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NAVIGATING THE SACRED AND SECULAR
A Qualitative Exploration of the Compatibility of Science and
Spirituality in Modern Western Society

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*allow yourself to transform
as many times as you need
to be fully happy and free*

- Yung Pueblo

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the views of five informants regarding the compatibility of science and spirituality. Three research questions help us explore the informants' views on science, spirituality, the relationship between them, the potential bridging of the two fields and what changes they understand to be important to the current way of seeing these two fields. The research uses qualitative methods, in the form of semi-structured and structured interviews, to gain a deeper understanding of the informants' views. The theory of postsecularism is applied to reflect on the informants' standpoints and to apply them to a larger context. The informants' views are related to a new spirituality that is understood as a postsecular movement.

Findings show that the informants have differing views regarding the compatibility of science and spirituality, and whether or not the two fields should be bridged. It was also evident that the informants have turned to spirituality more or less as a response to personal experiences along with feelings of dissatisfaction with the philosophies of Western science, and that a spiritual and holistic outlook is preferred going forward. The thesis concludes that, although the informants have diverging views and experiences regarding spirituality and the compatibility between spirituality and science, they have a similar outlook on reality and their views can be put into the context of, and understood as, an integrated social phenomenon.

Keywords: Science, spirituality, holism, postsecularism, paradigm shift and philosophy of science.

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1. Introduction

Knowledge is like a sphere; the greater the volume, the larger its contact with the unknown.

(Blaise Pascal quoted in Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 279)

Science has contributed to a great deal of useful inventions and technologies. Thanks to science, we are able to communicate effortlessly across the globe within seconds, travel across the globe within hours and days, and we have access to life saving surgical procedures and techniques. However, the way which these achievements have been accomplished and how they have been distributed between us are now seen to be threatening the future well-being of humans and our existence (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 275). The many global challenges and crises we are facing today - unequal distribution of wealth, resource depletion, warfare, environmental challenges violence, to name a few - are contributing to an existential crisis of humanity (ibid., p. 275). Some argue that these challenges are part of an overarching crisis of perception, which originates from the fact that people and institutions in our modern Western societies have a perception of reality that is insufficient for dealing with these global challenges (ibid., p. xi). Alongside these challenges we can see a growing scepticism about, and questioning of, modernisation and philosophies of science, alongside a perceived inability to envision how to move forward (Harding, 2015, p. 2). The mechanistic approach that has been the basis of Western science is now, for some, experienced as inadequate going forward.

Throughout the history of science, science and religion have had a dynamic relationship, transforming from being integrated to separated. This relationship has been frequently mentioned and discussed by philosophers of science, historians and many others, trying to establish the connection and compatibility of the two fields. Along with the questioning of modernisation and philosophies of science, people are creating movements, searching for new solutions, turning to other approaches and relating to other philosophical standpoints (Harding, 2015, p. 3). Spirituality has gained traction in Western societies and more people are turning to spiritual and holistic philosophies while questioning the underlying philosophies of Western secular science. The focus of this research is therefore to explore this rise of spirituality in the West on an individual level, looking at five people's spiritual and

holistic philosophies along with their perspectives on what role science has in them, and also relate this to a broader significance and social movement.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to explore the informants' views regarding the compatibility of science and spirituality. The aim is further to understand these perspectives as a social phenomenon and to discuss any possibilities and shortcomings of these perspectives. This research is a qualitative exploration of the informants' views.

The research questions that have been formulated in favour of fulfilling the purpose are:

- *What are the informants' views on science, spirituality and the relationship between the two fields?*
- *Do they believe the two fields can, and should, be bridged?*
- *Do the informants believe that the current way of seeing these two fields needs to change and if so, what are the most important changes?*

1.2 Delimitation

The research was limited to include the perspectives of five informants. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 the interviews were limited to be held online, via video and email. There is much to be said regarding the relationship between science and religion or spirituality in the history of science, but this thesis will be limited in this discussion. Furthermore, many areas and issues are connected to secularism and postsecularism. It is important to acknowledge that the secular foundation of Western science has discriminatory and racial consequences, however, due to the limitations of this thesis, this will not be covered.¹

1.3 Previous Research

Many have previously researched the various relationships between science and religion, and the expressions of spirituality in Western society. Two examples illuminating this scholarly

¹ Harding (2015) explores the exclusion of alternative forms of knowledge from the scientific sphere. Judging a knowledge system based on their involvement in spirituality and religion has discriminatory consequences on particularly black, indigenous and people of colour who ascribe to these non-secular knowledge systems.

debate include the work of social anthropologist Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah (1990) and professor of religion Anne-Christine Hornborg (2012).

In his book *Magic, Science and Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (1990), Tambiah explores the philosophy of science in a historical context, delves into rationality and relativism, and concludes with some reflections on modern science and the opposition of science and magic. Tambiah discusses the perspectives regarding magic, science and religion of various religious anthropologists, including Bronislaw Malinowski and Sir Edward Tylor. He writes that Malinowski made a sharp separation between science and magic, considering science to be a “profane” activity and magic and religion to belong to the “sacred” domain (ibid., p. 67). Tylor, on the other hand, saw the magical arts as “pseudo-sciences” (ibid., p. 50). Tambiah writes that Tylor had “faith in the explanatory value of science” (ibid., p. 43) and saw the magical arts as “*survivals* of the barbarous past” and as “one of the more pernicious delusions” of mankind (ibid., p. 45). Tambiah’s extensive exploration of the historical accounts on the demarcation of science illustrates that it has been a heated topic for centuries within the anthropology of religion.

Hornborg has in her book *Coaching och lekmannterapi: en modern väckelse?* (2012) (English: *Coaching and Layman therapy: a Modern Revival*)² explored the emergence of coaches and layman therapists. Hornborg looks at the increase of private companies and entrepreneurs in modern Swedish society offering therapy and coaching as a response to mental health issues, existential issues and to give individually tailored strategies for personal fulfillment. She sees the increase of these companies as a result of new spiritual trends and an increase in therapeutic solutions shown in popular culture and media (ibid., p. 205). “These businesses both reflect the late modern society and are a model for it: When success and the individual expression is emphasised, formalised businesses are also created for it”³ (ibid., p. 205). Hornborg says that these companies are influenced by the new spiritual movement, but since Swedish society also is heavily characterised by secularisation, they use science-like language, facilitating the companies’ establishment in mainstream society (ibid., p. 205-6).

² My translation.

³ My translation.

“Coaching clearly emphasises an ideology of success which conforms with the neoliberal society,”⁴ she writes (ibid., p. 207).

Hornborg emanates from a scientific perspective when she examines these companies and businesses, using science both as a starting point and a point in comparison. She writes that the New Age-movement, that originally emerged as a counterculture, went through change during the 90s and instead entered into a symbiotic relationship with the business market (Hornborg, 2012, p. 210). She questions the fundamental driving factors of these companies profiting from the need of personal development and individual coaching. The conclusion to her research is that coaching and layman therapy indeed can create strong emotional responses from the participants, but they have somehow been adjusted to fit capitalism in order to survive and earn an income: “Can we thus liken these new businesses to a religious revival, firmly adapted to modernity, a neoliberal market society and packaged in scientific language?”⁵ (ibid., p. 211). Hornborg’s reflections are interesting but do not touch on the importance and the reason behind the resurgence of these companies or spirituality and do not focus on the individual experience of a new spirituality in a secular society.

While research has been made about the relationship between science and spirituality in different historical contexts, this research aims to fill a gap by analysing this question from the informant’s emic perspective.

1.4 Disposition

I will begin this thesis by presenting the theoretical framework used; in section 2.1, I discuss the theory of postsecularism; in section 2.2, we delve into the meanings of “spirituality” and “holism”; and in 2.3, a brief presentation of Thomas Kuhn’s theory regarding paradigm shifts is presented. In chapter three I outline the methodological approach of this research followed by ethical considerations in chapter four. Next, I introduce the informants and the empirical data, in chapter five. Here, I discuss the informant's perspectives and views accompanied by a brief analysis of these. These findings are then discussed more in-depth in chapter six and analysed in relation to the purpose and research questions. The possibilities and limitations

⁴ My translation.

⁵ My translation.

with the informants' perspectives are also examined in this chapter. The thesis then concludes with a summary of the findings and analysis in chapter seven.

2. Theoretical Framework

In order to understand and answer the research questions, we will here establish what “spirituality” and “holism” means and what is included in the philosophy of science regarding paradigm shifts. Furthermore, postsecularism as a phenomenon will here be discussed and later used as an analytical tool to understand the informants' perspectives. These concepts, terms and theories will enable in-depth understanding of the informants' viewpoints and act as a base for the conclusive discussion.

2.1 Postsecularism

In Western society, there is large dissatisfaction growing regarding the philosophies of science (Harding, 2015, p. 2). This discontentment makes space for alternative philosophies and movements to emerge, and people are turning to new forms of spirituality. We are starting to see that research in some areas of modern science are closely aligned with the ideas and views of new spirituality and postsecular movements (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 68). The term postsecularism refers to the resurgence of religion and spirituality in a secularist, non-religious, society. Referring to the famous German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, Professor of Sociology Tariq Modood (2014, p. 15), writes about postsecularism in a Western European context:

[We are] currently witnessing a transition from a secular to a ‘post secular society’ in which ‘secular citizens’ have to express a previously denied respect for ‘religious citizens’, who should be allowed, even encouraged, to critique aspects of contemporary society and to find solutions to its problems from within their religious views.

Interdisciplinary scholar and author Mike King writes that a postsecular mode of thought is believed to have emerged around 1980 from the natural sciences, when Fritjof Capra (1975) and Gary Zukav (1979) “popularised the parallels between mysticism and quantum theory” (King, 2003, p. 10). King writes that the field of transpersonal psychology, with psychiatrists and psychologists Jung and Maslow in the lead, have also been a part of science contributing

to the postsecular thought, now along with contemporary physics (ibid., p. 10). Science, and more specifically physics and psychology, is believed to have introduced a new way of thinking, allowing for a transition in approach, from secular to postsecular, to occur (ibid., p. 10). With the wide range of meanings on postsecularism, the one used in this paper can be one understood in contrast to sociologist José Casanova's (2009, p. 1051) understanding of secularism, reading:

Secularism refers more broadly to a whole range of modern secular worldviews and ideologies that may be consciously held and explicitly elaborated into philosophies of history and normative-ideological state projects, into projects of modernity and cultural programs.

