

The Continuity of Consciousness

By Deborah N. Bauserman



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In the dark recesses of a limestone cave on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi are found red and white stencils of human hands. They are the oldest known art depicting humans in the world, a picture postcard made nearly 40,000 years ago. While archeologists are uncertain of their function—to convey important rituals, to invoke protection, or to cast spells—our ancient ancestor has sent us a simple, undeniable message: “I am human. I exist.” It is the first recorded spark of self-awareness.

As humans evolved, the spark of consciousness blazed into a fierce light shining on the minds of philosophers, poets, mystics, and artists, who inquired deeply into the question of consciousness. In the 6th century BC, Lao Tzu left this record: “Without going outside, you may know the whole world. Without looking through the window, you may see the ways of the heavens” (50). Today, the insights of these early explorers are being investigated with sophisticated technology and methodology by scientists representing a whole array of disciplines: physics, chemistry, biology, physiology, and psychology.

Yet, for all the continuous

fascination with consciousness, involving the brightest minds in the arts and sciences, we have no very complete understanding of its vast potential. When we buy a digital watch, we may receive an instruction manual of 20 pages; however, at birth, when we are endowed with the most incredible tool of all, consciousness, we get no instructions at all. Commonly understood to be housed in the brain, it gives a lifetime of service managing sensory information, remembering, dreaming, creating, providing a sense of self and connection to others, all with unobtrusive efficiency. Yet, after over 40,000 years of collective experience with consciousness, we are still without an operator’s manual.

Although we only incompletely understand the parameters of our incredible gift, and although those who study it produce conflicting explanations, we will briefly consider highlights of scientific study of consciousness, followed by a few noteworthy examples.

Let’s begin with Charles Tart, an acknowledged world authority in consciousness studies. He points out how much more than pure awareness is involved: “Our ordinary state of consciousness is

not something natural or given, but a highly complex *construction*, a specialized tool for coping with our environment and the people in it” (3). That is, in ordinary personal consciousness we find a mixture of thoughts, fantasies, ideas, and sensory information from the external world geared to survival, all significantly selected and limited by cultural conditioning. In addition, we experience things that are not physically present such as hallucinations, daydreams, and fruits of imagination. At night we dream and experience events and objects that we totally produce by ourselves.

To this incredible array are added elements of life that lie outside detectable ranges of perception: energy in the electromagnetic band, microscopic phenomena, very high- and low-level sound waves, and infrared radiation. We also generate our own internal stimuli—buzzing thoughts, familiar, peculiar or unnoticed internal organ sensations, volitional muscular activity, aches and pains, variable emotions, and much more. These processes are always occurring simultaneously throughout life, yet we from moment to moment we are unaware of most of this overwhelming input, thanks to the filtering process of consciousness.

Thus, personal consciousness cannot fully represent the external or internal world, but must consist of an extremely small fraction of our entire “reality.” If we realize our ordinary consciousness is something we must construct in order to survive in the world,

then we can understand that this consciousness is only one possible consciousness. The psychologist William James compared this process to that of a sculptor carving a statue out of stone. The process largely involves many levels of selection and consequent limitation, so each individual sculptor’s statue is unique, just like each person’s consciousness.

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Robert Ornstein, University of California, San Francisco, stands out as a pioneer in consciousness studies. His foundational work centered on the observation that right and left hemispheres of the brain control different aspects of consciousness. For instance, the left hemisphere of the brain is understood to be in time, analytic, linear, sequential, focal, verbal,

causal, and “masculine.” In contrast, the right hemisphere is described as timeless, holistic, non-linear, simultaneous, spatial, intuitive, synchronous, and “feminine.” As different as night and day, they are often seen as demarcating ordinary and non-ordinary consciousness.

