

## *Objective science and impersonal knowing*

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### **Picturing and knowing**

As scientific theories are studied and applied, it's very often taken for granted that the purpose is objective. As a theory is learned, it gives a clearer picture of what is being studied. And then the theory has to be applied, so as to achieve some desired objectives. This is a habitual view of science. But if one looks more closely, it is not quite correct. As science clarifies our theories and our pictures, they are used in two, rather different ways:

- One way is *objective and calculating*. It works outwardly, through an external picturing, so as to calculate the achievement of desired objects.
- The other way is *subjective and educating*. It works inwardly, beneath the external picturing, by asking reflective questions that educate our personalities.

For example, a map is a picture that serves to calculate where someone can go, what route to take, and how long the journey will be. This calculating function is essentially technical and specialized. It uses special techniques, of map-making and map-reading, to describe and to achieve various limited goals.

But a map does something more than this. It also represents an entire territory, including many possible routes and destinations. Thus it provides a way of stepping back from the calculation of narrow objectives, towards a less partial understanding of the territory as a whole. A map is not just a calculating machine. More essentially, it is a reflective tool, which works through intuition, towards a better understanding.

When a map is thus used reflectively, it is taken to express an understanding of the territory that it represents. Where the representation is observed to have gone wrong, that observation shows an underlying failure or a lack of understanding. And this failure needs to be questioned and corrected, so as to represent the territory more accurately and more clearly. By drawing and redrawing maps, our understanding of a territory may be improved, progressively, in the course of continued experience.

In this example of a map, we see two aspects that may be found in any scientific discipline. One aspect is concerned with *objective achievement*, as prescribed in some picture of the world. The other aspect is concerned with *subjective reflection*, through questions that improve our objective pictures and our living capabilities. Each of these aspects complements the other, but they need to be approached quite differently:

- When objects are sought to be achieved through some calculated technology, a scientist must work in a restricted way, within the confines of some theory whose assumptions are here taken for granted. At this time, a scientist is necessarily dependent on these theories and assumptions. They are implicitly involved in some current work that is in progress, and their questioning would seriously distract from the targeted achievement.

- But, there are also times when it's essential for a scientist to ask unsettling questions. Such questions are essential for a truly scientific education. What's here in question is a basis of assumptions and beliefs that have been accepted habitually. It's on this basis that our theories and our pictures have been built.

So, when our habitual assumptions and beliefs are thrown genuinely into question, the questions have to be reflective. They have to ask their way back down, from objective pictures that appear at the changing surface of our minds. Thus asking down, attention turns subjectively within. It is reflected down within: from outwardly differing appearances, to common principles that are more deeply understood.

As scientists ask their unsettling questions, these questions turn attention inward, towards a subjective depth of understanding that must be shared in common, beneath our many differences of personality and culture. That depth is both subjective and impersonal. There, knowing is completely subjective. It is a pure consciousness, found utterly unmixed with all the personal assumptions and beliefs that are involved in our differing and changing pictures of an objective world.

### **Objective detachment**

But what is the need for a subjective reflection, into the depth of our personalities? It is needed for the purpose of objective detachment.

All objects in the world are known through personality. They are known through a personal process of perceiving and thinking and feeling in our bodies, our senses and our minds. From this perspective, each person's experience can be analysed into three parts:

- First, there is a *knower*, or a knowing subject, which is each person's living self.
- Second, there is a process of *knowing*, which is effected through the personal activities of body, sense and mind.
- And third, there are objects which appear to be *known*, in pictures that have been constructed from our partial perceptions, thoughts and feelings.

This is a common sense analysis, which we take usually for granted. But if it is more carefully examined, it shows an inherent problem. The problem occurs in the second part of experience, where knowing is described as a personal process. Here, personality is being used as an intervening instrument, so as to know a world in which it is involved. Any such involvement must make knowledge compromised, with a confusing ignorance that needs to be removed.

In order to achieve true knowing, all personal activities must be included in what's known. If they are used as intervening instruments, while they themselves remain unknown, their intervention must bring ignorance into our knowledge of the world. This intervention must mix knowing with not knowing; so that we only know in part, through a confusing mixture of knowledge and ignorance.

In the end, as we use science to correct our knowing, *all* our bodily and sensual and mental activities have to be viewed objectively, as part of what is known. There has to be a standing back, subjectively, into a changeless depth from where all changing activities are known.

