

far off, are firmly present to the mind'.<sup>3</sup> 'What can be thought is the thought that it is'.<sup>4</sup>

Plato made use of the Parmenidian terminology, but gave a different meaning to it. For him, reality is 'being that veritably is', and non-being is becoming.<sup>5</sup> It is still a unity gathered together by reasoning from a plurality of perceptions.<sup>6</sup> Reality is conceived as the ideal of thought removed from the change of experience, subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness, while every lovely thing partakes of it.

Aristotle, on the other hand, deals with reality from the aspect of being, nature, namely, that which is: leaving aside the accidental sense in which something is said to be, he thinks that 'the kinds of essential being are precisely those that are indicated by the figures of predication', namely the predicaments.<sup>8</sup> But primarily it stands for the substance,<sup>9</sup> especially for the form which makes the substance what it is. Here the emphasis is on essence, though in a text there seems to be a reference to actual existence in inquiring the first cause of existent things.<sup>10</sup>

Plotinus makes a judicious synthesis between Plato and Aristotle: making use of the hylemorphic terminology of Aristotle, he follows the Platonic method of transcendence and rises from the reflected and participated beauty of the external world, through the beauty of the soul to the ultimate One, which is beyond being and thought.<sup>11</sup> St Augustine follows Plotinus in the use of the Platonic method. But he is more interested in the human facts of freedom and sin, and hence rises from existence, life and knowledge to pure

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Frag. 4, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Frag. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247c. Cf. *Theaetetus*, 152d.

<sup>6</sup> *Phaedrus*, 249c.

<sup>7</sup> *Symposium*, 211b.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V, 7, 1017a, 23-30.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 1, 1028a.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 1, 1003a, 27-33.

<sup>11</sup> Plotinus, *Enneades*, V, ix, 2; IV, viii, 1; V, v, 9: 'And this has nothing else to be in; so It is in nothing at all, and therefore in this sense nowhere. Where then are other things? In It. It is therefore not far from the other, nor in them, and there is nothing which contains It, but It contains all things. It is in this way the Good of all things, because It exists and all things depend upon It.' The One is beyond all multiplicity, and hence beyond all being. (Cf. *Ibid.*, VI, ix, 1; VI, ix, 3: 'After one has pronounced the word "Good", one should ascribe nothing further to it because any additions of whatever sort will make it less than it really is.')

JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM: "CONSCIOUSNESS AND REALITY" (CHAPMAN, LONDON, 1.974, 228 PAGES)

and infinite wisdom as the Supreme Reality, which alone can give intelligibility to evil and be the object of human choice.<sup>12</sup>

St Thomas brought the evolution of metaphysical thought in the Western tradition to a certain fulfilment by pinpointing the act of existence as the core of reality: 'Now being is predicated absolutely and primarily of substances; it is predicated secondarily and in a qualified sense of accidents. . . . But in simple substances it is present more truly and excellently, in as much as they also have the act of existing (esse) in a more excellent way'.<sup>13</sup> This 'being' of St Thomas is not the Aristotelian one, the form, but that which gives actuality to the form: 'Being is the actuality of every form or nature; for goodness and humanity are spoken of as actual, only because they are spoken of as being. Therefore, being must be compared to essence, if the latter is distinct from it, as actuality to potentiality'.<sup>14</sup> The act of being in this sense 'is the perfection of all perfections' and 'nothing can be added to the act of being that is extraneous to it, since nothing is extraneous to it except non-being'.<sup>15</sup> This act of existing points to 'the First Being which is simply the act of existing'.<sup>16</sup>

Thus we start thinking about a reality struck by what is presented to our thought and speech (Parmenides), and recognize that it is in itself and by itself (Plato); we understand its nature and form as coming in our predications (Aristotle); but, at the same time, recognize its objective reality beyond all form (Plotinus). In relation with our human existence bound in life, understanding and freedom, Supreme Wisdom has to be recognized as the culmination of all reality (Augustine). But, what is most basic in the objective reality, whether finite or infinite, is the act of existence, and God is subsistent existence (Aquinas).

The great contribution of Western Philosophy starting from the sixteenth century to contemporary times is the increasing emphasis placed on consciousness and personality as the central objects of philosophical inquiry. Descartes with his 'Cogito' showed that the subject of thought is the focal point of the objective world. Kant with his autonomous Reason indicated that knowledge of reality is

<sup>12</sup> St Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, II.

<sup>13</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, c.1.

<sup>14</sup> *Summa Theologica* I, q.3, a4c.

<sup>15</sup> *De Potentia*, III, a2, ad9.

<sup>16</sup> *De Ente et Essentia*, c.4.

## RELEVANCE OF THE INDIAN APPROACH TO REALITY

The Approach to Reality is different in different philosophical traditions. Greek Philosophy took an objective and ontological view of reality and emphasized the interrelation and hierarchical order of beings. Hebrew tradition gave a strong action-connotation to the verb 'haya' = is, and emphasized the personal side of reality. Indian philosophical tradition placed the accent on the interioristic and self-centred unity of reality in consciousness. Perhaps this diversity in approach to the basic problem of Philosophy—the question of Reality—may be the basic reason for the existence of different schools of Philosophy.

I shall not discuss here the Hebrew approach, which is unique in its own way. However, it is necessary to indicate briefly the general trend of Western thought to understand by contrast the physiognomy of the Indian tradition.

