

Vendantic view on life and consciousness: BN Shanta is correct

Medicharla Venkata Jagannadham

CSIR-Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, India

ABSTRACT

The explanation for Vedanta offered by Bhakti Niskama Santa (BNS)¹ is valid from both scientific and philosophical grounds. It seems that the published critique of Gustavo Caetano-Anollés (GCA)² to Shanta's paper is purely emotional and does not have any valid scientific or philosophical justification. In his rebuttal to Caetano-Anollés's critique, Shanta³ highlighted how the concept of 'Organic Whole' in Vedanta is completely different than that of Creationist Movement and Intelligent Design. Thus Caetano-Anollés's attempt to equate Vedanta with Creationist Movement and Intelligent Design is merely superfluous. This article highlights the validity of the argument made by Bhakti Niskama Shanta¹ and thus also intends to clarify why the Caetano-Anollés critique is groundless.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 March 2016
Revised 21 April 2016
Accepted 22 April 2016

KEYWORDS

cell science; consciousness;
Creationism; Darwinism;
evolutionary theories;
intelligent design; origin of
life; Vedanta

There is a general tendency in scientific community to believe (which is obviously dogmatic) that all theories in modern science are acceptable only when they are empirically verifiable. We do not have any valid justification to think that theories developed from other branches of knowledge such as philosophy are all fallacy, because all the fundamental concepts (for example Cartesian Coordinates) of science are developed based on philosophical grasping of truth. Vedantic philosophy begins with an inquiry about our true self and original source of both matter and life. Unlike Creationist Movement and Intelligent Design, Vedanta provides an elaborate explanation of real nature of matter and life. Bhakti Niskama Shanta (BNS)¹ made an excellent point from Vedanta that life comes from life (biogenesis). Artificial cells are not created from atoms and a claim of this sort is unscientific. This point is critically important to understand the article of BNS.¹ Moreover, BNS¹ highlighted 2 empirically verifiable Vedantic concepts (life comes from life and matter comes from life), which justifies that Supreme Cognizant Being is the source of both matter and life. Gustavo Caetano-Anollés (GCA) has failed to appreciate it and he has ignored it. Irrespective of its source, the door of an honest scientist should be always open to the ideas, which can be established from a valid scientific and logical ground. The limits of science should be

expanded to include the logically established ideas from any other branch of knowledge. Only such an unbiased approach toward truth can underscore the relation between Vedanta and modern science.

GCA feels that the views of Vedanta and Creationist Movement are one and same, and he seeks to prove that in his article. Unfortunately, the discourse in his article that smacks of bigotry, hardly meets his target. Without presenting any justification of hyphenating Vedanta with Creationist Movement, he reiterated it throughout the article. That makes his approach untenable and makes it quite obvious that he does not have even the slightest idea as to the basic tenet of the Vedantic philosophy.

Vedanta advocates a systematic study toward the search of the ultimate truth. It describes the nature of life, its transformation and purpose. If this approach is what forced CGA to equating Vedanta to religion then following the same line of thinking we should also tag Science as a religious document. The concepts "life comes from life" and "matter comes from life" are valid facts irrespective of our tagging Vedanta/Science to religion.

The source of infinite consciousness (*paramatma*) is present in all living beings as Chaitnya (consciousness) that guides the involuntary functions in the living organisms. The things that living organisms appear to control are due

CONTACT Dr. Medicharla Venkata Jagannadham ✉ jagan@ccmb.res.in 📍 CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Uppla Road, Tarnaka, Hyderabad-500007, India.

© 2016 Medicharla Venkata Jagannadham. Published with license by Taylor & Francis.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The moral rights of the named author(s) have been asserted.

to the finite consciousness coming from the soul (*atma*) of the living entity. The body (the physical body consisting of 5 elements [*panch-bhutas* viz, *prithvi* (earth), *apas* (*jal* or water), *agni* (fire), *vayu* (air) and *akash* (ether)]) is an illusion and the soul (*atma*) leaves one body and enters another body, and this process goes on for several rounds till the soul (*jeevatma*) reaches its goal – acquiring the pure dedicating consciousness toward the Supreme Absolute. Therefore, Vedanta advocates a systematic study to understand the relation between the *jeevatma* (the self or individual soul) and the Supreme Absolute.

