

an unfalsifiable proposition. To say that a particular person's ability only works at home is an unfalsifiable proposition - to anyone unable or unwilling to visit her at home. One might be able to verify it personally, but it cannot enter the literature of science. Similarly for an ability that only works under uncontrolled conditions - such an ability would be constitutionally impervious to the certainty that comes from control. And what of events that only happen when someone is alone and unmonitored?

In addition to the rather scattered evidence of an experimenter effect, many traditional paranormal techniques explicitly require an atmosphere of appropriate belief. To bend a spoon, you have to know that it will bend; to walk on water you have to know that you will not sink. The same principle seems to be at work behind the placebo effect, in which, notably, the physician's belief may be as important as the patient's (hence the necessity for double-blind, not just blind, studies). I am also reminded of a statement attributed to Cheng Man-ching, perhaps the 20th century's greatest Tai Chi master. When asked why none of his students of many decades came even remotely close to his level of attainment, he replied, "It is because you have no faith."

The experimenter effect and, more generally, the influence of a climate of belief upon measurable phenomena present a thorny problem for science, challenging not only its methods but some of its fundamental premises. At the same time, the principle of objectivity is crumbling from within science as well. In quantum mechanics, eighty years of interpretation has failed to resolve the measurement problem, while phenomena such as null measurements and the quantum Zeno effect demonstrate that observation can have a direct, intentional effect on measured reality. In neurology and psychology, consciousness is increasingly understood as an emergent phenomenon not localisable to a discrete observing "seat." Where is objectivity if there is no discrete subject? The contagion is affecting biology too, with the growing realisation that the phenotypic definition of an organism neglects symbiotic relationships essential to its viability.

The crumbling of objectivity, and with it the certainty implicit in the Scientific Method, poses an enormous challenge to science. Perhaps this explains some of the hostility of establishment science toward psi. On some level, people realise that the ramifications extend far beyond "does it exist or not?" Increasingly, though, science will find it impossible to sweep the "paranormal" under the rug, if only because the classical intuitions that it challenges aren't working very well anymore, even within the mainstream. The challenge, then, is nothing less than to reconceive what science is in the absence of objectivity as an absolute principle. The crumbling of objectivity need not herald the end of science as we know it, for there is a spirit of science prior even to objectivity. It is the spirit of intellectual humility, the willingness to hold lightly onto one's beliefs. And this humility is no less valuable when we recognise that evidence may, in part, reflect belief.

If a state of belief is indeed a state of being, then genuine progress in science advances not only what we know, but who we are. It is no accident that the first Scientific Revolution is associated with the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment. Could the present revolution in science foretell an equally dramatic change in the human condition? On the individual level too, experiences of anomalous phenomena are traditionally associated with a spiritual awakening; I would hazard that many of today's psi researchers would also associate their entry into the field with some kind of personal transformation.

The notion of growth, in beliefs and in being, offers an alternative to the ideology of objectivity and to the myth of the Scientific Method. A vast body of literature has long recognised that the Method does not describe how individuals actually practice science. Today, with the crumbling of objectivity, its collective validity comes under question as well. My classroom activity suggests an alternative. When faced with two logically consistent interpretations of the evidence, I choose the

interpretation that is more consistent with who I am, and who I wish to be. The intellectual humility so fundamental to science represents a willingness to grow into a new set of beliefs. A proliferation of anomalies, whether in science or in life, signals that the old set of beliefs isn't working very well anymore, and that it is time to grow. In my classroom, the web of ad hoc explanations, the discounting of obvious sincerity, the cynicism, arrogance, and despair, were associated with a state of being that is not me anymore.

Collectively as well, our culture is rapidly growing toward a new state of belief and a new state of being. The classical mindset of the discrete observer seeking, as Descartes so famously put it, to become lord and possessor of nature, is now obsolete. Rooted in the illusion of separateness, this mechanistic, materialistic worldview has brought us to the brink of ecological ruin, for it implies, to quote Herman Daly, that "the natural world is just a pile of instrumental accidental stuff to be used up on the arbitrary projects of one purposeless species." [6] Yet for several centuries now, our culture has been founded on the discrete and separate self of Descartes, which is also the economic man of Adam Smith, the phenotype of biology, the embodied soul of religion, and the neutral observer of science.

