

The Blaker Foundation - Exploring the Frontiers of Science and Human Experience

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Introduction

In the Editorial (Peter Fenwick / Max Payne) have introduced the origins of the Blaker Foundation. In this article, my aim is to give more information on the Foundation, as follows:

- 1. To place the creation of the Blaker Foundation within the overall context of the development of the Network.**
- 2. To explore the educational role of the Network in developing a systematic understanding of spirituality, as a means of reconciling the tensions that exist between science and religion.**
- 3. To identify how the various elements of Blaker Foundation programmes will encourage an integration of intellectual knowledge and personal development (emotional, intuitive & spiritual).**
- 4. To indicate the educational philosophy and methodology that will inform programme planning and delivery.**
- 5. To give information to members interested in being involved in programmes, either as participants or in their development and/or delivery.**

The Development of the Network

The Network has reached a significant stage in its development. Twenty-five years ago, it was created by a small group of scientists and doctors who questioned the materialistic explanations of life with which their training provided them, and which formed the basis of social existence within the western world. These individuals had become increasingly convinced that the world view they had been given was based on false assumptions, and that in fact the nature of reality was far more complex and exciting than it appeared.

The members of this small group were well ahead of their time in their thinking and forms of expression. They dared to question prevailing theories about the nature of the world, and to suggest that there was a spiritual basis to the universe which yearned to be recognised and made manifest in the external world. These people needed a 'safe house' where they could freely share their individual experiences of a benevolent power that was guiding them towards a realisation of an inner potential, the true nature of which they had only a dim awareness. They were sufficiently open to recognise the experience of synchronicities that brought them together in ways that enabled them to provide each other with much needed support in their challenging of conventional ideas, and in their exploration of a spiritually inspired understanding of life.

As time passed, an increasing number of people were invited to join the Network, as the need for a safe place to explore unconventional thinking was required by greater numbers of people. Conferences and seminars were held, which explored the implications for traditional mainstream thinking of the 'new' sciences, complementary medicine, and our experience of consciousness.

In the past few years, the Network has been growing rapidly. There has been an increase in support of the principle that formed the basis of its origins - that is, that a spiritual

dimension exists beyond our three dimensional world; and, to quote George Blaker, one of the Network's founders:

"Without a transition from our evolving but materialistically based culture to a broader spiritually inspired understanding of the world and its inhabitants the new, just, fair, sustainable and peaceful world order that should succeed us could not become established".

The possibility of a spiritual dimension is now much more widely accepted in our society than it was 25 years ago, and it is not quite so necessary to provide a 'safe house', entry to which is strictly monitored. However, in moving forward, the Network has to tread a narrow path. An asset can also be a difficulty. Many of those who proclaim the existence of a spiritual dimension are locked into a 'New Age culture', which indiscriminately accepts a wide range of supernatural entities and events, for which there is little or no evidential support. On the other hand, those who claim that nothing exists beyond the material remain closed to experiences which seem to challenge this view; or even if they are open to the experience, they are convinced that the explanation of such phenomena is rooted in the material world. This dichotomy reflects the historical antagonistic relationship between religion and science which has strong and powerful roots. It will take a transformation in thinking and experience to resolve the tension between the two.

The Relationship between Religion and Science

All religions acknowledge a spiritual dimension to life. However, they also prescribe what is required of the individual in terms of beliefs and behaviour. Most religious institutions claim to 'know' the nature of the connection between a spiritual reality and the way in which human beings should live their lives. Those who hold positions of power are able to impose their ideas on others - and so the rigid and doctrinal tenets of different religious bodies arise and solidify. Individuals who stay within the formal religious organisation, but still retain their spontaneity and unique creativity, are generally those who can retain a connection with a core spiritual essence, and, either consciously or unconsciously, do not allow themselves to be limited and constrained by inflexible belief systems.

When an increasing number of people became aware that the world views dictated by the churches were shaped by the distorted views of fallible human beings, they sought to find a more objective way of understanding the world. Science provided such an approach. Any claims that it made could be either proved or disproved. People flocked to a discipline that seemed to be grounded in a reality they could understand, and did not assume a reality beyond the physical world.

And so the pendulum swung in the other direction. The western world developed an interpretation of the world which suggested that, unless you could prove an event through use of the five senses, then your experience was a result of your imagination or wishful thinking, and was not to be valued. A spiritual dimension, because it was intangible, was not a possibility.

