may be possible hereafter need not be wasted on a fresh start." How can we prevent constantly having to start again?

Graham: *By considering the knowledge and wisdom of the ancients. In 2015 I hope to publish the next part of Fingerprints. New theories are coming through which support the hypothesis of lost civilisation, that support the dating of an immense comet impact in 10,900 BCE – exactly the window I suggested in Fingerprints. I suggested this in 1995 but there was no evidence. I tried earth-crust displacement and other things. This new work on the comet impact is compellingly suggestive of the kind of event that could have wiped out a civilisation. Then Göbekli Tepe in Turkey was discovered, where they are firm that the older layers are over 12,000 years ago. This is accepted, but not the implications. What this says about human history is not being discussed. Göbekli Tepe is a large site of multi-ton megaliths – no background to the culture – how come? Something missing in our story – missing in that time window when we appear to know that the earth was hit by a comet. That missing background intrigues me. I feel it hides the lost civilisation. The other interesting thing is carbon-dating. You can't date stone; so the way it's done is to date organic materials associated. This assumption has driven the timeline. The problem is that many of these sites are approached not in their pristine states. All kinds of things may have happened to these sites: many communities may have lived there; the stones may have been moved, etc. I've long suggested that some megalithic sites are far older than the carbon-dating record shows. There is something different at Göbekli Tepe. Work started about 12,000 years ago then about 10,000 it was deliberately covered up. We don't know why. It was hidden and preserved. That's why the Germans can be certain of its date. That is very important. It raises question marks over other sites – the Maltese – the Tala in Menorca – which have the same T shape – I think it challenges the dating of all megalithic sites.*

William: There are many mysteries that accompany any reflection on megalithic sites the world over – concerning the carving, the moving, the erecting, and the joining, of such immense blocks. The most persistent explanation of these questions invariably involves man-hours – that with enough people over enough years such structures as Callanish, Cheops, Tihuanaco or Machu Picchu are possible – and there the mystery ends.

However, would you agree that, regardless of the mysteries of motives, the significance of the align-

ments, and the ritual functions, there are questions about the moving and raising of the stones themselves that defy the explanations that have been offered? Do you feel that there was some technology, some harnessing of energy, that was known by megalithic builders that we neither know nor understand today? You illustrate one perspective of this in *Entangled*. By what means do you imagine that we may be able to recover this technology?

Graham: *I share your intuition. It has been my privilege to climb the Great Pyramid five times. I simply cannot envisage man-hours. It's almost magical. The same is true of Sacsayhuaman in Peru. It literally beggars belief. I defy man-hours. I strongly believe a technology was employed that we don't know or understand. We think of mechanical advantage – and as we develop there the powers of the mind are diminished. It seems that there is a mind-matter influence. And our society have left that faculty go dormant. In the past, I think they had great use of that; sound, chants, etc. That's one thing I hope to do in the sequel to Fingerprints. We've a long way to go. We need to overcome our own reference frame. I think the megaliths are important. Something important about ourselves that we've forgotten about ourselves and that we desperately need to recover.*

We ended the interview there, although I could happily have continued the rap for the rest of the afternoon. Off-camera I did manage to ask the one question that I had been itching to ask since reading *Supernatural* back in 2005, and which I hadn't managed to ask when I spoke to Graham at *Breaking Convention: what happens on your mushroom trip at Avebury at the end of Supernatural?* Eager for a story about machine-elves cavorting around the megaliths, I received the poetic response: 'not much, really.' At least one mystery was solved...

The mystery of good and evil, however, persists. My Libran and liberal constitution urges me to resist Graham's invocation to perceive the world in terms of good and evil. I strongly wish to see nothing more than a vast network of values interacting and conflicting and generating friction. My willed position is that there are no values beyond the context; that forces that may be labelled good or evil are constantly in opposition and are forever morphing into other forces with other values ascribed to them. One can attempt to resist evil knowing that evil will never be overcome, because there is no such thing. It's just a contextual and contingent value. Likewise oppression, aggression, violence – there's no *genus* of these matters – just

values that are placed upon acts that just *are*. Furthermore, whilst you are resisting 'evil' in one corner of the globe, someone else is resisting the 'evil' caused by you in another. Systems become oppressive through numbers. You resist a system that is only oppressive because it has many people helping it along. In fact, you yourself are most likely putting your shoulder to the wheel of the very system that you are now trying to resist. Then you realise there is no system – there are just endless interacting processes that themselves are endlessly interacting processes. Push somewhere and something will move somewhere else. This is the position that I try to maintain, yet I understand that such a position can become a nominalist chaos. Graham makes this clear – dualism is a useful teaching tool. Sitting on the fence is not effective resistance.

