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My place in evolution

Introduction

"My place in evolution" - a promising title. But can we say something concrete about this topic with the current state of knowledge of evolution? Given the vast size of the universe, isn't it meaningless what is happening in one of its countless galaxies? Isn't the coming and going of the blue planet in a distant solar system not irrelevant for the whole? Moreover, the universe and life on Earth arose *by chance* according to the still widespread mechanistic model. If all this growth and decay really is due to chance, there is no need to look for a place for us. We seem to be homeless random products in an impressive, but cold, and to us alien, universe.

Considered in terms of intellectual history, the question of our place in the universe is a relic of the old world view that, until recently, has in principle been the same everywhere since the Paleolithic era. In this man occupied a central position; he owed his life to the hereafter, and this dictated what he must and must not do. If he lived piously, he fared well, perhaps as early as in his own lifetime, but certainly in the afterlife. On the last day, he would be rewarded for his piety; paradise beckoned him.

Obrist calls the worldview underlying this idea *archaic-mythical*: archaic because it is ancient, and mythical because myths (stories of otherworldly beings) are of central importance.

It took a lot of time to establish such a worldview. First man had to create the necessary language. His original language was merely a conversation with hands and feet, with facial expressions and gesticulation, gestures and instinctive sounds, and that was not enough for a concept of the world. To expand this proto-language into verbal and conceptual language needed countless tens of thousands of years. Only then did it enable the development of a worldview that gave one the feeling of being at home in a well-ordered universe and immune to the attacks of chaos. The prerequisites for this created religion. The rules decreed by the divine were followed meticulously. The law of God prevailed; human rights were still far away.

This worldview disintegrated with the discoveries of modern science. At first only the educated elite realised, but with the advent of compulsory education this awareness spread to ever more parts of the population. Today, the decay of the mythical worldview is globalized with terrible labour pains. The "Arab Spring" is not a spring, but a genuine: "die and become" movement! Religions, especially Islamism today, are deeply committed to the old worldview, but they will perish together with it. It is understandable that they struggle with all their might against it, even when their methods can not be tolerated. But all this effort is in vain. The trend toward secularisation is unstoppable. The desperate attempts to stop the wheel of time are like the fight of Don Quixote against the sails of windmills. Science will prevail in the end, and with that man loses his central place in the universe, which once seemed to revolve around him as the "crown of creation". The dream ends with a disappointing awakening: "We have lost our importance for the universe."

Is this the last word? Do we live in a immeasurably large and incredibly old, but cold, senseless and random universe?

In my view, in its attempt to break away from the archaic mythical worldview, science swung from one extreme to another. This is always the case during separation from

something – one adopts the contrary position. A classic example is the young person who, in his adolescence, believes that his parents do everything wrong. He needs this perspective; it helps him to break away from his parents.

The same psychological law of development applied to modern science as it freed itself from the world of the ancients. It replaced this with its opposite, the mechanistic-positivist worldview, according to which the world is no longer governed by a benevolent God, but is mindlessly random. This contrary worldview throws the baby out with the bathwater.

Now religion is losing the ground under its feet. Because its very existence is being challenged, it reacts irrationally with fear and panic. It's not just current Islamist terrorism which reacts mindlessly and fanatically to modernity; the Christian church was no different. When it was still strong, Galileo Galilei was put on trial, Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake, and even in the 20th century all its employees take the anti-modernist oath which damns, inter alia, the teaching of evolution. Darwin is still not rehabilitated! Religions have a horror of modernity.

When dealing with Islamism, it's not about a struggle between Christianity and Islam, but the struggle between archaic-mythical collective religion and modern, enlightened individualism. Therefore the last pope, Benedict XVI, conspired with conservative Islam against godless modernity.

In retrospect, we now recognize that the development from an archaic-mythical worldview to a contemporary, empirically based one went too far in the first step. The pendulum swung from one extreme to another, as in the case of the youth whose image of his parents could not be worse.

But over time the violent "anti" can be reduced to a reasonable level.

That's exactly my intention: I will now relativize the mechanistic worldview.

From a mechanistic to a systemic model

In the 18th and 19th centuries, science explained life mechanistically. It is now moving slowly away from this. The change began with the modification of the concept of causality in the early 20th century. With the advent of quantum theory, the purely causal conception of natural processes was replaced by a statistical understanding of them, and with the advent of cybernetics after the Second World War, the linear conception of cause and effect in events was replaced by the circular one; through the image of the feedback loop, the impulses acting on a system are continuously corrected, thus changing the initial conditions. This led to the realization that in nature almost everything is networked with everything else via such loops.

Now "system" has become the key term for describing nature through the notion of each thing as a dynamic, self-regulating whole that has the ability to transform the totality, while maintaining its integrity, when the transformation takes place by means of self-regulation. Systems are capable of learning; they may even change their genome on the basis of experience.

The clockwork image of nature no longer fits any of these properties; the systemic view of nature has replaced the mechanistic.

This step will lead to a fundamentally new concept of mind and matter.

