"Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence." - John Adams

"It is far better to grasp the universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring." - Carl Sagan

At the core of skeptical philosophy is a humble respect for facts and truth. The universe does not bend to our personal desires or transform itself to suit our needs, no matter how much we may wish it to be so.

This may be a sobering realization, but it is also empowering. Belief in magic, superstition, or comforting fantasies may give us the illusion of control but they come at the expense of the potential for some measure of genuine control through science and understanding.

The reaction of some parents to the diagnosis of autism reflects this principle. It is, of course, understandable that parents of children with autism would look for an explanation that gives them some emotional hook to help them grapple with their situation. I believe that is what leads some parents to believe the anti-vaccine misinformation that falsely blames vaccines for autism. Now they have something and someone to blame, and the (false) hope of biomedical treatments to cure what was done to their child. That can be a more satisfying answer than the one that science currently has to offer.

Other parents of children with autism, however, have gone in the other direction, believing that autism is not a disorder at all but rather children diagnosed with autism are simply special spiritual beings struggling to adapt and communicate to our crude physical world.

Before Jenny McCarthy was convinced that vaccines damaged her son Evan, she was convinced that he was a " crystal child " and that she was an Indigo adult.

The idea of indigo children goes back to self-proclaimed psychic Nancy Anne Tappe who claimed in her 1982 book that the next age would be an indigo age, referring to the color of a person's aura . According to Tappe, Indigo children were supposed to be:

"Extremely bright, precocious children with an amazing memory and a strong desire to live instinctively, these children of the next millennium are sensitive, gifted souls with an evolved consciousness who have come here to help change the vibrations of our lives and create one land, one globe and one species."

This notion was adopted as an alternative explanation for children diagnosed with ADD/ADHD – they were simply impatient with our world.

This concept that certain children who may be diagnosed by the establishment with a disorder are really spiritually gifted has been further developed by Suzy Miller in her book, Awesomeism, about which her website says:

You're a parent or teacher or therapist struggling to come to terms with the diagnosis of autism. You sense that drugs and behavior modification aren't the answer. But what is there? Here it is! A fresh new and boldly positive way to view autism as it really is...not a problem or mystery but a gift in your life.

And

Their requirements all focus on a heightened state of consciousness within the collective. Simply stated, the energetic environment has to be suitable for who they really are! The collective consciousness of the children also stated that, "in 2012, it would begin to be revealed that these children are not only far from broken; but, energetically, they also hold a level of consciousness beyond the mass collective's understanding."

Fear not, there is an answer to the problem of integrating these higher-consciousness beings

into our world:

AWESOMISM has worked to support this shift in consciousness since 1999. In 2012, Dr. William Tiller stepped in with a simple hypothesis based on his years of research with intention: Is it possible to support the integration of children diagnosed with autism into their bio-body-suits with the use of a consistent and coherent intention?

Dr. Tiller is a materials scientist turned crank who believes in “intention,” which is jargon for magic or “wishing makes it so.” This is “The Secret” – the idea that you can change physical reality simply by wishing. He writes :

Psychoenergetic Science involves the expansion of traditional science to include human consciousness and human intention as capable of significantly affecting both the properties of materials (non-living and living) and what we call "physical reality." For the last four hundred years, an unstated assumption of science is that such a thing is impossible. However, our experimental research of the past decade shows that, for today's world and under the right conditions, this assumption is no longer correct.

He goes on to describe his experiments changing the pH of water with thoughts alone. In fact, according to Tiller, you can store “intention” electronically, and then remotely change the pH of water.

This, of course, is classic crank pseudoscience. Tiller clearly has a great deal of factual knowledge and can sling the jargon with the best of them, but has just as clearly lost his way. He has published some of his studies with intention-imprinted electronic devices and the pH of water. As far as I can tell from the full paper, there were no controls and no blinding in his studies. They appear to be the equivalent of the infamous N-ray experiments – lots of technical details, but no actual science.

Yet he concludes:

This research clearly shows that there are two unique levels of physical reality that may become

coupled by the proper application of human consciousness. In the uncoupled state, our normal physical reality, this second level is invisible to our physical senses and to our traditional measurement instruments. In the coupled state, the physics of this second level is malleable to human intentions and to human consciousness so that material property measurement magnitudes can be either increased or decreased by specific human intentions.

Translation – magic is real, and I proved it by anomaly hunting within a worthless scientific protocol.

Tiller and Miller have now teamed up to show that intention can help children with “awesomeism” adapt to their meat jackets and deal with the rest of us poor slobs limited as we are by physical reality and logic.

Although the New-Age pseudoscience of it all may be interesting, at the center of this particular fantasy are children who need proper diagnosis and treatment. Autism, despite anyone’s personal desires, is a brain disorder. We are beginning to unravel the genetic, developmental, and neurophysiological causes of the this category of brain disorders, and deeper understanding is slowly leading to more effective interventions to help children with autism maximize their potential.

Even if we knew nothing about autism, this would not justify substituting a supernatural fantasy for our ignorance. Acknowledging, and even detailing, our ignorance is a necessary step on the path to further discovery, while pleasing magical beliefs are a certain show-stopper.

That’s why skeptics prefer the truth,, no matter how unpleasant. Satisfying delusions are a tonic – a drunken stupor that trades later potential for current intellectual numbness.

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