

**THE ADVAITA VEDANTA  
OF CANKARACARYA**

**V. - THE COSMOS (BRAHMANDA) \***

**Does the World exist?**

If Brahman is « advaitam » (without a second), the one only reality that is or can be, how can we ever speak about a world? And yet the Scriptures present the world as a product of Brahman, and prescribe rules of conduct for the individuals. In doing so they evidently take for granted the reality of the world and the multiplicity of souls. The universal experience of mankind also points to the existence of plurality and real distinctions. How do we account for all this?

« To the preceding objection we reply, 'It may exist as in ordinary experience'. Even on our philosophic view the distinction may exist, as ordinary experience furnishes us with analogous instances. We see, for instance, that waves, foam, bubbles and other modifications of the sea, although they really are not different from the sea-water, exist sometimes in the state of mutual separation, sometimes in the state of conjunction &c. From the fact of their being non-different from the sea-water, it does not follow that they pass over into each other; and again, although they do not pass over into each other, still they are not different from the sea. So it is in the case under discussion also. The enjoyers and the objects of enjoyment do not pass over into each other, and yet they are not different from the highest Brahman. [Note: the 'enjoyers' are the individual souls, and the 'objects of enjoyment' the material world]. And although the enjoyer is not really an effect of Brahman, since the unmodified creator himself, in so far as he enters into the effect, is called the enjoyer according to the passage, 'having created he entered into it', (Taitt. Up., ii. 6), still after Brahman has entered into its effects it passes into a state of distinction, in consequence of the effect acting as a limiting adjunct; just as the universal ether is divided by its contact with jars and other limiting adjuncts. The conclusion is, that the distinction of enjoyers and objects of

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\* For the first part of the article see *Ephemerides Carmeliticae*, Vol. XIV (1963) 2, pp. 382-412.

enjoyment is possible, although both are non-different from Brahman their highest cause, as the analogous instance of the sea and its waves demonstrates ». <sup>38</sup>

So the distinction between the individual souls and the material world the Scriptures speak about and our own experience attests to is objective and to that extent true. But that does not mean that the distinction and the objects of distinction are real:

« The refutation contained in the preceding sūtra was set forth on the condition of the practical distinction of the enjoyers and the objects of enjoyment being acknowledged. In reality, however, that distinction does not exist because there is understood to be non-difference (identity) of cause and effect. The effect is this manifold world consisting of ether and so on; the cause is the highest Brahman. Of the effect it is understood that in reality it is non-different from the cause, i. e., has no existence apart from the cause. [The point is illustrated with the example of clay and the pots made out of it: clay is the substance, the pots merely its modifications.] These modifications or effects are names only, exist through or originate from speech only, while in reality there exists no such thing as a modification. In so far as they are names (individual effects distinguished by names) they are untrue; in so far as they are clay they are true ». <sup>39</sup>

Here we see the tendency of Vedānta to see in the material cause practically the whole of causality. This glorification of the material cause is a legacy of Sāṃkhya philosophy which defends the « sat-kārya-vāda » or the doctrine of the preexistence of the effect in the cause. According to this theory all the effects exist already, potentially but positively, in their material cause: not only the tree in the seed or butter in milk, but also pots in clay and statues in marble. The axiom of this school is « nābhāvo vidyate satah » (what exists cannot be destroyed) and « nāsato vidyate bhāvah » (what does not exist cannot be produced). On the contrary the Nyāya-Viśeṣika school holds « asat-kārya-vāda », the doctrine of the non existence of the effect prior to causation. But the sat-kārya-vāda of Sāṃkhya as adopted by Advaita Vedānta has to be understood with a certain reservation. Instead of saying that the effect preexisted in the cause, we ought rather to say that the cause continues apparently as the effect: Çankara does not admit the reality of the effect as such. Consequently some discerning

<sup>38</sup> SBE. XXXIV. pp. 319, 320.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem* p. 320.

commentatores have suggested that Çankara's theory of causality be termed « sat-kāraṇa-vāda », for according to it only the *Kāraṇa* (the cause) exists, and all *kārya* (effect) is an illusion.

From all this it follows that the multiple world of experience is unreal, the product of *avidyā* (delusion). What then is the purpose of the sacred rites and the rules of conduct prescribed by the Vedas? Does not this assumption undermine all religion and ethics?

« These objections, we reply, do not damage our position because the entire complex of phenomenal existence is considered as true as long as the knowledge of Brahman being the Self of all has not arisen; just as the phantoms of a dream are considered to be true until the sleeper awakes. For as long as a person has not reached the true knowledge of the unity of the Self, so long it does not enter his mind that the world of effects with its means and objects of right knowledge and its results of actions is untrue; he rather, in consequence of his ignorance, looks on mere effects (such as body, offspring, wealth &c.) as forming part of and belonging to his Self, forgetful of Brahman being in reality the Self of all. Hence, as long as true knowledge does not present itself, there is no reason why the ordinary course of secular and religious activity should not hold on undisturbed ». <sup>40</sup>

Here Çankara anticipates an objection even more radical and damaging to his position. If the world is unreal, then the Vedas themselves as part of the visible world must be unreal as well: how could they give us a true notion of the real Brahman?

« This objection, we reply, is without force (because as a matter of fact we do see real effects to result from unreal causes), for we observe that death sometimes takes place from imaginary venom (when a man imagines himself to have been bitten by a venomous snake), and effects (of what is perceived in a dream) such as the bite of a snake or bathing in a river take place with regard to a dreaming person. But, it will be said, these effects themselves are unreal! These effects themselves, we reply, are unreal indeed; but not so the consciousness the dreaming person has of them. This consciousness is a real result; for it is not sublated by the waking consciousness. The man who has risen from sleep does indeed consider the effects perceived by him in his dream such as being bitten by a snake, bathing in a river &c., to be unreal, but he does not on

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem* p. 324.

that account consider the consciousness he had of them to be unreal likewise ». <sup>41</sup>

So the world, though unreal, is objective enough and to that extent true. It has to be transcended by true knowledge, but not neglected as long as one is under the spell of *avidyā*. Çankara even insists on the distinction of the waking world from the dream world, though in the final analysis they are both illusory:

« It is not true that the world of dreams is real; it is mere illusion and there is not a particle of reality in it. Why?... because the nature of the dream world does not manifest itself with the totality of the attributes of real things. What then do you mean by the totality? The fulfilment of the conditions of place, time and cause, and the circumstance of non-refutation. All these have their sphere in real things but cannot be applied to dreams. In the first place there is, in a dream, no space for chariots and the like. ...In the second place we see that dreams are in conflict with the conditions of time. ...In the third place there do not exist in the state of dreaming the requisite efficient causes for either thought or action. ...In the fourth place the chariots, horses &c. which the dream creates, are refuted, i. e. shown not to exist, by the waking state. And apart from this, the dream itself refutes what it creates, as its end often contradicts its beginning; what at first was considered to be a chariot turns, in a moment, into a man, and what was conceived to be a man has all at once become a tree. Scripture itself, moreover, clearly declares the chariots &c. of a dream to have no real existence: 'There are no chariots in that state, no horses, no roads &c.' Hence the visions of a dream are mere illusion ». <sup>42</sup>

But this does not mean that the dream world is devoid of all objectivity and utility, or that the waking world has any reality in the absolute sense. So Çankara hastens to add:

« We only maintain that the world connected with the intermediate state (i. e. the world of dreams) is not real in the same sense as the world consisting of ether and so on is real. On the other hand we must remember that also the so-called real creation with its ether, air &c. is not absolutely real; for as we have proved before (II. i. 14) the entire expanse of things is mere illusion. The world consisting of ether &c. remains fixed and distinct up to the moment when the soul

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 324, 325.

<sup>42</sup> SBE. XXXVIII. pp. 134-136.

cognizes that Brahman is the Self of all; the world of dreams on the other hand is daily sublated by the waking state. That the latter is mere illusion has, therefore, to be understood with a distinction »<sup>43</sup>

### The Origin of the World

Having granted the world objectivity, the Vedāntin has to explain its origin. That Brahman is the cause of the world has been already declared in the second verse of the Brahma-sūtras. Now the question is raised: what kind of cause is Brahman? Is he only the efficient cause or also the material cause? It goes without saying that by material cause here is not meant matter but that substance the modification of which is the effect in question. The arguments of those who maintain that Brahman is only the efficient cause are first set forth.

« The pūrvapakṣin [adversary] maintains that Brahman evidently is the operative cause of the world only, because Scripture declares his creative energy to be preceded by reflection... For observation shows that the action of operative causes only, such as potters and the like, is preceded by reflection... It is therefore appropriate that we should view the prime creator in the same light. The circumstance of his being known as 'the Lord' furnishes another argument. For lords such as kings and the son of Vivasvat are known only as operative causes, and the highest Lord also must on that account be viewed as an operative cause only. — Further, the effect of the creator's activity, viz. this world, is seen to consist of parts, to be non-intelligent and impure; we must therefore assume that its [material] cause also is of the same nature; for it is a matter of general observation that [material] cause and effect are alike in kind. But that Brahman does not resemble the world in nature, we know from many scriptural passages, such as, 'It is without parts, without actions, tranquil, without fault, without taint' (Çvet. Up. VI. 19). Hence there remains no other alternative but to admit that in addition to Brahman there exists a material cause of the world of impure nature, such as is known from Smṛti [i. e. Sāṃkhya-smṛti], and to limit the causality of Brahman, as declared by Scripture, to operative causality ».<sup>44</sup>

As we see, the arguments adduced above to prove that God is only the efficient cause of the world and not its material cause also, are

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem* p. 138.

<sup>44</sup> SBE. XXXIV. p. 284.

quite plausible and should have convinced a philosopher of Çankara's calibre had they not inexorably led to that fatal conclusion. But that conclusion was inevitable in the absence of the notion of 'creatio ex nihilo', which notion we have received only from Revelation, whatever the philosophers may say about the possibility of arriving at it by reason alone. If therefore Brahman were only the efficient cause of the world, we would have to look for some other material cause, thus admitting another co-eternal principle.

It was this danger of dualism that scared Çankara away from the above position. Besides, the Scriptures say about Brahman that if you know It you will know everything that there is. Now, knowing the efficient cause alone, argues Çankara, you cannot know all the effects: knowing the potter, for example, does not enable you to know the nature of the pots he can make. Whereas knowing the material cause you know all the objects produced out of it, because, in Çankara's theory, the effect is nothing but the material cause modified, the modification adding nothing to it but name and form (accidental modes). According to this view, seeing a block of marble is as good, or almost as good, as seeing all the statues that can be made out of it. This exaggeration of material causality is responsible for most of the troubles of the Advaita Vedānta. We give below Çankara's reply to the foregoing objection:

« To this we make the following reply: Brahman is to be acknowledged as the material cause as well as the operative cause; because this latter view does not conflict with the promissory statements and illustrative instances. The promissory statement chiefly meant is the following one: 'Have you ever asked for that instruction by which that which is not heard becomes heard; that which is not perceived, perceived; that which is not known, known?' (Ch. Up., VI. i. 3). This passage intimates that through the cognition of one thing everything else, even if (previously) unknown, becomes known. Now the cognition of everything is possible through the cognition of the material cause. On the other hand, effects are not non-different from their operative causes; for we know from ordinary experience that the carpenter, for instance, is different from the house he has built... That Brahman is at the same time the operative cause of the world, we have to conclude from the circumstance that there is no other guiding being... The Self is thus the operative cause, because there is no other ruling principle, and the material cause, because there is no other substance from which the world could originate ».<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 284-286.

