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Technologizing the Soul, Spiritualizing Science: Neo-Kabbalists at Play in the Fields (and Waves and Particles) of the Lord

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ABSTRACT: Contemporary popular adaptations of the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah portray Kabbalah as a “science,” and its rituals, material culture and practices as “technology.” Concomitantly, neo-kabbalists are keen to point out the extremity to which Western science and technology have been brought by the challenges of Quantum Theory and Einsteinian Relativity. Neo-kabbalists are simultaneously drawn to religious (Jewish) ritual practice and paraphernalia and repulsed by religiosity; they interpret their spirituality in terms of scientific categories, while critiquing what they see as Science’s gross inadequacies. They claim that the “facts” of science are “true” only insofar as they reflect in the material realm the veiled reality of the metaphysical world. Thus, science is inadequate, while simultaneously necessary for justifying the claims of these new enactments of Kabbalah. Likewise, religion(s)—like traditional Judaism—are seen as obfuscating spiritual reality, yet all the while unwittingly embodying supreme hidden knowledge. Ironically, where classical definitions of science (from Latin *scientia*, glossing Greek *epistêmê*) would entail a knowledge of causal “whys,” and technology (*technê*) the practical “hows” and “whats,” neo-kabbalists insist that Kabbalah—as “Technology for the Soul®”—is the only way to get at the ultimate “Why” of reality, while Science merely answers to its “what” and “how.” This essay entails an exploration of widely shared neo-kabbalistic key concepts in an attempt to elucidate what they mean by “science,” “religion,” and “technology,” and what their innovative play on mainstream concepts may signal for locating the loose ends of scientific and religious considerations and commitments.

“Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

—Arthur C. Clarke's *Third Law of Prediction*

“Any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology.”

—Niven's *Law*

“Any technology distinguishable from magic is insufficiently advanced.”

—Gehm's *Corollary to Clarke's Third Law*

For out of the old fieldes, as men saithe,
Cometh al this new corne fro yere to yere;
And out of old bookes, in good faithe,
Cometh al this new science that men lere.

—Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Assembly of Fowles*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the early 20th century, Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag translated the key text of the esoteric Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah into contemporary Hebrew and began teaching it (along with other mystical treatises in translation) to secular Israeli Jews, sharing the previously secret wisdom openly to a theretofore unprecedented degree (Huss, 2005, 16). His primary strategy was to show the public that Kabbalah had an *experiential scientific* basis (Ashlag, 1984, 101). In freeing the mystical tradition from its prior highly constrained line of transmission, he pioneered a modern *Neo-Kabbalah*, which would eventually develop into a postmodern worldwide phenomenon.

Following Ashlag's lead, the founders of the two largest contemporary neo-kabbalist groups, Rav Philip Berg (d. 2013) of the Kabbalah Centre and Rav Michael Laitman of the *B'nei Baruch* Learning Center, have reached out to the secularized and those “burnt out on religion,” teaching Kabbalah as *science* and its rituals as *technology for the soul*TM or *spiritual tools*. In this essay, I explore neo-kabbalist discourses of “science,” “technology” and “religion” and consider what neo-kabbalists' play on these concepts may signal for locating the loose ends of scientific and religious considerations and commitments.

Key principles of quantum physics, especially particle-wave duality and quantum field theory, have become core symbols for Berg, Laitman, their schools and their students. In the late 1950s, linguist Kenneth L. Pike developed an intriguing approach to language description, utilizing the same particle, wave and field concepts the neo-kabbalists have so ingeniously

appropriated. In this article, I expand Pike's approach to the levels of semantics and discourse, beginning with an exploration of neo-kabbalistic ways of talking about science, technology and religion from the PARTICLE standpoint, i.e., as static categories with definitive, sharply-bounded features. Applying the WAVE view to my data, I continue with a discussion of the dynamic evolving process of how neo-kabbalistic ways of engaging science, technology and religion have developed over time. Finally, I conclude this essay with a treatment of the subject grounded in the FIELD perspective, considering these discourses as part of a greater, functional whole, in relation to other objects/discourses.

PARTICLE

Science is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014a) as “knowledge or a system of knowledge covering general truths or the operation of general laws especially as obtained and tested through scientific method.” More specifically, *science* is “such knowledge or such a system of knowledge concerned with the physical world and its phenomena: natural science.” The *scientific method* consists of “principles and procedures for the systematic pursuit of knowledge involving the recognition and formulation of a problem, the collection of data through [experiential] observation and experiment, and the formulation and testing of hypotheses” (Merriam-Webster 2009). *Natural science* deals with “objectively measurable phenomena”, and that which is *objective*, is “of, relating to, or being an object, phenomenon, or condition in the realm of sensible experience independent of individual thought and perceptible by all observers: having reality independent of the mind” (Merriam-Webster, 2009).

