

School of Consciousness

Science of the Whole

A Unifying Approach to Knowledge

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Note to the reader

I am acutely aware that I am covering a lot of ground in this article. My aim is simply to introduce and outline a “science of the whole” – what it is, why it is important, and how we can begin developing it. There are, no doubt, several points in the article where you will want more explanation or more detail or more evidence. I ask you to be patient. All these will come in later articles. This is no more than a brief introduction.

Summary

The universe and the human being have non-physical aspects as well as physical ones. Science obstructs our experience of the non-physical because it insists that only physical evidence is valid. This has two serious consequences. It limits our understanding of who we are and what the world is. And it causes us to overvalue the physical, the material. This is very apparent in modern culture. All of us have dormant “inner senses” that, if awakened and developed, would give us direct experience of the non-physical. If we did that, our understanding of ourselves and the world would change fundamentally. And so would our beliefs, values and lifestyles.

A Double-edged Sword

Science is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, modern physics clearly points towards a greater reality. On the other hand, science unwittingly blocks our direct experience of that greater reality. This needs a little explanation. Ever since Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* in the mid 1970s, there have been many books that draw striking parallels between the reality described by the new physics and the reality described by mystics. Both speak about interconnectedness, wholeness, the "dance of energy", and the critical role of consciousness. At the same time, science, *as currently understood and practised*, blocks out certain types of reality because it has limited itself to knowledge of the physical. In other words, it observes and studies only the physical aspects of the world and the human being. While it is true that some scientists have tried to take science beyond reductionism and into holism, science in general remains firmly rooted in the physical. It continues to believe that physical reality is the only possible reality. This is a very powerful belief and it has led a lot of people to believe that the universe began for no apparent reason, that life evolved by chance on this planet, that there is no intrinsic meaning to life, and that we have no existence before conception and after death. If this is indeed what large numbers of people actually believe, it is little wonder that there is so much existential anxiety in the world today and that so many people are drawn to beliefs and practices that promise more meaning and a richer life.

If, however, we were able to go "beyond the physical", we would see that there is much more to the world, and to ourselves, than science is telling us. To put this another way, if we were to widen and deepen the range of human faculties that we use in the pursuit of knowledge, knowledge itself would widen and deepen accordingly. If this happened, our fundamental beliefs about the nature and history of the universe and humanity would be transformed. This is significant because it is our fundamental beliefs that determine our lives – our economics, our politics, our education, our science, our culture, our relationships, our purpose, our lifestyle, and so much more. Change the fundamental beliefs, and our thinking and behaviour change accordingly. A new set of fundamental beliefs, grounded in deeper and wider forms of knowing, would give us the means to fill the vacuum felt by so many these days, as well as the energy and inspiration to develop the human project as I believe it is meant to be developed. When I say the human project, I am thinking of a future where the emphasis is not so much

on technology, useful as that is, but more on the development of the human being, and on wisdom and consciousness. Meanwhile, let us examine why science has become “science of the physical”.

Science of the Physical

Modern science was born when it became possible to observe and measure things much more accurately than ever before. The telescope and microscope played central roles, but just as important were accurate clocks, thermometers and weighing machines. Being able to do this brought many benefits, and science has changed the world and our lives in many important ways. But there was a price to be paid. With the advent of the telescope, for instance, planet earth was no longer the centre of the universe, and the status of humanity in the cosmic scheme of things was devalued in the process. More importantly, it was only a short step from being better able to observe and quantify physical things to believing that if something was not physically observable or quantifiable, it was not really important, or might not even exist. At a stroke, a whole range of human experience was pushed to the margins. Many branches of science changed in the process. For example, the science of astrology - studying the stars - lost its spiritual component, and became astronomy, *measuring* the stars.

As physical observation and quantification grew in importance and sophistication, science increasingly became *science of the physical*, because the knowledge that it generated was about the physical aspects of the universe, the physical aspects of our home planet and the physical aspects of the human being, to the virtual exclusion of all other aspects.

