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07 January 2024

Critical Review - Vedanta Treatise

For those seeking answers on the purpose and ultimate goal of human life, this is an intensive answer. Vedanta Treatise: The Eternities is the seminal work by A. Parthasarathy, and forms the core of the findings of over 60 years of research and study into the ancient wisdom of the Himalayas.

Assessment and Analysis of Vedanta Treatise

Throughout my time reading this book I felt it resembled ideas and concepts introduced in *Governing Business and Relationships*, however it took these ideas to the next level. While *Governing Business and Relationships* introduced basic concepts of running a business, relationships with yourself, and the world at large I feel that *Vedanta Treatise* was an extension of the latter two concepts.

Within the first page of *Vedanta Treatise* it is emphasized that “living is an art, a skill, a technique.” This opening was fascinating as it forced the reader to contemplate whether or not one viewed living in such a matter. When thinking about living I believe few people to understand the idea of challenging not only the physical body, but also the mind. Concepts such as concentration, focus, and discipline build only through constant trial and tribulation of the mind. However, these ideas extend far beyond the “hard mindsets” that are preached today by motivational speakers, military boot camps, and elite athletes. The simplest way to elucidate this is by dividing “toughness” into two separate categories. One of the categories can be classified as mental-physical toughness(MPT), and the other category can be defined as mental-mental toughness(MMT). Actions would fall into the category of MPT if it involves the mind restricting or pushing physical limitations; common examples of this include running while exhausted, achieving a maximum amount of pull-ups or push-ups, bootcamp training, etc... This form of mental toughness is widely accepted and even taught in a variety of sports and organizations. However it is MMT that is far less common in today’s society. Actions would fall into this category if it is not physically difficult, but mentally. Examples include: Admittance of

wrongdoing, self-vulnerability, acting on the direction of rationality opposed to emotion, even routine actions such as avoiding scrolling on tik-tok or other social media. The aforementioned activities are not physically enduring, however can still be extremely difficult mentally. Of course at a chemical level technically all activities would be MPT as even those that are mental are difficult because the affected chemical equilibrium in the brain, however for simplicity as a general rule if the action exerts a physical strain on the muscles and central nervous system it can be attributed to MPT and if the activity affects the chemicals of the brain (serotonin, dopamine, acetylcholine, etc.), however is not a physical strain, it can be attributed to MMT. Throughout reading Vedanta Treatise the author reiterates becoming proficient in areas of MMT, such as the ability to detach, which will eventually lead to the realization of self.

Below are personal thoughts in the form of articles which I have written in coordination with concepts and ideas from both Vedanta Treatise and Governing Business and Relationships. Please view the title of each of the four and if intrigued read the ensuing thoughts.

1.) The Pitfall of Modern (Advanced Intelligence)

Rationalization

One thing I have been thinking about a lot more recently is the ability to rationalize and explain different thoughts and actions that we do. I believe this rationality to, when ungoverned, be one of the pitfalls of advanced intelligence. Of course rationalization helps us make sense of our decisions and behaviors, providing a coherent narrative that aligns with our ethical framework, however without conceptualizing the notion that your mind has the ability to convince the

rational portion of itself that actions you do are aligned with your definition of ethical, this can destroy your perception of the world and develop into an ego unbeknownst to oneself.

Opinion analyzation

Recently I have found myself often contemplating whether my rationalization for performing different actions is “valid”, and I understand this concept of the possibility that my mind is convincing itself with biased avenues of thought. Of course this concept is all relative to your perceived ethical scale of the world. Further examination of this concept leads me to the following train of thought: do people often consider opposing or divergent points of view when analyzing their opinions and ideologies? Or even do people analyze their opinions at all? I believe people, including myself, rarely analyze rival opinions to their own for one of two reasons:

First- One is simply unbeknownst to this concept. Without the knowledge that this notion exists it is impossible to even consider engaging in such activity.

Second- It is hard. Giving credence to the theory that oneself may be wrong is difficult.

