



# Science and Religion

## The East and West perspective

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Year: June 2004

## Abstract:

Is it possible to be religious yet scientific? Scientific yet Religious? There are some interesting observations on how societies on the opposite sides of globe view science and religion. The distinction here has been explained as “East” and “West”. This understanding is not only desirable but urgently needed. The future of man is dependent upon convergence of science with intelligent human attributes like creativity, emotions and spirituality. Good future of man is dependent upon convergence of constructive science with universal religion of spirituality.

Experience and observation are the only source of knowledge, be it in science or in religion. The only difference between science and religion is that religion deals with truths of metaphysical world while science deals with the truths of the physical world. Our perception of things and phenomena is what builds our faith; be it in religion or in science. Nothing validates or defies that logic.

Business of science is to deal with "facts".

But what is a fact? That which exists, or occurs may be defined as fact. But how do we know that exists? It is through our sense of perception (touch, taste, smell, hear, see) that we know what exists? Can there be no case where our senses of perception fail to detect something that exists?

Yes. For instance, for a blind man a tree might not exist, but irrespective of what he thinks, the tree does exist. Thus, we do not deal with facts as such even in science, but only without our awareness of what seems to exist. In dealing with facts, awareness and context is inseparable from facts. Awareness and context can not be defined, it can only be described. To reach different paths, we need different methods and these are collectively called "Religion".

No one religion holds exclusive credit for 'good' values. Religion in itself does not make deeds and words unethical and immoral. It is moral and ethical behavior that preserves good values, the very foundation of which is an un-individualistic approach towards religion. Assumptions, transitions, contradictions, perplexities mark both religion and science.

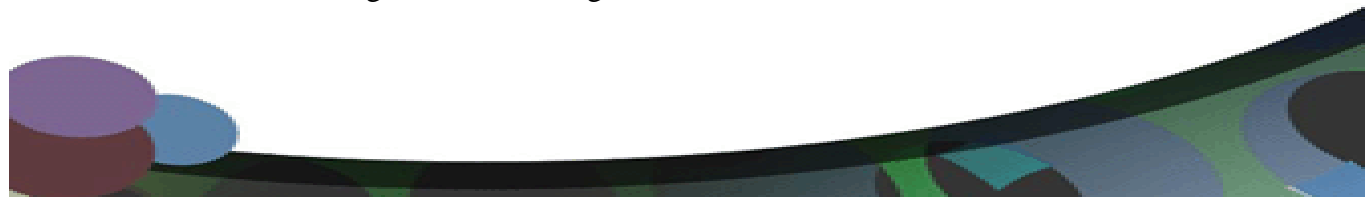
What has been a challenge for most religious

leaders is to keep pace with the intellectual progress in the field of science. It is important that humans, as one, design a framework wherein the basic of religion and science is determined by an inherent belief. This must lead to an idea that advancement in one, say science, does not yield drastic results i.e. a decline of religious beliefs. Ideally, none should be challenged, as together both make living in a broader perspective more realistic, fulfilling and complete. It is only then that the essential parts of religion will survive - proving the essence of their existence.

"The brain is wider than the sky,  
For, put them side by side,  
The one the other will include  
With ease, and you beside.  
The brain is deeper than the sea,  
For, hold them, blue to blue,  
The one the other will absorb,  
As sponges, buckets do.  
The brain is just the weight of God,  
For, lift them, pound for pound,  
And they will differ, if they do,  
As syllable from sound."  
- Emily Dickinson

In India, for example, religion welcomes science and science works towards coexisting with the narrow facts of religion. This is unlike the more confrontational western view of science and religion. Indian spiritualism strives to explain knowledge as eternal, that which cannot be created, only discovered. So is the case with God, it is still to be discovered. Hence neither of the two philosophies (science and religion) should be questioned for materialistic existence.

Indian Spiritualism says that we live for knowledge and not for happiness or pleasure. All knowledge is God, and itself a religion to reach



God. Knowledge is infinite, God is infinite. Religions are branches of Spiritualism, just like physics, chemistry, biology all branches of science.

Nobody can create knowledge, it simply exists and waits to be discovered – what was covered is uncovered. Knowledge is God himself and we simply discover it. The Vedas are a great Sanskrit book. In the East, people go down on their knees before a man who reads the Vedas as well as for the man who is studying physics or computers. With God all knowledge is sacred.

