

Worldviews in Collision

By Michael Mannion

A few years ago, I wrote a book on how the views of Americans about extraterrestrial life have changed over the last 50 years. Shortly after that, I worked on a project about a psychic in the UK who was channeling a discarnate being. Anomalous phenomena were prominent in both endeavors.

When people learned I was working on the extraterrestrial project, a surprising number of women and men eagerly told me about their UFO sightings and even about their encounters with non-human intelligences or "aliens." Similarly, while I was working on the book about the psychic, I heard many stories of personal experiences with telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis and communication with the deceased from people of all ages and backgrounds.

What became immediately apparent was that there exists a great disconnect in our society between the official denial of the reality of anomalies and the frequent experience of a wide range of anomalous phenomena by a large section of the population.

This dichotomy exists within individuals as well as within the culture. For example, one study revealed that 30 percent of people who *do not* believe in life after death describe having experienced contact with a friend or loved one who has died. They tell of seeing the person, hearing the person or even having a conversation with the deceased. Yet they report to investigators that, despite their own experiences, they have not changed their views on the possibility of life after death. What may account for this?

A recent science news story may offer some help. In March 2004, *New Scientist*, a mainstream British publication, featured a special section on parapsychology titled "Power of the Paranormal." The articles focused on the current state of that science and the impasse it has reached in its interactions with mainstream science. Writing in the magazine, Robert Matthews of Aston University in Birmingham, UK states "...by all the normal rules for assessing scientific evidence, the case for ESP has been made. And yet most scientists still refuse to believe the findings, maintaining that ESP simply does not exist."

According to Matthews, it is not the strength of the evidence, or lack of it, that leads scientists to reject parapsychology. "In the case of ESP research," he wrote, "the mindset of researchers has become a key issue." Conventional scientists and frontier scientists have different views of reality. They do not see the same data through the same prism.

The existence of "objectivity" is a powerful belief in conventional science. It is a bedrock tenet of the scientific worldview. Anomalies challenge that worldview, in scientists and in ordinary citizens. It is quite common for people to deny their own experiences when those experiences contradict a deeply held view of reality that provides equilibrium and meaning

in life.

Harvard psychiatrist John Mack, MD is an example of a researcher who was forced by his work to choose between his clinical psychiatric judgment and his worldview. Dr. Mack worked with men and women who claimed to have had encounters with extraterrestrial beings. He found their stories hard to accept and impossible to dismiss. He wrote in *Passport to the Cosmos*, "I was then faced with the choice of either trying to fit these individuals' reports into a framework that fit my worldview...or of modifying my worldview to include the possibility that entities, beings, energies—*something*—could be reaching my clients from another realm." He chose to modify his worldview to allow for his clinical findings, a rare thing in science and medicine when a researcher confronts anomalous phenomena.

This is the exact confrontation that the study of anomalies brings about in many people when new data challenge conventional scientific views. It is a great obstacle in the way of the acceptance of frontier science and also a major reason the investigation of anomalies is so critical.

The Power of Anomalous Phenomena

In his landmark work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn said "Discovery commences with the awareness of anomaly..." Scientific endeavors that deal with anomalies have the power to bring about fundamental changes in human understanding by forcing researchers to grapple with critical issues outside of the mainstream.

The experimental data compiled over the decades by frontier scientists provide a challenge to the answers that both science and religion offer for great questions concerning our existence, such as:

- What is life?
- How did life begin?
- What is consciousness?
- Is intelligence inevitable?
- How do we know and how do we know that we know?
- Who are we and what is our place in creation?
- Is there life on other planets?
- Is there survival of consciousness after physical death?

Both science and religion have developed answers to the above questions that have evolved over the past 4-6000 years into the different belief systems that exist today. But it is the information compiled in the 20th century, by pioneers such as Wilhelm Reich, and leading edge investigators of the early 21st century, that is now confronting the established worldview with new answers.

The Near-Death Experience: A Model for Progress

Efforts to understand the near-death experience (NDE), along with work done by mainstream researchers, have resulted in a greater understanding of this profound mystery. In 2001, Dutch researchers published a study of the NDEs in the respected British medical journal *Lancet*, concluding:

"Our results show that medical factors cannot account for occurrence of NDE; although all patients had been clinically dead, most did not have NDE. Furthermore, seriousness of the crisis was not related to occurrence or depth of the experience. If purely physiological factors resulting from cerebral anoxia caused NDE, most of our patients should have had this experience. Patients' medication was also unrelated to frequency of NDE. Psychological factors are unlikely to be important as fear was not associated with NDE."

The transformation of the NDE phenomenon from the realm of the paranormal to the pages of a respected conventional medical journal, can be seen as a prototype for how new knowledge can help transform our worldview, one anomaly at a time. If leading edge science keeps demonstrating that our understanding of our senses is incomplete; that we process and gain information in ways that cannot yet be explained; that mind and consciousness do not function according to current theories; then pressure will build to find answers to these scientific problems.

It took 25 years for the NDE to make its way from popular books such as *Life After Life* by Dr. Raymond Moody and *Heading Toward Omega* by Dr. Kenneth Ring, to the pages of a peer-reviewed medical journal. In the coming years, the study of UFOs, human-ET encounters, scientific remote viewing, distant healing, and other anomalies may move into the mainstream as well, as ground-breaking investigations advance human knowledge.

The results of exciting new research directly challenge our scientific understanding of time, our senses, energy and energy transfer, learning, physiology, medicine and healing. The bottom-line conclusion that one is forced toward by these investigations is that our present picture of reality is woefully inadequate and greatly in need of revision. Yet, as a society, we continue acting on a daily basis as if none of these discoveries have been made. They have had almost no widespread societal impact in our culture.

We humans are going through this life as if in a trance. Psychologist Charles Tart has written about what he calls "consensus reality," which he believes is in actuality a "consensus trance" that we all participate in. We desperately need to awaken from this trance because our very survival is at stake. We need a "mindshift," a transformation of our consciousness so profound that it will alter our behavior fundamentally.

Conclusion

Apollo 14 Astronaut Edgar Mitchell noted, *"There are no unnatural or supernatural phenomena, only very large gaps in our knowledge of what is natural...We should strive to fill those gaps of ignorance."* This wise counsel echoes the words of St. Augustine written over a millennium earlier, *"Miracles are not contrary to nature, but only to what we know about nature."*

Leading edge research is focusing our attention on both large gaps in our knowledge and phenomena that appear to us as modern day miracles. In the spirit of Dr. Mitchell, many investigators are helping to fill those gaps of ignorance and increase our understanding of reality so that we have a better comprehension of, and appreciation for, the truly miraculous nature of existence.

The old worldview is inadequate today but fiercely fights to preserve itself. A new worldview is struggling to be born but has not yet taken shape. Frontier science has the potential to provide new insights that can have a transformative impact on humanity and radically alter the current worldview for the better. This is needed urgently if the human species is to survive and thrive and not destroy itself. What is more important than new knowledge than can help humanity save itself from the crisis it has created?