I reflected on why the presentation of violence and brutality in *Entangled* and *War God* was of such importance to me. I came to realise that I was critical – disdainful even – of the depiction of sacrifice, torture, sadism, warfare and bloodshed in both novels. Was Graham not dwelling on these horrors to an unwholesome degree? Is there not something unsavoury about such graphic images? 'Absolutely,' was his pragmatic answer, 'I *am* dwelling on these matters to an unwholesome degree, because we cannot pretend that this savagery has not, and does not, take place.' This is central to the vision that Graham describes being given with ayahuasca. We cannot ignore the darkness.

I then understood that Graham could easily have come back to me 'but you do the same!', and with good reason, as I have run an annual open lecture at the university to which I have invited speakers, such as human rights lawyers and journalists and even a former captive at Guantánamo, to demonstrate to the audience the horrors that are committed by our governments in our name. Were someone critically to say to me, 'oh, you shouldn't be doing that. Why dwell on torture and incarceration?' I would reply, 'on the contrary, I don't do it enough – not enough at all, as I shy away from such matters as soon as I can under the justification that I shouldn't fill my life with darkness.' The suffering of torture in captivity is no different now than it was at the time of Cortés. That is the point, regardless of its name, whether 'evil' or 'bad' or 'nasty' or 'dark.' If you are tortured, or witness the murder of your friends and family, or hear the sound of gunfire meant for you – you are not going to smile calmly and say – 'I accept this as a manifestation of the Unified Good.' You are not going to confront

your torturer or the killer of your children with ‘Hey there! I don’t really believe that you’re evil – in fact I love you...’ We may all aspire to such mystic bliss, but it is unlikely to save you. It will not stop them hurting you, and it will not stop it hurting.

That, I understood, is precisely the opposition that is developed in Graham’s novels. The characters learn to love and trust, and in this way they oppose hate. Love is naturally loving. Hate is naturally hating. Ria and Leoni resist the terrible Sulpa in *Entangled* not by loving him, but by loving and trusting and helping each other. Tozi, Malinal and Pepillo in *War God* likewise oppose the hatred of their oppressors not by loving them, but by loving each other. There is a pragmatic, battle-weary, realistic aspect to these conflicts.

Sulpa, Huitzilopochtli and St Peter are discarnate entities inflicting their sordid lust for conflict and desolation upon humans; ‘That’s what demons do’ Graham declared, ‘multiply human misery.’ Is there something chilling in this depiction of the power of malevolent demons, especially given that Graham experienced visions of these forces in ayahuasca encounters? Again, Graham’s pragmatic and valuable response is that just as we cannot turn our backs on human cruelty, neither can we assume that all intelligent entities of the spiritual world are benign. On the contrary, as he explained so thoroughly, shamans and *curanderos* need to be particularly adept at navigating these otherworld landscapes and deflecting the influence of mischievous or downright nasty entities in order to open the healing space and prevent pain and suffering. Above all they need to be resolute enough to resist the lure of power that emanates from these more malign beings. *Entangled* depicts this struggle through a *brujo* who derives power to do harm and the shamans who need confront these *brujos* in the visionary realm. This is real. This is how it is, and nobody who has drunk ayahuasca, or attended any meeting in which non-material beings are contacted, or read Swedenborg, would be naïve enough to suppose that all there is angelic and benign.

