

SPIRITUALITY IN THE NATURAL AND SOCIAL WORLDS

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In his lead article Charles Tart describes the conflict between science and religion, arguing that scientific materialism often ends up as scientism, and as such needlessly emphasizes the difference between science and spirituality. Tart's solution is that science and spirituality can mutually benefit each other, parapsychology having shown the inadequacy of materialism.

As Tart suggests, any attempt to further support this thesis requires an understanding of science (and materialism) as well as spirituality, and I will attempt to sketch each in this paper. I will offer first an historical analysis which develops the concepts of science and religion in the modern world with the point of showing that the conflict Tart describes was virtually inevitable. In the second half of the paper, I will offer a few suggestions on the implications of parapsychology for spirituality, although I will not work these out in any detail. In particular, I will argue that parapsychology suggests a more relational world view, denying the interior, privatized view of self and spirituality developed in the modern world; in turn, this approach to self implies a more natural and social spirituality.

My argument in the first part of the paper is presented in two stages: (1) Modern science was intentionally defined as an approach that was the antithesis of religion; this analysis incorporated dualism and atomism. (2) Atomism rejects the possibility of parapsychology; in fact, it attempts to define parapsychology a priori out of existence. In turn, atomism suggests an epistemology which undercuts a major function of spirituality, i.e. the experience of the connectedness of life.

MIND, MATTER, AND SCIENCE

As modern science was developing in the 16th and 17th centuries there were specific problems facing Europe. Everyone is aware of the dominating influence of the Catholic Church over science, with the resultant recantation and house arrest of Galileo. Thus, science needed to find a way to free itself from this control, for very practical reasons. In particular, there were growing problems with the expansion of the population and the resultant need to increase the food supply. World trade was increasing with the desire to develop more efficient trading practices; Hadden (1994) has even argued that it was trade practices which gave rise to the mathematical and mechanistic world view. Additionally, there was a growing middle class and a group of wealthy merchants who demanded greater political freedom. The ideas of dualism and atomism were introduced to solve these practical problems.

Let me simply sketch the effect of dualism on science and religion. In arguing for dualism, Descartes declared that both mind and matter were

substances, medieval terminology which in essence asserted that they each had opposing characteristics. These can be set up in schematic form:

MIND	MATTER
thinking	non-thinking
non-spatial	spatial
purposeful	mechanical
free	determined
private	public
seat of value	avaluable
subjective	objective

This argument effectively solved the practical problem of freeing science from the Church by bifurcating reality into radically different domains. On the one hand, there was the mind, which with its rationality could know moral and religious truths, and which by definition survived bodily death. Obviously, this was the real domain of the Church. On the other hand, there was matter, which was non-thinking and had nothing to do with values (an atom is neither good nor bad). The material world was simply a machine that was determined, and the only stake that the Church should have in it was the assertion that it was the creation of God. Otherwise, religion, with its interest in the immortal soul, had no concern with the material world. This conclusion was so clever and solved the practical problem of scientists so well that it was not until after Descartes' death that the Church realized the negative implications of this philosophy for religion and put the Meditations on its Index of banned books.

Notice, however, another implication of this dualism. We have seen that this approach defined matter as non-thinking, mechanical, determined, etc. What may not be so clear is that this schema also defined the nature of science. Therefore, although I believe science should more correctly be characterized in terms of its careful approach to experimentation, nevertheless, it has been taken implicitly as a discipline that studied spatial, avaluable, unthinking material bits, and necessarily assumed that these bits acted in a determined and mechanistic manner. This view has become, I think, a paradigmatic assumption of science that can be changed only by a major revolution.

One can already see how science could naturally develop into scientism, and how science by its very nature became juxtaposed to the spiritual. It was not by accident or happen stance that science and the spiritual came into conflict; they were each defined as conflicting domains! Such was the price of freeing science from an over-domineering religion. Hence, it follows that our understanding of science and spirituality must change if we are to find them not only compatible but mutually supportive.

I will later explore how our understanding of the spiritual was also affected by this dualism. Now, however, let us take a closer look at how science conceived matter.

