

**DISCUSS JEFFREY KRIPAL'S ASSERTION THAT THE 'HUMAN IS TWO AND ONE'  
(2010: 270) AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR PARANORMAL RESEARCH**

**Carol Duncan**

**INTRODUCTION**

In making the assertion that the 'human is two and one', Jeffrey Kripal is presenting us with an invitation to look at our humanity from two different perspectives and reflect upon the relevance which these two ways of seeing might have for research into the paranormal. In discussing Kripal's proposition, I start by taking an overview of this apparent paradox in terms of how it has been formulated and defined from classical times right through to current neuroscientific thinking. I then proceed, in the context of "two" in relation to "one", to examine the various dualities encountered by the human being and consider how these might be reconciled with the concept of unity.

In considering Kripal's claim and its relevance for paranormal research, I note that early paranormal researchers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were seeking acceptance and validation by the scientific establishment for what were considered to be anomalous and non-rational phenomena. They found that their work met with resistance and rejection as it did not fit within the criteria of the materialist mindset, and I relate this to attitudes today, where a call for a post materialist paradigm is emerging to challenge the view of the scientific and academic establishment that only the strictly rational and empirically proven can possibly be acceptable and true.

Moving from the perspective of dualities in all their forms, I give fresh consideration to the concept of human as one, and the paradox which Kripal's assertion presents, and explore further perspectives on the stories which we tell ourselves about the nature of reality.

**OVERVIEW**

The assertion that the human is both two *and* one presents a paradox which has been discussed since the days of Plato and Plotinus. We are told in the Corpus Hermeticum

(Salaman et al, 1999: 23) that “of all living beings on earth, Man alone is double: mortal because of the body, immortal because of the real Man”. Kripal has observed (2014: 275) that the study of the nature of the human being and of embodied consciousness is based upon the ancient human experience of being not one but two. He describes the first member of this pair as the body-ego, the local, historical and social self, the day-to-day awareness of identity upon which our life is based, and the second as less easily defined. It may be experienced as “out there”, an external deity or presence revered by the western theistic religions, as a deep inner sense of Self or blissful void sought by the Asian traditions, or as a little of both. The ancient admonition to “Know Thyself” was reportedly inscribed over the portal to the oracle at Delphi. We may relate this statement to the development of self-awareness and consciousness in the human being, or view it as an echo of the act of creation itself, with the creator seeking awareness of himself through the creation of another, whilst ultimately the knower and the known are one. In today’s world, this aspect of “human as two” underlies much of depth psychology and provides a fruitful focus for neuroscientific research.

Whilst considering Kripal’s assertion that the human is both two *and* one, and its relevance for paranormal research, I should like to consider our perceptions of dualities of various kinds and their effect upon our sense of “reality”, with a particular focus on the resulting polarisation which underlies the rejection of the paranormal by the scientific establishment. I examine below some of the relevant developments within contemporary neuroscience, including Ian McGilchrist’s work on the bilateral brain; and discuss the cultural divide between scientific materialism and the paranormal, together with the work of Mario Beauregard and others in calling for a post-materialist approach to the relationship between mind and brain, spirit and matter.

Kripal proposes (2010:270) that, to know the human as both two and one, there is a need to go beyond the dualisms of right and left, mystical and rational, faith and reason, self and other, mind and matter, consciousness and energy, and so on. He suggests that, despite living in a world of duality, it is possible to synchronize the two forms of consciousness and identity and bring them both online together; and considers that the psychological and the paranormal are profoundly involved with the production of human intention and cultural

narrative – they form an essential part of the meaning of the story within which we live our lives.

I question just what Kripal means by human as one and expand his view of two and one a little further by questioning whether this can be the whole story, as the relationship between two points has long been considered to create a third entity. Here I refer to the tradition of alchemy which suggests the possibility of something new arising out of a duality, whether this is seen as a physical (or divine) child, or, as in sacred geometry, as a starting point for creating multiple additional forms.