For GCA stating “consciousness is fundamental” is same as stating “God is fundamental” and thus according to him Vedanta is same as Creationist Movement. However, according to Vedanta the form of Supreme Absolute or God possesses the qualities of *sat* (existence), *chith* (consciousness/knowledge) and *ananda* (joy/ecstasy). Therefore, the reckless claims in the critique of GCA show nothing but a signature of his ignorance about Vedanta. GCA’s attempt to mix Vedanta with Creationist Movement and Intelligent Design only reflects that he does not know the basics of Vedanta.

The nature of science is to accept corrections and agree with the logically and experimentally proved concepts. Science accepts revisions and progresses. Several scholars of Vedanta philosophy used yoga as experimental tool to successfully control the body and mind. Some of them lived by slowed down metabolism, using yogic methods.⁴ In the light of modern science we know that activities under the sympathetic nervous system are autonomic in nature and can be controlled by practice (e.g. closing of the renal sphincter).⁵ Some of the yogis were able to control heart-beat.⁶ This shows that they were well-aware of the modus operandi of the different systems that sustains our life and also gained control over them. They also successfully explored the healing potential of chemicals hidden in the plant kingdom.⁷ Hence, there is no good reason to believe that their way of thinking was unscientific. To call it unscientific or to hyphenate it with Creationist Movement and Intelligent Design² makes a quintessential example of oversimplification.

The article of BNS¹ critically analyzed the scope of research in the fields of origin of life and evolutionary theories and also suggested some alternatives. BNS¹ no way recommended stopping the scientific research. Instead, it showed alternate ways (like, subjective evolution of consciousness) to think on these problems.

Progress in science depends on re-examination of the previous findings and looking for new direction of studies. Outright rejection of the Vedantic philosophy amounts to the violation of one of the basic principles of science and calling it a pseudoscience is nothing but a manifestation of bigotry. Hence, in my opinion proper studies should be carried out on these subjects to derive appropriate conclusions. Understanding the relation between Vedanta and modern day science is crucially important in developing a holistic approach to understand life. So let us get rid of bigotry of any sort and adopt a rational approach while dealing with the issue.

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed.

Acknowledgements

The author feels thankful to Sri Sri Sri Jagadguru Aadi Sankaracharya Bhakta Samajam, Hyderabad for supporting the research activities on Vedanta with the relevant monographs and documents.

References

- [1] Bhakti Niskama Shanta. Life and consciousness – The Vedāntic view. *Commun Integr Biol* 2015; 8(5): e1085138; PMID:27066168; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19420889.2015.1085138>
- [2] Gustavo Caetano-Anollés. Creationism and intelligent design are incompatible with scientific progress: A response to Shanta and Vedanta. *Commun Integr Biol* (2016); 9(1): e1123356; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19420889.2015.1123356>
- [3] Bhakti Niskama Shanta. Vedāntic view of life: Reply to Gustavo Caetano-Anollés. *Commun Integr Biol* 2016; 9(2): e1160191; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19420889.2016.1160191>
- [4] Chaya MS, Nagendra HR. Long-term effect of yogic practices on diurnal metabolic rates of healthy subjects. *Int J Yoga*(2008); 1(1):27-32; PMID:21829281; <http://dx.doi.org/10.4103/0973-6131.36761>
- [5] Roberts MBV. *Biology A Functional approach*. In: *Nervous and Hormonal Communication*. Briton: Butler & Tanner Ltd; 1983 p. 262-297.
- [6] Raghavendra BR, Telles S, Manjunath NK, Deepak KK, Naveen KV, Subramanya P. Voluntary heart rate reduction following yoga using different strategies. *Int J Yoga* 2013; 6(1):26-30.; PMID:23440267; <http://dx.doi.org/10.4103/0973-6131.105940>
- [7] Yash Roy RC, Gupta PK. Neem–seed oil inhibits growth of terminate surface-tunnels. *Indian J Toxicol* 2000; 7(1):49-50.