

Insights from Para-Psychology and Applications to International Relations

Cornelia Beyer, University of Hull

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Western International Relations (IR) has much to learn from the so-called 'para-sciences'. At the one hand, they can instruct us about the role of consciousness and its connection to peace. At the other, we can learn from them that humanity is connected and not separated as mainstream ideas of individualism hold.

The para-sciences in particular have so far led a life in the shadows of the Western scientific discourse. While popular with the general population, as the success of publications such as *What the Bleep* testify, they have not been taken seriously by mainstream science, and especially so IR. This has a number of reasons. One is that IR mainstream still attempts to present itself against the image of a 'soft science' and struggles to get recognition for its robustness and credibility. It competes with the natural sciences for authority, but oftentimes fails in that respect.

This essay will present some of the findings of the para-sciences, in particular para-psychology. It will connect them to the less mainstream accounts in Western philosophy and IR on consciousness and unity.

We need to start this exploration with some words on unity and holism. Holism has been described in particular by J.C. Smuts, who defined it (similar to Aristotle) as a process of

creative synthesis that transforms the whole to be more than the sum of its parts. It could be especially found in evolutionary processes, both human and biological. It can also be applied to science in general. The process of scientific progress (according to Kuhn) proceeds via synthesis, in which the old is merged with the new. Unity, in turn, has been discussed as a philosophical concept since Aristotle and Plotinus (a student of Plato). Plotinus discussed the 'ground of all being' or the 'source'. For him, the source, the One, is encompassing all that is and is before all that is. It is the Knower and the Known. It is nature and intellect. It creates itself by contemplation. It is the energy of the universe and the universe itself.

Quantum physics and its various applications presented a major challenge to some of the traditional understandings of the universe in the more recent past, and are somewhat in congruence with the older interpretations above. Radin, for example, discusses 'field consciousness', an idea inspired by quantum physics. Field consciousness resembles collective consciousness, similar to the ideas of Carl Gustav Jung, James Suroviecki's 'swarm intelligence', and Rupert Sheldrake's 'morphic fields'. Sheldrake, for example, argues that life is organised not in separated singular entities only, but exists in a connected and interdependent whole of group consciousness. This can be understood as 'organising fields' establishing order, form and behaviour in living organisms. Howard Bloom comes close to this with his idea of the 'global mind', and Larry Dossey describes this as the 'one mind'.

In transpersonal psychology it is also argued that unity is the highest level of perception in the maturing mind, and does resemble a quasi-enlightened state wherein the duality of matter and mind, time and space and self are perceived as transcendable and artificial. The maturing mind, so Jenny Wade, does not see a determined separation between self and others. This description of enlightened consciousness does match with the descriptions of enlightened states of mind in different, particularly Eastern, cultures.

If we accept unity as a concept explaining the material world and the world of ideas, then we come to the conclusion that we are intrinsically all connected, we are all one. As meditation teacher Stephen Wolinsky put it, we are all 'of one stuff'.

Challenges to the traditional materialist worldview are presented in particular by the para-sciences. And many of the findings support the holist worldview. For example, the abundance of research into near-death experiences (NDE's) cannot longer be ignored and presents serious challenges to our established ideas about consciousness: Researchers have observed and interviewed countless individuals who have been pronounced clinically dead, but then revived. Their accounts of their experiences while 'dead' are oftentimes very similar and always include a description of surviving consciousness and experiences of transcendence and afterlife. It is estimated that about 8 million people in the US alone had these experiences, and it is difficult to explain them away by oxygen deprivation of the brain or other medical models. Transpersonal psychology is another field of the para-sciences that deals with spiritually inclined concepts. The Grof family (Christina and Stanislav Grof) were influenced by experiments with LSD and also research the survival of the soul over many lifetimes. They also looked into serious mental illness and claimed that these can be understood as 'spiritual emergencies' in which the mind struggles to mature to a higher state of consciousness. A third branch of related research is presented in biology by Rupert Sheldrake at the University of Cambridge, who researches into telepathy and similar phenomena. He claims to have accumulated evidence for telepathy both in animals as well as humans. Telepathy refers to communication from mind to mind without the involvement of the ordinary senses (such as vision, touch or speech and hearing). Dean Radin similarly presented evidence for the possibility of remote viewing and clairvoyance. Remote viewing in fact has been used by the CIA in the past for spying purposes. If telepathy and remote viewing exist, this would support Larry Dossey's

hypothesis of the *One Mind* , indicating that indeed all consciousness is connected throughout space, if not also throughout time.

