

An Argument for Contemplative Science

By Joseph Cadiff

“All phenomena are preceded by the mind, issue forth from the mind, and consist of mind. If one speaks or acts with an unwholesome mind, suffering flows just as the wheel follows the hoofprint of the ox that draws the cart”

Dhammapada, Verse 1

There is a lot of information on this page - and even more in the various resources suggested. So in this short blurb I want to **present the argument for contemplative science in the simplest and most direct terms possible.**

Since the time of the earliest human beings, we have always been interested in understanding how our reality works. Why? Because when we know how our reality works, we can successively navigate it to achieve our goals and live in harmony with our surroundings. If you don't know which plants are poisonous, or if you don't know how to start a fire, or how to plant crops, or which way to drive on the road, or how to act in social circumstances, or that destroying the ecosphere will inevitably lead to your own destruction as a human being, you are going to struggle. And if your idea of how things work is completely wrong, you are really going to suffer.

In other words, if you just don't know how things work, you may experience some struggle as you work to figure things out, but at least you are moving in the direction of figuring things out. If, however, you don't know how things work, and then you *think* you've figured it out when you actually have not, then you find yourself in a truly precarious position. Because not only are you going against reality (which is always a losing battle), but you are not even headed in the direction of figuring things out because you have allowed yourself the complacency of thinking you already have.

With this in mind, we can set up an equation.

unknowing (ignorance) = the struggle to figure it out (the struggle to know)

(Example: Not knowing fire burns, you touch the fire and get burnt. Next time, you don't touch the fire.)

unknowing (ignorance) + getting it wrong (delusion) = a continual cycle of suffering

(Example: Not knowing that drinking alcohol does not produce sustainable happiness, but thinking it does, you continue to search for happiness in more and more alcohol, leading to a

cycle of suffering. This could also be applied to searching for happiness in other things that do not actually produce lasting happiness.)

Now, we might think that these equations apply only to so-called "practical" things like those mentioned above. But this exploration of the rules and nature of reality simply begins with these essential survival issues, and then extends all the way up to the biggest questions we can ask.

"Is there a God?"

"Is there meaning to life?"

"What is the cause of true happiness?"

"Is reality nothing more than random chaos?"

"What's beyond the stars? How far does the universe go?"

"If we, as human beings, are just little specks in an unfathomably large multiverse, does that make us insignificant?"

"Can we map the entirety of reality such that we fully understand its nature?"

"What is the mind? What is consciousness? And how do I, as a conscious being relate to my environment? What is the relationship between the microcosm (me) and the macrocosm (my world, my multiverse, etc.)?"

These are some of the questions human beings have been asking for thousands of years. And the answers we come up with have a profound impact on how we live as a species on this planet. Indeed, if we really look at our human history, we see that it is often our answers to these deeper questions that most powerfully affect our trajectories as cultures and our development as a species.

And so, in broad strokes, what are the answers we've come up with so far?

Well, let us first look at Western Civilization (since this is what most of us in the modern West are most familiar with), beginning with the Greeks and culminating with what is currently the most authoritative source of knowledge in the 21st Century, modern science.

At the time of Aristotle, the Greeks were just getting into the ancient precursor to modern science, which they called, Natural Philosophy. This was, essentially, the careful observation of the natural world - the careful observation of physical things in an effort to figure out how the natural world functions. And this discipline paralleled Philosophy, which sought to understand that which could not be readily perceived by the senses (that which requires reasoning, logic, and inference, to determine). There were also Greek philosophers, like Plato and Socrates, who developed extrasensory perception through meditation techniques, and gleaned truths about reality through that means of knowing. This approach (of cultivating extrasensory perception),

however, has not continued in practice in either western philosophy, or western natural philosophy (science).

The next big shift in Western exploration of reality took place with the large-scale Christianization of what is now Europe. This shift added a Christian valence to all fields of human knowing, including philosophy and science. And perhaps the best example of this is in the life of one of the greatest pioneers of early European science, Galileo.

