

The Phases and Future of the Noosphere: Segment 12

David Sloan Wilson: Well, let me initiate the wrap-up round here. This has been so great, and I think one purpose of this is to continue interacting with each other. So, this is not really the end. I wanted to say a little bit more about the Science of the Noosphere project, which is embedded in a larger project called Human Energy. And Ben Kacyra who's the founder of that project talks very much in terms of the third story. What he means by that the first story traditional religions, the second story materialistic science, and the third story some kind of value-laden science that's close to what Teilhard was about with all of his writing. So, the idea that it does have to be a story, it can't just be science, it has to be science portrayed as story is what we're all about.

What I'd like to end discussing is just how do we do this. One is to make science available to the current generation of science fiction storytellers. This science is very new. It needs to be spread far and wide, including the artistic community basically, and that becomes their raw material. And then is there any other way to facilitate storytelling? So, how do we actually bring storytellers into this project? It's a scientific project. It needs to be a storytelling project in order to actually work towards global cooperation, the global good, call it the noosphere. So, what do each of you have to say about that? David, why don't you go first and then we'll end with PJ.

PJ Manney: To me, all culture as much as science informs culture, all culture actually comes from the arts and humanities, in that how we communicate the science, how we communicate what reality is, is what makes the impact. One of the things I did briefly was I used to talk to scientists, like JPL and other places and try to get them in a frame of mind to understand that even their fellow scientists wanted to hear why this mattered to them, why does this matter to the audience, what is this connection through story, that can make an impact on their science being communicated more broadly. I think that everyone has to learn how to be a storyteller.

We are naturally whether people realize it or not, but there must be for the third story by definition, you literally called it the third story then. By definition, we have to find that synthesis. It's not STEM, it's STEAM. You need to have the arts in the middle of all that analysis, because you have to make sense of it. As David said earlier, fiction often makes more truth, more sense than the data we accumulate, because we're able to see the bigger context, multiple contexts, bigger pictures that the scientific inquiry by definition is not really supposed to do. It's supposed to go down the silo, whereas the art can go across silos.

And that's where the third story comes in for me personally as a storyteller, because it is that synthesis of where do we find value and meaning and where do we find the hopefulness to drive us to a better future.

David Brin: I am in awe and I don't know what I could add to that. I mean I would rather leave that as the last word, but I will say that the ability to spread oneself...When I give keynotes at universities or commencements, I talk about how human beings can be many. PJ mentioned Robert Wright's Nonzero. You can be many. You can have a pastime. Scientists are the first priesthood to encourage amateur science to compete with each other to get on PBS, and explain what they're doing. And when I was in grad school, we were worried that specialization would get narrower and narrower and narrower with time and the exact opposite happened. Scientists today talk to people outside their field more than they ever did before.

Computer literature searches played a large role in that, but the ability to be eclectic, the ability to grasp that which is outside your field, even if it's on an amateur level, but to get the essence of what's going on all around you is in my opinion one of the greatest examples of the positive sum game. And I encourage everyone to not feel limited. That doesn't mean that the narrative we're hearing of hatred of scientists and of do my own research. No, a certain amount of humility is called for. If all the experts agree on

something, then you might bear the burden of proof. But—but to keep asking questions, that's another story. And it's to some extent as PJ said, it's all about story.