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# We need weight on the needles

13-17 minutes

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## 'We need weight on the needles'

**By Geoff Ward**

During conversations with Colin when we met in mid-October, 2003, I introduced, as a discussion point, the molecular biologist Darryl Reanne's book, *The Death of Forever* (1991), which attempts to show that the goal of evolution is to realise itself through consciousness, to “close the feedback loop between mind and matter”, an idea which seems consistent with Wilson's own view that “our purpose in the world is eventually to enable spirit to conquer matter”.

Reanne refers to the “mutant minority”, those few individuals in each generation who are “ahead of their time”, and whose consciousness has evolved far beyond the norm of the species. Visionaries foreknew what one day would be the common experience of mankind. “Change appears first in a tiny subsection of the population, a mutant minority (sometimes a single individual) and only slowly spreads through the population until it becomes the norm,” Reanne says.

Wilson, in the last chapter of *Alien Dawn* (1998), where there is a close examination of the question of why humans are in the world and what their purpose is, mentions one of H G Wells'

later novels, *Star Begotten* (1937), the central character of which is a writer of popular history books who notices that more and more exceptional children are being born, and wonders if this might be caused by mutations due to cosmic rays. He calls these children “Martians”. They seem to see the universe in a different way from other people, and he comes to the conclusion that a different kind of human being is appearing in the world and changing things.

Shortly before the death of Andrija Puharich, author of *Uri: a Journal of the Mystery of Uri Geller* (1974), Wilson was asked to write an article about him, and he rang him at his home in America. When Wilson asked Puharich what he was working on, he said he was studying supernormal children. “You wouldn’t believe how many of those kids there are out there,” said Puharich. “They seem to be on genius level. I know dozens, and there are probably thousands.”

For long Wilson has believed that humans are on the verge of an evolutionary leap to a higher level of existence. He agrees totally with Reaney’s concept of the “mutant minority”, so redolent of *Outsiders*. The Romantics of two centuries ago were part of such a minority but sought “sequestration from the world” (Thomas de Quincey), lacking the practicality needed to transform society. Wilson points out that what people need, *Outsiders* or otherwise, is to develop “essence”, to “polish themselves up” with self-discipline and a moral imperative capable of reshaping the world.

Wilson said: “I was talking to the Shaw Society when I suddenly found myself telling them that man was on the point of an evolutionary leap to a higher phase, and I thought afterwards, did I really mean that, or was I just saying it, you

know, as you do say things during lectures. But then I thought, no, that's not true, I really did mean it. Suddenly these words expressed a real deep conviction, and it seems to me that it is true, we're on the point of an evolutionary leap to a higher phase. We're pretty close to it. We'd better be, because the world's in such a mess."

But some might say that, with the world situation being what it is, we were more likely to destroy ourselves than evolve to a higher plane.

"No, I don't think so at all. I think that's taking entirely the wrong point of view. I've got a feeling that once you apply the 'real you', what Aleister Crowley would have called the 'true will', to the facts of human existence, it can make such tremendous changes that all of this kind of thing about 'My God, look at what a state we're in' is trivial. We're like a housewife who has let the house get into a really dirty mess. In comes the mother-in-law, rolls up her sleeves, and within two or three hours the house is suddenly shining and looking absolutely fine. You only need that person with conviction and realism to change everything.

"You can project forward and say things are getting worse and worse, we're getting more emigration and more and more people are moving around the world, horrible things are happening with more and more terrorism and the rest of it, but nevertheless, it looked a century ago as if the world was going to disappear into the blackness of the industrial revolution, that everything would be covered in soot a century ahead. That would have proven to be an untrue prophecy.

"You really can't extrapolate very far into the future. I've got a feeling that there are immense forces working. James Lovelock (the Gaia hypothesis) came up with this theory, basically that it does appear that life has quite deliberately arranged certain

things. For example, Fred Hoyle, the astronomer, said that when you look at the world you suddenly realise that this Earth appears to be absolutely perfect for the nurturing of human existence. He said it was almost as if someone had been monkeying with the physics. What Lovelock was saying was that nature appears to have this incredible power of regeneration and of change. We keep doing awful things to the world, by way of pollution and all the rest of it, but nature appears to have this quite extraordinary power of putting them right again. I am convinced that this is so. I just tend to be basically quite optimistic.

“I agree that if you actually put yourself down on ground level where you’re just seeing people’s feet, so to speak, then you do get into that state of thinking that things are bound to get worse and worse, you know, with the atom bomb, Aids and so on. I’ve got a feeling that whatever creative force lies behind evolution has taken a hell of a lot of trouble to get us where we are now and is not going to let us just disappear.

“You see, I do have this very, very powerful feeling, having noted this fact, that there do appear to me to be absolutely weird synchronicities which you can hardly believe are true. There does appear to be some kind of force which organises things; the forces actually involved in organising the world, so to speak, are here at this moment. Most of the trouble in the world appears to be due to the fact that so many people have no idea where they are going or what they are doing and they are causing their own problems in the way that you instantly cause yourself to slip into bad luck the moment you let yourself get into that state of thinking everything’s appalling, and asking what’s going to happen. Then things do get appalling, and everything goes wrong.

“Goethe, when someone said to him ‘You’ve always been lucky, you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth’, replied ‘Do you think I would have been such a fool to have been unlucky?’ This feeling he had, I feel, was quite correct in a sense, that we do actually control our own destiny, in the same way James Joyce said when you take a person’s character into account for writing a novel you’ve got to take into account whether they are the kind of person who will walk under ladders and bricks drop on their head, or they are the kind of person who will win the Lottery. That’s also a personality trait. I think this is perfectly true.