Hence, we can understand postsecularism, in this context, as a worldview which allows for something other than a secular base, whether that be religious, spiritual, or holistic, which then serve as a starting point for personal decision-making and life-philosophies as well as analysis of social phenomena.

2.1.1 Secular Science

In Western society, science can be seen as one of the main knowledge-producing regimes, and its secular foundation as an “epistemic knowledge regime that may be [...] phenomenologically assumed as the taken-for-granted normal structure of modern reality” (Casanova, 2009, p. 1051). It can therefore be understood to affect our understanding of life and the way we organise our societies. As philosopher Sandra Harding (2015, p. 2) writes:

Sciences and their philosophies have never been value-free. They have always been deeply integrated with their particular social and historical contexts. If they weren't, they would be irrelevant.

In *Objectivity and Diversity* (2015), Harding writes that Western science, being separated from any religious or spiritual practice, has resulted in a secular foundation (p. 127). The lack of discussions in academic and scientific spheres that include religious and spiritual perspectives can be understood to indicate that their practitioners and believers do not belong in these spheres. Similarly, Sullivan (2010, p. 154) explains that this secular position has become hegemonic in academic and intellectual spheres:

Our current age (in the North Atlantic world) is secular in that it presumes most people do not believe in a higher being and, moreover, it finds it difficult to fathom those who do profess such belief.

Alongside the separation of secularism and religion and spirituality comes other binaries, such as the one of “progress versus backwardness,” as Harding puts it (2015, p. 130), where secularist science is associated with progress and religion with backwardness. Two separate kinds of knowledge, intuition and rationality, are seen to be associated with religion and science respectively, and in the West, the intuitive knowledge is often devalued in favour of rational scientific knowledge (Capra, 1975, p. 34).

Within postsecularist research, religious and spiritual movements that are directly opposed to the secularity of the West, are, “from the perspective of the secular West, reduced to being the products of irrationality or false consciousness” (Lloyd & Viefhues-Bailey, 2015, p. 17). The secular West determines what movements are treated as valid and what can be included in the religious pluralism (which, in turn, is a secular Western framework within which religion is attempted to be managed and understood) (ibid., p. 17). The effects of secular science on our beliefs are discussed by sociologist Steve Bruce (2010): “Science and technology have not made us atheists but the underlying rationality and the subtle encouragement to self-aggrandizement make us less likely than our forebears to entertain the notion of a divine force external to our selves” (p. 135).

2.1.2 Spirituality as a Postsecular Movement

If we are less likely than our ancestors to encourage the concept of an externalised mystical force, we might instead go inwards to seek and form new ways of practicing and entertaining our mystical and spiritual desires. Despite the mainstream conversation around secularism and postsecularism mostly being on the resurgence of religion and religious traditions, there are a few researchers propagating the narrative about a new spirituality arising as part of postsecularism. Bruce (2010) writes that if “people are to be religious in the modern world they are more likely to be drawn to self-constructed individualistic ‘New Age’ spiritualities

(where they decide what they will believe) than to traditional authoritarian faiths” (p. 134-135).

While there is critique that postsecularism actually is a continuation, rather than a “re-emergence,” of the engagement between the sacred and the secular (Beckford, 2012, p. 12), others acknowledge a problem with the secular approach in society and that we are currently undergoing a “contemporary crisis of secularism” (Scherer quoted in Modood, 2014, p. 15). Simultaneously, some see postsecularism as a “revision of a previously overconfidently secularist outlook rather than a ‘return’ of religion to a stage on which it had once been absent” (Harrington quoted in Beckford, 2012, p. 3). This outlook leaves room for the further development of a secularist society and embracement of postsecularist notions rather than merely re-adopting a pre-secular state. “Instead of seeing the postsecular as a corrective to the failures of secularism and theories of secularization, some thinkers prefer to see it as a progressive development that builds on the achievements of both religion and secularism,” sociologist James Beckford writes (ibid., p. 3).

King (2003, p. 10) is aligned with the perspective of building on the secular foundation to develop a postsecular approach, explaining what the term postsecularism implies:

[...] there might emerge, or already be emerging, a quality of thought that goes beyond the secular, a thinking that celebrates our hard-won democratic rights and freedoms, but which is more open to the spiritual than the secular mind has generally been.

Furthermore, he believes that the postsecular will reject a narrative that a new spirituality will inevitably ascribe to the “presecular religious hierarchies that we so rightly reject as inimical to freedom and democracy” (ibid., p. 10). Professor and scholar David Tacey talks about how spiritual young people’s “[...] attitudes and assumptions bear the marks of secular society, and their spirituality is modern and secular, not religious or traditional” (Tacey, 2004, p. 78). He writes that young people are more influenced by secular society than religion, insofar that they rely more on their own conscience as a moral guide, than external authority. The reliance on conscience “is a product of modernity and the democratic principles inherent in

contemporary science,” he describes (ibid., p. 78). A new spirituality can therefore be understood to have influences from the secular society, but a sacred core.

Despite his belief that the presecular emerged from physics and transpersonal psychology, King says that “the time has come to be more confident about the spiritual. We don’t have to rely on physics to speak to us about ‘God’; we may not be able to use transpersonal psychology to fully encompass the transcendent [...]” (King, 2003, p. 11). Concluding his thoughts on postsecularism, he writes that a postsecular society might demonstrate features such as “a re-engagement with the spiritual, but secure in our secular freedoms,” and pluralism in the sense of “treasuring our presecular heritage, but denying primacy to any one tradition” (ibid., p. 11). He also writes that his starting point in defining the spiritual is “simply to say that it involves a profound sense of connectedness” (ibid., p. 11).

2.2 Spirituality

The concept of spirituality has a wide variety of definitions and interpretations. In this section I will discuss a few of these to demonstrate that it can have many different meanings, be a highly personal and individual experience, and that there still can be a shared understanding of its characteristics and depth.

2.2.1 What is “Spirituality”?

Physicist Fritjof Capra and chemist Pier Luigi Luisi (2014) define the spiritual life as “a way of being that flows from a certain profound experience of reality, which is known as ‘mystical,’ ‘religious,’ or ‘spiritual’ experience” (p. 277). They explain that this experience has been portrayed and interpreted in various ways and that there tends to be a common understanding that it is a “direct, nonintellectual experience of reality with some fundamental characteristics that are independent of cultural and historical contexts” (ibid., p. 277). The spiritual experience goes beyond the separation of the mind and body and sees them as one, and erases the separation of the self and the world, leading to a central awareness that enables a profound sense of oneness with all and a belonging to the universe as a whole (ibid., p. 277).

The distinction between spirituality and religion is that spirituality is “a way of being grounded in a certain experience of reality that is independent of cultural and historical contexts” whereas religion is “the organized attempt to understand spiritual experience, to interpret it with words and concepts, and to use this interpretation as the source of moral guidelines for the religious community” (ibid., p. 280). Religion is here seen as an organised community within which spiritual experiences are interpreted and used as the basis of how to live and *be*.

Spirituality can also be understood as “a direct inner experience of reality, or transcendent being” where *experience* is defined as a holistic type of understanding and *transcendence* means to transcend the physical and biological, as presented by Walach and Reich (2005, p. 428). Since the spiritual experience can be defined as a “direct inner experience,” it can be understood as a highly personal one. It is therefore very difficult, near impossible, to agree on one common definition and understanding of spirituality that encompasses every individual experience. Walach and Reich (2005) write that despite there being various experiences and ways of communicating and explaining them, “a generic experience of a transcendent reality is at the base of spirituality” (p. 428).

Another definition of spirituality is offered by Tacey, in his book *The Spirituality Revolution - The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (2004), who says spirituality is existential, and emerges from an inward source while being intensely intimate and transformative (p. 7). He explains that “spirituality seeks a sensitive, contemplative, transformative relationship with the sacred, and is able to sustain levels of uncertainty in its quest because respect for mystery is paramount” (ibid., p. 11). Although “spirituality” has had different meanings and been understood differently throughout time, Tacey (2005, p. 36) means that there is a new spirituality arising, one that is vastly more expansive and personal at the same time:

‘Spirituality’ now refers to our relationship with the sacredness of life, nature, and the universe, and this relationship is no longer felt to be confined to formal devotional practice or to institutional places of worship. As time moves on, we find we are able to define spirituality less and less, because it includes more and more, becoming a veritable baggy monster containing a multitude of activities and expectations. Spirituality has become diverse, plural,

manifold, and seems to have countless forms of expression, many of which are highly individualistic and personal. Spirituality is now for everyone, and almost everyone seems to be involved, but in radically different ways.

The core of spirituality can be understood to be personal, comparable to Walach and Reich's understanding of it as an inner experience coming from a source within the individual. Tacey agrees with this, adding that "spirituality" is an inclusive term, "covering all pathways that lead to meaning and purpose" (Tacey, 2005, p. 36). Tacey's definition of spirituality seems to encompass more than an inner experience, as opposed to the two first definitions presented. He acknowledges spirituality as a way of looking at life, rather than "just" an inner experience. He writes of it as an exploration of the "inner or true self," (ibid., p. 36). Additionally, Tacey says spirituality "is not just a cerebral activity, but involves feeling, intuition, and emotional areas of human experience" (ibid., p. 47-48).

I have chosen not to settle for one definition of spirituality, to demonstrate the wide variety of individual meanings of the term and in order not to pin one single definition to the informants' beliefs.

