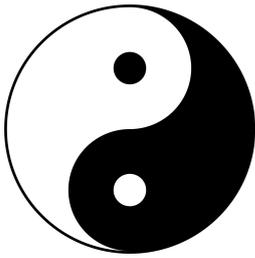


## **“The Attraction of Opposites – a bit of this and that ”**

*“You open the gates of the soul to let the dark food of chaos flow into your order and meaning. If you marry the ordered to the chaos you produce the divine child, the supreme meaning beyond meaning and meaninglessness.”*

*C. G. Jung: The Red Book, page 235*

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Born of this earth we come into it, if things go well, with the necessary anatomy to make our way in the world. Several billion years of evolution have equipped us with two hands, two arms, two feet, two legs, two eyes and so on; all we need to thrive as humans. Even our brains have two hemispheres! At first we are as helpless babes but then we grow and learn control of our soft machines, we stride out, upright, as bilaterally symmetrical beings, all matching pairs in motion, reflected opposites, from pretty much top to bottom.

Given this bodily foundation it is perhaps not surprising that our minds seem to possess a similar innate symmetry. From a very early age we begin to actively construct the world from related dualities. We paint our picture of the world through pairs of opposites. From before we can speak we learn and are actively taught these opposites as a means to divide the world into compelling common sense pairs; up-down, left-right, in-out, hot-cold, big-small, mind-matter; on and on it goes, seemingly ad infinitum. The experienced immediacy of these opposites soon establishes them as the coordinates, the map, by which we navigate the everyday world. Very quickly such discriminations become embedded as second nature, establishing a hypnotic hold over us. While these distinctions are clearly necessary to navigate the everyday round difficulties may arise when, as we shall see, the attraction of opposites becomes all embracing. When we cling to such concepts as fundamental aspects of reality.

Science has achieved great things by refining these discriminations via the working method of reductionism. It has attained a triumph of predictive and explanatory success that has imbued its discoveries and theories with a strong, if not

overwhelming, sense of clarity and certainty; all accomplished by dividing the world into smaller and ever smaller pieces. Science has constructed much of its compelling success through formalising these divisions and in the process carrying the splitting of reality to previously unimaginable degrees by utilising ever more sensitive and sophisticated technologies. These same technologies have enabled science to extend the reach of reality, the known extent of time and space, to billions of times the bounds once envisaged by our ancestors. The objective and concretised worldview that emerged from the rational enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was largely based on Newtonian science and its outlook. This has become so ingrained in society that it is still, even now, the prevailing world “myth”. It is a worldview in which there is little or no room for the spirit or psyche other than as epiphenomena of a physical and material world where space and time, energy and matter are viewed as the essential foundations for what is considered real. For many who are antithetical to the scientific endeavour this perspective has become a convenient stick with which to beat science for it clearly dismisses and ignores, or at the very least explicitly puts to one side, any consideration of those aspects of human experience that do not readily fall under examination by the scientific method, namely spirit, subjectivity and consciousness.

As we might expect in a consideration of the attraction of opposites there is, of course, another side to this particular coin. There is also that universal tendency, that desire, to unite, to bring together that which appears separate, to seek the one in all things, to view things holistically, to integrate and to dissolve barriers. It is not hard to find these conflating ideas in spiritual texts both ancient and modern, while these same trends are also no stranger to the scientific endeavour, in which field their importance has risen to much greater significance in the last hundred years or so.

It is, I think, fair to say that in both science and religion the tendency to categorise and objectify has come to dominate, so that both these arenas of human experience have come to be subsumed within the commonly held western “myth” in which reality is popularly taken to comprise objective matter and energy existing in

absolute space and time. Given that this particular worldview has been formalised and championed by science, religion and spirituality have, on a societal scale, increasingly been forced to take a back seat, seemingly required to fight a never ending losing battle against the prevailing materialistic perspective. Any defense of spirituality, conducted largely on the territory established by science, has necessarily proved unsuccessful, while any real attempt to articulate and establish a widely accepted religious or spiritual alternative has also largely foundered. The current worldview, established and coming to dominance on the greatly finessed objective observation of the outer world provided by science, has proved highly resistant to any ingress of the spirit or psyche. At the same time the fruits of the scientific method and scientific experimentation have fallen with increasing rapidity from the tree of technological knowledge, emphasising both the power and utility of scientific wizardry.

