

M&M Session 5.3 – Follow-Up – Where is Consciousness?

Metaphysics & Mystery Online Course

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Charles Eisenstein: Hey everybody, I wanted to add a little extra comment on the theme of “what is consciousness?” that came up in the course. I mentioned in the invitation Bernardo Kastrup’s metaphor of an eddy or a whirlpool in a stream of consciousness that our brains and out separate selves bring some interruption or turbulence or capture a little bit of the stream of consciousness and temporarily hold it inside a self. Another metaphor that I’ve heard before is that the brain is a receiving and maybe a receiving and transducing device that instantiates consciousness which originates from beyond the brain and is not generated by or located in the brain. I recently heard a podcast, a new podcast, or a series by Mark Guber entitled *Where is My Mind?* that references some of these ideas and I’ve been listening to it with my fourteen year old son Philip. It give a lot pretty strong evidence, kind of introductory level stuff, not a lot of it was new to me, but it gives pretty strong evidence that consciousness cannot be located in the brain. It talks about near death experiences, various experiments in parapsychology, telepathy and so forth, savants, some really interesting stuff. We listened to one program and it described some of Rupert Sheldrake’s experiments where, you know how when somebody calls sometimes you know who it is? The skeptical mind says, “well I just don’t remember the times when I called and I didn’t know who it was so times that I guessed right, those loom larger in my memory.” It’s called a selection bias. Anyway, so he Rupert Sheldrake tested it by having... I believe it was Rupert Sheldrake who did this, anyway he had four possible people that would be randomly chosen to call you and when the phone rang you would guess which one it was. They did many, many, many trials and over I don’t know how many hundreds of thousands of trials the correct guess rate was not one in four as you would expect, but 45%, almost one in two. That might not seem that impressive to the non-mathematically minded person, but the odds against to that were stated in the show were something like 22 octodecillion to one. Octodecillion? That’s approximately the number of atoms in the galaxy; it’s kind of that order of magnitude, the chances of picking just the right one. So that was impressive and then they described the Ganzfeld Experiment where they have people in separate rooms, the person in one room is given randomly one of four photographs or images and then attempts to send it telepathically to the person in the other room who then guesses which of the four it is. Philip and I listened to this and Philip, with his very already well developed critical mind, said, “well I see a flaw in that experiment because the person choosing the photograph might choose one that is kind of the one people would normally choose,” and there might be a psychological tendency to choose certain images and therefore the person receiving quote unquote might also have that same psychological tendency and kind of guess, “oh, so here’s what someone might choose.” It was a good objection except for the fact that the photos or the images are assigned randomly, but you know the guys thinking. The odds, they did it again many, many iterations of the test and the success rate was something like 32 or 33 percent and over the number of trials that they did that was trillions and trillions to one odds of that happening. Then I jokingly said to Philip, “well, the reason that we have these results is simply that all of the trillions and trillions of other experiments that didn’t bring significant results, those never or published, we never heard about those. Philip was like, “trillions and trillions of other studies?” because you know obviously there haven’t been trillions of studies. There might have been a few dozen or a few hundred even so that way of explaining it away doesn’t really hold. Now what do professional skeptics, professional debunkers, what do they say about it? Usually they resort to saying well you haven’t eliminated cheating. The experimenter could be making it up. Was there independent oversight? Was there some way

