

Editorial

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Welcome to the first issue of *AntiMatters*, an open-access online journal addressing issues in science and the humanities from non-materialistic perspectives. *AntiMatters* is published by the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE) in Puducherry (formerly Pondicherry), India. The SAICE is named after Sri Aurobindo, a polymath, revolutionary, evolutionary philosopher, poet, mystic, and yogi. The release of this inaugural issue on August 15th, 2007, celebrates his birthday.

August 15th is a significant date for a variety of reasons. It is (coincidentally?):

- the day on which India gained independence from the United Kingdom (in 1947),
- the day on which the surrender of Japan was announced (in 1945), marking the end of World War II,
- and the day on which the Assumption of Mary is celebrated by Roman Catholics.

As to the first “coincidence,” Sri Aurobindo was one of the leaders of the early movement for the freedom of India from British rule. As to the second, I think it best to let Sri Aurobindo himself outline his involvement in the termination of World War II. To this end I shall quote at some length from an autobiographical letter written by him in the third person.

At Pondicherry, from this time onwards [1910] Sri Aurobindo’s practice of Yoga became more and more absorbing. He dropped all participation in any public political activity, refused more than one request to preside at sessions of the restored Indian National Congress and made a rule of abstention from any public utterance of any kind not connected with his spiritual activities or any contribution of writings or articles except what he wrote afterwards in the *Arya*.¹ For some years he kept up some private communication with the revolutionary forces he had led, through one or two individuals, but this also he dropped after a time and his abstention from any kind of participation in politics became complete. As his vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured by the march of forces of which he became aware, that Britain would be compelled by the pressure of Indian resistance and by the pressure of international events to concede independence and that she was already moving towards that eventuality with whatever opposition and reluctance. He felt that there would be no need of armed insurrection and that the secret preparation for it could be dropped without in-

1 Between 1914 and 1921 Sri Aurobindo brought out a philosophical review, the *Arya*, and wrote, under a continual deadline, all of the works upon which his reputation as a philosopher, Sanskrit scholar, political scientist and literary critic is based. For six and a half years he produced from scratch the yearly equivalent of two or three full-length books, but working on as many as seven simultaneously.

jury to the Nationalist cause, although the revolutionary spirit had to be maintained and would be maintained intact. His own personal intervention in politics would therefore be no longer indispensable. Apart from all this, the magnitude of the spiritual work set before him became more and more clear to him, and he saw that the concentration of all his energies on it was necessary. . .

But this did not mean, as most people supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action; for it is part of the experience of those who have advanced far in Yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he had attained to it, he used, at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of action. Twice, however, he found it advisable to take in addition other action of a public kind. The first was in relation to the Second World War.

At the beginning he did not actively concern himself with it, but when it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate the world, he began to intervene. He declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies, made some financial contributions in answer to the appeal for funds and encouraged those who sought his advice to enter the army or share in the war effort. Inwardly, he put his spiritual force behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and the definite triumph of Hitler, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction. . . He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India. He allowed certain letters he had written in support of the war affirming his views of the Asuric [titanic or anti-divine] nature and inevitable outcome of Hitlerism to become public. He supported the Cripps' offer² because by its acceptance India and Britain could stand united against the Asuric forces and the solution of Cripps could be used as a step towards independence. When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it, change immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat. He had also after a time the sat-

2 In March 1942 the British government attempted to secure Indian cooperation and support for their efforts in World War II, offering India full Dominion status at the end of the war, with the chance to secede from the Commonwealth and go for total independence. The mission was headed by Sir Stafford Cripps, a senior left-wing politician and government minister in the War Cabinet of Winston Churchill.

isfaction of seeing his previsions about the future of India justify themselves so that she stands independent with whatever internal difficulties. (Sri Aurobindo, 1972a, pp. 37–39)

In view of the fact that “the very principle of his Yoga was not only to . . . attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning,” it seems to be more than a coincidence that the Assumption of Mary is celebrated on his birthday. Simply put, the ultimate aim of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga is the divinization of matter, and of this the Assumption of Mary stands as an apposite symbol.³ And one last “coincidence”: Sri Aurobindo left his body in December 1950, about a month after Mary’s passage into heaven was made dogma by Pope Pius XII.

