

InPresence 0084: Vaihinger's Philosophy of "As If" with Jeffrey Mishlove

Video Transcript - *New Thinking Allowed* with Jeffrey Mishlove
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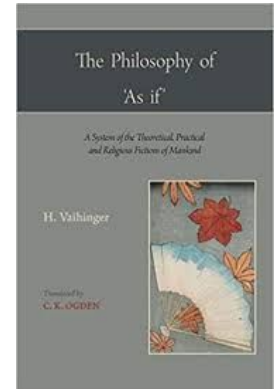


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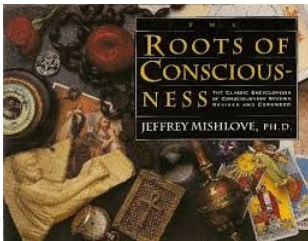
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(00:26) Hello, I'm Jeffrey Mishlove and today I'd like to talk to you about Vaihinger's philosophy of "As if," or in German, "Als ob." Vaihinger was a German philosopher, a student of Kant and Nietzsche, and he wrote the book back in the 1880s. It wasn't published until 1911. It was quite influential for a while. It's been forgotten and I think more recently revived. One philosopher has recently described it is the epitome of a philosophical system addressing the question of modeling.

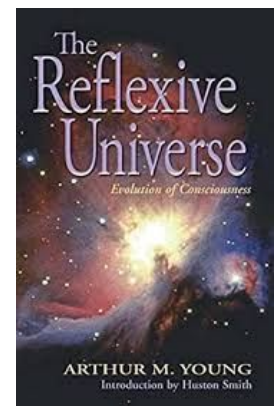


(01:07) Now, I first heard about Vaihinger's philosophy in an odd way. As I've mentioned in previous "In Presence" segments, my friend Paul Sirag and I were invited to live with Arthur and Ruth Young in Berkeley, when they set up the Institute for the Study of Consciousness. Now, I moved out as I recall, less than a year later because I had a girlfriend at the time and really it wasn't acceptable for me to be carrying on with my girlfriend as I was, at the Institute. So, we moved out and my friend Saul Paul stayed there for many years. As I have mentioned, Saul Paul has become a brilliant mathematician and physicist. His papers have been published in *Nature*, amongst other places, including the appendix on hyperspace and consciousness in my book, *The Roots of Consciousness*, 2nd Edition.



(02:08) The thing is this, Saul Paul was inspired to do all of this work because of promptings from Arthur Young, the founder of the institute for the Study of Consciousness, the inventor of the Bell helicopter, a cosmologist, an astrologer, author of *The Reflexive Universe* and *The Geometry of Meaning*, which are both very deep attempts to come up with cosmological

systems that would explain a great deal, perhaps not quite everything, but moving in the direction of theories of everything. Now, it so happened that many years after I left the Institute, Saul Paul was asked to leave, himself. And I, at the time, thought this was strange. Why would they ask Saul Paul to leave? He understood Arthur Young's theories probably better than anybody else. They had worked so closely together for so long.



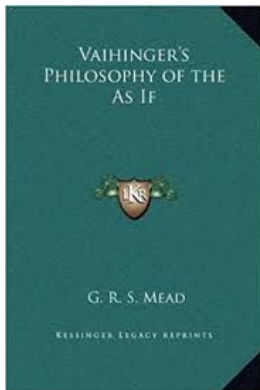
(03:13) When I talk to some of the board members who were involved in that decision, because I remained friendly with them, I was told that it had to do with Vaihinger's philosophy of "As if". Vaihinger's idea was, when it comes to cosmological systems, systems of metaphysics, systems of religion, he said, "We can never know whether they're true or false. You could say that they're fictions and they need to be judged by their practical consequences. What is the pragmatic effect of believing it's true, acting as if it was true?" That was apparently Saul Paul's sin. He didn't act "as if" Arthur Young's theory was true. He had his own point of view, his own theories. He had his own class that he was teaching on the theory of consciousness right there at the Institute and he wasn't teaching Arthur Young's theory. He was teaching his own. That was why he was asked to leave.

