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Religion, Philosophy, and Science: Three Aspects of Truth

(*Man in Evolution* Chapter 2 pp 14-24)

Optional: READ ALSO THE LONGER VERSION: THE INTRODUCTION OF HIS BOOK 'THE ESOTERIC TRADITION'

H. P. BLAVATSKY, the chief founder of the Theosophical Society of modern times, did not originate from her own head, did not invent, the majestic religion-philosophy, which passes today under the name of Theosophy.

She was the representative of a certain Body of wise and spiritually-minded men, who chose her as their Messenger to the world in that century, on account of her great spiritual and intellectual gifts. She was to strike the keynote of certain age-old truths which had been forgotten during the passage of many ages; and the aggregate of these teachings which she gave forth in outline in her great work, *The Secret Doctrine*, was intended to be the doctrinal foundation of a Society which should gather into its ranks high-thinking men and women, those whose whole intent and purpose in life was to live manly and womanly, and to do all in their power to fulfil the destiny which every man and woman should aspire properly to fulfil.

Her great work, *The Secret Doctrine*, she called "the Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy." These words, to many who do not understand their full import, may perhaps at first blush seem somewhat ambitious words, perhaps rather grandiloquent. But I assure you that they were well chosen; because it must be obvious to every thinking person that there is but one Truth in this universe; and that that Truth, if it can be formulated at all, must take some specific doctrinal form, embody itself in some particular cast, because the human mind works in that way.

It should not be imagined that *The Secret Doctrine* gives all the details of everything that is known. Such a supposition would be an absurdity; but it gives generalizations of the principles and of the lines of thought of the Ancient Wisdom, and these are illuminating and very helpful. Everyone should read that book. He who does not is really not keeping up with the times; and this will become very greatly more evident than now it is as time passes.

Now, the operations of the human consciousness are threefold, if you analyse them carefully; and these threefold operations men have designated by the words Religion, Philosophy, and Science. Religion comprises the mystical and the devotional (but not the emotional) faculties of man. Philosophy comprises faculties of the human mind which we generally call co-ordinating; in other words, the intellectual side, that which gathers together and formulates in intellectual fashion the truths which the consciousness intuits in or obtains from nature, often perhaps through a study of the outside world. And third is the operation of the human mind which classifies, through and by its inquisitive nature, the facts of the beings surrounding us, which it studies; and that is science.

We cannot separate the three fundamental operations of human consciousness, to wit, Religion, Science, and Philosophy, and put each in its own thought-tight compartment. They are not fundamentally three different things, but are like the three sides of a triangle, or like three views or ways of looking at Truth. Religion sees one side; science sees another side; philosophy sees a third side; and their unified vision proclaims the recondite facts of Being. We cannot separate them. It is unnatural to do so, and it is for that reason that the Theosophist refuses to do so.

And on what grounds do we say that these three are one and not three radically and intrinsically separate things? Because the supposition that they are separate would be contrary to everything we know of the facts of Nature and its fundamental Unity. It would be contrary to the fact that these three things evolve from man himself, who is a child and therefore a part

of Nature, and who, therefore, expresses all Nature's laws and operations in himself, be they in germ or be they more or less developed. Religion, Philosophy, and Science are the three offsprings of the spirit of Man.

In order to get this absolute truth, this all-embracing and fundamental formulation of the truths of Being, into comprehensible shape, all the operations of the human consciousness must be reckoned with. The understanding must be satisfied, else we have inner dissatisfaction, mental discomfort, and we long for something else. We feel that we have not reached that ultimate truth. Not that we can understand that ultimate truth fully with our as yet undeveloped minds — that would be absurd; for it would take an infinite mind to understand infinite truth; but we can have an ever-growing consciousness of Reality, an ever-developing perception and comprehension of the operations of the cosmos, and an ever-growing instinct, widening and broadening into full intellectual glory and consciousness, of the real nature of Being.