Returning there, what's known is not just an objective world, made up of pictured objects. Instead, what's known is a self-manifesting *nature*, which includes both the

objective world and all the perceiving and thinking and feeling activities that manifest appearances in everyone's experience.

A world of objects cannot manifest itself, to anyone. In this sense, the concept of an 'objective world' is incomplete. Such an 'objective world' cannot appear by itself. For any object to appear, it has to be perceived, or thought about or felt, by some living person. In order to conceive how any world appears, we need to add on a further conception of perceiving and thinking and feeling personality. Without this added idea of 'personality', we cannot account for how the world and its objects appear.

But if this additional conception is examined, it turns out to be unavoidably confused. What we call 'personality' is a confusion of two different things. It is a confusion of knowing self with bodily and sensual and mental actions. In order to know truly, the self that knows must be detached from changing acts of body, sense and mind.

These changing actions are not rightly knowing. They are not the self that knows. Instead, they are a part of what is known. They belong to an objective realm that we call 'nature'. That realm includes all changing acts and happenings throughout the world and in each personality. It is the complete realm of all changing activity that functions to produce all phenomena – as these phenomena are perceived or thought or felt to appear and disappear, in anyone's experience.

When 'nature' has been thus conceived, it is completely objective. It has in it no personal process that can rightly be called 'knowing'. Here, 'knowing' is no longer conceived as a personal process, which intervenes between what knows and what is known. So there can be no threefold analysis: of knower, knowing and known. Instead, there is a distinction of two aspects. One aspect is a completely objective nature; and the other aspect is a completely subjective consciousness.

In this two-fold analysis, all changing acts have been taken into the idea of 'nature'. Thus, they have been removed from the idea of 'consciousness'. Here, consciousness is a purely knowing witness, completely detached from all changing activity.

The knowing of that witness is completely disinterested and impartial. It is an actionless illumination that stays on present always, deep within our changing minds. From there, it lights all nature's acts. Its knowing presence shines unchanged; while nature produces a succession of partial appearances that come and go, at the narrow surface of mind's limited attention.

In order to be properly objective, a scientist must somehow stand back: into that knowing witness which stays unaffected at the depth of mind, beneath all superficial personality. It is from there that all sciences have been developed, in a variety of different cultures.

Here in India, nature is called 'prakriti' and its knowing witness is called 'puruṣa'. Similarly, in ancient Greece, nature was called 'physis' and its knowing witness was called 'nous'. This is an old distinction, which has long been used, in many ancient sciences.

### **Organic sciences**

From the distinction of nature and consciousness, there arises the idea of a living energy. In Sanskrit, that living energy is called 'prāṇa'. In ancient Greek, it was called

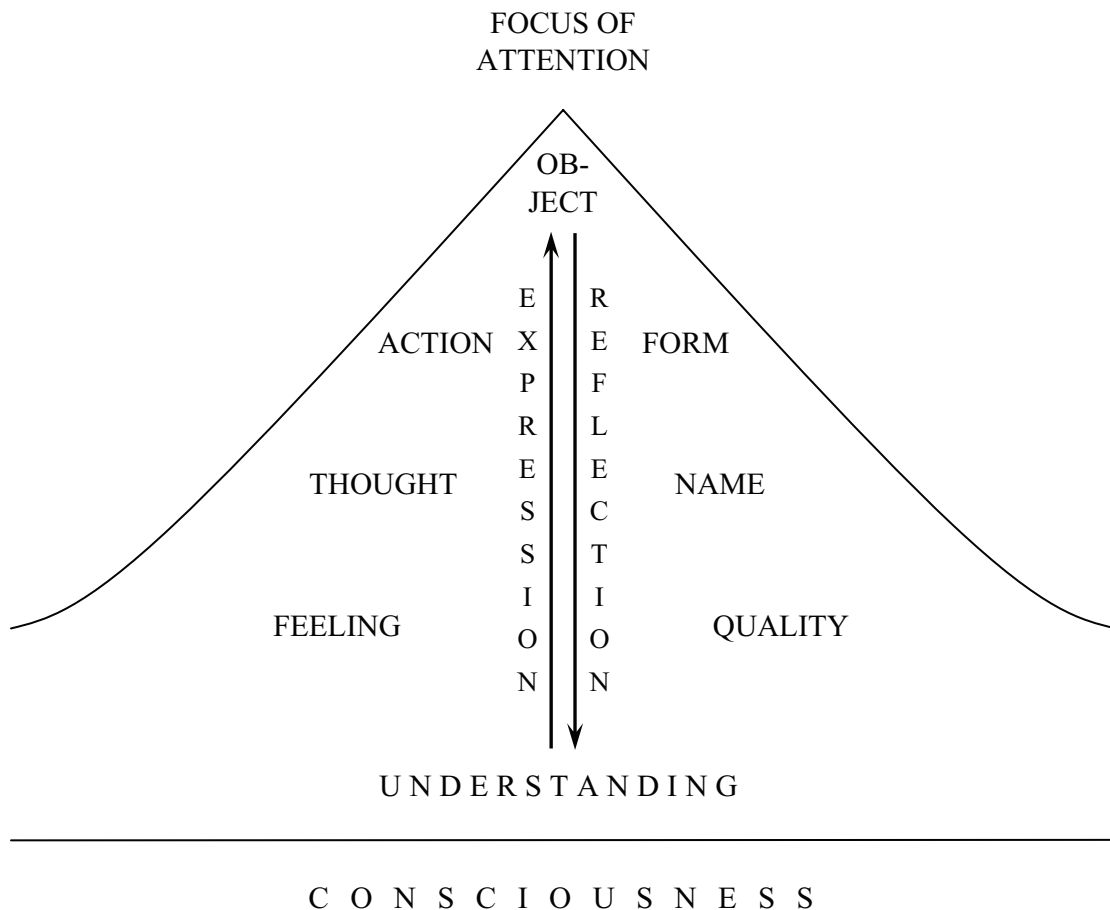
‘energeia’. Here, nature’s actions are conceived to arise from an unaffected consciousness, which witnesses their changing appearances.

