



Beyond Things That Matter

An essay reviewing Iain McGilchrist's *The Matter With Things* comparing it with P. R. Sarkar's biopsychology, neohumanism and spiritual philosophy

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Introduction

This review of *The Matter With Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World* will contrast and compare the views of Iain McGilchrist and P. R. Sarkar concerning the truth, biopsychology, consciousness, nature, morality, spirituality, and social philosophy. A primary question to be answered is how both approach the “what” and “how” to save humanity from the grasp of materialism. Iain McGilchrist, a psychiatrist with a background as a neuroscientist, researcher, philosopher and literary scholar offers his bipartite brain hypothesis that the current threat to human society and its relationship with “Nature” is a dominating, materialist-minded “emissary “of a left hemisphere of the brain that denies the values of the intuitive-minded “Master”, the right hemisphere of the brain. Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar, spiritual leader (known as Shrii Shrii Anandamurti), philosopher, scientist and social philosopher, offers contrasting view of spirituality and social philosophies that embrace a similar anti-materialistic view of the “what” ails society but offers an alternative view of “how” to escape the dilemma of materialism in his spiritual practices and social philosophy of Neohumanism. This comparison of McGilchrist and Sarkar will hopefully have heuristic value to promote further scientific investigation into the bipartite theory of McGilchrist's bipartite theory of the right and left brain and Sarkar's bipartite theory of the right and left pituitary gland.

McGilchrist presents a rather dystopian view towards the end of the book: “I believe that without an overarching understanding of the ‘All’ of which

we are a part, however tentative and incomplete it must necessarily be, we are bound to go on acting in such a way that we lose everything we value – or all that, when in our right minds, we value. The left hemisphere has dismantled the universe and is unable to put it back together again. Without a radically different understanding we just can't carry on. That is why I have written this book.” (McGilchrist, 2021 p 2051) He counters this pessimism with, “What is wonderful about us is not our pitiful lust for power, our self-absorption and our armour-plated invulnerability, but precisely our capacity to be vulnerable, to wonder, and to love: which alone makes what we most value possible.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 2054).

He offers that the restoration of these values is dependent on the right hemisphere of the brain's intuitive and holistic perspective of the ‘All’ remaining the Master of the left hemisphere. His approach to the “what” and “how” of this salvation of the human society that he supports, as best I can discern, is the restoration of the “truth” as involving a “process”, not “things”, that involves relationships; “matter” as an emanation from “consciousness”. In answer to “who are we?” he poetically paints a picture of humans as “beings that emerge out of the original consciousness, eddies in a seamless flow that embraces everything that is and was and will be.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 2054). He, like P. R. Sarkar, perceives a free will that chooses between embracing a short-sighted and impulsive egoistic left hemisphere's materialism or the right brain's intuitive and benevolent universalism.



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McGilchrist draws a parallel between the materialist tendencies of modernity to the findings of left-brain dominance in schizophrenia: “In schizophrenia, as in modernity, there is a relentless antagonism towards nature – both in humanity and in the whole natural world... all tending to the view that we are machines.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 523) He questions this notion with, “Might it be, then, that as a culture we were exemplifying not, of course, a sudden epidemic of schizophrenia, but too heavy a reliance on the world as delivered to us by the left hemisphere, meanwhile dismissing what it is that the right hemisphere knows and could help us understand?” (McGilchrist 2021 p 464)

Supporting his bipartite theory of the brain he quotes Roger Sperry, Nobel Prize winner for neurology of the bipartite human brain, “What it comes down to is that modern society discriminates against the right hemisphere. Any attempt to directly attack the overt symptoms of our global condition – pollution, poverty, aggression, overpopulation, and so on – can hardly succeed until the requisite changes are first achieved in the underlying human values involved. Once the subjective value factor has been adjusted, corrections will follow readily in the more concrete features of the system.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 2056-2057)