Thus, etically-speaking, *science* is (a) a systematic knowing or learning of (b) theoretic truth about general laws of nature, (c) through trustworthy discovery methods, (d) which are grounded in empirical, objectively measured observations and experiments, (e) which can be intersubjectively validated (cf. Ormiston, 1989). The theories developed through the application of the scientific method are “*abstract statements* about *why* and *how* some portion of nature ... fits together and works” (Stark, 2003).

Emic (insider) conceptual treatments of science by neo-kabbalists seem, at first glance, to be in substantial agreement with etic (outsider-scientific) definitions. However, neo-kabbalists critically use the aspects of “traditional” science which have been challenged by the so-called

“new science” of quantum mechanics to expand the definition of science to include their own spirituality and disenfranchise “old (i.e., non-quantum) physics.”

From a neo-kabbalistic perspective, traditional science consists of knowledge obtained through a systematic process for gathering and analyzing information, which involves the objective observation of stimuli, and is based on the assumption that predictable, deterministic laws of cause and effect in nature may be rationally discovered and described as universal absolutes (Berg, 1981, 55, 56; 1986, xxix, 112; 1993a, 67, and Laitman, 2006, 11). Neo-kabbalists see themselves as scientists of the spiritual, who, “like any ordinary scientist ... can [empirically] record reactions to actions” (Laitman, 2006). Just like any other science, kabbalistic astrology (for example) “is a science that provides us with predictable information” (Berg, 1986, 112).

Further, the discoveries of quantum mechanics have led neo-kabbalists to conclude that they are, in fact, the *only truly empirical and objective scientists around*:

Only when man enters the spiritual world, does he receive a gift of comprehending objective reality;....There is a method with whose help one can receive complete information about ... what exists beyond the bounds of human sensations and feelings, what is happening outside oneself. This method is called Kabbalah (Laitman, 2005, 174).

As neo-kabbalists see it, with the dawn of quantum physics, traditional science has reached its limit and is at a “dead end” (Berg, 1982, 202). They hold that Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle “might spell the end of the road for physics as an exact science” (Berg, 1986, xxix) and that “The indeterminism of the subatomic or quantum world ... [implies] that the traditional scientist’s so-called ‘objective’ view of physical phenomena ... [will] have to be replaced by a new observer-created perspective of reality” (Berg, 1993b, 26).

According to the neo-kabbalists, the physical world to which scientists have limited themselves, is an epiphenomenal “world of effects” (Berg, 1981, 55), its “formulae and equations may describe the interactions—the effects—but these tools can never reveal the innermost secrets of the reasons for the reaction” (Berg, 1981, 58).

While the work of the scientists is still seen by neo-kabbalists as being empirical (because scientists are, after all, reporting on their sensory *experiences*), their claims to objectivity are not

taken seriously. Neo-kabbalists assert that scientific objectivity is called into question because it is based on *a priori* knowledge. At the subatomic level the “experimental bias effect” means that scientists are projecting onto reality what they expect to see (Berg, 1981, 57; 1983, 29, 30). Concomitantly, “the results of the experiment are ... dependent upon the experimenter’s thoughts” and therefore, “the *modus operandi* of science is invalid” (Berg, 1988b, 36). Because scientists are bound by their five senses, “all that is outside of man is inaccessible” (Laitman, 2005).

Ultimately, the neo-kabbalists have determined that science is “‘religious’ in its reverence for physical laws” (Laitman, 2008, 155). Scientists are seen as dogmatists (Berg, 1986, 82) who are blinded by faith in their *a priori* constructs, believing “in the same sense that orthodox religionists believe” (Berg, 1986, 89). Science is as much myth as religion is: the electron is just a story, a “term invoked” by scientists who are merely observing an incomplete picture of a form of consciousness (Berg, 2008, 61).

