

# The Symbiosis Code

## *Mankind's Place in Nature*

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### 1. The Adventure of Philosophy

While many people are interested in science and technology, the number who are interested in philosophy is relatively small. The word science is derived from the Latin *scire*, 'to know.' Scientific and technological knowledge clearly have practical value in manipulating the material world to our seeming benefit. One possible reason for the relative lack of interest in philosophy is that it seems to have little if any practical value in manipulating the material world to our advantage. The word philosophy is derived from the Greek, *philos* meaning loving and *sophos* meaning wise – “loving-wise” – and is generally taken to mean “the love of wisdom.” (I don't know if this violates Greek grammar but it seems to me that “loving-wise” could also mean “the wisdom of love.”) The purpose of philosophy is not in manipulating the material world to our advantage but in wisdom, in understanding ourselves and our relationship to the material world, in understanding our place in Nature. So a philosopher is anyone who loves wisdom, understanding, wherever we are in that process.

Philosophical inquiry is a theoretical and experimental process of cultivating wisdom, of reflection and action, a dance of yin and yang. One reflective aspect is our seeking or asking or opening ourselves to wisdom – “What is this? Who am I? What is going on here? What's real, what's true?” etc, etc. Another is the process of meditation or thought that flows from our asking and from whatever insights or realisations arise in answer to our asking. Although always happy to learn from others, the willingness to think for oneself is a requirement in philosophical inquiry. “This above all things, to thine own self be true; and it must follow as the day the night, thou cannot then be false to any man.” (William Shakespeare, 'Polonius' in “Hamlet.”) Cross-culturally much of our socialisation suppresses our ability to think for ourselves, so this isn't always easy. It can take some courage to walk the opposite way of the parade, or even just a different way. And we can come face to face with conclusions that are neither easy nor comfortable to face, as well as some that make our heart sing.

Depending on our point of view, *thinking* can mean different things. It can mean the constant flow of thoughts and feelings that appear in consciousness, persist for a while and then disappear, followed by the next. It can mean the frequently abusive mind-chatter that plagues many of us. It can mean the logical reasoning, reflection and meditation to which Locke referred when he said “God has not been so sparing to men to make them barely two-legged creatures, and left it to Aristotle to make them rational.”<sup>1</sup> Our ability to think logically for ourselves is innate, it’s something we all have, a common sense. So the requirement to think for ourselves is one we can all meet. Thinking can also mean the intuition or insight or “I see!” that results when things are connected in our consciousness, giving us a new point of view.

There’s a saying “You can turn it over in your mind all you like but it won’t plough the field.” After thinking, doing; after reflection, action. Otherwise, what’s the point? If Beethoven had only reflected on the beautiful musical ideas that came to him, none of us could have had the pleasure of hearing or playing his music. In the active, practical or experimental aspect of cultivating wisdom we move from thought into action. Whatever insights or realisations have been revealed to us through our inquiry we test in our living. We practice living (with) the wisdom revealed by our inquiry, practice following our own wisdom. These “suck it and see” experiments generate more material for inquiry and reflection, and so more experiments. So philosophical inquiry is an adventure, continually going from the known to the unknown. Since everything is changing in some way all the time, continually going from the known to the unknown isn’t difficult, once we get the hang of it. Resisting it is difficult. There’s a story of a king, Canute, who sat down on his throne before the incoming tide and commanded it to stop. He found resisting difficult, saw that if he persisted in his resistance he would be drowned. He sensibly quit his stupidity, gave up his potentially lethal point of view, and lived.

This quote is an invitation to a process of philosophical inquiry: “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”<sup>2</sup> One of my Buddhist mentors offers the same invitation in a different form: “Don’t nourish the dark things; nourish the light.”<sup>3</sup> It’s so easy to get fixated on problems, on what seems to be not working and so ignore what is working. Both sentences invite us to think on, reflect on, inquire into, nourish, the light. Both are founded on the principle of giving and receiving or sowing and reaping, which also forms the basic axiom of deductive logic – if we wish to end up with a true conclusion, we must start with a true premise.

