



# Schrödinger's One Mind and its Relevance to Religion and Healing

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“Mind by its very nature is a *singulare tantum* [single only].

I should say: the overall number of minds is just one.”<sup>1</sup>

— Erwin Schrödinger

*Larry shows how the philosophy of the Nobel physicist Erwin Schrödinger can provide a new and rigorous metaphysic for modern science and medicine that transcends both fundamentalism and materialism. He will be speaking for the third time at Mystics and Scientists in April.*

Erwin Schrödinger (1887-1961), the Austrian physicist, was one of the most brilliant scientific minds of the twentieth century. In 1933 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for his discovery of wave mechanics, which lie at the heart of quantum physics. Schrödinger was one of the most openly spiritual scientists of his day. He was profoundly attracted to many of the early Greek philosophers and to Vedanta, the Hindu philosophy based on the teachings of India's ancient Upanishads.

Schrödinger was disappointed in the track record of western religions. He regarded much of contemporary religious thought as “naively childish” and “dreadful nonsense.”<sup>2</sup> In his brilliant biography of Schrödinger, Walter Moore describes how Schrödinger believed that the churches, “guardians of the most holy treasures of mankind,” had wasted their spiritual resources.<sup>3</sup> As Schrödinger put it, “The middle classes...recognise the Churches only as political parties and morality as an irksome restriction.”<sup>4</sup> Schrödinger's lament, observes Moore, is “a cry of spiritual pain of a soul torn between the need for religious belief and the inability to accept such belief without treason to his intellectual standards.”<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 1.**  
Erwin Schrödinger early in his professional career

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I know I speak for many citizens who are turned off by the extreme fundamentalist positions of many Christians and Muslims alike. It is the uncompromising God-is-on-our-side certitude of both sides that led to bloodbaths such as the Crusades, as well as to bloody internal conflicts within both religions. This penchant for violence within both Christianity and Islam has provided fodder for recent screeds condemning both religions by Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*<sup>6</sup>), Christopher Hitchens (*God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*<sup>7</sup>), Sam Harris (*The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*<sup>8</sup>), and other writers.

For many people, religion in America is no longer associated with the Golden Rule, caring for the sick and poor, and loving your neighbors and your enemies, but with homophobia, xenophobia, Islamophobia, Obamaphobia, paranoid distrust of governmental institutions, and profound ignorance of science. Many religious sects have seized the mantle of faux patriotism in which they confuse bigotry, intolerance, and militant triumphalism with love of country. It is all very wearisome. As a result, many individuals, like Schrödinger in his day, have become disgusted with the politicisation of the great religions and how they minimise, dilute, distort, or simply ignore their once-lofty spiritual teachings. This de-spiritualisation is largely why millions have deserted conventional religion in favour of a more private and intensely personal approach to the transcendent.

## The vexations of religion

Although Schrödinger's criticism of religions as political parties was written in the first half of the twentieth century, it has a contemporary ring, as churches throughout America have taken muscular, politicized stands on nearly every major issue in modern life, including marriage, sex, birth control, guns, war, taxation, immigration, healthcare, stem cells, death, education, criminal justice, evolution, and climate change. As a result, the separation between church and state in many instances has become perilously thin. Some religious leaders seem to want this constitutional provision abolished altogether in favour of some sort of Christian theocracy. This is the attitude Schrödinger excoriated as a vulgar squandering of spiritual resources. But his critical sword cut two ways, for he was also turned off by the arrogant debunking by scientists of the universal spiritual impulse that exists in humans, which he felt keenly.