Despite such ambivalent estimations of the scientific method, neo-kabbalists still see science as having worth on a “gross” level. Science is simply limited to a “what” and “how” mode of consciousness, while Kabbalah answers to the “why” questions at the back of things. The “1%” physical realm perceived by the five senses and studied by science is believed to be the manifestation of what is happening in the unseen “99%” reality of the *metaphysical* world. Thus, the atoms scientists study are actually “*energy-intelligence* consisting of protons (positive, desire to share energy-intelligence consciousness), electrons (negative, desire to receive energy-intelligence consciousness) and neutrons (the centrality energy-intelligence consciousness)” (Berg, 1991, 88). DNA is, likewise, an illusory manifestation of objective metaphysical reality:

... [The] individuality of human beings is not a result of a unique genetic code, but rather ... personal DNA structure is a product of the metaphysical, individual immortal soul that becomes manifest through the physical individual (Berg, 2005, 64).

Of course, the prime demonstration of the neo-kabbalistic view of science is in its treatment of quantum mechanics:

Wave consciousness is light. Particle consciousness is illusion. When a physicist observes an electron as a particle, his own personal consciousness of “desire to receive for the self” has stimulated the electron to act as a particle. When the electron behaves as a wave, the observing scientist, at that moment has thought consciousness of the Tree of Life. His thought wave consciousness is the stimulant that affects the wave behavior of the electron. Thus, the universe ... was created in a divine state of pure order and structure, and so it remains. To assert the idea of “randomness” and uncertainty principles as truth is to demonstrate an egotistical attitude toward inexplicable phenomena (Berg, 1993a, 90, 91).

While acknowledging the value of empiricism and the scientific method, neo-kabbalistic critiques of scientific “objectivity” allow them to fashion their spirituality as a kind of alternative science. If scientists are merely measuring their own “interior impressions” of a sensation of reality, then we do not truly “know if anything really exists outside us” and “At the end of the day, we are [actually just] studying ourselves” (Laitman, 2006, 47, 48). Since this appears to be the case, neo-kabbalists feel justified in declaring that they are researching the world of spirit “in a purely scientific manner,” because they can “measure ... [their] sensation of ... [the spiritual] in [*sic*] precise tools, quantify each sensation, and express it numerically” through the “tool” they call “the wisdom of Kabbalah” (Laitman, 2006, 55). Further, they are able to intersubjectively confirm their findings, because, as Laitman has it:

Kabbalah is a technique that provides accurate, mathematical, measurable tools. When I document data pertaining to one state, another Kabbalist can perform the same act—with his or her own tools—and experience the data I was referring to. The wisdom of Kabbalah provides an accurate measurement of human emotions (2006, 56).

Insofar as *scientia* is concerned with knowledge of “theoretic truth”, *techné* is concerned with the “art” which may *lead to* theory and entails the “methods for effecting certain truths” which are known *through* theory (Ormiston, 1989, 4, 8). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014b) defines *technology* as “the practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area”, “a capability given by the practical application of knowledge”, and “a manner of accomplishing a task especially using technical processes, methods, or knowledge.” Etically speaking then, technology is, ultimately, a means to an end.

Borgmann describes technological items' surface appearance as "the commodity," in order to reflect the "commodious and tradable availability of such items" and the "sophisticated and unintelligible" "deep structure" upon which they depend, as "the machinery" because of the debt the commodity owes to science (2003, 16-18). The technological device is thus the combination of the commodity and the machinery (Borgmann, 2003, 18).

The neo-kabbalists' concept of technology is, again, similar to the etic view, but is applied in ways and/or contexts most scientists would consider unorthodox. Technology is, for them, practically applied knowledge which involves (a) an awareness that "a specific act will produce a specific effect that is exactly how the technology operates" (Berg, 2007, 21). It consists of (b) "tools that help us get along in life" and "enrich our lives" (Berg, 2004b, 76), which (c) "can be utilized by anyone" (Berg, 2007, 20) and (d) allow humans to attain "control over the physical world" (Berg, 2008, 16).

Kabbalah is seen as "Technology for the Soul™"—practical knowledge of the spiritual world applied to life; tools which allow practitioners to attain control of the physical world of *effects* ("mind over matter", including teleportation, levitation, and even immortality!) and enrich their lives by gaining mastery over the metaphysical spiritual world of *causes* (Berg, 2008, 61-63).

Kabbalistic technology can be "harnessed by all who are in need of it" (Berg, 2007, 20). It is highly commodious (witness the Kabbalah Centre's myriad "technologies" for sale: red strings to ward off the evil eye, "Kabbalah Water" to energize the soul and heal the body, Names of God pendants to be worn in order to channel divine energies, dream books, etc.). Its machinery is just as unintelligible (and sophisticated) as that of any secular technology: One does not need to understand (or even be able to sound out) Aramaic or Hebrew in order to benefit from scanning prayer books, mystical texts, or names charts. The spiritual energies are received in much the same way that an unthinking grocery store check-out line barcode scanner processes ISBN information!