## **2. Whole and Part**

Our point of view determines what we see, what we can see. If we look artistically we see things one way, if we look religiously we see the same things another way, if we look financially we see yet something else, and so on. If we believe our eyes, that the way we see the world is the way the world really is, we end up believing that our point of view is reality. We have mistaken our own thoughts and feelings for reality.

Looking holistically we see that all human beings are whole, whole life-forms, both life and form, both being and human. We contain parts within us as smaller wholes: organ systems, organs, tissues, cells, molecules, atoms etc. And we are contained or embedded as parts within larger wholes: the body of mankind, the ecology of the planet, the solar system etc. One of the recurring issues in philosophy concerns the relationship between a whole and its parts. For example, if over the years every part of a boat is replaced with new materials, new parts, is it the

same boat? The answer of course depends on our point of view. If I'm focussed on the visible physical parts of the boat, the form/s, then the answer is clearly "No, the physical parts are all different, it isn't the same boat." If I'm focussed on the invisible part of the boat, the design into which all the physical parts fit, the answer is clearly "Yes, it is the same design, it is the same boat." I'm told that our physical bodies are constantly being renewed, in a constant state of flux with atoms and molecules constantly leaving and new ones joining, so that after every seven years not one atom that was originally in the body is still present. Is it still the same body?

Another question about the relationship between a whole and its parts is whether a whole is equal to or greater than the sum of its parts. Imagine that you get up one morning and you have an important journey to make in your car. You go out of your house and there's your car – all stripped down, completely and expertly dismantled, all the individual parts neatly laid out in piles on the ground. Is your whole car not greater than the sum of its parts? Or maybe your car is whole and you make your important trip and return home. To find your home dismantled, all the individual parts neatly stacked in piles on the ground. Is not your whole home greater than the sum of its parts?

Taken aback by the new state of your home you go to see a friend. An insane surgical team has got there first. Your friend has been expertly dissected, all the different organs and tissues neatly stored in specially designed containers to keep all the separate organs and tissues alive and healthy. Is not your whole friend greater than the sum of his or her parts? What is revealed in the whole but not in the sum of its part is the pattern or design of the whole, into which all the parts fit. It is the pattern or design of the whole which allows all the parts to fit together in useful and meaningful ways, thus giving all the parts meaning and value in the whole and to each other.

In any functioning whole every part makes a contribution to the whole, is useful, meaningful, valuable, just by being itself. The individual part is useful, meaningful, valuable when it is part of a larger whole. Disconnected from the whole the part is useless, meaningless, valueless to the whole. Your car's steering wheel is useless, meaningless as the steering wheel if it's disconnected from the car, from the whole. Disconnected from your body, from the whole, your teeth, hands, arms or liver are useless to you, meaningless. Disconnected from the body of mankind, we are useless, meaningless to the body of mankind. Disconnected from the ecology of the planet, mankind is useless, meaningless to the ecology of the planet. Disconnected from the solar system, the earth would be useless, meaningless to the solar system. And so on. Everything is in, is part of, the one whole. Everything is interdependent. No part or group of parts, not even all of them, can ever be greater than the whole.

This doesn't mean that the parts are somehow inferior – without the parts there is no whole. Not only is it true that the well-being of the part is dependent upon the well-being of the whole, it's also true that the well-being of the whole is dependent upon the well-being of all it's parts. So taking care of our parts, being kind to our bodies, minds and hearts, is one way of contributing to the well-being of the whole. Whether or not we feel we do this well already, taking care of our parts is one way to nourish or cultivate kindness, to nourish or cultivate the light. We may think of the universe as being "out there" but it isn't all out there. It's here too. This solar system, this planet, our bodies, minds and hearts, are all parts of the universe. So in being kind to our parts, or to anything or anyone, we are being kind to the planet, to the solar system, to the universe, to the whole.

