

# Commentary

**Biswanath Swain**

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I do appreciate the endeavor that the author has taken to discuss one of the pressing issues of the modern era, i.e., the nonreciprocal relationship between Science and Religion. To come up with a possible solution to this issue, the author has paid a conscientious analytical visit into the variety of literature starting from Vedas to Indian Philosophical Schools, and from there to Western Philosophical Schools - which is something that would obviously take the author one step ahead of other philosophical and more particularly other metaphysical discourses of others. However, tackling and unknotting some of the grave issues, like the one the author has taken in this manuscript, by using the diverse analytical methods borrowing from diverse literatures, sometimes, lands us on insurmountable problem(s) that I think the author might also be facing in a profuse manner. Let me put them one after the other.

**Comment 1:** Cartesian Account of Metaphysics holds that both mind (soul) and body (matter) are diametrically opposite to each other because of their inherent properties: while the essence (property) of mind is thought and consciousness, that of body is extension and divisibility. Body is devoid of consciousness whereas mind is devoid of extension and divisibility. Hence, these two entities, mind and body, exist in their own unparalleled way being undisturbed by one another. That is to say, there is, in fact, an unbridgeable gap in between Mind and Body.

The author is right in his interpretation that the Cartesian Framework is undoubtedly a dualistic one, and there is an unbridgeable gap in between Mind and Matter. However, the perspective that the author has taken with a view to elucidate that there is a big gap in between God and the World and that between Science and Religion through his (author's) strong claim that this division has got its mooring from the Cartesian Dualistic Framework is completely wrong. And by doing so, the author might have misinterpreted and misjudged Descartes' stance completely. In addition, the

methodological move that that the author has taken to go from the view that 'there is an unbridgeable gap in between Mind and Matter' to the view that 'there is a gap in between God and the World that has got inception from the stance of Descartes', that I found, is something fallacious. It is said so because in all his writings, nowhere Descartes has asserted a position that the existence of God is extraneous and unrelated to the existence of the world.

Rather he espouses a model where he states that it is true that Mind and Matter are diametrically opposite to each other and there is no interaction among themselves; but these two entities are operated by God in a very structured and planned way - the way He arranges every other entities in this world. As Descartes puts it:

God alone is the author of all the motions in the world in so far as they exist and in so far as they are rectilinear; but it is the various dispositions of matter which render them irregular and curved...God himself has taught us that he has arranged all things in number, weight and measure. The knowledge of these truths is so natural to our souls that we cannot but judge them infallible when we conceive them distinctly (Descartes, vol. I, 1985, p - 97)

In a continuation to his explanation of the relationship between matter and God, Descartes states that the matter(s) including our body that we come across and that we possess are neither the product of an "imaginary power" nor that of "some Goddess", rather a collection of some qualities taken together, which are preserved by God. In the words of Descartes:

by 'nature' here I do not mean some goddess or any other sort of imaginary power. Rather, I am using this word to signify matter itself, in so far as I am considering it taken together with all the qualities I have attributed to it, and under the condition that God continues to preserve it in the same way that he created it. (Descartes, vol. I, 1985, p - 92)

In his discussion of "Treatise on Man", Descartes clearly elucidates that each man is composed of a soul and a body. It is God who formed both the entities of different properties and make them combined together to fetch the good result required for a man. The insight of Descartes would be of great help here:

[T]hese men will be composed, as we are, of a soul and a body. First I must describe the body on its own; then the soul, again on its own; and finally I must show how these two natures would have to be joined and united in order to constitute men who resemble us. I suppose the body to be nothing but a statue or machine made of earth, which God forms with the explicit intention of making it as much as possible like us. Thus God not only gives it externally the colours and shapes of all the parts of our bodies, but also places inside it all the parts required to make it walk, eat, breathe, and indeed to imitate all those of our functions which can be imagined to proceed from matter and to depend solely on the disposition of our organs. (Descartes, vol. I, 1985, p - 99)

Hence, from the above discussion it clearly shows that Descartes does not vouch a thesis of the non-existence of God. Nor does he hold that God is completely unrelated to and eternally separated from the world, the matters, the soul, and all the worldly entities. Nor does he assert that the beginning or the origin of soul or mind and that of body or matter is something empty or void (that the author states emphatically that the existence of mind and body are like X-axis and Y-axis. By holding this view, the author might be making a mistake that it is true that the existence of mind and body are like X-axis and Y-axis, but the origin of X-axis and Y-axis is '0', but the origin of mind and that of body is not '0', rather something which is all-perfect and embodiment of all qualities or properties - God. It is He who operates both the entities in a very sophisticated way.)