that maybe the senders were tapping and tapping the wall between them or tapping the floor,? How do we know? Are we going to overturn our entire view of reality, our entire view of the universe and overturn science just because of this one thing which could have been cheating? What does Occam's razor say, Occam's razor, which is the philosophical principal that the simplest explanation is the right one. What's simpler, to reject all of science or to say this guy was probably cheating? This is something really significant ok, I want to take this to a level beyond where Mark Guber's excellent podcast goes, which is basically trying to establish the objective reality of psi-phenomena and other things that show that the consciousness is not located in the brain because this is what we're talking about here, what is consciousness, right? So there is another level here because when you say ok, I'm going to absolutely make sure that there's no cheating to an extent that will satisfy James Randi, a professional magician who likes to debunk these things. In fact, maybe we'll bring him on sight and have him oversee the experiment, make it absolutely impossible to cheat. When that is done often the results disappear and you get just statistical randomness. In general the more rigorous the protocols the less of an effect you get. The famous example of Uri Geller, the Israeli psychic who was famous for bending spoons right in people's faces without touching them and stuff like that, but when they brought him into really rigorous conditions his abilities seemed to disappear. If it was semi-rigorous conditions or the CIA maybe doing experiments on him, but those are not made public that keeps it in a corner of reality that is insulated from the story the skeptics story, which is really the story of the separate self in a world of force because there's no scientifically recognized force that could enable such things to happen. So here we are in rigorous condition and it doesn't work very well or at all so the skeptics can say, "see, there was cheating" and when we stop the possibility of cheating then there is no effect, just as we would expect, reality is just as we thought it would be. Another way to look at it though, and for me to think that sometimes reputable scientists who have nothing to gain from venturing into this territory like Daryl Bem is another one, an eminent psychologist, I'll mention him again in a minute. That's actually not a very simple explanation that these people just throw away their careers and commit fraud. So anyway, there's another explanation which is that... well a couple, one is that the presence of a very, very skeptical person who's imposing his control over the entire experiment, that suppresses the telepathy which exists in a field of interbeing. You could even say that the presence of that skeptic, especially if it's a hostile skeptic, is a proxy for the story in which this kind of thing cannot happen. The more the experimental set up enters into the reality field, that includes this story of separation, the less of an effect you're going to get. This makes it fundamentally unprovable. It's as if the universe conspires to present such things in a way that you have to make a choice about what to believe. This goes back to one of the earlier topics that a state of belief is a state of being because where does this choice come from? Basically it's saying that reality isn't going to make your choice for you, that we always have an opportunity to choose. You can see another anecdote on Mark Guber's podcast was a neurosurgeon who they made some kind of error and this guy, I think she's a woman actually, she has this near death experience in which she's on the ceiling and she sees everything happening in the room and she wakes up and says, "hey, I was on the ceiling" and the neurosurgeon says, "that's bologna" and she says, "no, really. I saw this, I saw that." She names all the things she saw. Someone's phone went off and they said this and everybody else, all the other assistants in the operating room were like, "oh my gosh, how did she know that?" They were blown away, but the neurosurgeon was like, "I'm not going to stand around here listening to this crap." Just as Galileo's critics refused to even look into the telescope "I'm not going to waste my time with something that's obviously impossible?" I'll just mention that reality is constructed so that if we want to we can maintain our belief bubble. I want to mention just one more, Daryl Bem who published very, very, very well constructed

studies on recognition and telepathy and published them in I think it was the *Journal of the American Society for Personalities and Sociology*, something like that, one of the top tiered journals and his methods were beyond reproach. Nobody thought he was cheating, but that was taken as evidence that there's something wrong with our statistical methods because an obviously impossible result has been demonstrated. Now there are actually problems with statistical methods that are used in science. That is a valid way to take it, but just to assume that this is an impossible result therefore there must be a problem with our statistics or with our the experimenter fraud, with the design or something like that. Basically that is an anti-scientific position that says no amount of evidence will change my mind and in a way that is healthy and universal. No amount of evidence will change my mind because my mind is not changed by evidence. When my mind is ready to change I will gather the appropriate evidence and when I'm on that verge of change, then the evidence will change my mind or it will seem that the evidence is changing my mind, but really the change is coming from somewhere else. So I want to just finally bring this back to consciousness. I do recommend you, if you're very skeptical of such things, do recommend you check out *Where is My Mind?* Mark Guber's podcast and really to even say that the question of where is consciousness located it in the brain or outside the brain? Is it generated by the brain or received by the brain? Even that is putting some kind of objective reality prior to consciousness itself, so I want to offer perhaps that it is consciousness that is elemental and I mention this in the original material, that consciousness is a primary feature of the universe and that to try to explain in terms of other things might be getting it backwards. Not claiming this, but offering this as something to think on. Finally I'll say to notice where the ideas take you, when you think about consciousness being beyond the brain, when you think about it not being limited to the separate self and not dying when you die, when you consider that we can know each others consciousness, that we can be intimately intertwined even not with just people but with a rock. Where does that take you? How does it feel to live in that reality? And maybe we can use that feeling as one of the important guides to our choosing because then we're choosing how do I want to be and who am I? Thank you.