

## *How Ervin is Now Shifting the World*

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For the past six years I had the privilege and pleasure to be working almost daily with Ervin and I could observe the way his thinking about the world, and indeed his being in the world, has evolved. He began by re-thinking about the way we think of the world. Ervin's first book, *Essential Society* (published in 1963), – *An Ontological Reconstruction* was published in The Hague in 1963. In this work, the author investigates the nature of general reality “ a venture at the interpretation of man – of his individual being as of his social existence – in the framework of the cosmic reality which is the foundation of his life.” [*Essential Society*, 1963, vi]. He asserts that if one wants to comprehend man's existence one needs to understand cosmos – understanding the macro in order to comprehend the micro, from the whole to the part. The object of his research is the whole system, and his research method is holistic.

*Essential Society* is to be seen in this light. An ontology based on scientific findings. Not armchair philosophy, but reasoned generalizations from findings that apply to particular fields - but can be shown to also apply to other fields. I highlight the importance of Ervin's work in this context, especially that in the 1960s positivism was still a dominant position in philosophy, and everything that could not be traced directly to sensory experience was branded metaphysical. Ervin saw from the very beginning that science is not limited to sensory experience - that scientific theories explore the world beyond the limits of direct human experience, and only test the theories in reference to experience. This is not to reduce all elements, laws or postulates of the theories to experienced "sense-data," but to test the consistency, the coherence, and the completeness of the theories as the most economical, complete and meaningful explanation of the relevant facts and events in a given field of inquiry.

Ervin originally wanted to title his essay 'Essential Cosmos'. Although he was very well known as a pianist, he was unknown as a writer and philosopher, thus it was perceived

'too big' to come out with a first book as a complete worldview. Therefore he was advised to frame his ideas in the context of sociology as practically applicable and pragmatical treatise.

Ontology, anthropology and sociology offer the structural backbone to his synthesis with the analysis of epistemology, aesthetics and politics. Ervin repeatedly emphasizes that one can understand man only through understanding cosmos and society because both are embedded within the other. The three sections of his treatise are equally important and are firmly interlinked with each other. Ontology is the basis from which anthropology is derived to understand man and to understand man one needs to comprehend him as a being existing in society.

For comprehending society, sociology cannot derive general statements from pure observation, it necessitates to ascertaining the 'essential', which is to be found in the laws of the cosmos. I believe that Ervin's evolutionary concept denotes that all that is in the world and all that becomes evolve from discoverable laws or regularities. Finding and understanding the laws of the cosmos and regularities are the basic requirements to uncover the 'essential' dynamics from which then sociology is then able to formulate a comprehensive and coherent notion of the description of man, society and life in general.

The way I understand Ervin's discourse is that the phenomenon of life is regarded as the consequence of an organization of organisms, where all organisms are constituted by particles of a homogeneous substance. The interactive dynamic process points to either progression to higher organic levels with attributes of coordination and integration, or to regression to dissolve such as death. The dynamic development of organisms includes the evolution of mind as a functional organ. Mind, in Ervin's view is a complex organic entity, an organ, which "is developed by basic processes and assumes a definite role for the organism, a role which the general progression of the cosmic process is the referent. Mind is therefore held to be emergent in evolution, on a level with all other organs and processes in nature; it is not generated by, nor does it represent a quality different from, the rest of the substance." [ibid, p61] In this explanation, mind has a complex functionality within the organic species - man. Mind's functionality can be described as an integral and essential operating entity specializing in the selection and adaptation of the organic structure to the external environment. It interacts within the individual, for example life processes as well as

with the external world. Following this thought process; Ervin 's understanding of the phenomenon of life is not merely a constitution of matter nor solely operated by mechanical means. "The phenomenon we call life is one of the resultants of a cosmic evolutionary process which includes its potential in all its phases of development. But life is a phenomenon: we call a process "living" when it reaches a certain level in mass and complexity. Until then we term it a mechanical, physical or chemical action and reaction." [ibid,p61] Thus mind deciphers epistemological and psychological experiences. Therefore the activity of mind is essential to comprehending the world and man in the world. Such comprehension of oneself and one's experiences are individually determined "and only through a more perfect understanding of our own *being* can we adapt our existence to all the aspects of our environment which we *experience* and attempt to comprehend." [ibid,p104]