2.2.2 Spirituality as a Counterculture Movement

Moreover, Tacey talks about a "spirituality revolution" occurring. The spirituality revolution, he writes, is "a spontaneous movement in society, a new interest in the reality of spirit and its healing effects on life, health, community and well-being" (Tacey, 2005, p. 1). It has surfaced as a realisation and response to that humans have outgrown ideals and values that were created in, and for, the early scientific era, where individuals were viewed as efficient machines (ibid., p. 1). Hence, the spirituality revolution includes reviewing our concepts of life, society, and progress, "while preserving the advances that technology and science have given us" (ibid., p. 1). He continues explaining that it is aligned with, and emerging from, the new sciences and the recent discoveries in physics, biology, psychology and ecology, meaning that contemporary research in these fields are acknowledging and validating "previously discredited spiritual visions of reality" (ibid., p. 1). Tacey's reflections are similar to Capra and Luisi's who present spirituality as a quality of thought and as a necessary movement in contrast to the mechanistic way of thinking.

While discussing the works and perspectives of Carl Jung, Tacey writes that our energies move outward into society and the world when we experience stable social conditions, but when we experience wars, depression, doubt, uncertainty, our energies flow inward toward the core instead (Tacey, 2005, p. 25). This is a theory as to why spirituality might arise in critical periods and times of instability. The emergence of spirituality could be a result of enforced inwardness along with the lack and withdrawal of hope and dreams from the world (ibid., p. 25).

2.2.3 What is “Holism”?

Holism, also spelled wholism, refers to an approach where something is acknowledged as a whole and more than just the sum of its parts (Holism, n.d.). The word is derived from the Greek word *holos*, meaning *all, entire, whole* (Holism, n.d.). When talking about systems thinking, Capra and Luisi link it closely together with holism. They mean that the holistic perspective in twentieth-century science is known as systemic (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 4). Like systems thinking, holism means that systems should be viewed in its wholes and not merely as its parts. In turn, the authors use it in contrast to mechanistic thought, where the emphasis lies on the parts, whereas a holistic approach emphasises the whole (ibid., p. 4).

2.3 Thomas Kuhn’s Scientific Paradigm Shifts

In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996), philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn extensively discusses the details and effects of the history of science and paradigm shifts. Kuhn talks about a paradigm shift occurring like a scientific revolution: “[...] scientific revolutions are here taken to be those non-cumulative developmental episodes in which an older paradigm is replaced in whole or in part by an incompatible new one” (Kuhn, 1996, p. 92). He emphasises that a paradigm shift does not happen cumulatively and without resistance. A scientific paradigm is defined as “what the members of a scientific community share, *and*, conversely, a scientific community consists of men who share a paradigm” (ibid., p. 176). These are the concepts, values and techniques that are shared by the scientific community and used to “define legitimate problems and solutions” (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p.

3). Kuhn believed that scientific facts emerge out of, and cannot be separated from, “an entire constellation of human perceptions, values, and actions” (ibid., p. 3).

Additionally, Kuhn suggests that new paradigms form and revolution occurs through crises that the old paradigm struggles to solve: “In both political and scientific development the sense of malfunction that can lead to crisis is prerequisite to revolution” (Kuhn, 1996, p. 92 & 151-152). He writes: “a decision between alternate ways of practicing science is called for, and in the circumstances that decision must be based less on past achievement than on future promise” (ibid., p. 157-158). When a paradigm shift has occurred, scientists develop a new scientific worldview and new scientific methods and basic assumptions that are incompatible with the old way (ibid., p. 111-112).

The following chapter presents the methodological framework, the chosen methods, selection of informants and various considerations regarding the research methods.

3. Methodology and Considerations

Studying humans means attempting to understand their perspectives and worldviews. We can do this through interpreting the communication people use to portray their experiences and thoughts about their reality. To aim for an understanding of people’s views of the world is, however, not entirely straightforward. Only to some extent can a researcher expect to understand the worldview and perspective of another person. The interpretation is done by the researcher and will therefore be a product of them. Having a reflexive stance is therefore vital to the research. The researcher’s own biases, understandings and experiences must be taken into account and understood to have a great impact on the study in whole and the interpretation of the exchange between the researcher and the informant. My background and experiences affect the scope of my understanding of the research subject and collected data, and have also been what prompted me into researching this subject.

I am a white Western European woman, brought up and educated in Scottish and Swedish society and school systems. The informants and I share, to some extent, similar social and cultural backgrounds which could be beneficial in the understanding and interpretation of the

interviews, but is not a guarantee (Gilje & Grimen, 2007, p. 171). The *meaning* behind some phenomena can be based on individual experiences and therefore difficult to fathom, which means we might never fully understand them, regardless of our shared backgrounds and experiences (ibid., p. 172). Additionally, if I assume that I share an understanding with the informant about the topic in general, and the underlying *meaning* of the topic being discussed, there is a risk that the meaning will not be explicitly explained. This could lead to difficulties to fully comprehend the topic for someone who has little, or no, prior knowledge. When interviewing the informants, I have aimed for clear explanations and done my best to ask follow-up questions for further clarification.

3.1 Methods

The methods for data collection used for this research are qualitative semi-structured interviews and a structured interview. This research is humanistic and aims to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon through interpreting the perspectives of five chosen informants. The perception of reality is different for, and constructed by, each of us, although similarities occur depending on, for instance, cultural contexts. We constantly produce and reproduce this reality through communication, actions and thoughts.

Qualitative research and interviews is an appropriate and efficient method for a researcher aiming to understand the complexities of life and a person's experience of the world (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wängnerud, 2016, p. 253). Through qualitative interviews we gain insights into a person's described reality and perspectives which, in turn, can give us a wider understanding of the phenomena we are interested in. Just as Bernard (2006) writes, "for anthropologists whose work is in the humanistic, phenomenological tradition, quantification is inappropriate" (p. 32). Furthermore, using a hermeneutic approach includes interpreting the collected data which enables us to get closer to the meaning of the phenomena and reality we are studying (Gilje & Grimen, 2007, p. 171 & 174). As depth and nuance are vital in understanding social phenomena, using a hermeneutic method is highly appropriate for this study.

3.2 Selection

The informants were chosen as suitable experts in their respective fields in order to answer the research questions of this thesis. They are active in alternative fields of work and all have at least one University degree from a Western schooling system, accompanied by training in various alternative areas. With their backgrounds in scientific education and alternative care, they qualify as suitable to provide insight applicable to the purpose of the research. Three of five informants were contacted through my parents and one through my friend. The fifth informant was contacted directly via his website and was in contact through his assistant.

3.3 Interviews

All five interviews were held online; four of which were semi-structured held via a web conferencing programme with video, and one a structured interview via email. The interviews were originally planned to be held in person, but were held online due to COVID-19 outbreak and restrictions. However, this brought unexpected benefits to my research. Conducting interviews online enabled me to interview suitable people irrespective of their geographical location and thus, I interviewed two people in Scotland, one in England, one in Gothenburg and one in the US, welcoming a wider range of backgrounds and experiences. Four of the interviews were held in English and one in Swedish, which was transcribed and later translated in order to be presented. Additionally, notes were taken during the spoken interviews, in the form of jottings, and after the interviews, in a more diary-like manner where I reflected on the experience of the interview.

Recording and taking notes, during and directly afterwards, proved to be useful as I referred back to them during the transcribing and writing process. Some valuable information was exchanged before and after the recording started and while some were noted, some were lost and forgotten. During one interview, a constant disruption with the sound interfered with the quality of the call and the personal connection. A drawback of having the interviews online is that of which we lose from a meeting in real life; taking into account body language, energy, details in the environment and the dynamic between the interviewer and the informant. However, the informants' openness and willingness to share personal reflections regarding the research subject contributed greatly to the connection between us. In terms of structured written interviews, no follow-up questions can be asked and unclarities can not be directly addressed. Interpretation of these answers are also more challenging than that of spoken ones,

as explanations can be minimal. This can be very limiting, however, due to one informant's schedule and preferred way to participate, this method was considered appropriate.

Additionally, the email interview has been complemented with information the informant has expressed in his book.

The interview questions were formed to be suitable for online semi-structured interviews, where the informants are given space to lead the conversation, and a structured written interview. Two different rough outlines were written for this purpose (see app. 8.1 & 8.2) and each interview guide was then adapted to each informant, taking into account what previous knowledge I had of them and their involvement in the subject. The guides were also slightly adjusted during the interviews depending on the direction of the conversation. As I aimed for that "the interviewees must always feel motivated to share their experiences"⁶ (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wängnerud, 2016, p. 264), I allowed for change to the interview guide during the interviewing process as I gained insight in which questions worked well and which did not. A challenge I encountered with the guide for the structured interview was to formulate questions that were broad enough to encourage reflective answers but not too broad, to minimise the risk of the answers to be diffuse and unclear.

3.4 Transcribing

Each interview was between an hour and an hour and forty minutes long and transcription was done by hand, including questions and probes.⁷ From the transcribed interviews, some central themes were identified and chosen. The interview with the sound disturbances was difficult to transcribe as many words disappeared from the recording. As I lip read and guessed most of the words, I could understand more of the interview but following this came a higher risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. In a few cases, my father, who is a mutual contact and familiar with the vocabulary of the informant, helped me find the missing words and attain the entirety of the interview.

⁶ My translation.

⁷ Bernard (2006) writes that "The key to successful interviewing is learning how to probe effectively - that is, to stimulate a respondent to produce more information, without injecting yourself so much into the interaction that you only get a reflection of yourself in the data" (p. 201). I included the probes in the transcribing to give an insight into what the informants naturally elaborated on and what they elaborated on after probing.

3.5 Methodological Considerations

Bernard (2006) talks about the *deference effect* as what occurs “when people tell you what they think you want to know, in order not to offend you” (p. 220). Seeing as three of five informants are acquaintances of my parents and one a parent of my friend, there is a high probability of them adapting their answers according to what they think I want to know. The informants’ relationship dynamic with the mutual contact(s) will also influence their idea of who I am and what we can discuss and as a result, certain topics could be emphasised or even avoided. However, knowing that the relationship to the interviewer is somewhat limited can make it easier to open up (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wängnerud, 2016, p. 259). Furthermore, my previous understanding of the topic will affect the informants’ willingness to open up and share. In my case, I found this advantageous as I experienced that my previous knowledge and understanding provided a sense of trust and enabled a deeper connection. My probing and follow-up questions also played an important role here, giving them a sense of what I pick up on.

