

Discourses/Articles

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MAN'S DESTINY IN THE UNIVERSE

(I)

Human arrogance can take many forms. One of its manifestations in a pre-eminent way is man's assumption that he is all-wise and his wisdom is incomparable, while its cruder forms take the shape of intolerance of the more respectable attitudes which the few enlightened ones entertain in life. Its subtler expressions go by the name of a scientific approach to things, which, it has to be confessed, is another name for a superior ignorance of anything which ranges beyond normal human understanding. This would make it obvious that a conceit of this kind is nothing short of a curse descended on humanity, and there has not been any other barrier to man's prosperity in the history of evolution.

It may be emphasised that 'not to know' is bad enough, but to disrespect knowledge when it actually reveals itself to some is worse, and there cannot be a greater bane to true progress, whether outwardly in one's vocations and pursuits of social life or inwardly in one's psychological freedom and happiness.

The beginning of wisdom is a recognition of the need for one to be humble before the might of the cosmos. Puny man, lodged in his mortal frame, crawls on the surface of the globe of the earth, which floats like dust spinning round the gigantic machinery of the universe. The very size of creation and the complexity of its structure should be enough to strike a deafening blow of consternation to the presumptuous mind of man, whose knowledge of his environment is far inferior in quality to that the frog in the well possesses in regard to the ocean's expanse. The light rays of the sun, which illumine the physical objects of the world and simultaneously shine upon the retina of the human eye, do not reveal a correct knowledge either of the objects or of man who sees things with their aid. What man beholds as the world outside him is more a play of the interaction of light rays than the substance of things or the structure of Nature. The causal relationship which man observes in Nature is a humorous conjecture of his mind, made in respect of what really happens in Nature as a whole.

Suppose a multitude of frogs residing in a reservoir near the huge building of a parliament house try to study the nature of this building. The frogs use an observatory and set up a telescope to see what happens in this house, and to it. It chances to be a Sunday, and no movement there is visible. The frog scientists immediately decide that this huge object is unfit for habitation for human beings as there is no trace of life there. Then, Monday follows, and the parliamentarians begin to enter the house, one by one. Now, the frog scientists would observe a strange phenomenon and conclude that the structure attracts human bodies on Mondays for a reason they cannot understand. But, to their surprise, the attraction seems to continue for some more days and suddenly it

ceases on the evening of Saturday. The frog scientists conclude, again, that the building has in it a peculiar property of repelling human beings on Sundays and attracting them on other days, since this discovery of theirs seems to be confirmed by their observation for several weeks together. Now, a textbook on the essential structure of the building is ready and the frog scientists rejoice at their discovery. Then, suddenly, there occurs a three days' holiday for the house due to a national festival, and the frog scientists are astounded that the house does not attract bodies on certain days, under certain given conditions, even if they are not Sundays. An exception to the rule has come and the conclusion is slightly amended, for there has been a new discovery. Bodies are attracted and repelled by the house not in a uniform manner but the system of the house seems to be a little complicated.

However, the wonder of the scientists is not over. On the anniversary of the nation's day, human bodies were not only not attracted by the house in the usual manner, but the bodies began to circumambulate the house in a line of procession. The old discovery seemed to be incomplete and so a little defective. Under certain other given conditions, bodies can move round the house, but these conditions themselves are not known. The frog scientists draw up statistics of the days on which bodies are attracted to the house, the days on which they are repelled, and the days during which they move round the house. A year passes and the scientists hope to observe the same phenomena getting repeated the next year also.

But it so happens that the holidays and the festivals do not fall on the same dates as during the previous year. The phenomena changes, and all the discoveries of the earlier year fall flat. The frogs are surprised at the capricious nature of the house, and they decide that the house seems to be governed by a law of indeterminism and no instruments available in the observatory could conduct the operations satisfactorily.

And what do our human scientists tell us today of the internal structure of matter? That it is constituted of electrical particles, which may also be waves, and these wave-particles move erratically with a law of indeterminism, as the renowned physicist Heisenberg proclaimed many years ago.

What was wrong with our frog scientists? They could observe only the effects and not the causes. They could not know why human beings should enter the house on certain days, not enter it on certain other days and also move round it on some days. Unfortunately for them, all this was not at all the property of the house or the building, which had nothing to do with the activity of human beings in respect of it, a secret which the frog scientists were totally unaware. And so are we, wise men of this earth, patting ourselves on our backs and parading our ignorance before other ignoramuses whose satisfaction we regard and value as an achievement.

