

“The Science Delusion”: A Banned TED Talk by Rupert Sheldrake

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by [News Voice](#)

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“Ten years ago, in January 2013, I gave my TEDx talk on The Science Delusion, which was later ‘banned’ by TED and has subsequently had more than seven million views on other websites. Last week this talk was re-released in a new, brilliantly illustrated version by an organization called After Skool.”

~ Rupert Sheldrake

[Video available at AfterSkool [odysee](#) and [youtube](#) channels.]

Transcription by [AI@NewsVoice](#)

Science delusion is the belief that science already understands the nature of reality in principle, leaving any of the details to be filled in. This is a very widespread belief in our society.

It's the kind of belief system of people who say, I don't believe in God, I believe in science. It's a belief system that has now been spread to the entire world. But there's a conflict in the heart of science between science as a method

of inquiry based on reason, evidence, hypothesis, and collective investigation, and science as a belief system or a worldview.

And unfortunately, the worldview aspect of science has come to inhibit and constrict the free inquiry, which is the very lifeblood of the scientific endeavor. Since the late 19th century, science has been conducted under the aspect of a belief system or worldview, which is essentially that of materialism, philosophical materialism.

And these sciences are now wholly owned subsidiaries of the materialist worldview. I think that as we break out of it, the sciences will be regenerated. What I do in my book, *The Science Delusion*, which is called *Science Set Free* in the United States, is take the ten dogmas or assumptions of science and turn them into questions, seeing how well they stand up.

If you look at them scientifically, none of them stand up very well. What I'm going to do is first run through what these ten dogmas are and then I'll only have time to discuss one or two of them in a bit more detail.

But essentially the ten dogmas which are the default worldview of most educated people all over the world are first, that nature is mechanical or machine-like. The universe is like a machine. Animals and plants are like machines.

We're like machines. In fact, we are machines. We are lumbering robots in Richard Dawkin's vivid phrase with brains that are genetically programmed computers. Second, matter is unconscious. The whole universe is made up of unconscious matter.

There's no consciousness in stars, in galaxies, in planets, in animals, in plants and there ought not to be any in us either if this theory is true. So a lot of the philosophy of mind over the last hundred years is being trying to prove that

we're not really conscious at all.

So the matter is unconscious. Then the laws of nature are fixed. This is dogma three. The laws of nature are the same now as they were at the time of the Big Bang and they'll be the same forever. Not just the laws, but the constants of nature are fixed which is why they are called constants.

Dogma four the total amount of matter and energy is always the same. It never changes in total quantity except at the moment of the Big Bang when it all sprang into existence from nowhere in a single instant.

The fifth dogma is that nature is purposeless. There are no purposes in all nature and the evolutionary purpose, and the evolutionary process has no purpose or direction. Dogma six the biological heredity is material.

Everything you inherit is in your genes or in epigenetic modifications of the genes or in cytoplasmic inheritance. It's material. Dogma seven memories are stored inside your brain as material traces.

Somehow everything you remember is in your brain in modified nerve endings, phosphorylated proteins. No one knows how it works, but nevertheless, almost everyone in the scientific world believes it must be in the brain.

Dogma eight your mind is inside your head. All your consciousness is the activity of your brain and nothing more. Dogma nine, which follows from dogma eight. Psychic phenomena like telepathy are impressive possible.

Your thoughts and intentions cannot have any effect at a distance because your mind is inside your head. Therefore, all the apparent evidence for telepathy and other psychic phenomena is illusory. People believe these things happen, but it's just because they don't know enough about statistics or they're just they're deceived by coincidences, or wishful

thinking.

And dogma ten mechanistic medicine is the only kind that really works. That's why governments only fund research into mechanistic medicine and ignore complementary and alternative therapies. Those can't possibly really work because they're not mechanistic.

They may appear to work because people would have got better anyway or because of the placebo effect. But the only kind that really works is mechanistic medicine. Well, this is the default worldview that is held by almost all educated people all over the world.

It's the basis of the educational system. The National Health Service, and the Medical Research Council governments. And it's just the default worldview of educated people. But I think every one of these dogmas is very, very questionable.

