

Evolution and the development of our consciousness

From struggle to cooperation

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Of course, everyone is familiar with the Darwinian theory of evolution about the origin of the different species on our planet. The strongest or fittest of these species would have managed to survive in a struggle for existence, through a random process of natural selection. This vision of evolution, in which competition and struggle are central, is still endorsed by many people.

But not by everyone. The English holistic physicist David Peat, for example, has pointed out that in indigenous cultures, nature is not considered a competitive place, where ‘survival of the fittest’ is central. They see nature as a ‘cooperative system of allies’, in which not only humans and animals, but even plants grow in a mutual relationship with each other and in support of each other. Peat noted that while Western science has been a triumph in ‘understanding the surfaces of things’, it has unfortunately left no room for ‘the spirit, or the numinous energy’— as has been the case in indigenous cultures around the world. In these cultures, people were, and still are, focused on ‘the whole of someone's being’. According to Peat, such indigenous views, in which cooperation is in the foreground, must also have existed among our distant ancestors.

Materialist science

Under the influence of the materialist, mechanistic view of science, the Darwinian theory of evolution has also limited itself to understanding the surfaces of things. It was assumed that consciousness did not play a significant role in shaping or directing the evolutionary process. After all, in

that theory, consciousness would have arisen quite late in the evolutionary process, when the brain had reached a certain degree of complexity.

This also implied that without a brain, there can be no consciousness. In recent years, however, there have been more and more indications – through reports of personal experience and scientific research – that consciousness can also exist separately from the brain and that all of nature appears to be permeated with it from its base. Let me briefly discuss a few of those indications below.

Near-death experiences

First of all, there is the increased number of reports of people who have had a near-death experience. Their experiences show very clearly that consciousness does not stop when our brains have stopped functioning. In the timeless dimension they have entered, their experience of consciousness appears to have become much broader and more intense. There, they often meet deceased family members or friends, and sometimes relive events from the past from different perspectives. The mutual communication suddenly turns out to be telepathic. Everything feels much more real to them than in earthly life – to which they continue to have access. In this earthly life they appear to be able to observe from a distance, and sometimes also have access to the thoughts of others.

Personal accounts of these experiences may not provide hard evidence for science. But anyone who takes the trouble to listen to the stories of near-death experiences with an open mind can hardly fail to notice the honesty and openness of the storytellers and the authenticity of their stories. On YouTube you can listen to fascinating reports from well-known people, such as Anita Moorjani, Eben Alexander and Nancy Rynes, who have also written interesting books about it. But countless unknown people nowadays also dare to tell about their near-death experience on various YouTube channels that are really worth listening to. In addition, scientific research in this field has also increased enormously in recent decades. And that has resulted in many publications, including, of course, *Endless Consciousness* by the well-known Dutch researcher Pim van Lommel.

Telepathy

The presence of telepathic ability also shows that consciousness can exist outside the brain. The Dutch psychologist Robert Wolff, for example, has reported how during his often unannounced, spontaneous visits to the Sng'oi tribe in Malaysia, he was surprised time and again by the fact that someone was already waiting for him: 'Half an hour from the village we were always picked up by someone. It seemed as if he – or she – had been waiting for us. When we got there, that person quietly got up and walked the rest of the way in front of us. There was little or no talking.'

Wolff indicated that they did not have a phone, that his visit was often unplanned and that there was no way for them to know that he would be coming on a particular day. He could not find an explanation for the fact that they were somehow already aware of his arrival. The South African writer Laurens van der Post and the American anthropologist Bradford Keeney have had similar experiences when they visited the 'Kalahari Bushmen' in Africa.

Among our Celtic ancestors, this telepathic ability also appears to have been known and, together with other forms of extrasensory perception, was called 'the second sight'. The researcher W.Y. Evan Wentz already mentioned this in his book *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* from 1911, in which he investigated the contact of people with the Celtic 'Other World'. The telepathic ability still does not appear to have disappeared in those regions. Scottish writer and activist Alastair McIntosh has pointed out that 'the second sight' has survived among people in the Scottish highlands, and also in remote places such as the Hebrides, because 'these are parts of the world where indigenous peoples have lived with each other, and with their place, for a very long time.'

Tellingly, telepathic ability has also been found in animals, and is probably even more present in them than in humans. In earthquakes and tsunamis, it is regularly observed that certain animals that lived in the area had sought a safe shelter beforehand. The English biologist Rupert Sheldrake has scientifically investigated the telepathic ability of animals. He mainly

focused on telepathic contact between dogs and their owners. He found evidence that those dogs very often knew exactly when their owners (who were far away from home) decided to go home.

Conscious plants

Various scientists have conducted research into the intelligence and consciousness of plants. The research by the Italian ecologist Monica Gagliano in particular stands out as far as I'm concerned, with a fascinating account of it in her book *Thus the Plant Spoke*. She has dared to open up to the insights of healers and shamans from indigenous communities, who claimed to be able to communicate directly with plants. Her fellow scientists were initially critical of it. But by persevering in her experiments and research, she has been able to convincingly demonstrate that various plants – including the *Mimosa pudica* and the pea plant – appear to possess consciousness. This is really special, because plants, unlike animals and humans, do not have brains. Gagliano has also talked extensively about her research in podcasts and talks on YouTube.

Consciousness at the basis of life

The insights that near-death experiences, telepathy, and plant consciousness have yielded indicate that consciousness can exist and function without the brain. Our brains continue to play an important role, but as a receiver and filter of consciousness. For a few decades, a number of scientists, including Rupert Sheldrake, have been arguing for the recognition of this receiving, filtering role of our brains. According to them, the relationship between our consciousness and our brain is similar to the information and images we receive through our TV, laptop or mobile phone, and its origin is not in the brain, but in an external source – in a non-local field of consciousness.

