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The Theory of Degrees of Reality in Advaita Vedānta

I. The Hierarchy of Being European scholars generally understand by the term 'Vedānta' the school of Indian philosophy, consisting of several branches, which is dedicated to interpreting the teachings of the Upaniṣads.[1] Various theological systems of Hinduism present themselves as Vedānta; each claims to be *the* Vedānta. All schools of Vedānta but one[2] espouse, in accord with the Upaniṣads, a more or less radical monism. The most widespread of the schools, that of the famous master Śaṅkara,[3] is Advaita Vedānta or, more precisely, Kevalādvaita Vedānta, i.e., "Monism" or "Extreme Monism." Advaita Vedānta holds that only pure spirit or consciousness—called Ātman, Brahman, the Highest Ātman, the Highest Brahman, even the Highest Lord—truly exists. The plurality of individual souls is illusory; only the universal Self is real. The essence of the self is described as light of knowledge and subsistent bliss. It is one, simple, and without parts. It never changes: every form of becoming, be it birth, change, activity, or suffering, is foreign to it. The bliss, knowledge, and being that comprise its nature are one and the same.

The philosophical basis of this radical monism is an illusionism *(māyāvāda)* which is, in part, derived from the illusionism of later

Buddhism—the schools of relativism *(śūnyavāda)* or Madhyamaka and epistemological idealism *(vijñānavāda)* or Yogācāra. If only the One Consciousness is real, it is argued, then everything in our experience that is multiple, changing, and material—the entirety of phenomenal experience—is not truly real. Unreal, however, does not mean *nonexistent.* In order to understand the illusionism of Vedāntic monism it is important to realize that it is conceived with the goal of liberation in view; in Indian philosophy knowledge is never an end in itself, but always serves the purpose of liberation. The monist conceives of liberation as the condition in which the soul dwells in pure spirit or consciousness, *as* pure consciousness. In contrast to this One Consciousness, the world and everything in it is without value, and from there Advaita Vedānta took the further step of declaring that it is without any real *being.* But this lack of being is never of interest to the monist just as philosophical idea, but only in reference to the goal—liberation. Only for the wise or enlightened is the world unreal; for the unenlightened person who lives in the world, its reality remains unshaken. The concept of unreality is therefore relative, depending on the standpoint of the knower, and it functions, so to speak, as a comfort to the one who strives toward liberation: if it can be shown that the world has no real being, then it is sensible and feasible to strive for liberation according to the method Advaita Vedānta prescribes.

That which is not truly real, therefore, still has a certain aspect of being. Radical monistic thought was never satisfied with simply, paradoxically doing away with experience—with the many, the changing, and the material—as that which does not exist. Even in Gauḍapāda,[4] Śaṅkara, and Maṇḍanamiśra, the earliest Advaita philosophers whose works we possess, we find expressions which attribute to the world a certain degree of reality. Later philosophers, driven by polemics and apologetics, investigate the ontological status of the world in extended discussions and order it in a hierarchy of degrees of reality.[5] By means of this ordering the concept of unreality attains greater clarity. In this essay, therefore, we shall consider the various levels of being that are presented in Vedānta. We shall for the time being leave the Indian terms untranslated, explicating them in the course of our investigation.

First series: two levels
satya—asatya
Second series: five levels
sat—asat—sadasat—anirvacaniya—pancamaprakara

Third series: three levels
paramārthasat—vyāvahārikasat—prātibhāsikasat

1: First Series

In order to explain the first series we must leap ahead to consider what the first and second terms of the second series mean. The fourth term of the second series, however, presupposes in turn an understanding of the first series. We shall therefore begin with the term *sat.*

Sat means 'being' or 'existing.' In its ordinary, unphilosophical sense the word means the reality that is present to us in mundane experience; for that is what *is.* In its philosophical sense, for the strict monist, *sat* means only the self or Brahman. The characteristics of this reality, Brahman or the self, which exists *truly* and *in itself (an sich),* is that it is simple and one; it cannot change; it is spiritual, i.e., conscious, and it is not dependent on anything but exists through and for itself.

