

Network Annual Gathering

Putting the Heart into Science and Medicine

Report by Chris Clarke

This was my first annual gathering. PETER FENWICK'S guarded chuckles about the entertainment, and the prospect of meeting a new sample of the membership had left feelings of hopeful anticipation, which were to be rewarded on both fronts! What appears here is a purely personal reaction to some of the particular presentations that I went to, with apologies to those whose presentations could not be fitted in.

To make room for the heart, one must first oust the machine, and so we started with a typically robust demolition of reductionism by MARY MIDGLEY, delivered with a shower of pithy asides and philosophical references. She focused on 'free will', pointing out the dualism inherent in the phrase. What is it that the will is, or is not, free of? It is the supposed tyranny of a causation imposed by matter, thought of as separate from mind. The denial of free will is thus the committal of a double error, according to Midgley, arising first from the assumption of a dualistic metaphysics, and then from a confusion between determinism and fatalism. There could be nothing in physical laws, even if they were deterministic, that could take away from the effort that is the essence of the exercise of conscious choice. She left us with two memorable alternative metaphors, which were to arise at intervals later in the programme, for her approach to the world. The different levels of theory were like different pages of an atlas, detailing transport, resources, population and so on, where there is no suggestion that one is 'fundamental' and the rest 'reducible'; or, in the other metaphor, they were like the views through the different windows into a tank in an aquarium, sometimes revealing different fishes, sometimes different aspects of the same fish.

Another key strand in the demolition of reductionism, for many people, was the evidence of parapsychology. Here YOCHIRO SAKO presented evidence which, if verified, would be the most startling that I have seen for clairvoyance/precognition, in which pictures and characters from languages unfamiliar to the subject were transmitted with accuracy of fine detail. To add to the astonishment, the work was carried out in a laboratory fully supported by the Sony Corporation in Japan. Those who went to a presentation by ALEXANDER TROFIMOV reported almost as remarkable work from Russia. We will certainly be hearing more from these quarters.

Several speakers developed a world view in which the heart entered more explicitly, and which embraced both science and medicine. ALEX REICHEL (from Australia) addressed miracles, including dramatic healings he had witnessed, from a theistic perspective. My impression of his packed paper was that the ultimate source of miracles was God, as pure compassion, but God did not act on the world by intervening in localized physical events. Rather, God was transcendent to the scientifically accessible universe, standing to it in a relation of downward causation. When one adopts one of the many alternative possible models for the quantum indeterminacy of the physical world, then this compassionate action is represented in some particular way, such as a condition on how the universe is going to behave in the future (if one uses one of the conventional models in which quantum events are governed by signals from the future) acting in conjunction with human acts of intention (prayers). I would have liked to have probed further the term 'downward causation', and the question of how much, in practical terms, this model was really saying if

all aspects of the universe that involve meaning and purpose were assigned to an ineffably transcendent god.

While Reichel's talk was excellently worked out and very interesting theoretically, the approach of GREG HITTER to a similar area was vaguer but more practical. In his fourfold division of the universe into Consciousness, Energy, Mind and Matter, the therapeutic act of changing consciousness (which then spread down to the other levels) could be the means whereby synchronicity came into play. The most impressive presentation of the role of the heart was, however, that by DENNIS SCOTT, who saw the healing process as the awakening of that 'spark of human awareness', the creative-reflexive capacity that can separate one from a traumatic event with which one has identified. He then described how he had found the means of helping this to occur by moving towards the person with such a purity of compassion that it became possible through breathing to draw the distorted shadow in through the third *chakra*, and out, purified through the heart. Psychiatry, by contrast, went towards the person in fear, labelling the other person as a 'patient', blocking the flow of love and thereby turning it to hate.

The theme of building an alternative to the conventional disease-treatment paradigm was taken up in, for me, the most stimulating session built on four short presentations. PETER MANSFIELD gave an elegant theoretical framework for his magnificently successful scheme whose members paid for help in the maintenance of a state of ease, rather than waiting for 'the crash wagon' to come when they had driven off the road into dis-ease. CHRISTINE PAGE, picking up again the theme of fear dominating conventional medicine, brilliantly described practices that enabled healers to be in touch with their own heart, caring for themselves, and put the heart back into community, no longer seeing the human as an isolated individual. HELEN FORD explored the consequences of self-hate with a dramatically uncompromising plea for living one's own self, leading to cries of 'what about Attila the Hun?' Finally CORNELIA FEATHERSTONE described her own experience of a synthesis of many of these ideas in relationship-centred care.

An interestingly different approach was provided by ANN RODEN'S presentation of the Ayurvedic tradition. Her challengingly understated talk began with the history and architecture of St Bartholomew's hospital, which implicitly embodied the ideas of central stillness and community. It then described a traditional quadripartite analysis of therapy under the headings of Physician, Attendant, Medicament and Patient - seemingly conservative until one realized that all these elements could sometimes lie in one person, and that the 'patient' was given the key role of combining good recollection, obedience, fearlessness and uninhibited expression of the ailment.

Her talk conveyed an impression of stillness, of being, which had also been present in DENNIS SCOTT who conveyed to us by his presence the possibility of the inner freedom that he described. The same feeling was manifest in the closing talk by ANDREW POWELL who led us a little way towards that state of realization, achieved through meditation, in which the customary struggle of opposition between birth and death was transcended in a state of mind like that of an uncollapsed quantum state, in which the distinction between birth and death becomes meaningless.

The gathering achieved remarkably many of its aims: for those of us who wished, the days were well framed by meditation, and there was time for sessions that were wholly or partly experiential: my choices were BARRY MAPP expounding Reiki and an excellent dance

workshop by CHARMIAN WYLDE that actually put into practice Midgley's proposal that mind and body should not be separated. Saturday's party, where the entertainment was indeed superb, brought us together and celebrated the wealth of creativity that we shared. Some aspects had to be affected by compromise, and in an ideal world with optional 36-hour days it would have been good to have had more opportunity for informal discussion with speakers, that essential process in which ideas that are initially imprecise or inadequately founded can be sympathetically honed and developed. I came away, none the less, with a wealth of material, both personal and intellectual, to work on, and a feeling of wonder for the vitality of what we are building.