Now, there is nothing inherently wrong with this. The problem arises only because most scientists – and, to be fair, much of the world – appear to believe that science is exploring *all* possible aspects of the universe, the world and the human being. They believe, in other words, that the physical reality is the only possible reality and that all the many things that might at first sight seem not to be physical can ultimately be explained in terms of the physical, or may not exist at all.

Science of the Part

Although science undoubtedly tells us much that is useful about the world and ourselves, it does not and cannot give us the whole picture. It is “science of the part”. There are two reasons for this. The first is that scientific knowledge is always changing. Despite the claims of some that we are close to producing a “theory of everything” or to knowing “the mind of God”, it is helpful to remind ourselves that the history of science is littered with the corpses of “hard facts” that have had to give way to newer “hard facts” as we make new discoveries. This is well illustrated by our understanding of the nature of matter.

At one time, many centuries ago, we were convinced that matter consisted of tiny solid things that we decided to call “atoms”, because we thought there could be nothing smaller (that is what the word “atom” implies). This belief eventually had to give way when we discovered that atoms consisted of even smaller things that we decided to call “protons”, “neutrons” and “electrons”. For some time this was the scientific “truth” until, perhaps inevitably, it was replaced by another “truth”, that protons and neutrons are themselves constructed of even smaller things, which may not actually be things at all, but “probabilities” or “tendencies to exist”. This process, of facts being replaced by newer facts, is unlikely to stop, and there is no reason to suppose that the facts of the early 21st Century are more sacrosanct than those of any other period. If they were sacrosanct, we would soon reach the point at which there is no more for us to discover and learn. Science would have done it all for us. That would be the ultimate stasis, the ultimate boredom. And quite apart from anything else, it just does not ring true, and it sits ill beside the daily diet of human affairs. If as a species we cannot even live in peace and harmony with each other and the planet, claims that we shall soon know nearly everything about almost everything sound hollow indeed. The likelihood is that what we currently know is greatly outweighed by what we do not yet know. We still have a great deal to discover and learn. Of one thing we can be sure, however much we think we know and understand today, our knowledge and understanding will be different in the future.

The second reason why science is a partial form of knowledge is because, as with all other forms of knowledge, science is the product of the means of acquiring it. *Ultimately it is we who are the means.* It is we who do the acquiring. Now, if we were to apply the whole of ourselves to acquiring knowledge in the pursuit of science, then science would reflect this. It would be *science of the whole*. However, if we apply only

part of ourselves, then scientific knowledge will be correspondingly limited. It will be *science of the part*. Since we have applied, almost exclusively, only the physical and intellectual parts of ourselves to the pursuit of knowledge over the last few centuries, science today reflects this. It is knowledge of the physical and the rational. If, however, we were to awaken and use parts of ourselves that we have forgotten about – such as our non-physical “lens” (which I will speak about shortly)– our understanding of who we are and what the universe is would change out of all recognition.

The Dominant Paradigm

In theory, science does not have a worldview, a set of beliefs, because it is supposed to be based on evidence only. In practice, it is fair to say that the core beliefs of science today are:

The universe and everything in it, ourselves included, is physical, and only physical. Science may talk about a universe that consists only of “energy”, but they leave little doubt that they believe this energy to be physical

For science, there can be nothing beyond this physical universe

The universe has no *intrinsic* meaning or purpose

Science has become so powerful and influential that all metaphysical, religious and philosophical claims that contradict it tend to be rejected. This worldview persists despite profound discoveries in physics and biology that suggest that the universe is anything but a machine, that “chance” may lie only in the eye of the beholder, and that the universe is rich in intrinsic meaning. Yet if, as science continues to insist, the universe began suddenly for no reason (the “Big Bang”) and life on this planet emerged by chance, then the world that science wants us to believe in must itself be totally meaningless.