I consider Kripal's use of the extended metaphor of "authoring the impossible" in relation to the paranormal and the sacred, in terms of the "authorisation" of our own story and how we as humans create our own sense of reality. Finally, I conclude by asking just what stories we tell ourselves about being both two and one and consider some of the ways in which we may find ourselves able to accommodate the paradox with which we are presented.

## HUMAN AS TWO

"We must be very careful about how we use a category like Human as Two . . . . I am using the expression *not* as a metaphysical statement implying an absolute dualism (which I also reject), but as a helpful heuristic device that captures quite accurately the kinds of functional dualisms that do in fact seem to give structure to human experience throughout the history of religions.

(Kripal, 2010: 63)

What are these functional dualisms, and how do they give structure to our experience? Physical bodies have evolved with two arms, two legs, two lungs, and two eyes, in addition to a range of other organs. The presence of physical opposites has proved useful in this regard. For example, two legs enable us to walk upright, and the development of the opposing thumb and fingers of the human hand facilitated a vital stage of our evolutionary development, as it enabled purposeful grasping and the use of tools. In addition, as Iain McGilchrist explains (2010: 16), the brain has an asymmetrical but dual hemispheric structure, each with specialised functions which provide radically different ways of perceiving and dealing with the world, and lead to two kinds of knowing. He suggests that the hemispheric differences are not just a curiosity, a bunch of neuropsychological facts

with no further significance, but actually represent two individually coherent, but incompatible, aspects of the world. (ibid: 94). Broadly, whereas the right hemisphere tends to perceive in wholes, through diffused attention, the left hemisphere operates through more focused attention, and tends to favour a more linear approach. According to McGilchrist, our attention is responsive to the world, but the world is also responsive to our attention. (ibid: 134) Through our perceptions, we create our own reality.

Kripal observes (2014: 275) that the very nature of embodied consciousness implies a duality which leads to the fundamental question of “Am I my body and, if not, who am I?” He refers to Feuerbach’s view that the ultimate secret of religion is the relationship between the conscious and unconscious, the voluntary and involuntary, in one and the same individual. Man with his ego-consciousness is depicted as standing at the brink of the bottomless abyss of his own unconscious being, questioning his identity, with the feeling that “I am nothing without a not-I which is at the same time my own being”. In very many cultures this takes the form of what Ioan Couliano refers to as the “separable soul”, which Kripal views as one of the most basic, long-lasting, and ancient religious ideas on the planet. (2014: 277) The question of the spirit/matter relationship and the phenomenon of the separable soul underpins a great deal of psychical and paranormal investigation, which is frequently motivated by the desire to provide “proof” of life after death, and to seek validation and recognition of this within the scientific community.

#### PARANORMAL RESEARCH

“paranormal (adj), denoting events or phenomena such as telekinesis or clairvoyance that are beyond the scope of normal scientific understanding”.

Oxford Dictionary of English (2009)

The Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882 with the twofold purpose, firstly to conduct systematic experimentation with hypnotic subjects, mediums, clairvoyants, and others, and secondly to collect evidence concerning apparitions, haunted houses and similar phenomena. In 1890, in his essay on what had been accomplished by psychical research, William James observed that “the ideal of every science is that of a closed and completed system of truth” and pointed out that phenomena unclassifiable within the system were therefore considered paradoxical absurdities, and must be held to be untrue. A great deal of research was being carried out and recorded in the Proceedings of the Society, and James

firmly believed that the rising generation of young anthropologists and psychologists would come to consider it a great scientific scandal that such a great mass of human experience had been left to take its chances between vague tradition and credulity and dogmatic denial. (James, 1890)