Ervin Laszlo's words written in the early sixties ring true today in the twenty-first century. "There is greater prosperity for more people than ever before in recorded history, but there is also a greater feeling of insecurity and a greater lack of human *raison d'être*. Modern man is progressing with giant strides but he has no conception of where he is going." [ibid,p,142] Then what is the relation of the sixties' human difficulties to society's evolutionary development today? Man's way of life, he explains, depicts a progressive divorce from nature; even if human well-being is reflected in the rapid advancement of medical science and technology in parallel with the increase of mental illnesses. The rapid growth of population and consequent formation of alliances in terms of political coalitions, finance motivated interest groups and so on, resulted in the loss of individuality.

What are the characteristics of a correct social organization where man has optimal fulfillments without the cost of his individuality? Ervin's replies, "an explicit and judicious scheme, built for the individual and following the changing pattern of individual demands in society, can provide a climate wherein all people can exercise their freedom of choice and determine as free individuals the kind and amount of satisfaction they will obtain. A nation so organized would provide optimum liberty for the individual: it would put at his disposal all instrumentalities for his auto-determination. More than that no nation can do for its citizens without encroaching on their personal liberty." [ibid,p147] Would this ideal scheme mean that the individual's need determines the sort of society that will serve his demands?

Can we deduce that Ervin focal point is man, his well-being, his fulfillments, and if these are met by society, then society functions optimally?

Ervin's *Essential Society* is the work of a young thinker conversant with Greek and twentieth century philosophy. The construction and structure of an ideal society in relation to the individual in terms of both the individual's and society's operational and functional demands are coherent, yet his claim to comprehending the cosmos denoted in his ontology in order to understand man and society is not yet fully outlined. What is that thing that evolves in cosmos, and so in society and in the human world? Evolution, according to Ervin, is that everything progresses according to certain law. Everything that happens in the world follows a logical path; everything changes every time, and changes logically with reason for change. In his view, society is a logically evolving system with its own laws.

What drives evolution in society? Ervin was looking for an underpinning concept that would interlink and explain the relationship between macro and micro, cosmos and human. He found this concept in Alfred North Whitehead's idea of "actual entity" and later in Ludwig von Bertalanffy's concept of "system".

Since publishing '*Essential Society*', Ervin' has authored and co-authored over eighty books. All those books are progressive steps towards the crystallization of his finding what makes the universe "tick" and man in the universe. The basic idea, that the world is not a layer-cake of separate physical, biological, and social or sociocultural realities but a consistent and coherent whole, stayed with him all through his life. But it gave rise to further insights. He realized that this fabulous development, from quanta to galaxies, cannot happen unless everything – literally "every thing" – is in communication with every thing else. He began to explore the idea that there is something deeper in the world, a field, that connects all things. In books and articles he published in the last two decades, he called this "something deeper" variously the psi-field, and the quantum/vacuum interaction field. Since 2004 he has been calling it the Akashic field. This is how he characterizes this field in his latest book, *The Next Scientific Revolution: An Introduction to the Emerging Paradigm*:

A field or dimension that is not directly observable but is implied by what we observe is an age-old intuition. It suggests that the observed world is not all there is: what we observe is rooted in, and is perhaps produced by, a dimension or field that is real but not observable.

Philosophers of the mystical branch in Greek metaphysics—the Idealists and the Eleatic school including thinkers such as Pythagoras, Plato, Parmenides, and Plotinus—differed on many points, but were united in the affirmation that there is a deeper or higher dimension in the world. For Pythagoras this was the *Kosmos*, a trans-physical, unbroken wholeness, the prior ground on which matter and mind, and all being in the world arises. For Plato this was the realm of Ideas and Forms, and for Plotinus “the One.” The perceived world is illusory, ephemeral and short-lived, while the hidden dimension is eternal, and eternally unchanging.

