

Mystery All The Way Down

We are constantly told that we are only a click away from a nearly infinite amount of information and that scientific inquiry is pushing out the frontier of knowledge at a breakneck pace. Never mind that information is distinct from wisdom and that a great deal of the information in which we are now immersed consists of trivia, vulgarity, pointless “news,” and transmissions aimed at nothing more than a moment of amusement. In any event, even the real, important information to which we now have access via the Web remains only a drop in the oceanic sea of potential information that people might someday possess. Moreover, much genuine information — the Hayekian knowledge of transient time and place — remains personal, tacit, and resistant to measurement, capture, and storage by technological means.

So, the overwhelming quality of the universe we inhabit and of our place and destiny in it remains a mystery — not only a mystery in regard to questions we might raise about these matters but, perhaps more important, a mystery in regard to questions that in our ignorance we have not yet even thought to pose. We are not the masters that we sometimes fancy ourselves, but tiny, fragile, ignorant beings lodged in an unimaginably large and mysterious frame of being and becoming. Humility about our knowledge would seem to be in order. Science is a wonderful means of discovery about the material world, but even in its proper realm — itself limited and unable to deal with questions of human meaning and value — it cannot answer many of the questions we are posing or might pose in the future. For as long as we can imagine, mystery must remain the overwhelming nature of the world we inhabit.