Toward a post-Cartesian science of nonduality:

UnScience, Dzogchen, and Einstein’s folly

By Ken Bradford

“It is not the victory of science that distinguishes our nineteenth century, but the victory of the scientific method over science.” – Friedrich Nietzsche

“The method of science is nothing but the securing of the calculability of nature.”

- Martin Heidegger

“Timelessly awakened, awareness is nonreferential.” – Garab Dorje

There is a popular assumption and widespread confidence among spiritual seekers, mental health professionals, and scientists alike that the findings of the “new sciences” such as neurophysiology and quantum physics provide a fertile field and solid grounds for deepening our understanding of nondual awakening. Nevertheless, as we celebrate the contemporary conjunction of Science and nondual wisdom, it seems to me prudent to ask whether this assumption is actually true or if we only wish it were true. That is, Can findings generated by the scientific method and worldview lead us to or enhance our understanding of nondual awareness? Looked at soberly, this assumption is found
to be dubious and the confidence we therefore place in the knowledge of empirical Science for this purpose over-rated if not misplaced. This article reviews the basic assumptions of the Scientific Method and its corresponding worldview, following which a post-Cartesian contemplative scientific approach is proposed that shifts the terms of engagement from the contemporary dialogue between empirical Science and nonduality to an experiential science of nonduality.*

It is of primary importance for any kind of inquiry, be it philosophical, scientific, psychological, or spiritual, to recognize that what we discover is shaped by how we look. The way in which we look shapes what we are looking for and so prefigures what we come to see and know. A mountain for instance, will appear differently to a geologist, a mining engineer, a botanist, and a rock climber. It appears still more different to a black bear, hawk, marmot, or trout. We could not say it is the same “mountain” in each of these visions. Minimally, we must acknowledge that any way of knowing must attune its method of inquiry to accord with its purpose and subject matter. In considering nonduality, the unconditioned nature of the mind, or, the being of human beings, it must first be recognized that the subject matter of the isness, or suchness, of a (human) being is not the same subject matter as that of the various aspects and qualities of that being. A being’s qualities or aspects can in some way be observed and qualified through observation.

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As phenomenologists have described, how we observe things is conditioned by what they mean to us, which forms and informs our seeing of them. That is, our perceptions of the world are shaped according to our “intentionality” toward them (Husserl, 1913/1962; Spinelli, 1989). Ordinarily, focusing strictly on observable qualities leaves the seeing of those qualities outside awareness. Looking at things can ignore, either deliberately or inadvertently, the influence of the intentional looking itself. As inadvertent, everyday ignorance, this is a manifestation of dualistic vision which splits experience into an invisible observing subject and a visible, observed object. In Scientific research, this split is deliberately proscribed and enforced. However, the being of a human being, or the nature of the mind, cannot be seen by standing apart from it and viewing it from the outside. While the Scientific Method is adept at discovering and explaining differences between qualities and aspects of things, it is unable to reveal anything about the nature of being itself, which is due to the unique principles which govern its practice.

**Cartesian Science and worldview**

The Cartesian vision that supplies the philosophical grounding of modern Science posits as its cornerstone principle a decisive separation between nature and the knowing mind. Descartes specified nature and the observables existing in nature as *res extensa*: that which extends in space and time. Absolutely separate and distinct from objects existing in space-time is the thinking which can know and manipulate objects, *res*
cogitans: that (thinking) which is self-grounded and does not extend into space-time.

This split between the removed knower and the objective known is a requirement of the vision grounding the Scientific Method and modern worldview.

