

**Reality, Mind, and Illusion: Contemporary Scientific and Religious Views on
Reality and the Transformation of Consciousness**

Or

What's Really Going On?¹

“If the truth can be told so as to be understood, it will be believed.” – Terrence McKenna²

This paper will raise some extremely profound and life changing questions, and resist the temptation to egotistically grasp at any specific answers. These questions have plagued and prodded the universe since the first emergence of auto-reflectivity within the self-labeled species called human. “Why is there something instead of nothing?” or as the title asks, “What’s really going on?” Pause, and consider the immensity and implications of such questions. The purpose of this paper is to provide a rational context for the reader to open a *non*-rational connection to the possibilities that are implied through questioning the nature of the universe, mind, and reality³. The questions themselves, almost certainly unanswerable to the rational mind, provide the insights and often self-destruct in paradox before an actual answer can even be attempted. Because of the fundamentality of these mysteries, the entire history of shamanic, religious, spiritual, rational, philosophic, and scientific thought has attempted to contain and work with these questions in an effort to “figure it out” or gain some significant insight into the essence of existence. The extent to which this quest has been accomplished within any of these fields is a question this paper will explore.

¹ No really, what’s going on?

² *Re: Evolution* (24 June 1994) This quotation is derived from a statement of William Blake: “*Truth cannot be told, so as to be understood, and not be believ'd.*”

³ The elusive definition of the words *universe*, *mind*, and *reality* lay at the very heart of this mystery.

We as humans have obviously ‘progressed’ in a relatively astonishing manner both physically and intellectually over the history of our existence, which is evident in our current medicine, technology, science, philosophy, art and music. But are we any closer to answering any of those fundamental questions through the history of our evolution? Clearly these issues cannot be adequately developed in anything less than encyclopedic. However, an overview will be made limiting the context of this paper to selected contemporary Eastern spiritual perspectives and modern Western scientific findings. Both perspectives will be discussed to present two sides of the same reality and will provide a general cosmology for our current time. However, these perspectives reveal that the real architecture of mind and reality is drastically different from most people’s view of the ‘inner/outer’ universe. The Sanskrit term for this concept is *maya* – the premise that our normal perception of mind and reality is illusory will be discussed in relative detail.

The perspectives of two influential contemporary Eastern spiritual masters will be given and contrasted when appropriate with the modern scientific worldview. It would be nice if all of these perspectives, including our own, agreed. However, obvious discrepancies are present, and it is up to us to decide whether the spiritual and scientific findings invalidate each other or possibly invalidate our own perspectives. This is an important point. There is an inherent danger in believing that one fully understands anything. As we become aware of ideas that are outside of our current frame of reality, it is important to carefully examine our prior assumptions and to note the deadening effects of generalization. Most of the perspectives in this paper will encourage the reader to go beyond her habits – beyond the dualities of “agree/disagree” and arrive at a realm where

concepts may not apply. As previously mentioned, the right questions, unanswered, consume themselves like an ouroboros and may be based on inaccurate or illusory assumptions. The goal is to entertain seemingly distant or paradoxical ideas, not only on a rational intellectual level, but also on the irrational, emotional level of our internal reality.

The primary foundation of most spiritual traditions, supported by contemporary scientific findings, that the nature of reality is drastically different than we normally experience may imply that our prior inaccurate assumptions and triggered responses to the unknown may be the very obstacles veiling a more accurate view of the nature of mind and reality. Before diving too deeply into this topic, it is important first to introduce the humans who have worked to recognize and free themselves from the illusion and attempt to understand the revelations they describe.

