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Lawrence LeShan's and Eileen Garrett's *Clairvoyant Reality* as William James' *Revelation of Veridical Reality*

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Abstract: The "Clairvoyant Reality" of pioneering psychologist Lawrence LeShan and medium Eileen Garrett, reprinted here in honor of LeShan's recent passing at age 100, may well be the understanding of "veridical reality" that James proclaimed would not be found "in this generation or the next".

Keywords: LeShan, Garrett, William James, precognition, clairvoyant reality, sciousness, Hinton, Mach, Planck, spacetime, fourth dimension, mediums

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In his 1895 Encyclopedia article on “Person,” William James began with its etymological origin as “mask,” and ended with a striking way to investigate the vast “unknown regions” all person-masks concealed. He informed his general-reader audience that “psychology” was, in fact, “just beginning to recognize this investigation as an urgent task.” The task was the serious study of mediums. The nascent science of psychology was, indeed, “just beginning” to take an interest in mediums, but the urgency, as it turned out, was for *discrediting* mediums and those who took them seriously, especially James himself. Fifteen years later, in the last year of his life, the beleaguered “Father of American Psychology” conceded (in his essay “A Suggestion About Mysticism”) that the “ordinary psychologist”—far from taking mediums seriously—disposed as “bosh” or “rubbish” “abnormal states of any kind”; and whatever urgency James himself had felt for investigating abnormal states of consciousness had been downgraded to a sober prescription for future generations to “keep an open mind and collect facts sympathetically.” (James, 1910, 1285)

Born 10 years after James died, Lawrence LeShan was precisely the sort of open-minded, sympathetic fact collector James had in mind. LeShan’s 6 decade collection (he died last year at age 100) not only includes compelling experiments in support of psychical phenomena — such as telepathy, psychometry, and precognition — a significant portion of them were done in collaboration with a medium, Eileen Garrett, who had also collaborated with J.B. Rhine, and later founded the Parapsychology Foundation. While parapsychology is still considered, in LeShan’s words, “a collection of facts in search of a theory,” his own

theory of a “clairvoyant reality,” formulated in collaboration with Garrett, and published in his groundbreaking 1969 Monograph, *Toward a General Theory of the Paranormal* (later republished in his 1974 book, *The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist*), may well be our best guide to that collection. It may also well be the best answer to the question posed by James at the end of that same Mystical Suggestion essay, a question about “alterations of consciousness” that, he said, “we will not understand...either in this generation or the next”: “Is...consciousness already there, waiting to be uncovered, and is it a veridical revelation to reality?” (James, 1910, 1280)

The specific alteration of consciousness that prompted James’s question was precognition. Like Merlin plunging Excalibur into stone for the future king of Britain to extract, James, in the last year of his life, had embedded this most baffling of all psychic phenomena into its most challenging setting—the ultimate question it invokes. For me, Lawrence LeShan and Eileen Garrett qualify as Arthur with their “clairvoyant reality.” Published 60 years after James’s challenge, it even fits his “not in this generation or the next” timeline for “understanding.”

As I tried to show in my book *The Illusion of Will, Self and Time*, there are other plausible Arthur candidates, before, during, and after James’s time, from Parmenides to Julian Barbour, including James himself. (Bricklin 2015) Significant and relevant understandings, in fact, surrounded James at the time of his future-targeted challenge. All of them, like the clairvoyant reality, embraced as “veridical revelation” a

universe that James was the first to describe, albeit disparagingly, as a “block”.

Minkowski's 1908 spacetime, for instance, derived from Einstein's 1905 special relativity, clearly corroborated “...already there waiting to be uncovered” as a “veridical revelation.” And while Einstein was slower than Minkowski to convert his relativity into a block universe “fourth dimension”—the conception that was to earn him the unresisted nickname “Parmenides” from Karl Popper—both Minkowski and Einstein were themselves preceded by a friend of James: the mathematician Charles Hinton, creator of the tesseract. In 1904, the year before Einstein's *annus mirabilis*, Hinton published a book elaborating ultimate reality as a Parmenidean block universe, fully crediting Parmenides. The book was entitled *The Fourth Dimension*—a term he had introduced in an 1880 essay “What is the Fourth Dimension?” James got his own personal introduction to this proto-block universe in an 1895 letter Hinton wrote him, depicting “time as the fourth dimension,” where “matter had another dimension which is experienced by us as duration,” “an obscure intuition...from the side of inner experience—which the description of the world as known to science leaves unsatisfied.” (Skrupskelis, 89)

James's psychical research colleague Sir Oliver Lodge—who would live to have an extended, complicated, ongoing debate with Einstein about the not-as-easily-dismissible-as-it-first-seemed ether (Rowlands), had also theorized a viable block universe. In 1891, the same year Einstein got his first geometry book, Lodge wrote: “events may be in some sense in existence always, both past and future, and it may be we who are arriving at

them, not they which are happening.” (Lodge, 554) This same “equal presence” of past, present, and future, expressed by James's beloved colleague Josiah Royce, delightfully tormented James in their playful, but earnest exchanges, and no doubt contributed to James's end-of-life concession to its plausibility. (Bricklin, 2015, 244-245) Finally, James may well have been influenced by the most renowned time denier of his (and, still, our) time, John McTaggart. In the same year as Minkowski replaced “time” with spacetime McTaggart (famous for his A series/B series denial of linear time, but whose mostly ignored permanent relations C series was ready-made for spacetime (Bricklin, 2015, 249) wrote:

It doubtless seems highly paradoxical to assert that Time is unreal, and that all statements which involve its reality are erroneous. Such an assertion involves a far greater departure from the natural position of mankind than is involved in the assertion of the unreality of Space or of the unreality of Matter. So decisive a breach with that natural position is not to be lightly accepted. And yet in all ages the belief in the unreality of time has proved singularly attractive. In the philosophy and religion of the East we find that this doctrine is of cardinal importance. And in the West, where philosophy and religion are less closely connected, we find that the same doctrine continually recurs, both among philosophers and among theologians. Theology never holds itself apart from mysticism for any long period, and almost all mysticism denies the reality of time. (McTaggart, 457)

Indeed, as much as James held out for a “pluralistic mysticism” that did not deny actual time (with actual effort), he too knew well that his pluralism was mysticism heresy, as well as an ill-fit for the most widespread mystical experience

acknowledged by religions East and West: divination—the first “unclassified residuum” that James listed as “broadcast over the surface of history.” (James, 1897, 681) He also knew, through the same direct source that Einstein first knew—Ernst Mach—that it was no longer scientific heresy to reject Newton’s “equal flowing time”. (Bricklin, 2015, 214-215) (While there is no indication that Einstein ever influenced James, James’s collaborative radical empiricism exchanges with Mach may have indirectly influenced Einstein.)

For the “consciousness [not consciousness *and* matter]...” part as “veridical revelation of reality,” there was James’s metaphysical suggestion of consciousness (consciousness without consciousness of self) as prime reality (Bricklin, 2007), with no matter “behind physical phenomena.” (James, 1890, 304) This radical skepticism about “self” and “matter,” “traversing common sense,” (ibid.) was also shared by Mach, who traced his commonsense traversal from a moment in his late teens, “decisive for my whole view” in which “the superfluity of the role played by [Kant’s noumenal] ‘thing in itself’ abruptly dawned on me”: “On a bright summer day in the

open air, the world with my ego suddenly appeared to me as one coherent mass of sensations, only more strongly coherent in the ego.” (Banks, 11) The seminal quantum theorist Max Planck, 52 years old when James made his future generation appeal for an understanding, also regarded matter as “derivative from consciousness”—a belief corroborated by the most striking aspect of quantum physics, the “observer effect”. According to Planck: “We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything that we regard as existing, postulates consciousness.” (Jammer, 19)

Thus the formulation of James’s direct challenge to us today to try to “understand” how the future might already exist, merged the foundations of 2 nascent theories in his own time—relativity and quantum physics—whose complete merger was to become the quest of the Century. A quest, I believe, that would do well to consider the clairvoyant reality as a “veridical revelation,” blending the deepest insights of mystics, physicists, and, yes, mediums.

Lawrence LeShan’s and Eileen Garrett’s “Clairvoyant Reality” in a Table of Comparison with “Sensory Reality” (Leshan, 1969, 58-60)

Sensory Reality	Clairvoyant Reality
1. Objects and events separated in space and/or time are primarily individual and separate, although they may be viewed as being related in larger unities.	Individual identity is essentially illusory. Primarily, objects and events are part of a pattern which itself is part of a larger pattern, and so on until all is included in the grand plan and pattern of the universe. Individual events and objects exist, but their individuality is distinctly secondary to their being part of the unity of the pattern.
2. Information comes through the senses and these are the only valid sources of information.	Information is <i>known</i> through the knower and object, being part of the same unitary pattern. The senses give only illusory information.
3. Time is divided into past, present, and future and	Time is without divisions, and past, present, and future

<p>moves in one direction, irreversibly from future, through now, into the past. It is the time of one-thing-followed-by-another.</p>	<p>are illusory. Sequences of action exist, but these happen in an eternal now. It is the time of all-at-once.</p>
<p>4. An event or action can be good, neutral, or evil, although its consequences often cannot be seen until long after the event.</p>	<p>Evil is an illusion, as is good. What is, <i>is</i>, and is neither good nor evil, but a part of the eternal, totally harmonious plan of the cosmos which, by its very being, is above good and evil.</p>
<p>5. Free will exists and decisions that will alter the future can be made. Action can be taken on the basis of will.</p>	<p>Free will does not exist since what will be <i>is</i>, and the beginning and end of all enfold each other. Decisions cannot be made, as these involve action-in-the future, and the future is an illusion. One cannot take action but can only participate in the pattern of things.</p>
<p>6. Perception can be focused by the will in any desired direction, unless it is externally blocked, and thus specific knowledge can be acquired.</p>	<p>Perception cannot be focused, as this involves will, taking action, and action-toward-the future, all of which are impossible. Knowledge comes from being in the pattern of things, not from desire to know specific information. Perception cannot be externally blocked since knowledge comes from being part of the All, and nothing can come between knower and known, as they are the same.</p>
<p>7. Space can prevent energy and information exchange between two individual objects unless there is a media, a <i>thing-between</i> to transmit the energy or information from one to the other.</p>	<p>Space cannot prevent energy or information exchange between two individual objects, since their separateness and individuality are secondary to their unity and relatedness.</p>
<p>8. Time can prevent energy and information exchange between two individual objects. Exchanges can only take place in the present, not from present to past or from present to future.</p>	<p>Time cannot prevent energy or information exchange between individual objects, since the divisions into past, present, and future are illusions, and all things occur in the "eternal now."</p>

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