

The Value of Extraordinary Experiences Without "Objective" Corroboration

By Michael Mannion

Love can be an extraordinary experience. However, it cannot be proven to exist. It is a completely subjective emotion. Verbal declarations of love are no guarantee that love is present. And silence about the presence of this powerful emotion is no indication of its absence. Behavior does not demonstrate the existence of love. Seemingly loving behavior may be motivated by fear, self-interest or even repressed hatred.

Yet the existence of love is not doubted. When a person declares "I'm in love!" he or she is not met with a chorus of skeptical voices demanding objective, physical proof as measured by mechanistic technologies. In general, an individual's self-assessment of the state of being "in love" is accepted by other people. Others may consider the love in question to be marvelous, misguided or doomed to be unrequited. But all know that the love is real, even though it cannot be photographed, x-rayed, weighed and measured or chemically analyzed.

There are valid applications of the tools that mechanistic science uses to obtain "objective" knowledge. The scientific method is a valuable means of guarding against the errors that arise from such factors as the present limits of factual knowledge, faulty methodology, prejudice, irrational emotions. However, it is a grave mistake to believe that the use of "objective scientific methods" eliminates the need for and value of the subjective factor in human experience.

The development of human knowledge and wisdom requires the integration of the objective and the subjective. Objective scientific tools are useful under the proper circumstances but can hinder progress when used in the wrong way or in the wrong situations.

People who report extraordinary experiences—unlike people who tell others they are in love—are met with demands that they supply "objective" proof of the reality of their experiences. If they cannot, their claims to have had extraordinary experiences are said to be delusions, hallucinations, ignorance or attempts to perpetrate hoaxes on the gullible. They are often said to be "irrational."

But it might be that those who demand "objective proof" of extraordinary experiences are the ones who are in fact irrational. Is it rational to think that the tools used in the study of the mechanical laws of physics and chemistry are appropriate for the investigation of subjective human experience? Might not the demand that extraordinary subjective experiences be measured and judged by the technology and standards of the physical world itself be an irrational attempt to ward off the disturbing emotions provoked by experiences that do not fit a particular picture of reality?

Is there value to the reports of those who have had extraordinary experiences only if there is some form of corroboration by mechanistic scientific analysis? Or might not the testimony of these witnesses have intrinsic merit?

Let's turn the spotlight away from those who report extraordinary experiences for a moment and shine this bright merciless light on those who demand "objective scientific proof." Perhaps they need to answer a few questions.

Why are physicists, chemists and other mechanistic scientists the final arbiters of the validity of experience?

Why are mechanistic scientists the ones to determine what is real and what is not? Who appointed them judges of these matters?

What work of theirs gives them the right to make the determination of what is real and possible—the fact that they have created nuclear weapons capable of annihilating entire cities or that they have created chemicals which now poison our food, air and water?

Finally, who has determined that mechanistic science is the only true science? Mechanistic science is the dominant model today, but is it the only scientific approach? Are its methods and tools the only ones that are scientifically valid?

Unfortunately, today's scientific elite frequently has more in common with the repressive priesthood of the Catholic Inquisition than it does with the founders of mechanistic science—who were themselves persecuted by the priests of their day. Too often, the technicians of contemporary science abandon their own principles and descend from the towers of "objective science" into a belief system themselves, which some refer to as "scientism."

In its arrogance, the scientific orthodoxy of today has brought us to the brink of extinction, yet its representatives claim to have the right to determine the nature of reality and to judge the validity of all experience outside its narrow domain.

Until recently, the majority of scientists believed that life existed only on Earth. Life was considered to be such a freak accident that it could only have occurred once. The universe was conceived to be an empty vacuum filled with dead matter and energy. Today, the consensus within mainstream science is that life is ubiquitous throughout the cosmos and that intelligent life is highly probable. This dramatic change has taken place in a very short period of time.

Could it be that such a transformation is at hand regarding the reports of those who say they have had extraordinary encounters with non-human intelligences? Will the testimony of these witnesses be seriously studied in the near future by the larger scientific community? If these witnesses are listened to with open minds, what is learned may set science on a path that will reshape our views on the nature of reality itself.

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