With this clarification we can proceed to consider the first series. *Satya* is that which corresponds to *sat,* the latter serving as a sort of standard. Thus in ordinary usage, *satya,* applied to statements, means 'true': a *true* statement corresponds to that which really exists. In an ontological sense, therefore, *satya* is that which corresponds to Brahman, being, insofar as it has similar characteristics. But since for the Advaitin there is only one *sat,* and nothing comes close to resembling it, the two concepts of *satya* and *sat* collapse into one. As far as linguistic usage goes, *satya* may perhaps be more emphatic: it refers to the *genuine, actual* reality of a thing. We shall therefore translate the word as 'truly existing.' As far as I can tell, the Advaita philosophers did not explicitly differentiate between *sat* and *satya.*

The negative expressions *asat* and *asatya* are more clearly distinguishable from each other than *sat* and *satya.* While *sat* and *satya* seem to coincide, *asat* and *asatya* are consciously kept apart. *Asat* is that which simply does not exist; *asatya,* on the other hand, means merely that something is without the features of true *sat,* which is not to say that it does not exist. *Asatya* is therefore that which does not *really* exist or which upon closer scrutiny *ought not* to exist, although somehow it does in an improper and ungenuine way. In ordinary usage *asatya* means 'untrue' or 'false.' Falsehood cannot, of course, claim any reality compared to the true or actual; yet at the same time it cannot be denied that, at least as an idea, it possesses a certain existence. This epistemological

concept of falsehood the Advaitin transfers to ontology. We shall translate it as 'not truly existing.' We shall encounter it again in the second and third series and in that connection explicate further aspects of it. The common translation 'unreal' for *asatya* is misleading, at the very least.

2: Second Series

We have now dealt with *sat*. In regard to *asat* we should add that, strictly speaking, it is the absolutely nonexistent, that which never and nowhere was or will be. Examples are: a rabbit's horn, a man's horn, and a sky flower—things that do not and cannot exist. It would be superfluous to go into the highly sophisticated Indian theories of nonbeing here, since they were primarily developed in non-Vedāntic schools. Sometimes for the Vedānta philosopher, speaking loosely or in hyperbole, *asat* is equivalent to *asatya* or *anirvacanīya*.

Sad-asat means being-and-not-being, i.e., both the one as well as the other. This mode of reality was recognized outside of Vedānta by the Mīmāṃsā philosopher Kumārila and within Vedānta by the monistic but non-illusionistic Bhedābheda school. The latter defined the relation between the One Consciousness and the multiplicity of nonspiritual, material things as one of simultaneous identity and difference; accordingly, they explained the status of the empirical world as at the same time truly existing and not truly existing. We must explicate this idea briefly, even though it was rejected by the radical monists we are concerned with as illogical and impossible. In the first place, the contrast with *sadasat* will help to clarify the concept of *anirvacanīya* which we are about to discuss; and second, even though the Advaita philosophers do not recognize the concept of *sadasat*, they include it among the degrees of reality, so that with its inclusion the total number of degrees comes to five, and they are able to refer to one of the them as "the fifth kind." We shall have to say more about this below.

Anirvacanīya means indeterminable or unspecifiable: in the older texts (Śaṅkara, Maṇḍanamiśra) one adds *tattvānyatvābhyām*, in the more recent (since approximately the tenth century), *sadasadbhyām* or *sadasattvābhyām*. The first expression means "as a 'that' or an 'other,' " the second, "as being or nonbeing." We can ignore the difference in meaning these two phrases apparently originally had and say simply that *(tattvānyatvābhyām* or *sadasadbhyām) anirvacanīya* means: 'indeterminable either as real or unreal.' *Anirvacanīya* is thus the negation of

sadasat: the former means *both* being *and* nonbeing, the latter *neither* being *nor* nonbeing. Concerning the history of these two peculiar concepts, which has yet to be investigated in any detail, we offer the following preliminary observations.