### WESTERN VIEW OF REALITY

In the history of Greek thought, Parmenides is considered the father of Metaphysics since he seems to be the first to deal with the world of experience under the transcendental aspect of being. The goddess told him: 'That which may be spoken of and thought of is what is: for it is possible for it to be; but it is impossible for nothing to be.' For Parmenides, being is unique and necessary: 'What is, is without beginning, indestructible, entire, single, unshakable, endless; neither has it been nor shall it be, since it is; all alike, single, solid.' But Parmenides is concerned with truth as such, and not about an existent absolute reality. Being is, for him, the object of speech and thought. Hence, for him 'things, though

Some others, like Dr. R. P. Singh and Dr. A. G. Krishna Warriar, try to interpret Sankara's philosophy as a form of Value Philosophy: The world is a variable; its value and significance change with the culture and spiritual insight of the individual who evaluates it.<sup>24</sup> According to A. G. Krishna Warriar the basic question is not whether for the Advaitin the world is an illusion or not, but rather 'To whom is the world real, phenomenal, or illusory?' To the siddha, the one who has already attained liberation in this life, there is no world at all by the side of the Absolute. To the 'Advaitic dialectician' and to the siddha who returns to the awareness of the plurality, the world may be accountable as illusion. To the worldly-minded man, the world is the sole reality.<sup>25</sup>

mate Reality is beyond all our finite conditions of experience: it is the condition of pure selfhood, unseen, unchangeable, indescribable, incomprehensible, undefinable, unthinkable, and unindicatable.<sup>23</sup>

*Taittiriya Upanishad* reaches the same non-dualistic conclusion, but taking the levels of human interest and activity for the stages of inward abstraction: one who is interested in worldly pursuits and wealth, has his consciousness concentrated on the (outermost) level, the self of food. Inner to this self of food, is that of vital breath, the level of animal life, and beyond it is the self of mind or sense experience. But different from it and farther beyond is the level of knowledge, which is conceived to form the *vijnanamaya*-man, or self of knowledge. Higher still is the level of pure bliss or happiness, which constitutes the self of bliss.<sup>24</sup> Interior to all these sheaths of selfhood is the one Ultimate Reality which is defined as *satyam-jnanam-anantam*, infinite and immutable consciousness.<sup>25</sup>

This Non-Dualistic trend of the Upanishads found its chief defender in a later period in Sri Sankara, who made Advaita or Non-Dualism the chief metaphysical school in India. According to him, the world of our experience has only a relative value, namely that of a stepping-stone towards the realization of the Real. This Real is immutable existence, pure consciousness and pure bliss: *saccidananda*. Infinite existence is immutable, since it cannot acquire or lose anything; it is pure consciousness, since it cannot lack anything. Once this Brahman is realized as the one Reality, the world and individuality of finite beings have no more meaning. The opposition between the Real and Unreal is found in our conscious experience itself: the areas of the I and the Thou, the subject and the object, split up everything into irreconcilable camps opposed to each other, as light and darkness. Hence, of these we have to choose one as real, and reject the other as unreal. Real is evidently that which remains unchanged in all states of consciousness, the common factor in all experience. This is pure I-hood or Self. Hence Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, can be defined only as pure and infinite truth and consciousness. By the side of that absolute selfhood, the individuality of finite beings can be characterized only as un-real (*an-rita*), non-knowledge (*avidya*) and illusion (*mayā*). But the world is not nothing; it does exist. But it

For Sankara to allow even a single distinction or attribute in Brahman would be to introduce a contradiction in the Absolute. Ramanuja, on the other hand, from his angle had to affirm that all positive and pure perfections found in the field of experience existed supereminently in Brahman, excluding only the imperfections and limitations. The finite perfection of individual things is not an argument against the absolute perfection and plenitude of the Supreme, but a cogent reason for it.

### Dualistic trend

From the same basis of consciousness there developed in the Upanishadic period a dualistic trend of thought about reality. The *Prasna Upanishad* starts with the assertion that Prajâpati, the Creator, produced in the beginning the basic (pairs) of all things, spirit and matter, Sun and Moon, day and night and the like.<sup>27</sup>

The spirit is he 'who sees, hears, smells, tastes, perceives, conceives, acts, he whose essence is knowledge, the person, and he dwells in the highest, indestructible self'.<sup>28</sup> On the side of matter appear the various factors of the changing world, the gross and subtle elements, the faculties of action and sensation, the mind, intellect (*buddhi*), and individuality itself.<sup>29</sup>

The same idea is developed in the *Maitrâyani Upanishad* where a certain identity between the individual spirit in man, and the Supreme Person is affirmed.<sup>30</sup>

This trend of thought appears especially in the philosophical system of the *Sâmkhya* and *Yoga* schools.<sup>31</sup> The metaphysical abstraction implied in this dualistic procedure is clear enough: it is an analysis of our conscious experience, reducing it to ultimate factors; in our experience, we find certain factors which are of the pure spirit, unaffected by the conditions of space and time, such as pure I-hood which unites all our acts of experience. These factors have to be traced to a spiritual principle, transcending space and time, called *Purusha*.

(3) The Sankarite contention adduced in support of the above thesis of the simplicity of consciousness, that perception apprehends only pure existence, is also refuted on the testimony of experience. For 'perception has for its objects only such things as are characterized by generic and other properties'.<sup>34</sup> Ramanuja rejects the Sankarite objection that the general and particular cannot be perceived in the same moment, and that if one has to be perceived in the other, it will lead to an infinite regress. For, 'even if perceptual knowledge lasts only for one moment, yet during that very moment' the generic properties and the distinctions are perceived together. If existence alone were perceived in all things, it would not be possible to distinguish between a jar and a cloth.<sup>35</sup>

(4) But the main Advaitic thesis against which Ramanuja has to marshal his arguments is the absolutization of consciousness, namely the Sankarite notion of consciousness as an unoriginated and attributeless and purely self-subsistent entity. Even eternity, self-illuminating nature and unity are all attributes outside the notion of consciousness itself. All stages of knowledge such as perception, inference and even yogic intuition—known as *jnâna*, *avagati*, and *samvit*—have relation to some object and lead to some practical purpose.<sup>36</sup> To say that there is pure objectless consciousness