Graham’s readers will naturally be drawn into speculation about major historical conflicts and the invocation of these dark entities. This is a weird and unsettling area of exploration, as the speculation can escalate into a feeling that such conflicts are created and controlled by non-material intelligences. It need not be so dramatic. If, as anyone sympathetic to the matter would aver, there are further dimensions of reality populated by discarnate souls of the dead and non-human entities (something Graham explores lu-

cidly in *Supernatural*), then it is perfectly appropriate to assume that human participants in such worldly conflicts may have derived power or knowledge from these entities. Shamans, *brujos* and *curanderos* do so on a daily basis in more localised conflicts. The relationships between Cortés and St Peter or between Motezuma and Huitzilopochtli are thus far less outlandish than may be assumed. They are part of the currency of reality, only on a vast scale. The burning question is not whether this occurs, but according to which ideologies. If Christian world leaders invoke God prior to launching a campaign of aggression against Islam; if a Moslem invokes Allah prior to retaliating with equally indiscriminate hostilities; or if Jewish settlers invoke their God prior to clearing a land of its non-Jewish occupants, are they invoking spiritual forces of compassion and love, or of hatred and violence? To whom are they really praying?

This, of course, is the link with Graham’s work *Talisman*, which looks at the troubled history of esoteric gnostic thought which has stealthily crept through the alleys and byways of history, occasionally blossoming in moments like Alexandria in the early Christian Roman period, the Cathar era of southern France and the Pyrenees, and the Florentine Renaissance. The message that Graham takes to be central of this ancient lineage of heretical thought is that the Christian god is not the prime creator, but a lesser entity – the Demiurge – who demands worship and obedience and instils hatred and fear. The structure of the church is thus a political institution in the service of this malevolent supernatural despot. The horror of European colonial conquest, the Inquisition, the brutal suppression of heresy such as the Albigensian Crusade, and endless wars of aggression can thus be understood as influenced by the presence of this demiurgic force. Graham, aware that this position may well offend, has discussed this in many presentations and interviews over the last few years, and one can see its integral relationship with the narratives of his two novels.

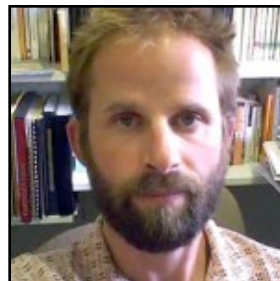
Hans Jonas describes in *The Gnostic Religion* the turbulent landscape out of which diverse religious-spiritual schools of gnostic thought arose especially in the Hellenised parts of the Roman Empire in the first centuries after Christ. This was a period of such cultural upheaval, of such calamities and conflicts, and of such an eradication of earlier spiritual models, that inevitably many folk looked upon their troubled landscapes and questioned whether this could really be the work of a great, ineffable and perfect god. It was reasonable to assume that it was not. As Graham

and Robert Bauval explore in *Talisman*, there was also the attempt amongst these gnostic communities to keep alive more ancient, pantheistic, mystical and perhaps harmonious spiritual teachings. This, argues Graham, is the parallel with the modern world, where destruction of the natural world and of the biosphere has reached such proportions that it would appear that human life itself is threatened; where corporatism and imperialism proliferate violence and enslavement and where individual human gnosis is declared anathema. The gnostic heresy is a wisdom that teaches people to question these brutalising institutions, to challenge their hegemony over the values of individuals and communities, and to experience the mysteries of reality first hand, joyfully. This is the wisdom that is always persecuted by the institutions, whether Church or State, or, as is so often the case, the Church-State brotherhood. Interestingly, Graham sees the *gnosis* of ayahuasca traditions and experiences as being analogous to the ancient gnostic traditions in the West.

One need not accept as gospel the dualistic, Manichean, view of good and evil in order to recognise the powerful spiritual wisdom in these gnostic traditions. One of Terence McKenna's more beautiful and melancholic presentations is *Unfolding the Stone*, in which, like Hans Jonas, he examines the traditions of alchemy beginning in the unsettled era of the early Christian years of the late Roman Empire. The vision of good and evil was of less importance to McKenna than were the twin radical gnostic teachings which rocked both the Greco-Hellenic world and the Roman-Christian world: that we are all divine, luminous, beings; and that fate can be overcome through magic. This, again, is the connection that is made both by Terence and by Graham between expanded consciousness achieved through psychedelics and gnostic esotericism. This is the powerful narrative of both of Graham's novels. Evil will not be overcome, as it is a force beyond the control of mankind, but it can be resisted. Fate can be overcome simply because we can choose our paths. We are not bound to consent to the control over our sovereignty that state and state religion demand. The further we explore the immeasurable capacity of our consciousness, whether with the assistance of psychedelics or through other empowering practices, the more we can understand how political structures can belittle and ridicule such capacities. This is what Ria and Tozi understand. This is what Leoni and Pepillo understand. We can overcome fate through the magic of resistance.