While current research upholds aspects of hemispheric specialization, neuroscientists are discovering greater integration between the hemispheres than previously thought. The formerly held position that the brain is a physiologically static organ has been replaced by the concept of neuroplasticity, according to which neural pathways and synapses may change due to changes in behavior, environment, neural processes, thinking and emotion, as well as changes from bodily injury. Jill Bolte Taylor, a Harvard-trained neuroanatomist, provides a riveting account of her own left hemisphere stroke, the gradual shut-down of her brain functioning, and her eventual recovery in her best-selling memoir, *My Stroke of Insight*.

For an even broader model, we can look to the work of Ken Wilber, one of today’s most influential philosopher/psychologists. His conceptual latticework, almost fractal in beauty, proposes multiple elements of consciousness: functions, structures, states, modes, developmental stages, and relational interactions, a project so complex that it really requires its own paper.

Clearly, theoreticians and scientists have no end of research

topics in sight.

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In academia, major divisions have predictably split the research community, almost in parallel to the right-left split of the brain itself. On one side are conservative members who stand by their belief that consciousness is strictly a function of one's own brain activity and ends at death. In contrast are equally convinced researchers who follow ancient Buddhist belief as well as contemporary quantum physics research in maintaining that separation is an illusion. For them, consciousness is more than the physical brain and can be empirically shown to function as a transmitter for nonlocal consciousness—broadly speaking, the entire consciousness of mankind and creation, untethered by time and space. For this community, the individual brain might be compared to a radio playing music—no orchestra inside!

The math on what constitutes ordinary versus non-ordinary states of consciousness is somewhat fuzzy, given the enormous variability in individual abilities. For example, for most of us, imagery in ordinary consciousness is likely to be unstable and lack vividness, as when we head out into a vast parking lot and try vainly to picture where we left the car. Others, such as the inventor Nikola Tesla, enjoy imagery that is vivid, intense and controllable. When Tesla designed a machine, he did it in his head without using physical drawings. Nevertheless, he could instruct a dozen different machinists how to

make each separate part, accurate to within a thousandth of an inch, and the completed machine would fit together perfectly.

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Careful empirical observations and even mathematical proofs, historically, have not always swayed strongly held beliefs, so the same may be true for our modest primer of the origins and mechanics of consciousness. But, with at least rudimentary descriptions of consciousness in place, and given the many interesting directions we might pursue, we will now go on to consider two examples of non-ordinary consciousness gaining traction in some research circles. Both examples involve (1) valid empirical research, (2) a teachable skill, and (3) creating a positive societal impact.

Let's start with remote

viewing—the ability to experience and describe objects at distant places that are blocked from ordinary perception. In a typical protocol, given a specific longitudinal and latitudinal coordinate, the remote viewer is asked to describe his or her perception of what is there.

Recent interest in remote viewing began in the 1960s when Russell Targ, then a graduate student in physics (and future pioneer in laser development and senior staff scientist for Lockheed Missile and Space), began to notice his gift for precognition. Curiosity piqued, he assembled an informal group of experienced researchers who were willing to share their own introspections about non-ordinary consciousness in experimental situations. Their work eventually led to creation of the Stanford Research Institute International (SRI) remote viewing program. Surprising evidence of the existence of the nonlocal mind eventually came to the attention of the U.S. government, the CIA and a host of other governmental agencies, where it was utilized as an intelligence gathering technique during the Cold War and remained highly classified until the 1990s.

Jack Anderson, syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post*, was an avid follower of the developing field. He described a CIA project titled "Grill Flame" carried out by Harold Puthoff, formerly with the National Security Agency, and Targ. Given only the coordinates of a remote location, Targ was able to describe an airfield, complete with such details as a large gantry and crane

at one end of the field. The CIA was impressed but critical. There was indeed an airfield, the Soviet's ultra-secret nuclear testing area in Kazakhstan, but no gantry or crane. That is, until the next series of U.S. spy satellite photographs arrived. Then, in fact, a gantry and crane were observed, just as Targ had described them.