As nature acts, its actions are spontaneous. They each arise from within, of their own accord. That’s what makes nature natural. In everyone’s experience, as nature shows appearances, its actions are not driven artificially, by objects from outside. Instead, each act of nature is inspired from within. It is inspired by a purely subjective consciousness, whose knowing stays unmixed with any changing actions.

As nature’s acts produce appearances, they are illuminated by a knowing consciousness that stays on present underneath. All nature’s energy is set in motion from that knowing presence, through the inspiration to which it gives rise. Thus inspired, nature’s energy is basically alive. As it arises into show, it inherently expresses consciousness, through purposes and meanings and values that are understood reflectively.

That living energy of nature is experienced by each one of us, in the process of learning in our lives. This process can be illustrated by drawing a schematic diagram (below). At the top of the diagram, there is a narrow focus of attention, where each object appears and disappears. At the bottom is a common ground, where a purely subjective consciousness remains unchanged. But at each passing moment, that consciousness supports a state of understanding, from which expression rises up through feelings, thoughts and actions that turn attention to an object.<sup>1</sup>

In the diagram, the rising of expression is shown by an upward arrow on the left. And it is followed immediately by a reflection back, which is shown by the downward arrow on the right. As the reflection goes down, the object is perceived and interpreted – through its form, its name and its quality.



By these up and down arrows, attention is shown cycling out and in. As attention goes out, a previous state of understanding is expressed, in the appearance of an object. This appearance is then taken into a new state of understanding, from which expression rises up again.<sup>2</sup> It's thus that we are motivated by a living energy, to keep on learning in the process of experience.

This process is described through an approach that may be called 'organic'. Our personalities are here described as 'organisms' or, in other words, as 'living systems of activity'. And the world that contains them needs to be described accordingly. As we experience that world, it is made up of happenings that we describe by representing them, through our actions of perception and conception.

Our worldly experience is thus mediated by our personal representations. It works through an essential correspondence, between the macrocosm of a containing world and its microcosmic representation by our smaller personalities. For this representation to be accurate, it must be co-ordinated with what is represented in the world at large.

In order to improve our representations, we need to harmonize our personalities, so as to achieve a better co-ordination in their correspondence with the world. Here, personality and world are each described as organic systems, which must develop mutually. This is the basic method of organic sciences, which are applied through their cultivation of our living faculties.

### **Modernization**

However, there is also a rather different kind of science, which is called 'mechanical'. This kind of science has a special restriction in its discipline. It only considers mechanical actions, between one object and another. Accordingly, the world and its objects are described mechanically, as structures that are made from component parts.

It's only to this structured world that mechanical sciences apply. They do not properly apply to any living activities nor any learning processes, in which a subjective consciousness is found expressed. Where science is mechanical, it applies restrictedly: through mechanically fabricated instruments, to a mechanically structured world.