The great merit of this argumentation is that the entire causality is centred in Brahman; its great flaw, that the effect is considered merely a modification of the cause. Çankara realizes that the doctrine of Brahman being the material cause also of the world is open to attack from many quarters. He himself formulates one of the main objections in the following words:

« The Vedānta opinion that the intelligent Brahman is material cause of this world is untenable because the effect would in that case be of an altogether different character from the cause. For this world, which the vedāntin considers as the effect of Brahman, is perceived to be non-intelligent and impure, consequently different in character from Brahman; and Brahman again is declared by sacred texts to be of a character different from the world, viz. intelligent and pure. But things of an altogether different character cannot stand to each other in the relation of material cause and effect ». <sup>46</sup>

To this objection which, by the way, is a very valid one, Çankara gives the following reply:

« Your assertion that this world cannot have originated from Brahman on account of the difference of its character, is not founded on an absolutely true tenet. For we see that from man, who is acknowledged to be intelligent, non-intelligent things such as hair and nails originate, and that, on the other hand, from avowedly non-intelligent matter, such as cow-dung, scorpions and similar animals are produced. ...If absolute equality were insisted on (in the case of one thing being the effect of another), the relation of material cause and effect (which after all requires a distinction of the two) would be annihilated. If again it be remarked that in the case of men and hair as well as in that of scorpions and cow-dung there is one characteristic feature, at least, which is found in the effect as well as in the cause, viz. the quality of being of an earthly nature; we reply that in the case of Brahman and the world also one characteristic feature, viz. that of existence (*sattā*), is found in ether etc. (which are the effects) as well as in Brahman (which is the cause)... [However, concludes Çankara, we cannot fully clarify this matter by arguments alone, but have to blindly accept it on scriptural authority]. Thus Scripture also declares, 'That doctrine is not to be obtained by argument, but when it is declared by another, then, O dearest, it is easy to understand' (Ka. Up. I. ii. 9)... 'Do not apply reasoning to those things which are uncognizable' etc. ». <sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem* p. 300.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 305-307.

The final conclusion, therefore, is that Brahman is the total cause of the world, which for Çankara means the efficient as well as the material cause. Of the two, the material cause may be said to be the more important from the point of view of the Vedānta, because it is the material cause that transforms itself and continues as the effect:

« because only when the [material] cause exists the effect is observed to exist, not when it does not exist. For instance, only when the clay exists the jar is observed to exist, and the cloth only when the threads exist... Nor is the jar observed to exist only when the potter exists; for in that case non-difference [identity] does not exist, although the relation between the two is that of an operative cause and its effect ».<sup>48</sup>

« We maintain, therefore, as our final conclusion, that milk and other substances are called effects when they are in the state of curds and so on, and that it is impossible, even within hundreds of years, ever to bring about an effect which is different from its cause. The fundamental cause of all appears in the form of this and that effect, up to the last effect of all, just as an actor appears in various robes and costumes, and thereby becomes the basis of all the current notions and terms concerning the phenomenal world ».<sup>49</sup>

That the material cause itself continues as the effect after the latter's production is as good as saying that the effect was pre-existing in the cause even before its actual appearance.

« That the effect exists before its origination and is non-different from the cause, follows from reasoning as well as from a further scriptural passage. We at first set forth the argumentation: Ordinary experience teaches us that those who wish to produce certain effects, such as curds, or earthen jars, or golden ornaments, employ for their purpose certain determined causal substances such as milk, clay and gold; those who wish to produce sour milk do not employ clay, nor do those who intend to make jars employ milk and so on. But according to that doctrine which teaches that the effect is non-existent (before its actual production), all this should be possible. \* For if before their actual origination all effects are

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 330, 331.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem* p. 341.

\* Cp. LUCRETIUS, *De Rerum Natura*, I. 159-166:

« Nam si de nihilo fierent, ex omnibus rebus  
omne genus nasci posset, nil semine egeret.  
e mare primum homines, e terra posset oriri  
squamigerum genus et uolucres erumpere caelo;



equally non-existent in any causal substance, why then should curds be produced from milk only and not from clay also, and jars from clay only and not from milk as well? ». <sup>50</sup>

But would it not be against the doctrine of the Vedas to hold that the effect exists somehow even before its actual production, when the Scriptures repeatedly proclaim that before creation the world was non-existent?

« This we deny. For by the non-existence of the effect previous to its production is not meant absolute non-existence, but only a different quality or state, viz. the state of name and form being unevolved, which state is different from the state of name and form being evolved. With reference to the latter state the effect is called, previous to its production, non-existent, although then also it existed identical with its cause ». <sup>51</sup>

Here the adversary raises one more objection: if the whole effect was already there in the material cause, what is the special need of an efficient cause?

« Your objection is refuted, we reply, by the consideration that the endeavour of the causal agent may be looked upon as having a purpose in so far as it arranges the causal substance in the form of the effect. That, however, even the form of the effect (is not something previously non-existing, but) belongs to the Self of the cause already because what is devoid of selfhood cannot be begun at all, we have already shown above... The doctrine that the effect is non-existent previously to its actual origination, moreover, leads to the conclusion that the activity of the causal agent has no object; for what does not exist cannot possibly be an object ». <sup>52</sup>

This last argument, however illogical, is remarkable for its ingenuity. The effect is that which receives the activity of the efficient cause; in the absence of something to receive its activity the efficient cause cannot even begin to function. Hence, the activity of the efficient cause, far from disproving the pre-existence of the effect, in fact demands it.

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armenta atque aliae pecudes, genus omne ferarum,  
incerto partu culta ac deserta tenerent.  
nec fructus idem arboribus constare solerent,  
sed mutarentur, ferre omnes omnia possent ».

<sup>50</sup> SBE. XXXIV. p. 334.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem* p. 333.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem* p. 339.

### The World and the Word

Here we have a question closely connected with the subject under discussion, and which throws into relief one of the basic concepts of Hinduism. The Vedas repeatedly assert that the world proceeded from the Word (Vāk, the same root as Vox). But this raises a problem for Çankara: if Brahman is the total and only cause of the world, what sense does it make to bring in the 'word' as cause of the world? To this objection he makes the following answer:

« The origination of the world from the 'word' is not to be understood in that sense, that the 'word' constitutes the material cause of the world, as Brahman does; but while there exist the everlasting words, whose essence is the power of denotation in connection with their eternal sense (i. e. the ākr̥tis denoted), the accomplishment of such individual things as are capable of having those words applied to them is called an origination from those words... Thus Scripture declares in different places that the 'word' precedes the creation. Smṛti also delivers itself as follows: 'In the beginning a divine word, without beginning or end, formed of the Vedas, was uttered by Svayambhū (Self-existent), from which all activities proceed'... And again, 'The several names, actions and conditions of all things he shaped in the beginning from the words of the Veda' (Man, i. 21). Moreover, we all know from observation that any one when setting about some thing which he wishes to accomplish, first remembers the word denoting the thing, and after that sets to work. We therefore conclude that before the creation the Vedic words became manifest in the mind of Prajāpati the creator, and that after that he created the things corresponding to those words ». <sup>53</sup>

Here we see the place of 'logos' in the Hindu scheme. The species of all possible things exist eternally in the form of words in the mind of the Creator. At the commencement of each cosmic cycle he decides which of these are to be translated into actuality as individuals. The real Vedas are those eternal words, which too are rendered in human terms and revealed at the beginning of each cosmic cycle. The Vedas apparently make mention of many individuals and passing events; but actually it is not those particular individuals and events that are meant, but certain universal types of beings and happenings which recur in all cosmic cycles. The words of the Vedas, though human, derive their force and truth not from their correspondence to the created things they

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 203, 204.

apparently refer to, but from their correspondence to the eternal species existing in the mind of God. Hence the total impossibility of disproving them! — and, we may add, of proving them as well. Those who do not believe in a personal God — at least for the duration of the cosmic cycle — believe the species to exist in the *ākāṣa* (ether, for want of a better word). They were perceived by the great Seers in their yogic trance and rendered in human terms in the Vedas. In any case the Vedas are irrefutable truth.

## VI. - VIVARTA-VADA AND MAYA

The contention that Brahman is the material cause of the cosmos has placed Çankara in a very vulnerable position. It is evident that material causes undergo change in being transformed into their effects. If, therefore, we consider Brahman to be the material cause of the world, we must also be prepared to admit that Brahman is changeable. To this objection, which is quite valid, Çankara makes the following answer :

« This objection, we reply, is without force, because a number of scriptural passages, by denying all modification of Brahman, teach It to be absolutely changeless (*kūṭastha*)... [Numerous scriptural texts are adduced here]... For to the one Brahman the two qualities of being subject to modification and of being free from it cannot both be ascribed. And if you say, 'why should they not be both predicated of Brahman (the former during the time of the subsistence of the world, the latter during the period of reabsorption) just as rest and motion may be predicated (of one body at different times)?', we remark the qualification 'absolutely changeless' (*kūṭastha*) precludes this. For the changeless Brahman cannot be the substratum of varying attributes. And that, on account of the negation of all attributes, Brahman really is eternal and changeless has already been demonstrated ». <sup>54</sup>

Of course the objection remains unanswered, but we have here an uncompromising assertion of the absolute immutability of Brahman. What Çankara is rejecting here is the *Pariṇāma-vāda* (evolution theory) which maintains that Brahman undergoes a real transformation in evolving into the world. Çankara's own solution to the above problem consists in denying the reality of the world while saving its objectivity, as we shall explain later.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem* p. 327.

There are a few other theories explaining the relation of the world to Brahman, which the Brahma-sūtras take into consideration. The first is the *Bhedābheda-vāda* (emanation theory) of Aṅgarathya, which is explained by Vācaspati in his *Bhāmati* as follows: As the sparks issuing from a fire are not absolutely different from the fire, because they participate in the nature of the fire; and, on the other hand, are not absolutely non-different from it, because in that case they could be distinguished neither from the fire nor from each other; so the individual souls also — which are effects of Brahman — are neither absolutely different from Brahman, for that would mean that they are not of the nature of intelligence; nor absolutely non-different from Brahman, because in that case they could not be distinguished from each other, and because, if they were identical with Brahman and therefore omniscient, it would be useless to give them any instruction. Hence the individual souls are somewhat different from Brahman and somewhat non-different (*bheda* and *abheda* at the same time); hence the name of the system, 'bhedābheda'.

Next comes the *Satya-bheda* (real distinction) theory of Auḍulomi, which is also explained in *Bhāmatī* as follows: The individual soul is absolutely different from the highest Self; it is inquinated by contact with its different limiting adjuncts. But it is spoken of in the Upaniṣads as non-different from the highest Self because, after having purified itself by means of knowledge and meditation, it may pass out of the body and become one with the highest Self. The text of the Upaniṣad thus transfers a future state of non-difference to the present time when difference actually exists. According to this theory, the condition of individual souls is similar to that of rivers that remain really (not merely apparently) different from one another and the sea until they merge in the sea losing 'name and form'.

The third opinion is that of Kāṇakrishna, according to which absolute identity exists between individual souls and Brahman even in the present condition. Having exposed the three views, Ṣankara concludes:

« In the opinion of the teacher Kāṇakrishna, the non-modified highest Lord himself is the individual soul, not anything else. Aṅgarathya, although meaning to say that the soul is not (absolutely) different from the highest Self, yet intimates... that there does exist a certain relation of cause and effect between the highest Self and the individual soul (and not the relation of absolute identity). The opinion of Auḍulomi again clearly implies that the difference and non-difference of the two depend on difference of condition. Of these three opinions we conclude that the one held by Kāṇakrishna accords with scrip-

ture, because it agrees with what all the Vedānta-texts (so for instance the passage 'That art Thou') aim at inculcating. Only on the opinion of Kāçakrishna immortality can be viewed as the result of the knowledge of the soul ». <sup>55</sup>

According to Advaita the process by which the cosmos proceeds from Brahman is *Vivarta* or apparent modification. The whole thing thus produced from Brahman is unreal but objective: it has all the appearance of reality without however its substance. Being objective it demands a cause; but Brahman cannot be an agent, nor directly responsible for this disreputable product. And yet it must somehow be derived from him, because the Scriptures are emphatic in asserting that Brahman is the cause of all this, and there is nothing else that may be invoked as the cause of the cosmos. Faced with this dilemma Çankara resorts to *Māyā*, that mysterious power of the Lord, which is not real enough to be distinct from him, nor so unreal as to be absolutely inefficient; which super-imposes this illusory world of name and form on the immutable Brahman, or rather transforms him *apparently* into this world of spirits and matter. Thus through this mysterious *Māyā*, Brahman becomes at once the material and the efficient cause of the world.