Having split the knowable world from the knower of that world, Descartes sealed this division through a double elimination, ejecting both the knower and the question of being from the purview of Science. In establishing conceptual thinking (res cogitans) as the privileged half of the split, it is implicitly assumed and explicitly asserted that rational thought can know things about brute nature but cannot itself be known. This empowers a vision that focuses strictly on externals. And, in concluding “I think, therefore I am,” Descartes established conceptual cognition as the ground of being. From the perspective of non-conceptual and pre-conceptual forms of cognizance, including the potentialities of nondual awareness, Descartes’ conclusions have only relative validity. In an absolute or existential sense they are simply mistaken. As a corrective, Existentialists reversed Descartes by asserting “I am therefore I think...sense, feel, intuit...”. However, this philosophical corrective has had only minimal impact on the juggernaut of the modern Scientific worldview.

Whether we like it or not, we live in a world informed by and conforming to Cartesian vision. It is not merely that Empirical Science and its deployment of technology is one paradigm among others that we can draw upon at our leisure to engage the world and direct our lives. Rather, the self and world understanding that Science conceives and
validates according to its vaunted Method define how we see the world we have found ourselves born into and for our entire lives have taken for granted as “given”. Any other self and world construct, such as Tibetan Buddhist or shamanistic or ecopsychological for instance, is either foreign or “alternative”, as in “alternative paradigm”. When I capitalize “Science” in these pages, I mean to convey the practice and authority of science as defined both by the empirical-natural scientific method arising with Galileo, Newton, and Descartes and the taken-for-granted self/worldview which this approach envisions, enshrines, and polices.

Throughout the last century there has been growing disillusionment in many quarters with the techno-zation and commodification of human experience, the exploitation of nature and natural resources, the disintegration of families and communities, and the dehumanization of human beings (eg. as “labor” or human “resources”) that is either explicitly or implicitly empowered by the Scientific, or as it is also commonly referred to, “modern” worldview. We have become familiar with many calls for and bold announcements of a “paradigm shift” from Science and modernity to an alternative holistic vision and “post-modern” consciousness. But, for all our disillusionment and much insightful recognition from philosophers, cultural critics, spiritual masters, and scientists themselves calling for a fundamental shift of paradigm, it has proven extremely difficult to accomplish this turn. Of course, the realization of nondual awareness is in itself nothing if not a paradigm shift of the most profound degree. The main challenge is how to discover and know the nondual nature of awareness for
ourselves beyond doubt or speculation, and for those of us so inclined, how to *convey*, *evoke*, or *transmit* this shift to others?

The first order of sobriety in seeking a shift of paradigm is to recognize that you and I, as the seekers of change, are already thoroughly conditioned by the tacit assumptions and consensually validated vision of the existing paradigm. How we see/construe the world, including ourselves, is not a purely conceptual framing that develops in adolescence or adulthood, but is an envisioning that begins in the cradle (if not before) in the ways the world presents itself to the wide-eyed baby who is open and receptive and eager to learn about existence and participate in it. In the gaze and touch of one’s parents (Winnicott, 1971; Montagu, 1986), including the manner in which the culture suggests babies should be seen and handled, and in uncountable other ways, an infant enters into a way of seeing and being seen, including how to focus, what is important to focus on, and eventually why to focus on whatever it is that warrants an investment of attention. The “operating system” of the paradigm we are born into is not neatly established following a mature analysis. Its fundamental framing forms outside of our consciousness as we inadvertently and unreflectively participate in that formation. Without reflecting on how we are already compromised, participating in and committed to a self-world construction, our worldview remains tacit, functioning as a nuclear predisposition holding sway in the depths of our thoughts and feelings. Psychoanalysis refers to this as the “pre-reflective unconscious” (Orange, Atwood & Stolorow p.7).
Science and nonduality

Since it is through unconscious participation that we tacitly envision the world and selfhoods we find ourselves inhabiting, it is necessary to access this non-conceptual depth in order to fundamentally allow it to shift. So, when I attend the big and festive Science and Nonduality Conferences, I am not at all surprised to find that while the motivation of these meritorious, stimulating, and fun meetings is to contribute to a paradigm shift of the most profound kind, the Scientific approach itself is prone to either deflect or stifle this noble intent. For instance, in the 2010 “Science and Nonduality Conference” description, the following declaration describes the primary assumption of the conference. “Nonduality...is a new paradigm in spirituality beyond religion, beyond faith, beyond gurus. It is an approach grounded in cutting-edge science.” (Neti Neti Media, 2010)

