

THE CHALLENGE OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

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Interdisciplinarity cannot be meaningful as a reductionist quest for a single formula from which everything else follows with necessity. The challenge posed by interdisciplinarity is that of trying to understand the fundamental unity and diversity of everything that exists and everything that continues to emerge within an evolutionary framework.

This challenge, I believe, is a genuinely human one: like anybody else, I am confronted with a number of questions, problems, perspectives, etc. which are inherently linked to the boundaries within which the human race exists. These boundaries and the restrictions they imply relate to the different levels on which we exist: the indeterminate quantum world, the neuro-chemistry of our brain, the culture in which we live — to name just a few. Some questions, of the utmost importance for humanity — questions concerning our orientation in the world, concerning guidelines for our behavior, questions concerning the validity and the scope of our knowledge, etc. — cannot be answered by experts qua experts in a specific field. The questions concern the grand scheme of the world; the questions concern how we fit into the big picture.

To the extent that these are real questions, they deserve real answers. This means that not just any answer will do. It is not just a matter of individual convictions, as we are sometimes led to believe in the name of a naively understood “plurality,” “democracy,” or “freedom.” Even when we accept that everybody is “entitled” — by whom? — to his or her personal belief and/or answer to these questions, this does not imply that all those answers are equally valid, not even if it were possible to prove that we cannot — in principle — know exactly which answers are true and which answers are false.

A major purpose of my work up to this point has been to investigate

i) the grounds — if any — on which we can answer these questions, and
ii) the tools to do so. It turns out that such an investigation, in a reflexive movement, answers the very questions it attempts to deal with: the grounds to answer the questions turn out to be the answer to the question.

That does not mean, however, that the interdisciplinary quest is just begging its own questions, at least not in a way that would trivialize the project. One could think about it as dealing with problems raised by language ... in language. It is obvious that we do this all the time and that we have no other tool available to substitute for language. Although this will certainly impose certain limits on the scope of such a project, this does not at all mean that it should be abandoned completely. One could argue, as a matter of fact, that it is precisely this type of restrictions that allow us to proceed with these investigations in the first place.

This volume might appear to be the result of coincidence: the result of the meeting of kindred souls. This, however, is essential to its nature. Friendship — unity in divergence or differentiated unity — and what it can accomplish appear as a prototypical form of interdisciplinary research, and, in that same reflexive movement, of interdisciplinarity itself.

The people who have contributed to this volume inscribe themselves in a growing intellectual and cultural tendency towards integration. This volume is therefore more than just academic. It investigates on the grounds of the most fundamental conditions for our existence — as we can trace it throughout the history of evolution — which options, if any, are open to us. Should we even care? For the first time in the history of humanity, I believe, we find ourselves in a position from which we can start to discern a possible answer or the conditions under which such an answer could be suggested. Enjoy the ride ... it is full of pleasant surprises.

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