I write this while the press reveals the full extent of state secret surveillance, while the Bilderberg Group meets in secrecy to draft global policy, and while British Foreign Secretary William Hague delivers the poisoned words 'if you've done nothing wrong you've nothing to be afraid of.' How arbitrary might the state's judgment of right and wrong be. How easily might one be branded a heretic. How readily do we relinquish power for security. How fickle is this security. How gleefully do we surrender our power to corporations, interacting socially through mechanisms that so easily become systems of surveillance. How gladly do we accept that we are not divine beings. How urgent is the current appeal to resist...

Biographies



William Rowlandson is a Senior Lecturer in Hispanic Studies at the University of Kent, and former Director of the Centre for the Study of Myth. He has recently completed a book concerning Borges and mysticism, which examines the relationship between Borges' own recorded mystical experiences and his appraisal of Sweden-

borg and other mystics. The book asks the essential question of whether Borges was a mystic by analysing his writings, including short stories, essays, poems and interviews, alongside scholarly writings on mysticism by figures such as William James. William's work within the Myth Centre has focused predominantly on the many aspects of the work of Jung. With co-Director Angela Voss, William organised a conference at the University of Kent in May 2011 entitled *Daimonic Imagination: Uncanny Intelligence*.

Graham Hancock is the author of *The Sign and The Seal*, *Fingerprints of the Gods*, *Keeper Of Genesis*, *Heaven's Mirror*, and other bestselling investigations of historical mysteries. His recent work focuses on shamanism and the origins of religion. His 2005 book, *Supernatural: Meetings with The Ancient Teachers of Mankind*, suggests that experiences in altered states of consciousness have played a fundamental role in the evolution of human culture and that other realities



not normally accessible to our senses may surround us at all times. While researching *Supernatural*. His experiences with the ayahuasca lead to his first novel, *Entangled*. His latest book *War God* was published earlier this year. His books have sold more than five million copies worldwide and have been translated into twenty-seven languages.

[REVIEW] Through a Glass Darkly: Magic, Dreams & Prophecy in Ancient Egypt

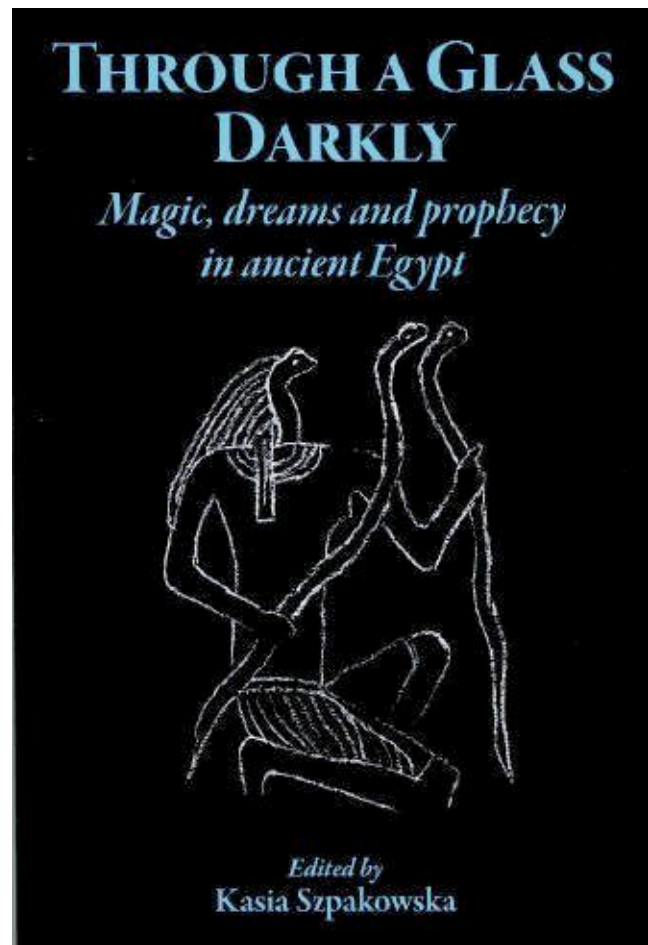
Callum E. Cooper



Paranthropology Journal couldn't be a more apt place to briefly discuss the following book, due to the interrelated issues of ancient human experiences, mysticism and anomalous phenomena. It is not the first time ancient Egypt and anomalous experiences have been addressed in this journal (Cooper 2011). And though it is rare to find literature that exclusively addresses the subject of anomalous experiences in Egypt, there have been some classic overviews of the subject produced in rare pieces (e.g., Dingwall 1930).

