



Can we Resolve the Tension between Science and Spirituality? – The Double Star of Truth

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In his opening editorial: The Challenge of the New (Network Review, Summer 2010), the newly appointed Chairman, Professor Bernard Carr stated that ‘the polarity between science and spirituality has, of course, always been a central issue for the SMN. Maintaining the right balance is not easy...’ Here is a story that suggests how the problem of ‘maintaining the right balance’ might be resolved by bringing together the scientific and rational with the spiritual and mystic, plus the relationship between the two.

Once upon a time in ancient India a newly-wedded couple are pointed out in the sky at night, by a Brahmin priest, a star called ‘Vashistharundhati.’ It is a pleasant little ceremony and supposed to be auspicious. The ancient records in their legends link this star with conjugal happiness.

First the science (astronomy) aspect of the legend: the Hubble telescope, launched in 1990, has enabled us to discover that this star is the double star, Sirius; that is, it consists of two separate stars situated so close to each other as to appear a unit to our naked eyes – see the top picture. Moreover, it is also a binary star; that is, the pair revolve around a common centre of gravity.

Now the spiritual aspect of the legend: How did the ancient priests know that Sirius was a double star without the benefit of powerful telescopes? Were they drawing upon some hidden spiritual faculty of extended consciousness to access information unavailable to the physical senses?

Finally the relationship between the scientific and the spiritual: Vashistha was a great sage who lived thousands of years ago, and Arundhati was his wife. Their marriage was a model of its kind in perfect conjugal happiness and mutual spiritual assistance. Can we see a wonderful inner significance in the old Eastern custom? For the marital happiness of Vashistha and his wife was due to their having found a common centre of ‘spiritual gravity’. *Although their individual lives were different, they were dedicated to a common purpose.*

In our joint explorations into such subjects as truth, reality, and the meaning and purpose of life, we are talking of a true marriage or a dance of the scientific with the spiritual. Only the poorest of dancers will step on each other’s toes. So for example, a person who, imagining himself to be spiritual, but without any qualifications in nuclear science, chooses to pontificate to a renowned physicist that his ideas about atomic nuclei are all wrong would be treading on a scientist’s toes. Conversely, an orthodox biologist with no shred of mystical or inner, subjective experience strutting like a game-

cock telling the whole world that consciousness is purely material epiphenomena in the brain and that any notion about divinity is a congenital delusion, such a scientist would be treading on all ten toes of a truly spiritual person.

What does all this mean?

The Double Star of Truth

The centre picture attempts to show that each discipline (namely, science and spirituality) has its appropriate boundaries, and each has its legitimate sphere or orbit of influence. *They are complementary and not opposed, and still less, antagonistic.* Their common centre of gravity – the third factor or pivot point in their marriage is the investigation of Truth, but each has adopted different, but complementary philosophies and methodologies, both of which are needed. Truth however is not an opinion or preconceived assumption. In fact C. S Lewis’s advice to Bede Griffiths was always to argue TOWARDS the Truth; not from the standpoint of assuming that you know the truth to start with.

The spiritual approach is generally deductive, i.e. top-down, working according to the Platonic method of moving downwards from the general to the particular. Such truth however, from our standpoint, since we can’t verify it directly for ourselves, is in the nature of a Revelation given to us by some advanced sage or mystic.

The scientific method is invariably inductive, i.e. bottom-up method, working according to the Aristotelian system of moving upwards from the particular to the general. In other words the building blocks of the micro make up the macro; for example in biology, information flows (or is allowed on principle to flow) only one way from the genotype to the phenotype, from the cell to the soma. Truth is acquired not by revelation but hard earned Experiment and Experience. By doubting anything that cannot be tested by independent experiment, science works inexorably, albeit laboriously towards the truth.

Again, both approaches are needed and both are in evidence in the several Mystics and Scientists conferences

at Winchester that I have attended over the years. Arguably, the finest example of a perfectly seamless blend of the scientific with the mystical is the great Newton. Apropos, at the 2011 Mystics and Scientists conference David Lorimer reminded us that there has never been any clash between first rate scientists and first grade mystics. The interminable clashes and dichotomies only involve their second rate equivalents. (We need not worry about third rate versions!)