The concept of neither being nor nonbeing has apparently two sources in Brahmanical thought: one is cosmogonic speculation, the other the mystical theology of the All-in-One. The most important cosmogonic hymn of the Rg Veda (10,129) begins by describing the state prior to the origin of the world with the words: "There was at that time neither being nor nonbeing." Fifteen hundred years later Śaṅkara applies the expression *tattvānyatvābhyām anirvacanīya* to the primal state:[6] one cannot say that before its origin the world did *not* exist. The idea of creation *ex nihilo* was never conceived by the Indians. They believed, rather, that what was before the world had to be some kind of prime matter or primal condition. Precisely for that reason, however, one also cannot say that at that time there was *something;* for being has not yet arisen. But this cosmogonic notion of neither being nor nonbeing loses importance for philosophers after Śaṅkara. The philosophers of monistic mysticism, rather, found another use for the formula 'neither being nor nonbeing'—in the description of the Absolute. That which transcends all experience is preferably described in negative terms, and the most radical of all negations is the denial of both being and nonbeing.[7] It is clear that in this case being and nonbeing can only mean empirically determinate existence and its opposite; for in a strict metaphysical sense the Absolute is Being itself. Śaṅkara's disciple Sureśvara still speaks of the self or *ātman* as that which is above being and nonbeing.[8] The later Buddhist philosophers, too, characterize the Absolute with the formula 'neither-nor.'[9]

After the disciples of Śaṅkara, however, the use of the 'neither-nor' formula undergoes a radical change. Interpreting the teaching of the Upaniṣads in light of more recent philosophical developments, Advaita philosophers preferred to define the *ātman* as that which is self-evident and manifest per se and, especially from Maṇḍanamiśra on, as Being in general. One ceased to think of the *ātman* in terms of the mystical characterization of neither being nor nonbeing; somehow the self, which had always before been the incomprehensible par excellence, became the formally *indubitable*. To be sure, the older formulae continued to be used alongside the newer, particularly when it came to asserting that the self cannot really be *known* in the ordinary sense; and self-luminous consciousness had all along been recognized as one of the characteristics of the *ātman*. In a sense, the teaching did not change at all. The tradition-

bound Indian philosopher, moreover, was not aware of any deviation from the past; he believed himself always only to be interpreting an old doctrine in a new way and never would have considered abolishing or even attacking it. Even modern research has hardly noticed the change that took place. Yet it is unmistakable that shortly after the reception of the theory of illusion, Vedānta became highly intellectualized and logicized; mysticism was thoroughly confined within the bounds of logic. The direction of concern shifted. The unknowability of the *ātman* was accounted for by making it the presupposition of all knowledge,[10] and this function of making cognition possible was characterized in terms of the concept of self-evidence as it had been developed in the epistemological controversies between Buddhist and Hindu philosophers (especially the Prābhākara school of Mīmāṃsā). In contrast to the self-evident self the world began to appear as a ghostly, illogical Unding that neither is nor is not. The world, and not just its primal state before becoming manifest, was described as "neither being nor nonbeing."

Meanwhile the concept of the indeterminable, that which is "neither-nor," found a new application outside cosmogony and mysticism, namely in the Advaita theory of error. All Indian philosophies intensely discuss the phenomenon of false cognition; the basic metaphysical and epistemological position of a school always becomes evident in its theory of error. Here we can only deal with radical Vedāntic monism. This school developed a theory of error centuries before it developed an account of valid cognition: the latter was achieved only in the seventeenth century,[11] the former was complete already in the tenth century.[12] This rather strange state of affairs was the result of the following circumstances. As I have already mentioned, all Indian philosophical reflection is directed toward the goal of liberation. The state of bondage, however, is generally believed to be caused by ignorance (not sin).[13] That is what one must eliminate in order to be free from rebirth; therefore, it is necessary to investigate what ignorance and error are. The philosopher of radical monism, or Advaitin, moreover considers all phenomenal experience to be illusory. Thus, for him error is primary, and that which is taken to be right cognition in everyday experience is, strictly speaking, just a special case of error. And so the whole world, the sum total of all objects of experience, is relegated to the level of an illusion.[14] In this manner one applies the results of one's investigation of sensory illusion to the world as a whole.

What is most important about the phenomenon of illusion is its ontological status, or degree of reality. One argued: the illusory object is *perceived*, therefore it is not unreal or nonexistent (not *asat*), for that

which does not exist at all, e.g., the horn of a rabbit, is never perceived. On the other hand, it is sublated, i.e., removed from the realm of existence, by a subsequent correct cognition. Therefore it cannot be real or existent either (not *sat* or *satya*); for that which exists cannot be eliminated by knowledge. The ontological status of the illusory object, therefore, is to be described as "determinable as neither being nor nonbeing," and the main characteristic of the indeterminable is that it can be sublated; that which is indeterminable can be removed, suppressed, or eliminated by (true) cognition.

