

PEAR Lab and Nonlocal Mind: Why They Matter

Human history is largely a reflection of “what ifs.” What if we could make fire, our ancestors wondered? Craft a wheel? Domesticate wild animals? Grow grain? Sail around the world? Fly? Split an atom? Go to the moon? In this issue of *EXPLORE*, we are considering the most important what if ever conceived: what if consciousness is nonlocal—that is, unconfined to specific points in space, such as the brain and body, and unrestricted to specific points in time, such as the present moment? What if consciousness is fundamental in the universe—derived from nothing more elemental, irreducible to nothing more basic? What would be the consequences for healing and for human welfare in general?

In this issue of *EXPLORE*, our window onto these considerations will be the peer-reviewed publications, technical reports, and essays that for more than a quarter century have flowed from the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) program. This organization was established at Princeton University in 1979 by Robert G. Jahn, then Dean of the School of Engineering and Applied Science, to pursue the rigorous scientific study of the interaction of human consciousness by using sensitive physical devices, systems, and processes common to contemporary engineering practice. Since that time, an interdisciplinary staff of engineers, physicists, psychologists, and humanists has been conducting a comprehensive agenda of experiments and developing complementary theoretical models to enable bet-

ter understanding of the role of consciousness in the establishment of physical reality.

The output of PEAR has been prodigious. It is the largest database of its kind in the world. The sustained ingenuity, precision, and courage demonstrated by the PEAR team in examining how consciousness manifests may be unparalleled in the annals of science—in its ambition, audacity, and reach, exceeding even the Manhattan Project. For what they set out to do, and for what they have achieved, members of the PEAR team to me are *all* heroes and heroines, from technicians to analysts to director. The editors at *EXPLORE* want to see this information made available to a broader audience, especially healthcare professionals, hence this special issue dedicated to PEAR’s accomplishments.

Why do we need PEAR? For nearly all of recorded history, it was taken for granted that consciousness is indeed fundamental and real in its own right. People saw evidence for this belief everywhere. With the ascendancy of empirical science, however, this view was rejected, and consciousness was increasingly considered an illusion, an imaginary ghost in the body’s machinery, a derivative of the brain. As Nobelist Sir Francis Crick, the codiscoverer of the structure of DNA, said in his 1994 book *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*, “The Astonishing Hypothesis is that, ‘You,’ your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of

nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Lewis Carroll’s Alice might have phrased: ‘You’re nothing but a pack of neurons.’ This hypothesis is so alien to the ideas of most people today that it can truly be called astonishing.”¹

Others agree. As a National Institutes of Health researcher in neurology recently said, “Free will does exist, but it’s a perception, not a power or a driving force. People experience free will. They sense they are free. [But] the more you scrutinize it, the more you realize you don’t have it.”² And philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel C. Dennett says, “When we consider whether free will is an illusion or reality, we are looking into an abyss. What seems to confront us is a plunge into nihilism and despair.”³

Philosopher Michael Grosso says in his critique of this materialistic perspective, “According to [this] official view, consciousness peeps out momentarily, a flickering phosphorescence of nerve tissue, and is destined to vanish forever after death.”⁴ This view is potentially disastrous for the things that have always mattered to humans, such as volition, meaningful choice making, personal responsibility, soul, spirit, and survival of bodily death. “Diminish or destroy brain function, and you diminish or destroy consciousness,” says Grosso. “Verdict on immortality: death of brain implies death of consciousness; the curtain goes down forever. But this is only one possible model. According to such luminaries as Plato, Bishop Butler, F S Schiller, William James, C. D. Broad, and Henri Bergson, the brain, rather than

produce, is said to detect, transmit, or filter consciousness. A crude analogy with radio and radio waves: the radio does not produce the radio waves; it detects, transmits, and filters them. If your radio breaks down, it doesn't follow that the sounds you're listening to have ceased to exist. They just cease to be detectable. An analogy is possible between this and the mind-brain relationship."⁵

Currently, the proponents of a physicalistic, antipsychic view of consciousness are on a romp, evidenced by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins's book *The God Delusion*,⁶ Daniel C. Dennett's *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*,^{7,8} and psychologist Richard Sloan's *Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine*.⁹ Will these voices of materialistic triumphalism endure? There are reasons to think that their antipsychic, consciousness-equals-brain certitude has already been eclipsed and that they are clueless about these developments.