This set of beliefs has become the dominant paradigm of our time. This is causing all kinds of problems. For example, it has pushed spiritual and esoteric knowledge into a box labelled “Interesting, but strange. Can probably ignore.” And it has led to the widespread belief that the universe and all its contents, human beings included, are basically physical in nature, that the universe is little more than a sophisticated

machine and that we, too, can best be understood as machines. However, what we believe strongly determines what we value. If our core beliefs are that the universe is little more than a highly complex machine, that it consists entirely of physicality, and that we, too, are little more than complex machines, then our values will reflect these beliefs. They will be mechanistic/material values, which means that we will tend to give high priority to material things and technology. It can be no accident that shopping and new technologies are now the world's main activities, and that financial pundits and technical experts are the new high priests. And it can be no accident that most discussions about the future are, in effect, discussions about the future of technology.

If, as many scientists insist, we and the universe are merely physical mechanisms, that the universe began suddenly for no reason, and that life emerged by chance, then the whole show must be meaningless. The fact that this statement, being part of the universe, must also be meaningless is little consolation! A life without meaning is a bleak life indeed. That is probably why, in today's world, there is nothing like a good crisis or tragedy to give people a sense of meaning. In this context, it is interesting to reflect on the growing status of the emergency services and security industry over the last 20 years. Crises, emergencies, and our current obsession with security are the modern substitutes for deeper meaning and purpose.

The Non-physical

When I say "non-physical" I am not referring to auras or *qi* or anything like that. These are simply subtle manifestations of the physical, available to anyone who is very sensitive to the subtle. The non-physical is different altogether. Perhaps the easiest way to describe it is to say that it is the wholeness and connectedness of everything in the universe. And I do mean everything! Thoughts are connected to thoughts. Events are connected to events, wherever they are. Lives are connected to lives. Past, present and future are connected to each other. *If we could experience such a reality, the things we currently think of as extraordinary or paranormal or impossible become ordinary, normal and possible.* Once we start experiencing the non-physical directly for ourselves, we see that telepathy, precognition, distant healing, clairvoyance, and out of the body experiences all make perfect sense. More important, they become part of our normal everyday lives. Clearly there is a lot in what I have just said. I will discuss this in some detail in a later article.

It is because most scientists (and many others) do not normally admit to the existence of modes of perception other than the physical senses that they do not admit the possibility of other forms of reality. They continue to believe that the physical universe is one and the same as the whole universe. The mistake they make is to use their narrowly based “map” to interpret a world that not only far transcends the limitations of this map, but also far transcends the comprehension of any one of us. Scientists have come to rely almost exclusively on their physical senses and on extensions to these senses (telescopes, microscopes, weighing machines etc.) to explore the world. Although it should be self-evident, perhaps we need to remind ourselves that if we use only one form of perception – the physical one - to view the world, the world will respond accordingly, by appearing to be wholly physical. If we had used another form of perception, the world would seem different. This is analogous to viewing the world through different coloured lenses. If we look through a red lens, the world seems to be red. If we look through a blue one, it seems to be blue. If we look through a physical lens, the world is physical, and so on. Reality changes according to the “lens” we use to view it.

There can be little doubt that the physical “lens” has become the lens of almost universal preference in the modern world. I say “almost” because there are a few people who are able to use other “lenses”, in addition to the physical one. The world they experience is richer and more extensive than the world most people experience. This is because they experience the non-physical as well as the physical. But we have to ask why the physical “lens” has become the lens of universal preference today. I believe it is because, for the vast majority of people, the non-physical “lens” has become dormant, through lack of use over millennia. And I believe that there are good reasons for this, but that is beyond the scope of this article. The fact is that most people today probably do not know that such a “lens” exists. However, what many people do have is the occasional fleeting glimpse of what it would be like to have the use of their non-physical “lens”. This happens when they have particular types of “extraordinary experience”.

