



THEOPHANY



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Dr., Dr. Spyridon K. Tsitsigkos
3 Ant. Nika, Chalkida – 34132 GREECE
stsitsig@gmail.com

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GENERAL DIRECTOR**Spyridon K. Tsitsigkos, MA, DD, PhD***Professor of the Psychology of Religion*

School of Religious Studies & Social Theology, University of Athens

☎ +30-2221078428, +30-6943627235, ✉ stsitsig@gmail.com**CHIEF EDITOR:****Markella Bibidakis**

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stsitsig@gmail.com

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THEOPHANY

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THE ROLE OF RELIGIOSITY IN COPING WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A REVIEW

By

Mantzanas Michail, Professor

University – Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens

National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, School of Philosophy, Department of
Philosophy, Laboratory of Counseling Philosophy and Philosophy of Self-knowledge

and

Tsiligros Panagiotis, MD, PhD

National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, School of Philosophy, Department of
Philosophy, Applied Philosophy Research Lab

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic is an emerging threat to humanity and all methods to address it, if not to control it, are urgently needed. Religion is one of the earliest and most important coping mechanisms. Scientific evidence in this area is accumulating rapidly. Although it is not yet conclusive, it brings to light the many beneficial effects of religiosity on human psychology during this crisis. However, there is a clear need for stronger research.

Introduction

In the past two years, two immeasurable realities of human experience are intertwined and sometimes clashed. One is a millennium lifestyle. The other is a two years old grid of scientific beliefs and governmental practices, albeit with a prehistory of some centuries, at least as far as it regards the ways to govern a population¹. The former is religion. The second is the amalgamation of scientific and governmental techniques ratified to respond to a specific emergency. The urgency is the COVID-19 pandemic.

The relationship between both realities is complex, ambivalent and bilateral. Religiosity is affected in different ways by the new threat and greatly affects people's attitudes towards the pandemic and its medical management. On the other hand, medical outcomes are correlated to religious practices in different ways. In particular, religion plays a critical role in addressing this new pandemic. A review of available documentation is essential to better understand some of these complexities.

The significance of religion on perceived physical and mental health.

Religion has been an important way to cope with the disease since time immemorial. Long before medicine started to evolve on a scientific basis, something that could be traced to the practice and legacy of Hippocrates (or those who composed the Hippocratic corpus²), religion played a central role both in coping with disease and in facing the multiple challenges that disease presented both to the biology and to the social life of the sufferers³.

¹ Foucault, M., *Histoire de la sexualite I: La volonte de savoir*, (1976), ed. Gallimard, pp. 184-185.

² Ackernecht, E.H., *A short History of Medicine* (1982), The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 55-57.

³ Sigerist, H.E., *Civilization and Disease*, 1943, Cornell University Press, pp. 131-134.

Many of the general population consider religious faith and beneficial practices for the mental and physical health of believers. Many scientists agree with this opinion, whereas others believe that religion can be detrimental to human health. Opinions about the potential benefits and harms of religiosity vary greatly and the research evidence is, at best, diverse, partial and inconclusive. This is the main reason why most healthcare professionals are reluctant to incorporate a religious dimension and perspective in the care of their patients. Obviously, that's not avoidance, it's a better understanding⁴.

It is worth noting that as early as 1910 the Flexner report⁵ was released in the United States. Among other things, the report clearly stated that there is no place for religion in medicine and that medicine is a purely scientific subject, with no place for Theology or Philosophy⁶. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that western medicine, particularly as it is practiced in the United States and in Western Europe, does not integrate religion as part of its arsenal.

However, people respond to religion in different ways. Public opinion polling in 14 countries during the fall of 2020 suggests that for a median of 10% of participants, their religious faith grew stronger as a result of the pandemic. The median is 15 per cent when asked about the religious faith of people in their country. That includes the countries of western Europe, as well as South Korea and Japan. This is likely the result of rapid secularization in Western Europe, as well as low levels of religious affiliation and observance in East Asia. However, rates in the US almost tripled: 28% saw their religious faith strengthened and the same rate applies to the faith of their compatriots⁷.

During the pandemic, levels of psychological stress rise significantly, affecting people's lives and health. Various methods are used to confront the new threat with varying levels of success. In adverse times, religion is and has always been an important coping mechanism for young⁸ and old⁹ alike¹⁰. It is important to assess the anxiety of death and tackle it through religious rituals and coping mechanisms¹¹. Religious faith, spiritual belief and life satisfaction reduce feelings of anguish associated with death and reduce psychological instability¹².

⁴ Koenig, H.G., King, D.E., & Carson, V.B., *Handbook of Religion and Health* (2012), Oxford University Press, second ed., pp. 53-71.

⁵ Flexner, A., *Medical education in the United States and Canada: a report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*. Bulletin No 4, (1910), New York City.

⁶ Puchalski, C.M., "Religion, Medicine and Spirituality: what we know, what we don't know and what we do." *Asian Pac J Cancer Prev*, 2010, 11, Suppl 1, pp. 45-49.

⁷ Pew Research Center, January 2021, "More Americans than people in other advanced economies say COVID-19 have strengthened religious faith". Assessed at https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2021/01/01.27.21_covid.Religion.report.pdf 12/08/22

⁸ Cotton, S. et al., "Religion / spirituality and adolescent health outcomes: a review.", *Journal of Adolescent Health*, (2006), 38 (4), 472-480.

⁹ Chang, B.H., Noonan, A.E. and Tennstedt, S.L. "The role of Religion / Spirituality in coping with caregiving for disabled elders", *The Gerontologist*, (1998), 4, 463-470.

¹⁰ Rodriguez-Galan, M.B., & Falcon, L.M., "Religion as a coping mechanism for health problems and depression among aging Puerto Ricans on the Mainland", *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging*, (2018), 30 (2), 130-153.

¹¹ Pandya, A.K., & Kathuria, T., "Death anxiety, Religiosity and Culture: implications for therapeutic process and future research", *Religions*, (2021), 12, 61, <https://doi.org/103390/rel12010061>.

¹² Mohammadzadeh, A., & Najafi, M., "The comparison of death anxiety, obsession, and depression between Muslim population with positive and negative religious coping", *Journal of Religion and Health*, (2020), 59: 1055-64.

Empirical data on religious coping

A cross-sectional study carried out in Brazil in May 2020 found strong use of religious and spiritual beliefs during the pandemic. This was associated with better health outcomes: higher levels of hope and lower levels of fear and sadness¹³. However, there are limitations, like the nature of the study and the fact that Brazil is a very religious country.

A similar study in Poland in March 2020 yielded similar results. It is interesting that the main study group is 21- to 35-year-olds. Contrary to the perceived crisis of faith in the younger generations, the study proved that religious faith and prayer are of great importance in this age group. Women are more interested in religious beliefs and practices than men. It should also be noted that the age group of seniors has experienced increased religiosity¹⁴.

Another study from Poland¹⁵ focused on specific aspects of religiosity in dealing with the psychological problems caused by the pandemic. Religiosity is interpreted as a multidimensional construction with effects that can only be described as linear. Among others, the CRS-Huber scale was used, which combined a psychological and a sociological approach and identified five components of religiosity: interest in religious issues, religious beliefs, prayer, religious experience and worship¹⁶. Among these, prayer and religious experience were found to be particularly significant, especially for post-traumatic stress disorder.

In a transversal study of Malaysian students from March to June 2020, levels of psychological disorders, religiosity and religious adaptation were estimated. Students belonged to various faiths (Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism). It was reported that 36% of students had a psychological disorder, which is in line with the findings of the general population. It was found that religious coping plays a significant role in psychological well-being, with positive religious coping associated with protection against psychological disorder, particularly by creating a sense of hope and optimism in the face of the pandemic¹⁷. Another cross-cultural study of undergraduate students from four different cultural environments (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovenia and the United States of America) and with predominantly different religions (Catholics, Muslims, Serbian Orthodox and Protestant denominations) before the covid era showed interesting results. Among the various methods of religious adaptation used, participation in religious services seems to be the most effective method of reducing anxiety in the four samples¹⁸. Other studies among university students suggest similar results¹⁹, insisting that an individual's resilience is tied to belief in the existence of God²⁰.

¹³ Luchetti, G. et al., "Spirituality, Religiosity and the mental health consequences of social isolation during Covid-19 pandemic", *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 2021, 67(6), 672-679.

¹⁴ Kowalczyk, O. et al., "Religion and Faith Perception in a Pandemic of COVID-19", *Journal of Religion and Health*, 2020, 59, 2671-2677.

¹⁵ Szalachowski, R., Tuczynska-Bogucka W., "Dies Irae? The role of religiosity in Dealing with Psychological Problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic – studies on a polish sample", *Religions*, (2021), 12 (4), 267, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12040267>.

¹⁶ Huber, S., *Zentralitaet und Inhalt. Ein neues multidimensionales Messmodell der Religiositaet* (2003), Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH.

¹⁷ Rahimi, A.C., Bakar, R.S. and Mohd Yasin M.A., "Psychological well-being of Malaysian University students during COVID-19 pandemic: do religiosity and religious coping matter?", *Healthcare*, (2021), 9, 1535. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9111535>.

¹⁸ Lavric, M. & Flere, S., "Trait anxiety and measures of religiosity in four cultural settings.", *Mental Health Religion and Culture*, (2010), (7), 667-682.

¹⁹ Khoo, S.S., Toh, W.X., & Yang, H., "Seeking control during uncontrollable times: control abilities and religiosity predict stress during COVID-19", *Personality and individual differences*, (2021), 175, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110675>.

²⁰ Edara, I.E., et al., "Religiosity, Emotions, Resilience and Wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic: a study of Taiwanese university students", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2021, 18, 6381, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18126381>.

For older people, the results appear to be in line with those of younger people. Consequently, in a cross-sectional study from November 2020 to January 2021 in Iran, religiosity and religious coping were shown to help older people to develop better mental health during the pandemic. Seniors with higher religious levels were less likely to experience anxiety and depression. Another interesting implication is that health workers are able to guide older adults to use religious adaptation to their advantage when dealing with high levels of psychological distress²¹. In the general public, the pandemic has dramatically raised anxiety levels, according to a study in Pakistan. On the other hand, increased religiosity appeared to be a vital outcome of the pandemic, seemingly serving as an important coping mechanism²².

Data from European countries point to similar results. A study from Italy suggests that when a member of the family tested positive for COVID-19, higher religiosity was evidenced in family members, particularly those that has a religious socialization at an early age. Another study in the U.S. and the U.K. showed that COVID-19 anxiety reinforced the religious beliefs of people who had been raised in religion at a young age. Consequently, in dramatic circumstances, it is possible to cope with religion, even in secularized societies²³. Another study among American Orthodox Jews showed that positive religious coping, intrinsic religiosity and trust in God had a strong correlation to less stress and positive health outcomes, the reverse correlation (less religiosity leading to more stress) holding also true²⁴.

Lastly, an interesting article from Spain focused on the effects of meaning in life, religiosity and spirituality in post-traumatic growth during the pandemic. The findings are revealing and help to distinguish between spirituality on the one hand and religiosity on the other. Every one of these dimensions of meaning contributes differently to post-traumatic growth. When looking at total growth, only religion was positively associated with it. The same applies to patterns that predict interpersonal and social growth. This is in line with other studies, also suggesting that psychological functioning is generally better among religious people than among those who do not have a religious faith²⁵.

Empirically based data on the effects of religion on public health measures.

A brief overview of the role of religiosity in immunization efforts and the spread of COVID-19 has to do with the role of religion as a coping mechanism. Public health measures, such as vaccination, are greatly affected by religious attitudes. While this is not about coping psychologically, it is a more holistic way of dealing with COVID-19. Hence, it should be noted that, despite the fact that the role of vaccination in the control of the epidemic is considered vital by experts and authorities worldwide, there is significant reluctance towards the practice by different populations. The response from the different churches varies considerably. Religions such as Buddhism or Judaism are generally supportive of vaccination. Muslims reject vaccines containing pig meat products. The Vatican rejects vaccines derived from cell lines

²¹ Ghoncheh, K.A., Liu, C.H. et al., "Fear of COVID-19 and religious coping mediate the associations between religiosity and distress among older adults", *Health Promotion Perspectives*, (2021), 11 (3), 316-322.

²² Abdullah, I. et al., "Anxiety, OCD, delusions and religiosity among the general public during the COVID-19 pandemic", *Int. Soc. Sci.*, (2021), 1-16.

²³ Molteni, F., "Searching for comfort in religion: insecurity and religious behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy", *European Societies*, (2021), 23, s704-s720.

²⁴ Pirutinsky, S., Cherniak, A.D., & Rosmarin, D.H., "COVID-19, mental health and religious coping among American Orthodox Jews", *Journal of Religion and Health*, (2020), 59, 2288-2301.

²⁵ Ursua, M.P. & Jodar, R., "Finding meaning in hell. The role of Meaning, Religiosity and Spirituality in posttraumatic growth during the Coronavirus crisis in Spain", *Front. Psychol.*, (2020), 11, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.567836.

from aborted fetuses. However, the Catholic Church is in favor of such vaccines, if there are no other alternatives. Other Christian faiths are generally supportive of vaccination²⁶.

An interesting article was recently published²⁷ that examines the relationship between public religiosity, internal and external beliefs (practices) and the spread of COVID-19. Country-level analyses were carried out in 47 countries, comparing data from two periods (October 23, 2020 to May 11, 2021). The results showed more cases of COVID-19 and more deaths from COVID-19 per million of the population in countries with more widespread attendance at religious services, regardless of gross domestic product per capita and number of covid tests per million performed. At the first occasion (2020), no correlation was found between religious beliefs and a number of cases and deaths related to COVID. However, at the second time point (2021), when COVID-19 related statistics were worse worldwide, both internal and external indices of religiosity were correlated to increased cases and deaths from the pandemic, after correcting for GDP per capita and tests performed per million. However, it is possible that the alleged adverse health effects of religiosity have not yet been demonstrated.

Another interesting finding from the above study is a correlation between a country's religiosity and COVID-19 screening, with more religious countries performing fewer tests on average. This could be related to fewer precautionary measures²⁸ and limited vaccination intentions²⁹ in these populations. The two are linked less to religiosity per se than to disregarding scientific evidence and distrust of the media. In addition, if GDP per capita is taken into account, the results were not statistically significant. This could simply suggest that poorer countries, which are also more religious, conduct fewer tests simply because they do not have the financial means to do so.

Discussion

The threats that we all face in the last two years require every possible means to address them. Medicine has done its best in this regard, but people's needs are more complex and are not unilateral. Religion has played a significant role in the process of fighting the disruptive effects of COVID-19 and facilitating people's physical and psychological recovery.

Over time, data from countries around the world are gathering statistically meaningful results on the effects of religiosity on coping mechanisms. Significant heterogeneity is the norm because of differing study designs and research methodologies. However, a consensus on the positive effects of religiosity on psychological adaptation is progressively formed. We still need well-designed studies to identify and eliminate confounders.

²⁶ Garcia, L.L., & Yap, J.F.C., "The role of religiosity in COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy", *Journal of Public Health*, (2021), 43(3), e.529-530.

²⁷ Linke, M. & Jankowski, K.S., "Religiosity and the spread of COVID-19: A Multinational Comparison", *Journal of Religion and Health*, 2022, 61, 1641-1656.

²⁸ Perry, S.L., Whitehead, A.L. and Grubbs J.B., "Culture wars and COVID-19: Christian nationalism, religiosity and Americans' behavior during the coronavirus pandemic", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (2020), 59 (3), 405-416.

²⁹ Olagoke, A.A., Olagoke, O.O. and Hughes, A.M., "Intention to vaccinate against the novel 2019 coronavirus disease: the role of health locus of control and religiosity", *Journal of Religion and Health*, (2021), 60 (1), 65-80.