## Spirituality and healing

Against the tide of the crass politicization and de-spiritualisation within contemporary religion, a link has formed between the intrinsic spiritual impulse experienced by most humans and the field of integrative medicine. One of the first individuals to identify this connection was Stanford health psychologist John A. Astin, whose findings were published in 1998 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.<sup>9</sup> Astin conducted a nationwide survey to determine why individuals choose complementary/alternative medicine (CAM). He found that most people do so not because they are dissatisfied with conventional medicine, but because they find CAM-type therapies to be more congruent with their personal beliefs, values, and philosophical orientation to life. Many individuals described having undergone transformational psychological and spiritual experiences that changed the way they see the world. Following these experiences, they see in

CAM an approach to health and illness that resonates with their worldview more keenly than does conventional medicine. Subsequent evidence suggests that these same reasons are important in why healthcare professionals choose courses in CAM during their professional training.<sup>10</sup>

Along with epidemic politicisation, a trend that has turned many individuals away from traditional religions and toward CAM has been the disinterest within these religions in healing. For centuries, healing occupied a high place in the remit of Christianity. Jesus, the Great Physician, told his followers, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater [works] than these shall he do..." (John 14:12, KV). These works presumably include so-called miraculous healings, dozens of which are recorded in the New Testament.<sup>11</sup> Yet many congregations today would be utterly shocked and embarrassed if a radical healing occurred in their midst. Faith healing is viewed in many congregations as a metaphor; a fascination of the gullible lower classes; and a violation of the rectitude and solemnity of sincere worship. Profound, rapid, miracle-type healing is rationalised: these healings may have occurred during the biblical era, but times have changed. The real miracles today come in the form of modern drugs and surgical procedures, not through faith and prayer.

It is therefore ironic that, as many congregations have become turned off by healing, CAM has been turned on by it. For more than two decades, the nature and extent of healing intentions has been a recurring theme in CAM research. Dozens of controlled trials of remote healing have been conducted, approximately half of which have yielded statistically significant results.<sup>12, 13, 14, 15, 16</sup> These experiments are generally designed to answer two fundamental questions: (1) Do the compassionate healing intentions of humans affect biological functions remotely in individuals who may be unaware of these efforts? And (2) can these effects be demonstrated in nonhuman situations, such as tumor growth and wound healing in animals, microbial growth, specific biochemical reactions, or the function of inanimate objects?

What has been accomplished? In a 2003 analysis, Jonas and Crawford found "over 2,200 published reports, including books, articles, dissertations, abstracts and other writings on spiritual healing, energy medicine, and mental intention effects. This included 122 laboratory studies, 80 randomised controlled trials, 128 summaries or reviews, 95 reports of observational studies and nonrandomised trials, 271 descriptive studies, case reports, and surveys, 1,286 other writings including opinions, claims, anecdotes, letters to editors, commentaries, critiques and meeting reports, and 259 selected books."<sup>17</sup>

How good are the clinical and laboratory studies? Using strict CONSORT (CONsolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) criteria,<sup>18, 19</sup> Jonas and Crawford gave an "A," the highest possible grade, to studies involving the effects of intentions on inanimate objects such as sophisticated random number generators. They gave a "B" to the intercessory prayer studies involving humans, as well as to laboratory experiments involving nonhumans such as plants, cells, and animals. Religion-and-health studies, which assess the impact of religious behaviours such as church attendance on health, were graded "D," because nearly all of them are observational studies, with no high-quality randomised controlled trials. Many systematic and meta-analyses have been published in the peer-reviewed medical literature assessing the quality of remote healing and distant intentionality studies. Nearly all these peer-reviewed analyses have yielded positive findings, suggesting that healing effects are real and replicable.<sup>20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28</sup>

The depth and breadth of healing research remains little known among health care professionals, including, unfortunately, many of those who have offered stern criticisms of it. These critiques are almost never comprehensive, but often rely on philosophical and theological propositions about whether remote healing and prayer *ought* to work or not, and whether these experiments are heretical or blasphemous.<sup>29, 30</sup> Dossey and Hufford have evaluated the 20 most common

criticisms directed toward this field,<sup>31</sup> and Schwartz and Dossey have analysed the critical factors that are involved in healing experiments.<sup>32</sup>

