

Science Contribution to Spirituality¹

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Introduction

Talking about Science – the **How** of Life – and Spirituality – the **Why** of Life – brings almost immediately a sense of dichotomy at minimum, and often of conflict or antinomy. This is mainly the result of the divergent developments between the two. It has not always been the case in human societies. There was even a moment in time where there was no differentiation between the two, where they were but two facets of the same human quest: the understanding of Life. This dichotomy illustrates also a key characteristic of the human constitution. On one side, the use of our capabilities to sense, to measure the universe, together with our mental capabilities to model all our perceptions; and on the other side, the non-mental aspect, driven by intuition which gives access to other dimensions of Reality. The first is called Natural Science, the other one Universal Science.

So, Science, as well as Spirituality, is the search for the understanding of Nature, of Reality. This is exactly how HPB defined Science: *“Science is an abstract of every fact, a comprehension of every truth within the scope of human research and intelligence.”*²

In a similar way, Professor Einstein expressed it as: *“Science is the century-old endeavor to bring together by means of systematic thought the perceptible phenomena of this world into as thorough-going an association as possible. To put it boldly, it is the attempt at the posterior reconstruction of existence by the process of conceptualization.”*³

Science and Spirituality processes

The Source of Spirituality is, most of the time, the fruit of Revelations, which sources are lost in time, brought to humanity by “divinities or their servants” and which contents are carried on by Traditions from one period of time to the next one, and from one continent to the other one.

In most of the religious Traditions, these Revelations were veiled, masked, concealed, to give birth to, on one side the Mysteries, which access to was reserved and controlled, and, on the other side Theology, a “legislation”, a “codex” aimed for the people at large in order for the clergy to exercise temporal power over them. Of course, this is an oversimplification of what Mysteries and Theologies are. At the end of the day, Spirituality, above the intellectual concept, is the boat which carries and guides us all along evolution toward the next step of our pilgrimage on this manifested world.

What is important to keep in mind for the sake of this discussion is the word Revelation. It is a mode of knowledge acquisition which sole substantiation, according to the “Guardians of Faith”, is a Divine or “Supernatural” source. This is one of the major difficulties in front of the scientific

¹ Lecture delivered at the 37th European Congress – 30 July to 3 August – Paris, France.

² BCW VIII What is in name? p 13

³ Albert Einstein – Ideas and Opinions

community. Madame Blavatsky had identified it when introducing her opus magnum, the Secret Doctrine. She wrote: “... it claims consideration, not by reason of any appeal to dogmatic authority, but because it closely adheres to Nature, and follows the laws of uniformity and analogy.”⁴

She also added: “It is above everything important to keep in mind that no theosophical book acquires the least additional value from pretended authority.”⁵

Natural Science is the resultant of the development of human intellect skills, based on observation, analysis, modeling, inference and cross-checking. It is mainly based on logic, with mathematics as its supporting language. A key characteristic of Science is what we can call the “lineage mechanism”. Any scientific discovery, whatever ground-breaking it is, is always the end result of a chain of previous scientific discoveries. And most of the time, using the same thought scheme: it starts with an observation which cannot be explained by the current set of scientific laws. History of Science seems to be full of “genius” who suddenly start a revolution in scientific concepts by discovering new models, new ways to interpret observations. In fact these discoverers are sitting on the shoulders of all the past discoverers, and it gives them the capability to see further.

From time to time, it may look like a complete break-down, like the General Relativity of Albert Einstein which redefined the basic concepts of Time and Space, and demonstrated that any action at a distance cannot be instantaneous.

A similar “scientific revolution” started with Max Planck and the new physics – quantum physics – which emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. This was the beginning of a bigger earthquake because it shattered some strong common sense understanding like the concept of causality, and the fact that the localization and momentum of a particle cannot any more be identified completely, which means that we cannot anymore define the movement of a particle. But a close look at the history of these discoveries shows a very tight link with previous physics, even if they provide with completely different models.

What is important to remember is the mechanism which supports modern scientific researches: observation, measure, model elaboration, predictions and cross-checking with new observation...

The key-word in this approach is **consistency, coherence**. If any observation does not match with model or prediction, then the door is fully open for new science. There is no censorship. Any theory can be challenged. Of course, real life and all our societies, including the scientific societies, have their censorship and reluctance to accept new concepts. This is part of the difficulty for the Universal Science to penetrate inside these areas. But, at least, we have reached a period of time where new scientific discoveries can be aired and discussed openly.