Faced with a convergence of crises, humanity is being led into a more intimate relationship with nature, more connected, the subject/object distinction less clearly defined. The catchwords of the new era, words like interconnectedness and wholeness, bespeak this shift, which pervades fields as diverse as ecology, quantum mechanics, and Bayesian statistics. We are not separate from what we observe; our facts are not separate from our beliefs; perception and reality are intertwined. As the Age of Separation draws to a close, the old dichotomies are crumbling: man versus nature, matter versus spirit, self versus other. Phenomena like the experimenter effect in psi are merely tiny harbingers of a vast Gestalt, and by pursuing their study, we step across the threshold of a new state of belief and of being that will come to define 21st century science.

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Coming to our Senses: in Praise of Embodied Experience

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Sue Bayliss reflects on the wider implications of issues raised by Kate Anthony in her Beyond the Brain presentation – see report below.

“My belief is in the blood and flesh as being wiser than the intellect. The body - unconscious is where the life bubbles up in us. It is how we know that we are alive, alive to the depths of our souls and in touch somewhere with the vivid reaches of the cosmos.”

D. H. Lawrence

“The body is the unconscious mind...”
Candace Pert, Molecules of Emotion.

“...the human body is the best picture of the human soul.”
Wittgenstein

As a holistic psychotherapist interested in the messages from our bodies, I was intrigued to note my strong physical reaction to the talk on online therapy at the SMN summer conference. My insides started to churn and a feeling of mild nausea followed. I was surprised to discover later that several other women had responded in a similar way to the ideas that were being discussed.

The talk contrasted with the preceding presentation by Andrew Powell, warning of the dangers of 'techno-pathology' and calling us to connect with the soul rather than the ego. His metaphor of humanity speeding along on a runaway train of consumption was apt and moving.

Returning to online therapy; particularly discomforting for me (and others?) was the suggestion that the term 'real life' could be replaced by 'offline' to denote the experiences we may have whilst not engaging in some screen based technological activity. Online thus becomes the norm from which offline deviates. Food for thought, indeed. My experience that day caused me to reflect on why I consider embodiment so important.

In this article I want to make a plea for embodied experience and outline some of the dangers to self, soul and relationships that our techno-driven society presents. I am, of course, aware of the many benefits of technology and possess a smartphone myself (and am fighting the almost inevitable addiction that comes with it!) Today we have all experienced what YouTube, websites, online learning and Skype can provide, not to mention the ease and speed with which we can communicate through text and email.

But there is the darker side of technology to consider. Cyber bullying has resulted in young people taking their own lives, women who speak out receive rape and life threats via Twitter, beheadings can be watched on Facebook, children may be groomed through their mobile phones, video gaming based on shooting 'enemies' has been found to decrease empathy and

increase aggression. In the playground boys force girls to see explicit pornographic images displayed on mobile phones. Online gambling facilitates the addicted gambler to engage in the habit at any time of day or night. Human cruelty is not new and will always be with us but there is more scope for people to reach others now through technology.

Rapport building between humans is a subtle dance of body language cues which are matched and mirrored unconsciously. Voice tone, intonation and timbre all play a part. Our deepest needs (as well as food, water and sleep), which are survival needs as a baby, are to be seen, heard and feel felt as neuroscientist Dan Siegel puts it. Babies confronted with the unmoving, unmirroring facial expression of a depressed mother soon become distressed. How can smiley face or other icons compensate for the bodily experience of human connection that has been with us all through our evolution? How can we feel the emotional safety we require for deep healing to take place when we have no access to physical presence? As a therapist, how can I feel the genuine empathy necessary for a working relationship without witnessing my client's suffering and relief? We know that mirror neurons facilitate our understanding of what is going on for someone else when we see their gestures and facial expressions. Online and telephone counselling is appealing to politicians and employers as it is so much cheaper than face to face.

