KARL H. POTTER

The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Volume 3

Advaita Vedanta Up to Samkara and His Pupils

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Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṃkara and His Pupils

EDITED BY

KARL H. POTTER

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Contributors:

Edeltraud Harzer, University of Washington
S. Subrahmanya Sastri, Varanasi
Allen W. Thrasher, University of Washington

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PREFACE

This volume, the third in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, is the first of those devoted to the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. It covers the writings of Gauḍapāda, Śaṃkarācārya, Maṇḍana Miśra and Śaṃkara's pupils : Sureśvara, Padmapāda, Toṭaka, and Hastāmalaka (the last according to traditional authorities only).

The remarks offered in the preface to volume two in this series relating to the general intent of the *Encyclopedia* apply to this volume and others to follow. To review briefly: this volume is intended, not as a definitive study of the works summarized, but as an invitation to further philosophical attention to them. The plan has been to make available the substance of the thought contained in these works, so that philosophers unable to read the original Sanskrit and who find difficulty in understanding and finding their way about in the translations (where such exist) can get an idea of the positions taken and arguments offered. The summaries, then, are intended primarily for philosophers and only secondarily for Indologists, and certain sections of the works have been omitted or treated sketchily because they are repetitious or deemed less interesting for philosophers, though they may be of great interest to Sanskritists. I might also add that the summaries are not likely to make interesting consecutive reading; they are provided in the spirit of a reference work. It is hoped, on the other hand, that the editor's Introduction will provide a readable account of some of the pertinent features of Advaita Vedānta for those hitherto unacquainted with that system of thought.

Preparation of this volume has been assisted materially by the gracious assistance provided by several agencies and individuals. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State, represented by Ms. Evelyn Barnes, kindly provided the project a generous grant in PL-480 rupees to cover preparation of this and other volumes. This grant made possible contacts with Indian colleagues and provided honoraria for a number of the summaries here included. The grant has been administered through the American Institute of Indian Studies, which has provided generous assistance in easing administrative details connected with the

gathering of summaries, in arranging editorial travel and consultation, and in providing secretarial assistance and supplies. I wish especially to thank Pradip R. Mehendiratta and Edward C. Dimock for their good offices. In 1975 I received a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies through the Joint Committee on South Asia of the American Council of Learned Societies and Social Science Research Council that enabled me to make use of the unparalleled collections at the India Office Library and British Museum in London, without which opportunity a number of the summaries could not have been completed and much scholarly information could not have been conveyed or alluded to through references. I wish to thank James Settle of the American Council of Learned Societies as well as the authorities and staff members at the libraries mentioned. Finally, there are several individual scholars who are probably not aware of the extent of their contribution to this volume through their helpful and provocative conversation with me over the years in connection with Advaita. I wish especially to record my appreciation and debt to Anthony J. Alston, Daniel H. H. Ingalls, T. R. V. Murti, and Allen W. Thrasher for sharing their scholarship and thought with me. I am, needless to say, responsible for all misinterpretations of the materials that have crept into what follows.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

1

HISTORICAL RÉSUMÉ

I. What is Vedānta?

The Vedic literature represents the thought of the Aryans, Indo-European-speaking folk who perhaps entered India in the middle of the second millennium B.C. Consisting of a wide variety of materials, notably hymns and directions as to the proper performance of ritual, this literature also contains the beginnings of the philosophical and theological speculations that flowered eventually in classical Hinduism. Many of these speculations, usually reported in the form of discussions between teachers, pupils, and interlocutors, sometimes encased in mythological or didactic stories, are to be found in those portions of the Vedic corpus which reflect the later stages of philosophical development. These sections are termed 'Upaniṣads' (a term of doubtful etymology). The distinction between Upaniṣads and other parts of the Veda such as Āraṇyakas and Brāhmaṇas likewise seems to follow no established rules; presumably it is a matter of tradition. One must always remember that the Vedic 'literature' represents what primarily was, and is even today, an oral tradition.[1] Brahmin families pass from father to son that portion of the Veda which has been entrusted to them to preserve since ancient times.

The Upaniṣads are literally "the final sections of the Veda," which is what the term 'Vedānta' also means. Thus Vedānta philosophy, properly speaking, is that philosophy which takes its lead from the Upaniṣads. However, since the meanings of Upaniṣadic utterances are ambiguous, there came to be several Vedānta philosophies, corresponding to differing interpretations of the essential genius of the texts that inspired them. Despite an evident similarity in terminology, which is derived from their common allegiance to the same basic literature, these Vedānta philosophical systems vary substantially among themselves, and there is a polite but perfectly clear

rivalry among them as to which system 'really' represents the teaching of the Upaniṣads. It is an issue that, in the nature of the case, may well be insoluble.

Vedānta philosophers are a particular section of those who specialize in *mīmāṃsā*, or exegetics of the Vedic scriptures. Mīmāṃsā is sometimes divided into Pūrvamīmāṃsā, the school of exegetics that interprets the 'older' scriptural hymns, and Uttaramīmāṃsā, which interprets the 'later,' Upaniṣadic materials. The two exegetical systems differ in the emphasis they place on the injunctive and ritual aspects of the Vedas as opposed to those passages that apparently convey information, especially information about things beyond immediate sensory awareness. The style of the oldest Vedantic philosophical works is overwhelmingly influenced by the exegetical tradition. Great portions of these works are concerned with the niceties of language, and it is mainly in later times that philosophers make bold to compose independent treatises (*prakaraṇa*) in which the elements of Vedānta philosophy are set forth according to the logic of the views themselves, rather than in an order determined by that of scriptural authority.

Much of the Vedānta literature is composed following the tradition of *sūtra* and commentary that reflects the oral tradition in which it was born. *Sūtras* are aphoristic phrases designed to remind their memorizer of the elements of the literature so summarized. Both Pūrva and Uttaramīmāṃsā have their *sūtras*, one set for each being known to us now, though others may have existed at an earlier time. The *(Pūrva)mīmāṃsāsūtras* of Jaimini form the basis of the older variety of Vedic exegesis, as well as provide a taking-off point for commentators such as Śabara, Kumārila, and Prabhākara, who pioneered systematic Mīmāṃsā philosophical systems through their commentaries. It is difficult to date the *Mīmāṃsāsūtras*—the tradition they represent must go back at least to the time of the writing of the Upaniṣads themselves, that is, to before 600 B.C., but the *sūtras* as we now have them need not be credited with such antiquity: it seems unlikely that they are earlier than 200 B.C. The set of *sūtras* ascribed to Bādarāyaṇa, variously called *Vedāntasūtras*, *Brahmasūtras*, or *Śārirakamīmāṃsāsūtras*, provides the corresponding vehicle for the 'later' (Uttara) exegetical tradition. Since the two sets of *sūtras* refer to each others' authors one might suspect they are of roughly the same age, although one cannot rule out the very real possibility of multiple authorship.