Part I of the book goes into detail of how right hemisphere deficit syndromes are more impactful than left hemisphere deficit syndromes for most human experiences. McGilchrist states, “The left hemisphere is, compared with the right hemisphere, unreliable in just about every way that matters. In terms of attention to the world, and its role in thereby constructing, and understanding, experience; in its inability to comprehend time, space and motion; in its lack of skill in conveying and interpreting emotion; in its (lack of a) sense of the body as a living inseparable part of the self; in the comparative weakness of its faculties for direct perception, for the evaluation of beliefs and for making judgments; and indeed in terms of its lesser

intelligence (which means understanding): in all of these it is more vulnerable to falsehood, more likely to deceive us, than the right.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 555)

This review will deal with contrasting and comparing how McGilchrist and Sarkar approach moral and ethical values of the “truth” in Part II. The major portion of the review will involve contrasting their views on the role of consciousness in levels of the mind and our relationship with the world of matter, nature and the ephemeral “sacred” in Part III.

We begin with exploring how both men dedicate themselves to establishing a fundamental “ground” of what is “true reality”. While both embrace love and relatedness as essential ingredients of the truth, Sarkar emphasizes unity with a Supreme Consciousness as an aspect of the “ultimate truth” for everyone. However, they both adopt a needed balance between individual and collective truths to insure a common welfare.

Truth: Benevolent Relatedness to Self and Others

Regarding the etymology of the word “truth” McGilchrist offers, “The Latin word *verum* (true) is cognate with a Sanskrit word meaning to choose or believe, like one’s loved one, the one in whom one chooses to believe and place one’s trust, to whom one is true”. (McGilchrist 2021 p 576)

He offers three fundamental questions as a path to a truer account of our shared reality. His account of the first question, “What is the true reality?”, contrasts how the right hemisphere grasps the truth by, “Rather than conceiving it as a thing, it would experience it as a process, one that, in this case – not just for now, but in principle – has no ending. More importantly, it would see that truth is a relationship.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 573)

For the second question, “What account of reality emerges?”, he posits, “It is a world in which relationships are ontologically primary, foundational; and ‘things’ are secondary, emergent property of relationships. It is one where matter is an aspect of consciousness, not consciousness an emanation from matter.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 2052)

To the third question, “Who are we?”, he offers this poetic description, “We are temporarily material entities, capable, we do not know how or why, not just of awe before creation, but of playing a part in creation itself; beings that emerge out of the original consciousness, eddies in a seamless flow that embraces everything that is and was and will be; for a while distinct, but never wholly separate from the flow, since we are for a while that flow, wherever it finds itself. (McGilchrist 2021 p 2054)

Sarkar's notion of a bipartite pituitary raises the question of whether he is referring to a bipartite brain division or bipartite glandular plexus involving the right and left pituitary gland.



For Sarkar (1996, p 15) the truth is known in part as *satya*, “action of the mind and the use of speech in the spirit of welfare for all.” Like McGilchrist the “truth” is relational and benevolent.

Sarkar and McGilchrist take a different perspective on the support of truth and moral values. McGilchrist finds that the efforts of religion to maintain some semblance of moral values has been too readily shunned by modernism. He says, “When our society generally held with religion, we might indeed have committed many of the same wrongs; but power-seeking, selfishness, self-promotion, narcissism and entitlement, neglect of duty, dishonesty, ruthlessness, greed, and lust were never condoned or actively and openly encouraged – even admired – in the way they sometimes are now. In other words, we have lost all shame. And that can't help but make a difference to how we behave.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 2000) Sarkar sees religions as purveyors of dogma that has led to many wars and social divisions. Sarkar calls these social divisions “socio-sentiments” that have been promoted by religious differences. (P. R. Sarkar, 1982)

In place of a morality that is infiltrated by dogmas of “never do this”, “always do that” Sarkar supports a universal ethics called Yama and Niyama that is based on time, place and person. The first of five principles of Yama, how to relate to others (animate and inanimate entities), Satya, “truthfulness”, Ahimsa, “non-harmfulness” does not preclude the use of force if necessary to protect the common welfare. Other elements of Yama include asteya, non-stealing, not taking something that belongs to others, and Brahmacharya, move towards a state of oneness with Cosmic Consciousness and fifth, aparigraha, to live simply, taking only what is needed individually and collectively. (Sarkar 1996)