Through a Glass Darkly is a compilation of papers from a 2003 conference highlighting current research and findings on phenomena related to magic, dreams, and prophecy in Ancient Egypt. The presentations were given by several well noted Egyptologists at the Baskerville Hall in Wales (near the village of Hay-on-Wye), UK. Half of the papers presented offer new theories and discussions of already well-established knowledge on ancient Egyptian views on dreams and their meaning, as well as on magic and prophecy. While other papers consider modern research, such as Robert Ritner, who presents new data on a bronze serpent wand, which is frequently found in Egyptian iconography.

The most intriguing papers, particularly where paranthropology is concerned, are those addressing the ancient views and interpretations of dreams and magic. In the literature available on ancient Egypt and dreams, particularly with Dr Szpakowska's work, and Dingwall (1930), dreams were seen as a gateway to the future, they could deliver precognitive messages or inspiration from supreme beings (much like apparitions (Dodds, 1971)). Dreams and precognitions have been found to be a natural aspect of human nature, from ancient times to the present day. Research on the experiences of the ancient Egyptians and contemporary anomalous phenomena has begun to show that paranormal phenomena seem to be natural and unchanged in their characteristics throughout time (see Cooper, 2012). However, the papers presented in *Through a Glass Darkly* also dem-



Through a Glass Darkly: Magic, Dreams and
Prophecy in Ancient Egypt.
Edited by Kasia Szpakowska
(The Classical Press of Wales, Hardback, 2006)
RRP £45.00

onstrate that such experiences are influenced by religious interpretation. Much relation is given to the ancient gods of the time and their involvement in dreams, magic and prophecy.

Conferences such as this, and the production of presented papers in the form of a book, are highly

useful in updating the information and knowledge we have on history and ancient societies (or any issues of the arts and sciences). Though much like social science, ancient history will always discover something new, and by understanding what we know about human-beings from the social sciences, it helps us to understand ancient history and our development throughout time. In this instance, an understanding of the paranthropological aspects of human nature works well with the topics at hand, presented by Dr Szpakowska.

Dr Szpakowska made the excellent point that academic study for a long time regarding magic, the mystical (especially the paranormal), has for a long time been misunderstood and shunned. Conferences, papers, books and educational programs are increasing, regarding such teachings on the transpersonal, mystical and paranormal. Even dreams within psychology, from its Freudian beginning and onwards, produced much criticisms as to whether pursuit of studying such human features in modern day and ancient history can teach us more about human societies. Dr Szpakowska (2003) has demonstrated otherwise, and publication on such matters has increased greatly in the last decade or so - especially with regards to the interpretation of dreams in ancient Egypt.

Through a Glass Darkly is a highly thought out collection of Egyptological papers which I believe would interest most people involved in paranthropology and parapsychology – aside from Egyptology. As with anomalous experiences, ancient societies and their history present a puzzle for researchers, which require the gaps to be filled to help us learn more, rather than simply making assumptions about how things in the past or present work and are interpreted. This is why all research in social sciences has its importance in our understanding of human functioning in life, and our actions towards others. It is only our personal assumptions and biases which affect our understanding of ancient societies, and how human systems work, rather than learning from available evidence, as Dr Szpakowska points out.

It is further stated that anthropologists have the advantage of living samples to learn from, while the Egyptologist does not, and they must draw information about the dead together, to form an understanding. However, as we know from paranthropology, the line between anthropology and Egyptology is arguably level. The book itself hopes to inspire new thinking in - what I would class as - the paranthropological

aspects, surrounding practices and beliefs in magic, dreams and prophecy in ancient societies. In quote:

'In the end, perhaps the real beauty of the study of ancient civilizations such as Ancient Egypt, is that we can pursue the vapour trails left by individuals in the past, the data and ideas of yesterday, and re-examine and reconfigure them in tomorrow's new light (Szpakowska, 2006, p.xiv)

I believe researchers dealing with any forms of exceptional human experiences can learn from this statement. And, to any researchers of such phenomena, this book is certainly of use in understanding experiences of the ancient societies; in order to greater understand the experiences of today.

