

## *A SENSE OF THE COSMOS*

### **Preface to the Monkfish Edition**

For ten consecutive days in December of 1995, the NASA Hubble Space Telescope, orbiting far above the earth's atmosphere, pointed its lens toward what seemed an "uncluttered" portion of the sky in the constellation *Ursa Major*. Astronomers narrowed the focus of the telescope to a tiny speck of black sky about the size of a dime 75 feet away. The resulting image, assembled from over 300 separate exposures, appears on the cover of this book

I was standing at a magazine rack in a Borders bookstore when I first saw this photograph on the front of the *National Geographic*. Opening the magazine and eagerly reading the explanation of the photograph, I was struck with wonder: a nearly microscopic point in an apparently empty patch of the night sky was here shown to be a window onto hundreds, thousands of stars, many certainly greater than our own sun, and, like our sun, pouring out unimaginable streams of life-creating energy onto who knows what planetary worlds and who knows what living beings that may have arisen upon these worlds. I remember standing there for a moment with my eyes closed, sensing the mingling of impersonal joy and yearning that everyone sometimes experiences looking up at a night sky strewn with millions of shining worlds.

I put the magazine back and started to walk away, but after two or three steps I stopped short. What had I actually seen? Something was not quite right. I turned around

and went back to the magazine rack. My knees nearly gave way when I looked at the picture again. Could it really be? I opened the magazine again and this time very attentively read the explanation of the photograph: these were not stars at all, they were *galaxies*! Hundreds, thousands of galaxies never before known or seen inhabited that infinitesimal speck of “empty” sky, each galaxy itself containing billions of suns. I suddenly became very quiet inside.

I would like to think of the present book as an extended commentary on this image and the inner experience such images and discoveries can evoke. Every day in almost all its branches the revelations of modern science offer evidence that the universe, reality itself, is alive—alive beyond all imagining. All those who love science must know this truth in their bones, whatever may be the view officially sanctioned in the corridors of our universities and institutions of research. In any case, this is and always has been the view offered by the great spiritual traditions of the world, East and West, in all cultures and at all times previous to our own.

The very word “cosmos” signifies that the universe itself is a living organism, unimaginably vast in its extent and in the depth of its purposes and intelligence—and its beauty and, above all, in its goodness. And, according to these traditions, to know this universe, to know reality, it is necessary for a man or woman to perceive it with more than the intellect alone. It is necessary to perceive it with the unique source of perception by which beauty and goodness can be perceived—with the depth and subtlety of the power of feeling. The power of feeling—not the violence and chaos of what we usually know of as our emotional reactivity—the power of feeling must be joined to the genius of the intellect in order to know the nature of reality.

We cannot know, so the great spiritual traditions teach, with only one part of the human intelligence. To know with the intellect alone is to know beings, but not to know Being itself, which is where meaning resides. And this implies that the true scientist must himself or herself strive to bring together all the parts of oneself, must strive to become an ordered world in oneself as a prerequisite to seeing and knowing the order of the cosmos and the true nature of everything within the cosmos, all life, all elements, all laws and forces. Then one begins to understand that the great mechanism of the cosmos is an abstraction from, that is to say, an embedded aspect *within*, the far greater organism that is the universe, reality itself. Not only in our ourselves, in our own bodies, but in everything, everywhere, mechanism exists only as an aspect of organism. Mechanism is the instrument of organism; mechanism is the instrument of life, it is how life does things.

But really to know how life does things, it is necessary to know why life does things. And this cannot be known without the joining together in ourselves of feeling, instinct and thought. The greatness of modern science, as this book tries to show, is rooted in its courageous effort of reliance on what it considered the pure intellect as it was joined to and supported by a rediscovered respect for the bodily senses—which, in a larger meaning of the term, form part of the “instinctive” functions of the human psyche—as the source of knowledge. But in this revolutionary development of modern science, what was forgotten—for reasons having partly to do with the widespread cultural blunting and degradation of the meaning of faith in the religious institutions of the West—is that the heart, the power of profound feeling, is absolutely necessary in order both to be good and to see the good, to know the good that is an objective—yes,

*objective*, attribute of the real world—*out there*. Losing this meaning of the human heart, losing the feeling component of knowing, science easily becomes scientism and easily leads to the belief that there is no objective value in the world. And this in turn leads to the moral relativism that has become the source of despair in our culture and especially in our younger generation. Of course, no less despairing, but not as obviously so, is what is simply the other side of the coin of moral relativism, namely, moral absolutism, the tyranny of the emotional reactivity masquerading as the human heart.

Here is the truly revolutionary aspect of this ancient vision: it is telling us that it is impossible for a human individual, for mankind, to have real knowledge without at the same time having virtue. When it is said—and it is said and seen by everyone now who has any eyes at all—that our knowledge has gone far beyond our morality, this is the same thing as to say that we need to rediscover how to join the attention of the heart to the powers of the mind and the perceptions of the senses. And this is to say, simply, that our being must catch up with our knowing. We must begin to confront a mysterious directive offered by two of the greatest minds of the twentieth century: Martin Heidegger and G.I. Gurdjieff. Each spoke in his own way—Heidegger as a philosopher, and Gurdjieff as an “awakener” – of the need to think deeply, to ponder, to contemplate the one ultimate question: the Being of beings. What can such words mean to us ? And why should they be, how could they be, the most important question that our world has to face? They sound so abstract, maybe even meaningless, so removed from the flesh-and-blood problems of our world and everyday life.

But step outside one starry night. Go to a place where the “light pollution” of man-made cities is lessened. Go to a place out there and in here where our inventions of

concepts and explanations no longer obscure the subtle intimations of higher truths within oneself. And look up at all those shining worlds.

What do you feel?

No. That is not the only question to ask oneself.

The question is: what do you *know*?

It is the same question.

Then observe your inner state. Could you hate? Could you be overwhelmed by envy or resentment? Could you dishonor any man or any woman? Is it not true that your wish to know more and more about the great world around you is now joined to the deep yearning to serve one's neighbor and whatever it is that is, for you and for me, God? Is it not true that no man or woman has ever committed a crime in the state of wonder? Is it not true that there is such a thing as sacred knowing? And can there be any real knowing, worthy of the name, that is not embedded in a sense of the sacred out there and in oneself? Does our world cry out for anything more fundamental than this sense of the cosmos?

