

Established Parameters

about Star Trek, Data, a super-antibiotic and Franciscus of Assisi

Occasionally, Debbie and I enjoy watching episodes from the iconic science fiction TV-series Star Trek. Some of those episodes are transcendental. They have to be, because the series is about the future, and the creators want to show the progress that human kind has made by that time. Not only technologically, but spiritually as well.

Data

One of the episodes¹ is titled “Hero Worship”. It is the story of a little (human) boy who is rescued by crew member Lieutenant Commander Data, and then starts to look at Data as his Messiah. The ship’s psychologist asks the boy how he is doing, and he answers with the phrase: “I am functioning within established parameters”, in stead of the normal human answer “I am fine”. The little boy is emulating the way of speaking of Data, who is an android (human robot) and talks like that.



Data

This is a fascinating answer I think, and prophetic. Let’s examine it. For the android Data it means, that all his systems function within the tolerances that his maker, the scientific engineer Noonien Soong – a famous cyberneticist and android specialist – has programmed. He made Data humanoid, but in all aspects physically and mentally superior to a human. It is Data’s quest in the series to be or become as human as possible, within those boundaries.

Nature

But what would this mean, when a human would answer like the boy did: “I am functioning within established parameters”? We cannot fall back on a cyberneticist who constructed us, we are born from our parents. The program (DNA) they gave us, originally comes from nature, which evolved in billions of years and produced us.

If we consider the entire species *homo sapiens* in its current situation, can we honestly say that it functions within the parameters established by nature?

Super Antibiotic

Opposed to what other animals and organisms that surround us in nature do, *homo sapiens* from time immemorial tries to operate outside, or separate from, the boundaries that nature imposes.

¹ Episode 111 from Star Trek *The Next Generation*.

He has retreated from nature more and more into a self constructed, technologically supported artificial shell. He doesn't live outside under the stars anymore, but in little stone and concrete cubicles. He is no longer a reciprocal part of the food chain, but has put himself at the top of this with artificial means, where he became more or less invincible and untouchable, and a menace for all other creatures and vegetation and natural sources. He almost never dies from natural causes anymore such as a lion attack, but only from his own technical contraptions like



“Bing Banging” – J.Paul Jordaans, 2014

weapons and cars, some diseases where his medical science has not found a cure for yet or many selfinflicted ailments from substance and medication abuse. He abstracted reality with language, and digitalized it with money and computers. He doesn't give back to nature and only takes away, exhausting nature on one side and polluting it with an enormous heap of waste on the other, which contaminates his natural resources (air, soil, water).

Even the organisms in his own body that try to live in symbiosis (bacteria, viruses, fungi) have a hard time, because he tries to kill those with medication for all kinds of reasons.

Man himself has become a kind of super-antibiotic, a means of reducing and killing all life in and around him in his unnatural quest to live despite of natural threats.

Hybris

Mankind delights in thinking it is the most intelligent animal, but this is only arrogance and hubris, for no single other living being is as stupid to destroy its own resources and environment. Doing so, mankind proves to be the least intelligent of all creatures that ever populated earth. Perhaps it is for this reason, that earth has not yet been visited by “alien” intelligence (as far as is officially known). As long as homo sapiens populates this planet, there is no business for them here. Lacking such visitors, tv-series like Star Trek can flourish without competition. If reality does not provide, we make it ourselves! This is good fun for the viewers, but actually it is only a kind of futuro-colonialism that suffers the same problems as the adventurism that occurred on earth for millennia, which caused humans to arrive at locations on the planet that don't suit their baldness - too cold, too hot, too dry, too wet, not enough food etcetera. And in order to survive it forced them to create artificial means and tools, at the expense of the environment, congeners and other species.

Symphony

Confronted with such an indictment, Homo Sapiens tends to defend himself by pointing out all the achievements of its species in the area's of the Arts, Culture and Science. Without having to deny those achievements, I ask myself – as one of those standing in the dock – whether this defense can be successful. It sounds like a murderer who defends himself by pointing to the beautiful symphony he composed the very morning of the murder. On close inspection, the

achievements of the Arts, Culture and Science are only of benefit to our own species – not to the rest of the planet, not to Nature.

Happiness

Homo Sapiens is causing and fighting overpopulation, wars, a climate disaster and a sense of burn out and loss of meaning. Clearly he doesn't function within established parameters anymore, for he tried to change these parameters artificially and caused disastrous imbalances. He now feels alienated and threatened by the chaos caused by his own unnatural behaviour.

Of course this raises the question: how and when will mankind ever be able to say: "I function within established parameters"? It is hard to predict when, because we have been following the wrong course for ages, and it will take quite some time to find the right track again. But there is no doubt whatsoever about the "how": as soon as our species sees through the illusion and starts acting in accordance with Nature again, instead of trying to manipulate it. Do we have to return all the way back to a time where we lived in the trees like monkeys, eating nuts, fruit and ants and only occasionally dared to descend to ground level? Or is the solution a headlong rush into artificial intelligence, to develop into a sort of android species who will solve all our current problems? Who knows. But I think the solution will not be found in going backward or forward, but in being present and earnest. Not in past or future, but right here now.

In order to find this solution, mankind has to stop its biggest mistake: seeking happiness.

Franciscus of Assisi

This doesn't mean that seeking happiness is wrong *per se*, but doing so *outside* ourselves is. Happiness is not to be found in collecting possessions at the cost of others, or in separating or manipulating nature, for we are nature ourselves. *Homo sapiens* must realize that he can and need not add to himself. Happiness is not reached by looking for it in the outside world, because we all are happiness already inside ourselves. We are life, we don't have to live it. Life will take care of itself.

As St. Francis of Assisi² already said:

"What you are looking for, is where you are looking from".

As soon as we realize that we are searching with that which we want to find, that we are already what we think we are missing, our meaningless and devastating quest will end. Only then we can find peace and joy in ourselves again and say: "I see what I Am, and it is good". Or, in words that by that time will perhaps be more appropriate: "I function within established parameters".

Every development in the area's of art, culture, science and spirituality that sprouts from this insight, will bring real prosperity and a feeling of true joy.

Perhaps Star Trek's android Data, despite his apparent artificiality, was a shining example of Nature after all.

² Assisi 1181/1182 – Portiuncola, 1226. Artist impressions of Data and St. Francis by Debbie Parkins, © 2019.



J.Paul Jordaans, *Grathem, maart 2019*
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St. Francis of Assisi