Interestingly a successful programme in schools that teaches the development of empathic skills invites the kids to witness and learn to understand the wonderful body language dance that takes place between a (real) mother and her baby who take centre stage on a green rug in the classroom. Roots of Empathy, devised by Mary Gordon in Canada, has achieved some excellent results in the reduction of bullying and improved empathy in schools.

Empathy on the Wane

Such programmes are needed as empathy is now in shorter supply than previously. A decline in empathy was recorded in college students in a study at the University of Michigan for the period of 1979 – 2009. A 48% decrease in empathy and a 34% decrease in the ability to see things from another's perspective were recorded among college students with the greatest decline taking place over the last decade. The study related this decline to the isolation involved in the use of personal technology and social networking sites. The more hours spent interacting with a screen, the fewer opportunities for learning to read and respond to the body language signals of other humans. Anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy believes that we humans developed our (previously) good empathic skills during our hunter gatherer times through shared care of infants who learned to relate to a variety of 'alloparents' within the extended family group. Ape mothers do not hand their offspring over to the care of others.

Rewiring the Brain

What is now becoming clear is that the rapidly shifting attention that goes with the use of screen technology does not favour the development of emotions such as empathy and compassion which need to emerge from slow neural processes. Multitasking boosts levels of stress related hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) leading to expectations of (or even addiction to) constant stimulation as well as slowing down our thinking. According to a London study in 2005 workers distracted by email and mobile calls experienced a fall in IQ more than twice suffered by pot smokers.

Brains are being wired and rewired as a result of the frequent use of technology. Deep and creative thinking also suffers. The average American teenager

was sending over 2,000 texts per month in 2009, whereas the average time spent reading print in the age group of 25 – 34 years in 2008 was 49 minutes per week. Maryanne Wolf of Tufts University has said: "the digital world may be the greatest threat yet to the endangered reading brain as it has developed over the past five thousand years."

Just when the idea of mindfulness is being promoted as a proven way of boosting mental health, so mindless behaviour can be observed daily as people are mentally absent, engaged on their mobile calls or texts to people whilst sitting in trains (oblivious of the needs of others in the carriage), having meals with their friends or 'attending' lectures. Presence, the greatest gift we can give one another, and vital for therapeutic relationships, is giving way to scattered attention.

Technology and relationships

Thanks to the advancement of technology we can now witness the following behaviours that are damaging the trust necessary for successful relationships. Suspicious spouses or lovers check texts and emails belonging to their partners with possible unpleasant consequences. The insecure lover feels an almost constant urge to check their phone and Facebook page for messages. After a split, the rejected lover discovers their smiling replacement on their ex's Facebook page as well as photos of him or her enjoying a party or night out. A client of mine who broke up with a controlling boyfriend found that he had set up her new mobile on i-cloud and ensured he had access to all her communications! Controlling spouses or parents can use mobile phones to barrage their victims with texts and calls. Nowadays there is no need to find '50 ways to leave your lover' as with one text or email it is all over.

Onscreen pornography creates problems for real relationships as men start to lose their libido due to the addictive nature of the images they view. After a time only the most aggressive films can have the required effect, usually resulting in less loving interactions with spouses. They also find their flesh and blood partners less attractive in comparison to the women they are viewing. Young women today are asked to perform acts similar to those the men are viewing onscreen which causes them distress in many cases. In contrast, a practice such as tantra enables the alignment of sensual pleasure with emotional management in service of spiritual growth, a profound experience of embodiment and the cultivation of compassion and love.

But perhaps it is easier not to find a real (offline) lover at all. Alternatives are available in the form of lifesize dolls and computer programmes that simulate a girlfriend. Sad, but not entirely surprising in our disembodied world. In Japan the word hikikomori denotes a new phenomenon whereby young males in their teens and twenties withdraw to a room in the family home and refuse to come out. They spend their time engaging with technology in almost total isolation. A Japanese psychiatrist estimates that around a million young people are affected. I have certainly come across young males and females plagued by anxiety in this country who prefer to stay in their techno - equipped rooms to the utter despair of their bemused parents.

