

Book Review

Review of Charles T. Tart's Book: The End of Materialism: How Evidence of the Paranormal Is Bringing Science and Spirit Together

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ABSTRACT

Tart believes that the big five, his referral to telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, and psychic healing, are well supported by scientific evidence. Tart reviews this evidence, but wants to go to the next step: to consider other paranormal phenomena, and to look at the issue of what these phenomena mean in a philosophical sense (his best bet). You can find this book at Amazon http://www.amazon.com/End-Materialism-Paranormal-co-published-Institute/dp/1572246456/ref=cm_cr-mr-title.

Key Words: materialism, paranormal, telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, psychic healing, science, spirit.

Tart confronts this issue of belief and knowledge, and how we humans struggle with meaning. He (page 25) writes: "Things that we believe that we don't know we believe, though, are like a set of chains. They just automatically affect our perceptions and thoughts, and trap us."

Tart (page 34) writes: "If you don't consciously see that you have competing, clashing views of something, it won't feel as if you have a conflict. But, at a deeper, psychological level, your psyche is not whole when you do this; the conflict will exact a price from you on less-conscious levels."

This struggle is most apparent in a misplaced certainty given to a science turned scientism, with materialistic philosophy at its core. Tart (page 37) writes: "Scientism has uselessly hurt enormous numbers of people, and we must distinguish scientism from science if we want any hope of science and spirituality helping each other."

Tart (page 38) writes: "Until we learn to distinguish essential science from scientism, we remain vulnerable to false invalidation, which seems to have the full power and prestige of science behind it but is really an arbitrary, philosophical opinion. And we lose the ability to constructively apply essential science to increase our understanding of and effectiveness with spirituality."

Tart (page 67) writes: "pseudoskeptics aren't actually skeptics in a genuine sense; they're believers in some other system, out to attack and debunk what they don't believe in while trying to appear open minded and scientific, even though they're not." Tart continues: "Various media love to report in these controversies stirred up by pseudoskeptics, and usually give the pseudoskeptics high, expert status and make the arguments sound serious, either because (1) the people running a particular reporting medium are themselves pseudoskeptical, committed to scientific materialism, (2) as cynical media people have put it for decades, controversy sells more newspapers than accurate reporting, or (3) both."

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Tart (page 192) writes: "Try to always notice when I write [scientism] rather than [science]. A major aspect of my personal identity is being a scientist and thinking like a scientist, and I consider science to be a noble calling that demands the best of me. I want to use genuine, essential science to help our understanding in all areas of life, including the spiritual. Scientism, on the other hand, is a perversion of genuine science. Scientism in our time consists mainly of a dogmatic commitment to a materialist philosophy that dismisses and [explains away] the spiritual, rather than actually examining it carefully and trying to understand it."

Among the various accounts of paranormal phenomena presented by Tart, there is one interesting account of an out-of-body experience (OBE), where a hidden number is revealed (page 204): "The number 25132 was indeed the correct target number near the ceiling above here bed. I had learned something about designing experiments since my first OBE experiment, and precise evaluation was possible here. The odds against guessing a five-digit number by chance alone on one try are hundreds thousand to one, so this is a remarkable event! Note also that Miss Z had apparently expected me to have the target number propped up against the wall behind the self, but she correctly reported that it was lying flat. She had also hoped to pass through the wall or closed door and see a second target number in the control room, but could not do so."

Tart (page 226) describes Dennis Hill's near-death experience (NDE), and quotes Hill: "There is a sudden rush of expansion into boundaryless awareness. I feel utter serenity infused with radiant joy. There is perfect stillness; no thoughts, no memories. In the rapturous state, free from the limitations of time and space, beyond the body and the mind, I have no memory of ever having been other than This." And Tart (page 229) speculates: "If NDEs were nothing but hallucinatory experiences induced by a malfunctioning brain as a person dies, as materialists want to believe, then we would expect great variation from person to person, and the qualities of experience would be largely determined by the culture and beliefs of each person experiencing the NDE. Instead, we have great similarity across cultures and belief systems, arguing that there's something real about NDE rather than it being nothing but a hallucination."

Tart (page 246) takes a materialist rejection of after-death communication, and turns it into an absurd darkness: "I personally find the materialistic idea quite depressing - an admission that, to materialists, will simply show that I have neurotic hopes and lack the courage to face the facts. If I believed that there's no hope of any kind of survival, I would adapt as much as possible by becoming more normal in this materialistic age. That is, I would show excessive concern for my health, promote research that supports health and increases our life spans, and avoid taking any unnecessary risks that might endanger my health or my life, while otherwise trying to maximize my pleasure and minimize my pain. Psychologically, I would try not to think about the depressing reality and finality of death, would work on distracting myself with constant pleasurable pursuits, and if the above steps weren't enough, to find a doctor who would prescribe mood-altering medications so I wouldn't feel depressed."

Tart (page 291) provides a neat summary: "When we look at paraconceptual phenomena in detail, in the science of parapsychology we find, grouped for convenience, two categories. Group one, the big five - telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, and psychic healing - are psi phenomena whose existence is supported by hundreds of rigorous experiments for each phenomenon. Group two, the many maybes, are phenomena that have enough evidence that it would be foolish to simply dismiss them as unreal, but not enough evidence, in my estimate, to make them foundation realities for further research as the big five are. The many maybes that we've surveyed in this book (which certainly aren't all of them) are postcognition, out-of-body experiences (OBEs), near death experiences (NDEs), after-death communications (ADCs), and postmortem survival in some kind of afterlife as primary evidenced through mediumship and reincarnation cases."

Tart (page 291) continues: "The big five paint a picture of humans as being who are more than just their physical bodies, beings who can sometimes communicate mind to mind, sometimes clairvoyantly know the state of the physical world, sometimes predict an inherently (by physical laws) unpredictable future, sometimes affects, for the better, other biological systems, as in psychic healing. Traditional spiritual systems in general tell us that ordinary, physical life is only part of reality; there's a larger, more encompassing spiritual reality beyond the ordinary space, time, and embodiment, and the big five can readily be seen as glimpses of mind operating in this larger reality."

Tart is describing "the end of materialism," as the evidence he brings forth supports his best conclusion (page 310): "My current best bet is that there's a real spiritual realm, as real or perhaps even more real (in some sense that's hard to understand in our ordinary state of consciousness) than ordinary material reality. My current best bet is that this spiritual realm has purpose and is intelligent and loving in some profound sense. My current best bet is that our human nature partakes of this spiritual nature. The deep experience of many mystics that are one with all of reality, including spiritual reality, is about something vital and true. The several psychic ways we occasionally connect with each other (telepathy) and the material world (clairvoyance) are partial manifestations of this inherent connection with all of reality, spiritual as well as material.

References

Charles T. Tart, 2009, *The End of Materialism: How Evidence of the Paranormal Is Bringing Science and Spirit Together*, New Harbinger Publications.