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Paranthropology: Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal

We live in a world that is impossibly more fantastic than the present materialist and scientific paradigms allow. In such a gross mismatch between the weirdness of the real and the Flatland of the boring and banal, it is so hopeful, and so refreshing, to see serious intellectuals take the strange so seriously. What we have with this new journal and this remarkable collection of essays is a cause for celebration.

Dr. Jeffrey J. Kripal, Author of *Authors of the Impossible: The Sacred and the Paranormal*.

In 1908 William James wrote that: 'The great world, the background, in all of us, is the world of our beliefs. That is the world of the permanencies and the immensities.' More than a century later Jack Hunter has collated a selection of thought-provoking new narratives to help chart the geography of this world. In essays covering ground all the way from Tibet to Taiwan and into the landscape of dreams and the Afterlife an array of internationally renowned researchers discuss the discourse between the human, natural and supernatural worlds in a bold attempt to record the history and current affairs of this as yet mostly undiscovered country of which we all (like it are not) are citizens.

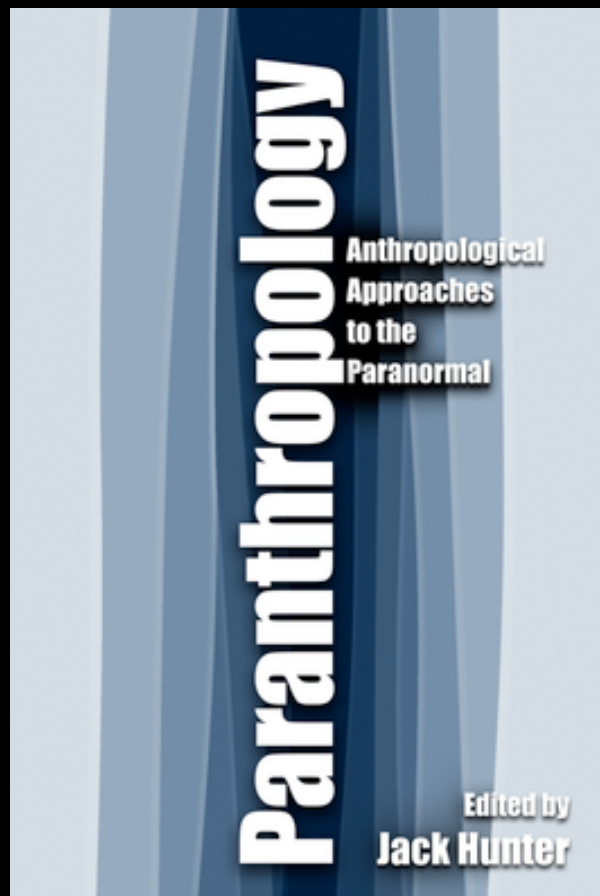
Dr. Wendy Cousins, University of Ulster.

In a short period of time, Paranthropology has established itself as a serious and intelligent voice in the difficult and sensitive area of the anthropological study of the 'paranormal.' We are living in a complicated period in relation to our understanding of 'extraordinary' phenomena. Naive materialist approaches are more assertive than ever, in anthropology and in the world more generally. At the same time, the taboos against admitting to the reality of the paranormal are weakening. There is a growing body of writing which takes the paranormal and extraordinary seriously, while bringing to it the same academic standards that any other subject matter would require. This is a valuable and important development, and it helps open the way to new modes of understanding in the sciences and social sciences that will not reject scientific rationality, but expand that rationality so as to include more of the world of human experience. The articles in this Paranthropology reader provide important clues and suggestions, along with rigorous argument, to help us in exploring what is likely to be a major area of anthropological engagement in coming years.

Dr. Geoffrey Samuel, Research Group on the Body, Health and Religion (BAHAR), School of History, Archaeology and Religion, Cardiff University.

This compilation is an impressive collection of academic approaches to the anthropological study of anomalous experience...To have a collection of essays of this calibre in one volume makes this book a real gem. Previously those of us interested in the anthropological approach to the paranormal had to make do with occasional contributions in other publications.

David Taylor, *Anomaly: Journal of Research Into the Paranormal*



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Paranthropology

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