

The Spectral Revolution with Jason Reza Jorjani

Video Transcript - *New Thinking Allowed* with Jeffrey Mishlove

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(00:22) **JM:** Hello and welcome, I'm Jeffrey Mishlove. Today we are going to look at the spectral revolution, by which I mean we're going to examine the ways in which our minds become clouded by archetypal forces, in ways that we're not even aware, that we're unconscious of, and how we can free ourselves from that sort of hypnotism. With me is philosopher Jason Reza Jorjani, who is a faculty member at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Welcome, Jason.

(00:55) **JRJ:** It's great to be with you, Jeffrey.

(00:57) **JM:** You're an expert in the philosophy of technology, and one of the points that you make is that global culture, Western culture in particular, is sort of mesmerized by the power of technology to such a degree that not only does technology, of course, improve our lives in many, many ways, but it also distorts our worldview, our vision of reality.

(01:24) **JRJ:** Yes, technology is often considered applied science. But, one of the things that I'm concerned to argue is that actually science is essentially technological. Technology is the more fundamental phenomenon, without which even the most basic sciences couldn't be elaborated. Even for geometry you need basic writing instruments and ways to measure straight lines, so technology preceded science chronologically. But also, our theoretical world pictures are not mirrors of reality, they are models of the world, and they have an ultimately practical significance. They allow us to get a better handle on nature, so science is essentially technological.

(02:08) **JM:** We build models in order to predict and control things, and when we're successful in so doing we tend to think, well this model accurately reflects reality and you're suggesting that might not be the case.

(02:24) **JRJ:** That's why I think spectral phenomena are so significant. The term paranormal, I believe, is a misnomer. It suggests that anomalous phenomena, like ESP, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, are exceptions to an adequate mechanistic understanding of the natural world, but this mechanistic and materialistic vision of the world is a model that we've constructed for practical purposes and we've lost sight of that fact. So, what appear to be irrational phenomena are actually things that are perfectly normal in the animal world, or even they're characteristics of, say, plant life. And so, against the

background of these phenomena, we're able to see the limits of the technological scientific approach to nature.

(03:19) **JM:** So, what you're suggesting, if I get your meaning, is that in societies, such as our own, that are highly advanced technologically, there's a tendency to deny the existence of paranormal phenomena, even when they are demonstrated empirically, as in scientific parapsychology, to act as if these things couldn't possibly exist because they seem somehow inconsistent with the technical, rational, mechanistic, materialistic worldview we adopt.

(03:51) **JRJ:** That's right. And the people who have, despite that marginalization of these phenomena, continued to research them, namely parapsychologists, often try to elaborate what amounts to a new metaphysics in order to explain these phenomena. They want to replace the Cartesian modern paradigm in science with a new paradigm, or a new framework of knowledge. Whereas I believe, the deeper significance of these phenomena is that it gives us an insight into what model building is and how we construct frameworks of knowledge, and to the fact that they are socially and psychologically constructed.

(04:33) **JM:** In other words, we really have to appreciate that reality is reality and a model is a model and the two can never precisely mirror each other.

(04:43) **JRJ:** Yes, and we have no objective access to reality, capital R. There are different forms of life in nature and they have various finite horizons of experience, based on what their vital interests are. There's no objective perspective for a standpoint.

(05:00) **JM:** Well, when you use the term, the spectral revolution, you seem to be looking forward to an era in which people will be able to accept both the power of technology and at the same time acknowledge the reality of psychic phenomena, of the powers of the unconscious, of fringe areas, maybe even things like life after death.

(05:25) **JRJ:** By spectral revolution, I mean several related things. First, the word spectral has more than one connotation. It evokes the spectrum, like the light spectrum, so it's a confounding of binary oppositions, like being and nothingness, life and death, mind and matter. I think that what we've termed paranormal phenomena confound dichotomies in exactly that way. Spectral also suggests what is in the process of coming to be, that which is to come, rather than static being. So, in that way it's evocative of nature as process, which is what is not captured by the net of our mechanistic worldview. And finally, by spectral, or specter, I mean to evoke two archetypes in particular, Prometheus and Atlas, two fraternal titans from Greek mythology, who I believe are the specters that are possessing us through the history of technological development and its transformation, both of the natural world and our own forms of embodiment.

(06:42) **JM:** In a sense, you're saying that Prometheus and Atlas are archetypal energies that have possessed, or mesmerized, the human race.