The second set of five principles, called Niyama, for self-regulation to maintain inner harmony involves first principle of shaoca, purity of mind and body, again to serve to common welfare; Santosa, related to maintaining contentment but also relates to the experience of joy and awe, mentioned by McGilchrist; Tapah, willingness to undergo hardship to serve others needing help; svadhyaya, to have an understanding of spiritual literature and great books and the fifth principle, Iishvara Pranidhana, to meditate on and become one with Cosmic Consciousness. (Sarkar 1996)

As with yama and niyama, McGilchrist offers a balanced application of moral judgement that supports the coordinated cooperation of the individual and society, “Thus a good society is not one in which individuality is lost, but one in which it is fulfilled; yet, at the same time, that individuality must not be a threat to the cohesion of the society. There is such a thing as tyranny of individuals over society, as well as society over individuals.” (McGilchrist 2021 p588) Sarkar confirms this point of view with, “One must not forget that collective welfare lies in individuals and individual welfare lies in collectivity.” (Sarkar 1992 p 8)

Regarding a foundational truth both men agree on the basic “ground of being” or that consciousness precedes matter in the ontology of the universe. This preeminence of consciousness is grounded again in a process of interconnected relatedness that is omnipresent. In the next section we will also deal with the limits of the brain as the sole arbiter of consciousness and the preeminence of Supreme Consciousness as the final goal on the journey of levels of the mind.

Consciousness: Foundation of Reality

Ian McGilchrist's exploration of consciousness is deeply informed by his background as a psychiatrist and neuroscience researcher and added to greatly by his background as a philosopher and literary scholar. He leads with the stance “that consciousness precedes matter is an idea that has an ancient lineage, and more than a little, I shall suggest, going for it. Matter could be born of consciousness without either being the same as, or wholly distinct from, the other. And if true, a form of asymmetry familiar to the readers of this book would operate, mind and matter being aspects of the same thing, but that not of itself making them equal.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1619)

McGilchrist reflects on the limits of the brain: “I do not suggest that the brain originates anything. I do not know that the brain ‘causes’ consciousness: it might or might not. For example, it might transduce, or otherwise mediate, consciousness.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 56) These limits make room for what might be referred to as the “bodymind”, a term offered by Candace Pert the author of *Molecules of Emotions: The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine* (Pert 1997). Her extensive research as a neuroscientist and



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pharmacologist on neuropeptides asserts that the mind's activity is not confined to the brain but replicated throughout the neurohormonal system of the body; thus she coined the term, "Bodymind". She states that the polypeptides of the neuroendocrine system function just as the neurons of the brain and bring into our awareness the emotions expressed in the bodymind thereby avoiding the Cartesian body and mind duality. These neurotransmitters called peptides carry emotional messages throughout the body and brain. Emotional expressions could begin with thoughts associated with the brain or the body's reflex glandular response that interacts with the autonomic nervous system operating at first beyond conscious awareness but coming into awareness. These alternative origins of emotion are coupled with the brain/glandular response, mediated by the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland, another flow state of "betweenness" that McGilchrist supports.

Sarkar (aka Anandamurti) expands this bodymind model with his "Biopsychology", a science of intuition and yoga that includes five levels of the mind associated with the first five of seven cakras. (Anandamurti, 1968) He defines a cakra as a

plexus of subglands. From some of the endocrine glands identified by the author we can postulate that the eight classical endocrine glands identified here are related to what Anandamurti identifies with plexi of glands located vertically along the spine from the muladhara cakra (Kamamaya/conscious mind) at the base of the spine ascending to the sahasrara cakra (beyond qualities/things) associated with the pineal gland. Ascending from the cakra at the base of the spine is the svadhithana cakra (Manomaya/subconscious mind) associated with the prostate gland and the ovaries; the manipura cakra (Atimanas/supramental mind) associated with the adrenal gland and pancreas; the anahata, cakra, (vijinanamaya/subliminal mind) associated with the thymus gland; vishuddha cakra (hiranmaya/subtle causal mind) associated with the thyroid and parathyroid glands and just below the crown cakra the ajina, cakra, associated with the pituitary gland. (2013 p 107-112) Anandamurti states, "The main controlling station of the citta and mind is located in the sixth plexus – the pituitary plexus (ājīṇā cakra).. The right petal (the acoustic root of which is Ha) controls the...propensity of extroversiality of the human mind. In this it is assisted by the right subtle

nerve current (the *piṅgalá*), which primarily controls the left portion of the body and secondarily the right portion. The left petal of pituitary plexus (whose acoustic root is *kṣá*) controls the force of spiritual inclination.” (1968) These descriptions of the *cakras* and subtle nerves are of a psycho-spiritual nature combining the western science of neuroanatomy/endocrinology and eastern metaphysics.

