

Truth and Perception

Inspired by Madhyamaka-Sastra of Nagarjuna

By Musafir

Most of the miseries on earth exist because we assume our perception as the absolute truth. In fact, what is perceived may not even truly exist. Unfortunately, most of us lead a miserable life proving our perception as truth through various phenomena. Many a time what we assume as true is based on mere observation but we fail to realize that what is observed may be illusionary – empty of inherent existence. For example, Einstein’s theory of relativity was a blow to Newtonian Physics. Newton’s concept of absolute space and time was replaced by relativistic space-time model. The universe was now a non-simultaneous, four dimensional space-time phenomenon. Similarly, Copernicus’ theories rejected the Bible as the source of all truths. Kepler and Galileo’s theories were opposed by the church. Later the church modified its view and wrote supplemental explanations to the Bible. All the above mentioned observations (illusions) resulted in immense miseries and chaos to the humankind.

We seem to be influenced by the scientific realism which places too much emphasis on observations. But an observation depends on the object being observed, the observer and time. If time were frozen, the sound and sight from the object will also be frozen. Thus, perception is not an independently existing entity to be relied on. Remember, nothing is absolutely inherent in existence. Existence is dependent. Similar to objects, phenomena are also empty of inherent existence. According to the Newtonian school, mass is composed of material that takes space. However, a matter can only exist when it is dependent on space. Matter cannot exist by itself or does not have inherent existence. According to scientific realism, existence supersedes facts of existence. They take the absolute existence of an objective reality for granted and hope that the truth about this reality can be obtained through science. The concept of matter arriving from immaterial source is not an absurdity in modern science. We know that matter and energy are interchangeable ($E=mc^2$). However, the relationship between matter and energy is also an arbitrary and conventional statement uniting energy to matter in a relationship called time. In absolute sense, energy ceases to exist when changed to matter. Therefore, an externally and independently existent phenomenon must be without change. Going deep in Newton’s theory, we come across acceleration which is dependent on motion which is a type of change that has been shown to be empty of inherent existence. Another factor in Newton’s theory, time is also an association of the independent phenomena of past, present and future. If there was no change, there would be no time. Time, therefore, is empty of inherent existence.

Scientific realism as inspired by Sir Isaac Newton is the search for truth using laws and reasoning induced from

factual observations of the sensory world around us. Newton set forth his laws of mechanics. These laws made profound statements. First the law of inertia – a body will not accelerate without some external force acting on it. Next he established the relationship between force, mass and acceleration. His third law stated that to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. In developing the concept of gravitational force, he speaks about an unseen entity external to things themselves – the gravity. Nevertheless, Newton would not admit to theorizing of entities that do not actually exist. My point of the argument is to state the absurdity of observation and its components, object, observer and time. Let us examine this in the context of the Newtonian theory:

- For motion to possess inherent self-existence, it must exist independently of all other phenomena including time.
- But to exist independent of time, it must exist at a particular time.
- Motion is dependent on the change in time, and thus does not exist independent of time.
- Motion is not an independently existing phenomenon. It depends on that which moves.
- No one can determine when motion exists, therefore, it is empty of existence.
- Motion exists conventionally as the relationship between similar objects in different space and time.
- All the entities are themselves empty of existence unless a dependency is established
- In order for something inherently to exist, it must have had an inherently existing cause.
- Dependent origination is thus empty of inherent self-existence.
- All external phenomena lack absolute existence. Therefore, existence must be empty unless dependent on something such as coal is an object not a fuel unless it meets fire.

Scientific realism fails to explain several phenomenon such as psychic. Scientific realism cannot explain the understanding of inconceivable and inexplicable truth. Science tends to go to exactness refusing to accept something else or something more. Thus, it spreads an illusion of truth. We must seek self-liberation and avoid ignorance. A truly enlightened person realizes that perception is illusionary, therefore, he is liberated from ignorance. An enlightened person realizes that there is a difference in the conventional truth and absolute truth. Absolute truth comes from within (independent thinking) and not from illusionary perception.