

Commentary 04 on  
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ON SCIENTIFIC AND RELIGIOUS TRUTH  
by Varadaraja V Raman

## HIERARCHICAL TRUTH

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The distinction between the fact and the truth as drawn by Prof. Raman deserves careful attention and apprehension. Yes, comparing religion and science, one could notice the difference in their attitudes and their products – and this difference has to be explained somehow. V. V. Raman has suggested a model worth analyzing. In this commentary, I would like to ask my questions, and refer to a different approach to the problem that might prove more adequate in the further development.

After having read V. V. Raman's article, one might wonder about the different relation of science and religion to facts, which has not been touched at all, the focus of the article being on the difference of religious and scientific truths. It is not clear, why the "distinction between fact and truth is of the utmost importance in any discussion on science and religion." {10}<sup>†</sup> Also, it not convincing neither that religious truths are endopotent (everybody knows the influence of religions on the culture, and there have been enough examples of the marriage of the church with economy), nor that scientific truths are exopotent (it is only a bad scientist who had never tasted the feeling of deepest satisfaction and joy raised by scientific research). In general, it is not evident that we should compare science and religion without indicating their relation to other fields of human activity and creativity (productive work, art, philosophy etc.).

The main result of V. V. Raman's attempt to reconcile science with religion is that they have become more opposed to each other, being given different domains that do not intersect in any point. This is the usual outcome of an approach trying to explain anything "from within", while the only possible way of integration is to find a common framework allowing to compare the apparently different things. In V. V. Raman's scheme, there is a sphere of "external" activity, which is being serviced by science, as opposed to the sphere of "internal" processes, which have nothing to do with science and hence have to be farmed out to religion. Starting with this picture, one will quite logically conclude that religion must exist for ever – since nothing else is allowed to touch the realm of the soul. However, as it has been mentioned above, it would be illegal to attribute all spirituality to religion, and I could even declare that the humanity has reached the stage of development when religion becomes opposite to spirituality, and antagonistic to it.

According to V. V. Raman, the principal distinction between truth in science and religious truth can be formulated as {14}:

- “(a) We need scientific truths for deriving practical benefits.
- “(b) We need religious truths (truths from the humanities) for deriving inner peace and satisfactions.”

Let us consider these statements in more detail.

In many cases, statement (a) applies to both science and religion. There are two ways of employing religion for “deriving practical benefits”. The direct way is to use the economic and social power of the church to impose the directions of activity profitable for one person to a number of other persons. For instance, Christianity has been a tool of mass exploitation for many centuries, the struggle between different Christian schools reflecting the economic interests of certain social groups. Other religions served to the same purpose, in their specific regional forms. There is also an indirect way of

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<sup>†</sup> *Notation:* { } paragraphs of the source text.

making profit on religion, when being religious conforms with the current social norm and hence provides a religious person a kind of social (and virtually economic) preference before those who do not esteem the tradition.

In the same way, statement (b) is also not specific enough. First of all, I would not identify all the humanities with religion: for instance, there have been many examples of music, painting and literature inspired by quite different things, and even anti-religious. Using the word “religion” for any instance of creativity or reflection would cause nothing but term confusion, which is certainly profitable to the priests, but is contrary to human reason. Also, Prof. Raman tends to mix religion with philosophy {13}, which is quite profitable for those who would like to present class struggle as mere theosophical debate. One could observe that “inner peace and satisfaction” can be obtained from almost any activity, provided there is a kind of devotion, which should not be necessarily related to faith. Moreover, most inspiration from religion is in fact not religious at all, merely taking the *form* of religion under the social pressure.

Second, the ability of religion to bring “inner peace and satisfaction” is questionable. V. V. Raman himself indicates that “in some instances priests and theologians may even detract from the deep-felt religious experience” {5}, and “the general practitioners of most religions derive immense spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment ... without inquiring into or trying to understand their esoteric symbolism, historical roots, or doctrinal bases...” {2}. In other words, for most believers, their “rites and rituals” are nothing but a sort of meditation technique, and a good psychotherapist could well replace a cleric with the same (or even better) psychological result. Moreover, the church has always treated too zealous believers with caution, since their individual faith could easily come in conflict with the institutionalized tradition. This indicates that faith as a system of beliefs is only one component of any religion, not necessarily the dominant one.