\* other things:<sup>34</sup> by knowing Brahman, everything else is known,<sup>35</sup> he who knows Brahman becomes Brahman.<sup>36</sup>

### Analysis of consciousness

The basic problem for Sankara is what is the ideal or authentic state of consciousness. Only by solving this question can the natural error of our daily conscious experience, in which the spheres of the I and Thou are confused and cross-attributed, be properly resolved. The Ideal state, designated as *svarûpa* and *svabhâva*, is that in which a thing is itself alone unmixed with anything else. Thus in the blowing of a conch, and in music, sound alone and not the individual notes constitute the *svarûpa*.<sup>37</sup> In the various utensils made with clay or gold, clay or gold alone is the *svarûpa*; in the cloth the thread is the *svarûpa* or reality.<sup>38</sup>

When this concept is applied to the field of knowledge, it appears that the time-place circumstances which distinguish the individual acts of knowledge do not belong to its essence.<sup>39</sup> They change and are not always found. Similarly, what distinguishes between waking state, dreaming state, dreamless sleep, and pure consciousness of realization, does not pertain to the essence of knowledge. Only the common factor in these varying states constitutes its ideal condition.<sup>40</sup> This is *cinmâtra*, pure consciousness or sense of 'I'.<sup>41</sup>

This ideal and immutable essence of knowledge should constitute the Absolute Reality, which is therefore of the nature of pure consciousness, *bodharûpa* pure self-awareness, *cidânandaikarûpa*, of the form of knowledge and bliss alone.<sup>42</sup> It is so pure that it does not admit even the subject-object, knower-knowledge-knowable distinctions.<sup>43</sup> Sankara finds the *Taittirîya Upanishad* statement *satyam jnânam anantam Brahma* the best designation of the Absolute Reality, though he will not take it as a definition of Brahman, nor as a list of the attributes of the Absolute, but only a designative

consciousness, and dares not add anything further to it, but only desires to lose oneself in that ocean of light and bliss in order to find one's own perfection and fullness in it. But once we realize, with Ramanuja, that the individual soul in its inmost core is an absolute in its own right, namely a unique, indissoluble and immortal personality, though limited and dependent, the view of the Supreme Reality also passes beyond the level of 'perfection' (even if it be consciousness) to the *One Who is saccidânanda*, with no consideration of what comes from him, or what he does. In such an encounter, there is no place for losing oneself; there is no 'where' to be dissolved in, but only an immutable Person who is, as it were, an inextensive point concentrating in his incommunicable and eternal moment all that is.

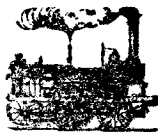
statement, which points to it as pure consciousness, immutable and infinite; Brahman is satyam, the only one who truly is, because He alone is immutable.<sup>44</sup> Immutability is the true condition of reality, since what changes is not itself; Brahman is jnānam, fully in itself and shining by itself, and hence also anātam, infinite; any limitation will mean imperfection and change.<sup>45</sup>

### The World of Mâyâ and Avidyâ

Looking from the side of Brahman—absolute, immutable and infinite consciousness—it is clear that there cannot be anything real outside of or beside it. Hence, everything that falls within our experience should either be reduced to Brahman or relegated to the level of the unreal or illusory. Sankara reduces all that is pure perfection in our conscious experience, such as the sense of I, to Brahman: all this is as light reflected on a piece of glass, the waves and foam projected over the water of the mighty ocean. What is left besides this ultimate reality is merely limitation and determination, namely 'name and form'. 'Although one and the same Self is hidden in all beings . . . yet owing to the gradual rise of excellence of the minds which form the limiting conditions . . . the Self, although eternally unchanging and uniform, reveals itself in a graduated series of beings, and so appears in forms of various dignity and power.'<sup>46</sup>

Sankara's system is called *Advaita*, non-dualism. This is not monism. The negative 'a' only negates the world as a reality added to or beside the Absolute. Hence the world is said to be *mâyâ*. *Mâyâ* is a term which has had different meanings in different contexts in Hindu tradition. Most of these can be reduced to two radical ones, *prājna*, namely power, knowledge, etc., and *kapata*, deception, mystery, illusion, etc. Advaitic use of *mâyâ* seems to assume both these opposite meanings: on the one hand it is Brahman's light diffusing itself, the power producing illusion, and on the other, the illusory and unreal world beside Brahman, something in itself anirvacanīya, mysterious. *Mâyâ* is at best said to be a mystery a veil around Brahman.<sup>47</sup> Hence it is not false, but

Vallabha of the fifteenth century proceeds by way of inference from the nature of effects, and reaches three forms of Brahman; the supreme impersonal, the personal, and the causal abode of the avatārs, and other creations: this third form is the source of the material principle, Prakriti, the individual souls, and of all creation and multiplicity.



Here a distinction is generally made between consciousness and the conscious subject. Consciousness appears as the phenomenon of self-awareness. According to the habit of rational analysis, it is easily conceived of as an action, or at least as an aspect or a movement implied in the act of direct affirmation. It may even be conceived as a transitory quality which sometimes is and sometimes is not. An action or quality cannot be in itself, but has to be in some subject. So, whenever we speak of consciousness, we think of a conscious subject, someone who acts or is qualified. But this distinction may be exaggerated if the subject is objectified into a thing, or the quality is conceived in the fashion of an addition to the subject, or the action is imagined as a transition from potency into act. All these, so natural in the procedure of rational analysis, will simply miss the reality of consciousness.

Therefore, Nagarjuna and the Mādhyamika Buddhists have an element of truth to contribute when they speak of consciousness as sūnyatā, or void. Void does not mean pure negation, or absence of all reality. It only means that the reality does not fit into our mental framework. All we affirm is an object, a construction of the self. Hence, they can never fully represent or reconstruct the self for us. Desire, which is at the root of all outward movement of inquiry, leads us away from the self. Similarly, all the factors conceived as essential to individuality are objective constructions and so cannot reveal the self. Whatever is conceivable belongs to the objective world by that very fact and has to be excluded from the area of consciousness.

