

HOW QUANTUM PHYSICS
CAN IMPROVE THE WAY YOU
THINK, LIVE, AND LOVE

T H E
P O S S I B I L I T Y
P R I N C I P L E

M E L S C H W A R T Z



sounds True
BOULDER, COLORADO

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INTRODUCTION

I awakened one weekend morning some twenty years ago feeling quite anxious. Having recently divorced, I was missing my kids, who were with their mom that weekend, and I thought getting out of the house might help. I headed out for a bike ride, but as I pedaled around the gently rolling hills of my hometown, my angst only continued to heighten. I realized I was experiencing the start of an anxiety attack—something that had never happened to me before.

Still feeling shaken when I arrived home, I walked into my office and absently pulled a book off the shelf: *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*, written by theoretical quantum physicist Fritjof Capra, which I had bought some time before but never gotten around to reading. Now I opened it and began to read about a major worldview shift, catalyzed by quantum physics (also known as quantum mechanics), which was just beginning to herald a deep impact on many aspects of our society. Capra described how this quantum sense of reality departed radically from our beliefs rooted in the once-groundbreaking work of the seventeenth-century thinkers Isaac Newton and René Descartes.¹ I felt myself becoming enthralled as I read of a wondrous universe—one that was inseparably whole and thoroughly interpenetrating—in which all notions of separation faded away. Moreover, this new reality indicated that the universe existed in a state of uncertainty—a state of pure potentiality.

As I continued to read, I was astonished to notice that my anxiety and despair had been supplanted by a sense of serenity and connectedness. Although nothing at all had changed in my outer world, my inner world was undergoing a profound shift. I was becoming a participant in this magical wholeness that I was reading about. I no longer

felt alone, but sensed that I was an integral part of this universe. I felt calm and connected. Capra's vision had opened me to the immense potential to be derived from connectedness.

As I continued reading over the following days, my fears retreated, and I began to embrace my future with confidence that I could summon these new potentials into being. Finishing Capra's book, I set to reading more about quantum physics, focusing on the theory and its implications (as the mathematical and technical aspects were well beyond my comprehension). I had immersed myself not only in understanding the science behind this quantum vision but also, more importantly, how it might affect us on personal levels. As my understanding of reality altered to align with these discoveries, my beliefs changed too. I reflected on how my misinformed beliefs, rooted in fear and the idea that change was onerous, had constrained my life. This insight ultimately touched virtually every aspect of how I think and live.

The new life that emerged was untethered by many of my old limitations. Rather than feeling unmoored, I marveled at my transformative experience, reflecting that if this worked so well for me, why not for others?

I began to integrate these insights into my work as a psychotherapist and marriage counselor and was further buoyed by the success experienced by so many of my clients. Over time, I developed an accessible approach that applied the quantum worldview to personal growth, showing people how to live more resiliently and fearlessly and how to think, feel, relate, and communicate differently based on this worldview.

At the same time, I began to teach this approach through a series of lectures and workshops to both therapists and the general public. This experience of working with so many people and witnessing their gains deepened my conviction about this approach toward personal transformation. This process helped me distill my new thinking into some basic principles to assist people in their lives.

How exactly do the quantum worldview and its core principles bring about personal transformation? It boils down to one word:

possibility. I've called this book *The Possibility Principle* because its purpose is to open the window of possibilities in all areas of our lives. I believe that we can shed the old beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors that have constrained us by welcoming life-enhancing principles that we can cull from quantum physics. Doing so enables our proactive participation in orchestrating our life experiences.

This book shares the myriad benefits we can enjoy by integrating the messages of quantum physics into our everyday existence. Examples drawn from my daily practice will show you how you too can achieve these breakthroughs. (I have altered the names and identities of all clients discussed in this book to preserve confidentiality.)