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THE MINISTER FACED WITH DELICATE MARITAL CRISES: THE CASE OF A HOMOSEXUAL HUSBAND

By

Rev. Fr. Athanasios G. Melissaris

Archpriest of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

Associate Professor of Pastoral Counseling and Psychology at the University of Athens

Licensed Psychologist – Doctor of Pastoral Psychology (Boston) – Doctor of Pastoral Theology (Athens)

Abstract

This article deals with the case of a homosexual husband, whose wife came to seek assistance from the author of this paper. She found herself at a painful crossroads after realizing her husband's sexual orientation, followed by meeting another man whom she felt fulfilled her needs. During their session the author, as a pastoral minister, attempted to determine the steps that she should take in order to gain control of her life again on both a spiritual and psychological level. At the same time, the minister sought to help the woman remove the hurdles that prevented her from attaining wholeness. There are many complicated questions, theological as well as psychological, involved in this situation, such as homosexuality and divorce, all generating feelings of inadequacy and guilt. Reflecting on what happened, the author claims that he would nowadays handle the situation differently. In addition, he decided that, given the insoluble impasse of her marriage, she should continue her life with the responsibility of her choice. Another important issue to be considered is the handling of the painful feelings that prompted her to see a professional, who could help her recover from the emotional trauma which had been ailing her. Her counselor's pastoral approach would also be important to help her realign herself with her church community and its teachings. Finally, through recourse to theological quotations an assessment is made concerning the implications of the divorce on a theological level, including the importance of confession, penance, and holy communion as sacramental aides towards healing and wholeness. Finally, it is explicitly pointed out that the Church allows divorce under certain conditions by exercising discernment, thus helping people to get out of desperate marital impasses and follow the way of Christ.

Keywords: divorce, homosexuality, marital crisis, pastoral counseling, guilt, healing.

Introduction

*“Because men can't endure the untried
The brought from elsewhere and it's early, hear me
It's too early yet in this world my love
To speak of you and me” (O. Elytis)¹.*

Marriage is rife with conflicts. That fact is well known and sounds like an insignificant fact. What is less known, perhaps, is the actual extent of the quantity and variety of conflicts that plague married life. According to recent estimates², as much as half of the married or non-married couples experience serious conflicts on a regular basis, which is natural given that even taciturn, patient, and well-meaning spouses often disagree with one another on many issues. However, disputes take many forms and do not always involve disagreements. More and more, couples encounter surprisingly unexpected truths about each other. One such truth concerns the latent homosexual orientation of one of them, which is nowadays more frankly and openly discussed than in previous times.³ The frequency of this issue forces pastors as well as pastoral psychologists to reconsider aspects of marriage and to seek novel ways of guidance to those concerned, in a spirit of pragmatism and enhanced understanding of the complexity of the problem.

Understanding is essential because many people remain unaware of the nature of sexual orientation and its origins. Because of this ignorance, people, including clergy, react differently to the issue in a way that can be harmful to clients and their families. With this still broader ignorance and prejudice, it is essential to establish a common context. David K. Switzer, Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at the Perkins School of Theology, at Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, Texas indicates the need for a shared understanding of the issue very tellingly. As he aptly pointed out,

“The situation is difficult for the clergy and lay care workers in the church. We differ one from the other in various ways. We have different levels of knowledge, ignorance and prejudice. We have different attitudes and we have our own beliefs as to what is right and what is wrong. Denominations and faith groups have somewhat different positions on various matters related to homosexuality, homosexual behavior, and the role of homosexual persons in the church and among the clergy. Obviously, our own particular beliefs and convictions and personal emotional reactions are going to shape our response to the family which is in turmoil because one of them has recently been identified as being of homosexual orientation”⁴.

¹ *The Collected Poems of Odysseus Elytis*, translated by Jeffrey Carson and Nikos Sarris, introduction, and notes by Jeffrey Carson (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University, 1997), p. 244.

² This article, authored by Siobhán C. Daly, Pádraig MacNeela and Kiran M. Sarma, “investigated the stories of heterosexual women who experienced a husband coming out as gay and a consequential marital separation. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used. Loss, anger, spousal empathy and concerns regarding societal prejudice were reported. Additional stress was experienced when others minimised the experience due to the gay sexual orientation of their husband. Experiencing positive communication with their husband during and after the disclosure aided the resolution of the emotional injury experienced by them. They all eventually ‘let go’ of their husband. This involved a process of reconceptualising the self as separated. Findings indicate the importance of supporting women to re-focus on their needs during and following marital dissolution. The importance of non-judgemental support for marital loss, rather than a focus on the gay sexual orientation of the spouse, was highlighted.” “The female spouse: A process of separation when a husband 'comes out' as gay,” *National Library of Medicine* 13 (2018): 8.

³ In his article, Frederick W. Bozett, “based on in-depth interviews of gay men who had been married, focuses on the nature of the spousal relationship and the almost inevitable marital disruption. It describes the conditions which bring about the man's disclosure of his homosexuality, the means of disclosure he uses, the wife's response, and the interactional effects the disclosure and response have on the marriage relationship. Most of the marriages ended in divorce. Regardless of whether the wife was accepting or rejecting of her husband as a homosexual, she appeared to be an enabler of his transition to a homosexual lifestyle. Implications for counseling are discussed.” (“Heterogenous couples in heterosexual marriages: gay men and straight women,” *Journal of Marital and family Therapy* 8 (1982): 81-89.

⁴ David K. Switzer, *Pastoral Care Emergencies: Ministering to People in Crisis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 180.

In my early days of pastoral ministry, I was approached by a young woman who had not come to me for confession, but to seek my advice on the problem she was facing. As I was on my way home, I asked her if she could see me the following day so that I could be available and devote more time to her problem. Therefore, very briefly, she clued me into the nature of her concern, which was her suspicion that her fiancé was probably gay, and that she did not know how to address the problem. She added that they had been in love with one another for many years and that they were about to get married, but she wasn't sure whether she should proceed with the marriage or cancel it or seek the advice of a counselor instead.

Having set up an appointment with her for a future meeting, I instantly recalled a similar incident that had been brought to my attention during my training as a doctoral student in pastoral psychology at Boston University. This previous case also concerned a heterosexual relationship in which a member (the husband in particular) had proven to be homosexual. The entire dialogue between the client and the counsellor was recorded and distributed to us as reading material on which we were asked to write a detailed reflection. So, I was asked to look in my files for any notes I might have kept on the subject. I discovered that there was a file of it in my notebook, and as I reviewed it, I realized that nowadays I would have handled that case with a little more discretion. This was in 1993, and I was in the very beginning of my academic study of pastoral ministry, so I was just an inexperienced novice. The following is a verbatim account of my exchange with my client, a distressed Catholic, along with a lengthy commentary and reflection on the whole case.

During the women's narrative, it emerged that her husband has begun to date another homosexual male at the Law School he was attending in Boston, while she had met another divorced individual whom she feels meets her needs. It was then that the woman reached a crossroads and decided to seek advice from her counselor.

The Conversation

- Client:** We were young. Maybe we shouldn't have gotten married, but it was a pressure. Little girls get married. And it's better than being a sinner. So, we get married, and I'm a good wife, and I'm good for my Lord, and he's good for his Lord, and it happens. I mean, is it all a joke? Can I pray for something? Is anyone listening? What happened to you? Should I crawl and repent on the stairs?
- Counselor:** I sense your frustration, the guilt you are feeling. How does it feel to come to a crossroads after six years and think about what I did six years ago, what did I do? Perhaps you have a strong feeling of regret?
- Client:** Yes, as if I had wasted six years of my life, which I don't think is true because I learned a lot from him, and I love him. And I threw away a year and a half since he's told me he was gay—I should have just said, let's end this right now, you've got to figure out your life. But he's not certain. I was waiting to find out if he was actually gay. He's not sure. He's got no idea what God wants. And so, I have waited and waited, and my life awaits me. In the meantime, I could easily fall in love with this guy, Tom, but I want to get involved, but I don't care. I told him; you just have to make decisions about your life so I can move forward.
- Counselor:** Do you still feel as though you're communicating?
- Client:** Yes. I guess. I don't really ask him about his lovers. What more can be said?
- Counselor:** Therefore, you are still waiting. How do you feel right now?
- Client:** I sense I might get divorced and be hated by the church. It seems to me that you could kill someone and go to jail and come back and be forgiven, but you divorce, and that's it.
- Counselor:** Why do you feel that way?
- Client:** It seems that anyone who divorces in the church is scorned. As if they weren't strong enough to get away with it. Or they weren't intelligent enough. Or they didn't love

each other enough. Or maybe not praying enough. My God, I've prayed enough to fill a cathedral after cathedral.

Counselor: And that too makes you feel guilty?

Client: Guilty how? Praying?

Counselor: What divorce means.

Client: Yes, yes! What the heck! There's nothing else I can do. Will I live the rest of my life? Do I age with a guy who doesn't love me?

Counselor: Clearly not. If it's what you said that's making you miserable.

Client: "As you've expressed"? You think there's another matter?

Counselor: No, no. I don't want you to think I'm trying to be biased. That's not the kind of thing I'm trying to do. Based on what you told me, I have a feeling that you feel guilty, that you feel abandoned. Your husband can't fulfill your needs anymore. And you are looking for someone to nourish you, for someone who accepts you as you are, who will not abandon you. That's what I get.

Client: I feel like if I do get a divorce that I must leave my family. First, I was raised a Roman Catholic. My family, the people in this church won't understand that there won't be people here for me, and it's because everybody believes in the same church that we have to leave. So, I had this dream that I run off alone into a city, and I'm single and alone, and I never have to worry about security. I divorce quietly, I leave and I feel incredibly lonely, but know that I made the right decision. But I feel I have to run away, that I can't stay and be with my family, that I have to wear a big A on my chest like Hester Prynne.⁵

Counselor: So, you feel that if you get a divorce, you're going to feel a sense of rejection. How do you know that?

Client: Well, I guess all the things that I've said.

Counselor: Has your family ever said that to you? Did your friends ever tell you this?

Client: Well, I mean, it's clear from the Bible that divorce is wrong. My parents have been married for forty years, but don't get divorced. You get married and you're still married. That's why I'm not a good wife. I couldn't keep my man happy. I must be under some spell. Oh, you have to take yoga lessons. You believe in the new age, where it's all about fast food. Well, seven years is your average wedding. Either you're married after seven years or you're divorced.

Counselor: I agree you stay committed to your marriage. You have invested a great deal of time, effort and emotion. You shouldn't feel guilty about it. The ideal is marriage, the Church teaches. However, we also realize that we are all sinners, and we do not live up to the perfect ideal of what God would want us to do. And there's nothing to be embarrassed about. And for this reason, as we read in the Scriptures, divorce is permitted when things are not going as they should. Sometimes it's not up to us. It doesn't need to be what you did or what he did.

Client: How come people don't know that? Why is there a lot of judgment? It's not taught from the pulpit. What is preached from the pulpit is that you don't divorce -- that's how it is. And so, the people who make it are judged. And people told me to submit to your husband like God would have you submit to church. Over and over. And I want to. I want to be a good spouse. I do. But I'm trapped between two worlds. I stick with my husband, and I die slowly...

⁵ Hester Prynne, protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's masterwork *The Scarlet Letter*, is one of the most important female protagonists in American literature. In the course of the story, as a resident of Colonial America, Hester is sent ahead to the "New World" by her husband, who later assumes the name of Roger Chillingworth, as he has some business to finish before he can join her. After he is shipwrecked and captured by Native Americans and presumed dead, Hester continues to live her life as a seamstress in the town. She seeks comfort in the local pastor; At some point passion emerges, culminating in the conception and subsequent birth of their child, Pearl. Because Hester has no husband with her, she is imprisoned, convicted of the crime of adultery, and sentenced to be forced to wear a prominent scarlet letter 'A' for the rest of her life.

Diagnosis and Reflections

Before I add my first reflection on the earlier dialogue, I would like to add a few current personal reflections on the issue of homosexuality. The issue of homosexuality, which entails deep anthropological and theological implications, constitutes nowadays a serious challenge; one which requires of pastors, particularly those exercising Orthodox pastoral care and counseling, to devise a creative response to it. Pastors are called to reflect deeply on the entire issue based on the Gospel as well as to place their hands “on the marks of the nails.” After two thousand years, we Christians still have to face many prevailing misunderstandings.

Today, the Criminal Code does not condemn engagement with homosexual acts, as an offense in itself and by itself. Homosexuality and heterosexuality are expressions of sexual impulse. The legalization of homosexuality and its compatibility with marriage is a challenge of modern life. This is a reality for many people, while divorce is widespread as well. It is of no use to stigmatize homosexuals for the undermining of the institution of marriage.⁶

With these thoughts in mind, I will attempt to submit my reflection on the matrimonial issue entrusted to me. One of the principal tasks of this first encounter was to listen to the “story” of the individual. “Evoking story” is an extremely delicate and personal act. In many ways it demands the delicacy of a surgeon, as one literally enters this person’s world; you see what “makes them work”. This ability to evoke someone else’s story is a very powerful tool that must be handled very carefully. The practice of pastoral care calls for great discernment. As Fr. Philotheos Faros, a longtime pastoral psychologist, wisely indicate in his book, pastoral “surgery” may often be necessary, but it should also be exercised as delicately as possible.⁷ The pastoral counselor must take great pains to evoke the true meaning and interpretation of the story.⁸ For this reason, as Gerkin points out, “From the standpoint of the pastoral counselor as interpreter, reflection and gathering of further impressions as well as factual data to support or alert, elaborate or add to the understanding we know have of narrative themes and issues in Susan’s or ‘anyone’s’ life story”. The acquisition of an adequate hermeneutic understanding of the speaker’s story is of paramount importance.

In this first encounter, Charles Gerkin brings a lot of pertinent material to the counseling relationship. What I was told in that context was a story; and as Gerkin puts it, in that context:

“All the stories told in a certain manner of frustrated desire to advance with the story of a lifetime. In each case there was a sense of blockage, as if the way forward in an imaginary plot for the person’s life was obstructed. The flow of a line had encountered an obstacle or had been impeded in some way. The nature of the obstruction or obstacle varied enormously, but the sense of blocking seems universal...”

Gerkin’s description is extremely important here. Here there is a “hindrance”, an “obstruction”, (which is the revelation of her husband’s homosexuality), which frustrates and blocks the continuation of his life. So that the wife feels as if she is in control of her life again it is necessary to.

1) identify exactly what the blockages are which are preventing her from moving towards wholeness and

⁶ For an excellent account of the Christian sacramentality of marriage, see John Chryssavgis, *Love, Sexuality, and the Sacrament of Marriage* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1996).

⁷ π. Φιλόθεος Φάρος, *Μαθήματα ζωής: Κατανοώντας το περιεχόμενο της ποιμαντικής διακονίας*, (in Greek) Athens: Armos, 2020, p. 81.

⁸ Correctly interpreting the client’s narrative is especially important. This kind of interpretation follows several phases. John Patton, executive director of the Georgia Association for Pastoral Care, points our attention to the significance of interpretation on behalf of the counselor. “The first type of interpretation to be discussed is the kind that assists a person in the discovery or rediscovery of his or her story. Humankind is presented in the Bible as existing as a part of history and in community. Persons are not isolated units moving from one experience to another. Normatively understood, they exist as a part of something. What the pastoral counselor sees, however, whether he or she practices ministry in a parish or counseling center, is many persons who have become cut off from their roots, their network of relationships, and they sense of direction. Without root, relationship, and direction, they have difficulty telling their story. Often, they can only present a problem. The memory of who they are and where they are going is dim.” John Patton, *Pastoral Counseling: A Ministry of the Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1984), pp. 197-198.

2) what steps must be taken to help the wife once again achieve this sense of wholeness and control in her life on both a theological and psychological levels. The worthy pastor will seek to liberate people from their fears, exhibiting a deep understanding and infinite amount of love towards them, so that they could enjoy inner peace and be prepared to face whatever crisis will hit them in life-- thereby proving their faith in God. It is then to identify these "blockages" that we must turn.

Marriage is a far-reaching commitment, which can have not only tremendous rewards, but also serious repercussions. In this note, it is unfortunately the latter that emerged after six years of marriage. There are plenty of complicated theological and psychological problems that are involved in this situation.

The first has to do with homosexuality. In St. The Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, we find a very harsh declaration against homosexuality:

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves, nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God”⁹.