This collection of subglands at these *cakras*, the known endocrine glands and some glands yet to be discovered by science, are associated with fifty sounds that constitute the Sanskrit alphabet. These root sounds are like a symphony that regulate our internal and external balance with the world and our deeper contact with our inner-most selves. This deeper self-knowledge is developed by the practices of meditation, *asanas* (yoga postures) and a sentient, holistic lifestyle, the goal of which is to become self-realized by attaining unity with Supreme Consciousness.

Sarkar further defines this process of self-realization as “If, by dint of *sadhana* (spiritual practice), a person can elevate his or her unit existence (consciousness) and bring the crude, or conscious mind to the level of the subtle, or subconscious mind, and thereafter, going even higher, elevate the subtle or subconscious mind to the level of the causal, or unconscious mind,... This experience or realization in the path of *sádhana* comprises a state similar to the stance of the supreme attainment of intuition. In this supreme state all mind, all consciousness, is merged in the Supreme Cognitive Force. They become one. This state is the supreme attainment, the supreme stage, or unbounded consciousness.” (Anandamurti 1985, Discourse 11)

Sarkar’s notion of a bipartite pituitary raises the question of whether he is referring to a bipartite brain division or bipartite glandular plexus involving the right and left pituitary gland. He states the locations and functions as: “The lunar plexus, or *ájina* *cakra*: 1. *apará* [mundane knowledge] *kṣá*, 2. *pará* [spiritual knowledge] *ha*...the area between the two end points of the eyes is the area of the lunar plexus. Pursuing Sarkar’s division of the right and left functions of the pituitary he designates, “That the right wing of the pituitary plexus controls the qualities, attributions and quanta of the leftistic propensities which have degenerating and depraving effect, such as shyness, shamefulness, melancholia and fear which are associated with the *manipura cakra* (lower body). The left wing of the pituitary controls the rightistic propensities, attributions and quanta associated with the above the *ájina cakra* (upper body) which pave the way to supra-consciousness...When both sides of the pituitary

plexus are fully developed and fully utilized, one attains apexed intellect.” (Anandamurti, 2013, p 123) He stated, “Hence, this is a completely new science.” (2013, p 145)

This element of “control” or inhibitory actions implied by the right and left wings seems to be central to achieving this balance and apexed intellect. This is a similar notion to McGilchrist’s notion of the right brain being the “master” of the left brain “emissary” but that the right brain is paradoxically and secondarily dependent on the functions of the left brain. McGilchrist confirms that there are more inhibitory nerve networks in the brain than facilitating nerve networks that would account for balance and control of expression of propensities that involve thought, emotion and action. He goes so far as to say, “The inhibitory action of the corpus callosum enables the human condition. Delimitation is what makes something exist..(p 1250) and adds ‘balance needs to be constantly disturbed and restored. Symmetry-breaking is everywhere in living organisms; it may be argued that all qualitative cellular transitions and cellular decision-making are forms of symmetry-breaking, and it is indeed ‘fundamental to every physiological process.’” (McGilchrist 1282) As with the needed balance suggested by both authors the left side of the brain/pituitary gland, the “ego”, needs to be the servant of the “intuition” on the right side brain/pituitary gland. It is interesting that Sarkar’s bipartite theory of the right and left pituitary is focused on the pituitary gland that is considered the “master gland” of the neuro-endocrine system in contrast to McGilchrist’s right brain as the “master” of the left brain. This idea of opposite poles balancing one another to achieve wholeness is echoed in Anandamurti’s sutra that states, “Obstacles are the helping forces that establish one in the goal.” (Anandamurti 1967)

It is noteworthy that Sarkar’s biopsychological model of levels of the mind describes the spiritual and intuitive knowledge as associated with the right side of the pituitary, whereas the the left side of the pituitary, deals with the world of things or worldly knowledge. This bipartite pituitary theory of Sarkar parallels McGilchrist’s bipartite theory of the brain regarding the right side of the brain containing the intuitive holistic perspective, while the left brain deals with the limited view of “things”. However, McGilchrist opines, that the brain may not “originate anything” or “cause consciousness” but that it might “transduce or mediate” consciousness. Sarkar’s model of biopsychology as a science of intuition and yoga offers an expansion on the bipartite model of the brain offered by McGilchrist that includes the neuroendocrine system mediated by the two hemispheres of the brain.

