

What Is This Class About Anyways???
A New Way of Seeing Everything – March 18, 2016

As several of you have pointed out to me, in class and privately, this class is introducing more subjects in greater depth and brevity than can easily be absorbed. Here's why: I'm trying to show patterns.

Like Ann Sullivan teaching Helen Keller to understand that the forms rapidly pressed onto her palm are abstract symbols combining to represent something else, I'm trying to bring to mind dynamic patterns of the human species in the context of the patterns of the evolution of the Universe as a whole. The point of this is not to prove anything. The point is to see if you recognize these in your own daily life, and if, having identified these patterns and forces, you find that you can leverage them.

A new way of seeing everything is to suggest that humans have a natural proclivity, as a species, to do just this. The historical record of the rise and fall of civilizations up to the present day is the record of humans working together around shared visions in ways that allow the spontaneous creative capacity of individuals to be useful in cooperative ventures for the betterment of the whole community.

I'm suggesting that this proclivity is the hallmark of what has and does distinguish us as a species. The proclivity is a desire that individuals find in themselves through their attentive engagement with the world around them. It is not an "either/or." It is a "both-and."

I am making the further proposition: That what we call "virtue" and try to define as "ethics" or "morals" is none other than our species' attempts to define roadmaps and techniques to exercise and develop this innate capacity. In order to facilitate teaching, cultures work to define the maps and techniques as if they were artificial intelligence programs. To the extent that the teachings become "rules applied to others," they lose their value. Human desire springs from each heart.

I'm suggesting one aspect of the hard-wiring of this natural proclivity to contribute to the greater community and make things better is that our brains reward us for our efforts. That is, the electrochemical processes of our brains generate reward chemicals. Our overall experience is a deepening sense of peace, and full-hearted joy in daily life. We are in control, because we have learned how to control where we direct our thoughts.

The idea is a simple one. We live in a dynamic Universe. Everything is new every second. Four-dimensional space-time and the contemporary understanding that the Universe is expanding at an accelerating rate provide a visual image of on-going creation. We are not just a result of some event that happened 13.7 billion years ago. What we do this afternoon contributes to what we will be tomorrow, just as what we did yesterday has contributed to where we are right now.

The presently dominant so-called WEIRD culture (Westerized, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) is not typical of the human species. This is the culture most of us have been raised with. It has transformed the face of the world and contributed to a flourishing of human life. However, it does not appear to be sustainable in its present form.

In this class I'm suggesting that what we have done right in science, Capitalism and human culture is to compete cooperatively to make the world better. The winning formula is one in which our communities honor and reward the value added to the world. Money is not value. In theory, it represents value, but in our current "survival of the fittest/greed is good" mode, it has become unhinged from its feedback systems. At present, the danger we face is that we have allowed money to become the proxy for power, and money has lost its association with value.

However, all is not lost. The real power is the human desire not for power itself, but rather for life. And history seems to indicate that many individuals feel that the life of the group is more important than even their own individual life. And the life of the group depends upon the care and well-being of the entire Earth's eco-systems.

Where can we start in the face of the challenges now confronting us? We start with ourselves, and becoming aware of our own desires and creative capacity to transform. Perhaps that is the purpose of our lives.