In fact, it is maintained by many people, but Christ did not say anything at all about homosexuality, and that it was Paul who criminalized the Christian life. Indeed, it appears only in his letter to the Romans, St. Paul is also adamant in reprimanding homosexuality as an unnatural lifestyle:

“Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion”¹⁰.

As someone who must have gone at least to some extent to church and read the Bible,¹¹ it may be safe to assume that s/he has at least searched out the Scriptural position concerning homosexuality and would have at best found it as disturbing as she found the Christ’s words about divorce. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that at the theological level she has questions concerning the nature of homosexuality.

The second theological issue raised here is that of divorce. In the context of counselling, the wife vaguely quotes the synoptic understanding of divorce and declares that divorce is equivalent to adultery. Looking at this issue more closely, we read: “But I tell you that anyone who divorces his

⁹ 1 Cor. 6: 9-10. The standard, conservative view of the matter usually assumes their form of the following passage: “According to ch. 5 one of the members of the Corinthian Church lived in an incestuous union with his father’s wife. According to ch. 6 there occurred lawsuits between members of the Church, who thus sought the arbitration of unbelievers, i.e. heathen courts. Paul’s response to both of these challenges to Christian purity and honor is clear and definite. The actions of the individuals concerned have brought dishonor on the name of Christ, while the failure of the Church to correct these individuals, implies that the whole Church has been contaminated. For the first problem, that of incest, Paul prescribes separation from fellowship with the Church. The details of what exactly this means in practice are unclear, but what is crystal clear is the objective of the punishment: “that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord”. In other words, the incestuous person was in danger of losing his eternal salvation unless he repented. These two themes give Paul the occasion to administer to the Corinthian Christians a very sharp rebuke, and then to go on and warn them that sins like these will exclude their practitioners from the Kingdom of God. Among those who will be excluded are passive and active homosexuals who practise and persist in practising such acts. One important point here is that this time Paul distinguishes between the two roles, that of the passive (μαλακός), and that of the active homosexual (αρσενικοίτης), although both of them, according to Paul, are equally guilty. As if he wanted to underscore solemnly the consequences of such acts by the Jewish custom of judicially establishing a matter by two or three witnesses, he plays the part of a witness twice by solemnly averring once at the beginning and once at the end, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Cited from Chrys C. Caragounis, *Homoeroticism Ancient and Modern—And the Christian Church*, Revised Edition, Lund 2007, pp. 76-77.

¹⁰ Romans 1: 26-27.

¹¹ The reader may find it useful to have in his or her disposal several biblical and theological resources about sexuality in general video here is a good one William V. Arnold, *Introduction to Pastoral Care*, chapter 14: “A Pastoral Approach to Sexuality” (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), pp. 204-214.

wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”¹²

From an Orthodox and biblical perspective, it is clear that in its ideal form, marriage is an indissoluble bond and life-long covenant. The Church defends the ideal of the permanence of marriage, considering the Holy Sacrament of Marriage as a constitutive ecclesiological reality. Nonetheless, in her pastoral care and in her concern to help people, the Church has accepted certain exceptions allowing the dissolubility of marriage. Scripture emphatically points this out when we read, “*For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel.*”¹³ However, it is equally clear that divorce was permitted due to weakness of the human condition,” Jesus said to them, ‘It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.’”¹⁴ Indeed, the existence of divorce in the Greek Orthodox Church falls under the broad heading of God’s “*economia*”¹⁵ and falls under two biblical concepts which have been thematically extended. The two grounds for divorce in Orthodoxy surround those which concern the death of the spouse and those which concern the adultery of the spouse.¹⁶ In this instance, if the wife so wished, it would be permissible to allow divorce on the former and possibly also the latter as well.

On the psychological front, there are a number of emotional issues in this situation. First and foremost is a sense of inadequacy. Expressions such as “*I can't satisfy it*” or “*How can I supplement with men*” can indicate a sense of competitiveness in an athletic sense. In a way, she feels deficient about herself. (Indeed, it is also a deeper issue that must be addressed later.) She has personalized the issue of her husband’s homosexuality by trying to explain it in terms of what *she* is unable to do and thus put herself into a corner and dilemma.¹⁷

This feeling of inadequacy is starting to appear in this “other possible relationship”. Here, she feels that this other person is capable of responding to her needs, while her husband is not. This scenario reminded me most vividly of the story of Susan Clarke related by Gerkin in his sixth chapter. Indeed, Gerkin’s assessment of Susan’s situation as one where “the issue appears at this point to be not so much one of sexuality as of intimacy, self-expression, and integrity in relationships” may be equally applied here.¹⁸ Thus, especially with this incident, it is important in this context to make use of the hermeneutical circle to help “*enlarge or enrich the arena of reflection within which the evaluation of behavioral choices takes place.*”¹⁹

The second proof of the psychological problem is culpability. Closely related to the previous question, she feels guilty about two things. The first relates to the marriage of a homosexual. This fact must be very disturbing for her, and in turn, evoke several subsequent feelings. Again, she feels

¹² Matt. 5: 32.

¹³ Mal 2: 16

¹⁴ Matt. 19: 8

¹⁵ «Economy» is viewed as a «transitory leniency» by which the Church is a dispenser of divine mercy preventing worse consequences. Some further elaboration on the concept of divine economy is essential. As is stated by Professor of Canon Law at Hellenic College/Holy Cross Seminary Lewis Patsavos, “Unlike secular law, or Mosaic law the purpose of the church’s law is the spiritual perfection of her members. Mere application of the letter of the law is replaced by a sense for the spirit of the law, and adherence to its principles. This purpose is the determining factor when authority is granted to apply the law when circumstances warrant according to each individual case. The spirit of love, understood as commitment to the spiritual perfection of the individual, must always prevail in the application of the law. The abolition of the letter of the law by the spirit of the law has led to the institution of economy exercised in nonessential matters. Through ‘economy,’ which is always an exception to the general rule, the legal consequences following the violation of the law are lifted.” See, “The Canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church,” in *A Companion to the Greek Orthodox Church*, Fotios K. Litsas, ed. Department of Communication, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, New York, 1984 p. 144-145.

¹⁶ Such are the guidelines laid out by Rev. Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos, Professor of the New Testament at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, in his article “The Indissolubility of Marriage in the New Testament: Principle and Practice,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 34 (1989): 335-345.

¹⁷ “Interviews with 33 women, plus data from 70 more, explored wives’ reactions to being informed by their husbands that they were bisexual, the consequences of disclosure, and the factors determining those reactions and consensus. Findings suggest that wives struggled less with the homosexuality itself that with the problems of isolation, stigma, loss, cognitive confusion and dissonance, and lack of knowledgeable, empathic support or help in problems solving. Moreover, faulty assumptions about “disclosure” seem to have led to serious misconceptions about the wives, on the part of husbands, researcher, and therapist alike. These misconceptions and the “realities” are discussed.” Jean S. Gochros, “Wives’ Reactions to Learning That Their Husbands Are Bisexual”, *Journal of Homosexuality* 11, (2010): 101-114.

¹⁸ Charles Gerkin, *The Living Human Document* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), p. 133.

¹⁹ Idem. p. 141.

guilty because she invested in a relationship for six years, and that has now led to an inevitable impasse.

The second cause of this guilt is a strong sense of ostracism in even considering divorce. Whether it is parental pressure, familiar or social, it is clear that something has ingrained a profound sense that divorce is a "dirty thing" that will lead to its ostracism. Indeed, the fact that she feels it, especially on the part of the ecclesial community, is revealing of one of two things. Firstly, it is quite possible that the church community is actually very cold and judgmental. Secondly, however, the feeling of this pressure was so strong that it did not resist it. Now that the problems have arisen in marriage, we conjure up the same sentiments. It is very likely that this individual is not a very strong personality type and may either have a difficult time making decisions or it is quite possible that for her whole life she has had decisions made for her. This "inability" to make decisions was clearly manifested by his subtle hints to me to tell him to divorce. Deep down, she knows what is the answer which best benefits her and her situation; however, she is seemingly too preoccupied with other issues, which are preventing hers to make this tough decision.

A woman's story is incomplete. During the initial visit I tried to actively hear her situation and "evoke her story". I tried to intuitively listen and reflectively reinterpret her story. It was through this process that I arrived at those preliminary conclusions.

In that first and foremost visit, what was of crucial importance was to update Gerkin's statement where.

"Pastoral counselors are, more than anything else, listeners to and interpreters of stories. Persons seek out a pastoral counselor because they need someone to listen to their story. Most often, the story is tangled, it involves themes, plots, and counterplots. The story itself is, of course, and interpretation of experience".²⁰

Reflection on the task

Thinking back to what happened, I would have opened up a bit differently than the original counselor. When a person comes into a counselling setting, they are often intimidated, and starting the session by diving headlong into the issue can be very intimidating for an individual. I should have asked more generic and casual questions to set the tone for the rest of the session.

The second thing which I would have done differently is to rephrase my questions regarding the assignment. In formulating the questions, as I did, I may have created a potentially "psychiatric" atmosphere and for many, this may be intimidating. Indeed, if the person feels that they are "being analyzed", this can lead to mistrust and a breakdown in the counselling relationship.

The third thing I would have done in a different way was with the husband. First, I should have asked her how he felt about the relationship and then secondly, I should have possibly thrown out the option of having the two of them come in together the next time so that more issues could be brought into a clearer light. As Fr. Philotheos Faros elaborates, we should strive to remember, but each version sees things differently, from his or her own perspective. Considering this, pastors should always listen to both sides before reaching any conclusion. It would also help immensely if we tried to remember that we often tend, as pastors, to side with women when they have differences with their husbands, a tendency that might help explain, to some extent, why men do not feel attracted much to the Church.²¹

I felt that I was attentive to this situation and I tried to accurately interpret the various signals that were being thrown at me. At the same time, I tried to keep Anton Boison's model of the "human person as a 'document' to be read and interpreted in a manner analogous to the interpretation of historical texts" as well as the further implication of his model "that the depth experience of persons in the struggles of their mental and spiritual life demanded the same respect

²⁰ Idem. p. 26.

²¹ Φάρος, *Μαθήματα ζωής*, p. 95.

as do the historic texts from which the foundations of our Judeo-Christian tradition are drawn” in mind throughout the session.²²

In addition to Boison’s model, Chrysostom’s dictum, “For the man does not exist who can by compulsion cure someone else again, he will”²³ was also a strong motivating factor in how I approached this situation. Indeed, I tried to make sure that the decisions (if any) would be made by her and her alone. I did not want to be put into a corner whereby I would have to make a choice for her, which may sometime down the road be looked upon by her with resentment. In fact, just by the statements she made of feeling “pressured” to marry and the like, there is potential here for her to blame individuals whom she feels have made decisions for her.

I am not sure that I have properly balanced the role of auditor and interpreter at this first meeting. Indeed, “*pastoral counseling may thus be understood as dialogical hermeneutical process involving the counselor and counselee in communication across the boundaries of language worlds*”. Therefore, I don't know how effective our communication has been in this particular case and in this context.

Moving towards a Telos

When moving towards a telos, it is important to ask "which telos are we moving towards?" Joseph Allen is correct in reminding us that in the pastoral relationship, we are striving for “wholeness”, or for “holiness” within oneself and between oneself and others. The telos we strive for are also described by Gerkin's signals for the end of an advice relationship. These signals are:

- 1) signals of integration and wholeness.
- 2) signals of altered behavior and altered relationships.
- 3) signals of clarity about continuous problems in the life of the soul.
- 4) signals of openness to transcendence and parabola.
- 5) signals of appropriation of *eschatological identity*²⁴.

Therefore, with these models in mind, the last telos to which not only this, but every counseling relationship must strive for is wholeness on a physical, psychological, and spiritual level. That is the ideal. In this situation, the ultimate hope is to resolve problems with her husband, herself and the community in general.

The first problem which must be resolved is the relationship with her husband. At this point, it appears that no other issue can be addressed in this context unless it is addressed first. This will be a catalyst for her integrity and wholeness and help facilitate altered behavior and altered relationships. Hence, it seemed clear from her allusions that deep down this woman wants a divorce from her husband so that she can continue her life.

Above and beyond that, it would also be necessary to address her other feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and insecurity; and depending on how deep or serious these issues are, it may even be necessary to refer her to a professional who would be better equipped to help her through the emotional trauma which she has been experienced and will experience as this process proceeds. Actually, if I were in that situation, I wouldn't want to probe very deeply because of the possibility of opening very painful wounds. Because of my background, I would do more harm than good in this situation.

Once this has been done, it will be necessary to help re-integrate her into the community of faith. This final telos will be appropriating his *eschatological identity*²⁵. Perhaps there are deeper

²² Idem. p. 38.

²³ St John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), p. 57, as cited in Joseph Allen, *The Ministry of the Church: Image of Pastoral Care* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), p. 117.

²⁴ Gerkin, pp. 184-190.

²⁵ The concept of “eschatological identity”, used by Charles V. Gerkin in his *Pastoral Psychology*, should not be confused with the “Ultimate Identity”, applied by L. Elhard, in the influence of Eric Erikson. See L. Elhard, “Living Faith: Some Contributions of the Concept of Ego-identity to the Understanding of Faith”, in: P. Homans (Ed.), *The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology* (pp. 135-161), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968, 1969. The “eschatological identity” (Ch. Gerkin) is simply the orien-

spiritual difficulties here. In many ways, I felt very enigmatic about her faith since on the one hand, she tended to go to church, while on the other, it seemed as though her faith was easily destabilized. This session, however, was not sufficient to evaluate or even make a tentative judgment about his spiritual position.

*Decisions on Pastoralism towards Healing and Wholeness*²⁶

In the verbatim scenario, the visit ended with me recommending that the wife thinks about her situation and the things which we spoke of and then come to see me in about a week's time. In the upcoming meetings, there will be a number of issues that need to be addressed to help move this person towards healing and wholeness.

Unfortunately, there was not much that could have been done in terms of preventative ministry in this situation. As such, it is appropriate to apply Joseph Allen's supporting ministry plan to cope with this situation. The aims here will be:

- 1) belching, retaining or stabilizing the disturbed person, and
- 2) help the person himself to gain strength to cope with his problem.

Therefore, according to Joseph Allen, there is a six-fold pastoral response in a situation like this one. First the pastor must be a "*shoulder to lean on*"; secondly, the pastor must encourage the person to face the problem and grow from it (it was facing the problem which I tried to focus on in this encounter); thirdly, the pastor must help give a true and objective view of the situation; fourthly, the pastor must help build spiritual defenses; fifthly, discuss the meaning of the person's problem; and finally, be alert to helpful Scripture and other reading materials.²⁷

In theological terms, we must discuss the theological implications of divorce. Here, I'll need to dig deeper to find out what she understands about marriage and divorce. Since I can assume from the first visit that she will repeat that divorce is wrong, I will need to explore two biblical texts with her. The first is *Deuteronomy 24*, in which we read:

*"Suppose a man enters marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house and goes off to become another man's wife"*²⁸.

Here, in the Old Testament, it is clearly stated that divorce is indeed permissible.²⁹ Although it says that the man writes the certificate of divorce, I will need to make clear to her that in that context, according to civil and cultural laws, it was the husband who issued the certificate, whereas in our culture it can be either. It will also be necessary to underline the sentence "something wrong" here. It will also be important highlight Christ's own teaching in Matthew where Christ says, "*But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery*". In this way we shall see that a lifetime marriage is clearly the ideal; however, Scripture is clear that in some cases divorce is permitted. As stated previously, we will need to explore the two tenets under which divorce is permissible in the Greek Orthodox Church—those of

tation of the human psyche to a divine future (q.v. *Kingdom of God*) as if to say that we see the present world "sub specie aeternitatis".

²⁶ "The Judaeo-Christian religious tradition has generally been mistrustful of sexuality, wherein homosexuality is not even a legitimate discussion. The psychological tradition has been heterosexist and homophobic. It is argued that only a creation-centered spirituality and a transpersonal psychotherapy can be truly supportive of gay men and lesbian women. A transpersonal model is presented that is integrated with creation spirituality. This model is applied to specific situations of gay men and lesbians with clinical examples. In this inquiry, the special gifts of homosexuals are noted." John A. Struzzo, "Pastoral Counseling and Homosexuality", *Journal of Homosexuality*, 18 (2008): 195-222.

