Towards a World Idea-System

If the major attribute of the human mind is the capacity to investigate, to enquire, to discover, and to invent, the dominant motive behind this is surely the urge to know and understand, and the effort to find meaning in life. This "effort after meaning", this desire to find order and reason in the universe around us, is the motive force behind the discoveries of most great thinkers. The same power has prompted the many different theories and world-views, sane and aberrant, proposed down the ages by geniuses and cranks alike.

The search for meaning is a search for reality. The human mind is not satisfied until it can account for and relate all the various data and evidence at its disposal within one common framework of ideas. "Peace", says Pitirim Sorokin, "is not absence of struggle but absence of uncertainty and confusion". This distils the essence of the motive behind nearly all forms of human enquiry. The mind will not abide uncertainty, confusion, lack of order, inconsistency, and lack of integration of ideas.

The advent of modern science disrupted and overturned many of man's former conceptions of the nature of the universe. In the West mediaeval moulds of thought were broken and have never been recovered. A scientific era, largely mechanist, "materialist" in its focus, and completely sceptical of all ideas that could not be subjected to its own type of "scientific test" set in. This was a very necessary corrective to the unthinking and unrealistic (because not based on reality) notions of earlier centuries. But today we have reached the interesting position where science itself, in its ever-persistent search for knowledge and understanding, is penetrating entirely new areas of reality and levels of experience. The old mechanistic physical concepts and "materialist" ideas seem themselves increasingly unrealistic and ever more inadequate to explain the phenomena under investigation.

"Atomisation" and synthesis

The tremendous developments of science and technology, and the ever increasing specialisation to which these developments have led, present very serious problems to those who would seek a unified picture of reality and a unified human understanding of the universe. The number of scientific journals, even in one field of study like physics or chemistry or biology, is now so great that it is just not possible for a single human mind to keep abreast of developments in any subject. In Russia, for example, large staff are continually at work making abstracts of the papers published in various learned journals. It has even been found necessary to make a digest of the abstracts themselves so that the average scientific and technological mind may be kept informed of progress in its field.

Alongside this "atomisation" of knowledge, this increased and increasing specialisation, and the technological multiplication of our human world, there is a most interesting and entirely opposite trend.
In all branches of pure science at advanced theoretical levels, there is a blending and a merging of ideas and scientific concepts. It is almost as if specialisation at the technological level is forcing and accelerating efforts to achieve a theoretical unity. It looks as if we can say that as we approach the heart of any one subject, we come close to the heart of all knowledge and find the point where the true relationship between the many different branches of knowledge can be known.

**Interplay of ideas**

The effort to achieve a synthetic understanding of life is not confined to science. It can be noted in many other fields as well. It is almost as if man has reached the *reductio ad absurdum* of his search for ever more precise and detailed knowledge of ever smaller areas of study and is being forced by the very extent of his investigations to take account of other fields of knowledge. Modern medicine, for example, can no longer ignore the contributions of psychology and the influence of psychological factors in both health and disease. This is true in spite of the fact of increasing experimentation with physical methods for treating psychological difficulties, a trend that is almost certainly temporary. Psychologists in their turn are unable to ignore the reality and influence of religious factors in mental breakdown and mental health. C. G. Jung is not the only psychologist to draw attention to the fact that most psychological difficulties in people over 35 are fundamentally religious difficulties. Religion likewise is being forced to adjust to advances in scientific, medical, and psychological understanding and not only to seek a relationship but a practical *modus vivendi* with these areas of human life. The religions of the world are also finding that the evidence and testimony of students of yoga, meditation, and other inner disciplines are destroying ancient dogmas, forms of thought and outworn religious observances. To use religious language, the life of the spirit can no longer be contained within the ancient dogmas and doctrines.

This particular wheel "comes full circle" as we find the scientists, those apostles of an earlier "materialism", studying the phenomena of Extra-Sensory Perception. Unusual experiences and unexplained powers—telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and psycho-kinesis—are all now the subject of investigation. Such "occult" sciences as astrology are the subject of mathematical and statistical study. The techniques of investigation may be naive and rudimentary. Significance lies in the fact that the work is being done at all and is often the subject of a doctoral thesis at a University.

There seems even to be a new trend and movement in the philosophical field as trained thinkers reflect on the meaning and significance of all these new explorations and find how arid and fruitless it is to confine their contributions to linguistic and semantic analysis. It is in the philosophical and religious fields especially that the influence of eastern thought is being profoundly felt.

