

# Place of Religion in the Modern World

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**Abstract:** Sportively accepting the facts of life, as they are, is a primary requisition to properly understand limitations and efficacy of any Religion. This would help in grasping its running status and mode of functioning than giving away to conjectures. One needs to have a clarity in mind that Religion is not merely restricted to a set of beliefs but is also expected to be a faultlessly thorough guide to live meaningfully. It had been and continues even today, that only a meager percentage of the society has clearly followed the genuine meaning. Most of the adherents have been blindly using it as a tool of utility for personal gains. Memorizing a sizable number of aphorisms or couplets with a few mythological man-made anecdotes and getting totally drowned into the ritualistic practices seems to be an accredited qualification. It is sad but a fact that most of the religious minded people have been involved in scandalous affairs, corrupt activities and immoral deeds. Their viewpoints lacking in analysis have proved to be detrimental to the society. It is indeed indescribably a horrible situation. Religion, as such, at no stage is to be blamed for this scenario but it is the self-inspired level of immaturity, self-acclaimed intellectual status and impatience, that have caused all the irreparable damage. Just as many of our preferred actions that are performed, religious activities too fall under personal affairs only. Exhibition of one's own set of beliefs uninvited and further forcing others to appreciate the same unconditionally has become virtually a designated mark of power. It is also claimed to be a sort of social service. Many times, certain agenda is preconceived and deliberately spread so as to gain cheap popularity and subscriptions. In history too this has happened many times. In the present-day context, if this ignorance is encouraged or sustained without any protest, it surely would lead to an irreparable damage. Therefore, the chief intention of this paper is to bring forth the simple principles of living as suggested by religions and show how unfortunately the philosophical and spiritual meanings have been deliberately been eliminated or dissipated. Interpretation of the textual matter must go in the hands of people having scientific temper and regard for true spiritual bent of mind.

**Keywords:** Efficacy of Religion, Philosophical outlook, Scientific temper.

## 1. Introduction

Many of the social problems have emerged mostly due to the clash of the set of beliefs rigorously adopted by opposing schools of thought. At times one feels their genuine concern for the welfare of humanity is a doubtful proposition because apparently at least shows no serious relevance. Everything has gone to an utmost complexity in their ramifications. There is a

dire need for a rethinking and philosophical inquiry. In the light of the present availability of the scientifically backed knowledge, a reshaping of ethical values, morality and practical utility of the religious thought are badly required. Therefore, now it is mandatory for us to hunt out for better solutions from refined methods, although they might turn out to be rigorous approaches. With this we can expect religions and religious philosophies to easily tackle fundamental issues than remain merely ornamental. The unfortunate part is from ages, although in theory, all stand united on a common platform, but they widely and vigorously differ in implementation. Each has his viewpoints directly connected to his religious sentiments as priority and a temptation to belittle or condemn others for their opinions. It has become an act of joy and self-assumed supremacy. They may complement each other only with a sense and expectation of mutual appreciation but no way not beyond that. The damage caused is irreparable and there does not seem to be any effort in a sizable manner, in near future. We do need a fresh material with sensible editing of the confusing and complicated voluminous material filled with escapism when put to the test of validity.

What is the connection between Religion and Philosophy? Usually, it is looked upon as a sort of a support system provided by Philosophy to Religion. In fact, all Religions would perpetually seek an infallible support from Philosophy to present own convictions. Obviously, there was a strong desire for the propounders to get a philosophical nod and openly stamp their beliefs or outlooks as rational. Owing to this all religions claim and the publicized miracles got a sort of certification. Ultimately, we can understand the need of philosophical expressions for all religions for their on publicity. In this persuasion there was indeed a noticeable success but the ritualistic practices also found a place of reverence. Therefore, one should not hurriedly conclude Religion and Philosophy in an alloyed form. Philosophy has a special area cum branch to deal with Religious sentiments and activities. It is always the province selected by Philosophy to analyses on the basis of various standard modes of reasoning and categorizing the same to bring out the essence. Just as Philosophy of Science is restricted to the select branches of science, which have earned recognition, similarly it deals with religions and the