I find this assertion remarkable, in that it summarizes in 2010 the same conclusion Freud arrived at in 1927. In his provocative essay, The future of an illusion, Freud submitted religion in general and monotheism in particular to a cultural psychoanalysis, looking into the motivation for and function of religion in human life. He observed that the motivation for adhering to religious beliefs arises in the existential anxiety we experience in becoming aware of impermanence, mortality, and the helplessness we suffer in the face of these truths. Rather than confronting the groundlessness of
existence as it is, human beings invent constructed realities in the guise of religious
worldviews to serve as grounds to soothe these anxieties by pretending to know what is
unknowable. With this “knowledge” comes the (illusory) sense of having power over
our existential powerlessness.

Additionally, Freud discussed how the vulnerability and fear we experience in regard to
our aggressive and sexual passions inspires the codification of moral restrictions and
normative belief systems fundamental to religion. The moralistic prohibitions of
civilization, having a religious credo as its backbone, protect us from jeopardizing our
domestic security arrangements. Typically, religious beliefs and moral dictates are then
practiced with what amounts to obsessional zeal, indicative of the effort we exert to
fend off and control existential anxieties. Religious constructs and moral constraints
create viable myths to live by and inhabitable civilizations to live in, but at the cost of
psychological estrangement from our actual, unconstrained human nature. Freud
(1927/1961) concluded his analysis of religion by calling it, “the universal obsessiona
neurosis of humanity” (p.43). But he did not stop there.

Going beyond the “neurotic illusion” of codified religion, Freud turned to Science as the
bright alternative to truth and sanity, declaring that “science is no illusion” (p.56).
Likewise, the bold aim of the Science and Nonduality Conference heralds “a new
paradigm beyond religion, beyond faith...”. But not however, beyond Science. Nondual
awareness is conceived as “an approach grounded in cutting-edge science.” However,
this strident assumption has not been well-examined, which brings us to the critical question: *Can “cutting-edge science” provide true grounding for unconditional presence, which is beyond the illusions of dualistic vision?* Let’s take a look.

**Scientific Method and unScience**

To review, the principles governing the Scientific Method require, 1) separation of observer and observed, 2) the privileging of objectivity and the objectification of nature, 3) reliance on calculative (logico-mathematical) thinking rather than other, non-calculative forms of cognizance, 4) the exclusion of variables being studied (to avoid confounding “extraneous” influences) rather than the inclusion of variables, variability, and the interdependent contextuality of phenomena, and above all, 5) submission to Science’s overarching purpose: *the prediction and control of nature*. “Nature” here should be understood as both the natural world as well as the psychological world of human attitudes and behavior. These fundamental, sharply dualistic premises form the ground that defines the method that shapes knowledge recognizable as “Science”. What Freud did not recognize, and what the current dialogue between science and nonduality also does not seem to fully recognize, is that Science and technology have become a modern religion. We look to Science and technology to protect us from the unpredictability of existence as much as past cultures turned to religious doctrine for a sense of social order and cosmic comprehension. While it is true that the Physical Sciences do not impose moral constrictions on their subject matter, the Social Sciences
do exert moral authority and power. For instance, empirically-based psychiatric diagnoses make decisive judgments regarding the “disorders” of various moods, thoughts, and behaviors (Bradford, 2010), which directly result in the voluntary or involuntary control of those moods, thoughts, and behaviors, whether through drugs, therapies, or incarceration. Science’s prime directive of prediction and control is the deployment of a value system that works, as does religion, to control the unpredictability of human nature.