Especially if emotion is stemming from the feel to defend oneself, objectivity can be nearly unattainable

You don't know what you don't know

The phrase “you don't know what you don't know” may sound repetitive and intuitive however I believe it to be a concept of ultimate importance. One who does not understand that their mind

obtains the ability to justify any action will inevitably fall into the trap of the supreme ego, essentially the idea that “I am supreme”. This is because one is able to excuse their own actions in the absence of doing the same for others. However the most unfortunate part of this system is the facet in which the person rationalizing does not even know they are doing it, only further intensifying the premonition of superiority. This concept however extends far beyond the surface level ideas and beliefs one holds.

What is a belief?

This notion of introspection and contemplation can be congruent to every area of life. For example asking yourself, “are any of the beliefs I hold really true?” — I believe it nearly impossible to say whether or not any belief I put credence in to be “true”. Any idea I have is simply a conglomerate of the experiences in my life. Given adverse experiential education my beliefs are subject to change at any time. Not only my beliefs however the deeper rooted intricacies of concepts such as, “what does the word right really mean?”. If I were to redefine my interpretation of the word right itself my perception of the scale in which I operate under shifts completely.

Reality

On a day-to-day level these questions are relatively trivial and even potentially disruptive. In order to operate on a cognitive level you must put some amount of conviction into what one believes in order to function however it is the concept of knowing that no opinion you hold is the “truth” that truly sparks a method of thinking divergent from ordinary. I find the concept of

beliefs to be fascinating as I truly do not consider anything I believe to be permanent. However I often wonder if people intentionally allow their thoughts to be questioned in order to refine and adjust them.

2.) Intelligence vs Intellect

If asked — “*what is the difference between intelligence and intellect?*” What response comes to mind? These broad and general words can be defined in a multitude of different ways, however for the purposes of the article the following definitions will be Used:

Intelligence: The acquisition of external knowledge and mastery; traditionally concerning a field of study or discipline.

Intellect: The ability to utilize reason and awareness to understand and contemplate abstract ideas.

Disparity in the Modern World

The world today teaches kids to further their intelligence starting from birth with classes in Science, English, Math, Literature, etc... However, developing a strong intellect is neglected in the most absolute way. I believe that teachers today are unaware of the importance of strengthening the intellect by methods of questioning, thinking, and introspecting. For this reason the impressive amount of intelligence amassed is not able to be effectively utilized within life.

The Intellect is not only utilized for managing the external aspects of the world, but also finding peace and happiness within oneself.

Intellect Utilization

Today the world is plagued by constant chasing of material wealth, even when acquired people fail to find inner satisfaction and happiness within themselves. This inevitably asks the question, “*Why chase money if it’s not going to make you happy?*” I believe it to be a combination of internal comprehension and external success that contribute to a favorable existence. The concept of “subjective scientists”, scientists who study the subject — you, has recently emerged as a divergent method of data collection. What I found interesting about this was how they merged the fields of analytics and science with the spiritual aspects of finding inner peace. The scientists were able to methodically study human beings and create laws pertaining to an individual. The merge of spirituality and scientific study is an extremely important discipline that has been neglected as the world trends towards gathering mere intelligence.

Emotions: controlled or controller

The ability to disassociate yourself from any affair and analyze it with complete objectivity is crucial to sustaining relationships throughout your life as well as finding happiness and success in both the internal and external environment. Without the development of the intellect and thus the ability to analyze concepts of such abstract nature it is difficult to even begin to conceptualize the faculty of understanding one must obtain in order to be in complete governance of one’s internal domain. In the absence of the intellect obtaining control of the mind one will inevitably

be directed by emotions in the facade of rationality. The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer declared, *“It is difficult to find happiness within oneself, but it is impossible to find it anywhere else.”*

The Integration of Stress into Today’s Society

Anywhere and Everywhere

In the world we live in today it seems that stress is an impossible feeling to escape. It almost seems as if stress is truly a universal constant. The American institute of stress cites, “ 8 out of 10 American college students experience frequent bouts of stress.” Stress at its core is a state of worry or mental tension. This worry is most often associated with unknown future occurrences. I believe the general incompetence at being able to sustainably deal with such emotions stems from the societal neglect of introspection and regulation of the mind. This neglect has an exponential effect on the furthering of the aforementioned dilemma.