Remote viewing sounds like a rare gift, yet Joe McMoneagle, one of the top remote viewers for SRI for nearly two decades and the author of *Remote Viewing Secrets*, believes anyone can be taught the skill. Hella Hammid, a photographer and regular contributor to *Life* magazine, was invited to join the SRI team as a “control” subject, having no experience in so-called psychic abilities. With training, Hammid became an outstanding remote viewer who beat the odds of one in a million over nine trials in her descriptions. In successive studies she accurately described objects hidden in wooden boxes, small objects hidden in aluminum cans, and even microscopic targets the size of a dot, such as those used by spies to conceal messages in letters. All these viewings were carefully evaluated and found to be statistically significant.

Many years have passed since the heyday of official, classified government interest in remote viewing, and more sophisticated technology has taken its place. Is there still a need for this skill? Targ seems to think so, saying “we favor the government being as well informed as possible about what is happening the world. We think this is one of the best ways

to prevent war.” He also holds that it has wider potential social benefits, citing studies showing information breakthroughs in executive decision making, futurist predictions, medical diagnosis, and even space exploration (for example, details about Jupiter that were later confirmed by Pioneer 10).

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Remote viewing as the ability to *receive* information outside the sphere of ordinary consciousness. To look at the other side of the coin of consciousness, what about *sending* information—specifically, information to enable healing with a present or remote person? Indeed, new data substantiating remote healing has aspects in common with double blind studies in remote viewing, showing that all people have capacities to be healers.

The first experts we call upon to illustrate the power of intentionally altering consciousness for the purpose of healing are shamans. “Shaman” is a word from the language of the Tungus people in Siberia and has been adopted widely by anthropologists such as

Michael Harner to refer to persons in non-Western cultures who were previously known by terms such as “witch,” “witch-doctor,” “medicine man,” “sorcerer,” “magic man,” and “seer.” According to Harner, shamans are the keepers of a body of ancient techniques to achieve and maintain well-being for themselves and members of their communities. Because these so-called primitive people lacked our advanced level of medical technology, they had excellent motivation to develop capacities of consciousness for health and healing. Moreover, the basic uniformity of shamanic methods, which are strikingly similar in vastly different cultures, suggests that through trial and error people arrived at the same conclusions around the world.

The essential practice of the shaman begins with a shift from what Harner designates Ordinary States of Consciousness (OSC) to Shamanic States of Consciousness (SSC), the latter being trance states that may be facilitated by drumming, rattling, or (sometimes) ingestion of sacred potions of ayahuasca. The differences between these states of consciousness are suggested by the role of animal guides: dragons, griffins, and other animals functioning as spirit guides that would be considered “mythical” by us in the OSC are “real” in the SSC. Basically, what is real and what is fantasy depends on the person's state of consciousness.

A well-known example combining shamanism with Western technological medicine is the work of Dr. Simonton and his wife in treating oncology patients,

originally at the Simonton Cancer Center in Fort Worth, Texas.¹ As a part of their treatment, patients relax in a quiet room and visualize themselves on a walking journey until they meet an “inner guide,” which is a person or animal. The patient then asks the “guide” for help in getting well, a process that closely resembles a shamanic journey and the recovery of a power animal. When the Simontons, without suggesting content, had their patients make drawings of their cancers, they spontaneously drew snakes and other creatures surprisingly similar to those seen by shamans as harmful intrusive powers in the bodies of their patients. Using these and other techniques, patients were sometimes surprisingly successful in gaining relief from pain and other side effects of their cancerous conditions.

At the two-week follow-up, the fracture sites were consistent with eight, not two, weeks of recovery.

At present, healing modalities using shifts in consciousness in the presence of the client include but are not limited to energetic healing, Reiki, Therapeutic Touch,

pranic healing and Chi Gong.² (Alternations in consciousness facilitated by LSD and psilocybin, by the way, are making a comeback for treatment of intractable pain and end of life comfort, as explored in Michael Pollan’s recent book, *How to Change Your Mind*.) Psychic healers and those trained in energetic healing have also shown ability to manipulate symptoms with their mind from a distance. For evidence that anyone can learn remote healing, your author has had first-hand experience and offers the following example.