And when you look at it, they're, they fall apart. I'm going to take first the idea that the laws of nature are fixed. This is a hangover from an older worldview. Before the 1960s, when the Big Bang theory came in, people thought that the whole universe was eternally governed by eternal mathematical laws.

When the big bang came in. Then that assumption continued, even though the Big Bang revealed a universe that's radically evolutionary, about 14 billion years old, growing and developing and evolving for 14 billion years, growing and cooling, and more structures and patterns appear within it.

But the idea is, all the laws of nature were completely fixed at the moment of the Big Bang, like a cosmic Napoleonic code. As my friend Terence McKenna used to say, modern science is based on the principle give us one free miracle and we'll explain the rest.

And the one free miracle is the appearance of all the matter and energy in the universe and all the laws that govern it

from nothing in a single instant. Well, in an evolutionary universe, why shouldn't the laws themselves evolve?

After all, human laws do. And the idea of laws of nature is based on a metaphor for human laws. It's a very anthropocentric metaphor. Only humans have laws. In fact, only civilized societies have laws.

As CS. Lewis once said, to say that a stone falls to Earth because it's obeying the law and makes it a man and even a citizen. It's a metaphor that we got so used to that we forget it's a metaphor. In an evolving universe, I think a much better idea is the idea of habits.

I think the habits of nature evolve. The regularities of nature are essentially habitual. This was an idea put forward at the beginning of the 20th century by the American philosopher C. S. Purse. And it's an idea that various other philosophers have entertained.

And it's one which I myself have developed into a scientific hypothesis, the hypothesis of morphic resonance, which is the basis of these evolving habits. According to this hypothesis, everything in nature has a kind of collective memory.

Resonance occurs on the basis of similarity. As a young giraffe embryo grows in its mother's womb, it tunes in. To the amorphic resonance of previous giraffes. It draws on that collective memory. It grows like a giraffe, and it behaves like a giraffe.

Because it's drawing on this collective memory. It has to have the right genes to make the right proteins. But genes, in my view, are grossly overrated. They only account for the proteins that the organism can make, not the shape or the form, or the behavior.

Every species has a kind of collective memory. Even crystals do. This theory predicts that if you make a new kind of

crystal for the first time, the very first time you make it, it won't have an existing habit.

But once it crystallizes, then the next time you make it, there'll be an inference from the first crystals to the second ones all over the world. By morphic resonance, it'll crystallize a bit easier the third time.

There'll be an inference from the first and second crystals. There is, in fact, good evidence that new compounds get easier to crystallize all around the world, just as this theory would predict. It also predicts that if you train animals to learn a new trick, for example, rats learn a new trick in London, then all around the world, rats of the same breed should learn the same trick quicker just because the rats have learned it here.

And surprisingly, there's already evidence that this actually happens anyway. That's my own hypothesis. In a nutshell in morphic resonance, everything depends on evolving habits, not on fixed laws. But I want to spend a few moments on the constants of nature, too, because these are again assumed to be constant.

Things like the gravitational constant, and the speed of light, are called fundamental constants. Are they really constant? Well, when I got interested in the question, I tried to find out. They're given in.

Physics handbooks, handbooks of physics list the existing fundamental constants, and tell you their value. But I wanted to see if they changed, so I got it. The old volumes of Physical handbooks. I went to the Patent Office library here in London and they're the only place I could find that kept the old volumes.

Normally, people throw them away when new values come out, they throw away the old ones. When I did this, I found that the speed of light dropped between 1928 and 1945 by about 20 kilometers per second.

It's a huge drop because they're given arrows of any fractions of a set. Ah, practical points of error. And yet all over the world, it dropped. And they were all getting values very similar to each other with tiny errors.

And then in 145 it went up at 48, it went up again, and then people started getting very similar values again. I was very intrigued by this and I couldn't make sense of it. So I went to see the head of Metrology at the National Physical Laboratory in Teddington.

Metrology is the science in which people measure constants. And I asked him about this, I said, what do you make of this drop in the speed of light between 1928 and 1945? And he said, oh, dear. He said You've uncovered the most embarrassing episode in the history of our science.

So I said, well, could the speed of light have actually dropped? And that would have amazing implications if so. He said, no, no, of course, it couldn't have actually dropped, it's a constant. So oh, well, then how do you explain the fact everyone was finding it going much slower during that period?