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terms/approaches involved. Naturally there would be an extensive coverage of God's existence, liberally used adjectives for God's typical characteristics and above all monitoring of human affairs by the Agency. Furthermore, the other possible lookouts viz; Atheistic, Skeptic, Agnostic, Fatalistic etc. are also dealt with impartially. Most of the times philosophical analysis would expose the falsifying ideas and shortcomings of the wishful thinking dragged or purposefully promoted by religions. Certain impressive terms, coined purposely for benefit, are scrutinized to check their usability. It is a proven fact that with the progress of scientific temperament many of the ideas have lost their appeal, just as in science, to be precise Chemistry, we have various orders of Reaction, judged on the basis of the concentration of the number of the reactants involved, here too, we find somehow Religion and Philosophy cannot be sundered apart. That is why activities involved here may be graded as second-order type or even independent. There had been, needless to say, necessity of philosophy for the presentation of its tenets. Much owing to these various definitions of Religion is given to show the eagerness on the part of Religions to hold on to the image of God, so that it would easily appeal to mass psychology and trap the gullible minds. ...religion is "human recognition of a superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God or Gods entitled to obedience and worship"(Concise Oxford Dictionary), "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."(William James), : a set of beliefs, practices and institutions which men have evolved in various societies"(Talcott Parsons), "a body of scruples which impede the free exercise of our faculties"(Solomon Reinach), "ethics heightened, enkindled, lit up by feeling"(Mathew Arnold), Religion is the recognition that all things are manifestations of a Power which transcends our knowledge"(Herbert Spencer) [1].

## 2. Background

Survey of Indian or European philosophy in detail is not an easy task because there had been upheavals caused due to the influence of social and political factors. Facing wars and natural calamities would, needless to say, bring upon radical changes in the approaches towards life in all its phases. Somehow in Europe the thinkers had a different canvas to work upon and their tradition permitted them to succeed one another by presenting or adopting a new standpoint. At times they reached their milestone rather in a hurried manner by vehemently criticizing or rejecting completely the ideas of the predecessors. That is why due to this, energetically, the wheel of progress could cross many vistas and develop the subject in a thoroughly pragmatic fashion. In India the scene had been quite different. Most of the schools of thought jumped to almost same conclusion by stemming out the energy cum viewpoint, from the ancient religious scriptures. However, some of them wantonly preferred different routes. Therefore, the religious outlook became almost compulsory for presenting a new philosophical thesis. There was not any disregard towards the earlier thought or approach, but to the contrary it was the

reverence that in a way subsequently provided strength and appeal. At the most in parallel there was development of the off-shoots, however, the source of inspiration remained same. "This it is sometimes claimed, gave a progressive coherence to the philosophical views and, as such, what Indian philosophy might have lost in variety was compensated by the intensity it gained [2].

There had been arguments for and against the existence of God. Both the arguments seem to be pretty convincing but in their own created world. Once the route of the journey is confirmed from the metaphysical world towards the spiritual zone, everything seems to be very soothing and filled with poetic sensibility. But then the problem arises only when the extended claims are put to a severe test in the mart of the world or subjected to the ongoing affairs in the mundane world, the major portion collapses. Many times, it sounds merely the result of a wishful thinking. To the contrary, the arguments against the existence of God rest more on the ground reality faced by all and mostly scientifically backed. The only risk in totally adopting this viewpoint is that one has to outrightly reject many ideas or subjects related to the fundamental necessities of human beings, particularly faith and emotions. Most of the ramifications may not be agreeable or useful in totality. There is certainly a soteriological factor which builds or supports the thinking pattern. Furthermore, the psychological security gained through social traditions and private faith cannot be outrightly dismissed. When the atheists speak of something as absolute reality through rather their personal experiences, the truth cannot be ignored. However, beyond the commonly cognizable dimensions of the world and human nature, there are definitely some vistas which have been proved through the experiences of the evolved beings. Therefore, it could be always wise to pick up or at least give a favorable consideration to all shades before arriving at any conclusion.

"What Thales did was to leave Marduk out. He, too, said that everything was once water. But he thought that earth and everything else had been formed out of water by a natural process, like silting up of delta of the Nile.... It is an admirable building, the whole point of which is that it gathers together into a coherent picture a number of observed facts without letting Marduk in... But nothing as sharp as this took place in Indian Philosophy. Our philosophers, generally speaking, were not so keen on shaking off their Marduks, their world of traditional beliefs and fancies [3].

