



Pari Perspectives

"The future has an ancient heart"
CARLO LEVI

**Ideas in Science, the Arts,
Spirit and Community**

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F. DAVID PEAT

Return of the Sacred

**Seven Encounters between
Science, the Arts, and the Sacred**

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AT THE EDGES OF CONSCIOUSNESS: Towards a Science of Human Experience for the 21st century June 6-13, 2023

Àlex Gómez-Marín

The scientific study of consciousness began to cease being taboo only thirty years ago. Today, it is a field of study de facto and de jure, even within the neuroscientific orthodoxy. It is however a young science —as it turns out, some of its very researchers have recently described a great deal of what is going on in it as pseudo-science. If anything, consciousness research looks more like a proto-science. In the same way as behaviorism failed to do justice to cognition, cognitivism today seems unable to properly tackle the c-word.

We continue to struggle untangling Galileo's knot, exactly four hundred years after he programmatically declared the separation between the 'primary phenomena of motion' and sensations as 'secondary qualities' with 'no real existence save in us.' A great deal of progress in science as we know it can be attributed, in part, to concentrating on what we call objective reality (shape, position, velocity, etc.) and to setting aside the scientific study of subjective reality (smell, taste, pain, etc.). Giving ontological and methodological priority to the former has been a very fruitful move indeed. However, it is worth wondering how much longer we can postpone a science of human experience, pretending that it can thrive without revising some of the foundational assumptions that lie at the heart of science as we know it..

But there is more. Despite currently enjoying a renaissance in terms of general interest and academic momentum, dominant attempts for a new science of consciousness systematically overlook a wide continent of thought adjacent to its preferred simplified laboratory experiments and sanctioned phenomenology. The map misses the wild territories of the life of the mind, crowded with 'exceptional' experiences and 'anomalous' phenomena. Ranging from psychedelics and lucid dreaming to synchronicities, near death experiences and mystical phenomena, the current paradigm tends to ignore, disdain, ridicule, and even censor their study.

I call them the edges of consciousness. They are 'edges' in a double sense, as they are 'marginalized' (via all sorts

of derogatory prefixes like 'pseudo-', 'super-', 'extra-', or 'anti-') while also being a true 'frontier' of knowledge. The central point here is that the study of consciousness requires that we take seriously the many flavors of human experience and that we specifically entertain those that



AT THE EDGES OF CONSCIOUSNESS
SCIENCE AND ANOMALOUS EXPERIENCES

Pari, Italy / June 6-13, 2023

with Allan Leslie Combs Etzel Cardeña Paul Grof Sarah Janes Jeffrey Kripal Roderick Main	Dean Radin (via Zoom) Tanya Sacramento Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes
Curated and chaired by Àlex Gómez-Marín	
The study of consciousness requires that we take seriously the many flavors of human experience, particularly those that lie at the edges of what is typically explored scientifically and discussed in public. From psychedelics and	synchronicities, to lucid dreaming and psychic phenomena, the 'backdoors of perception' have the potential to transform not just neuroscience and physics but our very understanding of the nature of reality and our place in it.

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have been largely avoided by academia and left to lie beyond the border of what is typically explored scientifically and discussed in public. Ironically, they turn out to be more normal than we are often willing to acknowledge. To be called 'fringe' as one walks through the 'cutting-edge' of the scientific ridges and gorges of nature is part of the job of the true explorer of the unknown.

Last summer in Pari we had plenty of opportunities to discuss the research findings and ideas of a wide range of international experts on those topics and to weave them together with our own personal insights and experiences. Through rather formal (but varied) presentations upstairs at the Palazzo and relentless informal (but deep) conversations downstairs at the Restaurant, and within the walls and the nature that surrounds the village, the edges of consciousness became more than a scientific 'topic' and



turned into a living reality to wonder and wander about.

We learned about parapsychology as a proper science. We enjoyed some fascinating hermeneutics on exceptional experiences. We weighted the local and non-local aspects of consciousness within current big unknowns in psychiatry. We had a glimpse of the history and present reality of the revelatory and healing power of dreams. We tasted a rich metaphysical menu to better integrate our experiences and discovered a juicy intersection between philosophy and mysticism. We were taken by the beautiful honesty of the subtle art of mediumship beyond facile stereotypes. We examined the great story of the evolution of consciousness. We also impossibly dove into the archives of the impossible. All this and much more, while also exploring creative and rigorous frameworks to integrate such a constellation into a coherent understanding. But it is pointless to try to summarize it here.

In Pari, context is constitutive. The participants are not merely an audience or clients. What takes place in the group (sometimes straightway from day one) is too exceptional to be understood unless it is actually experienced. What happens in Pari does not stay in Pari, but it is hard to tell what happened to those who weren't there. And even to those of us who were there: Why did we come in the first place? Where were we really during the event? And where did we go from there? We sense it but we don't really know. I believe (or hope) we go to Pari not so much for information (or entertainment) but for transformation.

Yes, these gatherings have the potential to profoundly impact our current state of knowledge in many fields and maybe to illuminate some local darkness in the world. As the Nobel Laureate in Physics Richard Feynman posed, we should be willing to refute ourselves as quickly as possible, as only then true progress can take place. Can we transcend both our doubts and beliefs? Perhaps that's the skill that is practiced when surfing at the edges.

The study of the human mind holds surprises like those that revolutionized our understanding of matter-energy and space-time just a century ago, and which we have not yet fully integrated into the citadel of academia or our daily lives. Current neuroscience has the same responsibility as early 20th-century quantum physics. And so do all of us, laypeople included. Openly and critically thinking and living such anomalous experiences contributes not just to neuroscience and fundamental physics but also to our very understanding of the nature of reality and our collective and individual place in the world. Science (and life) is a journey into the unknown, or it is not science (and living).

EAST AND WEST PHILOSOPHY IN DIALOGUE June 20-25, 2023

Joseph L. Pratt

In late June 2023 the Pari Center hosted the symposium 'East and West Philosophy in Dialogue: From Worldview to Sustainable Order.' The five-day symposium brought together prominent philosophers working in China and the West to explore how traditionally Eastern emphases on holism may relate to the contemporary worldview and pressing environmental and social challenges. Participants considered the Eastern holism especially as expressed in the Daoist tradition as an alternative to a reductionist and largely materialist paradigm. The symposium was

