

The Microcosm and the Macrocosm

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The ancient aphorism, 'As above, so above', known as the 'Law of Hermes Trismegistus' (Thrice Great), has guided the thought of many down through the centuries and been the basis of systems concerning the universe and man himself. As man gazed at the panoply of the star-spangled heavens above him he sensed a Power that brought all things into being including humanity and sought to establish a link with this Power for the benefit of his own life on earth. Thus prehistoric stone circles were erected as such links, regulating the life of the tribe according to the seasons, which were in alignment with particular heavenly bodies. What happened above was related to what happened below.

There is a relationship and a unity between the cosmos (and the Creator) and individual human beings. When man made an exploration of his own being he came to startling discoveries. A modern psychiatrist puts it, 'A recognition of our own divine nature, our identity with the cosmic source, is the most important discovery we can make.' (1)

Mystics down through the centuries have experienced this unity with a Divine Being or Cosmic Source. Modern studies into near-death experiences have also shown this unity is also felt by the percipients.

Leslie Grant Scott, who underwent a near death experience, had an extension of consciousness and a sense of the unity of all life, and records:

There is only one Power of which everything is a manifestation. Therefore I know that the Great (Macrocosm) is like the small (Microcosm), and that if one could completely understand the tiniest shell on the seashore, one could comprehend the Universe. (2)

This is what the poet Tennyson was expressing when he plucked a flower from a crannied wall. As he examined it, he thinks, 'if I could understand, what you are, root and all, and all in all, I should know what God and man is.' (3)

In Tantric texts, the human body is described as a microcosm that reflects and contains the whole macrocosm. In the Purushakara Tantra it is represented in the image of the Cosmic Person where the material world is placed in the region of the stomach; the heart and the upper part of the body contains the various heavenly regions, and the legs contain the underworld.

The relationship between man and the cosmos is seen in the teachings of various religions, especially in Hinduism where in the Upanishads, the most frequently quoted sentence is 'Thou art that' meaning 'You are of divine

nature' or 'You are Godhead'. Everything is regarded as manifestations of the one Power at the heart of the Universe. This Power is 'Atman' (Spirit) and each individual human spirit (also called 'atman') is to be merged with it.

This conception can be traced through Heraclitus, Empedocles, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Schoolmen and the thinkers of the Renaissance.

As the universe was then thought to be geocentric, this relationship was reinforced by the idea that the earth was the centre of the universe, everything revolving round it; therefore man, who resided on it, had a special position in the cosmos.

The Buddha who said to his disciples, 'I proclaim to you that this animated body, no more than one fathom high, is the dwelling place of the world', also refers to this relationship.

This holistic view of the universe is taught in the following story of the Buddhist Hura Yen school:

The Empress Wu, who had difficulty understanding the complexity of Hura Yen philosophy, asked Fa Tsang, one of the founders of the school, to give her a practical demonstration of cosmic interrelatedness. Fa Tsang took her to a large hall, the entire of which - the walls, ceiling and floor - was covered with mirrors. He first lit a candle in the middle of the hall and suspended it from the ceiling. In the next moment, they were surrounded by myriads of glowing candles of different sizes

reaching to infinity. This was Fa Tsang's way of illustrating the relationship of the One to the many. ...

He then placed in the centre of the hall, a small crystal with many facets. Everything around the crystal, including all the countless images of candles, were now collected and reflected in the small interior of the brilliant stone. In this way, Fa Tsang was able to demonstrate how in Ultimate Reality the infinitely small contains the infinitely large and the infinitely large the infinitely small. (4)

The Jewish Cabbala is a mystical system of religious philosophy that was influenced by Neo-Platonism. It describes a pattern of life based on intense experience and contemplation, giving an esoteric account of the relation between God and his creation. According to this doctrine, God becomes creative through the medium of ten Sepheroth or emanations regarded by the Cabbalists as the most perfect, reflected representation of Divinity having a unity, which is called the archetypal man and the heavenly man. The whole creation became complete with the creation of man, the microcosm. Each member of his body corresponds to a part of the visible universe. Similar concepts are found in Gnosticism and other esoteric systems.

Above all, the alchemists sought a correspondence between man the microcosm and the universe, the macrocosm according to the law 'as above, so below'. They symbolically represented this in two intersecting equilateral

triangles called the Seal of Solomon. Now it is known as the Star of David and is the emblem of the modern state of Israel (King David unified Israel and Judah). The Pythagoreans also adopted it as an emblem of health and mystic harmony.

The alchemist and philosopher Paracelsus (1493-1541) believed that all magic figures and cabbalistic signs could be represented by the Microcosm and the Macrocosm.

Robert Fludd (1574-1637), who brought astrology, alchemy and the Cabbala to his empirical observations, considered that the material world and man are constructed to the same divine plan – ‘There are three worlds, the Archetypal, the Macrocosm and the Microcosm; as God, Nature and Man’. In his book, *Utrusque Cosnzi Historia*, man, the microcosm, is pictured as being centred in the circles of his own heaven and surrounded by the circles of the planets which are related to the physical structure of the body. This is the Hermetic Cosmic Man reflecting the Macrocosm.