Here are a further few events that happened on an August 15th:

- 1877 Thomas Edison makes the first-ever recording (“Mary Had a Little Lamb”).
- 1914 The Panama Canal opens to traffic.
- 1944 Operation Dragoon — Allied forces land in southern France.
- 1965 The Beatles play to nearly 60,000 fans at Shea Stadium in New York City, marking the birth of stadium rock.
- 1969 The Woodstock Music and Art Festival opens.
- 1973 The United States bombing of Cambodia ends.
- 1977 The Big Ear, a radio telescope operated by the Ohio State University as part of the SETI project, receives the famous “Wow! signal” from deep space.

So what is in this first issue of *AntiMatters*?

The first item (“What Buddhist Meditation has to Tell Psychology About the Mind”) is a plenary address to the American Psychological Association delivered on August 23 of 2002 (eight days late!) by **Eleanor Rosch** and published here for the first time. Rosch explains why Eastern traditions, particularly Buddhist thought and meditation, can reveal a quite new understanding of what the human mind and its knowing capacity actually are. She is critical of biological and psychological approaches to meditative and religious experiences since in taking our present versions of the body and the mind for granted they marginalize these experiences. Our habitual mode of knowing (for the purpose of this address called “consciousness”) is founded on a more basic and comprehensive mode (“awareness”). Meditative awareness reveals, *inter alia*, a massive interdependence, which completely eludes the simplistic oppositional thinking of our “argument culture” (Tannen, 1998). An understanding of interdependence, Rosch points out, has clinical significance:

3 In the eyes of Carl Jung, the announcement of the Assumption of Mary in 1950 was “the most important religious event since the Reformation” (Storr, 1983, pp. 322, 324). It meant for him that “the heavenly bride was united with the bridegroom.” In Indian metaphysics, the female aspect of the Divine (*māyā*, *prakriti*, *shakti*) is responsible for the material creation.

It can provide people who suffer from guilt, depression, or anxiety with a vision of themselves as part of an interdependent network in which they need neither blame themselves nor feel powerless. In fact it may be that it is only when people are able to see the way in which they are not responsible for events that they can find the deeper level at which it is possible to take responsibility beyond concept and (depending upon the terminology of one's religious affiliation) repent, forgive, relax, or have power over the phenomenal world.

Rosch impressively illustrates the transition from illusory ego-centered responsibility to egoless genuine responsibility with quotations from the autobiography of martial artist Peter Ralston (1989).

The next two items — “Particles, Consciousness, Volition: A Vedantic Vision” (PCV) and “The Quantum World, the Mind, and the Cookie Cutter Paradigm” (QWM), by Yours Truly — have had a checkered history. In a paper on the physics of (mind-matter) interactionism (Mohrhoff, 1999), I concluded that interactionism “cannot be the last word” and referred to another paper then in review. In February 2000 this paper received two reviews with many helpful suggestions, one by Jonathan Shear and one by Jean Burns. The latter review opened with the good news that “[t]his is a very nice paper with interesting and innovative ideas, which obviously have had a lot of thought.” Thank you, Jean. It took me three years to resubmit this paper (under its present title, PCV) along with another paper (QWM) to *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (JCS). In March 2003 Jean Burns announced that she had finished the pre-screening on these papers. (“They look fine — clearly written and well thought out.” Thanks again.) Two years passed. In response to my eventual inquiry, in March 2005, I learned that my papers were “accidentally placed in the category ‘incoming correspondence pending’ instead of being sent out.” Both papers were ultimately rejected by JCS. Explaining the rejection of QWM, Dr. Burns wrote to me in May 2005:

In response to your question, we'd like to clarify that our rejection of #1555 was not because we agreed with the referee that your paper was poorly done. Rather, it was because a response that would satisfy the referee and others who had similar questions would then make the paper more technical from the standpoint of physics. And JCS has a policy that we don't publish papers that involve lengthy technical considerations that are specific to a field. Anthony [Freeman] sent me a copy of the referee's comments when he received them. I said I thought that the referee was overly critical and that a more constructive solution would be to have you respond to the comments in the review. However, I realized that it was not only the referee that would have such questions and that your response would necessarily involve considerations that only a physicist could appreciate and evaluate. So any response would mean that the paper would be too technical for us. I note that you brought out a similar point at the end of your commentary — when you give talks on these ideas, some people in the audience (usually the spiritually inclined ones) “get” what you are saying, and others have numerous objections, the resolution of which would involve reading several of your technical papers. This state of affairs is normal for highly original work. But because of this situation, JCS was no longer an appropriate venue for the paper.