Inherent intersection of stress and life

The Corporate world that America lives in today is riddled with the dilemma of finding a proper work-life balance. For example one of the most lucrative mainstream careers of Investment Banking compensates extremely well however causes paramount levels of stress. The entire job market is essentially structured like this, the less desirable a job is leads to a lower supply of potential labor which leads to higher paying jobs. It is simple supply and demand, yet it is polluting the minds of young adults, constraining them to the belief that money equals success and high levels of money come with high levels of stress. This natural phenomenon is not negative though — rather it is a simple mechanic in which the world operates. It is the inability to deal with the resulting emotions that causes such significant levels of mental agitation.

Ailment?

Introspecting and being truly honest with yourself allows your intellect to understand your mind and govern it. The powerful and ancient philosophy of stoicism advocates a similar mantra, “development of self-control as a means of overcoming destructive emotions.” It is of the utmost importance to understand that having emotions is healthy, however regulating your mind to act on the direction of your intellect, the rational and analytical portion, is crucial in order to achieve a natural equilibrium of the different chemicals in the brain thus leading towards a capable and calm mind. People are only able to accept this theory on mental restoration if they believe they are responsible for their fortune and misfortune. This realization that you are the “architect” of your own life is critical to permanently remedy any mental illness or agitation.

Vulnerability: A Super Power

What Does Being Vulnerable Mean?

Everybody has flaws. The issue is not directly with the flaws however it is with the inability to properly address these flaws. Unbeknownst to one, the mind will rationalize these “flaws”; essentially neglecting to observe or analyze them. The reason behind this is protection. Your mind paints a perception of itself in a certain way. This perception often tends to be of extremely high quality and when the body receives stimuli that is converse to the respective perception it will interpret said stimuli as a threat. The human persona naturally fights threats by fleeing or ignorance, “the most common strategies include lying and hiding feelings, especially when the threat includes strong criticism or punishment.”(Gordon 3). Hiding flaws does not purge them however, it only makes them more apparent. Therefore allocating time and effort to allow yourself to become vulnerable to your own mind is truly the first step in self development. This process is never a straight line however, the beauty of the process is that the discord of your prior experiences leads to finding the true sense of who you are. The world renowned philosopher, A. Parthasarathy, dictates how those who are truly rare, and above all he could use his intellect to explore his inner layers and get to the core of his personality. With the first step to becoming truly intellectual being vulnerability, the importance of allowing your actions and character to be questioned by your mind in order to commence improvement cannot be overstated. The ability to

be vulnerable with yourself, learn from mistakes, and explore personality are the foundation of a calm, capable, and complete mind.

Importance

The ability to develop intellectual acumen, or being able to govern emotions and impulses of the mind, is crucial in order to achieve a natural equilibrium of the different chemicals in the brain — leading towards a calm and capable mental state. The first and most important step in this process is allowing yourself to be vulnerable to your mind. As humans our natural resistance to threats, especially those pertaining to concepts such as value and purpose, is defensiveness.

When the mind enters such a defensive mode, one's perception of any given situation is altered leading toward further entrenchment in one's own ideas. Allowing your beliefs and character to be questioned can be very difficult however it is critical to examine these inquiries with holistic objectivity.

As stressed within each of the articles I believe one of the most elementary, and important lessons is acting on the direction of the intellect. The mind is extremely fickle in regards to its senses. Human emotions innately tend to foster intensely and subside as time passes on. When acting on direction of these emotions, rash and frankly poor decision making is all too common

as there is little true basis in which the decision was made. Therefore acting in accordance with the rational portion of the brain, or the intellect is the most effective process to produce positive outcomes. However just as one is not able to walk into the gym and lift 500 pounds the same applies for mental strength. The harder the tug of emotions the more difficult it is to remain disciplined and act rationally. Therefore one must constantly train the mind to effectively govern these emotions when the time arises. However one not only must delve into the inner layers of personality, but also must be challenged on a daily basis. These mental challenges are critical to building fortitude. Additionally realizing goals and ambitions for yourself is one of the pillars of Vedanta philosophy as alignment with a relative or absolute goal is key.

