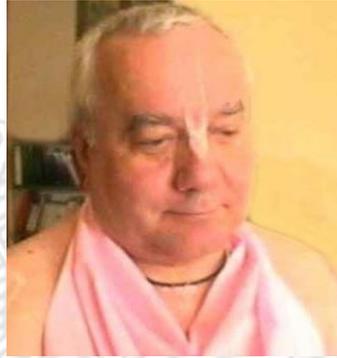


# The Scientific Understanding of Mercy

By  
Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Ph.D.

In order to comprehend the true unity of knowledge we have to consider more than our individual and collective finite perspectives. The sum of finite or partial perspectives is always going to be finite or partial. What does it mean to go beyond such perspectives, and what is the means for doing so? Most importantly, can such a leap beyond individual and collective finite perspectives be scientific?



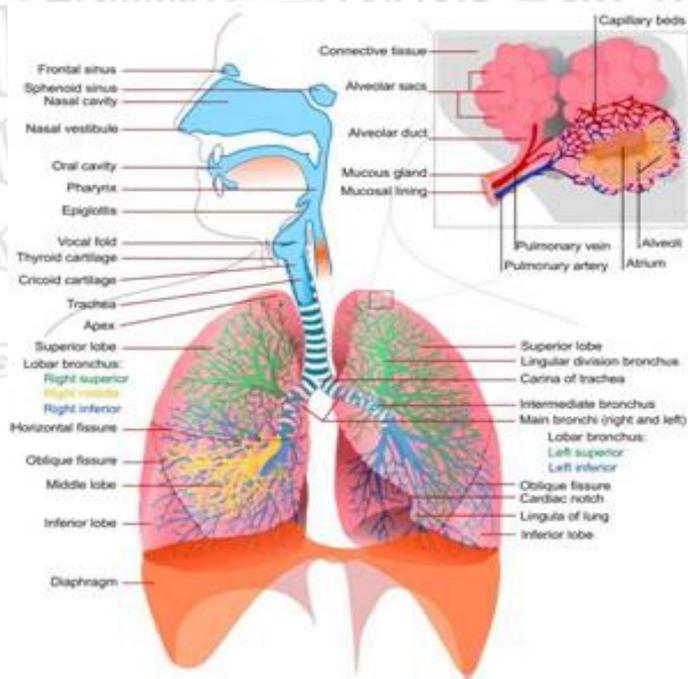
The general method of modern science is primarily analytic. We take what is given to us as integral and whole, and we separate it into constituent parts of which (we assume) the original whole is a composition thereof. Each individual may take the same concrete whole, by which I mean a unified multiplicity of parts or a unity-in-diversity, and analyze or divide it in a variety of ways, no two of which may be exactly the same.

For instance, a book may be analyzed in terms of its physical characteristics - its paper type, weight, whiteness, etc., or in terms of its chemical composition, or in terms of properties of the ink that is pressed onto the paper. One may calculate the statistical occurrence of certain letters that appear in the book, or words, or specific grammatical formations. In this way, the same object may be analyzed from a variety of perspectives right up to the meaning the author had intended, or the reader interpreted from the book.

We can claim that the book itself is the concrete unity of these various perspectives. But could we reproduce the book from the various perspectives of our individual analyses of it?

*"...Son of man, You cannot say, or guess, for you know only A heap of broken images..."(T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land)*

Is it possible to conceive that in their own development of culture, the ancient civilizations of Man already confronted this real problem of the unity of knowledge, and long ago realized the inherent defect of this finite approach. Thus they chose a different method for comprehending "what is" by a more holistic science that we, today, call Religion or spiritual science. No one can say that ancient Greek philosophy and science were not based on reason. The elaborate philosophical, scientific and spiritual Sanskrit treatises of India all present a viewpoint that is similar yet also quite distinct from the modern analytic perspective, in that it forms the basis of much of India's religious tradition. Did they consider their methods any less scientific than the analytic tradition, or more scientific?



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T. S. Eliot

And if the latter, could that be justified?

Much can be learned from our own modern experiences if we take a more sympathetic view of the rational merit of the non-analytic viewpoint. Accounts of scientists within the modern period of science tell of inspirations and insights that do not arise from any rational method of deduction or induction, yet play the major role in scientific discovery and theory. The question of why Quantum Mechanics seems to be so successful in accounting for observable phenomena may have more to do with how knowledge comes to us from reality than with anything we have to do with creating knowledge from our own fertile brains. Is such an idea so far beyond the ken of rational thought?

