

THE SCOPE OF THE UNIVERSE: THE NON-PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

Empirical science, particularly astronomy and cosmology, reveals the *physical* universe in space and time. Yet there are many other types of things that don't fit into the physical universe and thus are not widely accepted by mainstream science. Non-physical entities-- such as deceased souls residing in various heavens, ghosts, spirit guides, angels and devas-- are all widely believed to exist by much of humanity (and have been for thousands of years). There are a large number of names for them in different religious traditions around the world. These entities fall outside the scope of science for one

simple reason. We can't perceive them, or obtain evidence of them, through our five senses.

Mainstream science restricts its investigation only to what we can know through our five senses. Thus science, in all of its many disciplines, reveals not just the physical universe but the *sensory* universe, the universe that is available to our sensory way of knowing.

But if we're asking what is the *ultimate* scope of the universe, it is plausible to wonder whether it might be larger than what we can perceive directly or indirectly (telescopes and microscopes) through our senses. Aren't there other ways of knowing about the cosmos besides sensory knowledge?

To assume otherwise is to become a strict empiricist in the tradition of John Locke and David Hume: only objects accessible to our physical senses can be real. But this is ultimately *a metaphysical assumption that can't be proven.*

What if there are other ways of knowing, besides sensory, that have gained and maintained at least some credibility over the ages? For example, there is *intuitive knowledge*, where we just have an “inner knowing” about the answer to some question without having to think much about it or bring outer evidence to bear. There is the practical knowledge we refer to as “wisdom,” knowledge about how to live that we’ve gained through life experience.

Though conventional science is skeptical, there

is also *paranormal knowledge*, knowledge about remote objects through clairvoyance, knowledge of other people's minds by telepathy, or knowledge of the future through precognition. Finally, there is *visionary or revelatory knowledge*, through which we might gain awareness of something like a ghost or an angel, although there are instances where ghosts and angels have become apparent through direct visual perception. In brief, there are popularly accepted ways of knowing that extend far beyond sensory knowledge. What these ways of knowing reveal extends the scope of what is "knowable" *far beyond the physical universe revealed by our five senses.*

Why does science reject non-sensory knowledge as, in some cases, “nonsense”? Because it can’t be tested in accordance with the basic principles of the “scientific method.” It is easy to obtain direct evidence of the existence of physical things or processes through empirical tests. Not only can one person do the tests and obtain the direct evidence of his or her senses, but other, independent investigators can perform the same test and get exactly the same evidence. Scientific knowledge is thus built up by consensual and replicable sensory evidence obtained by independent investigators. This is not so hard to do for the physical world. Most of us can agree on what we see. Even if we are using complex methods such as microscopes and telescopes, if

our instruments are working, and we follow protocol in doing the tests, we can all usually agree on what we see. This makes building a consensual PHYSICAL universe pretty straightforward.

It's not so easy for non-physical phenomena because we can't ordinarily *see, hear, or touch them*. The problem, briefly, is that we can't all agree so easily on "evidence" that comes from our intuitive (or visionary) faculties as opposed to our senses. We can't easily perform rigorous tests that, if done properly, always obtain the same rigorous results. Even in controlled, experimental tests of telepathy and clairvoyance, which have been performed in carefully

controlled ways for over seventy years, the results don't always come out the same. *The results are sometimes strongly influenced by the expectations of the investigators and/or the subjects.*

This can happen in conventional science as well, but not to such a confounding degree.

So where does this leave us? If we accept only knowledge gained through our senses through replicable experiment, all we get is the physical universe. We can't really claim to know now — or ever — much about basic human questions that have come down through the religions of the world for millennia such as: What happens to us after we die? Is there spiritual help for us when we pray? Is the cosmos benign, malign, or

indifferent? The perennial debate between science and religion dismisses religious inquiries as having any empirical validity: **Science dictates that these are non- scientific questions and cannot be answered.**

Religious questions may be meaningful to us personally, but they aren't meaningful questions from a scientific standpoint or in terms of investigating the physical universe. Yet the religions of the world maintain that these are highly meaningful questions and that there are answers (with slight differences to the answers depending on various religious creeds) that we simply need to consider simply based on faith. If we believe the answers offered by the religions

of the world, then suddenly the universe gets larger. There are places such as heaven and hell and entities such as discarnate souls, angels, and devas.