One noteworthy detail that I experienced and reflected on was that the interviews where I commenced by sharing my background and what initiated my interest in the research subject flowed more smoothly and the connection between me and the informant was different. I felt more comfortable asking additional questions and it felt more like a conversation than an interview. The interviews where I did not share or open up about myself first felt formal and I was less comfortable. This made me reflect on my role as an interviewer and how to make the informant feel comfortable in our meeting. Opening up about oneself and sharing personal details will definitely be beneficial to the dynamic and the flow of the interview. In the next chapter, I will discuss the various ethical considerations that arose during the research process.

4. Ethical Considerations

In alignment with the American Anthropological Association’s ethical guidelines (2012), I have been transparent with the informants about the purpose of the study and their participation, along with the use of the data collected through the interviews. During the initial contact with the potential informants, I shared the purpose of the research, the research

subject and what their roles in the research would be. The informants gave their consent to be interviewed, the call being recorded and me taking notes during the interview. Furthermore, at the beginning of the interview I explained more about the research and myself. Getting the informants' consent of participation prior to the research, but also during, is important (American Anthropological Association, 2012). Following this, I often emphasised further consent during the interviews; that the informants need not answer a question or can answer with how much or little detail they wish.

Additionally, expectations regarding anonymity were established and four of the informants have been given fictional names and remain anonymous. One informant consented to being presented as himself and so I have kept his name. It is also the researchers responsibility to protect the informants from becoming emotionally burdened following the interview (Bernard, 2006, p. 206). Researching and conducting interviews regarding personal belief systems, life philosophies and spirituality requires a level of sensitivity, flexibility and understanding to make sure the informant feels respected. I have therefore been careful in assuring the informants consent, and also assuring my availability post the interviews in case any questions or reflections arose.

The following chapter presents the key findings of the semi-structured interviews, the structured email interview and includes brief analyses and interpretations of this empirical data. The results will be discussed more in-depth in relation to the theoretical framework and the research questions in chapter six.

5. Results and Analysis

Following the themes that emerged from the interviews, this chapter is divided into different sections and subsections, beginning with the informants' backgrounds and involvement in the alternative field.

5.1 A Holistic Worldview

The debate between science and religion, and spirituality, have been around for centuries (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 282). Many people have attempted to unify them and understand the

connection between them. The informants I have interviewed are a few of these people who add to the discussion and offer insights into the individual driving factors that lie behind the phenomenon of questioning the philosophical foundations of science.

5.1.1 Getting Involved in Alternative and Holistic Science

Claire is a nature coach based in Scotland.⁸ She has three University Psychology Degrees; one undergraduate and two postgraduate degrees including an Honours Degree in Psychology, a Masters Degree in Applied Psychology, and a Masters Degree in Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology. She has further training in coaching and runs her own coaching training programmes where she trains nature coaches. On her website, she writes that she is “working to develop an emerging field of research on earth connection and its relevance to business in the 21st century.” In Claire’s own wording, what drives her to do the work she does is to help people realise and embody their full potential.

Alex is a Shamanic Psychologist and has gone through training to become a Yoga teacher, a Tai Chi teacher and has also done training in various healing and massage techniques that he practices with his clients.⁹ He has a Bachelor’s Degree both in Law and in Botany and Zoology. He receives clients one on one and in groups and also does workshops on subjects relating to consciousness and well-being. He practices various forms of holistic therapy techniques and identifies his work to be in the field of holistic science. Alex is driven by “helping people get past the programming of the mind to reach pure seeing” (more on “pure seeing” in section 5.1.2).

Louisa became interested in alternative healthcare when she injured her back and did not receive sufficient help in the mainstream healthcare system.¹⁰ Her back healed with help from a sports masseur who performed acupuncture. This encouraged her to do the training to become a sports masseur herself, and she later performed massage therapy while still working as a preschool teacher. She also received a Bachelor's Degree in Physiotherapy and is a

⁸ This interview was held on April 22nd, 2020.

⁹ This interview was held on April 23rd, 2020.

¹⁰ This interview was held on April 27th, 2020.

Qigong teacher, Tai Chi teacher, a Yoga teacher, has training in mindfulness, and does conversational therapy alongside massage therapy. Today she works with many of these techniques in her therapy work for the local municipality in Sweden. Louisa tells me she is passionate about helping people and seeing them grow and improve healthwise.

Michael is a medical doctor with additional training in the various techniques he uses as a practitioner today.¹¹ He left conventional medicine thirty years ago, where he worked as a general practitioner, due to the narrow way of thinking and limited space and freedom to explore. Today he uses different techniques for the benefit and well-being of his clients. Michael says he connects to a higher inspiration and helps people release stuck energy to allow it to flow freely in the body. He emphasises that he believes in a holistic approach to healing.

Fritjof Capra is a systems theorist, scientist, deep ecologist, and author.¹² He has a Ph.D. in theoretical physics and has spent twenty years doing research in high-energy physics. He has written and co-authored several books on systems theory and the integration of different dimensions of life to create a new way of thinking. Systems theory is a new emerging interdisciplinary field of research that studies systems. Systems thinking started within biology but developed to also be applicable to social systems,¹³ and, as Capra and Luisi (2014) writes, “In twentieth-century science, the holistic perspective became known as ‘systemic’ and the way of thinking it implies as ‘systems thinking’” (p. 63).

The discovery of atoms and subatomic particles led physicists to understand the universe as an “interconnected web of relationships whose parts can be defined only through their connections to the whole” (ibid., p. 79). This opened up to thinking in terms of connectedness, relationships, patterns, and context and understanding phenomena in relation to the interactions and relationships between its parts (ibid., p. 65). The authors write that the systems view of life “is an ecological view that is grounded, ultimately, in spiritual

¹¹ This interview was held on May 2nd, 2020.

¹² This interview was held on May 10th, 2020.

¹³ Systems theory also has a different meaning in social studies. Systems theory, in the sense it is presented in this paper, is derived from the original understanding of *General Systems Theory*, mapping principles of organisation of living systems (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 84).

awareness,” emphasising that connectedness, relationships, and community are the fundamental concepts of ecology and that the first two concepts along with belonging are the essence of spiritual experience (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 70).

Capra has done personal exploration in meditation alongside his scientific research and gained interest in the similarities between high-energy physics and the spiritual elements and philosophies of life. While doing research in theoretical high energy physics, Capra became interested in the philosophical implications of the conceptual revolution that took place in modern physics. He identified a shift from the mechanistic worldview, stemming from Descartes and Newton, to a systemic and ecological view. He deepened his exploration and started researching this shift in a wide range of fields of knowledge. The systemic perspective was central to his research in all these different fields and he identifies a sense of urgency about wanting to help overcome the current, multi-faceted, global crises. That urgency, together with having the curious mind of a scientist, he explains, drives him to do the work he does.

5.1.2 The Interconnectedness of Reality

The informants have very personal life philosophies, spiritual experiences and expressions of their spiritual beliefs, however some areas overlap. There are mutual views such as the core values and sacredness of spirituality, certain feelings surrounding spiritual experiences and the language used. Claire feels a strong unity through nature, Alex talks in terms of pure seeing, Louisa tunes in to a deep belonging and connection during difficult periods, Michael says he “embraces the flow of universal love” and Capra has reached fundamental insights through meditation.

Despite not learning in detail about Capra’s personal life philosophies, he gives us insight on what some of his driving forces are and shares some experiences. In 1975, Capra wrote *The Tao of Physics* (1975), discussing the relationship between Eastern mysticism and modern physics. He explains that his interest in Eastern mysticism, physics and the relationship between them arose during the 1960s, a period of profound and radical personal transformations in his life: “The spirituality, questioning of authority, sense of empowerment, and experience of community that were characteristic of those formative years became the

foundation of my values and of my activities as an environmental activist and educator,” he shares. During this period Capra practiced meditation, experimented with psychedelics, and read books about Eastern mysticism all while researching high-energy physics. He continues: “With the resulting expansion of my consciousness I soon recognized significant parallels between the basic concepts of modern physics and the principal ideas of Eastern spiritual traditions.”

Claire shares with me an explanation of the sacred connection she experiences with nature: “Something awesome happens when I’m out in nature, there’s this connection that flows through me and I feel as if I’m fucking nature itself.” Similarly, Michael talks about universal love flowing through him and all of us. He illustrates this by reading an excerpt from a text he wrote in 1999:

Love is universal, everywhere, to me there is nowhere it is not. This is universal love of course. Universal love is unconditional. Universal love is the true power in the universe. Emotional love excludes all but a few. Universal love is all inclusive. When love, universal love, is flowing through me, there is no judgement, no criticism of anyone. I only see their qualities, not their failings. Universal love is respect, universal love is service, can I be of service to you? Love, universal love is generosity, what of me can I give to you? Universal love is consciousness of the higher self. And universal love is not self-conscious.

Michael believes that the power of love is the only thing that can heal anybody from anything. This healing of the body means to unlock any blockages, be it emotional, physical, mental or spiritual, allowing universal love to flow through the body. Michael does not state explicitly what he believes universal love *is*, but he compares it to air, saying “it’s there, we’re not really conscious of it, we use it, it supports our lives.” The soul is all love, “our chunk of universal love,” he proceeds. In his work, Michael explains, he connects to his consciousness and higher self which then communicates with his patient’s higher self, and, through a machine, shows him where there are any blockages. When asked what this means to him, he takes a long pause before saying “I simply accept it, because it is what I do,” followed by a gentle laugh.

Claire's work includes coaching people in nature to achieve their full potential in life and business. A traumatic experience at the age of twenty-two was like a wakeup call to her, she explains. Following the wakeup call, she studied in different fields, first realising the nature part was missing in the spiritual approach and then that spirituality was missing from nature. The masters in Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology included a module looking at the spiritual human and nature relationship and also allowed her the freedom to fill the gaps in her own knowledge with the intricacies that she previously felt were lacking. Claire then developed a steady foundation on which she could consciously create a sustainable organisation that she hopes will still emerge as a relevant and leading organisation in eighty years time.