Galileo actually began his adult life as a Christian contemplative, but when his father told him he would no longer support him unless he went to university, Galileo went into science. Denied the opportunity to explore God inwardly, Galileo decided that he would seek to know the mind of God through his Creation, the natural world. And so, at least from the time of Galileo, the objective behind much of science has been the quest to know the mind of God through knowing the natural world. Another way of formulating this quest is that scientists have been striving to know reality from the "God's-eye-view," what they believed to be the truest of views. But there is one piece of the puzzle that these European scientists and philosophers seemed to miss: *what about the human mind and consciousness itself? Where does that fit into God's creation?*

Well, we can perhaps find the answer to these questions as these scientists understood them by looking to the biblical story of creation. According to a literal reading of this story, human beings are a part of God's creation, and we were simply placed in the midst of the world that God had already created. In other words, before human beings, a real, objectively existent world was created by God and then we, as human beings, were placed in that world. So, in this model, we as conscious beings, don't have anything to do with the creation of our world. It was already out there, created – as it is – before we arrived on the scene. And the job of a Christian scientist (a Christian who happens to be a scientist), is to figure out how this created world works in all its divine glory and detail such that we can know how the mind of God works.

And this is more or less where we find ourselves today in terms of popular understanding of our place in the world, minus the God part. That is, thanks to the Enlightenment period, many intellectual and "rational" human beings gave up the idea of God, as science began to paint a more and more random, chaotic, and overall meaningless picture of reality, devoid of spirits, demons, a Divine Creator, and a Divine trajectory for humanity. Now, instead of the God's-eye-view, science is after, as Thomas Nagel put it, "The View from Nowhere," the totally objective view of reality. That is, science has come to believe that we as *subjective* beings are capable of attaining a completely *objective* view of reality, devoid of any subjective bias or religious myth. Even without the God piece, however, this view still fundamentally reifies the idea of an inherently existent external world that existed long before human beings were on the scene. Though now instead of the biblical story as backup, science has turned to the Cosmic story of the Big Bang to explain how the universe came into being, and how human beings were not simply a few days late to the party (as the biblical story tells us) but a few billion years late to the party of reality. This also leads to the claim that a reality, a universe, existed prior to conscious beings. But this then raises the question, which we will address in more detail below, can we even talk

about a reality that exists without a conscious observer? Is there such thing as a conscious-less reality?

Ironically, despite this overall shift in our view of reality, even to this day, many scientists are religious people. And the way this this cognitive dissonance is reconciled is quite amusing. Most often it is through some variation of the nifty metaphysical argument made famous by Stephen Jay Gould called, *Non-Overlapping Magisteria*.

Gould argues that despite their apparent differences and contradictions regarding the nature of reality, science and religion each have their role in human life. He argues that science is about how reality actually works, how things actually exist, and religion is just about our human internal life of moral judgements, ethics, and various "religious" sensibilities – essentially a clever cultural coping mechanism. In this model, religion no longer has anything to do with knowing how reality actually works, only about how we as human beings get ourselves to keep working in reality without having a mental breakdown.

We could perhaps describe the relationship between science and religion in this context as "principles and laws of the external world," and "principles and moral laws by which human beings must live their lives in order to experience some meaning in their life and not be swallowed up by the meaningless soup of a chaotic external reality that science has revealed."

The problem with this model is that it basically means that religion is something of an adult fairy tale that helps us feel OK in an otherwise meaningless existence. It is, in a sense, nothing more than an incredibly functional bedtime story for adults to sleep at night without experiencing a continual existential crisis. It also makes a distinction that may be false. It claims that reality is not itself meaningful or moral or sacred and that the only way to truly know reality in terms of how it actually exists is through physical measurements of the physical world.

And, just like the previous Christian model of reality, it tells us that there is a real, objectively existent world out there that consists solely of matter, and that we as consciousness beings have just been plopped into this material reality with no significant role in its creation or transformation.

Fortunately for modern science, and all of humanity, both of these severely flawed models of reality are being called into serious question by the newest findings of Quantum Physics. To put it succinctly, QP has essentially realized that in all of science's explorations of reality (both with its Christian valence and without), it has completely failed to account for the role of the conscious observer in the universe. And essentially what they have found is that when you look at the equation for the universe and you take out the observer from the equation, you are left with a frozen universe. In other words, you are left with a universe that does not exist (because we all know the universe is not frozen). In other, *other* words, without a conscious observer observing the outer world, we cannot even speak of a truly existent outer world. Why? Because a world that is not observed by anyone is on principle *unknowable*. And to speak of something that is on

principle *unknowable* is meaningless. Because, *on principle*, you could never know it, which means you could never know if it does or does not exist.

