

Will Spring and Summer No Longer Come? The Future Demands a New Worldview

An interview with Ervin Laszlo
by Elizabeth A. Debold



Dr. Ervin Laszlo

Ervin Laszlo is a renaissance man for the world of the future. If that's a bit of a mind-bender, then consider this: Laszlo started his career as a pianist; became the leading proponent of systems theory as a broad philosophical framework; went beyond Darwin to elaborate general evolutionary theory; theorized the “fifth physical field” to prove an absolute dimension beyond time and space; taught in universities across America, Europe, and Asia; and now advocates for global sustainability. What led him from the concert stage to the laboratory, around the world, and across the disciplines? Interest, pure interest. “I’m interested in problems, in puzzles, in what in science are called ‘anomalies,’ ” he says matter-of-factly. “I’m really interested in things that I don’t understand.” And thanks to the incredible reach of his interest, we are all waking up to see the entire cosmos in a new light—as one living system of which we are an integral part.

Born in Hungary between the two world wars, Laszlo was a child prodigy—a brilliant pianist who let his mind soar as his hands flew over the keys. After he would finish playing, he’d rush to his typewriter to capture the insights and questions that had come to him. Eventually realizing that “you can’t be a professional concert pianist and have your mind work on philosophical scientific problems,” Laszlo gave up music to pursue science. And pursue he did: he has been chasing science out of the laboratory and snug academic circles ever since, bringing the latest discoveries to bear on the fundamental questions of human life. About a decade ago, Laszlo founded the prestigious Club of Budapest, gathering together leading minds in art, science, religion, and culture in order to evolve a new ethic for a sustainable world.

After a recent lecture at Yale University, *WIE* had the privilege of speaking with Dr. Laszlo about his vision for a paradigm shift that could change the future.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT: *You have written that we are in a “macroshift”—where the economic and ecological systems on this planet will undergo a crisis, a*

total transformation leading to utter breakdown or extraordinary breakthrough. What do you see happening? And how soon do you believe it will happen?

ERVIN LASZLO: That's what we don't know. Obviously, you can't keep having more and more people use more and more resources, and have greater and greater inequality in the distribution of those resources, without a breaking point being reached. Right now, for example, with the melting of the ice cap deflecting the Gulf Stream, it's entirely possible that in three years England will have the frigid climate of Labrador, which is at the same latitude. Spring and summer just won't come. The fact of the matter is that we live on a planet where everything is circular—whatever you do to other people or to nature eventually comes back to you. While it has always been like this, we weren't even capable of thinking this way until a couple hundred years ago.

An additional factor has to do with the behavior of complex systems: they don't change smoothly. It's impossible to tell, even theoretically, when a complex system is reaching its limit—there are so many feedbacks, so many self-correcting mechanisms that are operating. But when there is more and more stress, sooner or later you reach a tipping or bifurcation point, and all of a sudden the system just can't correct for it. We have been ignoring the pressure building in the system. As a result, we are facing an “ecol-nomic” crisis—ecological and economic simultaneously—with potentially catastrophic problems like climate change and sea level increase that may threaten our survival.

WIE: *These are problems of a magnitude and complexity that humanity has never faced before. It's intriguing that as a scientist, you're not looking toward technological solutions but, instead, toward a fundamental change in our thinking. What is this new thinking, and how can it help us?*

LASZLO: It's about a new worldview with new values adapted to living, surviving, and developing on this planet. The rise of spirituality and the rise of meditation techniques and involvement with inner growth are all part of this phenomenon. And it's already occurring, but it has to be accelerated.

Now, you can get to this new worldview by rational or intellectual means. You can get to it intuitively, through art, spirituality, or religion. And you can get there through science. If you look at developments in science, you'll find that science is increasingly recognizing that everything is connected very strongly with everything else. Everything that exists is an open system. Nothing is entirely closed or independent—everything is very sensitively connected.

The implications are enormous wherever you look. So, for example, we are not just a block of cells, like a building is a block of bricks. Most fundamentally, our living tissue is not made out of hard-core elements—atoms and molecules—it is made of waves. Thus, we are living systems that are continuously receiving and transmitting information. This information transmission is faster than any conceivable biochemical mechanism, because what happens in one part of the

organism simultaneously happens to the other part. It's constantly interactive on multiple dimensions. It's a remarkable thing—going way beyond any technical, biological, mechanistic, and materialistic concept of the organism.

As so much of the spiritual literature says: we are not limited to five slits in the tower—meaning that we don't just see the world through the five sense organs. To me, it's very obvious that consciousness is not a byproduct of the brain, produced by a complex set of neurons. It's something that's pervading the whole universe. It's there in the whole body, in all living systems, probably all the way down to the quantum level. We are living in a universe that itself is conscious. And so, we can open the roof to the sky. In creativity you open up—you have a possibility to open the roof to the sky. Then you're no longer alone. I had these moments as a young musician in concert—a sensation of being part of a larger universe. You have united with something larger than yourself.

I believe that these things will give us a new paradigm of a universe that is connected. We are far more interconnected to one another and to all elements than we ever thought. A friend who I admired very much, Jonas Salk, said that a new paradigm in science and in society is like a response of the immune system, because it enables you to think in ways that are more adapted to coping with new problems. So, if this paradigm would begin to penetrate into society, we would have more solidarity, more humanity, and a better relationship to nature and to each other, because we would recognize what William James said in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*—that we are separate on the surface but connected in the deep. Or what Buddhists know—that we are connected to the cosmos. It's also what I think Jesus meant when he said, “You have to love each other, as I love you, because you are all part of the same.” All of the great prophets have said this. But we've lost this interconnectedness in our fascination with technology, the economy, and power itself. Recognizing the subtle element connecting all of nature and its effect on our mind, our consciousness, could go a long way toward making us more human—and by the way, help us to survive the crisis that we are now facing.