### 3. Symbiosis: The Way of Life Together

Looking at human beings biologically and ecologically we see that human beings are life-forms of this planet. So I'm not a philosopher – I'm a life-form that enjoys philosophy. We limit and confuse ourselves if we mistake what we do for who we are. Human beings are life-forms of this planet, human life-forms, human forms of life, life in human form. Both individually and collectively we are one life-form among many. Life has innumerable forms and is in all its forms. What is the function or purpose of life-forms?

Many know something of the essential part trees play in the planetary ecology. A live acorn is a biological mechanism which transforms water, air, earth and fire into a life-form, an oak tree. In an acorn is the design for a unique oak tree. The actual way this design evolves or unfolds will be affected by the environment of the acorn. In the womb of the earth an acorn receives moisture, gases, nutrients and the warmth of the sun and sprouts, becomes a seedling, an infant. Continuing to receive moisture, gases, nutrients and warmth, passing through stages that might be called 'childhood' and 'adolescence,' it becomes a mature adult oak tree. Birds, mammals and thousands of insects find a shelter, a home and/or food there. It's roots interact with fungi in the soil, receiving nitrogen from them and giving them sugars. It participates in the water and carbon cycles of the planetary ecology, gives us animal life-forms oxygen and receives carbon dioxide from us, and its roots hold the earth together. Then of course there is the beauty, the magnificence, of the tree.

All this is achieved by the acorn/oak tree with no apparent effort, no struggle, just by being itself, a symbiotic life-form. In many different ways and with many different species the oak tree is life-giving: life-supporting, life-encouraging, life-enriching, life-enhancing. Every symbiont is life-giving. If an oak tree could speak English it could accurately say of itself "I am here to share my life with my world." Along with Jesus of Nazareth apparently, it could accurately say of itself "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."<sup>4</sup> What is the function or purpose of life-forms? I am here to share my life with my world. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly, that their joy may be full.

Symbiosis comes from Greek, *syn-*, together, with + *biosis*, way of life; from *bios*, life (from Compton's Encyclopaedia). It is the name given to a relationship between life-forms which is beneficial to both/all parties: flowers benefit from bees and bees benefit from flowers. For this reason symbiosis is also called mutualism. It is a relationship of mutual giving and receiving, mutual benefit, mutual blessing, interdependence, cooperation. Some symbiotic relationships are so pervasive they seem to affect almost all life-forms. Like the symbiotic relationship of the plants giving all us animal life-forms oxygen and our giving them carbon dioxide. Another is the root systems of most plant species interacting with the soil micro-organisms. These micro-organisms aid the plant in taking up nutrients, and receive nutrients from the plants. In some environments many plants simply cannot become established without the aid of associated micro-organisms. Symbiosis between animals and micro-organisms is equally important: most animals rely on micro-organisms in their gut to properly digest and metabolize food.

Symbiotic relationships exist not only between organisms but within organisms, between organ systems and organs. All our organ systems and organs function inter-dependently, in symbiosis. In a healthy body all the parts function harmoniously together to maintain the well-being of the whole. So symbiosis exists in and is operational in our physical bodies and is

continuously manifested in that most essential of life-functions, breathing. We're hard-wired for symbiosis, natural symbionts. Without symbiosis we would not be. Symbiosis within our bodies (all the parts cooperating in serving the well-being of the whole) is clearly the way of health, of wholeness, of life, for our bodies. Presumably this is also true for our larger body or whole, mankind, and for mankind's larger body or whole, the planetary ecology.

It appears to me that the planetary ecology is a web or matrix of innumerable interactive symbiotic relationships. So if they could talk it's not just oak trees but all symbionts that could accurately say of themselves "I am here that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly, that their joy may be full." And it's not just the symbiotic plants and animals that could say this, but the planet's water, air, the earth itself, the sun, even our seemingly dead moon, all could say the same thing. All are contributing, all are playing an essential part in the planetary ecology, all are life-giving. Can anyone or anything give what it does not have?