Is it because they were fudging their results to get what they thought other people should be getting? And the whole thing was just produced by in the minds of physicists? We don't like to use the word fudge.

I said, well, what do you prefer? He said, well, we prefer to call it intellectual phase locking. So I said, well, if it was going on, then how can we be so sure it's not going on today? And that the present values are produced by intellectual phase locking.

And he said, oh, we know that's not the case. And I said, how do we know? He said, well, he said, we've solved the problem. And I said, well, how? He said, well, we fixed the speed of light by definition in 1972.

So I said, but it might still change. He said, yes, but we'd never know it because we've defined the meter in terms of the speed of light. So the units changed with it. So he looked very pleased about that.

They'd fixed that problem. But I said, well then, what about big June E, the gravitational constant known in the trade as big G. It's written with a capital G, newton's universal gravitational constant that's varied by more than 1.3% in recent years.

And it seems to vary from place to place and from time to time. And he said, oh, well, those are just arrows, and unfortunately there are quite big errors with big G. So I said, well, what if it's really changing?

I mean, perhaps it is really changing. And then I looked at how they do it. What happens is they measure it in different labs, they get different values on different days, and then they average them.

And then other labs around the world do the same and they come out, usually with a rather different average. And then the international committee on Metrology meets every ten years or so and averages the ones from labs around the world to come up with the value of big G.

But what if g were actually fluctuating? What if it changed? There's already evidence actually, that it changes throughout the day and throughout the year. What if the Earth, as it moves through the galactic environment, went through patches of dark matter or other environmental factors that could alter it?

Maybe they all change together. What if these errors are going up together and down together? For more than ten years, I've been trying to persuade metrologists to look at the raw data. In fact, I'm now trying to persuade them to put it online on the internet with the dates and the actual measurements, and

see if they're correlated, to see if they're all up at one time, all down at another.

If so, they might be fluctuating together, and that would tell us something very, very interesting. But no one has done this. They haven't done it because g 's are constant. There's no point looking for changes.

You see here's a very simple example of where a dogmatic assumption actually inhibits inquiry. I myself think that the constants may vary quite considerably well within narrow limits, but they may all be varying.

And I think the day will come when scientific journals like Nature have a weekly report on the constants like stock market reports and newspapers. You know, this week big G was slightly up. The speed of the charge on the electron was and the speed of light held steady and so on.

That's just one area where I think thinking less dogmatically could open things up. One of the biggest areas is the nature of the mind. This is the most unsolved problem that sounds simply can't deal with the fact we're conscious and it can't deal with the fact that our thoughts don't seem to be inside our brains.

Our experiences don't all seem to be inside our brains. Your image of me now doesn't seem to be inside your brain. Yet the official view is there's a little Rupert somewhere inside your head and everything else in this room is inside your head.

Your experience is inside your brain. I'm suggesting actually that vision involves an outward projection of images. What you're seeing is in your mind but not inside your head. Our minds are extended beyond our brains in the simplest act of perception.

I think that we project out the images we're seeing and these images touch what we're looking at. If I look at you from

behind, you don't know I'm there. Could I affect you? Could you feel my gaze? There's a great deal of evidence that people can.

The sense of being stared at is an extremely common experience and recent experimental research suggests it's real. Animals seem to have it too. I think it probably evolved in the context of predator-prey relationships.

Prey animals that could feel the gaze of a predator would survive better than those that couldn't. This would lead to a whole new way of thinking about ecological relationships between predators and prey, and also about the extent of our minds.

If we look at distant stars, I think our minds reach out, in a sense, to touch those stars and literally extend out over astronomical different distances. They're not just inside our heads. Now, it may seem astonishing that this is a topic of debate.

In the 21st century, we know so little about our own minds that where our images are is a hot topic of debate within consciousness studies. Right now, I don't have time to deal with any more of these dogmas, but every single one of them is questionable.

If one questions it, new forms of research, and new possibilities open up. And I think as we question these dogmas that have held back science for so long, science will undergo a reflowering, a renaissance. I'm a total believer in the importance of science.

I've spent my whole life as a research scientist, my whole career. But I think by moving beyond these dogmas, it can be regenerated once again and become interesting and I hope, life-affirming.

Thank you.

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