This research has most famously been tested by research conducted by the Global Consciousness Project directed by Roger Nelson. The Global Consciousness Project is an enterprise founded by Roger Nelson while he was at Princeton University. It attempts to find evidence for the existence of a global consciousness. For this purpose, it builds on previous research with Robert Jahn and Brenda Dunne in the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) project. Both use random event generators. Random event generators are devices that use quantum level electronic or radioactive decay processes to produce random numbers (zeros and ones). The output usually follows a statistically to be expected distribution. Dunne now claims that the output changes when the random event generators are presented with strong human intention. Nelson, on the other hand, has created a global network of these devices, and attempts to show that the combined output of this network is affected by global states of mind and emotion: changes in the output of the network correlate with global events of high importance. About two thirds of globally important events (determined by news coverage) result in fluctuations in the output of the network that cannot explained away by chance. His analyses suggest that is it in particular the shared emotions of fear and love that produce these effects.

These results run counter to many known physical laws. Brain science tells us that human consciousness can influence matter only indirectly through physical action. Consciousness itself is measured only in brain waves, which however are very weak (weaker, for example, than radio waves) and are thought not to have any effects on matter. Therefore, Jahn and Dunne have developed a theory to explain their findings drawing and analogy to quantum physics. Quantum physics, they argue, demonstrates 'how consciousness represents its experiences and observations of the physical world'. In my understanding, however, it can be interpreted in that the effect is maybe taking place at a quantum level. The subconscious

might be connected to the quantum level. It might be at this level, which is below the conscious and below the material level, that information from mind to matter is passed. The effects then are shown in the physical level.

If the one mind hypothesis, global consciousness and telepathy would be true, what would that mean for social relations? First of all, it is important to note that it is likely that such phenomena, if they really do occur, are dependent on emotions and closeness. Monozygotic twins are thought to exhibit high levels of telepathy, likewise are pets with their owners and mothers with their babies. So, a strong emotional bond of love, as well as emotional closeness seems to be important for this effect, as has also been empirically demonstrated by the PEAR project. Also, strong emotions seem to produce more telepathy than weak emotions. Reports about telepathic events usually involve emergency situations. This would mean that the connection between consciousnesses is dependent on emotional closeness, which would translate at the broader level into integration and a sense of community. Love strengthens this effect, and this would mean the absence of social conflict would be beneficial for this to take place. What would be interesting to do here is for Nelson to compare more integrated regions with less integrated regions to see if his network shows variance between these regions and if the effect is stronger in one than the other.

The idea of a connected consciousness is presented in cutting edge scholarship in IR somewhat with Alexander Wendt's idea of states as 'as if persons'. By the aid of philosophy, he looks at the psychological personhood of states, rather than the legal and moral personhood, and argues that states are like persons because they have collective minds. He argues that states have minds and therefore personhood because they have collective intentionality. States can form collective interests. Their collective intentionality is more than the sum of the intentions of the members of the states (the citizens), which he refers to as supervenience. Therefore, he argues, we can find something unique in the

state, we can speak of a mind of the state. However, this entity is not conscious and does not have emotions. Consciousness and emotions are only to be found in the members of the state.

If states have minds and personhood, why can we not take this argument further and speculate about a global mind? States are like persons, even though they are not an organism, or have emotions or consciousness. Maybe we could argue about the global consciousness that it is something like an organic element in humanity, something that connects us and makes us whole. Humanity might also have collective emotions, collective thoughts. And these might form the basis for the global mind.

If we assume the state to have a mind, the gap to global consciousness is not that far. However, it raises the question what global consciousness is. Is it just the sum of the many consciousnesses by individuals on the globe? Are these consciousnesses maybe connected, and if so, how? Or is the global consciousness also even more than the sum of its parts (which would open up room for more spiritual inclined interpretations). Let us go through these options one by one.

Global Consciousness as the sum of the consciousnesses of the world citizens. This option means that what we observe is nothing more than 6 billion separate consciousnesses. All of these consciousnesses would have emotion and intention. But we would see them as separate, as isolated. Robert Keohane argues that a global *demos* is missing. With this he means that people are not yet cosmopolitan enough in their orientation for a global mind to develop. The orientation towards the globe as the focus for identification is still weak. People have many identities and orientations, but they usually end within their state or their regions.