At about the same time Dr. Burns wrote to me in a separate email, “I mentioned your pa-

per to Richard Amoroso, the editor of Noetic Journal, saying that it is highly original and that I had reviewed and approved it, and he asked me to tell you that he will accept it for his journal.” One more “thank you,” Jean. Both papers were scheduled to appear in the *The Noetic Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January 2006). Unfortunately the journal folded after the last issue of 2005.

By this time I had deposited both papers in the Cognitive Sciences Eprint Archive CogPrints . On March 6, 2006 I received the following email:

Hello: My name is Benny Shanon and I am a professor of psychology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Israel). My areas of specialization are the phenomenology of human consciousness (including both ordinary and non-ordinary states of mind) and the philosophy of psychology. By complete chance, I have recently gotten to your text bringing together quantum mechanics and Vedic thought. I was very much impressed, and also touched, by your writing. The paper was one of the very best I have read on these topics (and, in fact, I have read a lot) and my sentiment was that it really touched the Truth. . . Thanks for the good reading!

Shanon is the author of *The Antipodes of the Mind*  (Shanon, 2002), a pioneering cognitive psychological study of Ayahuasca, a plant-based Amazonian psychotropic brew. The research reported in *Antipodes* is based on the systematic recording of Shanon’s extensive experiences with the brew and on a large number of interviews. When I met Benny in January 2007 at a conference organized by the Department of Psychology of the University of Delhi, I learned that, in his estimation, the world view that most closely accords with the Ayahuasca experience is the Vedantic Advaita philosophy — hence his interest in, and appreciation of, PCV. For their publication in *AntiMatters*, both PCV and QWM have been substantively revised.

In “Memory Without a Trace,” **Stephen Braude** argues that theories of memory that involve some kind of storage — bridging the temporal gap between occurrent remembering of an event and the event remembered — are deeply mistaken. The mechanisms they posit cannot possibly do what is required of them. His critique is hardware-independent and thus germane not only to theories that locate memory traces in the brain but also to speculations about environmental memory (in connection with evidence for post-mortem survival), genetic memory in reincarnation cases, and cellular memory in transplant cases (see below). According to Braude,

both memory researchers and parapsychologists are missing an opportunity to be genuine scientific pioneers. Rather than boldly searching for new explanatory strategies (for memory specifically and for human behavior generally), they cling instead to familiar mechanistic presuppositions, which they’ve typically never examined in any depth, but by means of which they can maintain the illusion that they’re doing science according to the allegedly tough-minded methods exemplified in some physical sciences. . . But there are novel explanatory options and strategies they never consider; there are alternative and profoundly different approaches to the understanding of human beings. However, spelling out those options is a huge project, one that must be reserved for another occasion.

People are waiting to hear about it, Stephen.

The next item (“Acquisition of Donor Traits by Heart Transplant Recipients”), excerpted from Pearsall et al. (2002), reports some of the transplant cases just mentioned. (At present this paper is available at the website of *Nexus* magazine under the title “Organ Transplants and Cellular Memories.” ↗)

Taking the evidence for postmortem survival to be sufficiently strong and compelling that an unbiased person ought to conclude that materialism is false, **Neal Grossman** (“Who’s Afraid of Life After Death?”) reflects on the academy’s refusal to examine this evidence and comes to the conclusion that

