

IS MODERN SCIENCE A CHALLENGE TO RELIGION?

by

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The subject that has been suggested is somewhat an involved one, and I do not know how far this would be a very appropriate theme to discuss before an audience of this kind who are basically devotees of God and aspirants of the spiritual ideal of life. However, all visions of life can be consolidated into a system of integrated organisation, and nothing conceivable can be regarded as extraneous to the methodology to be adopted in the pursuit of the spiritual ideal.

"Is there a conflict between the scientific method and the religious aspiration of the soul?" is a moot question. Generally, when people speak of science, what the common populace understands is the comfort that has been provided by applied science, such as fast travelling, telephone, telegraph, Internet, satellite, and television. These are the things that are in the minds of people when they speak of the technological advance science has made; but science does not mean technology. It is a vision of life itself.

What clashes or appears to come in conflict with religion is not the comfort that has been brought to us by these technological inventions of applied science, but the theory of science, which is something very deep, and bordering upon philosophical and metaphysical foundations of life itself.

That the world is external to everyone is the basic foundation of all scientific perception. Observation and experiment being the methods of a scientific process, it goes without saying that what is observed and experimented upon has to be outside. The outsidership of the world is a very important aspect to be considered here, but we may put a question to our own selves: "Is the world really outside us, so that what happens in the world does not affect us in any way, and the world does not care for what is happening to us in our own internal operations? Are the individual and the world, the two principles of consideration here, segregated from each other? Has the world nothing to do with the individual, and has the individual nothing to do with the world?" It looks that there is no communication possible between the individual and the world. The world may not know at all that some individual is dead and gone, and the individual is not concerned in any manner if a star in heaven cools down and extinguishes itself. Let anything happen to the heavens; what does it matter to us? But, "Is it so?" is the question.

This supposed conflict between physical science and religion may be said to have begun somewhere toward the end of the nineteenth century, when the geocentric interpretation of the heavenly bodies was replaced by the heliocentric concept on the discovery of Copernicus. This discovery clashed with the biblical belief and tradition, which holds that the earth is the foundation, and the sun and the moon and the stars move round this earth.

The second thing that opposed religion as it was understood in those days was that the world was created, according to the biblical tradition, some four thousand years ago, but the scientific discovery declares that the beginning of the world must be traced back to aeons and aeons of time process earlier, and the earth is several millions of years old. This again was a challenge to the medieval concept of religion.

But the third thing is most important. When Newton discovered the law of gravitation and concluded that everything that is happening in the physical world can be mathematically deduced by the logical process of conclusion drawn from premises, and the world which is physical in its nature is contained within the cup of space and time, and when his successor or follower Laplace wrote the five volumes on "Celestial Mechanics," the war between science and religion appeared to have commenced. We are told that the writings of Laplace were presented to Napoleon for his consideration. Napoleon seems to have declared, "Monsieur, I do not see God in your scheme"; and the answer of Laplace seems to have been, "Your highness, I have used the best of telescopes, but I have not found God anywhere." This is classical science: God has to be seen in order to be believed.

Does it follow then that whatever we see with our eyes really exists? Can we establish logically or scientifically that the world exists at all? Which scientific procedure can establish the truth of the externality of the world? Science is against any kind of hypothesis and taking for granted anything unproved. But is there any proof to substantiate the belief that the world exists, except the assertion that it is seen? The senses come in contact with what we call the panorama of the external world. That is the proof!

Here, science fumbles. It is trying to cut the ground from under its own feet. Taking anything for granted is not the beginning of science. We cannot even take for granted that the world exists unless we prove that it exists. One cannot prove one's own existence even. How do you know that you are existing? Where is the syllogism by which you have deduced the consequence of your existence from a premise? What is the proof that can establish the truth of your own existence? Bring the argument and let us see what it is that tells you that you really exist.

It was the French philosopher Rene Descartes who took up this question of doubting the existence of his own self: "Some devil may be working in my mind. It may be telling me

everything in a topsy-turvy way. The world may not be there. I may not be here. Everything is doubtful. There is no certainty of anything. I can doubt the validity of anything and everything." But he went deeper into this phenomenon of doubt and discovered that doubt is not possible unless there is someone who is to doubt; if the doubter also is to be doubted, the very fact of doubting loses its meaning. Nobody can be an utter skeptic, because that defeats the very purpose of skepticism. I am thinking, and therefore, I must be existing. This is Descartes' conclusion.

