

### **The Physiology of the Noosphere: Segment 3**

**David Sloan Wilson:** I'm so happy to be talking with you, Francis and Shima. This conversation is going to be centered on your article together, "Collective Consciousness Supported by the Web: healthy or toxic?" More generally, it's about the concept of the Noosphere, which was a term coined by Teilhard de Chardin and others in the early 20th century, and now represented by what we call the Internet Age, global consciousness, collective consciousness. And of course we'll be making that connection. But perhaps I could ask you to begin by setting the stage. What caused you to write this paper and to work together to write this paper that we'll be discussing?

**Francis Heylighen:** Well, I actually had been working with Shima already for a while on consciousness in the sense that there is recently a lot of things going on in the neurophysiology of consciousness. That means kind of dynamical models of how neurons in the brain form something that is like consciousness, and what that also means for consciousness in the more practical sense of how conscious people are of what's going on in the world.

Now, I was already interested in the Noosphere for a very long time via also the concept of the global brain. The idea that a World Wide Web forms kind of like a brain for humanity. And then it seemed logical to connect these two, if we were looking at consciousness in the human brain, and if we were looking at the Noosphere as the equivalent of a global brain, then we would come to one of the frequently asked questions about the global brain, will the global brain become conscious? In Teilhardian terminology, will the Noosphere become conscious? It's one of those questions that people always ask, but you don't really know what they expect as an answer, because what consciousness is is very ill-defined.

So that's why we decided to connect these theories of consciousness with theories of the Noosphere, and we found that there are actually some quite convenient analogies between the dynamics in the Noosphere and the dynamics of the brain. And the most obvious one is that, what is consciousness in the brain? It's those parts of mental activity that you monitor, that you examine, that you critically consider, so that you can, if necessary, change them, redirect them.

What are subconscious mental processes? These are processes that happen automatically in the background. It just goes, you put your hand on a hot plate, you pull it away before you have had the time to think, "This is bad, I'm going to burn my hand." So most processes in the brain are subconscious. They just go, input, output, and whatever happens in between, you can't intervene, you can't monitor, you don't know how you're doing it.

Consciousness means you are aware of something. And then you think about what does it mean? What can I do with it? Is it really what I think it is? Am I not mistaken? Am I not seeing something different from what I think I'm seeing? That's what consciousness is. And then, if we apply that to the Noosphere, we get this nice idea that if the Noosphere, as defined by Teilhard, is the sphere of thinking, of thought.

Thinking by definition is conscious. It means questioning things, looking at different angles, combining information from many different places. So actually the Noosphere is in a sense the conscious part of the global brain, and then the subconscious part of the global brain is just the infrastructure of the web. The infrastructure of the web makes sure that all these thoughts are being forwarded from the one to the other, recorded on servers, distributed among different computers, that happens in the background, or as you might say, the subconscious idea.

**Shima Beigi:** So this was always at the background of our research. And then connecting that with the Noosphere was... Well, the idea of the is kind of connected to also sustainable development, Gaia theory, systems thinking. So it was obvious for us that the next step for the Noosphere, as it's set out by Teilhard de Chardin, is to connect it with what's the state of research right now. For example, the

curiosity about consciousness. Also, bringing the qualitative nature of consciousness into research. And then also the digitalization and decentralization that is happening around us.

So the age that we're living right now, 21st century. The age of technology and computers and algorithms, are heavily impacting the way we think. And if you look at the Noosphere, what is a Noosphere? A Noosphere or a mental sphere is created by the unity of thoughts that is being shared by collectives. And this thinking, this unity of thought right now in 21st century, is subject to many different forces that inspired us to hone the conversation or steer the conversation toward how we can actually look at the qualitative dimension of the Noosphere, and how we can go deeper into the Noosphere, how we can change it? Is there any way to really, not engineer it so to speak, but really affect it consciously, mindfully?