At the dawn of the modern age Giordano Bruno brought the concept of the hidden dimension into the ambit of modern science. The infinite universe, he said, is filled with an unseen substance called *aether* or *spiritus*. The heavenly bodies are not fixed points on the crystal spheres of Aristotelian and Ptolemaic cosmology, but move without resistance through an unseen cosmic substance under their own impetus.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the French physicist Jacques Fresnel affirmed the idea of a space-filling and in-itself unobservable medium called “ether.” In Fresnel’s theory the ether is a quasi-material substance in which the movement of heavenly bodies produces friction. If the Earth moves through the ether, the light that reaches it from the Sun should display the effects of “ether-drag”: toward the light-source the beams should be reaching the Earth faster than in the opposite direction.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Michelsen and Morley measured the speed of light in the direction of the rotation of the Earth and also in the contrary direction but failed to discover a difference. The physics community took this as evidence that the ether does not exist, notwithstanding Michelsen’s warning that the experiments disproved only a particular mechanistic theory of the ether and not the concept of a space-filling medium that would transport light as well as other fields and forces.

When Einstein published his special theory of relativity, the theory of the ether was discarded: it no longer appeared necessary. All movement in space (more exactly, in the four-dimensional spacetime continuum) was said to be relative to the given reference frame: it is not movement against a fixed background.

However, the ether, as an unobservable plane of reality underlying the observable phenomena came back to physics through the back door. Theoretical physicists began to trace the fields and forces of nature to common origins in a unified, and later in a grand-unified and then super-grand-unified field. An in-itself un-observable ground of the observable phenomena entered the

narrative of the theories. In the so-called Standard Model of particle physics, the fields and forces of the universe are quantized: they appear as either elementary or composite quanta. The repertory of elementary quanta includes fermions (quarks, leptons and their antiparticles), and gauge bosons (photons, W and Z bosons, and gluons). Since the autumn of 2012 it also includes the hitherto hypothetical and now experimentally confirmed Higgs boson. The basic entities of the universe are not independent, material things even when they are endowed with mass; they are part of the unified matrix or field that underlies the all of space.

David Bohm's theory of the "implicate order" makes the point explicitly: "What we experience through the senses as empty space ... is the ground for the existence of everything, including ourselves. The things that appear to our senses are derivative forms and their true meaning can be seen only when we consider the plenum, in which they are generated and sustained, and into which must ultimately vanish."

I asked him to summarize what he means by this Akashic field or dimension, and this is what he told me:

Gyorgyi: What is the Akasha and why is it important to know it?

*Ervin:* The Akasha is a dimension in the universe that subtends all the things that exist in it. It not only subtends all things: it generates and interconnects all things, and it conserves the information they generated. It is the womb of the world, the network of the world, and the memory of the world.

This concept is important for us, and it is important for science. It is important for us because it orients our thinking and our behavior. And it is important for science because it enables the integration of the various theories of the empirical disciplines into what Einstein called the simplest possible and yet comprehensive scheme—a scheme that gives us a meaningful picture of the world based on all the accessible evidence we have of the world.

Gyorgyi: How does the Akashic concept differ from our habitual picture of the world?

*Ervin:* The new science paradigm gives us a very different concept from that which most people hold in the modern world. Understanding the world through the lens of this paradigm calls for a veritable "Gestalt switch." We normally think of the things we experience as real, and the space

that embeds them as empty and passive, a mere abstraction. We need to turn this around. It is the space that embeds things that is real, and the things that disport themselves in space that are secondary. They are the manifestations of space, more exactly, of the Akasha, the underlying generative and interconnecting matrix that fills space.

This concept emerges from the findings of cutting-edge physics. Space, quantum physicists realize, is not empty and passive; it is a filled and active plenum, even though physicists still refer to it as the “*vacuum*.” In the emerging view space is the ground, and the things we know as real things in the world are the figures on the ground. They are figures not just *on* a ground; they are figures *of* the ground. The things we consider real are manifestations of space—manifestations of the cosmic matrix that fills space.