The correct method, therefore, is to deny. All that is conceivable may be denied of consciousness. Even then, all will not be denied. What will be left behind is consciousness. It can be called void, since everything conceivable is something illumined by, constructed by, and reflecting consciousness.

of intelligence, has consciousness as quality; having the nature of intelligence is self-luminosity.<sup>28</sup>

Hence the Atman is not mere formless consciousness as the Advaitins would have it, but a knower.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, what is ultimate is not consciousness nor even happiness, but the One in reference to whom consciousness shines and happiness is joy-giving. That immaterial I-entity which is by its own indestructible reality and exists by its own Self is the Atman.<sup>30</sup> To identify consciousness or happiness with this Self is equivalent to concluding from the statement 'Devadatta has a stick', that 'Devadatta is the stick'. If the self were consciousness itself, our awareness would be 'I am consciousness', and not 'I know'.<sup>31</sup> Hence, for Ramanuja the Self is higher than any perfection predicated of him and is the ultimate ground of reference to which all have to be referred.

J. A. Bhagavat, Lord, in His capacity through his *shadgunas* or six attributes, to reside in the heart of every being.<sup>50</sup>

The Highest Atman, the support and supreme Lord of all, manifests Himself in the dual forms of *cit* and *acit*, embodied and unembodied, perishable and imperishable.<sup>51</sup> Commenting upon the doctrine of Scripture, Ramanuja says that Brahman, having in His nature not even the semblance of an imperfection or blemish, but abounding in all auspicious qualities, enjoys the sport of the origination, sustenance, destruction and entrance within, etc., of the world.<sup>52</sup> Brahman is like a being 'without form', so that He can reside in all beings without being affected by the imperfections of their forms.<sup>53</sup> It is in this sense that all things are said to be an *amsa*, a part of the Lord: the entire universe is a self-manifestation and concretization (*murtam*) of Brahman who is of the nature of knowledge.<sup>54</sup>

### Sat and Asat

In this context, Ramanuja's concept of *sat*, or being, is important. For Sankara, *sat* is real, and *asat* unreal; what is existent in all states of consciousness is *sat*, and what appears only in one or other state is unreal. But for Ramanuja, all that in any way is, is real. Hence, *sat* is applicable not only to Brahman, but to the entire

We may take Sankara's doctrine of consciousness as a more positive approach. His method is to oppose the area of the object with the area of the 'I'. According to him, the two are opposed to each other as night and day, darkness and light. This is not a mere metaphor. Knowledge is the characteristic of the subject and not of the object. The conscious subject illumines things and makes them intelligible. In every respect, the two areas are opposed to each other. The object is divided and composed of parts; the subject is a unity in the consciousness of the 'I'. The object as object does not know; the subject as subject is the principle of knowledge. The object is the field of desire, action and pleasure; the conscious subject appears tranquil, self-consistent and blissful. The object is a thing, exteriorized and constructed; the subject is interiorized in itself, and simple. Objects of our knowledge are intimately bound up with time-space circumstances. Though the conscious spiritual subject may appear actually dependent on objects and bound in time-space limitations, still, these do not actually affect its interior reality. Hence, consciousness is the area of the simple 'I-hood', pure awareness.

It is in this sense that he interprets *Chândogya Upanishad*, VI, i, 4, *Sad eva somyedam agra âsîd ekam evâdvîtiyam*, which is the basic text for the Advaita position. According to him, this text does not assert the unique reality of Brahman and the unreality of other things. It only declares that before creation 'the world was essentially *sat*' (*jagatah sadâtmakatâm*), and that it was not differentiated by structural peculiarities of name and form.<sup>55</sup> It further asserts that all beings have the same unique ground cause (*upâdâna*), namely Brahman, and no other operative or conjunctive cause (*nimittakârana*) distinct from it, like the *prakriti* of the Sâmkhya.<sup>56</sup> Hence, it is not correct to say that the Lord is pure 'Being' only, for being is only an aspect of the Lord.<sup>57</sup> In the main scriptural contexts where the designation of Brahman as being occurs, like *Chândogya*, VI, i-ii, *Taittirîya*, II, 6, and others, it presents the Lord in the act of creation: Brahman, who is *sat*, sends forth *sat* and *tyat*, the intelligent and non-intelligent beings, and He Himself enters them as their inner ruler.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, for Ramanuja, *sat* indicates the aspect of the Supreme Person as the originator of all things, as well as the ultimate condition to which all return on their reabsorption.<sup>59</sup>

According to Ramanuja, consciousness is the self-manifestation of Reality and is therefore the pattern for reality itself. In this outlook he is in a certain sense unique, since other philosophers of the Indian tradition gave emphasis to other aspects. Though Sankara also looked at reality from the angle of consciousness, his non-dualist stand was not very helpful in evaluating the reality of finite beings.

Bhâskara, looking at the world of reality in terms of causality, says that the Supreme Being has two aspects, one of cause (*kâranarûpa*) and the other of effect (*kâryarûpa*) in which he transforms himself into the world and things in it, though this latter is temporary and not eternal as the former is. Yâdavaprakâsa held to the doctrine of *Brahmaparinâmavâda*, according to which the Absolute by its own power becomes the Lord and finite beings; absolute is identical with itself, and is not affected by the contingency of the pluralistic world. But Ramanuja questioned precisely this point: if Brahman transformed himself into finite beings, how could they not but tarnish his simplicity and purity?<sup>25</sup>

Hence, when, from the aspect of consciousness, the world of finite beings is said to be an attribute of God, no imperfection, limitation or modification of God is implied. God is pure consciousness. The world of beings is a word emanating from Him, a word which implies no change or modification in Him.