The materialists have been ridiculing at the traditional beliefs, yet the problems of life at the mental level faced by all remain same in uniform manner. This is why even the schools practicing Existentialism or Agnosticism, have been quite successful to a fairly high extent, in exposing the excesses of the traditional religious outlooks but their own problems show that they too are no way complacent either.

## 3. The Nervous Confusion

It is an open fact that modern man is also chasing the same goals as his predecessors did. The only difference is that in earlier times most of the problems were centered around Nature and its mystery. Once the various shades of Nature-phenomena

were revealed in installments, the focus was shifted to human mind and its needs. Generally, the common problems were purpose of life or living, connection between God and human affairs, Life after death etc. Various faiths were developed but they had soteriological pattern. This approach somehow had been perpetually holding human mind tightly. It is providing such a lasting hope that every person coming under its arena thinks he or she is qualified for the desired fruitful results. There have been transitions and deviations but only on a temporary basis. Any of the revolutionary pattern of thinking always begins with handful of persons. As the results of their efforts fructify, the society looks with an awe and suspicion. Despite this there is a beginning of a radical movement within the society. A smaller percentage does begin to recheck its own thinking pattern.. The greater percentage, however, starts with younger/liberated generation. Very few of the older generation would ever dare to reshuffle or remold their ideas. It needs courage to dismantle the beliefs which have precipitated on the dint of emotional thinking or by using emotive language. The utter confusion comes in for many but there is lack of courage and sportive nature to announce or accept the limitations of the traditional ideas. Failure of the ideas to generate desirable goods is an open fact but many would not accept owing to the supreme ego carried along and always nurtured. From the spiritual point of view the blunder committed is much due to a falsifying image of God erected by the majority. This in turn brings in lot of hope but further its failure causes nervousness leading to depression.

#### 4. Objections Against the Popular Beliefs

There are several arguments and theories presented by philosophers to prove the existence of God and his intimate relationship with human beings. It is also claimed that there is a close connection between God and human affairs as well as Universe. Similarly, It is also trusted that though all religions describe his virtues very confidently he remains transcendental by nature and cannot be grasped by our logical thinking or reasoning. The only way to understand his (God) presence is through unfaltering faith and intuition. Most of the proofs furnished are to be trusted without doubting so that further extension can be carried forward. Let us examine some of the popular arguments in favor of his existence and capacity to solve all the societal and individual problems.

In the Causal Argument there is a lot of impetus on Nature's law of Causality wherein God is sanctioned the designation of first cause of creation. Since scientifically every effect must have a cause, the chain of creation has to begin from a point which is causeless and that is taken for granted as God. There are certain valid objections against this argument. Although apparently it seems to be a simple argument and quite convincing too, it is difficult to introduce God into the proposed causal chain and expecting the law to cover the infinite existence. Further there could be problems of Deism and Pluralism as Universe itself has multiplicity of causes. William James who gave a Pragmatic Argument presented his idea through his famous work, 'Varieties of Religious Experience' wherein apart from the human psychological need a practical