This situation is again changing. Increasingly many people are becoming disillusioned with the alienation that results from living in a society governed by a predominantly materialistic view of life. There seems to be considerable evidence of a spiritual dimension - though not much evidence as that word is used in traditional science. However, many are fearful of a return to religious systems that promote inflexible and doctrinal approaches.

They are looking for ways of understanding the world, and of living in it, that give value to each individual's own internal authority within the world's interconnected fabric-for paths that reflect their unique experience and learning. How is it possible to explore the nature and reality of a spiritual universe whilst retaining the rigour and systematic methods of investigation that have proven so successful in science? This is a question that has been central to the development of the Network, and is also fundamental to its original educational ethos. There is now a need to expand the current activities of the Network in order to involve many more people in addressing this more effectively, building upon the cumulative inheritance and wisdom of the past 25 years. This will require a new education programme, which will offer new ways of delivering stimulating ideas using appropriate and effective learning processes. It is the realisation of this purpose that will guide the development of programmes run by the Blaker Foundation.

The Blaker Foundation

The Blaker Foundation seeks to introduce an educational process which explores the relationship between science and experiences that appear to suggest the existence of dimensions beyond the material. Specifically, it aims to offer structured opportunities for people to discover and put into practice ways of perceiving the world and of living their lives that:

1. Open horizons and enable them to explore and develop all dimensions of their experience - practical, emotional, spiritual, intuitive and intellectual;
2. Use coherent, critical and rigorous methods of testing the truth or validity of different possible approaches.

It will develop programmes based on current 'post-Newtonian' thinking in science, medicine, spirituality and consciousness. But these will not be exclusively intellectual encounters. The Foundation is based on the belief that, not only does experience have emotional, intuitive and spiritual dimensions as well as intellectual; but that learning contexts should enable participants to engage all these aspects in the learning process, both in themselves, in other participants, and in the course presenters / facilitators.

As a means of achieving this, programmes will include the following elements, though the emphasis on each may differ, according to the focus of enquiry:

1. The opportunity to gain information on up-to-date knowledge that has been acquired in the sciences and other systematic studies of human experience. This could include, for example:
 - the challenge that quantum physics makes to the belief that all events can be explained by cause and effect;
 - a holistic approach to medicine, health and well-being;
 - the scientific evidence for spirituality;
 - current findings in our understanding of our experience of consciousness;
 - scientific evidence of parapsychology, including telepathy, clairvoyance and out-of-body experiences.

2. The implications of this 'new knowledge' for the world view that we hold; the ways in which it challenges the materialistic, Newtonian world view; and the extent to which we can shape a different world view that reflects the knowledge base as it exists to date.

3. The opportunity for all participants to explore the implications for how they live their lives, and possible changes they might make to their lives. There is a recognition that we are all operating within a context that has been shaped by limited beliefs, which in turn may have led us into having a limited experience of life. However, if we are to make changes and explore our full potential, we want to make sure that what we do is grounded in valid information, and we are not blown about by popular 'fashion of the era' views.

4. A recognition that this process will continue beyond the programme; and that any outcomes or conclusions that are reached either individually or collectively by the end of the sessions should be 'held lightly', and remain open to modification resulting from future experience.

Educational Methodology

It is important that the Blaker Foundation is not only committed to communicating new ideas in science and medicine, but also that the processes of communication and learning reflect up-to-date methodology and embody its core aims. The Foundation has a commitment to the transformation of consciousness through education, and in aiming to achieve this, identifies with the philosophy that:

*"The educator needs to be consciously and continually aware that we are inconclusive about our understanding of what it means to be human. However, we have hope that we can be less inconclusive, and we search for the means to be so. In searching, we look for ways to change to create a better world for ourselves. In this process, we are all learning."*¹

In realising this philosophy, the emphasis in programmes will be on experiential learning. There is considerable misunderstanding as to what is meant by experiential learning, in that it is often taken to exclude rational discourse on ideas, and to focus completely on subjective states of being. Within the Blaker Foundation, the experiential approach will not be seen as a mutually exclusive alternative to approaches based on behavioural and cognitive learning theories. Rather, a holistic integrative perspective on learning will be taken, that combines experience, intellect, emotions and behaviour. Its programmes will reflect the view that:

*"Learning involves managing the relationship between the external world (objective conditions) and the individual (subjective experience). Experiential learning theory recognises and equally values internal, subjective experiences, and external, environmental 'objective' reality. It advocates that the two interpenetrate and interrelate in subtle and complex ways - and that, through the relationship, both change. Learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms."*²

Programmes & Membership Involvement in the Blaker Foundation

It is hoped that the development of this educational initiative will provide greater scope for members to become more involved in Network events, and to have a range of opportunities to be part of each other's process of growing and learning. This may be as participants of courses and workshops. We are also seeking to develop a small group of

experienced and competent people to become involved in the planning and delivery of these events.

