

# The Magician as Rebel Physicist

*by Pete Carroll*

A scientist, whose name eludes us, once described artists as interesting people with dull ideas, and scientists as dull people with interesting ideas; his comments on sports people shall go unrecorded here. Magicians, on the other hand, usually go to extreme lengths to make themselves seem interesting, often with counterproductive results, and their ideas tend to vary from the puerile to the astonishing, depending on the quality of the speculative science that they base them on. We do not necessarily imply negative connotations by the use of the term speculative science. Speculative science exists in both good (useful) and bad (useless) forms.

Established science spreads like a gradually expanding irregular lump of concrete into one field of knowledge after another, replacing rule of thumb and intuition with formal rules and mathematical precision. Many people then tend to regard the captured territory as somehow boring or deadened, usually because they lack the patience to understand the intricate details and principles involved. Good (useful) speculative science occurs in the form of experimental theories beyond the edges of the concrete of 'proven' science. Imagine it as the reinforcing bars sticking out of the existing concrete: some of it will eventually have concrete poured over it, other parts will eventually get sawn off and discarded. Bad (useless) speculative science consists of the pieces already sawn off and thrown away but rescued and carried around like fetishes. Astrology and the supposed healing powers of magnets and crystals provide examples of this.

The soft or 'parody' sciences, such as psychology and sociology, mimic but fail to emulate the hard sciences. We may liken them to structures built of jelly reinforced with wet spaghetti, and subject to rapid putrefaction.

Because you need knowledge of established science to create or appreciate good speculative science, far too few people realise how vast the subject has become. Three areas of particular interest to magicians have shown spectacular growth over the last few decades: cosmology, the physics of the entire universe; particle physics, the study of the ultimate building blocks of everything; and neurophysiology, the study of what makes us tick and aware of our ticking.

All three sciences say the same basic things to the magician. In their established form they all imply that conventional magical symbolism remains myopically small and parochial. The Elements, the Kabbala, the Runes and so on: how simplistic and local these now seem. In their speculative form, all three fields offer plenty of scope for an upgrade of magical metaphysics: theories of how magick actually works (or fails to work). Magick can, by definition, only develop such theories from speculative science, for once an idea has entered the fold of the proven or disproved it becomes science or

rubbish and ceases to qualify as magick. Thus magical theory must continue to move forward in tandem or even ahead of speculative science if it is to retain its vigour and credibility.

## **NEURO QUANTUM COSMOLOGY OR BUST!**

Religion has generally given up the race and philosophy has in the main fallen far behind, which is why nobody ascribes much credibility to either of these enterprises nowadays.

All of our ideas originate in what we can observe about ourselves and our environment, and the theories we construct to explain or extend these observations. Science consists of no more than a fairly self-consistent edifice of theory which allows us to make increasingly sophisticated observations. Thus 'organized common sense' leads to uncommon insights. So do we simply look Out of the window and see earth, air, fire, and water, like the Ancient Greeks, and strive in the face of evidence to the contrary to build a mortal universe based only on these, or shall we have a look at the latest data from the Cern Quark Crusher?

Remember that Hellenic culture persisted essentially unchanged for an entire millennium, and the primitive theory of 'elements' survived to little useful effect till the eighteenth century and, incredibly, it still continues to influence occult metaphysics. Shall we rest content with the Neoplatonic assumption that, because we can perceive a mental image of any phenomenon then all phenomena must already have numinous counterparts, and continue to labour under an unproductive psychophysical parallelism for evermore, or shall we look at the new knowledge of how the brain actually perceives information and creates awareness?

So do we wish to inhabit a universe of neo-Babylonian astrology, or shall we make ourselves feel more up to date by adding the outer to our current seven planets? Ye gods, the Hubble Space Telescope has already shown us a trillion times more of a universe almost too bizarre to imagine. When we examine the careers of the great wizards of the past, Dee, Paracelsus, Newton, Agrippa, Bruno, Crowley and Spare and even Barrett, we see renaissance style minds quite at home with the scientific knowledge in their own culture. Okay, so now we have a lot more knowledge in our culture, but that constitutes no excuse for failing to rise to the challenge. We find few things more laughable than someone who pretends to metaphysical knowledge but cannot tell a neurone from a neutron from a nova.

Perhaps we should present a brief taster of some of the more hotly disputed topics up at the sharp end of some of the more interesting fields. Few science fiction writers have yet addressed the hyper-awesome scale of the universe revealed by modern instruments. Whilst many people seem to have accepted that we inhabit a galaxy that contains at least star for every person on earth, and that many of these probably have planets, few people seem to have got their heads around idea that beyond this galaxy we can see at least on entire galaxy for every person as well. We can think of no religious creation myth that does not pale into puerile insignificance compared to this. Furious debate rages over such

questions as the rate, if any, at which the universe appears to expand, and how it comes to exist at all, and whether time itself exists independently of, or dependant upon, the universe. Theorists advance fanatical hypotheses involving alternative forms of time and matter to try and explain the extreme weirdness going on in the immensity all around us. Magicians may find much here that they can use in support of their own paradigms.

Down at the other end of the scale in the subatomic quantum domain we can now observe events for which we have not yet even developed convincing visual or verbal analogies, and in which cause and effect and time, as we understand them on the human scale, apparently cease to apply. Again, just what one wants in a magical paradigm. On offer at the moment we have theories of instantaneous communication, extra dimensions, antiparticles moving backward in time, reverse causality, *ex nihilo* creation, and quantum tunnelling which resembles teleportation after a fashion.

As the neurosciences begin to free themselves of the alchemical superstitions of 'psychology', a few enlightened enquirers have at last started to frame the right questions, to which we might get sensible answers, such as how does self awareness arise, and how do we make emotional, creative, unpredictable or even parapsychological responses. Even though the answers to these questions seem some way off at the moment, the fact that we can now recognize such questions as valid and deserving of straight answers indicates a willingness to transcend those pathetic substitutes for real understanding: spirituality and psychobabble.

To sum up:

The speculative theories at the cutting edges of science offer the magician a rich store well worth plundering for paradigms. Those who persist in propping up their modus operandi with psychobabble, discarded science, or spiritual theories of mind, relegate themselves to the B-Team.

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