One would rather say that religions use special psychological techniques to achieve their goals, and the ignorance of the people who haven’t been taught the simplest rules of self-control makes them the instrument for the priests following their own interests. And no religion can last longer than people’s ignorance about its doctrine and means of influence. That is why blind faith is eulogized by the church.

It should also be noted that there are two opposite ways of attaining internal comfort and peace. The animal way is to hide from the problem, drive it out of consciousness; the human way is to understand and solve the problem in a creative way. The former is practiced by religion and some psychotherapeutic schools; the latter way implies external activity, collaboration and communication with the others, and the aspiration to make the world better.

Returning to V. V. Raman’s definition of truth as an interpretation of facts {8}, one might doubt that the word ‘truth’ is applicable to any religion at all. Since religious revelations do not need neither facts nor investigation, since they do not allow critical analysis and adjustment to reality, they should be called *dogmas* rather than truths. Certainly, dogmas grow from some past truths, and may retain a limited amount of truth to speculate on. Still, this disguise cannot eliminate the anti-truth nature of any dogma, religious dogmas included.

As I see it, human activity is always associated with a definite product, which is certainly an object possessing existence independent of its producer, but also a materialization of the subject’s intention, goal and purpose – in this latter aspect, the product can only exist within the human culture. It should be noted that *any* activity results in some material changes; however, there may be different levels of material changes, some of them affecting the ‘state of motion’ of material things rather than the things themselves. In particular, there is no activity without communication, and the state of the collective motion of the human society will change as a result of people’s activity. Such products could be called ‘ideal’, and they have to be accompanied by certain material processes, though they can never be reduced to them. An important class of ideal products is composed by the essentially nonlinear modes of motion of human bodies driven by the collective effects of a larger scale, and thus reflecting social processes in an individual and providing an individual a mechanism of self-reflection. This class of phenomena is what distinguishes a human from the rest of nature, and it might be called ‘spirit’. The description of the hierarchy of spirit, including the levels of soul, mind and mentality, as

well as the description of how this collective effect manifests itself in human activity as a hierarchy of consciousness, requires special treatment. For this commentary, it is only important that culture as a collection of all the products (in contrast to nature as a collection of objects and their interactions – culture was often said to be the ‘second nature’) includes both material things (the sphere of material culture) and ideal products (the sphere of spirituality); there is also the sphere of ‘praxis’, encompassing the ways of using the products of activity by the other people as a special class of products, including the ways of creative transformation of the praxis itself.

Already at this point, one could distinguish various ‘subjective experiences’ (as ideal products) from their institutionalized forms (as a part of praxis). For instance, using religious rites for achieving psychological balance may have nothing in common with religion – no more than borrowing the theme of a work of art from Christian mythology makes the artist a faithful Christian. Also, using science-like language and complying with the style of an academic journal is not enough to make a piece of work a scientific investigation, though it may become a part of institutionalized science for quite a while. The lack of distinction in this aspect is the main source of the common talk of the dogmatism of science or inspiration from religion; in fact, institutionalized science may lose its relation to rationality and become a kind of religion – inversely, within religion, its practitioners may break its spiritual tenets and get engaged in artistic creativity or scientific exploration.

Following the general line of development from syncretism, via analyticity, to synthesis, one could suggest the following scheme for the hierarchy of spirituality:

- 1 syncretic spirituality (dogmatism)
- 2 analytical spirituality (creativity)
  - 1) intuition (art)
  - 2) rationality (science)
  - 3) wisdom(philosophy)
- 3 synthetic spirituality (ideology)

In the institutionalized form, in the praxis, syncretic spirituality is the basis of religion, the levels of creativity correspond to the spheres of art, science and philosophy, while ideology becomes institutionalized in the forms of common moral, law or social activism. It should be stressed that, while the hierarchy of spirituality has a universal significance and hence will be unfolded in any culture in the future, the forms of its institutionalization are historical and changeable from one society to another. Moreover, the dominance of the higher levels in the hierarchy may make institutionalized forms of the lower level unnecessary, as soon as the society has developed enough.