So, unlike the Christian model and the scientific atheist model, we, as conscious observers, actually *do* play an important role in bringing into being (unfreezing) our universe. We are, QP tells us, half of the equation of reality (the observer + the observed / subject + object / self + world). Without a conscious being serving as an observer, there is no universe to speak of. And so, as an explorer of reality, if we wish to know the complete picture of reality, we cannot limit our exploration to merely the *observed* (the world); we must extend our exploration of reality into the realm of the *observer*.

And what does it take to know the nature of the *conscious observer*? We must know the nature of mind and consciousness. For if we do not know the nature of mind and consciousness, what, really, do we know about the *conscious* observer?

This brings us to our current scientific understanding of mind and consciousness. According to mainstream modern science (which, again, is the dominant source of authoritative knowledge in our global culture), consciousness is an emergent property of the brain. That is, consciousness arises from the organic material of the brain. The implications of this view are that matter is foundational in reality and that consciousness is secondary, or arises *from* matter. This also means that when the human brain ceases to function, mind and consciousness vanish. This implies that unlike matter and energy, consciousness does not follow the law of conservation, which says that nothing (matter and energy) is ever created or destroyed; rather, it is conserved in a new form. It also presents the untenable view that a material object (the brain) can give rise to something non-material (consciousness). This strange premise has led many scientists and philosophers to deny the existence of consciousness altogether, in order to avoid the consequences of the argument that says that something physical could not be related to something non-physical because they would have no way of interacting. Moreover, the moral and spiritual implications of this view are devastating. This is probably why if you press most scientists to actually live by this materialist worldview that reduces conscious human beings to their brains, or as Stephen Hawking's put it, mere "chemical scum on a moderate size planet, orbiting around a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a billion galaxies," they will not. That is, it is a view so devastating to our ability to flourish as conscious beings that a separate life philosophy, disjointed from the "hard reality" of the materialist view must be created. And we can see the devastating effects this worldview is having on human depression and anxiety around the world, and on the way we are continuing to treat one another and the planet. In short, this view is a dead-end; and worst of all, it has not even been legitimately proven to be true.

The primary reason science has failed to come up with any theories about consciousness that do not rely on the brain serving as the foundation of consciousness is that science has studied the human mind and human consciousness (non-physical phenomena) almost exclusively through physical instruments of measurement. That is, science has studied the outward behavior of

conscious beings, and they have studied the physical bodies (including the brain) of conscious beings, but they have never succeeded in studying the mind or consciousness directly.

The exception to this took place around the time of the early 20th century pioneering psychologist, William James. It was James who rightly suggested that in order to understand the human mind and consciousness, we need to train attention and engage in this study through subjective observation of the mind and consciousness itself. The problem James and others ran into? Well, have you ever tried to sit still and carefully observe your mind for hours on end? If you have tried for even a few moments, you know how hard it is to focus the mind and keep it steady on an object of attention, especially when that object of attention is the mind itself. And this is exactly the problem James and others ran into. They quickly concluded that it was impossible to train the mind to sustain high enough levels of attention to reliably observe itself. And if this were the case, it would be impossible to produce reliable first-person studies of the mind that could be replicated and corroborated thousands of times.

And so, western science gave up on first-person, subjective study of mind and consciousness and resorted to studying the brain and behavior, leading to the disciplines of neuroscience and behaviorism. And because of this, science has not surprisingly failed to progress in its understanding of the relationship between the physical body (brain) and the non-physical realities of mind and consciousness. Science has learned a great deal in the last hundred years about the outward behavior of conscious human beings and its relationship to the functioning of the brain. But, again, despite scientific materialism's attempt to equate the brain with consciousness, neither the brain, nor the behavior of conscious beings are consciousness itself. Moreover, simply because there are correlations between the functioning of the conscious mind and the neural functioning of the brain does not mean that the two are the same, nor does it mean that one arises from the other. It simply means there is a correlation.