*arûpam*, *avyayam*, not bound by empirical speech, untouched, formless and imperishable.<sup>28</sup> This was precisely what Bhartrihari did. For him, the word was itself absolute and ineffable. Neither written word nor even Scripture could express all that is implied in the word itself. Hence, its interpretation through discussion, tradition and inference creates a variety of theories about the supreme reality. As eternal subsistent word, reality is pure existence, comprising all time and transcending all time. It has no beginning or end, birth or death. Hence it is pure authentic being itself. This was how Bhartrihari absolutized the word as the reality.<sup>29</sup>

The same is the case with *Tattvamasi* = 'Thou art that' of the *Chândogya Upanishad*, which is one of the basic Scriptural authorities for the Advaitins, who hold that the statement identifies *Tat* (Brahman) and *tvam* (you, the individual self). But, according to Ramanuja's *sâmânâdhikaranya* theory, both the terms *Tat* and *tvam* refer to Brahman, but under different aspects: *Tat* refers to Him as the Supreme One to whom everything belongs as mode, while *tvam* indicates the same Brahman under the aspect of *Antaryâmin*, inner ruler of the individual soul. Therefore, the *mahâvâkya* means: 'Since you are a mode and manifestation of that Supreme Brahman, he is your inner Ruler without whom you cannot be or act.'<sup>30</sup>

#### Consciousness as self-consciousness

Here again, the procedure is from consciousness. All consciousness is self-consciousness. Only in being conscious of myself am I conscious of others. Only what is luminous in itself illuminates others. Whatever the level of knowledge, there must be one who knows. Man is conscious because he knows other things, and knowing them he knows himself. He is the symbol of the unity and self-consistency of reality itself.

The very idea of liberation suggests that Self is the greatest value in nature. Unless there is someone to be liberated, all ascetic effort towards liberation is meaningless. An impersonal consciousness is a purposeless nonsense for a goal.

All the material and spiritual goods in the world require some person to enjoy them. Man is indeed a person. But if he examines

his personality, he comes to the knowledge of the Supreme Person: the fact that man finds himself dependent upon and subject to material things shows his limitation. Hence, he is not the absolute Self. He has not produced the things he knows and enjoys, so he is forced to look for the source from which the origination, etc., of the world proceed. Material things which are unconscious are not their own selves; they are only modes and manifestations of a cosmic self, the Supreme Person. In relation to him, even the human person is only a mode and participation, though a conscious one.

#### The Supreme Person, the Supreme Real

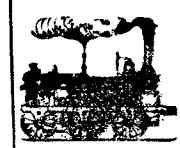
The true knowledge of reality, therefore, is recognition of the Supreme Person as the core and centre of all reality. Everything is a manifestation from Him. He cannot be defined by any perfection, even by *satyam-jñanam-anantam*, the truth-knowledge-and-infinity formula of the Upanishad. All perfections pertain to his *svabhâva*, his self-manifestation. For the perfections we attribute to Him are drawn from the finite world of our experience, which is only an external manifestation of the Real. Everything is He, and has to be referred back to Him as its ultimate Self. Yet nothing can be identified with Him. All imperfection and limitation have to be denied to Him as incompatible with His self. But all perfections, even the least ones, have to be referred to Him first and foremost, as to their ultimate and authentic ground, and only secondarily to the finite subjects in which they appear. All created entities, including celestial beings and men, are only the manifestation of an infinitesimal part of his pure being. Yet man, too, as a conscious being, is a person and can address himself to the Supreme Person who is full of love and compassion for his creatures.

#### CONCLUSION

Thus, following the Upanishadic procedure, one can obtain an integral vision of reality.

(1) If the Ultimate Reality is viewed as residing in the heart of every being, the finite beings appear as organically united with the Absolute as members and faculties in a body. The Supreme is intimately immanent, not only in the whole body, but also in each member, yet it totally transcends them all.

(2) The cosmic vision which conceives the Absolute as residing in the Sun presents a cosmic unity of beings parallel to the human microcosm.



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### The final cause

However, the efficient activity is not aimless. If the agent is intelligent, he intends to achieve something definite by his action. Even without this, the activity itself should have a definite goal, to be an act. This goal, in a way, makes the activity what it is and specifies the act and the effect. Hence, this end or goal is something which contributes to the being of the effect. It is, therefore, called the final cause.

### Transcendental causality

Though the notion of causality is drawn from our finite experience, it has implications that point to the transcendental order. Here the general principle is enunciated by St Thomas: 'Whatever is found in anything by participation must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially, as iron becomes heated by fire.'<sup>9</sup> This principle is applied to finite existence: all finite beings by their very nature are not existence, but have only participated existence. If they were existence, they should be all existence and should have always existed and be imperishable, immutable and infinite. But this is not the case. Their participated existence can, therefore, be understood only by reference to a cause which is subsistent, pure and infinite existence. 'All beings other than God are not their own being, but are beings by participation, and therefore . . . are caused by one First Being, who possesses being most perfectly.'<sup>10</sup>

as the most basic one among all causes. Only existence that is all by itself can account for the existence of finite beings. That which is not by itself cannot act by itself. Hence, all finite beings derive their being and activity from the supreme subsistent form of existence.<sup>11</sup>

The causes are therefore listed by St Thomas in ascending order of importance; matter, which does not act, but is a subject that receives the effect of action, is at the bottom of the scale; end, agent and form are the principles of action. But even the agent acts only by virtue of his form.<sup>12</sup> Existence is the most common feature that embraces all things, the first and most intimate reality of all effects; so it has to be referred to God, the subsistent existence, as His proper effect.<sup>13</sup>

(3) The emphasis on subsistent existence as the source of all things shows also that this First Cause is the efficient cause of all things. The proper causality of transcendent existence is to effect things and place them out of their finite causes with their own individual existences.