There is a good metaphor for this concept of the world. Think of waves traveling over the surface of the sea.

Ervin When you look at the surface you see waves moving toward the shore, waves spreading out behind ships, waves interfering with waves. The waves move from one point on the sea toward another, yet there is nothing in the sea that would move that way: the molecules of water on the surface do not move from one place to another, they just move up and down. The motion of the waves is an illusion—an illusion not in the sense that there would be nothing that would correspond to it, but in that it is not what it appears to be. The waves travel across the surface of the sea, but the water of the sea does not travel.

The same applies to the motion of things in space. Things do not move *across* or *over* space, they move *in*, more exactly *within*, space. They are *conveyed* by space. Space is not empty and passive: it is the cosmic matrix that generates and connects all that exists. Everything that exists in the world exists within the dimension of the world we habitually call space.

The view this gives us is very different from the commonsense view. The world that meets our eye is not an illusion, but it is not what it appears to be. The real world is not an arena of separate things moving across intervening space; it is a manifestation of a cosmic matrix. All things are part of that matrix, and are conveyed in and by the matrix. Not the bare existence of things is the illusion, but their separateness. All things are *in* and *of* the matrix, and in the final count are one with the matrix.

Gyorgyi: Can we be certain that this is the correct view of the world?

*Ervin:* This is an important question and I am glad that you asked it. This question is usually asked by skeptics; people who want to disprove a statement or theory. But it should be answered also by those who are ready to believe in it. The plain fact is that we cannot be *absolutely* certain that the new science paradigm is the correct view of the world. But we can be *reasonably certain* that it is. There is no absolute certainty in science beyond the formulas of logic and mathematics. It is only there that we can have proof of the truth of our conclusions, because the proof, the same as our whole chain of reasoning, is “axiomatic”: it is defined in its own terms without reference to anything else.

Einstein pointed out that as far as the proofs of mathematics do not refer to reality they are certain; and as far as they refer to reality they are not certain. Abstract schemes can be certain, but they become uncertain when they are applied to the real world. Sir Karl Popper summed up the implication for science. Scientific theories, he said, are improvable but not provable. Already two-and-a-half thousand years ago Plato warned us that our ideas about the world are at best a likely story. At this point in the evolution of our insight into the nature of things, the new science paradigm presented here is, I believe, the likeliest story.

Gyorgyi: Is the Akasha the intelligence of the world?

*Ervin:* The Akasha is indeed a kind of intelligence. In the traditional context we would call it the spirit or consciousness of the world, and in the modern context we can consider it the logic or “program” of the world. It is what makes the world intelligible, makes the stars and planets, and the atoms and organisms behave in a way we can comprehend.

The Akasha is a striking, indeed a revolutionary concept. I believe it is important for two fundamental reasons. First, because it changes our thinking about the fundamental reality of the world—the whole world. And second, because it’s the key to creating a real shift in the world around us: a “worldshift.” A worldshift can only be based on a new way in how we think of ourselves and how we relate to each other. If we are all part of the Akasha – if we are all “dancing with the Akashic field” as he writes in his latest book, then we are all part of each other. He made this into the fundamental element of his “Oneness Declaration,” the first three of the sixteen points that he tells us hallmarks the new consciousness.

1. I am part of the world. The world is not outside of me, and I am not outside of the world. The world is in me, and I am in the world.
2. I am part of nature, and nature is part of me. I am what I am in my communication and communion with all living things. I am an irreducible and coherent whole with the web of life on the planet.
3. I am part of society, and society is part of me. I am what I am in my communication and communion with my fellow humans. I am an irreducible and coherent whole with the community of humans on the planet.

But Ervin's thinking now goes beyond grand theories and declarations; it goes down to the most immediate level of how we relate to each other. Relating to each other, recognizing that we are all part of each other, is a precondition of creating a timely and effective shift in the world.