The doctrine of the sympathy of all things is found in the works of the Neo-Platonist, Pico della Mirandola (1463-94), who wrote:

Firstly, there is the unity in things whereby each thing is at one with itself, consists of itself, and coheres with itself. Secondly, there is the unity whereby one creature is united with the others and all parts of the world constitute one world. (5)

This is supported by the Neo-Platonist, Iamblichus: 'The world is a live animal, whose different parts are interdependent, whatever may be the distance between them'.

Modern consciousness research has shown that 'as above, so below' is not so absurd from the point of view of materialistic research as it appears. Transpersonal psychology has confirmed that the entire cosmos is encoded in the psyche of each of us and therefore accessible in deep systematic self-exploration.

This idea is not new. The mathematician and philosopher, Leibniz (1646-1716) based his philosophical system on the concept of the 'monads' which were 'the very atoms of nature' but, unlike material atoms, were spiritual entities mirroring the universe in miniature. They did not act directly on each other but had a relationship due to a pre-existing harmony. These monads had many characteristics of *jives* in the little-known religion of Jainism which is the oldest personally founded religion in India. In its animistic worldview, knowledge of the universe could be deduced from the information contained in each *jiva* or single particle of matter.

The new relationship which modern science has found between the whole and the parts prompted Arthur Koestler (1905-1983) to propose the word 'holon' (derived from the Greek 'holos' - 'whole', with the suffix 'on' suggesting a part). These are 'Janus-faced' entities which display both the independent properties of the whole and the dependent properties of parts relying on the way we look at them from 'below' or from 'above'.

Considering the constituents of the human body, it can be seen that there is a relationship between the cells, tissues, organs and the organism as a whole, on the one hand, and the larger ecosystem of which they are a part, and ultimately of the whole cosmos. Cells function as separate entities and they are constituents of tissues and organs. In turn, these are individual forms of higher orders, e.g. the fertilised egg contains the potential for the whole organism and it develops towards this. It is not a separate entity and should be viewed in the context of this larger whole. All the genetic information about the entire organism is contained within the cell and is expressed in its future development to a higher organism.

In the eighteenth century, Newtonian physics superimposed the atoms as solid building blocks and ushered in the age of materialism, where the spiritual nature of all things was relegated to the background. The twentieth century showed that these building blocks were not as solid as was thought but seem to be parcels of compressed energy in various forms. The philosopher, A.N. Whitehead, who observed that science is indebted to the insights of the mystics for some of its influential concepts, sums it up:

Matter has been identified with energy, and energy is sheer activity. The modern point of view is expressed in terms of energy, activity and the vibrating differentiation of space-time.

Any such agitation shakes the whole universe. (6)

In his research into consciousness, Grof coined the term 'holotropic' meaning literally 'moving towards wholeness', to describe a non-ordinary state of

consciousness in which we are not really whole but identify with only a small fraction of what we really are. In this state it is possible for us to experience a different level of consciousness, but not lose touch with everyday reality. We have paranormal experiences including spiritual and philosophical insights, visions, out-of-the-body experiences, mystical states, etc. Those having such experiences report that they had a feeling of the totality of life of a cosmic nature.

What Grof proposes is similar to the Cosmic Consciousness Theory of Robert M. Bucke (1837-1902) who, beginning from human self-consciousness, posits a new state of consciousness beyond this where a person can experience the oneness of the universe, the immortality of the soul, and the Divine Love behind it all. Beyond perceptual mind and conceptual mind is 'Cosmic Consciousness mind', as he termed it, which every human has the potential to experience. The scientist, Rupert Sheldrake, says that if this were so, 'the more or limited wholeness of all organisms at all levels of complexity could then be seen as a reflection of the transcendental unity on which they depended, and from which they ultimately derive'.

Ancient cultures throughout the world have symbolically used the relationship of the Microcosm and the Macrocosm in the building of their temples of worship where the basic function is to link man with God. The ground plan of these temples approximately follows the structure of the human body. As the Christian Church is known as 'the Body of Christ', this is incorporated schematically in the layout of Christian churches. The crossing of the nave and the transept represented Christ's heart and

outstretched arms; the altar, his head; the aisle, his body; and the door as his feet. The steeple and spire of the building point heavenward to God.

As Christ also represented humanity in Byzantine churches, here the symbolism is more generalised. The nave represents the human body, the chancel, the soul, and the altar, the spirit. A similar symbolism is seen in Hindu temples.

Megalithic tombs were sometimes constructed in the form of the human body, their inner space representing the womb from which it was believed the deceased would be reborn.

It can be seen from the foregoing that man lives his life in relation to the Source of all being. Whether realising it or not, he is always acting upon certain assumptions with regard to his origin and his identity. If these assumptions are false - mechanistic, materialistic, atheistic - his life takes on false aspects. Man being in the 'image of God' becomes more truly the microcosmic reflection when he properly sees the macroscopic original. His treatment of his body and of his fellowmen, the use of his time and the direction of his energy are ultimately derived from his awareness of his identity and his relationship to the universe.

References

1. *The Cosmic Game*. Stanislas Grof, Hill of Content, Melbourne, Australia, 1998.
2. *Psychical Research*, XXV, 1931, p. 113.
3. *Flower in the Crannied Wall*.
4. Quoted by S. Grof, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.
5. *Opera Orrtnia* , Pico della Mirandoia, Basle, 1557.
6. *Nature and Life*, Cambridge, 1934.