Alex's way of seeing the world permeates his work through and through. He says that the brain is keeping us from seeing what is actually there. He uses techniques to get past the programming of the mind and reach what he calls "pure seeing." Pure seeing is the consciousness we reach when we drop the human identity and see things without judging, intellectualising or putting labels on them, he explains. We see reality in a deeper form, and consciousness is the only thing that doesn't change at all. This is the perspective from holistic science: "What it comes down to in holistic science is that who human beings are is a divine soul, pure spirit or pure consciousness, having a human experience."

Through a specific technique that Alex has developed, he assists people to reach a deep meditative state, to stop the programming of the mind and to attain a state of pure seeing. Alex is active within the field of holistic science, which he defines as "the science of everything" including all dimensions, angel realms, arch angels and "whatever else you may think of." Holistic science encompasses everything and, as opposed to the narrower view of knowledge within school science, includes a broader definition of knowledge.

Louisa acknowledges a restriction in what type of knowledge is accepted regarding her work. She feels a lack of open mindedness but has trust in herself: "I know what works, I know in *here*," she says and points at her chest, "what is right and I try to work from that."¹⁴ She

¹⁴ My translation.

participated in training for Christian spiritual counselling,¹⁵ along with ten ministers.

Although not religious herself, she acknowledged a spiritual element in the ministers when they were talking and sharing. I get the sense that Louisa is struggling for words while trying to explain her experience: “It was something special, they had another dimension with them [...] I can’t explain it in any other way, it was very relaxing you know... non-judgemental...”

¹⁶ When asked whether or not she recognised herself in those things, she reflected: “Do you know what I think it was? [...] that when you have a different view, when you have another dimension with you, then I felt that I could mirror that with them.”¹⁷

The lack of a holistic perspective in Louisa’s Physiotherapy education made her consider quitting several times. Nevertheless, she finished her degree and decided to distance herself from conventional care to help people unblock physical and emotional blocks with help from different therapeutic techniques. The relationship between the body and the soul along with a holistic perspective of the human being appears to be central to her work.

5.1.3 An Experience Beyond Language

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.
The named is the mother of ten thousand things.
Ever desireless, one can see the mystery.
Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations.
These two spring from the same source but differ in name;
this appears as darkness.
Darkness within darkness.
The gate to all mystery. (Tzu, 1972)

The informants seem to share the feeling that language often is an insufficient method to justly explain and share personal spiritual experiences. These experiences are sometimes so sacred that in the attempt to put it into words, the depth and meaning is lost.

¹⁵ Swedish: s jalv r dsutbildning

¹⁶ My translation.

¹⁷ My translation.

When discussing whether or not language captures the essence of a spiritual experience and nature connection, Claire refers to one of the foundational texts of Taoism, the Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu (1972): “The Dao that can be spoken is not the Dao.” She explains the importance of embodying the spiritual element so well that it is picked up non-verbally to the point where words become superfluous. “Nature is non-verbal,” she emphasises, while explaining her desire to build a community around her that embodies the connection to nature without having to use words. Alex has a similar reasoning saying: “how do you then use language to talk about something that is energetic rather than intellectual? [...] how reality works is not intellectually [...] so that’s why, when you come back with a story or a myth because how are you best going to talk about reality when it won’t be captured in words?” Alex suggests that stories are a good way of expressing an experience that is otherwise difficult to make tangible. He says that symbols and archetypes are the language of Spirit and work beyond the material world pointing to an energetic reality in the next dimension.

When asked if she could share what spirituality and nature connection means to her and how she would define it, Claire says “I don’t know if I have words for it because what I have found is that [...] the people who are talking about this, don’t have a fucking clue, but the people who know about it aren’t talking about it.” She goes on saying “and I understand why, because the words, any explanation in words that I give to you, will not do it justice because they will be heard and interpreted by you based on where you are.” She explains how sacred it all - what it means to have consciousness, to have awareness, to feel, to think - is to her: “I mean it kind of moves me to tears and I know that you can’t tell anybody about it, they have to experience it and that’s built in to even how I work in coaching.”

Michael also reflects on the use of language in relation to spiritual experiences and the work he does. “The fact that people can’t explain it doesn’t matter. Accept it, it’s magic, it’s happened, so great, wonderful! Let somebody else work out the why,” he says. I ask my question about how you talk about something if you can’t find words that do the experience justice, to which he replies: “If I was a poet... to me, poets are the only people who put so much feeling into a few words. Uh, and I’m not a poet, so...,” followed by a strained facial expression and, “it is difficult.” He continues by addressing those who have sacred and

magical experiences: “[...] they see the magic happen, they experience it, they are part of it, they witness it, they receive it, they are involved in it. How to explain it, doesn’t matter. The only thing that’s important is, does it work?”

Many words and expressions were used by all of the informants, albeit in different contexts. Some of these include consciousness, dimension, holistic, paradigm, intuition, healing, alternative, and energy. I recognise these words as being common in the field of holism and spirituality, which could imply that there in fact is certain language available to use in order to fathom thoughts on energetic experiences. Claire expresses a few times a discontentment with the language that *is* available to use, and a dislike when other people use that language. The words and language are seen to be lacking in depth and meaning, when, as Claire says, the people uttering them are not embodying the depth and meaning of them. That people are able to practice the spiritual elements from a deep level of integrity is important to her, and not just claiming to know it, “wearing the costumes.” There is thus a sense of aversion to use some of the language that exists, that does not fully embody and capture the essence and depth of the personal spiritual and sacred experiences and connections.

5.2 The Informants’ Views on the Relationship Between Science and Spirituality

The informants also have similar understandings regarding the field of science, the favouring of rationality over spirituality and the favouring of a mechanistic approach to the world over a holistic one. It also emerged that they experience several challenges in regards to science and scientific thinking that oppose their ontological and philosophical standpoints. Parallels between ancient knowledge and modern science also surfaced in several of the interviews.

5.2.1 The Informants’ Understanding of Science

When it comes down to fundamentals about science, they’re based on philosophy, and philosophical assumptions are basically perspectives of seeing the world and there’s no way of proving or disproving them. So when you have a mainstream belief system, that takes precedence over anything else. So the other stuff gets pushed to the sides, ‘oh no, that’s not possible,’ that gets discounted.

Claire shares some reflections on the fundamentals of science. Her observation on the relationship between science and spirituality in the domain of psychology, but also in society in general, is that we've once deemed the two fields completely different only to now realise that they actually cannot be separated and that we do not know how to weave them back together. She explains that the more people try to disprove the connectedness of these two fields, the more evidence they gather to suggest the alternative. Even within neuroscience people are realising that the mind does not exist and actually just is a construct. Louisa shares the same understanding and says that despite there still being resistance and that there still needs to be scientific evidence for the effects of alternative practices, there might be an opening through neuroscience: "I believe that neuroscience maybe is a part in bridging science with these spiritual principles or alternative principles."¹⁸ Both Louisa and Claire mention how science today is largely focused on measuring and monitoring. The overall holistic approach is lost and there is a disconnection from the human spiritual element.

Alex, on the other hand, shows an appreciation for scientific experiments, explaining that he likes the idea of replicating experiments. To do an experiment that can also be tested by someone else, he says, is the best part of science, and he would like to see similar experiments being done in multidimensions: "There doesn't seem to be any difficulty with doing experiments such as a shaman [...] having a journey inside somebody else's body and coming back and drawing the cancer or the whatever it is they found inside the body and then having an x-ray and seeing whether it matches."

While Claire admits that she sets out to get scientific degrees for credibility and confidence in her work, she also recognises the not-very-objective base that science and scientific methods are built upon. She compares scientists and psychics, saying that both make predictions of information: "the only difference is that the psychic is saying that 'I'm intuitively getting this information,' and the scientist is going 'I've objectively measured this so that I know that it's accurate.'" The issue here is that intuition is not regarded as a viable method and that, in the West, intuition has been radically disregarded in favour of rational thinking.

¹⁸ My translation.

Michael says that the separation of the left brain, the rational side, and the right brain, the creative and intuitive side, stemmed from the findings and doings of Newton and Descartes. The focus of and training into the left brain while ignoring parts of our right brain “makes us think that the only things we can touch, discuss, everything, that things that are just tangible and logical, are acceptable,” he notes. From Descartes’ renowned “I think, therefore I am,”¹⁹ to the scientific findings of Newton, the attention was on thinking rather than feeling. “I think we’re trained to drown out our intuition because of our training and left-brain logic and assessment mentally, rather than following our feelings,” Michael claims.

Claire makes a similar point regarding intuition and scientific experiments: “I don’t think science is as scientific as it would like to believe, [...] so there’s this element whereby I think it is far too easy for science to be distorted by human agendas and human emotions, so it is not as pure as people would like science to believe.” Ideas within the mainstream field of science then take precedence over any alternative view. “For me [it] comes down to [that] the biggest problem in objective science are the humans that are doing it. We’ve even got research that shows that how we believe about the experiment is then going to influence and impact the results.”

5.2.2 The Role of Science in the Informants’ Practices and Work

When discussing whether or not their scientific education serves credibility in their work, specifically for it being scientific, there are somewhat contrasting views and experiences. For Alex, it has not made such a difference since his clients come to him via word of mouth. However, Claire, Michael and Louisa acknowledge that their scientific background has given them credibility in the work they do and with the people they meet. Claire says “I recognise that people value the academic achievements, and the scientific credibility, so I set out to get them [...] to give additional weight to what I did.” She acknowledges that a credible evidence base will allow other people to use and build on her work so that it can be recognised as a valuable methodology.

¹⁹ René Descartes was known to have reached many of his insights through metaphysical reflection and meditation (see Descartes, 2012). Through his meditations he explored ontological questions regarding Being and thinking, formulating his renowned philosophical statement “I think, therefore I am.”

