

Assumptions, Beliefs, White Crows, and Connections

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According to the dominant Western worldview, we are individual entities, dwelling and moving in our unique, isolated worlds. When we interact with one another or with other parts of Nature, we do so by means of language and other physical signals and by means of conventional physical forces and energies. What we know of the world and of each other we have learned through our senses and through the patterns imposed upon earlier sensory information by our faculties of reason and intellect. We live in a world in which causes must always precede effects and in which time flows inexorably in one direction only: from past, to present, to future. Our thoughts, images, feelings, and wishes are private, sometimes entertaining, often painful, but never able to exert any direct influences upon others or upon the physical world.

These assumptions are pervasive, seductive, and seem to concur with our typical experiences and with common sense. However, we are aware of many historical and contemporary anecdotes that are inconsistent with these assumptions, and there are beliefs, accounts, and experiences within many traditions that do not appear to fit readily within this neat and tidy worldview. I call these exceptional events and experiences "white crows", following William James, who reminded us that it takes but a single white crow to demonstrate the nonuniversality of the contention that "all crows are black". The beliefs, assumptions, and axioms of the typical Western worldview are our black crows; I would like to remind you of some of the white crows that point to an important implication consistent with our theme of the day: the deep and profound interconnectedness of all things.

Initially presented as part of a special one-day conference on *Earth and Soul: Ecopsychology and the Healing of Self, Earth, and Society*, sponsored by the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and held in Palo Alto, California on February 26, 1994.

The first white crow, so familiar now that it would perhaps be better to call it a dark grey

crow, is that there are important interconnections between the contents and processes of our individual minds. They allow us to integrate our perceptions and memories, our thoughts and feelings. These connections give us access to what was formerly preconscious or unconscious, with accompaniments of both wisdom and terror, and they permit the wonderful and spontaneous novel combinations we call "creativity".

A second, light grey, crow is that there are important and extensive interconnections between our minds and our bodies. Our body's hormones and blood sugar levels can influence our moods. Twisted neurochemicals can provoke twisted thoughts and feelings. Certain molecules coursing through our central nervous system amplify our imagery. The discipline of psychosomatic medicine is founded on myriad observations that our thoughts can make us ill. The newer interdisciplinary of psychoneuroimmunology recognizes the complementary picture: Our thoughts, images, and feelings can help us achieve wellness through their impacts upon our nervous and immune systems. We already are seeing the power of our thoughts and our beliefs. In the bodily effects that we witness in hypnosis, biofeedback, autogenic training, and in ubiquitous placebo reactions, we see the somatic traces of belief and of confident expectation. In meditation, we observe the relaxed and restful hypometabolic bodily state that accompanies a calm, tranquil mind. Changes in imagery and in focus and density of attention are accompanied by changes in the density of specific subpopulations of white blood cells, and some of these changes may have important consequences for our health and well-being.

And now for some proper white crows: Our mental influences can extend beyond our bodies. It is possible for us to become directly aware of and to directly influence distant events far beyond the range of our senses and motor systems. The disciplines of parapsychology and psychical research know these as instances of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis. Related occurrences are known in esoteric and spiritual traditions as revelation, inspiration, prophesy, and miracles. I have time for only a few examples, drawn from my personal experiences.

I describe the body of a stranger at a distant location, including details of a heart enlarged like

a large balloon and located on the wrong side of the body. These details are confirmed. This is an instance of accurate clairvoyance (knowledge of some distant objective event), with potential diagnostic implications and applications.

I have an unusual early morning dream about a monkey who is a catcher in an aerial (trapeze) act. Twenty minutes later, I turn on the radio to hear a comedy routine about someone's cousin who is hairy all over, with long dangling arms, like a monkey, who is a catcher in an aerial (trapeze) act. This is an instance of precognition (accurate foreknowledge of a future event that could not be rationally inferred) in which I seem to have peered, during sleep, twenty minutes into my future.

