

Science, Religion and Spirituality

Two Fundamental Changes for Humankind to Make Progress

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Introduction and Overview

If civilized humankind is to proceed into the future with any assurance of continued productive development, two related changes need to be made in the foundation of our modern cultures. Finding adequate solutions for virtually all of the other major challenges confronting humankind are stacked on top of the need for these underlying and fundamental adjustments to be made.

First, a more wholistic science must emerge that pursues discovery in the subjective as well as the objective dimension of reality and that explores and utilizes human intuition as well as human intellect in the process. If science can make this move, it will position itself to come out of the shadows and take the lead in guiding decision making in all of our cultural institutions.

Second, universal spiritual awareness must replace all parochial religious belief systems and thereby free the human intuitive capability for unfettered development so as to better access, understand and utilize the subjective dimension of reality. Relieved of the significant roadblock that religion poses, science can then include the subjective realm of reality in its purview for serious exploration and examination.

The consequence of these simultaneous changes being achieved would be to create the conditions for humans to realize the appropriate balance in their cultural worldview, a balance that can underlie true long-term sustainability for individuals, societies, cultures, countries, Gaia, and the human species. In my view, we have reached the point where survival of the species in a civilized state probably depends on these two changes occurring, most likely within the 21st century.

The Argument

Since humans learned how to locate resources in the surrounding environment and to form artifacts that could be useful for their survival, they have been engaged in exploring and testing the results of alternative actions in objective/material reality from a rational perspective – the basis for science. Correspondingly, ever since humans became self-aware, developed language and could share their reflections on why they live and die, they have relied on their experience of subjective/spiritual reality to suggest answers which they

express in diverse belief systems. The subjective and objective perspectives are both fundamental in human experience and awareness. And humans possess different mental states and operations – the intuitive and the rational – that provide access to these two different perspectives and experiences of reality. From virtually the beginning, there have been these two different ways for humans to know the self, others and the world – each valuable and each revealing its own truths about reality as a whole.

The human intellect/reason discerns an objective/material reality defined by physical entities separated by space and related over time. Its primary task is to find and defend space for the individual and group in a competitive environment where physical survival and propagation are the essential goals. Reality from this objective perspective is a constant struggle for one individual or group to gain advantage over other competing entities until the end comes for that individual or group. By contrast, the intuitive discerns a subjective reality defined by a web of connections that become so dense that space and time cease to define the situation and the self merges through different scales to share a common identity with other “entities.” In this subjective/spiritual reality there are no beginnings and ends, just participating and sharing in a combined, larger identity where battling for dominance is futile – just fighting against one’s greater self. This greater sense of a united self invites caring and cooperation rather than competition, and the core experience is one of pervasive Love and unending existence in the whole.

These two very different perspectives and experiences of reality and their associated mental functions – intellect and intuition – have been part of the human cultural fabric from the time that humankind became fully communicative and self-reflective. In most societies what may seem to be exclusive perspectives have been accepted as complementary, if in tension. Within this tension, some cultures emphasize one perspective or the other. So it is that in western cultures, science, technology, economy, and defense are the primary seats of the favored objective perspective, while the arts and religion are the primary seats of the less valued subjective perspective. In western culture there exists a constant tension between these two domains, and this tension has significant consequences for the institutions that are caught in the middle: politics, education, and the social and community services. When set against one another and not held to be a stimulating complement, the tension of the objective and subjective perspectives can be dysfunctional to the point of paralysis within societies and a source of severe conflicts across societies.

Is there a way to resolve this contest between equally fundamental human perspectives without having to select one and reject the other [either religion or

secular humanism]? I contend that the answer is Yes, but the solution is neither easy to achieve nor easy to understand. We must re-examine some fundamentals.

A key fact is that the truths revealed by the objective and subjective perspectives are not expressed in the same way. Objective awareness of the material world can be shared directly between humans through mutual observation and manipulation of material entities as well as through literal reference in language. Subjective awareness has no such direct or literal vehicle for sharing. The experience of subjective reality is just as immediate as the experience of the objective, but because the subjective is intangible, it can only be shared among humans through symbolic reference – the domain of metaphor and “as if.” In this vein, Evil is portrayed as if it is a living personality – the Devil/Satan/Lucifer. Likewise, the core spiritual experience of unification is characterized in objective terms as [if] being “born again.” Art and Religion are the social “institutions” within culture whose primary role is to express subjective awareness in these kinds of symbolic terms. Critically important is the fact that at root, Art and Religion are **NOT** the subjective itself; they are symbolic representations of this subjective awareness or experience. So, social sharing of subjective awareness/experience necessitates an additional mediating layer in the communication process – symbolic representation.