I have been interested in this growing body of evidence and have written about it extensively over three decades. During the 1980s, when healing experiments first began to attract national attention, I thought the mainstream religious community in America would be pleased, because the studies appeared to validate the phenomenon of healing, which has long been a central feature of the Christian tradition. Although many did approve, I was surprised when I was deluged with mail from religious believers who objected to these experiments. Many were incensed that the healing studies included non-Christians such as Buddhists or pagans such as Wiccans, and that the healing intentions of these individuals appeared to be as effective as the prayers of born-again Christians. Some insisted that there must be some mistake in the experiments, because God would never answer non-Christian prayer. The healing experiments made for strange bedfellows, as skeptical, materialistically oriented scientists who were certain that remote healing was impossible in principle found themselves aligned with complaining Christians in opposing these experiments.

## Transition

As many of America's religious organisations have become increasingly politicised and secularised, CAM is becoming increasingly spiritualised. As Astin discovered, a spiritual vector has been shown to underlie CAM — an animating, life-changing force that strongly influences people's worldview and the type of therapies they choose. Spirituality also influences people physically. Hundreds of studies reveal the influence of spiritual belief and practice on health and longevity.<sup>33</sup> Evidence from the new field called the epidemiology of religion, founded by pioneer researcher Jeffrey S. Levin, compellingly shows that people who follow some sort of spiritual path (it does not seem to matter greatly which one they choose) live significantly longer and have a lower incidence of most major diseases.<sup>34</sup> And while some congregations seem increasingly intolerant of other religions' beliefs and lifestyles, CAM is showing the way toward religious tolerance. How? Healing studies consistently suggest that no particular religion has a monopoly on healing, and that the healing intentions and prayers of no specific religion appear to enjoy an advantage in the actual experiments.

## Re-enter Schrödinger

Many scientifically oriented individuals experience severe intellectual indigestion over the idea that spirituality is important in health. Relief for this malady can be found in a new view of consciousness — not actually new, but an ancient view that is being newly supported through solid science. This is where the views of the physicist Schrödinger, with whom we began, become useful.

Schrödinger embraced a model of consciousness that unifies the consciousness-related phenomenon of remote healing with both science and the great wisdom traditions. In books such as *My View of the World*<sup>35</sup> and *What Is Life? and Mind and Matter*,<sup>36</sup> Schrödinger painstakingly built a concept of the One Mind, in which consciousness is transpersonal, universal, collective, and infinite in space and time, therefore immortal and eternal. His vision is that of *nonlocal mind*, a term I introduced in 1989 in my book *Recovering the Soul*, to indicate that consciousness is infinite, eternal, and one.<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 2.** Erwin Schrödinger in 1933, the year he was awarded the Nobel Prize

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See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Erwin\\_Schrödinger.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Erwin_Schrödinger.jpg)

Schrödinger believed that consciousness, although experienced individually and as limited to the cranium and to the present moment, was in fact infinitely extended in space and time. This means that the mind is in some sense unbounded and unrestricted, therefore inseparable and unitary. He wrote, “To divide or multiply consciousness is something meaningless. In all the world, there is no kind of framework within which we can find consciousness in the plural; this is simply something we construct because of the spatio-temporal plurality of individuals, but it is a false construction.... The category of *number*, of *whole* and of *parts* are then simply not applicable to it; the most adequate... expression of the situation is this: the self-consciousness of the individual members are numerically identical with [one an] other and with that Self which they may be said to form at a higher level.<sup>38</sup> ...Mind is by its very nature a *singulare tantum*. I should say: the overall number of minds is just one.”<sup>39</sup>

In adopting a unitary view of human consciousness, Schrödinger recognised what he called the “arithmetical paradox” — that although there are millions of apparently separate minds, the view that humans have of the world is largely coherent. This is possible, he asserted, because each individual “I” is part of an indivisible whole.<sup>40</sup> There is only one adequate explanation for this, he wrote, “namely the unification of minds or consciousness. Their multiplicity is only apparent, in truth there is only one mind.”<sup>41</sup>

