

The UNSOLVED MYSTERY of HEALING

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DISTANT HEALING: *Healing mediated by nonlocal mind.*

I grew up on a farm and worked in fields, played sports on fields, entered the field of medicine, served on battlefields, and I field questions following lectures. For me, as for everyone else, “field” is connected with a rich variety of experiences and meanings. It is no wonder, therefore, that the term is used differently, even by experts.

In 2003, authorities in medicine, nursing, psychology, physics, engineering, mathematics, anthropology, and biology were convened by the Samueli Institute for Information Biology and tasked with developing definitions and standards in healing research. After a great deal of discussion and feedback, consensus was reached on terms that are relevant to healing, which included the following:

FIELD: *A force that can cause action at a distance.*

FORCE: *The cause, or agent, that puts an object at rest into motion or alters the motion of a moving object. All presently known interactions are believed to occur as a result of four fundamental forces: the strong and weak nuclear, the electromagnetic, and the gravitational.*

As these definitions reveal, fields are related to forces, distance, and space. Do they help us understand healing? Well, yes and no. It all depends on the type of healing we are talking about.

I find it useful to divide the progress of medicine into three overlapping, nonexclusive phases using a quasi-historical template. This approach begins arbitrarily at the time the practice of medicine in the United States first began to be scientific, which was roughly the decade of the 1860s. I designate this as Era I or mechanical medicine. Examples of Era I therapies include surgery, pharmaceuticals, or any other physical thing. Roughly a century later we saw the advent of Era II or mind-body medicine in the post-WWII period. Era II medicine acknowledges the effects of one’s mind on one’s own body. Examples of Era II therapies include relaxation techniques, meditation, mental imagery, and hypnosis. During the last two decades of the 20th century, Era III or nonlocal medicine began to take shape. This approach embodied the key concept that one’s intentions can affect another individual at a distance, beyond the range of the senses, even when the distant individual may be unaware of such an effort. Examples of Era III therapies are distant healing methods of all types, including intercessory prayer, which have been tested in several controlled clinical trials. Fields and forces help us understand Era I (mechanical) and Era II (mind-body) healing, but, I believe, are inadequate explanations for Era III (nonlocal) forms of healing. Let’s see why.

The street meaning of “nonlocal” is, literally, not local. If something is nonlocal, it is not localized or confined to

a specific place in space or time. In this sense, then, “nonlocal” is simply a fancy word for “infinite.”

Nearly everything we know about distant healing suggests that we are dealing with a nonlocal phenomenon. Physicist Nick Herbert, an expert in nonlocality in quantum physics, lists three characteristics of a nonlocal event: It is (1) *unmediated* by any known form of energy in physics; (2) *unmitigated* or undiminished by increasing distance; and (3) *immediate*.

Studies in remote healing overwhelmingly suggest that distance does not matter; it is as effective from the other side of the Earth as at the bedside, and does not get weaker with increasing separation of the healer from the individual being healed. If this type of healing were mediated by recognized types of energy, this would not be the case, because they would diminish in strength with increasing spatial separation. Moreover, evidence suggests that nonlocal healing events may be time-displaced, acting into the past or future.

Classical fields and forces can't account for these features of remote healing because they involve space, distance, and time—requiring transmission of vibrations or energy, a term that is problematic in its own right. New concepts are required to capture Era III healing, and I believe the term that works best is *nonlocal healing*, mediated by *nonlocal mind*.

Nonlocality is an accepted concept in quantum physics, but we should be careful in granting too much explanatory power to modern physics where healing is concerned. People and particles are different, and I suggest that quantum physics, as currently understood, appears inadequate in accounting for nonlocal healing.

How we talk about healing affects how we use it, and the effects we achieve. But the main danger in using outmoded, classical images of fields and forces is that these terms can lead to a false view of consciousness and who we are.


Since honesty begins at home, let me confess that I do not have an adequate science-based explanation for consciousness and healing, nor does anyone else, as far as I know. Of course, hypotheses *hoping* to explain them abound, and rely on areas such as quantum entanglement, holography, complementarity, the quantum vacuum, zero-point energy, microtubule physiology, and so on. Yet to label healing with such terms is not to explain them. Even describing them as nonlocal, as I have done, is to substitute one mystery for another, because of the plain fact that no

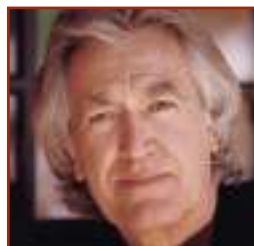
one understands how nonlocal events could be possible. Who knows? A breakthrough theory may appear at any moment, sweeping our ignorance before it. But the best description of where we stand currently in the healing-and-consciousness field was captured by Sir Arthur Eddington in his remark about complementarity in modern physics: “Something unknown is doing we don't know what.”

We are profoundly in the dark because we are dealing with the most mysterious entity in the universe: consciousness itself. As the prestigious philosopher John Searle unambiguously says, “At the present state of the investigation of consciousness we *don't know* how it works and we need to try all kinds of different ideas.”

Dean Radin, senior scientist at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, makes an observation about parapsychology in his book *The Conscious Universe* that also applies to consciousness and healing: “An adequate theory of psi ... will almost certainly not be quantum theory as it is presently understood. Instead, existing quantum theory will ultimately be seen as a special case of how nonliving matter behaves under certain circumstances. Living systems may require an altogether new theory. Quantum theory says nothing about higher-level concepts such as *meaning* and *purpose*, yet real-world, ‘raw’ psi phenomena seem to be intimately related to these concepts.”

I realize it is more uplifting to dwell on what we know than on our ignorance. But to say “I don't know” is an exercise in nonattachment and can be a liberating step toward new understanding. In the history of medicine, we have often known *that* something works before we had a clue *how*. Sometimes the explanation comes later, or perhaps not at all. In the meantime, awe and wonder remain okay.

But two things we do know: Healing happens, and consciousness is involved. That is reason for unspeakable gratitude. 



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