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A Bible-based approach to consciousness research

Eric Nelson | May 19, 2014

PETALUMA, CA, May 19, 2014 – Long before the scientific method became the gold standard of scientific research, a little-known carpenter’s son living in Palestine suggested a novel approach to achieving unbiased results.

“Nobody sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on to an old coat, for the patch will pull away from the coat and the hole will be worse than ever,” the Bible records him as saying. “Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins – otherwise the skins burst, the wine is spilt and the skins are ruined.”

Put another way, when exploring new concepts, be sure to check your assumptions at the door, otherwise you might find yourself trying to cram outdated beliefs into new paradigms (or vice versa) with potentially disastrous results.

Consider, for instance, the ongoing debate over the source and nature of consciousness. Is it brain-based or does it perhaps originate somewhere else?

“I would say the brain does not create consciousness,” said Dr. Eben Alexander, a neurosurgeon and author of “Proof of Heaven” during a recent Intelligence Squared [debate](#). “In fact, no neuroscientist on earth can give the first sentence to explain the mechanism by which the physical brain creates consciousness.”

Dr. Steven Novella, an academic neurologist from Yale School of Medicine, fired back.

“We don’t have to know how the brain creates consciousness in order to know that it creates consciousness,” he said. “We don’t know exactly how the brain creates consciousness, but the evidence can only lead to one interpretation.”

Insisting that there is only one interpretation of a phenomenon that is not fully understood (not even close) sounds a bit like putting new wine into an old wineskin. This is not to say that Dr. Alexander’s assumption is necessarily correct. However, until we have a clearer understanding of the evidence,

there does seem to be some advantage in assuming at least for the moment that consciousness may not begin with the brain.

In the end, though, what difference does it make? Although consciousness is associated with nearly every aspect of our lives, perhaps the most intriguing is its impact on our mental and physical well-being. If we end up discovering – or in the meantime assuming – that our health is at least to some extent dependent on a matter-based brain, we'll continue to run into all sorts of trouble. If, on the other hand, we learn that consciousness originates outside ourselves, even within the Divine, our prospects might suddenly improve, and the temptation to rely on human willpower to maintain our bodies will decrease.

It's likely that any final conclusion will need to be drawn from personal experience, by "working out one's own salvation," as it says in the Bible. And, just as the Bible lays the groundwork for good scientific research, it also provides at least a hint of the discoveries that lie ahead:

"We have the mind of Christ," declared the apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, implying that the opportunity to claim one's mental connection with the Divine – and the benefits that go along – is open to all of us.

Eric Nelson's [columns](#) on the link between consciousness and health appear regularly in a number of local and national online publications. He also serves as the media and legislative spokesperson for Christian Science in Northern California. Follow him on Twitter [@norcalcs](#).

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