McGilchrist unites in himself the scientist and philosopher to join those who aspire to combine a subjective psychology and objective science. ”

It is understandable that modern science would begin its research on the well-developed brains of mammals as the “command center” of a machine model of awareness and the obvious “pathway to perception”. However, the ancient Tantric science of intuition and yoga (union), estimated to be seven thousand years old, without the benefit of modern scientific technology began to fathom, through meditation, a metaphysical model of cakras and primordial sounds emanating from the body that became the Sanskrit alphabet of 50 sounds associated with the seven cakras. (2013, Chapter 19) Sarkar combined this Eastern mysticism with Western neuroscience science to offer a model of biopsychology that needs careful study that combines the arts, humanities and modern science. I think that Sarkar and McGilchrist would resonate with the science of sound and the neuroendocrine system being worthy ingredients to be included in a synthetic science of the mind.

The next section affirms the authors views on the ontology of consciousness and matter while differentiating qualities associated with matter and human consciousness in the objective and subjective realms.

Consciousness and Matter

McGilchrist states that when he uses the word consciousness, “I refer very broadly to all that we might call ‘the experiential’. This covers all the activities that go on, for each of us, as we say, unconsciously and pre-consciously, as well as consciously; but could not go on without what is conventionally referred to as subjectivity, or inwardness, of some kind.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1597) Later in the text he continues, “I would say that matter appears to be an element within consciousness that provides the necessary resistance for creation; and with that, inevitably, for individuality to arise” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1612) To repeat his comment for emphasis “that consciousness precedes matter is an idea that has an ancient lineage, and more than a little, I shall suggest, going for it. Matter could be born of consciousness without either being the same as, or wholly distinct from, the other.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1619) He quotes Max Planck who was asked whether he thought consciousness could be

explained in terms of matter and its laws. “No, he replied. ‘I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness.’” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1620)

Sarkar refers to “unbounded consciousness” to connote the universal application of consciousness to all, not separating it from matter but seeing consciousness as the fundamental ground that precedes and encompasses matter. McGilchrist quires whether matter and consciousness are the “same” or “distinct” from one another. Sarkar would simply say matter and consciousness are “associated”. Regarding the quality of this consciousness Sarkar says, “When the knowership of the Cognitive Faculty remains associated with matter, that is to say, when it remains associated in such a way that there is no realization of existence, nor the capacity for doership or active experience, then that state of matter we call crude matter. The manifestation of consciousness...is greatest where the sense of existence is most pronounced. For this reason, human beings are considered the most developed beings”. (Anandamurti 1985, Discourse 4)

Regarding the relationship of the subjective mind and objective mind Sarkar maintains that “In fact, you never come in physical contact with anything. Your contact with everything is through your mind, through your nerve fibres, through your nerve cells, and your entire objective mind. When you feel you see, it is an internal projection with the help of your nerves..... The subjectivated mind is the witnessing counterpart of the objectivated mind and may take its object both from the external physical world and the internal psychic world. It may create an object within itself..... In other words, all the objectivities of the world together are the object of the Supreme Subjectivity.

Sarkar shares a similar view to McGilchrist that, “All so-called materialistic ideologies have devastating effects on human beings. Where the object of adoration is matter, as in the case of materialism, the mind will certainly become matter, and when the mind takes the form of matter a vacuum is created in its place. Thus the very existence of human beings is converted into matter.” (Sarkar 1988)

The next section explores the expansion of the human identity to include nature’s animate and inanimate world. Both authors explore the primacy

of love and devotion as primary for the human experience of unity with the natural world of people and nature. Sarkar offers Neohumanism, the love of all creation, as an expansion of humanism and offers an “awakened conscience” as a path of social equality and oneness with Supreme Consciousness.