Truth must satisfy the entire nature of man if it be announced as such; otherwise we claim it is not truth; it is hypothesis; it is a theory; it is an imperfectly investigated fact of Nature, perhaps. In any case, if it do not satisfy the devotional, the intuitional, the mystical; if it do not satisfy the intellectual, the co-ordinating faculties in us; if it do not satisfy our inquisitive and penetrating mind, that is, our astral-physical mind or ordinary brain-consciousness — in other words, if it do not satisfy the three inner operations by and in and through which only, the human consciousness can act — then we claim there is something wrong, and we refuse to accept it otherwise than as a speculation, clever perhaps, possibly true, but not yet proved.

So then, if there be in the world a truly fundamental system of teaching, a religion-philosophy-science — which it must be if it comprises all the operations of human consciousness — then that Truth must include all these three. Otherwise it remains imperfect, and its dicta can be not otherwise than imperfect likewise.

When the Theosophical Society was founded, its members were the recipients in those days of much cheap ridicule, because we taught certain things which were scientifically unfashionable; they were not popular; therefore they were not acceptable. Let us mention a few of these things, which are now, however, fully and commonly accepted.

We taught in those days, for instance, that there was such a thing as one man affecting another man by psychological methods, by suggestion, which today is popularly called 'hypnotism.' And oh how we were laughed at for believing in 'medieval superstition'! And yet, in a little while, it became a commonly accepted fact of knowledge; it became scientific because the scientists knew a little more about it. They are now not quite as dogmatic as then in rejecting truths which they themselves had not been fortunate enough to prove. We were told: "All that you people teach is *a priori* — from your own consciousness. It is not founded on investigations into Nature. Where are your proofs?" And we said: "The proofs are around you daily. Look, search, examine, investigate, follow out your own procedure in investigating Nature, and the abundance of proofs surrounding you will arouse your utmost astonishment."

Now, today, so common is this knowledge of psychologic elements, that all averagely educated men know something of that particular thing, 'hypnotism'; and in some countries, as in Germany and France, legislation has been passed regulating, and very properly regulating, the practice of psychological or psychic processes as affecting others.

Many years ago our Theosophical literature teemed with references to radiant energy proceeding from matter — from certain matters more than from others. And we received much cheap ridicule for this; much incredulity was shown regarding our claim. But now it is a fact of common knowledge. The researches of Becquerel, the Frenchman, and of Roentgen, the German who invented or found the X-rays, are now known by everybody.

Radium opened the eyes of scientists to the great varieties of the behavior of matter in many fields of scientific research, not merely in geology, but in astronomy and in chemistry, and generally speaking in all branches of philosophy or knowledge pertaining to the material or rather mineral portion of our earth.

We see everyday in the researches and in the advances and in the discoveries made in the scientific fields of thought, closer approximations to what we have taught, and we are very glad that it is so. We do not claim this priority of knowledge as a matter of self-justification. We claim it only as an illustration of our general theme, that between Theosophy and Science there can be no opposition. A proved fact is a truth; but let us be sure it is proved.

Take the case of Evolution, a subject which periodically arouses much interest and much comment, both favorable and unfavorable. For instance you remember the so-called 'evolution-trial' in Tennessee (1925). A certain man was tried in a court of law for teaching what was called the evolutionary doctrines of science; and other men took an opposite view, saying that evolution was not proved; but the other party said it was proved. These men who denied the fact, denied it supposedly from religious motives, because the present evolutionary doctrines of modern science clash with the teachings of old-fashioned religion. But that is entirely beside the point. It is not the question at all, if we love Truth, whether some particular doctrine is or is not according to the dogmas or teachings of some church — whether it be a scientific church or a religious church! The only question we have to concern ourselves with is: Is it a fact? Is it true?