The Spiritual Masters

An important distinction needs to be made when discussing spirituality or religion in the East. As a general concept, there is no one such thing as *Hinduism*; and there is no one such thing as *Buddhism*. These are both words invented by Westerners to describe living traditions composed of a plethora of different sects, colors, and flavors of spirituality that have evolved and multiplied over thousands of years. There are some basic underlying views by people we call “Hindu” and people we call “Buddhist”, but there is nothing anyone can say that is absolutely true about each and every practitioner in these categories. Most of what we call Hindu or Buddhist is represented by the words

and actions of significant human beings. As Gandhi states, “In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals.”⁴

In light of this distinction, both Buddhist and Hindu ideas will be explored through the views of two specific “spiritual masters”. This is a Jamesian perspective. Dr. Robert McDermott explains in his afterward to *The Essential Aurobindo*,

“William James went in search of great souls and tested the worth of each by the fruits of their experience. In *The Variety of Religious Experience*, James argues that the only way to study religion is to call in the experts, those individuals whose lives exhibit an uncommon awareness of a presence taken to be divine.”⁵

To better understand what current insights are available into the nature of reality and consciousness, it is important to examine and learn from individuals who appear to have gained some significant revelations through lives devoted to inner exploration. Let us call the few most notable of these humans “spiritual masters”. Sri Aurobindo says,

The master is one who has risen to a higher consciousness and being and he is often regarded as its manifestation or representative. He not only helps by his teaching and still more by his influence and example, but by a power to communicate his own experience to others.⁶

To evaluate the ‘legitimacy’ of spiritual masters it is important to consider the completeness, consistency, universality and value of their teaching. Do they implement their revelations for the good of the whole? Are they living examples of their teachings? What is the teacher/student relationship?

For this paper, the main contemporary spiritual masters who will be discussed are Sri Aurobindo and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. No argument will be supplied to justify their qualifications as “spiritual masters”, for anyone who truly learns anything about

⁴ Fischer 185

⁵ McDermott 250

⁶ McDermott 41

these figures will no doubt agree to their status. For example, people who have experienced the physical and energetic presence of any of these masters usually report that they instantly felt a blissful and serene irrational connection with the masters themselves and their teachings. Haridas Chaudhuri, the first to present Sri Aurobindo's thought to the West, writes,

Of course there can be no doubt that when an individual attains spiritual liberation for himself, he unconsciously shines as a source of peace, enlightenment and inspiration to other individuals who come in contact with him.⁷

Similarly, Eknath Easwaran writes of Gandhi, another spiritual master,

Just to meet him was to run the risk of being turned into a hero, and the lives of countless numbers of ordinary men, women, and even children were transformed completely by this one little man ... Even his enemies were not immune. 'Don't go near Gandhi,' new British administrators were warned when they went to assume their duties in India. 'Don't go near Gandhi; he'll get you.'⁸

As for the Dalai Lama, even videos of this amazing human being have been known to bring people to tears of understanding, love, and compassion. There is something very profound happening through contact with these outstanding human beings, something that is beyond our normal rational understanding.

Teaching the Ineffable

These two spiritual masters come from diverse traditions, but both claim some insight into the mysteries of the universe. Assuming they are each in some degree accurate, then their teachings should somehow relate to one another. The difficulty and seemingly different viewpoints from all the religious traditions throughout the world are

⁷ Chaudhuri 169

⁸ Easwaran 64

due to the ineffable nature of the ultimate structure and workings of reality. This quandary will be discussed in more detail later.

In light of the history of religious bigotry, fanaticism, intolerance, and iconoclasm, it would seem that masters of a certain spiritual tradition would have some belief of spiritual superiority, but this is not the case. Gandhi says, “I came to the conclusion, after prayerful search and study and discussion with as many people as I could meet, that all religions were true, and also that all had some error in them.”⁹ Haridas Chaudhuri agrees, and said that Aurobindo “showed to the world that all the historical religions and spiritual disciplines, if sincerely followed, lead to the same goal.”¹⁰

If religions all lead to the same goal, then why are there such seemingly diverse teachings of all the religions of world history? The answer lies in the fact that our language, thought patterns, metaphors, and symbols are all based on a consensual yet inaccurate view of reality. The differences in spiritual teachings are due to cultural and historical interpretations of the ineffable. Chaudhuri explains,

Creeds and dogmas in respect of which different religions and religious sects so violently disagree are all in the nature of imperfect symbolizations of one ultimate Truth.¹¹

Since all religious traditions are seeking the ‘one ultimate Truth’ it would seem beneficial to study this truth through the lenses of as many views as possible to gain a better understanding of the ineffable. Dr. Robert McDermott explains that there can be no universal religious system because “the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in

⁹ Fischer 184

¹⁰ Chaudhuri 74-75

¹¹ Chaudhuri 234

its self-expression and means of development.”¹² Even Western religions, which we will not explore in this paper, have similar insights to the Eastern traditions about the ultimate nature of reality. Chaudhuri expresses, “The personal God of monotheism is in ultimate analysis no more than a symbolization of the one ineffable impersonal Absolute.”¹³ This insight makes an important point.

