

Neurology, Phrenology, Astrology

By Bhakti Madhava Puri, Ph.D.

A person [a spiritual entity] has subjective experiences, he has a brain that has neurons whose firings can be detected by machine M. The person (experiencer) looks at a pattern P and the Machine M records a pattern P_m of neuron firings. A decoder then correlates the pattern P_m with the pattern P as identical. This is the process called brain reading.

A phrenologist correlates bumps on the head by a similar process. By correlating the characteristics of persons with certain bump patterns they can then determine the characteristics of persons simply by feeling their heads.

Astrology can do the same thing by correlating the pattern of stars and planets at birth with certain characteristics of people born under those celestial patterns. This can all be made very complex as we find in computerized astrology programs.

The Chinese beat a gong whenever the Moon dog comes to eat the Sun god during a solar eclipse. Every time they do it it works. So much for the empirical correlational/modeling/mapping method of 'science.' Can such a method ever explain anything or can it only ever be simply metaphor?

Of course these examples are all falsifiable. Does that make them scientific? More importantly, what does it really tell us about thoughts and neurons? Do neurons create subjective thoughts? Do subjective thoughts correspond to neuron firings? Or are there other undreamt of theories like this that no one has yet imagined?

Generally I consider it a mistake to confine oneself to definitions, which are even etymologically limited to finite determinations, when referring to the infinite or spiritual. In my opinion what is needed in such circumstances is conceptual comprehension, not definitions. The central subject of this essay is in regard to the idea of correlationism as used in science. This is directly related to current discussion on the topic of qualia. The attempt to correlate thoughts, feeling, or willing with phenomenal appearances fails to recognize the difference between being and essence, or thought and being. True there is a mediated identity or intrinsic unity between being and essence, since being is what essence appears as. However, it is mere abstraction or naivety to collapse the difference and ignore the negativity (mediation) in the relation.

Abstract monism, scientism, impersonalism, voidism, materialism, and so on are all products of this failure to acknowledge the role of mediation or negation that is the hallmark of the difference between spirit and nature. Science has long taken the philosophically rejected path of the positivists in which immediate (unmediated) being is held to be the permanent and fixed reality or truth (as the ancient Parmenidians did). This view was challenged by the ancient Heraclitians then just as it is today by those who refute the static non-dialectical framework of the abstract understanding.

In India the ancient atheistic and materialistic samkhya philosophy was challenged by the theists who introduced the importance of Purusha, the person, to what they argued was the otherwise impotent impersonalist viewpoint. The idea of person (the unity in difference of thinking being) was revived in modern times by Descartes, who, for reasons of spirit's own purposes, divided that

unity in difference into an opposition of thought and being, or *res cogitans* and *res extensus*, from which the duality of subjectivity and objectivity arises. The attempt to overcome that duality by positing a sheer identity is a move by philosophically bereft scientists and others, who have given us the naive realism of science today.