Within the period after Descartes that is considered modern philosophy, Spinoza conceived the Absolute Truth as possessing the attributes of thought as well as extension. Schelling conceived Nature as "petrified intelligence." And Hegel showed that the Absolute Reality was thinking Subject as much as Substance. The conclusions that they reached were achieved by great rational effort. Yet modern philosophy has taken the one-sided approach of the cogito - the "I think" of the finite individual, and placed that in confrontation with a truth that is merely unthinking substantiality only.

To conceive a sentient Absolute leads us to contemplate the possibility that we could be recipients or perhaps participants of knowledge rather than producers of it. For example, in the Bhagavad-gita (15.15), Krishna (the Personified Absolute) tells Arjuna, "From Me come remembrance, knowledge and forgetfulness." This study wishes to demonstrate that a rational and experiential (or scientific) process is involved in comprehending and accessing such a non-finite source of knowledge. It is not based on assuming superiority to "what is" and attempting to grasp it within our fist or mind. Rather, the opposite attitude is implied - a submission to or letting one's attention sink into the object of study and allowing the object, as it were, to speak for itself - "If they become silent, the stones will cry out." (Luke 19:40).

If the Absolute - the Truth - is intelligent, rational, and systematically organized, then it must be scientifically accessible, i.e. amenable to our own reason and experience. What is required is neither the loss of reason nor experience, the two fundamental principles upon which science is based. What is needed is an antithetical change in the attitude that we bring to science. But this change is not as drastic as it may at first appear.

In a real sense, scientific thought is controlled by the object, or by our experience of the object. If an object contains Sulphur, our experiments will show the presence of that element and any theoretical conclusions must be based on that evidence.



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Scientific thinking is not free to conclude otherwise. In this sense scientific thinking is absorbed in its object, and our experience of (experiment on) the object determines the course of our thinking about it. We are not free to think whatever we want about the object - at least within the discipline of a particular science. The defect with this type of thinking is that it brings to the object a specific number of fixed ideas or categories that experience of the object, itself, may not suggest. This procedure more or less forces the object into a Procrustean bed, in which the parts that do not conform to the experience of the object that we can make any claim to having arrived at truth.

This conformity or identity of thought and thing is to be understood not merely in its identity, but also in its difference. The logical form that comprehends such an identity-in-difference is called dialectic. Within the Cartesian dualistic logic, from which modern science has developed, thoughts and things are as impossible to tie together as rocks and clouds. Dialectic logic overcomes this problem. Furthermore, the inherent dynamic nature of dialectical logic means that we no longer deal merely with static things or being, but with becoming and change.



***Thinking is inherently active, and essentially spontaneous or self-active. Aristotle called it noesis noeseos, or self-thinking thought.***

Thinking is inherently active, and essentially spontaneous or self-active. Aristotle called it *noesis noeseos*, or self-thinking thought. Any unity with thinking (a verb) must consequently involve activity. "What is" is thus transformed into "What is becoming." But this is completely misconceived if it is thought of as an evolution from simple elements to more and more complex compounds of them, or even as an emergence. The "becoming" that is mentioned here refers to the explicit development in mediate thought of that which is implicit or immediate and relatively thing-like. In other words, Truth is a gradual revelation of itself to itself. As part and parcel of Truth we are as much witnesses to that self-revelation as we are integral moments of its intrinsic dynamic.

The work of harmonizing and integrating the various fields of knowledge is not left to the individual as much as it is already accomplished in and by the Complete Whole. Rather, the individual must become self-forgetful, which is achieved anyhow in the universalizing activity of science. And more than self-forgetful, the individual becomes a self-sacrificing or dedicating unit within the self-realizing Absolute. It is here that entrusting oneself to the intelligence and reason of the True, once it is scientifically realized, introduces us to the concept of the mercy of the Absolute.

This can be understood only when the essential negativity that characterizes reality is comprehended along with the positivity that is normally associated with Being. "Thinking" is negative activity because it is a determining - literally a terminating or delimiting activity. It is what produces distinction and differentiation - particularity, within the universality of mere positive being.

Although it is constantly at work in scientific endeavours, the negative contribution of thought to the constitution of reality has all but been neglected and forgotten, or at best misconceived and nullified by reduction to electrical activity or as an epiphenomenon of positive being or matter. But there can never be anything such as "positive" without simultaneously conceiving the "negative." We form the conception of "blind" only because there is someone who can see. Opposites are essential to the existence of each other, and therefore everything has an opposite, or it would not be conceived. It is this fact that is naturally expressed in and as dialectical logic. Sometimes this is referred to as the logic of "and" rather than the logic of "or." In dialectical logic we can have the simultaneous existence of "identity and difference," rather than the "identity or difference" of formal logic.

## SUBMIT MANUSCRIPT

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