Once admitted, *Māyā* will behave for the rest like the *Prakṛtī* or prime matter of Sāmkhya philosophy, with this difference that while *Prakṛtī* functions on the plane of reality, *Māyā* remains on the illusory plane.

« Belonging to the Self, as it were, of the omniscient Lord, there are name and form, the figments of Nescience, not to be defined either as being (i. e. Brahman), nor as different from it, the germs of the entire expanse of the phenomenal world, called in Çruti and Smṛti the illusion (*māyā*), power (*çaktī*) or nature (*prakṛti*) of the omniscient Lord. Different from them is the omniscient Lord himself... In this manner the Vedānta-texts declare that for him who has reached the state of truth and reality the whole apparent world does not exist. The Bhagavat Gīta also (V. 14, 15) declares that in reality the relation of Ruler and ruled does not exist. That, on the other hand, all these distinctions are valid, as far as the phenomenal world is concerned, Scripture as well as the Bhagavat Gīta states ». <sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem* p. 279.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 328-330.

### The World not a Total Vivarta of Brahman

Vedānta maintains not only the immanence of Brahman but also his transcendence: that is to say, while Brahman apparently transforms himself into the world, he remains all the while unmodified in himself. He is Saguṇa (qualified) and Nirguṇa (unqualified) at once. For this reason the world is considered not a total 'vivarta' of Brahman but only a partial one. If the world were a total vivarta of Brahman, he would be entirely contained in the effect and there would be no point in seeking him outside the phenomenal world. The Vedas therefore teach that only a quarter (*pāda*, literally, foot) of him passed over into this world, while three quarters remain unmodified. But this position, the adversaries claim, is self contradictory; the Vedāntins must admit either that the world is a total vivarta of Brahman, or that Brahman is divisible:

« The consequence of the Vedānta doctrine, it is said, will be that we must assume the entire Brahman to undergo the change into its effects, because it is not composed of parts. If Brahman, like earth and other matter, consisted of parts, we might assume that a part of it undergoes the change, while the other part remains as it is. But Scripture distinctly declares Brahman to be devoid of parts. [Here are quoted several scriptural passages] all of which passages deny the existence of any distinctions in Brahman. As therefore a partial modification is impossible, a modification of the entire Brahman has to be assumed. But that involves a cutting off of Brahman from its very basis. Another consequence of the Vedantic view is that the texts exhorting us to strive 'to see' Brahman become purposeless; for the effects of Brahman may be seen without any endeavour, and apart from them no Brahman exists. And finally, the texts declaring Brahman to be unborn are contradicted thereby. If, on the other hand, in order to escape from these difficulties, we assume Brahman to consist of parts, we thereby do violence to those texts which declare Brahman not to be made up of parts. Moreover, if Brahman is made up of parts, it follows that it is non-eternal. Hence the Vedantic point of view cannot be maintained in any way ».<sup>57</sup>

The objection, as we see, has been well formulated by Çankara himself. It is a rational objection based on the self-contradiction involved in assuming the world to be a 'vivarta' of Brahman, whether total or partial. But Çankara's reply is not as well

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 349, 350.

reasoned; he takes refuge in the revelation instead. The sacred texts declare Brahman to be absolutely indivisible, and, at the same time, the world to be a partial 'vivarta' of Brahman; and in this question of Brahman we have only the light of revelation to go by:

« That the entire Brahman undergoes change, by no means follows from our doctrine, 'on account of the sacred texts'. For in the same way as Scripture speaks of the origin of the world from Brahman, it also speaks of Brahman subsisting apart from its effects... Nor do we violate those texts which declare Brahman to be without parts; we rather admit Brahman to be without parts just because Scripture reveals it. For Brahman which rests exclusively on the holy texts, and regarding which the holy texts alone are authoritative — not the senses and so on — must be accepted such as the texts proclaim it to be. Now those texts declare, on the one hand, that not the entire Brahman passes over into its effects, and, on the other hand, that Brahman is without parts... As the Purāṇa says: 'Do not apply reasoning to what is unthinkable! The mark of the unthinkable is that it is above all material causes'. Therefore the cognition of what is supersensuous is based on the holy texts only ». <sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, as « even the holy texts cannot make us accept what is self-contradictory », Çankara feels constrained to show at least that there is no such self-contradiction involved in the Vedantic doctrine:

« No, we reply, the difficulty is merely an apparent one, as we maintain that the (alleged) break in Brahman's nature is a mere figment of Nescience. By a break of that nature a thing is not really broken up into parts, not any more than the moon is really multiplied by appearing double to a person of defective vision. By that element of plurality which is the fiction of Nescience, which is characterized by name and form, which is evolved as well as non-evolved, which is not to be defined either as the Existing or the Non-existing, Brahman becomes the basis of this entire apparent world with its changes and so on, while in its true and real nature it at the same time remains unchanged, lifted above the phenomenal universe ». <sup>59</sup>

The key to the explanation is *Māyā* which is almost a sublimated form of *Prakṛti* the Prime Matter of Sāṅkhya philosophy, and behaves exactly like it in practice.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 350, 351.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem* p. 352.

### The Play of Māyā

Vedānta, while condemning the dualism of Sāmkhya, is compelled to accept its psychology and cosmology. According to Sāmkhya the ultimate realities are Spirit and Prime Matter. This prime matter is called by various names: *Avyakta* (unmanifested) because in its original unevolved form it cannot be defined as being or non-being, this or that; *Pradhāna* (principal) because the whole cosmos evolves out of it; *Prakṛti* (nature) because it is the source of all activity, the spirit remaining merely a witness. This prime matter contains latent in it three potentialities (*guṇa*), namely, *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. Of them *Satva* is the principle of clarity and goodness, *Rajas* of activity and passion, and *Tamas* of passivity and darkness. It is the interaction of these three *guṇas* that brings about the evolution of the cosmos, and in the process implicates the unwary spirits in the fetters of matter by an illusory bond born of ignorance.

All this finds a place in the Vedānta. In his *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi* Cankara gives the following description of *Māyā* which could be applied almost literally to the prime matter of Sāmkhya:

« The Supreme Māyā out of which all this universe is born, which is the power of the Supreme Lord, called *avyakta* (unmanifested) and which is the beginningless *avidyā* (nescience) having the three *guṇas* (potentialities), is to be inferred through its effects by (our) intelligence.

« This Māyā is neither being nor non-being, nor both together; it is neither differentiated nor undifferentiated, nor both; it is neither composite nor non-composite, nor both; it is most wonderful, undefinable ».

« Its effects can be destroyed by the realization of the non-dual Brahman, as the illusion of the serpent in the rope is destroyed by the realization of the rope. The qualities of it are called *rajas*, *tamas* and *satva*, and these are known by their effects ».<sup>60</sup>

In subsequent stanzas he explains the function of these three 'guṇas'. *Rajas* has the power of projection (*vikṣepa-çakti*) by which it conjures up this illusory show of the world and excites individuals to passion, attachment and activity. *Tamas* on the other hand has the tendency to conceal (*āvaraṇa-çakti*) the true nature of Brahman and present the illusory world as real. « It is this force which is the ultimate cause of the conditioned existence of the 'ego' and the exciting cause for the operation of *vikṣepa-*

<sup>60</sup> *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi*, verses 110-112.



çakti ». <sup>61</sup> It is *Satva* alone that is helpful, for its nature is clarity and purity, and when it increases in an individual it leads that person to liberation. In all this we clearly see the influence of Sāmkhya. Similarly in prescribing the spiritual exercises to lead the aspirant to the intuition of Brahman, Vedānta will have to borrow almost everything from the Yoga of Patañjali. Though Çankara declares war on the Sāmkhya and Yoga in these words: « Although there are many Smṛtis treating of the soul, we have singled out for refutation the Sāmkhya and Yoga because they are widely known as offering the means for accomplishing the highest end of man and have found favour with many competent persons », he hastens to add: « We willingly allow room for those portions of the two systems which do not contradict the Veda. In their description of the soul, for instance, as free from all qualities, the Sāmkhyas are in harmony with Veda which teaches that the person (*puruṣa*) is essentially pure... The Yoga again in giving rules for the condition of the wandering religious mendicant admits that state of retirement from the concerns of life which is known from scriptural passages ». <sup>62</sup>

Çankara's main quarrell with the above two systems turns round their fundamental dualism. But his own *Māyā* does not answer his purpose very well. It must either behave like an entity in its own right thus undermining monism, or remain inert jeopardizing even the tenuous objectivity he had granted the world.

The general pattern of the evolution of the world is also the same as in Sāmkhya. For the spirits and the prime matter of Sāmkhya we have here the absolute impersonal Brahman and *Māyā* his creative power. The first evolute of Sāmkhya is Mahat-buddhi (cosmic intelligence); here we have instead *Içvara* (personal God) i. e., Brahman as limited by *Māyā*. Thence follow the various steps of evolution on the cosmic and the individual planes almost exactly as in the Sāmkhya system.

### Observations

1° Çankara, we must bear in mind, is primarily a theologian trying to defend and expound revelation with the aid of reason, not a mere philosopher investigating the nature of things out of curiosity. His whole attitude, therefore, is that of a believer, not that of an inquirer. He has accepted as revealed truth absolute monism or, as the Vedānta prefers to call it, 'non-dualism', which for Çankara and his school means not only that there is only one God, but that God is the only reality that there is or can ever be. This world therefore is unreal.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, verse 115.

<sup>62</sup> SBE. XXXIV. pp. 297, 298.

2° This God of Vedānta is transcendent and impersonal without any activity, unrelated to anything because there can be nothing besides him. Personality and individuality, in Hindu philosophy, implies a certain composition, which is absolutely inadmissible in Brahman who is simple and immutable.

3° But on both these points, namely the unreality of the world and the impersonality of God, Çankara has to make compromises, because common sense cannot dismiss the world as a fantasy, and common conscience will not be satisfied with an impersonal God out of all reach and relation. The compromise consists in admitting the objectivity of the world though not its reality, and an equally unreal but objective personality in God, in which personality he acts as the creator, conserver and consummator of this illusory world.

4° The admission of the objectivity of the world brought in the necessity of explaining the origin of it. Brahman is the total cause of the world. Çankara does not admit even instrumental causes in the production of the world: Brahman does not need instruments for action. But what sort of cause is Brahman? Is he efficient cause only, or also material cause? The idea of an efficient cause producing the entire effect without the coöperation of other causes, material or instrumental, which is the idea implied in 'creatio ex nihilo sui et subjecti', has never seemed acceptable to the ancient philosophers whether of the East or the West. Yet Çankara seems to have come close to admitting it at a certain point in his defence of the absolute self-sufficiency of Brahman in the act of creation. Commenting on the Sūtra « And (the case of Brahman is) like that of gods and other beings in ordinary experience », he writes:

« We reply, 'like gods and others'. As gods, fathers, rishis and other beings of great power, who are all of intelligent nature, are seen to create many and various objects such as palaces, chariots etc., without availing themselves of any extraneous means, *by their mere intention*, which is effective in consequence of those beings' peculiar power — a fact vouchsafed by mantras, arthavādas, itihāsas and purāṇas — so the intelligent Brahman also may be assumed to create the world by itself without extraneous means ». <sup>63</sup>

Why was it then that he did not exploit this idea to the full and arrive at the true concept of creation? The reason is evident: with absolute monism to defend he could not take any further step in this direction, for that would force him into admitting an effect which is distinct and different from the cause. The efficient cause

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 347, 348.

does not pass into its effect as the material cause does. The palaces and chariots produced by the magical power of the gods and rishis are not part of them, but distinct entities. For this reason efficient causality must not be allowed a dominant rôle in creation. The choice necessarily fell on material causality, for according to « sat-kārya-vāda » the material cause contains the effect in its totality and continues to be identical with it even after its production. Hence the meaning of the total causality of Brahman is this: « Hitherto we have established so much that Brahman, intelligent, one without a second, *modifying itself* without the employment of any extraneous means, is the cause of the world ». <sup>64</sup>

5° What is to be understood by the statement that the world existed in Brahman prior to its actual creation? That the world was potentially contained in God even before creation may be asserted by even a christian theologian. But the statement, though verbally the same, means two very different things in the two contexts. When the Scholastic says that the world was potentially in God, he does not mean that the *world* was, but merely that the *potentia activa* to produce the world was. The condition is very different from that of the tree potentially contained in the seed; here the tree itself exists though in an unevolved form. This latter is the idea of Çankara and the rest of the Hindu philosophers when they speak of the effect as contained in the material cause. But some of the classical examples are inadequate to express even this idea. That oil is contained in the seed or curds and butter in milk is easy enough to see. But that all the pots possible are already there in a lump of clay or innumerable statues in a block of marble is not equally clear. This confusion of ideas is due to the glorification of the material cause on the one hand, and a total ignoring of the formal cause and minimizing of the efficient cause on the other. The essence of the pot and the statue is not principally the material of which they are made, even though that material is a substance, but the form given to that material even though it happens to be only an accidental form. But even where substantial forms are in question, Çankara easily reduces it all to the material cause, as, for instance, when he considers plants as mere modifications of earth, or scorpions and other insects as modifications of cow-dung etc. What the efficient cause does is, according to him, merely to help unfold what is hidden in the material cause. Creation is merely such an unfolding, in which Brahman is the efficient cause as well.