Such a sophisticated and unintelligible machinery makes Neo-Kabbalistic technology seem "magical." Neo-kabbalists frequently reference Clarke's Third Law of Prediction: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." During the *Power of Kabbalah: Level II* class I participated in as part of my ethnographic field research, our instructor

frequently referred to the power of “the magical Hebrew letters” and other “magical” technologies provided by the Centre.

The opaque “black box”-like character of neo-kabbalistic technology was most keenly brought home to me the first time I joined some of the men of the Los Angeles Kabbalah Centre for morning prayers. I had brought with me my grandfather’s *tefillin*—small wooden boxes containing passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, strapped to the head and left arm during men’s morning prayer, which are traditionally worn in literal obedience to the commandment of the Hebrew scriptures (“And so it shall be as a sign upon your hand, and as a symbol on your forehead that with a mighty hand the LORD freed us from Egypt,” Exodus 13:16, JPS Tanakh; “Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart; bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead,” Deuteronomy 11:18, JPS Tanakh). As I began to prepare for the service two of my neighbors interrupted me, distraught over the fact that my *tefillin* were old enough that it was highly likely that some of the Hebrew letters on the scrolls might be damaged. They feared for me, lest I unintentionally “download corrupt code” through my use of faulty technology (like getting shocked by a frayed electrical wire)!

The same morning, I was shown another spiritual technology I had never previously considered as such. One of my neighbors flashed me a look at his Blackberry PDA, and said in a hushed whisper, “This little baby may be the most important spiritual technology I use.” He then gazed intently into his reflection on its tiny screen in order to meticulously center his head *tefillin* upon his brow (for maximal receipt of spiritual “flow”) before offering me the PDA to adjust my own headpiece!

Neo-kabbalists are keenly aware of the fact that their “science” and “technologies” are seen as religious, but they vehemently reject such a categorical imposition. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014c) rather simplistically defines *religion* as “the service and worship of God or the supernatural.” Anthropologists and philosophers of religion have long endeavored to develop a more cross-culturally applicable definition or description.

Harris [2008(1989)] and James (1961) see religion as a perceived relationship with the divine and/or supernatural beings. Harris questions anthropological definitions based on “a belief in any indwelling forces and powers” on the grounds that, if we adopt such an approach, we would “soon find it difficult to separate religion from physics. After all, gravity and electricity are also

unseen forces that are associated with observable effects” [Harris, 2008(1989), 17]. Intriguingly, neo-kabbalists frequently talk about spiritual energies in terms of electricity and gravity. In addition, this sort of definition cannot be applied to their beliefs, because they do not believe in a personal divinity or supernatural beings: “God” is an imprecise code-word for the energy-emanating “Infinite Desire to Bestow” at the back of the Universe (Berg, 2001, 14, 15). “Angels” are merely cover-symbols for “the plumbing, wiring and duct work of the world” (Berg, 2007, 6) and are “one and the same” with what science calls “particles” (Berg, 2007, 10).

Pascal Boyer founds his definition on the idea of unnaturalness and counterintuitiveness: “Religious representations typically center on claims that violate commonsense explanations concerning ordinary things, beings, and processes” (1994, 393). Boyer’s approach is problematized when we consider neo-kabbalists’ observation that quantum physics “overturns our belief ... that *common sense* serves as the best guide to the world around us. We now know that our rational consciousness belongs to the world of confusion described by the formulation of quantum mechanics” (Berg, 2003, 94, italics added). Additionally, his condition of “unnaturalness” is moot from an emic Neo-Kabbalistic perspective, since any event or experience perceived as part of the believer’s “expected world” will be conceived of as “natural” (Warms, et al., 2009, xi).

For Winkelman and Baker (following Elfstrom, 2002), the “uncritical acceptance of received wisdom is a key characteristic that distinguishes religion from science” (2010, 47). Yet, neo-kabbalist teachers urge their followers not to take their word for it, but to test everything out for themselves. Lessons are not to be accepted blindly, only principles tested out with tangible results in lived experience are to be accepted (Berg, 2004, xix).