When we embrace the possibilities the quantum worldview offers us, we invite defining moments—moments when we dare to venture into new terrain, transcending our struggles and actualizing new realities. For example, reading Capra's *The Turning Point* was a defining moment for me. Defining moments are far more than simple insights. Regrettably, most of our insights—our *aha* moments—fade over time because, mired in the comfort of the familiar, we don't treat them with the respect they deserve. A defining moment is a singular burst of insight in which we choose to embark in a new direction. All that is required to break new ground is our willful intention to do so. At the core of the Possibility Principle is this truth: possibility begets more and more possibility.

Many books and teachings about personal growth address our thinking and perhaps our beliefs. Yet they leave out something critically important: an appreciation of how our operating worldview informs our beliefs, our thinking, and our lives. I'll demonstrate how our operating worldview creates the landscape we live in and, as a result, is the basis of our experience. Because I'm not a scientist, my descriptions of quantum physics are easy to understand and intended as metaphorical, not literal. That said, quantum physics resists the imposition of stark definitions even by experts in the field.

By helping my clients work through a vast array of challenges, I have developed practices that can help us overcome our obstacles and summon new possibilities into our lives. Many of our operating beliefs, when we

look deeply into them, make little sense and do much harm. Throughout this book, I introduce exercises—prompts for self-inquiry—that will help you reformulate your worldview and apply quantum principles to your thinking and beliefs. Mastering your thinking and beliefs will lay the foundation for authentic self-esteem, help you overcome chronic, cumbersome issues, and improve your ability to communicate. All of these shifts in turn can open you to new possibilities in your relationships with others, as well as your relationship with yourself.

I begin the book by describing the transformation in scientific understanding that has taken place over the past three centuries, how it has shifted from the mechanistic model of the universe conceived by thinkers such as Newton and Descartes to the revolutionary insights of quantum physics developed in the last ninety years. I go on to show how our unconscious addiction to the old worldview damages our ability to live sensibly, let alone to achieve our greatest potential. Each of the next three chapters explores a key principle in quantum physics that we can utilize in personal ways to our great benefit. In chapters 5–12, I present many examples to demonstrate how to make use of basic quantum concepts to reconstruct how we think about ourselves, how we interact with people and our environment, and how we communicate with each other.

The goal of this book is to help you envision your world and yourself as you develop the insights and skills to navigate your life without fear and with self-empowerment. You'll learn methods to become the master of your thinking and discover profound meaning and purpose in your life.

The time has come for each of us to experience a personal revolution, just as the scientific world did nine decades ago. It is time for us to let go of a long-outdated worldview and embrace a new, forward-thinking, empowering worldview offered by quantum physics. It is time for each of us to experience new possibilities—possibilities we can apprehend when we let go of the old outlook that keeps us stuck in so many areas of our lives. Reading this book is your first step. Welcome to your new quantum life.

THE PROMISE OF THE QUANTUM WORLDVIEW

A worldview is the “meta-picture” of how we think reality operates. What we need to understand is that it’s merely a temporary snapshot of reality. Over time, new theories and discoveries presage shifts in our worldviews. The paradigm that Earth was the center of the universe prevailed until it was eventually overturned in the early 1600s by Galileo, who suffered persecution for claiming that Earth moved around the sun. What we think of as reality is actually no more than the current worldview. Yet as each new theory and discovery arises, we reenvision the world and how we come to live in it, and our new vision has profound consequences on most aspects of our lives.

Until the sixteenth century, the worldview in the West was dominated by the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, which were based in part on the writings of Aristotle, amounting to a combination of reason and faith. Then a series of developments in physics and astronomy, brought about by early scientific masterminds Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, and Galileo Galilei, led to a greater reliance on analytical reasoning and a view of the natural world based on mathematics rather than spiritual principles or superstition. The philosopher and mathematician René Descartes followed the astronomical discoveries of these men—including the heliocentric model

of the solar system—and discovered what he believed to be the absolute certainty and truth of scientific knowledge. Among other things, he described the universe as operating like a giant clock.¹

Isaac Newton straddled the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and furthered Descartes's vision by depicting the universe as a giant machine, a worldview known as the *mechanistic paradigm*. His vision dominated science and philosophy until the twentieth century, when quantum physics revealed that reality on the quantum level—dealing with the smallest ingredients of the universe but having implications for our everyday world as well—looked strikingly different from what we could have imagined.

