

System explained by Humberto Maturana

What are the implications for your distinctions between epistemology and ontology for practice?

Speaker 1, Humberto Maturana:

SPEAKER 1: These are very profound and challenging distinctions I find. And they have major implications for the practice of science, the doing of science, and for environmental decision making and the development of policy around all sorts of issues. Would you care to explain for me the implications for practice?

HUMBERTO MATURANA: What is involved here in terms of the question about cognition is explaining how we do what we do. And these two explanatory parts entails two attitude with respect to that basic question, how do we do what we do, which I shall indicate here with a question mark. And I put the question mark at both sides because it's the same question, how do we do what we do?

But in this side here on objectivity in parentheses, when one starts from the assumption that one can refer to an independent reality, in fact, one does not accept the question how we do what we do because when is accepting that one can do what one can do. So, if we don't do that. There's nothing to explain. We have the ability directly or indirectly to accept the existence of an independent reality or to refer to it indirectly or things of this sort.

And the other side here, I accept the question and in the process of answering how we do what we do, we find what I have said about mistakes that we do not know when we commit a mistake because the mistake is the evaluation of a particular action or statement in reference to another one. So, what appears here is on the one hand, an analysis of the money of noin, epistemology. But it also appears something else which is an analysis of human relations.

Because in daily life, when we claim to be objective, we demand obedience from the other. Now, if I say to somebody, please, be objective, will this other person here do as I say. If I say I am objective, this person here do as I say. So human relations are involved. And if human relations are involved, human coexistence and the character of human coexistence is involved.

Now in this other explanatory passing in objectivity in parentheses, when I say this is this way, the other person can ask me, how do you know? And I will not answer by reference to reality, I will answer providing some experiential coherence which give validity to my statement. I will not say to the other, I am objective. I'd say, I think that this is so because of this and this and that. And the conversation is open in which we can both reflect upon the fundamentals that give validity to this statement. So here in objectivity in parenthesis, a cognitive statement is an invitation to participate with the other in a particular domain of experiential coherence while in objectivity without parentheses, a collective statement is a demand for obedience.