

"A CONSIDERATION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF PHYSICS"

by

Max Jammer

COMMENTARY

by

E. C. G. Sudarshan
Center for Particle Theory
Physics Department
The University of Texas at Austin

Philosophy is a functioning of awareness that bases itself on the knowledge gained and experiences interpreted by the person, as well as by the cultural and genetic inheritance. Insight, inspiration and inventiveness are cases of functioning when the output is more important than the input as judged at the time and place. In other contexts and cultures one would have talked of grace or the touch of the divine for these modes of functioning.

The main thesis of Professor Jammer is, therefore, eminently reasonable: Physics makes us new persons with new perspectives, new interpretations of experience. Hence our philosophy would be different. He cites a number of historical cases. In other words, the effect is not "local" but "global" both in epoch and domain, time and space.

The magnificent yet ridiculous physics of Aristotle, the development of Newtonian physics, the increasing alienation of physics from philosophy and the strange gathering together of both in our time, when physicists prefer to repudiate philosophy, is only one account. There is another stream in which such a dichotomy is not tolerated. I allude to the Vedic tradition of India and the related Sufi, Kabbala and mystic traditions of central and west Asia. When the observer observes himself and his measuring instruments, then experimental philosophy and theoretical physics merge. Such a holistic viewpoint frightens some and some jesting Pilates ask: What is its use? Yet these tradi-

tional pathways provide a mechanism for a total investigation of "all that is dynamic", not just predesignated segments of the universe of experience.

There are certain technical points on which I maintain different views. Schrödinger, perhaps the greatest philosopher-scientist of our time, is not at all maintaining neutrality of science, but highlighting the nondual metaphysics of the Upanishads by asserting that even basic physics gives evidence to this point. The nondual experience of ānanda (bliss-knowledge) requires not atoms and electrons, quanta and quaternions, but measurement and cognition. The quotation from Schrödinger is, therefore, misleading to the non-adept.

Professor Jammer identifies the cognizing intelligence with the biophysical legal person and is, therefore, constrained to constrain the person's knowledge by "light-cone limitations". Even apart from the good case to be argued against such "causality" restrictions, a mode of functioning of the cognizing intellect where such limitations are transcended, may be conceived and experienced. (In the third ICUS meeting Professor Josephson talked briefly about a technique for such transcendence.) But I note that these views are not essential to Professor Jammer's main thesis.