On the lowest level, one can already realize that the subject plays an integrating role in the development of the world, and there is much that depends on people’s activity; however, one still cannot distinguish reflection of the world from its transformation, and the product from the object, which leads to all kinds of the identification of nature with spirit, so that any activity becomes mystified and transformed in a kind of magic rite. The ideal product of this level takes the form of various beliefs, myths etc. Since there is insufficient distinction between the people’s actions and their effect, there can be no reason for further reflection and revision of the syncretic view of the world, which makes the formations of this level essentially static; when directly or indirectly imposed on an individual by a social group, they become dogmas. Dogma could be considered as a lowest-level (traditional, common) truth, since it reflects the stable core of the usual activities it has its origin in.

The level of syncretic spirituality is the earliest stage in the development of consciousness, and the institutionalized forms of it are the most ancient. The roots of spiritual syncretism are in the low degree of the separation of primitive people from the group (tribe, kin etc.), which is a natural consequence of the low level of economic development rarely allowing an individual to produce any culturally significant without the co-operation with the others. In the modern society, this stage often precedes practically coping with a serious problem, taking the form of prejudice, superstition, skepticism, agnosticism etc.; this is a reflection of the insufficiency of the current means to solve the problem and the necessity of a creative approach to produce such means.

The level of analytical spirituality is characterized by the recognition of the people’s ability to

produce things that are different from those existing in nature, and the dominance of creativity over passive reflection. In contrast to syncretic spirituality, creativity is never static, always striving for something new, yet unknown – and there are no limits to exploration. Logically, the first level of creativity makes stress on the productive ability itself, with fantasy and expressiveness determining the specificity of the product. This kind of spirituality becomes institutionalized in the arts.

As a dialectical negation, the level of science shifts the accent to the objective side of creativity, demanding that the product reproduce the essential features of the currently accessible part of the world in an adequate formalism. While the artist can create anything he/she feels worth creating, the scientist's creativity is constrained by the demand of applicability, which is obligatory for any science, no matter how fundamental.

Finally, the highest analytical level is to restore the integrity of spirituality, considering both production and reflection as the components of the process of creative reproduction of the world and synthesizing art and science in a qualitatively different activity, which is institutionalized as philosophy.

All the three levels of analytical spirituality can be associated with certain kinds of truth, in accordance with their relation to the human activities they reflect. Thus, artistic truth is what makes one live with a work of art, feel it as something personal addressed to one's soul in a very individual way. Art must be true to be art – that is, it must be socially relevant, or *actual*. However, truth is only one of the components of true art, and not necessarily the dominant one, when a specific aesthetic phenomenon is regarded. The level of rationality supports a different kind of truth, mainly related to applicability – one might call it *validity*. In science, something can be true only if it is applicable to a class of problems as a means of achieving a practically acceptable solution. It will certainly be not true beyond the limits of its applicability, and no science can pretend to give absolute solutions for all times. Indeed, all the activity in science is directed to the determining the region of applicability for the formally constructed statements (hypotheses). Finally, the level of philosophy is characterized by a kind of truth, which I would call *consistency*. This is a synthesis of actuality and validity, demanding that every philosophical inquiry should be correlated with the current trends of economic and social development, while being based on the rational understanding of the world. Philosophical truth (wisdom) cannot, however, be neither immediately applicable, nor treating the particular events of the day. Universality is the inverse side of consistency, and the truths of philosophy can be useful in innumerable situations through many centuries.

The synthetic level of spirituality forms an immediate subjective basis for activity, and the principal form of the ideal product on this level is *idea*. Ideas can be expressed as artistic images, scientific concepts, or philosophical categories – inversely, ideas can influence the creativity of an artist, a scientist or a philosopher, in the same way it determines the direction of any other activity. It is on this level that one can be said to be right or wrong, and the synthetic level of truth might be called *rightness*.

To summarize, there is a hierarchy of truth, and every particular formation in human spirituality is associated with all the kinds of truths arranged in a characteristic hierarchical structure, not necessarily coinciding with the primary sequence related to the stages of development. I did not consider the relation of truth to other aspects of spirituality (e.g. beauty), and the vast field of epistemological functions of truth (objective and subjective truth, absolute and relative truth etc.) has been left for another time.