THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE IDEAL AND THE REAL IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

One of the consequences of globalization appears to be a radical shift in our traditional value systems. Our identities as human beings are no longer defined by our religions or cultures, but are generalized as a global identity. This new global identity emphasizes the material self-sufficiency of individuals. The dignity of the 'human being' is reduced to the level of a 'consumer', and our values are redefined in accordance with the requirements of global community. Increasingly, it is scientific realism that guides our value system. This robs human beings of their moral freedom, and the possibility of a meaningful and purposeful life. In this paper an attempt is made to show how scientific realism can be balanced with a recovered philosophical idealism in order to prevent the continued deterioration in the quality of human life.

Introduction

What is popularly known as globalization is the byproduct of our technological age, which in turn is the offshoot of our scientific rationality. The pervasive phenomenon called globalization has had its impact on all aspects of social life of individuals. As a consequence of this impact, there appears to be a radical shift in our traditional value systems in general. This is conspicuous in the life-style led by the individuals in the modern societies. Such a life-style necessitates us to redefine our value systems to suit our new world-view which is directly or indirectly regulated by glo-

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balization. There are two ways of approaching human being. One way is to approach him through the culture in which he or she is brought up. Such a view of human being becomes culture specific and strengthens the doctrine of cultural relativism. Broadly speaking, it is the culture that provides man with any social identity. The identity, either physical or social, of any individual reveals his or her accidental features. To say that 'I am brown complexioned' or 'I am an Indian' is to define one's accidental attributes. They are the external marks of individual's identity. The other way of approaching human being is to see him beyond any culture. In other words, one has to look at man as man. This is how the essential nature of human being is realized. What is problematic here is to define this essential nature of human being for it is always defined in terms of something else. As Wittgenstein suggested we should not ask for the definition of it, rather, we must look for it. We will come to this issue in due course. Apart from these two approaches, the third approach is to look at human being within the global culture which attaches a distinctive identity to the human individuals. Under this new identity there is a danger of individuals losing their respective cultural identities for all the cultural identities get subsumed under the universal or global identity. But this universal or global identity should not be confused with the spiritual identity advocated by the various religions of the world. The spiritual identity certainly strengthens the human values and the quality of human life for it rests on the basic premise that the human nature is essentially the same everywhere. On the contrary, the global or universal identity of the individuals under the sway of globalization only strengthens the material self-sufficiency of individuals. The natural consequence of such an identity is that the expression 'human being' is replaced by the expression 'consumer'. Or the expressions 'human being' and 'consumer' are used as synonyms. A human being becomes essentially a consumer in the context of globalization. In the process, the scientific realism reigns supreme in the form of technological development and the philosophical idealism which stands for human ideals or values gets completely neglected. Or our values are redefined in accordance with the requirements of global community. Normally it is our value system (ideals) that guides our scientific activity. What is good for human and social well-being alone is pursued by the sciences. But in a technologically advanced global society it is the science that guides our value sys-

tem. In other words, science is no more under the control of human beings, but rather, we are under the control of science. This is the paradox. If science exercises its authority on human conduct then human beings are treated as the ultimate subjects of modern science and technology. We should not invite such a situation. First of all, the polarization between the ideal (ought) and the real (is) results in the lopsided development of human personality as well as human societies. The conflict between the ideal and the real ultimately emerges as a conflict between philosophical idealism and scientific realism. Secondly, the domination of scientific realism over philosophical idealism robs human beings of their moral freedom and meaningful and purposeful life. Every living organism lives and dies but without realizing the meaning and purpose of its life. In this context I would like to recall the distinction made by Sartre between 'being-in-itself' and 'being-for-itself'. What Sartre intends to show here is that human individuals have greater dignity than stones, tables, and other living creatures. What gives humans the grater dignity over other existents is their subjective life. Being-in-itself is to possess unconscious existence. On the contrary, being-for-itself represents the conscious life led by the humans. Similarly, while discussing the nature of pleasure Mill criticizes Bentham for he failed to distinguish quantitative pleasure from a qualitative one. It is in this context Mill holds that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied rather than a fool satisfied. In this paper an attempt is made to show how the mesmerizing effect of scientific realism would promote globalization which ultimately dehumanizes the basic human character. Unless and until a balanced approach towards philosophical idealism and scientific realism is adopted there is going to be deterioration in the quality of human life.