The world has the same degree of reality as the object of false perception. For it, too, is perceived—in everyday experience. Thus it cannot be *asat*. But it is also, in mystical experience, sublated. Therefore it cannot be *sat*.

Here it becomes clear that 'indeterminable' is a synonym of 'not truly existing.' The essence of that which does not truly exist lies in its indeterminability, and this in turn is equivalent to its eliminability through right cognition. Synonymous with 'not truly existing' and 'indeterminable' are all expressions which mean 'false' or 'untrue.'

The world is also to be characterized as "indeterminable" in relation to that which truly exists in itself, to *sat* or the self. For one can neither say that it is identical with *sat*, since the latter is spirit and one while the world is nonspiritual, insentient plurality, nor that it is different from it, for it is evident in experience that it has existence of some kind. Since in reality there is only one, indivisible Being, everything that exists, exists only insofar as it is endowed with the being of the One.

This purely negative manner of argumentation, which leads to the concept of the indeterminable whether one is investigating the ontological status of the world or its relationship to the One, distinguishes the radical monism of Advaita Vedānta from the above-mentioned Bhedābheda-Vedānta. The latter, in its formula 'both-and,' brings the Absolute and the world together; the former, through its 'neither-nor,' holds them strictly apart, while at the same time trying to conceive, through its doctrine of illusion, of some kind of (seemingly real) relationship between them. Both schools have in common that they grant only incomplete reality to the world: that is expressed both by the concept 'being-nonbeing' and the concept 'indeterminable.' Just as the older Advaitins, e.g., Sureśvara, had no qualms about applying the schema 'neither-nor' to the Absolute, so they also sometimes, like their Buddhist predecessors,[15] applied the notion of 'both-and' to the world.[16] But shortly after Śaṅkara it became fixed that only the world should be characterized

in terms of 'neither-nor.' The world had become an illogical Unding. The self, on the other hand, became, so to speak, the patron saint of logicality.

A curious detail which I shall only briefly mention, and which also has an ancient Buddhist parallel, is the fifth degree of reality, called the *pañcamaprakāra* or "the fifth kind." The inventor of this bewildering concept is Vimuktātman. In investigating the state of transition from bondage to liberation, the condition known as "the elimination of ignorance," he finds that it is neither being, nor nonbeing, nor both, nor neither. Later Advaitins used the term 'the fifth kind' for this mode of existence.[17]

3: Third Series

The discussions of the series *satya—asatya* and *sat—asat—sadasat—anirvacanīya—pañcamaprakāra* are, until approximately the tenth century, in a certain respect incomplete. When the relation of the world to Brahman is reflected upon, then the former is *asatya,* the latter *satya.* But when the phenomenon of perceptual error within mundane experience is considered, then the world is *satya,* illusion on the other hand *asatya.* The world is thus *satya* or *asatya* depending on one's point of view; the concepts are relative, and that diminishes the clarity of the theory. Gradually, one came to see that it is necessary to distinguish two more degrees of reality within *asatya* and *anirvacanīya:* the "practically existent" *(vyāvahārika-sat),* which includes that which we experience through right cognition in everyday experience, and the "ficticiously existent" *(prātibhāsika-sat),* which is the status of illusion or error. The first is, in respect to that which truly exists *(sat),* so to speak illusion of the first degree; the second is illusion of the second degree.[18]

Both expressions, 'practically existent' and 'ficticiously existent,' had long been in use without, however, being clearly differentiated and ordered. One had attempted to prove that the indeterminable is quite capable of playing an active or passive role in knowledge and action, indeed, that this is precisely the nature of the indeterminable. On the other hand, it was later still permissible to characterize the world as mere appearance or false appearance, and it is still today quite common to compare the world to an illusion of the senses. But as a result of the sharper differentiation of the apparent from the real within the realm of the indeterminable, the world regained a measure of reality. It no longer stood quite on the same level as sensory illusion; for one recognized illusions of the first

