

Love as a Cosmic Force

John Broomfield, Havelock, New Zealand

*'These are the days of miracle and wonder
This is the long-distance call.
The way the camera follows us in slow-mo,
The way we look to us all.
The way we look to a distant constellation
that's dying in a corner of the sky.
These are the days of miracle and wonder,
And don't cry baby, don't cry, don't cry.'
Paul Simon: Graceland*

We live in strange times amazing and scary. We are bombarded with bizarre and unfamiliar images, and the interpretations we are given are contradictory and confusing. One set of voices speaks with supreme optimism of evolutionary advance and the unfolding of boundless human potential. There is evidence of a bright future, we are told, in today's technological breakthroughs, which hold incalculable promise for the improvement of the human condition. From the opposite corner a chorus chants a dirge of environmental disaster. Human overpopulation and overconsumption are destroying the Earth. We are done for if we go on like this.

What are we to believe? The doom-and-gloom school is hard to stomach, but the rosy vision of the evolutionists seems to fly in the face of facts. Those advances in scientific knowledge intended to give man control over the forces of nature, seem to have left us disempowered in the wake of their devastating effects on the natural environment. Are the doomsayers right? If so, what went wrong? Is there anything we can do, or is it already too late? Is there no hope left?

Of course there is! Things are bad, but they are not hopeless. We must understand what happened and what needs to happen. Let's start with the conundrum of the increasing impotence of our 'powerful' science.

Science With No Holds Barred

The initial impact of science and the technologies it spawned was like a tidal wave. The source? Science's disregard for all limitations. Nothing was off-limits to its probing. As a consequence science overwhelmed self-restrained cultures, those that imposed sanctions against human intrusions into realms deemed sacred. The mastery of nature was stated baldly as the central purpose of classical science. This provided justification for the domination by 'rational man,' not only of other natural species but of non-scientific or 'natural man'. In the name of progress, other ways of knowing had to yield to science. Violent conquest was elevated to the status of natural law by the Darwinian precept of the 'survival of the fittest,' which won general acceptance by educated Europeans and their descendants around the world in the Victorian era. 'Science, The One Truth' became the clarion call of a civilization. This immodest claim was lent credibility by the apparent incapability of non-scientific cultures to offer a contest. The fact that scientists believed their own propaganda that they alone were on the path to truth resulted in a laser-like focus of energy upon this narrow shaft of knowledge. Moreover, the vast material resources skimmed off by Europeans as their navies, armies and administrative bureaucracies

swarmed across the globe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries permitted the fabrication of technological marvels that seemed to confirm that scientific man had subdued nature. Science and history are the dominant myths of the modern age, linked by a common epistemology of time. With the claim they assert to universal validity, they have held us spellbound. We have been taught that they are the keys to both past and future. We have failed to recognize their role as mythic systems and have not understood that mathematics, the esoteric language of the sciences accessible in its farther reaches to few even among the initiated, is the sacred symbology of a faith.

'We only recognize the myths of others,' the Indian scholar of religions, Raimundo Panikkar, observes wryly. ¹ But all of us are immersed in myth. We live by the tales we tell. Our universe of understanding is metaphor. 'Our immediate awareness of reality consists of images,' Carl Jung said. 'We are living completely in a world of images, and we have the greatest trouble in saying anything valid about the objective reality of things.' ² We must be mindful of our imagery for it is our world. We must be conscious of our mythology and ask whether it is apt for our times. We must take heed that the tales we tell enhance the life of our universe. **Classical science and history will not suffice as the mythologies of the twenty-first century.** Forged in the era of European expansion and imperialism, these are myths of domination, focused upon mechanisms of control in a segmented universe of separated objects. They have drawn their power from a more ancient myth of the West: Judaeo-Christian millenarianism, the legend of the coming of the Messiah to bring a thousand years of peace and abundance. Modern science assumed the mantle of the Saviour, albeit offering a salvation secularized, and the idea of progress gave history a trumpet to herald the imminence of a materialist heaven upon earth. But classical science bore the seeds of its own destruction. A consciousness that conceives an indifferent, spiritless machine universe of which the basic constituents are senseless chunks of matter locked in interaction by random, purposeless energies is profoundly unhealthy for humans, critters and the very earth itself.

