

# Man and Universe

## No Separation

Man is an artist creating the world. He is also a part of the artwork itself which is creating the artist. Many deny or ignore this circular structure of consciousness, of life. They prefer a linear notion of time and a closed concept of space.

The fact of our incompleteness and interdependency, and the consequent responsibility of needing always to re-create ourselves, is shunned by those who desperately want to "be" someone — once and for all. But our incompleteness is inescapable. At the beginning of this new semester it is instructive to recall that success is never final and failure is never fatal.

It is a Janus-faced illusion of the technological age in which we live that knowledge is thought to equal the manipulation of factual data, and that it is possible to see things the way they "really" are. This kind of narrowmindedness is the product of a mentality that technology has given rise to: a computer mentality. Our technological myopia imprisons us within the safe illusion of a particular social, political, aesthetic, or spiritual view from which we "tell it like it is." And we do not want to hear anything else. What we have lost is the art of authentic listening.

Perceptual and value rigidity pose a greater threat to man than nuclear holocaust. It is this uncritical mentality that produced the bomb in the first place. Now we do not know how to get rid of it. Man is like the universe itself — a changing, dynamic, paradoxical and ultimately mysterious phenomenon, "doing its own thing" in such a way that no one formulation of what that way is will ever be sufficient. An academic community, in particular, should remember and celebrate this. It goes to the heart of what is meant by "university."

Think about this. There is no list that could ever exhaust the qualities of, say, a stone. Even the lowliest of stones always retains the possibility of being seen in a new light (both physical light — whatever that is — and the metaphorical "light" of conscious perception) which can always illuminate more and more of the stone's qualities. The qualities of

a stone are infinite. It is arrogant to think that we could ever know any particular stone, or the nature of stoneness, once and for all. If that was possible, artists would have put themselves out of business long ago.

The simple fact of our limited relationship to any object of study does not destroy the possibility of knowledge. Rather, it should rid us of our arrogant attempts to possess knowledge in a manipulative and tyrannical way. The technoscientific approach to knowing the world and the underlying philosophical principles of this approach (subject/object dualism and a mechanistic Newtonian reductionism) attempt to conquer the world rather than harmonize with it. This creates a kind of technological imperialism which eventually turns on its master — as it is doing today. It is this mentality which is the basic cause of our economic, political, social and spiritual problems.

What is needed is a cognitive ecology that will save the dynamic, unpredictable, serendipitous, passionate and mysterious aspects of knowledge. These qualities have become the endangered species of our intellectual life. But it is not only a holistic and pluralistic view of the world that is in danger of extinction. Ultrascientific rationalism also destroys these same qualities in the person who refuses to accept them as an integral part of the natural world. This is the more serious problem. It is not so much that we need to fear computers becoming human as it is that we should deeply fear humans becoming like computers.

The universe is not something separate from us, not something "out there" to discover, manipulate and conquer. Given what we have to work with, we must constantly re-create the universe from within ourselves or it will cease to exist. This is the source of man's true freedom and responsibility. We are not only the hand drawing the hand. We are also the hand which is being drawn by the very hand we draw.

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