and second degree. Both are contrasted with the absolutely real, that which *is* in the highest sense *(paramārtha-sat),* viz., Brahman or the *ātman.* And so we get the three-membered series presented above (the third series). When it comes to translating the terms of this series into a Western language, it seems helpful to take into account the etymological content of the expressions and distinguish the *real* or truly existent *(paramārthasat)* from the *actual* or practically existent *(vyāvahārikasat):* that which truly is and that which exists practically are not the same thing for Advaita philosophers. For that which truly exists does not serve any function at all; it simply *is.* The essence of practical existence, on the other hand, which is first degree illusion, consists, as has been said, in its being involved in processes of knowing and acting. The third series, then, can be rendered by the three concepts: Reality—Actual Existence—False Appearance. The latter two levels are both "indeterminable," "false," and "not-truly-existent," but in different degrees. Of course, if one wanted, one could insert the terms *sadasat, asat,* and *pañcamaprakāra* into the series, so that six levels of reality would result.

II. Vimuktātman on the Ontological Status of the World

In order to document what I have set out above, as well as take it a step further, I shall translate and interpret a passage from the *Iṣṭasiddhi.*[19] This important work of Vimuktātman, a philosopher of probably the tenth century, is concerned especially with the clarification and defense of the concept of the indeterminable. Although this concept had been in use for centuries, Vimuktātman's work, which considers all the objections against it, appears to be the first comprehensive treatment of the topic. Vimuktātman belongs to the school of Śaṅkara. His views have had much influence and represent the predominant interpretation of Advaita Vedānta up to the present time.

At the conclusion of a discussion of Brahman, Vimuktātman asserts: "We ascertain, therefore, on the basis of revelation,[20] tradition,[21] logical argumentation, and direct experience, that Brahman alone and nothing else is real."

At this point he allows an opponent to speak (it is the practice in Indian philosophical treatises to introduce a new topic with a question or objection of an opponent):[22]

> ">If that is the case, then what is the mode of existence[23] of the world, which is a second thing (besides Brahman) and serves as the

object of perception and other means of knowledge?[24] If the world does not exist at all, then perception and the other means of knowledge do not have any object and hence are without validity; neither the ritual portion nor the knowledge portion (of the Veda)[25] would be valid, for their basis (i.e., the world, to which they refer) and their own existence[26] (insofar as the Veda itself belongs to the world) would be eliminated. Moreover, perception and the other means of knowledge (would not only be invalid, but) if the world, in which they are included, did not exist, they would not even exist! And revelation, tradition, and logical argumentation could not possibly exist. The consequence of all this is that Brahman as described above could not be demonstrated by these (means of knowledge).

"If, in order to avoid this predicament, one were to accept (the reality of) the world, then there are three possibilities: either the world is different from Brahman or identical with Brahman or both. For a real thing cannot exist (in relation to another) in any way other than these three. If, however, the world is not a real thing, then the stated consequence would follow; for it is certainly impossible that one could make use of anything that is not real, say, the horn of a man or a sky flower. But then if the world is a real thing, Brahman cannot be demonstrated to exist in any of the three relations.[27] It follows that, whether the world exists or not, the Upaniṣads cannot demonstrate Brahman. It is therefore inadmissible to say that man attains that which is (ultimately) desirable and avoids that which is undesirable through the vision (of Brahman).[28] Thus one must hold liberation to have a different nature, or else admit that there is no such thing as liberation.<

"To all this we reply: There is no defect at all in our position; for we believe that the world is made out of *māyā*.[29] And since *māyā*, together with its product (the world), is indeterminable either as something real or something unreal, the defects that would result from saying either that the world is real or that it is unreal do not affect our position. To be more explicit:[30] If the world has no reality, then monism need not be rejected. But if it is (also) not unreal, then the mentioned problems—in particular, that sense perception and the other means of knowledge become invalid—do not ensue. Thus, it does not follow that Brahman cannot be demonstrated. And, since *māyā* and its product cease to exist upon

cognition of Brahman, it is not the case that liberation cannot be attained.

">But (says the opponent) I do not know any such thing as 'indeterminable *māyā*.'<

"I shall explain it to you (i.e., discuss it later).