This, perhaps, need not have been an inevitable course of events. In eastern religions such as Buddhism and Taoism the primacy of matter, form and objects was the subject of deep questioning and scepticism from the very outset and led to a world view that gave primacy to process and change in nature and was more inclined to focus on the fundamental interdependencies of things rather than the properties perceived as belonging or intrinsic to those things. This is a more relational worldview where objects exist not so much in and of themselves but arise solely through the network of relationships in which they partake. From this viewpoint the phenomena of the world are frequently considered illusory. This position is maintained not to deny the existence of the manifold objects of the everyday world but rather to emphasise that they have no intrinsic or independent existence in their own right. The Buddhist emphasis on continual change and the dependent origination of all things sums this up succinctly. It is mirrored by Buddhist cautions as to the dangers of attachment, whether the object of desire is of a material, conceptual, emotional or ideological nature.

This “eastern” worldview was largely established and verified on the greatly finessed objective (yes, objective) observation of a persisting inner world through

reproducible meditative methods tested and confirmed by countless practitioners century after century. The attitude adopted here, of observing the inner world with an emphasis on personal verification and repeatability under constrained “experimental” conditions, is one that I would argue has striking similarities to the scientific approach.

Science itself is far from immune to such unifying and holistic trends. Not only can these be clearly discerned in science they are of necessity the very essence of its global theories that seek to explain specific phenomena through the operation of all encompassing fundamental laws.

By way of illustration, in the life sciences, having divided the species of the living world up via the binomial scientific nomenclature of Linnaeus, unifying tendencies become clear in Darwin’s theory of evolution, and in modern ecological theory that bind the organic and inorganic world together through the planet wide systemic processes of nature. Over in physics Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity melds and dissolves all our common sense notions of space and time into one continuum where no objective, universal “now”, no universally agreed present moment, can be established and in which neither space nor time are absolute. The discoveries of quantum mechanics similarly dispose of our simple notions of here and there, this and that, throwing them into deepest confusion, while we are also forced to confess that we can find “no stuff in matter”. There is nothing solid on which to stand. All these advances do not prevent scientists from continuing to seek grander and more all-embracing concepts with overtly ambitious names such as the Theory of Everything (TOE) and the Grand Unified Theory (GUT); but still not including spirit or psyche.

From my perspective it seems clear that two opposing trends can be discerned in the fields of science and religion/spirituality. One is the tendency to divide and categorise the phenomena of the world, in an attempt to achieve an ordered and coherent world view, while the counter tendency is to unify and seek a common underpinning or source from which all phenomena draw their being. There is, it

seems, a fundamental commonality here, which speaks to our most basic proclivities for comprehending the world, both inside and out.

I am inclined to view fundamentalists, of both the religious and scientific kind, as those of a conservative bent who prefer to have faith in fixed beliefs, the common (sense) currency handed down by their society or peers, those who seek to concretise in order to safely contain any fresh experience within traditional frameworks. This is not to be inherently critical of this position. In the case of religion, where a particular tradition is alive and vibrant and still has general social credence it undoubtedly presents at least the possibility of offering sanctuary to those upon whom strong inner experiences are visited. Without such a framework the individual is left to come to terms with such events in solitude, not an enviable task. The downside is of course the chance of having the “anomalous experience” dismissed or declared mad if it cannot be accommodated in the current framework either by the relevant authorities or the individuals themselves.

On the other hand there are the spiritual seekers, those who are driven to seek a more personal revelation of their inner world because they are, for whatever reason, unable to accept the traditional social frameworks, formulations and worldview. I would argue that across the major religious traditions, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Taoism the revelation is that the path followed here is one leading to the discovery and direct experience of a unity and universality of existence that gives rise to all individual phenomena and underpins their very being. Where the experienced reality that is revealed is far removed from common or socially received sense and where its subsequent distillation and expression is inevitably couched in terms that appear paradoxical at best and completely irrational at worst. As here;

*“Concerning this the Lord says in a mystery, ‘Unless you make on the right hand as what is on the left and what is on the left hand as what is on the right and what is above as what is below and what is behind as what is before you will not have knowledge of the kingdom.’” The apocryphal Acts of Peter – XXXVIII*

The Gospel of Thomas provides many similar examples.

At their far frontiers perhaps both science and spirituality suffer a similar problem. How to communicate? How to describe phenomena beyond the normal horizon of experience and which do not lend themselves to easy description using language that evolved to meet the context and needs of the everyday. The means by which the universal laws of science or the anomalous experiences of spirituality are expressed therefore becomes problematic for both. Because our many languages are universally rooted in everyday experience and are so attached to the apparent reality of the opposites they do not adequately convey the nature of the reality discovered or encountered by unification and integration. Perhaps our words are better suited to designate things rather than to revealing process and dimension. Science of course has its very own language of mathematics, which does a far better job than the spoken word in this regard, although this still leaves scientists with the hard job of translating all the niceties and ramifications of a “simple formulae” into a plain vernacular comprehensible to the average man or woman.

