Energy Talk

published in Network Review No 64

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I offer these comments in response to 'Energy Monism: A Solution to the Mind-Body Problem', by Professor Mark B. Woodhouse, in Network, December 1996, No. 62.[1] His article was drawn from his recent book Paradigm Wars, which I greatly admire.[2] His comments are a critique of views I have previously advanced about the nature of healing,[3,4,5,6]and reflect our mutual concerns about how the term 'energy' is used to describe the role of consciousness in these events.

Woodhouse states that my critique of the role of energy in healing is *'philosophical* and therefore cannot be resolved merely by more performing [sic] experiments'. In my judgment, this is hardly true. I believe it is possible to do critical experiments that would immensely clarify the role of 'energy' in healing. Indeed, as I shall describe, many such experiments have already been done, whose weighty implications I feel Woodhouse underestimates. So, although philosophical considerations do enter into my views on these matters, they also involve empirical and *practical*reasons as well.

Background

In order to set the stage for this discussion, I offer the following model of healing, based on the evolution within medicine of our understanding of the role of the mind in health.

Beginning roughly in the 1860s, Western medicine began to adopt an approach based on concepts drawn from the classical, Newtonian concept of the world.[7] The result was a rather mechanical view that still dominates medicine, and which can be designated simply as Era I or mechanical medicine. In approximately the 1950s, how-ever, a radically different perspective began to arise, which today is generally referred to as mind-body medicine, which we can designate as Era II. Mind-body medicine acknowledges that one's thoughts, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and perceived meanings make a difference in one's own body. The Era I and Era II perspectives are local models; they regard consciousness as localized or confined to specific points in space (the brain and body) and time (the present moment), and assert that these events can be explained in terms of the known laws of physics, chemistry, physiology, and so on. Today, however, we are compelled on the basis of much evidence to recognize the emergence of Era III or nonlocal medicine. Unlike Eras I and II, the Era III, nonlocal perspective acknowledges that an individual's thoughts and intentions may affect the bodily function of other individuals at arbitrary distances, even outside the awareness of the recipient.[8]

Era I (mechanical) and Era II (mind-body) effects are explainable, at least in theory, in terms of the causal, energetic concepts known to modern physics. They are believed to involve one or more of the four forms of energy known to physicists - the electromagnetic, the gravitational, and the strong and weak nuclear forces, whose salient characteristics are recognized world-wide by the scientific community.

Eras I, II, and III are not rigid categories; in clinical practice they overlap and influence each other. For example, a physician may prescribe a medication for a patient (an Era I, mechanical approach). She may then suggest to the patient that the drug is quite powerful, setting in motion the effects of expectation on the part of the patient (Era II, mind-body

events). The physician may later pray for the patient, extending empathic, healing intent (an Era III, nonlocal intervention). Thus, in a very simple clinical event, the prescribing of a medication, all three vectors of healing - the mechanical, the mind-body, and the nonlocal - can combine. Moreover, it is important to realize that nonlocal healing phenomena have local consequences. Nonlocal events leave local tracks in the body; this is how we often recognize that nonlocal phenomena have occurred.

According to physicist and author Nick Herbert, non-local phenomena display three major characteristics. They are*unmediated* (by any known form of energy), *unmitigated* (their strength or robustness does not diminish with increasing spatial separation), and *immediate* (the distant events occur simultaneously).[9] Although these concepts and characteristics were originally applied to subatomic particles, it has become increasingly evident that consciousness also behaves similarly in certain clinical, experimental, and everyday settings. I proposed the term*nonlocal mind* in 1989 to refer to these phenomena.[10]

Many people who are new to the concept of nonlocality seriously underestimate its implications. As the term is used in physics, 'nonlocal' does not imply 'a long way off' or 'a very long time' but *infinitude* in space and time. *A limited nonlocality is a contradiction in terms*. Just so, nonlocal healing is not synonymous with 'healing from afar,' but with healing that is completely uninfluenced by spatial separation.

But let us be cautious. Although nonlocally correlated behavior between subatomic particles has been established beyond reasonable doubt as a result of the celebrated theorem of the late physicist John S. Bell and the subsequent experiments of Aspect and others,[11] and although nonlocally correlated behavior has also been demonstrated between distant humans,[12] we simply do not know whether or not 'subatomic nonlocality' is related to 'human nonlocality.' For all we know, we may be dealing with accidental correlations of language.Therefore, in spite of many popular books on 'quantum healing,' 'quantum psychology, ' and even 'quantum golf'(!), no one has yet shown a direct connection between nonlocal quantum events and nonlocal manifestations of consciousness.