#### 4. Getting Lost

A planet of symbionts, where everyone and everything is sharing life, giving life, contributing something to the well-being of the whole, sounds to me like a flexible design for an unfolding paradise. If so, there's a glitch in the process! One way of classifying life-forms is according to their relationship with other life-forms. Biologists recognise three kinds of relationship between life-forms – symbiosis or mutualism, commensalism and parasitism. They're summarised below:

RELATIONSHIP	WHAT HAPPENS
<b>Symbiosis</b> (Giving & Receiving)	Both organisms benefit
<b>Commensalism</b> (Receiving)	One organism benefits, the other is unaffected
<b>Parasitism</b> (Taking)	One organism is harmed, the parasite 'benefits'

Which classification does mankind currently belong in? How much of a benefit is mankind to his world now, to the other animals and vegetation and to the ecology of the planet? How much does mankind benefit from the other animals and vegetation and the ecology of the planet? How much harm is mankind doing to the other animals and vegetation and to the ecology of the planet, for his own supposed benefit? If mankind is not walking in the way of life together, in what way is mankind walking?

#### 5. The Symbiosis Code

In the bible there's a mythic story which apparently contains a set of instructions for mankind's symbiotic function within the planetary ecology – "a symbiosis code." Maybe someone sensed the possibility of mankind's getting a bit lost and wrote them down for safe-keeping. If so, how thoughtful, how kind. So here they are, possibly ancient instructions in symbiosis and maybe not. Luckily for us we all have the ability to think for ourselves. We're not looking at this text religiously but bio-logically. Who knows what we'll see from that point of view?

**And Life blessed them (mankind), and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.<sup>5</sup>**

I don't know how mankind first appeared on earth. I assume it was part of the natural and on-going unfolding or evolution of the "planetary acorn" into a "planetary oak tree." In the story this is the first time a planetary life-form is participating consciously in symbiosis, in life – maybe beginning this process as a commensalist. Before we can breathe out we have to breathe in. Before we can give, we have to receive. Since this is a conscious process we have to be conscious of having received, and so of having something to give. Since it is a conscious process we have and must have the choice of saying "No." So this isn't an imposition. It's another invitation to an adventure in nourishing the light.

**1. And Life blessed them.** Are we in with a chance here? Do we qualify? Is this instruction in symbiosis, if that's what this is, being offered to us? Has Life blessed us? Ok, so maybe we've all acquired some limitations, but have we been blessed? Are we being blessed now? Yes, we are. All of us. All the time. Every symbiotic relationship is one of mutual benefit, mutual blessing. Every symbiont gives. So directly or indirectly every symbiotic life-form is blessing us now. All of us. Every in-breath is a blessing received. Without the plants we could not breathe, could not be human beings. Every time we eat we are being blessed by the animal and/or plant life of this planet. What about the home we live in? The clothes we wear? The tools we use? All are blessings from the planet's animals, plants and minerals. What about the blessings of being able to see, to hear, to feel, to walk, to read, to write, to communicate? What about the blessings of learning, of relationship, of friendship, of love? What about the blessing of being able to give something, to in some way participate in symbiosis and contribute to the well-being of the whole? Are we being blessed now? Yes, all of us.

The experience of being blessed, of receiving a blessing, naturally results in thankfulness, gratitude, appreciation, joy. As does the experience of giving or sharing a blessing. Thankfulness, gratitude, appreciation, joy – these are the first step, without which we cannot proceed to further steps. Thankfulness is not here just to help make us feel good, although it does, it's an essential part of the symbiotic process. Without thankfulness, gratitude, appreciation and joy there is no awareness of having received, of being blessed, of having something to give. And yet as soon as we practice or nourish or cultivate these things of light in our consciousness, we are already participating in step 2.

