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## Science and the Elephant

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Abstract:

*This is a brief conceptual analysis of the limitations of 'scientific' empiricism which I tried to convey without any possible scientific or philosophical jargon which are commonly used by scientists or philosophers and which are difficult for others to understand. The terms which appear as jargon here do not need to be understood literally as they are supposed to convey mere examples rather than meaning.*

Article:

A while back a philosopher-psychologist-theologist-psychic-experiencer and an honest human being (as per my general understanding of honesty) invited me to comment on the reality of spiritual-psychic experiences. In his own research, he meticulously searched for scientific pieces of evidence (especially psychology and neuroscience) to substantiate the experience of psychic phenomena. My reply to him is elaborated here—

"Dear—,

Many thanks for your message. I really appreciate the volume of research you have done. However, I am afraid that I can't help you with this as a scientist. In my humble opinion, the more I am delving into psychology, neuroscience and the brain—the more I can understand their serious limitations. I believe that to understand psyche and spirituality you need 'Faith' and *not* merely investigations verifiable by quantifiable observation. 'Faith' here refers to an unyielding belief in something or someone for which there is no quantitative, measurable proof. The experience of psychic phenomena *cannot* be explained through scientific 'empiricism' *unless* scientific investigation itself undergoes a major paradigm shift which doesn't seem to be a near possibility.

The word 'empiricism'—which can also mean gaining knowledge through experience has been forcefully constricted (especially since the scientific revolution) to a tailor-made term in science where it roughly means documentation through experimentation. I believe you should place more importance on being liberated through Faith rather than trying to present your experience to the world as documented evidence. How does a son experimentally prove or document that his mother loves him? He does not require either science or philosophy to feel it. He just needs to give her a warm hug to feel it. I would suggest you see '*Dekalog: One*'<sup>1</sup> (1988) directed by Polish film director Krzysztof Kieslowski if you have not already seen it.

Science assumes that psychic experience is nothing but a physiological hallucination. The question is—Who set the rule that 'physiological hallucination' is *not* merely a part of the process required to attain a yet-scientifically unexplainable psychic experience?

Maybe or maybe not an integral part of the process to attain spirituality or gather psychic experience is through the activation of cortico-limbic<sup>2</sup> dopaminergic or serotonergic or opioid pathways in the brain. Maybe or maybe not synchronous oscillations within the delta and theta frequencies<sup>3</sup> in the brain might result in psychic experience. But how do these prove or disprove the experience of spirituality or psyche or for that matter *any* experience?

It's like the allegory of the blind men and the elephant—where a group of blind men who never saw an elephant before try to conceptualise how an elephant looks by touching its different parts.

Each of them then describes the elephant based on their own shallow experience—their versions being ridiculously different from each other. They also fight with each other suspecting that the other person is lying.

A majority of scientists would argue that they are not claiming to be knowing or working on absolute truth—they are just trying to work on a part of reality. Now—this is even more dangerous—it's like saying—*'I know that the elephant doesn't actually look like its tusk—but let me stick to my task of knowing the elephant by its tusk—some other scientist would be working on the tail to follow its trail'*. Needless to say, this is an immature approach. At the most, they can say—*'OK... let us make a needle from the tusk which would help mankind stitch torn clothes.'*—which is fine.

Now the counter-argument that was supposed to be coming by now is—*'How do you know an elephant through Faith?'* Even if we ignore the literal absurdity of the question and change it to *'How do we know Form through Faith?'*—the simple answer is—one doesn't need to know Form through Faith the way we deduce Form through physical measurement and sensory perceptions and even trying to do so nullifies Faith itself. Faith doesn't obey the same rules of measurement and quantification that the five senses require to construct the meaning of the world.

That is why when Jesus utters on the Cross—*'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'* (Luke 23:34)<sup>4</sup>—most probably He was not thinking whether His Father looks like Charlton Heston or even if he did that was perhaps the least important phenomenon occurring in his mind.

Or when Helen Frankenthaler paints the *'Mountains and Sea'* (1952),<sup>5</sup> the last thing in her mind is to present the mountains and the sea in a way human beings perceive as representative Forms.

Or when Susan J. Barnes states about The Rothko Chapel (made of fourteen completely black-hued paintings by Mark Rothko—1964-1967) that it has become *a place of private prayer for individuals of all faiths'*<sup>6</sup>—the last thing that she was trying to say is that the individuals can

deduce the form of a *Homo sapiens*-like God hidden in these black canvases even though an individual might indeed see someone like that through his Faith.

Who has set the benchmark that ‘scientific’ query—(apart from the purpose of making needles as stated above) is only valid if proven or coded by numbers? Why would science disregard other modes of inferences—like subjective, introspective, emotional or innate deductions and consider them even beyond its scope of the investigation? Why is it that the scientific paradigm is axiomatically set such that it only qualifies quantified results in a piece of paper as evidence and considers the rest as deception? Just because numerical measurement gives quantifiable results when it comes to measuring the distance between Earth and the Moon, how can it possibly be made the yardstick for validating *any* query—even with regards to validating honesty, morality, and character of a believer? Experimental psychology in many ways comes closest to defying this scientific paradigm staying within the ambit of scientific logic—but still ultimately falls into the same trap of documentation since the prejudice of the assessment criteria is flawed.

My apologies if my suggestions don't seem worthwhile. Like you, I have tried with my limited ability to understand the nature of truth through several perspectives. Apart from the sheer joy of practising the arts any other way of intellectual investigation faltered inevitably for me after running the marathon of the blind till some point. And I arrived at this conclusion, that unless you have Faith you can't feel the warmth of Truth (you might have noticed journals not favouring subjective or qualitative descriptions as this)—and to validate Faith as a piece of empirical evidence (where 'empiricism' means gaining knowledge through experience) the paradigm of scientific logic needs to be changed. A poet feels. A painter feels. A musician feels. Someone as honest as you can feel its essence. But you won't be able to trace its path. On the other hand, science tries to trace the path and fail in both feeling it and finding it. Maybe its role at the end of civilization will only be marked as a discipline that helped mankind make needles to lead a warm, healthy, comfortable life—which is fine. No questions asked—yet a *lot more* was expected of it.

The fallibility of human experience, prejudices and questions on human morality are often placed as standard arguments against approving psychic and mystical experiences. However, strangely

enough, the same fallibility is not weighed similarly when it comes to the domain of science. The history of science with regards to the heliocentric solar system, insights into the universe through unverified thought experiments, the scandals regarding the origin of the Human race, the ghostly axioms of quantum physics are some examples to consider.

From a purely biological perspective, we as 'thinkers' with our developed pre-frontal cortex are far less efficient in our resilience in maintaining and sustaining our progeny when compared to a virus that evolves, sustains and multiplies in an incomparably more proficient manner. Our problem-solving and decision-making ability more often than not makes us appear as *enfant terrible* compared to the instinctive and innate behaviour of animals who does not know how to light a fire but arguably lead a more rational life. From a purely philosophical perspective, we as thinkers are yet to scratch the surface of the famous question—"Who am I?"

Kind Regards,"

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