

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF CONSCIOUSNESS *

EDGAR D. MITCHELL

The view of our planet from space that I was privileged to have was an event that has profoundly affected my life. The pictures you have seen in books, magazines and on television help give some sense of that awesome but magnificent sight. Such a perspective provides an overview that is most provocative. But photography has its limits and a photograph cannot tell you of the way my philosophy and my commitment to philosophy has been changing since that voyage to the moon.

To see a small, majestic planet Earth in its blue and white splendor floating in a black sky is something you cannot forget. It stays with you profoundly, long after the splashdown, the hero's welcome and the parades have been forgotten. The view from space has shown me—as no other event in my life has—how limited a view man has of his own life and of the life of the planet.

Man fancies himself the highest development in nature, the ruler and most intelligent of creatures on Earth. About that notion, I have strong reservations. If animals could communicate with us, and some experiments going on now indicate they might some day, I will suggest that the first thing they would say is how glad they are not to be human, because no other animal commits the atrocities and stupidities that men do. In our surfeit of knowledge but paucity of wisdom, we have come near the brink of global destruction. The possibility of a nuclear Armageddon is very real. The possibility of our extinction by environmental pollution is just as real and only a little bit slower than by fission or fusion. Coexistent with these threats is the possibility of overpopulating while wasting natural resources at an insane rate so that starvation becomes our fate. Certainly these man-made threats to life on Earth cast some doubt on the supremacy of human intelligence.

So the situation is desperate, and I became acutely aware of that as I gazed at Earth from a quarter of a million miles away. It put a new

* In Dr. Mitchell's absence, his paper was read by James Beal of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

perspective on things far beyond just the visual dimension. I could see the potential of the planet if it were to function in accordance with the natural design of the universe. I could see what Earth can be if man would but choose to make it so. Yet I knew that back on Earth people were fighting, stealing, raping, deceiving—totally unaware of their individual part in or responsibility for the possible future of the planet, just living unconsciously or distrustfully or greedily or callously or apathetically. And at the same time other people were living in poverty, ill health, near-slavery, starvation, fear and misery from prejudice or outright persecution, because individually and collectively we have not had the will to change these conditions.

As I said, those thoughts and perceptions stayed with me and worked on my mind. I could see the problem; but even more important, I began to see a solution. It is the only possible solution but it will be enormously difficult to achieve. The solution is: a change of consciousness. Man must rise from his present ego-centered consciousness to sense his intimate participation in the planet's functioning, and beyond that, in the functioning of the universe. Otherwise we are doomed. It is as simple as that. It is not for the universe to bow to man. It is for man, who inhabits an insignificant little planet, to find within himself, individually and collectively, ways to bring his consciousness into attunement with the universe.

So today I would like to talk a little about how we can try to develop planetary consciousness in man, and the part parapsychology can play in that all-important process.

The first thing parapsychologists should recognize—and it has been pointed out many times by psychics themselves—is that psychic development is not equivalent to spiritual growth. The history of psychic research has shown time and time again that gifted sensitives and mediums have resorted to trickery and fraud. They were no more ethical, and sometimes less so, than the average population. Now I am not making a general judgment of psychics—I do not mean that at all. But you know as well as I that both scientific investigators and ordinary people seeking guidance have sometimes been deceived for a while by psychics whose main concern is not advancing knowledge or helping those in need but rather increasing their own status, wealth and power over others.

As I said, psychic development is not equivalent to spiritual growth. In my opinion, psychic power can be compared to nuclear power. Its effect, however, can be more profound. The power is essentially neutral and can be used either diabolically or altruistically, depending on the consciousness of those who control it. Therefore if the psychic event

and parapsychology, which studies it, are to become a means of enlightening the human race through the expansion of consciousness, they must be seen in a larger perspective than we have traditionally held.

To study the psi event as an end product, devoid of its ramifications, is a barren endeavor. Psychic abilities and the study of them must become grounded in a transcendent view of man and his relationship to the universe. Otherwise they just become a tool for sophisticated ego games, as has been the case for much of conventional scientific discovery. One can see example after example of this exploitation already, where unscrupulous advertisements invite the gullible to buy this book or take that course or try some other device so that he can gain power, success, fame and fortune. Nothing is said about helping people or teaching humility, compassion and wisdom to the ones who respond to the ads. No, the advertisements just say things like "Increase your earning power" and "Make others obey your command." Well, if that's what psychic abilities are all about, I would prefer to see them remain locked in the laboratory forever. We just do not need any more of that sort of nonsense. Man is totally capable of bringing about his own destruction now, without adding to his arsenal a new, more effective technique to subvert planetary potential.

