

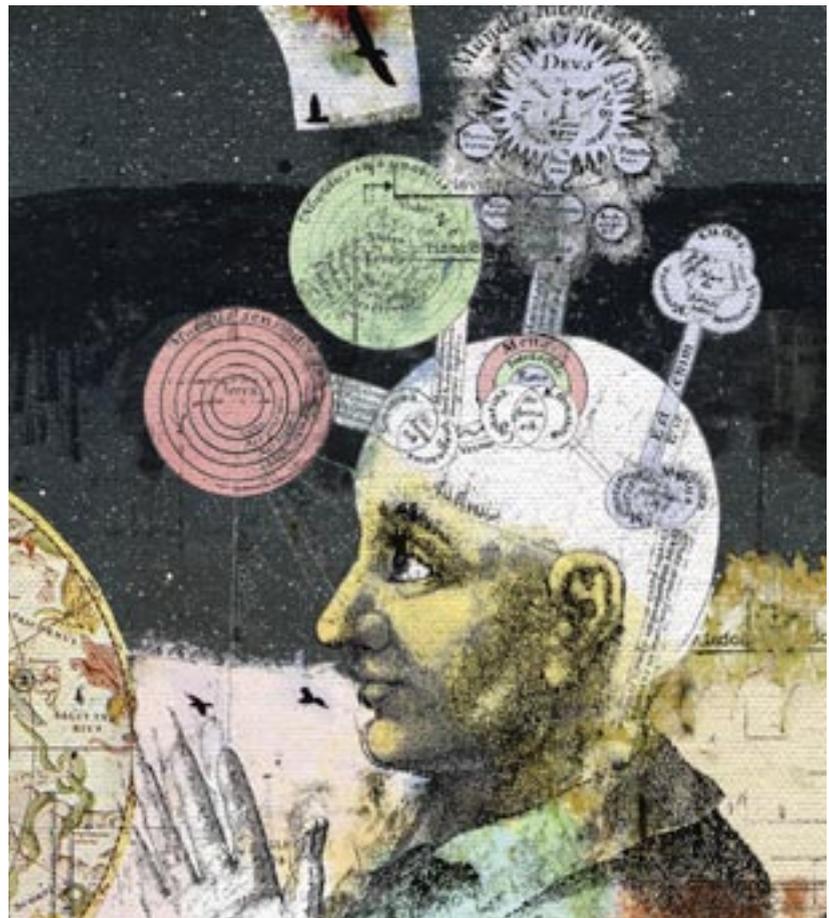


COSMOS, CONSCI

As human beings, we live in two worlds: material and mental, physical and spiritual, secular and religious, perhaps earthly and heavenly—there are many expressions, real and fanciful, of our dualistic ways of thinking. Both worlds seem real, but are they? Largely we keep them apart. We seek to provide for our families and achieve for ourselves, and we wonder about the meaning and purpose of life and death. Two worlds.

Traditionally, these worlds have been radically distinct, mutually impermeable. Today, boundaries are blurring as instant communications catalyze the globalization of ideas, and business leaders should appreciate the significance and subtleties of this emergent megatrend. Over time, more of the world's commerce will relate to fundamental questions of human existence, so that understanding how constituencies and customer think—consider advertising—will have an incremental benefit to business.

I live in both worlds. In one, I'm an investment banker: I built and ran a large M&A firm, which I sold to Citigroup (where I'm now senior advisor concentrating on China). In the other, I did a doctorate in brain research, and I write about science and philosophy/theology and produce and host a public television



BRYAN HUBBLE

Public fascination with Cosmos, Consciousness and God is growing, and top management should know what's happening.

BY ROBERT LAWRENCE KUHN

CONSCIOUSNESS, GOD

series, *Closer To Truth*, on the implications of frontier science. In its new season, *Closer To Truth* focuses on Cosmos, Consciousness and God, featuring leading thinkers of all persuasions, from theistic philosophers Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne to atheist philosopher Daniel Dennett and physicist Steven Weinberg. I do not avoid conflict or fear ridicule; I test conventional wisdom and challenge current belief; I accept uncertainty but not sloppy thinking; I keep arguments clear and thinking critical.

Public fascination with Cosmos, Consciousness and God is growing, and top management should know what's happening. As a primer, following are some fundamental questions (each a *Closer To Truth* episode).

Cosmos

How Vast is the Cosmos? Everyone knows that the universe is huge, but few can imagine how staggeringly immense the universe, or multiple universes, may actually be. It stops your breath.

Did Our Universe have a Beginning? Everything in the universe has a beginning, but does the whole universe have a beginning? Does a universal commencement make sense?

How Many Universes Exist? More than one universe? How could multiple universes be generated? What would they be like? Talk about expanding your horizons!

Is Time Travel Possible? What does time travel reveal about the nature of space and time and the laws of physics under extreme conditions?

Why are Black Holes Astonishing? They warp space and time, squeeze matter into a vanishing point (i.e., sin-

Is the "Real You" a special substance that is both nonphysical and immortal? Most people think "certainly." Most scientists, "certainly not."

gularity), and trap light so it cannot escape. How can black holes perform such stupendous tricks?