Various sorts of commentaries are composed on *sūtras*, and then subcommentaries and further commentaries on those. Traditionally,

a *bhāṣya* is an extensive explanation of the meaning of the *sūtras*, a *vṛtti* is a briefer explanation, a *vārttika* a critical treatment of a *bhāṣya*, and so on. Frequently a writer will compose verses of his own for ease of memorization on the part of his reader or pupil, then provide his own commentary on those stanzas.

In addition to the Vedic scriptures, notably the Upaniṣads, and the *sūtras* that are intended to capture the essence of scripture, Vedānta philosophers will on occasion cite as authoritative, and occasionally even write separate commentaries on literary monuments that are not commonly accounted as part of Vedic scripture. Sometimes this tendency represents particular sectarian religious movements, as in later times led members of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta system to comment on old Tamil works of Pañcarātra persuasion. Far and away the most important instance of this phenomenon concerns the famous *Mahābhārata* poem, the *Bhagavadgītā*. Although the epics (the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*) are not accounted as *śruti*, that is to say, as works having unquestioned scriptural authority, they are pre-eminent among those works generally regarded as *smṛti*, 'tradition.' To both older and later Mīmāṃsakas *śruti*, connoting that which is 'heard,' is either authorless or of divine authorship; not being a human production, it cannot be mistaken, though we may be mistaken about what it means—thus the necessity of exegetics. By contrast *smṛti*, what is 'remembered,' comprises works of admitted human authorship, and thus there is the possibility of human error contaminating what they say, although this possibility is rendered academic by the venerability and sagacity of those who composed them. Vyāsa, the alleged author of the *Mahābhārata*, is one of the hoariest of sages, and the didactic portions of that epic, among which the *Bhagavadgītā* stands foremost, have an authority for all practical purposes equivalent to the scriptures themselves. Thus it is that many Vedantic philosophers have written commentaries on the *Bhagavadgītā*, finding in Kṛṣṇa's teachings an appropriate foil for expressing their particular slant.

The Upaniṣads—at least the oldest of them—the *Gītā*, and the *Brahmasūtras*, then, comprise what is considered to be the triple basis (*prasthānatrayi*) for Vedantic philosophy.

II. What is Advaita Vedānta?

So far we have been discussing the general background that all Vedānta philosophy shares. However, the present volume deals with only one Vedānta system, and indeed with only the earliest part of its literature. This system is properly known as Advaita Vedānta,

though so important has it become in the eyes not only of scholars but also of those who have been influential in molding the attitudes of enlightened Hindus toward India's past, that one will frequently find the term 'Vedānta' used to indicate *only* Advaita Vedānta. This tendency is a confusion to the uninitiated as well as a constant source of irritation to those who are affiliated with one of the other Vedānta systems. Still, it serves to emphasize the importance that is now attributed to Advaita among the Vedāntas, and especially that attributed to its most famous figure, Śaṃkarācārya, a thinker with whom we shall be dealing at length in this volume.

Just as it is a mistake, though a common one, to identify all Vedānta with Advaita, so it is also a mistake, and a common one, to identify all Advaita with Śaṃkarācārya's philosophy. Through the efforts of a number of diligent scholars, we can now safely say that Śaṃkara did not found Advaita Vedānta and that there are points of interpretation on which others—also properly called Advaitins—differ from Śaṃkara. These points of distinction will become clear as we proceed. First, however, it will be well if we attempt to state as clearly as possible what is shared by and constitutive of the Advaita Vedānta philosophical position. I shall do this in rather summary form here; a fuller explanation is in the sequel.

We may divide the Advaita philosophy, rather arbitrarily for the moment, into a theoretical and a practical basis. Some propositions that characterize the theoretical basis are :

1. The purpose of philosophy is to point the way to liberation (*mokṣa*) from the bondage of rebirth (*saṃsāra*).

2. Bondage is a product of our ignorance (*avidyā*); the true Self (*ātman*) is not bound, does not transmigrate, is eternally liberated.

3. Bondage is beginningless and operates with regularity as long as ignorance is not removed.

4. Since bondage depends on ignorance, liberation is manifested upon the removal of ignorance by acquiring its opposite, namely, knowledge (*vidyā*).

5. The operation of ignorance consists in its creating apparent distinctions (*bheda*) where none actually exist.

6. Therefore, knowledge involves the awareness that all distinctions are false, especially the distinction between the knower and the known.

7. This awareness, which constitutes liberating knowledge, which is free from subject-object distinctions, is pure, immediate consciousness (*cit, anubhava*).

8. The true Self is itself just that pure consciousness, without which nothing can be known in any way.

9. And that same true Self, pure consciousness, is not different from the ultimate world Principle, Brahman, because if Brahman were conceived as the object of Self-awareness it would involve subject-object distinction and, as said above, this is a product of ignorance.

10. The real is that which is not set aside as false, not sublated (*bādha*), in contrast to products of ignorance, which are eventually sublated.

11. Assuming the above criterion of reality, it follows that Brahman (=the true Self, pure consciousness) is the only Reality (*sat*), since It is untinged by difference, the mark of ignorance, and since It is the one thing that is not sublatable, for sublation itself depends on there being consciousness.

12. Pure consciousness is experienced during deep sleep; since we awake refreshed, it is inferred that pure consciousness (reality, Brahman, the true Self) is also the ultimate bliss.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of Advaita tenets, but it will serve for the moment to indicate the tenor of the theory. Now for some 'practical' propositions.

13. Since all distinctions are the product of ignorance, any positive account of a path to liberation, involving distinctions, must be ultimately false.

14. However, some false views are less misleading than others. By criticizing worse views one arrives by stages at better ones.

15. For example, the view that effects are different from their causes (*asatkāryavāda*) is worse than the view that the effect is essentially identical with its cause (*satkāryavāda*); within the latter, the view that the cause transforms itself into its effect (*pariṇāmavāda*) is worse than the view that it manifests its appearance as effect without itself changing in so doing (*vivartavāda*); still, all views that take causation seriously are inferior to nonorigination (*ajātivāda*), since causal relations, as any relations, involve differences and are thus tinged with ignorance.

16. Or, for example, the view that one needs a distinct judgment to verify or justify true knowledge (*parataḥprāmāṇyavāda*) is worse than the view that true knowledge justifies itself (*svataḥprāmāṇya*); however, both these views are ultimately inferior to the view that truth is not to be found in judgments, that therefore one cannot attain ultimate understanding or truth through the *pramāṇas* or 'instruments of knowledge.'

17. Or, again, atheism and agnosticism are worse views than theism; within theism, again, monotheism is preferable to polytheism; but ultimately preferable to all theisms is monism.