The brain's filtering function ensures that the information and images come to us in manageable proportions. Its strength can vary from moment to moment. For example, if we have started to identify with our ego, or are in fight-or-flight mode, the filter function becomes stronger. Then less awareness comes to us. If we feel relaxed and open, or have an overwhelming experience in nature, for example, the filter function

becomes weaker. Then much more awareness can flow into us, and we experience life much more intensely and vividly.

In the world of science, it has been suggested since the beginning of the 20th century that consciousness, and not matter, is at the foundation of life. The quantum physicist Max Planck said the following about it in 1944: ‘All matter arises and exists by a force that causes the particles of an atom to vibrate and holds this tiny solar system of the atom together. We must assume the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind behind this power. This mind is the matrix of all matter.’ According to him, consciousness is already present at the subatomic level. It also implies that evolution encompasses much more than genetic inheritance. In recent decades, this has been further elaborated in various ‘field theories’, including those of Rupert Sheldrake, Ervin Laszlo and Lynn McTaggart, and by epigenetic research.

From competition to collaboration

Interestingly, the evolutionary process, and the involvement of consciousness in it, is nicely reflected in the development of our own bodies. In this context, the evolutionary biologist Elisabet Sahtouris has pointed out that initially there was competition and struggle between the different types of bacteria, cells and organs at every level, but that they all eventually switched to mutual cooperation. When the cells were given their specialized functions, they managed – despite the initial resistance – to start working together in organs, and these organs then also in the overarching organism of our bodies.

According to Sahtouris this insight also has consequences for developments in today's society. In her view, the competition and struggle, which we currently see all around us, will eventually lead to the reunification and cooperation of all humanity on a global level. As with our cells and organs, this does not happen by all becoming the same, but by maintaining and respecting each other's unique functions and qualities. In doing so, she shows that diversity and inclusion is an evolutionary principle – a principle

that is actually not different from the biodiversity that allows all of nature to flourish.

Imperialist empires

In this context, the American writer David Korten has written in his book *The Great Turning* that our society is currently going through a process of transformation on a global scale. According to him, there is a shift from imperialist empires – empires that have existed for about 5000 years and to which today's international corporations must also be counted – to an Earth Community. This is also essentially a shift from competition and struggle to cooperation.

The empires that Korten speaks of could once be founded and expanded top-down, because a patriarchal culture had emerged. Men and the so-called 'masculine' qualities with which they identified themselves – including hierarchy, struggle, power and control – played a central role in it. Women and their so-called 'feminine' qualities – including feeling, care, openness, empathy, and connectedness – were structurally undervalued and suppressed. But this does not alter the fact that this culture has been harmful to almost everyone. As Korten has emphasized, only the few people at the top have benefited from it and it has caused a lot of misery for the majority of people.

Narrowing of consciousness and imbalance

We must keep in mind that this historical period of several thousand years fades quite into insignificance compared to an evolutionary process of billions of years. From an evolutionary point of view, this has been a relatively short period in which we have collectively had to deal with a temporary *narrowing of consciousness*. The sense of identity of many people – especially men – then shifted from their heart to their head, to their ego. This made them feel separated from the surrounding natural world, from their own bodies and from their fellow human beings. Their understanding was limited to the surfaces of things.

Because of the persistent patriarchal dominance, a structural *imbalance* has also arisen in our culture. It has been able to continue into the present day and is closely linked to the global crisis situation in which we have ended up. The patriarchal nature of this imbalance has been investigated and mapped by various – especially feminist – researchers in recent decades. In my Dutch book *Het helende verhaal* (The healing story), published in 2023, I also paid extensive attention to it.

We can see all around us that there are still people in power – both in politics and business – who dream of being at the head of an expanding empire. It is no coincidence that they – and their followers – are fighting areas such as climate change, feminism and diversity. They feel that these are the areas in which their power is systematically undermined.

Expansion of consciousness

In these same areas, as everyone knows, protests are taking place all over the world. These show how a long patriarchal history – which from the beginning was collectively driven by egocentric consciousness and *external power* – is gradually going to be healed in a natural way by a power from within, by *inner power* from our heart. The protests are part of a process in which our consciousness is increasingly expanded on a collective scale – a process that promises to bring balance back to our culture.

As I indicated in my previous Mantra article (summer issue 2025), the first traces of this can be found as early as the 18/19th century. During that period, people in the Western world began to become increasingly aware of various forms of injustice and discrimination in society. In addition, there was a growing interest in the surrounding natural world, in indigenous cultures and in our own (pre)historic past. The wealth of Eastern culture was discovered during that period. And then gradually more and more attention was paid to personal privacy, to psychological and spiritual development.

Since then, this expansion of consciousness has been able to spread further and further. Movements such as the ‘counterculture’ of the 1960s, #MeToo,

Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion, and of course the development of global communication through the Internet, have accelerated this expansion of consciousness. The previously discussed attention to near-death experiences, telepathy, and plant consciousness is also part of it.

Towards an Earth Community

As David Korten has foreseen, everything indicates that we are increasingly seeing ourselves primarily as members of an Earth community – a community in which all other living beings also have a full place. Just like the cells and organs in our own body, in this community we have switched to mutual cooperation. Deep from our hearts, we have then started to perceive the spirit that is hidden under the surfaces of things.

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