the atheist and the believer, from the fundamaterialist to the fundamentalist, share something in common. In fact, from an epistemological perspective, what they have in common is much more significant than what they disagree about. What they agree about is this: beliefs pertaining to the possible existence of a transcendent reality — God, soul, afterlife, and so on — are based on faith, not fact. If this is true, then there can be no factual evidence that pertains to such beliefs. This metabelief — that beliefs about a transcendent reality cannot be empirically based — is so deeply entrenched in our culture that it has the status of a taboo. The taboo is very democratic in that it allows everyone to believe whatever he or she wants to believe about such matters. This allows fundamaterialists to feel comfortable in their conviction that reason is on their side, that there is no afterlife, and that those who believe otherwise have fallen prey to the forces of irrationality and wishful thinking. But it also allows fundamentalists to feel comfortable in *their* conviction that they have God on their side, and that those who believe otherwise have fallen prey to the forces of evil. Thus, although the fundamentalist and the fundamaterialist are on opposite extremes of the spectrum of possible attitudes towards an afterlife, their extreme positions unite them as strange bedfellows in their battles against the possibility that there are matters of fact about the afterlife that empirical research might discover.

The evidence from NDEs suggests that God is not bothered by “sins” — in fact, may not even grasp the notion — and it supports the concept of an all-loving non-judgmental God. If theologians and religionists were to open the door to empirical evidence, they would thus run the risk that evidence may contradict some aspects of what was believed solely on the basis of faith. No wonder that some religious fundamentalists are up in arms about the NDE.

Studies on the transformative effect of the NDE show that the cultural values of wealth, status, and material possessions become much less important, and the perennial religious values of love, caring for others, and acquiring knowledge about the divine ascend to greater importance. . . . As long as religious values are presented as merely religious values, it is easy for popular culture to ignore them or give them minimal lip service on Sunday mornings. But if these same religious values are presented as empirically verified scientific facts, then everything changes. If the belief in an afterlife were to be accepted, not on the basis of faith, nor on the basis of speculative theology, but as a well-confirmed scientific hypothesis, then this could not be ignored by our culture. In fact, it would mean the end of our culture in its present form.

For further reading on NDEs I suggest —

- “Near-death experience in survivors of cardiac arrest: a prospective study in the

Netherlands” by Pim van Lommel, Ruud van Wees, Vincent Meyers and Ingrid Elferich. *The Lancet* 358, 2001, 2039–2045, DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(01)07100-8. Use [this link](#) for a free download (PDF) or [this link](#) for a printer-friendly version.

- “About the Continuity of Our Consciousness” by Pim van Lommel. (i) *Advances in Experimental Medicine and Biology* 550, 2004, 115–132. (ii) *Brain Death and Disorders of Consciousness* (edited by C Machado and D A Shewmon), Kluwer Academic and Plenum Publishers. Free access to this paper is provided by the International Association for Near-Death Studies via [this link](#).

Like van Lommel, many students of paranormal phenomena believe that quantum mechanics may help explain what is going on. Apart from evincing a deplorable physicalist/reductionist inclination, this belief is unfounded, for quantum mechanics cannot even explain what is *normally* going on — forget the paranormal. The only feature of quantum mechanics that is more or less universally accepted is that its mathematical formalism provides us with algorithms for assigning probabilities to possible measurement outcomes on the basis of actual outcomes. In other words, the laws of quantum mechanics correlate measurement outcomes. They neither account for the occurrence of the correlata nor help explain how the correlations come about. While some of the well-tested predictions of quantum mechanics no doubt boggle the mind, this is not much of an asset when it comes to explaining other mind-boggling phenomena, be it the very existence of consciousness or the evidence for ESP and PK. Quantum mechanics is as much in need of explanation as are the existence of “normal” consciousness or the occurrence of “paranormal” phenomena. If these mysteries have something in common, it is our apparent inability to make them go away, however hard we try.⁴

The article by philosopher of science **Dennis Dieks** (“The Quantum Mechanical Worldpicture and its Popularization”) is a welcome reminder that

the outcome of foundational work in the last couple of decades has been that interpretations which try to accommodate classical intuitions are impossible, on the grounds that theories that incorporate such intuitions necessarily lead to empirical predictions which are at variance with the quantum mechanical predictions. However, this is a negative result that only provides us with a starting-point for what really has to be done: something conceptually new has to be found, different from what we are familiar with. It is clear that this constructive task is a particularly difficult one, in which huge barriers (partly of a psychological nature) have to be overcome. . . The sheer difficulty of the situation, in which the only thing that is certain is that familiar concepts do not work, surely is one central element of the particular situation in quantum mechanics.