18. Or, again, the skeptical or materialist view (Cārvāka or Lokāyata) is inferior to those views which accept the authority of scripture; among the latter, those views (Buddhism, Jainism, etc.) which accept as authority scriptures other than the Vedas are inferior to those views which accept the Vedas as authoritative; among the latter, the view that holds that only the injunctive sections (*karma-kāṇḍa*) of scripture are authoritative (or that scripture is exhausted in injunctions) is inferior to that which holds that both the injunctive and declarative (*jñānakāṇḍa*) sections are authoritative; within this last, those who think that both sections speak of liberation—that both actions enjoined and knowledge conveyed in scripture are directly relevant to gaining liberation—hold an inferior view compared to those who believe that the two sections speak to different ends—injunctions leading one to heaven, declarations to liberation, Ultimately, however, scripture can provide no positive key to liberation, because the key lies in removing ignorance, a negative step; so the highest view of all is that of *apavāda*, that reality is "not this, not this" (*neti neti*).

The 'dialectical' aspects of these last four examples of stages along the way toward understanding explain why so many apparent contradictions—paradoxes, if you will—are apparently condoned and indeed frequently celebrated in Advaita. No contradictions are ultimately acceptable to Advaita, to be sure, because contradictions are clearly in the scope of ignorance, if only because they involve language and so distinctions. But it doesn't follow that any contradiction is as good as any other: some are instructive paradoxes, puzzles, which inspire questions from pupils that sympathetic *gurus* can turn to advantage in bringing their pupils to a higher stage of understanding. Frequently Advaita texts read as *verbatim* reports of teacher-pupil interviews.

The feature illustrated in the last four examples likewise suggests the kind of richness that makes Advaita so impressive when contrasted with philosophies such as Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, which believe that the ultimate truth can and should be literally expressed in language. It must also produce feelings of irritation among nonbelieving Advaita scholars, for apophasis coupled with dialectic renders it difficult at all times to know with what degree of seriousness one should construe what is being said at any moment.

Of particular relevance for our present purposes, the 'dialectical' features of Advaita also make it especially difficult to distinguish an Advaita Vedantin from other Vedantins, especially in cases where we only have fragmentary passages or references to go on in determining

his views. A good deal of scholarship—to be reviewed below and in the historical introductions to the philosophers whose views are summarized in the body of this volume—has been expended in attempts to establish how Advaita developed prior to the time of Śaṃkara. But which were the Advaitins? Who are the philosophers that this volume should treat?

III. Who Were These Philosophers?

As we have seen, Vedānta in general can be safely stated to have arisen in the Upaniṣads. It was later epitomized in the *Vedānta-sūtras*. Commentators on these writings interpreted them in different ways and with different emphases: one finds old commentators referred to frequently in Śaṃkara, Rāmānuja, and the other great Vedantins, as well as in their commentators in turn. Unfortunately, the dictates of style and manner entailed that these references do not necessarily identify by name the old teacher-commentator whose opinion is being quoted or reported; frequently it was left to a much later writer, removed from the time of the old commentator by more than a millennium in many instances, to tell us that Śaṃkara meant so-and-so by "they say" in a given passage. As a result, one views these identifications with a mixture of gratitude and skepticism.

Our business is with Advaita Vedantins, however. Did an Advaita tradition exist in the first half of the first millennium A.D.? Śaṃkara certainly thinks so: he refers to his 'tradition' (*sampradāya*) and quotes certain old writers with the reverence appropriate to the elders of a tradition one accepts. He even goes so far as to say that even a man wise in all the sciences is still like a fool if he has no tradition.[8] Despite this, scholars of pre-Śaṃkara Vedānta have had little success in identifying beyond question more than one or two names of writers who may have been associated with an Advaita tradition.

One could, of course, argue that the great teachers whose instruction is reported in the Upaniṣads, men such as Yājñavalkya and Uddālaka Aruṇi, were Advaita Vedantins, since they propounded views and arguments that are interpreted by Advaita as expressing the philosophy outlined above. This would be tendentious in the extreme, however, since important representatives of other Vedānta systems—notably Viśiṣṭādvaitins and Dvaitins—also claim the authority of those very same teachers. Thus the truth of such a claim seems to rest on the acceptance of the truth of Advaita in contrast to other Vedāntas, not on historical arguments of a nondoctrinal sort.

The same consideration weighs against *our* uncritically counting

Bādarāyaṇa, the author of the *Brahmasūtras*, as an Advaitin, although it doesn't stop Advaitins from doing so. In any case, we know nothing of Bādarāyaṇa, not even his date or place of origin, and a summary of his Advaita leanings, if they existed, will arise naturally from the commentaries of his Advaita interpreters, which *are* summarized below.

Bādarāyaṇa mentions on occasion views of others by name. In one passage[3] he contrasts the views of three old teachers—Āśmarathya, Auḍulomi, and Kāśakṛtsna, in that order—on the question of the relation between the individual self and the true Self. Śaṃkara interprets Kāśakṛtsna's position indicated in the *sūtra* in question as representing the monistic Advaita position, and one might therefore wish to count Kāśakṛtsna—whoever he may have been—as an old Advaitin. Unfortunately, once again other Vedantins claim him too: Rāmānuja does so by interpreting the *sūtra* in a way consistent with Viśiṣṭādvaita. Since the *sūtra* in question consists of precisely one word[4] it is not hard to construct divergent readings.

The date of the *Brahmasūtras* is not closely identified—the best scholarly guesses put it a century or two before or after Christ.[5] It seems safe to say, for reasons of the sort mentioned, that we have no firm evidence at this time of an Advaita tradition prior to the time of the *Brahmasūtras*, though there were doubtless Vedantins of some sort, and the *sūtras* do on occasion suggest that older teachers had offered differing interpretations of the Upaniṣads, quite possibly in the form of systematic treatises. Once past the time of the *sūtras*, however, we hear of a few names that may perhaps be linked with Advaita.

The dislike Indians had for identifying people by name is a constant headache in this connection. Instead of naming previous commentators, or even their traditional affiliations, it is characteristic of Indian philosophers to introduce an opponent's view by a laconic "some say." Indeed, we are lucky to get even that; the bane of the efforts of the translator of Sanskrit philosophical texts is making sure when one is dealing with an opponent's view, since so frequently no signal whatsoever is given. Slightly better chances for identification are afforded in passages where an author is making passing reference to someone's position. Unfortunately, even here the given name is either not known or not deemed sufficiently respectful; the person in question may well be identified by the work he wrote. Even this wouldn't be so problematic if we had the *whole* name, but as the work is likely to be a commentary and the author is addressing a knowledgeable audience, the identification may well be only to the *type* of commentary the person is reputed to have written. For example,

Śaṃkara is frequently referred to by his disciples as the *Bhāṣyakāra*, since he wrote a *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*.