To not stand apart from nature in order to predict and control it; to not privilege objectification of self and other; to not privilege the isolation of variables and divided consciousness, including the logic-bound functions of calculative thinking, but instead, to open to interdependence and intersubjectivity by relaxing the separation between self and other, observer and observed, is to be explicitly unScientific. Opening oneself to undivided consciousness is, by definition, unScience.

Thinking that new, “cutting-edge” science is somehow beyond the paradigm of old Science is a serious misunderstanding that overestimates what these new sciences can disclose in regard to human subjectivity and nondual awareness. Although discoveries of quantum physics do challenge the paradigm of empirical Science - for instance, the “observer effect” that the observer influences the observed and Heisenberg’s “uncertainty principle” which states that any measurement of energy or matter on a
subtle level remains uncertain -, these challenges have not resulted in any significant change to the Scientific Method of which I am aware.

More importantly for the “field” of nondual awareness, the very notion of “cutting-edge” science means that today’s breakthrough discoveries, in being “cutting-edge” exist within time. What was cutting-edge yesterday is normal today and passé tomorrow. Likewise, today’s cutting-edge science will become non-cutting-edge and eventually fade in importance. Cutting-edge Science is completely relative, neither absolute nor unconditioned nor a cognizance of timeless wisdom. Instead, it is a constructed knowledge relative to and dependent upon the conditions of a time and place, which includes the technologies existent during a particular epoch. In contrast, nondual awareness depends on no-thing, is unconstructed, lies beyond any limitations of time and place, and being primordial, is neither new nor old.

The compelling symbol for the 2010 Science and Nonduality Conference is a modification of Einstein’s famous $e=mc^2$, honoring the physicist’s brilliant discovery that energy can transform into matter, matter into energy. Einstein’s discovery is remarkable not only in its explicit recognition that matter and energy are transmutable into each other but still more profound is the implication that in order for this to be possible, energy and matter must share the same nature. However, as Heidegger (1987/2001) notes, Einstein did not discover this nature and “could not teach us what energy and matter essentially are in themselves” (p.233). Instead, he spent a good deal of his
remaining intellectual life in the futile search for a Unified Field Theory. I consider this search to be futile because there is no way to sandwich even an instant of nondual field awareness into a conceptually-bounded theory. To theorize after all, is to suppose, whereas the immediacy of non-conceptual cognizance is completely beyond supposition.

Still, Einstein’s hopeless search strikes me as a divine folly. I imagine that there was something about the singularity of his quest to comprehend the incomprehensible that opened him and left him open as he aged into a true humanitarian and playful mystic transcending the constructs of Science. The famous zany photo of him riding a bicycle, radiant and joyful, and the one with his tongue sticking out, white hair disheveled, eyes dancing soft and sparkly, which happily hangs over my desk just now, attests to a kind of lightness and suggests the play of a free mind. Might not the folly of Einstein’s search: a continual non-finding of conceptual ground, have contributed to the maturation of what seemed to be an increasingly noble and open-hearted human being?

While Science can give illuminating, inspiring, and often quite useful explanations of things, it cannot reveal the essence of that which it explains. As we know, the truth (validity and reliability) of Scientific explanations are wholly based on the measurability of entities, which confers Science’s holy grail of statistical significance. This requirement defines the reach and range of its application and delineates the kinds of subject matter: measurable objects, that are appropriate for Scientific research. This being the case,
Science is fundamentally unable to discover what is unmeasurable. Phenomena such as love or hate, equanimity or obsession, ignorance or awakening, and the nature of mind itself, all lie outside the purview of Scientific study. This poses a formidable problem for psychology and spirituality in general and an insurmountable one for nondual wisdom.