Charles Eisenstein (“A State of Belief is a State of Being”) reminds us that when we reject, for example, “that synchronicities have any meaning beyond what we project onto them, we are also rejecting that the events of our lives are meaningful.” Whatever the devout skeptic may claim, the choice between meaning and meaninglessness is not

4 “The attractiveness of quantum theories of consciousness may stem from a Law of Minimization of Mystery: consciousness is mysterious and quantum mechanics is mysterious, so maybe the two mysteries have a common source.” (Chalmers, 1995)

dictated by science or its methods of inquiry. It depends on who or what we are, our state of being. As Eisenstein observes, the mind-set of the devout skeptic inevitably generates feelings of gloom and desolation. As Bertrand Russell (1903) wrote in what is perhaps his best known and most reprinted essay,

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temper of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins — all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

One cannot but appreciate the poetic appeal of this passage. How is it that the materialist's asseverations so often have the aesthetic appeal of a Greek tragedy? Sri Aurobindo builds up a similar tension but, in contrast to the materialist, offers a gratifying resolution:

For this is the monstrous thing, the terrible and pitiless miracle of the material universe that out of this no-Mind a mind or, at least, minds emerge and find themselves struggling feebly for light, helpless individually, only less helpless when in self-defence they associate their individual feeblenesses in the midst of the giant Ignorance which is the law of the universe. Out of this heartless Inconscience and within its rigorous jurisdiction hearts have been born and aspire and are tortured and bleed under the weight of the blind and insentient cruelty of this iron existence, a cruelty which lays its law upon them and becomes sentient in their sentience, brutal, ferocious, horrible. But what after all, behind appearances, is this seeming mystery? We can see that it is the Consciousness which had lost itself returning again to itself, emerging out of its giant self-forgetfulness, slowly, painfully, as a Life that is would-be sentient, half-sentient, dimly sentient, wholly sentient and finally struggles to be more than sentient, to be again divinely self-conscious, free, infinite, immortal. (Sri Aurobindo, 1972b, pp. 243–244)

Two book reviews follow, the first introducing (i) Stephen E. Braude's *The Gold Leaf Lady and Other Parapsychological Investigations* ♠ (University of Chicago Press, due to be released in October 2007), the second summarizing and discussing *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century* ♠ by Edward F. Kelly, Emily Williams Kelly, Adam Crabtree, Alan Gould, Michael Grosso, and Bruce Greyson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). In the words of the authors, the general strategy adopted in preparing this ground-breaking volume was

to assess the overall state of psychology, as it exists here at the beginning of the 21st century, from a perspective that deliberately but selectively takes into account its first hundred-plus years of organized scientific effort. The essential driving idea was to step backward, the better to jump forward — “*reculer pour mieux sauter*.” The tactical opportunity for this exercise was to be provided by the centennial of the publication in 1903 of an extraordinary book by a largely forgotten genius, F. W. H. Myers, titled *Human Person-*

ality. Deeply admired by William James and other leading scholars of that period, this two-volume work is unquestionably a great but neglected classic of our science. It advances an elaborate but empirically supported theory of the constitution and functioning of human beings, one that in many ways is sharply at odds with current mainstream thinking, but one that we believe penetrates far closer to the empirical truths of the matter. By framing the relevant issues in the context of Myers's work, we thought, we would be able to justify and to some extent foreshadow what we anticipate will become a major and vitally necessary reworking of central parts of scientific psychology.

In the item that follows, **William James** sets down "Frederic Myers's Service to Psychology." Originally published in 1901, this article is now available as an editorial supplement to *Human Personality*, on a CD-ROM that comes bundled with *Irreducible Mind*.

The final section of this issue contains two book excerpts, one ("Philosophies of Evolution") from *The Four Faces of the Universe* ♣ by Robert M. Kleinman (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 2006), and one ("Postscript: Some Thoughts on Astrology") from *The Gold Leaf Lady and Other Parapsychological Investigations* ♣ by Stephen E. Braude (University of Chicago Press, due to be released in October 2007). I never thought that a piece on Astrology would meet our standards, but Braude's does with flying colors. What may be next?

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