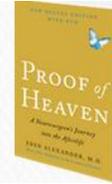




Dr. Eben Alexander

Consciousness is the Most Profound Mystery in the Universe.



Post Debate Reflections:

The Sound of One Hand Clapping

Eben Alexander, May 9, 2014

The current online voting for Wednesday (May 7, 2014) night's debate shows Dr Moody and myself (Dr Eben Alexander) victorious (currently 68:32, from 50:50 before the debate). I suspect that is related to the listeners' awareness that an audience of neuroscientists would have agreed with me, against Steven Novella, that no neuroscientist on earth can give the first sentence to explain a possible mechanism by which the physical brain creates consciousness (the Hard Problem of Consciousness – see below). The brain is obviously tightly linked to consciousness – the mistake is in believing, as I did before my coma (and the debate opponents Novella & Carroll still do), that the brain creates consciousness. He now knows otherwise.

More modern scientific thinking – that is sweeping the field – is that the brain is a reducing valve, or filter, that reduces consciousness (that is primary in existence) down to a trickle – our very limited human awareness (that is liberated to a much higher level when freed up from the shackles of the physical brain, as happens in near-death experiences, actual death experiences, shared death experiences, through deep meditation, centering prayer, the gift of desperation, etc). The scientific implications are stunning, and basically provide powerfully for the reality of the afterlife. This is the new science that will become dominant over the next decade.

The online audience is probably also more cognizant that I would have been widely supported by the global physics community in pointing out the very deep mystery of the measurement problem in quantum mechanics – the profound mystery within quantum mechanics that the observing mind is critically entangled with what is being observed. Consciousness paints reality.

Unfortunately, the audience then got cheated out of what might have been a more interesting and meaningful exchange. Sean Carroll made a joke agreeing with MIT physicist Scott Aaronson that “since both quantum mechanics and consciousness are confusing, maybe they are the same.” Laughter. So much for useful interchange and scientific discussion.

The physics community has only become more befuddled by recent experimental results suggesting that consciousness is at the very core of all reality. Those founding fathers of quantum physics would be even more mystified today (witness the delayed choice quantum eraser experiment in 1999). They

have *not* “figured it all out,” as Sean suggested. The physics community at large would agree with Dr Alexander, and probably wonder how any physicist in the modern world could claim to say “now we know better,” than the likes of Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, Jeans, Wigner, and others. As if he is so close to the truths that evaded the brilliant early minds that developed the field. Totally wrong! He has written popular books about some of the concepts, though he actually seemed unwilling to discuss any relevant aspects of quantum theory in the debate – not only about the measurement problem, but also about the 1935 EPR (Einstein, Podolsky, Rosen) paradox that highlights the non-local aspect of quantum mechanics (intriguingly related to the non-locality of consciousness mentioned by Dr Alexander in the debate). Clearly Mr. Carroll chose to make a joke and deflect any discussion about the deep mystery of the measurement problem that remains completely unresolved in modern quantum physics.

I have been concerned for a long time that, with the notable exception of British mathematical physicist Roger Penrose, most mainstream physicists today seem to be woefully uneducated in the importance of having a much deeper understanding of the nature of consciousness (and the profound depths of the Hard Problem) if they want to truly get closer to an understanding of the nature of reality.

The mind-body discussion has been ongoing for around 2,600 years, and is at the very heart of the issues raised in this debate. Modern neuroscientists, in their increasing knowledge of the workings of the brain, have *not* been coming closer to an understanding of how the brain creates consciousness. In fact, they have come closer to truly appreciating the unfathomable depths of the Hard Problem of Consciousness, arguably the most profound mystery known to all of human thought. In essence, the Hard Problem was stated in the debate when I challenged Steven Novella to offer the first sentence in his explanation of how the physical brain creates consciousness. That’s all – just the first sentence. Steven was speechless. It is not his fault – as I pointed out, no neuroscientist on earth can offer the first sentence in explaining what they say is “widely known,” with the implication that they are almost there. This is the most obvious case of a faith-based religion imaginable! Not one word to explain what they claim to be widely accepted in science.

The complete lack of any idea of how the brain might create consciousness is a crashing thunderbolt that demolishes simplistic scientific materialism. Consciousness exists primarily. The brain acts more as a reducing valve, or filter, reducing consciousness down to the trickle of our human awareness in the material realm.

In coming to grips with the profound nature of lessons from my coma journey, I share the following, to put the consciousness issue in perspective:

The only thing any one of us truly knows to exist is our own consciousness, itself. Remember that modern neuroscience dictates that everything any one of us has ever experienced since before we were born, everything, is nothing more than the assembled patterns of electrochemical flickering of 100 billion neurons in a 3 pound gelatinous mass (our brain) floating in a warm, dark bath – a model of what we assume to be “external reality,” but just a *model* – not “reality” itself. They assume that the sheer complexity of the brain somehow creates consciousness, yet no one on earth has the faintest idea how

to connect the dots. So any theory about the nature of reality must begin with a far more complete description of the nature of “consciousness,” and especially of the relationship between consciousness and any “reality” that exists. The very daunting nature of this enigma is so profound that many scientists run away, claiming it all to be too deep a mystery to even consider from a scientific viewpoint. However, there is a growing cadre of scientists, like myself, who are charging straight ahead towards a deeper understanding of this profound mystery at the very heart of our existence.

Some neuroscientists and other materialists have recently given up on pure materialism (brain creates consciousness), notably Christoph Koch (a colleague of Sean Carroll’s at Caltech) and Galen Strawson, and I noticed Karl Jansen who wrote the Ketamine paper on the “against” list provided for the IntelligenceSquared debate now acknowledging at the beginning of that article the role of spirit, not just brain chemistry, in NDEs.

Dr. Jansen has the following to say about the Ketamine-NMDA journal article ([referenced](#) on the “against list” for the IntelligenceSquared debate on May 7):

‘I am no longer as opposed to spiritual explanations of these phenomena as this article would appear to suggest. Over the past two years (it is quite some time since I wrote it) I have moved more towards the views put forward by John Lilly and Stan Grof. Namely, that drugs and psychological disciplines such as meditation and yoga may render certain ‘states’ more accessible. The complication then becomes in defining just what we mean by ‘states’ and where they are located, if indeed location is an appropriate term at all. But the apparent emphasis on matter over mind contained within this particular article no longer accurately represents my attitudes. My forthcoming book ‘Ketamine’ will consider mystical issues from quite a different perspective, and will give a much stronger voice to those who see drugs as just another door to a space, and not as actually producing that space’.

I’d like to close quoting someone I admire a lot:

The suppression of uncomfortable ideas may be common in religion and politics, but it is not the path to knowledge, it has no place in the endeavor of science.

— Carl Sagan (1934 – 1996), *Cosmos*, 1980

Dr Carl Sagan lamented the rising prominence of ignorance in the predominant cultural thinking of the time. It is interesting how the tables have turned – that pure materialist “scientists” suppress uncomfortable ideas, and are willfully ignorant of the abundant evidence of the afterlife. He would be gratified that many modern scientists, and so many souls enlightened by their own experiences, are fully addressing the deep mysteries of consciousness and quantum mechanics (especially in light of the remarkable experiences related to the afterlife question) and the very nature of all existence. These scientists and journeyers have become the enlightened ones so confronted by the rampant ignorance of the deniers and debunkers. I am optimistic, however, that reason will prevail, and that the world will come to fully realize the tremendous implications—including the reality of the afterlife.

–Eben