Empirical Considerations

Why are we justified in attributing a nonlocal quality to consciousness? For over 150 years, researchers in the field of anomalous cognition and anomalous perturbation ('parapsychology') have amassed a compelling body of evidence attesting to the nonlocal behavior of the mind. This evidence has recently been the subject of stringent meta-analyses published in prestigious scientific journals.[13] Although there remain a few vocal die-hards within the skeptical community, the debate has essentially shifted from whether these phenomena occur to how they take place.[14,15,16,17] This body of evidence is buttressed by approximately 150 studies in the field of so-called distant, remote, spiritual, psychic, or prayer-based healing, in which the empathic, mental intent of one individual is correlated with physiological changes in the body of a distant biological system - humans, micro-organisms of a great variety, germinating seeds, plants, enzyme systems, cells, and so on.[18,19]

Is the 'transmission' of 'energy' involved? Although researchers have diligently searched for some mediating signal that carries the stimulus from one individual to the 'target,' they have not been able to find one. Candidate theories to account for nonlocal, consciousness-mediated events abound, some of which try to restore a role to 'energy' by redefining it. For example, failing to find one of the four known types of energy, some researchers and

philosophers have proposed 'subtle energy' to account for these effects, a force so rarefied it escapes detection by current instruments.

Along these lines, Woodhouse proposes that a 'fifth force' may mediate healing, not yet detectable. I assume that physicists someday will indeed discover not just a fifth force but - who knows? - possibly a sixth, seventh, and eighth force, and so on. Physics is in its infancy; surely it has not exhausted nature's inventory at this stage of the game. Whether any of these turn out to mediate non-local healing is another question.

Practical Considerations

Although I agree with Woodhouse that there is more out there than our instruments can currently detect, I also believe that to rely on fifth or fifth-plus energies to explain distant healing causes all sorts of problems. Recently psychologist Lawrence LeShan (Network, August 1996, No. 61, 11-14), wrote of the need for a disciplined language in speaking of the role of 'energy' in healing. LeShan comes by his concerns honestly; he has studied, practiced, and taught spiritual healing for decades, and his book, *The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist*, remains a classic in the literature of healing.[20] He observes,

I am not here questioning the fact that 'the universe is made up of "energy", and that 'everything is "energy"', or that - as Laura Huxley once charmingly informed me - 'Energy is God's delight'. All these may well be true for all I know and I would be the last to try to agree or disagree with these or with many similar statements which I constantly run into.[21]

So what's the problem? Let's examine LeShan's list of the ways 'energy' is commonly used: *1.* in a mechanical device such as a bulldozer, *2.* in an electrical mechanism such as a light bulb, *3.* in a love affair, *4.* in a painting such as Picasso's Guernica, *5.* in a group of people, *6.* a musical piece such as the 5th Symphony, *7.* in a 'healing,' such as psychic/distant healing, *8.* in an idea, *9.* in a person. Now let's look at the characteristics which, LeShan points out, physicists impute to energy when this term is being used in their journals and notebooks. It is *1. quantitative*(describable in numerical terms); *2. predictable* (if not in fact, at least theoretically); *3. additive*; *4. obeys the inverse square law* (diminishes in intensity in inverse relationship to the square of the distance from the source); *5. obeys the first law of thermodynamics* (can neither be created nor destroyed); *6. obeys the second law of thermodynamics*(becomes less and less organized as time goes on unless something is done about it); and *7.* in some instances*needs an organic component to be active* (although an electric light bulb can go on and off if it has a solar or light sensor, a painting shows no activity unless a human being or other organic component is involved). Problems in communication arise when the qualities scientists attribute to energy don't match up with the ways lay people use the term, and vice versa. For instance, insisting that love obey Newton's first and second laws sounds absurd to lay people; yet many scientists are so wedded to a mechanical point of view they are willing to dismiss love as nothing more than the consequences of brain chemistry.

This presents us with a choice. We are free to talk about energy anyway we wish, but if we hope to achieve a dialogue with fellow scientists and physicians about healing, the vocabulary of science must be respected. We may know privately that energy has an interior 'feeling' side, as Woodhouse points out, but we shoot ourselves in the foot in trying to communicate with our colleagues when we trade on these meanings instead of those recognized with-in science.

We may also delude ourselves. We may believe so fervently that a yet-undiscovered form of energy mediates healing that we forget that, at present, its existence is purely hypothetical and remains an act of faith.

Ignoring these issues creates horrendous problems for healers, which I feel Woodhouse does not recognize. Consider recent events concerning the healing modality Therapeutic Touch (TT) at the University of Colorado. For years TT researchers and practitioners have referred to 'energy patterns', 'energy flow', 'energy fields', and 'blocked energy', as if these concepts have been empirically demonstrated in their clinical and experimental literature. In addition, they have drawn freely on the language and concepts from quantum physics and natural systems theory, as if these bodies of knowledge have been unquestionably shown to validate the principles and findings of TT. However, although there is considerable evidence for the clinical efficacy of TT, the critical experiments that are required to clarify the actual role of 'energy' in TT-related healing have, by and large, not been done. Most TT practitioners (there are notable exceptions) do not appear to realize this. They do not use 'energy' metaphorically, as caution might dictate, but as if it is a physical healing force actually capable of trigging external detection devices. In doing so, TT proponents at the University of Colorado played into the hands of skeptics and cynics who despise distant healing in all its forms. These individuals launched a vigorous, concerted campaign to ban the teaching of TT in state-funded institutions, and as part of their strategy they derided the unscientific ways in which TT proponents use the term 'energy'.