Most of us have extraordinary experiences from time to time. It could be a vivid dream, or a powerful sense of being totally connected to the whole of creation, or a feeling of absolute certainty that we have just met the love of our life. Or it might be a lasting sense of inspiration brought on by something or someone. Although each of these counts as extraordinary, they are not all that extraordinary, in the sense that they do not pose a threat to the prevailing worldview, which is essentially the worldview of

science. Science does not discount these experiences. On the other hand, there are very different kinds of experiences that many people have at least once in their lives. They include telepathy, precognition, distant healing, clairvoyance, a near death experience, or an out of the body experience. These cannot be explained by science. But it goes further than this. Science actively rejects them, partly because it believes that they are impossible, but also because they threaten the prevailing worldview. They are indeed impossible from the point of view of science, but that is only because science has, unknown to itself, become a restricted form of knowledge. It is because science today is the world viewed through the physical “lens”.

Our Inner Senses

If we want to experience and understand the non-physical aspects of ourselves and the world, we first have to develop the means to do so. This means developing our dormant “inner senses”. The actual process of awakening and training our inner senses is not easy. There is a lot to it. It is as much a general character training as it is a specific training in being able to experience at will what we may have experienced only very haphazardly and infrequently, in the form of an extraordinary experience. I will go into some detail about the training in a later article. I just want to make the point here that if we did go through such a training, the range of our consciousness would extend considerably, and I believe that our lives would change fundamentally as a consequence.

First, extraordinary experiences – such as telepathy and clairvoyance – would become a normal, accepted part of our daily lives. That alone would change much that we believe to be true and possible. And that, in turn, would lead to fundamental changes our behaviour and our lifestyles.

Second, we would learn about aspects of the universe and the human being that we are completely unaware of. What we think of today as indisputable scientific facts will turn out to be the product of restricted (physical) consciousness. That would change our understanding of who we are, as human beings, why we are here, and what we are capable of. This would give us new meaning and purpose, and that would lead to new values and priorities.

Third, we would have something very different to be serious about. What do I mean by this? At present, by far the biggest source of seriousness in the world is worrying about, or trying to solve, problems. Just think about the amount of time, money and energy devoted these days to trying to solve problems. However, the fact that a lot of people appear to derive their sense of meaning and purpose from having problems and crises and to deal with suggests there is a widespread, albeit unconscious, vested interest in having a reliable supply of problems to deal with far into the future. This must surely act against any serious attempts to solve problems once and for all. Perhaps we should not be surprised that poverty and crime and injustice and unhappiness (to name but a few) seem to be as widespread as ever. If, however, we had the use of our inner senses, we would see that there are very different things to be serious about, very different sources of meaning and purpose, which have nothing to do with problems. I believe that we would then cease to be a problem-creating race, and become a life-enhancing race.

Esoteric Knowledge

I mentioned “esoteric knowledge” earlier, and I should say a few words about it, because it will have an important role in developing a “science of the whole”. In essence, esoteric knowledge is a coherent description of the non-physical aspects of Man and the Cosmos, with some guidelines on how to behave and develop on the basis of this description. It is sometimes called “spiritual “knowledge” or “occult science”, but these can be misleading terms. For example, “occult”, meaning “hidden”, is sometimes assumed to mean “dark”, as in black magic, while “spiritual” means so many different things to different people that it may be preferable not to use the word at all. There are not many modern accounts of the non-physical. Arguably the best known are *Occult Science* by Rudolf Steiner, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* by Alice Bailey, *The Cosmic Doctrine* by Dion Fortune, and the various works of Helena Blavatsky. There are others from other cultures, mainly India, Egypt and Tibet, but they are full of metaphors and symbols, whereas the three works I have mentioned attempt to describe the non-physical in modern concepts and language.

There is much to draw on in the world’s spiritual traditions, their teachings and literature. But we need to take a fresh look at these, through the eyes of the spiritual scientist, so to speak. We need to be surer of our ground. We need to know which facts within these traditions are true, which are partly true and which are false. This implies

that we need to find ways of ascertaining this directly for ourselves – hence the need to awaken and train our “inner senses”. We will then be able to add to the body of non-physical and spiritual knowledge, just as our body of physical knowledge (science today) is constantly growing. By doing this, that which science currently regards as intuitional and non-measurable, or even non-existent, will eventually be seen as measurable and verifiable, albeit using very different parameters.