In truth, it kind of comes down to whether you want to believe in something more than the physical universe. As an atheist or agnostic, you take one of two roads. Either you believe there is nothing beyond the physical cosmos, end of story, or you believe **there is no way to know** about what might exist beyond the physical, so you remain noncommittal and hold to a perpetual “maybe.”

On the other hand, if you want to believe in Deity, heaven, an afterlife, and perhaps angels

and spirit guides, then you can become a believer within the context of a particular religion. Or you can at least become spiritual and believe there is more to life than the physical cosmos. So, again, it seems to come down to what you're comfortable with and choose to believe: **either strict empiricism (and the materialism that goes along with it) or a cosmos with non- material dimensions and a much greater scope.**

There is a third alternative, however, which has been proposed throughout history in many mystical traditions and is proposed in this essay as well. It was originally proposed in my 2008 book, *Global Shift*. To keep it simple, this view

proposes that **all forms of knowing have some degree of validity, even if some of them don't meet the standards of the scientific method and are not as highly replicable and consensual.** Thus, even more simply, at least some of the objects of non-sensory knowing are not "nonsense" but are valid and exist. In short, **all forms of knowing are valid and exist.** See the Prologue of this website for a more detailed argument for this idea.

That implies something like Deity, heaven, ghosts, angels, may well exist, and that there are non-physical realms or domains of the Cosmos that go beyond the physical universe.

Even more important, we can gain access to these things through direct (inner) knowing; we don't have to take them on faith (or believe in them because they are part of a religious doctrine). The trick is that to do this, we have to consider relaxing our standard of what constitutes valid knowing and valid knowledge beyond knowledge obtained by the scientific method. Conventional science adamantly won't do this, so, again, it ultimately comes down to what you're comfortable with.

The "more relaxed standard" spoken of here (and also the Prologue of this website) is simply this: **Any phenomenon that has 1) been revealed through intuitive knowing and 2)**

been described in a similar way across many cultures and many historical times, has what might be called *consensual existential validity*.

“Consensual existential validity” means collective human experience, through countless experiences over many cultures and times, has all agreed on approximately the same thing, even if the details vary slightly from culture to culture and from one historical epoch to another.

Some of the things which meet this standard are just what we’ve been talking about, i.e., some type of Deity, an afterlife with heavens and possibly hells, souls surviving death and entering an afterlife, and some type of spiritual helpers that assist humans (guides, angels, etc.)

For lack of a better term, let's call this the viewpoint of a "universal spiritual paradigm" or, to use Huxley's term, the "perennial wisdom" that has been handed down through countless cultures over millennia.

Existential validity means that this universal spiritual paradigm is not simply a construct from various religious doctrines or something that has to be taken on faith. It is direct knowledge gained through countless instances of direct intuitive or visionary "knowing" across many cultures and historical times. It is based on non-sensory ways of knowing but is not nonsense! To embrace "existential validity," you simply have to embrace that there are other

ways of knowledge that reveal valid information, even if they don't adhere to the strict standards of scientific knowledge and investigation.

If you are willing to entertain these other ways of knowing, the idea of consensual existential validity, and the resulting “universal spiritual paradigm” that is implied, **then the universe suddenly gets much larger.** We're left with ONE universe that includes both the 3D physical universe and a spiritual dimension(s) as well. Heaven and earth are all of the same piece of fabric. They are fully integrated in a single cosmos. One part of the universe, the observable physical cosmos, is in three-

dimensional space; the rest is in existence (existential) but not in physical space, only in time. For example, dogs and cats and planets are in 3D space, but minds and ghosts and angels are not spatial. They are existential—actually they exist in consciousness. Not your or my consciousness but a larger consciousness. Ghosts and angels also do things with a duration, so they exist in time. The idea of something existing in time but not space is interesting (as it seems to go beyond Einstein's space-time continuum). More will be said about this further on.

A very interesting fact is that many philosophers and scholars took the above world view for granted up until the Renaissance. It was only during the 18th century Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution that the scope of the cosmos—or reality, if you will—was reduced to the physical universe, i.e., the proper object of scientific investigation. Everyone was so enthusiastic about science and the scientific method that it co-opted the full scope of “reality” for awhile. Only what science could investigate was considered real; the spiritual dimension got relegated to the realm of myth, superstition, and cultural belief. This strange limitation of the cosmos persisted for about 250 years and reached a crescendo in the logical

positivist and empiricist movements in philosophy (and radical behaviorism in psychology) in the first half of the twentieth century. The “death of God” movement in the sixties was part of this tendency.