To what extent is this still the case in the field of research into the paranormal? Joseph Milne points out (2013: 11), that the once obvious division between empirical, metaphysical, and divine knowledge has been obliterated in the conflation of all enquiry into the empirical. Rupert Sheldrake's research into apparent anomalies such as telepathy has been reviled and attacked by the scientific and academic establishment and has even resulted in actual physical injury. David Fontana (2007) questions why scientists in general are seemingly so resistant to any mention of anything suggestive of the paranormal, and comments that, while the typical answer given by scientists is that they don't find the evidence convincing, the truth is that they simply don't know the evidence even exists; they have never studied it and show little sign of even wanting to do so. He notes that at the British Association meeting in September 2006, Prof Peter Atkins is reported as saying apropos research into telepathy that "work in this field is a complete waste of time. There is absolutely no reason to suppose that telepathy is anything more than a charlatan's fantasy". On the same subject, Fontana claims that Prof Lord Winston is on record as saying, "I know of no serious properly done studies which make me feel that this is anything other than nonsense". The explanation that Fontana proposes is that many scientists claim that if psychic abilities exist and if the mind survives death (and is therefore non-physical), many of the most fundamental laws of science would have to be re-written. Moreover, the presence of this dimension challenges the supremacy of material science, and instead of being the final authority on life and death and everything else, material science simply becomes the science of material things, much to the resentment of those involved.

#### A POST-MATERIALIST APPROACH

As Mario Beauregard indicates (2015), the modern scientific worldview is predominantly predicated on assumptions closely associated with classical physics, and materialism - the idea that matter is the only reality - is one of these assumptions. A related assumption is reductionism, the notion that complex things can be understood by reducing them to the interaction of their parts, or to simpler or more fundamental things such as tiny material particles. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century these assumptions narrowed, turned into dogmas, and coalesced into an ideological belief system known as scientific materialism, which implied that

the mind is nothing but the physical activity of the brain, and that our thoughts cannot have any effect upon our brains and bodies, our actions, and the physical world. The ideology of scientific materialism became dominant in academia during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so that a majority of scientists started to believe that it was based on established empirical evidence and represented the only rational view of the world.

In a Manifesto for a Post-Materialistic Science (2015), Beauregard and others claim that the nearly absolute dominance of materialism in the academic world has seriously hampered the development of the scientific study of mind and spirituality, and the subjective dimension of human experience. The development of quantum mechanics questions the material foundations of the world by showing that atoms and subatomic particles are not really solid objects and suggests that the physical world is no longer the primary or sole component of reality. The authors stress that paranormal manifestations such as psi phenomena, NDEs in cardiac arrest, and replicable evidence from credible research mediums appear anomalous only when seen through the lens of materialism and call for a post-materialist paradigm.

According to the post-materialist paradigm, mind represents an aspect of reality which is as primordial as the physical world, and fundamental to the universe. There is a deep interconnectedness between mind and the physical world which can be influenced by the mind (through will or intention) and is not confined to specific points in space or time. Since the mind may non-locally influence the physical world, the intentions, emotions, and desires of an experimenter may not be completely isolated from experimental outcomes, even in controlled and blinded experimental designs. Minds are apparently unbounded and may unite in ways that suggest a unitary One Mind that includes all individual single minds. Whilst post-materialism is inclusive of matter, which is seen as a basis constituent of the universe, scientists should not be afraid to investigate spirituality and spiritual experiences, since they represent a central aspect of human existence.

It is suggested that the post-materialist paradigm has far-reaching implications, by fundamentally altering the vision we have of ourselves as humans, fostering positive values such as compassion, respect and peace, and emphasising a deep connection between ourselves and nature at large. Moreover, a lived transmaterial understanding may be the cornerstone of health and wellness, as held and preserved in ancient mind-body-spirit practices, religious traditions and contemplative approaches. The authors of the Manifesto go even further to suggest that the shift from materialist science to post-materialist science may

be of vital importance to the evolution of human civilization and may be even more pivotal than the transition from geocentrism to heliocentrism.

Kripal (2010: 262) discusses Beauregard's concept of the brain and the mind as representing two epistemologically different domains which can interact because they are complementary aspects of the same transcendent reality and finds quite remarkable the ways in which the neuroscientist turns to hermeneutical and semiotic terms. Beauregard has argued (2007: 150) that trying to look at neurons to understand consciousness is like trying to "determine the meaning of messages in an unknown language (thoughts) merely by examining its writing system (neurons)". To this Kripal would add "while denying, in principle, that there is an unknown speaker to detect and decode at all" and suggests that materialist neuroscience operates exactly like religious fundamentalism here. He considers that Beauregard's non-materialist neuroscience works very differently. It does not deny the materiality of the body, the brain, and the physical world in general, or attempt to reduce mind to these material processes. It begins with mind, intention, and human freedom, and shows how this consciousness communicates its messages through the shared neurobiology of the body and brain. This "informational transduction mechanism" is described as "a paramount achievement of evolution that allows mental processes to causally influence the functioning and plasticity of the brain", in essence, a kind of microtelekinesis within the brain itself. (Kripal, 2010: 263)