(4) This pre-eminence of existence also shows the intimate immanence of the First Cause in all the effects and their actions.

God not only produces things, provides them with their natural

### Prajnanam Brahma<sup>20</sup>: Brahman is consciousness

The most basic intuition of the Indian tradition is that the Ultimate Reality is consciousness. This is a direct conclusion arrived at from the desire to know—namely, the tendency to unify all experience in an ultimate ground. The Aitareya Upanishad sets forth the principal arguments for the conclusion in this matter: (1) Sight, hearing, smell, and all internal experience through mind and intellect are all modes of becoming conscious; (2) Perception, discrimination, wisdom, insight, thought, thoughtfulness, and even desire and will, are only different aspects of this *prajñāna*, or intelligence; (3) All beings in the universe, from the celestial ones down to the least earthly ones, are all ordered and guided by intelligence. The Ultimate Reality, which is the ground of all these forms, modes and expressions of reality, should be pure intelligence: 'All this is guided by intelligence, is based on intelligence. The world is guided by intelligence. The basis is intelligence. Brahman is intelligence.'<sup>21</sup>

### Metaphysical meaning

The statement defining Brahman as *prajñāna*, or pure intelligence, marks an upward or transcendental movement of thought. In all the things coming within our experience, the noblest and most comprehensive one is consciousness. Things have meaning for us only to the extent to which they are known. Even among the grades of knowledge, pure consciousness, which is light without subject-object dichotomy, is the most comprehensive. The object is presented to thought only in the intelligibility it shares with the subject. When this intelligible aspect is separated as the area of the knowing subject as distinct from the object, the object itself is mutilated. Knowledge of reality has to be focused at a point where the subject and object meet together. This point is *prajñāna*, or consciousness.

Approach to God from consciousness interiorizes God. God, who is called Brahman, the one who is really big, the all, is also the Atman, the real self of every being. An exteriorized God is no God, but a mere phenomenon—at best, a symbol of the divine, with only a psychological and pedagogical value.

\* → things. In the totality of beings, He is the supreme ruler and central axle of the wheel that unifies all the spokes.

(2) The correct vision of reality is not a mere abstract idea of the absolute, nor a partial view of things that excludes the basic unity. The true vision is to see Brahman in all things, and all things in Brahman.

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### Manner of looking at the universe

The rational outlook is interested in the object, the being which is independent of our thought and presented to it. Hence, the Greek was a willing contemplator of the universe which was conceived as a theatron, a well-arranged play, a cosmos, a perfect and harmonious totality, which orders the infinite forms to which Physis, eternal motion of procreation, gives reality. This cosmos, which means splendour, order, adornment, etc., imposes itself equally on all. Even the gods who presided over it were in some manner bound by it.

On the contrary, the attitude and approach of the Hindu to the objective world is quite different. For him, the world is simply 'existence'—something which is outside itself, an extrapolation of reality. It is simply a projection from the absolute, and it therefore obscures our vision and hides the Self. Hence, it has only a symbolic and pedagogical value: to lead us back to the core of reality. This is why Bhagavad Gita calls all action, all knowledge, all devotion and all faith 'yoga', because they all lead us back to the Self.

is a mere projection of eternity, by its very nature it tends to fall back into the eternity of the source. Hence, time has a corroding effect, reducing everything back to the original calm of the Divinity. On the other hand, since eternity itself is the personal existence of God, it has—implied in its evolution—a certain benevolent plan: it is a self-manifestation of God himself. 'I am time', says the Lord in the Gita. The purpose is the education and liberation of souls bound in bodily existence. Hence, the whole history is a drama, with a symbolic and religious value for man. This is the basic idea of Hindu ritual: stone and water, the Lotus and the Banian tree, ashes and oil, all have a certain divine virtue present in them, and they help to lead man to the realization of the Divine.

### Idea of truth

From the rational point of view, truth is a-letheia, a removal of the veil, the manifestation of the objective, clear and immutable. Logos is the unifying basis of multiplicity.

But from the angle of consciousness, satyam is not an absolute value, but a combination of the Real and unreal, a mere designative term of the Ultimate. Sabda, or word, is not the unifying factor, but the diffusing and diversifying māyā individualizing things through name and form.

Nor is God a 'He'. 'He' circumscribes consciousness in a definite essence. Any determination contradicts the very meaning of the Ultimate Reality.

God can be conceived only as pure consciousness. Taittiriya Upanishad describes God as satyam-jñānam-anantam, infinite immutable consciousness. As Sankara rightly notes, these three terms do not define Brahman, though they do refer to Him in their primary meaning. According to Ramanuja, they do not represent His ultimate substance, but only aspects and modes of the divine reality manifested to us. Thus, Brahman is the pure consciousness, the ground and source of all that can be affirmed and conceived, but defined or exhausted by none of them.

Ayam Atma Brahma :<sup>22</sup> this Atman is Brahman

The transcendence of Brahman, as affirmed in prajñānam Brahma, should be counterbalanced by a downward or outward movement which affirms the immanence of Brahman in all things: Brahman is the Atman in all things. 'He became corresponding in form to every form. This is to be looked upon as a form of Him,'<sup>23</sup> says the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad.

There is nothing real in which Brahman is not the Atman, the self and the ground. 'Everything here is Brahma; this Atman is Brahma'<sup>24</sup> says the Māndūkya Upanishad. All things are enveloped by the Lord. He is above everything, outside everything, beyond everything, yet also within everything.<sup>25</sup> He is the hearing of the ears, thought of the mind, voice of speech and breathing of breath.<sup>26</sup>

(4) But the four mahāvākyāni indicate the four steps of a complete metaphysical evaluation of reality. Metaphysics starts with the realization of the intelligibility of reality. Ultimate Reality is pure intelligibility, absolute consciousness. In its light, other things should be evaluated—in other words, evaluated according to the grade of consciousness they imply and involve.