A new view of mind and matter

The ancients imagined spirit and matter as something existent, as *ontological* opposites: spirit was divine (transcendent), and matter impermanent (of this world). Man consisted of both, of eternal spirit and perishable matter. He was on the one hand "flesh", sinful and mortal, but on the other possessed an immortal soul that God had breathed into him at his creation. That's why he was called to live a spiritual life and to overcome the flesh.

This ancient view of mind and matter is changing fundamentally today: Being is now viewed as a single reality with two aspects, a spiritual and a material. Two complementary poles of this being have emerged from the ontological contradictions of the past. Willy Obrist, a long-time friend of Uschi and me, gave his last book about this the title "No spirit without matter, no matter without spirit." The spirit aspect is the ordering, creative principle of nature, and the matter aspect is the ordered mass. The integrated state of animated being comprises both.

What was once marvelled at as "divine intervention" is now an "invention of evolution". According to the systemic model, living beings are gifted with spirit, and evolution is no longer a meaningless product of chance, but the result of the creative tendency of being, without which the universe would not be what it is today: 13.7 billion years is too short a time to bring forth the universe *through chance*.

The creator God of antiquity is now the creative tendency of nature; God is no longer discussed away, but redefined. He is, according to Obrist, "enfolded" into the present.

The basis for this momentous transformation is a discovery of depth psychology. The seemingly otherworldly powers of the ancients are in fact forces of the unconscious psyche which, because of their unconsciousness, were only recognised in projection and thus consigned to the other world. With this insight depth psychology has not only created a new image of the psyche, but also a new image of the world.

Both should be discussed; I begin with the psyche. Depth psychology differentiates between the conscious and the unconscious realm of the psyche.

A new view of psyche

The unconscious realm

The depth psychological principle is: "The psyche was not breathed into man by an otherworldly being, but is a product of evolution."

Our unconscious psyche came into being through biological evolution. It is ancient. Its roots go back to the very beginnings of life, when only the simplest cognitive systems (e.g., for example bacteria) existed. These became increasingly complex over the course of evolution.

How deeply our unconscious mind is rooted in the domain of plants is illustrated by Erwin Thoma in his beautiful book: *The Secret Language of Trees* (Ecowin 2012):

"Plants in general, and trees in particular, grow in a fixed location but are at the same time very sensitive beings which actively take care of their environment. They record memories and experiences. They are self-aware, and discriminate between themselves and others. From this they develop active strategies of defence against threats as well as the maintenance and development of their own resources. They protect and actively promote their offspring and adapt their behaviour to obtained information. The words in the language of plants - the signs of communication - are molecules. Liquid, solid or gaseous, they serve as messengers to store information in memory and to act as signals. To date we know of over 20 groups of molecules with about 100,000 different substances in this plant language.

Who still wants to speak of primitive life-forms? Plants and trees are anything but mere mechanically functioning systems. ...

The ability to develop active strategies and look ahead to act goes so far that plants can change their genetic code as soon as they realize that the code inherited from their parents is no longer optimal in a new, changed life situation. ... Taking such scientifically proven findings into account upsets the mechanistic worldview" (Thoma 2012, 94 f.).

Our unconscious is closer to that of animals than to the plant kingdom. Our nearest relatives are the primates; our and their genomes are almost identical.

But our psyche not only has much in common with plants and animals, but also differs from both, especially in the realm of consciousness.

The conscious realm

This is, in the language of depth psychology, the domain of the ego. This usage is new and needs getting used to. In the psyche model of Marie-Louise von Franz, the ego is a light circle on the surface of a dark sphere, which represents the total psyche (Jung 1968, 161).

→ *Jung's psyche model ...*

Because of its continuous development the ego has, in the course of evolution of consciousness, become a significant *subsystem* of the psyche that increasingly influences our way of life. The contemporary ego can be compared with a teacher in a school who is teaching his class independently but is only one of many school staff and must comply with the curriculum and the rectorate (the rectorate is the self in the psyche model, and the school the total psyche).

While our unconscious nature has hardly changed in the last millennia, the conscious ego has continued to develop within cultural evolution.

Since cultural advances are only stored "on paper" (in cultural conventions) and not in the genome, they can - as in war when reason is swept away by primitive feelings - even briefly disappear.

Nevertheless, our consciousness has an evolutionary precursor in the animal kingdom.

Consciousness

Origin

Our consciousness is rooted in the animal kingdom. Its evolutionary precursor is the curiosity of young mammals. Together with the mammals, the *neocortex* originated in the frontal lobe of the brain, which allowed another step in the evolution towards consciousness. It is the material basis of consciousness, or to put it more bluntly: no neocortex, no consciousness.

Animal curiosity became human curiosity, which is the basis of our insatiable thirst for knowledge. A proverb from Glarus says "Ds Gwünder isch ds Grööscht am Mäntsch" (humans wonder the most). A child's will to learn is enormous and remains throughout his or her lifetime, unlike in animals which lose it slowly when they are *fit* for the struggle for existence. But man, an instinct-deficient being, has never stopped learning; he must always develop his ego further to compensate for his lack of instinct.