This insight now appears more and more in Ervin's writings and lectures. When he was asked to write up in a few sentences what his message is to the world, he addressed himself to young people. He wrote:

"You are the most crucial generation that ever walked the Earth. You live at the precise time when you have the power to change the world. The world has changed before, but not so fast as it does today: not in the span of a single generation. And it did not change consciously: by the will and the power of that generation. Now it does. You can change the world – consciously. ... At a time when the old system breaks down and a new system seeks to break through, a small group of dedicated people can change the world. As Margaret Mead said, nothing else ever has. Be that group, and create a new world: consciously and purposefully. That is your historical opportunity and your epochal challenge. Live up to it."

Then he was asked to sum up his message in a few sentences, speaking directly to the young people of the world. He turned to me to record his message on video. This is what he said:

“All the great spiritual traditions of humanity tell you that you have to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Jesus said that, the Buddhists say that love all of creation, love all of life. This message has unprecedented relevance today. We need to live and act under the umbrella of love. Why is that? Because sciences are telling us that living system cannot live or survive unless all its elements sensitively tuned to all the other elements. Everything responds to everything else. What happens to one is felt by the others. This is the only way a living system can live otherwise it would fall apart, it would die. Human civilization has to recover this kind of sensitive tuning of one person to another; it has to recover the love that binds all its elements. You can contribute to this. You can start loving yourself truly because if you love yourself truly then you love the person next to you. You love all of life; ultimately you love the whole of creation. We need a new civilization based on love. This was a message coming from the spiritual traditions, and now scientists reinforce it. This is a message of love coming from the scientist. Do take it seriously. It is a precondition of creating a new civilization.”

As we can see, there is a wide and deep trajectory in the evolution of Ervin’s thinking and feeling about the world, and about relating to people in the world. It goes from the recognition – spelled out in *Essential Society* - that the world is not a layer-cake of separate physical, living, social things, but all these things are related and they all evolve together. From this comes the recognition that if all things evolve together, they must be connected – must constantly be in touch, in communication with each other. This is what he is telling us in what he now calls the Akasha Paradigm. And his thinking evolved still further. It evolved to what I think is the most crucial dimension. I would sum this up by this simple and basic insight: that if we are to be in touch with the world, we must be in communication with each other: in communication first of all with those who are closest to us. And this closest of all communication is what Ervin calls “love.”

In his new book, *The Next Scientific Revolution*, Ervin spells this out:

“Love is not just sexual attraction and the desire for satisfaction. Love is connection; belonging; oneness—with others, with nature, and with the cosmos. Life without love is disconnected and lonely.

Love is an expression of our desire for coherence with the world. It is healthy and good not only as a subjective inclination, but also objectively, as an effective response to a real and urgent requirement of our own life and wellbeing.

The breakdown of connection between our self and the world is bad for us, and bad for the world. The self-concerned behavior it inspires is a wrong use of the freedom granted to human beings in the world.

Also the contrary holds true. Love, nonduality, recognizing and seeking our connection with the world is individually health-enhancing and socially and ecologically sound. It is objectively good—the highest good. Becoming conscious of our subtle but vital connection to others and to nature is a good way to strive for it. It is a major benefit of a conscious dance with the Akashic Field.”

Ervin’s Oneness Declaration makes this clear: “Collaboration calls for empathy and solidarity, and ultimately for love. I do not and cannot love myself if I do not love you and others around me: we are part of the same whole and so are part of each other.”

Throughout his intellectual and personal development Ervin has been guided by the two saying that are dearest to his heart: Einstein’s saying, that we can’t solve the significant problems that surface in the world today with the same kind of thinking that gave rise to those problems, and Gandhi’s saying that we must all be the change we want to see in the world. This is how Ervin is now trying to shift the world – by shifting his thinking and his feeling about the world, and about the people who are around him. Having had the privilege to be around him, working with him, I had participated in these shifts, and I believe I had some role in them. I can testify that this shift is real – and that it is, in my view, important both as the emerging insight about the true nature of the world, and as the way we need to think about, live in, and love each other, in the world.