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Why Dossey is an Energy Monist: A Reply

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In the last issue of [Network \(No. 63, April 1997\)](#) Larry Dossey in his article 'Energy Talk' referred to the emergence of what he called 'Era III medicine', this being non-local medicine in which 'an individual's thoughts and intentions may affect the bodily function of other individuals at arbitrary distances, even outside the awareness of the recipient'.

In this article Mark Woodhouse argues that Dossey's position is consistent with his own view of 'Energy Monism'. This is a shortened version of a larger article, the full text of which is available on request.

Dossey thinks that the concepts of physical energy and beyond that, of non-physical energy, have been overworked in discussions of both the physics and the metaphysics of healing. We need, instead, to appreciate more the contributions of *consciousness* in understanding healing phenomena. I would agree, and have argued as much in *Paradigm Wars*. Consciousness is not reducible to physical or to non-physical energy of any kind. Any account of healing that leaves out the central role of consciousness would necessarily be incomplete, if not potentially incoherent. I am as frustrated as Dossey by claims such as 'Healing energy is just a special form of electromagnetic energy'.

What I attempted to accomplish in my earlier critique was to leave the door open to further explorations of (especially) non-physical forms of energy that might be critical in fully understanding healing, whether locally, at a distance (over time, even if quickly), or non-locally (instantaneously, irrespective of distance). There are *three* potential categories to take into account here. I infer from his response that he, too, is open to such further exploration, but while others are doing that, he insists that consciousness - especially in its non-local aspects - should be properly taken into account. This is a difference of degree, not of principle, between us. Let me turn, then, to his specific concerns.

I. Much of Dossey's response is devoted to showing that the use of the term 'energy' in local and non-local healing contexts at best is metaphorical because it does not conform to the definitions of energy associated with the four forces (quantitatively measurable, conforming to the inverse square law, etc.). Researchers who infer that the clinical evidence for healing effects *proves* the existence of healing 'energy' thereby open themselves and the profession for sceptical criticism, because nothing conforming to classical models of energy has been detected or in any way shown to be the critical variable. From these facts, plus further studies suggesting that the consciousness of healers and healees may be connected in ways that violate standard energy models, Dossey infers the existence of non-local mind.

I agree with all of this, including the existence of non-local healing connections. Yet despite his concessions to what science might discover beyond the four forces, it seems to me that Dossey's account rocks back and forth on the law of the excluded middle; we have physical energy which tells us virtually nothing about healing, and we have non-local consciousness which does seem partly explanatory of certain healing connections.

There are for me *many* levels of consciousness and of energy, some standard and some non-standard, to be taken into account; and what distinguishes these levels up and down the line, so to speak, are progressive differences of degree, not ontological gaps. As many transpersonalists (Wilber, Tart, etc.) have persuasively argued, it is arbitrary to suppose that just because certain transpersonal phenomena (OBEs, mystical union, healing, *kundalini*, etc.) do not conform to the parameters of ordinary consciousness - 3-D consensus reality, as it is sometimes called - it does not follow that they do not signal the existence of other levels or independent realities beyond those manifest in three dimensions.

I would venture to say the same for energy. Just because there may be forms or levels of energy that do not in every way conform to the criteria by which we identify the standard four forces, it does not follow that there is no energy beyond the four forces that might in some very critical way mediate healing. There are things that x-rays can do (laws they conform to) that radio waves cannot, things that quantum jumps do that a bicycle rider cannot do, and so on. But I wouldn't arbitrarily draw the line within any of the known forms of energy and conclude that the others were, after all, not 'really energy' because they didn't conform to all of the laws that governed the other forms.

It is to be expected that, *if* there turn out to be forms of energy other than the four forces they would in some ways behave quite differently than the normal forms we are accustomed to. Take *qi* energy, for example (which I shall henceforth take as my 'stand-in' for whatever healing energies might turn out to be). It does not satisfy all of the criteria that Dossey (citing LeShan) lists for normal energy. For example, it's not directly measurable. But it does satisfy other basic criteria of energy. It moves. It condenses and becomes rarefied. It is blocked by other energetic (material) forms. And it satisfies the most basic definition of all forms of energy; it *does work*. Indeed, the only way we know anything about energy is through its effects.

