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The mailing address of the *Transcendent Philosophy* is:

Dr S.G. Safavi
Journal of Transcendent Philosophy
121 Royal Langford
2 Greville Road
London NW6 5HT
UK
Tel: (+44) 020 7692 2491
Fax: (+44) 020 7209 4727
Email: philosophy@iranainstudies.org

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Why the Modern Intellectual Cannot Teach the Truth?

Aadil Farook

ISTAC, IIUM, International Islamic University Malaysia

Abstract

The body-soul duality has confused some of the most sophisticated minds since ages. Spiritual masters of all traditions claim that the soul, too, has organs. Let us consider what Western Philosophy calls as the mind-body problem. Neuroscientists claim the dualism of mind-brain to be true; the mind is to soul what the brain is to body; the mind is a ‘spiritual’ brain distinct from the biological brain. To understand how they interact, let us consider computer technology as an analogy. Intelligence itself belongs to the software but it cannot perform its function without its information processor i.e. the hardware. Mind is like the software whereas brain is like the hardware. Furthermore, in both cases, the earlier is non-material whereas the later is material.

Perhaps the two most fascinating scientific discoveries in the last few years are as follows. Firstly, the biological heart which has been considered as only a blood-pump since ages is actually a lot more than that i.e it is an intelligent organ. Secondly, there is a dualism of heart as well i.e besides the biological heart, there is a spiritual heart. However, the secret is much deeper than that which, if understood by the modern man, would not have given birth to so many “isms”. The History of Western Thought is full of false prophets who claimed to bring man out of darkness. Is it not wondrous that some of the most educated and intelligent people can turn completely foolish when it comes to religion?

People who can design highly complex integrated circuits may still fail to understand the simple teachings of religious scriptures.

This research deals with the major philosophical and spiritual implications of the new insights brought to us by Science on a much larger scale than that anticipated by those who explored them.

Keywords: Heart, Intelligence, Intuition, Science & Religion.

Importance of worldview

The pendulum of our age swings with the thrust of relativism, the amplitude of uncertainty while hinging on subjectivity. Paradoxes that defy the best minds, stir the calmest hearts and threaten the conviction of most, revolve around Truth. Reality is a supreme puzzle harder to join after the ascent of intellect. Most religions demand leaps of faith too big for inquisitive minds. Science's relentless pursuit of facts renders it cold for human emotions. Philosophy cannot avoid and instead drowns in the waves of its times. Psychology mocks man's dignity by deeming him a puppet dancing to an unheard tune. Intuition and imagination in Art and Literature fail to serve the utilitarian ends of materialism. Hedonism is a forbidden tree whose fruits poison man's soul; so pleasure, too, is not a beacon of guidance. Thus a cry for intellectual unity among all kinds of people seems fruitless. Yet, one definition of truth worthy of highest consent is that it has to pass the deepest scrutiny of reason and stand the longest test of time.

A Challenge for Western Thought

Is there anything that is qualified to be called the Truth? Do we need a Truth to live for? Can there ever be a single Truth which would unite the whole world without any conflicts? Or is Truth the unmatched utopia which will never prevail beyond wishful

thinking? Does Truth stand independent of us? Is Truth only an illusion of our psyche? Is it an inevitable epiphenomenon of the natural disposition of our brain? Do we see things as they are or as we are? Is there a visionary who, blessed with the height of wisdom, possesses a magical answer to these unsolved riddles of our times? The History of Western Thought is full of false prophets who claimed to bring man out of darkness.

Once upon a time, man was foolish, naïve, “backwards” and irrational. When he would set his eyes upon the mighty mountains, he would think of a Creator behind them. When he would witness the undisturbed alternation of sun and moon, he would imagine a God moving them. When he would see his body designed with fragility and perfection, he would ascribe the same cause to it. When he would be in need, he would lift his hands for a prayer. When he would be confused about right and wrong, he would open a Holy Book. However, thanks to science, technology, intellect and progress, there is no such idiocy anymore. Now he can explain everything with science and logic. He does not need fairytales to be fascinated with; perhaps he has grown too wise for them. How superstitious was he!

The above is an excerpt from the diary of a modern man as to how he views religion. Is not it wondrous that some of the most educated and intelligent people turn completely stupid when it comes to religion? People who can design highly complex integrated circuits fail to understand a simple teaching of religion. We have already read the modern man’s explanation, but the secret is much deeper than that which, if understood, would not have given birth to so many “isms”.

The body-soul duality has confused some of the most sophisticated minds since ages. Spiritual masters of all traditions claim that the soul, too, has organs. Let us consider what Western Philosophy calls as the mind-body problem. Neuroscientists claim the dualism of mind-brain to be true; the mind is to soul what the brain is to

body; the mind is a ‘spiritual’ brain distinct from the biological brain. To understand how they interact, let us consider computer technology as an analogy. Intelligence itself belongs to the software but it cannot perform its function without its information processor i.e. the hardware. Mind is like the software whereas brain is like the hardware. Furthermore, in both cases, the earlier is non-material whereas the later is material.