## HUMAN AS ONE

What does Kripal mean when he refers to the Human as Two *and* One? We must remember that he has said that that he uses this expression not as a metaphysical statement but offers it as a heuristic device intended to be helpful when examining the functional dualisms which give structure to human experience. From a psychological point of view, Jung's work on the process of individuation demonstrates the desirability of developing a unified sense of self in this life. However, the notion of Unity alone could also be seen as an unthinkable concept, because in order for anything to exist it must negate that which it is not. (Lawlor, 1982: 20). However, if we experience the world solely in terms of duality and polarity, of self and other, subject and object, then we may miss the fact that our perceptions (of that other) may be illusory. Diane Hennacy Powell has proposed (2012: 129/131) a model called the Möbius Mind, which calls upon the analogy of the Möbius strip to illustrate the paradoxical relationship between our inner and outer worlds. In daily life we experience the physical world as though it is outside of us, but what

we really interact with is its reconstruction by our brains and sensory organs. By their very nature these limit how we are able to perceive the world, and we are easily drawn into confusing this reconstruction for an actual external reality. Our perceptions also shape the neuroplasticity of our brains and bring about modifications which in turn affect our ability to perceive. In addition, as Kripal points out (2010: 266), all of our contextual, materialist, and historical methods of dealing with our perceptions are left-brain methods which emphasise difference and division, not sameness and equality, and the Now of consciousness, the Sun outside Plato's Cave.

Technological advances into "artificial intelligence" have given us a new set of concepts for looking at brain function, and we may now view it as the place where the software and the hardware interface. As McGilchrist (2010: 1) puts it, the brain is where mind and matter meet. The functions undertaken by the two sides of the brain are not mutually exclusive; they operate together and complement each other, and total brain function is spread across both hemispheres – the brain is one as well as two.

#### A "WHAT IF" STORY

Sacred geometry demonstrates that the relationship between number one and number two creates a third, the number three. (Butler, 1970) In the Pythagorean tradition there are three stages of creation: (1) undifferentiated unity, (2) the separation into two powers to create the world order, and (3) the union of the opposites to generate life. (Cornford, 1937: 3/4) In alchemy, from the *coniunctio* or mystical marriage which arises from the relationship of two, may come the birth of the third, the new. (von Franz, 1980: 168) In our daily experience, the use of our two eyes reveals to us a third dimension and gives us access to a 3D world, and this immediately becomes flat and without depth as soon as we close one of our eyes. In Eastern traditions, there is also a "third eye", an inward eye of intuition and imaginal vision, which reveals yet a further dimension. (Meader, 2004: 257)

*What if* the place where the two hemispheres of the brain can work together in harmony is the entry point into what Henri Corbin (1972) describes as the *Mundus Imaginalis*, that place which is no where, yet from which form and manifestation arise? If we create our own reality through our perceptions, and if the human is both two *and* one, then maybe

through the integration of opposites and the resolution of the paradox we may have access to a realm which is beyond both.

#### AUTHORS OF OUR OWN STORY

We live with the paradox of both two and one every day. We develop a healthy sense of self, of individual identity, as part of our psychological development as we learn to separate from mother and lead an autonomous life. We relate to the “other” through interpersonal relationships, and possibly also the transpersonal, addressing “God out there” as we are taught to pray to an outer Creator being. We accept the world as our environment, learn to interact with it, and have no doubt that our personal perceptions and experiences are “true” as we create our own sense of reality. It may however eventually dawn on us that we are not completely independent in our actions but are playing a part in a drama which is unfolding around us. We may see this as our response to the expectations of others, or construe it as the interplay of archetypal forces, the “gods” at play, pulling our strings like so many puppets. To become conscious authors of our own story, rather than simply readers of the book, maybe we need to enter a third realm which spans dualities, where both two and one are valid, paradox is resolved, and new possibilities may emerge.