Some scholars warn against the runaway enthusiasm that permeates the materialistic camp, where consciousness is concerned. John Searle, one of the most respected mind-body philosophers afoot, cautions, "At our present state of the investigation of consciousness, we *don't know* how it works and we need to try all kinds of different ideas."¹⁰ Philosopher Jerry A. Fodor has observed, "Nobody has the slightest idea how anything material could be conscious. Nobody even knows what it would be like to have the slightest idea about how anything material could be conscious. So much for the philosophy of consciousness."¹¹ Sir John Maddox, former editor of *Nature*, has soberly stated, "What consciousness consists of . . . is . . . a puzzle. Despite the marvelous success of neuroscience in the past century. . . , we seem as far away from understanding . . . as we were a century ago. . . . The most important discoveries of the next 50 years are likely to be ones of which we cannot now even conceive."¹²

Respect for a fundamental role for consciousness is emerging from areas other than consciousness research. Henry P. Stapp, a leading theorist in quantum physics at University of California, Berkeley, observes, "[T]he new physics presents prima facie evidence that our human thoughts are linked to nature by nonlocal connections: what a person chooses to do

in one region seems immediately to effect what is true elsewhere in the universe. This nonlocal aspect can be understood by conceiving the universe to be not a collection of tiny bits of matter, but rather a growing compendium of 'bits of information. . . .' And, I believe that most quantum physicists will also agree that our conscious thoughts ought eventually to be understood within science and that when properly understood, our thoughts will be seen to DO something: they will be efficacious."¹³ Stapp's view does not validate the findings of the PEAR project, of course, but they seem cordial to PEAR's directions.

After an awkward interlude of nearly two centuries, the idea that consciousness is real, fundamental, and irreducible is returning, in part because of the impact of PEAR over the past three decades.¹³ Impressive descriptions of these developments are available in researcher and theorist Dean Radin's books *The Conscious Universe*¹⁴ and *Entangled Minds*,¹⁵ Robert G. Jahn and Brenda J. Dunne's *Margins of Reality*,¹⁶ Stephan A. Schwartz's *Opening to the Infinite*,¹⁷ Wayne B. Jonas and Cindy C. Crawford's *Healing Intention and Energy Medicine*,¹⁸ Richard S. Broughton's *Parapsychology: The Controversial Science*,¹⁹ Etzel Cardeña and colleagues' *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence*,²⁰ and Edward F. Kelly and colleagues' *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century*.²¹

In 1989, I introduced the term *nonlocal mind* in my book *Recovering the Soul*²² because of the abundant evidence supporting this particular view of consciousness. Since then, evidence has continued to accumulate. If we unpack nonlocal mind, we can see why this idea is crucial for human existence.

The street meaning of nonlocal is, literally, not local. If something is nonlocal, it is not localized or confined to a specific place in space and time, as mentioned. Nonlocal, therefore, is another word for *infinite*. The implications for consciousness are profound, for if something is nonlocal or infinite in space, it is omnipresent, and if nonlocal or infinite in time, it is eternal or immortal.

In spite of the intellectual indigestion that these ideas evoke in some individuals, there are compelling scientific, historic, and experiential reasons for believing that

consciousness behaves nonlocally or infinitely in space and time. This evidence, some of which appears in the following pages, suggests that space and time are simply not applicable to certain operations of consciousness. Consciousness is both transpatial and transtemporal; it is not *in* space and time.²³

Nonlocality is a concept also applied by physicists to a class of events whose definition relates to the speed of light.²⁴ But physics does not own nonlocality, nor do physicists enjoy a monopoly on nonlocal events and the language that describes them. People were routinely experiencing nonlocal manifestations of consciousness millennia before quantum physics was invented in the 20th century, and we are not obligated to cede nonlocality to scientists who have chosen to nuance the term differently.

In striking contrast with materialism's local view of consciousness, the idea of nonlocal mind affirms ancient concepts such as *soul*, *spirit*, and *Buddha nature* that designate an ongoing something that survives the death of the physical body. In short, nonlocal mind not only makes room for immortality, it mandates it. Why? Temporal nonlocality does not mean "for quite a while" or "a long time," but *infinitude* in time: eternity or immortality.

The possibility that science might affirm a nonlocal, immortal quality of consciousness has horrified many scientists for some time. Around 1900, a leading American biologist insisted to Harvard psychologist William James, "Even if such a thing [immortality] were true, scientists ought to band together to keep it suppressed and concealed. It would undo the uniformity of Nature and all sorts of other things without which scientists cannot carry on their pursuits."²⁵

The result of this paranoid point of view, in the opinion of many, has been disastrous. As author George Orwell put it, "The major problem of our time is the decay of belief in personal immortality."²⁶ This is not admitted within science. Even addressing the topic of immortality in many scientific circles is considered a sign of intellectual weakness or of "going mystic." As Grosso relates, "I once let on to a serious ecologist that I was interested in life after death. He reacted as if I had set fire to the American flag or spat on the

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