Currently, the relationship between Science and nonduality is a dialogue between dualistic empiricism and non-dual wisdom teachings. The 2010 SAND logo, modifying Einstein’s equation to read, Om=mc^2 is a fanciful depiction, however misleading, of this dialogue. Still, the dialogue is surely a fertile one, with Scientific research serving at times as a portal to awe. The awesome discoveries of astronomy, neurobiology, and physics for instance, are inspiring many psychologists and students of spirituality to open their minds and hearts to the wonder of and implications for existence that are beyond the confines of contemporary self and world constructs. But let us be clear about these Scientific inspirations: they lead us beyond Science. Once we see the direction in which a Scientific portal opens, and accept a trajectory that leads beyond empiricism to wonderment, we find ourselves in a wholly different kind of awareness that calls for a fundamentally different kind of attunement. A different kind of science.

**Psychology and nonduality**

The word “science” comes from *scire* (L.), which simply means “to know”. The particular method of knowing should accord to that which is to be known. If what is to be known,
comprehended, and lived forward is no-thing, if the knowledge to be discovered is not separate from the knower and is of the nature of non-conceptual cognizance, and if the power of nondual presence is a yielding to the potency of non-action, then the science of such wonderment must accord to the wonder of suchness. Since the knowing of no-thing makes no (logical) sense, yet displays itself as brilliant clarity (tsal-wa) (Tib.), and since the non-action of nondual presence suggests passivity yet expresses itself in energetic compassionate activity (thug-je) (Tib.), the logic of no-thingness is necessarily paradoxical. Clearly, any paradoxical science is well beyond the ken of logical deduction and the approach of empiricism. Thus, if we conclude, as we must, that nondual presence is beyond the approach of Science, what would then be the approach appropriate to a non-dualistic science?

Recognizing that the unconditioned mind is not discovered somewhere apart from the conditioned mind that seeks it, the approach most appropriate to the “study” of unconditioned presence might be seen to belong to the field of Psychology, since it is Psychology that endeavors to study the mind as distinct from other Sciences which study the brain and neurophysiological processes. However, this clarification is of little help, since Psychology in general conceives of itself as an empirical Science. Even Transpersonal Psychology is of little value, since it is currently a hodgepodge of understandings (Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992), many of which, either implicitly or explicitly, endorse empiricism as a preferred Scientific approach.
A viable alternative would be to accept the distinction the philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey, made between the Natural Sciences, *Naturwissenschaften*, which seek objective *explanations*, and the Human Sciences, conceived as *Geisteswissenschaften*, literally “spiritual sciences”, which seek *understanding* arrived at through subjective/inter-subjective inquiry. This is the approach favored by Existential-Phenomenology and experience-near approaches, which have had only minimal impact against the juggernaut of Science. As it stands, the dialogue between Psychology and nonduality is primarily a subset of the dialogue between Science and nonduality.

For instance, there is currently a great deal of excitement in both academic and clinical psychology circles regarding “mirror” neurons. Neuroscience has discovered the existence of neurological functioning that seems to convey emotional states between people, proving that there is a physiological basis for inter-subjectivity in general and empathy in particular. By explaining this neurological function, Science validates that empathy and psychological resilience exist. This research has proven to be very exciting and is gaining widespread popularity for substantiating for instance, that simple kindness, compassion, and courage have beneficial value. Because, apparently, we were not sure about that... I find this kind of discovery and the immense interest it generates fascinating, as it reveals how estranged we (in our worldview) are from ourselves and others. Rather than a subjectively-keyed science that empowers direct inquiry into feelings, which can tell us everything we need to know about empathy as a lived experience, we privilege as proof objective knowledge garnered in a laboratory.
As an empirical Science, Psychology is a weak discipline that undermines its best efforts at human understanding by misunderstanding the nature of its own subject matter. Trying to understand subjectivity and inter-subjectivity as if it were an observable something is bound to obscure and distort the essential no-thingness of human existence. In this regard, William James (1897/2006) declared, "Science as such assuredly has no authority, for she can only say what is, not what is not." (p.56) And as the renowned psychologist of perception, J. J. Gibson put it, "Psychology, or at least American psychology, is a second-rate discipline. The chief reason is that it does not stand in awe of its subject matter. Psychologists have too little respect for psychology." (Quoted in Zeig, 1997, p.189). Giving primary attention to objective findings while relegating the lived experience of subjectivity to a secondary position undervalues subjectivity itself, which is after all a subject matter proper to psychology. Instead, if we shift our manner of seeing from one of objectification and control to one of humility that dares to stand in awe of human being, a door may open to a respectful, authentic, and necessarily contemplative science of psychology. As with empiricism, contemplative sciences likewise must identify their purpose and discern their particular subject matter.