Indian philosophy believes that man is traveling from lower truth to higher truth, through various conditions and circumstances, but to the same goal – which is how science approaches any study or theme. What we are looking at is how the perception of religion and God is distinct in the East from the West. With a firm belief in God, religious faith in the east is increasing by the day. There are more spiritual classes, temples, satsangs, colleges and degrees on spiritualism in India today than there ever was.

The great Hindu scriptures say that God is absolute truth, absolute joy, and absolute beauty. Any scientist who is seeking the absolute truth, as Einstein did, is seeking God. Anyone seeking absolute joy, whether in a tavern or in the shopping mall or in Monte Carlo, is seeking God. And anyone who is seeking absolute beauty -- on a canvas or a stage or a mountaintop -- is seeking God. What lovers of beauty seek in paintings, in sculpture, in dance, in music is just a reflection of the absolute beauty that is God. The real source of all beauty is God, the beloved. So there is nobody who is not seeking God. The scientist in his lab, the pleasure seeker at the

casino, the artist in her studio: all are seeking God. We are all lovers, restlessly searching for the Beloved, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Face behind the veil.

One day a 6 year old girl was sitting in a classroom. The teacher was going to explain evolution to the children. The teacher asked a little boy: Tommy do you see the tree outside?

Tommy: Yes.

Teacher: Do you see the grass outside?

Tommy: Yes.

Teacher: Go outside and look up and see if you can see the sky.

Tommy: Okay. (He returned a few minutes later) Yes, I saw the sky.

Teacher: Did you see God?

Tommy: No.

Teacher: That's my point. We can't see God because he isn't there. He just doesn't exist.

A little girl spoke up and wanted to ask the boy some questions. The teacher agreed and the little girl asked the boy: Tommy, do you see the tree outside?

Tommy: Yes.

Little Girl: Do you see the grass outside?

Tommy: Yessssss!

Little Girl: Did you see the sky?

Tommy: Yessssss!

Little Girl: Do you see the teacher?

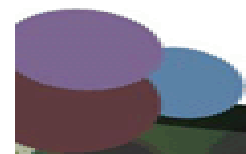
Tommy: Yes

Little Girl: Do you see her brain?

Tommy: No

Little Girl: Then according to what we were taught today in school, she just not have one!

Taking the view of Eastern societies, religion is needed to understand the difference between good and bad – at times good freedom and bad freedom. A better world may come not from those people that merely deal with science and machines, but those that are intelligent and able to expression compassion and love. People



skills may be more important than the ability to know what a computer is saying.

Deciphering religion within the same segment of society can also be a varied experience. Ancient fears like 'God is a policeman, with punishment in the one hand and rewards in the other' fail to create the ultimate magic of fear with the present generation like it did a few years ago.

The West however, negates this phenomenon. The basic fact remains that a religion that does not need to induce fear in someone will make a mark for itself. It is only when a person is not infused with fear of God or the supernatural that he/she becomes strong. The purpose of religion is to make man strong and not weak.

This generation is spoon fed 'scientific logic' through their introduction to play school UFO's, electronic cars or any number of modern fallacies, even before they learn to hold the spoon themselves. They do not understand that is the deception of facts with the maximum logic and completeness in verifiable terms. This simply means that science cannot defy the existence of God with proving it, since that would negate the very existence to be scientific.

History has shown that science has bent toward researching various fields such as weapons and wars. Without generalizing, the aim has never been to understand the problems of the East, the culture and the way of life. The strength of East is its Love, love is tolerance, non-violence or Ahimsa as Gandhi said, selfless service and sacrifice. This is real love for humanity and only such love in the view of East can lead to God. Mahatma Gandhi, a man who drove not only the Indian nation to independence through

non-violence, but also achieved this victory through restraint and patience.

"Why not let people differ about their answers to the great mysteries of the Universe? Let each seek one's own way to the highest, to one's own sense of supreme loyalty in life, one's ideal of life. Let each philosophy, each world-view bring forth its truth and beauty to a larger perspective that people may grow in vision, stature and dedication."

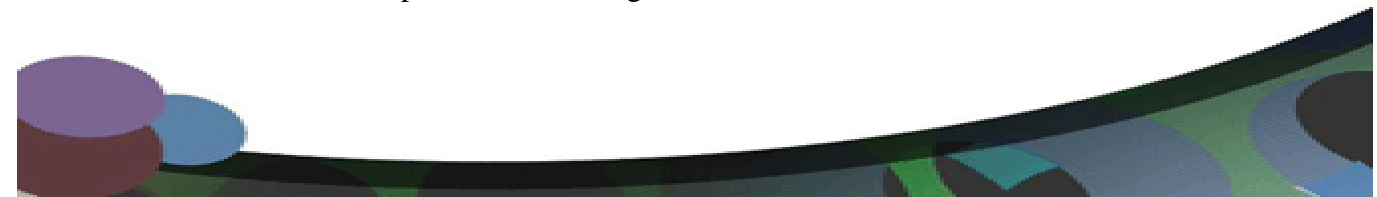
- Algernon Black

"When people thought the Earth was flat, they were wrong. When people thought the Earth was spherical they were wrong. But if you think that thinking the Earth is spherical is just as wrong as thinking the Earth is flat, then your view is wronger than both of them put together."