(06:55) **JRJ:** Technological science has deconstructed, really torn apart, the traditional worlds of meaning of cultures all around the world. And, it's believed that it has done so because in a neutral sense it is more objectively adequate to reality. But I think what's actually happened, is that a particular mythology, namely ours, a mythology that goes back to our Greek progenitors, has come to dominate over other myths in the world, because it's simply more powerful, it's more captivating. And, at the heart of this mythos are Prometheus and Atlas.

(07:36) **JM:** Many people would say we're a Christian nation, you know, the Christian myth, the Judeo-Christian myth is the dominant myth of our culture. I guess you are, at least in part, taking issue with that.

(07:49) **JRJ:** Many people, particularly more fundamentalist Christians, would also call technological science demonic. In a way, I think they're right. But, I hear demonic in the Greek sense of daemonic, which meant not only... it meant actually to be moved by genius. The Latin translation of *daemon* is genius, where we get the word ingenuity from. So, it has a positive side, as well as a darker, menacing side.

(08:20) **JM:** Well, the Christian tradition regarded the ancient gods and titans as literally demonic, in some sense. But, let's talk a bit about these characters, Prometheus and Atlas. I think most of our viewers have heard the terms but may not be aware of the poetry and the story behind these images.

(08:42) **JRJ:** Well, what's most interesting about these two figures in particular is that they rise to prominence in Greek literature just before scientific thinking gets off the ground. They herald the rise of science in ancient Greece. In the case of Prometheus, Aeschylus wrote a series of, a trilogy really, of tragedies centering on Prometheus. The basic idea is that Prometheus is the creator of man, not Zeus. In Greek mythology, we were created in the image of the titan Prometheus and we were meant to be a race of new gods. But, out of his jealousy, Zeus bound us in the chains of ignorance. In order to remedy this, Prometheus steals fire from the gods and brings it to the realm of men. This fire symbolizes both the light of knowledge, the light in its darkness, fire in the, you know, night time. Also, it's the fire of the forge, what gives us the ability to craft tools that improve the conditions of our lives. For this, Prometheus is punished by being chained to a rock in the Caucasus and having his liver devoured by an eagle. The reason it's the liver, is because in archaic Greek culture, the liver was used for fortune telling, or soothsaying, for seeing the future. The very name Prometheus means forethought, and it's related to the word *mathos*, the root of mathematics, *mathmato* or *mathos*, which means to always already know something about which you haven't studied yet. In other words, to come up with a formulaic mold to recast things in terms of. That's essentially what technological science does. In so far

as Prometheus created man in his own image, this is also the archetype of genetic engineering. That's the way it's taken up by Mary Shelly in *Frankenstein*, or the modern Prometheus.

(10:38) **JM:** That being the subtitle of her famous novel, *Frankenstein*.

(10:42) **JRJ:** Yes, and the most interesting aspect of the story, which is not well translated into the film adaptations, is that she really evokes the sense that the monster is a specter of the inventor himself. He is a genius, he's a creative artist in a sense, but he's also someone possessed by the spirit of technological science.

(11:06) **JM:** So, the Promethean myth really involves the acquisition of various powers, technological powers by humanity and how this is threatening, either to humanity itself or to the gods.

(11:21) **JRJ:** That's right, and insofar as it's threatening to the gods, that's also the kernel of the Atlas myth. Atlas is the brother of Prometheus. We see his story unfold in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias* dialogues. In these dialogues, on the one hand Plato sets forth his cosmology. He gives us the image of a demi-urge or builder god who's a constructor of the cosmos. On the other hand he tells us the story about Atlantis, or the realm of Atlas. Somehow in these two dialogues, the image of the demiurge and that of King Atlas are conflated with one another, and I think it's deliberate. King Atlas is a brother of Prometheus and he creates a civilization of hybrids, of heroes in a sense, people... the word hero comes from eros... people who are born of eros between gods and mortals, and so they arise to a god like stature and have no need for the gods any longer. They develop a very advanced civilization on the Earth. Atlas also is used, of course, commonly in English to refer to models, like star charts, or geographical atlases of the world, even atlases of the human body. This is another connection between King Atlas and the demiurge, or world constructor, in Plato's dialogues. At any rate, the story ends with Zeus convening a council of the Olympians and them deciding to wipe the Atlanteans off the face of the Earth amidst earthquakes and terrible floods, which of course is a parallel to the story of Noah's flood in the Bible, which was used to wipe out the civilization of giants that are referred to in Genesis.