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¹Recently, a relatively new medical discipline known as Neurocardiology has uncovered the presence of the neurons in the heart, the same type of cells that are present in the brain. There are as many as 40000 neurons in the heart. The nervous system of the heart is made up of these neurons which are capable of processing information without the help of neurons from the brain. The neurons of the heart obtain information from the rest of the body and make appropriate adjustments and send back this information from the heart to the rest of the body including the brain. In addition to this, these neurons possess a kind of short-term memory which allows them to function independently of the central nervous system.

²These findings prompted the nervous system of the heart being mentioned as the “brain in the heart”. The heart possesses its own little brain, capable of complex computational analysis on its own. Data clearly indicate that the intrinsic cardiac nervous system acts as much more than a simple relay station for the extrinsic autonomic projections to the heart. An understanding of the complex anatomy and function of the heart’s nervous system contributes an additional dimension to the newly emerging view of

the heart as a sophisticated information processing centre, functioning not only in concert with the brain but also independent of it.

³The heart communicates with the brain in 4 different ways. Firstly, its nerve cells or neurons transmit information to the brain. It is called neural traffic and research has shown that the heart sends more neural traffic to the brain than the other way round. Secondly, the heart has been found to secrete a very powerful hormone called Atrial Natriuretic factor (ANF) that has a profound effect on many parts of the body including those portions of the brain that are involved in memory, learning and emotions. Thirdly, with every heartbeat, pressure waves are generated and when these travel through the arteries to the brain, there are recordable changes in the electrical activity of the brain. Finally, the heart has an electromagnetic energy field 5000 times greater than that of the brain. Since the heart's energy field is greater than that of the brain, it has a profound effect on the brain's functions.

⁴Even though the timing of the heartbeat can be influenced by the brain (through the autonomic nervous system), the source of the heartbeat is present within the heart. There appears to be no need for nerve connections between the heart and the brain. That is why, when a person has a heart transplant, all the nerve connections between the heart and brain are cut but that doesn't stop the heart from working when it is placed in the new person's chest.

⁵It is common knowledge now that the heart of the unborn child develops and starts pumping long before the brain comes into existence. Even though the actual event which triggers the beating of the heart cells of a baby is not known, it is suspected that the mother's heart energy conveyed in primal sound waves contains the information that is the code that jump-starts our life. Once the heart begins to beat, it continues to beat throughout a lifetime (auto rhythmic beating function) even when the brain stops working in cases like 'brain death'. Brain death is described as a condition

when brain activity has stopped forever. Hence even when the brain dies, the heart can still live. But when the heart dies (unless we find a replacement for the heart), the brain cannot live. Thus, the brain needs the heart for its survival more than the other way around.

⁶Joseph Pearce, in “Evolution’s End”, claims that the biological heart is governed by another higher unseen order of energy. The behaviors of people after heart-transplants reflect that of the late donors. Experiments were done on two cells taken from the heart and observed through a microscope. In the first experiment in which they are isolated from one another they simply fibrillate until they die but when similar cells are brought near to each other, they synchronize and beat in unison. They don’t have to touch they communicate across a spatial barrier. Our heart made up of many billions of such cells operating in unison is under the guidance of a higher, non localized intelligence so we have both a physical heart and a higher universal heart and our access to the latter is dramatically contingent on the former.

Intelligence used to be defined as only rationality expressed by the brain and measured by IQ tests. In 1983, Howard Gardner of Harvard revolutionized the whole concept of intelligence. He showed 7 distinct kinds of intelligence – logical/mathematical, linguistic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial & bodily/kinesthetic. He claimed that IQ-tests measure only the first two types. In 1996, Daniel Goleman, in his famous book ‘Emotional Intelligence’ showed that life depends far higher on the ability to manage emotions rather than mental abilities alone. Emotional intelligence is of a humanistic type whereas logical intelligence is of a selfish type. Thus intelligence devoid of heart turns man cunning and insensitive. Some deem emotions as only the by-product of brain but it has been shown that emotions are much faster than the thought process and surpass the linear-reasoning of the brain. J. Andrew Armour proved in his book “Neurocardiology” that amygdala, the portion of brain dealing with emotional memory processing, is influenced by the heart.

On a less scientific and much simpler, philosophical and experiential level, we can understand the heart-brain interaction by reflecting on how we reason in our everyday lives. An emotion or feeling gives birth to a thought process. The sequence of the reasoning progresses in the direction as governed by the emotion behind it. The final conclusion which we label as rationale is nothing but the super-imposition of the initial emotion. Man, as we all know, is primarily governed by passion. There are very few instances in which his rationality is unaltered by his emotions. His heart and mind are fully interconnected. Feelings arouse thoughts and thoughts stir feelings and this vicious cycle goes on.