- Isaac Asimov

Worse still is to expect others to convert to a particular religion. What is important is that everyone respects the other religions even if they do not abide by it. Religion must be viewed as the broader basis upon which any science or thought process is built on. As Indians believe that the future of man is dependent upon convergence of science with creativity, emotions and intelligence, the future of man is dependent upon convergence of science and spirituality.

The West believes in the philosophy of 'Survival of the Fittest' and they point to the decline of their own religious beliefs. How does the East measure up? The Eastern civilization which is far older than the West has not shown any signs of decline in its faith and religion. Philosophers in East also point out that the reasons for decline of religion in West have failed to keep the pace with the unprecedented intellectual progress in



this world. Hence, they have been counterattacking, defending and losing ground more or less foolishly.

According to an Indian mind, a representative of the fraction of eastern psyche, religion trains mind and focuses on what is best for all. Science without this control can make a steamroller (representative of destruction in this case) but it cannot teach it where to stop so as to not to crush an ant or a crying child.

Most of the success of science is very evident because it is tangible and materialistic. The success of religion primarily depends on being able to achieve a long term goal; in an Indian context – attain ‘Nirvana’ or experience identity of the soul. The concept of religion is hence, non-testable. Much of Western psychological thought is centered on considering the brain as the device that makes a human body function. The East, especially India, believes in soulful existence. Some Eastern philosophers believe that all people of the West see God and Goddess as living *outside* the body. In the East, God is seen as living *inside* the body.

The point of this essay is not to create a divide between the East and West, but to distinguish between the way the people understand differences due to philosophy, mindset and the way of thinking. The two cultures have very different ways of acting to a given situation. Unless the two understand, agree to accept that the nature of each society is different; the problems of the world will be difficult to solve.

Once, the difference is accepted, we will not commit to mistake of measuring the other with the yardstick of our own religion. What religion

proposes is that religion is a matter of faith and realization, not a topic of discussion.

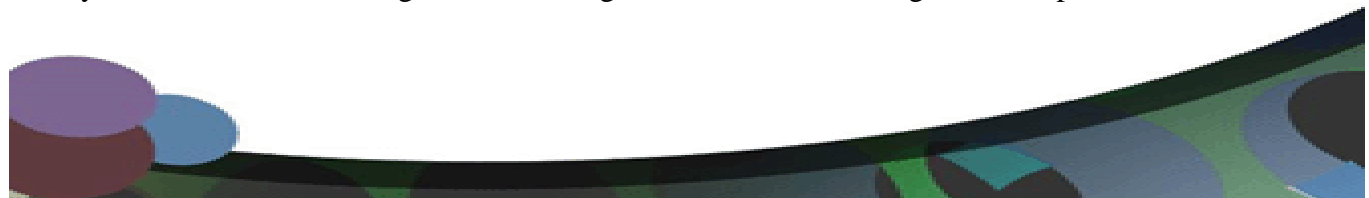
“Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind. The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed. Scientists were rated as great heretics by the church, but they were truly religious men because of their faith in the orderliness of the universe.”  
- Albert Einstein

“What is so wonderful about great literature is that it transforms the man who reads it towards the condition of the man who wrote it.”  
- E. M. Forster

Science can never prove that God does not exist since it is not possible to prove a negative conclusively. On the other hand, there has never been a shred of verifiable evidence to suggest that God does exist, thus lending weight to the argument that there is no such thing or person called God. It is only a matter of faith, and perception of power.

On the other hand, even under the most abstract circumstances, it could be proven that God *does* exist. Some firm believers in the concept of existence of God abide by the fact that the scientists will not stop at one proof. The defined problem will drive them toward looking for a more verifiable method of proof. If discovered, this piece of verifiable evidence would convert all non-believers of God into strong believers.