">But if the world has no reality, then perception and the other means of knowledge would provide no valid cognition, and all the problems previously mentioned would result.[31]<

"When does it occur that perception and the other means of knowledge fail to provide valid knowledge because something real is not present?

">In the case of the (false) perception of a man's horn and the like.<

"No, (such things are not to be compared with the world; for they are altogether unreal, i.e., nonexistent, whereas) the world is *not unreal*. And if the world is to be considered similar to (a totally nonexistent object such as) a man's horn, insofar as it *lacks reality*, then it can be considered similar to that which is real, insofar as it *lacks unreality*.

">(If you will not accept that the world is on a par with a man's horn, then I offer another example:) That the means of knowledge do not provide valid knowledge when (their objects are) not real is evident in cases such as dreaming.<

"But then you do recognize something which is indeterminable; for you give up the example of the man's horn and cite instead a dream, which is without both reality and unreality.

">A dream, too, is real.<

"Well, then, lack of reality is not the basis of the invalidity of cognition; for even in the absence thereof (viz., unreality), invalid cognition occurs (namely, in the case of a dream, which you have just declared to be something *real*).

">A dream (let us say, then) is an illusory thing *(mithyāvastu)*.<

"But is *that* something real *(vastu)* or something unreal *(avastu)*? In either case, the problem just mentioned remains.

"One could perhaps argue as follows:[32] >The illusory thing is in fact two real entities which have been confused.[33] Or else, it is something real which appears as another real thing, so that a cognition having it as its object is false.[34]<

"Then one cannot say that sense perception and the other means of knowledge do not deliver valid knowledge in dreams; for their object is not like that in the dream state.[35] Now, one could say (using an idea accepted by the Advaitins): >Dream cognition is invalid, because its object is indeterminable; and the same will be true of waking cognition.<But that is not correct, because (waking cognition) is not (like dreaming cognition) sublated (by another, subsequent cognition which corrects it). Or, (we can ask:) why should not dreaming cognition be valid like waking cognition; for it has, just like waking cognition, something indeterminable as its object? If one responds,>Because it (dreaming cognition) is sublated,<then we would say: Invalidity, then, is due to the fact that (the cognition) is sublated and not to its object being something indeterminable.[36]

"Moreover, should one say that invalidity—which one wishes to maintain both for dreams and for waking cognitions—consists in the nonexistence of (the object) itself and its effects *after* (the cognition) is sublated, then I agree. But when it is alleged to be the nonexistence (of the object) *prior to* (sublation), then it is to be said in response that that is not the case even for dreaming. Should one say that sublation results from correct cognition of the true state of affairs in regard to the real thing, then I would agree to that too. But that the sublating cognition always exists, or that sublation occurs prior to the occurrence of this cognition—neither of these alternatives is true for dreaming. Therefore, just as in one's dream world, all worldly and Vedic involvement with actions, factors of action, modes of cognition, objects of cognition, and so forth, continues undisturbed, even though it is indeterminable, and a cognition that overthrows that experience arises from causes originating from within the dream itself[37]—so in regard to the waking state everything stands uncontradicted (i.e., all the experiences of the waking state retain their validity up until enlightenment).

">Since the illusory character of the world of waking experience is known prior to enlightenment,[38] practical activity in waking experience should not be possible. A dream, on the other hand, is not known to be illusory until one wakes up; so practical activity would be possible in it.<

"That is not a defect (in our theory). For it is well known that such phenomena as magical illusions, mirages, fata morgana,

double vision, and loss of orientation do not cease prior to fully awakening (i.e., prior to direct apprehension of the true state of affairs), even though their illusory character is recognized (in the abstract).

">But even if the false appearance continues, practical activity in reference to and motivated by it is not possible (in such cases). Similarly, such (activity) would not occur in relation to this (world of appearance).<

"True. Even in this case (in regard to the world of waking experience) there is no such thing (as practical activity); there is only the appearance thereof, as in dreaming. And you, too, agree that the ficticious appearance of a magical illusion, etc., does not cease prior to awakening.[39]

"Therefore, as in dreaming, so in waking experience—there is no negation of the ficticious appearance of the world or of the practical activity therein prior to awakening. But practical activities, which are motivated by conviction in the real existence of the world, do not arise after insight into its false character is (fully) achieved. Actions and nonactions which are based on the knowledge of its illusory character, on the other hand, will occur. Moreover, those which are motivated merely by false appearances will also occur as before. For in common experience we observe that certain actions and abstentions, e.g., those in regard to sweet things that appear bitter, occur even though the falsehood (of the appearance) is recognized. Therefore, even though one recognizes the indeterminable nature of the world, practical activity is possible up until the attainment of enlightenment."[40]

Notes

1. In India 'Vedānta' is just a synonym of 'Upaniṣad.' The philosophy based upon the Upaniṣads is called *vedāntavāda* or *brahmavāda*.