Medieval science was a mixture of Aristotelian teleology and alchemy, which stressed sympathetic connections among things, mental and physical. Roman Catholic doctrine had been reinterpreted through Aristotelian

philosophy, and in its attempt to separate from the Church, as well as to employ the technological power of the New Science, natural philosophers rejected Aristotle's more organic and teleological view of the world in favor of atomistic mechanism. Atomism, of course, was an ancient doctrine, but it was revived at this time because of its non-teleological approach to nature. However, based on its conceptual power, it was employed in an astounding variety of ways totally unrelated to the material world (Edge, 1994). There were a variety of atomisms, but the English (Newtonian) interpretation eventually won the day, and it consisted of several straightforward components: (1) Reality ultimately consists of basic units--in the material world these are indivisible material bits, and (2) Atoms exist in a void; the purpose of the void is to separate the atoms, which are self-sufficient and inherently not connected to or dependent on other atoms; and (3) Action occurs through contact, one atom bumping against another, and the job of science is to explain how atoms become associated (and thus built into molecules, etc). According to this mechanistic view, there is no teleology, no sympathetic relations, and no action at a distance. Work in nature occurs only through contact.

Notice that this understanding of the world seems to exclude parapsychology a priori. Remember that each mind is considered a separate atom, but parapsychology asserts that in telepathy information is transferred from one mind to another without any "bumping" or intermediate processes. Analogously, clairvoyance assumes that information is received from the environment in a non-sensory way. In other words, as opposed to the traditional sensory understanding of light waves traveling between the object and the eye and then being transformed into a mental experience, clairvoyance asserts that no physical intermediary is necessary. One can simply have information from another mind or from a distant part of the world without any "bumping." All parapsychological actions seem to be action at a distance, precisely what was ruled out a priori by modern science (see Griffin, 1993).

The basic point here is that the atomistic approach to the world separates and breaks it down into discrete elements. The implication of parapsychology, however, is just the opposite. Connectedness, of person with person and of person with the environment, seems to be the implication of these data. Parapsychology suggests an emphasis on relatedness.

WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY

We have examined the nature of matter and of science; let us now look at spirituality. I find it quite difficult to characterize the nature of spirituality--its manifestations are so diverse--but one common element of the world's great religions is the attempt to engage the human in experiences in which the individual self is connected to a more encompassing reality. What seems to be asserted is the inadequacy of our ordinary individual selves. Connection, therefore, is basic. The Judeo-Christian tradition has tended to personify this force, but many other religious traditions do not. For instance, mystical experiences often do not point to a personified larger force; indeed, nature mysticism seems to imply a more spiritualized (and perhaps even personal) but

certainly not personified nature. What I think is important is that humans are put into a larger context in which human nature is congruent with a greater nature. William James (1967), in his "Conclusions" to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, puts it this way: "He becomes conscious that this higher part [of the person] is conterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with" (p. 774). Spirituality brings us fundamental meaning in life because we find ourselves connected with--related to--a larger context.

PARAPSYCHOLOGY AND THE SPIRITUAL

Having given a characterization of the spiritual, let me now relate it to parapsychology. It strikes me that parapsychology as a scientific enterprise does not derive meaning from its data in any direct way. First, its language is not consistent with this view of spirituality--a chi square will never be part of religious language. But more importantly, the information gathering aspect of ESP experiences does not suggest ultimate meaning. After all, I can be connected by telephone to all areas of the world; soon we will be connected by an information highway whose memory perhaps will approach the volume of the so-called Akashic Records. Simply having access to information does not provide fundamental meaning. However, parapsychology is importantly related to spirituality for two reasons. The first is less theoretical and more practical. For the general public, I think that paranormal phenomena are symbolic and paradigmatic cases of the mysteriousness of the universe and of its failure to be grasped by contemporary rationality. Scientism excludes transcendence, and paranormal phenomena stand in defiance of such reductionism.

On a more theoretical level, however, parapsychology is importantly related to spirituality, but the connection is indirect. Parapsychological phenomena are no more spiritual than any other phenomena in themselves, but there is an implication of the paranormal that is profound: the data of parapsychology provide evidence for the view that there is a connectedness to all things, and that this relatedness is natural, not a result of human artifact (i.e. the telephone); but as opposed to atomism, parapsychology suggests that the world is relational, and relational in such a way that its nature is conterminous and continuous with mine. Individual bits of ESP bring information, but if psi indirectly suggests that all aspects of the cosmos are intimately interrelated and I am a significant part of this unity, then spiritual meaning can be developed out of this view.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, we tend to think of meanings being the creation of persons--hence ultimate meaning requires an Ultimate Person. But fundamental meaning does not require this cosmology. My wife, for instance, had a mystical experience in which she "saw" the sweep of history, with its wars, its crises, its progress, its civilizations, and she had the overwhelming feeling that things were as they were supposed to be. As a part of the symphony of life, the melody was played as it should be--with its beauty and its cacophony. All were parts of the symphony of life, including the individual life.