Michael says that his intense medical background is bound to influence his work and give him more credibility. Despite it not being fulfilling for him in the past, his background in science serves as a backdrop for everything he does and is one part of a complete perspective. Michael also experiences a challenge from the traditional outlook of science. He acknowledges that some scientists think that one of the machines he uses in his practice is useless, but he quotes an old friend that once said “that’s like saying ‘That piano is useless, certainly you put me in front of a piano and it *is* useless. Put Lang Lang in front of a piano and you get sonic poetry.’” He continues, “If you can use the instrument, master the instrument.” Furthermore, Louisa is convinced she wouldn’t be in the same job if she did not have her degree in Physiotherapy. It has been her way in, enabling her to work at the local municipality, despite that her degree and the knowledge gained from it is a very small part of the work she does today.

5.2.3 The Relationship Between Eastern Philosophy and Modern Science

When philosophical and ontological disagreements arise between different knowledge-producing systems, the mainstream system will often take precedence over the others. The informants experience different levels of acceptance from society regarding the philosophy of science and philosophy of spirituality. While acknowledging fundamental differences, they also recognise similarities between modern science, Eastern philosophy and new spirituality.

Claire sees a link between new research that is being done and proven with ancient philosophy. She means that going back 2000 years for instance, Buddhist philosophy has said that the mind is a construct, which neuroscience just now is realising. Michael agrees and says that the more he continues, the more he realises that the ancient East were wise and correct. He refers to ancient Chinese knowledge and the barefoot doctors a few times when it comes to their approaches and way of working,²⁰ and agrees with that energy flowing through the body without interruption and balance in the body prevents illness. He explained that barefoot doctors only were paid when the patient was healthy, thus running a *health* service rather than a *sickness* service.

²⁰ Barefoot doctors were farmers, folk healers and graduates who worked as medicinal practitioners in rural areas in China, as a complement to urban-area doctors, during the 1960s and 1970s (Tu, 2016).

Capra has drawn many similarities between Eastern knowledge and mysticism and science. However, when delving deeper into Eastern mysticism, he has experienced challenges when it comes to approaching the teachings both rationally, through scholarly research, and experientially, through meditative experience. He says it took several years to find a balance between the two contrasting approaches. Louisa also acknowledges that things that ancient masters within Yoga, Qigong or traditional Chinese medicine have said for centuries, that were previously seen as wacky nonsense, are just now becoming acceptable because research has been done and says it is reasonable knowledge.

5.3 The Role of Science in a New Paradigm

Having expressed facing several challenges within science and issues with which they disagree, there seems to be dissatisfaction with the current scientific approach. Challenges in relating to rational thinking in science result in the desire to create a new way of relating to the world. The informants share a unifying vision of what a new paradigm should entail. They all believe that a holistic approach is preferable and advantageous moving forward. However, their views on how to reach this new holistic paradigm differs. The first question that arises is whether or not the informants believe that the two contrasting fields of science and spirituality can and should be merged.

5.3.1 The Possibility of Bridging the Gap Between Science and Spirituality

Alex does not believe that science and holistic science could ever meet. He reflects that there is a struggle for the alternative scene in what he calls “real science” since people can just make it up and nobody can check if you’re spiritually correct or not. He elaborates on the relationship between science and holistic science: “But they won’t meet in any way, because holistic science means what it says, which is the science of everything. [...] it encompasses everything, there’s no box within which you have knowledge and outside is ‘don’t go there.’ Contrastingly, school science has a box which says ‘if you can’t test it by our methods, it does not exist.’” On the other hand, Alex’s idea on making scientific experiments in multidimensions with shamans, presented in 5.2.1, suggests that there can be a linkage between spirituality and scientific methods. In his example the scientific methods would validate the spiritual practice.

Michael thinks the boxes within which knowledge is put is tragic “because trying to squeeze things into boxes, you lose information. You lose context. Whereas if you keep all the information [...] as part of a much wider, vastly more integrated whole [...] you’re looking, you know, expansive. That’s where the beauty is, in the expanse.” However, there is a wish to embrace the advantages and perspectives of each field to strengthen our overall knowledge. “Unless something is scientifically proven these days, it’s regarded as nonsense. [...] my wish would be that we use knowledge, experiences, perspectives to enrich each other,”²¹ says Louisa.

Louisa’s wish is to take the best of both worlds and use them together, to get the best possible outcome for the patient. Her wish does not seem far-fetched as she, Claire and Michael all acknowledge the positive effects their scientific backgrounds have had in their practices, as previously mentioned in 5.2.2. Similarly to Louisa, Claire believes that science and spirituality should be bridged, and her work has shown how this can be done. She tells me that, during her masters in Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology, she and an intern developed a psychometric tool of measuring nature connection, and “apparently I’ve developed a whole new emerging field of research,” she says. She explains that to her it is a game of “how do I merge [science and spirituality] together” so that other people down the line can build upon her work, essentially shortcutting their journey.

Drawing on Capra and Luisi’s (2014) definition of spirituality, understanding it as inner growth and being correlated with a sense of connectedness and belonging, they claim that there cannot be a dichotomy between modern science and spirituality, and that spirituality is compatible with the systems view of life (p. 279 & 282). They write that “the fate and well-being of modern civilization will be shaped significantly by the balance (or lack thereof) between the two opposing developments of technological progress and spiritual wisdom. Clearly, a science ‘without a soul’ would lead to disaster. Conversely, we cannot manage our complex modern world with a purely spiritual approach” (ibid., p. 275-276).

²¹ My translation.

5.3.2 Movements Propagating a Paradigm Shift in the View of Knowledge and Science

Working towards a more holistic approach to health and way of living is a shared vision for all the informants. They are all passionate about what they believe is needed to be done for the implementation of a system change. To help others realise their full potential, full health and to pave the way for others are some of the key factors that arose during the interviews. So how do you make a system change? For Claire it's been about "playing the game" in order to take the rules and change them to your advantage in order to play the game better. She is essentially striving towards finding out what it takes for us to shift our understandings of ourselves and the world and get back into harmony with the earth, trying to figure out how to merge science and spirituality. Louisa also mentions to "play the game" for a special purpose, adapting her work in order to fulfill what she wants.

Furthermore, Claire does not believe the mainstream story will change overnight. She reflects on the works of Thomas Kuhn and explains that paradigm shifts, according to Thomas Kuhn, is how you create a shift or a scientific revolution: "you present the ideas, people fight back against the ideas, the ideas gather traction, more people fight back against them and then boom, all of a sudden they're accepted as the new normal." Having been involved in the field of psychology for twenty years, she is seeing that dramatic shift occur, meaning that the thoughts and ideas she leans towards were already in existence in the 50's and 60's and are now gathering more traction. Ideas within psychology that Abraham Maslow published in the 60's are being revisited and brought forth and the relevance of them are being reconsidered in the 21st century. When we expand our thinking, ideas that once seemed crazy don't anymore, Claire points out: "The guy that was once ridiculed ten years ago is actually getting more and more credibility and traction and is getting [...] published in mainstream journals."

Alex identifies different movements that are aiming to shift the mainstream story. These movements consist of hundreds of thousands of small organisations with no central command applying loose leadership, group decision making and forming community, which is the key moving forward to a new paradigm, according to Alex. Since decision-making and power is distributed throughout the organisations, it is hard to pick apart and stop the movements. The old paradigm is central command with no diversity, which is why it will fail, he says and adds: "nature does *no* central command." Alex considers himself to be a part of one of those

movements; the consciousness and alternative health movement. Likewise, Claire wonders how to create sustainable organisations in contrast to the current organisations that were created seventy years ago which have “power structures that are no longer valid and actually [are] creating discord within the world.”

I asked Michael whether he feels there is a shift in consciousness happening, to which he replied “Oh, I’m sure there is.” Reflecting on his role in this change, Michael says that “All I can do is speak the truth as I see it.” Acknowledging one’s own responsibility and role in this change has not been overlooked. A part of that role is helping other people along, making the path easier for others to navigate. Claire says that she is seeing more people awakening:

I’m watching the seeds, the points of people awakening in various forms and it’s accelerating.

She acknowledges that she needs to do whatever she can so more people can wake up, which is what is needed for evolution. She points out that there is a connectedness in this rapid transformation occurring. “We all go or nobody goes,” she says, continuing with explaining that sharing our questioning in whatever way that we can is imperative to the change. Claire emphasises the importance of the collective and also acknowledges that there are other people going through a similar journey as her, while perceiving themselves as separate and this makes it even more imperative to take the action. Alex also recognises his role in his spiritual journey:

Everybody is as important as everybody else and everybody’s as powerful as everybody else and everybody’s as spiritual as everyone else. We’re all divine beings having a human experience, just because somebody says ‘Oh I’m realising a thing or two,’ you know, doesn’t make you sort of special or better, it just means that you can help other people along.

Claire concludes her reflections on the transformation taking place with revisiting the importance of embodying the knowledge you gain during the spiritual journey and turning it into action. This is how the experiences are lived and realised, and how insights are brought into form. “It’s the action, it’s the embodiment, it’s the transformation from the insights that creates the shift,” she says.

Looking back on his explorations of different fields of knowledge after stopping his research in high-energy physics, Capra says he can see that they amounted to the systematic investigation of a central theme, namely “the fundamental change of worldview, or change of paradigms, that is now occurring in science and in society; the unfolding of a new vision of reality, and the social and political implications of this cultural transformation.” He lists a number of global challenges including environmental degradation, climate change, violence, war and economic inequality followed by stating that none of these can be understood, let alone solved, in isolation. They are all interconnected and interdependent which is why there needs to emerge a new way of thinking and looking at these issues. Capra believes that this thinking should be in terms of patterns, relationships and context - systems thinking.

