

System explained by Humberto Maturana

Exploring implications of the different pathway choices - Objectivity and responsibility

Speaker 1, Humberto Maturana:

SPEAKER 1: Humberto, I'm just wondering if you use the first mode in a situation where there is a great deal of agreement about the situation, where the grounding of the experiencing there has been very, very substantial, don't you think that it may well be that that kind of attitude, which derives from objectivity without parentheses is the appropriate one for that particular condition?

HUMBERTO MATURANA: It seems to be because what will happen there is that this fundamental agreement will have defined this domain in which the expression this is objective will be heard. We are speaking in physics. This is a valid statement in physics. Or this is the reality in physics. So, we have that already.

The domain of experiential coherence is as the reference for reality of our objectivity. So, we are not making a claim of obedience but an invitation for participation in a particular domain of experiential coherence. So, it depends on how we are in our relation with the other. The character that this has. We are already in a conversation, we have a fundamental agreement that we are talking about physics, then I can say, but this is the real case. But if that is not the case and I say but this is the real case, the other hears a demand for obedience.

SPEAKER 1: So, in your view, when we are in the path of objectivity without parentheses—

HUMBERTO MATURANA: In our culture...

SPEAKER 1: In that case, simply, there is no grounding. And therefore, people are talking about different things and one is trying to impose one view over the other.

HUMBERTO MATURANA: Exactly. There is no established common ground, and the person that makes reference to reality objectivity is claiming implicitly a privileged access to that transcendental ground so that the other does not agree, is intrinsically mistaken, is resistant, is a rebel or whatever derogatory expression we have.

In daily life, we do one way or another precisely according to how we relate with each other. If we want the other to do what we want to do, that means today, we say we are objective. If what matters for us is the other, we are never objective. We're never objective with our friends. We invite. We participate in a conversation.

It's an entirely different situation because the relation is what is important. So, there is always opening for conversation. This is the difference between collaboration and obedience.

SPEAKER 3: Am I right though in that you have said that reality is a way of avoiding responsibility?

HUMBERTO MATURANA: Yes, you are right. Whenever I say I am a realist, the reality is what validates me. I don't take responsibility in the sense that I do not take cognisance that what I'm saying is validated through me. So, it has nothing to do with me. I'm irresponsible. Well, that is the validity in itself. Not me.

Well, if I operate here with this awareness that I cannot claim that to say something about something independent from me, then I am always taking responsibility. I think that this is so because, blah blah blah blah blah blah blah. I present the experiential coherence on which I ground my statement. And the other may say, oh, but I think that this other way blah blah blah, blah.

And the conversation is not a confrontation. It's an opening for inquire about which is the adequate or which is the case that we are living in this moment or eventually to go somewhere else because we cannot make a decision about what we want in that instant.

So, this has fundamental consequences with respect to how we live. To how we treat the environment.

For example, in objectivity without parentheses, we operate essentially in the domain of power because we demand obedience. And with the main demand obedience of other human beings-- of other beings of the environment, we dominate. We have the environment to submit to our will. We do not take responsibility on what we do because we are acting on our transcendental knowledge, so we can even modify the environment.

While here we are open to reflections, what I do has consequences, and I am responsible for those consequences. So, I have to be careful in what I do. I have to open my attention and my reflection on where I am and what happens, where I am with what I do. So, in the long run, these two explanatory attitudes have very different consequences in how we live.