

**PROLEGOMENON TO THE STUDY OF  
THE SIMILARITIES IN MYSTICAL  
THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE**

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**Mystical theology and science share a common understanding in regard to the limitations and hindrance of language in unlocking reality. Both would agree that language falsifies reality. It falsifies it by imposing limits to the real. It falsifies it by imposing human categories and classifications to the real. For both realities is beyond words and human concepts. Reality transcends language. Language in fact hinders a true understanding of the real. What language does is create what the Hindus' call Maya. Namely a conventional reality based upon language -a world of appearances and forms of illusion or deception generated by a falsifying language which an unenlightened mind takes as the only reality. For the physicist Bohr language is a barrier to understanding reality Dante like Lao Tzu, Pseudo-Dionysius St Augustine (354-430), St Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) Zen and many forms of Eastern mysticism knew the simultaneous inapplicability and inevitability of human language when talking of reality or God and his attributes and domains. Whether the reality as investigated by science is really just another name for God or the reality investigated by science is just a reality and not the God of religion. In other words is God just another name for reality or is reality just another name for God is by the by. What is important is this reality/God as understood by both science and theology is beyond the ability of human language –and thus intellect to grasp**

## SCIENCE

Heisenberg notes that “ the strangest experience of those years was that the paradoxes of quantum theory did not disappear during this process of clarification; on the contrary they have become even more marked and exciting.”<sup>1</sup>

In regard to the paradoxes and contradictions of quantum theory Wick states the orthodox view when he says “here my opinion of the orthodox quantum mechanics, like Bohr, comes down to the meaning of words. “Classical” and “complementarity”, insult and commendation, are euphemisms; the belief concealed is that Nature has been found in a contradiction. But quantum physicists are not simpletons. In their hearts they know such a claim is philosophically unacceptable and would be rejected in other sciences.”<sup>2</sup>

Wick notes “ I believe orthodox quantum theorists [slates] reason, consciously or unconsciously, something like this. The microscopic world exhibits paradoxes or contradictions and this fact is reflected in the best theory describing it.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> F. Selleri, *Quantum Paradoxes and Physical Reality*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990, p.v111.

<sup>2</sup> A. Wick, *The Infamous Boundary*, Birkhauser, Berlin, 1995, p.184

<sup>3</sup> A. Wick, *The Infamous Boundary*, Birkhauser, Berlin, 1995, p.183.

Nicholas of Cusa states "... needful to enter the darkness and to admit the coincidence of opposites beyond all grasp of reason ... [God] art found unveiled is girt around with the coincidence of contradictories ... the door whereof is guarded by the most proud spirit if reason and unless he be vanquished the way in will not lie open"<sup>4</sup>

"Dual pictures, dual language: linguistic analysis is the key to understand quantum mechanics Bohr told his protégée Heisenberg shattering his hard won vision of the micro world. The very words physicists use to describe reality constrains their knowledge of it and scientists in every field will one day encounter this barrier to human understanding"<sup>5</sup>

Now on the point of an object being both a particle and a wave Zajak notes that "we are limited by our language to lists of words much as our worldly experiences limit the concepts those words bring to mind."<sup>6</sup> With this in mind Zajak points out that we naively apply to the micro world concepts which only have applicability in the macro world. Electrons don't behave like mini billiard balls and light does not behave like scaled down sea waves.

As Zajak notes "*particles and waves are macroscopic concepts which*

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<sup>4</sup> F. C. Happold, *Mysticism*, Penguin, 1984, p. 336

<sup>5</sup> A. Wick, *The Infamous Boundary*, Birkhauser Berlin, 1995, p.33.