With the best of intentions, scientists were prevented by the specialization of their disciplines from comprehending the full extent of their impact on the earth. They had hefted a boulder into a pond, as it were, and in their single-minded concentration on its descent to the mud, they were oblivious to the waves that rolled out to every shore. With a segmented picture of nature and the corresponding compartmentalization of knowledge, they were only dimly aware of the seamless, integrated whole. Reductionism—the belief that it is the parts that govern the functioning of the whole—ill-prepared them for systemic reactions. They knew the boulder affected the pond; they didn't expect the pond to retaliate. The earth as a self-nurturing organism was bound ultimately to react to correct the imbalances generated by a science that had forgotten the principle of reciprocity. To change the metaphor: Scientists whose prime purpose was to establish universal, immutable natural laws found it hard to perceive that the rules of the game even perhaps the shape of the playing field might change in response to their activities. Nor was it easy for them to accept that man was not the only player.

Persuaded that none but humans are possessed of self-reflective consciousness, our scientific civilization was unprepared for purposeful initiatives taken by the 'lower creatures'. Consider as a case in point the disarray into which medical science has been thrown by the recent ingenious behaviours of viruses and carcinomas.

A Paradoxical Universe

Fortunately as Eastern traditions teach, everything contains its opposite. Each great advance in scientific knowledge has revealed unexpected mysteries. When the physicists split the atom and threw open the door they believed would finally disclose the fundamentals of existence, they found themselves gazing upon a surreal landscape disturbingly similar to the alchemical vision on which their seventeenth-century precursors had so resolutely turned their backs. When the chaos theorists harnessed microelectronic computing to power up mathematics, they found that their nonlinear equations clouded the certainty of dualistic oppositions on which much of classical scientific reasoning rests: simple/complex; order/disorder; random/determined.

For the 'New Science which has emerged, subscribing as it does to Werner Heisenberg's dictum that 'every process of observation produces a large disturbance',³ there can no longer be simple, absolute certainties. For the New Scientists the visual symbol that typifies their craft is the mind-bending fractal image on the chaos mathematician's computer display a maze without end. The New Scientists stand in awe of the sublime mysteries they confront. With Annie Dillard they muse:

'What do I make of all this texture? What does it mean about the kind of world in which I have been set down? The texture of the world, its filigree and scrollwork, means that there is the possibility of beauty here, a beauty inexhaustible in its complexity, which opens to my knock, which answers in me a call I do not remember calling, and which trains me to the wild extravagant nature of the spirit I seek.'⁴

A wild, extravagant universe in which everything contains its opposite is a paradoxical universe. As we piece together our jigsaw puzzle, we must begin with paradox. Once we accept paradox, we see that we are not constrained by the absolutes of classical science. Consider objectivity. Objectivity requires an ability to stand apart but there is no 'apart'. We are inescapably of the universe. Here in the belly of the beast we cannot step back to draw perfectly proportioned pictures. But where in the heavens is it written that disengagement is a requirement for understanding? Because we are of the universe 'stars thinking', as Sister Miriam MacGillis says 'its knowledge is patterned into our very cells'. There's no better place than in the belly of the beast to feel its life force. This may not be scientific knowledge, but it is knowing, nonetheless. A universe in which everything contains its opposite is a universe of interconnectedness, of interpenetration. Ancient traditions, Western as well as Eastern, teach that the appearance of the separateness of things is illusion, *maya*. Again, a paradox: The existence of 'the many things' is the source of much delight and beauty (*vive la difference*, as the French say of gender). This is what the Hindus call *lila*, the joyous play of life force in matter. They warn us, however, not to become so entranced by the *maya* of separateness that we forget that the reality is connectedness. If in our consciousness we empower separateness, we are all too likely to ignore the fact that what we do to 'the other', we do to ourselves. If we pollute the stream, we pollute our own bodies, made as we are from the water we drink. If this is a world of connectedness, it is also a world of impermanence. Here is another way to understand *maya*. Rather than saying that separate objects are illusory, we can say that their appearance of permanence is illusory. Form is not fixed. Things assume particular shapes for a time and then change into other shapes. Diversity of form allows the world to be known (experienced) in diverse ways

A Collaborative Work in Progress

From native peoples we learn that the path of wisdom lies in opening ourselves to these other forms 'Mitakuye oyasin' (To all my Relations), as Lakota Sioux say with reverence: 'the four-leggeds, the eight-leggeds; those that crawl and those that swim; our feathered friends and green relatives; the waters and the winds; Grandfather Sky and Grandmother Earth'.

Indigenous traditions also teach that boundaries between forms are not as impermeable as they may seem. By 'shifting shapes' to enter the eagle's keen eye, the bear's great strength or the flame's searing heat, the shaman is showing us there are passageways to the spirit wisdom of every natural form. The great good news the shamans bring is that we are not alone. On a planet that is everywhere alive, conscious and inspirited, humans have many wise allies for counsel and aid. We should lay to rest our exaggerated fears that we do not have the resources to keep this show going. Equally we must learn humility. The hubris of Homo sapiens in claiming superiority over all other species has been the source of severe damage. Humanity is merely one spirit form amongst countless billions.