The language used by different spiritual and religious traditions use extremely powerful words such as *divine*, *spirit*, *God*, the *One*, and the *absolute*. The problem with these words is that they have been overused and have lost the immensity of their meaning. Through common usage, connotations, emotions, and triggered responses arise uncontrollably in anyone who hears these words, thus distorting or even negating their intended meaning. The goal of this paper is not to describe the ineffable, but to strip the teachings of the masters of these inaccurate, overly stereotypical descriptions and focus primarily on what they are saying about the current condition of humans. Hopefully a description free from connotatively misconstrued terms will be fresh and more meaningful to the reader. As Terrence McKenna says, “If the truth can be told so as to be understood, it will be believed.”

The Illusory Nature of Reality

A prevalent theme among the teachings of these spiritual masters, and spiritual Eastern traditions in general, is that the normal consensus reality that most people experience every day is more illusory than ‘real’. Mystics and scientists have discovered through thousands of years of internal and external exploration that the actual structure of

¹² McDermott 206

¹³ Chaudhuri 234

mind and universe are far different than what we currently conceive. This idea should not be too surprising. It would be difficult for the modern mind to conceive a worldview in which the Earth is flat, floating on an infinite sea of water, surrounded by dragons with a domed roof fixed with stars rotating above. This is not only how people thought of the universe at one time, but they actually *perceived* it this way. Through insights passed along from previous rounds of human investigation, we as a modern species have discovered new ways to look at the world and directly participate in our own evolution of collective consciousness to understand and then actually attempt to perceive the universe as it really is.

The Scientific View

Through advances in scientific investigation, humans in the modern Western world have now discovered that the notion of an illusory reality may actually exist wherein mind and matter are intimately linked. For example, the concept of gravity, which humans have long explained as a force pulling from the center of heavy objects, is actually inaccurate. Our current models suggest that gravity is a name given to the curve of space-time. So, as a skydiver plunges earthward, she is sliding down a depression in the spatial fabric caused by the earth's mass.¹⁴ Scientists have long known that matter is not 'solid' like we perceive. The amount of 'empty' space in the table and the air surrounding it may not be that different. Consider the infinitesimal film of physical reality we normally experience. What is true on that level is not true on a different scale. For example, to think of the surface of a Volkswagen in terms of its Euclidean shape is to think of it as an observer ten meters or one hundred meters away. What about an observer one hundred kilometers away? or one micron away? If you had the perspective of an

¹⁴ Greene 70

elementary particle, you might pass right through the car and not even notice it was there.¹⁵

Chaos theorists are now beginning to study the relativity of all science; meaning ‘external’ reality cannot be distinctly studied without factoring in consciousness. Even dimensionality is relative to the observer. What is the dimension of a ball of twine? Mandelbrot answered that it is dependent on the observer.¹⁶ From a great distance, the ball is no more than a point, with zero dimensions. Closer, it seems to be a sphere with three dimensions, closer still – a line making it one-dimensional. The more microscopic we become, the more the dimensions shift and change until we get to the theoretically smallest part, which is a one-dimensional string. So a science, which is based on measurement, is only accurate relative to a single point of view.

If science, which supposedly was free from the constraints of subjectivity is finding that consciousness must be included as a fundamental element within the ‘external’ universe, then it would be necessary to learn from people who thoroughly studied and mapped the interior universe – the masters who study consciousness, and integrate into our worldview what they say about our reality and its illusory nature. For centuries, contemplative traditions have developed rigorous techniques for examining and probing the mind. The disciplined examination of experience has been used within widely differing philosophical and religious traditions yet have all come to similar conclusions. We may therefore expect that many of the insights of these traditions will be valid beyond their particular metaphysical and cultural frameworks.¹⁷