The overwhelming feeling was one of meaning based on the connectedness of things.

The same feeling was expressed by a student in one of my early experiments into producing mystical experiences. He said: "I was at the source of awareness, enlightenment, and existence, manifested in a form of energy linking all objects animate and inanimate.... I felt morally elevated to a state of pure and simple existence flowing like a continuous current through a waterfall, going deeper and deeper within all existence while feeling more and more at peace and content.... I was surrounded by meaning and freed from the despair of meaninglessness, guilt, and time."

Both experiences were spiritual ones in which fundamental meaning was derived from the ultimate connectedness of all things. Engaging in parapsychology does not bring this experience, but its data do suggest that connection is more primary than separation, that we are interrelated with others and the world, that we are "conterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality."

In this regard, the teleological nature of parapsychological experience is particularly pertinent since it implies that the world responds on the basis of the same principle that human consciousness employs. The mind and the world are not radically distinct realms, each employing separate principles, but consciousness and the world share the same working principle. The cosmological MORE that parapsychology implies, therefore, is continuous with our own nature. No cosmic consciousness is necessarily implied, nor does one have to postulate a world soul. What is required is that the world is not alien to my nature, but that it is continuous (but not necessarily identical) with my nature.

Juxtapose this view of spirituality with the traditional Western view that has emphasized the difference between mind and body. This distinction did not begin with Descartes, but has at least two other sources in ancient thought. In the *Phaedo* Plato argued that philosophy was a preparation for death; analogous to the spirit separating from the body (this was not understood in Cartesian terms) at death, so a philosopher was supposed to engage in the process of purifying his spirit. Since it was the appetites and the senses that distracted one from philosophical purity, the philosopher should distance himself or herself from these concerns. Hence, the mental/spiritual world was good, and one should guard against the negative influence of the body.

Likewise, stoicism focused on the distinction between what one had control over and what one did not have control over. In essence, one could control one's internal attitudes toward the world but not control external events in the world. The effect of this stoic distinction produced a further emphasis on the essence of the self being its interiority, and to be happy one ought to make this interior self as cut off from the dominance of the senses and the world as possible. Cartesian duality reified these distinctions into atomistic entities, thus emphasizing the disjunction between mind (the interior), and body/matter (the exterior).

The reason I am emphasizing the separation between mind and body so greatly is that this division has had an interesting effect on our view of spirituality. As the distinction between mind and body has been emphasized, so has the distinction between the spiritual and the non-spiritual. In distinguishing mind from body, spirituality was conceived as the act of attaining greater and greater purity of the spirit, with spirit understood to be interior and non-physical. To be spiritual meant that one had to inhabit a purely mental, non-physical, transcendent world. This view resulted in an emphasis on the distinction between the sacred and the profane, between the spiritual and the non-spiritual.

Thus, to become spiritual implied two kinds of separations. On the one hand it meant that one had to separate oneself from the physical world and achieve some sort of spiritual transcendence; thus, disconnection from the world (and our bodies) was emphasized rather than our being continuous with the natural world. On the other hand, it meant separating oneself from the daily affairs of the community. Once spirituality was viewed as the purity of interiority, in order to be spiritual one had to separate oneself from physical and from social. I have already talked about the first point; let me discuss the second point quickly.

If spirit dealt with the purity of the private, interior self, then the public world concomitantly assumed lesser importance. For both theological and practical reasons, this distinction was emphasized more in protestantism, but the emphasis on the separation of church and state in America exemplifies its cultural importance. The public realm and the private realm are different arenas in this view. This approach is radically different from most other cultures in the world in which the spiritual and the non-spiritual, while maintaining a distinction, are not viewed as disjointed. For instance, Balinese culture is one of the more religious cultures in the world with its plethora of temples and religious ceremonies. One can hardly go 10 or 15 miles without seeing a religious procession or ceremony; the daily offerings made in one's compound, sometimes as many as 100, testify further to the importance of religion. However, when one questions the Balinese about their religious practices, something odd (from our perspective) is noted.

Temples do not ordinarily house divinities, but for a 3-day period every 210 days the gods descend to enjoy a celebration in a particular temple. If asked which divinities are being worshipped in the temple ceremonies, the Balinese are unlikely to be able to respond with any specificity. It is astounding to the Westerner that so much religious ceremony can occur without the participants knowing the particular divine objects of the worship. When this is pointed out to the Balinese and they are asked why, if the divinities seem to unimportant, they continue with their celebrations, their answer is likely to be that it is simply Balinese to engage in the religious ceremonies. Indeed, it is the religious pageantry which defines what it means to be Balinese; the religious and the social are so intertwined that a comfortable distinction cannot be made.

