

BOOK REVIEW

The Quantum Society

by Danah Zohar & Ian Marshall
Bloomsbury, 1993
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The authors examine the dynamics of self and society in relation to assumptions from quantum reality. They argue that social perceptions, values and behaviors can be changed as we draw and operate upon assumptions of quantum reality. It is, in general, a book about change. It calls for changing our social perceptions and values, for changing the way we view society and the way we relate to each other within society. The basis of their argument is that of fundamental physical reality in view of insights of quantum physics and quantum thermodynamics. It is their conviction that a new paradigm is emerging from the description of quantum reality.

The book consists of 300 pages divided into fourteen chapters which consists of such chapter titles as: "What is 'Quantum Society'?", "A New Physics of the Mind," "Freedom and Ambiguity: The Foundations of Creative Community," "The Many Faces of Truth," "The Politics of Transformation: The Loss of Meaning" and "Reinventing the Family."

A flavor of the book might be gained from the authors' summary of the features that a new social reality must have:

1. "It must be holistic. Small shifts in society are felt world wide."
2. "It must get beyond the individual/collective dichotomy." There must be a way that "... mediates between the self-centeredness and fragmentation of extreme individualism and the imposed communality of extreme collectivism." (p.8)
3. "It must be plural." A vision that accommodates the multiplicity's and diversities of different ways of experiencing realities is necessary.
4. "It must be responsive." More flexibility and less hierarchy.
5. "It must be 'bottom-up', or emergent."
6. "It must be 'green'. Social reality must be one that is natural with the world.
7. "It must be spiritual." This has to do with understanding "... the ultimate meaning and sanction of our actions and projects." (p. 10)
8. "It must be in dialogue with science." This dialogue makes sense only if the science in mind is that of the new science of the twentieth century.

The basic features of the quantum reality are presented in a way that seems consistent with the interplay, overlap and complexity of an "impossible" way of thinking that is now amenable to us (and has been for over seventy years). Quantum physics has, for example, called into question the either/or way of thinking and involves a both/and kind of existence. Quantum reality is that

light is both wave-like and particle-like at the same time. Neither is more primary or more real. The Principle of Complementarity necessitates that both are necessary to any full description of what light is. The Uncertainty Principle accords that we can never pin light down and specifically identify it. Quantum reality shifts in nature according to surroundings (contextualism). The "two-slit experiment," an examination of a stream of photons, is presented as an illustration of the observer and the observed in quantum reality being involved in a creative relationship with each other. The authors point out that the quantum wave function ". . . always contains a plethora of possibilities, all equally real and many mutually contradictory." These concepts and others in quantum theory have implications for self and society. Several select quotations which relate quantum assumptions to self and society are the following:

The creativity of a quantum system . . . rests on its duality. It rests on the fact that neither all the individual characteristics (particle-like potential) nor all the relational characteristics (wave-like potential) are fixed in an extreme position. The freedom possessed by such a system is an *internal* freedom. The whole system, its identity, its 'character', its expression and its receptiveness, is somewhat unfixed, inside and out. It is in a state of flux and becoming, like the free-form dance . . . or the music generated in a jazz jam session. This internal freedom *thrusts* the system into 'community' (into the dance or the music), where the indeterminate, relational aspect acquires its identity as it relates. (p. 96)

and: ". . . the quantum self is in a state of constant becoming, This internal freedom to become underlies the quantum self's motivation to get into relationship or community or to have experience" (p. 97).

And:

And the way we look at ourselves, the way that we perceive ourselves, is defined by our attitudes. *Attitude*, I believe, is the human equivalent of measurement. *The attitudes that we adopt in any situation partially determine how that situation will unfold.* Our attitudes hold the key to the amount of internal freedom we can enjoy, and hence to the kinds of communities that we build. (p.100)

And:

We need to recapture the natural within ourselves, and to see that *within such natural rootedness lies our empowerment to act . . .* (p.182)

And:

A quantum understanding of human consciousness and the person helps us to see that there is an infinity of potentiality 'sleeping' inside us all. This potentiality is evoked through our experiences and our relationships. There is no end to the persons that each one of us can be. Most of us feel this about ourselves, but we often have difficulty realizing it about others." (p.265)

And, finally:

"Every time that I try to understand another person's point of view it is a small religious act. It is also a small political act." (p.248)

These quotes, perhaps, suggest why the book may have meaning to those of us who attempt to operate out of the principles of the person-centered approach.

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