Is neo-kabbalah, perhaps, a *New Age* religion which does not quite fit the categorical definitions of *religion-in-general*? Many New Age religions syncretize religion and science (Lewis, 2004, 107) and attempt to develop a ‘third option’ which “rejects neither religion and spirituality nor science and rationality, but combines them in a higher synthesis” (Hanegraaf, 1998, 517). New Age religions are frequently characterized by *scientism*, which Hammer defines as:

...the active positioning of one’s own claims in relation to the manifestations of any academic scientific discipline, including, but not limited to, the use of

technical devices, scientific terminology, ... theories, references and stylistic features—without, however, the use of methods generally approved within the scientific community...(2001, 206).

I would argue that neo-kabbalah *ought not* be labeled “New Age.” In its present manifestation, neo-kabbalah *rejects* both science and religion as dealing with illusionary epiphenomena or myths. It seems scientific, until we arrive at Hammer’s final key clause: Contrary to his requirement for membership in the category, neo-kabbalah has adopted the scientific method, even if it is being applied to a domain (consciousness) which many scientists would not imagine applying it to.

For neo-kabbalists, religion is a “mode of [rote] behavior” (Berg, 1986, 192) which involves “performing something in [physical] action” (Laitman, 2005, 164). It involves “conforming to a strict religious way of life” where one “has to perform certain ritual tasks” (Berg, 1983, 43) in “rigid reactionary adherence to dogmatic doctrine for the sake of the Deity” (Berg, 1981, 212). Its purpose is to “calm people down” and “nurture ... hope” (Laitman, 2006, 104); indeed, it is “founded on coping” and “offers us hope”, but is incapable of delivering (Berg, 2008, 13). It is a “man-made invention (Berg, 2008, 201). And thus comes the refrain, “Kabbalah is not religion. Kabbalah is about as religious as the laws of electricity. Kabbalah is technology” (Berg, 2007, 20); “Kabbalah has nothing to do with religion, and does not imply that we need perform any physical actions” (Laitman, 2006, 42), religion is a “manmade fantasy” (Laitman, 2006, 101).

WAVE

Most of the following overview of contemporary neo-kabbalah’s evolution is based on the development of the discourse of Rav Berg’s Kabbalah Centre, where I have done ethnographic fieldwork and which has the best documentation over the longest period of time. The latest phase of the three discussed is also characteristic of Rav Laitman’s *Bnei Baruch Learning Center*.

In its first phase of development (roughly the 1980s), American neo-kabbalah was something of a Jewish revitalization movement. It began as an attempt to bring secularized Jews back to “true religion” (Berg, 1981, 121). During this phase, Berg defined Kabbalah as “a mystical Judaism” and argued that real “Judaism is not concerned with conforming to a strict religious way of life in which it is perceived that if one wants to be considered a Jew he has to perform

certain ritual tasks ... [The] goal is to connect ourselves with metaphysical forces ...” (Berg, 1983, 43). It was seen as a tool to break down the “barriers now extant between Jews adhering to different sects” (Berg, 1983, 43). It criticized mechanistic “traditional” science by appropriating the new science of quantum mechanics, which was lauded as an ally proving the truthfulness of (mystical) Jewish spirituality (Berg, 1981, 45-47)—The rise of the New Science finally made it possible to describe the mysteries of Kabbalah in terms readily intelligible to the common lay person.

The second phase (roughly the 1990s) was largely precipitated by the rejection of the Centre and its leadership by the mainstream Jewish community. This led to the castigation of traditional Jewish teachers and rabbis as “selfish” “cult” leaders (Berg, 1981, 209). After the initial rejection, Berg’s neo-kabbalah was universalized and the introductions of his books went from describing his teachings as “a Jewish mysticism” to a “universal technology” available to people of all creeds or none. Traditional religion began to be denounced as being based on the same kind of blind faith as mechanistic science. At the same time, quantum mechanics was re-evaluated. Science was now not so much a savior finally permitting wider dissemination of the teachings, but was characterized as something of a younger sibling finally getting around to discovering things the kabbalists had known all along. In fact, it was the kabbalistic revelation of Rabbi Ashlag which made the new scientific discoveries possible: “The sole reason for the scientific discoveries in the twentieth century ... was that Rabbi Ashlag revealed the Kabbalistic Theory of Rabbi Isaac Luria” (Berg, 1993b, 79)!

The third phase (roughly the 2000s) was initiated by a tremendous groundswell in the popularity of the movement, partly precipitated by the high-profile involvement of celebrities like Madonna, Demi Moore, Ashton Kuchner and Rosanne Barr. This newfound celebrity and acceptance by powerful culture brokers correlated with a cavalier “who-cares-what-mainline-scientists- think-about-us” stance. Quantum physics began to be criticized as limited by its (previously lauded) uncertainty and its fixation on materiality (e.g., always looking for smaller and smaller elementary particles). It began to be denounced as myth, religion-like blind faith, focused on effects rather than on causes, just like its mechanistic predecessor.

