

Respecting the Scale of Our Ignorance

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Thomas A. Burns PhD.

Klamath Falls, Oregon

Introduction

As humans, and even as scientists, we allow ourselves to announce with such confidence our views on all matters of our life and death as well as on the nature of the world around us. We debate the correctness of our differing views selecting – carefully or not – the evidence to support our positions. In this process, we believe we can determine the truth about ourselves and the surrounding conditions that define our existence.

If we are sensitive and open minded and careful, we try to do all this as responsibly as we can. What we systematically overlook in this “admirable” and “necessary” process of creating our worldviews – our belief systems – is the scale of our fundamental ignorance and insignificance.

Consider Three Sets of Facts

The Material Sphere

At the scale of the currently recognized physical universe with its hundreds of billions of galaxies, our planet Earth – in our moderate size solar system in our own Milky Way Galaxy with its billions of solar systems – does not amount to an atom in a grain of sand. All 7 billion humans currently living on Earth are not the equivalent of a single electron in relation to the size of the cosmos. And this physical cosmos is only about 4% of reality. At scale, it is hard for all of humanity to get much closer to material nothingness and cosmic insignificance.

Time

As a species, humans have lived on planet Earth for about 300,000 years or only .000022% of the time in the estimated 13.8 billion year life of the physical universe. This is almost no time at all, and if we consider the significance of the 80 year life of a single person, the relative time number becomes .000000022%! From a time perspective, humans as a whole have been present in physical reality for so brief a period as to be barely noticeable – much less “noteworthy.”

Human Perception

Vision is the primary sense for humans, but the human visible light spectrum is only .0035% of the electromagnetic spectrum. And, as huge as it is, the electromagnetic spectrum does not account for the full energy domain. Humans participate in this entire energy realm, but the reality that they conceive from their primary sense is limited almost beyond comprehension. Our other senses

are even less acute. Modern humans have developed tools [technology] to capture the presence of much of this greater energy spectrum and to convert portions of the various spectra beyond human perception to spectra within the human range. But the full implications of these greater spectra are just beginning to be appreciated. The reality that our collective human senses reveal and which we depend upon to create our worldview perspectives is limited far beyond our ability to estimate or appreciate.

Conclusion

Humans can not avoid creating and relying upon their worldviews, but we can realize in doing so the implications of the vast scope of our ignorance, as the above facts reveal. An appropriate response to this situation is to vigorously avoid hubris. In addition, we must remain totally committed to open-mindedness and to hold both our worldviews and our paradigms and theories within science to be temporary conveniences – always subject to the expectation for fundamental change. At our human combined intellectual and spiritual best, we are not any where near the edge of conceiving the “Truth” about ourselves or the reality in which we play a minuscule part.

What we can do is allow our awareness of our basic and essentially permanent state of ignorance to motivate us to respect all of the components of our immediate, supporting planet, so we can continue our adventure as a privileged species into the vast unknown. The time has come for us humans to get off our arrogant and abusive “High Horse,” which we have been riding as if from the beginning of time we have been the singular, special focus of cosmic-galactic-solar-planetary “attention.”