**Toward a science of nonduality**

The unexamined assumption, which we tacitly endorse when we are held in thrall to the Scientific worldview, is that the “basis” of empathy is neurophysiological. The discovery
of mirror neurons is so exciting because it proves the existence and value of empathy. Based on the faith we have in Science, we know that mirror neurons exist because they can be independently observed and measured (res extensa), and this gives us a confidence we may have previously lacked in regard to relational experience. *We grasp onto objective findings rather than focus on the remarkable lack of confidence we may have in our lived, subjective findings and non-findings.* In so doing, we overlook the opportunity to inquire into our self-ignorance. Of course, since the mirror neuron research does validate felt experience, this research does give us permission to trust ourselves more deeply, which I suspect is why we find it so inspiring. Accepting these findings is also fruitful in suggesting further research and therapeutic applications.

However, it does little or nothing to liberate us from continuing to participate living in and through the illusions of dualistic consciousness, including the empiricist worldview. And, while neuroscientific knowledge does increase our understanding of the human condition, it does not necessarily help us to integrate this knowledge.

Learning about mirror neurons is not the same thing as being empathic. The conceptual knowledge of neuroscience does not extend to the non-cognitive, emotional habits of reactivity that impair our best intentions to consistently be kind and compassionate with ourselves and others. To realize the capability of being empathic requires a shift to a more fundamental kind of knowing/science in which we do not remain mere consumers of findings, but become inter-subjectively engaged participants in living our lives and reckoning with our lack of confidence in felt experiencing.
To integrate living knowledge does not involve a journey going either backward or forward in time, but of more fully immersing ourselves in this time and place by collapsing our effort to get anything or anywhere else, including any particular knowledge, control, or prediction. Contemplative science demands that we do not stand apart from experience. Being present with the way things are in any moment is a participatory knowing that opens the way to the unconstructed basis of all constructed knowledge, including all the knowledge of Science. In discovering this basis – through daring to be open in a situation - we begin to practice a science of nondual presence, a science that is far more fundamental to human welfare than any empiricist derivation.

For example, if we conclude that empathy is based in neurophysiology, we may then ask, What is neurophysiology based in? Inquiring into this, we notice first of all that physical entities such as neurons appear as external objects and observable processes. Looked into more deeply, we notice that neurons are not actually “out there”, but appear in our knowing of them. Without recognizing neurons, we could neither say that they do nor do not exist. Of course, we could also consider that neurons (or quarks or God, for example) might exist, even if we have not personally observed them and do not actually know if they do exist. It turns out that this is the actual case for most of us in regard to mirror neurons, since most of us have not ourselves seen the neurons, but know of them strictly through reading or hearing about them. They exist for us as an idea in our imagination. Neurons appear in, depend upon, and are always only found in
a human capacity of cognizance. Therefore, the basis, place, or “field” of empathy is not neurophysical, but psychical.

If we proceed to inquire into the “basis” of the psychical, the question presents itself:

What is the nature of the mind? How is the nature of awareness different from that which appears in awareness as a particular idea or form (nama-rupa)? Psychical phenomena such as imaginations, ideas, perceptions, feelings, and sensations always and only appear within a capacity of cognizance. And cognizance can only occur if one already has the nature, or potentiality, for being open to phenomenal appearances.