²⁷ Allen, pp. 229-230.

²⁸ Deut. 24: 1-2

²⁹ For a theological reappraisal of divorce, see "A theology of separation and divorce?", in John Patton and Brian H. Childs, *Christian Marriage and Family; Caring for our Generations*, (Nashville: Abington Press, 1988), pp. 184-186.

adultery and death;³⁰ we will then need to see if either of this applies to her situation. In order to help her better understand her situation, supplementary reading material may also be necessary.³¹

It may also be necessary (depending on the avenues she would pursue in the future) to discuss the theological implications of her husband's homosexuality. Indeed, the vision of contemporary society and the Church on this matter is rapidly moving in divergent directions. Again, it will be necessary here to look at the issue and outline the Church's position so that she can come to a better understanding of not only her husband's situation in relation to the rest of Church life, but also, gain a better understanding of her own identity as a woman.

Other long-term theological decisions that may arise would be matters of confession, penance, and holy communion. My first impression tells me that this person may have never been to confession before; as such, to recommend this option may undermine the inherent aspect of repentance which is a pre-requisite of the sacrament. By the same token, to recommend this at this point may even further augment her feelings of guilt and separation and thus, at the outset, may not be a wise suggestion at this point. But at a certain point, it would be beneficial to help her return to full communion and reconciliation with God and with her.

Depending again on how frequently she receives holy communion, it may also be a good penance to have her not receive the sacrament for one month after the actual divorce from her husband. By enacting this small act of penance (and again if this could be combined with confession) the woman would be provided with both psychological and physical means of reintegration into her parish.

At first glance, this individual may also need some professional guidance to help her not only cope with what she has been through—being married to someone who has homosexual and then after finding out, all the subsequent emotions such as guilt, rejection, and inadequacy—but also to help in the process of healing and wholeness.

She must therefore take a concrete decision on what she wants to do with her marriage. But in the same way, it will also be necessary to put her husband in the picture and see where he is in terms of the marriage contract.

To summarize, this is a complex situation in which several emotional, psychological, spiritual, theological, and even sociological issues are present; it will inevitably take much time and effort in order to bring about a resolution. Given this, it is therefore appropriate to remember and reflect on the role of the pastor and thus close the circle. In his work *On the Flight to Pontus*, St. Gregory the Theologian puts it best when he said:

“The scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings; to rescue it from the world and give it to God; and to watch over that which is in His image if it abides; to take it by the hand if it is in danger or restore it if ruined; to make Christ dwell in the heart by the Spirit; and, in short, to deify and bestow heavenly bliss upon one who belongs to the heavenly host”³².

This is what a pastor should strive to accomplish in his ministry.

³⁰ See Theodore Stylianopoulos' article, “The Indissolubility of Marriage in the New Testament: Principle and Practice,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 34 (1989): 335-345.

³¹ “The Church grant ‘ecclesiastical divorce’ is on the basis of the exception given by Christ to his general prohibition of the practice. The Church has frequently deplored to the rise of divorce and generally sees divorce as a tragic failure. Yet the Orthodox Church also recognizes that sometimes the spiritual well-being of Christians caught in a broken and essentially nonexistent marriage justifies it if works, with the right of one or both of the partners to remarry. Each parish priest is required to do all he can to help couples resolve their differences. If they cannot, and they obtain a civil divorce, they may apply for wash in sandwich jurisdictions of the Orthodox Church. In others, the judgment is left to the parish priest when and if a civil divorce person seeks to remarry. Those Orthodox jurisdictions which issue divorces require a thorough evaluation of the situation, and the appearance of the civil divorced couple before along listicle cord, where another investigation is made. Only after divorce is issued by the presiding Bishop can they apply for an ecclesiastical license to remarry.” Rev. Stanley Harakas, “The Stand of the Orthodox Church on Controversial Issues,” in *A Companion to the Greek Orthodox Church*, Fotios K. Litsas, ed. Department of Communication, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, New York, 1984 p. 221.

³² P. Schaff and H. A. Wase, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the One Christian Church*, Series 2, vol. VII, S. Cyril of Jerusalem, S. Gregory Nazianzen: Orations, Sermons, etc. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), p. 209.

Epilogue

Pastoral care must be grounded in realism and not fantasized as a medium the Church, by permitting second and even a third marriage, does not deny the holiness in this agreement all character of marriage. On the contrary, it affirms both, yet at the same time it also affirms the simple truth that marriage cannot be a prison when it has ceased to exist in reality. As Metropolitan Kallistos Ware says in a 30-year article

“in permitting a divorce when the partners have become irrevocably alienated, the church does not bring the marriage to an end but he is a fairly complete. The marriage, as the sacrament of love, has already seized to exist; In their relationship to one another, the partners are already dead. While the sacrament of marriage is indeed the divine action, it is not a piece of magic, but also requires human cooperation. Sacramental gift of Christian marriage needs to be accepted and lived on the human side, and it can eventually be rejected. When this has happened, the church does not exist on the permanent continuation of a lifeless outward form, which has ceased to be a grace giver and has become mutually destructive...

*Most important of all, in the Orthodox rationale of divorce, is the appeal to divine compassion and mercy. Whether Catholics or Orthodox, we are all agreed that the Church is not a juridical corporation, governed by the inflexible legal code, but it is the Body of Christ, the Pentecostal fellowship of the Holy Spirit. As ‘ambassadors for Christ’ (2 Cor. 5, 20), whether bishops, priests, or lay people, we are here to manifest in the world the loving kindness and generosity of the of the Savior. We take as our model Jesus with Zacchaeus (Luke 19, 9), with a woman taken in adultery (John 8, 11), with a woman ‘who was a sinner’ and who washed his feet with her tears (Luke 7, 47). To these and countless others he offered fresh hope, a new beginning, a second chance. Shall we not do the same for those whose marriage has failed? Humans make mistakes; persons enter into matrimony who should never have considered getting married to one another in the first place; or else a marriage that began by being reasonably happy turns sour and becomes poisoned. Is the Church to offer no remedy or hope of healing, so long as both the partners are alive? Surely this cannot be the way of Christ”.*³³

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³³ Kallistos Ware, “The sacrament of love: the Orthodox understanding of marriage and its breakdown,” *Downside Review* 109 (1991): 90.

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TRANS-MODAL UNDERSTANDING: The new language of science.

By

Dr. Spyridon Stergiou, B.F.A, PhD, MSc Psychology
He teaches at Athens University

“When any physical process first starts functioning, it sends out ‘feelers’ in all directions. Thus, time may be reversed, accepted laws may be violated, and unexpected things may happen” (Henry Margenau)

“The individual seeks to experience the totality of existence as a unity full of significance” (Albert Einstein)

“There is a subtle difference in the separate operation of the two [brain] hemispheres. They determine the [internal] balance of a person and indeed of an entire civilisation. The right hemisphere is the intuitive unifier and the left is the rational analytic operator. Both are necessary. But the proper balance between the two [only] happens when the right hemisphere is the master. Our Western civilisation suffers from an excessive domination by the left hemisphere”

(Iain McGillchrist as summarised by Max Payne)

Abstract

Science is currently facing many challenging conceptual problems. The most serious thing is that we are not considering the facts and the way in which they are understood. The average scientist does not see that there is a conceptual problem in the way in which he approaches, executes and interprets his work. Therefore, there is a problem regarding the awareness of non-deeper on the part of modern (positivistic) science itself of the structure, nature, opportunity and meaning of the world and life. In this article, the holistic model is proposed, i.e., experiential participation and interaction of the scientist as an entire man (right and left-brain hemisphere) with Nature. The inter-modality presupposes a state of mind which enables us not to be too impressed and not to stick to what we perceive. It is possible only if the desire for exclusive spiritual conception is combined with the desire for immediate personal experience through the integration of the self-reported unit of events and situations that unifies space / time without space / time. Preventing confusion makes it easier to understand the world's presence and feel it work.

Introduction

It is a fact that many intellectuals all over the world make judgements that science today faces many delicate conceptual problems. Most seriously, it does not take into account the real facts and how to understand them. Science sees no need to change anything in its conception and studies of *reality*. The only need it perceives is the one that governs ever more the knowledge of reality along with current knowledge. But while, for example, Quantum Mechanics, already for some years now, has offered us new ones (in many cases, completely contrary to the old Physics), the central theoretical and ideological axis of science seems as if it does not want to move. Today, for example, in both Philosophy and science, in particular Psychology and Sociology, we know the three types of "reality": *reality*, *actuality*, and *factuality*. But the average scientist only considers the oldest paradigm (of Voltaire's time) that he successfully conducts scientific research. He does not see that there is a conceptual problem in the way he approaches his work, he carries it out and he interprets the results. Or if, occasionally, he perceives such a problem, the scientist expresses it quantitatively; quality considerations are usually avoided. In his view, what he needs to do is to perfect the existing scientific language, so that it reflects the truth of the research subjects more precisely. He considers sensory perception, object-based understanding, the specificity of terminology, calculability, and reductive (q.v. *Reductivism*) frameworks as the quintessence of what scientific language should reflect. He does not suspect that there may be something in nature that cannot be illuminated by the way he uses the available communication tools regardless of the extent, expansion, enrichment, or deepening of their denotative potential.

Trans-modality presupposes a state of mind that does not allow one to be too impressed and caught up in what one perceives. Such an attitude is possible only if the desire for exclusive intellectual grasping is coupled with a desire for direct personal experience, which embodies that self-referring oneness of events and states, and which unifies space/time with no space/time. We want to *intuit* its presence and feel how it works as it does. It comes down to the following: just as there is more to things than the atoms that compose them, there is more to words than the meaning they bear. That 'plus' is woven into the use of signs in such a narrow way that you can't engage one without engaging the other. The meaning and that which goes beyond, are entangled as particles in the nuclei of atoms. You can't have meaning without something that goes deeper and deeper than it, no more than you can have matter without the shapes and history behind its current structure. One comes to view due to another, and vice versa.

However, there is a condition: you, the student of reality, must be mentally prepared to recognize the enmeshment of meaning with what goes beyond it on its *own* terms, not on *yours*. Boundness, depth, and elusiveness are part of "*hereness*". Both modalities need each other to be what they are in the framework of a whole that is both divisible and omnipresent. The mind has grasped this capacity for reality generally. It integrates the tendencies towards abstraction, logic, factual information, utilitarianism, and the expressiveness of the left hemisphere with those towards contextualization, intuition, implied information, interpenetration, and the feeling of the right hemisphere. The thrill of living something is that it puts us in contact with the catalytic power of the whole behind the forms. Things now appear to us as "new" though we realize simultaneously that we have always known them. As Iain McGilchrist formulates it: "*The right hemisphere deals with the world before...separation has transformed it into something else, before the left hemisphere has re-presented it. It is not*

that the right hemisphere connects the pieces of reality – because the entities it reveals were actually never separate” (McGilchrist, 2009, p. 179).

There will not be, of course, any attempt here to deal with the conceptual intricacies involved in this kind of information and the science or Philosophy it encourages; that alone would require a whole book! But the extent of the problem will hopefully become clearer when some of its implications are discussed in this article. Thus, it may be possible to convey a more gratifying concept of *trans-modality* and how it overturns our contemporary alienation from nature and truth. The more we sense nature, the better we understand it; the better we understand nature, the more we see that its most crucial function is keeping its various manifestations connected; and the more we consider the role of connectedness, the better we appreciate (and handle) these manifestations.

We will discuss this way of functional and dynamic integration to try to give a practical definition of the trans-modal reality. The definition will not be exhaustive; the *trans-modality* reflects a reality that cannot be understood by a simple precise description. Neither the trans-modal reality can be known just by choosing to do so. *Trans-modality* presupposes a state of mind that allows one not to be too impressed and stuck in what one perceives, whether positive or negative.

Such an attitude is only possible if the desire for an exclusive intellectual grasp is accompanied by a desire for direct personal experience. Of course, the subject of un-inspired (cerebral) and experiential knowledge is nothing new. Epistemologically, it has been presented by Italian philosopher, rhetorician, historian, and jurist Giovanni Battista Vico (1668–1744)¹ and was later applied to the dual division of the sciences into theoretical (*Verstehen*) and practical/positive (*Erklärung*) by the German theologian, philosopher and historian Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). Exclusiveness in any field of interest is the only attitude that does not correspond to trans-modal perception. Similar to modes of perception, inter-penetration and/or co-regulation of other modes of perception and thought complement and/or inform other attitudes.

What is trans-modal reality?

How should trans-modal reality be defined? We can try to do it in two ways: one negative, the other positive.

In a negative way, trans-modal reality is seen as a loss of known conceptions of reality. Objects are usually believed to exist in space-time as constructions, relationships or situations that have emerged through linear and deterministic processes. However, when discussing the negative trans-modal reality, the opposite approach is used. Objects, states, and relationships are now seen as de-conceptualized, de-objectified, de-constructed, de-located, de-timed, and de-compartmentalized “objects”. Once you de-characterise the modes of nature’s being as they appear to you, they emerge to view more as what nature is itself is, i.e., with no cultural projections.

The reverse holds true for the positive description of what exists. Here we just conceive of a model of action in nature that is articulated dynamically through the different systems by which objects, events, relationships and mind come into identifiable form. Physical operations occur at different organizational levels using specific qualities: in time, space, shape, distinctiveness and categories.

Localization, linearity, and the rest of the modalities currently used by scientists apply to these particular operations that require planning, realization, reason and

¹ G. B. Vico, *Theory of Knowledge*, Shoe String Pr Inc., 1969.

structure. On the other hand, non-locality and non-linearity apply to those particular operations that require intuition, tendency, indirectness, and in between. All objects, conditions, and systems are local and time-based. But bringing them together as objects, states, and systems is not. The whole is bigger than her parts. A need or occasion prompts a locus or moment to elements of other loci or moments.

Visual anti-mirror effect of spirit and matter.

Let's see how it works out. Physicist Sir James Jeans (1877-1946) used to maintain the following: To say that the mind cannot influence matter today becomes as absurd as to say that matter cannot influence "ideas," as he called what in this task is described as 'dynamic patterns.' Physical existence must be of the same general nature as these ideas or dynamic patterns. Reality beyond the mind produces dynamic models within.

If the concept of Jeans is correct, it is also necessary to be able to reverse it. Just as matter outside the mind produces dynamic patterns within it, dynamic patterns inside the mind produce results outside of it. Experimental evidence exists to support this conclusion. There are also three compelling theoretical reasons for why this is true:

First, above all, matter is energy, therefore form. It means that matter embodies a process rather than a structure, and processes cannot be regarded as physical entities. Things are finally made of sub-particles, or fleeting electrical excitations of the only field, as Einstein called them. But that just describes how things exist in their composite structure. It does not describe how matter operates. It depends entirely on what the material has become, thanks to the empowerment offered by dynamic models.

Secondly, in the final analysis, matter is not static; all appearances go in the opposite direction. On the one hand, matter reflects the dynamic patterns through which sub-particles interact with each other not locally and not numerically in the nuclei of atoms. On the other hand, matter reflects how these dynamic patterns interact with other more complex assemblages on a more composite level of organization to produce even more complex physical entities.

In the hierarchy of complexification, these ever more complex entities can range from sub-particles to particles, atoms, elements, molecules, etc. up to the complexity of the human brain. There are more electrochemical interaction points between the 100 billion neurons and their billions of synapses in the human brain than there are individual particles in the universe.

What is the practical effect of this exercise on increasingly complex assemblies of dynamic models? Change the dynamic patterns in the interaction of any number of physical units and you end up not only with a different material entity, you have a different order of material entities. The power and potential of physical existence lies in how matter is put together. It's not about what the material is composed of. As Iain McGilchrist (2009, p. 196) writes, we have "*a world where nothing is ever fixed or fully known, but [is] always becoming something else*".

Third, dynamic models can be modified by other dynamic models, provided that the most general of all, nature itself, that triggers change. As Jean underlines, following in the footsteps of Plato and Goethe, the causes must be of the same nature as their effects².

