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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 York 2017
Reviewed by Jim Smith

Reflections:

First, the book is simplistic and anthropocentric on the issue of consciousness and the existence of the cosmos having no other grounding, in other words a false dualism of conscious beings. *You are the Universe* is nothing less than the re-positing of the human experience (let's not malign the species) as the pinnacle of the all creation, this time in another blend of scientific spiritualism. And it sets this up in the very beginning in the preface - "Once you decide that you want to participate fully, with mind, body and soul, the paradigm shift becomes personal"(p. 6). Is this anything other than "thinking makes it so"? This time the dualism is between humans and all other conscious beings.

One level of Bateson's work was in exposing the incorrectness of the dualisms that exist in modern philosophical and scientific thought – mind/body, human/nature, society/ecology, biological/emotional, God/nature – were all falsifications to him. Likewise, the limits of linear thinking, compartmentalization, and the languages that evolved to represent this way of thinking had become obstacles to greater understanding and the ability to comprehend the reality in which living (and non-living) things exist. Here is an example of this view:

If you put God outside and set him vis-à-vis his creation, and if you have the idea that you are created in his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. And as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore as not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will be yours to exploit . . .

If this is your estimate of your relation to nature and you have an advanced technology, your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell. You will die either of the toxic by-products of your own hate, or, simply, of over population and over-grazing. (Bateson, 1972, p. 468)

What he is saying is that in the context of modern society, people have created a false representation to themselves of their being, which then enforces the idea that mind exists only as an expression of humanity. Mind and consciousness are given the same meaning, confused as being one and the same thing. For Bateson, this is another expression of the arrogance expressed in the quote above.

Second, it seems to be another book about reality that never talks about anything really going on in the real world. Stan Krippner nailed this, I think, in part of his review when he said:

“For Chopra and Kafatos, mind has been present in and beyond all time and all places. The building blocks of nature have no intrinsic properties without an observer, and the brain is not the source of that observer. A major outcome of this paradigm is that we experience the world through choice. Really? Tell that to the victims of the Holocaust, the Inquisition, the Cambodian

Killing Fields, and the various famines, epidemics, earthquakes, floods, forest fires, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis that have beset humans (and other animals) over the millennia. When the authors ask their readers to develop their “cosmic selves,” they are focusing on a privileged minority of the world’s population. If they mean to relate their “participatory universe” into daily life, they need to be more inclusive.”

Third, it is another attempt to resolve its own trap of being another "self-fulfilling paradigm," by arriving at a position which implies a god-like nature to humans vis-à-vis making us the pinnacle of cosmic purpose. As George Carlin once said, "If the human species is the ultimate product of the universe, then I'd have to say that the universe aimed rather low and settled for very little." One thing this does, is to present all humanity as a homogenous entity existing in a generic state. The political implications of this position are enormous and a re-iteration of the "West is best" perspective, erasing differences both practical and real. Again, Krippner's statement above.

Forth and lastly, all of these attempts, of which there have been many, to "explain everything" always try to resolve spirituality and science by arriving at some hybridization that is pretty mechanistic in the final analysis. Many of the ideas in this book were discussed by Bateson 40 years ago, in a more satisfying way.

Key to understanding Bateson is grasping his conceptions of mind, ecology, knowledge, difference, evolution, and their interrelationships and interconnectedness. To begin with, we have his view of mind. In *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*, (2002), Bateson lays out an explicit discussion of what he means by “Mind” in which he elaborates the following points:

1. A mind is an aggregate of interacting parts or components.
2. The interaction between parts of mind is triggered by difference, and difference is a nonsubstantial phenomenon not located in space or time; difference is related to negentropy and entropy rather than energy.
3. Mental process requires collateral energy.
4. Mental process requires circular (or more complex) chains of determination.
5. In mental process, the effects of difference are to be regarded as transforms (i.e., coded versions) of events which preceded them. The rules of such transformation must be comparatively stable (i.e., more stable than the content) but are themselves subject to transformation.
6. The description and classification of these processes of transformation disclose a hierarchy of logical types immanent in the phenomena (pp. 85-86).

From this outline Bateson states, “If you consider these criteria, you will recognize that they fit a number of complex entities that we are used to talking about and investigating scientifically, such as animals and persons and, in fact, all organisms” (Bateson, 2005, p. 19). But in addition to all living organisms, “Mind” is even more than this; it “applies to a much wider range of those complex phenomena called “systems,” which include systems consisting of multiple organisms or systems in which some of the parts are living and some are not, or even to systems in which there are no living parts” (Bateson, 2005, p. 19).

In Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and

Epistemology he says "We get a picture, then, of mind as synonymous with cybernetic systems – the relevant total information-processing, trial-and-error completing unit . . . I am calling "Mind" immanent in the large biological system – the ecosystem. . . . What I am saying expands mind outward" (Bateson, 2000, pp. 466-467).

He went to great lengths to elaborate and explicate the stochastic (random) nature of learning and evolution, and their relationship to one another. An ecology and a mind (or ecology and mind, if you will) are overlapping identities of the same process or level of existence, not bound by space and time, but not ungrounded either.

We face, then, two great stochastic systems that are partly in interaction and partly isolated from one another. One system is within the individual, and is called learning, the other is immanent in heredity and in populations, and is called evolution. One is a matter of a single lifetime; the other is a matter of multiple generations of many individuals. (Bateson, 2002, p. 141)

The two systems work at different levels, one within the other, but "fit together into a single ongoing biosphere that could not endure if either somatic or genetic change were fundamentally different from what it is" (Bateson, 2002, p. 141).

The universe will continue to exist after the human species has annihilated itself, as it seems bent on doing. And there will continue to be mind and consciousness, and the universe.

The continual striving to place humans as the pinnacle of, (well let's name a few): evolution, the universe, all species, God's image, etc. etc., seems to me to be a position of arrogance not supported by a real review of what we have done to ourselves, other beings and the planet (to say nothing of using outer space as a garbage dump for the stuff we blast into space). "Save the Planet" is another expression of this egocentrism! We can't even take of ourselves. The less we would do to the planet, the better it would be. I'm afraid we are probably a short lived evolutionary cul-de-sac. It didn't have to be this way, we just evolved a socio-economic system that destructively exploits the world and all its creatures and resources for a few fleeting moments (in geologic time) of comfort and amassing of wealth for a very small portion of the population.

I think Paul Feyerabend hit it on the head, if I can paraphrase it, "Once upon a time, some scientists wrote a fairy-tale, based on the desire to find a unity behind the many events that surround us." The success of technological development has led people to mistake science with progress, and vice-versa, and view/impute scientists with the quality of high priests. The search for this universe leads down dozens of rabbit holes, and it is my view that this book is another exploration without the satisfaction of enjoying Alice's adventures, another fairy tale. The background music is "Fairy tales can come true, it can happen to you . . . "

Sorry if this is rambling in some ways.

By the way, did something change in the SOC email or communication system? Or did I offend someone? I have not received any of the discussion since March 2.

Jim Smith

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