**Revolution in thought**

While there is as yet no integrated picture of all areas of human life available to man, it is clear that the once rigid boundaries between the various areas of scientific and philosophic investigation have broken down. The same phenomena are now being investigated by experimenters from different fields, and from...
different points of view. In due course we may expect to see the emergence of an entirely new and revolutionary world system of ideas, based on the tendency to integration and synthesis that is the dominant note in humanity’s thought-life today.

It is too early yet to predict the nature of the new view of reality that seems bound to emerge increasingly in the next fifty years. We are in the middle of one of the most profound revolutions that there has ever been in world thought and only the very wise or the very foolish would dare to forecast the nature of our “new” view of reality. We can however note certain clear trends and assumptions which seem likely to point us in the right direction.

In the first place we must recognise that our search for meaning presupposes an underlying unity and order in the universe. This not only means the universe of the “so-called tangible world”, but the universe of mind and consciousness, of human understanding, and of the motive power and energy lying behind and within all life. Were this sense of order and unity non-existent, our search for it would be an investigation of the unreal. We must also expect, at least for a long time to come, that the nature of the “realities” revealed along different paths of investigation will often appear contradictory. This we shall have to accept and probably attribute to limitations in our understanding. We must also guard against the very human tendency to impose one particular interpretation or view of reality on the evidence, when another view seems just as possible on an objective appraisal of the facts. We must also take great care to see that any picture of reality that we create is a flexible one, is an “open system”, capable of expansion, development, modification and change.

Relativity

When Einstein first proposed his special theory of relativity in 1904 few appreciated that he wrought a revolution not only in physics but in our whole attitude to life and mode of thinking about the world. Up to that time much of human thought was essentially “technical and concrete” in its nature. Its logic was a rather simple logic of cause and effect. Paradox was to it anathema. It was based on the assumption of a three-dimensional space and a one-dimensional time. One of the significances of the theory of relativity is that it has destroyed forever the validity of these separate concepts of time and space and replaced them by the idea of a four-dimensional space-time continuum. The idea that events occur at the same moment of time at different points in universal space can never be proved. Measurements of space and time were proved by Einstein to differ with the rates of relative motion. No more can we speak of motion occurring within an unaffected space and time: no more are space and time universal uniform receptacles in which matter in motion exists. There are as many spaces and times as there are relative rates of matter’s motions. The whole view of physical reality was transformed. The philosophical consequences were and are incalculable, and the practical consequence was to revolutionise the basis of physics. This revolution led to many of the technical developments that are altering the face of our world today. The logic of this “new” physics was a kind of transcendent logic, moving so far beyond our familiar concrete thought that only a few had the capacity to understand it.

Parallel to the development of relativity theory, other scientists such as Bohr, Rutherford and Planck were exploring the universe within the atom and seeking
to define the laws that governed that universe. It is an interesting fact that they arrived at a similar position to that arrived at by Einstein in his special and general theories of relativity. It is no longer possible to study the more minute particles of "matter" individually because the very process of observation affects the "behaviour" of the particle. Such particles can only be studied in the mass. Heisenberg has expressed this fact in his principle of indeterminacy which states that one can know the velocity of a particle or its position but not both at the same time. We therefore find a form of relativity in the microcosmic world of the atom.

**Ideology and reality**

It is interesting to note the extent to which the concept of relativity has permeated every field and walk of life. In spite of this permeation, however, there are still many concrete and rigid barriers to the fluid, flexible and intuitive thought patterns based on relativity. Nineteenth century thought, whether political, economic or religious, was full of over-simplification and was essentially rigid and ideological, and each field of thought was governed by its own rather set system of ideas. While relativity has brought tremendous change, many of our social and political ideas are still too influenced by ideological rigidities of thought. Much of the western attitude to the communist system is rigid and ideological and increasingly divorced from the realities of the situation in Russia and Eastern Europe. Likewise, the Russian view of Western society is essentially ideological and equally divorced from reality. Many people recognize that these attitudes are among the major barriers to achieving a rapprochement between these two major power blocs.

Similar rigidities are to be found among the protagonists of all the great religions. Almost invariably they assume that the view of reality provided by the founder of their religion is the best view that the world has ever been given and that it partakes of the nature of an ultimate and final revelation. This accords ill with the tone and temper of an era which recognises the essentially relative nature of reality. Whatever the present leaders of religious thought may say, they will be forced in time to accommodate to this new and realistic emerging world view. Churchmen will no doubt dislike to be described as the technologists of religion but much of their thought is basically technological and concerned primarily with doctrine and dogma.