In the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century, the empiricist reduction of the world to the strictly material universe was critiqued and began to unravel. This breakdown of a strictly materialist worldview was described in detail in chapter 2 of my book *Global Shift*, “The Rise and Fall of the Scientific-Materialist Worldview.”

There have been several different trends in recent times that point to a renaissance of the original pre-Enlightenment view of the

cosmos—one that includes both the physical and nonphysical domains within a single universe. Developments within physics, such as the ability of remote particles to affect each other at a distance (entanglement), point to a broad revision of the physical space-time universe described by Einstein. In quantum physics, the distinction between consciousness and matter has been blurred, because the very existence of a particle depends on the process of observing it. Reduction of the cosmos to a strictly physical entity had required a sharp boundary between mind and matter. This cannot be so if the possibility of certain particle coming into existence depends on whether or not it is

observed. Beyond physics and hard science, many other common phenomena point to a merging or interpenetration of physical cosmos and psyche. Synchronicities, where an outer event reflects our inner thoughts and expectations, suggest an integration of mental and physical. Common paranormal processes, such as mental telepathy (remote knowing of another's mind) and precognition (foreseeing the future) reveal instantaneous events transcending spatial and temporal boundaries. Once again, we are left with a universe that includes mental phenomena and exceeds the scope of the physical universe.

If we say that the universe is actually *conscious*, that it has an outer, spatial aspect as well as inner, conscious dimensions, we would be in alignment with a long-standing philosophical viewpoint that extends from Plato in 300 century. This is fundamentally a monistic BD down to Whitehead in the 20th century's point of view. This is fundamentally a monistic point of view. Mind and matter are two aspects of an integrated reality, not separate things or processes in need of some mysterious type of interaction, as proposed by dualist philosophers such as Descartes. Because Descartes had no idea how mind and matter could interact as separate substances, he proposed that God breeched the gap and did the job. But what if

God or Deity, aka “an intelligent ordering principle,” is inherent to nature itself.

There is no way to prove a monistic view of the cosmos is correct, but it is certainly more parsimonious and elegant than dualistic viewpoints. In order for *everything*—physical and non-physical—to be integrated into a single, monistic universe, then it would seem that there would need to be a single substrate underlying virtually everything. But what could that substrate be—or what could it be made of? This is not an easy question to answer, as will be seen in the following.

The Composition of the Universe

Multiple choice: energy(ies), particles, consciousness or information (or all four)?

Standard physics maintains that the physical universe is made of energy and matter, with matter consisting of a wide variety of particles.

The activity of matter is governed by four forces operating on different scales. At a macroscopic scale (the size of humans, mountains, planets and stars) gravity is the main force that visibly operates; holding us on earth and keeping planets in orbit around the sun. The second force, electromagnetism, operates at a macroscopic down to microscopic scale. It is very familiar in daily life every time we turn on

a light switch or operate an electric motor. At a microscopic scale, it is responsible for interactions among charged particles. The third and fourth forces operate only at a very microscopic level. The weak nuclear force, very briefly, is a force involved in the radioactive decay of subatomic particles.

The strong nuclear force is what binds protons and neutrons together within an atomic nucleus.

So mass, energy, and the dynamics of these four forces are all there is, according to conventional physics. What is left out of this picture? On the face of it, it would seem that something like “life energy” and mind (consciousness) are left out.

Describing living things, whether plants, single-

celled organisms, or animals as being solely electromagnetic in nature (assuming that they don't operate by the other three forces) seems to fall short. Certainly numerous electrical and chemical processes go on within a cell, including chemical energy in the form of ATP, but the question remains regarding *how all these electrical and chemical processes are organized or coordinated into cellular metabolism*, something that is necessary for the cell to be "alive." It doesn't seem that electromagnetic forces can do the job alone, so the presumption is possible that "life," "life energy," or "life force energy" has some kind of a mediating role. See the essay on "Life Force Energy" for a more detailed discussion of this point.