« As of a folded piece of cloth we do not know clearly whether it is a piece of cloth or some other thing, while on its being unfolded it becomes manifest that the folded thing was a

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem* p. 349.

piece of cloth; and as, so long as it is folded, we perhaps know that it is a piece of cloth but not of what definite length and width it is, while on its being unfolded we know these particulars, and at the same time that the cloth is not different from the folded object; in the same way an effect, such as a piece of cloth, is non-manifest as long as it exists in its causes, i. e. the threads etc., merely, while it becomes manifest and is clearly apprehended in consequence of the operations of shuttle, loom, weaver and so on. — Applying this instance of the piece of cloth, first folded and then unfolded, to the general case of cause and effect, we conclude that the latter is non-different from the former ». <sup>65</sup>

It is significant that in the enumeration of the causes of the cloth the weaver comes last.

6° But evidently Brahman cannot be the subject of this unfolding nor its agent. And yet the world has somehow to be drawn out of him and assured a certain degree of objectivity. This impossible task is assigned to *Māyā* the mysterious power of the Lord, which is neither Being nor non-Being, neither identical with Brahman nor distinct from it, which by a process to be designated as neither action nor inaction, brings about this unreal but objective world as an apparent transformation of Brahman. Çankara is the first to admit that this is no explanation of the mystery of creation, but merely a restatement of it. But the trouble with the restatement is that it has only helped to render the mystery infinitely more mystifying.

## VII. - THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL (JIVATMA)

This is an exceptionally crucial question for Çankarācārya. The Advaita Vedānta, unlike most other schools, finds itself in a very paradoxical position with regard to the soul. Its avowed object is to save the soul, and yet it can never fully convince itself and others that there *really is* a soul to save, because it cannot in principle admit that there is an individual soul distinct from Brahman. This paradox will put Çankara's ingenuity to the most severe test.

That there is a spiritual principle in man which does not perish with the body is easily established.

« On account of certain popular modes of expression such as 'Devadatta is born', 'Devadatta has died' and the like, and

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem* p. 342.

on account of certain ceremonies such as Jātakarman, some people might fall into the error of thinking that the individual soul has a beginning, and in the end undergoes destruction. This error we are going to dispel.

« The individual soul has no beginning and is not subject to dissolution, since thus only it can be connected with the results of actions, as the Çāstra teaches. If the individual soul perished after the body, there would be no sense in the religious injunctions and prohibitions referring to the enjoyment and avoidance of pleasant and unpleasant things in another body (another birth). And Scripture says, 'This body indeed dies when the living soul has left it, the living soul does not die' (Ch. Up., VI. xi. 3).

« But it has been pointed out above that ordinary language speaks of the birth and the death of the individual soul! True, but the terms 'birth' and 'death', if applied to the soul, have to be taken in a secondary sense. What then is the thing to which those words apply in their primary sense, and with reference to which can we speak of a secondary sense? They apply, we answer, to whatever moves and whatever does not move. The words 'birth' and 'death' have reference to the bodies of moving and non-moving beings; for such beings are born (produced) and die. To them the terms 'birth' and 'death' apply in their primary sense; while they are used *metaphorically only* with reference to the soul dwelling in them... Whether the individual soul is produced from the highest Self like ether etc., or not, will be discussed in the next Sūtra; the present Sūtra merely states that the gross origination and dissolution which belong to the body do not affect the soul ». <sup>66</sup>

Our author is now ready to face the real problem. The Scriptures sometimes speak of souls as identical with Brahman, at other times as emanations from Brahman like sparks from fire, or again as creations of Brahman. What then are we to hold about the origin of the soul? The next Sūtra provides the answer, says Çankara. The Sūtra in question runs as follows: « nātmā, aṣṛuter-nityatvāt-ca tābhyah » (the soul is not [produced] as scriptures do not say so, and as it is eternal according to them). This Sūtra is interpreted in two different ways by Çankara and Rāmānuja. To Çankara, the soul is uncreated because it is identical with Brahman who is eternal. Are not the rest of the beings also identical with Brahman? Why then should they be said to be created? There is a difference, answers Çankara. Material creatures are not Brahman pure and simple, but merely apparent transforma-

<sup>66</sup> SBE. XXXVIII. pp. 28, 29.

tions of Brahman; at bottom they are illusions that have a beginning and an end. The soul on the other hand is Brahman itself as lying concealed under the above said illusion. Apparently it is part of the cosmic illusion, but in reality one with Brahman.

According to Rāmānuja, the individual soul is indeed an effect of Brahman like the material creation, and like the latter is a mode (prakāra) of Brahman. But while the material world is dissolved periodically and reduced to the potentiality of prime matter, spirits are only separated from their bodies, but retain their intellectuality and individual existence. Hence they are said to be eternal in a very special sense, and the material world said to be created.

To return to Çankara, this is how he poses the problem :

« There is a Self called the living one (the individual soul), which rules the body and the senses, and is connected with the fruits of actions. With regard to that Self the conflict of scriptural passages suggests the doubt, whether it is produced from Brahman like ether and the other elements, or if, like Brahman itself, it is unproduced. Some scriptural passages, by comparing it to sparks proceeding from a fire and so on, intimate that the living soul is produced from Brahman; from others again we learn that the highest Brahman, without undergoing any modification, passes, by entering into its effects (the elements), into the condition of the individual soul ». <sup>67</sup>

Before proposing his own solution to the problem Çankara takes care to range against himself all the arguments the opponents are likely to bring forward :

« The pūrvapakṣin [opponent] maintains that the individual soul is produced... Nor can the individual soul be conceived as mere modified highest Self, on account of the difference of their respective characteristics. For the highest Self is characterized by freedom from sin and so on, while the individual soul possesses the opposite attributes. That it is an effect, follows moreover from its being divided. For ether and all other things, in so far as divided, are effects, and we have concluded therefrom that they have an origin. Hence the soul also, which is distributed through all the bodies, doing good and evil and experiencing pleasure and pain, must be considered to originate at the time when the entire world is produced. We have moreover the following scriptural passage, ' As small sparks come forth from fire, thus from that Self all

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 29, 30.

vital airs etc.' (Br. Up., II. i. 20). This text teaches first the creation of the aggregate of objects of fruition, beginning with the vital airs, and then (in the words, 'all the Selves') separately teaches the creation of all the enjoying souls. Again we have the passage, 'As from a blazing fire sparks, being of the same nature as fire, fly forth a thousandfold, thus are various beings brought forth from the Imperishable, my friend, and return hither also' (Mu. Up., II. i. 1)... Nor can the fact that in some places (as, for instance, in the accounts of the creation of the elements) the creation of the soul is not mentioned, invalidate what is stated about it in other places; it being a general principle of interpretation that whatever new, and at the same time non-contradictory, matter is taught in some scriptural passage has to be combined with the teaching of all other passages ». <sup>68</sup>

The objection is formidable as set forth by Çankara himself. His main defence against it are the Scriptures, « for we know from scriptural passages that the soul is eternal, that it has no origin, that it is unchanging, that what constitutes the soul is the unmodified Brahman and that the soul has its Self in Brahman. A being of such a nature cannot be a product ». <sup>69</sup> Here he quotes a number of scriptural passages to confirm his contention that the soul is not produced but is the eternal Brahman itself. But how to account for the fact that the souls are many while Brahman is one and indivisible?

« But it has been argued above that the soul must be a modification because it is divided, and must have an origin because it is a modification. — It is not, we reply, in itself divided; for scripture declares that 'there is one God hidden in all beings, all-pervading, the Self within all beings' (Çvet. Up., vi. 11); it only appears divided owing to its limiting adjuncts, such as the mind and so on, just as the ether appears divided by its connection with jars and the like. ...The causal passages which speak of the soul's production and dissolution must therefore be interpreted on the ground of the soul's connexion with its limiting adjuncts; when the adjunct is produced or dissolved, the soul is also said to be produced or dissolved ». <sup>70</sup>

So it is the one indivisible Brahman that appears to be divided into the multitude of souls. But even granted this, would it not follow that Brahman is the agent and percipient in all these

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 30, 31.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem* p. 31.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem* p. 32.

individuals, particularly since the Scriptures themselves make statements such as the following: « There is no other knower but he » (Br. Up., III, vii. 23)?

« This is not so, we reply; because there is a difference of nature. From the circumstance that Brahman is connected with the hearts of all living beings it does not follow that it is, like the embodied Self, subject to fruition. For, between the embodied Self and the highest Self there is the difference that the former acts and enjoys, acquires merit and demerit, and is affected by pleasure, pain and so on; while the latter is of the opposite nature, i. e. characterized by being free from all evil and the like. On account of this difference of the two, the fruition of the one does not extend to the other. To assume merely on the ground of the *mutual proximity* of the two, without considering their essentially different powers, that a connexion with effects exists (in Brahman's case also), would be no better than to suppose that space is on fire (when something in space is on fire)... In reply to the assertion that, because Brahman is one and there are no other Selves outside it, Brahman must be subject to fruition since the individual soul is so, we ask the question: How have you, our wise opponent, ascertained that there is no other Self? You will reply, we suppose, from scriptural texts such as, 'That art Thou', 'I am Brahman', 'There is no other knower but he', and so on. Very well, then, it appears that the truth about scriptural matters is to be ascertained from Scripture, and that Scripture is not sometimes to be appealed to, and on other occasions to be disregarded ». <sup>71</sup>

Here we see what a staunch believer in the Vedas Çankara was. But his opponents have a similar complaint against him, that he accepts only the monistic statements of the Vedas as literally true, while he easily explains away the dualistic texts in a figurative sense.

The words we have *italicized* in the passage quoted above betray the weakness of Çankara's defence: it is not the *proximity* of Brahman and the soul that creates the difficulty, but their *identity*, and all the arguments adduced do not answer that difficulty. But there are still greater difficulties to tackle. If the individual soul is Brahman himself why should it find itself in such a hopeless predicament? how could it ever get involved in transmigration at all? The following objection raised in a slightly different context is perfectly applicable to our case.

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<sup>71</sup> SBE. XXXIV. p. 115.



« [Assuming the identity of Brahman and the embodied Self], the creative power of Brahman belongs to the embodied Self also, and the latter, being thus an independent agent, might be expected to produce only what is beneficial to itself, and not things of a contrary nature such as birth, death, old age, disease, and whatever may be the other meshes of the net of suffering. For we know that no free person will build a prison for himself, and take up his abode in it. Nor would a being, itself absolutely stainless, look on this altogether unclean body as forming part of its self. It would, moreover, free itself, according to its liking, of the consequences of those of its former actions which result in pain, and would enjoy the consequences of those actions only which are rewarded by pleasure. Further, it would remember that it had created this manifold world: for every person who has produced some clearly appearing effect remembers that he has been the cause of it. And as the magician easily retracts, whenever he likes, the magical illusion which he had emitted, so the embodied soul also would be able to reabsorb this world into itself. The fact is, however, that the embodied soul cannot reabsorb its own body even ». <sup>72</sup>

This is the argument of the adversary (enunciated so cleverly by Çankara) against admitting an intelligent agent as cause of the world. But at bottom it is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the doctrine of the identity of Brahman and the embodied soul.