“For some reason, there is an element in us... you’ve only got to look at people and see the things that go wrong for them, and say, uh-oh, I can see that written in their faces, that he or she is that type of person, and then when something awful happens you say, yes, that’s just the kind of thing I would have expected, almost as if in some way they had induced it themselves by their attitude.

“Now, essence is the something in us that develops from contact with hard reality - the hard reality finally knocks off your corners and gradually creates a kind of reality inside you. Remember Gurdjieff said we all possess personality and we all possess something inside us called ‘essence’ which develops only from what he called intentional suffering. He didn’t mean the kind of suffering that just happens - appalling accidents - he meant the kind of suffering that a monk knows, for example, deliberately starving himself, sitting cross-legged on a bed of nails and all that, that’s intentional suffering.

“It’s intended to get you into a state in exactly the same way as taking a piece of emery paper and trying to clean a rusty piece of metal. It’s polishing yourself up. It’s deliberately

subjecting yourself to a certain discipline. In fact, it is self-discipline rather than suffering, and people who don't have any self-discipline are the people who drift into these states where appalling things happen to them, and somehow they are inducing it themselves.

“The problem is, of course, the kinds of things I'm saying can easily lead to idiots like Hitler, for example, to start talking about an elite which can do all kinds of things. Hitler believed in himself absolutely and totally and look what a mess he was, ending by destroying himself and Germany. What you have to do is apply this inner certainty together with a very strong moral sense, which is what Hitler lacked completely. I think we all have a very powerful and clear idea of right and wrong. You can see this extremely clearly in someone like Hitler.

“In fact, this is an observation I made from writing about criminals. For some reason, they all seem to paint themselves into a corner and land themselves in the most appalling situations. When you learn about Al Capone dying of syphilis after years in jail you just nod your head and say, yes, that's just the kind of thing that would happen from the way that he lived, he'd end like that. It's almost impossible to escape this kind of fate. But on the other hand, once you've got a fair, clear certainty that something can be done, once you've got yourself into this, so to speak, positive stream, then on the whole things tend to go OK. You just have to recognise the underlying possibility of words.

“I've got a passage, which I'd been intending to write for years, in the next volume of Spider World; the last one has just been published in America, called Shadowland. I'd always intended to do some future volume of Spider World in which Niall travels... one of the things he's discovered is the ability to

leave his body and to mentally travel. It's not out-of-the-body experience in the normal sense, it's the curious ability to be in other times and places.

“Niall finds himself on some peculiar planet where he feels the air around him is full of spirits and gradually they become quite clear to him and he asks ‘What are you doing here?’ and they say ‘We’re guardian angels, actually - our job is to look after those people down there’, pointing at the surface, and they say to him ‘Do you happen to be free, by any chance?’ and Niall says ‘Yes, why?’ and they say ‘We’d be really grateful if you gave us a hand because we can do with all the help we can get’. He says ‘OK, what do I do?’ And they say ‘Well, it’s perfectly simple, once you have a person or persons you are in charge of as their guardian angel you have a quite direct link into their minds so that you can guide them and give them warnings about things that are due to happen to them, or steer them in the direction of good things that will happen to them - that’s all you’ve got to do’. He says ‘That sounds like money for old rope, no problem at all’. They say ‘Well you have a go and see what you think’.

“And Niall quickly discovers that it’s not money for old rope at all because human beings are so bloody awkward and difficult that it’s like trying to drive a dodgem car at a fairground – you twist the steering wheel one way and it goes the other. You think that all that’s needed for a certain person is the right kind of background and life and they’ll see what’s good for them and they’ll go ahead and do it. In point of fact, people tend to do things that aren’t good for them at all, choose the person who will absolutely wreck their lives, and so on and so forth. It’s Poe’s imp of the perverse.

“On the other hand, if people are given sufficient sense of the difficulty of something or other then suddenly they galvanise and they really will make the right kind of effort and then at last you get them on to the right track.”

So it requires a challenge of some kind? “Well, yes it does. When I was at school I called it the weight on the needles because we were in a hosiery class where we used to make things on old knitting machines which were kind of flatbed machines with needles sticking out of the top and you had to wind the wool in and out around the needles to begin with. Then you moved the camshaft across them very slowly and gently and the needles went up one by one.

“Once you’d got three or four rows of knitting you then had to put a fairly heavy weight on the whole thing, called a cone, dragging the knitting downwards, and then you could quite happily push the camshaft back and forwards, and then underneath a scarf would proceed to materialise! The only trouble was that if you went back and forwards too happily, and forgot all about it, and the weights reached the floor, then suddenly the wool was curling up over your needles and you got a horrible mess and you had to cast off and start all over again.

“This is the problem with human beings. We need weight on the needles. Without weight on the needles we cannot create our own essence. It’s what we really need, some strong sense of purpose, of a kind of resistance too, so to speak, but only resistance in the same sort of way that a boat cutting through the water has resistance against it.

“T E Hulme said the bird has the grace it possesses not because it can fly but because it had to fly in air against gravity, and it’s this set of conditions that forms the weight on the needles and allows the bird to become as graceful as it is. We



have to grasp in the same sort of way that we're in a particularly complex and difficult world, but once you've got the principle of the self-discipline and so on, you suddenly start getting results back from doing certain things, and you know, things still go wrong but you realise suddenly why they're going wrong and what you have to do to put them right.”