The relevance of all this to our present context is that, in many Vedānta works by Śaṃkara and his pupils, in those of some Mīmāṃsakas, of Rāmānuja and his followers, and of Bhāskara and others, there are constant references to one or more persons called 'Vṛttikāra.' A Vṛttikāra is someone who wrote a brief commentary (*vṛtti*), but the simple allusion to that fact fails to distinguish those who commented thus on one work from those who commented thus on another. Presumably there were *vṛttis* on many of the Upaniṣads, on the *Bhagavadgītā*, and on the *Brahmasūtras*, all of which are now lost; there were also *vṛttis* on other works—for example, on the *Mīmāṃsāsūtras*—which in a given context may be the work alluded to.

Śaṃkara speaks frequently of Vṛttikāras. He speaks, more specifically, of a *Śārirakamīmāṃsāvṛtti*, that is, a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*, whose author he names as Upavarṣa.[6] His reference there implies that Upavarṣa also wrote a commentary on the *Mīmāṃsāsūtras*, and this is confirmed by Śabara, author of the major existent commentary on the *Mīmāṃsāsūtras*, who summarizes some of Upavarṣa's views.[7] It is also indirectly confirmed by the fact that Bhāskara also quotes Upavarṣa in the same connection as does Śaṃkara, although under different *sūtras*.[8] Later commentators such as Padmapāda, Govindānanda, Ānandagiri, and even the Naiyāyika Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, have also cited certain views they attribute to Upavarṣa.[9] It seems from all this that there must have been an Upavarṣa who wrote commentaries on the *Mīmāṃsā* and *Brahmasūtras* (or perhaps, some scholars[10] have suggested, a single commentary on both), and furthermore that Śaṃkara, who refers to Upavarṣa as 'Bhagavān,' counted Upavarṣa as a member of the tradition he follows.

Upavarṣa's date has been hazarded as between 100 B.C. and A.D. 200, since Śabara's date is around A.D. 200.[11] Viśiṣṭādvaita writers, notably Rāmānuja himself, speak of a Vṛttikāra named Bodhāyana,[12] and Vedānta Deśika, the great Viśiṣṭādvaita scholiast, identifies Bodhāyana with Upavarṣa.[13] For various reasons that identification seems suspect, and it is more likely that Bodhāyana wrote a different *vṛtti*, and quite possible that Śaṃkara is criticizing that in places.[14] Padmapāda, for instance, speaks of 'another *vṛtti*' (*vṛttyantara*) with which Advaita differs.[15] There is no reason to identify either Upavarṣa or Bodhāyana with the Vṛttikāra who is cited in Śaṃkara's commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, although Ānandagiri, many centuries later, seems assured that not only are the *vṛttis* on

Brahmasūtras and *Bhagavadgitā* by the same hand, but that the same author also wrote *vṛttis* on several Upaṇiṣads.[16]

Śaṃkara, in commenting on some of the oldest Upaniṣads, makes three references to old teachers who apparently addressed themselves to the interpretation of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. Ānandagiri identifies these as referring to Draviḍācārya, who, according to Sarvajñātman (a pupil of Sureśvara's), wrote a *bhāṣya* on some *Chāndogya* "sentences" (*vākya*) ascribed by him to Brahmanandin.[17] On these rather flimsy bases one may take Brahmanandin and Draviḍācārya as two more early Advaitins, since Śaṃkara once again seems highly respectful toward the author of the views he makes reference to. Not all modern scholars have been willing to accept these two as Advaitins. There are authorities and arguments, though by no means conclusive ones, for identifying Brahmanandin with Ṭaṅka, an old teacher mentioned by Yāmunācārya as an opponent but by Rāmānuja as a forerunner in his own tradition.[18] Again, the dates of these two commentators on the *Chāndogya* are almost entirely uncertain.

A final name to be mentioned here is that of Sundara Pāṇḍya, who seems to have written a *vārttika* on Upavarṣa's *vṛtti*.[19] Scholars have identified some passages in Advaita and Mīmāṃsā works that are identified by later Advaitins as referring to Sundara Pāṇḍya,[20] but little or nothing is known of his identity or date.

Other old Vedantins, such as Bhartṛprapañca, Brahmadatta, and Bhartṛmitra, appear not to have been Advaitins, although Brahmadatta may have had strong leanings in that direction despite his espousing theses at odds with those we listed above.[21]

So far we have been dealing with figures who, except for Bādarāyaṇa, wrote works now apparently lost. The first complete Advaita philosophical work is all, or at least a large part, of some stanzas (*kārikās*) that Advaita tradition construes as constituting a kind of commentary on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*. The same tradition identifies the author of these stanzas as Gauḍapāda. Śaṃkara speaks of Gauḍapāda as his *paramaguru* and teacher's teacher.[22] The stanzas are called by several names : *Māṇḍūkyakārikās*, *Gauḍapādiyakārikās*, or *Āgamaśāstra*.

Modern scholarship has blossomed forth in vast controversy over a variety of matters relating to Gauḍapāda. The details must be gathered from the literature itself;[23] here we merely mention the problem areas as they affect our general understanding of Advaita development.

First, there is the question of the date of the *Māṇḍūkyakārikās*. If Śaṃkara's identification is to be accepted one would naturally place the *Kārikās* no more than fifty to one hundred years prior to Śaṃkara's date, which many scholars feel should be fixed at A.D. 788-820. On

this understanding the *Kārikās* can date from no earlier than the end of the seventh century. On the other hand, a Buddhist philosopher, Bhāvaviveka, appears to allude to several of the *Kārikās* and quotes one verbatim, and Bhāvaviveka's date is clearly fixed as prior to 630, since one of his works was translated into Chinese around that year. Thus the *Kārikās* must date not later than the early seventh century. But if we place the *Kārikās* in the sixth-seventh century we must either reinterpret Śaṃkara's remark about his teacher's teacher, or else recompute Śaṃkara's date.

Second, there is the name 'Gauḍapāda.' 'Gauḍa' is an old term referring to the northeast portion of the subcontinent, roughly North Bengal. It has been suggested that the *Kārikās* really constitute more than one work, but that the collection came to be known as *Gauḍapādīyakārikās* because the several authors came from that region, or perhaps because the tradition they pioneered flourished in that region. Predictably, this view has not found favor among proponents of the Advaita tradition, who believe the entire set of stanzas constitutes a single Advaita treatise. Nevertheless, given the pronouncedly Buddhistic flavor of the fourth book of stanzas, which contrasts in terminology with the rest, the possibility that we are dealing with more than one work and/or author cannot be ruled out.