'As the crickets' soft autumn hum
is to us,
so are we to the trees
as are they
to the rocks and hills.
Gary Snyder.⁵

In this age there is no greater imperative than for humans to open to the wise consciousness of our spirit companions. We must learn to see and hear truly. We must 'wake up'. The shaman's path is but one of a myriad of age-old disciplines (yogas) of body and mind that open clear channels of imagery, intuition and the senses to allow these sounding boards to resonate with the harmonies of spirit. The path of awakening begins in silence, for it is in silence that the busy chatter of the mind can be stilled. Too often the pattern of our thoughts is stuck in old, habitual ruts. When the Native American teacher Rolling Thunder says 'all pollution begins in the mind', he is encouraging us to engage in the mental spring-cleaning of spiritual discipline. He is also reminding us of the immense power of consciousness. This is central: the universe is conceived in the mind. Matter is thought made manifest. I once saw an electronics company billboard along the Mass Turnpike in Boston that expressed this with surprising poetry: 'Dreams taken seriously become realities'. We find the same teaching in Mahatma Gandhi's simple but exacting dictum: if you want a loving world, you must love unconditionally, everybody and everything, your enemies included.

Given that the world is made in the mind, every thought has an effect. But we do not make the world alone. This is a co-created universe, a brilliant, multicoloured fabric woven of the myriad strands of consciousness of all beings. As the ancient European shamans understood, there is 'a web of fibres that flow through the entire universe, linking absolutely everything each person, object, event, thought, and feeling. This web is so sensitive that any movement, thought, or happening no matter how small reverberates throughout the entire web'.⁶ The world is forged in relationship. We live in community with human and non-human companions, and our world is an ongoing co-creation. The statement that consciousness is fundamental is not a prescription for individual disengagement. Significantly, Gandhi, a man who placed great emphasis on the power of thought, was one who insisted equally upon engagement with others. 'God is found in action', he said. Truth

(synonymous with God in Gandhi's view) emerges from the struggles required to build and sustain community.

The universe is an ongoing creation, a collaborative work in progress. Here we come face to face with the most intriguing paradox of all. We make up the world as we go along, and yet the outcome is not happenstance. Though this is not a determined universe, it is a purposeful one. We have freedom of choice and yet we are part of the weaving of a vast intended pattern. Recall Martin Buber's words:

'Fate and freedom are promised to each other. Fate is encountered only by him that actualizes freedom... this free human encounters fate as the counter-image of his freedom. It is not his limit but his completion; freedom and fate embrace each other to form meaning'.⁷

It is also Martin Buber who tells us that 'love is a cosmic force'. Believe him, and take heart. This is a loving, nurturing universe. Living in it is not a cake walk. You and I came here in this time to do a job of work, and acquiring the experience we need has its inevitable trials and tribulations. Life is suffering, say the Buddhists. Equally, life is joy. Both will pass. What will never pass and this is the ultimate gift of this universe of love is life itself. Life everlasting is a fact.

*This is the concluding chapter of John's book *Other Ways of Knowing: recharting our future with ageless wisdom*, which has just been published by Inner Traditions International, Rochester, Vermont. The U.K. distributor is Deep Books, 35 Evelyn St., London SE8 5RT UK. Telephone (0171) 232-2747. John can be reached in New Zealand by fax: +64 3 576 5148 e-mail: john@eagle.nelson.planet.org.nz

References

1. Panikkar, Raimundo. Lecture: *Mythos and Logos Mythological and Rational World Views*, Geist und Natur Conference, Hannover, May 24, 1988.
2. Jung, C.G., *Dream Symbols of the Individuation Process*. Zürich, privately printed, 1937. p. 43.
3. Heisenberg, Werner, *The Physicist's Conception of Nature*. trans. Arnold J. Pomerans, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1958. p. 15.
4. Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York, Bantam Books, 1975. p. 142.
5. Snyder, Gary, from *Little Songs for Gaia, No Nature: new and selected poems*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1992. p. 287.
6. Bates, Brian, quoted by Janet Allen-Coombe: *Weaving the Way of Wyrd: An Interview with Brian Bates, Shaman's Drum*, No. 27, Spring 1992. p. 20.
7. Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Edinburgh, T.& T. Clark, 3rd edition 1970. p. 102.

John Broomfield is leader of the 'EAGLE Connection' and former president of the California Institute Integral Studies.