

Science and Absolute Values

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Photo date and location unknown

Honorable chairman, distinguished scientists, eminent professors and scholars:

I sincerely welcome all of you who are attending the third International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences, sponsored by the International Cultural Foundation.

As I am sure you are aware, two previous conferences have been held, the first in New York City in November 1972, and the second in Tokyo in November 1973. As the founder of the International Cultural Foundation, I have desired and done my best to create and maintain throughout these conferences an atmosphere in which an open and unreserved exchange of opinions could take place. And I have been greatly pleased with the fruitful results of these conferences and with the participants who have contributed so much to them.

The development of science and the issues now facing humankind

At present, ever more serious problems continue to develop and confront humankind. The solutions to these challenging problems call for and indeed require both localized approaches and a global approach. Therefore, we demand the wisdom and knowledge of the many distinguished scholars who are gathered here at this conference.

As a scientist myself, I have been observing with keen interest the development of science and technology. I know that science and technology and what we call the "scientific method" have had a far-reaching impact on human life. Through observation and study of the world of reality, science has extended and expanded our perception of this reality beyond our physical senses.

For example, we are now cognizant of bacteria, which we can detect using a microscope. Some of us journey to the moon, directed by computers whose astronomical speed of calculation baffles the human mind, while others talk about making such travels an everyday possibility.

To our naked eye, the earth still appears flat, but science has compelled us to admit that it is round. A diamond appears to be solid and we were once amazed to know that in fact it is a scattering of particles in mostly empty space. On a more abstract level, the transition from reality to extended reality is illustrated

by the transition from classical to quantum mechanics and from the deterministic model to the probabilistic model, both of which are equally confusing to non-scientists.

Although the progress in science has provided us with a tremendous amount of information, we still suffer from our inability to internalize this information and our inability to fully comprehend its deeper implications. This inability has led to much anxiety, confusion and uncertainty as we lose our firm reference points. As a result, we feel we are in a state of imbalance with scientific progress due to the suddenly expanded reality.

The necessity for cooperation, with a global worldview

Meanwhile, when we think of the strong probability of our finding in the spirit world the answers to the disharmony and imbalance that attend the limited human function of thinking, it does not seem accidental that Zen meditation and its practice recently have become controversial objects of scientific research in the West as well as in the East, where for centuries they have been practiced and valued. The study of extrasensory perception has drawn the attention of quite a number of scholars in the academic community. The discovery that a dolphin can intelligently communicate with human beings deserves notice. Along the same lines, it has been observed that plants respond to the love and other emotional states of human beings. These discoveries suggest that our present view that the animal and plant worlds are lacking in consciousness and reason may be flawed.

Thus, we may now envision a universe in which a harmonious coexistence is brought about between human beings and other creatures, a universe where human beings, the center of all things, turn the whole universe like a wheel in ultimate harmony and oneness. Other issues worthy of notice are the roles of the educator and the medical doctor. They may be drastically affected by the ability of the computer to process enormous amounts of information accurately and promptly. Some scientists have hinted that the future study of elementary particles and cosmology may alter our concepts of space and time.

A study conducted by the Club of Rome informs us of potentially disastrous events in the near future due to pollution, population growth, scarcity of natural resources and rapid industrialization. Recently it has been found that atmospheric ozone is on the decrease, caused by repeated nuclear testing. As you all know, the presence of ozone in the upper atmosphere is vital to the survival of life on the earth, since damage to cellular molecules by the sun's ultraviolet radiation occurs in the absence of the ozone layer. Solutions to these problems cannot be arrived at through the efforts of scientists alone or by the efforts of any particular individual, group or country. The Club of Rome study clearly indicates the finiteness of the world's resources and ecosystems, and also makes clear the absolute necessity of a global approach and cooperative effort for proper and complete solutions to the world's problems.

These problems call for a worldview, accompanied by an attitude of sacrifice and cooperation among all peoples of the world, transcending the interest of any one community or nation. Such a spirit of cooperation will be attained only when all human beings come to view themselves as members of the same human family. This revolutionary change in human consciousness to embrace such a worldview has long been needed and is vital to humanity's survival today. In many educational systems throughout the nations of the world, the merit of competition and the survival of the fittest, achieved only by the winners in the competition, has been overly stressed. This has long been a plague undermining the healthy human endeavor to lead humanity into a world of peaceful coexistence by bringing them to feel themselves as members of one human family.

Now humanity somehow has begun to feel that in educating people the emphasis needs to shift and that cooperation has to be taught as vital for survival. In light of this viewpoint, the goals and philosophies of education will have to undergo a profound transformation.

In the past, we have accepted the contribution of science and technology to the enrichment of human life without deep reflection. Now we begin to wonder. Some disquieting questions come to mind. Are we happier in our technology-enriched world? Are we more sound ethically? Are we becoming more humane with love and concern for one another? Answers to these questions are not found simply by analyzing statistics, because the human being has many aspects that are not discretely quantifiable.

In any discussion of quality of life, these non-quantifiable factors play a major role. As illustrations, let me cite love, ideals, the joy of creating, belief in God and numerous other value areas. The question of the preservation and development of these humane aspects of life remains the greatest theme of our research.

The way for science to meet today's challenges

In light of this theme the question of interpretation and proper use of the vast amount of information generated through scientific research and discovery becomes a profound and serious one. Our attitude that tends to overemphasize the value of science may need reexamination. After all, any scientific truth is tentative -- the truth in one generation can possibly be invalidated in the next. Consistent experimental

results, derived from a model built on the basis of a limited investigation, constitute scientific truth. However, in the course of building a model we go through the processes of idealization, simplification and approximation. As a consequence, we may have an approximate understanding of truth and not the absolute truth. Science has grown so big that it sometimes seems beyond the realm of human beings.

Science needs to be strictly thorough, accurate and detailed in determining facts. In the process of utilizing its accumulated information and achievements, science needs to remain positioned as one of the areas of human creativity. It needs to stay within the human realm so it may be used, controlled and appreciated just like works of art and music.

When we reflect on the history of the human race, we see there have been new frontiers in every era, some culminating in the development of literature and others in the blossoming of medicine and the various sciences. Yet in the past, development of science and technology has been aimed mainly at the conquest and exploitation of nature.

Today this very science compels us to set up a new ethical standard. The new ethic ought to concern itself with the problems of love for nature and a reexamination of human values and the need for cooperation among human beings. It must attempt to set a new view of value and a new ethical norm that can bring about an ideal world of harmonious coexistence among all creatures on earth.

The development of science and technology has certainly raised issues that invite us to reflect seriously on what is essential for us to remain human and to preserve humaneness in our lives. I strongly believe that the aforementioned ideal world can be made possible only when every field of science and technology is mobilized for the benefit of humankind and when a cooperative spirit of human activity guides those who work in those fields.

I ardently desire and expect the answers to come from you. This will surely be realized by assembling the results of your respective researches together with your opinions and wisdom. From the very bottom of my heart I beg you to play the role of the bridge that will connect and lead the present world toward a world of higher dimension and absolute value.

Thank you for your attentive listening!