Hindu religion is not restricted to a single book. In the east, religion is deciphered as 'dharma'



and related to 'karma'. It clearly denotes the responsibility to keep performing good deeds and leaving the rest to God. Hindu Vedas are not written by a person or group and it is believed that these evolved over the years. In the Christian West, the Bible is taken as the word of God and it is assumed that it has never changed or evolved. terms of the world we experience. It is possible that there are programs running on highly complex computers or plugged into a gigantic grid that may be self-aware.

Religion or science neither can be viewed as eternal or absolute truth. Science takes 'Perfection' as its measure for achievements and strives until it is achieved. Hence, the approach is very goal oriented. Focused on the result, the end. The end is so enchanting, so alluring that we forget the means altogether. With means alright, the end must come. Fault in our vision is that we are forgetting that the means should be righteous, proper and exact. Religions is the eyes of society, which helps program our mind free from all prejudices, or set of beliefs and make it open minded. Any religion, which cannot stand this test, must die. The sooner it dies the better it is for humanity.

Concluding the debate, it would be apt to state that all humans hold beliefs based on some basic principle or source, be it a scientific, religious or any other influential approach. People develop opinion or belief from these. People in today's world are indoctrinated into religion at an early age and this means that their personal beliefs are actually shaped by the religion they follow. They are no longer able to make up their minds independent of the religions they follow since their personal beliefs to a degree have been

trained by the explanations put forward by religious teachers.

"If any student comes to me and says he wants to be useful to mankind and go into research to alleviate human suffering, I advise him to go into charity instead. Research wants real egotists who seek their own pleasure and satisfaction, but find it in solving the puzzles of nature."

- Albert Szent-Gyergi

"For the moral attitudes of a people that is supported by religion need always aim at preserving and promoting the sanity and vitality of the community and its individuals, since otherwise this community is bound to perish. A people that were to honour falsehood, defamation, fraud, and murder would be unable, indeed, to subsist for very long."

- Albert Einstein

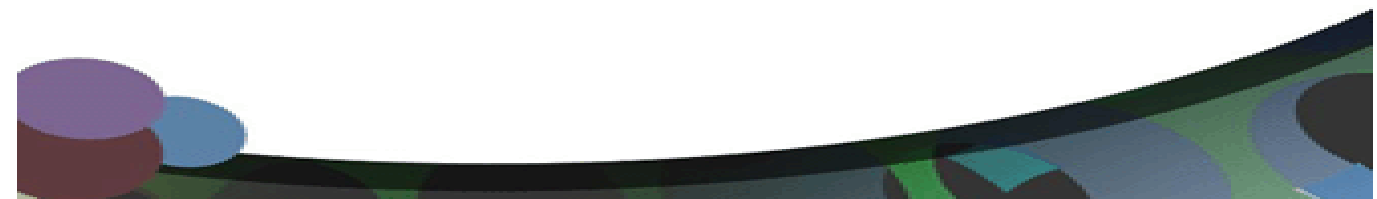
All beliefs, including religion, owe their origins to the basic human nature of curiosity where supremacy of no single principle – whether science or religion – should be claimed.

Questions? Suggestions?  
Or just want to say "Hello!"

Please write in to me at:

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I guarantee you a reply, often on the same day! :)



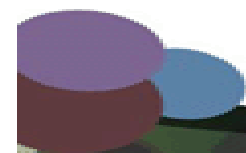
## Notes and References:

1. Claiming that transcendental teachings of religion are statements of facts, Swami Vivekananda said: "...a tremendous statement is made by all religions that the human mind, at certain moments, transcends not only the limitations of the senses, but also power of reasoning. It then comes face to face with facts, which it would never have sensed, could never have reasoned out. These facts are the basis of all religions to the world. Of course we have the right to challenge these facts, to put them to the test of reason; nevertheless, all the existing religions of the world claim for the human mind this peculiar power of transcending the limits of sense, and the limits of reason; and this power the put forward as a statement of fact." - Swami Vivekananda: Complete Works: "The necessity of Religion", Volume II, 1935, Page 61.
2. On Religion as a wave of the future, Swami Vivekananda said, "...Religious ideas will have to become universal, vast and infinite, and then alone we shall have the fullest play of religion, for the power of religion has only just begun to manifest in the world. It is sometimes said that religions are dying out, that spiritual ideas are dying out of the world. To me it seems that they have just begun to grow. The power of religion, broadened and purified is going to penetrate every part of human life. So long as a religion was in the hands of the chosen few, or of the body of priest, it was in temples, churches, books, dogmas, ceremonials, forms and rituals. But when we come to the real, spiritual, universal concept, then and then alone, religion will become real and living; it will come into our very nature, live in our every moment, penetrate every pore of our society, and be infinitely more a power for good than it has been ever before." - Swami Vivekananda: Complete Works: "The necessity of Religion", Volume II, 1935, Page 68
3. On Commercialization of Science, Misuse of Scientific knowledge for profiteering, Integrity of Science, A Center for Science in the Public Interest, USA, SPI Project states: "...There is strong evidence that researchers' financial ties to chemical, pharmaceutical, or tobacco manufacturers directly influence their published positions in supporting the benefit or downplaying the harm of the manufacturers' product. A growing body of evidence indicates that pharmaceutical industry gifts and inducements bias clinicians' judgments and influence doctors' prescribing practices. There are well-known cases of industry seeking to discredit or prevent the publication of research results that are critical of its products. Studies of life-science faculty indicate that researchers with industry funding are more likely to withhold research results in order to secure commercial advantage. Increasingly, the same academic institutions that are responsible for oversight of scientific integrity and human subjects protection are entering financial relationships with the industries whose product-evaluations they oversee. Source: <http://cspinet.org/integrity/about.html>
4. The American Association for the Advancement of Science's Committee on Science in Promotion of Human Welfare, in an important document titled "Integrity of Science" released on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1964, has given convincing evidence that scientists – if not all scientists, at least a considerable section of them-care for maintaining the integrity of science as any thinking humanist in the world, if not more. A few lines for the document's section on "The Responsibilities of the Scientists and of Society:," "...Under the pressure of insistent social demands, there have been serious erosions in the integrity of science. This situation is dangerous both to the science and society. If society is to enter safely into the new age of science, steps must be taken to strengthen the competence of science, as reliable guide to nature at its source the integrity of science. Scientist has an incapable to maintain the integrity of science. Scientists have an inescapable responsibility to maintain the integrity of science; this is required by their duties to their own disciplines and toward society." Then this impressive document proceeds to indicate how the maintenance of integrity has to be worked for, in a manner which will hardly admit of any improvement
5. Vivekananda says, "Man is a man so long as he is struggling to rise above nature and this nature is above external and internal. Not only does this compromise the laws that over the particles of matter outside us and in our bodies, but also the more subtle nature within, which is in fact the motive power governing the external. It is good and grand to conquer the external nature, but grander still to conquer our internal nature. It is grand and good to know the laws that govern the passion, the feelings, the will of mankind. This conquering of inner man, understanding the secrets of the subtle workings they are within the human mind and knowing, its wonderful secrets of subtle workings are within the human mind, and knowing its wonderful secrets belong entirely to religion.. There are scientists, who try to ignore the spiritual phenomenon for the simple reason they are unprepared to undergo the disciplines required for comprehending it. These are surface scientists, it is not a good sign of a candid or scientific mind to throw overboard anything without proper investigation"- Swami Vivekananda: Complete Works: "The necessity of Religion", Volume II,
6. Religion deals with the truths of metaphysical world just as chemistry and other sciences deal with truths of physical world. The book one must read to learn chemistry is book of nature. The book from which to learn is religion is your own mind and heart. The sage is often ignorant



of physical science, because he reads the wrong book – the book within; and scientists if often too ignorant of religion because he too reads the wrong book – the book without. Science is description, deals within given time, space and cause. What it can not see is beyond time space and causality. A man who has moral perfection can see things beyond real of time space and causality.”- Swami Vivekananda: Complete Works: “The necessity of Religion”, Volume II.