Third, there is the matter of the alleged Buddhistic leanings of the *Kārikās*. Even the most ardent Advaitin can hardly deny that the terminology used, especially in the last book, is redolent of Buddhism. That fact alone does not bother those who are willing to admit Advaita's affinities with certain Buddhist systems (Vijñānavāda, Mādhyamika) and who thus have no objection to allowing a general 'influence' on Advaita by Buddhism. Not all Advaitins are so tolerant, however, especially when their opponents have raised what Advaitins consider to be the malicious charge that Śaṃkara was a 'crypto-Buddhist,' citing Gauḍapāda as evidence. There is little reason to doubt that Śaṃkara viewed Buddhism as one of the worst of heresies and criticized it as roundly as any opposing philosophy of which he was aware. This issue, more than any of the others discussed in the scholarly literature, has raised as much heat as light.

Fourth, there is the very interesting question of the relation between the stanzas and the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* itself. The accepted Advaita tradition is that the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* consists of a dozen sentences explaining the syllable *aum/om* as having four parts (waking, dream, deep sleep and the 'fourth') and as being symbolically identical with Brahman, the Self. The first twenty-nine *kārikās*, constituting the first book of Gauḍapāda's treatise, provide explicit commentary

on these twelve sentences: the relationship between sentences and stanzas is indicated in the commentary attributed to Śaṃkara. The remainder of the *Kārikās*—the last three books—are not specifically comments on the Upaniṣad, although it is contended that they are relevant to its subject matter in a general way. This is not the only relationship that has been suggested, however. The great Dvaita Vedantin Madhva and his followers consider the twenty-nine *kārikās* of the first book, though not the remaining *kārikās*, to be scripture (*śruti*), although they think the Upaniṣad and the stanzas were separate treatises. Rāmānuja also thought those *kārikās* were scripture. It has even been suggested by one modern scholar that the first book of *kārikās* antedated the Upaniṣad itself, so that the Upaniṣad was based on the stanzas rather than the reverse.

There are other issues surrounding Gauḍapāda and the *Kārikās*. However, no one really doubts that there are one or more works preserved in what we call the *Gauḍapādīyakārikās* and that at least one of these works (say, the second and third books) teach Advaita Vedānta in clearcut terms. And since Śaṃkara and Maṇḍana Miśra both know these stanzas they must have been written prior to the time of those philosophers. Thus, despite the many interesting questions raised by scholarship it still seems safe to say that the *kārikās* of at least the second and third books constitute the earliest extended Advaita treatise that has been preserved for us.

Gauḍapāda is according to tradition supposed to have taught Govindabhagavatpāda, Śaṃkara's teacher. Tradition also makes Govinda a Kashmiri who, while traveling south toward Cidambaram happened on Gauḍapāda on the banks of the Narmadā River and became his pupil. It was also on the Narmadā that Śaṃkara subsequently studied with Govinda. These traditions are embellished with interesting stories but can in no way be authenticated at this time. We know nothing at all about Govinda except that he was Śaṃkara's teacher. He apparently wrote little or nothing.

This brings us, then, to the time of Śaṃkarācārya. As mentioned above, many scholars tend to believe that he flourished around the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth century, but this date is not conclusive, and we favor placing him a century earlier. It is extremely difficult to differentiate traditional stories from fact in his case—no other Indian philosopher has been celebrated in so many legends, and these are reported as unquestionable by his followers. He is reputed to have lived a very short life of only thirty-two years, yet if in that time he was indeed responsible for the vast quantity of

literature that is attributed to him, he must have been composing every hour of the day !

The basic problem however, not only for arriving at Śaṃkara's date but also for arriving at reasoned conclusions about much else about him and his philosophy, concerns the authenticity of the works attributed to him. If we could be certain which works are by Śaṃkara we could then draw up a list of references found in those works, and provided we could identify their sources or the authors they presuppose, we would then be able to provide at least an upper limit for his date.

It is difficult if not impossible to be sure which works Śaṃkara wrote. We may start by assuming that he wrote the *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya*—the Śaṃkara we are interested in is, by definition, the one who wrote this work. No one seems anxious to question the same person's authorship of the *Bhāṣyas* on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣads*. Beyond these, the questions begin. We shall not try to deal with these questions at this juncture—the issues will be summarized later when the data and arguments are reviewed.

Even in the three works mentioned, there are enough references to give us some purchase on Śaṃkara's date. The author of these works clearly knows Kumārila and Prabhākara, the two philosophical Mīmāṃsakas. They are usually held to have flourished in the seventh century. Advaita traditional accounts of Śaṃkara's life relate a meeting between Śaṃkara and Kumārila. It seems likely that Śaṃkara also knew Dharmakīrti's work. These facts are enough to insure that Śaṃkara did not flourish before the seventh century but do not determine whether he lived in the seventh, eighth, or even the ninth century.

The situation is further complicated by uncertainty about the identity of Maṇḍana Miśra, whose *Brahmasiddhi* constitutes an extremely important source of Advaita. Maṇḍana wrote several Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā works and is reputed to have studied with Kumārila. Tales are told about Śaṃkara's meeting with Maṇḍana and his wife, and their eventual conversion. According to the Advaita tradition, Maṇḍana then changed his name to Sureśvara and became a pupil of Śaṃkara. Some scholars have thought it evident that both Advaitins were aware of each other's works, which confirms their contemporaneity.

The reader will find a review of the arguments concerning Śaṃkara's date in the body of this volume at the outset of the section assigned to that writer. For reasons given there I incline to believe that he flourished at the beginning of the eighth century.

Śaṃkara is said by some of his biographers to have been born in

Kalāḍi, a small town in the Malabar region now included in the state of Kerala. His father died when Śaṃkara was very young, and he developed as a child prodigy, very learned and very religious. At an early age he left home, studied with Govinda, and eventually, arrived at Banaras where he attracted some followers, notably Padmapāda, Hastāmalaka, and Toṭaka. On a journey to Allahabad, he is supposed to have met Kumārila, then very old, who sent his pupil Maṇḍana to debate with Śaṃkara. Maṇḍana brought his wife along, and after Śaṃkara had defeated Maṇḍana (so goes the story) the wife took up the cause. During the course of their further discussion, the wife, Bhāratī by name, pointed out that Śaṃkara was not fully experienced in worldly ways, not having mastered *kāmaśāstra* or the science of passion. Śaṃkara then asked for a month's delay in the proceedings, occupied the body of an amorous king and quickly mastered *kāmaśāstra*. After the month was over, he returned to the debate, defeating Bhāratī, who along with her husband became Śaṃkara's devoted disciple. Maṇḍana, according to tradition, was renamed Sureśvara and proceeded to compose several important Advaita treatises.

The entourage then returned to Kerala by way of Śṛṅgeri, where a *maṭha* was founded. When Śaṃkara's mother died, he fulfilled his childhood promise by performing the last rites despite the fact that he was an avowed *saṃnyāsin*, that is, he had renounced all religious ritual acts.