Consciousness and the Natural World

McGilchrist and Sarkar both express a universal love of all of nature which includes the cosmos of all entities. McGilchrist expresses this sentiment as, “Any love, goodness and beauty we can bring come out of Nature and out of the cosmos in the first place: where else can they possibly come from?” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1846) Whereas Sarkar states, “When the underlying spirit of humanism is extended to everything, animate and inanimate, in this universe – I have designated this as “Neohumanism”. This Neohumanism will elevate humanism to universalism, the cult of love for all created beings of this universe.” (Sarkar 1982 p 7)

McGilchrist cautions, “Nature, that we are reviling and doing our best to devastate – is the great whole to which we belong. All the elements of the left hemisphere insurrection can, individually and together, be seen as an attack on Nature – and, with it, on the body; and hence on life itself.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 2048)

Regarding love or the devotional sentiment McGilchrist says, “In relation to the divine, unlike spacetime, there is also a realm of spiritual gnosis that does not apply to physics, since God is far more accessible to heart and soul than to intellect.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1865) Neohumanism’s heart inspired universalism, according to Sarkar, helps transform geo-sentiments regarding place, socio-sentiments related to groups and human sentiments that deny the devotional love of all of creation. (Sarkar 1982 p 7)

Sarkar’s Neohumanism offers a path of liberation of the intellect from the shackles of sentiments related to identification with place, groups and narrow human values which fail to promote social equality. This review does not lend itself to an extensive review of the many strategies for overcoming these narrow sentiments that can be approached by a careful reading of the book, *Neohumanism: Liberation of the Intellect*. (1982) Here we will look at the method of “Awakened Conscience” (Sarkar 1982, p 69) offered by this Neohumanist text

as an approach to the study of actions and goals that serves the general welfare of all beings.

This awakened conscience approach begins with a synthetic or Gestalt-like, systems approach of the study of whether suggested solutions serve the general welfare. Each suggested action and alternatives (the parts) are questioned as to whether the source of information (pros and cons) supporting these actions collectively (as a whole) reflects the truth as intuitively weighed against the ethical principles alluded to earlier as Yama and Niyama. The final arbiter in this process of awakened conscience is the intuition of an individual or group decision as to what serves the general welfare that balances individual and collective welfare.

According to Sarkar (1982 Discourse 11) the evolution of the expression of Neohumanism happens in the three stages. The first stage of “practice” involves the application of the spiritual practices similar to yoga and intuitional science, grounded in a universal ethics. Stage two occurs when there is a critical mass in humanity’s “collective mind” of what Sarkar and McGilchrist have characterized as shared spiritual and “right hemisphere” values. According to

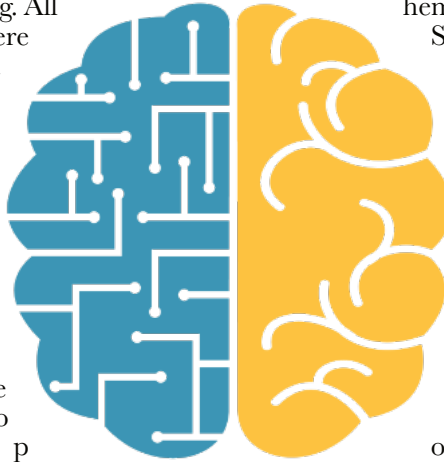
Sarkar this ubiquitous collective mind will bring about a “new era” of spirituality replacing the values and practices of a materialistically oriented society. The final stage of union with the Supreme Consciousness will then be individually self-realized by many who have applied the spiritual practices of these three stages. These stages of Neohumanism involve first a personal practice, then an essence of collective spirit and finally a mission where each individual has a link

with the Cosmological Hub and the spirit of optimism in taking action to liberate society and planet.

Consciousness and the Sacred

The final topic deals with the acceptance of the “sacred” meaning of “God”. Whether considering McGilchrist’s “coordinating principle of the universe” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1865) or Sarkar’s “dancing on the bosom of Consciousness” (Sarkar 1956) with a capital “C” both appear to accept an anthem dedicated to God.