¹⁵ Gleick 105

¹⁶ Ibid 97

¹⁷ Capra 2002, 47

Illusion: Conventional vs. Ultimate Truth

The details of this metaphysically astonishing topic are vast. For this paper, a general framework on an illusory structure of reality will be of more benefit than attempting to go into the detailed aspects of this topic. According to the Dalai Lama, “There is a disparity between the way things appear to us and the way they exist. This is why they are said to be illusory.”¹⁸ We already have some examples of this from the scientific world, but the Dalai Lama emphasizes that our *entire* reality is essentially illusory. What does this mean to a ‘normal’ human being? I experience a solid chair that I sit in, and a house that I live in, the sun’s heat on my skin, and sneezing with springtime allergies. It is difficult to understand how someone can call this all illusion. Buddhists realized this disparity and coined the terms *conventional* reality and *ultimate* reality. Candrakirti says in his *Supplement to (Nagarjuna’s) ‘Treatise on the Middle way’*,

[Buddha] said that all phenomena have two entities,
Those found by perceivers of the true and of the false;
Object of perceivers of the true are realities,
Objects of perceivers of the false are conventional truths.¹⁹

Conventional truths come from the point of view of an ordinary worldly consciousness. Examples of these kinds of truth are those discovered by the planet’s scientists. However, even the scientific fact that matter is made up mostly of space, which is an example of a worldly illusion, is still only a conventional truth. Sri Aurobindo makes clear that perceiving our entire experience of reality as being illusory in nature is not denying its significance or reducing life to a type of nihilism. He says, “To deny entirely its reality or to seek an escape from it as a mere disastrous illusion is to put away

¹⁸ Dalai Lama 1995, 50

¹⁹ Dalai Lama 1975, 62

from us the problem and to shun our work.”²⁰ Similarly, the Dalai Lama recognizes, “for some, the absence of inherent existence would literally mean non-existence.”²¹

This perspective illustrates the necessity of integrating the insights of the East and the West. One is investigating the fundamental truths of the conventional reality, and the other is mapping the process of experiencing the truth that conventional reality is illusory to an even ‘deeper’ truth. Aurobindo says, “East and West have two ways of looking at life which are opposite sides of one reality.”²² The questions, “What is the reality of the chair I am sitting on?” therefore has two truthful answers. The first is the conventional truth that says something like, “it is made of wood, which is made of atoms, which are mostly composed of energy, and within the small material part of an atom are infinitesimal sub-atomic particles, which are theoretically composed of one dimensional vibrating strings too small for us ever to measure without fundamentally affecting its nature”. The second answer to the question concerning the reality of the chair is the ultimate truth.

Concerning The Ultimate Truth of Reality

With such a captivating title, this section will not attempt to convey what the ultimate truth of reality *is*, but more what it is *like*, since understanding this truth would equate to experiencing it, which is extremely difficult. Different traditions, including Hinduism and Buddhism, differ mostly in the details describing the ultimate truth. What they all agree upon is that the ultimate nature of reality is incomprehensible to our ordinary awareness and ineffable in words created to describe conventional, not ultimate,

²⁰ McDermott 60-61

²¹ Dalai Lama 1995, 35

²² McDermott 79

reality. Our consciousness and our language evolved through hundreds of thousands of years of co-creative interaction with the conventional reality. Both our consciousness and our conventional reality are said to have created each other.

This co-arising dualism was explained by the Buddha in the *Heart of Wisdom* sutra in which he spoke of the ultimate nature of all phenomena – that form is emptiness and emptiness is form, and apart from form, there is no emptiness.²³ This may seem trite, but therein lies the most important truth of human existence. All phenomena are empty, meaning they are lacking inherent existence; reality is essentially ephemeral, like a dream. Dualisms arise together; mind and external reality arise together; form and emptiness arise together. We cannot conceive of emptiness without conceiving of form – they are essentially one and the same, but we perceive them as having independent existences. This duality is where the problem exists. We have the conception of every *thing* as having an independent existence, including ourselves. The ultimate truth is that all of conventional reality is like a dream, with no inherent existence to it, only co-created with a consciousness that permeates all phenomena.

The term Buddhists use to describe how conventional reality organizes itself is “dependent co-arising”. This term basically means that everything that seems to exist only exists through the complex interaction of different causes and immediately co-dissolves. This idea is an extremely subtle philosophy that is beyond the scope of this paper.

