

# The Enigma of the Unseen Spiritual Realm

—*Dr. Eben Alexander, scientist, academic and second-generation neurosurgeon for more than 25-years, highly trained — Harvard Medical School, Duke University School of Medicine*  
Review Dr. Alexander's credentials at [www.gotchoices.net/alexander](http://www.gotchoices.net/alexander)  
The following is an excerpt of Dr. Alexander's November 2008 discovery:

I had to wrestle with the fact that everything I had learned in four decades of study and work about the human brain, about the universe, and about what constitutes reality conflicted with what I'd discovered. I was a secular doctor who had spent his entire career in some of the most prestigious research institutions in the world, trying to understand the connections between the human brain and consciousness, our human spirit. It wasn't that I didn't believe in consciousness. I was simply more aware than most people of the staggering mechanical unlikelihood that it existed independently – at all!

In the 1920s, the physicist Werner Heisenberg (and other founders of the science of quantum mechanics) made a discovery so strange that the world has yet to completely come to terms with it. When observing subatomic phenomena, it is impossible to completely separate the observer (that is, the scientist making the experiment) from what is being observed. In our day-to-day world, it is easy to miss this fact. We see the universe as a place full of separate objects (tables and chairs, people and planets) that occasionally interact with each other, but that nonetheless remain essentially separate. On the subatomic level, however, this universe of separate objects turns out to be a complete illusion. In the realm of the super-super-

small, every object in the physical universe is intimately connected with every other object. In fact, there are really no "objects" in the world at all, only vibrations of energy, and relationships.

What that meant should have been obvious, though it wasn't to many. It was impossible to pursue the core reality of the universe without using consciousness, our human spirit. Far from being an unimportant by-product of physical processes (as I had thought before my discovery), consciousness, our spirit component, is not only very real—it's actually more real than the rest of physical existence, and most likely the basis of it all. But neither of these insights has yet been truly incorporated into science's picture of reality.

All the objects in the physical universe are made up of atoms. Atoms, in turn, are made up of protons, electrons, and neutrons. These, in turn, are (as physicists also discovered in the early years of the twentieth century) all particles. And particles are made up of... Well, quite frankly, physicists don't really know. But one thing we do know about particles is that each one is connected to every other one in the universe. They are all, at the deepest level, interconnected.

Before my discovery, I was generally aware of all these modern scientific ideas, but they were distant and remote. In the world I lived and moved in – the world of cars and houses and operating tables and patients who did well or not depending partially on whether I operated on them successfully – these facts of subatomic physics were rarefied and removed. They might be true, but they didn't concern my daily reality.

But in my discovery, I experienced these facts directly. In fact, I feel confident in saying that the truest and most sophisticated tool for scientific research that we possess:

Consciousness – our human spirit, itself.

The further I dug, the more convinced I became that my discovery wasn't just interesting or dramatic. It was *scientific*. Depending on whom you talk to, consciousness – our spirit component is either the greatest mystery facing scientific enquiry, or a total nonproblem. What's surprising is just how many more scientists think it's the latter. For many – maybe most – scientists, consciousness isn't really worth worrying about because it is just a by-product of physical processes. Many scientists go further, saying that not only is consciousness a secondary phenomenon, but that in addition, it's not even real.

Many leaders in the neuroscience of consciousness and the philosophy of mind, however, would beg to differ. Over the last few decades, they have come to recognize the "hard problem of consciousness." Although the idea had

been coalescing for decades, it was David Chalmers who defined it in his brilliant 1996 book, *The Conscious Mind*. The hard problem concerns the very existence of conscious experience and can be distilled into these questions:

How does consciousness arise out of the functioning of the human brain?

How is it related to the behavior that it accompanies?

How does the perceived world relate to the real world?

The hard problem is so hard to resolve that some thinkers have said the answer lies outside of "science" altogether. But that it lies outside the bounds of current science in no way belittles the phenomenon of consciousness – the human spirit – in fact, it is a clue as to its unfathomably profound role in the universe.

The ascendance of the scientific method based solely in the physical realm over the past four hundred years presents a major problem: we have lost touch with the deep mystery at the center of existence – our consciousness. It was (under different names and expressed through different world-views) something known well and held close by pre-modern religions, but it was lost to our secular Western culture as we became increasingly enamored with the power of modern science and technology.

For all of the successes of Western civilization, the world has paid a dear price in terms of the most crucial component of existence – our human spirit. The shadow

side of high technology – modern warfare and thoughtless homicide and suicide, urban blight, ecological mayhem, cataclysmic climate change, polarization of economic resources—is bad enough. Much worse, our focus on exponential progress in science and technology has left many of us relatively bereft in the realm of meaning and joy, and of knowing how our lives fit into the grand scheme of existence for all eternity.

Questions concerning the spirit, soul, God, and Heaven proved difficult to answer through conventional scientific means, which implied that they might not exist. I doubted their veracity, mainly because I had never experienced them at a deep level, and because they could not be readily explained by my simplistic scientific view of the world.

Like many other scientific skeptics, I refused to even review the data relevant to the questions concerning these subjects. I prejudged the data, and those providing it, because my limited perspective failed to provide the foggiest notion of how such things might actually exist. Those who assert that there is no evidence for phenomena indicative of extended consciousness, in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, are willfully ignorant. They believe they know the truth without needing to look at the facts – stuck in the trap of scientific skepticism.

We have been seduced into thinking that the scientific world view would not seem to leave much room for our soul, or spirit, or for Heaven, and God. My discovery

revealed the indescribably immense chasm between our human knowledge and the awe-inspiring realm of God.