It seems the most compelling argument scientific materialism presents to equate the brain with consciousness is the obvious and rather coarse argument that when you severely damage the brain there is a significant change in a person's mental functioning (their conscious capabilities), such as when someone undergoes a concussion or more severe head injury. This same argument is then taken to its most apparently definitive point when it presents the example of someone dying. It argues that when someone dies and their brain ceases to function we cannot physically observe any consciousness remaining in the body of the person or continuing on to somewhere else. Therefore, the argument continues, the experience of consciousness is entirely dependent on the physical brain and it vanishes completely when the brain dies.

But again, remember, if consciousness is by definition a non-physical reality, why would we expect to be able to observe it through physical measurements. In other words, if consciousness does, in fact, continue on in another form after the death of a human being, we would not be able to observe its continuation through physical instruments of measurements. Therefore, to say that consciousness is terminated at death because a dead person ceases to be conscious is an incredibly limited argument. It's like saying that because a blind person can't see anyone in a room, there is no one in the room. In order to see the people in the room, one needs the faculty of

sight. Similarly, in order to observe consciousness, one either needs to be observing that consciousness with consciousness from the first-person perspective, *or* if working from the third-person perspective, one needs the faculty of extrasensory perception (that is, perception not limited to the five senses that measure the physical world).

So, to review, we have three issues on the table:

1. In order to know the full picture of reality, we need to know the nature of the conscious observer, not just the observed world.
2. In order to know the nature of the conscious observer, we need to know the nature of mind and consciousness. But because the untrained mind is unable to sustain attention on a single object (such as itself) for extended periods of time, it is difficult to study the mind and consciousness from the first-person perspective.
3. Since the mind and consciousness are non-physical, we need a non-physical instrument of measurement to observe it (such as first-person, subjective observation or third-person extrasensory perception).

So, do we understand the problems we're facing in our quest to understand reality as a species such that we can avoid the continual cycle of suffering that stems from the duo of *not knowing* (ignorance) and *getting it wrong* (delusion)?

Good.

Now, cue the proverbial pin that pops the bubble of Eurocentric Hubris, and enter: *The Other Half of the World!*

Specifically, enter Ancient India.

So, guess what Eurocentric Civilization? It turns out that while you were busy for centuries coming up with ever-more ingenious methods for studying the outer world and coming up with ever-more complex technologies, India and many of the other Asian countries with advanced contemplative traditions were busy studying the mind and consciousness and coming up with sophisticated meditative technologies for studying the deepest levels of mind and consciousness.

Specifically, these contemplative traditions have come up with three very important things related to the problems we listed above.

1. Ancient Indian contemplatives (yogis) developed the meditative "technology" of *samadhi*, a highly refined and powerful level of single-pointed mental concentration that allows for a sustained non-conceptual observation of the mind and consciousness. Due to its high level of mental concentration, *samadhi* also departs from a reliance on the coarse

physical senses and provides the mind with extrasensory perception, including clairvoyance and clairaudience, among other supernormal abilities.

2. Using this meditative technology (what B. Alan Wallace has called the "telescope of the mind"), these contemplatives have discovered and mapped out levels of the mind and consciousness that are unknown in the West, precisely because the West has not been using this same technology to observe the mind and consciousness. The same is true on the flip side in the sense that the Tibetans, for example, were not using high-powered telescopes to observe stars and planets and so their knowledge of space was far inferior to that of modern western culture when they entered the global scene in the mid 20th century.
3. In conjunction with this meditative technology, Indian contemplatives, specifically in the Buddhist tradition of Madhyamika, developed a philosophy that when used in conjunction with *samadhi* brings about a direct experience of the non-inherent existence of self and world. That is, the philosophy of *emptiness (shunyata)* as explained in the Prasangika Madhyamika school of Indian Buddhism gets at exactly the point Quantum Physics is now making regarding the non-independent existence of the external world – that is, the non-existence of the external world *independent of* a conscious observer. The primary difference between these two methods – one ancient, one modern – of getting to this truth, however, is that the ancient method when combined with *samadhi* leads to a direct experience of this truth. And it has been reported that the direct of experience of this truth is actually profoundly *liberative* and leads to all sorts of paranormal abilities within the individual experiencing this sustained direct perception of the true nature of reality, all of which defy the laws of physics as understood by modern science.