Philosophical Idealism

The expression 'idealism' is basically construed in two senses. In one sense it is understood that every system of philosophy sets forth certain ideals to be realized for the well being of individual and society. In this sense, every system of philosophy is idealistic in its character. Even Marxism is not an exception to this characterization. In another sense, idealism represents an ontological position wherein ideas are treated as primary

and matter secondary or derivative. Those systems of philosophy that oppose this view claim themselves to be anti-idealist. But philosophical idealism in the present context must be understood in the sense that philosophy as a discipline aims at certain ideals to be realized. The ancient Greeks held that philosophy is born out of man's sense of wonder and inquisitiveness expressed in questions "What are things really like?" and "How can we explain the process of change in things?" As Stumpf puts it: "What prompted these questions was the gradual recognition that things are not exactly what they seem to be, that "appearance" often differs from "reality"."[1] In our day-to-day life we are often carried away by the appearances without probing into the very reality of these appearances. Philosophers have advanced diverse explanations with regard to the distinction between appearance and reality. For instance, the classical and modern empiricists in the West, and the ancient Indian materialists like Carvaka could not see anything beyond sense-experience. Hence, they identified all that is perceived (appearance) with reality. Similarly, pragmatists explained the reality of anything and everything in terms of its utility and function. There are many different conceptions of reality. I do not propose to go into the details at this juncture. Here we are not talking about the reality which scientists and likeminded philosophers explained in terms of material or physical phenomenon. Traditionally, philosophy is viewed as a reflective and evaluative enterprise. It reflects on the essential meaning and purpose of life and its subordinate activities and the terms under which these activities are carried on. As Ingram views it:

> The essential means the most basic, the most necessary, and/or the most universal features of some activity or thing. It is what defines something in its innermost identity, relating it to things that are like it and distinguishing from the things that are not. Although this defining activity is similar to that of social and political scientist's penchant for constructions classifications, it involves considerably more than the mere description of reality; it prescribes a norm or ideal to which the activity or the thing being defined must conform in order for it to be truly what it is. Therefore, the definitions sought by philosophers have a critical edge.[2]

What is most important to notice in the above passage is that the reality of any activity or thing is assessed on the basis of a norm or an ideal

to which it has to conform. This is the reason why the ancient Greeks time and again emphasized the need to distinguish between wisdom and knowledge. It is through philosophical wisdom norms or ideals are arrived at. Knowledge is always knowledge of appearances. A natural scientist arrives at knowledge of a given phenomenon by means of observation and experimentation. Philosophy, on the contrary, is fundamentally conceived as the 'love of wisdom'. Even in the Indian tradition philosophers are characterized as the seekers of truth. A philosopher is one who digs out the truth which exists beneath the appearances. Also, the Indian philosophers are a step ahead of the ancient Greeks in holding the view that philosophers should not remain as mere lovers of wisdom, but must also lead the life of wisdom. It is the philosophical wisdom that reveals the ideal character of anything or activity.

It is true that even science makes a distinction between appearance and reality. But this distinction is confined to the analysis of facts of existence. Even for a scientist what is real is true. There is no dispute about this. But philosophical idealism, on the contrary, proposes that to be real is to be ideal and vice-versa. This means a philosopher puts forward only those ideals which can be realized for otherwise ideals remain utopian. Similarly what is real must be in conformity with the ideal projected. Therefore, one needs to distinguish between a real which is empirically real from a real which is ideally real. The latter is arrived at by means of philosophical reflection and evaluation. To arrive at the ideals which can be realized in a meaningful and purposeful life is the job of a philosopher. The following illustration may help us in understanding it in a better way. The concept of 'human being' is explained in terms of cut and dried matter possessing certain number of chromosomes by a physiologist. If one does not possess the required number of chromosomes then that entity is not classified under the class 'human being'. A bat may appear to be a bird but in reality it is a mammal for a zoologist. This is decided on the characteristics possessed by the animal in question. A philosopher cannot come into picture here for his reflection and evaluation are of no use to judge whether a particular animal is a bird or mammal. For a philosopher a human being is one who possesses humanity. But how would one interpret this concept. If humanity is treated as an essential ingredient of human beings then the attributes which make up this hu-

manity such as rationality, ensoulment, consciousness of self, and possession of meaningful world are subjected to critical reflection and evaluation by philosophers. But all these attributes acknowledge the normative or ideal status of humanity. If humanity is viewed in any of the above mentioned ways then humanity consists of potentials that ought to be realized. The ideal fulfillment of potentials depends upon human agency. It may be realized or may not be.

There is also another possibility. It is to make philosophy confine itself to the ideals which can be realized. What is to be realized must be made possible by the scientific rationality. As in the case of Aristotle's four-fold theory of causation in which formal cause is the ideal or the blueprint. This blueprint becomes a reality when it is realized as a final cause. Similarly, philosophical idealism provides us with a blueprint of the life-world with some ideals to be realized. Before we construct a massive structure we go for a blueprint of it. It is the builder who has to bring this structure into reality. It is the job of a scientist to arrive at the world-view that conforms to the ideal blueprint of a philosopher. Therefore, it is the ideal that precedes the real. We must be a bit cautious here when we talk about the reality. We are not talking about the natural world (natural reality) which is the given world. We are concerned with that world or reality which is transformed into a life-world by the intervention of human agency.