² This may apply to a "closed" universe, speaking rationally, but not necessarily theologically.

“Whatness”, “Howness” and the “Cosmic Law”

The important point here is that, strictly speaking, the similarity between causes and effects *isn't* anchored in the sub-particles making them up as such, i.e., it isn't based on the 'whatness' of matter. It is based on dynamic models that mould sub-particles into particles and then into all other increasingly complex entities. Without such complex dynamic patterns, physical existence would not have the essential qualities which appear as its “whatness”.

In this way, nature, as we know it, embodies a hierarchy of "hows". The 'how' on one level or mode of physical expression invites another level or mode of 'how' to take shape. In the end, we don't have a fixed scale of 'whats'. We have an auto-modifying, or auto-adjusting, “hows” process. No "what" can exist without a "how" which has turned it into what it has become.

This state of self-regulating and self-organising interaction is here called ‘*trans-modal reality*.’ It embodies the “essence” of Einstein’s and German logician, mathematician and philosopher Kurt Friedrich Gödel’s (1906–1978) “block universe”. Since “*everything is everywhere at all times*” (Whitehead, 1967) — a phrase that reminds us of the "sympathy" of beings, as taught by the Stoics— as English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) summarily describes the block universe, any one thing can also be contacted by any other, and any piece of *information* can lead to any other piece of *information* at any one moment.

It depends on the specific circumstances and the awareness of their limitations and potentials. The lowest or simplest "how" does not lead to or determine the highest. There is no such thing as total Determinism. This conclusion simply creates a new milieu where the different physical possibilities allow new dynamic models to emerge (q.v. *Emergentism*) when certain requirements make it essential.

Behind all this, we can discern something which, from a certain point of view, resembles a "law" of cosmic differentiation through inter-penetration. This “law” is incomprehensible. Iain McGilchrist again explains why: “‘*Grasping’ elements ... won’t get us as far as we would like to, because the most important things in life refuse to be grasped ... Like Tantalus’ grapes, they retreat from the reaching hand*” (Whitehead, 1967, p. 179). So, the only thing that can be said about the law of cosmic differentiation through inter-penetration is that different dynamic patterns of physical existence emerge and change, some for longer periods, some for shorter. The law is enacted as formations find opportunities to spread, not spread, semi-propagate or diverge entirely according to their experience of opportunities. What is seen as an obstacle in one case is seen as an opportunity in another.

Space-time unifying with no space-time

In this sense, trans-modal reality (a general modality emerging through more particular modalities) qualifies as a synonym for the *block universe*, when this is perceived as reacting to its own self. Trans-modal reality embodies this unity of events and states that unite space/time without space/time! Thanks to the *consciousness* which is creation itself, all entities, events and relationships, which hitherto existed only beyond space and time, are focused in space and time. The two general modalities are interwoven to give nature a more complete expression.

The notion of creation in general gives rise to a major conclusion. It is not man himself, who catalyses entities or events into manifestation through his measurements, as contemporary popular idealism has it and Quantum Mechanics tentatively suggests; it is the block universe or trans-modal reality itself. A quantum physicist can be seen

to be collapsing some phenomena in manifestation. But the collapse takes place *via* him, not *by* him. He does not want particular phenomena to break down to be of this or that. By acting in this way, he does and being the person he is, he just helps the block universe to continue its local manifestation of self. He becomes the unconscious agent who "materializes" what needs to happen at that particular moment and place.

Particular entities or events existing in an overlay as endless possibilities in trans-modal reality (or the *block universe* itself) come into manifestation by the specific observer. But being the person he is at that particular manifestation of space/time, the observer measures into actual appearance only that which needs to come to the foreground for trans-modal reality (or the *block universe*) to continue being what —and *as*— it is. Something that exceeds space/time is prompted in space/time. From an innate possibility, or virtual status, it becomes an expressive entity. The actor plays his particular role so that the cosmic play can unfold as it must.

The conceptual problem of today's science

Now let's go back to the question posed in the first paragraph of that article. What are the three aspects of the conceptual problem facing contemporary science? What makes them so important?

The first aspect of the conceptual issue is the way scientists look at reality. The second is the manner in which nature is objectified. The third is how scientists understand and manipulate reality in the light of both modes of "objectivation". To find satisfying answers to these three questions, conceptual questions are the greatest challenge of our time. The task is not just to recognize how we think and how nature works. The task is to become aware of why the important breakthroughs of science in the last 130 years calls for such an exploratory conceptual exercise to begin with, for example, why what we have discovered calls for ways of doing and thinking that qualitatively reflect it.

We will not attempt to achieve this with the categories presented in the above paragraph. An interpenetrative world calls for an interpenetrative presentation! Over-systematic analysis and categorization will be counter-productive. Clarity is always acquired to the detriment of truth. In the objectification of entities, facts, situations or relationships to better understand their transactions, we affect them in two ways:

On the one hand, we remove them from their interconnected reality, allowing us to isolate them conceptually.

On the other hand, our treatment of the objectified entities, facts, situations or relationships as isolated 'things' obscures their connectedness to the enveloping world — particularly in more subtle and indirect forms of existence. As a result, we are caught in our own clarity. As Cantor, Merleau-Ponty, Whitehead, and Heidegger all discovered in their own unique ways, the more solidly we abstract the domains, aspects or relationships of nature, the more arbitrarily we conceive their interaction with another objectification. We are distorting both the image as well as the dynamics of physical reality. Rather, we need to understand our understanding more than the "things" we try to understand!

Rediscovering hidden treasures

We now come to a few suggestions as to how this delicate exploratory task could unfold. The propositions will not be limited to the recognition of what Biology invites us to objectively and which Physics offers us to contemplate. The proposals will touch on epistemological considerations, the brain operations involved in perception, the

biological structures filtering incoming information, as well as the structure of reality that the above conditions suggest.

Getting informed about how the brain apprehends things and how they show up in its light, pushes one to investigate how the brain reaches into the outside world, from where and for what purpose. We can't just become familiar with what happens in nature or in the mind. We can afford to work with the situation.

In this way, we discover a number of mechanisms that have been neglected until now. There's the right hemisphere or the limbic brain. Another is the emotional interaction of these two centres worldwide through neurophysiological excitement. As a result of re-activating such mechanisms, it is possible that instead of continuing to adapt the inside of our brain to the forms of the outside world, as we do today, we will start to adapt it to the deeper layers informing the same.

Buddha was right when he stated that "*we are our thoughts and through our thoughts we make the world*". We are, in fact, what we believe. This does not mean that the thought is completely arbitrary. Nor does it mean that thinking cannot change when it reaches a point where the person realizes that it must. The will to bring about such a change must come as a powerful impulse. A simple philosophical conviction does not mobilize enough energy to do the work. It brings forward-looking connoisseurs to imaginative rather than intuitive ideas. And this is a major confusion that needs to be recognized.

We're not trying to imagine a new world. We want to understand its presence and feel how it functions the way it does.

Rehabilitating the limb brain

To obtain the qualitative change suggested above, it is first necessary to inform future connoisseurs about four important points. The first is how and why potential connoisseurs had permitted themselves to stop considering the right hemisphere. The second is how prospective experts will not confuse the underlying integrality informing the right hemisphere with the conceptual, logical and conditioned interpretations of it by the neocortex. The third area is how foresight experts will avoid becoming bogged down in future interpretations. Finally, the fourth area concerns the manner in which intellectual acuity can be maintained (and even increased) in such circumstances.

It will be far from easy to give a coherent description of the ins and outs of this radical re-education programme. The issue is not just what disciplines need to be taken into account in the discussion. Nor are there any methods of investigation to be adopted. The question is which responses are really relevant and for what reasons.

Moreover, the individual must find out if he has the courage to go beyond the answers he obtains. Such an attempt will allow him to sink once again into the actual experience of wholeness that used to line, from within his understanding and feel its catalytic effect on his perception.

The last question is what can best facilitate the above-mentioned process. An old Chinese proverb puts it in one word: "*If you don't look where you're going, you're likely to end up exactly where you're going*"!

Awareness that modern science works.

The question now arises is whether the ancient Chinese warning, with which the previous paragraph ended, be discussed from a scientific and philosophical angle? Is there language capable of formulating an appropriate response?

In this paragraph, as in the next, we shall attempt to find suggestions for a possible answer. This is not going to be an easy task. In our time, science, humanities, social thought, and studies of consciousness are becoming more and more autistic (q.v. *Solipsism*). So, long as these disciplines remain locked into a specific pattern of thinking, they will not offer suggestions on how to exit from the labyrinth in which contemporary man has been stuck. For that to happen, there has to be a radical shift in heart and mind. We need to better understand why the Lights of the eighteenth century happened in the first place, and we need to turn them around to shine on its own basic assumptions.

If this is to happen constructively, the experience of fullness must become as functional in our time as the *raison d'être* of fragmentation. We can no longer afford to blindly enclose ourselves in our objectification, as the Enlightenment has done. It has already been emphasized elsewhere that nature also objectify his creatures. But it does so in an attempt to establish sufficient stability to be able to change in the future without slipping into chaos. Our society today is doing the exact contrary. We are in the process of establishing a natural stability in the conceptual mechanism of science. Thus, we can then channel change in one direction, that which suits our current understanding of things. We have to figure out how that happens and circumvent it.

To the protean age

Since the 1880s, the previous certainties of the left brain have become increasingly tenuous. The German mathematician Georg Cantor (1845-1918) discovered in his honor that all mathematics was necessarily unreliable and incomplete. Austrian physicist and philosopher Ludwig Boltzmann (1844-1906) has shown that no system is perfect on its own. Albert Einstein maintained that if there is no feeling of admiration or wonder, "*science degenerates into insane empiricism*". Danish physicist Niels Bohr (1885-1962) introduced probability as a major actor of quantum physics. The German physicist Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) discovered uncertainty at the very heart of the objectivation of physical existence. Kurt Gödel not only corroborated Cantor by proving that incomplete character is the rule of mathematics. He showed that mathematics is not actually an objective science, as everybody accepted until his time.

These provocative departures from the "normal" world view show that since the 1880s we are increasingly moving towards a protean attitude in both science and society. Proteus was a Greek god who abhorred contact with others. If you spotted him somewhere, he would change his shape and disappear. Nobody was able to touch him or establish contact with him.

Protean behaviour is a reaction to the rigid way we have objectified the world since the introduction of agriculture (10,000 BC) to begin and write later (3,100 BC). Today our self-blocking practices in objectifying reality have reached the limits of their possibilities. If we manage to abandon them, this will be reflected in the way we discuss science and manage it.

One of the ways we could use for achieving this is to become more aware of our own expectations from the practice of conceptual objectification, its usefulness for predictive theory and its applicability to actual research. Max Payne takes a lucid look at this extremely important issue in a journal by Frank Parkinson *Science and Religion at the Cross Roads*. "*Dark matter and dark energy*", writes Payne, "*show that we do not know the full range of the properties of matter. But the same applies to the open quest for improved thinking. It suggests that we do not know the full range of the properties of mind either*" (Payne, 2009, p. 54).

There is a paradigmatic failure in the reasoning which these words reflect, and this applies to the understanding of physics and spirituality. Since the dawn of civilization, we have taken the way we "objectify" reality (secular or holy) as given. We have not seen this as just a filter through which feelings are activated, reality is grasped, and thoughts are put together. Even less have we seen the limited applicability of this system of objectification to reality, physical or nonphysical, measurable or not. We stand convinced that we can use the existing conceptual filters to apprehend the far ends of the self-organising physical continuum as much as we use them for apprehending the middle section that is perceivable through our senses. In other words, we have ignored a fundamental law of pro-epistemology. He says that while everything may interpenetrate with everything else, everything cannot be viewed in the same way as everything else. Each object must be seen sensitively to the demands of the particular bar of the self-organization scale from which it operates. For example, we are unable to study microbes with a telescope. Nor can we analyse the chemicals using a stethoscope. It just isn't true that because our objectification-filters work adequately for making sense of the section of reality perceivable through the senses (or their technological extensions), the objectification-filters work equally well for making sense of other sections not perceivable by the senses or fathomable through the logic they dictate.

Relevance vs comprehensive knowledge

If we do not know "*the complete range of the properties of matter*," as Payne continues, it is not due to some current ignorance of them. It will not be dissipated at a later date as we refine our survey technologies, broaden our objective knowledge and improve our computer capabilities. Our ignorance is due to the fact that the conceptual filters we use for objectifying what happens to the rungs closest to where we are standing on the ladder of physical organisation, cannot be used for apprehending properties on the far ends of the same ladder. For example, the physical organization is quite different in terms of particle physics and chemical interaction. The one level that is not applicable is the lowest. No organization exists at all. No concept filter is required. Reality is alive, not abstract. A holistic wave takes over, ending all self-blocking objectification and mental activity.

Could a more flexible approach to understanding be developed, capable of understanding more closely the properties linking all levels? Can we develop a new way of thinking that draws selectively on other rationalities without ending up with a call to irrationality? Is it possible to invite nature to reveal its functioning through various modalities, conceptual systems and organisational levels? Maybe it will be. But there is one caveat: we should not lock into objects that we become aware of nature. Reality needs to be both abstract and lived. There are situations on the fringes of existence where the truth can in no way be understood in terms of objects, or wrapped in certainties of any sort. These situations have to be complied with for what they are. They must be perceived for what they do both within themselves and within the global framework of reality.

Starting to understand trans-modal reality.

Two basic findings are important here. The first was mentioned earlier. This concerns the mutual penetration of compartments, tendencies, levels of expression and modes of action of nature. This is a sort of synesthetic state of a much wider (and deeper) scale. The mutual interpenetration in nature has been discussed by many wise elders.

It is also strongly supported by contemporary science. Five examples demonstrate this.

Firstly, there is the correlation of two distant events without any transfer of energy from one to the other. This correlation is referred to as non-locality or entanglement, depending on the appearance of the particle operations being investigated.

The second instance is the ability of children, well tested by Noam Chomsky (1988), to know more about what words mean than grownups or other kids may tell them they do.

The third instance is that the body as a whole, rather than the brain alone, functions as the source of most of the information and knowledge acquired by an individual (McGilchrist, 2009, pp. 118-120)³.

The fourth example is the collapse of Schrödinger's wavefunction in quantum mechanics. He converts a simple possibility to the real through an act of measurement. Ultimately, what is born is what is conceivable. As it becomes wider and deeper, so too is the reality brought into existence.

Lastly, we come to the fifth example; this is the work of the physicist David Z. Albert (1992) on the blending of quantum mechanics with special relativity. Albert and his academic colleague Rivka Galchen (2009, pp. 32-40) treat this huge problem of theoretical Physics in a highly illuminating article: "*Everything there is to say [about physical existence] can be packed into an infinite set off propositions of the form 'at t1 this is the exact physical condition of the world' and 'at t2 that is the exact physical condition of the world,' and so on. But the phenomenon of quantum mechanical entanglement and the space/time geometry of special relativity – taken together – imply that the physical history of the world is infinitely too rich for that*". This means that places have intertwined. The timeframes are also tangled. The past remains active in the present like in the past. The present is active in the past and the future as well as the present. Schrödinger's wavefunction manifests as a state in which object-mediated thinking encounters reality with a non-object structure and non-object-mediated thinking encounters object-mediated reality. As Albert and Galchen (2009) explain in their article, "*it is from wave functions that physicists infer the possibility (indeed, the necessity) of entanglement -- of particles having indefinite positions, and so forth*".

If the trans-modal picture of physical existence outlined by the above five instances is correct, then it stands to reason that each of nature's compartments, tendencies, levels of expression or modes of operation flow into, or evokes, every other compartment, tendency, level of expression or mode of operation. Like holograms, human beings are parts that live in entire parts and parts that live in parts.

Another point important here is the little understood ability of the mind to reach across nature's different compartments, tendencies, levels of expression, systemic organisation and modes of operation by contacting just one of them. This was announced by Whitehead when he declared that "*everything is everywhere all the time*." The interconnection of nature, which this access presupposes, allows us to get the best kind of information we need, even though the question was poorly worded. What counts is the authenticity of the intent expressed by the questioner.