The Death of Solitude and the End of Participating Consciousness

For many young people being alone without the distraction of a screen provokes anxiety. When students at Yale were asked what place solitude had in their lives they seemed puzzled that anyone would want to be alone. They tend to use technology to stave off any encounters with solitude. As Berman notes: "The world of creativity, of imagination, of depth of the self, is closing down."

Solitude is not a problem if we can identify with our environment, our planet. In his book, *The Reenchantment of the World*, Berman describes how the Scientific Revolution swept away the last vestiges of a participating consciousness in the West that still exists today in some indigenous peoples. "Participation is self and not-self identified at the moment of experience. ... and this identification is as much sensual as it is intellectual." If we no longer feel a connection to the earth, if it ceases to be sacred, then the potential for us to take control of it and exploit its resources is enormous as Bacon and Descartes rightly saw.

"(T)he notion of a value free science was part of a political and religious campaign to create a stable social and ecclesiastical order throughout Europe. What modern science came to regard as abstract truths, such as the radical separation of matter and spirit, or mind and body, were central to this campaign." With this historical view we can see the rise of modern technology as a further development on this path of denial of our full humanity.

It is sobering to realise that Morris Berman wrote the following passage in a book that was published in 1981 (*The Reenchantment of the World*), long before the arrival of smartphones, ipads and instant messaging. "Modern science and technology are based not only on a hostile attitude toward the environment, but on the repression of the body and the unconscious; and unless these can be recovered, unless participating consciousness can be restored in a way that is scientifically (or at least rationally) credible and not merely a relapse into naïve animism, then what it means to be a human being will forever be lost."

Iain McGilchrist writes in a similar vein in his ground breaking book, *The Master and His Emissary*: "And what has limited the power of both art and science in our time has been the absence of belief in anything except the most diminished version of the world and ourselves." Indeed

he sees a return to being embodied as one of the ways to escape the dominance of the left brain hemisphere, to get out of the hall of mirrors that keeps us trapped. He quotes Max Planck: "Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. And that is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are part of nature and therefore part of the mystery that we are trying to solve." This is the perspective of a participating consciousness, one that recognises that there is no true separation of subject and object, observer and observed, conscious and unconscious. Everything is connected.

In a world where the left hemisphere rules we would expect power and control to be important and a greater valuing of the mechanical than the living. Technology appeals to the left hemisphere as it is both mechanical and under our control. The right hemisphere connects us to our bodies and to other living beings. Peter Levine, a psychologist and NASA consultant, who has studied the effects of trauma over many years, writes: "The degree to which we cannot deeply feel our body's interior is the degree to which we crave excessive stimulation. We seek titillation, overexertion, drugs and sensory overload." He continues: "As a society, we have largely abandoned our living, sensing, knowing bodies in the search for rationality and stories about ourselves."

Coming Home to our Bodies

As a therapist, I see people who have no idea what they really want, what makes their hearts sing or what to do for the best. They try to think their way through these issues but nothing satisfactory results. Until they allow themselves to feel their bodies and hear their messages they will not discover their deepest desires.

When people lose touch with their vital centre they may become depressed and anxious and / or develop health fears. A sports coach who kept pushing himself to work more hours regularly fell into a depression. After I taught him to 'make friends with his body', he stopped pushing himself and instead listened to his body's cries for rest and enjoyment, giving it finally what it had been asking for all along. He now enjoys his work and heeds his body's needs for recuperation and fun. His depression is a thing of the past. Illness can be viewed as an attempt by the body / unconscious to communicate with the unresponsive mind by means of symptoms, as Gabor Mate's excellent book, *When the Body Says No* documents.

We can access our 'inner wisdom' by tuning in to our hearts and guts. The heart's neurology is a kind of mini brain with over 40,000 neurons that function similarly to the head brain. Our guts, too, have much to tell us. It is now well known that emotional memories stored in our bodies, and can be triggered by touch or awareness. If more than 95% of our brain activity is unconscious, including the way our minds 'read' the messages of our bodies, then it would make sense to trust our body wisdom rather than the 5% (or less) of activity that we are aware of.

