

Separateness Versus Connectedness

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For heuristic purposes, the perspective continuum of which modern humans [homo sapiens sapiens] are capable can be viewed in terms of the two very different perspectives at the poles: 1) The material/objective perspective is associated with human intellectual and rational thought and underlies the separateness/competitive/individualistic orientation which in turn supports biological survival. 2) The energy/subjective perspective is associated with human intuitive competence and underlies the connectedness/cooperative/communal orientation which in turn supports social cohesion. In all human cultures, the material/objective perspective is primary since at the fundamental level the physical survival of the individuals of the species depends upon it. But, to be fully successful, human societies also require cooperation and sharing among the members as well as respect for the surrounding ecology that sustains them; and the energy/subjective perspective supports this awareness and the social/communal behavior that follows from it.

Different cultures emphasize these two perspectives and ways of knowing and engaging reality to different degrees. In general, aboriginal hunter-gatherer cultures, which prevailed for 96% of human history [about 250,000 years], kept both perspectives available through most activities – shifting to emphasize one or the other as the situation required. Complex civilizations, which have been pervasive among human societies only in the last 3,000 years, have tended to focus more on the material/objective point of view with the subjective/intuitive viewpoint realized and expressed in institutionalized religion; and in different complex societies religion has had greater or lesser influence through the rest of the culture. Among these complex cultures, modern “western” civilization – at least since the Age of Enlightenment – has emphasized the material/objective/intellectual perspective with the energy/subjective/intuitive perspective being pushed more and more over time to the periphery in the more “isolated” domains of the secular arts and religion. The very fact of this significant degree of isolation constitutes the basis for the growth of religious fundamentalism in modern complex societies – an effort to bring the subjective/intuitive perspective back into the center of modern materially and intellectually oriented culture.

What role does language play in this objective-subjective dynamic of perspectives? The answer is that language serves both perspectives, but at root it is an instrument supporting the material/objective/intellectual perspective of biological survival. To facilitate communication and reliable information passing, language is the key tool that humans use to “capture” the significant

components of the reality within which they exist. It does so by carving up that world into thousands of separate nouns to “stand” for separate things, and thousands of separate verbs that describe separate actions in how these nouns/ things can be related. From grammar, tense then sets these identified actions in a time framework while adjectives and adverbs suggest levels of intensity. In its primary information passing function, language is a tool which most humans regard as “accurately” representing objective reality.

The essential problem in this contention that language “captures” reality is that the very categories – things and actions – that language elects to distinguish are firstly partial and secondly artificial constructs imposed on a reality of infinite variation [just consider the way humans carve up and name the components of the visible color spectrum – blue, red, yellow, etc., not to mention the 99% of the electromagnetic frequency spectrum to which humans do not even have perceptual-cognitive access]. So, at the objective level, language is an artificial construct that serves an essential communication function but which only very incompletely captures what reality IS. And yet the worldviews, upon which humans place so much emphasis and value, rest largely upon this unexamined and inherently incomplete language construct!

Secondarily, language can be employed to serve the subjective/intuitive perspective. Metaphor and simile are the main devices that bend language to support this alternative viewpoint. Metaphor bridges and connects and fuses categories that are otherwise kept separate in the information passing function of language. So, we humans can declare “poetically” that “He grew like a weed to become a tower of strength.” Metaphor asks humans to bring together – even unify – categories that are for literal information passing purposes kept discrete. Metaphor connects otherwise separate entities and actions and challenges humans to “look outside the box,” to explore relationships that the literal use of language does not permit. Art and religion are the “special” zones where metaphor reigns and where language can contribute to humans being able to activate/realize the subjective view of reality. And at its extreme – like energy – the subjective perspective infinitely connects all things into one universal identity – with the discreteness of the material/objective perspective dissolving.