7. “In its self interest, society must respect and indeed encourage, the integrity of science. Too often, science is regarded only as a means of satisfying immediate social demands, and such demands sometimes produce pressures, which erode the integrity of science. Society must recognize more clearly than it now does, that such pressures are self defeating, and given the hazards involved, in faulty understanding of the power modern science, , exceedingly dangerous as well. If scientist wants to strengthen the integrity of science, the integrity of science and if citizens learn to respect the importance and integrity of science to the society, we can enter the new age of science in the hope that it will properly serve the welfare of man” - A report of American Association of Advancement of Sciences committee in the promotion of human welfare, December 31, 1964, Quotes,
8. Copernicus in 1543 opposed geocentric astronomy of Ptolemy with helio-centric theory that earth and planets move around the sun and not vice versa. “A few hours later he was beyond the reach of conscientious men who would’ve blotted his reputation and perhaps have destroyed his life”, comments Dr White. Roman Catholic and Protestants churches, Copernicus theory was vehemently denounced with all authority, the church leaders had basis on the bible. It was in 1611, sixty eight years after death of Copernicus that a small telescope of Galileo showed up quite and unforeseen things. Many years ago, opponents of Copernicus asked him, “If your doctrines were true, Venus would show phases like moon”. Copernicus answer was characteristic of a great seeker of truth, who is sure of things and known of full of wonder in regard to vast unknown, “You are right; I know not what to say, but God is good and ill in time find an answer to this objection”. He said. It took 150 years for Copernican theory to be accepted. - From the book, “A history of warfare of science with theology in christen-dom “, George braziller, New York 1955. Page 123-4.
9. “The Aim of science is to describe impersonal facts of experience in verifiable terms as exactly as possible, as simply as possible and as completely as possible. The scientific mood is specially marked by a passion for facts, by cautiousness of statement, by clearness of vision and by a sense of inter-relatedness of things. There is only one way of knowing how nature works the way of careful observation and experiment. Then you can begin to formulate hypotheses and theories and from these again deductions can be made. Once more observation and experiment must be brought to bear on these deductions – so that in the end we get reliable theories which account for all the observed data. This sequence is called the scientific method. The fundamental postulate of science is uniformity of nature” - J. A. Thomson, Introduction to Science, Henry Holt & Company, New York; Williams and Norgate, London, 1911.
10. Swami Vivekananda on necessity of cultivating reciprocity between religion and science, “Is religion to justify itself by discoveries of reason, through which every other concrete science justifies itself? Are the same methods of investigation which we apply to science and knowledge outside to be applied to the science of religion?” And continuing this, he himself gave answer to this: “In my opinion, this must be so, and I am also of the opinion that sooner it is done, the better. If a religion is destroyed b such investigations, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition; and sooner it goes the better. I am thoroughly convinced that this destruction would be best thing that could happen. All this dross will be taken off, no doubt, but essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant out of this investigation. Not only will it be made scientific, as scientific, at least as any of consultations of physics or chemistry, but will have a greater strength because physics or chemistry has no internal mandate to vouch for its truth, which religion has” - Swami Vivekananda: Complete Works: “The necessity of Religion”, Volume II,
11. JA Thomsons book, “introduction to science”. Henry Holt and company. “Science is a description of facts, with maximum completeness, and maximum economy of thoughts. Laws of nature are descriptive formulae in “conceptual short hand of the routine of our perception. Since does not pretend tot know anything about God. It cannot say that God does not exist, without being unscientific and need not say that good exists to be scientific.” “The aim of science is to describe impersonal facts from experience in verifiable terms as exactly as possible, as simply as possible, and as completely as possible. The scientific odd is specially marked by a passion of facts, by cautiousness of statement by clearness of vision and by sense of interrelatedness of things. There is only one way of knowing how nature works the way of careful observation and experiment. Then you can begin to formulate hypothesis and theories and from these again deductions can be made. One more observation and experiment but be brought to bear these deductions so that tin the end we get reliable theories which account for the observed data. This sequence is called scientific method.”
12. Sir Arthur Eddington said, “The theory of relativity has



passed in review whose subject matter of physics. It has unified the great last, which by the precision of their formulation have won the proud place in human knowledge, which physical science holds today, and yet in regard to the nature of things, this knowledge is only an empty shell – a form of symbols. It is knowledge of structural form and not knowledge of content. All through physical world runs on unknown content, this must surely be the stuff of our consciousness. Here is a hint of aspects deep within the world, of physics and unattainable by the method of physics and more over we have found that where science has progressed, and furthest the mind has but regained from nature that which the mind has put into nature. We have found strange footprints on the shore of unknown, we have devised profound origin. At last we have succeeded in reconstruction in creature that made the foot print! It is our own!

13. "It is not an issue of scholasticism that we are discussing, the acceptance or rejection of which does not matter except in theory. What we are discussing, the acceptance or rejection of which does not matter except that in theory. What we are discussing is an issue of "to be or not to be." Man will have to find the way to do this successfully or he will not survive. Something therefore will have to be done first in the very spirit of today, which is dominated by the powerful overtones, of scientific spirit. These overtones which create more problems than they solve, will have to be replaced by the conviction that it is possible to be scientific yet spiritual. And if we understand all our problems at their roots, there is no greater urgency today than this – Swami Budhananda, Advaita Ashrama, June 1973

## Credits and Thank you

Some people whose contribution must be acknowledged in preparing this essay:

Pallavi Kumar, Nitika Mendiratta, Mark Robinson, Andrew Hards and Steve Pyton