³ Of particular interest here is a quotation cited by the author from Lakoff & Johnson (1999).

A linear description of nonlinear

Let us now address the trans-modal reality (and the trans-conceptual understanding it entails) with three particular concerns in mind.

First, the desire is to create an approach to reality informed by the advancements in 20th century physics.

Secondly, breakthroughs must be used as a platform for the development of new epistemological sensitivities.

Third, if the existing approach to investigating nature can no longer be used for describing the new realities illumined by 20th century Physics, by Mathematics, and by consciousness studies, we need to search for a new Philosophy of linguistic expression. In that case, the question arises of whether we should eliminate time, grammar, and syntax. In the end, nature works without any of them.

The answer to the latter question is an unequivocal no. A non-linear language is in no way required to describe or comprehend non-linear reality. The very structure of trans-modal reality, which emphasizes transformative connections, renders this unnecessary. Grammar and syntax need to stay in place. Just by being interrogated in any language, the block universe collapses in manifestation all these qualities and local and temporal quantities that are relevant to the mission of the questioner.

The picture that emerges from the scientific and theoretical advances of the twentieth century tells us that nature is constitutionally open to the deeper questions involved in the superficial questions posed to it. It puts in the foreground any relevant event or fact; past, future, present, narrowly woven, vaguely woven, directly or indirectly put together, personal or abstract and any combination thereof. Both the specific and the general, the partial and the whole, the explicit and the implicit, can be drawn out in this manner from a state of latent to an active explicit state.

The prerequisite for such understanding is given here as trans-modal thinking. As has already been implied, trans-modality actually means that the universe and the contemplative mind form a set of modes of operation and rationalities. They can only be experienced, understood and utilized if the individual is not conceptually locked into them. Or if it is enclosed, that it can abstain from judging other modalities by the regularities appearing in its own.

The block universe and its trans-modal expressions

The concept of the *trans-modality* we are talking about here is based on the notion of the universe of blocks, which is considered an acquired. This is of the utmost importance.

Trans-modality can neither be defended pro nor against. It is perceived as primal and unquestionable. In this sense, it is like gravity, the second law of thermodynamics, the speed of light, and other data. A rationale or analysis is not required – or possible.

Of course, one can refuse the operation of *trans-modality*. But if we do, he will have to contend with the notion of the block of the universe put forward by Einstein and Gödel.

As explained above, the *block universe* was conceived by both men through water-proof mathematics. Both showed that, in the last analysis, *space* and *time* are creations of the mind at least as we perceive them as (scientists) people; they don't constitute aspects of objective existence. Space and time thus have no independent existence, especially when the universe is considered to be an organic whole.

Even so, Einstein and Gödel failed to deduce from this that if mind creates space and time, it probably also creates the logic inviting one to think in terms of space and time. Thus, the two friends created a deep conceptual problem for each other. The reason was that (like everybody else at the time) the mindset of Einstein and Gödel operated under the imperative of Enlightenment/rationality and the object-mediated approach it expresses itself in. Despite some references by Einstein to the mysteries of nature, neither he nor Gödel conceive of reality as something partially different which may be symbolically or metaphorically denoted. Still less could they envision a world where things, states, forces and relationships are not clearly defined and their modalities not infinitely extendable.

In fact, Einstein and Gödel quickly realized that the relative conception of space and time, which the bloc universe supposes, is incompatible with human rationality. For example, the science of the Enlightenment had given a static, invariable and accurate picture of the world. However, concepts as scandalous as non-locality, non-temporality and non-linear dynamics had appeared on the stage. They did not correspond to the well-groomed image or the idiosyncratic rationality propagated by the Enlightenment.

Einstein and Gödel realised that the new notions arising from their advanced cosmological Mathematics radically change the way we think in Epistemology, Philosophy, Physics, cognitive science, communication, and the sciences in general. The two wise men therefore adopted a two-pronged approach. First, they have distanced themselves from paradoxes, their own work has given way to. Secondly, in the cases they couldn't do so, Einstein and Gödel worked out the paradoxes in such a way that they no longer offended accepted epistemological thinking and its self-locking principles.

A transrational logic?

The next question is, how do we deal with the trans-modal reality? Doesn't that demand a trans-conceptual and trans-rational approach? And if so, how can we accept a situation in which certainty can only be achieved in very limited areas under very controlled and specific conditions?

Modern research about the brain, general relativity, quantum mechanics and chaos theory can all help answer these tricky questions. But ancient philosophies in particular Taoism, Vedanta, primitive Buddhism, and Greek thinkers like Parmenides, Heraclitus, Xenophobes, Socrates, and others also offer answers. Indeed, their contribution is, in some ways, greater than that of more recent thinkers.

Ancient philosophy deals with more profound epistemological questions. For example, in one of its fragments Heraclitus remarked that "*nature loves to hide*" (Heraclitus, *fragm.* 211). He also hints that not understanding nature might be our own doing. As he explains, "*evil witnesses are the eyes and ears of people if they have souls who do not understand their language*" (*fragm.* 201). This saying implies that any type of logic informed by the senses is liable to mislead us; a stand that reminds us of the principle of falsifiability of the Austrian-British philosopher, academic and social commentator Karl Popper (1902-1994). Heraclitus says it explicitly: "*A connection that is not obvious is stronger than an apparent connection*" (*fragm.* 210) or: "*[People] do not understand how to be in disagreement [with itself, something can] be in agreement with itself*" (*fragm.* 212) or again: "*From [all] things come one unity and one unity [comes] all things*" (*fragm.* 206).

One way to understand what is really happening in our relationship with nature is to acknowledge that it works through mutual responsiveness. Fragment responses to

other fragments. But the fragment also answers to the whole and the whole to the fragment; and this point reminds us of the principles of the psychology of the Gestalt. They do this because, in the final analysis, we are so conditioned by our past objectification that we do not realize that fragments and integers are actually the same. Fragments represent the local and temporal shrinkage of the whole, while the whole represents the non-local and non-temporal extension of the fragments.

Thus, the so-called reactivity here translates the ultimate completeness into fragmentation and the fragmentation into the ultimate completeness. In the light of this, it is no longer possible to lock fragments or integers into any objectification. We realise that how we conceptualise and why represents the key to grasping what reality is on either end of the objectification scale i.e., the statements cowardly or strongly objectified.

Fragmentation and unifying fragments (*wholifying*)

What makes such reactivity so effective? To answer the question, we have to once more indicate the initial stages of evolution after the Big Bang. In the beginning there was only one all (or white or "empty"). Then, by some natural, random (?) fluctuating, everything blew up. The universe we perceive today is the final product of this early event. The minuscule basic units that make up matter are the fragments in which this whole thing burst.

At the same time, the core tiny units embody the restoration effort. In this exercise, the key to successful local operations is a balanced reactivity. Is the fragment more responsive to the whole, or to his ontological need to be a fragment? Is the whole more responsive to the fragment, or to his ontological need to remain a whole? Can they function simultaneously? The question, *mutatis mutandis*, resembles the strong (but paradoxical) co-existence of causation (determinism) with indeterminism (Tychism). When fragment and whole do, the *wholifying* fragment responds to a fragmenting whole, the fragmenting whole responds to the *wholifying* fragment and constructive responsiveness appreciates the merits of both in a mutually inclusive self-transcending exercise.

Here we have an unusual (absurd) way to strike the right balance. It doesn't avoid seeming opposites. It grows to effectively absorb a pole in its apparent opposite. That, in the end, is inclusivity. That's why we have to avoid exclusivity at all costs. Tell me your answer and I'll tell you who you are! Tell me how you're not reacting to things and I'll tell you what you miss! The world responds to the manner in which its fragments, respond to it; fragments, respond to the manner in which the world responds to them. We must neither forget nor exaggerate it.

Trans-organizational reality and trans-rationally intelligent

Because fragments are thus compelled to restore fullness, *consciousness* is present in all the operations, expressions and structural levels of the universe. This reflects a tendency to re-unite the basic units detached from physical existence produced by the Big Bang. It manifests itself in a palpable way by gravity and *negentropy* or *syntropy*. The role of consciousness is to seek unification within and across space and time (q.v. *relatedness*). Its effort is based on the same imperative of close ties between the basic physical units as prior to the Big Bang.

In light of this, peculiar knowledge functions as the local and temporal extension of specific events or physical states in the block universe. The collector perceives these physical prolongations in connection with his current needs. However, he does

so only to the extent that he is able to grasp the physical events and states on their terms.

This explains a fundamental epistemological warning generally overlooked by the scientists of the dominant society. What an object has been made does not take into consideration (or why) that it has become an object. In the first case, the object depends on how the various units of physical existence interact in order to form models. In the second instance, it depends on how the different models are interconnected. And in the third case, it depends on how the different levels of organization themselves interact on how they actually arrive at forming real 'things'.

This is where historicity becomes a scientific description of reality. It is quite correct to maintain that things are made up of basic units, both solid and energy consuming. But that can't explain what it is. Even less, he explains why they happen to be as they are at this particular time and place. The account of creation is just as important as the act of creation. In fact, the narrative and its logic constitute the creation itself.

For example, the Parthenon or the neighbour's cat are both made up of little physical units. But that doesn't tell you much about the difference between the two. The Parthenon as Parthenon and the neighbour's cat as the neighbour's cat are describable only in terms of the different ways in which the basic units, making them up have been put together and in which interacting levels of organisation. These cannot be broken down by base units themselves. The patterns of their interaction with and between these different levels are what enables them to be as they are.

Conclusion

Modern science should consider where it is going, with which i.e., new paradigm functions resulting from the quantum revolution. In this article, we propose the principle of "*trans-modality*". Objects are not conceptualized, not constructed, and not synchronized. Once you de-characterise the modes of nature's being as they seem to you, they emerge to see without cultural projections. The whole i.e., it is similar to the phenomenological method. Physical operations take place at various organisational levels using specific qualities. Ultimately, we want to show how the mind can influence matter. The sub-particles are based on dynamic models. Thus, Nature embodies a hierarchical "hows"; no "what" can exist without a "how". This state of self-organised interaction is called "trans-modal reality", that is, synonymous with the block universe. All this is manifested in the specific observer through the human conscience. According to this principle, the scientist-researcher must take into account every possible mutual feedback that his research will cause in the investigated nature, with all the possible results for the future survival of man on our planet. In other words, within a holistic framework of an approach, including the cooperation of the two cerebral hemispheres, science should each time take its moral responsibility very seriously into account.

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THE SECOND CHANCE OF LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

By

Khader I. Alkhouri, MA, Cand. Ph.D. of the University of Athens

Abstract

As we know the hearts of people and animals are opposed to each other in terms of genetic and psychological characteristics they are demarcated to some extent. The human heart is the focal point of consciousness and an important piece when conducting psychological-religious research because the religious behavior has a special place in the heart, which is easily proven by the advanced spiritual life of humans. But today we are talking about humans with pig-hearts that had been genetically modified. In this specific article, I would like to provide some thoughts about the transplantation of a pig-heart into a human being in the light of Psychology of Religion and some bioethical consequences.

Keywords: Faith, Psychology, Religion, ethics, pig-heart, transplantation.

Introduction

As we know, in all the front pages of the newspapers and all the scientific articles in bold, they wrote about the first successful transplant on a man, David Bennett, 57 years old, that received a pig-heart that had been genetically modified, in Baltimore, Maryland U.S.A on 7 January 2022 (Wilson, 2022). He has one last will before the miracle happens, and it was "I want to live". Probably behind those words, "Lord, give me one more chance to dedicate my life to you". Religious behavior is influenced by the interaction between nature and nurture, which means that Genetics, like any other behavior, is studied by psychologists (Tix, 2017). We cannot deny the challenges and the good news that we are witnessing today from a secular and technological development perspective, but we must also not forget that they are closely related to other scientific, psychological, ethical, religious, and spiritual areas. Many questions flood our minds in the field of Psychology of Religion, such as: Is there an effect on the person's psycho-spiritual behavior after a genetically modified animal heart transplant? What is the religious and psychological position of the human being with a genetically modified pig-heart? Is the heart the center of love literally, or metaphorically? What is the position of religion on the acceptance of animal organs for human use? Will the person acquire new feelings and new kinds of unconsciousness (e.g., Bad dreams) and what is the solution if yes? We will try to answer some of these questions.

Ethic and Religiousness

What is the religious and psychological position of the human being with a genetically modified pig-heart? Since Bishop Luke successfully performed the world's first kidney transplantation from an animal (calf) to the man at the hospital of Yeniseysk (Baloyannis, 2015), this concludes that there is a positive attitude from the religious perspective. About the first successful transplant on a man that received a pig-heart: The Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) in the UK welcomed

the news about the man who receive a genetically modified first pig-heart surgery. On the other hand, The Christian Medical Fellowship of the UK said it did not imply bioethical problems (Kelly, 2022). Mark Pickering, Chief Executive Officer at the Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF), said “we are on the right side of the line” because in this case there was no modification of the human’s DNA (Pickering, 2022). Dr. Said Moshe Friedman (Chief Rabbi in London): The main concern in Jewish law is the preservation of human life, since organ transplantation provides the greatest chance of survival, the Jewish patient will be obligated to accept a transplant from an animal. In Islam, there is a similar basis, that the use of pig organs is permissible if it saves human life (Hunter, 2022). Islam has forbidden eating pork as mentioned in the Holy Quran in 4 verses, but it did not prohibit the use of the member of pig-heart to transplant to a human being.

Since the current Christian Orthodox Church’s position on organ donation, it should be a last choice for the affected person, and the goal should be to prolong and save the person's life in the foreground. Also, for the Orthodox Church, the heart has a deep theological meaning (THE HOLY SYNOD, 2006). The role of the Church that is followed is to allow and encourage open dialogue that is guided by the Holy Spirit, by the wisdom of the Bible, and the tradition of the Church because the mission of the churches is to help the faithful to assume their responsibilities individually and as a group of believers (Byk, 2007). Saint Basil the Great, as he acknowledged the necessity to use medicine in the treatment of diseases, said that this is a tool that God presents to physicians to enable them for treatment of people. But we must take great care in the use of medical technology, if necessary, not to make us fully responsible for our health condition or disease. To touch on the basic understanding of what humans should be and what our relationship with God (Cole-Turner, 2001). Also, the Orthodox Church goal is not to impose rules, regulations, and prohibitions on our lives, but to establish a standard that leads to knowledge of the truth into freedom (Hatzinikolaou, 2008).

The role of health professionals should be practiced by belief-based values because these cultural values (Potential sources of moral purpose and individual force in health care) have an impact on the patient in many aspects and diversely. Also, it is important for maintaining the patient's values without conflicting with them, whether they are based on a spiritual or atheistic view (Kørup, et al., 2020).

Heart

As we know the function of the heart is to push the blood through the blood vessels to supply the body with oxygen (Staff, 2020). Yang Luhan known as “Gene Scissors” is a true scholar who graduated from Peking University-Harvard. He tells us that there are two major risks in transplanting pig organs into humans: on the one hand, pig genes carry endogenous retroviruses (PERVs) themselves, and on the other hand, pig organs will produce rejection in humans. Yang Luhan's team successfully used CRISPR-Cas9 “gene scissors” technology to inactivate disease-causing genes in pig cells (Niu, et al., 2017).

First, we must research the concept of the heart in Psychology and religious fieldwork. The heart retains a kind of ‘memory’ (Cirillo, 2018), also known as the Chatterjee phenomenon (Ballet, Mulleman, & Vandermotte, 2021). The heart has two kinds of memories short- or long-term memory (Zoghi, 2004). So, after the heart transplant from a genetically modified animal to a human, does the person acquire new feelings and new kinds of his mentality? If yes, then the heart should be understood as the seat of our deepest feelings, by which man expresses himself to the world, his fellowmen, and God, as we can see in the prayer mentioned in Psalm 51:10 *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”* (Bible, 1975). Ultimately, is the

heart the center of love literally or metaphorically? The Bible says, “*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself*” (Bible, 1975, p. Luke 10:27). So, the Bible proves that love has a place in the memory of the human heart. And we find this in many writings of the great Saints and Ascetics of the East, such as St. Gregory Palamas and St. Nicodemus of Mount Athos. But what is the religious stance of the person with the heart from a genetically modified animal? The spontaneous heartbeat of the fetus before the formation of the brain, and the continuation of the pulse after brain death incline us to infer that from a psychological perspective, the human heart is recognized (with all its inward and outward appearance, width, depth, and height) as the focal point of consciousness (Edwards, 2015).