I am in an office in San Antonio, Texas, describing aloud my spontaneous thoughts and images into a tape recorder. Sixty-five hundred miles away, in Edinburgh, Scotland, a colleague in a university laboratory is looking intently at a randomly selected target picture. The picture is a reproduction of Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Dance at Bougival* which depicts a theme of jollity at a tavern on the banks of the Seine: In the foreground, a man dressed in black with a hat and a woman with a bonnet dance, his outstretched hand grasping her outstretched hand; in the background are people in lively conversation seated at tables; a glass beer mug and a glass beer pitcher, both half filled with beer, are visible on a table. Images arise before my mind's eye, and I describe them: "...A woman with a hat or bonnet...a man with a cap...several figures, like a French Impressionist painting by Monet or Renoir...a glass beer mug filled with beer, or a ceramic beer stein...pub atmosphere...jollity, lively, people with round rosy cheeks...a hand holding another hand...clasped hands...." This is an instance of telepathy (direct mental knowledge of the mental content of another person, typically at a distance), and it occurred under well-controlled laboratory conditions.

I am sitting in my office one morning and someone comes to the door and says "good morning", bringing to mind some unfinished business regarding a "firing" of this person. I reach for a closed book of safety matches, and when my hand is an inch away from them, the matches burst into flame. There are no heat sources around, and safety matches are not supposed to do that. This seems to be an instance of spontaneous, unintentional

psychokinesis (a mind-over-matter effect). The part of me that knows how to do such things apparently converted an unconscious issue regarding personnel firing into physical fire, that could be readily observed by myself and could have been witnessed by others or by cameras (were they present), perhaps to get my attention.

Countless similar instances of psychic functioning have occurred in people's every day lives, as well as under controlled conditions in laboratories. What is of great interest about such events is that they take place at distances without being mediated by the senses or by conventional energies or information transfer. Precognition is inconsistent with our usual understanding of time: In precognition, the "effect" (the precognitive knowledge) occurs before the "cause" (the foreseen event). All of these "paranormal" events or "exceptional human experiences" are "white crows" in that they are inconsistent with certain assumptions of the received worldview described earlier. They indicate that such a worldview is incomplete and in need of expansion in order to include all of Nature's events that need explaining. To me, more importantly, they indicate that, beneath the surface of appearances, we are extensively and profoundly interconnected with one other and with all of Nature's ten thousand things. Such interconnections would seem to be necessary for such psychic events to be able to occur in the first place, since they do not seem to be carried by any known forms of force or energy and, in any case, such a "transmission model" does not seem adequate to account for these phenomena. Rather, it seems that Nature is holographic, with everything available in some latent or implicate form everywhere and everywhen, somewhat like the esoteric concept of the "akashic records". A friend, who is a Sanskrit scholar, has told me that "akasha" (meaning "space") literally comes from the prefix "a" (meaning "absence of") and "kasha" (meaning "a fist"). This image implies the opposite of a fist, with its closedness, structure, and tight clinging; the image of "akasha" suggests an openness, a pervasive, unstructured, unbounded being.

On to more white crows. Psychic phenomena do not take place in isolation or in specific, well-defined locations or foci; rather, they occur in the context of *fields*. It is as though all of the participants contribute to the emergence of these phenomena. For example, in laboratory studies of telepathy, it is not the case the only the "sender" or only the "receiver"

are involved; rather, the telepathic experience appears to emerge out of the *relationship* of the two. Everyone connected with the experiment seems able to contribute something, mentally, to the occurrence.

