

Vedāntic view of life: Reply to Gustavo Caetano-Anollés

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ABSTRACT

The author would like to thank Professor Gustavo Caetano-Anollés from Department of Crop Sciences, University of Illinois for his interest in his work. We may sometimes observe that there is a noticeable difference between the anecdote people narrate about the implications of a scientific paper and the real conclusion of the paper. Prof. Gustavo Caetano-Anollés's response¹ is an ideal example of the same, where he has tried to make great hay about the implications of the article "Life and consciousness – The Vedāntic view."² The Vedāntic view subscribes neither to the views of 'Creationist Movement'/'Intelligent Design', nor it supports some splendid anti-science proposal. Vedāntic view refutes the dominant reductionistic view of life in modern biology by proposing a viable alternative concept of 'Organic Whole' and thus serves a scientific critique to the nescience (*avidyā*) that is practiced on the name of science.

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Professor Gustavo Caetano-Anollés claimed in his response that the published paper 'Life and consciousness – The Vedāntic view' is "another attempt to devalue the study of the origin and evolution of life and promote creationism, this time within the theistic evolutionary framework of Vedānta. Here I discuss how the tenets and tactics of Vedānta scholars are similar to those of the Intelligent Design movement. The focus simply shifts from a divine 'designer' to an all-permeating divine 'consciousness'. I also show that Shanta's claim that giving "proper attention" to ancient Vedānta philosophy can fuel a research program in evolution is misleading. Creationism and scientific progress, especially related to the field of evolution, are incompatible."

To support his above claim, in his response Prof. Caetano-Anollés quotes the word "Supreme Cognizant Being" and the statement "the view that a supernatural being, God, is external to living organisms and that He imposes form on matter from the outside (intelligent design) is also reductionistic, and shows a logical fallacy." from the paper 'Life and consciousness – The Vedāntic view.'

Reading the whole of the response, the author of this reply sincerely feels that Prof. Caetano-Anollés completely failed to understand the gist of the argument

in the paper 'Life and consciousness – The Vedāntic view' and merely overlaps the sentimental stand against Intelligence, Design and Creation. Therefore, this reply is an attempt to confiscate any such sentimentalist misconceptions and understand how biology cannot avoid intelligence and creation tags.

Biology cannot avoid intelligence and creation tags

Nineteenth and twentieth century biology was completely based on misleading ideological imposition that living entities are particular states of matter and in that era biologists have only made several attempts to deny the living organism of its veracity as an immortal soul, in favor of genes, molecules, atoms and so on. Twenty first century biology realizes that living entities (animate objects) do things, which are intentional and purposeful (internal teleology) and nonliving objects (inanimate objects) have things done to them (external teleology or design). From bacterial antibiotic resistance we can see that even the tiny bacterium displays the sign of great *intelligence* (natural genetic engineering³). Unlike inanimate objects, all living cells (and all living organisms) *create* and maintain order. To *create* and maintain

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this order every cell has to work like a tiny chemical factory, performing many millions of reactions every second.⁴ Thus, the proponents of ‘Creationist Movement’/ ‘Intelligent Design’ argue that an intelligent being is necessary for the creation/design of factory (example of external teleology) from the basic elements or parts. This is a more reasonable argument as compared to the imprudent materialistic view that the cell/life is a product of mere accumulation of inert chemicals. However, Vedānta philosophy is not based on ‘Creationist Movement’/ ‘Intelligent Design’ or reductionistic materialistic views. According to Vedānta philosophy an “organic whole” (*pūrna*) comes from an “organic whole” (‘Life comes from Life’ or ‘every cell comes from a cell’ – biogenesis) and an “organic whole” (*pūrna*) cannot come from the mechanical and chemical additive sum of the parts (*khandā*). Prof. Caetano-Anollés completely missed this main point, which the paper ‘Life and consciousness – The Vedāntic view’ clearly highlights. It is empirically observable that ‘Every day Sun rises in the East’ and hence it is logical to conclude that the ‘First Sun rise was in the East’. There is no problem, if someone wants to dedicate his whole life to do a rigorous scientific research to prove the opposite ‘First Sun rise was in the West’. The problem arises when keeping such illogical views in mind someone wants to critique those who have the conviction on the obvious ‘First Sun rise was in the East’. In the paper ‘Life and consciousness – The Vedāntic view’ it is clearly stated.

“Vedāntic explanation that independent Supreme Cognizant Being is the source of everything is founded on 2 scientifically verifiable axiomatic facts: (1) Life comes from Life, and (2) Matter comes from Life. Consciousness arises from consciousness, or life comes from life. Where there is life there is consciousness. Consciousness does not originate from that which is unconscious or impersonal, and life is not a product of insentient matter. The conception that life comes from life (biogenesis) is the only scientific idea that has ever been verified by experiment and observation. The second axiomatic fact ‘Matter comes from Life’ is apparently observable in nature. Every species produces their own chemicals necessary within their bodies. ‘Life comes

from Life’, and ‘Matter comes from Life’ are 2 scientifically observable deductions from Vedānta. On the other hand, materialism (life originates from matter) is an unverified ideological presupposition that has no scientific or observation-based evidence to support it.”

For a detailed critique of Darwinian objective evolution of bodies and abiogenesis (material origin of life), and a further elaboration on Vedāntic view for ‘soul hypothesis’, consciousness and ‘subjective evolution of consciousness’ one can refer author’s recent paper ‘Why Biology is Beyond Physical Sciences?’⁵, the published book chapter⁶ and the article ‘Sorry, Darwin: Chemistry never made the transition to Biology’.⁷

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed.

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