That is the Theosophical position. Therefore, there cannot ever be in Theosophy such an antinomy, such an opposition of sense or of meaning or of teaching, as is implied in the well-worn phrase, 'the conflict between Religion and Science.' To a Theosophist that notion is absurd. He says there must be something wrong either in the science or in the religion or in both. Let us find out where that twist is, where that wrong lies. Let us straighten it out or correct it. Let us get to the truth of these things. It is as easy to find truth as it is to find wrong; and the methods are very simple. They are: honesty of purpose first; next, an unbiased intelligence inclining neither to this side nor to that, but swayed only by the desire to arrive at the facts of Nature, the elucidation of the wonderful cosmos which surrounds us as expressed in its operations.

When we come to examine any particular part of the 'general world-process,' as the German philosophers call it – the operations of the cosmos around us – we should not hesitate to believe a thing because it is unfashionable or because someone who knows very much or thinks he knows very much says, "Oh! that is old moldy medieval superstition!" We ask: Did the men of past ages know nothing? Are we the only ones who know anything? Has the human race in all the vast time behind us brought forth no great men who knew anything, who loved Nature and investigated her as our men of science love Nature and investigate her? The supposition is an absurdity. The facts of history all teach us to the contrary.

Similarly must we be open-minded to the reception of any new discovery. There is, of course, an instinctive feeling in us, which perhaps operates for our good in some ways, that we should not accept things offhand. It is in itself a good thing, and if this reluctance to accept some new truth were nothing but that, and were accompanied with a willingness to examine, then indeed it would be a wholly good thing. But when there is a sheer unwillingness to examine something new, it is evil; it is inimical to the best interests of the human race, and it is profoundly unphilosophical, therefore profoundly unscientific, and therefore profoundly irreligious.

These three divisions of the workings of human consciousness are natural, and therefore are the proper method of understanding the facts of Nature as our mind interprets them to us: Religion, Philosophy, Science. But, we repeat, unless the complete nature of man is brought to

bear on these, unless these three cooperate in him completely, there is something wrong, and the mental precipitate will be dogmatism.

Let me give a few illustrations of what I mean by scientific dogmatism. I shall refer to three historical rejections of truth, two of them by one of the most famous academies of science in the world then, and even so standing today: the French Academy of Science. Today nobody disbelieves the fable that stones fall to the earth from the skies — that meteorites fall. But for hundreds of years that fact was refused credence by the scientific authorities. It was laughed at; it was rejected; the reporters of the occurrences were openly called fools, idiots; and the great French physicist and astronomer, Arago, openly announced in the French Academy of Science that it was an impossibility for stones to fall from the skies. "Why," he said, "there are no stones in the skies. How then can stones fall?" Unmitigated dogmatism!

Our second illustration of this spirit: You remember something perhaps of the French painter and speculative physicist, Daguerre, the inventor of the daguerreotype — the first practical demonstration, perhaps, of the reality of photography. Daguerre was married; and his wife came to the family physician one day in great distress of mind. She told him: "Doctor, I am afraid my husband is going crazy. He told me last night that he was perfecting a process by which to fix pictures on a wall by means of the sunlight, and that there was a way of doing it; and he was going to discover a way by which pictures could also be fixed on metal or paper." And the doctor said, "Madame, I shall see your husband. Perhaps you have not reported correctly what he said."

And the physician saw Monsieur Daguerre and conversed with him; and he likewise left his presence in great distress of mind, saying later to the wife: "Assuredly, Madame, your husband is mentally affected!"

But in a short time Daguerre had perfected his process; photography was invented; and this same eminent physicist, Arago, this time announced with approval the new discovery to the doubting French Academy of Science.

Third: Do you remember that when Edison brought forth his first phonograph, one of the eminent members of the same French Academy of Science, arose and denounced "these American methods of propaganda in advertising"? He said, "It is a clever trick of ventriloquism; the principle is utterly unscientific; it cannot be!" But in a few years practically everyone knew of the phonograph and many owned one.

