

System explained by Humberto Maturana

Epistemology and ontology

Speaker 1, Humberto Maturana:

SPEAKER 1: I think a very important distinction for me here is the as if distinction. We experience things as if they were. And I think you use this as well. So now we're really talking about both epistemology and ontology.

HUMBERTO MATURANA: Yes, we are talking about epistemology and ontology. Now, what I do is to bring to the fore, so to say, two manners of explaining that appear as you realize that you or I or whoever, we realized that we cannot distinguish in what we are living perception and illusion. And these two paths of explaining have to do with our attitude with respect to what we do. Whether we think that we describe or we refer to an independent reality, or whether we are aware that what we talk about has to do with us.

Now, and I hear I'm going to make a little drawing, put here observer observing. Here is a living human in language. There are two avenues for explaining. One in which one acts in the full confidence that one can refer or validate or fundament what one does in a reference to an external independent reality. And I call this the path of objectivity. Reality.

And this is an attitude. One acts in the conviction that what one says is validated through a reference to reality. And the other in this particular one which one acts under the conviction that one can refer to an independent reality, when he's not aware or does not take into consideration that we commit mistakes. Mistakes are committed but are intrinsically errors about reality. Illusions are intrinsically errors about reality.

Now, in this other explanatory avenue, under the realization that we do not know when we commit a mistake because a mistake arises in the comparison with a different experience, mistakes are not intrinsic errors about reality, but mistakes are experiences that are evaluated with reference to other experiences. The same as illusion.

So, in this other explanatory avenue, one does not explain through a reference to reality but one explains experience with experience. And this I call objectivity in parenthesis. That means

I am aware that I cannot make reference to an independent reality to validate what I say. So I am aware that I validate what I say and validate an explanation of my experience with experience.

So, these two mandatory avenues and take two different ontological attitudes. In this one of objectivity without parentheses, one operates in terms of accepting incidental existence of reality. And this I call the transcendental ontology. The being of the being is transcendental.

In this other path that is not the case, I am aware that I cannot pretend that. So, I am aware that the being of the being arises in the doings of the observer. A table is a table not in itself but in the doings of the observer. And this I call the path of constitutive ontology, the ontos, the being is constituted in the operation of the observer, while in this other one the being is independent of what the observer does.

SPEAKER 1: In the first one you have a universe, in the second one you have a multiverse. Is that the case?

HUMBERTO MATURANA: Yes, in the sense that here you have many realities. Because here there's an interesting point, all what I have developed has to do with the explanation of experience, with the explanation of what we do, with the explanation of what happens to us as human beings. This is why eventually language has to be explained, consciousness has to be explained, and so on and so forth.

Reality is not the primary concern. In this, if I had not been in the attempt to explain how we do what we do then reality would be the primary concern because if they found the foundation of eventual understanding. But if I want to explain how we do whatever we do and I want to do that because I discover that this is my subject as a neurobiologist, then reality is not my question, is experience. How do I explain experience? And I observe that we use experience to explain experience and so on and so forth. So many ways of coherence is leaving that we leave us as realities will appear. So here we shall have many realities.

But there are domains of objects that arising are doing and which we use to explain our doings, domains of experiences that we use to explain our experiences, and so on and so forth, each one of these realities. That they are in the ordinary living so to say not this not different from what we would leave it here, but when you want to say something the difference appears. Because here you will look for a reference to transcendental reality to validate what you say, and in the other one, you will look to the coherence of your experience to validate the explanations that you are proposing.

In this domain of objectivity without parentheses in reality, there is one single universe, us, as the fundament for everything where everything is. This is so we have here a universe. Only one form of fundamental being. No, there are many forms of fundamental beings because they being a arises in the coherence of operation of the observer. So, this is multiverse, many forms. And what is interesting is at the same time that the manner of human relations is different in each case.