The crows become even whiter. Careful psychokinesis (mind-over-matter) research has shown that human consciousness, through processes of attention and intention, is able to directly influence the physical world. A vast variety of inanimate physical systems (ranging from bouncing dice to radioactive emissions) can be perturbed, mentally and at a distance, and spatial distance and temporal distance do not seem to influence such effects importantly. These psychokinetic effects seem to be goal-directed or teleological in nature. If a human participant fills his or her consciousness with an intention or image of a particular desired outcome or goal, the likelihood of occurrence of that goal or outcome increases. In these cases, the mind does not appear to push and pull events that are efficient causes of the outcome; rather, the mind seems to "pull" the goal itself into existence, and the efficient causes that are "downstream" seem to take care of themselves. These findings have important implications for our conceptualizations of the nature of causality, and for the role of human consciousness in the physical world.

In determining whether or to what extent these psychic white crows occur, our psychological world is most important. Factors such as openness, belief, and confident expectation are mental attitudes that are favorable to the strong occurrence of these psychic interactions, whereas defensiveness, critical doubt, and fearful apprehension or anxiety seem to chase away these white crows.

The crows become whiter still. There is growing evidence that these mental influences may be able to act backward in time. Present mental effort is somehow able to influence past events. The past is not changed. Rather, consciousness seems to be able to act on initial probabilities to help determine what happened in the first place. Just as other findings point to a kind of spacelessness in the realm of psychic occurrences, in which distances and spatial separations do not seem important, so too do these retroactive psychokinesis studies point to a kind of timelessness as well, in which past, present, and future events all exist in some

common "now" and can mutually interact with one another.

Psychokinetic influences upon living systems, upon biological targets, have also been observed, opening the way for empirical and theoretical studies of at least some of the processes that could be involved in the mental or spiritual healing of one person by another person, even at great spatial separation. According to one theory of psychic healing, the healer's experience of merging or being one with the healee, when motivated by a deep feeling of love and concern for the healee's well-being, is sufficient to trigger or optimize the self-healing processes of the healee, often with dramatic improvements in wellness.

There are curious field effects that accompany psychic occurrences. Directing one's attention and intention toward a particular location can produce a localized and lingering influence in that area that can persist even after the instigating intention and attention have been withdrawn, only to gradually fade away. Something like this may be involved in so-called psychometry in which memories appear to inhere in physical objects and may be accessed by sensitive individuals. Something akin to this may be operative in some cases of hauntings or apparitions, as well as in "power spots" that are reported for various locations or sites on the earth's surface. So, in addition to the more obvious ways in which we are all interconnected with the planet, there appear to be even more subtle and extensive connections of a psychic nature that tie us into the planet and its traces. There is evidence that our psychic functioning and indeed our more usual physiological and emotional functioning may be interrelated to fluctuations in the earth's geomagnetic field, which is, in turn, influenced by solar and cosmic events. All of this points to an incredibly intricate, interconnected, and intertwined fabric of mind and matter which influences all of us in subtle ways and to which we constantly add our own subtle influences.

A parapsychologist named William Roll has used some wonderful words to describe the interconnections of which we are speaking. He speaks of consciousness as being embodied, emplaced, and enduring. And he uses and extends the Iroquois Indian concept of the "long body" as a metaphor for the greater, more extensive self that we all share—not only with one another, but with all sentient beings and with all of inanimate Nature.

If body and mind are somehow one, the difficulties of explaining their interactions decrease. If apparently separate persons are somehow one, telepathy becomes less strange. If persons and all aspects of the environment are somehow one, clairvoyance and psychokinesis become more understandable. If cause and effect are one, we see causality in a new way, and precognition is no longer as problematical. If matter and spirit are somehow one, we see their interactions as a boundless dance, rather than as bounded conflicts.

Paradoxically, we are unique and individual and isolated from one another, but are also profoundly interconnected and one. Thomas Wolfe was right when he said, "Every man is an island". John Donne was right when he said, "No man is an island". Each of these complementary views is true, and each is incomplete. Different ethical systems follow from the two views. The ethical system that can emerge from a realization that we are interconnected with one another and with all of Nature in one "long body" in such a way as to allow the various white crows we have been discussing promises to be much more favorable to our healthful and heartfelt survival and that of our common home, the Earth.

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