

David's Desk # 189 Audio Companion

February 2023

[edited for clarity]

James: Hi, David.

David: James! Hi!

James: Welcome to another David's Desk Audio Companion.

David: Thank you, and the same to you, my friend.

James: I'm looking forward to this one. I've already gone down a couple rabbit holes with the concept of poiesis.

David: Yes. It's a wonderful concept and I just felt it would make for a nice David's Desk to explore it a bit.

James: I like that it's part of holopoiesis, although this month you wanted to talk about poiesis itself. So let's get our walking boots on and jump down the rabbit hole!

David: Okay, my friend. [*chuckles*] You first.

James: One of the things I found when I was doing a little bit of background in that work and yes, it's pre-Socratic pre-atomic, used in philosophy quite a bit. It was used by Heidegger. He was using the concept of poiesis as a "bringing forth" or "bringing out of concealment into unconcealment." He also described it as the original site of being, the original site of truth, and in and of itself as the agency of the "bringing out of."

David: That's a wonderful description, James. I totally concur.

James: How is it that you that you're looking at poiesis in Incarnational Spirituality?

David: I need to back up a little bit beyond what I shared in David's Desk this month. As I've shared in other ways and other places, back when I began working with John, my first subtle mentor and colleague, he was the one that introduced me to the idea of systems and that life was comprised of systems, in particular, that when we incarnate we incarnate, not into a body, but into a whole system of relationships and interconnection. That was that was my perception on things and how he described the way in which the subtle world operated, at least from his perspective, that was similar to what I had experience.

Then some years later, maybe two or three years later, I met a group of young physicists who were touring the country giving workshops on what they called the new physics. I discovered that what they were talking about—partly quantum mechanics, but partly chaos theory and the beginnings of systems theory with Bertalanffy—what they were describing was basically what John had described and had been describing. That was very affirming for me and it became sort of the scientific underpinning for me of my subtle experiences.

But then many years later, when I became part of the Lindisfarne fellowship with William Irwin Thompson, as I mentioned in the Davis desk, I met Francisco Varela, who was absolutely a wonderful, wonderful man who died way way too early. He was in his 30s when he died. He was working with another Chilean scientist down in San Diego named Humberto Maturana and they were they had coined the term autopoiesis to mean the capacity of self-generation and self-making as a way of defining life. The way that they talked about autopoiesis, I thought this is very similar to the way John talked about the processes at the heart of incarnation.

I hadn't quite started putting all that together in Incarnational Spirituality yet—that started really at the turn of the century, and this would have been back in the late 70s. That was my introduction to autopoiesis. It was one of those words that I love to say, you know? [*chuckles*]

But when I wanted to describe some of the deeper forces at work within the soul and within our relationship to the world, autopoiesis wasn't quite sufficient. I needed something that described the impulse towards creating wholeness and creating connectedness, and the impulse—which is one recognized in modern science—by which simple systems give birth to more complex systems. And so I followed, along with Francisco and I coined my own word which is holopoiesis, the making of wholes.

But what I wanted to focus on in this David's desk was the poiesis part, the fact that even though both of these concepts describe natural processes, and autopoiesis is at work not just in living systems; it's at work throughout the universe, as far that goes, in the creation of more complex wholes. In a way, autopoiesis and holopoiesis overlap as a dynamic.

Where we were concerned, it meant to me our ability to to shape and create the kind of self that we wish to manifest in the world, and also that we're responsible for creating wholeness, as well. There are domains in which it's not going to happen naturally unless we are part of the nature that helps it to happen. So those are my thoughts behind David's Desk, and I wanted to emphasize the fact that we have that capacity within ourselves—we are makers.

James: Yeah, we're makers, we have choice, we have intention.

David: This brings up an interesting thought for me, which is the difference between recognizing our power to choose and our capacity as a maker. The "making" part is a combination of choice and intentionality and the willingness to take action. I can say that there are things I would choose if my life were different, but it's not and so I don't have those choices. But I still have agency, and if I'm willing to put the work into it and the effort, I can take action to change my circumstances in ways that can open up some of those choices that I might not have had otherwise. The idea of poiesis for me carries with it the sense of intentionality and action; there's something I need to do in order to bring something about—whether that's wholeness or whether it's self.

James: We're providing that direction, definition, and purpose in terms of bringing about something. The way Heidegger was talking about it was there is agency in the unconcealing—otherwise it would remain concealed.

David: Yes, exactly.

James: You have a wonderful concept of the standing activist who comes into relationship with the world, both subtle and and physical, to bring about wholeness or to bring to fruition an intention that we have. We have that intentionality, we have that ability to be poietic, to be philosophical, to be craftspeople, to create something, and that is coming from some spark within us.

David: I totally agree, James. We raise an otherwise natural process into self-awareness and into consciousness. And then it becomes a chosen process, something that is actually brought into being by our agency. There's so much in our world—I guess, there always has been, but especially it seems true these days—that would rob us of our agency. It tells us that we're victims or we're disempowered. We're told the shapes that we should take. There's so much in our world that says this is how you should be and this is who you are.

Recognizing that we have this poietic ability, we have this "making ability in ourselves, that that is our sovereignty, and that no one else is going to be responsible for making us who we are, and for bringing wholeness into the world in the unique way that each of us can do so. But if I take that responsibility, if I say, yes, I am the actor here, I am the maker, then that's a position of power, and I am empowered. That I feel—at least in my experience—brings forth into awareness more of a sense of what the soul intended as incarnation was planned and executed.

James: It truly is this sense of I'm the vehicle through which my soul's intent, my soul's gift to the world is being wrought. It's not totally due to to this personality called James, it really is James plus

a lot more that's flowing through the willingness to create, the willingness to be and to do in this world.

David: Exactly. Yes.

James: What we have to offer is so much more than what we can think of,

David: And recognizing that does not diminish what James brings to the equation, or what David brings.

James: Yes, that's very true. You have that example of being "David the writer" sitting at the desk, who is now having a conversation with the elements that are coming forward in the book. There's David, and there are the threads that are being woven together that are coming to you through inspiration and insight from a place that is more than personality.

David: Very poetic.

James: Yeah. So I'm looking forward to continuing this conversation because it sounds like this is step one of a discussion into holopoiesis.

David: Yes. And I feel it's laying a foundation for further discussion later on Sovereignty and the ways in which we can express sovereignty in our world, but also the ways in which it can be diminished unless we stand in our poiesis.

James: Yes. Well, thanks, David. I'm looking forward to the shapes that I'm going to be taking as we move forward.

David: Thank you, my friend. Me too.