So, with the wisdom of the rest of the non-European world on our side, we now have (1) a *technology* for studying the mind and consciousness from the subjective perspective *and* for developing extrasensory perception with which one could attempt to observe the continuation of consciousness after human death with a non-physical instrument of measurement. We also have (2) a *testable* working hypothesis from these contemplative traditions that gives us a "map" of mind and consciousness that includes levels of consciousness with which the West is entirely unfamiliar. And finally, we have (3) a philosophical hypothesis about the ultimate nature of reality that can also be *tested* using a combination of *samadhi*-powered subjective meditative exploration and science-powered objective exploration as expressed in Quantum Physics.

Combining these two methods, the subjective and the objective, and these two civilizations, East and West, we are at a moment in history where we are poised to make unprecedented discoveries about the nature of reality.

And what do these contemplative traditions (specifically, Buddhism) tell us we will find if we engage in this type of comprehensive exploration of reality? They tell us that we will find that:

1. There are three primary "levels" of mind and consciousness. There is (1) the coarse level of mental consciousness, which constitutes our human psychology with which most human beings are relatively familiar. At a subtler level, there is (2) a *subtle continuum of*

consciousness, which is non-physical, non-personal, and non-human. That is, it is a primal flow of consciousness that transcends the human brain and as such the human mind altogether. Further, it is said that it is the repository of all our experiences and memories (or karma) and it is what carries on after death. It is what serves as the basis for our next incarnation. In this way, it could be compared to a stem-cell consciousness, in that it does not have any configuration itself, but has the potential to take on any number of configurations (i.e. human consciousness, animal consciousness, etc.) Finally, (3) the deepest level of consciousness entirely transcends human conceptualization, including space and time, and is known as *primordial consciousness* or *pristine awareness*. It is this level of consciousness that the contemplative seeks to actualize as it is the ground of being. When one is able to sustainably *dwell* in this ground, it serves as the ground of *liberation from suffering* and *omniscience*.

2. This model of reality tells us that mainstream modern science has its model of reality entirely backwards. That is, while modern science tells us that *matter* is the foundation or ground of reality and that consciousness arises from matter (if at all), these contemplative traditions tell us that it is actually *consciousness* that is the ground of our reality, and as such is more primary in the universe than matter. In fact, these traditions tell us that the idea of "matter" and the "external physical world" are simply mental conceptualizations, or creations of the conscious mind that have no inherent existence "out there" as science has believed for centuries.

If this view of reality were proven to be true it would be a HUGE revolution in our understanding of ourselves as conscious beings and of our reality as a whole. Our reality becomes a co-emergent reality that is, rather than a solid, physical, inherently existent external world, a conceptual display of consciousness itself. This also means that consciousness does not end at death and that we – each and every one of us – have the potential to realize *primordial consciousness* and the *liberation* and *omniscience* that comes with it. This is the birthright of every human being.

Moreover, this model of reality explains the scientifically inexplicable spiritual displays of Tibetan yogis who have realized these deeper layers of consciousness and reality. It explains how they are able to die and yet have their bodies not decompose for weeks after death. It also explains how in some cases yogis die and are able to dissolve their physical body entirely into light. In other words, there are spiritual masters out there who have already displayed these extraordinary signs of spiritual accomplishment that defy the currently agreed upon scientific laws of reality. But because the dominant source of knowledge in the modern world is science, and science has no way of explaining these phenomena or extrasensory abilities of yogis within their limited materialist worldview, these spiritual occurrences, even when documented by scientists, are left as simply “extraordinary” and “inexplicable.” It seems scientists have, on the whole, not been willing to actually alter their worldview based on these inexplicable displays. But, again, if the worldview described above were considered possible, then these yogic feats would be entirely explicable. They would not be seen as outside the bounds of reality; rather, the bounds of reality would be expanded, and these abilities displayed by yogis would be seen as “natural” within this broader understanding of mind, consciousness, and reality.