It is good to hold things in abeyance of judgment until they satisfy all the faculties we have in us; but such rejection should not be off-hand. We should examine everything and hold fast to those things which appear to us as good. It may be that our intellectual capacities are not sufficient for us to know truth even when it is logically and properly presented to our minds; that is our misfortune. But we should not carry that spirit of indisposition to recognise something as true merely because it is new, or unfashionable, or unpopular, or unscientific, or irreligious, or unphilosophical, according to the standards of the day.

To return to the matter of the 'conflict' between Religion and Science. How many times in the past must you not have heard the question, 'When a man dies, shall he live again?' You have looked to the scientists for some answer to this question, so momentous, apparently, to the individual; and you have received as replies only theoretical speculations; and rightly, coming from that source, because what other answer could they give? They do not know, and being honest men, they would not say.

Or you were told: "Go to the churches. That is their field of thought. We, scientists, search and investigate material nature only. It is to religion that belong by right the question and the theoretical explanation of the nature of the human soul and its destiny after death."

But this antinomy between science and religion should not be, because it is without basis in Nature itself. The antinomy is a historical one in Occidental Europe. It is not a natural

one. If the one exist without the other, that is, if Science and Religion be considered as fundamentally divorced the one from the other, each then incomplete, theoretical answers given by either must of necessity be incomplete likewise and therefore insufficient. There is no need for such a contradiction, for such an opposition, for such an antagonism, for such a difference of system and of thought between these two, twin sister-faculties of the human consciousness.

This conception itself, this supposed fundamental antinomy or opposition between Religion and Science, or Religion and Philosophy, or between any two of these three, or among all three, makes directly for Atheism, loss of man's spiritual intuitions, and for a growing sense in the human heart of despair and discouragement. The idea is an entire folly; it is not only useless but mischievous; and in no other part of the world, that is to say in no part of the world which has possessed religious thought of another type, does this totally unnecessary antinomy exist.

Therefore I say that no antinomy among these three exists in reality; and it has arisen only in the western world from the fact that occidental religion has long since lost the key to the teachings of its own religious Master; and in a very natural revolt from religious obscurantism and dogmatism, the scientists turned to that which alone seemed to give some promise of an adequate answer to their questions concerning the nature of Nature herself and of the nature of man — that is to say, to the physical world surrounding us.

Yet, penetrated as they were, more or less, with the dogmatic teachings and doctrines and beliefs of preceding centuries of occidental religious thought, they answered as far as they could honestly answer such inquiries, and that answer, as just pointed out, was in substance: 'Turn to the Church if you hunger after these things. We do not know, for that is not our sphere.' You see, this was a tacit recognition of the opinion that religion and science were fundamentally antagonistic.

Then turning to the Church, what answer did you receive from that quarter? That answer we all know.

Now to the Theosophist religion is both scientific and philosophical. It must be. It is the devotional and intuitional reachings and searchings after truth of the human spirit. Theosophy itself is Religion; not a religion, but religion *per se* carried to the *nth* degree, and in its deeper and wider reaches no human mind can fully compass it. It is Philosophy, also; not a philosophy, but philosophy *per se* carried to its *nth* degree, and no human mind can fully compass it. It is Science; not a science, but science *per se*, carried to its *nth* degree, so that no human intellect can compass its bounds.

In the *American Magazine* there appeared some years ago (Sept., 1927) an interview with Dr. Michael Pupin, Professor of Electro-Mechanics at Columbia University, who is quoted as follows:

Science finds that everything is a continuously developing and intelligent process. It reveals man as a being with a soul which is progressing more and more toward divinity in a universe of unbroken continuity

In my opinion, all scientific evidence tends to show – not to prove, but to point toward the belief – that it is very unlikely that the soul of man is going to cease its existence when the body perishes. The law of continuity and the general scientific view of the universe tend, I think, to strengthen our belief that the human soul goes on existing, and developing after death.

Now there is much that is very fine in Dr. Michael Pupin's words; but we must point out that it is by no means a proof of human immortality if the human soul merely survive the dissolution of the physical body for a more or less prolonged period of time. Immortality means continuous and unending self-consciousness, and, strictly speaking, implies neither beginning nor end. Dr. Pupin says not a word about the beginning of the human soul. Did it, or did it not,

precede its present birth into this world? If so, whence came it? If not, how can it be immortal in only one direction, the *post-mortem* direction?