The key to Çankara's answer to this serious difficulty is the distinction between the empiric order and the absolute one. On the empiric plane, where alone are creation, transmigration, birth and death valid and objective, Brahman and the embodied soul are not identical. Brahman there is *İçvara*, that is the Absolute in so far as veiled, limited and personalized by *Māyā*; the individual soul is *Jīva*, that is the Supreme Self as limited and individualized by *Avidyā*. And both of these, *İçvara* the creator and *Jīva* the creature, though objective have no absolute reality; they have only an empirical existence. On the absolute plane of reality on the other hand, the Supreme Self and the embodied self are one and the same; but then on that plane there is neither creation nor the distinction of Creator and creature. The defects of the transmigrating soul, therefore, are not shared by Brahman, because on the plane whereon he is one with the soul, there is no creation or transmigration, whereas on the plane whereon creation and transmigration take place he is *İçvara* the creator, different and distinct from the transmigrating soul.

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 343, 344.

« For scriptural passages [several are quoted here] declare differences founded on the relations of agent, object and so on, and thereby show Brahman to be different from the individual soul. And if it be objected that there are other passages declaratory of non-difference (for instance 'That art thou'), and that difference and non-difference cannot coexist because contradictory, we reply that the possibility of the coexistence of the two is shown by the parallel instance of the universal ether and the ether limited by a jar. Moreover, as soon as, in consequence of the declaration of non-difference contained in such passages as 'That art thou', the consciousness of non-difference arises in us, *the transmigratory state of the individual soul and the creative quality of Brahman vanish at once*, the whole phenomenon of plurality which springs from wrong knowledge being sublated by perfect knowledge ». <sup>73</sup>

As we see, the situation is saved only at the cost of reducing almost to nothing the reality of the individual soul *as individual*. But there is a subtle difference between the unreality of the material creation and that of individual souls. While the material world is illusion thrown upon Brahman, the souls are Brahman as seen through that veil of illusion. Under Māyā, Brahman presents himself on the one hand as *Īçvara* the creator, and on the other hand as *Jīva* the creature. And as long as this illusion lasts, these two forms of Brahman will function as distinct agents on the empiric plane, without mutually communicating attributes or fruits. But with the lifting of the veil not only the material world but also these two illusory aspects of Brahman will disappear. Concludes Çankara: « *Paramātman* [Supreme Spirit] by reason of connection with an *upādhi* (limiting adjunct) appears to partake of the attributes (of this *upādhi*) just as the formless fire seems to partake of the form of iron (in which it adheres). The *ātman* is, by its very nature, essentially unchangeable »; « Brahman and *ātman*, which are respectively designated by the terms 'That' and 'thou', are fully proved to be identical when investigated by the light of Vedic teaching ». <sup>74</sup>

### The Nature of the Phenomenal Ego (*Jivātman*)

So, there is, at least on the phenomenal plane, an individual soul distinct from Brahman. What is its nature? Here Vedānta borrows most of its psychology from Sāmkhya. According to this school there is a double personality in man: there is the spirit

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 344, 345.

<sup>74</sup> *Viveka-cūdāmaṇi*, verses 193, 243.

(puruṣa), the real « ego » out of all connection with matter, and there is a false « ego » which is implicated in matter and draws after it the spirit in transmigration. What actually informs the body is not the spirit, but a certain image of the spirit which is reflected in the mental organism made up of subtle matter. This image of the spirit informing matter behaves like a substitute for a rational soul, and constitutes the false or phenomenal « ego » called *Ahamkāra*. Under its influence matter behaves as if it had life and reason; and the real spirit watching these activities of matter provoked by its image, believes them to be its own and foolishly associates itself with them and assumes responsibility for them. Thenceforward it follows matter in transmigration because it believes itself to be bound: it behaves like a dog that remains in a place imagining itself to be chained to that spot.

Vedānta's *Jīva* is very similar to the *Ahamkāra* of Sāmkhya. *Brahma Sūtra*, in describing *Jīva*, uses the expression « *ābhāsa eva ca* » (i. e. it is only a shadow), which is thus interpreted by Çankara :

« And that individual soul is to be considered a mere appearance of the highest Self, like the reflection of the sun in the water; it is neither directly that (i. e. the highest Self) nor a different thing. Hence just as, when one reflected image of the sun trembles, another reflected image does not on that account tremble also; so, when one soul is connected with actions and results of actions, another soul is not on that account connected likewise. There is therefore no confusion of actions and results ». <sup>75</sup>

In his work *Upadeṣa-sāhasrī* he brings in the example of the image of the face reflected in a mirror :

« The Self, its reflection and the mental organism are compared to the face, its reflection and the mirror. The unreality of the reflected image is known from the scriptures and reasoning ». <sup>76</sup>

But the analogy of the shadow and the reflected image carries with it a special difficulty; for the object of the Advaita Vedānta is not to prove that the soul is an illusion like the rest of the cosmos, but that it is nothing but Brahman itself, though appearing to be a distinct entity due to the play of illusion. Now, it is easy to show that the image in a mirror is substanceless, but not quite as simple to demonstrate that it is identical with the face of which it is a reflection. Çankara's argument is based on the assumption

<sup>75</sup> SBE. XXXVIII. p. 68.

<sup>76</sup> *Upadeṣa-sāhasrī*, xviii. 43.

of that identity: « And the Self, like the face, is considered different from its reflection. But in fact, like the face, it is one with its reflection »<sup>77</sup> In spite of such assertions, the analogy does not help to prove the soul's identity with Brahman, but only its close similarity to him and absolute dependence on him.

Assuming the soul to be a shadow or a reflected image of Brahman only leads to worse embarrassments: how do we explain transmigration with only a shadow for its subject? Çankara recognizes the gravity of the problem:

« Who is the subject of transmigration since it cannot be the Self which is changeless, nor the image which is unreal, nor the 'ahamkāra' which is not a conscious entity? ».<sup>78</sup>

His reply:

« Let transmigration then be a mere illusion due to a want of discrimination (between the Self and the non-Self). However, it has an (apparent) existence due to the real existence of the changeless Self, and therefore appears to be pertaining to it. Just as the rope-snake, though unreal, has an existence due to that of the rope before the discrimination between the rope and the snake takes place; so, the transmigratory condition, though unreal, is possessed of an existence due to that of the changeless Self ».<sup>79</sup>

Çankara discusses the point at greater length in the Vedānta Bhāṣya:

« True, we reply. There is in reality no transmigrating soul different from the Lord. Still the connection (of the Lord) with limiting adjuncts, consisting of bodies and so on, is assumed, just as we assume the ether to enter into connection with diverse limiting adjuncts such as jars, pots, caves and the like. And just as in consequence of connection of the latter kind such conceptions and terms as 'the hollow (space) of a jar' etc. are generally current, although the space inside a jar is not really different from universal space, and just as in consequence thereof there generally prevails the false notion that there are different spaces such as the space of a jar and so on; so there prevails likewise the false notion that the Lord and transmigrating soul are different; a notion due to the non-discrimination of the (unreal) connection of the soul with the limiting conditions consisting of the body and so on ».<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, verse 33.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, verse 44.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, verses 45, 46.

<sup>80</sup> SBE. XXXIV. p. 51.

On this question of transmigration the Vedānta finds itself in a far worse predicament than the Sāmkhya. The latter has a real spirit to transmigrate. This spirit mistaking the movements of its shadow in matter for its own actions, foolishly implicates itself in matter. In Vedānta too we have the real Brahman and its shadow the individual soul. There is also the mistaking of the shadow for reality, which is the cause of transmigration. But how to put them together to make a workable scheme? To begin with, who is it that mistakes the shadow for the reality? It cannot be Brahman, evidently. Is it the shadow then? Çankara does not dare to say so. In all the explanations he gives, like the ones we have quoted above, the super-imposition is done by others. It is not the rope that imagines itself to be the serpent, nor the non-existing serpent that flings itself on the rope; it is the erroneous opinion of some one else that creates this imaginary snake. When that ignorance is removed, the snake too is sublated. But this cannot be true of the individual soul; for in that case as its existence depends on the ignorance of others, its liberation would result from the enlightenment of others too. Which is evidently unacceptable even to Çankara. This point will always remain one of the blind spots of Advaita Vedānta, and all the ingenuity of Çankara will not clarify it. Any talk about the transmigrating soul and its identity with Brahman can proceed only at the cost of shifting standpoints and leaving loose ends at every step. The individual soul is in reality identical with Brahman, yet it has to discover this identity; its individuality is merely illusory, and yet this illusion carries it through endless transmigrations; it has to labour hard to achieve liberation, and then discover that it had always been free and there was nothing to achieve. These are some of the puzzles provided by Advaita. The intricacy of the situation may be gathered from the following typical explanation of Çankara:

« That same highest Brahman constitutes — as we know from passages such as 'That art thou' — the real nature of the individual soul, while its second nature, i. e. the aspect of it which depends on fictitious limiting conditions, is not its real nature. For as long as the individual soul does not free itself from Nescience in the form of duality — which Nescience may be compared to the mistake of him who in the twilight mistakes a post for a man — and does not rise to the knowledge of the Self, whose nature is unchangeable, eternal Cognition — which expresses itself in the form 'I am Brahman' — so long it remains the individual soul. But when, discarding the aggregate of body, sense-organs and mind, it arrives, by means of Scripture, at the knowledge that it is not itself the aggregate, that it does not form part of transmigratory existence,

but is the True, the Real, the Self, whose nature is pure intelligence; then knowing itself to be of the nature of unchangeable, eternal Cognition, it lifts itself above the vain conceit of being one with this body, and itself becomes the Self, whose nature is unchanging, eternal Cognition... And this is the real nature of the individual soul by means of which it arises from the body and appears in its own form ». <sup>81</sup>

From the above it is plain that it is the individual soul that has to recognize its true identity with Brahman. But what is that individual soul? Is it the image of Brahman mentioned above? It cannot be; because the image itself is an illusion. It can only be Brahman himself in so far as he is invested with the said image or shadow. It must then be he who mistakes the shadow for the substance and attributes to himself the material limitations of the shadow. But can Brahman, even under the veil of *Māya*, be guilty of such a flagrant mistake? At this point the argumentation takes a slightly different direction and presents the whole question from the standpoint of a third person, the man of the 'rope-snake':

« Thus the embodiedness and the non-embodiedness of the Self are due merely to discrimination and non-discrimination... The individual soul is therefore called 'That whose true nature is non-manifest' merely on account of the absence of discriminative knowledge; and it is called 'That whose nature has become manifest' on account of the presence of such knowledge... *The whole process is similar to that by which an imagined snake passes over into a rope as soon as the mind of the beholder has freed itself from its erroneous imagination* ». <sup>82</sup>

Without calling in a third person to witness it is impossible to give even a semblance of consistency to the illusion theory. But if the illusion is attributed to a third person, the whole problem of the transmigrating soul will remain untouched.

But how did the supreme Self get embodied in the first place, and how did this *samsāra* (transmigration) start at all? To this question Çankara's reply is that the question is out of place, because this embodiment and transmigration never began, it has always been so. According to him any other hypothesis implicates one in contradictions. We quote below a part of Çankara's reply to an objection based on the inequality of creation:

« This objection we meet by the remark that the transmigratory world is without beginning. The objection would be va-

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 185, 186.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 187, 189.

lid if the world had a beginning; but as it is without beginning, merit and inequality are, like seed and sprout, caused as well as causes, and there is therefore no logical objection to their operation...