As it has developed over the last three decades, neo-kabbalah has begun to defy convenient

categories like “religion,” “science,” or “New Age.” At least emically-speaking, it is no longer a religion (and is *definitely not Judaism*; neither from its own, nor the mainstream Jewish community’s perspective). It is only as counterintuitive as quantum physics, scorns the unnatural and is far *too* critical in its urging of its adherents to test everything. By rejecting both institutionalized science and religion, while still advocating the application of the scientific method, it evades classification as a New Age movement.

FIELD

How do neo-kabbalistic discourses of science, religion and technology relate to social scientific considerations of these objects? How can a consideration of neo-kabbalistic discourses be viewed as part of a greater, functional whole, which will help the scientific study of culture (and science in general) move forward? I contend that the ways in which neo-kabbalah interrogates our etic (outsider-scientific) categories may help us to critique *our own* discourses of (and ways of studying) religion and science.

Religion can neither be simplistically defined (in a particulate sense), *nor* easily characterized by a gestalt list of characters. At what point does a belief/believing system (cf. Ruel, 1982) become “religious?” Perhaps we need something more like a “science/technology—religion continuum” based on a wave model? Or, do we need a Leibnitzian gestalt field of *probabilistic tendencies*? Perhaps both?

Critiques of scientific objectivity analogous to those of the neo-kabbalists have been put forward within several scientific disciplines. Anthropologist Roy Wagner has pointed out that even at our most objective, we are merely perceiving a perception of a perception:

What we see as lightning striking the earth from the clouds is a retinal afterimage, usually of a static charge going the other way—the perception of a perception What we perceive ... is always some oblique, reflected, refracted, or transformed version, a slowed-down copy of the original in the nerve impulses reaching the brain, observed as part of the body that is observing it (2001, 176, 177).

As Neurotheologians Newberg and D’Aquili put it:

The best that science can give us is a metaphorical picture of what’s real, and while that picture may make sense, it isn’t necessarily true. In this case, science is a type of mythology, a collection of explanatory stories that resolve the mysteries of existence and help us cope with the challenges of life. ...[Despite] science’s

preoccupation with objectively verified truth, the human mind is incapable of purely objective observations. All our perceptions are subjective by their nature; even our most basic sensory perceptions of the world around us can be thought of as an explanatory story created by the brain (2002, 170, 171).

However, despite the stunning revelation that none of us can ever make a truly objective observation, along with the neo-kabbalists, and a whole cadre of neurophysiologists and neuropsychologists as well, we can affirm that we *can* still make *empirical* observations of reality. Hyper-lucid states in which individuals experience a sense of Absolute Unitary Being or mystical union, from a neurophenomenological standpoint measured by the physiological correlates of the experience, are perceived as being “at least as solidly and as literally real as any other experience of reality” (Newberg, et al., 2001, 160). Mystical experiences can be corroborated in much the same way as scientific ideas and are often just as critically evaluated (Winkelman and Baker, 2010, 51).

Anthropologists Michael Winkelman and John Baker have pointed out that “mysticism ... has empirical content, providing ... rigorous methods to study the mechanisms that underlie the processes of the mind” (2010, 53). Each tradition of mystical approach to reality can be appreciated and engaged as “a science of the mind and consciousness, turning trained attention and observational processes toward a systematic examination of mental processes” (Winkelman and Baker, 2010, 53). As Lynne Hume urges in her book, *Portals: Opening Doorways to Other Realities Through the Senses*, perhaps it is high time that anthropologists, sociologists and other students of religion and culture take seriously “other ways of knowing” (2007, 47). What would the social scientific study of religion and spiritual experience look like if we honestly engaged the facts of “other ways of knowing?” What would *other* scientific disciplines look like? What would all of this mean for *religion*?

Neo-Kabbalists and other like-minded, empirically-oriented mystics seriously trouble the boundaries of science, technology and religion. As a result, a prior step may be in order before we can properly address the questions raised by “other ways of knowing.” First, we must unflinchingly examine *ourselves* to determine whether we are the sorts of scientists (and scientific disciplines) who mean to be searching for scientific *truth*, or if we are, rather, investigating *the facts of the real*. Only after this question has been settled can we begin to consider what that distinction means for us and for the future of the scientific enterprise.

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