Let’s return to the example of the Volkswagen. What is the inherent existence of this object? We know the conventional reality of it, but what is its ultimate reality? An even subtler task is to find the inherent existence of the self. There are so many moments

²³ The Dalai Lama 1995, 42

of everyday life wherein we reference 'I' or 'me' but don't often think of what 'we' are referring. It is a profound exercise to peel back all the individual layers of what we could classify as self in an effort to find the smallest or biggest categories that could be classified as 'me'. The ultimate truth of reality tells us that there is no 'me' independent of everything else. Contemporary science, according to Joanna Macy, shows "that there is no logical or scientific basis for construing one part of the experienced world as 'me' and the rest as 'other'."²⁴ This insight is because there is a web of relationships that sustain all the different cycles and activities that make up our physical and mental 'self'. There is no clear line demarcating these activities from a separate continuous self. The Dalai Lama says, "What we think of as 'I' is a succession of instants in a continuum of consciousness."²⁵ Western philosopher Gregory Bateson thinks the abstraction of a separate 'I' is the epistemological fallacy of Western civilization. Macy explains that Bateson believes, "the self is a false reification of an improperly delimited part of a much larger field of interlocking processes."²⁶ Cognitive scientists have arrived at the same position. According to the Santiago theory, our self, or ego, does not have any independent existence but is a result of our structural coupling.²⁷

A profound exercise is to really consider this point to be true. Take the time and actually attempt to 'find' the self. Can we really be convinced on a deep level that our very 'self', which we cherish so much, is only a metaphor. Most resist this view because of an improper projection of what it implies. This is not a view of nihilism or escapism, but is similar to the holographic view of the universe proposed by physicists, where each

²⁴ Macy 187-188

²⁵ Dalai Lama 1994, 102

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Capra 1996, 295

part contains the whole. Mahayana Buddhists have the image of the net of Indra, where each node is a jewel reflecting all the other jewels, including itself and all its reflections.

Why Do I Care?

This notion seems like an intricate and fascinating philosophical idea that is fun to think about and ponder its implications, but eventually we have to get back to our ‘normal’ lives. It is difficult to believe that all reality is illusory and that ‘our’ perspective is really just a node in an infinite field of consciousness. Besides intellectual curiosity, why should I care about a reality I don’t experience? According to the spiritual masters, it is because our ignorant view of the nature of reality leads directly to our suffering and overall dissatisfaction. Sri Aurobindo says,

All the problems of human life arise from the complexity of our existence, the obscurity of its essential principal and the secrecy of the inmost power that makes our its determinations and governs its purpose and its processes.²⁸

Similarly, the Buddhist teaching according to the Dalai Lama says, “the root cause of our pain and suffering lies in our own ignorant and undisciplined state of mind.”²⁹ We perpetually grasp and feel attached to the inherent existence of things such as self, family, friends, possessions, health, and work. However, none of these phenomena have an inherent existence and our grasping at something that is constantly slipping away causes us mental and physical suffering. The spiritual masters who have experienced the ultimate reality explain that without the experience of illusion, the ultimate bliss resulting from the dissolution of illusion would not occur. Illusion is necessary to break free from the veils of illusion.

²⁸ McDermott 133

²⁹ Dalai Lama 16-17

The first sermon of the Buddha has been organized and dubbed the Four Noble Truths. The first noble truth is that all life/reality is *dukkha*, usually translated as *unsatisfactory* or *suffering*. The reason for this suffering or dissatisfaction is the second noble truth, which says that our suffering is caused from our attachment to an incorrect view of the world. The fact that our conventional reality is taken as being ultimately true is causing the ups and downs, struggles, fears, and dissatisfaction with life. There is good news, however. The third noble truth states that this condition of ignorance is curable, which makes sense, for there exist humans who are able to tell us about the reality of reality. If one individual can see the truth of our universe, then it should be possible for all individuals to see it. Aurobindo also agrees that the possibility of spiritual transformation is latent in all humans.³⁰ There are libraries of books containing methods devised by spiritual traditions throughout history for transcending our normal consciousness to actually have an experience of the ultimate reality. These methods will not be discussed here.