<sup>6</sup> H.Zajak, *Optics*, Addison Wesley Publishing Company, New York., P. 449

*gradually lose their relevance as we approach the submicroscopic domain.*”<sup>7</sup> Thus with regard to the ontological nature of the world the situation seems to be as O’Hear notes “ontology here would be seen as determined by the demands of an area of discourse, rather than by any feeling that human recognitional powers and abilities should determine the limits of our language.”<sup>8</sup> In this regard the logic which is generated by the use of the logical constants of a natural language such as ‘or’, ‘if’, ‘not’, ‘and’, etc may not be adequate enough for the natural language to interpret or understand the ontological nature of the physical world. Thus concepts which are contradictions in terms such as an object being a ‘wave-particle’ or such mathematical ideas as ‘completed infinities’ reach the limits of our logic because they start violating our logical laws. In other words the nature of the world may transcend the limits and ability of language thus logic to characterise.

Quine argued that science had rejected the notion of the object and regarded it as a myth. Physical objects are as mythical as the gods of Homer. As Quine notes “...physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries-not by definition of terms of experience, but

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p.450.

<sup>8</sup> A.O’Hear, *What is Philosophy*, Penguin, 1991, p.51.

simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer.”<sup>9</sup>

“... all our knowledge is what a Taoist would call conventional knowledge, because we do not feel that we know anything unless we represent it to ourselves in words, or in some system of conventional signs as the notation of mathematics...”<sup>10</sup>

Now relativity physics through the assigning of properties to matter ie objects sees these properties as being due to the object’s relation with other objects not so much as intrinsic to the object or constituting its essence. In this regard science denies that objects have sui-generis determinate, necessary, and immutable properties or essence. On this point M. Born argues “the theory of relativity...has never abandoned all attempts to assign properties to matter...But often a measurable quantity is not a property of a thing, but a property of its relation to other things...Most measurements in physics are not directly concerned with the things which interest us but with some kind of projection, the word taken in the widest possible sense”.

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<sup>9</sup> W.V. O,Quine, From a Logical Point of View, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts.

1953, p.44.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, p.24

Commenting on these findings Marcuse states that “objects continue to persist only as ‘convenient intermediaries’ as obsolescent ‘cultural posits.’”<sup>11</sup>

“The very words physicists use to describe reality constrain their knowledge of it and scientists in every field will one day encounter this barrier to human understanding.”<sup>12</sup>

### MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

“As we climb higher we say [The supreme Cause] is not soul or mind nor does it possess imagination conviction speech or understanding. Nor is it speech per se understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order greatness or smallness equality or inequality similarity or dissimilarity. It is not movable moving or at rest. It had no power it is not power nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life.”<sup>13</sup>

Beatrice “ . .it is only from what is taken in by your senses that you can form notions suitable to your intellect,” ( Paradiso, 4.41-5)

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<sup>11</sup> **Marcuse.H**, (1992) One Dimensional Man, Beacon Press, Boston. P.149.

<sup>12</sup> A. Wick, *The Infamous Boundary*, Birkhauser, Berlin, 1995 p.39.

<sup>13</sup> C, Luibhed & P, Rorem ( ed and trans) *Mystical Theology 1045D-1048A* in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, New York, Paulist Press, 1987, p.106.



“Beatrice’s caution about extending human concepts beyond the horizon of sense-experience in which we learn them applies not only to such terms as “long” “white” and “beard” but- more challengingly to such terms like “just” or “love” which may be as we say “abstract” but which we have nonetheless abstracted from our experience in this earthly world”<sup>14</sup>

“Dante could have learned from St Augustine (354-430) as from St Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) about the simultaneous inapplicability and inevitability of such “human terms” and specifically of physical language and imagery when talking of God his attributes and domains. “<sup>15</sup>

As Zajak notes *“particles and waves are macroscopic concepts which gradually lose their relevance as we approach the submicroscopic domain.”*<sup>16</sup>

‘Pseudo-Dionysius’s mystical logic requires and derives from an extreme skepticism about the analogical extensions of human terms to the deity ‘ we

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<sup>14</sup> C, Ricks, *Dante in English*, Penguin, 2005, p.Li

<sup>15</sup> C, Ricks, *Dante in English*, Penguin, 2005, p.Li

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p.450.

have a habit of seizing upon what is actually beyond us clinging to the familiar categories of our sense perceptions and then we measure the divine by human standards and of course are led astray by the apparent meaning we give to divine and unspeakable reason' Seizing upon what is actually beyond us itself felicitously commits something like the intellectual moves it reproves for if the something were really beyond us we could not seize it." <sup>17</sup>