A similar type of reasoning applies to mental processes or consciousness. Volitions, intentions, emotions, and thoughts cannot be found directly in the physical world (specifically, in the physical brain), so they can't easily be explained in terms of physical phenomena that have mass and operate in space. Nor can they be explained in terms of the four fundamental forces of the physical universe. Yes, transmission of a nerve impulse through a nerve cell is an electrical process, but understanding the electrodynamics of nerve impulse transmission does not lead us to an understanding of thoughts, feelings, and other elements of mind/consciousness. Brain waves (electrical fields of varying voltage) can be picked up electrically on an EEG, but the

thoughts in your or my mind cannot be picked up by any electrical device.

In short, life and mind cannot be explained in terms of the four basic physical forces. They are in some way separate from or beyond these forces. Separate but integrated. A cell needs “life” to function as a living cell. Your brain needs your mind if your volition to walk or raise your hand actually leads you to do so. But what actually are the “life force” and mind? Are they made of anything at all? How do they interact with the physical world—or do they interact? At our present stage of knowledge, attempts to answer these two questions lead to paradoxes.

In the first place, it's questionable whether life and mind even occupy space. Is it meaningful to say that "life force" is in a cell or that "mind" is in a brain? Maybe it makes some sense to say that life force is "in" a cell, but where is it? How would we recognize it if we could find it? We are not going to see "life" by looking at the cell through a microscope, or even an electron microscope. Yes, the cell looks active and appears to be metabolizing, but the idea of a life force organizing or coordinating the metabolism is merely an hypothesis—a theoretical construct. Yet we can't actually observe it directly, the life force, per se. The same is even more obvious for mind and brain. We can observe the brain in

various ways, but we'll never find consciousness/mind in the process.

For the sake of simplicity, let's stick with the example of mind or consciousness. The question: "What is mind made of?" might initially seem meaningless. If mind is not a physical entity and occupies no space, perhaps it's not anything at all. If mind is not anything, what is the point of asking about what it might be made of? End of story.

The reason the story doesn't end, however, is that mind—or consciousness—still has two obvious properties that can't be ignored. The first is duration. Thoughts and feelings, for example, have a specific duration. They may not

exist in physical space, but they do take place over a particular time. Something that exists only in time but not obviously in space is quite interesting, especially if we assume Einstein's 4D space-time continuum is supposed to define everything.

Then second, conscious/mental processes are *processes*. They do something. My mind goes through a process of logical deduction, your mind goes through a process of emotional reaction to something I said. How is that possible? It sounds like some kind of "energy" is involved. That is, mental processes are active (they think, feel, lift arms, etc.), and ordinarily it would seem that they require some kind of

“energy” to do so. In ordinary conversation, we might say that someone “expended a lot of energy” in just thinking about a problem. But here is where a big paradox arises. If mind or consciousness is not any kind of physical “thing” — if it has no apparent measure in space—what kind of energy could it utilize to “operate”?

The four types of forces physics is concerned with certainly operate in space, though under very different size scales (from atomic nuclei to galaxies). Not so, apparently for the “energy of thought.” If consciousness requires some form of energy to do anything at all, it is certainly an unusual type of energy in that it doesn’t take up

any measurable brain space. If the idea of a non-spatial energy doesn't sit well—if you insist that for something energetic to happen, it must traverse space—then you arrive at a different paradox. Where do thoughts occur in the brain. How do they map onto the electrophysiological activities of neurons and/or groups of neurons (which can be measured by an EEG). How does the 'energy' of thinking map onto the electrochemical energy of large groups of neurons in the brain? Is there one and the same "energy" involved for both mental and physical brain processes? Or is the energy exerted by mental processes somehow separate but parallel in some way to the electrical and

electrochemical processes in the brain? So which paradoxical alternative are you more comfortable with? For this author personally, the possibility that consciousness utilizes some kind of non-physical, mass-less energy seems more attractive than the idea that it utilizes the very same energy that can be measured in the physical brain by an EEG. If there is in truth only *one energy* involved between brain and mind, then there *must at least be two very distinct ways of experiencing this energy*. The EEG measures neuronal activity as an “objective phenomenon” — direct observation from “the outside looking in.” The existential stream of consciousness that we experience subjectively

occurs from a radically different perspective of *being* , from “inside looking out.”

Mind-Body Issues

The preceding section suggested the possibility of a **unification** of mind and brain—that the mind is just the interior—the “from the inside out aspect” --- of the outer, physical brain.