Where man becomes rational in a neutral manner, that is, without favoring his emotions, is mostly the scientific domain. Conclusions of scientific investigations and experiments are more often than not free from adulterations and biases. Why is that so? Why is a scientist more often than not honest in scientific truths? It is because the conclusions have nothing to do with the fulfillment or negation of his desires; but the same scientist will never be that honest in concluding religious truths because, he knows it will directly interfere with his desires. Even in scientific matters like evolution and creation, scientists who are inwardly anti-religious lose their honesty. Atheist Richard Dawkins, who can be called a “fundamentalist Scientist”, despite claiming to be a pure rationalist, rejects a refutation of Darwinism which is more rational than its defense. Scientists, too, are humans like us.

Is intuition a source of intelligence? How can people create art or become great artists with neither learning or studying art nor having an arts degree? They call it artistic sense. But what is artistic sense? Artistic sense is nothing but intuitive intellect invested for art. The rationalists recognize it in the domain of Arts but shun it when it comes to religion. It is their intellectual dishonesty and hypocrisy. Without intuition no one can compose music or write poetry. ‘Gut feeling’ and ‘6th sense’, too, are human experiences

that cannot be denied. Why does someone in love possess such a strong and accurate sixth sense regarding his beloved? Heart is way above being just a romantic-sounding word.

Knowledge itself is neither Western nor Eastern. Science is neither materialistic nor spiritual in its scope and purpose; it is concerned with the observation, collection and definition of facts and the derivation from them of general rules. But the inductive conclusions derived from them are not based on facts and observations alone but are influenced, to a very large extent, by the intuitive attitude towards life and its problems. The great German philosopher, Kant, said: "It seems surprising at first, but is none the less certain, that our reason does not draw its conclusions from things, but ascribes them to it"⁷. This ascription cannot be free from intuition coming from the heart.

"If you are not deceived by the mirage, be not proud of your understanding.
Your freedom from this optical illusion is due to your imperfect thirst" - Urfi⁸

One seldom comes across a more beautiful explanation of the phenomena of perception than the above words of the Persian poet. With a vehement desire to drink, the sands of the desert would give the impression of a lake but due to the absence of a keen desire for water, one cannot perceive it. A person with hatred for someone will see faults in him that do not even exist, whereas, a person in love with someone finds gems in him out of no where. Human knowledge is only a perception of the reality, not the reality itself. In quantum physics, even the distinction between subject and object has ceased to exist. We see things as we are not as they are. Perception, too, is the work of heart.

Till now we have discussed heart in the light of modern science and simple philosophy. Although it has certainly shed new lights on many things but we have not yet answered the question raised at the

start. It is said that where all human intellect ceases, the sagacity of revelation starts. Similarly, where scientists and philosophers have nothing to say further, a deeply spiritual or religious man will have a lot to offer. The role of biological heart and the existence of spiritual heart that Science has discovered now were revealed in the Quran, in more than 100 verses, 15 centuries earlier. But Islam did not just settle there and took the concept to another level altogether. It further explained the role of spiritual heart (*qalb*) as well which would, in turn, create all the difference.

A mirror reveals the true picture only when it is itself clear and clean. When an impurity mars it, the image is dimmed and if it becomes covered with dirt, it cannot reveal a true reflection. The *qalb* is a mirror. When it is freed from vices, it is spotless and speaks only the truth. When a vice takes place, a black spot appears on it and if the vices go on persisting, the black spot grows bigger till the heart becomes completely blind to the truth. Just as the brain has an IQ level reflecting capability to understand many things, the heart has a purification level which indicates its capacity to comprehend the Ultimate Truth.

Truth is infinite and cannot reside in a finite container. Human senses have limitations with mortality written all over them. Although the human brain is amazing to reach beyond the stars or inside a micro particle but it, too, would fail to give the right output in some of the fundamental questions of life if it receives input from a corrupt master (*qalb*). *Qalb* is the only organ which has the potential to grasp the infinite despite human limitations. Quran says that God neither exists in the heavens nor on the earth but only in the *qalb* of His true followers. The *qalb* is His home but He enters it only when it is clean enough for Him.

The modern man, in his sheer ignorance, thinks that religion doesn't appeal to him because, unlike the older times when man hadn't developed logical competence, now he has intellectually progressed too much to even need religion. In truth, his heart has been

darkened so much due to sins that he has lost the ability to see the reality. God describes such people as deaf, dumb and blind who can neither see the truth nor hear the truth nor speak the truth. When Muhammad (pbuh) said that our heart is the organ which governs our body, his words were spoken from a spiritual point of view because from the physical perspective, even a school-kid knows it. The indifference to religion in the modern age is not because of intellectual superiority but due to spiritual inferiority.

