



FROM SCIENCE TO GOD

The Mystery of Consciousness and the Meaning of Light

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FROM THE CLOSING CHAPTERS OF FROM SCIENCE TO GOD

Converging Paradigms

The worldviews of science and spirit have not always been as far apart as they are today. Five hundred years ago, there was little difference between them. What science there was existed within the established worldview of the Christian church. Following Copernicus, Descartes and Newton, Western science broke away from the doctrines of monotheistic religion, establishing its own atheistic worldview, which today is now very different indeed from that of traditional religion. But the two can, and I believe eventually will, be reunited. And their meeting point is consciousness. When science sees consciousness to be a fundamental quality of reality, and when religion takes God to be the light of consciousness shining within us all, the two worldviews start to converge.

Nothing is lost in this convergence. Mathematics remains the same; so do physics, biology, and chemistry. The shift may throw new light on some of the paradoxes of relativity and quantum theory, but the theories themselves do not change. This is a common pattern in paradigm shifts; the new model of reality includes the old as a special case. Einstein's paradigm shift makes no difference to observers traveling at everyday speeds; as far as we are concerned Newton's laws of motion still apply. In a parallel way, making consciousness fundamental does not change our understanding of the physical world. It does, however, bring a deeper appreciation of ourselves.

The same applies on the spiritual side. Much of the wisdom accumulated over the ages remains unchanged. Forgiveness, kindness, and love are as important as they ever were. Many of the qualities traditionally ascribed to God remain, they being equally applicable to the faculty of consciousness. The difference is that spiritual teachings and scientific knowledge now share a common ground. This too often happens in paradigm shifts. Newton brought terrestrial and celestial mechanics under the same laws. Maxwell integrated electricity, magnetism and light in a single set of equations. With the shift to a consciousness metaparadigm—the paradigm behind the paradigms—the integration goes much further. It is the two halves of humanity's search for truth that are now brought under the same roof.

This meeting of science and spirit is crucial, not just for a more comprehensive understanding of the cosmos, but also for the future of our species. Today, more than ever, we need a worldview that validates spiritual inquiry, for it is the spiritual aridity of our current times that lies behind so many of our crises.

The only devils in this world are those running around inside our own hearts, and that is where all our battles should be fought.

—Mahatma Ghandi

The Great Awakening

The more I explored the nature of consciousness, the more I came to appreciate the critical role that inner awakening has to play in the modern world—a world which, despite all its technological prowess, seems to be getting deeper and deeper into trouble.

Almost every problem I considered—from personal problems, to social, economic and environmental problems—involved human decisions. These decisions were based on human thinking, human feelings and human values, which in turn were influenced by our need to be in control of things, and our need to bolster an ever-vulnerable sense of self. It was clear that inner issues such as these that lay at the root of our problems as much as any external factors. Our continuing social, environmental and economic crises were symptoms of a deeper inner crisis—a crisis of consciousness.

This crisis has been a long time coming. Its seeds were sown thousands of years ago when human evolution made the leap to self-awareness. Consciousness had become conscious of itself.

Our early self-awareness probably involved a sense of identity with one's tribe and kin, but not a strong personal self. Gradually this inner awareness evolved, becoming more focused, until today it has reached the point at which we have a clear sense of being a unique self, distinct from others and the natural environment.

But this is not the whole story. Dotted through history, have been those who have discovered there is much more to consciousness than most of us realize. This individual self, they tell us, is not our true identity. Moreover, it has shortcomings. If this is all we know ourselves to be, our actions are misguided, and we bring much unnecessary suffering upon ourselves. To free ourselves from this handicap, we must complete the second half of our inner journey and discover the true nature of consciousness.

*If men and women have come up from the beasts, then they will likely end up
with the gods.*

—Ken Wilber

In the past, becoming more self-aware was essential for one's personal salvation. Today it has become an imperative for our collective survival.

Our knowledge of the external world has grown far faster than our knowledge of ourselves, bringing with it an unprecedented ability to control and manipulate our surroundings. The technologies we now have at our disposal have amplified this potential so much that we can now create almost anything we dream of. Unfortunately, however, technology has also amplified the shortcomings of our half-developed sense of self. Driven by the dictates of a limited identity, and by our belief that inner well-being depends upon external circumstances, we have misused our newfound powers, plundering and poisoning the planet so much that our collective future is now at stake.

We have reached what Buckminster Fuller called our “final evolutionary exam.” The questions before us are simple: Can we move beyond this limited mode of consciousness? Can we let go our illusions, discover who we really are, and find the wisdom we so desperately need?

These questions face us everywhere we look. Our degradation of the environment is forcing us to examine our priorities and values. Our disillusionment with materialism calls us to ask what it is we really want. The ever-accelerating pace of change demands we become less attached to how we think things should be. Our personal relationships are challenging us to move beyond fear and judgment, to love without conditions. Social problems often reflect the meaninglessness inherent in a materialist worldview, while various political and economic crises reveal the shortcomings of our self-centered thinking. From all directions, the message is “wake up!”