One of the early programmes is to be entitled "Implications of Modern Science for a World View". The first course will consist of 6 modules, each module taking place over one week-end every two months, and will begin in October 1999. If there is sufficient demand, the course could be run in different geographical locations. It would also be possible to run an event on week-days, should that be preferable for a number of people.

A brief outline of this programme is as follows:

1. The Role of Science for a World View - A Historical Perspective

- **Metaphysical assumptions of classical science - what is the justification for claiming there is no God and no existence pre- and after death?**
- **Determinism v freewill.**
- **Relationship between world views and attitudes/behaviour**

2. Implications of Contemporary Science Part I

- **Quantum physics - and the death of a mechanistic world view.**
- **Interconnectedness & synchronicity.**
- **Living with uncertainty.**
- **The influence of the observer**
- **Implications for relationships with families, friends and groups.**

3. Implications of Contemporary Science Part II

- **Chaos and the emergence of self-organising systems.**
- **Developmental biology.**
- **Neural networks**
- **Relationship of ideas to group processes, organisational development, and basis for decision-making.**

4. The Nature of Consciousness

- **Philosophy of consciousness.**
- **Experiencing altered states of consciousness - is there a significance and value?**
- **Continuity and discontinuity between consciousness of internal and external worlds.**

5. Social and moral implications

- **Classical science - the emphasis on parts, isolation and alienation.**

- Contemporary science - the emphasis on the whole, relationships and participation.
- Does the metaphysics of interconnectedness and participation imply a morality?

6. Fully Integrated World View - Living the New Science

- Developing an understanding of self in relation to our wider society/ecology.
- Translating understanding into positive change in relation to beliefs, consciousness and/or action.
- Where to from here?

A second programme title being developed, and also taking a modular form, is entitled "Development of Personal Consciousness". The aim of the programme is to enable people to explore the options available for their personal development, including an experiential component. Topics will include processes of transformation, such as spiritual disciplines, yoga systems, shamanism, the development of self-reflexive awareness, and Bohm Dialogue.

A major conference is being planned for May/June 2000, entitled "The Role of Research & Education in the Development of New World Views". This should be of particular interest to anyone wanting to explore participatory methodologies as a means of promoting the processes of learning about ourselves and the universe we inhabit.

Should you wish to have more information about the Centre's philosophy and principles, and would like to explore the possibility of being involved in its development, could you please contact the Blaker Foundation. You will then be sent an information pack and will include a form for you to complete should your interest in involvement continue.

We would welcome your comments and response to any part of what you have read. An effective way of doing this would be for you to join our email list. Please send a single email message (removing any automatic email footer), to 100705.1363@compuserve.com. No message subject required. Place the following message in the main body: "subscribe". Further details can be found on our developing website URL:

[HTTP://www.cis.plym.ac.uk/cis/pfilmore/blaker](http://www.cis.plym.ac.uk/cis/pfilmore/blaker). For those not having an internet / email facility, responses by letter / fax would be welcomed. (If sufficient interest is generated, we will include a letters page in future editions of the review, giving wider publicity to a cross-section of contributions).

Two Blaker 'Open Days' for those interested in being involved in discussing its development, one on Friday 25th June, the other on Saturday 26th June. There will be no cost to this. To quote a relevant section from the information pack:

" We are seeking people who wish to be actively involved as participants in the early programmes, not just as consumers, but as individuals interested in being co-creators in a process that is new and innovative. As a means of exploring what this might mean, we are planning to hold an 'Open Day' at Bordesley Hall, for anyone wanting to inquire more into the development of this initiative. The day will be interactive, and will take as its starting point the ideas expressed in a one page document entitled 'Participatory Philosophy: Process and Principles'. We believe that the collective energy of the group will create a synergy that will support and inform the next stage in the process."

Notes

1. This quotation is taken and adapted from a conversation between philosopher and educator Paulo Freire and two educators from the University of Sao Paulo, Ubiratan D'Ambrosio and Maria do Carmo Mendonca.

2. Adapted from D Kolb *The Process of Experiential Learning* from "Culture and Processes of Adult Learning", Ed M. Thorpe et al, The Open University, 1993.

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