(04:20) So, it brings up some questions about Vaihinger and about his work because I've talked before about pragmatic criteria. If it works, it's true. That's basically the idea of pragmatism. Vaihinger is suggesting something along those lines. If it works, it doesn't matter. In fact, he goes so far as to say, there are some theories that we know are fictitious. They may not be self-contradictory, which is a deeper form of fiction, but they're false. They contradict physical evidence. Nevertheless, if you believe in them, if you believe in them as if they were true, in fact, not even as if, because if you say, "As if, it means well, I know it's false but I'll act as if." No, if you accept that it is true, what are the implications for you? If you accept, for example, that life after death is true, if you accept that astrology is true, or that tarot reading is true, is that going to make you more effective? By many accounts, yes it will.

(05:33) Now, the tricky thing is if you're a philosopher like Vaihinger, you're not entering into that belief system. It is true, because you're a philosopher. At some level, you're saying to yourself, "I know it's not true, but I'll act as if." Is that good enough? Well, perhaps it is, in some regards good enough. Now, I know this, when it comes to psychokinesis there's a lot to be said for complete conviction that you can do this, that it's true, but how do you enter into that state? Does it take a certain personality type, for example? I get comments. They don't all get published in the comment section on the "In Presence" and *New Thinking Allowed* videos, but I get comments from people who say, "If you want to know the absolute truth, read the Quran. If you want to know the absolute truth, read the Bible. Read the Old Testament, or read the Gospels. Or if you want to know the absolute truth, read this person or read that person." There're some people amongst the viewers who have the ability to accept certain paradigms, certain belief systems as being absolutely true.

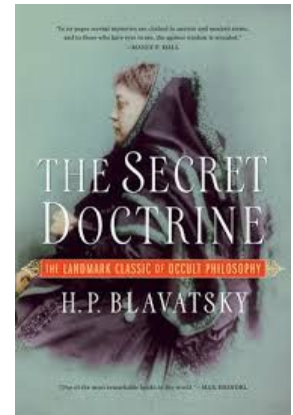
(06:56) Generally speaking, I'm not such a person at all. Ironically, I attribute this astrologically to the fact that my rising sign is Libra. Libra is the balance, the scales. I'm always weighing and balancing. I'm always saying, "Well, it could be this or it could be that, but who knows?" Now, Vaihinger is suggesting you got to go a little deeper with it. You got to act as if it's true. But on the other hand, does that create a social environment like the one Saul Paul Sirag was in, where he was asked to leave a very suitable situation because he wasn't willing to enter into the "as if" philosophy deeply enough to satisfy the people around him? And, it's very tricky. Some people suggest that Vaihinger is actually a skeptic. He's saying we can't know these things. The only way we can work with them at all is to act as

if. Then there are other people who say that it's just nonsense, it's all nonsense, because Vaihinger's philosophy itself has to be taken as a useful fiction. Why should we act "as if," because where is the benefit there? How can we ever know what the pragmatic value of something is?



(08:26) Interestingly, Vaihinger's philosophy was taken up by G.R.S. Mead, a theosophical writer who wrote a book about Vaihinger. Mead was a scholar of Gnosticism, one of the most intellectual people ever associated with Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophical movement. But, I believe that his intention was to say, if you want to take the ideas of Theosophy - and Madame Blavatsky had developed a very detailed comprehensive system integrating Buddhism and various Eastern esoteric traditions and some ideas of her own and introducing them to the Western market.

(09:15) She was very effective and out-reaching. A great deal of what we called New Age culture today comes from Madame Blavatsky and her followers like Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater. But, what we call New Age thinking - auras, chakras, spirit guides, thought-forms, channeling information from higher consciousness, from hidden masters - all of that comes out of Theosophy.



(09:44) I believe that means intention and focusing on Vaihinger's philosophy was to say that if you really want to get the most value out of Theosophy, you'll never know for sure whether these teachings are true, but if you embrace them as if they were true, then you'll be able to enter into the world where they are of value. This is true in so many different regards. We are pushed to accept the right-wing political position as if it were true, a left-wing political position as if it were true. There could be a lot of social pressure on us to enter into that "as if" modality, sometimes for the best and often not for the best.

(10:35) Now, let me ask you some questions. Have you ever been placed in a social environment where there was a lot of pressure on you to act "as if" a certain system of beliefs was true, even though you had real doubts? Did you accept that pressure? Have you resisted that pressure? Are you under such pressure right now? And, to the extent that you believe certain systems of thought to be absolutely true, do you find that they work better for you or do you find that maybe they don't? Are you acting as if something is true and it's not really helping you? Those are all things worth pondering. I'll leave you with those thoughts. Thank you for being with me. (11:24)

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