What sort of existence is mine? I am conscious that I am existing. What is that consciousness? "I am an individual; I am Mr. so-and-so," is my consciousness of existence. Is the consciousness of the existence of a personality a complete acceptance of the truth of life? He concluded that this cannot be the ultimate truth of life because there is a longing to break the boundaries of personality in everyone.

No one can tolerate finitude. The finite consciousness, which is proved by the very fact of my knowing that I am, establishes the validity of there being something which is not finite. What is it that is not the finite? It should not be a multitude of finites; it should be the Infinite. My existence as a finite being, substantiated by the indubitability of this assertion, also brings about a wider unexpected consequence, namely, the Infinite also should exist; therefore, God exists. If I am existing, God has to exist, because the concept of God is only a cosmic correlative of the acceptance of one's own being as a finite individual. The finiteness of individuality proves the infinitude of the Truth of life. This smashes the erstwhile concept of the externality of the world, and the dichotomy that is seen between the perceiver and the perceived.

Now I am touching upon the threat that theoretical science poses before religion. Here, it is also necessary to understand what religion is. Though we are trying to analyse the practical and theoretical aspects of science, do we know what religion is? Religion basically is a longing for what is

above oneself. There is something transcending myself; but for that fact, I would be a most happy person in this world. I would be carefree, secure ultimately, and perfect in every sense of the term. But no one feels that one is perfect. There is always a complaint that something is wrong, something is inadequate, something is insufficient. Finally, there is a threat of extinction of the existence of the individual himself. Death comes upon oneself.

These are the fears of the psyche, which have a basis and a truthfulness in the sense that they indicate the possibility of the existence of some realm where these insecure conditions are overcome completely.

The truths of life seem to be in several layers of self-transcendence, one rising above the other, and the lower does not satisfy until the next higher one is reached. We can never be satisfied with anything in this world because satisfaction cannot arise from that which is totally outside us. The outsideness of the values of life and the objects supposed to bring us satisfaction defeats the very attempt at acquiring any kind of permanent joy and satisfaction in this world. That from which we seek satisfaction, namely the objects of sense, are incapable of contact by the perceiver because of the fact that they are outside. We have already dubbed the world as something totally external to us, unconnected with us, and therefore, we can expect nothing from the world. Nevertheless, man runs after the pleasures of life in the form of contact with objects which are totally outside. Here is a contradiction in the very operation of desire itself. It is a self-defeating attempt of what we call human desire.

Desire is the longing to possess that which is not within oneself, but which is outside. But the outsideness of the object prevents its coming in contact with the experiencing consciousness. So every desire ends in tragedy, frustration and utter defeat, and no one ever goes from this world with the satisfaction that the attempt has succeeded. Everything is lost. The conclusion of the old man who is about to depart is that the whole life has become futile, and there is no value or

worth in anything, because he has lived a life of pursuing that which one cannot expect in a world that is totally outside.

The religious ideal is not based on the concept of the externality of the world, or the internality of anything. The world is neither outside us, nor is it inside. We are integrally related to the world; so is the case with the world in respect of our own selves. We are not sitting outside the world, we are in the world, but not inside the world as something contained in a pot. The relationship between the individual and the cosmos is of an organic whole. To put it in a more plain way, we may say it is something like the organs of the body getting related to the bodily organism itself. Though the hands and the feet can be perceived by oneself as objects of sense, they do not remain as external objects. They are organic parts of the whole body, which is the transcendence of the limbs. Thus, religion rises above the classical scientific notion of the externality of the world and touches upon what we may call the universal concept of the truth of life.

The Truth, which is the ultimate aim of the religious pursuit, is an all-comprehensive universal inclusiveness, and here it does not go hand in hand with classical physics which requires the world to be totally outside. The clash between physical science in its classical form and the religious ideal lies in this fact that on one side it is asserted that the fact of life is a universal inclusiveness; on the other side, it is asserted that it is totally outside.

Later, towards the middle of the twentieth century, the theories of science got modified systematically, and more considerate and investigative scientists found that it is impossible to know anything unless there is a relationship between the knower and the known. A totally disconnected object, as the world is, cannot be known by any individual consciousness. The involvement of the object of perception in the subjective operation of visualising is necessary in order that perception can take place at all. There must be an *en rapport* between the perceiving consciousness and the perceived object. The two stand parallel to each other.