Each one of us is more familiar with consciousness or spirit than we are with anything else, and yet we understand far more about the rest of the universe than we do about the mechanism of consciousness. It is so close to home that it is almost forever beyond our grasp. There is nothing about the physics of the material world (quarks, electrons, photons, atoms, etc.), and specifically the intricate structure of the brain, that gives the slightest clue as to the mechanism of consciousness, the human spirit.

In fact, the greatest clue to the reality of the spiritual realm is this *profound mystery* of our conscious existence. This is a far more mysterious revelation than physicists or neuroscientists have shown themselves capable of dealing with, and their failure to do so has left the intimate relationship between consciousness and quantum mechanics – and thus physical reality – obscured.

To truly study the universe on a deep level, we must acknowledge the fundamental role of consciousness, the human spirit, in painting reality. Experiments in quantum mechanics shocked those brilliant fathers of the field, many of whom (Werner Heisenberg, Wolfgang Pauli, Niels Bohr, Erwin Schrodinger, Sir James jeans, to name a few) turned to the mystical worldview seeking answers. They realized it was impossible to separate the experimenter from the experiment, and to explain reality without consciousness. What I discovered is the

indescribable immensity and complexity of the universe, and that consciousness – our human spirit – is the basis of all that exists.

If I had to summarize all this, I would say first, that the universe is much larger than it appears to be if we only look at its immediately visible parts. (This isn't much of a revolutionary insight actually, as conventional science acknowledges that 96 percent of the universe is made up of "dark matter and energy." Seventy percent is "dark energy," that most mysterious force discovered by astronomers in the mid-1990s as they found incontrovertible proof based on Type Ia supernovas that the universe has been falling up – that the expansion of all of space is *accelerating*. Another 26 percent is "dark matter," the anomalous "excess" gravity revealed over the last few decades in the rotation of galaxies and galactic clusters. What are these dark entities? Explanations will be attempted, but no one yet knows.)

Second: We – each of us – are intricately, irremovably connected to the larger universe. It is our true home, and thinking that this physical world is all that matters is like shutting oneself up in a small closet and imagining at there is nothing else out beyond it. And third: the crucial power of *belief*. I was often bemused as a medical student over the confounding power of the placebo effect – that medical studies had to overcome the 30 percent or so benefit that was attributed to a patient's believing that he was receiving medicine that would help him, even if it was simply an inert substance. Instead of seeing the underlying

power of belief, and how it influenced our health, the medical profession saw the glass as "half-empty" – that the placebo effect was an obstacle to the demonstration of a treatment.

At the heart of the enigma of quantum mechanics lies the falsehood of our notion of locality in space and time. The rest of the universe – that is, the vast majority of it – isn't actually distant from us in space. Yes, physical space seems real, but it is limited as well. The entire length and height of the physical universe is as nothing to the spiritual realm from which it has risen – the realm of consciousness (which some might refer to as "the life force").

This other, vastly grander universe isn't "far away" at all. In fact, it's right here – right here where I am, typing this sentence, and right there where you are, reading it. It's not far away physically, but simply exists on a different frequency. It's right here, right now, but we're unaware of it because we are for the most part closed to those frequencies on which it manifests. We live in the dimensions of familiar space and time, hemmed in by the peculiar limitations of our sensory organs and by our perceptual scaling within the spectrum from subatomic quantum up through the entire universe. Those dimensions, while they have many things going for them, also shut us out from the other dimensions that exist as well.

The universe is so constructed that to truly understand any part of its many dimensions and levels, you have to open

yourself to an identity with that part of the universe that you already possess, but which you may not have been conscious of.

The universe has no beginning or end, and God is entirely present within every particle of it. Much – in fact, most – of what people have had to say about God and the higher spiritual worlds has involved bringing them down to our level, rather than elevating our perceptions up to theirs. We taint, with our insufficient descriptions, their truly awesome nature.

But though it never began and will never end, the universe does have punctuation marks, the purpose of which is to bring beings into existence and allow them to participate in the glory of God. The “Big Bang” that created our universe was one of these creative “punctuation marks.” God’s view was from outside, encompassing all of God’s Creation and beyond.

The physical side of the universe is as a speck of dust compared to the invisible and spiritual part. In my past view, spiritual wasn’t a word that I would have employed during a scientific conversation. Now I believe it is a word that we cannot afford to leave out.

“I was blind, but now I see,” now took on a new meaning as I understood just how blind to the full nature of the spiritual universe we are – especially people like I had been, who had believed that matter was the core reality, and that all else – thought, consciousness, ideas, emotions, spirit – were simply productions of it.

This inspired me greatly, because it allowed me to see the staggering heights of communion and understanding that lie ahead for us all, when each of us leaves the limitations of our physical body and brain behind.

Humor. Irony. Pathos. I had always thought these were qualities we humans developed to cope with this so often painful and unfair world. And they are. But in addition to being consolations, these qualities are recognitions – brief, flashing, but all-important – of the fact that whatever our struggles and sufferings in the present world are, they can’t truly touch the larger, eternal beings we in truth are. Laughter and irony are at heart reminders that we are not prisoners in this world, but voyagers through it.

There is no “scientific” explanation for all of this. But be encouraged to *know* that deep and comforting truth: that our eternal spiritual self is more real than anything we perceive in this physical realm, and has a divine connection to the infinite love of God the Creator.

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is.”  
—*Albert Einstein* (1879-1955)