« Without merit and demerit nobody can enter into existence, and again, without a body merit and demerit cannot be formed; so that, on the doctrine of the world having a beginning, we are led into a logical see-saw. The opposite doctrine, on the other hand, explains all matters in a manner analogous to the case of the seed and sprout, so that no difficulty remains ». <sup>83</sup>

The problem to be solved was whether the creatures when first created were all equal, as one should expect them to have been, since no one had yet any merit or demerit. But that would be against the order of the world, as there could not be any order if all things were absolutely alike. So we must assume that in creating the world for the first time God arbitrarily made differences among creatures, which again would argue against his goodness and equity. Çankara answers the objection by denying altogether the ground for it: there really was no first creation to argue about. Differences are due to the actions of the previous birth, and that birth to its previous birth and so on 'ad infinitum'. The same is the answer to our present difficulty as to how Brahman ever got embodied. He never *got* embodied, he has always *been* so.

If such is the case, how can any one hope to be liberated from this bondage? A thing without a beginning cannot have an end. Not so, assures Çankara. Though *samsāra* has no beginning it can have an end, because when it comes to an end it is not really coming to an end, but we realize that it never existed:

« Ignorance has no beginning, and this also applies to its effects; but upon the production of knowledge, ignorance, although without beginning, is entirely destroyed as is everything of dream life upon awakening. Even though without beginning this is not eternal, being clearly analogous to *prāg-abhāva* (antecedent non-existence) ». <sup>84</sup>

### VIII. - THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE SOUL

Now we can settle down on the empiric plane and speak more easily about the soul as an entity distinct from Brahman, as we have already spoken about *Içvara* the creator of the world. Viewed

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 360, 361.

<sup>84</sup> *Viveka-cūdāmaṇi*, verses 200, 201.

in this way what are the attributes of the soul? All admit that intelligence is the first and foremost attribute of the soul; but all do not agree on the place to allot to intelligence in the make up of the soul. Here it is not question of actual intellection which is a transient act, but of intellectuality in the abstract. According to the Vaiçṣika school, intellectuality, though a very necessary and inseparable quality of the soul, is not its essence, which is the simple spiritual substance. The Sāṃkhya on the contrary holds that intellectuality is the very essence of the spirit, which opinion is shared by most Vedantic schools. Commenting on the Vedānta Sūtra: « Jñā 'ta eva » (It is intelligent for this very reason — II, iii, 18), Çankara writes:

« The pūrvapakṣin [opponent] maintains that the intelligence of the Self is adventitious, and is produced by the conjunction of the Self with the 'manas' [internal sense], just as, for instance, the quality of redness is produced in a jar by the conjunction of the jar with fire. For if the soul were of eternal (essential) intelligence, it would remain intelligent in the states of deep sleep, swoon and possession, while as a matter of fact, men when waking from deep sleep and so on declare in reply to questions addressed to them that they were not conscious of anything. Men in their ordinary state, on the other hand, are seen to be (actively) intelligent. Hence, as intelligence is clearly intermittent, we conclude that the Self's intelligence is adventitious only.

« To this we reply that the soul is eternal intelligence, for that very reason that it is not a product but nothing else but the unmodified highest Brahman which, owing to the contact with its limiting aduncts, appears as individual soul. That intelligence constitutes the essential nature of the highest Brahman, we know from scriptural passages. Now if the individual soul is nothing but the highest Brahman, then eternal intelligence constitutes the soul's essential nature also... The absence of actual intelligizing is due to the absence of objects, not to the absence of intelligence; just as the light pervading space is not apparent owing to the absence of things to be illuminated, not to the absence of its own nature ».<sup>85</sup>

The next question raised regards the magnitude of the soul: is it *vibhu* (all-pervading) or *anu* (atomic, that is, of limited measure)? There are passages in the Scriptures that describe the soul as 'anguṣṭha-mātra' (of the measure of the thumb), and others that assert it to be all-pervading. There is also a third hypothesis possible, that the soul assumes the size of the body it inhabits.

<sup>85</sup> SBE. XXXVIII. pp. 33-35.



That is the opinion of the Janists, who have some very ingenious solutions to the most difficult problems. The spiritual soul, they say, has no particular dimension, but it accommodates itself to the body it inhabits. Thus it follows the body as the latter grows from a tiny embryo to adult size; nor does it find any difficulty in transmigrating from the body of an elephant to that of an ant. This opinion is summarily dismissed by Çankara as altogether unreasonable; but from his arguments it is plain that he had a less clear grasp than the Janists of the nature of a spiritual substance.

« The Jainas are of opinion that the soul has the same size as the body. From this it would follow that the soul is not of infinite extension, but limited, and hence non-eternal like jars and similar things. Further, as the bodies of different classes of creatures are of different size, it might happen that the soul of a man — which is of the size of the human body — when entering, in consequence of its former deeds, on a new state of existence in the body of an elephant would not be able to fill the whole of it; or else that a human soul being relegated to the body of an ant would not be able to find sufficient room in it. The same difficulty would, moreover, arise with regard to the successive stages of one state of existence, infancy, youth and old age ». <sup>86</sup>

There remain the two other alternatives: the soul is either atomic in size or all-pervading. Those who maintain that the soul is atomic in size have some very important scriptural pronouncements in their favour. The Vedas frequently speak about the soul as entering a body or going out of it; which cannot have any sense if the soul is all-pervading. Besides, the Scriptures explicitly mention the minuteness of the soul e. g. « That living soul is to be known as part of the hundredth part of the point of a hair divided a hundred times ». <sup>87</sup> But, if the soul is atomic, how can it fill the body? The reply is that the soul though occupying one point of the body — the heart, to be exact — pervades the whole body with its quality of intellectuality, just as a lamp placed in a room pervades the whole room with its light, or a drop of sandal ointment fills the surrounding space with its fragrance. Çankara denies the atomicity of the soul; to him the soul is all-pervading because it is identical with Brahman:

« The soul is not of atomic size, since the Scripture does not declare it to have had an origin. On the contrary, as Scripture speaks of the highest Brahman entering into the elements and

<sup>86</sup> SBE. XXXIV. p. 431.

<sup>87</sup> Çvet. Up., V. 9.

teaches that it is their Self, the soul is nothing else but the highest Brahman. And if the soul is the highest Brahman, it must be of the same extent as Brahman. Now, Scripture states Brahman to be all-pervading. Therefore the soul is also all-pervading ». <sup>88</sup>

The examples of the lamp and the sandal ointment do not help, says Çankara, because it is not right to say that the lamp sends out its activity, or that the ointment diffuses its quality around. There is no « actio in distans », nor do accidents extend beyond the limits of their substances.

« Nor must you say that the case of the soul is analogous to that of the light diffused from a lamp; for that light itself is admitted to be (not a quality but) a substance. The flame of a lamp is substantial light with its particles crowded close to one another; the light diffused from that flame is substantial light whose particles are thin and scattered ». <sup>89</sup>

« Nor again is it possible that a quality of an atom should diffuse itself beyond the atom. For qualities occupy the same place with the substances of which they are qualities, and a quality not abiding in its substance would no longer be a quality... Hence odour also, being avowedly a quality, can exist in so far only as it inheres in its substance; otherwise it would cease to be odour [that is to say, if we find odour diffused in space we must assume that particles of matter having that odour are diffused in space]...

« If the intelligence of the soul pervades the whole body, the soul cannot be atomic; for intelligence constitutes the soul's proper nature, just as heat and light constitute that of fire. A separation of the two as quality and that which is qualified does not exist. Now it has already been shown that the soul is not of the same size as the body; the only remaining alternative therefore is that it is all-pervading ». <sup>90</sup>

But how is it then that the Scriptures speak of the soul as entering into and going out of the body, and describe its size as infinitesimal? Such passages, answers Çankara, are to be understood in a figurative sense, as referring only to the apparent and illusory conjunction of the soul with the phenomenal world. That apparent conjunction with the body and the consequent activities are all limited; but they have nothing to do with the real nature of the soul.

<sup>88</sup> SBE. XXXVIII. p. 42.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem* p. 40.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem* p. 43.

« Moreover we have the scriptural passage: ' That living soul is to be known as part of the hundredth part of the point of a hair divided a hundred times, *and yet it is to be infinite* ' (Çvet. Up., v. 9), which at first states the soul to be atomic and then teaches it to be infinite. Now this is appropriate only in the case of the atomicity of the soul being metaphorical while its infinity is real; for both statements cannot be taken in their primary sense at the same time. And the infinity certainly cannot be understood in a metaphorical sense, since all the Upaniṣads aim at showing that Brahman constitutes the Self of the soul ». <sup>91</sup>

### Is the Soul an Agent?

Hindu philosophy in general has a congenital prejudice against action, because it is action that binds one to transmigration. According to some schools, particularly the Advaita of Çankara, even good actions necessitate rebirth, albeit in a better condition. Final liberation is bound up with complete cessation of all activity.

The 'prima facie' (pūrva-pakṣa) arguments in favour of assuming the soul to be an agent are many. First of all there are the Scriptures that assert that the soul migrates from body to body, and, what is even more conclusive, prescribe actions to be performed by individuals, which would be meaningless if the individual soul is no agent.

Another argument of the opponents adduced by Çankara is this: it is useless to explain away the activity of the soul by saying, as the Sāṅkhya and the Vedānta do, that it really belongs not to the soul but to 'buddhi' or 'manas' (the mental organism composed of subtle matter), because the mental organism is only an instrument with which the soul acts. If 'buddhi' itself were to be considered an agent, you will have to admit that it is a self-conscious entity, and a substance; in which case you will have to invent another instrument for the said substance to act with. Most Hindu schools maintain that no substance is immediately operative; every agent needs an instrument to act with.

Çankara admits that the individual soul is an agent on the phenomenal plane; but like everything else on that plane, both the agentship and the activity are mere illusions superimposed on the Self by Avidyā. Activity does not belong to the true nature of the soul; if it did, the soul could never be liberated as it could never renounce activity which is the cause of bondage.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibidem p. 44.

« It is not to be supposed that the agentship of the Self belongs to its true nature, as heat belongs to the nature of fire. But just as in ordinary life a carpenter as long as working with his axe and other tools undergoes pain, while on the other hand he enjoys ease and leisure after having finished his work, laid his tools aside and returned to his home; so the Self also, as long as it is joined with duality presented by Nescience and is an agent in the states of waking and dreaming, undergoes pain; but as soon as, for the purpose of shaking off its weariness, it enters into its own highest Self, it frees itself from the complex of effects and instruments, and enjoys full ease in the state of deep sleep. And in the state of final release also, the Self, having dispelled the darkness of ignorance by the light of knowledge, and having reached the state of absolute isolation and rest, enjoys full ease ».<sup>92</sup>

### Individual Freedom and Divine Concurrence

This is an interesting question discussed by Çankara as well as by other Hindu theologians. Here of course we must for the time being forget that the individual soul is identical with Brahman and consider it merely as it is on the phenomenal plane, a finite spiritual being distinct from Brahman. Viewed in that way, is the activity of the individual soul entirely its own? With the nature and faculties at its disposal is it able to act by itself without the intervention of God?

« The pūrvapakṣin maintains that the soul as far as it is an agent does not depend on the Lord, because the assumption of such a dependence would serve no purpose. For as the individual soul has motives in its own imperfections, such as passion, aversion and so on, and is furnished with the whole apparatus of the other constituents of action, it is able to occupy on its own account the position of an agent; and what then should the Lord do for it? Nor does ordinary experience show that in addition to the oxen which are required for such actions as ploughing and the like, the Lord also is to be depended upon. Moreover (if the activity depended on the Lord), it would follow that the Lord is cruel because imposing on his creatures activity which is essentially painful, and at the same time unjust because allotting to their activities unequal results. [But if it is argued that the Lord cannot be charged with cruelty and injustice because in allotting reward or punishment his judgement depends on the evaluation of the

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 54, 55.

merits and demerits of the creatures in question, the objector will still insist that] such dependence is possible only if there exist religious merit and demerit on the part of the creatures, and these again exist if the soul is an agent... Hence the soul's activity is independent ». <sup>93</sup>

These objections have no force, says Çankara, because the Scriptures explicitly teach that the Lord is the causal agent in all activity:

« For although the soul has its own imperfections, such as passion and so on, for motives, and is furnished with the whole apparatus of action, and although ordinary experience does not show that the Lord is a cause in occupations such as ploughing and the like, yet we ascertain from Scripture that the Lord is a causal agent in all activity. For Scripture says, ' He makes him whom he wishes to lead up from these worlds, do a good deed; and the same makes him whom he wishes to lead down from these worlds, do a bad deed ' (Kau. Up., iii. 8); and again ' He who dwelling within the self pulls the self within ' (Çat. Br., XIV. vi. 7, 30) ». <sup>94</sup>

But if the Lord is the mover in all the activity of the soul, where is the place for free will and responsibility? Here is Çankara's answer to this difficult question:

« The Lord makes the soul act, having regard to the efforts made by it, whether meritorious or non-meritorious. Hence there is no room for the objections raised. Having regard to the inequality of the virtuous and vicious actions of the souls, the Lord, acting as a mere occasional cause, allots to them corresponding unequal results. An analogous case is furnished by rain. As rain constitutes the common occasional cause for shrubs, bushes, corn and so on, which belong to different species and spring each from its particular seed — for the inequality of their sap, flowers, fruits and leaves results neither when rain is absent nor when the special seeds are absent —; so we also must assume that the Lord arranges favourable or unfavourable circumstances for the souls with a view to their former efforts. [Here the adversary objects:] But if the activity of the soul is dependent on something else, this having regard (on the part of the Lord) to former efforts is inappropriate. — By no means, we reply; for *although the activity of the soul is not independent, yet the soul does act. The Lord*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem* p. 58.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem* p. 59.