In sum, the fact that *qi* energy may have some fundamentally different properties from other forms of (physical) energy is not a sufficient reason to deny its existence or underestimate its potential effects in healing contexts. For there appears to

be no greater difference between *qi* and magnetic energy than between, say, magnetic energy and quantum jumps.

II. At this point, Dossey will raise three objections. 1. Where's the beef? He's already conceded that science may well discover other dimensions or types of energy in the universe that go beyond the current four forces. 2. The discussion of *qi* energy, or any other seemingly non-physical energy that may be related to healing, is both metaphorical and question-begging; that *qi* behaves differently than quantum energy is worth asserting only if we know independently that *qi* exists. 3. Finally, Dossey will suggest that I am simply missing the point about the importance of non-locality - whatever the truth of non-physical energies turns out to be. I will address these concerns in turn.

1. Where's the beef? Maybe other forms of what we label as non-physical energy will be confirmed in the future - and maybe they won't. Why, then, have I entered into such a lengthy discussion of the physical-to-non-physical energy continuum? I have entered into this discussion, first, because I believe the reasons Dossey offers for all but dismissing non-physical (healing) energies *vis à vis* standard physical energies are not persuasive; and, second, because we have prima facie good reasons, when we talk to healers and healees alike, for supposing that *something* of an energetic nature often transpires in healing contexts - in terms of what is seen, what is felt, and what is physically changed.

My concern, then, is that if Era III Medicine is to represent a comprehensive paradigm of healing, and standard physical energies won't do the trick, then more needs to be said about how distinctive healing energies of a potentially non-physical sort (by current standards) fit into the total picture. It seems to me that Dossey has felt obliged to underestimate the importance of healing energies that don't fit current models - not, of course, because they are non-physical energies, but because non-locality is not about 'energy' at all.

This may well be, but from the fact that non-locality is sometimes operative in healing (and other) contexts, it does not follow that a good deal of healing is not involved with so-called non-physical energies that can be locally or distantly connected, but *not* in non-local (i.e., instantaneous) ways. The constructive challenge I would put to Dossey is to fill in the details of the Era III paradigm of healing and medicine in a way that would allow us to account for healing effects in all three contexts: *a.* locally (energetically, whether physical or non-physical); *b.* at a distance (energetically over time, whether physical or non-physical); and *c.* non-locally (non-energetic). There is no need to make non-locality account for more than it actually applies to.

2. But how do we know that non-physical healing energies exist? Am I not just begging the whole question with metaphorical appeals to mysterious energies we have no good scientific reasons to believe in? I do not assume that we have proven that they exist; however, I do assume that it's reasonable to postulate that they might exist given that: *a.* we have an impressive body of clinical evidence demonstrating healing effects - which Dossey and I generally agree on; *b.* these effects cannot be explained by standard energy models - which Dossey and I also agree on; *c.* not all distant healing effects necessarily involve non-locality - which Dossey and I should agree on, but may not; *d.* 'energy' may be a metaphor in certain contexts, but it is a highly *useful* one and inherently no stranger than all kinds of other metaphors in mainstream science, such as 'folding space', or the 'planetary' model of the atom - which I also think Dossey and I should agree on. We may not be able to give an independent description of healing energy apart from its effects, but we cannot do that for electricity or gravity either.

I am apparently more impressed than Dossey with the role of clairvoyance in healing contexts, although for one who so courageously affirms the power of prayer, clairvoyance is not an especially big metaphysical leap. Indeed, for all the attention that has been devoted to special *effects* in the experimental literature of healing, the beggared stepchild is clairvoyant medical *diagnosis*. I mention this because by far the best direct - and, I would add, empirical - evidence we have for the energetic realms involved in healing contexts comes from clairvoyant healers (also called 'etheric surgeons') who first have to diagnose what's wrong before they undertake their healing work. And what does their 'work' consist of? You guessed it. Moving energy!

I cannot prove this to Dossey, because there are virtually no experimental studies addressing this specific topic. However, I have known and worked with clairvoyant healers who see all the kinds of things that Barbara Brennen 'sees' and that are so dramatically illustrated in *Hands of Light*. This ability is as testable as other psi abilities. We can test for intersubjective verification of clairvoyant descriptions of the energies involved, and we can construct blind protocols that would significantly diminish, if not rule out, so-called 'psi-leakage'.