Einstein’s  $E=mc^2$  is probably the most famous scientific formulae of all time and like other scientific formulae it makes a universal statement concerning the manner in which phenomena of nature, in this case, energy (E), mass (m) and the speed of light (c) relate to one another. Although they are universal in nature the great strength of such a formula is that it can be used in every specific situation encountered and also make predictions about what will occur under circumstances where the phenomena has not previously been directly encountered or observed.

If science has maths and mathematical formulae as its language of choice what does religion and spirituality have with which to convey the universals, the ineffable, the eternal truths of the inner world? There are, of course, always the arts; painting, sculpture, music and poetry. However, there are also forms of words that at first glance appear as meaningless and mystifying to our verbal understanding as advanced mathematics appears to our everyday notions of number and arithmetic.

My favourite spiritual examples come from Buddhism, where some of its branches use words to logically deconstruct the world while others, as in Zen, use them to present impossible counter intuitive conundrums, the koans, which throw the very meaning of the words and any concepts they clothe into question. In both cases the common goal is perhaps to demonstrate or reveal the conditioned and habituated nature of our everyday experience of the world, to cut through the mundane to expose the root of all being and becoming, the immediacy of a fundamental reality, a pristine awareness, in which all experienced phenomena are subsumed in the knowing now.

Given that these two trends to divide and to combine, to multiply and to unite, are clearly present in both religion and science are we straining credibility to propose that there are self-similar archetypal notions that underpin understanding across the realms of human experience. That when the traditional religions speak of "God's heavenly eternal realm" we overlook the unconscious foundations this may share with "man's earthly temporal abode" of scientific investigation. Are spirit and matter enfolded in a mirrored embrace in which each is a reflection of the other and both are reflected within something much greater still? That spirit and matter are both metaphysical beliefs?

In the spiritual sphere the progression from the plurality of animism, through paganism and polytheism, culminating in the great unified monotheistic religions is perhaps one expression of this great archetypal transformation. While over in science the clockwork universe of Newtonian mechanics with its clear causal lines connecting one of infinitely many atomic billiard balls to the next has been subsumed by quantised fields in which all phenomena become smeared out probabilistic events even causing many physicists to throw up there hands at any attempt to describe or understand any true, ultimately real, underlying reality.

There are many quotes from scientists that might be given lest anyone doubts that thoughtful scientists themselves are prepared to recognise the limits of scientific knowledge and certitude. Two of my favourites are from Arthur Eddington who,

although not so well known now, was a renowned contemporary of Einstein. Given below, the first acknowledges the outright mystery of it all while the second hints at the mysteries of relationships and identity, strongly suggesting that even our most basic notions require a radical re-evaluation.

- *"Something unknown is doing we don't know what".*
- *We used to think that if we knew 1 we knew 2, as 1 and 1 are 2. We're finding we must learn a great deal more about "and".*

We are then forced to conclude that simple everyday words like Matter or Spirit or God (or even "and") merely clothe our ignorance for we cannot in either case bottom them out. We seemingly fail to find any firm bedrock on which to stand. We are forever condemned to build on sandy soil. But we are not quite done yet. Consider the following formulation of a well-known Buddhist perspective:

**Not this**

**Not that**

**Not this and that**

**Not not this and that**

Tautological claptrap? Not quite as concise as  $E=mc^2$  perhaps but it strikes me as just as profound. Both take just a second to read but their ramifications are unending. Scientists are still discovering new aspects of Einstein's theories, still using them to ask new and universally pertinent questions. Similarly the Buddhist luminary Nagarjuna is probably most well known for his use of the Indian fourfold logical tool the tetralemma given in an abbreviated form above. This seems to me like a convenient verbal formula into which you can plug any pair of opposites you choose. I invite you to give it a try and see where it leads you. I offer two examples to start you on your way.

**Not inside**

**Not outside**

**Not inside and outside**

**Not, not inside and outside**

**(Then where?)**

**Not matter (stuff)**

**Not mind (spirit)**

**Not matter and mind**

**Not, not matter and mind**

**(Then what?)**

*(A do it yourself kit for 21<sup>st</sup> Century koans perhaps?)*

This formulation with its emphasis upon NOT may strike some as unduly negative, even defeatist. To my mind that is not the intention. I take it as an ultimately positive expression which, by denying all the categories by which we habitually understand the world points us towards, encourages us to confront, the eternal mystery which lies “beyond”. It encourages us to turn our everyday face to the “knowing now” and in doing so come to a true recognition of ourselves. We might conclude that the singular and universal NOW, beloved of mystics, is not, as Einstein has shown us, about a temporally objective present moment in time, but rather it resides in the heart, the ever knowing spirit of pristine awareness?

