

REALITY BEGINS WITH CONSCIOUSNESS: A PARADIGM SHIFT THAT WORKS (E-book)
by Vernon M. Neppe and Edward R. Close. 2nd edition. At: brainvoyage.
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Vernon Neppe and Edward Close's book *Reality Begins With Consciousness* is an interesting exercise in speculative metaphysics by two physicists. However, this is not the way they envision their work—they consider it a meta-paradigm that has philosophical implications but which belongs in the realm of science.

Theoretical physicists are fond of writing philosophical metaphysics in the name of science, for example, David Bohm (1980), Amit Goswami (1995), and Fred Alan Wolf (2011). These physicists usually make use of the alleged implications of quantum mechanics to make broad claims about the nature of reality as a whole: reality is “inconnected,” “everything is one,” “consciousness made the physical world,” or “we made the physical world.” An alternate approach is offered by the biologist Rupert Sheldrake in his theory of morphic resonance, a view with affinities to the philosophical theory of forms, although unlike Plato and Aristotle's forms, his “morphic fields” are dynamic and evolving. What these systems have in common is a tendency

toward metaphysical monism (often in some version of panpsychism or pantheism). The physics-based systems use nonlocality enshrined in Bell's Theorem in quantum mechanics to assert the interconnectedness of all things. Sheldrake's morphic fields perform a similar role. The physics-based systems focus on the role that consciousness plays in quantum mechanics and assert a strong causal role for consciousness in the formation and functioning of the universe.

Neppe, a neuropsychiatrist, and Close, a physicist, have developed what they label a "metaparadigm," which is a large-scale research program for the scientific enterprise. Their program is in the general tradition of metaphysical monistic systems that are based on alleged implications of quantum mechanics, although it is broader in scope. For those interested in psi, they discuss in detail how their theory allows psi phenomena to occur.

The authors label their paradigm the "Triadic Dimensional-Distinction Vortical Paradigm model (TDVP)" (Neppe, "Author's Preface"). This begins one of the chief difficulties with understanding their work—the number of neologisms. Neologisms may be justified, and a revolutionary theory may require multiple neologisms, but when they are used they should be sufficiently clear. Neppe and Close's stipulative definitions of their neologisms are often no clearer than the neologisms themselves. The authors use so many neologisms because they believe that introducing consciousness into the science of nature changes the paradigm that has dominated science since the 17th-century scientific revolution. Their model posits a unified reality of space-time-consciousness. Reality is an infinite unity, nonlocal

on a finite level, [existing] as a reality essence (a metareality) involving a persuasive consciousness (information expressed through meaning as metaconsciousness) and order (ordropy [another neologism, M.P.—"ordropy" is defined as the opposite of "entropy"]) with "metalife" (all encompassing life in the infinite: potential life—"polife")—which then manifests as physical life in the finite when linked with the correct current physiology. (p. 2)

Now nonlocality is a fundamental principle of quantum mechanics, and the view that the universe is infinite may or may not be correct, but it is a defensible philosophical position (Neppe and Close's interpretation of "infinity" will be discussed below). "Metaconsciousness" is unclear. The system posits consciousness at the lowest levels of reality, including inanimate objects. It is difficult to understand what it means for a subatomic particle in a rock to be "conscious." "Consciousness" is notoriously difficult to define, but Thomas Nagel makes sense when he states: "But fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is to be that organism—something it is like for the organism" (Nagel,

1974, p. 435). Thus, to say that a cat is conscious is to say it makes sense to ask, “What is it like to be a cat?” Nagel’s view squares with the position that consciousness involves awareness of one’s surroundings. To say that humans, cats, and other mammals, and perhaps reptiles and fish, are conscious makes sense on this account. To say that rocks or atoms have awareness of their surroundings does not. “Information expressed through meaning” may require a conscious being, but it is not consciousness itself or some mysterious “metaconsciousness.” Consciousness can play a role in reality as a whole without positing what is de facto a form of panpsychism, as it does in traditional theistic systems that posit a conscious Being who creates and continually sustains the universe in existence. Even the view that human beings create the universe through causation that works backwards in time (as Frank Tipler, 1994, posited) makes sense of consciousness as a property of existing beings rather than a mysterious “metaconsciousness.” There must be at least some continuity between consciousness and metaconsciousness to be able to make sense of the nature of metaconsciousness—and the similarity to which Neppe and Close refer is insufficient to grasp what they mean. A clear operational definition would be helpful.