Although pictured on the front of Vedanta Treatise is Ganesha, the hindu god of beginnings, the author commonly references other religions and even gives credence to their existence. Personally this was one of the first true signs that Vedanta truly embodied what it meant to be objective and open-minded. Preferential attachment is the detriment to lasting happiness and although Parthasarathy has “strong ties” to India and hinduism; he is still able to conceptualize that other religious entities or ideologies may exist and/or hold relevance. This mental absence of ignorance is to a level I have yet to observe. The author is not only accepting, but actively looks for exposure within avenues of thought in contrast to his own. This level of detachment from one’s own ideas and conceptions is a foundation to be able to truly hold a holistic perspective on all things worldly.

The overlap seen between scientific phenomena of different cultures can often be vast. For example on page 177 an image is depicting Atman and 5 sheaths. These 5 sheaths are structured in concentric circles with Atman at the center. The circles are as follows, outermost to innermost: Food Sheath, Vital-Air Sheath, Mental Sheath, Intellectual Sheath, Bliss Sheath. A quick explanation of the 5 Sheaths is as follows:

Food Sheath - The physical body consisting of the 5 organs of perception and 5 organs of action.

Vital-Air Sheath - The 5 physiological functions(i.e. Perception, Digestion, Circulation, etc...)

Mental Sheath - Comprises the mind and controls the previous 2 sheaths, Intellectual Sheath -

Comprises the intellect, the faculty to think, reason, and judge. Bliss Sheath - The bliss sheath contains the inherent, innate material one is made up of (Parthasarathy 177). This closely mirrors Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The Basic structure of MHN is Basic needs, psychological needs, then self-fulfillment needs. With religion, science, or even spirituality there is a colossal amount of overlap between distinct cultures, many of whom had no contact with each other. This observation naturally procures the question: Is there a true form of which all material and spiritual practices and ideologies embody? Reverting back to the 5 vital sheaths and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, one must satisfy the function of the first parameter before progressing forward. Although spiritual enlightenment is the true end goal one must conquer his emotional, physical, and intellectual self before aiming to achieve a state of bliss and eventually realize his inner self, Atman.

The most distinct difference between Vedanta Treatise and Governing business and relationships was the emphasis Parthasarathy put on the Dreamer, Waker, and Deep-sleeper states. The Waker stands when “the consciousness functions through the gross body.”(Parthasarathy 181). The Dreamer exists when consciousness functions through the causal body. Between the three states these two are at the most prominent as they serve to illustrate the concepts within the Vedantic Theory of Perception. The first question that is asked to posit the Vedantic Theory of Perception, “Is the world what it appears to be to the senses?” This question is best conceptualized when holding the dream vs waking states side by side. When one is actively in the dream state he knows everything to be true. He is unable to conceptualize the waking world and accepts stimuli in the dream world to be that of truth, not of his own creation. When one is in the waking state he disregards experience from the dream state as fanciful and wholly believes his senses. It is this arrogance, that one holds his senses to be of absolute truth, that is liable to cause unrelenting agitation. One must come to the realization that perception is not real. Just as 2 people view the word love diversely, neither view is right or true. Both interpretations are simply one’s perception from his own experiences. Especially when it comes to language, a man-made phenomena, I do not believe that there is a true embodiment of what any word means. As time progresses and language continues to evolve the true nature of a word is only attributed to the context and precedent in which one is using it. This theory can be extrapolated to anything in life. Although there may be a true form of any given concept, the way anyone interprets the given concept today will simply be an aggregate of his own experiences.

Therefore one can never truly hold his own beliefs in absolute reality as the substance in which these beliefs exist is wholly dependent on perception, generated from experience, of any given person, which is completely arbitrary.

Religion, especially in today's society, is a very taboo subject. The world today has strayed far from the true efforts of religion and moved towards a fanatical attachment to a god or scripture. Although this is not necessarily bad or wrong, "true devotion means faith in good rather than faith in God."(Parthasarathy 231). People today, all over the world, use religion to further their own agenda and affirm their own beliefs, while this is the opposite purpose of any religious ideology. The root of the problem is that the vast majority of people are shrouded in ignorance and have no idea of the devastating nature of their own mind. Ego-centric personalities are remarkably common in today's society due to the advancement of the mind. Parthasarathy details how "the real and earnest part of devotion is seen in the annihilation of the ego, self-effacement." However the concept of an ego is so rampant in today's society the relativity of its severity has been far shifted. Additionally the detriment of the ego extends far beyond the external world. Internally an ego disrupts your entire perception; altering the observance of stimuli that one perceives in order to cater to one's own framework of himself or the world. As aforementioned perception is everything, and perceiving experiences in a sound and objective state of mind is the keystone of building intellectual foundation, progressing to self-development, and ultimately enlightenment.