2. This exception is the system of Madhva. Cf. H.v. Glasenapp, *Madhvas Philosophie des Vishnu-Glaubens*, Bonn, 1923. But even Madhva's teaching contains many remnants of the original Vedāntic monism.

3. He probably lived in the seventh century C.E. According to traditional belief, he lived around the turn of the eighth century, but that seems hardly

tenable. His teachings are concisely summarized in the *Upadeśasāhasrī* (trans. by Hacker, Bonn, 1949, *Religionsgeschichtliche Texte*, Heft 2).

4. His work, the *Māṇḍūkya-Kārikā*, is translated by P. Deussen in his *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda* (Leipzig, 1897). *The Āgamaśāstra of Gauḍapāda*, ed. by V. Bhattacharyya, Calcutta, 1943, is a new edition with an English translation.

5. In later Buddhism as well there are degrees of reality. Connections with Vedānta are obvious, and were this a historical investigation we would explicate them. But we shall not consider Buddhism in this study. The meanings and interconnections of concepts of reality in Vedānta diverge considerably from Buddhism and can be described independently of historical references to the latter.

6. See my article, "Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology of Śaṅkara" (Chapter 4 in this volume).

7. *Bhagavadgītā* 13,12; *Kaivalya Upaniṣad* 24; *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4,18; perhaps also *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 2,2,1.

8. Cf. my *Untersuchungen über Texte des frühen Advaitavāda, I: Die Schüler Śaṅkaras* (Mainz, 1950), p. 39.

9. Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* (St. Petersburg, 1913), pp. 436,2 and 438,4. Cf. *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (Kyoto, 1923), pp. 188f.

10. This doctrine is also found in the oldest Upaniṣads. See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3,7,18–23; 3,8,11.

11. By Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra in his *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*, ed. with English trans. by S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri, Adyar, 1942.

12. In Vimuktātman's *Iṣṭasiddhi*. See below.

13. Thus one sees God's essence to consist not in his holiness (this notion is almost unknown) but in his consciousness: the godhead is pure awareness or spirit.

14. When Indian philosophers discuss error, they consider almost exclusively sensory illusion. The commonest examples, trotted out over and over again, are: the rope which in half darkness appears as a snake and mother-of-pearl which is mistaken for silver. The snake and the silver are termed "illusory objects." In this way illusion is conceived to have an objective existence.

15. Cf. *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6,23 (cited on p. 176 of the *Āgamaśāstra of Gauḍapāda*, ed. V. Bhattacharyya), a subjective variant of the 'both-and' formula: all things have two appearances, according to whether one apprehends them from the state of enlightenment or the state of nonenlightenment.

16. Gauḍapāda, *Māṇḍūkyakārikā* 4, 68–70.

17. We may add here that the introduction of this term is traditionally attributed to Vimuktātman's successor Ānandabodha; see M. Hiriyanna's introduction to his edition of the *Iṣṭasiddhi*, pp. xxxvf.; P. Hacker, *Kl. Schr.*, p. 119, n. 2. Vimuktātman himself has the concept of a "fifth kind," but does not use the term *pañcamaprakāra* (editor's note).

18. It has not yet been determined who first divided the indeterminable into the practically existent and the ficticiously existent. This dichotomy does not occur in Vimuktātman (probably the tenth century); it occurs in Prakāśātman (*Pañcapādikāvivaraṇa*, p. 31, 1 ff.); later in the thirteenth century in Citsukha (*Tattvapradīpikā*, p. 83, 3 ff.) and still later in Dharmarāja (*Vedāntaparibhāṣā* II.27, p. 60, in the above-mentioned edition and translation).