Neither is the world above the individual, nor is the individual above the world. They are coeval in time and space. We are of the same stuff as the world is made of, and we are living in a realm which is just the physical realm of the five elements. The world is a constitution of the five physical elements - earth, water, fire, air, and ether, which also are the building bricks of the individual body. The very substance of our physical existence is the same as the substance of the physical world. The building bricks of the cosmos are the building bricks of our own personalities. Then, if that is the case, what is it that makes us feel that we are different from the world? It is an interference of a particular unintelligible phenomenon called space and time. Though classical physics from the point of view of Newton considered that space and time have nothing to do with the contents of the world, it was later discovered that space and time are vitally connected with every physical event in the world.

It is in the Taittiriya Upanishad that we hear of the evolutionary process of the cosmos. *Tasmadva etasmatatmana akashah sambhutah*: From the Universal Absolute, the Selfhood of the cosmos, space emanated. Here, we must realise that even space has a connection with the Absolute. *Akashadvayuh*: The principle of air emanated from the vibrations of space. *Vayoragnih*; Friction created by the movement of air created heat, which is fire. *Agnerapah*: The condensation of the heat of fire produced the liquid condition of the world, which is water. The solidification of water became the earth principle, *Adbhyah prithivi*. *Prithivya oshadhayah*: From the earth arise all herbs, plantations and trees, which are the foodstuff of animals and human beings. *Oshadhibhyannam*: All that we eat arises from the plants and trees and vegetables and such edible articles produced by the earth. *Annatpurushah*: The human arises as a latecomer in the process of evolution. This physical body is *annamaya*, constituted of the foodstuff which is the earth principle, which again is an evolutionary consequence of the water principle, that again of the fire principle, the fire principle of

the air principle, the air principle of the space principle, and the space principle is rooted in the Universal Existence.

So, you can know your connection with the Ultimate Reality. We are sunk deep in Ultimate Being. We are an automatic evolute in the lowest form of its expression, in its physical, material form, which is the spatio-temporal expression of the non-spatial and non-temporal Supreme Being which is Ultimate Consciousness: *satyam jnanamanantam brahma*.

Lofty is this concept. Today, the more understanding type of physical scientists have practically stumbled upon this great concept of the Upanishads. Mathematicians who declared that the world is only equations, point events, and waves of probability, or a continuum of some indescribable stuff which is incapable of description, have inadvertently been forced to accept that existence is indivisible. This conclusion should be drawn by the consciousness of the scientist himself.

The great physicist, Sir Arthur Eddington, who would not accept that there is God or such a thing as consciousness, fell upon this acceptance inadvertently, unconsciously, as it were. In his great book "The Nature of the Physical World," he utters a gospel truth: "The stuff of the world is consciousness."

Science misunderstood is a threat to religion; if you consider it only as a technological process of flying with great speed and working through satellite, television and internet, that would be a poor concept of science. Science is a noble investigative procedure, which can take us to the depths of the secrets of life, if dispassionately we go with it.

Here is an unexpected discovery of science that the stuff of the world has to be consciousness. Why is it so? It is because the world has to be known in order that it may be accepted to exist. Who is telling you that the world is existing? Your consciousness is telling this. How does the consciousness know that the world is existing, unless this

consciousness is pervading the world of perception? The imbibition of the very structure of the physical world into the structure of consciousness is the reason why we believe in the existence of a world, and that it is ours. So, there is finally no conflict between the highest discoveries of science and the noble aspirations of religion.

By "religion" we are not meaning Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism - this "ism", that "ism", and all that. These are all designated denominational forms of the true meaning of religion. Religion is the aspiration of the soul for its ultimate destiny. It is a search of the individual for the Absolute. It is a longing of the spirit within us for God Almighty. It has nothing to do with any "ism", and no one can be free from this eternal longing for perfection, which may better be called spiritual aspiration rather than a religious longing, because of the abuse of the word 'religion' in modern times, under historical circumstances, and in the studies in schools and colleges.

People who are now considering themselves as scientists and very advanced in logical thinking pooh-poo religion, thinking it is an old grandmother's story, because their idea of religion is so poor, as is their concept of science. There is a tragedy that has befallen every one of us in our not being able to be precise in our knowledge of things, whether it is scientific or religious.

There is no conflict. There was a time in the Middle Ages when physical science appeared to be clashing with the theological doctrines of the church. The church excommunicated many scientists, and they were punished with severe indictments from the Pope. An inquisition was set up in the Middle Ages - for us, very unthinkable, indeed. People were burnt, thrown into the flames by dogmatic religious followers, and science retaliated and disconnected itself from the Pope.