The key question here is: can Spirituality alone or Natural Science alone lead us to the complete understanding of Nature or Reality? Probably not, otherwise we would not be discussing it today here. The two aspects may be complementary, like the particle and the wave aspects of quantum physics. Ultimate Reality is a holistic whole which approach requires a holistic research method, encompassing the integral constitution and capabilities of Man.

Science contribution to Spirituality

The first fundamental proposition from the Secret Doctrine is the “Omnipresent, Eternal,

⁴ Preface to the S.D. (p. viii)

⁵ Introductory to the S.D. (p. xix)

Boundless, and Immutable Principle” symbolized by absolute abstract Space and absolute abstract Motion. During the manifestation phase of it, this is the global substratum in which we are evolving. Therefore, nothing exists outside of it, and the universe must be ruled by one uniform set of laws. This should be simple to understand. But we, as sparks of consciousness in our evolution rings, have added so much mental complexity and bias that a single Truth became infinity of different individual truths. Spirituality has degenerated in religions and philosophies which went away from real human experiences. They have the tendency to become crystallized dogmas which do not provide any more a real support to the pilgrim on his way. Of course, there has been and there is still awaken souls capable to experience and transmit the core of the teachings, but a quick look to the current state-of-the-world shows us they must be very few and well hidden from the masses. Religion based on revelation does not leave any room for discussion and reconciliation with day-to-day facts and observations. Or, more accurately, they provide stereotyped answers for all questions, and if the answer is too far or too opposite to the recurrent facts, then it retreats behind the veil of the revelation.

On its side, Science had first to overcome, in the Western world, the yoke of secular judo-Christian tradition which controlled fiercely any attempt to challenge its dogmas. It took centuries and martyrdoms to emerge from obscurity. But then, when the door started to open, the pendulum went on full stop on the other side. Too happy to have killed the anthropomorphous God who had persecuted them for centuries, the 19th century scientists declared that Science was or would be able to explain everything, including consciousness. It was the time of the positivists, with Arthur Comte as their leading figure. It did not last long, but enough to crystallize the materialistic philosophy of life, at least in the scientific community. It was also the time where Madame Blavatsky published her Opus Magnum – the Secret Doctrine – announcing (in her preface) that: *“The aim of this work may be thus stated: to show that Nature is not “a fortuitous concurrence of atoms”, and to assign to man his rightful place in the scheme of the Universe”*. Since this time, Science made tremendous progress, not only on discoveries and theories, but also in its philosophy of Science. The positivist attitude largely disappeared, even if it still resonates in some laboratories, and many of the Science discoverers of the last fifty years have a much more humble attitude in front of Reality. They publicly admitted (not all of them) that they, just do not know about the universe fundamental principles.

Richard Feynman (Lectures on Physics – 1963) wrote and was teaching that: *“It is important to realize that in the today physics, we have absolutely no knowledge of what energy is, and why it is conserved”*. Of course, we know how to measure energy, we know the transformation schemes, but we have no (scientific) idea about what energy is. The same can be said about most of the fundamental processes observed and measured on Earth, and now in the nearby space, planets and other bodies like comets and asteroids. One of the fundamental one, gravitation, remains a mystery, even if we can measure and predict its action on massive bodies. The current theory expects the discovery of the graviton, the particle which transmits the gravitational interaction, and a lot of efforts have been deployed to detect gravitational waves since more than twenty years, with no success as of today.

All these facts have opened up the Pandora box for new theories and many cosmological models are proposed every month for testing. The interesting consequence of “not knowing” is an opening of the scientific mind, even if it concerns only a minority of scientists.

As an example, David Bohm, physicist and philosopher, developed the concept of “wholeness” in an attempt to describe Reality in combining the ancient Greek philosophy and new scientific theories like quantum physics. Somehow like what the hylozoists taught long time ago.

He wrote in the 80': "*... reality can be considered as in essence a set of forms in an underlying universal movement or process... our general world view is itself an overall movement of thought, which has to be viable in the sense that the totality of activities that flow out of it are generally in harmony, both in themselves and with regard to the whole of existence.*"⁶

This is an example of Science contribution to Spirituality, where the holistic approach allows for a greater thought scheme to encompass more than pure observation and induction.

