

[Human Mind](#)

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Published by Anonymous on Dec. 02, 1990

Human Mind

the Final Frontier

Former Astronaut's Institute Explores the Crossroads of Inner Space and Earth Science

In February 1971 - while the Vietnam War raged and a watershed book called *Altered States of Consciousness* turned mind research inside out - Captain Edgar Mitchell deftly piloted the Apollo 14 lunar landing module fifteen miles north of the Fra Mauro crater. The module landed like an aluminum butterfly on the moon. Mitchell was the sixth man to leave his boot prints in the lunar dust. He was forty years old, one of the most highly trained men in the frontiers of technology. Ironically, while his career of navy pilot and NASA astronaut propelled him into outer space, his deepest interests lay in man's probing into inner spirit. On the mission's return flight to Earth, Mitchell experienced a powerful interlude of cognizing a conscious intelligence underlying the cosmos - a space samadhi of sorts. In 1972 he left NASA's astronaut corp and the following years established the Institute of Noetic Sciences in California. A brochure at the Institute states Mitchell chose the word Noetic "to encompass the method by which we gain knowledge: the reasoning processes of the intellect, the perception of our experiences through the senses, and the intuitive, spiritual or inner ways we have of knowing." Thus, noetic arches into the incomprehensively vast and mysterious territory of unbound Mind that is only consciously traversed by mystics, yet is every individual's true home and identity. To Mitchell, it is the "ultimate frontier."

The Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) is located in Sausalito, a small Mediterranean-type town just across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco. It occupies a warren of offices in a handsome redwood building near the town's harbor. But it is not a research lab or a school. It is more like the National Geographic Society, whose members' dues and contributions fund a global range of projects, each member participating in the adventure via a stunning monthly

magazine.

At IONS, member-derived funds support projects and seminars that are freshly - often with a new mode of spiritualized science - surveying the geography of our inner selves: intuition, creativity, values, beliefs, meditation, mind-over-body healing, and how the quality of our consciousness affects our world and can change it. Studies range from athletes who train their psyche as vigorously as their body to what makes people who serve their fellow humans selflessly - altruists - tick. From these frontiers the IONS offices in Sausalito puts out a stream of monthly and quarterly publications and books to its members, arranges lectures, seminars and offers tours to lands of super-saturated spiritual life, including over the past year Bali, Malaysia and India.

Edgar Mitchell lives in Palm Beach, Florida, not far from where his Saturn rocket rent the Earth sky in 1971. His brainchild has been functioning for seventeen years. He is now 59 and long ago exited the day-to-day operations at IONS. He runs a real estate investment firm, travels a lot, writes and speaks often on not only how science must crack open its eggshell of materialist thinking, but also on the need for religions to acquire more data from present-day voyagers into the mystical states, and to re-examine belief structures that are not validated by those excursions.

As it turned out, after a month-long attempt to reach him for an interview, he was still traveling. However, we do have excerpts from a speech he gave at an IONS symposium. He talks of the power of belief and his experience of the universe as white light, a mystical 'seeing' common to many faiths, including Hinduism: "Many developments force us to recognize the role our belief systems play in our lives. We recognize now that belief system is everything. We humans do not perceive reality except through the lens of our own sense, as modified by the belief system that we have shaped and hold. This is a revolutionary understanding, because science has consistently said to us, during the last three hundred years, that there is an absolute reality and it's up to us to discover what it is. I think we can question those concepts - no, I will restate that - we must question those concepts, because they are not quite on the mark. We must recognize that we're involved in the universe, not outside of it, and that the universe in which we're involved is a 'self-organizing universe' which is fundamentally intelligent in a way that we don't quite understand.