(5) When one proceeds to evaluate finite beings in their intelligibility, it becomes evident that their ātman, their sufficient reason and ultimate ground, is Brahman Himself. Hence, the ultimate ground of beings and the Supreme Reality are the same.

(6) This leads to the realization that Supreme Reality is not a mere 'it', nor a 'he', nor even a 'thou', but an 'I'. Āham Brahmāsmi declares that our authentic self, the ultimate ground of our existence and intelligibility, the real aham, is God.

(7) Tat tvam asi completes the circle by casting a look on the finite world, the apparently individual and isolated selfhoods, and declares that Tat, the Supreme Reality, is their Self. Their apparently independent individuality is only a symbol of a deeper and all-comprehensive Self. This Ultimate Self makes them what they are.

This polarity between the transcendent Self and the finite selves will be examined more closely in the next chapter.



*The efficient activity of the Sākshin*

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How the One can pass out into the multitude of beings without undergoing any change is specially brought out by the idea of sākshin, or witness. The Supreme Being enters his creatures as their inner ruler and witness. The efficiency of consciousness is not in the mode of any physical endeavour that brings change in the agent, but rather witnessing, in other words knowing and willing. No other efficiency is conceivable in a being who is pure consciousness; to ascribe any other activity to Him will be mere anthropomorphism.

The sākshin, or witness concept, is a pregnant one. The sākshin is not an inquisitive intruder, nor an inactive onlooker. Witnessing implies knowing and willing without any involvement or dependence on the factors of the change. All change and transformation take place, not in the cause, but in the effect. Still, the efficiency comes from the conscious will of the sākshin. Hence, Brahman is both the ultimate ground and efficient principle of the universe of beings. He is the sole cause, who produces all things by His will and desire, as Ramanuja states.<sup>22</sup>

"THE WORD" (P. 206)  
405

*Origination by word*

However, the nature of this immanent efficiency, (which in no way affects the transcendence of the cause,) is best set forth by the traditional statement, 'vācārambhanam vikāra', all change is introduced in creation through vāc, the word. All procession of beings from the Supreme Being who is pure consciousness can come only through an intellectual emanation, symbolized by the word. It can be conceived as the magic word of the juggler that conjures up things, or as the expressed will and desire of an all-powerful God who creates castles and chariots by his command. But the best way will be to conceive it in the fashion of the thought or spoken word which emanates from the fully conscious self, yet never equals or fully translates the internal knowledge. The word does not add anything new to the internal consciousness, but is only an inadequate manifestation. Through the word, the self becomes a witness, a sākshin. The world is the word of God. All that is in it is super-

<sup>22</sup> Vedārth, no. 14.

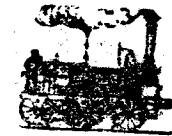
eminently in God, yet it is the word of God and His self-manifestation.

In the conscious self *versus* word combination, there is no strict cause-effect dichotomy. The conscious self manifests himself in the word, and can be known only through his word. On the other hand, the word in itself has no independent reality; it is the word of the one who utters it and bears witness to him. Similarly, the world has full intelligibility and meaning only as the word of God.

The finite being certainly has its entitative reality, the specific nature and individuality, but these do not constitute it into an absolute. All its being and reality are received. The specific nature and individuality serve only as a point of reference, a sort of reflector, which manifests the meaning and intelligibility shared from God. It is God's self-manifestation. God can be known only through his word, the word of finite beings.

This immanence of the cause in the effect is brought out also by the familiar analogy of light. The Upanishad says :

The sun shines not there, nor the moon and stars,  
These lightnings shine not, much less this (earthly) fire!  
After Him, as He shines, does everything shine.  
This whole world is illumined with His light.<sup>23</sup>



Light itself is often used as a synonym for caitanya or consciousness. Creation is a mere reflection of the light of Brahman. He illumines all, but is not illumined by them. Their light turns our gaze to the light of Brahman as their real source.

*Final causality*

Looked at from the angle of consciousness, final causality loses its aspect of purpose in the agent, which is the very source of order and beauty. Efficiency for a conscious agent is not for increasing his consciousness. External activity, and all the effects thereby produced, cannot add anything to the internal consciousness. Much less has the Supreme Consciousness anything to gain through its efficient activity. His only goal is Himself, His self-manifestation, which by its very nature returns to Himself. Hence, in Him, material, efficient and final causality are identified as in a single principle. Sankara, who ascribes to the qualified Brahman a proper

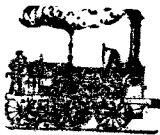
<sup>23</sup> Kath Up, V, 15. Cf. Mând Up, II, ii, 10; Svet Up, VI, 14.

efficient causality, admits that plan and purpose have to be supposed in intelligent agents. But he finds Brahman's purpose in creation *anirvacanīya*, indefinable. According to both Sankara and Ramanuja, the only purpose assignable to the all-perfect Supreme Brahman is *līlā*, mere sport, the free and spontaneous self-expression.<sup>24</sup>

Ramanuja adds a new element by stating that the things of the finite world are produced by Brahman as playthings, not for Himself, but for the enjoyment and education of souls. Though Brahman Himself has no personal purpose, the world has a purpose: to cater to the enjoyment, education and final liberation of souls.

Finality is something that expresses itself in the structure and order of the effect, rather than in the desire of the cause. The very diversity of conditions and states in the world of finite beings arises from an internal finality and dynamism, which produce certain tendencies and reactions leading to a new order of things. The Karma theory is only a naive expression of this internal teleology in nature. The metaphysical element in this facile moral theory is that the world of finite beings, as a self-manifestation of the Supreme Reality, contains in itself a dynamism and purpose to reduce the conscious beings back to their origin. The finality in the world is not superimposed from the outside.