What role does science play in this context of alternative perspectives? Science arises in the context of the emergence in complex civilized societies of greater and greater reliance upon the material/objective perspective and its associated intellectual/rational human capabilities. In this situation, the analytical process becomes more and more refined resulting first in the rigorous scientific method

of investigation and second in the more and more integrated theories to explain “how things work” at a systems level.

Traditionally, scientific analysis depends upon examining some “separate” phenomenon and “explaining” this phenomenon by identifying [separating] the relevant units of analysis [the parts] and ascertaining the lawful relationships among these parts. Science in this sense is the rigorous application of the dominant material/objective perspective that supports biological survival – how separate individuals and groups interact in and with a surrounding “world” that is competitive, uncertain, and threatening and that requires vigilance. The material perspective of separateness – of discrete but lawfully related entities – is essential in this “scientific” way of understanding self, life, society, and reality.

The material/objective perspective of “separateness” is fundamental for humans. Science creates a rigorous analytical, evidence based methodology to apply the material perspective of separateness in a manner that has the potential to provide “proof” to others of how things work.

As science has pursued understanding reality at both the smallest scales of atomic and subatomic reality and the largest scales of galaxies, universes, and possible multiverses, the material perspective of separateness has persisted in standard particle physics and astrophysics. And beyond question the science of material “separateness” has been hugely successful – accounting for much of the technological progress that modern human societies have achieved within the condition of civilization. This is no small feat, and science and its practical application in technology must be appreciated for the enormous contribution that they have made and that they should continue to make.

But ultimately, science in its most modern iteration has arrived at the point of challenging the separateness point of view itself – the material/objective perspective. While there are precursors, it is Einstein’s key contribution in physics that mass and energy are transforms of one another [$E=mc^2$] in a constant dynamic of interrelationship that sets the stage for viewing reality from an energy and not just a material/particle point of view. In this regard, it is essential to understand that energy is everywhere all the time and totally interconnected through fields manifesting in different concentrations from atoms to tornadoes to solar systems to galaxies.

As scientific discovery in physics has proceeded to both ever smaller and larger scales, explanations from the energy-field perspective have become ever more important. Particles seem perhaps better understood as tiny concentrations of energy existing in infinitely interconnected field determined interactions. Current

Big Bang theory holds that energy is primary in the origin of the universe and that material “things” [particles, atoms, etc.] “precipitate out” of this initial energy base. Vibrating “strings” in string theory are understood more as manifestations of energy than as true particles. Quantum mechanics with its probability view of material manifestation, its evidence for simultaneous material “presence” at multiple locations, and its “spooky interactions at a distance” all correlate with the subjective view of reality as not defined or separated by either time or space, infinitely interconnected, ultimately unified, and best “captured” by an energy-field point of view.

Pursued far enough, scientific discovery reveals a less exclusively linear and material and a more circular and energetic reality. Ultimately these two perspectives on reality are more complementary than they are contradictory – just as humans possess both intellectual and intuitive capabilities allowing them to understand and participate in the world from both perspectives. In the modern era, science has matured from being an exclusively material/objective defined pursuit to being an exploration of what these two perspectives reveal in their dynamic interrelationship.

For at least the last 200 years, basic discoveries in the physical sciences have often been the precursors for related discoveries in the biological and social sciences. If this trend persists, humans may be looking at the initial phase as modern complex society more broadly reincorporates the importance of the subjective/intuitive/spiritual perspective. In this process, the fallacy of the religious point of view in converting the principle of the sacred and the spiritual into dogmatic concrete and literal belief is likely to be exposed – separating the “wheat from the chaff.” If this occurs – along with the just identified, overall trend in the direction of science including evidence for the subjective in its experiments and theories – humans can anticipate greater balance in their complex societies as the appropriate results emerge from the utilization of both basic human perspectives in understanding and engaging all aspects of reality.

Post Script: If for some this essay seems too “thick” but readers want to persist, they can find a full discussion of the concepts upon which this essay is based in multiple entries on my academic website: www.dynamic-humanism.com