Without having a natural capacity for openness, for being present in a situation, we can know nothing of either our presence or our situation. Our basic, “true” nature is that of situated presence, in which cognizant awareness is not separate from the phenomena of which it is aware, and phenomena is not found separate from awareness. In regard to empathy, it must be conceded that empathy is neither mirror neurons nor our conceptual understanding of mirror neurons. Empathy is a capacity of human feeling that arises through intersubjective attunement, but only if one is open to and present in an intersubjective situation. Contemplative science practiced as a science of nonduality leaves the neurophysiology and psychology of empathy to those sciences, and orients itself to the inter-subjective presencing which allows for empathic attunement and misattunement. The openness, or inter-ness of subjectivity is the “subject matter” proper to a science of nonduality. What then, is a proper method for such a science?
As Heidegger noted in his momentous philosophical inquiry into *Being and Time* (1927/1961), the subject matter of human *presence* and the method of inquiry into that subject matter are the same. To arrive at ontological (self-) knowledge rather than “ontic” knowledge of things and beings, we must recognize that the subject that seeks to know itself is “always already” the knowledge the knowing subject seeks. It is in this sense that we can speak of nondual cognizance in which there is no division between the knower, knowing, and the known.

Of course, there are other kinds of knowing – Scientific and the usual, everyday kind - that do separate the knower from the known, whether consciously or not. It is critical for contemplative science to be able to distinguish these ways of knowing. Making such distinction is the traditional first step of *dzogchen* practice and the heart of Zen and *Prajnaparamita*. In *dzogchen*, this distinguishing is known as the practice of *rushen*: recognizing (*lhag-thong* (Tib.); *vipashana* (Skt.)) the difference between mind (ontical) and the nature of mind (ontological). In Zen this is spoken of as the recognition of emptiness in contrast to constructed knowledge. This recognition must be made in order to appropriately identify what kind of knowing is indicative of nondual awareness.

**The aryā marga: Dzogchen as a science of nonduality**
To arrive at self-knowledge we typically travel along a path of self-reflection, which requires that we pause in our headlong hurtling through time and look within. On this road, we may see various things about ourselves such as compulsive thought patterns and emotional conflicts. Additionally, through sustained self-attention we may discover more subtle and sublime qualities, such as patience, bliss, compassion, equanimity, mental-psychic clarity, and the like. In both instances, we learn things about ourselves through exercising meditative attention. If we continue on and in this way, it is possible to find ourselves on what can seem like another path entirely. As self-reflection settles into seeing itself seeing, a dawning of unconditioned awareness may arise. This manner of seeing reveals itself as a way of being that is beyond dualistic vision and the suffering brought on by self-ignorance, grasping, and aversion. The Buddha referred to this further path as \textit{arya marga} (Skt.): the high way to happiness. To practice a science of nonduality, it is necessary to proceed on the \textit{arya marga}.

Any science of nonduality must begin with the recognition of nondual awareness. As mentioned, \textit{dzogchen} practice begins with the direct introduction of unconditioned presence (\textit{rigpa}) (Tib.) from teacher to student, which is why \textit{dzogchen} is sometimes considered a “non-gradual” path. \textit{Dzogchen} can be taken as an example of a “science of nonduality” if we understand “science” to mean \textit{knowledge}. Following this tradition and the three decisive points outlining its path by its first historical teacher, Garab Dorje (Reynolds, 1996), it is clear that this is a science of \textit{experiential knowing}. Its explicit purpose is to discover and expand that manner of self-knowledge that is inherently
“self-liberating” (*rang-drol*) (Tib.). Anything short of a living recognition is at best an approach to a science of nonduality, and may well involve - as a manner of preparation - a dialogue between religion or psychology or Science and nondual wisdom.