19. Ed. M. Hiriyanna, Baroda, 1933. The translated passage is pp. 32ff. The translation attempts to achieve a compromise between accuracy and readability.

20. I.e., the Veda, which contains scripture of absolute authority that is considered to be not of human origin.

21. I.e., the ancient religious writings of secondary authority, e.g., the *Bhagavadgītā*.

22. The opponent will speak several times in the text that follows. His statements are set off by ><.

23. The word *gati*, literally 'path,' is frequently used by Vimuktātman in the sense of 'mode of existence,' 'degree of reality.' The word *prakāra* is more or less synonymous with it.

24. The other types of cognition or sources of knowledge are: inference, testimony (especially that provided by the Veda), comparison, implication, and nonapprehension.

25. The ritual portion consists essentially in the hymns and the Brāhmaṇas, the knowledge portion in the Upaniṣads.

26. *Āśrayāsiddhi* and *svarūpāsiddhi*, which are actually logical terms, are not, according to the commentary, used here in their technical senses.

27. I.e., as either different from or identical with, or both different from and identical with, the world. Vimuktātman has given the complete proof of this impossibility in the preceding section of his work.

28. The opponent formulates his argument so that in the end the existence of Brahman and even liberation are called into question. He does this for the following reason. The goal of all Indian philosophy is to prove the possibility of liberation and show the way to its realization. If any kind of systematic reasoning undermines the possibility of liberation, or if it can be shown that liberation is not what it is said to be by a particular system, then the entire system is overturned.

29. *Māyā* (which in its original meaning denotes 'magic') is in Advaita Vedānta the illusory prime matter of the world.

30. Noteworthy in the following is the purely negative argumentation.

31. As becomes evident in the next objection, the opponent does not comprehend that "being unreal" or "having no reality" (i.e., not *truly* existing, *avastutva*) is different from "being nonexistent" *(asat)*.

32. Two views are given which explain in different ways the extent to which something real is present in dreaming and the extent to which dreaming is illusory.

33. This is an allusion to the theory of error of the Prābhākara school of Mīmāṃsā.

34. This is an allusion to the theory of error of Nyāya and the Mimāṃsā school of Kumārila.

35. Translator's note: The proposals just put forward by the opponent are based on interpreting illusion as a mistaking of one object for another. But obviously the illusory experience known as dreaming cannot be construed in that way.

36. Vimuktātman here stresses the fact that within the sphere of the indeterminable both valid and correct cognition are quite possible.

37. E.g., the roar of a tiger which one dreams, which awakens one from the dream.

38. Namely, through the instruction of Advaita philosophy.

39. We read *-anivṛttim;* see *Iṣṭasiddhi,* ed. Hiriyanna, p. 693 (Additions).

40. Vimuktātman here makes a sharp distinction between the abstract understanding of the world's lack of true being and the immediate experiencing of the One Spirit or Consciousness: The latter he holds to be possible, but one gets the impression from what he says that it is for him something quite foreign and remote. Editor's note: Hacker's notes 5, 34 and 37 have been replaced or omitted.

7

The Idea of the Person in the Thinking of Vedānta Philosophers

Among the philosophical schools of Hinduism, especially those have reflected on the nature of the person which had set themselves the task of interpreting the "Vedānta" texts, i.e., the Upaniṣads. Thus, these schools are called Vedānta systems in the West, or also, in short form, the Vedānta. Reflecting on the core or authentic being of man was for them no philosophical "theory," no purely intellectual hobby, and the instruction about it was not the business of "education" or "culture." Rather, such reflection was understood as a quest, and such instruction as a way toward the *true goal;* the quest as well as the guidance on the path had an unmistakable religious quality and intent. The abiding tendency of all Vedānta thinking is expressed in a statement transmitted in the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra:*[1] "There is nothing higher than attaining the Self" *(ātmalābhān na paraṃ vidyate).*

The purpose of the present essay is not to give a comprehensive historical survey of Vedāntic thought relating to the person, the Self, the *ātman;* such a survey is, in any case, not yet possible given the present state of research. My knowledge of the philosophical Hindu doctrines that I present is based upon the study of the works of some representative thinkers of a relatively early period: Gauḍapāda (around 500 A.D.?),