People can be brilliant in their professions with impure hearts because most require only good brains. Religious knowledge, however, is quite different from secular knowledge. If Ghazali, Rumi or Ibn-al-Arabi used logic to the fullest for their brilliant philosophies, it is because with a heart similar to theirs, reason will always reach the truth. The problem with the modern man is that he uses logic as much as them but has a heart not even worth comparing to them. As much as intellect guides man, it leads him astray - the criteria being state of the heart. Modern man's intellectual discourse is mostly a rational expression or rather justification of the call of lower-self (*nafs*).

It is noteworthy to compare the ancient and modern concepts of Philosophy. In Greek tradition, it was considered *hikmah* (wisdom). For Muslims, philosophy was nothing but an honest search for the truth. In today's academics, the discipline of philosophy comes under Arts because now it has been robbed of its serious nature and is more just a creative ability to think without any profound veracity, with more emphasis on originality rather than depth. Iqbal must have seen the highly obscured vision of Russel, Nietzsche, Freud, Marx and Rousseau, when he said that, "man's reason aims at the conquest of the world of matter; his love makes conquest of the infinite. Knowledge devoid of love is nothing but juggling with ideas"⁹. Quran rightly described pseudo-intellectualism as nothing but mental conjectures devoid of reality.

Rumi saw the heart, being a special inner insight, bringing us into contact with aspects of reality other than those open to sense-perception and intellect. Intellect, according to him, only restrains the living heart of man and robs it of the invisible wealth that lies within. While admitting the superiority of intuitive intellect over rational, Iqbal said that “where thought grasps Reality piecemeal, intuition grasps it in its wholeness. One fixes its gaze on the temporal aspect of Reality; the other on the eternal. One slowly traverses, specifies and closes up the various regions of the whole for exclusive observation; the other is present enjoyment of the whole of Reality”¹⁰.

The issue with the modern man is that he is so in love with this illusionary world that his rationality is bound to suit only his emotions which are non-religious and non-spiritual in nature. That is why even when he opens a Holy Book, his interpretation deprives him of the truth and the celestial verses fail to penetrate into his dark heart. On the other hand, the same man, amazingly, shed tears on a mere song or a movie or a novel despite knowing it is only art not the truth! The issue with religion is that it is too deep to be grasped without a receptive heart, and certainly not for the shallowness and superficiality of the modern age. Thus Islamization of knowledge is Islamization of man which in turn is Islamization of hearts.

A Sufi once said that no real understanding of the Holy Book is possible until it is actually revealed to the believer just as it was revealed to the Prophet. Sufis of the past were able to derive many hidden meanings behind seemingly simple Quranic verses. Hazrat Ali gave a lecture from *isha* till *fajr* on only the first letter of *Bismillah*. These people had hearts of gold; we only wear gold on our skins. The spiritual heart (*qalb*) is the organ of higher knowledge when pure. The holy book is not another collection of papers, letters and ink. It is an infinite ocean of knowledge, but only for the thirsty - not for the heedless, arrogant, “civilized” and “refined gentlemen” of the 21st century! The reason why most

cannot perceive God in anything in life is because they have too much of everything else, instead, to long for. A Sufi once said that this universe is His book to take lessons from it.

Conclusion

The modern age speaks too much of enlightenment of the mind, whereas, with a darkened heart, the mind will only give birth to an inverted reality. No wonder arrogance is known as dignity; indifference is known as tolerance; humbleness is known as weakness; material greed is known as ambitiousness; vulgarity is known as freedom; lust is known as love; insensitivity is known as rationality; conscience is known as confusion; short-sightedness is known as practicality; conviction is known as fundamentalism; higher conviction is known as extremism; denial of human limitations is known as genius. The best illustration of inverted reality is human prosperity, a term we hear earlier than we learn how to crawl. By devoting himself solely to increase the quantity and quality of *ghair-ullah* (non-God), man is now inevitably fascinated with all but God whereas the essence of religion was none but God.

What appears as the decay of religion and the rise of intelligence is in reality nothing but the death and emptiness of hearts turned idle, unable to hear that eternal inner voice. Nietzsche said God is dead. I say conscience is dead. The pinnacle of delusion is that modern man has assumed his superiority amongst creations as an unconditional state whereas it solely relies on his acts – man can even be lower than the beasts. Man is great only because he has will and yet doesn't sin, not because he sins and can rationally justify it as well. The latter case represents that of the modern man and he is so proud of it. He defies the truth using an instrument which alone cannot even measure it.

If man flies to the highest sky of reason, he would nothing but the clouds of Truth, only if the wings of faith take him that far!

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