It is my impassioned conviction—reinforced through both my professional and personal experience—that nothing impedes our lives and our ability to thrive as distinctly as the outdated, seventeenth-century worldview of *mechanism*. This outmoded paradigm imposes a straitjacket on our beliefs and our thinking, impoverishing our life experiences. Not having kept pace with the advances of science and its ensuing shift in philosophical thinking, many of our operating assumptions and beliefs are obsolete, incoherent, and invalid. Not only has mechanism fostered a disenchanting view of the cosmos, and consequently our lives, but it assaults our individual and collective psyches as well.

The mechanistic model of the world says that the world consists of separate and inert objects that are disconnected from one another, interacting only through cause and effect. According to this picture of reality, the world operates as a giant machine, and we become the cogs in the machine, detached from one another and disconnected from the universe at large. Separation being the essence of the Newtonian worldview, this image is devoid of any sense of relatedness, leaving us as strangers in a cold, austere world, absent any scintilla of belonging or purpose.

Through this filter, we experience a vast array of struggle and malaise: anxiety, depression, failed relationships, incoherent communication, and the gloom of existential despair—all of which we will explore later in detail. The motif of separation isolates us and induces

us to compete rather than collaborate and promotes extreme individualism over the common good. Winning replaces compassion. Conflict trumps cooperation. This crippling worldview colonizes our thoughts and beliefs, and for the most part, we live out our lives in accordance with this construct.

Another core tenet of the mechanistic paradigm is known as *determinism*—the ability to predict future conditions based on present circumstances. Determinism strips us of our sense of wonder and creativity, but even worse, it drives us to seek certainty as we avoid the uncertain. As a culture, the epidemic of anxiety that we experience is caused in large part by our addiction to certainty, which has us fear and avoid the unknown. Certainty also imperils our relationships as it thwarts our ability to be truly present.

From this cosmology we succumb to the dispiriting mechanization of our spirit. Meaning and purpose are cast out in deference to cause and effect—the fundamental by-product of separation. It is little wonder that we suffer as we do. As the noted eco-philosopher Henryk Skolimowski succinctly put it, “As we read the universe, so we act in it.”² If we constantly envision a machine operating, we become machinelike. If we see and think in separation, we’ll experience our lives through this lens of isolation. Imagine wearing very dark sunglasses permanently affixed to your face. You wouldn’t see things the same way as others would. The tint of your glasses would filter the light. The worldview of mechanism is the dark filter through which most of us see.

We need to examine how our prevailing worldview corresponds with its consequences. We are clearly operating from the wrong game plan. Science has indicated—and empirically proven, at least for the time being—that its new discoveries demand a significant reconsideration of our worldview. Yet most of us remain wed to the old principles that classical science postulated, and our lives are terribly impoverished as a result.

To use another metaphor, imagine that you’re a fish in a fishbowl. Your universe, your reality, is limited to the edges of the bowl that you keep swimming into. Similarly, our reality is confined by mechanistic

determinism and separation. These false beliefs do unimaginable harm to us, as we'll explore together.

RETHINKING REALITY

The remarkable discoveries emerging from the field of quantum physics over the last century have been discussed by scientists and noted by philosophers, but we haven't succeeded in adopting them in our everyday lives. That's because most people aren't sufficiently aware of these startling breakthroughs or—more importantly—of the beneficial implications for how we live and view reality.

The primary principles from quantum physics show up in three vital conceptions that can enable us to live the lives we choose.