Therefore, if we have no physical brain activity, we have no mind. The idea is that mind and brain are somehow just the interior and exterior aspects of one underlying process that can be objectively observed by neurophysiological procedures, such as an EEG or placement of electrodes in the brain which measure activities of specific brain regions. This kind viewpoint

has a wide following and is accepted by many brain scientists up to the present time. In philosophy it is referred to as “neutral monism.” It obeys the rule of parsimony: we only need to believe in a single thing with two aspects to explain the relationship between brain and mind.

Yet this viewpoint would seem to have two problems. First, it doesn't explain **how** we can get from *causally related* multiple nerve signal transmissions in neurons (the exterior aspect) to *logical and semantic connections of conscious thought* (the interior aspect). There is still a big jump or gap between the causal physiological sequences of brain events and the logical-semantic sequences of mind events.

Furthermore, this is not a new gap; philosophers have been arguing about it for centuries.

It is at the very heart of the so-called “mind-body” problem. Frequently it is referred to as the “hard” problem in philosophical discourse about the nature of consciousness and the mind.

A number of views have been proposed to handle the “gap.” The materialist view maintains that the *mind is nothing more than the physical brain*, and so avoids explaining how we get from causal physiological brain sequences to mental linguistic-semantic sequences altogether. Another view, psychophysical parallelism, argues that brain and mind are separate streams that occur in parallel, each remaining true to its

inherent content and proper sequence. Various devices are invoked to perfectly coordinate the two streams. In the case of Descartes, God is required to make the perfect coordination.

Yet another common view is that of idealism. Mind alone is the ultimate foundation of reality, and the entire physical world, including the human brain, are only a projection of mind. This view has been popular in the Far East, particularly Hindu thought. But the idealist view does not explain the gap between mental and physical at all. There is no explanation for how the usually “illusory” physical world arises out of or is a projection of the Universal Mind from which everything arises.

The mind-body problem continues in philosophy to this day because there has never been a satisfactory explanation of the gap between brain and mind. In fact, there is also no satisfactory answer to the question of whether brain and mind are separable and distinct (dualism) or simply two aspects of the same thing (monism), the neutral monistic position mentioned above.

The second big problem for materialism is the possibility of survival of consciousness following death.

Parapsychological research has amassed quite a bit of evidence for survival of the mind or the soul following death. This has come from

hundreds of reliably reported cases of “near-death” experiences, from similarly numerous cases of communication with the deceased, and from multiple cases of apparitions and ghosts.

Much could be said of this evidence, but it is best to review it and judge for yourself.

Mainstream scientists don’t fully accept paranormal evidence, but, for anyone who reads all this large body of evidence and finds it compelling, it provides considerable support for the idea that the mind/soul is not simply reducible to the brain and can, in fact, separate from the brain at the time of death.

Survival of the mind/soul is also consistent with psychophysical dualism rather than monism. No

matter how well mind and brain are integrated while we are alive, if the mind (consciousness) can separate and continue on in some fashion following death of the body/brain, then somehow mind and brain are separable and not merely “two aspects of the same underlying thing.” The separability of mind and brain does not give credence to psychophysical parallelism or idealist viewpoints about the mind, but it does support a basically dualist approach to the relationship between mind and body.

If the mind survives physical death, where does it go?

Back to the Question of the Afterlife

We are back to the notion, described in the essay on the afterlife, of the mind being capable of existing in a non-physical space. If the mind goes on after death, we certainly cannot find it anywhere in physical space. Ghosts may temporarily appear to certain people in a visual, 'spatial' form, but they have a way of "fading" or "disappearing" back into nothing.

Nonphysical realms of the mind following death are certainly quite familiar to us all. Western religions refer to them as "heaven" (and hell); Buddhists describe them in detail as the "bardos;" some Native American peoples speak a place they call Summerland, and various mystical traditions from theosophy to Rosicrucianism refer to "higher planes" or

“higher dimensions.” None of these realms can be found in physical space nor has anything to do with physical space, and yet all kinds of beings reside in these “places,” and they undergo all kinds of activities there. What enables discarnate minds or souls to undergo activities in various heavens or hells? For activities to occur in a nonphysical realm, the traditional answer has been to imagine some kind of non-physical energy. Few names for such an energy exist throughout historical religions, although theosophy and other esoteric traditions refer to “subtle energy.” The short answer to the question of where the mind goes after death is this: (1) it “resides” in a non-physical space (variously described in different

religious or mystical traditions); (2) is accompanied by all types of other minds/souls (again, depending on the particular religion or mystical tradition); and (3) gets about by utilizing a non-physical type of energy which, for lack of a better term, can be referred to as “subtle energy.”

