

InPresence 0025: Science and Pseudoscience with Jeffrey Mishlove

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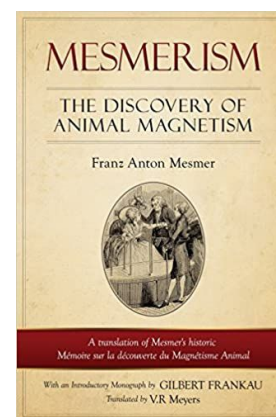


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(00:38) Hello, I'm Jeffrey Mishlove. Today I'd like to talk about science and pseudoscience. I'm a parapsychologist. I work in a field which is often called a pseudoscientific field, and naturally I strongly disagree. People say it's pseudoscientific because we are endeavoring to study something that doesn't exist, and their reason for saying it doesn't exist is usually that it's incompatible with what they believe to be a well-established, rationalist worldview. My attitude is, simply, that science is based first and foremost on empirical observations. Theories have to follow from the observed facts.

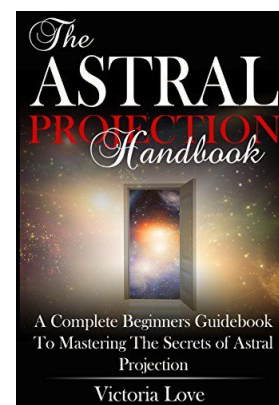
(01:29) Now – my hero – William James, had a lot to say about this more than a hundred years ago. He said, when it comes to disputes between the Mystics and the Scientifics, the Mystics usually have the better of the argument when it comes to the facts, but the Scientifics have the better of the argument when it comes to the theories. Isn't that interesting? Now, throughout history, there has been an effort to describe mysterious phenomena in terms of what are the leading edge theories in science. So, today, for example, you get a lot of people talking about consciousness and parapsychology in terms of quantum mechanics, or in terms of string theory and hyperspace, really cutting-edge ideas that very well will have something to contribute.

(02:32) But, it's interesting to see how this process has been going on for hundreds of years. For example, in the 18th century, when Franz Anton Mesmer began working with what we now call hypnosis, he used the term “animal magnetism” to describe what was going on. The reason is because, in his era, magnetism was on the cutting edge of science, and animal magnetism sounded like a really good term that was likely going to work out. Well, it's fair to say at this point in time, there may be a few advocates for the idea of animal magnetism, and we have a lot to learn about bio-fields, of course, but, basically, Mesmer's theory was not correct.

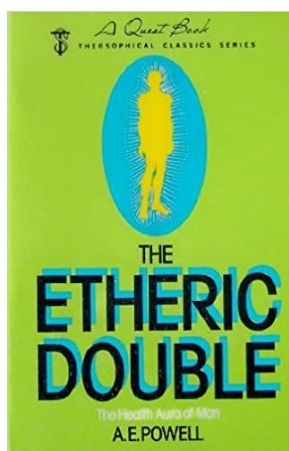


(03:26) In an even earlier era, it was believed that the universe itself was composed of spheres. So the people talked about the “music of the spheres” – that is, each of the planets was associated with a sphere, almost like a glass sphere revolving around the Earth – and that if you went out into the universe, you were entering into the realm of these planetary spheres. So, when people began having

visionary experiences back then – let us say, anywhere from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance – it was called “astral projection,” because they were projecting into the astral realm of the spheres, of the planets. The planets were then thought of almost as stars, at the time. It wasn’t completely understood that they revolved around the Sun.

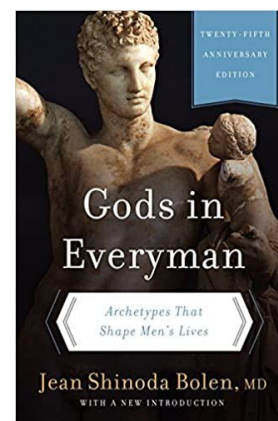


(04:27) Another example of what we could today call – well, I’m going to refrain from calling it pseudoscience, and I’ll tell you why in a minute – but I have another example for you. In the 19th Century, when the Theosophical movement became very important and powerful, in terms of people looking at these sort of cutting-edge aspects of consciousness, one of the leading scientific theories was known as the “ether”. It was thought that radio waves propagated through the ether. It wasn’t believed they could propagate right through a vacuum, which is considered to be the case today. So, the Theosophists talked about “etheric energy” and the “etheric body,” and that language is still used even though in our scientific discourse we no longer refer to the ether as a valid scientific theory. Although, once again, there are some frontier scientists who believe that all of these old ideas should be explored once again.



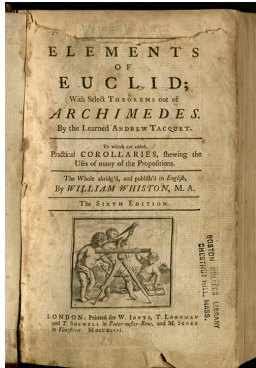
(05:37) Now, although the theoretical terms “astral projection,” “animal magnetism,” the “etheric body,” and, for all we know, “quantum consciousness,” may really not be accurate theoretical descriptions of what’s going on, I want to also share with you another idea - that I have brought up before - from William James and the notion of pragmatism, and that is, “if it works, use it.” In the psychic field, there are people who have a need for a solid intellectual explanation. I happen to be the kind of person myself - I’m comfortable swimming and tolerating ambiguity. I can live with not knowing and just say, “we don’t know yet.”

(06:28) But some people want to have an explanation. It makes it easier for them to feel comfortable, and to communicate with other people. And, you know what? If they’re gifted dowers, or gifted psychic practitioners, and they say it’s because they’re working with etheric energy, or they’re working with the astral body, or they’re working with biomagnetism, or any number of other theories that are not scientifically grounded, but they are getting results in their regular practice, it’s very likely that explanation is working for them and it's true for them. So, my attitude is to have tolerance for that sort of thing. We still have so much to learn.



(07:20) In the most ancient times, it was thought that these kinds of powers, like the strength of Hercules, were bestowed upon humans by the gods themselves. For all we know, we may yet come to a new understanding of what the ancients

had referred to as the gods. I think that you'll see quite a bit of interesting work in the field of Jungian psychology with regard to archetypes in that regard. We have hardly begun to probe what archetypes really are.



(07:57) And consider this, for a moment: scientific research in human civilization. Let's be generous and say it's been going on for over 1,000 years, maybe 2,000 years, since the work of Euclid and Archimedes. Still, that's a very short time frame in the larger picture, when you consider that the Earth itself is about 4 billion years old, and that humans have been on the Earth maybe over 100,000 years. Imagine what our scientific thinking will be like 1,000 years from now. Let me leave you with that thought. Thank you for being with me. (08:47)

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