1. **Embrace uncertainty.**

Contrary to Newton's determinism, one of the core findings of the new, quantum-based science is that the universe is awash in uncertainty. In the early part of the twentieth century, the physicist Werner Heisenberg discovered that within the quantum realm, the rule of certainty no longer prevailed. Uncertainty is the fabric of the quantum world. This principle has vast applications in our lives, and we should view it as good news. Welcoming uncertainty frees us from the severely constrained existence in which the mechanistic template imprisons us. Think of uncertainty as the wind in our sails, empowering us toward the lives we seek. Uncertainty is where new possibility lies.

2. **The universe is in a pure state of potential.**

Uncertainty implies potentiality, as all outcomes are possible. It appears that reality looks more like a *reality-making process*—a perpetual state of flow—than a fixed state of being. With a shift in our perceptions and thinking, we too can enter into the flow of possibilities. We are no longer inert cogs in the giant machine but the creators of our own destinies.

3. The universe appears fundamentally inseparable.

The universe appears to be a thoroughly interconnected, interpenetrating whole. Inseparability implies that we are an integral part of everything and everyone. This understanding showers us with meaning, purpose, and connectedness. Once we appreciate that the distinction between the other and ourselves is altogether indistinct, inseparability can usher in compassion and empathy. As we'll see, inseparability becomes the bedrock of healthy relationships.

These three principles stand in stark opposition to how and what we think reality looks like. You may wonder what these principles of quantum physics have to do with your personal life; the answer is *virtually everything*. This includes the possibility of living a self-empowered and meaningful life as we replace the tired beliefs that constrict and dehumanize us and welcome the profound benefits to be gained by opening to the messages of quantum physics. In the next three chapters we'll explore each of these principles in some detail, and throughout the rest of book, we'll unpack their beneficial effects in greater depth.

Given that the universe appears to be inexorably flowing, and that we are an inextricable part of that reality, quantum physics provides a figurative ride on the current of change. We cease being the inert parts of Newton's machine, limited by determinism, and become conscious participants in the crafting of our lives. From this perpetual condition of movement and flux, we are left not with a fixed material reality but a bubbling state of potentiality.

Yet if we keep selecting the same habitual thoughts and feelings, we remain stuck. This common experience is well illustrated in the 1993 movie *Groundhog Day*. The main character, played by Bill Murray, is given repeated opportunities to remake himself by reliving the same day over and over again. In what he at first experiences as a feverish nightmare, he is allowed to return continually to the previous day and learn from his mistakes and those of others around him. Once he adapts to what seems like a punishment or a maddening existential trap, he takes the opportunity to choose differently and summon new

possibilities, freeing himself from his habitual repetition of the past. In the process, he becomes more aware of his interconnectedness with the people in his life and, as a result, a more compassionate person.

Most of us struggle in a similar way to achieve such change in our lives. The quantum model invites us into our growth and change process; this new perception of reality enables us to apprehend the possibilities that await us. The principles of quantum physics enable us to break free from the past as we may choose. Uncertainty, potentiality, and inseparability provide us with the platform to become the masters of our lives. If we are all interconnected in an unimaginably profound way, and the universe is uncertain and constantly in flux, we are liberated from the confines of predictability, and we open the door to new potential and personal growth. Once we grasp the fact that consciousness, not matter, appears to be the fundamental basis of reality, we are in the director's chair.

This whole new vision of reality created by the discoveries of quantum physics is also known as the *participatory worldview*. The revelation of the participatory worldview is that reality appears to be a kind of creative dance in which we all participate—again, more of a reality-making process than a fixed, objective reality.

To continue to adhere to the classical—mechanistic—paradigm, which reduces us to meaningless, disconnected parts of the giant machine, is akin to living out our lives in solitary confinement, falsely imprisoned by our operating beliefs. Our departure from our old mind-set enables us to align with the flowing potentiality of the universe. We become unstuck. Opening to the messages from quantum physics restores our human potential. When we alter our view of reality from a lifeless, inhospitable machine to a wondrous, inseparable universe of possibility, everything changes. With this shift of mind, our possibilities become bountiful.