Śaṃkara then began extensive journeying that took him throughout India. At Dwarka in the west he founded another *maṭha*; he founded a third *maṭha* at Badrinath in the Himalayas and a fourth at Puri in the east. He founded the sect of the Daśanāmis, the "ten-named ones," and installed his most important followers as the heads of the four *maṭhas*. Some stories have it that he met the famous Kashmir Śaiva savant Abhinavagupta, who cursed him with an ulcerous disease of which he eventually died, but not before Padmapāda had transferred it back to its donor, who also died of it. At the age of thirty-two then, having lived a remarkably full life in such a few years, Śaṃkara passed away.

The above account draws a few stories and traditions from the indefinite number found in the many traditional biographies. It is hardly possible to discriminate fact from fiction among these at this late date. Their number attests the particular reverence felt for Śaṃkarācārya by Advaitins in particular, but also to a remarkably great degree by Indians of all walks of life, whether or not their philosophical and/or religious persuasions agree with his.

Overshadowed as an object of traditional reverence, Maṇḍana Miśra must not be underrated as a philosopher. His alleged identity with Sureśvara has been severely questioned by scholars.[24] As mentioned, tradition makes him a pupil of Kumārila and an elder contemporary of Śaṃkara's. His single Advaita work, the *Brahmasiddhi*, is an independent treatise developing the major tenets of Advaita. The sources of the thought expressed in this work have been the subject of speculation. Yet it seems to have been quite original. There is some reason to think that for several centuries following Śaṃkara's and Maṇḍana's lifetimes it was Maṇḍana who was viewed by other schools as the major figure in Advaita.[25] Vācaspati Miśra is said to have continued Maṇḍana's brand of Advaita in a commentary, now lost, on the *Brahmasiddhi* and in his *Bhāmatī* on Śaṃkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*.

Śaṃkara had many pupils, but only four of them are remembered by name. Padmapāda, a native of Cidambaram (?), is supposed to have been one of his first followers. Padmapāda's *Pañcapādikā* is a commentary on Śaṃkara's commentary on the first four *Brahmasūtras*; it is not clear whether Padmapāda's work carried beyond that point—in any case it is all we have. Although there are one or two other works attributed to Padmapāda, his authorship of them is doubtful.

Sureśvara is now associated especially with the history of the Kāmakoṭi Pīṭha at Conjeeveram (old Kāñchi), which may or may not have been one of the original *maṭhas* established by Śaṃkara but which has become since then one of the great centers of Advaita activity. Tradition, as we have seen, makes him Maṇḍana before conversion; we have no hard evidence about any other facts pertaining to his life. Śaṃkara is said to have assigned to him the writing of subcommentaries (*vārttikas*) on two of his own Upaniṣadbhāṣyas, those on the *Bṛhadāranyaka* and the *Taittiriya*. The former is a truly vast work—Mahadevan says it is about half the length of the *Rāmāyaṇa* ! Sureśvara also wrote an independent treatise of great beauty and skill, the *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*. Other works attributed to him are probably spurious.

A third disciple of Śaṃkara's was, according to tradition, originally named Giri but was given the name of Toṭaka when he joined Śaṃkara's group. He is supposed to have been very devoted but was apparently not a quick learner until one day after Śaṃkara, to the irritation of the other pupils, had delayed lessons so that Toṭaka might attend. He eventually arrived and amazed all by producing first a poem of eight verses, *Toṭakāṣṭaka*, and then a longer work, entitled

Śrutisārasamuddhāraṇa, which is supposed to have been spontaneously composed in the presence of his teacher and fellow pupils.

A final name of interest is that of Hastāmalaka, whom tradition identifies as a son of Prabhākara (not necessarily the famous Mīmāṃsaka), and of whom his father had despaired, for he had been cataleptic from birth. When addressed by Śaṃkara, however, asking "Who art thou?" the boy blossomed forth with a fourteen-verse poem on the Self, now called *Hastāmalakastotra*.

When Śaṃkara established the four *piṭhas* at Śṛṅgeri, Dwarka, Badrinath, and Puri, he is supposed to have put one of his pupils in charge of each. However, the traditional lists of the different temples disagree on the details of who was installed where, and in addition the Kāmakoṭi temple at Conjeeveram has since become extremely important as a center of Advaita sectarianism. So we cannot say with certainty at this point which pupils are to be associated with which temples.

The following list names the authors treated in this volume, those works which are accepted by practically all scholars as authentically theirs, and also the most important of the spurious works. An approximation, based on evidence to be summarized below, is given of the dates we are at present inclined to assign to these writers.

A CHECK LIST OF AUTHORS AND WORKS

Abbreviations : d. date; p. place; w. work(s); T, edited and translated; E, published but not translated; M, manuscript(s) available but not published; *, probably spurious

Upavarṣa; d. before A.D. 200 (?); p. ?; w. *Brahmasūtravṛtti*

Brahmanandin; d. ?; p. ?; w. *Chāndogyopaniṣadvākya*

Draviḍācārya; d. ?; p. "the South"; w. *Chāndogyopaniṣadvākyabhāṣya*

Sundara Pāṇḍya; d. ?; p. ?; w. *Brahmasūtravṛttivārttika*

Gauḍapādācārya; d. A.D. 600 (?); p. North Bengal; w. *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣadkārikās* (also called *Gauḍapādakārikās* or *Āgamaśāstra*), (T)

Śaṃkarācārya; d. A.D. 725 (?); p. Kerala; w. *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* (T), *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya* (T), *Taittiriyopaniṣadbhāṣya* (T), *Upadeśasāhasri* (T), *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya* (T), *Aitareyopaniṣadbhāṣya* (T), *Īśopaniṣadbhāṣya* (T), *Kaṭhopaniṣadbhāṣya* (T), *Kenopaniṣad (pada)bhāṣya* (T), *Kenopaniṣad (vākya)bhāṣya* (E), *Muṇḍakopaniṣadbhāṣya* (T), *Praśnopaniṣadbhāṣya* (T), *Bhagavadgitābhāṣya* (T), *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣadbhāṣya* with *Gauḍapādiyakārikābhāṣya* (T), **Dakṣiṇāmūrtistotra* (T), **Pañcikaraṇa* (T), **Aparokṣānubhūti* (T), **Ātmabodha* (T), **Śataśloki* (T), **Ātmajñānopadeśa* (T), **Ātmānātmaviveka* (T), **Tattvabodha* (T), **Daśaśloki* (T), **Vākyavṛtti* (T),

**Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (T), **Sarvavedāntasiddhāntasaṃgraha* (T), **Advaitapañcaratna* or *Ātmapañcaka* (T), **Vākyasudhā* or *Dṛgdṛśyaviveka* (T), **Upadeśapañcaka* (T), **Māyāpañcaka* (T), **Laghuvākyavṛtti* (T), **Śvetāśvataropaniṣadbhāṣya* (E), **Nṛsiṃhottaratāpaniyopaniṣadbhāṣya* (E), **Kauśitakyupaniṣadbhāṣya* (E)

Maṇḍana Miśra; d. A.D. 680-750 (?); p. Mithila (?); w. *Brahmasiddhi* (T [French])

Padmapāda; d. A.D. 750-(?); p. Cidambaram (?); w. *Pañcapādikā* (T)

Sureśvara; d. A.D. 750 (?); p. ?; w. *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣyavārttika* (E; partly T), *Taittiriyopaniṣadbhāṣyavārttika* (T), *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* (T), **Dakṣiṇāmūrtimānasollāsa* (T), **Pañcikaraṇavārttika* (E), **Kāśimokṣavicāra* (E), **Svārājyasiddhi* (E)

Toṭaka; d. A.D. 750 (?); p. ?; w. *Toṭakāṣṭaka* (E), *Śrutisārasamuddhāraṇa* (E)

Hastāmalaka; d. A.D. 750 (?); p. ?; w. **Hastāmalakaślokāḥ* (T [German])

IV. Relation to Other Systems

Śaṃkara is very much aware of the variety of philosophical views current in his time as well as those relevant to his purpose and which flourished at earlier periods. It would be instructive to measure the amount of time he gives specific systems. Impressionistically, in default of such a measure, we can say that the early Advaitins devote the greatest amount of time to dealing with the views of Mīmāṃsakas and other types of Vedānta. But in the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* Śaṃkara considers at length Sāṃkhya. In that work also, there are extended criticisms of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Yoga, Buddhist, Jain, and Cārvāka theories. By consulting the index to this volume the reader can quickly trace the most important passage in which each school is criticized.

One may also raise the question of the influence of the various systems on the development of Advaita. Defenders of the tradition point out that their philosophical stance goes back a long way—in their eyes, it was developed by the sages of whom we hear in the Upaniṣads and by their predecessors. On the other hand, as was implied in the foregoing, there seems to be a remarkably small number of identifiable Advaitins prior to Śaṃkara, and one not disposed to accept tradition uncritically may well speculate that the Advaita interpretation of the Upaniṣads, although no doubt receiving a good many cues from the scriptures themselves, also owes something to other influences, blossoming forth for the first time especially in the works

of Śaṃkara and Maṇḍana. Once the question of influence is opened up in this way there does indeed seem to be some reason to suspect certain factors that conditioned the Advaita interpretation.

Some of the influences are relatively uncontroversial. It is clear enough, for example, that Maṇḍana Miśra's brand of Advaita incorporates the doctrine of *sphoṭa*, a grammatical theory held by Bhartṛhari the grammarian, whereas, Śaṃkara and his followers reject the *sphoṭa* theory. Again, Maṇḍana's explanation of false judgments tries to assimilate the Advaita view to that of the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka, whereas Śaṃkara is ambivalent and Sureśvara definitely critical of the Bhāṭṭa view on error. Maṇḍana also appears to owe something to Mīmāṃsā in his attitude toward the place of meditation in achieving release, and in his tendency to accommodate to some extent a "combined-path" view (*jñānakarmasamuccayavāda*).[26] These tendencies are not surprising : Maṇḍana was indeed a major figure in the history of both Grammarian philosophy—as the author of the *Sphoṭasiddhi*, a masterful exposition of the theory—and of Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā—as the author of several works about the system and (possibly) as a student of Kumārila himself.

It is also evident that either Advaita takes over some of the Sāṃkhya psychology or that the two systems have a common source. Advaita and Sāṃkhya both develop their account of the world through a model of reflection, according to which the pure consciousness of Self (one Self in Advaita, many in Sāṃkhya) is reflected by the *buddhi*, in various forms, including egoity (*ahaṃkāra*), internal organ (*manas*), and eventually the physical bodies and qualities of the empirical world. The parallels between the two theories on such issues clearly make it important in Śaṃkara's eyes that he carefully distinguishes the peculiar Advaita version, involving *avidyā* as a positive force though nevertheless ultimately unreal, from the Sāṃkhya account featuring a *prakṛti* that undergoes real transformations and in which *avidyā* is only a negative fact, the failure to discriminate.

The greatest notoriety has surrounded alleged Buddhist influence on Śaṃkara's Advaita. On the face of it the charge is absurd. Śaṃkara not only shows no self-conscious leanings toward Buddhism he saves some of his choicest disrespectful language for the Buddhists.[27] Nevertheless, the issue has attracted considerable scholarly discussion. As we have already seen, Gauḍapāda uses Buddhist terminology to draw Advaita conclusions. Furthermore, there are important parallels—up to a point—particularly with Vijñānavāda. Majumdar argues that Gauḍapāda got his philosophy straight out of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*.[28] The handling of *avidyā*/*māyā* in Vijñanavāda resembles

Advaita's in certain respects. Comparisons with Mādhyamika are also possible : both Mādhyamika and Advaita profess the doctrine of nonorigination (*ajātivāda*) and both Advaita and Buddhism appeal to dreams as illustrations taken to show the unreality of the world. Other points of comparison can also be found.[29]

Loyal Advaitins have almost universally rejected the suggestion of any influence, and many of them will argue that the parallels just noted are accidental or the result of misunderstandings or foreshortened views. For example, K. A. K. Aiyar[30] points out five aspects in which Advaita and Buddhism are entirely distinct, and most of them relate to the alleged parallels. (1) Both schools say that the world is "unreal", but whereas the Buddhists mean that it is only a conceptual construct (*vikalpa*), Śaṃkara does not think the world is merely a concept. (2) Momentariness is a cardinal principle of Buddhism—consciousness is fundamentally momentary for them. But in Advaita consciousness is pure, without beginning or end, thoroughly continuous; the momentariness of empirical states of consciousness overlies this underlying continuity. (3) In Buddhism the "self" is the ego, a conceptual construction and quite unreal; in Advaita the Self is the only really Real, the substratum of all conceptions. (4) In Buddhism *avidyā* causes us to construct continuants, such as the self; in Advaita it causes us instead to take what is unreal to be real and vice versa. (5) Removal of *avidyā* leads to a "blowing out" (*nirvāṇa*) for Buddhists, but for Śaṃkara it leads to perfect knowledge (*vidyā*).[31]

2

THEORY OF VALUE

I. Bondage : Life, Death, and Rebirth

As do all Indian philosophical systems (except for the Cārvākas), Advaita orients its entire approach around the quest for liberation (*mokṣa*), the release from bondage (*saṃsāra*). Although there are various levels on which this quest can be understood or interpreted, it seems quite evident that the Advaita philosophers studied here construed bondage quite literally as a more or less mechanical process (though under divine control) describable in very specific detail. In order fully to understand the Advaita theory about liberation it is necessary first to comprehend what constitutes bondage, that is, to review the cycle of life, death, and rebirth as it is conceived in Advaita. For reasons that will become clear, it seems best to begin this account at the time of a man's death and to trace his continuation around to the time of his subsequent death in his next life.