Scientific Realism

Scientific realism, on the contrary, has its own role to play in shaping the life-world of the individuals. All the changes that are brought about by modern science and technology for leading a comfortable life-style by the humans are received with mixed reaction. To quote the remark of Ziman in this context: "Science has become a major part of the stock of our minds; it products are the furniture of our surroundings."[3] In the context of globalization science and technology become two important determining aspects of the quality of life led by the individuals in any society. Therefore, the progress of these two indicators of qualitative life becomes a matter of pride for any society. Technology as an applied form of science has become the basic means of production in modern economy. It goes

without saying that mass production leads to mass consumption. As Ravetz puts it: "The technocratic view of science is that of a basic factor of production, needing ever-increasing supplies of highly-trained 'scientific manpower'. This view of science is descendant, in a simplified and vulgarized form, of a tradition extending from Francis Bacon down through Karl Marx."[4] Bacon defined knowledge in terms of power and Marx equated philosophy with political economy according to which the major advances in science and technology boost the needs of production. The boost in production is linked up with the better economic stability of any society and the comfortable living of the individuals in any industrialized society. But this technocratic view of science is dangerously one-sided for it converts science into an ideology. Also, there is a danger of scientism percolating into every form of human life by dislodging moral rationality from its sphere. Here the expression of ideology is nothing but false consciousness which is often oppressive.

One of the worst consequences of the monopoly of science and technology over any society is that science assumes to be an independent and self-contained factor in deciding the life-style of the individuals. Globalization, being the offshoot of industrialization, initially aims at catering to the specific needs of consumers on the basis of contract. Once this requirement is taken care of the excess stock of commodities produced under this contract are dumped on the developing and the underdeveloped countries. Thus, globalization gradually spreads its tentacles by converting the developing and underdeveloped nations into its dumping ground of its rejected products elsewhere. The survival of globalization is invariably dependent upon the industrialized science. As Nash views it, industrialized science and science-based industry are closely related to each other. One cannot make any neat bifurcation between these two. In the case of industrialized science, it is primarily the needs of the industry that are to be taken care of by the science. On the contrary, science-based industry tries to augment its production by making use of the techniques of modern science.[5] In other words, globalization encourages only those forms of science and technology that promote false needs at the cost of the genuine needs of individuals living in a society. Its ultimate aim is profit making at any cost. First of all individuals themselves must have philosophical wisdom to make a distinction between genuine and false needs.

The genuine policy makers must keep this distinction in mind before recommending a particular course of action.

Partly the burden rests on the community of individuals to guide our science and technology to meet the ideals of life. Just as food, clothing and shelter are accepted as the basic needs of human life, freedom, happiness, and justices are accepted as the true ideals of human life. Unfortunately modern science and technology are oriented towards augmenting our commercial and military capabilities. The big business establishments in the world today found it more profitable to venture into the commercialization of military needs which range from ordinary military uniforms to sophisticated weapons of mass destruction. Now it is the turn of the military technology to dominate all other forms of technology. As citizens of human community how horrific it would be to see science as a new Leviathan. It is a dangerous body of knowledge which is esoteric, inhuman and increasingly dominant.[6] This form of science and technology is not guided by any ideals but by power and domination. It is true that scientific temper has to be cultivated to oppose superstition and dogma, but not to oppose values. Every scientist as a humanist must also realize his social responsibility as a scientist.

The inventor of electricity should not think that he would not be harmed by it if he accidentally comes into contact with a live wire just because he invented it. A scientist as a citizen of human community must not become a victim of his own discoveries and inventions any more than the fellow citizens. If science is pampered to destroy the human values then it becomes fully authoritarian in style, giving the young or old no opportunity to develop their powers of criticism and judgment. "The increasing power of natural science thus threatens the destruction of humane understanding among educated people as the humane studies are increasingly deprived of prestige, of time in university teaching programmes, and of resources of research. As a result, our thinking about ourselves and the world around us becomes grossly materialistic and quantitative; the higher sensibilities and values are crushed beneath the machine."[7]

One must realize that the fundamental differences among humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences are more of degree than of kind. Each discipline has its own role to play in the life-world of individuals. When it is a question of decision making between two available alterna-

tives, it is philosophical wisdom that comes to one's rescue but not the knowledge of any particular science. Reflective thinking and evaluation are the two fountains of philosophical wisdom. Possessing scientific knowledge is different from how to make use of what is possessed. One must realize that science does not survive "by manpower units alone; and without some ideal to replace that of the pursuit of truth it could soon degenerate. Moreover, to the extent that science becomes organized around the service of commercial and military industry, it will be subjected to the criticism of being dirty work."[8]

There is a reason for calling modern science a dirty work for it is solely responsible in creating problems of environment or bio-sphere Slowly people are coming to realize how modern science in the form of industrialized science has become more and more hazardous. Consequently the social and ethical problems become the deepest problems to understand the adverse impact of industrialized science of present day. There is no wonder when one says that science has lost its pristine purity. Here in this context we must make a distinction between professional ethic and general ethic. A scientist may follow all the prescriptions of a professional ethic to keep his discipline hale and hearty. But general ethic is more interested in keeping the whole society hale and hearty. For philosophical idealism it is the latter which is important.

