

Language, Thought, and Science In a Reality of Separation

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To facilitate communication, language artificially carves up reality, creating different words to reference the actions and things that we regard as separate entities. Importantly, our dependency on this basic language tool has an enormous impact on our conception of reality. Moreover, this impact enlarges significantly, as its use becomes pervasive – highlighted in the following.

Language is the basis for our major thought process. We “think” in language. Our reality of separate things and actions gets huge support as a consequence.

Science relies on the rigorous use of logical, analytical, language-based thought. This process magnifies the separation assumption in language itself since analysis involves taking things apart, identifying the separate units, and searching for the lawful relations among them.

Employing this approach, science has revealed a vast micro and macro material reality and generated a technology that has empowered humans enormously. The result is that science strongly supports the view that reality is composed of separate actions and things which we can investigate for their causal relations.

So, That’s the Way Things Are! What’s the Problem?

The problems arise and accumulate as the effort to establish causality among all these separate things runs into the need to account for larger phenomenological systems – example: climate. Understanding systems requires accounting for multiple causal sources which necessitates examining all causal factors. But, as we probe this larger domain, we find that the pursuit of “all” never ends. If we follow causality far enough from our singular system perspective, we discover everything is connected, because the systems we carve out are themselves not separate. Reality is all one unified, totally integrated “system” of energy and energy based matter. Our assumptions of separation and independence are illusions created by our compounded dependency on our conceptual tools of language, language based thought, and rigorous analytical thought.

In addition, our totally unified reality is ever changing due, at a minimum, to the fact that our universe is expanding. The only constant is change at every scale; so, even our best, large, system based, analytical investigations are inherently partial because they never include the whole picture and the system being examined is in a constant state of change. These are the underlying reasons why our theories are always having to be adjusted as “new” information “arises.”

The scientific procedure defined by the rigorous analytical process and the assumption of separation never reveals the complete “truth.” This does not mean that the studies pursued under this process lack value, only that we must understand the essential reasons for their limitations. And we can anticipate that the larger the system being investigated, the greater will be the effect of these limitations.

No wonder results in our social/cultural sciences are so problematic: These are enormous systems of great complexity that encompass significant causal “variables” that are virtually endless. However rigorous our methodology, we cannot reasonably expect that our best such analytically based, scientific studies will be more than usefully suggestive. Proof? – very unlikely!

How Can We Improve This Situation?

First, we need to recognize the problems of relying exclusively on the rigorous analytical process with its problematic assumptions of separation and limited causality. Then, we can explore the potential value of alternative modes of thought that are not subject to these limitations. If we can develop these alternative thought processes to the point of their being rigorous, we can employ them to complement our existing analytical based approach. Non-western cultures have already achieved considerable sophistication in this regard in their intuitive based meditative traditions. But these traditions have focused on the goal of personal enlightenment rather than the social and pragmatic use of the intuitive. And the association of this meditative tradition with religion leads many to reject, out of hand, its utility in the broader domain of scientific investigation.

We can make a start in exploring the utility of this alternative direction by recognizing the value of intuitive based insight and inspiration, which have played a major role in critically important breakthroughs in analytical science itself. The intuitive is always contributing in our mental processing, but it is paramount in the meditative state where its value lies in “seeing” the big picture – the principles that underlie system unification. Edison, Tesla, and Einstein are just three major theorists who developed their own idiosyncratic intuitive techniques to assist them in discovering major “answers” in their scientific inquiries. My view is that intuitive processing has a great deal more to offer.

It's time to wake up, include carefully developed and managed alternative modes of thought in our scientific process, and properly adjust our conception of reality to free it from the language based assumption of separation. In this process and in behalf of securing an expansive future for humanity, we can respect the social and ecological implications of our totally unified reality. Immaterial energy connects every “Thing;” so every “Thing” is included in “us.”