Consequences of the Loss of an Embodied Self

The greatest threats to our security are perpetrated by those who have lost touch with the intelligence of their bodies. The spiritual teacher Richard Moss says that the distance between you and yourself is the same as the distance between yourself and others. Morris Berman again: "If you lose touch with yourself, with your own reality, then a huge abyss opens up in the center of your soul, and rather than sit with it, endure it, so you can find your way home, the temptation is to stuff it with systems and slogans."

Sue Gerhard in her book, *The Selfish Society* makes the link between emotionally deprived childhoods and the desire for power. Alice Miller's studies of Hitler and Stalin reveal the brutality of their upbringing and she holds the very harsh childrearing practices prevalent in Germany at that time largely

responsible for the ease with which Germans were hypnotised by Hitler. Our childhood experience will either encourage or inhibit our ability to fully inhabit our bodies, though we can learn to become more embodied through a range of practices and therapies. Cultures in which children are held, touched and carried for much of their babyhood and not forced to sleep alone tend to produce more securely attached and embodied adults. One of the effects of trauma is a tendency to shut down or misinterpret our bodily sensations.

We know from a range of studies that human touch or physical contact with animals brings down blood pressure and provides comfort. How sad that teachers, nursery workers and therapists are no longer allowed to touch their charges or clients. As a private therapist I have not stopped hugging clients who are crying (with their permission, of course) or before they depart if it seems appropriate. One person whose heart rhythm is ordered (coherent, as it is known) can positively affect the disordered heart rhythm of another person or group. The Institute of HeartMath has conducted extensive research into the heart brain connection and the impact of the electromagnetic field of the heart which can be measured at a distance of 12 feet away.

We have the choice to view our bodies as machines or as organisms imbued with intelligence, their messages to us necessary for our navigation through life. Iain McGilchrist comments: "The body has become an object in the world like other objects, as Merleau-Ponty feared." For women today the body is a commodity to be displayed to attract approval, a defensive measure in a society ready to judge a book by its cover, and much anxiety is associated with whether it looks right. Anorexia is the expression of an extreme disconnection from the body as our living home. Only by creating a relationship with our embodied self as a source of wisdom and intelligence can we resist the extreme pressures to view our bodies as shop windows or machines.

Descartes considered animals to be without souls and saw the people passing his window as robots, a typically schizophrenic view, but one that has greatly influenced our thinking in the West. Chief Seattle had already recognised the connection between animals and humans when he said. "If all the beasts were gone, we would die from a great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beast, happens to us. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth." The nineteenth century saw the

removal of draft horses from city and country and the killing of nearly sixty million buffalo in the US. Morris Berman writes: "Organic life doesn't fit well into urbanized, technological societies, and the result is that it got removed from them, creating what John Berger calls "a new solitude". Nonhuman Otherness is not merely degraded now, but absent; and so, in a sense, are we."

The antidote is to embrace the view of our bodies that Clarissa Pinkola Estes advocates in her ground breaking work: *Women Who Run with the Wolves*:

"In the instinctual psyche, the body is considered a sensor, an informational network, a messenger with myriad communication systems... In the imaginal world, the body is a powerful vehicle, a spirit who lives with us, a prayer of life in its own right....Like the Rosetta stone, for whose who know how to read it, the body is a living record of life given, life taken, life hoped for, life healed. It is valued for its articulate ability to register immediate reaction, to feel profoundly, to sense ahead. ...It speaks through the leaping of the heart, the falling of the spirit, the pit at the center, and rising hope. The body remembers, the bones remember, the joints remember, even the little finger remembers..."

To confine the beauty and value of the body to anything less than this magnificence is to force the body to live without its rightful spirit, its rightful form, its right to exultation."