*indeed causes it to act, but it acts itself. Moreover, the Lord in causing it to act now has regard to its former efforts, and he caused it to act in a former existence, having regard to its efforts previous to that existence; a regressus against which, considering the eternity of the 'samsāra', no objection can be raised ».*<sup>95</sup>

Here we have an admirable attempt to explain the mystery as clearly as it is possible in human terms. All activity and physical movement come from God, and yet it is the soul that freely acts. Human reason compels us to admit this much. Beyond that the mind cannot penetrate; there will always remain a residue of mystery at the heart of the problem. But the explanation of Çankara while throwing light on the divine 'concurus', carefully avoids the problem of the initial choice of the free will: the soul acts in this particular way because the Lord moves it in that way, and the Lord moves it so in view of the dispositions produced in it by its past actions; and these past actions in their turn were determined by the 'concurus' which was itself determined by the actions preceding it. And so on backwards to eternity. The problem of the free will is thus only thrown back beyond reach, never faced squarely. But then we must admit that no philosophy can adequately explain the mystery of the free will.

#### IX. - KARMA-SAMSARA AND MUKTI

The doctrine of *Karma-samsāra* or the transmigration of souls is the most fundamental tenet of Hinduism, the one doctrine never called in question by any Hindu sect, and equally shared by the dissident groups like the Buddhists and the Jains. They differ among themselves only on minor details regarding the manner in which transmigration takes place, and the means to be employed to put an end to this recurring evil. *Mukti* means 'deliverance' from this iron ring of endless births and deaths, and all the various religious systems and even philosophical schools have been devised with the sole purpose of bringing about this deliverance.

This universality of acceptance has spared Çankara the trouble of proving karma-samsāra; indeed no Hindu philosopher has ever felt constrained to prove it. But in accepting this doctrine Çankara the metaphysician was forced to find a place in his system for a whole gamut of mythological appendages inseparable from it. This section of his *Bhāṣya* therefore presents a spirit almost in contrast with the highly philosophical tone of the rest of the work. But we must remember that he is only commenting upon the work

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 59, 60.

of Bādarāyaṇa, closely following the order and subject matter of the Brahma-sūtras.

Karma-samsāra is accepted not only as an established truth, but as a beginningless process. Assuming a beginning to the world and the transmigratory process would involve one in a vicious circle says Çankara: « Without merit and demerit nobody can enter into existence, and again, without a body merit and demerit cannot be formed; so that on the doctrine of the world having a beginning we are led into a logical see-saw ». <sup>96</sup> So leaving aside the question of its beginning, let us watch how it works.

*Karma* literally means 'action'. In a technical sense it is sometimes used to denote Vedic Rites as opposed to *Jñāna* (Vedantic Wisdom). In the present context it stands for all moral actions, good or bad, in so far as they produce in the agent certain subtle impressions called *samskāra*, which in their turn necessitate transmigration (*samsāra*). According to Advaita Vedānta good actions as well as bad call for transmigration, in different conditions of course, in the former case to enjoy the fruits of good works, in the latter to suffer the punishment for sins.

The above mentioned *samskāras* or subtle impressions accumulate in the subtle body which accompanies the soul in all its vicissitudes until they wear themselves out by producing their destined fruit. It must be noted that Indian philosophy conceives of matter in two conditions, gross and subtle. The vague, indeterminate, indefinable prime matter (*prakṛti*) in the process of evolution differentiates itself into the five prime elements remaining still in an imperceptible condition. This is subtle (*sūkṣma*) matter, which after further evolution and transformation results in the gross (*sthūla*) matter we perceive. The visible, external body of man is composed of gross matter, and it is this body that the soul leaves behind at death. But within it is the subtle body built up of vital airs, internal senses and the mental organism, which adheres to the soul as long as the traces of *karma* linger in it, thus binding the soul to transmigration. This subtle body is a link as it were between the spiritual soul and the material gross body.

« The soul accompanied by the chief vital airs, the sense organs and the mind, and taking with itself nescience (*avidyā*), moral good or ill-desert (*karman*), and the impressions left by its previous existences, leaves its former body and obtains a new body... Here a question arises whether the soul when going to the new body is enveloped or not by subtle parts of the elements constituting the seeds of the body. — It is not so enveloped, the *pūrvapakṣin* says... To this the teacher replies, 'in obtaining another it goes enveloped'. That means :

<sup>96</sup> SBE. XXXIV. pp. 360, 361.

we must understand that the soul when passing from one body to another is enveloped by the subtle parts of the elements which are the seeds of the new body... As the mode of obtaining a new body is thus declared by Çruti, all hypotheses which owe their origin to the mind of man only are to be set aside because they are contradicted by Scripture ». <sup>97</sup>

The mass of *karma* that a soul has accumulated through the past eternity is so enormous that in the normal course even a thousand births would not suffice to exhaust the store. That part of *karma* which has begun to fructify in the present life is called *prārabdha-karma*; what is left over for future births is known as *sancita-karma*; and what is being newly formed in the current life *kriyāmāṇa-karma*. Unfortunately, in most human beings, the amount of *karma* newly formed far exceeds the amount deleted in one life, so that at the end of one life the soul finds itself more heavily burdened than at the start. Hence the interminableness of *samsāra*.

But repeated births alone will not satisfy the law of *karma*. As merits and demerits do not normally cancel out, there is also need of a variety of conditions of existence to permit the diverse merits and demerits to produce their fruits. To this end there is an ascending order of heavens above and a descending order of hells below, all of which are *bhoga-bhūmi* (worlds of fruition) because there merits and demerits fructify, but no new ones are acquired. This world alone is *karma-bhūmi* (world of action) where merits and demerits can form. But even in this world there is diversity to suit *karma*: the whole range of animal and vegetable life with varying grades of perfection in each order. Now, among all this infinite variety of states and conditions on earth, in the heavens and the hells, there is only one state, that of man, in which the soul can acquire merit or demerit. In all the others, the soul can passively expiate part of its *karma*, but never augment it. In one sense the condition of man is disadvantageous, because both merit and demerit compel transmigration; but there is at the same time a very great advantage attached to it, for in that condition alone can the soul work out its salvation, that is, actively and effectively reduce its *karma*, even delete it entirely. All the Hindu religious and philosophic systems are attempts to devise ways of doing it.

For Pūrva-Mīmāṃsa, vedic rites are the only means of deliverance; Sāṃkya-Yoga gives that privilege to asceticism and mental absorption. Many of the religious sects with their theistic theologies consider *bhakti* (love and devotion to a Personal God) as the essential means of salvation. To Advaita Vedānta, the only thing

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<sup>97</sup> SBE. XXXVIII. pp. 102-104.



that counts is *jñāna* (intuitive knowledge) of the Absolute, Impersonal Brahman. All these schools, though once intolerant of one another, have ended up in a compromise, each one holding to its own means as the most efficacious while admitting the others as useful up to a point. Here we are only concerned with the compromise as conceived by Bādarāyana and developed by Çankara in his Advaita Vedānta.

### The Three Paths of Samsāra

There are three paths open to transmigrating souls according to their respective deserts. Two of them lead upwards and one down. We may summarily dismiss the lower path. It is for those wicked souls that have neither works nor wisdom to their credit. Wisdom here means at least faith in the Lower Brahman, that is, the personal aspect of Brahman. Works in question are vedic rites, austerities, charitable works etc., even though performed without any special reference to God. The reprobate souls that have no such merits sink after their death to the subterranean world *Samyamana*, the abode of Yama, or even lower to one of the seven hells all under the rule of Yama. Thence, after countless ages of torments, they return to the earth to resume their pilgrimage starting from the lowest forms of life. It is to be noted that according to the doctrine almost universally held by the Hindus, no soul is destined to remain eternally in hell.

« Those who are neither entitled, through knowledge, to follow the road of the gods, nor, by works, to follow the road of the fathers, for those there is a third path on which they repeatedly return to the existence of small animals...

« The latter descend to *Samyamana*, the abode of Yama, suffer there the torments of Yama corresponding to their evil deeds, and then again reascend to this world. Such is their ascent and descent; as we maintain on the ground of such a course being declared by Scripture...

« Moreover the purāṇa-writers record that there are seven hells, Raurava etc. by name, which serve as abodes of enjoyment of the fruits of evil deeds ».<sup>98</sup>

The two paths leading upwards are the path of the gods and the path of the fathers, the former reaching to one of the heavens above, the latter stopping short at the moon; the one is a path of no return, the other provides only a temporary relief from the travails of *samsāra*. These two paths have been admitted into the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibidem pp. 124, 122, 123.

scheme of the Advaita Vedānta as a compromise and concession to the other systems, whereby sacrifices, austerities, devotion to a Personal God, are all allotted their respective shares of efficacy, but carefully kept in their places as subsidiary to wisdom.

We shall first discuss the lower one of these paths, that of the fathers. It is meant for those who have performed works, but not acquired wisdom.

« Scripture states that the souls of those who perform sacrifices and the like, rise on the road leading through smoke, and so on, to the sphere of the moon, and when they have done with the enjoyment (of the fruits of their works) again descend ». <sup>99</sup>

We have remarked above that merits and demerits do not cancel out. It is only wisdom that has the power of deleting *karma*. Works only produce their fruits good or bad as the case may be. So if a man in his lifetime has committed many crimes, but also performed a few good works, say sacrifices, he cannot reap these contrary fruits simultaneously. After death, good works obtain the priority of fruition, and the soul wrapped in its subtle body ascends by the path of the fathers to the moon, where it remains until the good fruits are all exhausted. Then it has to descend to this world to atone for its past demerits if it has any, or for the simple reason that it has not yet acquired wisdom without which final liberation is impossible. The condition of its rebirth will depend on the presence or absence of these demerits and the gravity thereof.

« Then, at the passing away of the works, i. e. when works performed such as sacrifices etc. are by the enjoyment of their fruits exhausted, the souls descend with a remainder yet left... For Scripture declares manifestly that the souls descend joined with such a remainder, ' Those whose conduct (*carāṇa*) has been good will quickly attain some good birth, the birth of a Brāhmaṇa, or a Kṣatriya, or a Vaiçya. But those whose conduct has been evil will quickly attain an evil birth, the birth of a dog, or a hog, or a Caṇḍāla ». <sup>100</sup>

Even the path of descent has been carefully charted out for these souls:

« We now have to inquire into the mode of that descent. On this point Scripture makes the following statement: « They

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem* p. 112.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem* p. 114.

return again the way they came, to the ether, from the ether to the air. Then the sacrificer having become air becomes smoke, having become smoke he becomes mist, having become mist he becomes a cloud, having become a cloud he rains down ' ». <sup>101</sup>

Up to this point, says Çankara, the return journey is straight and swift; but thereafter it is long and hazardous. The soul thus rained down finds its way into some plant, not to be incorporated in it — only wicked souls returning from hell are sometimes reborn as plants — but to wait for that plant to be eaten by some animal, and perhaps that animal by another animal, and so on till it chances upon the right species of animal or man, and wait for that individual to procreate so that it may enter into the embryo and be reborn. <sup>102</sup> We can now leave the soul to its own resources.

