

A Quantum Metaphor for Enlightenment

Werner Heisenberg is famous for the *Uncertainty Principle*. This principle basically posits a limitation on localization of conjugate pairs of physical properties such as momentum and position or energy and time. Essentially, the principle says that you can't have precise observation of both simultaneously. However, Niels Bohr saw additional implications of this formulation and extended it into what is now known as the *Complementarity Principle*. In Bohr's more general version, he proposes that the limitation on localization applies also to alternate ways of perceiving and interpreting any given event. Bohr stipulated that the alternate ways of perceiving and interpreting an event were in fact complementary. More importantly, for the purposes of this piece, Bohr proposed that a full understanding of categorical dichotomies can only come about through establishing a *superposition* of the conjugate pair. A superposition for the purpose of this piece will be defined as a condition in which neither component of a complementary pair is localized.

Robert Jahn and Brenda Dunne* extend the complementarity principle to include states of consciousness. These writers provide several examples of such complementary processes in human consciousness: analysis/synthesis, observation/participation, reasoning/intuition and doing/being. It appears that both the physical and mental worlds consist of many such dyadic pairs. The concept can also be extended to the biological dimension (male/female), to the emotional dimension (love/hate) and to the social dimension (rich/poor). Many other examples could no doubt be generated but these should be sufficient for illustration. The point is that it isn't possible to have both of these dichotomous but complementary pairs manifest simultaneously within the same physical reality, consciousness or person, which no doubt lies behind our general disdain for any ambiguity that we perceive in a recognized and accepted dichotomy such as male/female. Thus, this is how the dualistic world that we inhabit is built.

Jahn and Dunne suggest that for the most part the best one can do with complementary processes within localized consciousness is learn to establish a balance between them. Take, for example, an activity such as art. One cannot access creative inspiration while focused on the details of the painting process. On the other hand, one cannot practice the details of the painting process while seeking an artistic intuition. If one focuses exclusively on intuition then one may have an artistic inspiration but not a work of art. On the other hand, if one focuses exclusively on the painting process one may create a painting but not a creative masterpiece. The switching from one mode to the other and back again involves the dichotomy between doing and being. As the quantum physicist Amit Goswami has suggested, one should learn to regularly shift between these alternatives or as he often says, "do, be, do, be, do." However, this describes a balance achieved by alternating between modes, not a superposition.

To experience a superposition one must go further and resolve the differentiated nature of the complementary pairs. It is proposed then that experiencing a superposition is what occurs when one has the simultaneous experience of both local and non-local consciousness, that is, an enlightenment experience. In short, enlightenment is the resolution of the apparent dichotomy within consciousness. Thus, enlightenment might be defined as a direct experience of the superposition of all dualistic systems within material reality and thereby revealing their undifferentiated origins; i.e., the unity of All That Is.

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* [Margins of Reality: The Role of Consciousness in the Physical World.](#)