Further development

What distinguishes man is the constant development of his ego, the evolution of consciousness. We are - depending on one's viewpoint - condemned or chosen to keep having to mentally develop. Those who reject this fate cause offence, and that hurts. Whoever still does not open his eyes must atone for it bitterly. This is why „Lappi, tue d Augen uuf!“ (fool, open your eyes!) is inscribed on the city gate of Schaffhausen.

Man *is* not man, but *becomes* man; becoming human and becoming conscious belong together. Konrad Lorenz formulated: "The transition from ape to man - that's us."

We are those beings which can become aware of themselves. This is unique on our planet. No one else is wondering about their origin and destiny and thinks about their place in evolution.

With this keyword we are at the heart of the matter: "My place in evolution." I think we see things now with a bit more differentiation.

The circle closes; I am slowly coming to the conclusion.

My place in evolution

If the goal of human evolution is to become conscious, then whoever strives to do so lives in accordance with evolution. He is no longer only an *unconscious* part of biological evolution, but engages *consciously* with the continuation of this, the evolution of consciousness. Since other beings, with their unconscious selves, are automatically part of evolution, man can consciously become a co-creator of it.

The question is: "Do I want to commit myself to the humanization of man?" Everything we do to promote this happens in the context of evolution, and is therefore experienced as meaningful. We feel part of a larger whole, and this feeling gives us strength and joy to get involved in this good cause.

For the humanization of man, Jung's concept of the individuation process is helpful. This requires a *turning inward*: paying attention to one's own dreams and "gut feelings", intuitions and fantasies. In this way one gains more clarity about one's own personality and its shadow; after this one comes into contact with the deeper layers of the psyche, and finally with the creative spirit of nature.

For the ancients, the inner dialogue was prayer, the conversation between man and God. Individual turning inward is a contemporary substitute for the collective religion of antiquity. The individuation process is therefore not a dubious "Ersatz-Religion", as Jung was often accused by theologians, but a complete replacement for archaic-mythical religion. It is to Jung's credit that for more than a century this has been widely recognized and its consequences realised.

His discovery gave new impetus to the evolution of consciousness. As Jung linked the ego with the self, culture and nature regenerated, he accessed an inner connection to the creative spirit of evolution. His student E. Neumann described this as the "ego-Self axis".

I summarise:

The ancients believed that they were at the centre of the universe and the centre of divine care. From our present state of knowledge, this is greatly inflated. Modern science rightly protested against this and formulated a contrary worldview without the hypothesis of a God. But that left only chance. The target was over-shot.

Today it is becoming increasingly apparent that the mechanistic-positivist worldview is just as extreme as was the archaic-mythical. We are neither the crown of creation, as the ancients believed, nor just nothing in a cold, spiritless and meaningless universe as positivism asserts. The truth lies in a creative compromise between both extremes at a higher level.

This is illustrated in the following graphic from Willy Obrist, which summarises the development of our worldview from archaic-mythical to the contemporary, empirically based one:

→ *Diagram: "The two steps ..."*

At the conclusion of my presentation I present two of Uschi's dreams. These will confirm my observations about the unconscious. Uschi will present the dreams to you, and then we will exchange ideas on the topic of "My place in evolution".

Rolf Kaufmann

Two dreams from Uschi about this topic

First dream

Introduction by Uschi: The first dream I had 1 June 2011 before a course entitled "Jesus and the institutions" that Rolf and I gave in a monastery.

I will now tell you the two dreams. Before the discussion I will distribute printed copies of them.

→ Recount the first dream ...

"Late in the evening before going to bed, I again look out of the window from my room in the monastery. The view of the lake and the mountains opposite impresses me all over again.

Suddenly Jesus is standing behind me. He wishes me a good evening and says that he wants to show me something. We stand there silently and look at the sky for a long time. It is becoming ever darker. Suddenly a blue text lights up in the almost blue-black sky. In giant letters the following can be read in block capitals:

RELIGIONS ARE ONLY INSTITUTIONS

I am puzzled by this spectacle. After a while, a huge, fiery red bar emerges from the left to cover the whole of the text. Finally, the bar fades and disappears. In its place, and in the same bright red colour, another row of text appears, again in huge letters:

LIFE IS EVOLUTION

From the bottom of my heart, I agree with this, "Yes, it is!"

Jesus says: "You see, it's that simple."

I go along with him, but then object: "Yes, but it will take a long time before humanity will understand this matter. I will not live to see it."

Jesus looks at me for a long time and then says: "It is important that you understand it." Meanwhile the night has become dark.

Jesus says: "You can go to sleep now; I'll keep the night watch."

I go to bed, turn onto my side, and fall immediately into a deep sleep."

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Second dream

The second dream is about Willy Obrist, who was already dead. He once said to me in a dream:

"Trust your Self. Go this way consistently, simple, true and clear. Then you'll find your place as a grain of sand, and your task in the outer and inner reality in a greater whole. That makes you happy and grateful."

→ Final discussion ...