McGilchrist suggest that the “placeholder” terms – *logos, li, tao, rta...* “suggest a coordinating principle in the universe which is evidenced in order, harmony



and fittingness; a principle that is not only true, but the ultimate source of truth.” (McGilchrist 2021, 1865) On parallel Sarkar states, “Those who regard atoms of energy as the initial manifestations of Prakrti (nature) and want to deny the existence of consciousness beyond them, should know that these so-called atoms of energy are indeed dancing on the bosom of Consciousness.” On our relationship with God Sarkar states, “Your relationship with God is personal. No one can sever this relationship. It is part of your being, your birthright.” (Sarkar 1971)

In a self-revelatory manner McGilchrist refers to his own “religious disposition” as having “resulted from a largely private lifelong exploration of the experience of being alive, guided by meditative reading of the spiritual texts of different cultures, experiencing holy places in different lands, encounters with human beings who seemed to me to be deeply spiritual people, sporadic attendance at rituals of great beauty, a lifelong celebration of art, and poetry, but of music above all; and love; and long communing with the astonishing beauty of the natural world.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1865)

Sarkar and McGilchrist seem to use the words Consciousness and God interchangeably. McGilchrist offers, “What the term ‘God’ requires of us is not a set of propositions about what cannot be known but a disposition towards what must be recognised as beyond human comprehension.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1866) In sync with his bipartite hypothesis he proclaims, “The right hemisphere is better at accepting uncertainty and limits to knowledge. An understanding of the divine must rely on indirect and metaphorical expression, not direct and literal expression... It involves appreciating a Gestalt, not a construction of parts; entering into an ‘I-Thou’, not just an ‘I-It’ relationship,” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1873) “It seemed to me that there was something ‘beyond’, in some sense, that drew me forward; something I had intuitive acquaintance with but could say almost nothing about, except that it seemed both real and beautiful... In fact it seemed to me that Nature in all her forms, including those we call inanimate, was alive.” (McGilchrist 2021 p1879) He concludes, “What underlies and unites all these aspects of experience for me is the conviction of a direct and reciprocal engagement with whatever-it-is that is the ground of Being, and which we call God.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 1881)

McGilchrist contends “It is often said that we are experiencing a crisis of meaning. Not coincidentally, far more of us than ever before in the history of the world live divorced from Nature, alienated from the structures and traditions of a stable society, and indifferent to the divine. These three elements have always been what have provided us with an

overarching sense of belonging: our relations with the living world, with one another, and with a divine realm.” (McGilchrist 2021 p2025) He muses “I have been forcibly struck by the remarkable similarities in the wisdom enshrined in writings coming out of a breadth of traditions – Hindu, Taoist, Buddhist, Christian, Hebrew, Islamic, those of the ancient cultures of North America, or those of ancient Greece – that I have encountered.” (McGilchrist 2021 p 2058) To add to these great sources of wisdom we have reviewed elements of Sarkar’s inspiring spiritual discourses that wed Eastern mysticism and western science.

In a concluding remark McGilchrist pleads. “It is easy to misunderstand what cultures wiser than ours were trying to express by speaking of God; still easier to reject the idea of God entirely. But easy is not enough. It is our duty to do the more difficult thing: to find out the core of wisdom in this ill-understood, though universal, insight, for that there is such an inestimably valuable core seems to me more credible than anything else I know. (McGilchrist 2021 p 2059)

Conclusion

McGilchrist unites in himself the scientist and philosopher to join those who aspire to combine a subjective psychology and objective science that straddles the divide that exists between scientists and philosophers today. Sarkar has taken a similar path in synthesizing a subjective approach to an objective adjustment in science, spirituality and social philosophy. There is a vast array of leading scientists and philosophers quoted in *The Matter With Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World* that support McGilchrist’s bipartite brain model that moves a reductionist model of science towards the subjective realm that embraces consciousness as foundational to understanding the objective world. McGilchrist and Sarkar, though having traveled different roads as scientist and spiritual leader, have ended up at home with “Consciousness” as the ultimate truth of our shared reality.

The article, complete with all its references, is published on theneohumanist.com

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