(13:06) **JM:** Well, now, the giants in Genesis have some similarity to the myth of Atlantis in that it involves the marriage of humans and another race of almost godlike beings.

(13:20) **JRJ:** It's actually a very close comparison. If we look at the Book of Enoch, which many believe was excerpted or censored, removed from Genesis, it tells the story of why the civilization of giants was removed from the Earth, and it was because these titans, or giants, taught humanity all the arts and sciences. This brought humans up to equal footing with the gods, or with the Elohim, in Hebrew. So, it's really again out of jealousy, that their civilization meets its end. Among the crafts that they taught mankind was the use of psychic ability. In particular, there's reference to a group of sorceresses who dominate this society, women with tremendous psychical abilities.

(14:10) **JM:** Well, these myths suggest, and the way you suggest that we're captivated by these myths, subconsciously, that humanity is moving toward a point where, even though today we think of parapsychology as a fringe science, practically rejected by the scientific community. Nevertheless, it remains an acknowledged science by the American Academy for the Advancement of Science. We may move toward a time in history when not only are these abilities of the mind, these mysterious abilities acknowledged, but also cultivated.

(14:50) **JRJ:** You have to reconceive what technology is. The Greek root of technology is the word *techne*, or *techno*, which also means craft, in the sense of arts and crafts. It has a broader connotation of technique, not just machinery that's used in order to manipulate the world, but techniques that one cultivates in order to have greater capacities of control over oneself and the world. So, psychical ability is a form of technology, in the Greek sense of technology. Once we realize that our mechanistic models of the world, they're just that, in that they are not mirrors to some objective reality. There's no reason why psychical abilities can't be developed as a form of technology.

(15:37) **JM:** Well, many people are afraid of that, I think. Freud pointed out, for example, that most people, certainly in his era, in the early 20th century, didn't even want to know the contents of their own subconscious minds, let alone have other people be aware of their lustful and aggressive thoughts, for example. There are many reasons that people fear, and have feared, in Western culture, these powers. We've persecuted witches. The skeptics who rail against parapsychology talk about the rising tide of occultism and superstition. If we're to achieve spectral revolution we have to move beyond this somehow and also beyond the tragic outcomes of the myth of Atlantis or the myth of Frankenstein.

(16:32) **JRJ:** This is another reason why the spectral revolution, unlike say the Copernican Revolution or the Darwinian Revolution, has been resisted for so long. The data have been there for over 120 years, and yet unconsciously, I think, people have resisted coming face to face with the reality of these phenomena, because they pose such fundamental challenges to the way society is organized. Who wants to live in a world where your neighbor can become a well-trained telepath and read your intentions better than your spouse, or where people can clairvoyantly view what you do in your most intimate moments inside your home, or where the patents of corporations are not secure from remote viewing, where the stock market could be predicted in advance by precognition. So, there's a tremendous potential for social destabilization, even for the disintegration of society there. This is why, again, I think Prometheus and Atlas are so important. If we face that prospect of social disintegration, it's paramount that we find an ethos on the basis of which we can reconstruct society. That we haven't found that, I think is one of the reasons why parapsychological research has not affected a revolution yet. And, we don't need to look to some arbitrary source to impose that ethos. It's the ethos of Prometheus and Atlas, it's the essential spirit of technological science that we can, for the first time, become conscious of, rather than be unconsciously dominated by.

(18:08) **JM:** So, what you're saying, many people would say I don't want the kind of society that you have just described. It's better, even if unrealistic, to deny the existence of these phenomena, and thereby suppress them, than have to contend with them. But, you seem to be saying that no matter how much we resist, the Promethean myth will overcome that resistance.

(18:35) **JRJ:** The question is, who is the "we" that has to contend with them? Atlas also represents the world colonizing force of technological science. There is a political dimension to technological science. It conquers all other cultures. That can be a negative thing. But, it's also the potential for developing a cosmopolitan world society. So, if we are going to have to reorganize society, economics, politics, we have to understand who the "we" there is. What is our ethos, what is our constitution, as a people? I think that's already implicit, and the mythos has been driving us for 2,500 years, we just need to become conscious of it.

(19:20) **JM:** How is it implicit?

(19:22) **JRJ:** Well, we are Prometheus and Atlas. But, we have been them unconsciously. They have possessed us and instead we need to develop a free relationship to these potentially very constructive forces.