But the only way for this worldview to actually gain traction in the modern world is for repeated studies to be done between expert meditators (yogis) and open-minded scientists. For this is the procedure by which science proves new hypotheses and then introduces them to the public, thereby changing widely held beliefs about reality.

Therefore, it is essential that at this critical time in our history we combine modern science with contemplative techniques for exploring mind, consciousness, and reality. Because if science continues in its own way and Buddhists (for example) continue their practices in their monasteries, hermitages, and wilderness dwellings, Buddhists will go on knowing what they know, and scientists will go on knowing what they know, but the two streams will not meet and influence one another. And in terms of widespread knowledge in our global world, it is science that determines what the majority of people think they know about reality. Therefore, if there is to be a true revolution in our collective understanding of mind, consciousness, and reality, contemplatives must find a way of proving their understanding of reality to modern science through collaborative research. For it is when science begins to shift its view of *how to know reality* and the *nature of reality* itself that we as a global society will begin to shift our collective understanding of reality, leading to entirely new ways of being with each other and with our natural environment. Currently, our world is dominated by the **view** of materialism, the **mental disposition** of hedonism (searching for pleasure and gratification in the material world, which, according to materialism, is all there is), and the **way of life** of consumerism.

Imagine if our **view** were as expansive as the one described above, our mental disposition, attitude, and **meditation** an ongoing quest to realize that expansive view, and our **way of life** a non-violent, benevolent, and cooperative way of being that works to ensure that each and every member of our society is given as great an opportunity as possible to realize this liberation and awakening that arises naturally from the harmonization of this view, meditation, and way of life – that arises from knowing reality as it is and harmonizing one’s way of being in the world with that knowing.

Remember our equation:

Unknowing + getting wrong (what we’re currently doing as a global society)

= a continual cycle of suffering (what we’re currently experiencing as a global society)

But what if we changed this equation to:

Knowing + getting it right + living in accordance with that knowing

= genuine personal and collective happiness

To put this equation in more concrete terms, look at the way we are living as a species on this planet. On the whole, at least when it comes to those in power determining our collective trajectory, we have lost all sense of the sacred in self and world. We have lost all sense of the spiritual purpose of human life. And we operate under the assumption that this is our only life and that reality does not have any moral causality built into its very nature, which then justifies atrocious and destructive behavior with no concern for later consequences in this life or future lives. That is, we do not believe that acting virtuously is actually the cause for later happiness, or that acting non-virtuously is actually the cause for later suffering. We've thrown out some of the simplistic ideas of heaven and hell inherited by our Abrahamic traditions, and with it we have thrown out moral causality altogether as an inherent aspect of existence.

For example, think of all the fossil fuel companies whose CEO's and executives have known about the dangers of climate change for decades and yet have done nothing to reduce their contribution to this catastrophic disruption to our ecosphere. Or, think of these massive agricultural food companies who are creating food that is detrimental to the health of the public using methods that are also detrimental to local communities. Or, think of drug, alcohol, and tobacco companies using all their human intelligence to convince people to consume these substances that we all know are detrimental to human health. Or, think of the corruption in our political system and the ways in which our leaders cater to these large companies that are acting in these terrible ways. And think of our economic system that is built on a model of unrealistic and unsustainable perpetual, and ever-increasing growth that is on a crash course with the total depletion of our global resources and the destruction of our ecosphere. How are these companies and government bodies allowing this type of behavior? And how are we, as citizens, allowing these interest groups to continue to operate in this way?

For one, these individuals and corporations believe they can actually get away with it! They believe that since there is no moral causality built into the fabric of reality that ripens over the course of many lifetimes, they can do whatever they want to get ahead, and if, at the end of their life, they have amassed more material wealth than their competitors, etc. then they win! But according to the model of reality discussed above, nothing could be further from the truth. They have actually not moved a hairs-breadth closer to genuine happiness, and are actually marching directly towards severe future suffering. What's more, they are probably already suffering considerably on their way to even more future suffering.

According to Buddhism, it is actually these beings who are most deserving of our compassion. Why? Because these are the people who are acting at greatest odds with the nature of reality. These people are the ones living from the greatest level of ignorance and delusion. And even if they have not yet experienced the suffering that comes from living in this way, it is certain that they will, whether in this life or in future lives. It is, according to this model, a law of moral reality, that they will experience the suffering that is the result of the actions they have carried out. And these beings are engaged in terrible acts that will lead to vast suffering not only for countless beings living on this planet now, but also for future generations.