Fundamental problems arise when humans 1) forget [lose sight of the fact over time] that their subjective awareness is expressed in the objective through a mediating symbolic layer, 2) regard what have become their traditional symbols as literally or concretely accurate and real, and 3) come to believe that their literally transformed symbolic beliefs represent the one and only true statement/characterization of the subjective. In this process, humans have mistakenly objectified the subjective and created as literally real their “as if” symbols – gods and spirits and saints and saviors and a whole sequence of “as if” narratives of interactions among them [myth]. Once institutionalized, these literal belief systems become religious dogma, which comes to define/restrict much of human social behavior. And it all begins with the natural human desire to share awareness of the subjective in probing for answers to basic questions about existence, but then failing to retain the realization that all such sharing is inherently symbolic and not literal/concrete in nature.

Given what happens as the symbols of spiritual awareness mistakenly get transformed into literal religious belief systems, I suggest that our first move must be to reclaim spiritual awareness itself and recognize that all of our religious symbols are “as if” constructs. In short, we must get back to fundamentals and retrieve the universal spiritual perspective, which underlies all

religions, and release the parochial religious point of view of all institutionalized religions. Only when we do this can we retain the essential truth of a universal subjective reality while we avoid the many complications that arise when we allow ourselves the false privilege of reducing spirituality to literal religiosity.

By salvaging the essence of the universal spiritual awareness of subjective reality, we can erase the basis for the conflict between science and religion. And we can replace it with the concept that reality as a whole is revealed by the stimulating rather than contradictory pairing of the spiritual/subjective and material/objective perspectives. When science no longer needs to do battle with religion, it can relax its up-tight protective barriers and permit itself to explore the intuitive and the intuitive mental processes which offer humans a wide variety of subjective experiences. Science can explore human access to the immaterial domain where the infinite web of connections rather than separate entities is fundamental.

I need to say something at this point about the proposal by religious moderates that tolerance within a continuing central place for religion in modern society is all that is needed. Unfortunately, the proposal for tolerance among religions rests on the assumption that the faithful can “somehow” respect the claims of other religions when the religion to which they are committed asserts that it is the sole source of the truth regarding the basis for human existence. Exclusive and absolute truth for the faithful cannot logically accommodate respect for alternative such claims. The tolerance compromise may seem reasonable, but in fact it contains its own contradiction. By leaving the same essential absolute truth claims in place, the tolerance “solution” does nothing to address the fundamental conflict between science and religion. As a result, this tolerance proposal leaves science in the closet, unable to achieve wholeness or to lead in human affairs.

With universal spirituality replacing parochial religiosity, a more inclusive science can emerge without fear of challenging or being challenged by religion. Science can lead respecting the greater whole and exploring the fullness of both human capabilities and the greater reality that these capabilities reveal. Reason, the intellect, and rationality are valuable tools for science, but there are other tools that can also be valuable that science has largely overlooked to date: intuition, inspiration, and imagination. To be whole, science cannot be divorced from creativity, and all aspects of the intuitive are key for really understanding human creativity. If scientists are honest with themselves, they are aware that the scientific process at its best combines the powers of human intellect and intuition, drawing upon them pulsating in tandem most of the time. At analytical and tabulation points in this process, intellect may take the lead,

while in moments of reflection, the intuitive is likely to be dominant. There is no reason that the intuitive cannot be as rigorously developed and utilized as the rational in behalf of the objectives of science. But to explore this possibility, we have to first get beyond the objectivist/materialist door. Physics, astrophysics, and cosmology long ago discovered that in order to make progress they had to pry that door wide open. We now understand that energy is essentially the immaterial complement of matter and that these two expressions of reality are the transforms of one another. Balance and control is what is needed in science, not some antiquated pretense that reason alone is sufficient or that all of reality can be reduced to the material domain.

Conclusion

Until science finds a central place for the intuitive and the subjective reality that it reveals, modern humans will continue to dwell in a world where an incomplete science is forced to hide on the periphery of society and where we are subject to the spasms of religiously based international conflicts. To become truly whole and warrant taking the lead in directing social as well as material human affairs, science must be conceptually freed from its exclusive focus on reason and the effort to reduce all of reality to the objective. For this to happen, we must retrieve spirituality and the intuitive, which are not in themselves in any way in conflict with science. And we must discard our fundamentally mistaken commitment to religion in all of its iterations.

Yes, having the courage to make these fundamental changes across cultures and on a worldwide basis will not be easy. But only if we recognize the goal and what is at stake if we fail to work diligently toward it, can we be fully motivated to seek it.