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COMMENTARIES ON DEEPAK CHOPRA AND MENAS KAFATOS' BOOK, "YOU ARE THE UNIVERSE"; 2017, HARMONY BOOKS.

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YOU ARE THE UNIVERSE

Deepak Chopra & Menas Kafatos
Harmony Books, New Youk 2017
Reviewed by Joe Subbiondo

Deepak Chopra and Menas Kafatos have produced a book that is as unique in its aspiration as it is in its presentation. If its title, *You are the Universe* were not enough to make it a must-read, what could be more tempting than a book subtitled *Discovering Your Cosmic Self and Why it Matters*. If you were not aware of the credibility of the authors, you could easily dismiss the book as New Age garble. But given the credentials of Chopra and Kafatos, you have to give the book a chance. And if you do, you will discover that it is an engaging, imaginative, and provocative study sustained by a compelling argument and an integral orientation.

For the most part, the authors sum up the organizing theme of the book in the following conclusion:

We participate in the universe by finding order and figuring out where the patterns come from. Einstein hit upon a deep truth when he said, "I want to know the mind of God, everything else is just details." Substitute "the purpose of the universe" for "the mind of God" and you have a goal worth pursuing for a lifetime (p. 73).

Chopra and Kafatos structure their book around nine interrelated questions, which they refer to as "Ultimate Mysteries." These questions address the Big Bang, integration of the universe, invention of time, substance of the universe, design of the universe, quantum world in our everyday lives, conscious universe, beginning of life, and brain and mind. Questions comprise the chapters of Part One, and Part Two consists of four chapters entitled "Embracing Your Cosmic Self," "The Power of Personal Reality," "Where You Really Come from," and "Home Free." And for good measure, the authors add two appendices: "Getting Comfortable with Qualia," and "How Cosmic Consciousness Behaves."

While I find the content well documented and persuasively argued, I am not a physicist or a physician as are the authors. Consequently, I can only attest in a very limited way, to the history and legitimacy of many of their scientific claims. Nonetheless, as one who has been long engaged in the study of language and consciousness, I am indebted to Chopra and Kafatos for their challenging and insightful perspectives regarding their theory of a conscious universe.

As one dedicated to advancing integral education, I found the book groundbreaking in that it demonstrates the need for integral learning to effectively grapple with the complex issues of the 21st century. Throughout the book, the authors recognize that the study of the universe is no longer solely the domain of the natural scientists in general, and the physicists in particular. If we are to increase our understanding of the nature of the universe and our relationship to it, we need to move beyond the confines of the traditional disciplines by advancing an integral education that includes multiple ways of knowing, multicultural traditions, and transdisciplinarity.

A particularly significant moment in the book is in the discussion regarding reality at a recorded meeting between Albert Einstein and Rabindranath Tagore in 1930. The authors cite this conversation early on in their book in order to connect the expansive contours of their study. As described by the authors, Tagore was “someone the West viewed as an embodiment of Indian spiritual traditions” (p. 22). Tagore received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, and he was an acclaimed philosopher, musician, and artist. When Einstein, deservedly regarded by many as the “world’s greatest scientist,” asked Tagore about the meaning of truth, Tagore asserted that truth was human, that is subjective; and Einstein, while holding an opposite opinion, stated that he could not prove the objectivity of truth. Chopra and Kafatos use this historic exchange between these two luminaries as representing dialogue between East and West, as well as between the physical sciences and spiritual traditions. By the end of the conversation, Einstein and Tagore reached a meeting of minds and an integral framework. The authors use this conversation for inspiration and validation of their theory of a conscious universe:

The once-famous meeting between two great minds is now largely forgotten. But in a startling way, it was prophetic, because the possibility of a human universe, one that depends upon us for its very existence, now looms large. The most fantastic of possibilities, that we are the creators of reality, is no longer fantastic. After all, belief and disbelief are human creation, too. (p. 25)

Chopra and Kafatos present an integral approach to an ancient idea – the creation of the universe – by building a case for human participation in this creation. Their references to a wide range of writers support their position that no one discipline can deal with the complexity of a conscious universe. For example, they cite Lewis Carroll, David Chalmers, Copernicus, Euclid, Robert Frost, Alfred Korzybski, Leonardo da Vinci, Max Planck, Pythagoras, Bertrand Russell, Francis Schrödinger, William Shakespeare, and Walt Whitman among many others. Chopra and Kafatos’ references are not superficial: they inform and advance their central argument. Given the effectiveness of the Einstein/Tagore conversation for framing the goal of their study, the book would greatly benefit with references to more non-Western and feminine viewpoints.

One may well come away from this book realizing that the traditional disciplines simply cannot adequately explore issues that transcend disciplinary limits. An integral model of education, one drawing on many disciplines, cultures, and ways of knowing is needed if we wish to continue making progress in dealing with the pressing issues that currently challenge us. *You are the Universe* is an important step in this direction.