But this restriction does have an advantage, which has been greatly developed in the modern world. Mechanical sciences can be objectively standardized outside our personalities, through instrumental standards that are maintained by external institutions. Such institutions are industrially and socially and culturally organized. They have developed greatly in modern times, through the widespread use of printing and subsequent media of communication.

As a result of these modern developments, there has been a tremendous growth of mechanical sciences, which have accordingly got emphasized. This emphasis has clearly had its benefits. It has enabled a great spread of education and of scientific enquiry. Thus, it has improved our capabilities to think and to act and to ask questions for ourselves. But it is also causing problems, increasingly, as a mechanical approach to science has got overused.

One obvious problem is the environment. Through our mechanical sciences, we can engineer and calculate the achievement of particular results. But this approach is narrowing and specialized. It achieves its results by narrowing them down, in a proliferation of specialized disciplines. As each result is achieved, others are left out. So, as we increase our mechanical capabilities, they present us with more choices and

more conflicts in our lives. This brings with it the need for a corresponding education, which enables us to make better choices and to organize them more successfully.

What the environmental crisis shows is a failure of our education. Our mechanical achievements have run riot, without a corresponding education of our living faculties. It is just this imbalance which has caused our environmental crisis and the mounting problems in our health services and our social institutions.

In order to redress this imbalance, attention is now turning back towards old sciences that are organically conceived. But there is a problem here, in the way that these sciences are standardized. For a science to be truly organic, it must be organically applied, through living faculties that it develops in its practitioners. This is in fact how agriculture and animal husbandry and medicine work, along with all other sciences of society and culture and counselling and human development.

But how can these sciences be 'scientific'? How can they correct our personal mistakes and partialities, so that our knowing can be truer and less personal? In one way or another, all sciences need to establish common standards that are independent of our personalities.

One way is exemplified by the mechanical sciences. Their instruments are standardized externally, through their manufacture by industrial corporations and research laboratories. This standardization is *extensive*. It has to be organized extensively, through local and national and global institutions.

Another way of standardizing is more evident in the organic sciences. They work through living faculties that must be standardized internally, in the education of each individual practitioner. That standardization is *intensive*. It has to be attained intensively; as each practitioner gets educated, by asking questions for herself or for himself.

Where standardization is mechanical, what's thus attained is the impersonality of a machine. But, as our organic sciences get modernized, we need more than machines. We need an education that asks basic questions – in search of an impersonal knowing where each one of us may stand detached, from our own personalities.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this illustration, an idea of the ‘witness’ is represented at the bottom, by the horizontal line that separates the words ‘consciousness’ and ‘understanding’. This line shows the witness as a final limit, which is approached by returning closer and closer to it. As the return gets closer, our understanding of both world and personality gets broader and deeper and clearer. But when the witness is finally touched, all changing world and personality are completely dissolved, by their absorption into an unchanging consciousness.

Then there is nothing to be witnessed, apart from consciousness itself. Thus it turns out that consciousness itself is all of the reality that’s ever truly known, through each of the appearances which nature manifests. That is a reality which knows itself, as its own true identity. Its being and its knowing are identical. There no duality remains, between what knows and what is known.

The witness is accordingly an ideal limit of complete detachment, which when achieved gives way immediately to a complete absorption in what’s rightly known. That is an absorption into non-duality – which has to be impersonally realized, by finding knowledge to be ultimately free from all interfering personality.

<sup>2</sup> There is a connection here with the etymology of the English words ‘subject’ and ‘object’. The prefix ‘sub-’ means ‘under’, and ‘-ject’ comes from the Latin ‘jacere’, which means to ‘throw’. Thus, the word ‘subject’ may well refer to an underlying consciousness, which is found under the throwing up of expression into the changing appearances of objects.

And in the word ‘object’, the prefix ‘ob-’ means ‘against’. There is a sense of opposition, to an act of throwing. As expression is thrown up, objects are what it gets thrown against. Each object is a surface show, produced by an upward throw of expression that has risen up from consciousness. But as this show is produced at the surface, the upward expression gets immediately reflected back, to be absorbed in that same consciousness from which it came.

Thus, as implied by ancient etymology, ‘objects’ are appearances, which come and go. And an unchanging consciousness is the one ‘subject’, which might be called the ‘subject of all predicates’ (to use an Aristotelian turn of phrase).