“Ordropy,” as Neppe and Close define it, does seem to be a characteristic of living things that during their lifespan maintain an organic unity in a particular pattern of order that holds off entropy until the organism’s death. Some philosophers and scientists, including Neppe and Close, find the materialistic, mechanistic Neo-Darwinian paradigm insufficient to explain the order in complexity of life. But “ordropy” refers only to a tendency toward order—what is ultimately behind the order in living things?

Apparently the source of such order begins with the “C[consciousness]-Substrate,” “an infinite metaconsciousness from metainformation possibly linked with finite quantal ‘conscits’ with meaning translated into reality by neurological consciousness.” “Conscits” may be, according to Neppe and Close, something like the other “particles” of theoretical physics.

“Meta” usually means “beyond,” but that cannot be the meaning here since Neppe and Close want to affirm both metaconsciousness and metainformation as infinite consciousness and information, with affinities to William James’s notion of “superhuman consciousness” or F. W. H. Myers’s (1901) ideas of the subliminal self and the metetherial world. A contemporary version is found in William Roll’s concept of “psi fields” extending from living things. Roll suggests an extended mind theory in terms of “the Buddhist concept of reality as *sunyata*,” which he states is “a plentitude of no-things with which you may unite if your mind is emptied of particulars, [that] is not unlike the idea of the vacuum as an infinite field of energy and consciousness” (Roll, 2003, p. 84).

The only evidence Neppe and Close could give for a “conscit” would be an analogical argument from matter/energy, which operates through

“particles.” But why assume that consciousness, even if defined in terms of some kind of extended information field, operates through some kind of particle? In addition, and this point is directed at views of extended mind or extended consciousness that hold such to be a universal consciousness or information field, if there is no self-awareness in this “consciousness” and if it is just an information field, how is it any different from “memory” stored in a computer? If that is the case, by what process does such “storage” take place? The concept of a nonphysical mind whose powers extend beyond a particular body makes sense—the evidence for psi supports this position—but the vague pantheism of the universal consciousness view is not clearly defined or defended.

The authors’ notion of “infinity” is vague. They refer to the “infinity of the continuum,” which does not explain the nature of such infinity. “Infinity” can refer to potential infinity (as in the set of natural numbers, which has a beginning but no end), to actual infinity (as in the set of real numbers), to infinite space and time, or to an infinite mind (as in the traditional Judeo-Christian-Islamic idea of God). Where does Neppe and Close’s concept of infinity fit? It is difficult to tell.

Neppe and Close suggest that space, time, and consciousness are tied together through “tethering.” Yet the best they can do to describe tethering is through the analogy of “bubbles” in the universal space/time/consciousness. The nature of “tethering” remains vague. Ontologically Neppe and Close claim to be monists—apparently they hold (as did William James) a form of “neutral monism.”

Into this mixture of terminology comes the notion of the vortex. “Vortex” is defined in its usual spatial sense, but it is unclear precisely how vortices function in nature and in conscious experience. How do they fit into “metaspace,” “metatime,” “metainformation,” and “metalocality”? Another difficulty is that Neppe and Close often use long, stringed words to emphasize the unity of their system, but such word strings serve more to obfuscate than to clarify.

The authors hold that their system is a scientific refutation of traditional Jewish, Christian, and Muslim supernaturalist views of a God who created the universe from nothing. Their monism allows for a universal consciousness immanent to the universe but nothing more. They hold that the mystery of the infinite might be known through mystical experience, and they believe that some aspects of Kabbalistic mysticism may allow a person to apprehend, at least in part, the infinite substrate of reality.

The authors’ precluding supernaturalism or a creator God reveals a metaphysical naïveté that ignores the possibility that the universe and natural laws are contingent, requiring a necessary being to maintain them in existence. Of course Neppe and Close could argue that the universe and its set of natural laws are logically necessary, but this requires philosophical argumentation and cannot be determined by science. There is a temptation in theoretical physics, since it is the branch of science most closely related

to philosophical metaphysics, to confuse science and metaphysics. Neppe and Close's system is a metaphysical research program (in Popper's sense). Eventually parts of it may form a scientific research program, but there are parts, such as the discussion of ultimate things such as the immanence of universal consciousness and the arguments against supernaturalism, that are irreducibly metaphysical in nature.