Hence, the conception of the Sāmkhyas, in assigning an internal finality to the evolutions of Prakriti for the (self-realization) of Purusha, has a valid insight behind it. But their fault is that they isolate all finality in the individual self without a cosmic view of reality. The non-intelligent *Prakriti* cannot be conceived as purposeful if it is isolated from the Supreme Intelligence from which all order and beauty derive as participations.



exteriorization and conceptual mutilation is to discover God in the depth of the 'I am'.

As Sankara rightly remarks, the authentic way of attaining the Ultimate Reality is *anubhava*, realization. Sense experience gives only a view of the outside of reality. Inference from experience cannot take us far from the finite world. Even Scripture can give only a reported account of the Real. To know the Real, one should become one with the Real, be united with it in the intimacy of realization. In this connection, a general statement of medieval Hindu scholars is relevant: One who says 'God is' does not know God; only one who says 'I am God' knows God. He who says 'God is' makes God an alien, an object, a thing among other things, something corresponding to and on a level with his own finite intellect. Such an object cannot be the finite and all-embracing God.

On the other hand, the statement 'I am God' does not mean that my individual finite being is identical with God. 'I' is deeper than all that is finite, far beyond our *ahamkāra*, individuality. The meaning is that my real 'I', the ultimate ground of my reality and selfhood, is God. This is the only statement that cannot objectify or circumscribe absolute reality.

It appears clear from this that God is not an object, an 'it' nor a 'he', nor even a 'thou', but the transcendent 'I' that unites and centralizes in itself all reality, even my own self. The Absolute Reality is not far away from our intimate self. One does not have to reconstruct it by one's own efforts. It is already present in the depth of one's very being, as the truth of truth, the authentic ground and source of the intellectual light in us.

This view of God being the intimate Real in one's own being is affirmed by all the great mystics over the ages. St Augustine spoke of God as '*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*'.<sup>25</sup> 'Do not go out,' he exhorts in his treatise on True Religion. 'Return to yourself; in the interior of man resides Truth.'<sup>26</sup> 'God is nearer to me than I am to myself,' wrote Eckhart.<sup>27</sup> St Thomas Aquinas also often refers to this intimate presence of God in us.<sup>28</sup>

T. A.

(2) The *ayam âtma Brahma* formula has another important point to emphasize: Atman is Brahman, but not vice versa. Atman stands for the Supreme Reality as far as He is the ground and ultimate self of the finite individual being. When this Self is identified with Brahman, the implication is that finite things are in the Supreme, rather than the Supreme being received and contained by the finite.

(3) By seeing the Atman as identical with Brahman, one also obtains a realization of the all-comprehensive unity of absolute reality. This is a passage from change and instability to calm and tranquility which is termed *sânti*. *Sânti* is not a negative concept like *stirata* and *niscalata*, which indicate absence of disturbance and involvement in external multiplicity. It is a tranquility of peace which implies rest in the supreme plenitude of Brahman. Hence, the identification of Atman and Brahman shows that the individual discovers in its own depths the cosmic plenitude of God, and thus attains *sânti*.

Aham Brahmasmi: *I am Brahman*<sup>28</sup>

But the most important movement in the whole process is an inward one, by which Brahman is perceived as the *Aham*, the ultimate ground of I-hood, the ultimate self of our own personal being. Our phenomenal self is only an *ahamkârâ*, egohood, individuality. Most of it is constituted by material conditions and time-place factors, and only the immutable central point is conscious personality. The Supreme Consciousness, of which our own intelligence is only a mere reflection and participation, is more intimate and central to our being than all that we have as our individual being.

person. Concerning material objects, the person is not necessitated; he is not their slave, but master and disposer. If he had no choice, discretion and dominion over things, the sense of 'ought' and command would have no place or meaning. On the other hand, responsibility shows man's subordination to a higher Self from whom he takes orders. If he were all alone, this would have no meaning; material things, which are inferior to him, cannot create an obligation in him. Nor can he bind himself. The sense of 'ought' is, therefore, the beginning of a dialogue with the Supreme Person.

ness to others, receiving what they are, thus entering into a communion with the Supreme Person. An isolated being has no meaning. Material beings are symbols in our dialogue with other conscious beings and with God.

Even in our daily experience, only a personal communion with other persons brings a meaningful understanding of reality. Human beings are opaque to the processes of registration, classification, codification and statistical analysis. We never get through these objective processes to what something or someone means to a person. A human person is known only through love.

Love is a radical expression of the openness of a person to other persons. It is the response of the receptive person to the Fullness of what he actually is, the supreme, subsistent, conscious good, the Supreme Person. Hence all love is symbolic. Since we have no direct intuition of the Supreme, we constantly keep going out to him under the symbols of finite things. I love myself most because I am the symbol of the Absolute closest to me. I love myself, but not in order to close myself in my petty self: a finite closed in itself can only stagnate and perish. Nor is the goal of love to increase my own self by little additions, because however much I may add to myself, I shall remain finite and incomplete. The only reasonable goal of love is to surrender oneself totally to the One who is the Good of all good. Hence, love by its very nature is outgoing and transcendental.

Our love goes out to other persons because it finds in them the best reflexion of the communion with the Supreme Good. They have with me a similarity of condition, since they too are bound by the sense of trust, creative fidelity and hope. They, too, have received all that they are and all that they have and feel bound by the converging movement of all reality to the ultimate goal, that, too, in a conscious manner. They, too, show the spontaneous resistance to the corroding effect of time and the effort to transcend the limitations of matter.

Material things are also caught up in this movement of personal love. I know them only to the extent that they mean something. And what they mean is that they are precisely symbols of communication between the Supreme Person and human persons. They are for men, and, in that respect, words of the conscious Supreme Person addressed to conscious beings. In loving them, man is unconsciously loving the Supreme Good.