Way forward

We can sense that, after a period of infancy, Science can converge towards Spirituality for the benefit of humanity. Madame Blavatsky was very clear on this possibility. She also put forward the conditions for success: "*So far as Science remains... "organized common sense"; so far as its inferences are drawn from accurate premises – its generalizations resting on purely inductive basis – every Theosophist and Occultist welcomes respectfully and with due admiration its contributions to the domain of cosmological law.*"⁷

And on the other side, Science, we have also scientists convinced of the added-value of Science for Spirituality. Albert Einstein said: "*By way of the understanding [through the rational unification of the manifold that it encounters to the smallest possible number of mutually independent conceptual elements], man achieves a far-reaching emancipation from the shackles of personal hopes and desires, and thereby attains that humble attitude of mind toward the grandeur of reason incarnated in existence, and which, in its profoundest depths, is inaccessible to him.*"

So, the next question is: Why it does not work? Why most of the scientific community stays away from Spirituality in their scientific works? Why, when some scientists decide to explore new territories, including the study of unknown forces or phenomena, they are ostracized?

These are key questions which need an answer before a solution can be identified.

We have already seen the existing differences between methodologies, intellect vs intuition/revelation. But this does not prevent bridges to be built, there is enough space and common ground to work on it. Let's have a look on some current examples.

Theosophy teaches that all the cells of a human body are replaced by new ones every seven years. Science has witnessed this process of replication, and came with the following: we have roughly 100,000 billion of cells inside our body. Linked together, they would represent a chain of 15,000 kilometers. Every day, in our body, 20 billions of cells will die and will be replaced by new ones. The regeneration cycles take from some hours for the blood cells to fifteen years for the ribs bones. Which give an average around ten years. So, this process is recognized by both Wisdom Traditions and Science with a similar order of magnitude for the rate.

Another example, about one of the key process in our cosmos: gravitation. Madame Blavatsky clearly highlighted the fact that gravitation has fundamentally an electrical nature. In 2006, two Swedish scientists, Pr Zheng-Johansson and Per-Var Johansson published a completely new theory based on the properties of the vacuum polarization, and coherent with most of the last century major discoveries, introducing a new model for the structure of the vacuum: "*Vacuum is uniformly filled of electrically neutral particles, called vacuons which are essentially completely at rest in the absence of external disturbance. A vacuon is composed of an n-vaculeon and a p-vaculeon, endowed with electrical charges.*"

⁶ David Bohm – Wholeness and the Implicate Order

⁷ H.P.B. - Secret Doctrine, Addenda to Book I, p. 477

There are many other examples of “door-opening” from the scientific community. Maybe it is a sign that the time is ripe for building some bridges between Science and Spirituality.

But a key roadblock remains to overcome, a roadblock quite difficult to pinpoint and to resolve: what modern psychology call *the ego*. It is one of key characteristic of man’s constitution, at the heart of almost all our thoughts, speeches and actions, with a very tricky and subtle behavior. It grabs everything which comes to its attention through the senses and the memory, just to keep existing. It weights any situation in order to decide what is best for the sake of its survival. It is fueled by desires and it is driving us and therefore the world towards: “More for me”. This is the Lord of Materialism, the Lord of the Lies.

All Spiritualities, including Theosophy, have identified this as the major point to be resolved for the Dawn of Divine Light in our existence. “Taming the mind and discerning the real” is one of the favorite themes in Buddhism. Saint John of the Cross, together with most of the Christian Mystics, recommended devoting all thoughts, speeches and actions to the Divine.

Conclusion

To conclude, Science and Spirituality are two complementary aspects of human development and they have a common goal, to understand Nature or Reality. Spirituality, based on revelation and realization, is all-encompassing. Science is a step-by-step, mainly intellectual process, working inside a limited number of dimensions (or plans). But both scientist and spirituals are first of all men, together with their limitations at the current stage of development of humanity, including the ego.

Having a common goal and a common vehicle, they must cross-feed each other and converge.

For that to happen, there is a need for a common set of values, a common language and bridges between the key concepts of spirituality and the facts and discoveries of Science.

To quote again Albert Einstein: “*Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.*”

He had a realistic and profound understanding of Reality, and, to the question about it, “Do you think that we shall ever probe the secret?”, he answered: “*Possibly, we shall know a little more than we do now (1929). But the real nature of things, that we shall never know, never.*”

And finally, we need to be realistic and patient. On both sides, we have to be ready to challenge some of the “beliefs” and some of the scientific models. Life is a living process which unfolds itself on a continuous basis. Life is a wonderful evolving mechanism. Let us flow inside its magnificent current, equipped with a luminous life-vest, before we can walk on the waters...