Kripal advises us (2010: 269/270) that, in some fundamental way that we do not understand, paranormal phenomena *are* us, and are projected onto the objective world of events and things, suggesting that this usually takes place through some story, symbol, or sign. When we achieve the realization that we are indeed acting out a part in a drama or story not of our own making, we have the opportunity through this insight to choose to step out of that script or narrative and write our own. Kripal refers to this stage as Authorization, the decision to do something about it ourselves, and to take responsibility for our own story. As he points out, to author one’s world, whether literally or metaphorically, implies the integrated involvement of both sides of the brain, and the knowledge that the Human is Two *and* One. And, with conscious awareness of both reading and writing a narrative, there is the presence of the One who is always watching.

“When I was younger, life was a book to be read.  
As I grew older, I wanted to write the book for myself.

Now I ask myself, who is the writer and who the reader?"  
Carol Duncan, 1971 (unpublished)

## CONCLUSION

Jeffrey Kripal's metaphor of "authoring the impossible" is a fertile one, as it invites us to move outside the box of concrete materialistic thinking and engage with the possibility of multiple realities, and ask ourselves "*what if*"?

*What if* paranormal research did not have to battle against rejection by the scientific community?

*What if* science were able to enquire into the non-material realm and acknowledge the validity of "subjective" experiences?

*What if* this could enable us to learn more about what it is to be human?

*What if* the story within which our academic establishments operate could be one which welcomes exploration beyond conventional boundaries and "rules" which govern what constitutes the "truth" and legitimate enquiry?

*What if* we were able to conceive and embrace a transmaterial understanding of the world in which we live?

*What if* we were all able to witness ourselves living out our own stories, while at the same time recognising these as just our own versions of a larger story that includes all the others in its metanarrative?

*What if* I could watch myself watching myself, and then, of course, also watch the watcher . . . ?

## References

Beauregard, M, and O'Leary, D, (2007), *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientific Case for the Existence of the Soul*, New York, Harper Collins

Beauregard, M, Schwartz, G E, Miller, L, (2015), *The Manifesto for a Post-Materialist Science* <http://opensciences.org/>, and [www.scimednet.org/content/manifesto-post--materialist-science](http://www.scimednet.org/content/manifesto-post--materialist-science) (downloaded 4 May 2015)

Butler, Christopher, (1970), *Number Symbolism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

Corbin, H, (1972), 'Mundus Imaginalis or The Imaginary and the Imaginal' in *Spring 1972*, Zurich

Cornford, F M, (1937), *Plato's Cosmology*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co

Fontana, D, (2007), 'Why the Opposition to Evidence for Survival?' in *Network Review*, Spring 2007

James, W, (1890), *What Psychical Research Has Accomplished*, [www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/23336](http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/23336)

Kripal, J J, (2010), *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press

Kripal, J J, (2014), *Comparing Religions: Coming to Terms*, Chichester: Wiley

Lawlor, R, (1982), *Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice*, London: Thames & Hudson

McGilchrist, I, (2010), *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press

Meador, W, (2004), *Shine Forth: The Soul's Magical Destiny*, Mariposa: Source Publications

Milne, J, (2013), 'The Forgotten Metaphysics' in *The Mystical Cosmos*, London: Temenos Academy

Oxford Dictionary of English (2009), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition revised, ebooks copyright 2010, Oxford University Press

Powell, Diane Hennacy, 2012, 'Psi and Psychiatry: The Quest for a New Scientific Paradigm' in *Seriously Strange: Thinking Anew about Psychical Experiences*, eds Kakar, S, and Kripal, J J, India: Penguin Books

Salaman, C, van Oyen, D, Wharton, W D, (transl), 1999, *The Way of Hermes: The Corpus Hermeticum*, London: Duckworth

Von Franz, M-L, 1980, *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology*, Toronto: Inner City Books