Because of my experience in space, when I perceived the self-organizing intelligence of the Earth, I appreciate the magnificent variations in the human experience. I also appreciate what distinguishes us from our animal neighbors, and that is our capacity for self-reflection, the ability to think upon our own thoughts. The self-reflection can form an infinite regress - we can think about our thinking, and we can think about ourselves thinking about our thinking...and so on add infinitum. What happens when you carry that infinite regress to its ultimate limit - when you get to infinity? I tried the experience, and discovered that you see the universe as white light. You back yourself right against the edges of reality and you see white light. What is that a metaphor for? It's a metaphor for energy, it's a metaphor for all reality. It is what some of our models of reality describe as the divine point of view. It is when all existence is light, harmonious, peaceful and self-existent without dynamics."

If that sounds sagely, it is. Yet, it still carries the phrasing of a scientist. The white light is a metaphor for energy, or a model for a supernatural perspective. Mitchell views himself as philosopher-scientist, a new breed of scientist as comfortable with consciousness as with a computer. And indeed the driving vision at IONS is to awaken the science, social, business and political communities to the reality of a universe and its occupants that share superconsciousness. Mitchell points out that we have more knowledge of the inner realities available than ever before. And the future depends on applying it. "At no point in human history is it as obvious as it is today that human activity shapes the future of planet Earth," Mitchell asserts.

IONS hovers between science and pure mind, but much more within the frontiers of science than the dimensions of the psyche. Many other institutions - psychic exploration groups - roam far deeper into transcendent territory than IONS. The noetic group wants to stay close to science to remain credible enough to influence. Up until 1978 IONS was deeply involved in paranormal investigations - ESP, telepathy, psychokinesis, remote viewing, etc. Mitchell himself had co-edited a book called *Psychic Explorations* in 1974. But in 1978 "We decided to play down the psychic research and put a lot more emphasis on the healing area - mind and healing," says Willis Harman, current president of IONS, in an hour-long phone conversation with HINDUISM TODAY. "The phenomena are equally as mysterious as the psychic, but they are a lot more acceptable." He views this as a major milestone in IONS history: "It aligned us much more with the mainstream. We were able to interact with scientists more in major research to get some sort of science of consciousness under way." This is the public science-coaxing side of Harman. Later, as we discuss trying to prove metaphysics to establishment science, he intimates: "If you really want to know about psychic phenomena, then you explore inward and learn what the real origin of those things is. You don't try to convince anybody, including yourself, with statistics. They don't mean explorers who report

what the cosmos really seems to be like."

There are a number of very bright people at IONS, but Willis Harman is the Merlin who creates magic. He has a face contoured with kindness and knowing, speaks of abstract concepts as fluidly as talking about the weather, and has been a metaphysical searcher for 36 years. In 1954, as a professor of engineering systems at the prestigious Stanford University, California, he came face to face with internal reality when he attended an informal gathering where a hypnotized lady petted a non-existent cat. His science background failed to explain it. He ended up at the Stanford library, on a personal crash course in metaphysics and the mystic paths of spiritual traditions. He came into the circle of Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard, two pioneers in the woods of mind. Heard ran a Vedanta meditation center in California.

Now 73 - he jokes he's expecting "the 'big meditation' sometime along the line here" when we ask if he practices daily meditation. "This is a very crucial time in history and I'm in quite an active phase and don't seem to feel the need for any formal practice, just stay in tune as I go along." His main function is as communicator. He has been to India to talk to groups three times in the last decade - the first time as the guest of the Brahma Kumaris' at Mt. Abu. "The atmosphere in India is totally different from any other place on Earth." Out of IONS's 20,000 members, only a handful are from India.

He joined IONS as president in 1977 - only after some serious arm-twisting by good friends. It would be his third career change. In the mid-fifties, after his encounter with the potentials of the human mind, he left his Stanford Research Institute (SRI), a progressive think tank. Through Huxley and Heard, he became involved in a sideline project with a group of Canadian scientists, which apparently was viciously attacked by mainstream scientists. Edgar Mitchell had first offered Harman the presidency of IONS in 1973, but he turned him down: "I told him I have seen what happens to people who come up against the establishment. It was a little like he was walking into a buzzsaw, and to repeat the experience." But by 1977 he was a member of the board for Manley P. Hall's Philosophical Research Society and it was proposed that the two organizations exchange board members. He was also told that a number of IONS supporters would pool more money into the financially-strapped group if he came in as president. It meant leaving SRI. After a two-hour meeting where he gave ten reasons why he didn't want to join IONS, "I was all choked up and I couldn't say no." In hindsight, he calls it the "wisest decision of my life."