Schrödinger believed we are suffering from a consensus trance, a massive, collective delusion, about the nature of consciousness. As he put it, “We have entirely taken to thinking of the personality of a human being...as located in the interior of the body. To learn that it cannot really be found there is so amazing that it meets with doubt and hesitation, we are very loath to admit it. We have got used to localising the conscious personality inside a person’s head — I should say an inch or two behind the midpoint of the eyes....It is very difficult for us to take stock of the fact that the localisation of the personality, of the conscious mind, inside the body is only symbolic, just an aid for practical use.”<sup>42</sup>

Immortality for the mind was a key feature of Schrödinger’s vision. He wrote, “I venture to call it [the mind] indestructible since it has a peculiar time-table, namely mind is always *now*. There is really no before and after for the mind. There is only now that includes memories and expectations.<sup>43</sup> We may, or so I believe, assert that physical theory in its present stage strongly suggests the indestructibility of Mind by Time.”<sup>44</sup>

For many westerners, the extent of Schrödinger’s holism can be shocking. He maintained, “[As] inconceivable as it seems to ordinary reason, you — and all other conscious beings as such — are all in all. Hence this life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but is in a certain sense the *whole*; only this whole is not so constituted that it can be surveyed in one single glance. This, as we know, is what the Brahmins express in that sacred, mystic formula which is yet really so simple and clear: *Tat tvam asi*, this is you. Or, again, in such words as ‘I am in the east and in the west, I am below and above, *I am this whole world*.’”<sup>45</sup>

For Schrödinger, this vision was no airy-fairy piece of philosophy, but was thoroughly practical. The fact that an individual is in some sense the whole leads to acts of selflessness and altruism. “It...underlies all morally valuable activity,” Schrödinger asserted.<sup>46</sup> It causes individuals to risk their lives for an end they believe to be good, to lay down their life to save someone else’s, and to give to relieve a stranger’s suffering even though it may increase their own. In Schrödinger’s view, to save another’s life is to save one’s own life. His vision permits a restatement of the self-oriented Golden Rule, from “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” to “Be kind to others because in some sense they *are* you.”

The practicality of his view permeated the workaday life of the scientist. For Schrödinger, doing science was a spiritual exercise. Done properly, scientific work was akin to fathoming the divine will, the mind of God. He wrote, “Science is a

game. ...The uncertainty is how many of the rules God himself has permanently ordained, and how many apparently are caused by your own mental inertia.... This is perhaps the most exciting thing in the game. For here you strive against the imaginary boundary between yourself and the Godhead — a boundary that perhaps does not exist.”<sup>47</sup>

Schrödinger found affirmations of his nonlocal vision of consciousness in the mystical writings of many cultures and religions, particularly the Vedanta philosophy of ancient India, as mentioned. To underscore this view he quotes Aziz Nasafi, the Sufi mystic of thirteenth-century Persia: “On the death of any living creature this spirit returns to the spiritual world, the body to the bodily world. In this however only the bodies are subject to change. The spiritual world is one single spirit who stands like unto a light behind the bodily world and who, when any single creature comes into being, shines through it as through a window. According to the kind and size of the window less or more light enters the world. The light itself however remains unchanged.”<sup>48</sup>

Schrödinger acknowledged that science has its limits, dark corners of mystery that can only be illuminated by light from other sources. He observed, “Our science — Greek science — is based on objectivisation whereby it has cut itself off from an adequate understanding of the Subject of Cognizance, of the mind. But I do believe that this is precisely the point where our present way of thinking does need to be amended, perhaps by a bit of blood-transfusion from Eastern thought. That will not be easy, we must be aware of blunders — blood transfusion always needs great precaution to prevent clotting. We do not wish to lose the logical precision that our scientific thought has reached, and that is unparalleled anywhere at any epoch.”<sup>49</sup>

