

Science Buzz Cafe # 581

Monday 6 PM • November 23rd, 2026

The HopMonk 'Abbey'

230 Petaluma Ave. Sebastopol, CA
Host, Daniel Osmer (daniel@economicbuzzcafe.com)
6 PM • Come Early for Food & Drink • RSVP $7 • DOOR $10

The Middle Way in Quantum Mechanics and Buddhism

Carl Pilcher, PhD

Former Director of the NASA Astrobiology Institute at the NASA Ames Research Center

The Middle Way teachings in Mahayana Buddhism as developed by the 2nd Century CE philosopher Nagarjuna describe a view of reality that rejects the extremes of intrinsic existence and nonexistence. Interpretations of quantum mechanics offer similar extremes: realism, which claims quantum systems have definite properties independent of measurement, and what we may call empiricism, which claims they have no definite properties until a measurement is made. Between these interpretations of quantum mechanics is a "middle way" which claims relationships are key, like Buddhist Middle Way teachings of dependent origination and emptiness. Carl will lead a conversation about these various views, similarities and their differences. **Some folks won a Nobel Prize in physics for confirming much of quantum mechanics' weirdest claims.** He will also spend a bit of time with Schrödinger's cat along with Alice and Bob's entangled particles.

Carl Pilcher was the Director of the NASA Astrobiology Institute (NAI), headquartered at the NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, California, until his retirement in January 2013. Prior to his more than 6 years as NAI Director, he served for 18 years at NASA Headquarters in Washington, DC in numerous capacities, including Senior Scientist for Astrobiology and Science Director for Solar System Exploration. **He began his career at the Institute for Astronomy of the University of Hawaii, studying planets and moons in the outer solar system.**

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