And we see the same game played out in lives of people with far less power to affect others. Think of all the people cheating and backstabbing to get ahead in this world, thinking that they can actually get away with it and “win” the game of life in this way. Or think of those who are honestly pursuing their wealth and fame, but all with the false belief that the greatest potential we have as human beings is to become wealthy and famous and amass material goods. But again, we cannot really blame ourselves for this behavior since we are working from the limited model of reality and subsequent worldview that we have inherited from scientific materialism.

And look at the results. Look at our world. Our world is sick with disease; it is flooding; it is on fire; it is starving; it is depressed; it is neurotic; it is lacking meaning and purpose; our natural environment is being destroyed. Do we really need to look any further to see the results of our worldview, mental attitude, and way of life? We are in utter crisis as a species. And we need a dramatic shift in our collective consciousness. One way to do this is by shifting the scientific view of reality.

I recently asked a four-year-old girl where her mind was and she said, “in my brain.” Just in the way that four year-olds of our present moment already know to say that their mind and consciousness are in their brains, if we shift the accepted scientific view of reality to encompass the findings of the contemplatives regarding mind and consciousness, then the four-year-olds of the future may know that their mind and consciousness have far greater potentials than previous generations ever imagined.

For example, imagine if you picked up your phone tomorrow and discovered a *New York Times* article declaring that scientists had discovered that consciousness *does*, in fact, continue on after death, extrasensory perception is possible, and that they know the methods required to achieve it. And what if you read on to see that they have discovered that consciousness, not matter, is primary in the universe? And what if you read on further and saw that scientists had verified the past-life recollections of contemplatives who were able to give details about their previous incarnations that they would have no way of knowing except through extrasensory recall? Or that scientists had documented contemplatives performing other supernatural feats, including the transformation of matter, clairvoyance, and clairaudience. And what if you read on and found out that some of these western contemplatives’ bodies were not decomposing even weeks after their deaths, or that some of them had dissolved their bodies entirely into light?

How would that affect the way you live your life? How would your life change if you knew that your “journey” did not end at death and that you, and every other being, were responsible for your moral actions of every moment? And that your current moral actions were actually planting seeds for your future happiness and suffering? And what if you knew you could cultivate extraordinary levels of happiness, wellbeing, and supernatural abilities through mental cultivation and meditation? Might you shift your priorities and behavior?

Now, some people have asked me, “does this mean that everyone in the world needs to become a contemplative, a hermit, or a yogi?” Is that where this is headed?

The example I give here is Tibet. While, like every other country, Tibet was not a perfect civilization, it was a culture saturated with spiritual meaning and purpose based in profound insights into the nature of reality achieved by their greatest contemplatives dating back to their Indian predecessors. And indeed, many people in Tibetan culture pursued full-time spiritual life, either as a monk, nun, yogi, or hermit, with the full support of the rest of the society. But, of course, not everyone in Tibetan culture was a monk or hermit. There were farmers, nomads, shopkeepers, business people, government officials, artists, and so on. And yet, while not everyone in Tibetan culture pursued a full-time spiritual life, the whole culture was saturated by the expansive Buddhist worldview that Tibet had received from the Indian sages (those who know reality as it is), and which Tibet's own subsequent sages had corroborated thousands of times. Therefore, even those not pursuing a full-time spiritual life were benefitting from the presence and inspiration of spiritual masters and the wisdom and insight into reality these Tibetan spiritual masters were providing for their society. Based on the wisdom and knowledge of these sages regarding the nature of reality and the true causes of genuine happiness, even everyday people were able to build their lives around spiritual principles that were conducive to happiness and wellbeing in the present, and which planted seeds for even greater spiritual maturation in the future. And even now in the modern world, think for a moment of all the benefit these eastern spiritual traditions have brought to human wellbeing around the world! How many hospitals, rehab centers, fitness studios, yoga studios, etc. now offer and promote meditation techniques and spiritual insights taken from these spiritual traditions? What we miss, though, is that this little taste of meditation and the spiritual wisdom of these cultures we are given in these settings are only the tip of the iceberg of the spiritual insight into the nature of reality contained in these spiritual traditions.