The Union of Opposites

How do the extraordinary humans who have actually broken through the veils of illusion and experienced the ultimate truth describe this reality? A description of the ultimate nature of reality can only be an imperfect model because our thinking, perception, and language are rooted in conventional reality. However, it would be helpful to hear some attempts at describing the indescribable. The most commonly used metaphor for reality behind the veils of ignorance is a state where dualities fall away and there is a paradoxical union of opposites. This metaphor doesn't make sense to our

³⁰ Chaudhuri 8

normal awareness where things such as light and dark, self and other, are by definition separate. But psychonauts have discovered that these definitions are only true in our conventional reality. Chaudhuri puts it beautifully,

The true mission of the individual really consists in functioning as the luminous center of the Absolute's increasing self-manifestation in the universe by resolving the duality of birth and death in Immortality and that of pleasure and pain in pure Delight through a transformation of the divided egoistic consciousness which is responsible for the creation of all dualities.³¹

He is saying that the 'highest' reality is beyond both stability and movement, beyond both unity and multiplicity.³² This concept is quite difficult to understand. The Buddhist word describing this transcendent state is "emptiness". To make things more confusing, consider the Dalai Lama's words,

Therefore, when a tree, for instance, is analyzed, the tree is not found, but its mode of being or emptiness is found. Then when that emptiness is analyzed, that emptiness also is not found, but the emptiness of that emptiness is found. This is called an emptiness of emptiness. Thus, a tree is a conventional truth, and its mode of being is an ultimate truth.³³

These insights get even more confusing when thinking about the delusion of attempting to transcend an illusory experience.

Conventional reality is shown to be illusory, but there is a possibility of transcending this ignorance through methods such as meditation, which are also illusory. Again, the Dalai Lama explains, "...Illusory suffering is the result of causes and conditions that are also illusory ... thus, illusory antidotes are used to get rid of illusory sufferings."³⁴ Sri Aurobindo adds another interesting twist,

³¹ Chaudhuri 23

³² Ibid 25

³³ Dalai Lama 1975, 76

³⁴ Dalai Lama 1994, 62

For even release takes place only in the cosmic dream or hallucination by the recognition of the illusion and the cessation of the individualized mind and body; in reality, there is no one bound and no one released, for the soul-existent Self is untouched by these illusions of the ego.³⁵

This idea returns to the previous discussion of the illusion of self. Sri Aurobindo clarifies, “The Self in this view is one, it cannot be many or multiply itself; there cannot therefore be any true individual, only at most a one Self omnipresent and animating each mind and body with the idea of an ‘I’.”³⁶

Intermission

It is natural to feel confused about the concepts presented in the previous section. The simple reason is that the concept of ultimate truth is saying that concepts themselves are inherently illusory and non-existent. This is reminiscent of the introduction to this paper, where I warned that the questions about the nature of reality, rationally unanswerable, would dissolve themselves in paradox. However, within conventional reality, containing spiritual communities, and the academic and scientific world, humans are learning something about the nature of reality. The very fact that I am composing this paper on a computer that can be instantly e-mailed anywhere on the planet raises important insights. Through an evolution of consciousness, communication, science, and technology on the conventional side of reality, humans can learn to break through the veils and experience the bliss of ultimate reality. The Dalai Lama says, “Therefore, in one sense, we can say it is delusion itself – in the form of the wisdom derived from delusion – that actually destroys delusions.”³⁷

³⁵ McDermott 102

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Dalai Lama 1995, 97

Humans Break Through Delusion

Eastern traditions have used methods within the conventional reality to transcend the illusion of reality. Techniques of meditation to quiet the reality creating mind have been used for thousands of years including physical postures, repeating sacred phrases, sitting meditation, ecstatic dance, rhythmic drumming and ingesting hallucinogenic plants. But what about the West? Has science broken through the veils obscuring ultimate reality? The answer is yes. Sri Aurobindo predicted that science would thin the walls between soul and matter.³⁸ Within the material world, contemporary scientists have found that the actual reality of matter is not what most people normally perceive. As explained earlier, matter may more closely resemble consciousness than our normal, accepted perception of a dense, hard, object. Cognitive scientists also agree that the actual reality of an independent self is incorrect. Amazingly, scientists at Stanford University have not only proved that our mind and consciousness are not independent as we perceive, but have developed techniques for individuals to achieve awareness anywhere in space and time.