A Science of the Whole

Although it is impossible to know exactly how a science of the whole will develop, it is possible to say something about its main “building blocks”. In my opinion, they will be:

- Being open to the possibility that the universe and the human being has non-physical aspects, as well as physical ones.

- Being open to the possibility that all of us have “inner senses” (dormant in most of us) that, when awakened and trained, will give us direct access to the non-physical aspects of ourselves and the universe. Another way of saying this is that we will experience the spiritual world directly for ourselves.

- Being open to the possibility that esoteric knowledge, in the form of modern books (e.g. Steiner) and ancient traditions, describe and explain some features of the non-physical. Clearly, they will need study and interpretation, because they are not easy reads!

- The willingness and ability to see connections between modern science (e.g. some insights in physics) and esoteric knowledge. Capra’s seminal work has been mentioned, but there has already been much exploration in this area.

- New, wider concepts, which will be able to accommodate new, very different forms of knowledge. For example, we will need to expand our understanding of the meaning of “energy”, “universe”, “life” and “spirit”, to name but a few.

- A new epistemology. “Epistemology” can be translated loosely as “rules of evidence”. It is the way we answer the question: “How do we know what we think we know?” The agreed epistemology of science includes such imperatives as restricting itself to public, objective data; the search for inviolable, quantifiable scientific laws; being able to

replicate results, and so on. This has provided us with our current prediction and control science, and its worldview. But we have long known that there is something seriously amiss with this approach. It has no place for many of the most important things in life – intuition, creativity, aesthetic sense, spirituality, and the general conviction that life has essential meaning. In fact, it does not even have a place for what is most familiar to all of us, our own subjective awareness, our inner experience, our conscious intent. It omits consciousness altogether. To be more accurate, it attempts to explain it away in reductionist terms. In a science of the whole, we will be willing to admit other forms of evidence, obtained mainly through other forms of experience, such as the non-physical.

Of course, there will be other building blocks too, but I suspect that these will be the most important ones.

Afterword

If we are to fill the spiritual vacuum created by what science has become, we need to evolve a quite different knowledge base - one in which ethics, values, human development and spiritual growth are central components. It is important to be clear that science, despite the loss of its spiritual roots, still has much to offer. It remains a genuine and useful attempt to discover new facts and to authenticate existing ones. Just as the scientists of today have evolved the tools to penetrate the secrets of the physical, so scientists of the future will evolve the tools of perception to penetrate beyond the physical. This will mean developing as yet unused forms of perception - our “inner senses” - to the point at which they, too, will be as useful in the search for knowledge and understanding as our familiar five physical senses.

It is also important to acknowledge that neither physical science nor what we currently think of as “esoteric knowledge” can on their own give us the whole picture. Each is a partial form of knowledge. But since they are both talking ultimately about the same universe and the same human being, albeit from very different perspectives and using different forms of perception, they are, by definition, complementary to each other. They therefore have the potential to enrich and enhance each other.

None of this will happen soon. People do not easily give up the beliefs and habits of a lifetime, particularly if these are sources of status, income and security. That said, the

conditions needed for the development and acceptance of a science of the whole are already beginning to emerge. They are:

1. Large numbers of people are reacting to the gross materialism of our time, and are looking for ways to live more spiritually and ecologically.
2. Personal development, in all its many forms, is constantly growing in popularity. Many people engaged in this realise that it goes far beyond “success” or “life goals”. Personal development is ultimately about developing the whole of you, your whole potential, and this surely includes parts of you that you have not yet discovered, such as the non-physical parts.
3. For all its many achievements, science is unable to answer the big questions and provide deeper meaning. Many people feel this, and are searching for ways to go beyond the limits of science.

Although I clearly cannot predict when a science of the whole will emerge, I am certain that it will emerge one day. When it does, our understanding of who we are, where we came from, and where we are going will all change fundamentally. And when that happens, life for all of us will be very different and much richer.

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