Belief and Faith

Referring to religiousness, I imply both religious beliefs and faiths. Beliefs are our brain’s way of understanding our complex world (Lewis, 2018). S. Freud said that religion is the unconscious mind to fulfill desires (Cherry, 2020). In the Bible (Romans 10:9-10) it is said that “*if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*” (Bible, 1975). We conclude from it that faith has a close relationship with the heart. Yes, it’s been about the “degrees of faith” when Jesus Christ, as Bible mentions, said to the woman, in 7:50 Luke: “*Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.*” (Bible, 1975). Also, in Bible of James 5:15 said, “*And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*” (Bible, 1975), and in Epistle Paul to the Hebrews 10:35 said, “*Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.*” (Bible, 1975). But, perhaps, some say that faith is identified with placebo or suggestion. Authentic religious faith (intrinsic religiosity) neither deceives nor blackmails directly or indirectly, but functions freely.

Some clinicians have a lot to talk about faith, spirituality, and the unspeakable issues inside of human existence especially at the time of operations. For instance, Dr. A. Newberg of Jefferson Hospital, Philadelphia says that prayer is not a cure for cancer, but it can be just as important as science in helping patients recover (Newberg, 2014). In reference to the religious participation with patients from a religious point of view firstly the private prayer should be being become by the practitioner for the well-being of their patients and an appropriate expression of sympathy. Secondly, faith should be being shared between the practitioner and the patient for a psycho-spiritual helping (Foreman, 2018). Generally, three basic techniques, there have demonstrated the advantage of having a Christian-bioethical conversation: (1) Listening from central self and relational features, (2) linking to core story themes and values, and (3) leaning into critical personality styles (Greggo, 2010).

We should also mention that psychologists evaluate people after transplants. Psychological researchers study factors that help patients live longer (Novotney, 2011). It is important to know that psychologists are not only working to reduce the death rate, but also looking in-depth at how negative psychological situations affect the blood vessels and the heart (Saucy, 2013). It is often difficult to adapt to a new lifestyle after the transplantation of a body organ, but Psychology has proven experienced in psychotherapeutic intervention. Psychologists can identify relative strengths and weaknesses that could form the basis of a therapeutic intervention (Enright, Robert, DeLeon, Sciara, & Tanney, 1990).

Finally, belief can continuously call for a holistic view of the person and society. Medicine on the other hand can offer correction by highlighting particularly the body and the emotion as well as the spiritual elements of man. Especially, Christian Belief emphasizes the fact that the salvific victory of Christ became not only on human sin, but also on human suffering, pain, and death (Mahoney, 1984).

Faith healings (Miracles)

Speaking about religious faith with regards to medical treatments, we have to turn to religious miracles. A miracle is a supernatural agent, and it is a psychological process (Paloutzian, Rogers, Swenson, & Lowe, 2008). Since heart failure is responsible for the low oxygen that causes the death of brain cells, this means that returning the heart to work after stopping is a miracle (Lembo, 2014). The miracle is closely related to the degree of faith that emanates from the heart. So, belief in miracles gives spiritual meaning to people when their lives are in danger. Even doctors believe in miracles, so it is compulsory to include the clergy as part of the treatment team. And we should not underestimate or debase the tool of hope (Sreenivasan & Weinberger, 2017). Miracles are also strongly and positively linked to life satisfaction and stress relief (Nicolette, 2013). Sometimes the miracle does not come directly from God to the humans, but the flame of healing appears through the degree of faith in the name of God. The religious traditions were listened to precisely because religion is associated with a set of ideas about human relations and destiny, and traditions can be relied upon and reinterpreted (Lammers, 1996).

Is there an effect on the person after a genetically modified animal heart transplant on his spiritual behavior?

It's too early to predict on the psycho - spiritual behavior of the person after the first genetically modified animal heart transplant, so if we are interested in achieving fruitful results, first we have to make religious-psychological research on the person who received the new heart. Dr. Bartley Griffith, the director of the cardiac transplant program at the medical center, said, "It creates the pulse, it creates the pressure, it is his heart" (Rabin, 2022), this is the first evidence that shows the new heart is united with the human body and the person becomes the owner of it. It is expected that the psychological symptoms of the sick person after the transplantation will become like other psychological problems. Therefore, psychological and religious faculties must develop methods to make people with a genetically modified heart not feel psychologically weak accept reality, and feel that they are human like the rest without any discrimination.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, there is a close connection between the heart and faith. Religion has a major role in influencing the human heart in terms of psychological, spiritual, and therapeutic aspects. This means that we must not neglect the effective role of religion in medicine, especially from the perspective of the heart (see Cardiopsychology, Cardiotheology), because the heart has a deep spiritual meaning and is the one that nourishes anyhow the body. The use of a genetically modified pig's heart, from the perspective of religious-psychological Psychology does not conflict with religion because it does not modify the DNA of a human being. It is necessary to benefit from any of the medical developments that help the person to live for a longer period.

Summary

Using the religious-psychological research and studies field, besides the developed medical skills, can make a fundamental change in the rules to extend the lives of thousands of people. The human body carries a "spirit magnetic field", and human organs carry a "spiritual awareness" After a successful transplant on a man that receives a pig-heart, there is likely to be an impact on a person's spirit and safety. The heart is not just an organ that supplies the body with food (blood), but it is part of our memory, actions, and awareness.

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OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES AS PART OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES IN SAM PARNIA'S RESEARCH

By

Aliza Kulinsky,

MA candidate of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Introduction

This short research was written in the context of the course "paranormal phenomena", and deals with a topic that is difficult to categorize. On the one hand, the phenomenon of near-death experiences (NDE) is quite widespread, almost to the extent that it could be considered "normal" and take its place next to other unexplained experiences that a person can have in the context of various extreme physical conditions and which are continuously recorded in hospitals all over the world. On the other hand, the phenomenon of near-death experiences and within them that of the out-of-body experience (OBE), escapes and exceeds the "normality" of other experiences that arise in extreme physical situations. For thousands of years humanity has been dealing with the subject of life after death and is looking to find evidence, answers and uncover even a little of the great secret of death. Man has always been interested in the nature of the soul, or in other words, consciousness. In the independence of the soul from the body. Here these two questions are intertwined in a mysterious phenomenon that leaves even doctors/researchers without answers that could be a little definitive.

Approaches to the subject are various. Roughly, they are divided into two parts: those that try to find an absolutely biological solution (materialism), and those that, while looking for measurable, scientific evidence, remain open to exploring and accepting various types of explanatory models.

Whatever the approach and the results of the research, and whatever the criticism of each one, it is certain that each research is of great importance to man's ability to understand this complex subject.

While the researches on the topic are relatively few in scientific terms, there are several researches and approaches accordingly. Our choice to engage with Sam Parnia's research can be justified by its originality, Parnia's long involvement with the subject, and the fact that he himself is a physician who deals with patients who have suffered cardiac arrest. Another reason why he piqued our interest is his open approach combined with his uncompromising scientific and professional approach. In this paper we will briefly look at what near-death and out-of-body experiences are, Parnia's research with its conclusions and questions, and Parnia's colleagues' criticism of his research.

1. Near-death experiences.

1.1 What is a near-death experience.

Near-death experiences are the set of phenomena that are characterized and categorized as the experiences confessed by people who for a time, usually after a heart or brain failure, are considered dead. The experiences described, and which have been collected and cataloged by various

researchers¹, usually have the same characteristics. When positive, such experiences can include a variety of sensations, such as detachment from the body, feelings of levitation, absolute calm, safety, warmth, the experience of absolute separation, and the presence of a light.² When negative, such experiences can include feelings of hopelessness and unhappiness³. General features of the experience include impressions of being out of the body, visions of dead relatives and religious figures, and transcendence of egos and spatiotemporal boundaries. Many commonalities have been reported, although man's interpretation of these events often corresponds to his cultural, philosophical or religious beliefs.

As already pointed out, these experiences described in various articles and books dealing with the subject usually denote the same experiences⁴, more specifically, the ones we mention below. A feeling/awareness of being dead, a sense of peace, well-being and painlessness. A sense of detachment from the world. An out of body experience (OBE). A perception of one's body from an outside position, sometimes observing medical professionals performing resuscitation efforts. "A tunnel experience", or entering the dark. A sense of movement up or through a passageway or staircase, a quick movement towards and/or sudden immersion in a strong light that communicates telepathically with the person. An intense feeling of unconditional love and acceptance. Encounters with "Beings of Light", "Beings dressed in white". Also, the possibility of reuniting with deceased loved ones.⁵

NDEs are associated with changes in personality and outlook on life. A consistent set of values and belief changes associated with individuals who have had a near-death experience have been identified. Among these changes, some found a greater appreciation for life, higher self-esteem, greater compassion for others, less concern with acquiring material wealth, an increased sense of purpose and self-understanding, a desire to learn, increased spirituality, greater ecological sensitivity, and planetary concern and sense that one is more intuitive.⁶ However, as we have already noted, not all subsequent effects are beneficial, circumstances are also described where changes in attitude and behavior can lead to psychosocial and psycho-spiritual problems.

1.2 Explanatory models.

There are various theories and scientific proposals on the subject of near-death experiences, moving between spiritual, purely scientific (biological) and what we could call intermediate ones, which while trying to investigate the phenomenon with scientific methods, do not reject the possibility of realities that exceed scientific knowledge and capabilities.

¹ A particularly great example of an exploration of the phenomenon is that of the authors William Barrett and Raimond Moody, both of whom published books dealing exclusively with this subject, and in great detail. Their books are listed in the bibliography for further study.

² Steve Taylor, Near-Death Experiences and DMT, a neurological explanation of NDEs remains elusive. Psychology Today, October 12 2018. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/out-the-darkness/201810/near-death-experiences-and-dmt>

³ Marilyn A. Mendoza, What We Know About Near Death Experiences and how to help those who have them, Psychology Today, February 19, 2019. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/understanding-grief/201902/what-we-know-about-near-death-experiences>

⁴ Raymond A. Moody, *Life after Life, the investigation of a phenomenon survival of bodily death*, Bantam Books, New-York, 1976, p. 54.

⁵ Juan C. Saavedra-Aguilar, Juan S. Gómez-Jeria, Lic. Q., *A Neurobiological Model for Near-Death Experiences*, Journal of Near-Death Studies, June 1989, p.206.

⁶ Marilyn A. Mendoza, *Aftereffects of the Near Death Experience Adapting to an "exceptional experience"*, Psychology Today, March 12, 2018. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/understanding-grief/201803/aftereffects-the-near-death-experience>

a. Spiritual or transcendental theories.

Transcendental and spiritual theories are not ones that are easily found in books and manuals of scientific research. These theories are usually either personal or religious in nature and do not find much resonance in scientific circles. But these are reported by the researchers as descriptions of the interpretation given by the people themselves who declare these experiences, which we can see in the books of Raymond Moody, William Barrett⁷ and Sam Parnia. These theories view near-death experiences as genuine. That is, as experiences as real as any other experience that man has when he is in a conscious state.

Here the NDE represents evidence of the supposed immaterial existence of a soul or mind, which would leave the body after death. Therefore, an NDE will provide information about an immaterial world where the soul will travel when it ends its existence on earth.⁸

A. PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

Here we will refer to the main psychological theories prevailing today.

- Terror management theory.

According to this theory, death anxiety prompts people to adopt worldviews that protect their self-esteem, worth, and the viability and allow them to believe that they play an important role in a meaningful world. Thus, people must isolate themselves from their deep fear of living an insignificant life destined to be erased by death. One way to deal with this fear is to make sure they are part of an important group. TMT (Terror Management Theory) suggests that individuals are motivated to develop close relationships within their own cultural group in order to convince themselves that they will somehow - albeit symbolically - live on after their inevitable death. While some of the seminal studies on which TMT is based have not been replicated, thus drawing criticism within the field of psychology, the framework still resonates for many.⁹ For this reason, says this theory, man can interpret an NDE spiritually, precisely because he is "made" by his fear of death to believe that there is a life after death and that what he sees during the NDE is reality and not just a malfunction of his brain.

- The Depersonalization Model.

A depersonalization model was proposed in the 1970s by psychiatry professor Russell Noyes and clinical psychologist Roy Kletti, which proposed that the NDE is a form of depersonalization experienced under emotional conditions such as life-threatening danger, potentially unavoidable danger, and that the NDE can best be understood as hallucinations. According to this model, those facing imminent death become detached from their surroundings and bodies, no longer feel emotions, and experience time distortions.

This model, however, seems too limited to explain NDEs for people who do not have the sensation of being out of their bodies. Unlike most descriptions of NDEs, the experiences are dreamlike, unpleasant, and characterized by anxiety, panic, and emptiness. Also, during NDEs,

⁷ Barrett William, *Death-Bed Visions*, Methuen & CO., London, 1926. We do not mention a specific page here since the whole book deals with the subject in detail, in each of its chapters, citing at the same time the examples of audio-visual experiences and their interpretation by the people who experienced them.

⁸ Sam Parnia, *What Happens When We Die, a groundbreaking study into the nature of life and death*, Hay House, Carlsbad, 2006, p. 27.

⁹ Patrick McNamara, *Terror Management Theory (TMT) and REM Sleep*, Psychology Today, July 5, 2020. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/dream-catcher/202007/terror-management-theory-tmt-and-rem-sleep>

people who describe them state that they remain very clear about their identity and their sense of identity does not change unlike those who experience depersonalization.¹⁰

- The expectation model (expectancy model).

Another psychological theory is called the expectancy model. It has been suggested that although these experiences could seem very real, they were actually constructed in the mind, either consciously or subconsciously, in response to the stress of an encounter with death (or perceived encounter with death), and did not correspond to an actual event. In a way, they are like wish-fulfillment: because someone thought they were going to die, they experienced certain things according to what they expected or wanted to happen. The fantasy of a heavenly place was actually a way to soothe the anxiety of knowing that they were close to death. Subjects use their own personal and cultural expectations to imagine a story that will protect them from an imminent threat to their lives. The problem with this theory is that the subjects' accounts often differed from their own religious and personal expectations about death, which contradicts the hypothesis that they might have imagined a scenario based on their cultural and personal background. This is especially evident in children's accounts of NDEs. These are similar to those of adults, although children are less affected by religious and cultural influences about death.¹¹

- Dissociation model.

The dissociation model suggests that the NDE is a form of withdrawal to protect a person from a stressful event. In extreme circumstances, some people may withdraw from certain unwanted emotions to avoid the emotional impact and suffering associated with them. The person is also detached from their immediate environment.¹²

- Birth model.

The birth model suggests that near-death experiences could be a form of reliving the birth trauma. As a baby travels from the darkness of the womb to the light and is greeted by the love and warmth of nursing and medical staff, and so, it is suggested, the dead brain could recreate the passage through a tunnel into light, warmth and affection. This theory also presents some problems, for example, reports of exiting the body through a tunnel are common among both cesarean and natural births. Also, newborns lack the visual acuity, mental alertness, and ability to record memories of the birth experience.¹³

B. PHYSIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

Explanations that are categorized as physiological are divided into several groups, depending on the specific perspective or method chosen to investigate the phenomenon.

There are neurochemical, neuroanatomical, and so-called multi-factorial explanations that attempt to fit all or many neurophysiological explanations into a single model.

¹⁰ Bruce Greyson, Emily Williams Kelly, and Edward F. Kelly, *Explanatory Models of the Near-Death Experience*, Research Gate, January 2009, p. 216. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288006914_Explanatory_models_for_near-death_experiences

¹¹ Bruce Greyson, Emily Williams Kelly, and Edward F. Kelly, *Explanatory Models...*, 2009, p. 214.

¹² Harvey Irwin, *The near-death experience as a dissociative phenomenon: An empirical assessment*, Journal of Near-Death Studies, January 1993, p. 96.