To close, I quote Peter Levine's 'definition' of embodiment: "The way we know we're alive is rooted in our capacity to feel, to our depths, the physical reality of aliveness embedded within our bodily sensations – through direct experience. This, in short, is embodiment." On a more poetic note, Mary Oliver expresses it perfectly:

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert,
repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your
body love what it loves.



Toward a New Conception of God

Jacob Needleman

Jacob explores an immanent conception of God within human experience.

In the present highly publicised debates about the nature and the existence of God, both sides tend to treat God as a purely external entity said to be accessible only by faith—faith, in this case, defined merely as belief unsupported by evidence or logic. Entirely missing from these debates is the idea of God as a conscious force within the human psyche which is accessible through deep self-examination. A study of the psychological disciplines at the heart of all the great spiritual traditions of the world shows us, however, that the process of precisely guided self-examination brings about a knowledge that is as rigorous and as supported by evidence as anything science has to offer. At the same time, this point of view redefines faith as a form of knowledge that is attained not only or not principally by intellectual means, but also through the rigorous development of the emotional side of the human psyche. Such emotional knowledge is unknown to the isolated intellect and has therefore been mistakenly labeled as "irrational."

This "new" idea of God proposes that all the characteristics traditionally attributed to the purely external God are, within the scale of the human psyche, also attributes of this inner force of consciousness. When this inner energy of higher consciousness is experienced, it then becomes clear that such an energy permeates the entire universe. In this way, it is through self-knowledge that the existence of an external God is verified and understood.

When I started my career as a professor of philosophy I was required to teach a course in the history of Western religious thought—much against my then existentialist and atheistic inclinations. In order to teach this course, I had to do a great deal of research in the writings within the Judaic and Christian traditions and I was astonished to find in those writings philosophical thought of great power and sophistication. These writings completely overturned all my opinions about what I had taken to be the irrationality or immaturity of religious ideas, opinions which were and still are fashionable in many intellectual and literary circles today.

God and Inner Reality

But even so, somewhere in myself, I was still unconvinced—deep down I was still an atheist when it came to my personal, intimate feelings. It was only when I embarked on a personal work of guided self-examination that I experienced a glimpse of a reality that could be called "God." As my personal explorations continued, I experienced this quality of inner reality more and more and could no longer doubt that the meaning of God lay in this direction. At the same time, these undeniable experiences lit up and were in turn illuminated by all the philosophical and historical knowledge I had by then

amassed and I began to understand in an entirely new way the teachings of both Judaism and Christianity as well as the teachings of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. I was again astonished that nothing of this understanding seemed to be in all that I had heard about religion and God when I was growing up and when I was being educated in some of the best universities in America.

Here are a few of the many spiritual and philosophical ideas that helped me to glimpse the deeper meaning of Judaism, Christianity and the religions of Asia:

- The idea that God needs man (Judaism) as a uniquely free being who is at the same time under supreme obligation.
- The idea that scripture is deeply allegorical and symbolic, with many levels of highly sophisticated philosophical and psychological meanings. Many of my former atheistic leanings were due to my literal interpretation of scripture, which in numerous places paints a horrific picture of a presumed just and loving God.
- The idea that Jesus Christ was a highly developed human being who was a great teacher and that the notion that he was also God needs to be taken in a much more nuanced way than was commonly presented. In Judaism, for example, a highly spiritual human being was often referred to as "son of God," without thereby implying in some simplistic sense that he was God Himself in the form of a human being.
- The idea that there exists such a thing as genuine mystical experience (as opposed to many self-deceiving claims throughout history) and that these experiences really validate through direct evidence the fundamental teachings of religion.
- The idea that all authentic religions, Western and Eastern and throughout the whole world and human history, converge in genuine mystical experience (which may also be called higher states of consciousness). The differences between religions are only differences involving the pathways that lead toward the practice of directly experiencing higher levels of perception and understanding. All religions are paths to a metaphorical mountain-top variously named Wisdom, enlightenment, self-realisation, the kingdom of heaven, righteousness, etc. Differences that lead to violence and persecution are based on a corrupted relationship to the teachings and practices of religion.

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