Even though dzogchen is a path of direct knowing, this does not mean that a momentary knowing of instant presence cannot fade, be eclipsed, or otherwise lost by a resurgence of old habits of thought and emotion. While we may have a brief glimpse of the true nature of mind, typically the vividness of that glimpse fades. This indicates that there is a lack of integration in our capacity for embodying nonduality. Thus, contemplative science is valuable not only to discover but also to assist in the development of one’s capacity for embodying nondual awareness. Following the first of Garab Dorje’s key points, *direct introduction* into unconstructed presence, the second and third points emphasize the principles for ripening one’s capacity for integrating this presence.

Since even quite clear glimpses of the unconditioned tend to pass, leaving in their wake a vague memory about what natural presence actually is or is not, it is useful to increase one’s experience and confidence in this. The second key point directs dzogchen practitioners to no longer remain in doubt. This point directs us to experientially clarify how the *nature* of mind is absolutely unique and not to be confused with any particular *states* of mind, including subtle, lightly conditioned states such as bliss and the calmness of non-thought. Even if it is possible for a master to introduce a student to
unconstructed presence, it is not possible for a master to comprehend it for the student. To know nonduality beyond a shadow of a doubt, each person must discern that for him or herself.

Clarifying the difference between mind states and the suchness of mind itself is still not the same as being able to consistently embody that suchness in everyday situations. Tsoknyi Rinpoche (2003) speaks of the dawning of unconditioned awareness as “baby rigpa” (eg. p.134), and emphasizes the importance of “growing” that baby over time and in differing circumstances, so that it can eventually stand, walk, and fly on its own. On a non-gradual path, any science of nonduality would do well to acknowledge that the reason we call it a “path” is that the journey is not yet complete. Perfect equanimity, great compassion, and lucid awareness are not yet fully integrated in our lives. This is why Garab Dorje’s third point is to continue in instant presence, which means to practice allowing open responsivity to more thoroughly saturate our lives, through day and night.

This third point is usually understood to mean extending the duration of effortless presence. I like to think of this as getting used to being open and spontaneously responsive, of letting the presencing of suchness sink in. Implicit in this, as Sogyal Rinpoche (1993, p.266) and Peter Fenner have observed (2007, p.14), is that continuity also involves a deepening of openness in and through our repressive barriers. Remaining unconditionally present progressively relaxes the mind-body-energy tensions that serve
to maintain our self-world constructs. Allowing nondual awareness to more thoroughly seep in and saturate our existence exposes both our gross emotional conflicts and increasingly subtle psychic apprehensions. Remaining open and integrating these tensions within unconditional awareness allows for increasingly deeper release of them, eventually including even the subtle tendencies of our karmic seeds (vasanas) (Skt.) still waiting to germinate. Still further, the ever-fresh continuity of awareness allows for spontaneous release of transcendent qualities, such as unconditional compassion and psychic clarity that are inherent within the luminosity of existence itself (rig-tsal) (Tib.). Thus one realizes complete fulfillment (dzog-chen) in being totally here now.

Conclusion

Recognizing we live within the conditioned worldview of Science gives us the choice to perpetuate our participation in this vision or to release on its urgency to predict and control things. However, to do so invites exposing ourselves to the challenge of opening ourselves to the unpredictable, impermanent, non-conceptual nature of mind, beyond both codified religion and Science. This in turn challenges us to release the self-world constructs and security arrangements in which we normally take refuge. Experientially lived, the release of our self and world paradigm often involves weathering an existential crisis. Without submitting to the crisis of being opened to groundlessness, the freedom of nondual awareness will not be deeply realized. Whether deeply realized or briefly glimpsed or dimly sensed, the pull of authentic presence can be pursued as a
contemplative science of nonduality. Such science is an experiential practice, a way of knowing that is a way of being that has nothing to do with the limitations of laboratory science and everything to do with un-limited, instantaneous presence.

References


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1 Of course, there are multiple forces co-constituting the modern worldview. In addition to empirical Science, prominent economic, religious, social, and political forces converge to shape the benefits and plights of modernity. Since the scope of this article is limited to considering what kind of science is appropriate to facilitating understanding of nonduality, these complex social contingencies will not be further addressed.