Concluding Remarks

The above discussion brings out the defects of both philosophical idealism and scientific realism if they are pursued independent of each other. The failure of philosophical idealism is witnessed when the philosophers like Plato, Marx and Gandhi failed in their attempts to cerate ideal societies of their respective periods. Plato's 'ideal state', Marx's 'communist society', and Gandhi's 'Rama Rajya' turned out to be mere utopian ideals for they were never realized in the history of mankind; and it is doubtful whether there would be any scope for the realization of them in future. Here our contention is not to undermine their dream projects for the welfare of mankind, but the question is: How realistic are they? Therefore, philosophical idealism can no more nurture such ideals which remain

as museum pieces or reified ideals. An ideal is something which translated into a concrete reality. Similarly, scientific realism cannot boast about its achievements in the form of technological advancement for it is going to be detrimental to the furtherance of human race on the globe if the present day science and technology are not properly guided by philosophical idealism. Scientific realism would be like a ship without a captain in the absence of philosophical idealism. It is set adrift in the waters without any direction. We have already noticed the dangerous consequences of pursuing modern science and technology without any moral base. The ethical basis of science has its source in philosophical idealism. But in modern society, as consumers, we have already become slaves to scientific realism. Before the situation worsens we must come to our senses to revolt against excesses of modern science which is a tool or weapon in the hands of big industrialists to suppress human dignity. Human dignity consists in the freedom that one enjoys. Loss of freedom results in loss of creativity. Science ultimately becomes a walking stick for us without which we cannot move a few feet. This was anticipated by Michael Polanyi, the well-known physical chemist, Karl Popper, a well-known philosopher of science, and Robert K. Merton, a well-known sociologist. Polanyi held that science progresses in a disciplined way without causing any danger to human welfare only when it is undertaken by the free and dedicated men. In other words, free and dedicated men need not be scientists by themselves, but as principal observers they orient it towards human welfare.[9] Karl Popper viewed science as an embodiment of intellectual honesty which is realized through the principle and practice of criticism.[10] And Merton held that the ethos of science stands for the realization of highest standards of civilized human behaviour.[11] All of them anticipated dangers to science. According to Polanyi, the deterioration of science starts when bureaucracy, power and control determine the direction of science. For Popper it is the intellectual dishonesty and non admittance of any criticism that lead to its downfall. Merton viewed that the inherent conflict between the norms of cooperative scientific endeavour and those of lay society and state will contribute to its negative impact. Some eminent Marxist theoreticians like J.D. Bernal believed that science is primarily concerned with the society and social development. Therefore, a scientist has an obligation towards the welfare of the society. This is being done by the science

without losing its integrity and freedom.[12]

If science is not to degenerate, it requires both philosophical wisdom and highest ethical commitment. Majority of the scientists today indulge in 'mission-oriented' research. They do not have freedom to work on their own as they have fixed targets. The moral dilemma is whether an individual scientist pursues his scientific research for his own immediate benefits by turning his back to the sufferings of humanity or would he pursue his scientific research with strong social conscience and faith in human values. The present day scientific research prefers the former rather than the latter. Especially in the context of globalization this dilemma between the ideal and the real persists. In our normal course of life it is the ideal which guides our real course of action. But it is unfortunate that the real is projecting what should be the ideal in the form of false needs. In other words, we are virtually allowing scientific realism to dominate our philosophical idealism.

Endnotes

[1]Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy*, New York, McGraw Hill Book Company, 191982, p.3.

[2]David Ingram, *Critical Theory and Philosophy*, New York, paragon House, 1990, pp. xx-xxi.

[3]J.M. Ziman, *Public Knowledge: An Essay Concerning the Social Dimensions of Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p.1.

[4]J.R. Ravetz, *Scientific Knowledge and its Social Problems*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1973, p.21.

[5]L.K.Nash, *The Nature of the Natural Sciences*, Boston, Little Brown & Co,1966, p.113.

[6]J.R. Ravetz, *Scientific Knowledge and its Social Problems*, p.24.

[7]*Ibid.*, p.25.

[8]*Ibid.*, p.29.

[9]Michael Polanyi, *The Logic of Liberty*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul,1951, p.51.

[10]Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul,19630, Chap.1.

[11]R.K. Merton, *Science, Theory and Social Structure*, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1957, 537-61.

[12]For details see, J. D. Bernal, *The Social Functions of Science*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1939.