Dedication to a concrete image of energy in distant healing creates other types of problems within the healing community. I have seen researchers explode in formal conferences when their cherished, classical image of energy is called into question, in spite of the lack of any empirical proof of its existence.They often interpret a challenge to 'energy' as an assault on their data or as actual personal attack. They hang on for dear life to some physical, energetic force that mediates the distant events they study. This suggests that an 'energy psychology' is at work and that it can be fanatically defended at an unconscious level. Why are we so dedicated to preserving 'energy'? LeShan again: '"energy" appears to be [a] helpful and reassuring term. It can be used in a variety of situations, satisfies our curiosity as to what is going on, makes us feel that we understand the situation to a comfortable degree, and keeps us from having to think further as to what is going on'.[22]

With all due respect to Professor Woodhouse, I don't think the ways Swamis Muktananda and Rama describe their experience with 'higher energies' are particularly helpful in guiding our strategies in scientific discourse and in the world of medicine. LeShan makes the point:

One factor adding to the complications of this particular term ['energy'] is the fact that we often take concepts meaning something fairly familiar that are used in other ways of construing reality and apply them as if they are synonymous for 'energy'. I think here of such words as 'prana', 'wakanda', 'gray force', and 'orenda'. These are terms that make sense in the particular way of organizing and construing reality in which they originated. They make no sense when translated directly into others. Whatever it is that manifests in a 'meridian', it is not the same thing that makes an electric light bulb glow.You confuse the two at the peril of your possibility of constructive thinking.[23]

What the Experiments Show

Woodhouse says that 'if we had evidence for literally *instantaneous* healing at a distance, energy talk would be more problematic'. If we're willing to include nonlocal healing in the broader category of 'distant intentionality effects', which I believe is justified, we can say that such evidence already exists in abundance. Hundreds of experiments in remote viewing have been done at the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) Laboratory, in which one subject attempts mentally to convey to a distant receiver a complex image. Even when the subjects are separated by global distances, they demonstrate not only spatial nonlocality but temporal nonlocality as well. In the majority of successful episodes, the mental message is received by the distant individual days *before* it is mentally sent - indeed, before a computer has selected the image that will *later* be conveyed. These studies suggest that, at least in some settings, nonlocality in space involves nonlocality in time as well, and that the evidence for not just instantaneous effects of consciousness but for time-reversed effects as well is more plentiful than Woodhouse suggests.[24]

Woodhouse is aware of the problems these time-reversed experiments present for energy talk, yet he implies that energy can still possibly be reinstated as an explanatory factor through 'reversing perturbations in the space-time continuum'. Perhaps; but some authorities feel that trying to explain these spatiotemporally nonlocal events through any type of energy remotely resembling anything currently known is doomed. As Princeton researchers Jahn, Dunne, and Nelson state,

while there have been many attempts to interpret conscious-related anomalous phenomena in terms of some physical form of information transmission, virtually all of these have explicitly presumed a space/time reference matrix. The demonstration of negligible attenuation of the empirical effects with distance, along with the precognitive and retrocognitive capacities, would seem to call this presumption into question, and specifically to preclude their attribution to any known form of field radiation, be it electromagnetic, geophysical, or even subtler physical vectors.[25] [Emphasis added] The literature of psychic research abounds with attempts to transpose various physical formalisms [to account for these effects]: electromagnetic models, thermodynamic models, mechanical models, statistical mechanical models, and others. Although these comprise an interesting body of effort, none of them seems fully competent. Indeed, it appears that no simple application of existing physical theory is likely to prevail. In order to encompass the observed efforts, a substantially more fundamental level of theoretic model will need to be deployed, one which more explicitly acknowledges the role of consciousness in the definition of physical reality.[26]

In addition to the PEAR studies, researcher Grinberg-Zylberbaum and his colleagues, including physicist Amity Goswami of the Institute of Theoretical Physics at the University of Oregon, have performed a series of experiments on distant, shielded subjects, in which their electroencephalographic (EEG) patterns are compared once they achieve a feeling of emotional unity. The EEG pat-terns are not only strikingly correlated, they do not attenuate with increasing spatial separation or with sensory and electromagnetic shielding. Writing in Physics Essays, these researchers assert that these findings represent a genuinely nonlocal, macroscopic manifestation of consciousness that is physiologically relevant and meaningful.[27]

Woodhouse believes we seem not to have made much progress over classical dualism' in rejecting energy talk. I disagree. Events such as the above are *nondual* in this sense: When consciousness manifests nonlocally, as in the distant EEG correlation experiments, there is no doer and no done-to.The distant subjects behave as a single individual, and the separate

brains behave as a single organ. However, as explained above, once the nonlocal correlation takes place, local events within the body of both sender and receiver may *then* come into play, which can be described causally and energetically. Causation may also play a role via the formation of intention before the nonlocal connection is made; one desires to connect with another in order to establish a *later* healing event.

