

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

by

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The world we live in is mostly utilitarian, for to it utility has been the test of truth. If something is workable and useful, it is also meaningful and therefore real. This is sometimes identified with the pragmatic viewpoint, a purely working hypothesis on the basis of sensibility akin to animal perception. The subhuman instinct seen in animals functions upon the logic of pure utility – whatever satisfies hunger and sex and guards the instinct for life is real. But in man there is an additional factor: ego – whatever satisfies it also is real. Satisfaction of these urges is finally a factor of utility, and they have to be real in order that their satisfactions and their counterparts be real.

But, what is meant by being real? Tentatively speaking, for a thing to be real it has to persist in time and space as judged by a centre of experiencing consciousness. Now, this drags the factor of time and space also into the issue of reality. But what is the reason behind this judgment that to be real is to persist in space and time? We have to conclude that this is the only way in which the experiencing consciousness can decide the nature of reality. This position seems to land us in a question that we shall be discussing shortly.

It was realised by some that pure utility cannot always be the test of truth. Perception of mirage water under the notion that it is real water may bring to the mind of the thirsty man a sense of comfort. But, though the comfort may be real, the cause of it is unreal. A lunch served in dream may appease the hungry man in

dream. A false news of having won a victory or earned a lottery may bring a satisfaction whose cause is unreal. An untrue news of the death of the only son of a mother may even kill her, and while her heart-break is real its cause is unreal. Occurrences of this kind and the usual commonsense view of life have made people hold that truths have to correspond to facts. Beyond utility is correspondence.

Now, the idea that correspondence to fact is the test of truth implies that we are capable of knowing fact, and hence truth. But what is fact? Again, we stumble upon our criterion of persistence in space and time. This sounds almost like a vicious circle from which we cannot escape. Even a phantom can persist in space and time, such as mirage water. There seems to be, in the end, no criterion of knowing truth if we are to rely merely on the utility theory or the correspondence theory of truth.

Thinkers have held that the test of truth, ultimately, is coherence. The parts should organically fit themselves into the whole. Utility and correspondence do not satisfy this test because while they seem to satisfy one part of the knowledge-process, they conflict with the other parts. The process of knowing is a self-related, organic whole in which the parts are mutually consistent with one another. There should be no contradiction within its constitution and it should not be transcended by any other experience. Else, it would not be truth but its opposite. Facts should not only be satisfying to the senses, mind, intellect and feeling, thus serving the purpose of utility, but also correspond to existent facts. But the existence of the fact should not be merely tentative; it should also have been existent in the past and should continue in the future. The mirage water, for example, does not exist in the future, for when one approaches it, it recedes from one's contact and then vanishes at the particular point of difference in the circumstances that caused its appearance. It should also be self-consistent and consistent with the experience of which it forms a part. We say that waking experience is real because we see the same things throughout our life and the objects of waking life have been seen to be workable to our personality as also stand uncontradicted in the past, present and future of our span of life. They satisfy 'me, you and everyone else', at the same time. They are coherent to the practical system of our judgment of truth, viz., they

are not self-discrepant and are true for all persons, at all times and in every way.

This analysis would amount to saying that there can be no other standard of judgment of truth than what is provided in waking life. We usually forget that there is a subtle snag even in this relative truth of coherence (Vyavaharika Satta). That objects are mutually consistent with others' experience of them in terms of persistence in space and time is the conclusion of a particular observer to whom everything else stands in the position of the observed. How does one feel sure that others exist and that space and time do exist except by reference to oneself, to one's bodily conditions, set-up of the sensory organs, mental state and emotional reactions? Often we hear of objective facts, objective reference, and extramental realities. This is a great prejudice of what is known as the scientific way of thinking, which is slowly getting blasted by serious thinkers in the field of science itself, who have latterly come to realise that no scientific observation or conclusion can be regarded as final, so long as they are the outcome of approaches made by the consciousness which works in terms of the sensory and mental conditions of the scientist's personality which acts like a prism through which the consciousness gets deflected, diversified, mutilated and given a highly artificial structure and form. This would mean that truth as such cannot be known either by science or by philosophy, so long as the methodology employed by these techniques cannot be extricated from the terms and conditions of the psycho-physical organism which limits consciousness and prevents it from knowing truth as it is. Observation, and experiment, logic and argumentation are thus futile, in the end, in one's search for truth.

But who comes to this decision is a moot question. It is nothing but an inwardly felt self-certainly which is inseparable from consciousness, which does not stand in need of any external proof or verification and splashes forth hints of its absolute independence even when it passes through the contortions of operation through the body and mind. There is no objective way, in the modern scientific sense of the term, of knowing truth, for all 'objectivity' is the result of consciousness operating through a medium whose structure would definitely condition it. This would again imply that truth is realised in pure subjectivity of consciousness, which is

divested of all externality: in fact truth is consciousness. This selfhood of consciousness is inclusive of the whole of truth. Truth is, thus, non-objective, because consciousness is non-objective.

There is a great difference between solipsism and this position that naturally devolves from an analysis of experience, because consciousness here is not the subject of an object but the pure subject, independent of objects and, so, universal: it is Absolute. Here philosophy and science meet together and experience stands undivided by the difference of subject and predicate or the knower and known. This pure experience free from the limitations of body, mind and its objects is naturally transcendent to all of them though it is present in every one of them. This is the God of religion, the Absolute of philosophy, truth which has been the goal of the quest of all thinkers through the ages. This is the supreme object of the meditation by the Yogis. Self-realisation is thus co-extensive and co-eternal with Godrealisation.

The culture of mankind has to take note of this basic principle, and the sciences and the arts have to be consistent in their pursuits with this ultimate aim of existence. The crass externality of approach adopted by materialism is as far from truth as the poles standing apart. The sciences of man and the technological enterprises based on them are bound to take man far away from truth and drown him in sorrow if these are to constitute merely a means to outer comfort and aggrandisement. It also follows that hatred of every kind, prejudice and war are the noises made by the passing clouds of untruth which try to darken the sun of consciousness that is divinity. For the same reason the modern mechanistic psychology of education is faulty, because it is soulless. The mind carries the dead weight of earthly learning and knowledge of objects, while its life is slowly being sapped from within by its dissociation from truth. The way to the discovery of ultimate Truth rises gradually from unselfish understanding to mutual cooperation, from cooperation to harmony of existence, and from harmony to the indivisible Absolute.