**Comment 2:** The statement that the author has given "Wittgenstein argued that both language and thought have definitive limits" needs supporting arguments from the book titled "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus" written by Ludwig J. J. Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein does not say

that both language and thought have limits, rather he categorically states that language contributes to the process of thinking. There are limits with the domain of language, and because of these limits, we cannot think properly, and hence, our thoughts are limited. But as such, in principle, thought is not supposed to have limits. Once again, the limits in the thought are there because of the limits in the language. And altogether, Wittgenstein has discussed this perspective in a different context, not in the context of what the author has used.

**Comment 2.1:** But how this discussion is related to the discussion of the method of knowledge and the main topic, i.e., the gap in between Science and Religion.

**Comment 2.2:** By giving importance on the thesis that 'our thoughts are limited', is not the author holding the view that religion is limited. It is said so because religion is the product of the process of faith and belief in something which is not couched within the material and scientific framework. And in this process, the author is contradicting himself.

**Comment 3:** The axioms by nature cannot be arbitrary and absurd, rather they are something from which all the thought processes of a normal human being starts. And because of this they cannot be considered as false at any point of time. For example: "A is A", "It is self-contradictory to say 'I am not 'I am'" etc. Famous examples are the "Laws of Thought" given by Aristotle. All the axioms are not only applied on the domain of science, but also applied on all the domains where the thought process is being used.

**Comment 4:** The author at one point of time saying that there is no common platform that religion and science shares. Again he is saying that science is based on perception and observation who are the products of the use of sensory-motor organs and at the same time, the author is holding that "Religions in general, and Vedanta in particular rely on ... thousand scriptural utterings". This shows that there is an intersecting point between science and religion. Hence by bringing this discussion the author might be self-contradicting.

**Comment 5:** There is a conceptual and analytical error that the author might be committing by holding that

the knowledge through Shabda Pramana does not come through the method of perception, rather through reasoning. It is said so because when an individual gets the knowledge in a scripture or the knowledge about God from someone else (who must be trustworthy), that individual in question uses his/her eyes or ears to get those pieces of knowledge. That is to say the individual in question uses the method of perception, of course may use reasoning.

**Comment 6:** In the work titled "Critique of Pure Reason", Immanuel Kant has used two concepts: one is "Phenomenon" and other is "Noumenon" (plural noumena). The objects which are there in the form of phenomenon are something which are located in the spatio-temporal world, and thereby can be perceived. Whereas the objects which are there in the form of noumenon are something which can never be perceived by sense organs as they do not exist in the spatio-temporal world. They can only be comprehended by the faculty of reason. So it is very much conceivable, from the Kantian perspective, that some of the creations are limited in time and space.

**Comment 7:** Syadvad is a theory espoused by Jainism. They hold that knowledge that we have about any object in this corporeal world is not complete and perfectly right because whenever we perceive a given object, we perceive from one perspective. So by perceiving that object from one perspective, we cannot/should not claim that the piece of knowledge that 'I am having' is real, and a fact. This discussion is nowhere related to religion.

**Comment 8:** The author might not be aware that there is a similarity in between the thesis of Sankhya

Philosophy and that of Rene Descartes. Both (Sankhya theoreticians and Rene Descartes) are having dualistic framework, and at the same time both also espouse that it is the "Iswara" or "God" who is playing an important role in making Purusa (Mind) and Prakriti (Matter) function in a systematic way.

**Comment 9:** Philosophers in general are not atheists. Some of them believe in the existence of God whereas some of them do not. If we take all the schools of Indian Philosophy, we would definitely find that there are schools like Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa (purva and uttar), and Vedanta comes under the orthodox school of philosophers who believes in the certitude of Veda and its creator whereas schools like Buddhism, Jainism and Carvaka are considered as heterodox school of philosophy who do not believe in the existence of God, nor in the certitude of vedas. About which the author himself has already pointed out. So it clearly shows that all the philosophers are not heterodox and atheists.

## References

Descartes, Rene. (1985). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol - I. Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. New York: Cambridge University Press.

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