

Humans: Nothing and Everything – A Matter of Perspective 2021

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Over the last 400 years – and mostly in the last 200 years, science has supported two overall results for complex society – virtually worldwide. The first of these is the development of a vast array of technologies which have facilitated the ability of humans a) to organize and manage their social interactions and institutions and b) to manipulate the environment to achieve their desired objectives and benefits. The consequences have been remarkable. The second overall result is the accumulation of evidence based knowledge to the point where the fundamental way in which material reality works has been significantly revealed from the micro to the macro level. This is a spectacular achievement, and it continues with great prospective promise.

But in the process of supporting these positive results, science has also participated in exposing two serious problems. First, in multiple ways and at the global scale, humans have fouled and are continuing to foul their own nest to the point of endangering their own future – often the follow-on effects of the very technologies that science has spawned. And second, in the grand scheme of the virtually infinite material universe, humans have been assessed as accounting for essentially nothing – the follow-on contradiction of science having assisted humans to achieve the preeminent position among species on Earth. So, ironically, science can be celebrated for exposing the negative consequences of its own achievements.

Given the above conflicted condition, can humans depend upon science, which is devoted to the rational, material, objective perspective on reality, to carry them to the solutions to what are becoming their more and more pressing challenges?

Let's explore. For 96% of human history [250,000 years], humans led their lives in bands and tribes. These small human groups used their rational capabilities to address many of their needs, but they also almost universally recognized a sacred or spiritual principle in all of reality that promoted recognition and respect for all aspects of the natural world. In the last 5-10,000 years, religions as institutions with their extensive mythologies, rituals, and priesthoods have developed within complex societies as vast elaborations of this basic principled awareness – to the point of nearly losing sight of it. When science emerged as a major force in complex society over the last 150 years, it often legitimately rejected the validity of these religions while unfortunately overlooking the core spiritual principle at the root of all the dogma – the baby out with the bathwater problem. But, in recent years, science has recovered this underlying principle.

We need to consider the path that science has taken to this rediscovery as it is illuminating in itself.

Science is a systems based pursuit of understanding. It looks for components, causal relationships, and rules/laws of interaction. So, at root, science is all about connections at all scales between “things” – micro to macro. The problem is that the deeper scientists look into any phenomenon, the more connections they discover until a web emerges with some threads [i.e. components or variables] seemingly more “causal” than others, but where nearly all threads participate to some degree. Additionally, science’s devotion to material “things” is undercut by its own discoveries that energy – which is immaterial, everywhere all the time, and totally interconnected – is more prevalent in reality than material phenomena and forms the basis for all material phenomena.

So, science discovers that the “system” is virtually infinite with every “sub” system – whether material or energetic – fully connected to every other within and across all scales. The problem: if everything is infinitely interconnected, how do we legitimately carve out separate components/entities and attribute separate actions and effects to them? Our perception and our highly categorizing language support the assumption of discreteness. But, theoretically justifying this discreteness – upon which most science depends – becomes a major issue. We have to ask ourselves, “Is it possible that our fundamental perception of discreteness in our world is a biological convenience that supports our predation and thereby our biological survival but that does not accurately reflect reality?”

The ultimate challenge is that our daily lives are built around the assumption of discreteness – entities separated by space and time that we can manipulate to our purposes. And this assumption seems to WORK – unless it turns out that we forgot to take something significant into account! Ah...there’s the rub, the something else that we did not include [all the rest of the web!]. And over time, that “something else” always appears! Why? Because we never capture/control the system as a whole because the system is actually infinite in scope! So, what do we do? For a very long time, science has ignored the problem, held on to the basic assumption of discreteness, and accepted evidence of significant causal “involvement” for truly sufficient cause.

While aware of this underlying problem at the philosophy of science level, most of science proceeds undeterred because its technological applications and economic results are so successful. That is,.....until standard science runs into quantum mechanics where virtually everything is a matter of probabilities

and where neither time nor distance excludes one entity sharing identity and behavior “inexplicably” with another. Parapsychology, humanistic psychology, and transpersonal psychology then demonstrate that the same connectedness phenomena that quantum theorists discover at the subatomic through molecular levels also apply in human behavior at the level of complex organisms. Of course, these revelations are also nothing new to the advanced practitioners of meditation where paranormal phenomena are common, even being engaged on occasion to achieve practical results. Indeed, most of what are taken to be religious “miracles” are the kinds of effects of which most true masters of meditation are capable. Few elect this path as it too easily evolves into egotistical distractions, which most such masters strenuously try to avoid.

So, for some time now, science has been a) in the process of exposing the weakness in its own fundamental assumption regarding the discreteness of the “entities” it studies and b) coming to support an understanding of reality and a view of human capability that in turn supports what is really the ancient, human unification perspective on reality.

What is this unification perspective that both early human cultures and some modern scientists have come to recognize, and why is it important?? When everything at all scales from the micro to the macro levels is understood as one inseparable “thing,” everything shares identity with everything else. And if everything is part of and shares identity with everything else, everything shares its value with everything else. It follows that everything and everyone is obliged to respect all other parts of “themselves” as co-participants sharing in the infinite web of reality. This is the unification principle – the principle that underlies the fundamental contention of humans from the very beginning of a sacred principle in all of nature/reality. In respecting “others” we respect ourselves because at a basic level our fundamental identity is shared. Very importantly, it is this basic, unified view of self and reality that requires ethical behavior among humans – not merely as a social or cultural dictate but as a function of the very nature of existence. Respectful and responsible human interaction with the surrounding local to planetary ecology is then a necessary extension of this “ethic.”

As human rational competence – with all of its following assumptions about discreteness – is the mental faculty associated with the material, objective perspective on reality, so it is human intuitive competence that is the basis for the subjective, unification perspective on reality. And just as the rational faculty and critical thinking skills can be developed to a sophisticated level – as exemplified in science itself, so the intuitive faculty and mindfulness skills can be developed to an advanced level – as exemplified in some ascetic traditions in eastern cultures. There is no reason that both human faculties cannot be highly

developed in the general population of a single culture with a resulting benefit that can be exponentially greater. With both of these faculties equally well developed, humans would be in a much better position to responsibly manage their social and ecological pursuits and engagements. Both views are important, and both views reveal significant truths, but only when their input is properly balanced is the result the most productive for humanity. Humanity's long and sustainable Past prior to the modern era clearly demonstrates this.

Conclusion

Bringing the rational, material, objective perspective together with the intuitive, subjective, unification perspective, we discover that as humans we are at one and the same time Nothing and Everything. How successful we are in balancing the input of this paradoxical dynamic of perspectives will in large measure determine our future prospects as a civilized species in complex societies.

Currently, the rational, material perspective dominates in western culture, which in turn dominates at least the economy and ecology of the world. The results are spectacular in the material sense, but it is also the case that nearly all of humanity's global scale problems and weaknesses are directly attributable to the excesses of this rational, material perspective. Western-led global culture is suffering mightily from racial and economic inequity, climate change, out of control technology and social media, and political, economic and religious extremism. Collectively, these problems have the ability to sink the good ship "Modern Human Civilization." And all of these problems reflect the absence of sufficient input from the intuitive based unification perspective and the universal communal values it instills and the responsible ecological behavior it engenders.