Almost all accounts of the soul in the so-called afterlife have the above features in common. It is an ancient story that has been passed down through multiple religions for thousands of years. The names of various heavens and the beings who reside there change over cultures and times, but the basic idea of an invisible, non-physical realm occupied by non-physical forms

of energy and beings is universal. Such an account is hardly surprising; it is the best way to account for the universal belief in an afterlife as well the universal human experience of communications with deceased relatives as well as appearances of apparitions and ghosts.

To date, mainstream science has nothing to say about this “other” place—this nonphysical realm of heaven. The common scientific position is to say that we have no hard empirical evidence of such a place, and so it must remain a matter of personal belief and faith. To the author’s mind, there are no scientific laws or scientific explanations about how heaven can exist, and if so, how it can be related as a

separate “dimension” to the 4D space-time continuum of the physical universe.

In fact, it is more likely that heaven resides somewhere in consciousness—not somewhere beyond the bounds of the physical universe.

Each of us knows something about the depths of our own inner world, and we can listen to reports of others about theirs. But no one can claim to plummet the full scope and depth of the inner world of ALL consciousness, so perhaps the realm of heaven lies somewhere deep with ocean of all consciousness. If so, it could have the requisite property of being non-spatial and yet still be active.

So is it possible that consciousness extends beyond my, your, and others' consciousness to some vast "universal consciousness" whose boundaries none of us can fathom? The notion of a universal consciousness (or mind) has been proposed by quite a few philosophers from Plato to Spinoza, but, again, it is not an empirically-based, scientific construct. Here is it simply a theoretical proposal for a possible "residence" for souls in a so-called heaven and afterlife.

Other types of space

In the various heavens and hells proposed by the religions of the world, all kinds of things seem to go on. So we're back to the idea of activity in a *non-physical* type of space. One way to deal with this issue is to propose that there must be a different type of "space" in these realms. What if it turned out that the type of space involved is similar to the "space" in which dreams occur, what some people refer to as "dream space?" When we dream we are definitely active, but in physical space we don't go anywhere. Instead, we move around in "dream space." Perhaps the non-physical space of heaven is something akin to—or maybe even an extension of—"dream space." We go there every night and perhaps we may go there—or to

some place similar—after we die. Both dream space and the afterlife space reside in our deep minds or consciousness. A simple and common word to refer to them, keeping the term “space” as a metaphor, would be “inner space.” When we dream we don’t even recognize that we are inhabiting an inner space, unless we have a lucid dream—wake up and realize we are dreaming . Could it be the same in the afterlife: we have to “wake up” and recognize that we are dead, and no longer a part of the 3D spatial world, to fully get our bearings? In brief, the idea of an inner space, if such a thing exists, helps us out with the paradox of how we can continue to be active yet reside in a non-physical realm after we die. We have “receded” deep into

the inner space of consciousness, and not just our own private consciousness. We have moved beyond the entity that was our unique individual conscious mind during life and into an *open arena in the inner domains, realms, planes, levels, what have you, of "consciousness-at-large"* where we can have an ongoing, but nonmaterial, type of life. Who is each one of us in such a place? We are certainly not the conscious mind/body personality we were while inhabiting a body. We are likely to be something other than that, something referred to throughout history as the "soul."

A brief account of the soul

Every distinct religion and philosophy has its own view on the nature of the soul. A brief survey of the Wikipedia article on “soul” will produce at least thirty different philosophical and religious points of view. A common definition is to understand the soul, at least for human beings, as an immaterial, core essence that constitutes the foundation or “ground” in which all subjective, mental activity occurs. All religions of the world propose that the human soul survives the physical body at death and continues on in an afterlife realm. Buddhism alone takes exception in proposing the idea of “anatta” or “no self.” The Buddhist notion is that there is no underlying fixed state or entity behind the mind’s constantly changing

processes. When a person dies, thought forms continue but not an underlying self that holds those thought forms together. In reincarnational forms of Buddhism, these thought forms may continue and manifest a new mind and body in another reincarnation. Traditional Tibetan Buddhism takes a different view, however. It distinguishes three forms of mind: very subtle mind, subtle mind, and gross mind. Gross mind is the wakeful consciousness of everyday life, subtle mind is our unconscious mind, which manifests in dreams, and very subtle mind is a supraconscious mind that lies deeper than our unconscious mind. At death, we lose the gross mind and the subtle mind, but the very subtle mind continues on. At some point, it “catches

on” to a new subtle mind and begins to manifest a new set of habits and personality, eventually reincarnating in a gross body with a gross mind.