I think it would be a timely and much needed project for this journal to undertake the design of such an experiment (with Dossey's input) and, with the support of its readership, the execution of the experiment with well-known clairvoyant diagnosticians, including Barbara Brennen, Robert Jaffe, and Rosalind Bruyere - all of whom 'see' what current scientific instrumentation cannot measure (except in so far as what is seen in some instances may be transduced into some part of the electromagnetic spectrum). I must confess to not having a clue to understanding what they claim to see, if not of an *energetic* nature. And if the energies seen are not of a physical nature, then we appear to be justified in concluding that they are of a non-physical nature (by current standards). This, at least, would be my inference. If Dossey declines this inference, his only options would be either that clairvoyant diagnosticians are hallucinating or that what they see is of an electromagnetic nature, after all. And neither of these alternatives, I would think, are very appealing to Dossey. Clairvoyant diagnosis deserves a more substantial place in a true Era III medical model.

3. Have I simply misunderstood or underestimated the importance of what Dossey has to say about the importance of non-locality in healing contexts? Do we have a situation merely in which he stresses non-locality while conceding some vague possibilities to the energetic aspects of healing, whereas I stress the non-physical energetic aspects while conceding the (minimal?) role that non-locality plays in those contexts? My preliminary intuition is that non-locality and the evidence for it may tell us more about the nature(s) of time in a multidimensional universe than about the nature of energy, or how it gets around, within a particular level of that universe.

III. Let me now attempt to put all this together and show why I think Dossey is more an Energy Monist than anything else. It will be recalled that the full label for the view I defend is: 'Double-Aspected Transcendental Monism of Energy-

Consciousness'. The label of 'Energy Monism' is simply more convenient. And according to this view, energy (on however many levels or dimensions we care to have it) and consciousness (also on however many levels or dimensions we care to have it) are both aspects of each other neither being either separate from, or reducible to, the other (like the inner and outer aspects of a sphere or two-dimensional plane - and, as a unity of energy-consciousness, are expressions of a single, probably indefinable, universal 'source' of which we are all interconnected and interdimensionally nested manifestations.

This is a metaphysically robust monism. And whatever Dossey believes that non-locality shows about our interconnectedness within a single whole will also logically fit in this view, thus characterized. So far as structural monism is concerned, we are players on the same team, each with our distinct 'positions' to contribute.

Dossey clearly believes that consciousness both exists and is irreducible to matter/energy and the four forces. He also thinks that matter and energy exist and are not reducible to consciousness. How can he maintain the reality of these two kinds of things while avoiding a metaphysical dualism of the physical and the non-physical? How do consciousness and physical energy (the only kind he accepts) ultimately get together in Dossey's worldview? This is an absolutely critical issue for him.

Merely affirming structural monism - the radical interconnectedness of all things - won't do the trick. We still have to decide clarify the *nature* of what is so connected. And Energy Monism avoids the major problems with which classical dualism (which Dossey seems to want to reject) is faced - beginning with the problem of how the physical and non-physical interact. In the following diagrams, dualism is represented by Figure 1 and Energy Monism by Figure 2.

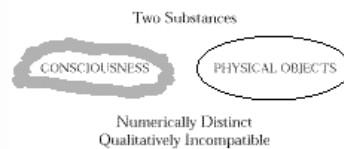


Figure 1.

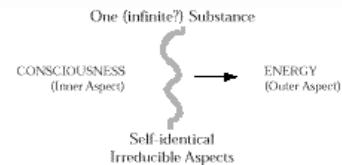


Figure 2.

I would agree with Dossey that each of our accounts leave many details and some important questions unresolved. Still, when all is said and done, Energy Monism: 1. affirms non-locality (not to mention spiritual healing and other anomalous phenomena); 2. does not try to reduce consciousness or non-local connections per se to either physical or non-physical energy; 3. affirms the continuity of the physical with the non-physical (whatever the non-physical ultimately turns out to look like); 4. affirms the oneness or interconnected field of consciousness that Dossey needs to account for non-locality, and; 5. shows how we can integrate energy (whether physical or non-physical) with consciousness without falling into the old paradigm dualism of mind and matter or, for that matter, the new paradigm incoherence of so-called 'quantum consciousness' (which tries to explain consciousness merely by introducing a radically different level of physical reality).

If the preceding features of Energy Monism can stand critical scrutiny, then we must tentatively issue Dossey the following invitation: Come on home!

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