Do we need to invent a substitute term for 'energy'? LeShan: 'Korzybski would have suggested subscripts, $energy_1$and $energy_2$ and so forth'.[28] But subscripting energy doesn't do the job; the classical imagistic baggage is retained. 'Factor X' anyone?

Some people contend that the debate about energy talk is a silly haggling over terms. LeShan disagrees, as do I. As he puts it,

Unless we recognize the problem [of language] and that it is not only confined to the one word ['energy']our progress will continue to be hampered. And for those who do not think it has been, I might point out that if I have an appendicitis attack, it will make a crucial difference whether my physician has been trained in 1990 or 1590. In one case I will live, in the other I will die. However, if I go to a psychic healer, it will not make any difference in which century the healer was trained.The results will be about the same. Nor have we learned anything much about under-standing, training, or using telepaths or clairvoyants in the past centuries. (I know of no other field - except possibly political science - of which this can be said). This is pretty shocking when you come to think about it and when you consider the serious work that has gone into such areas as psychic healing and spiritual development by intelligent, dedicated and hardworking human potential people. It illustrates that something [is] very wrong. Our attitude towards language appears to be one of them.[29]

Many of us are involved in discussions of nonlocal healing events in orthodox medicine, including medical schools and hospitals. We are making progress. In the United States, there currently are eleven major medical schools that, within the past two years, have developed courses in 'spirituality in clinical practice'. There are currently several controlled, double-blind studies in distant healing going on at premier medical schools and hospitals. These are historic, landmark developments. The main reason they are taking place is the recognition of actual data suggesting that religious and spiritual practices are correlated with positive health outcomes. One of the surest ways of derailing these monumental advances is to claim more than one can demonstrate, such as asserting that nonlocal healing events are mediated by some form of physical but nondemonstrable energy.This is the opening that skeptics are looking for. It is far better if we simply stick with the facts, focus on empirical findings, and adopt the sort of energy talk that is understood within the scientific community. This need not conflict with the rich ways we experience 'energy' in our psychological and spiritual lives.

Philosophical Considerations: On Not Knowing

It is fully permissible in science to defer on matters of mechanism - to say that we *don't know* how certain events happen. It can be fruitful to allow unexplained phenomena to float in a delicate state of deliberate ambiguity. In the history of medicine, we have often had to live with mystery in the face of obvious clinical fact. For the longest time we did not know how penicillin, quinine, colchicine, and aspirin worked, although their clinical effectiveness was obvious. In every field of science, the explanations often come later. So it is with distant healing. If it's any consolation, we can recall that physicists also do not know how nonlocal

events happen at the sub-atomic level - which brings to mind the aphorism that 'physicists never really understand a new theory, they just get used to it'.

Professor Woodhouse challenges us to think deeply about the relationships between science and spirituality with his concept of energy monism. I concur with many of his points - in particular, that there is a 'feeling' side to energy that cannot be captured by the language of 'energy', 'vibrations', and 'frequencies', and that we should avoid 'reductionism all over again' in the way we speak of consciousness. But I'm afraid I don't agree that energy monism is a 'solution' to these problems. We do not dispel the mystery of the connection between energy and consciousness merely by speaking of the 'inside' or the 'interi-ority' of energy, in contrast with its outside or exteriority. By emphasizing inside and outside, interior and exterior, we merely create new boundaries and interfaces which require their own explanations. Instead of grappling with the nature of the connection between energy and consciousness, we are now obliged to clarify the nature of the boundary between 'inside' and 'outside', or the difference in how an experience 'feels to me' and what it 'looks like to you'.Thus I feel that energy monism is yet another rendition of the old question of the relationship between energy and consciousness, mind and matter, and science and spirituality. Energy monism may drive these questions deeper (or higher); but the mystery simply recedes, it does not disappear.

Woodhouse is correct when he states that I have failed to explain how 'consciousness and (physical) energy fit together in an overarching paradigm'. I am not troubled by this fact, as I never aspired to such an ambitious goal in the first place. But even if I had, I think I would rather enjoy the failing and might even take pride in it. The reason is that, as no one else has managed such an accomplishment, my failing should put me in the company of the most lustrous thinkers through the ages, which is a very nice feeling indeed.

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