But if parapsychology can become linked with transpersonal psychology, then with this particular approach to the mind-brain problem—that old question about the nature of man's mind and how it is related to his body—will become part of the general study of consciousness. And when we begin to ask ourselves, "What is consciousness?" and "How can we develop higher consciousness?" then I think we will be well on our way to developing the proper attitude, the only attitude that will allow us to live in harmony with universal functioning.

But a moral or ethical foundation alone is not enough. There have been many highly-principled psychics who have not been able to tell us the slightest thing about how they function. And it seems that many highly-principled investigators have not done much better than that either. Because since the beginning of psychic research in the last century until now, there really has been no all-encompassing theory of the paranormal, although a few individuals, mostly working alone, have given serious thought to the problem. Lawrence LeShan's *Toward a General Theory of the Paranormal*, published by the Parapsychology Foundation, is an example.

Still, I think we are close to a breakthrough—very close. In the next few years I predict the development of a unified theory of universal functioning—a theory that will attempt to explain psychic phenomena

along with other events that in the past have been classified as mystical, occult or paranormal, and place them all in the framework of consciousness. This in turn will be related to the functions of nature on every level from subatomic events to supergalactic processes. I believe psychic energy is our key to a unified field theory.

Now that is a very ambitious project. It verges on the point where science will attain omni-science, omniscience. But I am not worried about the eventual outcome because in those far reaches of thought and understanding, if we can survive that long, science converges with religion and a universal value system emerges. Discovering this value system on a personal level has been the motivation behind every major religion, and certainly has been the final goal of great scientists. The names of Einstein, Schroedinger and Heisenberg come to mind.

The reason I say we are on the verge of a breakthrough is because over the last few decades, research by little known but visionary scientists, some of whom are here, has shown that there is a vast creative potential in man that is almost totally unrecognized by Western science. This knowledge of the life processes was previously known and expressed by a few ancient sages and enlightened religious teachers who took a subjective, intuitive approach to their knowledge. But now the objective, rational view of science is on the point of developing a totally new approach to the study of biological systems. This "new biology" or "new physics" will contain the view that psychic abilities are normal, trainable faculties associated with the sensory systems of living organisms. As in the discoveries of Copernicus and, later, of Darwin, I expect this will mark the beginning of a new age of understanding about man and the universe in which he lives.

The technique for unlocking that new understanding will be a multidisciplinary approach to the study of paranormal phenomena. The need for such an approach should be obvious. First, the multiplication of knowledge makes it impossible for one person to learn all he needs to know in order to deal with all the questions and possibilities that arise in pure research. You need a team of people, each of whom has been well-trained in a discipline but whose specialty is generalization. Second, history has shown time and again that important scientific discoveries generally happen only when someone steps outside the limits of his traditional discipline and looks at something from a fresh point of view. Then what should have been obvious all along comes into focus. A multidisciplinary approach tends to foster that sort of event. Third, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary because we have seen—at least, I hope we have seen—that the objective, rational approach to knowledge in the West has its limitations and that the

subjective, intuitive approach of the East can work hand-in-hand with it to take us farther than either can take us alone. And last of all, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary because life is holistic. At some level of functioning everything in the universe is in sympathy, in resonance, in harmonic connection with everything else. "Pick a flower and trouble a star," the saying goes. So the old ways of categorizing knowledge and cutting up existence into little compartments do not give us the clear, integrated picture of reality we are seeking.

How should an organization based on this approach be set up? A fixed institution is definitely *not* what I have in mind. In this rapidly changing world, the long-range goals of human enrichment and transformation of consciousness require an adaptive system sufficiently flexible to cope with shifting conditions and needs so it can move in any direction that seems best for the times. Therefore I prefer to call this organization "a modality for change."

The main elements of the modality for change are, as I envision it, (1) a research function, (2) an administrative function, (3) an executive function, and (4) an educational function that links all functions with one another and the planet through various communication loops. My major premise here is that fundamental research into methods of expanding human potential will propel all the other functions, whose purpose is to support the research. The one and only measure of success for this system will be its effectiveness in bringing new vistas of thought into societal processes in a way that promotes harmonious and peaceful functioning among all people and with the environment.

The research function should be composed of various elements spanning all disciplines of the natural, medical and behavioral sciences. The administrative function should be the central funding unit. In addition, it should maintain the normal processes dealing with personnel, accounting and legal matters. The executive function should provide policy and guidance for the day-to-day working of the entire system. It should do this by setting priorities and standards for research, and by acting as a steering committee for the administration. But it should not do this autocratically. Rather, the composition of an executive board or committee should be drawn from leaders of the research units.