5.3.3 Conceptualising a New Scientific Paradigm

Holism was not only a constant, but also a common interest underpinning the areas covered in the interviews. Alex shared some substantial suggestions on what he believes a new paradigm should look like. He believes the foundation of the new paradigm is people getting their power back by getting their spiritual connection, meaning that people start opening up to that they’re not alone and they have a community, whatever form that may take (virtual or physical), and also that they matter to the community. Alex expects that humans will, as previously mentioned in section 5.3.2, organise themselves in communities with no central command. Fundamental to the new paradigm is also having a huge respect for Mother Earth and therefore to examine our consumption habits. Alex summarises his views of the new paradigm:

It’s about personally awaking on an individual level as the beginning of being able to contribute as a steward on the planet to reducing the harm that we’ve been doing as human beings and put things to right through getting together and listen to each other and visioning the future and creating a golden age.

Alex tells me that his personal vision is peace on earth, ecological renewal and rights for all humans, plants and animals. Despite not speaking in detail about what they would like a new paradigm to consist of, Claire, Michael and Louisa in other ways shared their stance regarding the current way of being, offering alternative approaches and actions. Claire

mentioned several times her vision of having a community around her that embodies the nature and spiritual connection. She works on an individual level as well as a collective level, helping people realise their full potential as individuals but also working to do the systems change, creating a new way of relating to nature and merging spirituality and science. She reflects that in her work she talks about it as “creating a sustainable world” but that it is more “How do *we* come back into harmony with the earth?”

Michael’s view of health is holistic, taking into consideration the mental, physical, emotional *and* spiritual factors to a person's health. If intuition is the voice of our soul, and our soul is our chunk of universal love, the disconnection from the right side of our brains, our feelings and our intuition has arguably hindered us from connecting deeply to our souls and love. Michael believes we should train our intuition more, become more balanced and be free of illness. Louisa is also a strong believer that holistic health is the way to go. Taking knowledge from school science and alternative sciences respectively is beneficial to enhance our overall knowledge. Her example is China, where doctors from mainstream medicine and traditional Chinese medicine work alongside each other with the patient’s health in mind, collaborating, complementing and enriching each other. The soul is a core within all of us, connecting us to something bigger than ourselves, Louisa suggests, and it’s about the entirety of it all.

Evolution is no longer seen as a competitive struggle for existence, but rather as a cooperative dance in which creativity and the constant emergence of novelty are the driving forces.

Capra’s metaphor that evolution now is seen as a cooperative dance where creativity and novelty are the driving forces offers an alternative perspective on existence. When the focus shifts from competition, struggle and performance to creativity and innovation, there is more space for differences, development and inclusion. The holistic approach is also central to Capra’s views on the new vision of reality. The paradigm shift is leaving behind a view of the universe as a machine and opening up for a view of the world as a network with interconnected pieces and inseparable patterns of relationships, Capra predicts. Contemporary science is changing its views and discovering that the planet as a whole is a living, self-regulating system: “The view of the human body as a machine and of the mind as a

separate entity is being replaced by one that sees not only the brain, but also the immune system, the bodily tissues, and even each cell as a living, cognitive system,” he writes.

This appears to be in accordance with the other informants’ views, treating the body not separately from the emotions, mind and spiritual element but as one being where these aspects need to be taken into account when it comes to healing. Capra suggests that focus will turn to quality in the new paradigm with systems thinking: “And with the new emphasis on complexity, networks, and patterns of organization, a new science of qualities is slowly emerging.”

In the next chapter, I will discuss these findings in relation to the research purpose and questions along with the theoretical framework.

6. Discussion

Here, I will further analyse the findings in relation to the research purpose and questions, and theoretical framework. Possibilities and shortcomings of the informants’ views will also be considered.

6.1 Spirituality as a Postsecular Movement

The informants share beliefs and philosophies that are central to the various definitions of spirituality discussed in 2.2. Capra and Luisi (2014) explain that a spiritual experience can be understood as a “nonintellectual experience of reality” (p. 277) and the informants expressed a difficulty in explaining and putting words on to their sacred experiences and beliefs, or regarded this as unimportant: “you can’t tell anybody about it, they have to experience it” (quote from Claire). The inability or unwillingness to express it in words may portray that it is too sacred to attempt to intellectually understand or share.

Furthermore, the connectedness and relationship with sacredness was central to King’s (2003), Capra and Luisi’s (2014) and Tacey’s (2004) explorations of what spirituality is. Claire, Alex, Louisa and Capra all mention the importance of connectedness; the interconnectedness of different aspects of life, the various parts of a system, to others as a

community and to “something bigger than ourselves.” Michael mentions that universal love is unconditional and all inclusive, again indicating connectedness. This connectedness can further be understood to be similar as the unity of the self and the world, which Capra and Luisi see as a result of a spiritual experience. Likewise, the holistic view of seeing the body and health in its whole, embraced especially by Michael and Louisa, aligns with the spiritual experience that “goes beyond the separation of the mind and body” (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 277). The holistic view to see things as more than just the sum of its parts corresponds to the importance of interconnectedness found in spirituality and systems thinking. Holism, systems thinking and spirituality can therefore be understood to be vitally connected.

When talking about their spiritual experiences, consciousness is a central and recurring concept. The informants explain “consciousness” as “waking up,” “awareness,” and “pure seeing,” also implying that an expanding consciousness leads to clarity and is the core of the spiritual experience. Albeit occasionally using different language to explain it, be it holistic science, spirituality or universal love, and having slightly differing understandings of spiritual and holistic practices, the informants seemingly share a similar fundamental understanding and philosophy of reality. Their spiritual experiences are personal but share some fundamental characteristics recognised in spirituality by Capra and Luisi (2014), Walach and Reich (2005), Tacey (2004) and King (2003). One aspect of spirituality brought up by the informants, but not found in the definitions on spirituality presented in 2.2, is the soul. Alex, Michael and Louisa suggest that the soul is the core of the being, although they explain it in different ways.

When talking about their backgrounds, all of the informants identified a moment or period of their lives where their interest in a spiritual and holistic philosophy became evident and strong. These moments were identified as trauma, intense periods of questioning, personal feelings of urgency regarding global crises, dissatisfaction with school science and the narrowness of Western education and healthcare. As Tacey (2005) writes, it is likely that spirituality arises in critical periods of external instability and uncertainty (p. 25). For the informants, while experiencing external uncertainty, their energies were turned inwards. As Bruce (2010) writes regarding postsecularism, people in the modern world are more likely to be drawn to “self-constructed individualistic ‘New Age’ spiritualities” (p. 134-135). All of

the informants seem to have constructed their own forms of spirituality; holistic science, nature connection, universal love, systems theory and holistic care.

While it is not evident to identify the informants' standpoints as a postsecular movement due to the differing labels and explanations, the fundamental features of their experiences and philosophies which they explain, do point towards them ascribing to a new postsecular form of spirituality. The fact that their descriptions differ also illustrate the point that King (2003) and Tacey (2004) make, in that a new spirituality is a product of modernity and ascribes to the secular societies' hard-won democratic rights and freedoms, as it highlights the wide range of possible individual spiritual experiences. Modern society emphasises individualism and autonomy, not traditional or religious authorities, which is noticeable in the spirituality the informants have described. On the other hand, the informants referred back to and drew parallels between ancient Eastern philosophy, including Buddhism and Taoism, and modern spirituality, thus corresponding with Beckford's (2012) idea that postsecularism is a "progressive development that builds on the achievements of both religion and secularism" (p. 3).

6.2 Navigating Science

The informants share a struggle of navigating in science. They face challenges such as science being in discordance with their personal philosophies, too narrow and not inclusive. However, there are different views regarding the potential integration of science and spirituality or holistic science and what parts of science are compatible with their spiritual and holistic philosophies and values.

Michael and Louisa have struggled with scientific education and work within Western healthcare as they experienced no space or freedom to explore. As Harding (2015) discusses, Western science has a secular foundation and is separated from spirituality (p. 127). The lack of a spiritual perspective in scientific and academic spheres sends a message to spiritual practitioners and believers that they do not belong in these spheres. The secular outlook has become hegemonic in the West and often disregards spirituality as nonsense. Michael has faced critique from other scientists regarding technologies and machines he uses, despite himself experiencing them as highly efficient in his practice as a Doctor. There also seems to

be a feeling that school science is the only way to be taken seriously, but that a scientific education can prove useful in society. Louisa, Claire and Michael acknowledge that their scientific backgrounds have played an important role in where they are and what they do today, and Louisa is confident she would not have gotten her job without a scientific education. Michael sees his scientific background as a backdrop for the work he does, and Claire identifies that people value academic achievements and scientific credibility, so she sets out to get them.

However, though science might be found useful in some cases, the philosophies of science do not align with the informants' personal philosophies. Both Alex and Michael see school science as a non-inclusive box of knowledge and when knowledge cannot be tested by scientific methods, it is not scientifically valid. Trying to squeeze things into boxes leads to loss of information and context, Michael states. However, it can also be argued that putting knowledge into boxes makes the knowledge more manageable and researchable. Michael's contrasting opinion about keeping the information as part of a wider and more integrated whole can also be useful in the understanding of phenomena, as researching them in the context of a wider whole leads to a different understanding than when just observing them in themselves. In the act of separating things to study them, you risk losing valuable aspects and insights. Capra agrees that it is necessary to understand things in their relationships to other things.

Alex likes the idea of replicating scientific experiments and expresses an interest in trying spiritual practices such as shamanistic journeying in multidimensions with scientific experiments, in order to see if the shamanic journey matches the scientific methods. Contrastingly, Louisa and Claire express discontentment with that science today is largely focused on measuring and monitoring, and that the holistic approach is lost. There is a disconnection from the human spiritual element and secular science promotes rationality above intuition and feeling. The issue seems to be when science states it is objective, and disregards the agendas and intuition that play a role in the research. Objectivity is a heated topic surrounding the scientific field, and although there is more acknowledgement regarding the human subjectivity in research, the rational is still prioritised over intuition due to the rules and structures of science and scientific methods. Since intuition and spirituality are very

personal, it would be difficult to use them as a base for scientific research and to use it to create common understandings of phenomena. Although it seems to be more the values behind the contrasting methods that are not compatible.

