

29 Why Not A Theory of Everything

For 5,000 years, humans lived in the past tense: "Yesterday was the same as tomorrow." For the next 500 years people lived in the present tense: "Today can be whatever we want it to be." But now, for the next 50 years we must start living in the future tense: "Tomorrow's social, economic and political constraints must become today's reality."

"A quote."

The source

In the social sciences, two general theories explain both human behavior and how their social, political and economic institutions function.

The first assumes if we could understand human nature then we could explain both people and their society. If individuals can behave in aggressive or unscrupulous ways because that is part of human nature, then it is not surprising that a business or institution behaves in an aggressive or unscrupulous manner because it is people who are responsible for setting

those institutional policies and practices.

The assumption is if we could better understand human nature we could all learn to live peacefully and sustainably on a crowded planet in the 21st century. If people would only behave in more ethical and responsible ways, we could have heaven on earth.

The second competing alternative is that the human condition has little to do with human nature. Rather, what determines the flow of events is the context in which people live; they are but objects tossed about by external forces: The people who lost their homes through the mortgage crisis of 2008 were simply the victims of an economic set of forces over which they had no control. From this perspective it is the political, economic and social forces in the reality around us that shape and determine individual behavior.

But, it is logically incompatible that the institutional policies and practices which shapes and determines individual behavior are the very behaviors that establish institutional policies and practices. The two cannot be simultaneously true. Perhaps paradoxically, both are useful to explain most individual and institutional behavior in most situations, except at some extreme limits.

This paradox presents an interesting parallel between a scientific understanding of the physical and nonphysical worlds. In the case of the physical world, there are also two competing theories: Relativity theory is based on gravity as the primary force and works best for large masses such as heavenly bodies. Quantum field theory is based on the interaction between three forces at the sub-atomic level of matter. At the two extremes of very large and very small, the two are also mutually incompatible, but for everything in between both are useful and result in similar predictions.

At this basic elementary level there is similarity between theories of the physical and the nonphysical world. Conceptually, gravity is similar to human nature, and the three forces of quantum field theory are similar to the interaction between the political, social, and economic forces of the nonphysical world. This similarity raises the question of whether quantum field theory in physics can serve as a metaphor for the three forces in the nonphysical world.

Neither human nature nor the external context (the field) has been that successful in explaining the human condition. The assumption based on human nature has progressed from its early roots in psychoanalytic theory to the current level of analysis provided by the neurosciences, where such psychological topics as free will are now on the neurosciences agenda.

On the other hand, the assumption that situational factors (forces) are the primary elements for understanding human behaviors and structures have been largely trapped in academic silos, each competing in an effort to subsume the others: The financial crisis of 2008 is often seen from an economic perspective as a financial issue to be resolved by fixing financial mechanisms, rather than as the result and of three interacting elements. This single dimension approach is a form of hierarchical linear thinking which leads to conflicting perspectives based on discipline specific concepts.

“A quote”

Author and source

The conflict occurs despite the fact we understand that the events owe no loyalty to any particular academic discipline. Events and behaviors simply exist in reality; they reflect back the dimensions that are brought to bear on them by observers. A far more productive approach may be to use quantum field theory as a metaphor, treating the political, social and economic as three simultaneous and interacting factors in which each one is a function the other two. This, of course, creates a massive set of indeterminate possibilities. But, if that is the nature of our reality, then we need to shape our perspectives to match that reality, because, we can be sure, reality will not change to match our academic silos of discipline specific thinking.

The non-physical sciences have progressed to the point where we now have extensive factual empirical data about quantitative relationships between combinations of economic, political and social forces. We know that some relationships hold under some circumstances but not others. For example: human well-being (the overall quality of health and happiness) is greater when there are smaller amounts of economic inequality, and smaller when economic inequality is larger. But, the relationship is modified by the absolute level of wealth. People are better off overall under extreme wealth than under extreme poverty conditions.

These kinds of empirical relationships are now sufficiently sophisticated to allow us to make generalizations about the consequences and conditions under which the most basic

aspects of the human condition exist. We now can know the consequences of various combinations of specific economic, political, and social forces.

Further, we also now have basic information about the mathematical nature of many of these functions; most are exponential in nature. For example, we know about the diminishing value of marginal utilities: \$100 is worth more to a poor person than it is to a billionaire. Once we know the nature of these exponential functions we can address such issues as how much wealth needs to be redistributed from the very rich to the very poor in order to significantly raise their well-being in proportion to the reduction of well-being of the extremely wealthy. We can have an empirically-based discussion about what is the appropriate balance point based on what are the known consequences of a greater or lesser amount of redistribution of wealth.

We no longer need to live in an ideological world of beliefs disconnected from factual reality. We have at our disposal quantitative information to allow informed civic discussions on the kinds of individual behaviors and the policies and practices of institutions that result from the interaction between many of the most important political, economic and social forces. However, using this information requires a form of matrix thinking in which each of the three elements is always considered in the context of the other two. Although the level of indeterminacy is great, it is not unmanageable. We do not need to know every possible outcome for every possible situation in order to make choices which improve the state of the human condition. We can make informed decisions within the constraints of basic scientific knowledge and information now available to us.