Remote Viewing in the West

This short section is included to illustrate that the West has reached conclusions similar to those of our spiritual masters in the East. The language is different, but the implications remain the same. A modern technique called “remote viewing” has actually been developed in which a person can train her mind to move her focus of awareness anywhere in space and time. Consider the words of Sri Aurobindo,

³⁸ McDermott 194-195

The prevalent modern idea of temporary conscious existence would then have to broaden itself and admit a Life that has a wider range than the physical universe and admit to a personal individuality not dependent on the material body.³⁹

This concept seems to be materializing with the current scientific advances in remote viewing.

The CIA first sponsored research into controlled remote viewing (CRV) in the 1970s. The military was given a \$20 million dollar budget in which \$15 million went to the Stanford Research Institute (SRI), plus two laser physicists and a psychic.⁴⁰ The Stanford research team learned about remote viewing through the psychic Ingo Swann and developed a scientific method to teach people, specifically the military, how to perfect this skill.⁴¹ Princeton University researchers first proved remote viewing exists, with a departure from chance expectation of 10^{-10} (odds of one in ten billion)⁴². In a nutshell, CRV is a technique showing the interconnection and non-locality of reality. A remote viewer can sit in a room and ‘see’ events at a target location anywhere in time and space. SRI has shown that there is no evidence for a decrease in accuracy or reliability when looking days into the future or thousands of miles into the distance. That is, it is no more difficult to describe tomorrow’s remote viewing target location than it is to describe today’s.⁴³

Anyone can be trained in remote viewing without any belief in spirituality or the divine. This process is a scientific technique that gives people complete control over their positions and movements in both time and space. Interestingly, viewers can take the

³⁹ McDermott 99

⁴⁰ Buchanan 79-80

⁴¹ Targ 26

⁴² Ibid 7

⁴³ Ibid

perspective of other humans. The process requires the viewer to begin feeling the target person's feelings and actually thinking the target person's thoughts.⁴⁴ These mental shifts of self may also have a physical reaction. Remote viewers have been known to have side effects such as changing eye color to match the target person or even sympathetic physical injuries. What does the very real existence of remote viewing tell us about the reality of self?

Modern Western scientists have perfected the technique of CRV without knowing exactly why it happens. Most theories about how this process works are based on Western models of the unconscious. But again, this is just one model of an ineffable interconnected universe. The Eastern perspectives given in this paper illuminate some reasons why CRV works. Sri Aurobindo was correct when he said,

Such a turn of human thought, effort, ideas of life, if it took hold of the communal mind ... might develop a Science which would bring the powers of the physical world into a real and not only a contingent and mechanical subjection and open perhaps the doors of other worlds.⁴⁵

Wrapping Up

We are at a unique moment in our history where all of the world's spiritual teachings and scientific findings are immediately available to us. The Internet has offered another level of self-reflective consciousness where humans can not only reflect on themselves, but on the teachings and science of most of the history of human existence. Through the study of this multitude of traditions, it can be seen that many striking parallels exist between them. Scientific insights of the 'external' world are revealing that there is no disconnect from the 'internal' world. Traditions and masters of the study of

⁴⁴ Buchanan 131

⁴⁵ McDermott 198

the ‘internal’ world are saying that both the internal and external world create each other and more importantly, neither of them has an inherent existence. Wherever one looks, be it science or spirituality, people are saying that our current perception of mind and reality are inaccurate. What does this mean for us to be born into an illusory world? Christianity would call it original sin. Understanding that the world is illusory is the first step to seeing past the views of ignorance that shield us from an accurate perception of reality. This state may not include an “I” or any form of duality such as subject and object. Because this thought is so alien and paradoxical to us, it is difficult to even imagine what this means. But the first step in a path towards truth is to continuously ask the most difficult of questions, “What is really going on? No really, what is going on?” Maybe we learned the best answer as children in this famous nursery rhyme...

Row, row, row, your boat
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream.

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