The See-Saw of Inquiry into Truth

Let's look at this Revelation-Experience tension like this. Reverting to the Chairman's editorial remarks, note that he uses the term 'polarity', not opposition or conflict. With a polarity, the poles are united by a common factor – the search for truth, encapsulated in the SMN mission to provide 'a forum for pursuing truth, wherever it leads', with no dogma or creed.¹

The picture at the bottom shows a see-saw with science and spirituality on opposite ends. Truth can be attained by:

- Experience – the dicta of modern science grounded on logic and empiricism; or
- Revelation – the ancient wisdom tradition drawing upon intuition and insight, being the teachings of sages, and the time-honoured method of instruction in spiritual schools.

Another way of looking at Experience and Revelation is Doubt and Faith. They are not mutually cancelling: both are needed. What we accept on faith and trust must be tested by experiment and experience. However the closer we advance towards Truth, the narrower the gap becomes between doubt and faith; for what need of either when we master the art of looking-experiencing the Actual, the Real?

We may forever place our faith (and it is a faith born from experience) in the rigour of science to bring us down to earth, to ground our intuitions and test them by experiment and experience. But can there be any doubt that by turning to the spiritual and mystical we may be lifted beyond and above the confining and obscuring veil of blind materialism to reveal the source and noumenon of evanescent matter, to apprehend how physics may well be embedded in the matrix of metaphysics.

Before we close let me say that truth by revelation does not just mean a teaching from some high source or a book or a supposed Master. That's second hand. In the final analysis it means the real INNER EXPERIENCE – Truth from within by acute contemplation and meditation, the time honoured way of the true mystical scientist (again citing Newton as arguably the finest example). In point of fact, all the sages since time immemorial have told us that what they teach they have learnt from experience. Fine at their lofty level, but as we said earlier, for us many rungs down the ladder of spiritual attainment, what they give out must necessarily be in the nature of revelation, which has to be tested by us in the laboratory of life. We have to earn and deserve the experience. We talk a lot about evidence-based spirituality. Absolutely so. But a major proviso is this: are we qualified to understand the evidence, or when evidence is presented do we, like so many invincible materialists, look the other way?

To close with the words of another legendary scientist (surely also a mystic at heart) who revolutionised our ideas about space and time, Albert Einstein, who said:

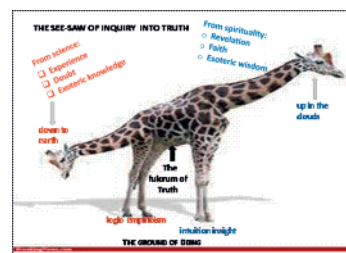
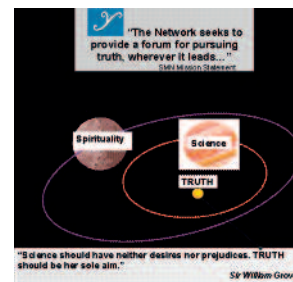
He who delights in the tension between apparently opposing points of view is the mark of a man who has attained to wisdom. [My italics].

Let us therefore celebrate our differences, welcome with open arms the ensuing tension and enjoy the headaches due to the inevitable stresses and strains between science and spirituality. For the one checks and balances, tests and counterbalances the excesses of the other. Neither one is superior to the other since *both* are needed for a balanced inquiry into truth, but in a wise proportion depending upon the context of such inquiry. By means of a healthy tension the SMN mission of 'truth wherever it leads' is best served and the apparent conflict between science and spirituality is not solved, but amicably resolved.

Great spirits have always found violent opposition from mediocrities. The latter cannot understand it when a man does not thoughtlessly submit to hereditary prejudices but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence.

Of all the communities available to us there is not one that I would devote myself to, except for the society of true searchers, which has very few living members at any time.

– Albert Einstein



Edi D. Bilimoria, has worked as a Consultant to the petrochemical, oil and gas, aerospace, transport, and construction industries. He has been Project Manager and Head of Design for major innovative projects such as the Channel Tunnel, London Underground systems and offshore installations. A student of the perennial philosophy for some forty years, Edi's work has been published extensively in the fields of science, engineering and the esoteric philosophy. His book The Snake and the Rope was awarded the Network prize in 2008. For the past two years he worked as Education Coordinator for The Theosophical Society in Australia. A great lover of classical music, Edi is a choral singer and a life-long, active and dedicated pianist.

¹Or for that matter in the injunction about absolute freedom of thought implied in the motto of The Theosophical Society 'There is no religion higher than truth'.