In 2010, when the author was enrolled in a year-long study of energetic healing,³ a fellow student whom we shall call Pam (a biochemist and the CEO of a healthcare consulting company in Maryland) suffered three broken bones and a concussion after falling from a cliff during a hike. Pam had the presence of mind to call the group and ask for help from the emergency room. Healing energies were immediately directed to her for the next two days the group was meeting, followed by telephone contact to receive feedback from our subject about results; she reported that she needed no pain medication after the first day and rapidly regained function in all areas. At the two-week follow-up with her surgeon, the nurse was apologetic that their department seemed to have lost her x-rays. The x-rays they possessed depicted her fractures, her name and other identifying information, but the fracture sites were consistent with eight, not two, weeks of recovery. The surgeon appeared later with a group of interns and

was quite interested to learn about the strategies producing such remarkable results.

Like so many other areas of non-ordinary expressions of consciousness, the causal mechanisms of various forms of psychic and remote healing are not known, yet the results, for those who experience them, are profound. Opportunities for expansion of personal consciousness are numerous and freely available through the practice of disciplines such as meditation, contemplative prayer, self-hypnosis, yoga, or taijichuan.

Before we conclude, mention ought to be made of a hypnotic technique known as age regression, which reveals the continuity of consciousness from lifetime to lifetime. Evidence of reincarnation is now well-documented in mainstream medical journals, general audience publications, and even the national evening news. Chief contributors are Ian Stevenson and Jim Tucker of the University of Virginia, who have completed decades of research into children’s memories of previous lives. Just around the corner, new credibility may be in store for techniques enabling adults to recall their past lives and their experiences between lives as pure consciousness. Accessing these states with skilled practitioners has been shown to alleviate persistent physical and emotional symptoms otherwise unresponsive to traditional medical treatment.

To conclude, what about that missing operator’s guide

to consciousness? Let's take a cue from the great poet Emily Dickinson, herself an intrepid explorer of consciousness from the narrow confines of her Amherst family home:

Go thy great way!
The stars thou meetest
Are even as Thyself –
For what are Stars but
Asterisks
To point a human life?

NOTES

¹ The Simonton Cancer Center's integrated program was the first of its kind in the world and was pioneered by the "father of mind-body medicine" for cancer, O. Carl Simonton, M.D.

² Pranic healing is a comprehensive no touch treatment technique based on ancient practices and uses energy or prana to treatment various illnesses in the physical, emotional and mental bodies. Taichichuan is an internal Chinese martial art practiced for its defense training and its

health benefits.

³ The year-long training in energetic healing took place under the auspices of the White Winds Institute, Atlanta, GA, in the satellite study center then in Edinberg, VA, directed by Dr. Fernand Poulin.

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Upcoming Club Events

Please check with individual clubs to confirm these dates. (Clubs: Submit your events to be published here! Send information, or the link to your published schedule online, to info@torch.org.)

CENTRAL PA

May 8: Renewable Energy: the intersection of technology, economics and politics
John Golbeck

June 12: The Columbian Connection: What Columbus started
Steve Smith

DURHAM-CHAPEL HILL, NC

May 15: Survival of the Friendliest
Brian Hare

FREDERICK, MD

May 20: The Evolution of America's Baby Boom Generation
Jack Topchik

HAGERSTOWN, MD

July 16: Summer Discussion Time
Mike Anderson

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, VA

May 14: The Other Campus of Virginia Tech Forty Miles Away
Harry Dorn

ROCHESTER, NY

May 9: Mars Landing Updates (Joint meeting with Buffalo & Geneseo Torch Clubs)
Nick Warner

June 12: Exodus: the True Story of the Ship 'Exodus'
John Lovenheim

ST. CATHARINES, ON

May 8: The Morningstar Mill
Carla Mackie