Global Consciousness as the collective consciousness of the world citizens. This is a more convincing option. Even without the assumption of telepathy, we can assume that individuals on the globe are interconnected, are communicating, and are influencing each other's opinions, thoughts and emotions. With the advent of the internet, social media and global satellite

television, this effect has become even stronger. The global mind constitutes itself from the mental and emotional connection between people. If we don't assume the parapsychological hypothesis, we still can assume that the mental connection between people is produced by communication. We interact and share emotions by being influenced by the media. With the event of social media, this effect has even become stronger. We see effects in the Arab Spring, which was intensively promoted by Twitter and Facebook. Media therefore facilitate global consciousness. With globalisation, communication flows are increasing our integration, our connectedness, our common thinking. This leads me to the last option.

Global Consciousness as more than the collective consciousness of the world citizens. This option would relate to many spiritual interpretations. Global consciousness is more than the sum of its parts, it is integrated. This would open up the debate what this superimposed consciousness consists of and who is the subject of it. Wendt rejects a consciousness of the state. He argues, because states have no subjective experience they are not conscious. I think, we need to look into this argument again. If the state does not have a consciousness, then global consciousness must also be rejected. If we assume global consciousness to be the integrated subjective experience of a unity (an 'I am'), then we probably will have to reject it. However, we could continue his argument about the mind and argue that the global consciousness is the sum of the consciousnesses of the inhabitants of the world and more than that (supervenience). A 'we-feeling', a concept of us as the nation, for example, or as humanity, cannot be created by individual consciousnesses in separation. It depends on their integration into something larger. This 'something larger', the nation for example, does not have a consciousness per se distinct from the individual consciousnesses that constitute it. Nonetheless, it is more than the separated individual consciousnesses that constitute it, because it depends on something collective. It depends on identification with the something larger, it is more than the sum

of its parts. It is how these parts relate to each other and to an idea of their collective that they hold in common and that determines how they relate to each other. And I think, this is similar to what we find in the global consciousness. Global consciousness is how we relate to the world.

Therefore, global consciousness is more than one individual consciousness plus one individual consciousness. It is how consciousness 1 interacts with and relates to, emotionally, mentally and physically, consciousness 2 via communication and action, emotion and thought. Compare this to pieces of a puzzle. If we think of puzzle pieces as individual pieces, they don't amount to much. But if they are put in an integrated order, they produce something that is larger than the sum of them without an order. Global integration on a mental and emotional level is what produces global consciousness. And this global consciousness is more than the sum of the individual consciousnesses alone. This global consciousness does not have an I-identity per se distinct from the individuals that constitute it. To claim the opposite would be to claim the existence of god. But if the individuals all share an identity of WE, then we can say that the global consciousness has an identity, like a puzzle that has been put together in the right fashion. It is an integrated whole. And I believe that this is what the global consciousness project measures. When we measure it, it means that the individual consciousnesses are aligned by showing corresponding thoughts or emotions.

But how do these individual consciousnesses produce a global consciousness? Here again, the media, including social media and communication in general, allow for the creation of globally shared states of mind. For example, when the World Cup was going on, many peoples in the world watched the important games and shared similar emotional states at the same time. The same is happening when an important global event of political nature is taking place. The media allow us to engage in globally shared emotions and thoughts. These will be still determined by the individual reactions to these ideas, for example, not

everyone in the world cup game supported the same teams. But many people will be affected in a similar way and therefore produce similar emotions and thoughts. Before that, however, we need a framework that determines that we are going to watch the World Cup games and cheer for one team in the first place. This factor is the basis for the resulting kind of connection and integration, and it is produced by culture, societal norms, history, and our political system. Therefore, the spread of democracy and globalisation in part present us with the backbone for the development of more integration and the potential for a higher global consciousness, lest in places where it results in opposition and conflict. Historically, the emergence of the nation state had presented us with the potential to raise a national consciousness, but this is increasingly in the process to be overcome by global integration.

Global consciousness would ideally present itself as an integrated whole, as a puzzle put together in the right fashion. This would depend on global relations of harmony and peace, in my opinion. If we are indeed moving towards a more peaceful world, as Steven Pinker argues, we might witness the emergence of global consciousness.

Much of today's conflicts, as I have argued in *Inequality and Violence*, can be traced back to inequality. What effect does inequality have on the one mind or the global consciousness? Inequality produces conflict, and occasional violence. Conflict is related to worsening social relations. We know that inequality contributes to feelings of frustration, envy and guilt. This does weaken the global consciousness. Inequality will therefore negatively affect the global consciousness. And this might make it harder for people to integrate and in turn, might make positive relations more difficult to achieve. It might hinder mutual understanding and therefore peace. On the other hand, if inequalities would be reduced, this would mean a strengthening of global consciousness. And maybe we might by this be able to create more harmony internationally. Finally, if we are all connected, this would mean it would be an ethical demand in the first place to reduce inequalities.

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