Schrödinger prized intellectual rigour. “My purpose,” he wrote, “...is to contribute perhaps to clearing the way for a future assimilation of the doctrine of identity with our own scientific world view, without having to pay for it by a loss of soberness and logical precision.” The logical precision, he believed, came from the new physics he helped create. He saw not conflict but harmony between his interpretation of quantum physics and Vedanta. As his biographer Moore explains, “In 1925, the world view of physics was a model of the universe as a great machine composed of separable interacting material particles. During the next few years, Schrödinger and Heisenberg and their followers created a universe based on the superimposed inseparable waves of probability amplitudes. This view would be entirely consistent with the Vedantic concept of the All in One.”<sup>50</sup>

But not just Vedanta. Schrödinger cites with approval Aldous Huxley’s magnificent treatise *The Perennial Philosophy*, an anthology of mystical writings from the esoteric side of the world’s major religions.<sup>51</sup> This suggests that Schrödinger agreed in principle with the view that “all mystics speak the same language, for they come from the same country.”<sup>52</sup> If Vedanta had never existed, he could have found affirmation of his vision in other traditions.

## Consciousness unbound

It is becoming increasingly clear that consciousness can *insert* information remotely in space and time<sup>53, 54, 55, 56</sup> as in distant healing, and also *acquire* information remotely in space and time, as in precognition, premonitions, presentiment, and remote viewing.<sup>57, 58, 59</sup> The field of CAM has been centrally involved in these findings through the numerous experiments in remote healing that have been done over the past three decades.

Most critics of these developments appear locked into a local, finite, personal view of consciousness. Unable to conceive that consciousness *could* act nonlocally and transpersonally, they conclude that it *doesn’t* do so. Thus one of the most frequent criticisms of these experiments is that they are so theoretically implausible they should be ignored, no matter what the evidence shows.<sup>60, 61</sup> Theoretical plausibility, however, is a treacherous basis on which to dismiss empirical findings;



X-rays, heavier-than-air flight, meteorites, and coronary artery disease were once dismissed because they were said to be theoretically implausible. Plausibility arguments in science are sometimes valid, but they may also indicate ignorance and intolerance.<sup>62</sup> As philosopher and parapsychology researcher John Beloff, of the University of Edinburgh, stated, "Skepticism is not necessarily a badge of tough-mindedness; it may equally be a sign of intellectual cowardice."<sup>63</sup>

This is why a model of the mind that permits consciousness to manifest nonlocally is important. Such a model reveals how the world may work; it creates space for facts that don't fit in. The fact that such a model was advanced decades ago by one of the towering figures in modern physics may go far in tempering the tendency of critics to dismiss these findings out of hand.

Erwin Schrödinger is only one among many eminent scientists who have endorsed a nonlocal view of consciousness. In my recent book *The Power of Premonitions*, I provided comments from many other respected scientists, including Nobelists, who also took a nonlocal view of the mind — David Bohm, George Wald, Freeman Dyson, Henry Margenau, Sir Arthur Eddington, Gregory Bateson, and others.<sup>64</sup> Transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber has also assembled the writings of many outstanding physicists in his book *Quantum Questions: The Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists*.<sup>65</sup>

Will our western religions wake up to these common touchpoints with science? Or will these commonalities continue

to be obscured by the chorus of politicised religiosity, intolerance of dissenting views, and ignorance of science? And will the broader scientific community acknowledge, at long last, that nonlocal models of consciousness are *already* part of its legacy? If this awareness achieves recognition and acceptance, it will partly be because of those courageous consciousness researchers who continue to explore the nonlocal operations of consciousness in the domain of healing, and because of the fertile vision of Erwin Schrödinger, who pointed the way.

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Spread love everywhere you go.  
Let no one ever  
come to you  
without leaving  
happier.

Quote From Mother Teresa That Can Change The Way You Think Of People