Today we are in a different world altogether. The conflict has ceased; at least, it is appearing to be ceasing. Though it was once said, "The East is East and the West is West, and the

twain shall never meet," I think today it is attempting to come together, and is meeting. The West and the East wish to shake hands with each other and accept their common heritage as human beings, rather than Westerners and Easterners, scientists and religious followers, seekers of God and seekers of material values.

There are several textbooks written these days, where powerful monographs have gone into the depths of this harmony that is already existing between the external and the universal. Though the external may be different from the internal, it cannot be external to the Universal. The Universal is a transcendent element which rises above both the subjective side and the objective side. We cannot even know that there is anything outside us unless there is a third element which is not ourselves, and not the object that is perceived, also.

Because of the externality of the object of perception and the internality of consciousness, there is no connection between the two, and knowledge is impossible; no one can know that anything is. But there is a transcendent principle. Eastern thought considers this as *adhidaiva*, a spiritual principle operating as a transcendental element - unknown and unperceivable, but operating between the subjective side and the objective side.

The subjective side is called the *adhyatma*, the objective is *adhibhauta*, and the transcendent is *adhidaiva*. All the three have to work together in order that there may be perception at all. But we are so poor in our understanding that we know little of ourselves, and much less of the world, and nothing at all of this transcendental operation. Gods are behind our eyes and ears, our nose and tongue, and our sensations. These gods which are the denizens of heaven are the operators of this mechanism called the physical body with its sense organs. It is a presumption on the part of the egoistic individual to think that he or she is working. The workers are the great divine beings which are transcendent *adhidaivas* - gods in heaven, as we call them. But they are

invisible. They are invisible because they are neither inside nor outside; they are "above".

Here is a path-finding direction for both science and religion, so that if they work together in harmony they can create a world of joy and satisfaction that life is worth living. Do you want to depart from this world with the tragic feeling that nothing has been achieved? The world has eluded the grasp of everybody. Kings have come, empires rose and fell, and the earth has not changed. It appears to be so because of our wrong evaluation of the historical process. History is actually a natural process of the cosmos. It is the total operation taking place in the whole of creation, even when a little event is taking place somewhere in a corner of the world. Our learned speaker mentioned about quantum mechanics and the discoveries of relativity, etc., which highlighted the astounding truth of sudden and simultaneous action taking place in the universe. Every event is a simultaneous event. It is not taking place yesterday and tomorrow; it is just now, everywhere.

Did not the poet tell us that we cannot touch the petals of a flower in our garden without disturbing the stars in the heavens? It is not poetry; it is the truth. Every event is a universal event. Anything that is taking place anywhere takes place everywhere, and we are living throughout the universe, in all parts of the cosmos. Our individuality is not confined merely to this earth planet. It is everywhere in different parts.

Scientists today have discovered the possibility of worlds within worlds, and the possibility of many worlds, and our being inhabitants of all these worlds simultaneously. "Simultaneously" is the word we have to underline. We are not inhabiting these many worlds in succession - today here, tomorrow somewhere else. At one stroke, in a timeless manner, we inhabit the whole cosmos, and we are world citizens working in different forms. Unknown to our own selves, one part of ourselves is here on this earth performing

activities in this way, and another part of our own archetypal nature is in the heaven, even today.

Our higher self in the heaven is pulling us and summoning us: "Come on. You are not here, where you appear to be. You are in the heaven." That is why we are longing for the higher values of life, and we can never be satisfied; we are always unsatisfied because we are not in this world. We are really in some other world - not only in some other world, we are in all the worlds. This universal operation of individuals is a great discovery of modern quantum mechanics, which is quite different from that science which appears to be in conflict with religion. Science has become spirituality; physics has become metaphysics.

This is a wonder toward the end of the twentieth century that we are seeing; we believe that God shall come. The kingdom of heaven is within us; it is within us, because it is everywhere. How can a large kingdom be contained within our little frame of physical existence? It is because the inwardness of our existence is not actually the physical inwardness. The whole universe can be within us.

It is the Chandogya Upanishad which tells us that whatever is happening in the outside world is happening within us. If the sun is shining there, it is shining inside, also. If it is hot outside, it is hot inside, also. If it is raining outside, it is raining inside, also. If there is thunder there, there is thunder here, also. But we are so stupid that we cannot realise these events are taking place within us, commensurate with all the things that are happening outside in the world.

We are the world; thus, the discovery of science today tells us. This is what the great Yoga Vasishtha scripture tells us. This is what the Upanishads tell us. It is not merely the twain of West and East that is coming together; God and man are shaking hands with each other in this vast kingdom of universal creation.