

The Physiology of the Noosphere: Segment 4

David Sloan Wilson: Okay, so Marta, I wanted to focus our conversation on two key concepts and their relationship. The first concept is interdependence. So systems that are richly interdependent in their elements. And the second concept is functional organization, a system that qualifies as functionally organized in some sense. If it's a biological unit, then, of course, an organism is the quintessential functionally organized unit. An insect colony is a functionally organized unit. In human life, of course, a well run corporation is a functionally organized unit. And of course, corporation is derived from the Latin word for body.

And the position I want to discuss, I'll call it my own position, is that functional organization is a very special kind of interdependence. Of course, an organism or a corporation, or any functionally organized unit is richly interdependent. But there's other systems that are interdependent that do not qualify as functionally organized. So interdependence is a broader category than functional organization. And of course, whenever we talk about a brain or a global brain, or a superorganism, or the ideas of Teilhard in terms of the whole world becoming some kind of a Noosphere, we're talking about functional organization, we're not just talking about mere interdependence, we're talking about functional organization.

And so, the process that's required for something to become functionally organized becomes, I would say, the question, how do we take a system that's merely interdependent, and turn it into something that's functionally organized? And also, it's very important for it to be functionally organized for the common good, because you can take something like a slave society, and it's functionally organized, but it's not functionally organized for the common good. So, we really have a very constraining set of criteria for what we're trying to create here. And I think that many of our systems are merely interdependent. And they are not what we want. And they're not what Teilhard meant by the Noosphere. So I'm staking out a fairly strong position, and now please take your turn and we can dive into this.

Marta Lenartowicz: I understand, and correct me if I'm wrong, I like to imagine why... And I understand a little bit more, where the particular framing of the question is coming from. And I imagine it's from this debate you also had with Francis Heylighen and the question of the description of the Noosphere. Is it a project or a vision we are working towards or basically another way of describing the human reality, human society as a complex system that you can do and you do already? So the question is like, are we speaking about the Noosphere in terms of the organism-like functional structure? Or are we just speaking about the fact that the communication networks have covered the globe and there is interconnectedness?

DSW: It's an important theme in your writing, Marta. Is the Noosphere something that already exists or is the Noosphere something that we have to bring into being, and much of what you write you say, "No, the Noosphere is something that already exists." So, maybe you could elaborate that in your own words. In what in what sense can we say that the Noosphere is something that already exists?

ML: Okay, so let's go from there and we'll reach this interdependence and functional differentiation. I don't know if it's even appropriate but I have this very, very clear comparison which... Allow me to use, but it's really out of context, but it's like a little bit in the context because it's in the context of the religious context, where also the notion of the Noosphere can be said to come from. You see, there is this notion about heaven, yes, and the thing that humanity we will reach the paradise one day, and then what you have as... I'm just bringing the similar structure to deliver the point. You have the situation, that you have people on the planet, killing each other, crusading over each other, because their religion needs to be the one that will win because they have a religious state.

You see when you put it like this, it's ridiculous, yes? What they are doing, they are fighting, they're killing, they're murdering each other, because the description and the logic, the social paradigm they are

arguing for has this idea of reaching the goal of the paradise, and obviously they want the paradise. And then, you study this religion and what it says. I am not such a big expert on religion, but what it says about the paradise at least in the Christian, the Bible source, it says, "But the..." How is it exactly? "God's kingdom is already here." And there's this... Whenever we debate about the Noosphere being here or not being here yet, I am reminded about this quote, because it's not such a cheap notion that, okay, we have the paradise. Done.

And you see the suffering, you see the words, you see everything and you say like, "Yeah, but this is paradise." It's a little bit more complicated than that, because you see, descriptions are functional narratives. Social narratives have a functional power over how we act and how we behave. And this is what comes back to what I said before about the second order of cybernetic understanding of social theories. Yes? So, what we understand what is, this is something that organizes our behavior and our interpretation of everything.

Compare those two scenarios. When you say that the Noosphere is a future, harmonious, wonderful, well organized, fully functional, interconnected, but also functionally working as one organism. The state of humanity on a horizon, and we are working towards that. What this description does to my ear, it creates this dichotomy, not only between now and then, which is powerful in our motivational structures, but also between us and them, those who want it, and those who don't want it, the social dynamics and processes which are not that. So then the question is, and it's a serious question, how do you implement that without all those things marked as not wanted, without them on board?

Okay, crusades used to be the old way. I understand that we have developed a little bit more sophistication already, but it is the same thing. Because when you say something is not wanted, and you say like, *this*. This thing that you are pointing to will immediately speak up and protest, and will consider itself not included and not belonging to what you are proposing? So, what I'm suggesting with this description of the Noosphere being here, is that, yes, like okay, so if you take this as an understanding of what's happening, we are one organism, humanity, and as one organism, what am I doing?

And it's not so different from personal development. You are one organism, and then you look at yourself, and you will see, you smoke, you drink... I don't know, all the things you don't want to do. It doesn't mean you say, it's not me. You say, "Yes, it's me and actually I don't want to do that."

So it's not such a psychologically impossible scenario to say, yes, it's us humanity, and look what we are doing. But we are this organism. So I don't think it's such a dramatic distinction between saying that the Noosphere is not yet here or it's here rather than this.