As Vedanta Treatise progressed the theme of renunciation became prominent, but prior to reading I had yet to conceive the thought of renunciation. Just as “ The knowledge of the unknown can only be gained through the use of known factors”(Parthasarathy 13) this personal example goes to illustrate the brilliance in exposing your brain to unforeseen concepts and ideas. Any original thought generated within the brain can only come from past experiences, one is not able to conceive the unknown using unknown factors. This is among the most prominent reasons I feel grateful to have received books concerning Vedanta Philosophy. Although I do not wholly agree with all assertions made, it is extremely important to recognize they exist in order to allow my intellect to objectively analyze them and dictate adaptation and implementation.

Renunciation - Renunciation is the cure to preferential attachment, however it is not the end of material possessions or relationships, this distinction is one of utmost importance. Renunciation is acknowledging the ephemeral and inconsequential nature of worldly offerings even amidst them, perhaps enjoying them.(Parthasarathy 246). Regarding material objects as trivial is critical in the journey to self-fulfillment. Although these objects are able to bring joy, this joy is not lasting. Chasing the fulfillment of material goods is only an impediment of one's spiritual evolution, however as described before this does not mean to live as a sage, bereft of possessions. One can possess and even enjoy these goods, however one must always understand that these items are not the cure to their agitated mind. This chase of material or sensual goods is circular as well as detrimental; one will only cease after introspection yields the sought after

result. Best put, “Renunciation is a measure of spirituality. The Yardstick of spiritual evolution.”(Parthasarathy 247).

Parthasarathy’s thoughts on meditation were not only intriguing, but illuminating. He details meditation as the highest spiritual practice. Prior to reading I routinely meditated as a means to calm and allow my mind to enter a state dulled of emotion. However as the mind is simply a constant river of thoughts with a tendency to slip into the past or future I often found myself losing single pointed concentration. The true form of spiritual meditation is as a means to achieve absolute concentration. The ability to govern impulses, eventually converging the mind to single thought. However this process is impossible with the “use of an agitated mind, and thoughts running wildly in all directions.”(Parthasarathy 262). These assertions prompted a conversation within myself. Is meditation something I should continue doing, or should I put my time towards quelling the agitation of the mind? These questions and conversations are one of which I had no concept of prior and have expanded my view of how I perceive my meditative goals to be. Although I generally plan to continue meditation as work to clear my mind of agitation; this reiterates the importance of allowing your own thoughts and beliefs to be questioned even in continuing practices. In practice of absolute meditation the “ceasing of thoughts indicates the extinction of the mind, what remains is pure Silence, pure Awareness, pure Consciousness. The absolute reality, Brahman”(Parthasarathy 263). This view of meditation is one of spiritual significance; one who is able to effectively concentrate on a single point, ceasing the flow of thoughts, is seen as spiritually realized.

Vedanta Treatise was divided into three sections: Introduction to Vedanta, Practical Vedanta, and the Essence of Vedanta. As seen from the work above, my area of interest lies mostly within the practical application of Vedanta. The exposure of differing ideals and concepts I receive, at this time, is the most rewarding facet of study. Allowing my mind to contemplate abstract concepts and allowing my intellect to govern my emotions in day to day life has been life-changing. My long term goals and aspirations have shifted significantly and I feel as if my mind operates in a clear plain. My journey on this path has only just begun and I look forward to continuing. The intersection of my previous conceptualizations with those of the Vedantic philosophy have allowed my mind to explore a hybrid ideology, exemplified in the second paragraph of this analysis. I am truly unable to express my gratitude to you, Mr. Gary, for introducing this study into my life. The pursuit of self development is one that is commonly followed; however it is the mental and spiritual evolution that the world lacks the wherewithal to explore.