Throughout this piece I have, quite naturally, attempted to be clear in my meaning and to be rational in my approach but as my headline quotation from C. G. Jung makes clear this not enough. Facing the mystery requires holding hands with both the rational and the irrational which together lead to another world where feelings, symbols, dream images, visions and equations are the conveyors of meaning rather than words.

*“Nowhere else but in the psyche of the individual can the union be completed and the essential identity of Idea and Matter be experienced and perceived” C. G Jung*

We are therefore asked to be active participants in this endeavour. We cannot stand objectively aside and pretend we are uninterested observers, for now even scientists involved in researching the mysteries of quantum mechanics must wrestle with the role of the conscious observer in determining the outcome of an experiment.

In my own case my conscious efforts to reconcile the opposites have, across a lifetime, displayed themselves in the form of dreams and in meetings there with many spontaneous and autonomous personified entities from the unconscious realms. These have been among the most valuable experiences of my life and have done much to disabuse me of what is held to be common or even scientific sense. Such encounters have completely reshaped my worldview. The feeling, the power and the impact of such dreams is hard to convey but I offer the following example where the interplay of scientific concepts with what might be viewed as more spiritual matters is plain enough.

***Dream 405: 12th January 2001. Atop the Stepped Stupa***

*The sound, the feeling...SSSSTTTUUUUUUPPPPPAAAAHHHHH... whoosh.... and then I'm in. I am presented with a luminous field of being. In plan this is composed of concentric circles of awareness but when viewed in relief it is clear that is an energetic, rippling, rotating dynamic field. Like electrons in the concentric shells of atoms some parts of the field have the potential to be in a much higher energy state, these are recognised as individual stupas, which equate to individual centres of awareness, individual centres of being, individual people. They are all part of one and the same field but they all experience the field from there own perspective. Zooming in on one "individual" stupa I can see that it has its own concentric, stepped, quantised, energy levels. On the top level of this stupa I find myself laid out in my coffin. DEAD. It's true then. You can't see much of me. Just my feet protrude from under a striped funeral towel, which has a drawstring pulled tight over my head. I get the impression that the wavy lines of the towel are indicative of how it channels the energy of the field through my being and strongly suggests that although I am dead I am still energised by the field. The field is now my being, the "thing" of MY "mind", MY "life" is no more.*

Is it too much to imagine that in the modern world there is the hope that the apparently dissimilar approaches of science and religion might at last be coming together, that we can acknowledge some commonality? Science has since the end of the 19th Century taken on fresh explanatory modes as a result Darwin's evolutionary

theory, Einstein's relativity and the insights of the many founding fathers of quantum mechanics. These scientific developments have thrown all previously held western views of reality into profound question and by any fair assessment have brought us back, face-to-face, with the very same mysteries of being that have always characterised human experience and that have been the focus of spiritual endeavours for millennia.

Within science it is not now at all clear where "the answers" lie and surprisingly there is an increasing consideration being given to the idea that at least part of "the answer" may lie in the nature of human consciousness and awareness, an area that mystics and spiritual luminaries have explored for millennia using the only "consciousness meter" we have ever had at our disposal - the human mind. Can we embrace the best of both spirituality and science? Can we build the bridge of relationships across the seeming chasm between them? Such work is surely essential if any nascent worldview or myth that might now be emerging is to come to full term.

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*The self, which includes me, includes many others also. For the unconscious that is conceived in our minds does not belong to me and is not peculiar to me, but is everywhere. It is the quintessence of the individual and at the same time the collective.*

*Carl Jung, CW 13, Page 182.*

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#### **Further sources:**

- **Einstein and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings.**  
Edited b Thomas J McFarlane, ISBN 1-56975-337-7

This is one of my favourite small books. Anyone who is interested in the congruencies between science and religion will find this book a delight. The thoughts of many other scientific and mystic luminaires are quoted as well as those of Einstein and Buddha. Short explanatory chapters provide excellent background and context to the sayings.

- **Towards the First Revolution in Mind Sciences (1 hour 2 mins):**  
a lecture by Alan Wallace

**Available on YouTube:** It is hard to imagine someone better placed than Alan Wallace to discuss the relationship and congruencies between science and

spirituality. He holds degrees in both Physics and Religious Studies and for fourteen years studied and practiced as a Buddhist monk. Well worth a view.

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