value is also attached to the existence of God. It is definitely beneficial to one and all because there would be a hope to combat with the existing miseries. But then this existence cannot be proved only for the sake of utility. We know religions as such do not always give us profitable results. Inter and Inter-religious activities have been very dangerous and harmfully missing the required moral order as such. Therefore, the very pragmatic approach cannot be accepted as an empirical one. The easiest argument in favor of the existence of God has been the Empirical Argument. Herein all our faith is drawn from the trust we have invested in the experiences of the evolved or enlightened spiritual beings. In all parts of the world irrespective of the religion followed and preached, certain personalities have indicated unusual experiences, though privately. They have, on dint of the same, even demonstrated their supernatural powers, which have been witnessed and acknowledged by the society whole heartedly. However, the objections against this argument came from psychologists as they felt this way of proving is merely psychological but never objective. Of course, there had been a few psychologists who felt, these experiences cannot be totally ruled out because there could be some objective basis. In Teleological Argument, there is a presumption that every object that exists has a purpose, may be minor or major. Further the purpose seems to be well-defined and this can be cognized from the behavioral pattern or the functioning of the object for the sake of its own existence. This idea leads us to a wishful conclusion that the mastermind behind this kind of arrangement is an authority whom we refer to as God. The body design and functioning can be understood through this approach. Regarding this view normally the criticism is leveled taking into consideration Deism. When the Universe is considered as finite then the God in description also becomes finite only. At the same time there are many instances which can be shown to have no harmony at all. The Nature-disasters which bring upon tremendous loss indicate no positive purpose. Therefore, control or purpose of God designing such disasters is subject to harsh criticism. In Ontological Argument God is imagined to be the most perfect figure and therefore all the virtues or elevated qualities must belong to him. Existence is one of such essential qualities. Unless God exists 'Perfection' cannot be attributed. Existence itself is a basic and necessary quality for all description. This viewpoint was proposed by St. Anslem and supported by Rene Descartes though refuted by Immanuel Kant. It is true that Kant thinks that we cannot start with our ideals to reach the desired results. It is always the existing facts which lead us to the proper or genuine knowledge of any object. Therefore, taking certain things for granted before checking the existential reality and premises, would take us to a philosophical fallacy. Hegel opposes this viewpoint because to him this kind of thinking has limitations. It would work out for finite objects but cannot be extended to anything infinite in its stature. Therefore, the very idea of God needs to be exempted from such a limited vision. Moral Argument as presented by Immanuel Kant expects moral values to have an objective existence. When such a reformation is possible, then automatically it makes us assume that there is an infinite mind-God- to control the moral order. In the absence of such an

intellectual cum efficient mind it would be highly improbable to expect the moral order or values to survive. The critics feel that this is not at all convincing to have an idea that good actions would always result into good results. This without any argument, has been an existential fact. Therefore, this would bring down the very idea or image of God. Similarly, most of the values or rather virtues seem to be hypothetically designed and described. In Error Argument as given by Prof. Josiah Royce we realize that for every coin there are two sides. When it comes to the moral and ethical planes, we do find along with virtues the knowledge of the vices and vice-versa. In the mundane life everyone does experience both but the negative attributes more in intensity. So, pros and cons are everywhere. Taking this into account one can conclude that error cannot exist unless we have the knowledge of its counterpart. Having acknowledged the existence of error, we do confirm the existence of the opposite too. This makes us believe in the existence of the Infinite Truth which is logically and factually proved. At this juncture we can say God's existence is a necessity without which infinity of Truths cannot be managed. As we experience the presence of negative qualities like injustice, intolerance, insufficiency, hate, sadness devilish nature and certain Nature-phenomena, their opposites do have existence. The strong objection against this argument is how Royce confirms error as an incomplete element of Truth? Many times, we find that error or falsity cannot be a partial truth. Each is complete in itself. As well, it is not just mental that we conclude something as erroneous. Experiences show that many of the errors have nothing to do with mind. They do take place outside the frame of mind. Similarly, the notion that all truths have an internal connection is also not very convincing. When it comes to Deism, we have been guided to consider God and the Universe as separate entities. No doubt there is an intimate relation between God and Universe created but that is at the initial stages only. Later they have their own separate identity. Therefore, Deism maintains God as the primary cause of this world. He is also credited with the capacity to generate natural laws which have been given a subordinate status. There is no relation between him and the world at every stage but his movement at a specific time is expected for the functioning of the activities of the world. Such an involvement cannot be forecasted by human beings because it is the decision of the Divine Will. Deism unfortunately could not gather much ground and was severely criticized as it is clearly lacking in philosophic maturity. God's creation and arrangement of this world out of nothing is also not viewed as a fair idea qualified to be accepted. Since only the select activities are taken as monitored by God, it is not possible to support outrightly the Omnipotent or Omniscient or Omnipresent characteristic as publicized by all religions. The very purpose of creation of this world as described is not satisfying. In a similar way Pantheism and Panentheism also met criticism. The former insists that everything is God or God is everything while the latter trusts that God is exclusively the first cause as well as material cause of the world. However, Panentheism clarifies although World as such exists in God, it can never be equated to God or considered as identical. In other words, World is a recognized

portion of God but has no way an independent existence. In both cases there is a sort of failure in explaining the varieties present in the worldly activities. It may also sound to be a slightly defeatist type of an outlook making God as an imperfect being. The philosophical outlook through Theism is quite impressive because it accommodates all possible shades or characteristics. In this outlook God is described completely a spiritual personality. Developing a relationship is possible and there is only one God. It is also stated that one can establish a rapport which in turn is responded by blessings. All the major attributes are designated due to which human problems are solved. Although Theism also had to face criticism yet it is followed by the majority even in the modern world. There is one strong objection against Theism, that this idea deprives human beings of their freedom of Will because everything is sanctioned or manipulated by God.