The way of the fathers, therefore, is not altogether valueless. It leads upward and provides the soul with a temporary rest-house to relieve the fatigue and monotony of its interminable pilgrimage, though it does not lead to real liberation. This is the maximum benefit to be reaped from mere works, that is, sacrifices, asceticism etc., practiced without the knowledge of Brahman or special reference to God.

The way of the gods, on the other hand, leads to the heavens from where the souls do not have to return to *samsāra* :

« From çruti as well as smṛti we are acquainted with the way of him who has heard the Upanishads or the secret knowledge, i. e. who knows Brahman. That way, called the path of the gods, is described (Pra. Up. I, 10), ' Those who have sought the Self by penance, abstinence, faith and knowledge, gain by the northern path the sun. This is the home of the spirits, the immortal, free from fear, the highest. From thence they do not return ' ». <sup>103</sup>

This path is for those who have some knowledge of Brahman, however imperfect. Those who have realized the intuitive vision of Brahman do not have to follow any path as we shall presently see. Here it is question of an imperfect knowledge of Brahman. We must recall the distinction, noted earlier in this treatise, between the two aspects of Brahman, and between the corresponding two forms of religion. The Impersonal Brahman is the higher aspect, the Personal Īçvara the lower aspect of the divinity. The intuitive

<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem* p. 127.

<sup>102</sup> Vide *ibidem* pp. 128-132.

<sup>103</sup> SBE. XXXIV. p. 128.

knowledge of the first is the higher religion leading to immediate liberation (kṣaṇa-mukti), while faith and devotion to the second is the lower religion which brings about gradual liberation (krama-mukti). All those devoties who worship God in the diverse hindu sects, as well as those who perform sacrifices or austerities, provided they do it with the knowledge of God and the intention of pleasing Him, are fit for this path. By this generous gesture Advaita Vedānta tries to pacify the numerous *bhakti* schools and religious sects that between them comprise the vast majority of Hindus. But even here Çankara insists that the liberative efficacy of this lower religion derives not from the love and devotion, or sacrifices and austerities practiced, but rather from the knowledge of Brahman implied in them:

« Not by faith and austerities alone, we reply, unaided by knowledge, can that path be attained; for another scripture passage says, 'Through knowledge they mount to that place from which all wishes have passed away; those who are skilled in works only do not go there, nor penitents devoid of knowledge' (Çat. Br. X. v. 4, 16) ». <sup>104</sup>

At this point mythology takes over. Along this path are ranged in ascending order seven heavens presided over by as many vedic deities in their order of superiority. The highest, *Brahmaloka*, is the abode of Brahma the personal God. The soul leaving the body is led up the path by celestial nymphs (apsaras). This guidance is necessary, observes Çankara, because in the absence of the body the soul is incapable of any activity, its faculties remaining 'wrapped up'. At every stage of the journey the soul is illumined more and more till in the heaven of Brahma it comes to know fully and intuitively the true nature of Brahman the Impersonal. However it has still to wait for its final liberation which consists in its identification with the Absolute. In the mean time it shares in all the glory and beatitude of the personal Brahma, which however is not infinite as the personal aspect of Brahman itself is empirical and limited.

« According to him [Jaimini] the soul's own nature is 'like that of Brahman', that is, it comprises all the qualities beginning with freeness from sin and concluding with truthfulness of conception... and also omniscience and omnipotence; and in this nature the soul manifests itself ». <sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> SBE. XXXVIII. p. 234.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem* p. 408.

But, adds Çankara,

« The lordly power of those who take their stand on the effected Brahman is not absolute, for that reason also that Scripture teaches that their enjoyment is only equal to that of the eternally perfect Lord [i. e. the personal Içvara who is himself limited] ». <sup>106</sup>

At this point all the *bhakti* schools and religious sects bring their eschatology to what they believe a happy conclusion. They make the highest heaven everlasting, and let the soul retain its individuality in order to share in the glory and beatitude of the Personal God for all eternity. Of course they too make concessions to Advaita Vedānta. They admit that there is also an Impersonal aspect to Brahman, which according to them is not the higher form, and any cynic metaphysician is free to lose himself in it if he so choose. But for their part, they would « rather taste honey than become it ». But to the Advaitin it would be a pity to condemn souls — even the souls of men belonging to dissenting schools — to everlasting happiness with no prospect of release. So these beatified souls also will finally be released, which will happen at the end of the cosmic cycle. At the close of each such cycle, when the whole material and spiritual creation — which are in reality only appearances superimposed on Brahman — will be withdrawn into Brahman and reduced to potentiality awaiting a new creation, those beatified souls that have attained to perfect intuition of Brahman will be released by being identified with him. The rest of the souls will be reduced to potentiality and kept waiting for the next cosmic cycle when they will have to resume their journey at the point at which they had broken off.

« When the reabsorption of the effected Brahman world draws near, the souls in which meanwhile perfect knowledge has sprung up proceed, together with Hiranyagarbha the ruler of the world, to 'what is higher than that', i. e. to the pure highest place of Vishnu. This is the release by successive steps which we have to accept on the basis of the scriptural declarations about the non-return of the souls. For we have shown that the Highest cannot be directly reached by the act of going ». <sup>107</sup>

#### **Instantaneous Liberation (Ksana-mukti)**

This is the most ideal type of liberation and Advaita Vedānta is the way to it. It is altogether a category apart because, unlike

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem* p. 418.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem* p. 391.

the souls on the three paths mentioned above, these souls do not travel after death. The reason is indicated by Çankara in the last sentence of the text quoted above. You can go to the personal Içvara because he is only a limited and localized aspect of Brahman. But the absolute Brahman is everywhere, It is everything, but above all your own inmost Self: what need or possibility is there of going to It?

« From all these passages we ascertain that the highest Brahman is present everywhere, within everything, the Self of everything, and of such a Brahman it is altogether impossible that it should ever be the goal of going ». <sup>108</sup>

Though the liberation itself is instantaneous and the soul has no further journey to make after death, the preparation for it in this life is long and arduous. To begin with, the aspirant has to fulfil all the duties of his caste and condition according to the Scriptures. This is only a remote preparation. Then follows the most essential exercise, meditation. The elaborate discipline of the Yoga is adopted in full as a necessary aid to concentration. This meditation has to continue uninterrupted until death, says Bādarāyaṇa; but Çankara in his commentary remarks that though meditation in general must continue until death, the discursive part of it relating to Brahman itself will have to come to an end when one reaches the stage of intuitive realization:

« But now a distinction is made. Those meditations which aim at complete knowledge terminate — in the same way as the beating of the rice grains is terminated by the husks becoming detached from the grains — with their effect being accomplished; for as soon as the effect, i. e. perfect knowledge has been obtained, no further effort can be commanded, since scriptural instruction does not apply to him who knows that Brahman — which is not an object of injunction — constitutes his Self ». <sup>109</sup>

The essential fruit of this intuitive realization is the radical cancellation of all the accumulated *karma* of the soul and the preclusion of future *karma* for the rest of its life on earth: « On the obtainment of Brahman there takes place the non-clinging (to the agent) of the posterior sins and the annihilation of anterior ones ». <sup>110</sup> But though the soul is spiritually liberated, it is still physically bound to the body as long as this present life lasts.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem* p. 394.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem* p. 351.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem* p. 354.

For in spite of accumulated karmas being deleted and fresh ones precluded, *prārabdha-karma* or that part of the past karma which has actually begun to produce its fruits in this life must be allowed to run its course. It is only when that too has completely worn itself out and life terminated that the soul can pass over to the plane of the Absolute and lose itself in Brahman.

« It has been shown that all good and evil deeds whose effects have not yet begun are extinguished by the power of knowledge. 'The two others', on the other hand, i. e. those good and evil works whose effects have begun, a man has at first to exhaust by the fruition of their consequences, and then he becomes one with Brahman. This appears from scriptural passages such as 'For him there is delay so long as he is not delivered (from the body), then he will become one with Brahman' (Br. Up., IV. iv. 6) ». <sup>111</sup>

Such a soul has no more to fear rebirth. However there are some exceptional souls, charged with great missions to carry out in the world, who are repeatedly reborn on earth, not indeed for the expiation of their *karma*, but for the fulfilment of their office.

« So the Aparātmās and other Lords to whom the highest Lord has entrusted certain offices, last — although they possess complete knowledge, the cause of release — as long as their office lasts, their works not yet being exhausted, and obtain release only when their office comes to an end ». <sup>112</sup>

The expedient by which these liberated souls are kept going through repeated rebirths is the slackening of the tempo of their *prārabdha-karma*, « gradually exhausting the aggregate of works the consequences of which have once begun, so as to enable them to discharge their offices ». <sup>113</sup>

All the schools that believe in heaven and the continued individuality of the soul after liberation, believe also in the diversity of mansions there, that is, differences in degree of beatitude corresponding to the different merits of souls. Not so Advaita Vedānta. Consistent with its principles, it maintains that all the differences are this side of liberation. There are the three paths, there is instantaneous liberation; all that corresponds to diversity of merit. But at the terminus itself there can be no differences, for it is not a question of enjoying Brahman more or less according

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 362, 363.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem* p. 236.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem* p. 236.

to one's capacity, but just becoming Brahman whole and entire, or rather discovering that one has always been that: and evidently there cannot be more or less of Brahman.

« For all Vedānta texts assert the state of final release to be of one kind only. The state of final release is nothing but Brahman, and Brahman cannot be connected with different forms since many scriptural passages assert it to have one nature only ». <sup>114</sup>

But a very vital question remains to be answered, which Çankara carefully avoids, and his adversaries keep constantly harping on. Who will be left to enjoy this beatific identification with Brahman? This question is never raised or answered by Çankara, which is rather surprising considering his habit of marshalling all possible arguments against himself in order to demolish them. We may however read his mind in the following words:

« When the parts of him who knows are merged in Brahman, is there a remainder (which is not so merged) as in the case of other men; or is there no such remainder?... the Sūtra-kāra teaches expressly that the elements etc. of him who knows enter into the relation of (absolute) non-division from Brahman... And when parts that are due to nescience are dissolved through knowledge, it is not possible that a remainder should be left. The parts therefore enter into absolute non-division from [i. e. identity with] Brahman ». <sup>115</sup>

The comparison instituted here is between the soul of the wise man after release and the transmigrating souls at the time of the cosmic dissolution. During the night following the cosmic dissolution, the whole cosmos remains absorbed in Brahman, but the non-liberated souls though absorbed in Brahman retain their individuality so that they may continue their pilgrimage in the next cosmic cycle. The liberated souls, on the other hand, are completely merged in Brahman with no trace of individuality left. This should not be mistaken for annihilation, insist the Advaitins, and prove it with an analogy. An earthen vessel dipped in the sea will enclose a part of the water within its walls and give it a sort of individuality and distinction from the rest of the sea. Break the pot, and the water again becomes one with the ocean. It is not annihilated, but merely rid of the limitation and false individuation imposed on it by the pot; it has shed its ephemeral self and regained its real self in the ocean.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibidem* p. 329.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 376, 377.



But all this metaphysical jugglery has failed to reassure the vast majority of devout Hindus who would 'rather taste honey than become it'. Nor has it convinced the theistic Vedāntins. Rāmānuja and Madhva are vehement in their protest. If there is no soul to save, what is the meaning of all this painful probation? they ask. Instead of the individual soul gaining Brahman, here it is Brahman realizing himself. Everyone feels the need of saving his soul, no one feels an urge to save Brahman. And does he need to be saved? If after freely allowing himself to be veiled and limited by the illusory Māya, Brahman wants to liberate himself from that unreal cobweb, he surely can do it with less fanfare.

Monism strikes at the root of all religion. One may whet one's metaphysical acumen on it, but one cannot subsist on it. Even Çankara who speculated on the Impersonal Brahman and wrote volumes on it, lived all the while like the devout Hindu he was, worshipping the Personal Içvara.

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