**2. Be fruitful.** Give life, give of what you have, share, contribute something to the well-being of the whole, without concern for results, just for the joy of giving. In the words of Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet*, "Give now, that the season of giving may be yours." Participate in symbiosis as best you can now. Step 1 is always available. We are all breathing out as well as in, so we're all giving as well as receiving. Regardless of how limited or expansive our current circumstances we all have life, or are life, so we always have something to give. Our circumstances will always shape our giving but they can't prevent our giving. Everyone has things they can't do, everyone has things they can do. "Don't nourish the dark things, nourish the light." Rather than struggle with things we seemingly can't do or do anything about, we can do what we can do mindfully, with care, with love. Every day brings many opportunities to give our attention and care into what we can do, to let our love and our life flow into what we can do, into what we are doing, into that part of the whole universe which is at hand. Life is now. Symbiosis requires no special

circumstances. We don't need to change anything or go anywhere to give our life to our world. From a symbiont's point of view, all circumstance are opportunities to share his or her life in some way. So a symbiont is naturally thankful for whatever shows up. A bit like a gardener being naturally thankful for having a bit of garden to tend, or an artist being thankful for something to draw on.

**3. And multiply.** Some seem to take this as justification for filling the earth with humans, but what might it mean from a symbiotic point of view? Well, if we all keep giving our life into our world, life will inevitably be multiplied or increased in our world. And of course we may with experience increase in our ability and/or capacity to give life. Acorns do have a tendency to increase, to grow into oak trees, and to give life abundantly in many ways. Once again, we can't activate step 3 if we're not practicing step 2. We can't increase our fruitfulness if we're not being fruitful. We can't multiply what isn't there. And yet if we are practicing steps 1 & 2 we're already participating in step 3. All the steps of this code seem to follow this pattern, to be a sequence of "magic gates." Open gate 1 and gate 2 opens. Open gate 2 (implies gate 1 is open) and gate 3 opens, and so on.

**4. And replenish the earth.** Replenish (keep filling/re-filling) the earth with life. Again, this step is dependent upon the earlier ones, so mankind is going to have to do those before this step is possible to us collectively. But if we are multiplying or increasing life in the earth, we are already participating in replenishing the earth with life. Although it seems this step would follow inevitably from step 3, there may be an emphasis here in keeping the earth filled, ensuring it stays filled, a revelation of life's abundance and generosity. Because that state of abundance is necessary to the next step? Perhaps it also points to a change in our forms, to our hearts, minds and bodies being filled with life? Perhaps having moved through the first three steps, symbiosis is now sufficiently established in us that everything we think, say, feel or do is replenishing the earth with life?

Some say death is a part of life. It's not how I see things. Part of the sea is sea, part of the air is air. A slice of a jam pie is jam pie and blue, green and red light are all light. If death were a *part of* life then death would share in the nature of life. Death would be alive, life-giving, and an awful lot of dead humans and other things would be alive and walking around. Which isn't how things are. Death is a word we use to denote the absence of life in what used to be a life-form and is now a dead form. Death is not a part of life, death is an absence of life. Since life is not absent from itself, there is no death in life. Even if there seems to be a lot of it in human experience. Life is deathless, eternal. And we human beings are all life-forms of this planet, both life and form, not just the forms, not "only human." Or we'd be dead forms! And we're not. So we all either have eternal life within us right now or we are eternal life right now, depending on our point of view, on whether we're identified with the form or with the life of the life-form we are now.

In life there is no death. In life there is life and life's eternal wonder, beauty, wisdom and love. So in a world replenished with life, filled with life, there is no death, only the wonder, beauty, wisdom and love of life. In religious circles salvation and resurrection are sometimes thought of as living in heaven. From a biological and ecological point of view mankind's salvation or resurrection is his returning to symbiosis, to an identity and function in which he contributes to the planetary ecology, to the whole. We might say it's mankind's job to let all the earth be filled with life's wonder, beauty, wisdom and love. To be the essential conscious link between the

eternal abundance of life and the ever-changing earth. So if heaven seems to be absent on earth it's because mankind hasn't been providing that essential link.