Unless the causes, nay, the ultimate causes behind phenomena are known, knowledge cannot be said to be complete or adequate. There is not merely a cause behind an effect but there is what may be called a causal chain in which there are many links, of which every succeeding link may be said to be an effect of the preceding one, so that the last link at the highest end of the chain would be the ultimate cause. But suppose the chain is circular, so that it has neither a beginning nor an end, and every link influences every other link. Which, in this situation, is to be considered as the cause,

and which the effect? In a system of mutually determined relations, the causal explanation does not bring out the truth of things. Since the scientific approach is a special study in terms of cause-and-effect-relationship in a world of space-time, science cannot know the reality. To look at, see, observe or gaze at things is not the way of knowing their nature, even as the observations of our frog scientists, which were good enough, did not solve the riddle.

It is really a surprise that science, which hates all dogmatic approach to things, should cling to the dogma that the causal explanation is the only possible one, and is all that constitutes knowledge. There is a cause behind man's faith in causation. To think in terms of space, time and causality is a habit of the mind and the only way in which it can visualise the world. Space, time and cause are the very preconditions of human thinking. Since the mind is so made that it cannot think except in terms of these presuppositions, we should really doubt if our knowledge of the world is real at all.

Space, time and cause cannot become the objects either of one's perception or cognition, these being the constituents of the very ways of thinking. It is, therefore, impossible to know reality with the human mind, whatever be the methods it employs, whether inductive or deductive, sensory or rationalistic. Sense and reason are the faculties of human knowledge, and these are wound up in the laws of space, time and cause, which are the spectacles through which man sees creation and judges it with his reason. Even as the structure of the spectacles determines the nature and the form of the objects seen through them, man's knowledge of reality is cast in the mould of the space-time-cause-relationship. It is with these glasses that man sees not only the world of external objects, but also his own self as a personality and as an individual, due to which he neither knows the world nor himself properly. Even one's concept of the Supreme Being is spatio-temporal, and it is viewed more or less as an immensely large object of the senses, though in imagination it may be held to be universal. That reality cannot be an object should have become clear, since it also includes the subject which tries to know it. Thus the scientific methods of knowledge, which are observational and experimental, have little to do with its true nature.

The habit of relating causes and effects is not merely a philosophical prejudice but a more inveterate difficulty that has insinuated itself into man's practical outlook of life. The causal notion in which the intellect of man is imbedded and soaked to its fibre appears in outward life as the seeking of perfection and achievement by the relating of one person, thing or circumstance with another, so that achievement of any kind is identified with doing something, in some manner, under some condition. But all 'doings', whatever be their nature, are infected with the impossibility of bringing about a real connection between the terms related, whose internal relation is prevented by the operation of space and time. Hence, every activity of man, in any field whatsoever, ends in an ultimate failure, though it may, in the beginning, assume a semblance of success. Finally, everything seems to be doomed to crumble down and be wiped out of existence, because the so-called existence of 'relation' is an appearance on the surface of the space-time structure and is not true inviolable being. Man's professions and vocations, in short, all his business of life, is, thus, a perishable bubble floating on the tempestuous ocean of the space-time continuum. It appears futile, therefore, to hope for any substantial and permanent victory in such a precarious setup of things.

All this, and no more, seems to be the fate of man, because his body, senses, mind and intellect are all parts of the vicissitudes to which the space-time structure is subject, and the whole environment being thus transitory, not barring one's own physical and psychological constitution, actions, as known to man, cannot bring him freedom. And all the activity of science, it need not be pointed out, is within the framework of these phenomena.

But, there have been exceptional geniuses who had rare visions of a secret that underlies phenomena. It is impossible that there should be appearance without reality. Change implies changelessness; that everything passes away shows that something does not pass away. The unending longing of man and his hope for a better future, in spite of the defeats he suffers in all his efforts, prove that there is an eternal ground of being behind temporal succession. Life is joy in its core, though pain on its surface. The problem which normally faces a person in entering into these depths is, again, the framework of space-time, from whose limitations the mind cannot free itself. Every thought and every sensation is restricted to the laws of space and time. What can man do, then, to gain access into reality? He cannot obviously make use of the commercial way of thinking, the doctrine of 'give-and-take', or even the methods of science, for all these are within the realm of space, time and causation.

That this should be the location of man in the universe and yet he should presume the wisdom of life and put on an air of completeness and real achievement is a wonder. Nothing can be a greater marvel than this ignorance which man mistakes for freedom and success.

However, there is a way out. And it has been called by various names, — spirituality, mysticism, religion, yoga. This is the true vision of life.