Another great example of everyday people benefiting from the “trickle-down” of spiritual wisdom held in a particular culture comes from the stories of the Tibetan refugees in India. These were people who had just lost everything and were arriving in a foreign land to live in poverty. And yet, because of their worldview, and the spiritual context within which they saw their lives, these people were able to live happily in these refuge communities. And I have heard many Americans report that the cheerfulness and inner wellbeing they witnessed among the ordinary people of these communities was astounding, and something they envied and felt their own culture and their own lives were lacking. But these were not communities of yogis and spiritual masters; these were ordinary people whose lives were informed by the insights into reality derived from the full-time spiritual practice of spiritual masters of the present and past, dating all the way back to Shakyamuni Buddha and before.

Perhaps the best modern analogy to this dynamic is actually science and technology. Even though most people have never actually seen the Earth rotate around the Sun with their own eyes, because of the findings of full-time scientists and astronauts, we all benefit from this knowledge. The same goes for cutting edge medicine, technology, and other discoveries that are made by a relatively small number of “expert” individuals. These discoveries do not need to be made directly by everyone, since it is the findings, and the knowledge gained from these discoveries that then influences society as a whole.

The key difference here is that from the Buddhist perspective, while we may not in this current moment have the opportunity to directly realize the deepest truths discovered in the full-time contemplative life, our destiny as spiritual beings is to eventually create the causes and conditions in either this life or future lives to pursue that direct realization for ourselves. For while the “passed on” knowledge of these direct spiritual experiences can benefit us and help us to shape our lives in the right way (the way that will lead to genuine wellbeing and greater spiritual maturation), in order to experience the full benefit of such insights into the nature of reality, and truly free ourselves once and for all from the cycle of suffering, we must experience it directly for ourselves.

This is what the Tibetans understood. And so, their whole civilization revolved around creating as many opportunities as possible for human beings to realize their full spiritual potential. The Tibetans realized that the very *purpose* of civilization was not to merely create ever more elaborate and exciting hedonic comforts, pleasures, and convenience, but to meet the basic hedonic (material) needs of all human beings in a society, such that everyone could then pursue the genuine happiness that arises from spiritual cultivation of the mind.

This is not an entirely foreign concept to western culture. If you look at Maslow’s hierarchy, you see this same idea reflected. The great Greek philosophers also understood this truth as well. They made the clear distinction between *hedonia* (material and/or stimulus-driven pleasure and satisfaction) and *eudaimonia* (genuine happiness derived from inner cultivation of the mind and heart). Another way of defining these two terms is that *hedonia* is what one gets from the world, whereas *eudaimonia* is what one gives to the world stemming from one’s own inner contentment and fulfillment. So, we see that the Greeks, our own “western” heritage, also understood that the purpose of civilization was to create a *baseline of hedonic wellbeing* such that individuals could pursue the higher levels of happiness and wellbeing that arise from *eudaimonia*. But remember, by *hedonia*, they did not mean simply partying at nightclubs and eating six-course dinners. *Hedonia* refers to all material comforts and necessities including food, shelter, medicine, healthcare, fitness, education and so on. But unlike the direction we are headed in modern America, the Greeks (and the Tibetans) understood that life is not simply about a continual upgrading of hedonic convenience. It is about establishing a baseline of hedonic comfort and convenience such that deeper levels of human fulfillment and flourishing can be reached by the maximum number of individuals in a given society. *This is the purpose of civilization.*

And so, this is the argument for Contemplative Science. We need this revolution in outlook on the personal and collective level NOW. We cannot continue to live in the way we have been living as a species on this planet. We must realize our full potential as conscious human beings. We must raise ourselves up from the collective depression and malaise into which we have fallen. Our destiny is not be depressed, angry, and dissatisfied. Our destiny is to purify our mind and our view of reality such that we actualize the primordial consciousness that is our birthright and lead ourselves and all other beings to liberation and awakening. This is what is actually possible as human beings and it is time that we wake up and seize this precious opportunity before us!