The future of IONS as Harman prognosticates is supernova bright, in that "the public is disenchanted with the old science," and many scientists are adopting mind-based models. He says this year for the first time there was an International Forum on New Science. "New science is a science made on wholeness, not separateness."

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The first thing that came to mind as I looked at Earth was its incredible beauty - a splendid blue and white jewel suspended against a velvet black sky. How peacefully, how harmoniously, how marvelously it seemed to fit into the evolutionary pattern by which the universe is maintained. In a peak experience, the presence of divinity became almost palpable and I knew that life in the universe was not just an accident based on random processes...Clearly, the universe had meaning and direction. It was not perceptible by the sensory organs, but it was there nevertheless - an unseen dimension behind the visible creation that gives it an intelligent design and that gives life purpose.

Willis Harman

NEW SCIENCE HARMONY

As the president of IONS (since 1977), Willis Harman has a basic but profound message: our present science philosophy and methodology is "based on separateness - of observed, of fundamental particles - rather than on wholeness, where our universe, thoughts, feelings, awareness, everything that is in the human experience is all part of the unity." This "old" science has become the de facto knowledge and value system for our world, affecting even world religions. At the International Forum on New science held in Colorado, US, in late September Harman said in his keynote address, "The prevailing scientific picture seems to leave no room for the kinds of inner experiences and deep intuitions on which people and societies base their most basic value commitments...Science is the only generally recognized cognitive authority in the modern world. If we humans really are spiritual beings in a spiritual universe, and the dominant world view of modern society - that of science - denies this, it is a fundamental and in the long run, costly

error. Humanity could make no more serious mistake." The tide is running for a New Science, that allows for the "separateness" of old science, but is grounded in the metaphysics of our superconsciousness. Harman has written two lucid books on this crucial process: Higher Creativity, Liberating the Unconscious for Breakthrough Insights and Global Mind Change. Both are a must-read for Hindus. This revolution of thinking and perception will change all of the assertions of the old science, even those that various religions - including Hinduism - use to bolster their metaphysics and cosmology. "If you try to prove consciousness through quantum physics, it just means you have bought into the old way of thinking," Harman urged to HINDUISM TODAY. "Relativistic quantum physics, molecular biology, neo-Darwinistic evolutionary theory, "Big Bang" cosmology are all part of the old science world view. We have to start with a different set of metaphysical assumptions."

What is the data structure of the New Science? Harman proposes 4 sources: 1) physical parameter measurements; 2) teleological (exhibiting an inherent purpose or direction - as in guided by supernatural intelligence) factors operative in biological organisms; 3) self-reports of subjective experience, as in mental-psychic perception; 4) subjective self-reports of trained "inner explorers" of various cultures. "With the word 'trained' we are referring to a variety of meditative disciplines, yogas, and spiritual trainings that have been employed in many cultures. Of special interest are the reports of deep inner exploration that have led some to the concept of a common experience and a universal 'primordial tradition' or 'perennial wisdom' at the esoteric core of the world's spiritual traditions."

ALTRUISTIC SPIRITS

IONS instigates, supports and cooperates with other institutions on a constellation of programs, some as arcane as the Causality Project which investigates how substantial the cause-effect chain is. Under the heading Exceptional Human Abilities is a wonderful exploration of human values called Altruistic Spirit program. By looking into the lives of people who have dedicated themselves to service to others, the program illumines how individuals tap into the realm of caring, compassion and sacrifice. Toward identifying the altruistic spirit and ancient spiritual paths, IONS offers tours to countries of alternative cultures - such as Indian in the picture of an IONS tour last year. IONS also hosts the annual Temple Award for Creative Altruism, a US \$25,000 prize honoring selfless service. It is often shared among multiple winners.

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