

Twentieth Mystics and Scientists Conference

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This year's Mystics and Scientists Conference focused on the relationship between science and mysticism. Planned as a celebration of the progress achieved since the inaugural conference in 1978, the theme echoed the very essence of the Network's ethos and was aptly titled 'The Spirit of Science and the Science of the Spirit'.

DR PETER FENWICK opened proceedings on the Friday evening with a speech illustrated by CLIVE HICKS'S most inspiring slides of beautiful Gothic religious architecture. Complex designs of great dimensions celebrating religious faith and representing state-of-the-art science of that era. Dr Fenwick suggested that perhaps this was the last time science and religion came together. Following on came DAVID LORIMER'S talk on 'The Pursuit of Truth: Experiment and Experience'. This was a truly eclectic and succinct presentation filled with many relevant philosophical quotations of East and West and from antiquity to Einstein. A remarkable feat in the 45 minutes allocated! He brought out the crucial point, later to be expressed by other speakers in their own ways, that 'Unless you believe something exists, you cannot examine it'.

DR RUPERT SHELDRAKE completed the Friday evening session with his talk on 'Soul, Spirit and Science'. Dr. Sheldrake spoke on the historical ideas of soul and spirit and how concepts have changed. At one time even magnets were thought to have souls! This led naturally from magnetic fields to gravitational fields and on to his famous Morphic Fields which he demonstrated linked all aspects of his talk's title together. He also brought us up to date on his *Seven Experiments to Change the World* - well, two of the seven anyway! In particular, he showed a video clip illustrating how one of his experiments is going. First seen on Austrian TV, it demonstrated how Pam Sharpe's dog, Jaytee, knew precisely when his owner decided to set out for home. The use of synchronized cameras left little doubt in delegates minds especially when told the success rate was 90 per cent. Now if that can be repeated many times - we are really making progress!



David Lorimer invokes memories of Sir George Trevelyan

Much was packed into Saturday's programme with a 9.15 a.m. start and culminating in a special celebration dinner finishing well past 10.00 p.m.. A long but very rewarding day. PROF. ELLISON, DAVID LORIMER AND MALCOLM LAZARUS (initiator of the Conference series) gave the after dinner speeches. The rest of the report covering Saturday and Sunday is not in chronological order but grouped together under subject matter for easier reading.

Naturally, central to the conference subject matter was the science of consciousness, which Western Civilization tends to claim as its own creation. However, as shown by some of the presentations, ancient traditions from the East and Middle-East mapped out consciousness and human psychology in a scientific way a thousand years or more before Western Newtonian-founded science was born. All major ancient traditions featured in conference papers with two receiving particular attention. DR JOHN CROOK spoke on Zen Buddhism training and WARREN KENTON on 'A Kabbalistic View of Existence'. Both traditions appeared founded on a comprehensive understanding of human consciousness. Saturday afternoon gave the chance for delegates to gain practical experience in the two traditions at workshop sessions. An alternative to the workshops was a talk by PROF. DEREK BRYCE-SMITH on 'Spirit & Substance - A scientific Perspective'. Prof. Bryce-Smith spoke at the very first Conference together with PROF. ARTHUR ELLISON who gave a talk this time on 'The Crucial Importance for Science of Experience in Psychical Research'.

The Vedantic tradition, the likely source of all major traditions, inevitably received mention during the conference. More associated with Western thought was the paper presented by PROF. URSULA KING. This presentation concentrated on Teilhard de Chardin's work, who many consider to have been the greatest Christian mystic of this and the last Century. Metaphors of Fire as a spiritual cleanser, an initiator for change and new growth were part of de Chardin's philosophy and featured throughout the conference. Prof. King also spoke of the emerging worldwide private interest in spirituality which is transcending individual religions and hoped it would lead to a much needed Global Village consciousness.

Aspects of science ranging from the small particles of Quantum Physics to the whole of creation and its origination (Big Bang Theory) featured on the conference programme. The relationship and interdependence between matter and consciousness became one of the main themes to emerge from the conference. Chaos Theory was used by speakers to help explain consciousness. MSDANAH ZOHAR, in particular, explained that living systems are at the point of chaos - the point where change occurs. And that our society is poised at the edge as well. 'We can't go on papering over the cracks between science and religion - each has only part of the truth'. MsZohar also presented a framework for a viable religion which could be in harmony with science.

Another strong theme was that until mainstream Western science embraces parapsychology and consciousness it cannot be complete. A science that closes its eyes to evidence from parapsychology investigations and to evidence of consciousness existing beyond the confines of the physical body is a science that only partly describes existence. Thus mainstream scientific models of our universe are invalid since they do not fully describe all phenomena. These aspects were covered by many of the speakers and received particular emphasis by PROF. ARTHUR ELLISON and by DR PETER FENWICK. An area covered by Prof. Ellison concerned the fact that in Quantum Physics the answer often depends on the question asked. Example, a photon can appear as wave energy or a particle (harnessed energy). This suggests our model is not correct. That our world depends on consciousness is claimed by many mystics and Quantum Physics tends to confirm this explained Prof. Ellison.

The nature of transcendence or union with creation type mystical experiences ('oceanic' type etc.) received attention from various speakers. Dr Fenwick talked about the qualities of such experiences and what is known about associated brain activity. He also showed video clips of two persons with remarkable mental or psychic abilities/experiences. One person had become overwhelmed by them causing, one suspects, a very adverse effect upon their life. The other had integrated the experience positively, enriching their life and of those she encountered. Unfortunately mainstream science is unable to differentiate between such experiences, considering both as psychotic. Overall, Dr Fenwick's presentation demonstrated the failure of science to encompass all aspects of consciousness.

The Transcendent Experience also formed the a major part of PROF. KURT DRESSLER'S talk entitled 'The Experience of Unity at the Origin of Religion, Philosophy and Psychology, and at the Ultimate Horizon of Physics, Cosmology and Consciousness'. What a title! Sounds like the elusive Theory of Everything - which in a way it was. The boundary at the edge of the expanding universe was likened to the boundary between unity and non-unity. Beyond has no time or space and can only be described as unity as in the boundless state of mystical unity. This mystical state, labelled 'Oceanic' by C.G. Jung, is invariably described as outside of space and time. Although the words of our everyday consciousness are inadequate to fully describe and articulate such states.

Throughout the conference the need for analogies frequently arose to convey the ineffable. One suspects the artist comes closest in expressing the beauty of such experiences - exemplified by Dr Fenwick's opening speech with Clive Hicks's wonderful slides of Gothic religious architecture at its best.

The Conference brought forth the following key notions: that perhaps for Westerners, the Newtonian thrust was a necessary transitional stage before we would really start to look at self; that the way ahead now appears to be the integration of science and spirituality; that

spirituality has to move from ideas into action, to move into social, political and industrial areas etc.; that spiritual training could become the science of the 21st Century.

This anniversary conference built on the previous nineteen years of conferences to produce a framework for the future. Concepts that could close the gap between our spiritual instincts and the scientifically based life around us. Concepts that could end the misuse of science that is ruining our planet. Twenty years ago the ideals of our Network and its conferences were seen as idiosyncratic or eccentric by many. Now we are not nearly so much out in the wilderness from mainstream science. Perhaps a worldwide spiritual renaissance truly at peace with science is coming!

Audio recordings of the conference are available as usual from Wrekin Trading Co and video recordings from the Network.



The Mystics and Scientists Panel, L to R: John Crook, Warren Kenton, Peter Fenwick, David Lorimer, Arthur Ellison, Malcolm Lazarus