Like all monistic systems, Neppe and Close's system has difficulty dealing with individuality. They refer to "individual-units," but if such units are ultimately not ontologically separate from the neutral substrate, from whence lies the source of their individuality? Does their position imply that individuality is an illusion? And if "a finite subreality" is pervaded "by an infinite reality," how does the infinite not totally obliterate the finite? If the infinite reality transcends the finite reality, then there is reintroduced a dualism which Neppe and Close wish to avoid.

The authors rightly take psi seriously and attempt to integrate it into their system. They are correct that psi operates nonlocally. Whether such locality is sui generis with psi or part of a larger nonlocal structure is a key issue in parapsychology, one often ignored by those writers too quick to posit a parallel between quantum "nonlocality" and psi. Neppe and Close attempt to work psi into the various "meta-realities" of their system. Survival after death, for instance, is possible in their metaparadigm, as is communication with the dead, but since those who have died have passed on into metaspaces, metatime, and metaconsciousness, communication will be difficult and fraught with error.

Yet this solution solves a problem at the expense of adding further mystery. What kind of existence do those who survive death have in metaspaces? How does time flow for them in metatime? How is the individuality of their consciousness preserved in their world of metaconsciousness? They would require intentionality to be capable of seeking communication with the living. Yet if they are part of metaconsciousness, their individuation as finite beings is difficult to justify.

That said, the discussion of psi is one of the clearer and more cogent parts of the book. There is a good general account of psi research, the problems in such research, a summary of some of the current psi research, and a good discussion of statistics and psi. This section could serve as a short introduction to current research in parapsychology.

Their application of their theory to psi, however, is more problematic. They apply the notion of "indivension" which is defined as: the process involving fluctuating STC—mainly C-substrate domains of "zillions" (Nn) of individual-units. These portray unique or common transdimensional (often transfinite) relative experiential realities. Indivension occurs through the interaction of vortical distinctions (New term derivation: Individual-units; dimensions). This term (along with most of the terms used in Neppe and Close) as well as their stipulative definition, needs to be clarified.

Pierre Duhem (1962/1906) recognized that multiple theories can be constructed that are compatible with a class of empirical evidence. This idea, developed further by W. V. O. Quine (1951) is also called “the underdetermination of theory by evidence.” Many theories can be constructed whose value in explanation and prediction cannot be decided via empirical evidence alone. Quine (1951) states that one must look at the background assumptions held by those who develop and defend the theory, assumptions that are part of a “web of belief.” Deciding between empirically equivalent theories often becomes a matter of considering epistemic virtues such as explanatory power and parsimony.

Neppe and Close recognize that there have been a number of theories that include consciousness as an integral component of nature, among which are Bohm’s and Sheldrake’s theories. Even if Neppe and Close’s metaparadigm fits the empirical evidence, it must have sufficient epistemic virtue to be justified above other metaparadigms. They could claim that their theory, being a version of neutral monism, is ontologically parsimonious, but the “oneness” is so qualified by so many ontological parsings that the theory appears to be ontologically bloated. Appealing to a mathematical method, such as Neppe’s coauthor Close’s “Calculus of Distinctions,” will not determine which of two or more theories is correct. In the first place, Close’s calculus should be vouched for in peer-reviewed journals in mathematics and/or logic. If this occurs, it remains the case that mathematical consistency is the mark of many empirically equivalent theories.

The sheer breadth of Neppe and Close’s theory and the metaphysical issues with which it deals put it outside the scope of physics and into the scope of metaphysics. The criteria for evaluation of metaphysical theories are similar to the criteria used on large-scale scientific theories, but their confirmation or falsification is a more complex matter than in natural science. My sense is that unless they define their terms in a way intelligible to scholars other than themselves, their metaparadigm will not get the attention the authors desire.

In the end, I am skeptical of the viability of Neppe and Close’s theory in physical theory as well as in debates over psi. As an explanation of psi, it has little to offer over the standard theories thus far presented, one of the more promising of which is James Carpenter’s “first sight” theory of psi. I would recommend Neppe and Close to a patient reader who can slog through a swamp of unfamiliar and vague terminology to find whatever treasure may lie beneath.

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MICHAEL POTTS

Department of Philosophy and Religion
Methodist University
5400 Ramsey Street
Fayetteville, North Carolina 28311-1498, USA
gratiaetnatura@yahoo.com