The educational function exists for two reasons. First, within the modality, it provides the communications loops among all research units to disseminate information; and outside the modality, it disseminates information to society via the various media and other channels of societal functioning. Second, it actively seeks feedback from society so that information about human needs and problems flows

back into the system and helps guide the research. Therefore the educational function serves to influence societal thinking toward greater individual fulfillment and evolution by using information for transformation.

Those are some of the thoughts I have had since Apollo 14, and they have been more than just ivory-tower speculations. In fact, I am now putting together an organization along the lines I have described here to accomplish the goals I have mentioned. I cannot give you details of my plan yet. But I will say that I am in a position—through grace and good fortune more than through anything I have done myself—to provide the leadership and large-scale funding so that a reasonable degree of success seems possible. As things move along for the organization, hopefully it will become more than an organization. My wish is to see it become a growing organism having a collective consciousness, adaptable to its environment, attuned to planetary needs and able not only to sustain itself but actually to produce more than it consumes. I trust you realize this is a novel feat for an entity dedicated to fundamental research and human evolution on the frontiers of science and sensory awareness.

A novel feat, something that has never been done before. The point of this modality for change is just that—change. I hope it will help change our present rush toward oblivion, our materialistic philosophy of science, and the thinking of the business world so that basic research and humanistic motivation drive commerce rather than the reverse. I hope it will help change our petty, selfish value systems, and the quality of our entire lives by changing our consciousness.

I see parapsychology as being in a unique position to do this. The ever-increasing public interest in psychic, occult and paranormal matters will naturally bring parapsychologists into positions of leadership on the forefront of science. We must be prepared for that opportunity. To do that, we must see parapsychology within a larger perspective—the perspective of expanding consciousness—so that the accumulation of data leads to wisdom as well as knowledge, a wisdom that will help people of this planet to find fulfillment and peace within themselves, with their neighbors and with the environment.

If I sound a bit preachy and Biblical at this point, I mean to be. We are in the most crucial period in the history of man. It is not far-fetched, I think, with a linear extrapolation of current chaos to consider it as the last days. I am hopeful, of course, that man can rise above his current thinking and make it through this crisis of consciousness to see a new age of planetary awareness. But as I said earlier, the threats to our existence arising from our foolishness and perversity

are so great that we could extinguish ourselves, unless we individually, consciously, choose to change our course.

So I will leave you with these thoughts as a summary of my remarks:

1. Mankind has developed his scientific and technical abilities to an extent that, without evolving a new planetary consciousness, he will cultivate his own destruction.
2. Psychic energy is a neutral, unintelligent energy at least as forceful as nuclear energy since it channels through the mind.
3. The study and use of psychic processes without an attendant elevation of consciousness to a universal value system can cause only greater chaos.
4. Psychic studies are a key to the discovery of a unified field theory.
5. The implications of understanding the psychic energy are so far-reaching as to require a multidisciplinary team approach to research.
6. By the proper centering of consciousness on human and planetary enrichment through attunement to a universal value system, the creativity of man can be channeled to change the current chaotic direction of planetary progress.

DISCUSSION

ROGO: We are all in agreement with Dr. Mitchell, in sentiment. I really do not think his paper calls for comment at all. And I think there will be no objection from anyone here when I say that the sentiments presented by Dr. Mitchell will be a perfect way of ending this conference.

BELOFF: I do have a question. I gather that Captain Mitchell is a famous astronaut, but he is not, as yet, a very experienced parapsychologist and I could not help wondering, when he talked in this wonderful, grandiose way about parapsychology solving all the problems of mankind what, exactly, he will feel like, five years from now, when he has come up against the hard, practical problems of trying to demonstrate anything at all clearly in this field.

BEAL: I am somewhat on his side, myself, as you may gather. What we plan to look into, as mentioned briefly in his paper, is the holistic nature of man, looking at the mind-body environment, taking a systems approach to investigation, rather than looking at the mind from just the psychology end. It will be using a team of experts, with of course a psychologist being in on this. We would hope from a systems approach, to obtain more useful information, especially you might say, spin-off into the medical, psychological applications areas, because different disciplines have different ways of looking at things. Hopefully

we can get enough unbiased—or not too biased—investigators together to look at this from different aspects. We are looking at a kind of synergistic combination. In the past, it appears we have looked at psychology from certain aspects and the total systems nature of it, as it fits into the nature of man, has been somewhat neglected, but I believe that that is due to the lack of knowledge and the lack of technical expertise in other areas. I think now that things will blossom out a bit, because of the better equipment and scientific investigation techniques which are coming to the fore. Yes, it will not be an easy task, but it looks as though it will be an all-encompassing effort. We will do our best and see what happens.