A few other contradictions between science and spirituality are that in the informants' spirituality, words and labels are not necessary or important, whereas science functions thanks to categories, labels and explanations. This is also a direct contrast to the consciousness or "pure seeing" that Alex explained which is seeing things without "judging, intellectualising or putting labels on them." Scientific method *is* understanding through intellectualising, categorising and labels. Furthermore, Alex suggests sharing spiritual experiences through stories, and although stories are made from words, they are built on archetypes and symbols that represent the energies of spiritual experiences and other dimensions and translate them into intellectually tangible things. To express it is, however, not a necessity for the spiritual experience and philosophy. Claire says "you can't tell anybody about it, they have to experience it." The personal sacredness of spirituality seems more important than to make it intellectually and linguistically tangible for others, as opposed to organised religion which attempts to interpret these experiences with words and concepts for the purpose of making these a source for moral guidelines (Capra & Luisi, 2014, p. 280).

When asked whether or not science and spirituality or holistic science can and should be bridged, the informants' presented different perspectives. Alex's response to this is that school science is too narrow a box for it to ever be integrated with holistic science or spirituality. He says that holistic science is "the science of everything" and encompasses everything, and therefore is not compatible with school science, which is limited. Louisa, Claire and Capra believe in bridging the gap between these fields. Louisa's wish is to take knowledge, experiences and perspectives from each field and enrich each other. She believes neuroscience is an opening to bridging the two fields, and Claire acknowledges that new research on the mind as a construct is changing the game. This research within modern science is compatible with not only new spiritual philosophy, but also ancient Eastern philosophy. As more research is being done, old philosophies and knowledge are being revisited, and could be a way to integrate science and spirituality.

Another way is what Claire is doing within the scientific field; developing new scientific tools to measure spiritual elements and nature connection. Capra's answer is systems theory and modern physics that comply with that of the new systems view of life, and thus, spirituality. Michael says that he simply accepts that the methods he uses work, not worrying too much about the "why." This can be understood as him just accepting what works best for him without an element of critical thinking, however, since he has practiced alternative medicine and healing for so long, and has gone from mainstream healthcare to alternative healthcare, he has disregarded what has not worked and now goes with what does work in accordance with his values, beliefs and philosophies. There is no need to understand it all intellectually, because the spiritual includes feeling, intuition and emotional areas of human experience too, as Tacey (2004) writes.

6.3 Paving a New Path

Going forward, the informants visualise a fairly similar reality and world. The new paradigm the informants are helping create could be a postsecular one with a holistic approach to health, science and life in general. Spirituality does not abide to the values and philosophies of the secular science that has been dominating the West the last few centuries. Although they can overlap in some areas, such as in methods and experiments, what is emphasised and prioritised differs greatly.

Despite not agreeing with the philosophies of science, Capra, Louisa and Claire seem to accept secular science currently being the most acceptable way to produce knowledge. They have a goal to bridge the two fields, and Claire and Louisa aim to change the game through playing the game. The informants all recognise some attractive features of science, from modern science and scientific credibility to the scientific methods. In line with Beckford's (2012) ideas about postsecularism, the informants' standpoints regarding science could indicate that the new spirituality, as a postsecular movement, is a "revision of a previously overconfidently secularist outlook" (p. 3). Claire sees that many organisations that were created seventy years ago have power structures that are no longer valid and are creating disharmony in the world. The informants' backgrounds in scientific education and work imply that they have tried out different things and are now considering what parts of science, if any, they deem applicable to their personal philosophies and visions.

My understanding is that the issue with science is that it is so prioritised and that other knowledge systems and philosophies are disregarded if they do not fit the various criteria of science, or are not in unison with the philosophies of science, as Claire says: “So when you have a mainstream belief system, that takes precedence over anything else. So the other stuff gets pushed to the sides, ‘oh no, that’s not possible,’ that gets discounted.” The main concern seems to be the underlying values and the dogmatism found in some areas of science, that does not allow for alternative philosophies to exist. Instead, the informants envision and want to create a paradigm where holism is one of the main perspectives. King (2003) says there might be emerging a quality of thought that goes beyond the secular “but which is more open to the spiritual than the secular mind has generally been” (p. 10), which seems to be in alignment with the informants’ visions.

In the new paradigm, spirituality in all its wide varieties and definitions are accepted. Claire says it is the “embodiment, it’s the transformation from the insights that creates the shift.” The spirituality that is intimate and transformative (Tacey, 2004, p. 7) can result in both inner and external transformations, in order to mirror the external environment with the internal. Capra and Claire talk about this transformation happening as a paradigm change, where a fundamental change of worldview is happening in science and society. Claire also regards the resistance from some as normal, seeing to Kuhn’s (1996, p. 92) theories on paradigm shifts. Scientific facts emerge out of “an entire constellation of human perceptions, values, and actions” (ibid., p. 3), and accordingly, if there is a conflict in the scientific field and science is not seen as satisfactory, or even fulfilling, then perceptions, values and actions must change in order for science to change.

This is why Capra is striving for a new worldview within science, backed up by modern physics, as he sees that the current mechanistic way of thinking within science is unsuitable for the challenges we are facing around the world. Systems theory offers a new perspective for science as it shifts the focus from the mechanistic to the holistic, from separateness to connectedness (Capra & Luisi, 2014, 63-64). Meanwhile, Alex does not believe in an integration of holistic science and school science and shares what he believes the new paradigm is about:

It's about personally awaking on an individual level as the beginning of being able to contribute as a steward on the planet to reducing the harm that we've been doing as human beings and put things to right through getting together and listen to each other and visioning the future and creating a golden age.

Connection to nature, relationships to others, community, connectedness and responsibility are part of his vision for the future. I understand the connectedness referred to by the informants as a connection beyond the physical and biological which aligns with Walach and Reich's (2005) idea of spirituality and transcendent being (p. 428). This connectedness is also shown in the informants' urge and desire to help people in health but also along the spiritual path, and to make it easier for others going through similar experiences. So a new paradigm might be a postsecular society being more open to spirituality and Eastern philosophies, and demonstrate pluralism in the sense of "treasuring our presecular heritage, but denying primacy to any one tradition" (King, 2003, p. 11).

Finally, I will present a short conclusion to the research in the following chapter.

7. Conclusion

The informants share some similar values and outlooks regarding science and the compatibility between science and spirituality, but also have some differing perspectives. A few informants presented various ways to merge science and spirituality and saw benefits of taking the best of both fields. Others advocated for a completely new way of thinking and could not see science and spirituality or holism merging. The traditional philosophies of Western science are not seen to be compatible with the philosophies of spirituality and holism, however modern science is believed to contribute to a shift in philosophies in the scientific field. The dissatisfaction with school science could stem from a discontentment about secular science being experienced as the only acceptable approach in Western society. Here, a plurality of approaches could be seen as useful, however, more research is needed in this area.

The informants can be understood to be part of an emerging spiritual movement propagating a holistic outlook on reality. The informants' turning to a new spirituality seems to be a reaction and response to both individual experiences and global challenges. These findings point towards the possibility of the existence of a larger postsecular movement, although further research must be done in order to establish this. Furthermore, to be able to understand this movement as a part in a paradigm change, we would need extensive understanding of the current paradigm, its values, methods, philosophies and explore whether or not this is in transformation. Finally, this thesis has given us insight into the individual perspectives of five informants regarding their views of the compatibility of science and spirituality, and more research needs to be done in this area as to extensively understand spirituality, its relationship to science and their respective roles in our contemporary Western society.

8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1 - Interview Guide for Semi-structured Interviews

Would it be ok if I record this talk?

I will be taking some notes during the time, if that is ok?

[Short introduction by me about my research]

I am interested in researching people who combine alternative fields with science. I'm keen on learning more about people who work with this and their work, and explore this as a social phenomenon.

Initially, could you tell me a bit about yourself, your background and explain in a few sentences what it is you do for a living and what your work entails?

What drives you to do what you do?

What is your experience of working with the fields of science and spirituality/mysticism? Have you experienced any challenges in your work relating to this?

What have been some major influences on your work?

In terms of your background, [insert any previous background information I had for the specific informant].

What scientific background do you have?/Do you have any other scientific qualifications?

What other training do you have?

[If they use a label - dig into that and ask how they define it, what do they mean by that?]

[Present situation:]

What has inspired/influenced you to do the work that you are doing today?

[Deepening of present situation:]

How does science/your scientific background influence your work?

Do you feel like science/your scientific background has influenced you in any way in relation to your clients/or the people you meet?

(Has it for example given you more credibility or confidence in your work?)

(Has it given you more credibility in relation to your clients?)

(Is this important to you?)

Do you experience any challenges/conflicts between science and [their label] in relation to your work?

And if so, what are they?

Do you think it is necessary or relevant to bridge science and [their label]?

Why?

[Future:]

What is your vision in regards to the work you do?

Do you have any other reflections, thoughts or experiences you would like to share or add?

8.2 Appendix 2 - Interview Guide for Structured Email Interview

[Explain a bit about myself and introduction to interview]

Initially, could you explain a bit about yourself, your background and the work you do?

What drives you to do what you do?

What is your experience of working with the fields of science and spirituality/mysticism? Have you experienced any challenges in your work relating to this?

What have been some major influences on your work?

I see on your website that you have a Ph.D. in theoretical physics, an Honorary Doctor of Science degree and that you have spent many years researching high-energy physics.

Do you have any other scientific or other qualifications?

In your book *The Tao of Physics* you talk about the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism.

Where did your interest in Eastern mysticism, physics and the relationship between the two come from?

On your website, it says that you are engaged in “a systematic exploration of how other sciences and society are ushering in a similar shift in worldview, or paradigms, leading to a new vision of reality and a new understanding of the social implications of this cultural transformation.”

What do you mean by “similar shift in worldview or paradigms”?

And what does the new vision of reality look like?

Do you think that this is a necessary shift?

Why/why not?

Have you experienced any changes personally during the years you have explored these fields, and what are they?

Are there any other reflections, thoughts or experiences you would like to share or add?

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