

Sir George Trevelyan: thoughts and writings

## Stewards of the Planet

*from A Vision of the Aquarian Age*



**WE ARE ALL too easily awed by the very size of the universe as it is depicted by modern astronomy. Science cowers us, even bludgeons us, with mathematical data - the vast distances, the billions of galaxies, the infinite aeons of time through which this huge lifeless mechanism of gaseous and electronic vortices has been turning. How unimportant is the life of man on his tiny planet, we are told - a flare of a match struck momentarily in the vast darkness, burning itself out after a transient and ephemeral instant of consciousness. And we are asked to believe that this mechanistic structure of the universe is all that exists, all there is to reality. The terrible and autocratic authority of science silences the protests of imagination and even of common sense.**

In the early 16th Century, the mechanistic image of the cosmos evolved by Copernicus demonstrated that the earth was not the centre of the solar system, but that it revolved around the sun like the other planets. During the ensuing centuries, proliferating rationalism reduced the universe to mathematical formulae, human life to mere chance and natural selection, man to a mere observer, a helpless bystander. To study the cosmos, man, as Ernst Lehrs says, has made himself into a "one-eyed colour-blind pointer reader". He has developed the detached consciousness of an onlooker, whose very intellectual apparatus alienates him from the nature he contemplates. In stead of being a part of an all-encompassing whole, man has become an outsider, a pariah in his environment.

The Copernican Revolution reduced man to a status of no significance in a vast and dead mechanism, a chance accident of evolution. And by ironic paradox, this very demotion of man from his central position led him to an unprecedented arrogance, a monstrous presumption that allows him to exploit and pollute the planet to his own advantage, with no regard to the consequences. If man is of no significance in a world that is wholly indifferent to him, why should he not do what he likes for his gain or pleasure? Cooperation, participation and respect give way to a mentality of dog-eat-dog, a grim and ruthless battle for survival at all costs.

Now, however, basic human instinct, vision and the new spiritual science are rising in protest. To quote John Cowper Powys in his essay on Walt Whitman:

*Surely such a limited universe is a grotesque and preposterous substitute for the teeming Reservoirs, Levels, Regions and Dimensions of Life, which not only the mysticism of Walt Whitman, but the natural normal inevitable mysticism of ordinary humanity, the mysticism that springs from the calmest and clearest*

*portion of the human mind, feels assured must be discoverable, somehow or other, in the bosom of the All.*

The pre-Copernican system, as propounded by Ptolemy in the 3rd Century A.D., posited the earth as the centre of the solar system, around which the planets, sun and moon moved and poured their effluences. Beyond was the sphere of the fixed stars and, beyond that again, the Heavenly Spheres of the Empyrean and the *Primum Mobile*. As for the planets, they were conceived of as "crystal spheres", and the orbit of each was believed to mark the boundary of its field of influence. Earth was seen to reside at the centre of the planets' movements, and the effects of Mars or Saturn, for example, could thus play directly upon the human being. Man was thus always in all the planets, and they in man. Man, as the great experiment of God, was in the centre of the cosmos. The true science of astrology rests on this same geocentric perspective.

Laplace, Napoleon's astronomer, supposedly declared: "*I have searched the heavens with my telescope and I have found no sign of God*". But the mistake is to assume that Copernican astronomy explains all that is, and that there can be nothing more. The Copernican system effectively describes how the mechanism of the solar system works, but that is all it does. To treat it as anything more comprehensive is like describing the technical arrangements in a theatre, and forgetting that the real purpose of the edifice is to convey the energy, wisdom and power of a play. Ultimately, Copernican astronomy shows us no more of the total picture than a garden path shows us of the curve of the globe. We may certainly accept it as an explanation of the movements of the heavenly bodies. At the same time, we can also accept that reality is a more complex matter, and that – on a different and more spiritual level – earth is the centre it was once deemed to be. The mathematical formulae and calculations do not preclude higher worlds of beings, which cannot be apprehended by the ordinary senses or intellect. To create bridges into such spheres, we must intensify our thinking, and the beings of the higher worlds must lower their vibratory rates to meet us in new dimensions of consciousness.

To neutralise our sense of awe when faced with astronomical figures, Teilhard stresses that it is not size that matters so much as molecular complexity. The vast "red giants" among the stars have an exceedingly simple molecular structure. On the other hand, the temperate planet earth has achieved such "complexification" that self-consciousness has been raised to an unprecedented degree in the fabulously complex brain and body. Thus our earth, tiny in size, can carry an infinitely precious cargo. In consequence of this, it has been held worthy of divine attention. And this in turn suggests the infinite importance of man in the cosmic scheme, and explains the present concern for his welfare apparently felt in the higher spheres. For man has now reached that point in evolution at which he can allow awareness to expand, and so achieve cosmic and God-consciousness. We are entering the space age not only with our rockets, but through the expansion of mind, to meet the intelligences of the universe.

The spiritual view of the universe, then, restores man to a plane of central importance. This, by contrast, brings to us a new and true humility – quite different from the arrogance bred by materialism and its mechanistic perspective. If we are integrally part of the whole of living nature, we are indeed stewards of the planet, given "*dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth*". What have we done with our stewardship? The answer is appalling. But we can yet make good the terrible damage we have inflicted on the living earth and its creatures – damage for which, through our greed, we are directly responsible.

The dynamic and spiritual view of the universe now opening to our understanding does not in any way belittle the great intellectual accomplishments of modern astronomy. It complements that view while at the same time offering a broader and more meaningful context – and one that transcends the pessimism of rational intellectual humanists like Bertrand Russell:

*That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labour of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins – all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.*

Now we are beginning to awaken to a brighter alternative – the new certainty that, seen from a different perspective, the Ptolemaic system still reflects a certain profound truth. Whatever its physical mechanics, the universe can still be teeming with spiritual energies and qualities of being. Life on earth can be a part of the life of the entire universe. Distance is irrelevant. We experience that consciousness can be anywhere instantly. As Andrew Glazewski says, "*Our consciousness is not in our body: our body is in our consciousness*". At will, consciousness can be anywhere in its vast field, the body merely being the focal point for its operation in earthly life. Our "ego" is where we choose to direct our attention; it can instantly be where it sends its thought. And when we remember that thought can move faster than light, the vast distances of modern astronomy cease to appal or intimidate. The spiritual world view thus restores optimism and opens a new dimension of vision.

The possibilities inherent in such a view are admirably summarised by John Charles Earle's sonnet, "Bodily Extension":

*The body is not bounded by its skin;  
Its effluence, like a gentle cloud of scent,  
Is wide into the air diffused and blent  
With elements unseen, its way doth win  
To ether frontiers, where take origin*

*Far subtler systems, nobler regions meant  
To be the area and the instrument  
Of operations ever to begin  
Anew and never end. Thus every man  
Wears as his robe the garment of the sky –  
So close his union with the cosmic plan,  
So perfectly he pierces low and high –  
Reaching as far in space as creature can,  
And co-existing with Immensity.*