Two of the dominant trends in the thought-life of mankind in mid-twentieth century therefore are the trend to a unitive and unified picture of reality, and the acceptance of this reality as being essentially relative—at best an approximation of the truth, to be substituted by something better when it comes along. Implicit in the relativist viewpoint is the assumption that reality can be approached from different angles or points of view, and that this will produce different "pictures" of the one fundamental reality, "pictures" which can however be intelligently related to each other.

**The universe as Mind**

There is a third major trend which may in the long run be the most important of all. Even today many thinkers and scientists regard the universe as a kind of machine and consider that consciousness is a by-product or epiphenomenon of the interplay of matter. Since it has been the influence of scientific thought that has created the "materialist" world view, and since scientific thought and method still

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TOWARDS A WORLD IDEA-SYSTEM

has a predominant influence today, it would be just and appropriate if science itself were to achieve the break-through to a new and "non-materialist" world view.

If we can point to one thing with confidence about the growth of human understanding in recent years, it is the increasing interest shown in the study and exploration of the more subjective areas of experience. This trend is also noticeable within science. Such thinkers as de Chardin with his "noosphere" have sought to lead scientists beyond the idea that consciousness does not exist in itself or in its own right but i mere a by-product of the material universe. Most great thinkers have in fact recognised the "non-materialist" reality of the universe. Eddington puts it as follows: "...the frank realisation that science is concerned with a world of shadows. In the world of physics we watch a shadowgraph performance of the drama of familiar lines... It is all symbolic and as a symbol the physicist leaves it. Then comes the alchemist, mind, who transmutes the symbols...to put the conclusion crudely, the stuff of the world is mind-stuff."

James Jeans puts it as follows: "the stream of knowledge is leading towards a non-mechanical reality: the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine." De Chardin writes as follows: "To write the natural history of the world we should need to be able to follow it from within. It would thus appear no longer as an interlocking succession of structural types replacing one another but as an ascension of inner sap spreading out in a forest of consolidated instincts. Right at its base the world is constituted by consciousness clothed in flesh and bone. From the biosphere to the species is nothing but an immense ramification of psychism seeking for itself by means of different forms."

Consciousness and the new reality.

There was a time when the views of Eddington and Jeans were regarded, in this area, as somewhat romantic by many! But now we find de Chardin, recognised by scientists of all persuasions as a thinker of the most profound depth, coming out with a statement to the effect that the essential nature of the universe is consciousness.

But perhaps the most exciting and dramatic evidence of all in this area has come recently from Russia. In a series of articles published this year in the New York Times, Harrison Salisbury reports on some scientific papers published by leading Russian scientists in which they state their view that the nature of the universe is "spiritual", and not materialistic or mechanical. "Spiritual" and "material" are not of course defined. It would appear, however, that the essential meaning of these statements is that the nature of the universe is more closely related to our ideas of mind and consciousness than to the old, tired, and nihilistic conceptions of materialism. It would indeed be the final irony that from a materialist Russia may come the proof of the "spiritual" nature of the universe.

I said at the beginning of this article that only a very wise man or a fool would, at this stage in the development of human thought, make any categorical pronounce- ment about the nature of the picture of reality that will eventually emerge before us. What is clear however, is that mankind has travelled as far as it is possible to go along the road towards a mechanical, materialistic, non-purposive picture of

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1. The Nature of the Physical World.
2. The Mysterious Universe.
3. The Phenomenon of Man.
the universe, where mind and consciousness are but epiphenomena. At the end of this road there has been either a complete blockage or a break-through into areas of reality where mechanistic and materialistic conceptions no longer seem to work. We are forced therefore to turn away from materialistic and mechanical models of the universe and to shift our “effort after meaning” in the direction of an understanding of the place of consciousness in our world picture. With advances in psychology, in psychical research, and with the increasing understanding that we have of the contributions of world philosophy and thought, and with the willingness of religious thinkers to adopt a more experimental and experimental attitude to life, the balance is rapidly being restored. The place of consciousness and mind in our newly emerging view of reality will certainly be predominant if not causal.

Milk of white understanding  
give me today your lips 
that I might inherit your patience  

women corrupt to man’s ways  
envy emptied wombs  
while men castrate with their teeth  
the source of the white liquid  

Was it not said that the white light blinds?  
in that lit blindness  
deed and desire  
are a burnt sanity  
have a desert purity  
O, white light! I kneel before you.  

Draw the curtain gently  
Do not raise your voice  
while shattered insects die slowly  
and the flies’ tremulous colours shrink  
into black seeds.  

Hold your curious tongue  
while the rose withers its colour  
or else taste the blood of the thorn-nest,  
and its fruit—the morning Sun!  

O let me touch your pale lips  
and inherit understanding!  

Rajat Neogy