I do not want to deny that there is a difference between the spiritual and the non-spiritual in Balinese culture. The rhythms of Balinese life display a difference; there are times and occasions which are clearly designated as more

spiritual than others. The point is, however, that the distinction is not a hard and fast one and that the two, indeed, are intertwined in ways that we find curious in the West. Only when we can emphasize a private, interior self does this distinction between the spiritual and the social assume importance.

The position I am taking has at least one radical implication, and that is that the traditional paradigmatic case of the connection between parapsychology and spirituality--evidence for survival--has little importance. There are four reasons that count against its importance, the first one coming from the data itself, while the remaining three are more implied by my approach to spirituality. I take my first point from C. D. Broad, who described mediumistic communication as being "a blend of twaddle and uplift," a depiction that is both accurate and damning. But the theoretical reasons are more to the point of this paper.

Why has survival been taken to be religiously important? Surely one answer is that it shows that life is eternal. Christianity often has emphasized time to such a degree that life on this earth does not achieve meaning without it being put into a context of an after life. This may be one of the reasons why so much emphasis has been put on mediumship, trying to prove survival after biological death. It may have been thought that if one could prove continuing survival, then one's life would automatically achieve meaning. But, in what way does length of life itself bring any meaning? Why would living eternally bring meaning? The Myth of Sisyphus, in which Sisyphus is condemned by the gods to roll a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll back down as it almost reached the summit, is an adequate illustration of meaninglessness occurring eternally. Far from time bringing meaning, it is precisely the eternal length of time involved which makes the Myth so poignant and displays the absurdity--the ultimate absurdity--of continued life. If one is going to achieve meaning from an after life, it must come from a different source than sheer time; indeed, time may be irrelevant.

Further, without atomism, and the concomitant view of the self as an independent, separate entity--without what I have called previously (Edge, 1980) an entity metaphysics--it is not clear that it makes sense to talk about a separately independent surviving spirit. After all, if we cannot be designated as separate entities in this life, why would we want to do so in a view of the after life?

Finally, we need to consider carefully the kind of meaning that has been part of the traditional Christian view, of which survival was a part. The idea was that meaning is given to an object--a chair, a pencil, etc.--by the creator of the object, and we simply accept the meaning that is given. When we ask ourselves what is the meaning of life, itself, we looked for the same answer: God created the world and all peoples in it according to a plan, and it is our job to find our individual purpose in it, one that had been designated by God. We find our "calling." However, it is not clear that questions we can ask of individual things in the world can intelligently be asked of the world itself. Because pencils have purpose, or because I act with purpose, does not imply that all of life itself can have a purpose. It makes sense to ask the color of the

pencil, but does it make sense to ask the color of the cosmos? I believe it was Bertrand Russell who said that it does not follow from the fact that all of us have mothers that there is a mother of us all. The traditional approach to the meaning of life, the kind given by a Creator, is questionable, but that does not in any way undercut the idea of fundamental meaning--that each of us can make sense of our lives or large portions of it. I have argued elsewhere (Edge, 1980) that we create meaning rather than find it, but the point is that traditional meaning (which gave importance to the survival question) is a questionable idea.

CONCLUSION

I pointed out earlier that parapsychology in no direct way leads to spirituality, but only indirectly. While maintaining that view, it is also appropriate to point out that with the rejection of dualism, the distinction between the spiritual and non-spiritual (and between the scientific and the spiritual), is blurred. My suggestion is that a more holistic and non-dualistic spirituality is going to be more naturalistic and more civic than we have conceived it in the West. The point of the spiritual is not to separate oneself from the world; it is not to purify an interior element of the person and view the other elements as debasing this purity. Rather, the natural will become sacralized. The point of spirituality is not to separate oneself from the natural world and from others; rather, it is to make one's own actions in the natural world and one's interactions with others sacred. If a function of religions has been to connect our isolated selves with others and with the rhythms of life more fully, then spirituality must derive from these connections.

Parapsychology gives evidence that supports a more relational and connected view of the world, thus undercutting atomism and dualism. With this accomplished, our understanding of the natural and the spiritual become less disjunctive and more connected. This approach resonates with the grand religious traditions and mystical experiences which emphasize relatedness and connection, and which spiritualize the natural world and our ordinary actions in it.

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