## 5. Conclusion

Many times, the academic scholarship would lead us to those zones which hardly indicate any utility for our personal as well as social life. However, such pursuits keep us engaged for a fairly long period. Instead of questioning self over the very existence, purpose of life and destiny, it would be wise if we can learn to control our wayward feelings, temptations and the unabated energy within. We need to understand from a Stoic point of view the existing the reality and then learn to deal with it. According to Epicurus, "Vain is the word of a philosopher which does not heal any suffering of man. For just as there is no profit in medicine if it does not expel the diseases of the body, so there is no profit in philosophy either, if it does not expel the suffering of the mind."<sup>4</sup> There is no sense in wasting lamentations over the falling shades or seasons of life. It is crystal clear that we are pushed into a restricted area which is mostly governed by Nature-laws, than the extraterrestrial planetary configuration which is always in a flux. Existence or non-existence of God is not at all a basic problem of humanity. One can get adapted to any suitable stream than wasting time and energy over making it as a Universal Judgement. The mind is so weak that it easily gets impressed and caged by illusions than mustering courage to explore the reality. It is all because of the kindling of hopes by the religions for the future and claiming its own authority over even the proven scientific rules. For a common man, passing through the compulsory phases of life with least brushing with the ever-active adverse forces is the only desire. Reading and subsequently gaining knowledge thereof can make us learned but not necessarily owner of any wisdom. Distancing self than combating with the challenges to discover a solution and then providing guidance to the upcoming generations, has become a regular practice. Blaming over the composition of the planetary placements and assuming their guaranteed influence on our day today life happenings has become a routine for the majority. Continuing the ignorance by equating ritualism with spirituality is not just a mistake but a deliberate tactful marketing act for attaining supremacy. It is sad that much of the damage caused in the society is owing to the trivial matters for proving own religion as the only faultless one. Forcing others to accept what is not acceptable had been

the trend that continues even today without any interruption. In fact, escapism and contradictions had been the prominent features of all religions. The practical utility has been continually distancing. That is why William James suggested that Existence of God should be proved on the grounds of psychological security. With that sense, one can accept the success story of all religions.

Present generation, fortunately, has been quite vocal and is seriously looking forward to utility-based theories which can firmly stand the strict test of validity. When religion is restricted to only a private affair, most of the problems would be easily solved. Giving it an access to other areas of life like public affairs clutched with politics, the mess is instantly created. Religion and Spirituality are to be separated because the former go with ritualistic practices to create a large scale business while the latter remains with self, demanding no demonstration.

In Indian Culture Vedas are considered to be the ancient heritage. They are considered to be the final authority for gaining knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. They were later codified by the sage Vyasa into four distinct parts. Each Veda is further divided into two parts viz; Samhita and Brahmana. The latter is again branched out into Karma Kanda, Aranyaka and Upanishads. It is to be noted that Aranyakas mark the shifting of the importance from the routine ritualistic practices to philosophical thought and the same extended by Upanishads. It is sad that many generations had been stuck up at the primary

level only and that is why the modern society is actively interested in the philosophical thought and interpretation than confounded to ritualistic practices. Religion should solve the problems of humanity which to a large extent done by science, a fact which cannot be denied. Religion should help to develop moral codes, provide meaning to life and help all to sustain through challenges. It should be like a lighthouse or a Moral Compass to guide how we should act in various situations. Therefore, more than just gaining historical knowledge of religion the need is to rise above religion and bring out philosophical thinking. Lastly to conclude for the readers who are leery of the philosophical speculations than religion, the stoic approach should sound convincing. "I might be making a mistake by practicing Stoicism in favor of some other philosophy of life. And I think the biggest mistake, the one made by a huge number of people, is to have no philosophy of life at all [5].

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