

Drynachan Symposium on Participatory Reality

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Supported by The Epiphany Philosophers Trust

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This year's Drynachan symposium will be devoted to the theme of *Participatory Reality*, and has been supported again by the Epiphany Philosophers Trust. In keeping with the title we would like to solicit contributions from Network members who will not be attending the meeting itself.

Background After 300 years of a modern scientific approach stressing objectivity, reductionism and positivism, competing with older dualisms, a new world view is beginning to emerge across a range of disciplines which supersedes these competing *isms*. Described by the phrase 'participatory reality' ¹, it is characterised by such elements as:

notions of truth and reality that continually evolve from the dynamic interplay of humanity within and with society and the world (thus rejecting both the fixed categorical limits of Kant and the 'ultimate limit' idea of truth in scientific realism)

the realisation that conceptions and awareness are as much, or more, conditioned by society than by physiology

a holistic view of the person, embracing emotional, physical and spiritual aspects

a spiritually informed apprehension of the openness of consciousness towards the transcending of any particular world view

a practically grounded awareness of the interconnection of all beings within an ecological context

conscious engagement in society with the web of life as the place of creative process

One possible metaphysical and social-evolutionary frame for this world-view has been expounded by Skolimowski ². Essential philosophical strands have been brought in from Heidegger and other phenomenologists by Abram ³ and Varela⁴, while Abram has also developed the implications for consciousness and the transformation of perception. The embedding of this view within the post-modern conception of society has been pioneered through the Feminist critique of Spretnak ⁵ and the work of Tarnas ⁶. The place of conscious reflective engagement with the evolution of consciousness as it is transmitted in society (i.e. education) has been formulated and practised by Gang ⁷, while the nature of research methodology in this paradigm (with its implications for epistemology and the nature of verification) has been articulated by Heron ⁸.

The aim of the symposium is to advance the coherence of this view by bringing together in dialogue representatives of the disciplines involved, and others able to give a comparative perspective on the philosophical and spiritual issues. Specific disciplines represented will include physics, biology and ecology, philosophy, psychology, medicine and parapsychology. We invite your reflections on the theme in general and on the following questions in particular. Please send by email or hard copy. Reflections as well as abstracts will be posted on our website before the meeting. If you want your reflections considered at the meeting itself we will need to receive them by October 15th.

Overall question: what is the interplay between your life and your worldview in relation to the idea of participation?

More focused questions, some of which might serve as stimuli for reflection and feedback.
(This is not a questionnaire!!)

1. Does a participatory view of the world really provide a 'third way' beyond realism and relativism?
2. What aspects of your experience correspond to participation in the world, as distinct from (or superadded to) perception of the world and action on the world? Do these aspects extend to your being as embodied in the world? Do they extend to more subtle inner perceptions?
3. Are there aspects of your experience corresponding to a purely external (non-participatory) perception of, or action on the Other? Are there aspects of experience that speak to you of an absolute and totally given reality?
4. Are there experiences that you would describe in terms of a dialogue-encounter with the given Other (as opposed to discovery of what is entirely given)? How far do these extend to the non-human Other? Has your own life been affected by a view of reality as emergent from such dialogue?
5. Have you experienced points where your fundamental perceptual presuppositions have changed through conscious reflection? What influence has this had on your perceptual world?
6. Are there specific events where your motivation and value-systems have been shaped by awareness of participation? or of non-participation? or of absolute givenness?

Bibliographical notes

1. Heron, J (1997) "A participatory inquiry paradigm", *Qualitative inquiry*, 3, 274-294 (p.277)
2. Skolimowski, H (1994) *The Participatory Mind*, Arkana
3. Abram, D (1997) *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Random House
4. Varela, E, Thompson, E & Rosch, E (1993) *The Embodied Mind*, MIT Press
5. Spretnak, C (1991) *States of Grace*, Harper San Francisco
6. Tarnas, R (1991) *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Ballantine
7. Gang, P, Maver, D J & Meyerhof, N L (1992) *Conscious Education: the bridge to freedom*, Dagaz
8. Heron, J (1998) *Sacred Science*, PCCS

Participatory Reality Seminar, Drynachan 1999

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