Among the countless other views about the soul, Kabbalah and Theosophy are noteworthy.

Jewish Kabbalah distinguishes five elements or components of the soul: one related to instinct, another to emotions and morality, another to intellect, another to awareness of God, and the final element being identical with a part of God.

Theosophy also speaks of an aspect identical with God, the *Spirit*, and distinguishes this from the Soul, an intermediate aspect of the inner human consciousness which links the Spirit to the Body. The Soul, in Theosophy, can either be

attracted to the Spirit or attracted to the material realm of the body.

The few views mentioned here attest to the fact that philosophers and theologians have imagined the human soul in many different ways. There has also been plenty of dispute about whether animals and/or inanimate objects have souls. There are two broad steps that can be recognized in extending the notion of soul beyond human beings, but each has its complications. We can imagine many types of animals having souls, but where do you draw the line. While we easily think about our pets having souls that could be similar to our own, what about flies and mosquitoes—or even

amoebae and bacteria? If we go further and extend the notion of soul—or perhaps “innate intelligence”—to **all things**, from mountains down to atomic nuclei, what kind of “intelligence” are we talking about, and again where do you draw the line? For some of us, at least, it might seem easier to imagine that mountains and rivers might have some rudimentary interior consciousness, but what about everyday household objects like pencils and spoons? One thing is certain; it is unlikely that we are all going to agree on what the soul is and who or what has a soul anytime soon. The soul, in any of its forms, does not lend itself to scientific, empirical scrutiny. It remains a hypothetical construct that many of us ascribe to

because we need something to account for our cherished idea of our continued existence beyond death.

So much for the soul. Let's return to the question of where it might "take residence" if it moves beyond the body at physical death. Both above and also in the essay on this website, *Life After Death*, it was suggested that "heaven" is certainly outside the bounds of the spatial universe and belongs to *consciousness*—not our individual consciousness but some kind of "consciousness-at-large" or "universal consciousness"-- that includes but transcends all individual consciousness. Like the term "soul," the notion of a "universal consciousness" or

“universal mind” has been described in multiple ways by various philosophers down through the centuries. It cannot be demonstrated empirically any more easily than the concept of the soul.

There are many ways to define consciousness, but in its broadest sense of “awareness” (not self-awareness but basic awareness in the form of “sentience”), there remains the question of its ultimate extent. Does it extend only to humans and vertebrate animals or down to the simplest forms of unicellular and noncellular life, including bacteria and viruses? What about plants? What about non-living entities? Philosophers have drawn the line in many places, but the *panpsychism* viewpoint offers an

interesting alternative. Pansychism, explained in more detail in the author's essay on consciousness, is the idea that consciousness pervades virtually all existing entities and processes (animate and inanimate).

Panpsychism has been popular among some philosophers. Other viewpoints that tend to limit consciousness to just *a part* of the universe have the problem of explaining how consciousness could just arise "de novo" out of nothing at a certain stage of complexity of physical entities. So the panpsychist view maintains that consciousness exists in some form—perhaps very rudimentary forms for inanimate things like rocks— *throughout* the physical universe. The interior—the "from- the-

inside-out aspect” —of everything, from atoms to snails to humans to galaxies--all exhibit an orderliness that is best explained by some type of interior “consciousness.” Even chaotic systems follow certain mathematical laws.

The physical universe did not explode into existence 13.75 billion years ago in the absence of the laws of physics. Such laws—even though not material entities in themselves— were already there, and the early universe followed them closely. So the notion of universal consciousness or mind is sometimes invoked to explain the prior existence of the laws of physics before anything physical actually existed. We can call it a “universal intelligence” or, with the

Greeks, a “universal logos” or whatever we might. However some kind of inherent ordering principle/process (aka consciousness) -- that extends throughout the entire physical universe -- makes sense to many people because it allows us to understand why there is any ordering of things at all rather than total chaos.

