

## RESPONSE TO THE WEBINAR ON THURSDAY, 11 MARCH

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After Nikos' presentation there were so many responses and questions that I found it difficult either to place them or to distill a central theme. Now that I write, rather than speak a few words on Thursday, I would like to address a theme that has gripped me for some time in our discussions.

The theme is epistemology: How do we allow ourselves to know or to believe what we know or believe? And why do we seem to trust exclusively the old-fashioned scientific model to assure us that what we know or believe is true?

After Nikos' presentation, Stefan asked why the emphasis was placed on physics rather than on psychology as a source of objective truth. Nikos responded with what felt to me like a very limited description of psychology: neurons and brain science. But studies in psychology are far broader and deeper than empirical experiments in labs. The discovery, and naming, of archetypes by Jung resonates with the experience of archetypes in literature and religions through the ages and across all cultures. The objectivity is unattestable. Why shouldn't we trust it?

Dagmar told us she agreed with Christopher's discoveries, but she wondered whether she could trust them as true.

If I recall correctly, Yodan alluded to mystical experience as something out of the past (rather than of all times, I inferred). Isn't mystical experience both objective and not at all a mystery?

I think and feel we need to look at an unconscious fundamentalism that binds us, that tells us we can't accept an experience as objective unless we can prove it in a lab like we would an experiment in physics.

Perhaps Christopher and his supporters believe that the only way to reach people is by appealing to experimental science. But how can you concoct an experiment to prove, via the model of experimental science, that, as Nikos told us, the observer and the observed are connected?

Saachi's response came from the wisdom of the Buddha. Wisdom is lived experience, not doctrine and not laboratory evidence. Why doesn't our epistemology make space for such objective truth?

And now, at the close of remarks that are far from closed, I can't help including my personal experience:

Reading Alexander, starting when I was a callow and quite unconscious 18-year-old in 1966, gave me the assurance I wasn't the only one who experienced the world and buildings and beauty the way Alexander did. Through the years since then, Alexander lent me support in my designing and in my teaching. But it wasn't because he presented me with things I didn't already know and feel. It was because he was another person who had chronicled them, who had lived them, who had built them.

Despite the gratefulness I felt for Alexander, there was a frustration I felt for him as well. In the Prologue to Book 1 of *The Nature of Order*, Alexander describes adequately (and surprisingly succinctly) the source of our lack of beauty in what we build and our lack of trust in what we experience. It's the model in experimental science that tells us what we are allowed to believe as true. Epistemology! But then Christopher goes on, and on and on, to try to convince us to believe what he's presenting is true. In other words, we can only believe it once he's proved 'scientifically' that it's all right for us to believe it.

Shouldn't we take the wisdom in the Prologue seriously? Shouldn't we reject not only the geometrical fundamentalism that Nikos and Michael Mehaffy describe in their article of the same name, but also the fundamentalism of a limited and moribund scientific model?

As I write, I become aware of an attitude in myself and in Alexander. We try to convince other people we're right. We try to convert them. But if what we experience is objective, is rooted in our psyches or souls, is the experience other people have or can have, then our task is not to convert. It's simply to offer beauty, and a way to bring it into being. Beauty rather than power. Beauty rather than membership in a vocational sect. Beauty rather than spiritual death.