The soul may survive the body for a little while, some say; others again say, it may not survive it at all. Others again say that it had no existence before 'God' created it to animate the present physical body, but that when it dies it will have an eternity of existence. How can this last be? Is there such a reality as an eternity which begins and has no end in the other direction? The supposition is absurd.

Dr. Pupin continues:

You see science is constantly revealing divinity and man's relationship to divinity. Science is, therefore, the highest form of human theology, the highest form of reasoning about God. Science leads us straight to a belief in God, and this is the foundation of religion.

Dr. Pupin is exceedingly optimistic in the view that he takes of the visioning by science on the part of other scientists, of the religious consciousness of man. I wonder how many scientists would agree with his views. Few, I fear; though I do fancy that a great many scientific men are inwardly convinced that the old materialistic ideas of the older scientific luminaries are about as dead as a door-nail; but this is not the same thing as believing that the higher form of reasoning about 'God' or that the higher form of human 'theology' is to be found in the teachings of Science.

As to the opinion that Science leads us straight to a 'belief in God' and that this is the 'foundation of religion,' perhaps we might say that this is a somewhat unusual statement to make, for which I can see no actual foundation in the teachings of Science *as they exist today*.

Unquestionably were Science what it ought to be, and doubtless will be in the future, that is, the sister of Philosophy and Religion, these three forming but the three facets of the jewel of truth, as the mind of man understands truth, then might we say that Science would lead us straight to a knowledge of the Divine, which knowledge is the foundation of Religion. But likewise do I venture to say that such knowledge would be no dogmatic scientific theology of any kind, nor would it make for a mere 'belief in God.'

What would a religionist say in answer to Dr. Pupin's very remarkable claim that it is Science which proves God? And what is such a God, anyway? Whose God? What God? These are questions themselves demanding solution before we can afford to take things for granted because theoretically they may please us, and then say in a rather dogmatic tone, no matter how fine the words may be nor how noble the accompanying thoughts are, that "My work proves God even for you who are not in that work."

What might not the philosopher retort? Nay, this is accepting almost as a natural fact the antinomy between Religion and Science which we find it utterly impossible to accept. And I say again, until we abandon this fallacy which is founded on nothing but an outworn theory, then we shall continue to have this constant and totally unnecessary struggle between the two.

We could go on quoting for a long period of time, thus illustrating how necessary it is to examine before we judge, to be sure of our ground before we condemn, and at the same time to accept as truth only that which appeals to us as truth, appeals to us as satisfactory to the three states of our nature: the religious, the philosophic, and the scientific.

This is the road that open minds, eager for newer knowledge, for wider investigations into the spheres of being, should follow; for there is where man finds his true dignity as a thinker. Such an attitude is very scientific; it is very religious; it is profoundly philosophic; and it is with this attitude of mind, at least trying to hold this attitude of mind, that the genuine Theosophist approaches the study of Nature, no matter along what particular branch of scientific or other investigation his thoughts may take him.

And so I repeat: Religion and Science and Philosophy are not three things in themselves, existing so to say in physical or mental space, nor do they represent three

intrinsically separate laws of the Cosmos, but are merely three manners of manifestation of the human consciousness. Unless each one of these three corroborates the other two, that is to say, unless Religion is scientific and philosophic; unless Science is religious and philosophic; unless Philosophy be likewise religious and scientific, there is something wrong somewhere. For these three form, as it were, but the three facets or sides of Truth, as the human constitution visions Truth. And if we within ourselves find contradictions as among these three, if we find our own minds at war with ourselves about them, we can be positive that we have not yet found the true Ariadne's thread which will lead us out of the labyrinth of mere theory and hypothesis, into that still small path, which the Hindu Upanishads speak of as leading us directly to the heart of the Universe.