The Search for Certainty

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Preface

Who are we? What are we? How do we fit into the world? Or into the universe? These and other questions pertaining to ourselves and our environment are as compelling to us today as they were to our primitive ancestors. Throughout our history we have developed paradigms of thought that have attempted to answer these questions, each conceptual framework being particularly relevant to its age. We are, in the twentieth century, witnessing a complete reorganization of our thinking. We are now, with the aid of technology, able to bring together both ancient and new patterns of thought and to observe the emergence of a kaleidoscopic world view that is uniting the once dissonant theories of philosophy, religion, and science.

This book sketches an historical picture of three world views that have shaped our ideas about ourselves. These conceptual formats that have so influenced us are not mutually exclusive and are present in all of us simultaneously, although to varying degrees depending upon our individual biases.

Perhaps the most ancient paradigm is that of The Anthropomorphic World of Words. With the instruments we call language and words we differentiated ourselves and our environment into entities. We utilized words to remove ourselves from our experiences and to see ourselves as objective observers in a world fashioned for our use. Our linguistic skills made it possible for us to extrapolate and predict certain events crucial to our existence, especially those of a temporal nature such as birth and death. Our awareness of our finiteness led to the evolution of religious philosophies and the espousal of an anthropocentric universe in which gods and other forces of nature were viewed as like ourselves. The belief system that incorporates the idea that a God or gods created the earth and then created us in His or their image has been an extremely efficient frame. It has served us well for thousands of years and is still of paramount importance to millions of individuals. The Anthropomorphic World of Words has a global quality that does not address detailed information specifically and holds tremendous appeal for the philosopher and the mystic.

Although the idea of a man-centered universe proved to be almost totally acceptable, there were a few dissenting opinions. Copernicus suggested that the Earth is not necessarily the center of the universe. Darwin and Wallace sought to prove that we are on a continuum with other animals. Freud validated Darwin by indicating that we are heirs to many of the primitive drives and instinctually influenced motivational patterns seen throughout the rest of the animal kingdom.

As instruments and ideas became available to quantitate and qualify events and entities, we became heavily involved in a system of measurement and observation that grew into the paradigm we term *science* and catapulted us into The Mechanical World of Form and Function. We began to postulate laws of nature that are immutably fixed and knowable and believed that we could learn these laws and unravel all the mysteries of living and nonliving systems. As scientific scholars used that language of relationships called mathematics to measure and observe, they found that some of their data fit poorly into The Anthropomorphic World of Words. They were not able to reconcile many of the old word-world beliefs with the linear sequencing of data that captivated the imagination with the promise of provable and testable answers to our questions about ourselves.

The gathering of information into predictable sequences became a threat to religion in that it implied the world was reasonable and a mechanical interaction that could be understood without the introjection of the magical or miraculous phenomena hitherto used to explain the soul and its world. Western religious thought and scientific thought were viewed as conflicting, and science was labeled by some as antithetical to religious faith because it suggested that man was not lord of the universe. Many of us were caught in the struggle between science and religion and felt forced to choose between them or to live in a dualistic world of conflicting and irreconcilable beliefs.

Around the turn of this century we entered another conceptual world—The Relative World of Process. This world view was catalyzed by the publication of Einstein's theories of relativity. Mathematicians, physicists, and other scholars involved in studying the microcosm and the macrocosm began to postulate about a four-dimensional universe in which mass and energy and time and space coordinates are interchangeable.

In one sense, the enormous emphasis on differentiation and measurement characterized in The Mechanical World of Form and Function has led to the paradoxical situation in which all measurement became relative with no absolutes. With this relativistic approach to ourselves and our world, form and function fused. Being and nonbeing, self and nonself became moot questions in that the answers might always be stated as relative to what. This new theoretical frame placed all living and nonliving systems on a continuum, thereby decreasing or even abolishing our justification of ourselves as special isolated and absolute entities.

Although its opponents criticize this new mode of thinking as being mechanistic, its emphasis on relativity, probability, and uncertainty makes this theoretical format much less mechanistic in nature than some of the previous ones that focused on entities involved in event sequences. Any absolutes or cause and effect sequences are seen as illusions that are testable only in a retrospect organization of events.

Some postulate that this new philosophic frame will eliminate that form of thinking called religion. Others see this new conceptual approach as a man-God merger in which the lack of differentiation allows a certain increased frame of reverence in the relativity of all being. Life and death are no longer seen as discrete entities or events but as a process phenomenon with a waxing and waning nature in which the individual self merges into a continuum with the rest of creation.

All the varied facets of nature take on the aspect of kaleidoscopic, harmonic, resonating fields of influence intermeshing in patterns with transient properties analogous to the harmonic interaction of a symphony. This is somewhat reminiscent of the music of the spheres concept whereby the Greek philosophers postulated the influence of the heavenly bodies on our existence. The new emphasis on relativity allows a flexible format for mathematical representation of harmonic influences and attempts to modulate these influences to increase the data base of information and the flow of this information, i.e., the effect of these influences on other patterns of influence to give a statistically probable, though never absolute, presentation of various harmonics.

By monitoring and modulating such fields of influence as electromagnetic activity, we have been able to expand our communication skills to a global extent and are attempting to move to establish information exchange throughout the universe by harnessing and modulating influences that can move away from the earth at the speed of light.

The new conceptual frames of the twentieth century have allowed us to address the microcosm of subatomic fields and the macrocosm of interstellar relationships using our instruments and perceptive organs as an integrated part of the information flow. We no longer stand on the outside and observe but now participate as part of the interacting events. The information processed by our protoplasm, whether this information comes from electron microscopes or huge radar telescopes and which in the word world would be called perception and cognition, must be viewed in The Relative World of Process as a transient harmonic of interacting force fields.

For many of us the death of the absolute comes as an inconceivable and heretical blow to our whole world of ideas. To others, it opens a new frame of reverence in which we rejoin the fluid harmony of all being and in the process become infinite. In this type of transcendence, we merge with the ultimate and may set aside the fears generated by contemplating the dissolution of the transient organization called the individual or the individual self. This philosophic relativism with its emphasis on uncertainty has the possibility of engendering tolerance in social interchanges by implying that there can be no right, wrong, good, or bad since these are all relative concepts predicated on the delusion that the individual or his social group are unique, absolute entities.

For our practical functioning in everyday social situations there can be little question that we will continue to rely on the "as if" proposition that we do exist as unique responsible individuals. However, the potential for realizing our participation in the unbounded infinite may provide a frame of reverence that avoids the split between science and religion. This relativistic approach to the concept of self in no way diminishes the beauty of artistic creation in which a transient pattern of organized influences that we call an individual catalyzes other influences into information sequences that we call art, science, and philosophy. The phenomenon we call an individual person is simultaneously a discrete system of organized influences and a harmonic of the entire universe.

In composing this book we relied very heavily on the work of many scholars and made extensive use of quotations. Since the anthropomorphic

conceptual frame dominated our world view for thousands of years, we gave considerable time to its description. The mechanical world view has been dominant for only a few centuries and is evident in volumes of scholarly work. The relativistic world view has evolved in our present century and is only beginning to permeate our individual thinking. We have linked together the ideas of these different ages and different fields of endeavor to illustrate the theoretical paths we have traveled to reach our current views about ourselves and our place in nature. All these systems of thought or world views are important, and all have influenced our individual philosophies even though we may be unaware of their impact.

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