¹³ *AIPR Information Sheet: Near-Death Experiences*, The Australian Institute of Parapsychological Research, 2016. <https://www.aiprinc.org/near-death-experiences/>

The main physiological explanations are: cerebral hypoxia, anoxia and hypercapnia, endorphins and other neurotransmitters, and abnormal activity in the temporal lobes. Neurobiological factors in experience have been investigated by researchers in medical science and psychiatry. Among the researchers and commentators who tend to emphasize a naturalistic and neurological basis for experience is the British psychologist Susan Blackmore¹⁴, with her "dying brain" hypothesis¹⁵. It is important to point out here that even these explanations, while they can shed light on the state of the brain during the NDE, and while many researchers tend to rely on them, present certain problems and limitations. In part it is the same problems that arise in the other theories. Physiological-biological explanations usually present a state in which the brain is plunged into chaos, its functions being drastically reduced and fragmented, which does not correspond with descriptions of NDE experiences, which, as mentioned above, are usually very holistic and positive.

2. Out of Body Experiences.

2.1 What is an out-of-body experience?

The out-of-body experience, or Out of Body Experience, is a phenomenon in which the person is outside his body, as he usually states later.

There are various types of OBEs such as those that occur during sleep or during vigorous physical activity such as mountain climbing. There are also out-of-body experiences that are intentionally induced in various ways. Due to the limited scope of this work, we will not deal with them. The most important type of natural (uninduced) out-of-body experience, and the one most studied of all others, is the near-death experience (NDE) OBE. The researches on the subject are many and different in the method and the conclusions they propose.

2.2 The out-of-body experience in the context of the near-death experience.

The main characteristic of the near-death experience is the out-of-body experience¹⁶ along with the other experiences described by the people who declare it, such as the feeling of absolute calm and the presence of light, as already pointed out.

A near-death experience OBE is one of the few types of OBE that occur spontaneously, without being intentionally induced. For this reason, but not only, they cause a great interest in the scientific community, with the big question, if they can really prove in some way the possibility of the existence of human consciousness (consciousness) independently of physical existence. Since many people who have experienced such an experience, interpret it as a sign or proof of life after death, which most of the time completely changes their life. The answers given by scientists dealing with the subject to this question are varied, as we have already noted on the subject of NDEs in general.

In this small survey we would like to concentrate on a small series of the most famous and interesting studies that have been done on this topic. These are the findings of cardiologist Sam Parnia.

¹⁴ Susan J. Blackmore, *A postal survey of OBE and other experiences*, Journal of the Society of Psychical Research, Volume 52, No. 796, February 1984, p. 225.

¹⁵ Sam Parnia, *What Happens When We Die...*, 2006, p. 19.

¹⁶ Bruce Greyson, Emily Williams Kelly, and Edward F. Kelly, *Explanatory Models...*, 2009, p. 220.

3. Investigations by Sam Parnia.

3.1 First survey.

In 2001, Sam Parnia and colleagues published the results of a year-long study of cardiac arrest survivors. 63 survivors were interviewed. 7 had memories of the time they were unconscious and 4 had experiences that, according to the study criteria, were NDEs. The out-of-body claims were tested by placing figures on suspended boards that face the ceiling and are not visible from the floor. The number of participants was small, and while a fair number of NDE cases were reported, the research did not yield positive results in terms of OBE¹⁷. At the same time, however, the physician-researchers could not find a physiological explanation for the NDEs that occurred.¹⁸ Which leaves, at least for them, the question of the independence of consciousness open.¹⁹

3.2 AWARE Research.

While at the University of Southampton, Parnia was the principal investigator of the AWARE Study, which began in 2008. This study, completed in 2012, involved 33 researchers at 15 medical centers in the UK, Austria and the US and examined consciousness, memories and awareness during cardiac arrest.

The research progressed as follows:

The AWARE study has two objectives, (1) to examine the frequency of awareness and a variety of mental experiences during cardiac arrest resuscitation and (2) to develop a methodology to test the accuracy of visual and auditory perception reports against the duration of the cardiac arrest. The study began in 2008 and, in the first four years, examined 2,060 patients.

Cardiac arrest survivors were interviewed in three stages, (1) to determine if there were any memories or perceptions during the cardiac arrest, (2) to determine if the memories or perceptions constitute an NDE (with or without auditory/visual awareness) and (3) to verify the accuracy of any auditory/visual perceptions of the physical environment experienced during the NDE.

To assess the accuracy of visual awareness claims, 50 to 100 racks were installed in each hospital near the ceiling of areas where CPR was likely to occur.²⁰ Each shelf had an image that was only visible from above the shelf. The hypothesis of the study was that the images on the shelves could test the validity of claims of an NDE or even OBE, if enough cases of NDEs occur where the patient had visual awareness from a vantage point high enough to see the image.

Of the 2,060 patients in the study, only 140 survived and were well enough to have a Stage 1 interview. Of those 140, 39 were unable to complete the Stage 2 interview, mainly due to fatigue. Of the remaining 101 patients interviewed in Stage 2, only 9 were considered to have had an NDE (9%) and of these 9 NDErs, only two reported memories of auditory/visual awareness of the physical environment. Of these two, one was unable to attend an in-depth interview at Stage 3 due to ill health.²¹ The other patient had verified perceptions of NDE events:

During the NDE, the patient felt euphoric.

The patient heard a voice say "shock the patient, shock the patient".

¹⁷ Sam Parnia, D.G. Waller, R. Yeats, P. Fenwick, *A qualitative and quantitative study of the incidence, features and etiology of near-death experiences in cardiac arrest survivors*, Resuscitation Interdisciplinary Medical Journal, volume 48, issue 2, pages 149-156, 2001.

¹⁸ Sam Parnia, D.G. Waller, R. Yeats, P. Fenwick, *A qualitative and quantitative study...*, 2001, p. 151.

¹⁹ Sam Parnia, *What happens when we die...*, 2006, pp. 41-43.

²⁰ Sam Parnia, Josh Young, *Erasing death...*, pp. 227, 230.

²¹ Sam Parnia, Josh Young, *Erasing death...*, pp. 234-237.

The patient stood up near the ceiling and looked down at his physical body, the nurse, and another man, bald and "a rather fat man," wearing blue scrubs and a blue hat. The patient could tell the man was bald because of where the hat was.

The next day, the patient recognized the bald man who attended him during the resuscitation. The medical record confirmed the use of an AED (Automated External Defibrillator) which would have given the automated instructions heard by the patient and the role the identified man played in the resuscitation.

Unfortunately, both NDE cases with auditory/visual sensitivity occurred in non-acute areas of the hospital, without shelves, so further analysis of the accuracy of their statement was not possible.

Conclusions.

The authors of the study concluded that:

In most cases of cardiac arrest, the memories of visual awareness compatible with so-called out-of-body experiences are not of the nature of a dream or hallucination, but of an experience that is pure and real, just like the experiences of everyday life, or even more real. A number of NDEs may have vivid near-death experiences but do not recall them due to the effects of brain injury or sedative drugs on memory circuits, as evidenced by the fact that 90% of cardiac arrest survivors remember nothing of the experience.²²

In both cases of OBE noted and investigated, the cardiac arrest was of a very short duration (up to 5 minutes)²³, which may partially prove the authenticity of the statements in the research interviews: if the arrests were of short duration, the brain trauma is smaller or minimal, so the person's ability to remember an NDE or OBE is greater, which is almost impossible in people who have suffered from severe brain trauma.

While the researchers were unable to collect enough evidence/testimony that could substantiate any hypothesis, the results brought to light new findings that can promote new research on the topic. The relationship between the duration of the interruption and the memory of the experience is of great importance. The question remains whether the NDE occurred during the cardiac arrest, or after CPR.

The results of the study were published in October 2014. Both the initiation and the results of the study were widely discussed in the media.

3.3 AWARE II Research.

The AWARE II trial is a two-year observational study of 900-1,500 cardiac arrest patients, with subjects recruited on August 1, 2014, and a trial end date of May 31, 2017.

Methods.

In this research paranoia and other research collaborators presented novel methods for administering audiovisual stimuli to test implicit and explicit memories using a computer with images and sounds delivered during continuous CPR.

The results.

Among 465 in-hospital 5-minute heart attacks, 44 (9%) survived and 21 were interviewed. Of these, 4 (19%) reported explicit memories, including (internal) cognitive processes such as feeling

²² Sam Parnia, Josh Young, *Erasing death...*, p. 253.

²³ Sam Parnia, Josh Young, *Erasing death...*, p. 254.

peaceful, happy and perceiving seeing relatives, while other memories indicated external awareness e.g., listening to people talk. One of the 19 correctly recalled the audio stimuli given during CPR, but none recognized the visual test. In this limited sample, there were no signs of implicit learning. These were then compared to 22 reports from cardiac arrest survivors who self-reported an NDE. The following themes emerged from these statements: 1) feeling joy and peace (95%), light perception (86%), tunnel (59%), a review and judgment of significant life events, including a person's actions and intentions (54%), and an overall sense of positive transformation after the event (95%).

Conclusions.

External awareness and internal cognitive activity may occur during cardiac arrest. However, it is not clear whether explicit recall adequately describes the full range of cognitive processes during inhibition, or whether implicit memories can also be formed. For some survivors, memories lead to greater meaning in life and a positive transformation, which contrasts with negative psychological outcomes such as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress disorder). In this context, in place of the NDE a more appropriate term might be the transformative experience of death (TED-transformative experience of death). Further studies are needed to delineate the role of implicit and explicit learning and how cognitive activity during CPR may relate to the quality of brain resuscitation and overall psychological outcomes.²⁴

4. Critique and comment on Sam Parnia's research.

Acceptance of Parnia's research as would be expected from a study on such a complex and sensitive topic was rather cautious, as can be seen from the various comments and criticisms we find in connection with the publication of the AWARE and AWARE II research.

We will address the various comments shortly.

One of the researchers who expressed the greatest reservations about Parnia's findings is a neuroscientist Steven Novella, who claimed that a single case verified from the set of "highly selected and filtered from a larger data set" shows almost nothing. He also opined that Parnia is desperately trying to save the study by simply citing subjective accounts of what people remember long after the event. According to Novella, what Parnia is trying to prove is a case of OBE is actually a "memory" that is built in the mind of the person stating the fact, during the ongoing process of his recovery and has nothing to do with anything other than the normal functioning of the mind (in a period of trauma²⁵). Another critical comment was heard from parapsychology researcher Dr. Caroline Watt, who said that the period of consciousness in the patients that Parnia mentioned was not relevant to his objective study. Rather, it was a patient who gave a supposedly accurate account of events during his recovery. He didn't recognize the images; he described the noise of the defibrillator. Watt believes this proves nothing as many people know what happens in an emergency environment from television.²⁶

²⁴ Sam Parnia, Tara Keshavarz, Meghan McMullin, Tori Williams, *Awareness and Cognitive Activity During Cardiac Arrest*, AHA Journals, November 11, 2019. https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/circ.140.suppl_2.387

²⁵ Steven Novella, *AWARE results finally published-no evidence of NDE*, Neurologica Blog, October 9, 2014. <https://the-ness.com/neurologicablog/index.php/aware-results-finally-published-no-evidence-of-nde/>

²⁶ Laurin Bellg, *AWARE study initial results are published*, International Association for Near-Death Studies INC, April 22, 2015. <https://www.iands.org/news/news/front-page-news/1060-aware-study-initial-results-are-published.html>

An important and detailed critical commentary, which we believe deeply and purposefully analyzes the problems arising in Parnia's research results, belongs to researchers Robert and Suzanne Mays, NDE researchers (Robert is a chemist and software developer and Suzanne is in medical secretarial science). Due to the short length of this work, we will not refer to the comment in all its details, but we will try to get the gist. Their opinion is as follows:

According to Mays, the design of the study has significant problems. First of all, the fundamental issue is that it examines only those cases that have occurred during cardiac arrest and only in an experimental model of hidden optics, targets placed on shelves. The goal of the research is to demonstrate consciousness activity while there was no electrical activity in the brain.

The main problems of the investigation, according to the Mays are divided into three points:

- Very few cases were found for a huge investment of effort.

Of the original 2,060 CA cases reviewed, 95% were excluded before an assessment was made as to whether the case involved an NDE. The remaining 101 patients had the stage 2 interview to determine whether there was an NDE and whether there were memories of auditory/visual awareness of the physical environment. There were 9 NDE cases. Of these only two cases were suitable for the Stage 3 interview to determine the accuracy of statements and only one could complete this detailed analysis.

- Experimental vs. Phenomenological emphasis.

There is general confusion regarding the method used for experiments, that the only acceptable scientific evidence comes from experiments conducted under controlled conditions. However, there are many phenomena where controlled experiments are impossible or impractical. In these cases, scientists use phenomenological research in conjunction with theory development. With this alternative method, the researcher looks for anomalous phenomena (or anomalous aspects of a known phenomenon) and develops a theoretical model that explains the phenomenon, including the anomalous aspects. The explanation may or may not be mathematical in nature. NDEs are very amenable to phenomenological investigation, and the variant of NDEs contains many anomalous or paranormal aspects, where an anomaly may occur on a small number of occasions but is nevertheless repeated enough to warrant theoretical developments. Imposing an experimental requirement in the investigation of NDEs, as in the AWARE study, is problematic because the experimental conditions cannot be controlled.

- Reference to cardiac arrest cases as the best model.

Various studies have convincingly shown that there is no difference in intensity and content between NDEs resulting from sleep, syncope (fainting) and meditation and those resulting from coma-related events such as: drowning, cardiac arrest, severe disease. Much theoretical study and analysis has shown that NDEs occur in their "purest" and "deepest" form when the brain's electrical activity stops. Thus, any anomalous aspect that can be shown to have occurred during the electrical flatline will provide the clearest evidence that consciousness can function independently of the brain. Thus, the best model of NDEs that occur "near death," as Parnia and other NDE researchers argue, is "true death," that is, clinical death that occurs by cardiac arrest. The choice of clinical death from cardiac arrest as the "gold standard" for NDE evidence is based, according to Mays, on a faulty assumption and unfortunate previous analyzes of NDE data. Also, the requirement to prove that there was no electrical brain activity and therefore an actual "separation" of mind from body is very problematic because of the generally short interval between capture in a hospital setting and resuscitation. The cardiac arrest model is also problematic because it provokes endless debate

about exactly when NDE awareness occurred, when brain activity stopped and restarted, and whether there was residual brain activity in between.²⁷

Conclusions

After exploring the subject of out-of-body experiences in the context of near-death experiences, we see that any investigation of the phenomenon is difficult. In addition to the difficulty of finding subjects for a near-death and out-of-body experience statement, as we have seen, of those who survived cardiac arrest, roughly between 10% and 20% were able to report an NDE or something similar to an NDE, even fewer were able to register further statements about an out-of-body experience, and only unique cases can correspond to a positive answer to Parnia's research question, whether there really is a function of consciousness separate from the function of the brain. While the results of Parnia's researches face severe criticism, and while some points of this criticism are of great importance for future research in this field, Parnia himself is curious, although he does not overlook the purely scientific side, saying: "*Thus, while it was not possible to absolutely prove the reality or meaning of patient experiences and sensitization claims, ... It was impossible to disprove them either, and more work is needed in this area. Clearly, the recalled experience around death now deserves further genuine research without prejudice*"²⁸. In our opinion, having also studied Parnia's research, the books of William Barrett and Raymond Moody, the various researches and articles and also the criticism of the work of Parnia, the AWARE and AWARE II studies, are of great value. While they are currently struggling to show any positive results, even the unique cases they report are worthy of attention. However, we consider that Mays's criticism is very important since it shows Parnia's weak points and thus opens up the possibility of a new approach to the subject. Of particular importance to us seemed to be the comment on the research method, which concerns the way in which the findings are examined and in which the hypotheses are built. We would venture to say that it seems to us that phenomenological research together with theoretical development could perhaps be a better avenue for further research. At least it would be possible to try a new way, since the one used by Parnia did not bring results to the satisfaction of the scientific community. The question, however, as Parnia points out, remains open.

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