Materialists have an objection here. They protest *why can't matter/energy order itself*. Why do you need an extra “X”, in this case consciousness, to explain the orderliness of the universe?

Wouldn't it be more parsimonious to say that matter just orders itself? This argument has merits. A good response to this viewpoint is to say that we, ourselves, are a sample of how the

universe works, and we can't easily comprehend our own comings and goings without assuming the existence of some kind of consciousness. (The physical brain by itself does not explain the subjective contents of mind.) Since the full scope of a human being cannot be comprehended without including consciousness, the argument goes that the rest (or most of the rest) of the universe must be similarly so constituted. Otherwise humans end up being inexplicably privileged---the only point in the universe where consciousness exists. It seems more plausible to assume that some form of consciousness exists in all things and that humans are not a special case isolated from the rest.

Conclusion: The Scope of The Universe

Throughout this chapter, a case has been made for the view that **consciousness not only exists throughout all things (panpsychism) but in fact extends far beyond (or transcends) the physical universe.** So the physical universe turns out to be a *subsystem* within the “field” of consciousness—a kind of projection of consciousness into three-dimensional space, if you will—but not the entire story of the total cosmos or multiverse. There appear to be “domains” or “levels” of the multiverse that have phenomena and processes requiring *only energy and time, not space* (such as discarnate souls, for example). Perhaps the scope of the

multiverse goes even further than this. For all we know, there may be other domains that require neither time nor energy. Imagine “pure forms” that require neither time nor energy to exist. This is basically what Plato did in his “theory of the *forms*” which underlay the foundations of everything. These entities were informational only. Other principles were required to bring them down into existence.

There is no final answer to the question of the scope of the universe (multiverse). It remains a speculative, “metaphysical” issue that can only be answered by a range of alternatives. The alternatives are vast but can briefly be summarized as follows:

1. *Spatial physical universe* (not satisfactory because it doesn't account for mind)

2. *Spatial physical universe plus a finite or infinite number of other physical universes* existing in possibly different types of space—or hyperspaces—with possibly different types of physical laws. Sometimes these other spatial universes are referred to as “parallel universes.” (still not satisfactory because it doesn't account for consciousness)

3. *The physical universe (or set of all physical universes) plus consciousness.* This consciousness both pervades the interior aspect of all things within the physical, spatial universe(s) as well as having its own

inherent domains beyond space. In these nonspatial domains, processes require only energy and time (duration) for their existence. The type of energy involved is *nonphysical* and cannot presently be described by physics or the four basic types of forces in physics. It has been loosely called “subtle energy.”

3a. Nonspatial domains of consciousness that transcend the physical universe(s) have been subdivided in numerous ways by different traditions. A common ancient distinction in the history of religion is the Judeo- Christian one of “heaven(s)” and “hell(s)” This distinction may have some merit but is fraught with judgment

and the trappings of ancient religious ideology.

It is probably not useful as a basis for philosophical inquiry into the nature of nonspatial (subtle) domains.

3b. Ancient Vedanta as well as 19th century theosophy breaks down the nonspatial, subtle domain of consciousness into a series of 5-7 *levels*, sometimes called “planes,” including: etheric, astral, mental, causal, celestial, and ultimate. Theosophy in particular offers detailed descriptions of the nature and constituents of each level or “plane.” Further description of each of these different “sublevels” within the field of (subtle) consciousness is presented in the essay of this website entitled “Life Force

Energy.” There is no empirical basis for these levels, and their basis lies largely in ancient philosophical distinctions. Phenomena in all but the ultimate level are dynamic and require time and energy. The ultimate level is beyond time and energy.

4. Everything described in 1-4 plus an “ultimate” level of reality which is strictly informational or, in Plato’s view, the “form of all forms.”

Neither time nor energy is required at this level. Such a level might be a matrix for a finite or infinite number of universes that are purely subtle and temporal (nonspatial) in nature, as well as physical universes.

5. *The set of all existent universes (including purely formal or informational ones) plus the set of all possible universes permitted by logic and mathematics. Some philosophers have argued that in comprehending the largest cosmos conceivable, we need to include all possible universes that can exist without defying logic. In the end, this would seem to be as big as the cosmos can get. Whether possible universes actually exist probably comes down to how we want to define the word "exist."*

References

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