(19:33) **JM:** Now, Prometheus and Atlas, as you point out, were both punished by the gods. Are we heading towards that kind of a destiny? Are we to become like the people of Atlantis, getting ahead of ourselves and causing our own destruction? Certainly, there are many prophetic voices out there that suggest that's where we're headed.

(19:54) **JRJ:** The most unique thing about our civilization is its willingness to risk dystopia in order to reach for utopia. I think that the prospect of, you know, dystopian disaster cannot cause us to abandon the aspiration for a better world, a new world, one that transcends all of the ignorance and petty violence of traditional cultures going back throughout history.

(20:27) **JM:** Well, traditional cultures are often the ones that have been open to the paranormal, often to their disadvantage, because as you point out they end up being conquered by more advanced technological societies. They end up, in a sense, losing their own cultural roots as a result of their peaceful openness.

(20:51) **JRJ:** Well, I'm not sure it's a peaceful openness. There's also, you know... there are various forms of internal and external violence in tribal societies. Also, their acceptance of the paranormal is in a completely different form than that which it would take with the spectral revolution. It's a superstitious, pre-scientific relationship to these abilities. Whereas, what we would have on the other side of technological science is something quite different and more empowering.

(21:22) **JM:** You seem to be arguing that viewers of this program, who have an interest in science, mathematics, technology and engineering, ought to have an equal interest in exploring the unknown areas of the human mind.

(21:40) **JRJ:** I think that they should look at their interest in science, technology and engineering, against the background of what can't be encompassed by it, because that will light up the structure of technological science. It will reveal its limits.

(21:59) **JM:** What cannot be encompassed?

(22:02) **JRJ:** What cannot be encompassed, which then also in a way shows us the power of science and technology themselves, shows us that they are a transformative effort on our part to make our world more habitable and to reshape both nature and ourselves.

(22:27) **JM:** In other words, a greater appreciation of the true nature of science and of technology would also be an appreciation of their limitations.

(22:34) **JRJ:** Yes, this is not something that just happens. We have done this. We've reshaped the world. We are forcing answers out of nature in the way we put questions to nature.

(22:47) **JM:** And, so that we get the answer we're looking for...

(22: 51) **JRJ:** Yes.

(22:52) **JM:** And you're suggesting there are other answers we're missing as a result of that.

(22:58) **JRJ:** There's a dimension of life that we're missing as a result of that. We've overdeveloped our technical intellect and we've atrophied various instinctual abilities that we share in common with animals. We can regain those on the level of a cultivated intuition.

(23:15) **JM:** Well, you've talked about, for example, the use of precognition for investing in the stock market. Do you see that as a wise application of psychic abilities?

(23:29) **JRJ:** No, but I think it's one that could call into question the entire structure of capitalist economics. I think that we might have to move to a different form of economic system. Also, in the sense that patents would not be able to be protected by corporations. Remote viewing would allow corporations to steal patents from other ones before they really even had been worked out properly.

(23:55) **JM:** When we talk about paradigm change, many people point out that it was only a few hundred years ago that witches were burned at the stake, literally speaking. People were afraid that

other people with power, could just by their own thoughts, could cause damage. Now today, we look back and think about that as superstition. But, are we opening the door to... if that's a reality or superstition, either way, it seems rather frightening.

(24:26) **JRJ**: The mechanistic character of modern science in part is a response to those social conditions. I think a kind of, at least tacit truce was reached between the early modern... or late Renaissance scientists and the church. Insofar as after the burning of people like Giordano Bruno, who freely investigated psychic phenomenon in a scientific way, scientists kind of got the message that this is an area that ought not to be inquired into. Matters of the soul belong within the domain of faith, and so they focused on things that could be comprehended in terms of mathematical equations, that had a kind of mechanical regularity to them. This also allowed them to avoid being burned at the stake. So yes, by breaking that truce we are potentially opening the door to something like the witch burnings, which again is why the ethos of Prometheus and Atlas are so important. We need to decide who we are. Are we the people who sentenced sorcerers and sorceresses to death, or are we a people who are driven by the spirit of scientific exploration and discovery? We can't have it both ways.

(25:40) **JM**: Jason Reza Jorjani, it's been a pleasure having this conversation with you. You have a very penetrating intellect and you seem to be able to tease apart arguments that confound a lot of people, and at the same time do it with a vision of, what I personally regard as potentially an extraordinarily positive future for humanity.

(26:05) **JRJ**: Thank you so much for inviting me, Jeffrey.

(26:08) **JM**: Thank you for being with me. And thank you for being with us.

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