

The Texts of the Convivium

A NEW SCIENCE AND A NEW VISION OF THINGS

In our time a new vision of things is emerging – in broad strokes – as it were; a new vision that is crowding out a mechanistic view of reality maintained by classical physics as well as the view of Cartesian dualism in philosophy. This revolution also affects the spiritual dimension and is determined by many factors. On the one hand, it is the result of the new discoveries of quantum physics, of the formulation of the theory of relativity and biological research; on the other, on the human side, it is the result of the connections between mind and body highlighted by medicine, the psychology of the unconscious and the mystic dimension of spiritual traditions that have come into contact with each other after centuries of lack of cooperation and distance. Generally speaking, all new discoveries refer to the unity between matter and spirit and psyche and soma, a characteristic idea of the early Greek and Eastern philosophies. This physical investigation of the world and the searching of the human soul, confirm that the observer and the observed object interact, and in so doing affect each other, and that it is not possible to conceive an ultimate and static reality independently of these dynamic relations. The discovery of the “principle of indetermination” led us to a new notion of scientific research, whereby a researcher and the universe he is investigating represent a unitary whole, which is in a state of constant becoming. Also the study of archetypal structures of the human psyche has uprooted the claim that man completely objectivises himself, becoming fixed in an absolutely objective reality. In this light, which unifies everything, from a grass blade to human thought, every element is in contact with other elements and expresses itself through them in a game of functions and meanings. Thus, symbolic language prevails over the strictly technical/descriptive language because it is more suited to express these dimensions. The notion of man resulting from these investigations is aware that one’s profound being is organically linked to the collective roots of mankind, and even more deeply to the very cosmic substance which gives life to and shapes all things; at the same time, though, it cannot be traced back to these dimensions alone, it is aware that its identity can be reached with a quantum leap and it opens up to a greater mystery. The changes we are talking about can also be found in 20th century art and thought, no longer based on an already given reality, on the objective foundation of being, but on the inner occurrence and inspiration.

The basic theories of modern physics, therefore, oblige us to see the world as an organic whole, whose parts are interdependent; a self-regulating, self-balancing system. Quantum theory, for example, shows that we cannot break down the universe into units that exist independently from one another, but it is a complex network of relations among the various parts of a unified whole. It is a network that essentially includes the human observer and his consciousness. This means that the electron cannot have objective properties that are independent of my mind. The clearcut Cartesian separation between mind and matter, between the self and the universe is no longer valid in modern physics. We can no longer speak of nature without at the same time speaking of ourselves. The scope of this new notion of reality is truly impressive and is of global importance, i. e. at all levels of existence. In this connection recent studies that deal with three forms of matter are enlightening. The first form is matter of the atomic world, the non-living world, which is linked to continuous repetition (the world of homogenisation tending towards entropy, Carnot’s principle of thermodynamics); the

second tells us about another form of matter – that destroys living matter, that destroys this first world to create another living world; and finally a third form of matter called T – factor which is present in man. Our nervous system is made up of the encounter of conservative forces, homogenising forces and vital forces that destroy the mineral world to form a higher synthesis called the “T-factor”. This higher synthesis goes against the logic we are used to, i.e. Aristotelian logic, whereby when reasoning one must proceed excluding a third option – this thing is either black or white “tertium non datur”. Whereas this third form of matter, which is within us, deals with two realities that are in conflict with one another and synthesizes them into a higher unit where there is a third option. So one asks oneself: is this thing black or white? The answer should be “it is grey” (tertium datur). Thus in every human being the central nervous system develops into a neuropsychic energy-based way. It is the third form of matter, made up of the same atoms making up the universe, with the following difference: the nervous cells making up the neuron are organised and structured in such a way that the logical T principle, i. e. that there is a third option, allows the coexistence of homogenizing and heterogenizing forces in a condition of continuous flow, that is never once and for all defined. These discoveries seem to go well with the great intuitions of the Asian East. One of these can be found in the description of the Chinese Tao, where in the white half there is a bit of black and in the black half there is also a bit of white. Never is a thing either in one way or the other. In short, it is a dynamic and global conciliation of opposites. Therefore, the practical, concrete and existential attitude that stems from this state of things seems to be more that of patient understanding aimed at self-education rather than relying on great moral principles imposed from above. This does not mean depriving the objectivity of the moral imperative of its importance, because man has a need to be mirrored, but the educational tension shifts on customised education and the internalisation of the moral principle. In this case everyone has their working out time and the educator must simply provide guidance along the path, as he knows from first-hand experience the transition stages from one state to another, from one form to another, being always receptive to the mystery in which the profound secret of our identity and continuously showing the light one should try to reach out for to truly be oneself.

What we have been saying also harks back to that aspect of poetry and harmony inherent in life, that unfortunately has been overshadowed by centuries of ruling rationalism. Faced with the experience of beauty, today’s man, being no longer used to grasp the subtle aspects of mutual harmony between things, may feel a sense of uneasiness, because he understands that it escapes his analysis, giving him the feeling of having excluded and not being able to own something which he senses is not marginal at all. Beauty is the characteristic of the mystery, it his higher synthesis, quality and depth rolled into one. It is precisely beauty that reveals the most hidden intentionality of God, that of gift and participation offered to man. As if to say that a flower is not beautiful when God creates it, but when He gives it to man; that the universe becomes beautiful only on the sixth day of creation, when from “created” it becomes “given as a gift”. Otherwise life alone is not enough, it would just be existence. Life becomes “beautiful” only when it is the complete expression of love given as a gift. Only then does poetry flourish.

Therefore there are two attitudes man can take towards the world: one which is the product of technical/scientific thinking and the other which is the product of symbolic thinking. Instead of the distance of the subject from the object of his research, which is typical of objective scientific thinking, symbolic thinking relies on merging with the object of research. Instead of the assumed neutrality vis-à-vis the object, attention is paid to the resonance which the object awakens in us (just think of art in general),

resonance which makes us not only perceive the extent and depth of things, but also that nothing is an end in itself. And while science resorts to the use of knowledge tools, symbolic thinking uses intuition to understand reality. Intuition is strictly linked to the perception of beauty, to the aesthetic feeling, with which goodness and truth must be conveyed. Medieval people used to call this ability “the intellect of love”. The man of the future in order to survive his contradictions will have to balance the wealth of scientific knowledge with a clear perception of the value of his life and his role in the world, a perception that only intuitive/symbolic spiritual knowledge can give him, as it is mainly aimed at the search for meaning. We hope that the new millennium will be characterised by a “holistic” (from the Greek *holos* = whole) vision of life. A more understanding, harmonious vision – less concerned with knowing reality through the identification of opposite principles, but more intent on the search for the oneness present in all things.