



War of the Worldviews

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WAR OF THE WORLD

by Henry DeVries



Leonard Mlodinow and Deepak Chopra at "The Atlantic Meets the Pacific" debate in October 2011

"To many readers, there is no war of two worldviews, or if there is, one combatant is puny and unarmed while the other possesses tanks, robot drones and smart bombs," says Deepak Chopra. "Science is fully armed, while a new spirituality, divorced from religious dogma, is a fledgling."

Time magazine heralds Chopra as one of the top 100 heroes and icons of the century and credits him as "the poet-prophet of alternative medicine." Chopra, the world famous physician and best-selling guru, can now add another title to his extensive resume: worldview warrior.

Chopra began battling over the issue of science vs. spirituality when he first met another best-selling author at a televised debate at the California Institute of Technology on "the future of God." Chopra was the articulate advocate for spirituality, and taking the side of science was Leonard Mlodinow, a prominent Caltech physicist.

The central question: Does science describe the universe, or do ancient teachings like meditation unravel mysteries that are beyond the worldview of science? The ongoing discussions led to a remarkable book, *War of the Worldviews*, the product of that serendipitous encounter and the contentious—but respectful—clash of worldviews that grew along with their friendship.

"Hidebound science is ready to topple, making way for a new paradigm where consciousness takes center stage," says Chopra, a global force in the field of lifelong learning. Chopra is the author of nearly 60 books, with 19 *New York Times* best sellers on mind-body health, spirituality, and peace.

"Don't expect the bodies of fallen physicists littering the field. The outcome won't be the vanquishing of science but its expansion," adds Chopra.

VIEWS

The Spirituality vs. Science debate continued when Chopra and Mlodinow shared the stage at UC San Diego in October 2011 as part of "The Atlantic Meets the Pacific" (see sidebar, "Free Online Viewing of The Atlantic Meets the Pacific").

Stating the case for spirituality was Chopra, a fellow of the American College of Physicians, a member of the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, adjunct professor at the Kellogg School of Management, and a senior scientist with the Gallup Organization.

Aptly representing science was Mlodinow, a scholar of extraordinary achievement. He received his PhD in theoretical physics from the UC Berkeley and currently teaches at Caltech. Mlodinow is the writing collaborator of Stephen Hawking and co-author of the recently published *The Grand Design*, a book that argues that invoking God is not necessary to explain the origins of the universe. For popular culture credibility, he has even written for the TV series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

"As Leonard and I debate the great questions of human existence, my role is to offer spiritual answers—not as a priest or practitioner of any particular faith, but as a researcher in con-

sciousness," said Chopra, who argues the case of spirituality, not organized religion.

Chopra's and Mlodinow's UC San Diego session centered on such questions as "how did the universe emerge," "what is the connection between mind and brain," and "is God an illusion?"

"One of the issues Deepak feels science is close-minded about is the existence of a hidden or invisible realm," says Mlodinow. "It is true historically science has rejected many suggestions of invisible realms. But that's not because science has never examined them."

Chopra readily shrugs off the disdain of scientists for spirituality.

"When Leonard says that I am clinging to precepts from thousands of years ago, he can't be serious, given how much up-to-date science the new spirituality has come to terms with."

The book is earning worldwide praise.

"We need a worldview grounded in science that does not deny the richness of human nature and the validity of modes of knowing other than the scientific," said His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

"If we can bring our spirituality, the richness and wholesomeness of our basic human values, to bear upon the course of science in human society, then the different approaches of science and spirituality will contribute together to the betterment of humanity. This book points the way to such a collaborative endeavor."

Similar sentiments were expressed by UC San Diego professor V.S. Ramachandran, director of the Center for Brain and Cognition, who called their book "a timely revival of the debate between science and spirituality. In alternate chapters each author defends his position without disrespecting the other and the result is a remarkable contribution to the history of ideas; eminently readable, no matter which side of the fence you are on."

Moderating "The Atlantic Meets the Pacific" session was *The Atlantic* editor James Bennet, who said that before he read the book, he had expected the two authors to reach common ground on a number of issues. But after his reading, he came to the opposite conclusion.

"It really felt like a war. In fact, there is no peace at the end of the book," Bennet said. ■

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Free Online Viewing for "The Atlantic Meets the Pacific"

UCSD-TV created six programs on "The Atlantic Meets the Pacific" that are now available for free online viewing and downloading at its website, www.ucsd.tv/atlanticpacific.

Plans are underway for a second annual event in October of 2012. Created by UC San Diego Extension and *The Atlantic* magazine, "The Atlantic Meets the Pacific" brought thought-provoking conversations addressing new frontiers in science, medicine, technology, and energy against the backdrop of this rapidly globalizing world.

In addition to Deepak Chopra and Leonard Mlodinow, the three-day program featured many speakers who work on the cusp of "what's next," including serial entrepreneur Elon Musk, CEO of SpaceX and Tesla Motors, interviewed by *The Atlantic's* James Fallows; a conversation with Twitter co-founder Evan Williams; and computer game design pioneer and Sims creator Will Wright interviewed by *The Atlantic's* Alexis Madrigal.

Many of the conversations, like the Chopra and Mlodinow face off, took place at the Scripps Seaside Forum, an ocean-front conference center facility located in the heart of the renowned Scripps Institution of Oceanography.