"The very words physicists use to describe reality constrains their knowledge of it and scientists in every field will one day encounter this barrier to human understanding"<sup>18</sup>

To some Buddhists "... logic and meaning, with its inherent duality, is a property of thought and language but not the actual world"<sup>19</sup>

"... all our knowledge is what a Taoist would call conventional knowledge, because we do not feel that we know anything unless we represent it to ourselves in words, or in some system of conventional signs as the notation of mathematics..."<sup>20</sup>

"Such knowledge is called conventional because it is a matter of agreement as to the codes of communication. Just as people speaking the same

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<sup>17</sup> C, Ricks, *Dante in English*, Penguin, 2005, p.Lii

<sup>18</sup> A, Wick, *The Infamous Boundary*, Birkhauser Berlin, 1995, p.33.

<sup>19</sup> A, Watts, *The Way of Zen*, Arkana Penguin Books, 1990, p.93.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, p.24

language have tacit agreement as to what words shall stand for what things...”<sup>21</sup>

Bohr commenting on the dual, or paradoxical nature of quantum mechanics laid the blame on the paradoxes on words, or language. As he said “Dual pictures, dual language: linguistic analysis is the key to the understand quantum mechanics Bohr told his protegee Heisenberg, shattering his hard-won vision of the microworld. The very words physicists use to describe reality constrain their knowledge of it and scientists in every field will one day encounter this barrier to human understanding.”<sup>22</sup>

“Zen is extracting people from the tangle in which they find themselves from confusing words and ideas with reality.”<sup>23</sup>

Lao Tzu “ Tao can be talked about but not the Eternal Tao / Names can be named but not the Eternal name”<sup>24</sup>

“So long as the conscious intellect is frantically trying to clutch the world in its net of abstractions and to insist that life be bound and fitted to its rigid categories the mood of Taoism will remain incomprehensible and the intellect will wear itself out.”<sup>25</sup>

*Pseudo-Dionysius* says “... leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect and all things sensible and intellectual and all things in the

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<sup>21</sup> A, Watts, *The Way of Zen*, Arkana Penguin Books, 1990, pp24-25.

<sup>22</sup> A. Wick, *The Infamous Boundary*, Birkhauser, Berlin, 1995 p.39.

<sup>23</sup> A, Watts, *The Way of Zen*, Arkana Penguin Books, 1990, p.187.

<sup>24</sup> C, H, Wu *Tao The Ching*, Shambala 1990, P.1.

<sup>25</sup> A, Watts, *The Way of Zen*, Arkana Penguin Books, 1990, p.39.

world of being and non-being ... He possess all the positive attributes of the universe, yet in a more strict sense He does not possess them since He transcends them all wherefore there is no contradiction between the affirmations and negations inasmuch as He infinitely precedes all conceptions of deprivation being beyond all positive and negative distinctions.”<sup>26</sup>

Reality is mediated via language. Language falsifies this reality and delimits it in this regard it is a conventional reality

## **SAMVRITI**

“roughly “conventional truth’ the relative truth of the phenomenal world..”<sup>27</sup>

By giving a false picture of reality via the imposition of human categories and classifications the reality we view through our conceptual intellects is merely the shifting phantasmorgia of our words mere bubbles of words casting shadows over our minds and rendering reality falsely. Through our minds clouded over with words we overlay the real with fictions of our minds mere phantasms of our imaginings A world of word play a mere deception of our word chattering minds. Forms of illusion as ephemeral and

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<sup>26</sup> F. C. Happold, *Mysticism*, Penguin, 1984, p.212-213.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 299.

as insubstantial as the multi-refracting colours shimmering and dancing through the vapors enveloping a waterfall

## **MAYA**

“The continually changing impermanent phenomenal world of appearances and forms of illusion or deception which an unenlightened mind takes as the only reality.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Encyclopedia of Eastern philosophy and religion, Shambala, 1986, p.223.

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