**5. And subdue the earth.** Some seem to take this as justification for our lording it over the earth, forcing everything to serve humankind, falsely believing the human part is more important than the whole. What might this mean to a symbiont? The English word subdue means "to put or lead under." Put or lead all the earth under life, into life, into wonder, beauty, wisdom and love? Maybe something like this, "Let all the earth be filled with life, be brought to the fullness of its life, be a true yet ever-changing reflection of the invisible wonder, beauty, wisdom and love of life. Let all the earth receive the blessing of that unique gift of life that only Mankind can give, letting all the earth share more fully in life's nature and in life's joy." Who knows how our planetary ecology in a life-filled state might contribute to the solar system, or beyond? The magic of life is not restricted to just this one little planet, tucked away in a little corner of one of the billions of galaxies of the universe.

**6. And have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.** If these six steps are magic gates in the symbiosis code, they are bio-logical gates. A human infant is fully a human being, a whole life-form (the magic), but he/she isn't a child yet, nor an adolescent, nor an adult (the gates). It takes a lot of process before the design present in an acorn is revealed in the magnificence of a mature oak tree. But if these steps are magic gates, gate 6 will open naturally when gates 1 to 5 are open. Gate 5, perhaps our collective conscious participation in the contribution of a life-filled earth to the solar system and beyond is already beyond my comprehension, so I don't know what step 6 means.

Nevertheless, there are some logical implications. What does have dominion over the fish, the fowl and all the rest, over all the life-forms of this planet? *Dominion* means "rule or power to rule, sovereign authority, sovereignty" and comes from Latin, *dominus*, "lord." The English word *lord* means "keeper of the loaves" – the bread-giver – bread symbolising life. Life is the life-giver. Let's face it, without life, none of us life-forms do anything. Without life, we life-forms are billions of atoms in the planetary pool of atomic substance. Since nothing happens without life, it's not entirely unreasonable to conclude that it is life which is doing everything. Including writing this essay, and breathing this body. And creating and re-creating this body, and this planet. So one thing step 6 implies is that our identity is fully absorbed into life, is one with life. "I am the life."

Another implication is that the life-forms of this planet do not have dominion over us, do not control us. Parasitism is a condition of dependency on other life-forms for food, for existence, for survival. Being dependent upon them, the parasite is under their dominion, controlled by them. In contrast the work of a symbiont is to give (life), no matter what. The symbiont is controlled by its urge to give, to contribute to the whole; by love. Symbiosis is not dependency, it is interdependency. Giving and receiving.

All symbionts are peace-makers. Symbionts give life in their living, and in life is peace. Peace treaties between warring parties are helpful in the short term but they don't, can't, never will produce peace. Only peaceful people produce peace. No sweat. With respect to peace, people are always so polite aren't they? "After you." "No, please, you first." World peace will happen when we have a world full of peaceful people, not before. So let's be impolite (but kind) and go

first, continue to embrace life and symbiosis and come to know the peace of life for ourselves, and then see what happens.

In closing, some quotes attributed to Jesus of Nazareth: “I am the life”<sup>6</sup> and “I am with you always.”<sup>7</sup> “I, life, am with you always.” It’s true, isn’t it? I’ve never had the experience of being without life. Have you? Is it even possible to experience being without life? Since we have to be alive to experience anything, it seems not. And if it’s not possible to experience death, then no one has experienced death, or will. “I am the life: I am with you always.” There’s no escape! All of us life-forms are life as well as form: there’s no escape from ourselves, nor from our wonder, beauty, wisdom or love. And the word of life? I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly, that their joy may be full.

### **Some Possible Resources**

- Bloom, William: **The Endorphin Effect**, ISBN 0-7499-2158-7
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon: **Wherever You Go, There You Are**, ISBN 0-7499-25-485
- Katie, Byron: **Loving What Is**, ISBN 0-7126-2930-0
- Maurer, Robert: **One Small Step Can Change You Life**, ISBN-10: 0-7611-2923-5
- Tolle, Eckhart: **Practising The Power of Now**, ISBN 0-340-82253-8

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### **References**

<sup>1</sup> Essay IV, xvii 4

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 4.8

<sup>3</sup> Phra Hans of Tamprabok monastery, Thailand

<sup>4</sup> John 10:10

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:28

<sup>6</sup> John 11:25, 14:6

<sup>7</sup> Mat 28:20