Is There a Final Theory of Everything? It is the Holy Grail of physics: All the particles and forces of nature unified and explained by equations so simple they can be printed on your tee shirt. Are we getting there?

Does Emergence Explain Reality? Take anything; find all its parts; combine those parts any way you like. What do you expect? Nothing at all like what you have. It's called "emergence" and it describes how wondrously our world works.

Why a Fine-Tuned Universe? How can so many numbers of nature, the 30-odd constants and relationships of physics and cosmology, be so spot-on perfect for humans to exist? Beware: more than one answer is lurking here.

Can Science Deal with God? Consider three ways: Showing how God is not necessary; showing how God is likely; not relating to God at all. Only one way is correct.

Why is There Something Rather than Nothing? Forget science. Forget

God. This is the ultimate question: What if Everything had Forever been Nothing? Not just emptiness, not just blankness, but not even the existence of emptiness, not even the meaning of blankness, and no Forever. If you don't get dizzy, you really don't get it.

Consciousness

Why is Consciousness so Mysterious? How can the mindless microscopic particles that compose our brains "experience" the setting sun, the Mozart Requiem, romantic love?

What is the Mind-Body Problem? How could mushy masses of brain cells, passing chemicals and shooting sparks, literally *be* inner mental sensations and private subjective feelings? They seem so radically different.

How are Brains Structured? As far as we know, brains are the most

highly organized matter in the universe. How they make their magic is astonishing.

Can Brain Explain Mind? What is it about the brain that some scientists claim can explain mind? And what is it about scientific explanations that some philosophers reject?

Do Persons have Souls? Is the “Real You” a special substance that is both nonphysical and immortal? Most people think, “Certainly.” Most scientists, “Certainly Not.” Theologians are divided.

Is There Life After Death? Do we survive bodily destruction? Can our personal awareness transcend physical obliteration? There is no more personal question and no shortage of answers.

Does ESP Reveal the Nonphysical? Does the scientific study of extrasensory perception, or parapsychology, overturn the scientific worldview?

What is Free Will? On one hand, since the universe is a closed system, every event is determined by prior events. On the other hand, if one postulates nonphysical souls, how could they interact with physical brains? Free Will is a huge problem.

What’s the Far Future of Intelligence? Consider humanity’s exponential progress in technology over the past three hundred years. Now project forward three billion years.

Where are All those Aliens? Most scientists assume that the universe must be populated with innumerable alien intelligences and civilizations—after all, we humans can’t be so special. How come there’s no evidence?

God

Does God Make Sense? How can you know whether God really exists, if you do not know what God really is? What are God’s characteristics,

and what do they mean?

Arguing God from Design? The world certainly appears to be designed. Are appearances deceiving?

Arguing God from First Cause? Everything in the universe needs a cause, but does the whole universe need a cause? And what about God—does God need a cause?

How can the mindless microscopic particles that compose our brains “experience” the setting sun, the Mozart Requiem, romantic love?

Does Evil Disprove God? Theists have no tougher task than explaining evil, its enormity even more than its existence. Give theologians their due: they’ve devised clever, even profound, rationales. But do they work?

Did God Create Time? If God is in Time and experiences its passage, how could God have created Time? (And if God didn’t create Time, how could God be omnipotent?) If God is not in Time, how could God interact with humans? Also Leibniz’s question: “Why didn’t God create the world sooner?”

How Could God Know the Future? If God has perfect knowledge, does God know *everything* about what is to come? But if the future doesn’t yet exist, maybe there’s nothing now to know?

How Could God Interact with the World? If God ordains history and makes miracles, how does He do it? Fiddle with each and every atom? Command all of them en masse? What possibly could be God’s mechanism?

Eternal Life is Like What? Almost

all religions promise eternal life, but each has its own hereafter: some are collective and ethereal in the spirit, melding us into God’s Light or the Cosmic Consciousness; others are individual and corporeal in the body, maintaining our personal identity.

Can Many Religions All be True? No one denies the diversity of reli-

gions and the apparent incompatibility of their core beliefs. Many believe only their own religion to be True. Some claim all religions reflect the same Truth. Others assert that differing dogmas expose the bankruptcy and absurdity of all religions.

In our marketing campaign, we joke that “if you were an alien and had to know where thinking has come on Planet Earth, you would have to watch *Closer To Truth*.” To CEOs, even those who are not aliens, I offer the same (biased) advice. I do not promise that you will find Ultimate Truth, only that you will be enriched, and perhaps exhilarated, getting *Closer To Truth*. ▲

Robert Lawrence Kuhn, an international investment banker and corporate strategist, is Senior Advisor to Citigroup. He is the creator and host of *CLOSER TO TRUTH: Cosmos, Consciousness, God*, the public television series on fundamental questions (www.closetotruth.com). His article “Why This Universe: A Taxonomy of Possible Explanations?” was published in *Skeptic* magazine.