To have this proper vision of things, one has to set aside the old dogma, whether in the form of the belief that there can be real achievement through a business attitude to life which connects one thing with another, including some and excluding certain others, or the so-called approach of science, which is only a refined form of this very dogma of the senses and the mind which attempt to causally relate events in space and time. The correct perspective of life is what may be called the integral vision, which does not connect or disconnect, relate or associate, or outwardly manipulate things and conditions artificially through an apparent correlation of the impetuous tendency of the forces of the world not to yield to human effort at their subjugation. Man's folly is that he wishes to stand outside Nature and then control it. This is the mistake which even the scientist commits, and, in this ignorance of truth, there is no difference between the mind of the scientist and the faith of the rustic. Nature refuses to be relegated to the position of an isolated object of observation by the human mind, for it asserts its sway even over the mind of man, who is really a part of the universe. This sublime understanding is the spiritual view of life and its conduct in practical affairs is what goes by the name of religion. Here, in this religion, man does not look at the world, but the world as a whole beholds itself and becomes an object as well as a subject of its own study. This is what is known as self-analysis, self-investigation and Self-knowledge. Until man reaches this consummation of wisdom, he cannot hope to be in peace in this world. This he may take both as a warning and a simple statement of his true position in the universe.

The Consciousness that universally envelops this wide range of Nature, in its completeness, is what we know as God. And this God who is the true God, naturally, cannot belong to Hinduism or Buddhism, Christianity or Islam, to this creed or that faith, but exists by His own right, as the indisputable explanation of all the meaning that may be seen in life, in the march of cosmic history. The knowers of this God are the saints and the sages, the masters and the adepts, the Yogis, and incarnations that the world hears of in the scriptures and chronicles, which it holds as dear even in moments of its intense distress.

This is the fundamental position and the grand goal. To attain this, the way is, in one word, self-restraint, which means the sublimation of the spatio-temporal urge in the form of sensory passion and mental distraction, on account of which man longs for physical pleasure and tosses about in life without the power of concentration on anything. Self-restraint is yoga, which is the practical outcome of this glorious spiritual vision of things. And this is the proper vision of life. With this knowledge one becomes, at once, master over the senses and the mind, good in character and conduct, charitable in disposition, affectionate to all beings, powerful in thought and will, and immensely sober in a heightened awareness, which may be called God-consciousness.

II

The above is the principle and the policy which devolves out of the knowledge (Jnana) of Truth, which transmutes all activity and process of becoming into eternal being. But life is action (Karma). The relation of knowledge to action has been a subject of long discussion and varied judgment ever since the time of the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita. These two scriptures of mankind may be regarded as the statements, respectively, of the vision of Reality as it is, and this vision translated into the processes of the world as life and action, in every stage of human relationship. While the world may be regarded as appearance, and to live in appearance a bondage, freedom consists in the experience of Reality attained by degrees of self-transcendence. While Reality has no degrees, the stages by which it is reached in consciousness have gradations of varying intensity. These steps of ascent are the stages of one's rising through the degrees in which Reality is manifest in the world-process. Everything in the world is action, outwardly in Nature as well as inwardly in the individual. The world hurries forward to its destiny of self-completion, dragging with it the individuals which constitute its organic parts. The bondage of action, to which reference is usually made by teachers of the way of knowledge, is in one's falsely imagining that individual initiative and effort is independent of the universal activity of Nature, which goes on everywhere, perpetually. The source of the sense of 'I'-ness and 'mine'-ness in regard to oneself and others in the world is this erroneous notion of one's being independent of Nature, while really Nature includes everything. It is this untenable position maintained by the individual that is called ignorance (Ajnana). All suffering in the world may be finally attributed to this inexplicable stupidity in which everyone seems to be sunk, and freedom and happiness would spontaneously follow if this ignorance is to be dispelled by the knowledge of the fact that all action is a phase of universal evolution, and the role that the individual plays in the system of Nature is that an organic part would in respect of the whole which it subserves. This is the methodology of enlightened action (Karma Yoga), enunciated in the Bhagavadgita, which is the great gospel of life that has been bequeathed to humanity. To live wisely is neither to assert nor to deny action in the world, but to appreciate and evaluate it in its true relation to Nature's cosmic processes, to which

individual thought and action are no more than aspects of its own ways of working. To know this, and to act on the basis of this knowledge, is the whole wisdom of life, in whose light individual and social activity becomes a self-movement of the universe, entirely free from the reactions called pleasure and pain. The universe is God in eternal action.