A. *Death.* Death may be due either to "natural causes," construed here as one's having lived through his allotted years as determined by his past karma, or to violence, which interrupts the natural working out of karma. In either case, however, a man comes to the point of death endowed with several relevant bits of equipment. These include his gross body, made up of material substances such as earth, water, etc.; his sense organs and "action" organs (organs of speech, locomotion, grasping, sex, and excretion); his intellectual organ (*manas*); his sense of ego (*ahaṃkāra*); and his internal organ (*buddhi* or *antaḥkaraṇa*), which is the basis of his ability to engage in intentional awareness and consequent activity.

In addition, he has stored up in the form of traces (*saṃskāra*), or tendencies, the residues (*anuśaya*) of acts he has performed in the life just ending, as well as the residues of acts performed in previous lives, which have not as yet come to "fruition" or "maturation" (*vipāka*),

that is, which have not as yet produced their results. Karmic residues are of three kinds. (1) There are those residues that were determined at birth to work themselves out during the present life (the one just ending)—these residues are called *prārabdhakarman.* (2) There are those residues that were produced by acts performed either in this life or in a previous one, but which remain latent during this present life—called *sañcitakarman.*[1] (3) Then there are the results of acts performed during this very lifetime, which will mature in some subsequent lifetime in the normal course of events. This kind of karma is called *sañcīyamāna* or *āgamin karman.*

As karmic residues mature they are influenced by what are called "impressions" (*vāsanās*) to determine the way in which the karmic potentials will in fact be worked out, the kind of experience (*bhoga*) that will accrue to the agent in consequence, and the future karmic residues that will be laid down by the act(s) so determined. These *vāsanās* appear to be decisions arrived at by the internal organ to seek certain kinds of outcomes. For instance, K. S. Iyer[2] divides *vāsanās* into impure and pure types and subdivides the impure into those, for example, that relate to worldly pride, those that relate to over-intellectualizing (addiction to study, ritualism), and those that relate to one's body (taking the body to be one's true Self, use of cosmetics to beautify or medicines to remove blemishes from one's body). At any moment in one's conscious lifetime one is guided in acting by such *vāsanās,* which develop into desires (*kāma*).[3]

The Upaniṣads themselves suggest several accounts of what happens to these various things at the time of death. It is not altogether easy to rationalize all these into a single consistent account, although presumably that is what a commentator such as Śaṃkara will attempt to do. What we provide next follows Śaṃkara (*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* IV.2.1-21) where there are disagreements.

The process goes as follows :

1. The speech function becomes absorbed into the intellectual organ or power of thought (*manas*).

2. It is followed by the functions of all the other organs. Śaṃkara emphasizes that it is only the functions that merge, not the organs themselves. (One must keep in mind that a sense organ, for example, is not to be confused with the physical locus—the visual organ is different from the eyeball).

3. Then the *manas,* having absorbed these various functions, has its own functions absorbed into breath (*prāṇa*). That this is so is evidenced by the fact that a dying person—and for that matter one

asleep and not dreaming—is seen to breathe though his senses and his mind is not functioning.

4. Next, breath so endowed merges with the individual self (*jiva*), that is, with the internal organ as limited by the awarenesses, karmic residues, and *vāsanās* present at this moment. The man stops breathing.

5. Now the *jiva*, thus encumbered, joins the subtle elements (*tanmātras*). These are five in number, corresponding to the five gross elements—air, fire, earth, water, and *ākāśa*. The "subtle" elements apparently are conceived of as minute particles that form the seeds from which grow their gross counterparts. The cluster of the five subtle elements provides a (material) "subtle body" (*sūkṣma-śarira*) that now encloses the *jiva* along with its appurtenances, just as the gross body did during life.

6. All these factors collect in the heart.[4] The *jiva* arrives replete with awarenesses (both true and false), karmic residues, *vāsanās*, desires, and internal organ and so is perfectly capable of consciousness. However, since the external organs have stopped functioning, its consciousness at this point, like consciousness in dreams, is completely controlled by past karma. Thus at the "moment of death," the *jiva* is caused by its karma to develop a *vāsanā* that determines the direction the subtle body will go as it leaves the heart—by which veins and point of exit, by what path, and to what kind of birth.

7. Thus decided, the *jiva*-controlled subtle body leaves the heart by one or another of the many veins and arteries and eventually gains egress from the dead gross body by one or another opening.

B. *The Progress of the Subtle Body.* To this point, the Upaniṣadic sources appear relatively consistent in their implications. When they turn to the account of what happens immediately after death the versions diverge slightly.

Basically, the texts distinguish two paths for the subtle bodies to follow. One of these is referred to as the "northern path," the "way of the gods" (*devayāna*), which lies through fire or light and leads to the sun. The other is the "southern path", the "way of the fathers" (*pitryāna*), which leads through smoke to the moon. Śaṃkara tells us that it is those who observe ritual obligations but do not have knowledge of God (i.e., Brahman with qualities, *saguṇa* Brahman) who follow the southern path; those who know God follow the northern path.

What happens to those who do not fulfill their ritual obligations and do not have knowledge? They follow a third path, which leads to Yama's world or city— called *saṃyamanam* here and also in Manu,

the Epic, and elsewhere—or else they are immediately reborn as small animals, insects, perhaps plants, etc.[5]

How does the passage along these paths proceed? In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, we are told that the self proceeds from this body to the next like a leech or caterpillar. Śaṃkara comments that the idea is that the self creates a link from the old body to the new one by means of its *vāsanās*.[6] This serves to remind us that as the self encased in its subtle body moves along its path it is not unconscious—it is having experiences, determined by its karmic residues as in a dream, and is forming plans and following them out as it goes along. It is thus exhausting some of its stored-up karmic residues as it proceeds and continues doing so in the place (sun, moon, or *saṃyamanam*, as the case may be) at which it in due course arrives.

Some details of the stages along the northern path are discussed in the third section, fourth chapter of the *Brahmasūtras*. For one thing, Śaṃkara argues that though by having meditated on certain symbols one person may experience things appropriate to those symbols and another may experience other things appropriate to other symbols, still there is only one northern path. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* tells us that these transmigrating selves go to light, day, the waxing half of the moon, the six months when the sun is going north, the year, Āditya, the moon, lightning.[7] What sort of travel is this? Śaṃkara explains that these are references to divinities that conduct the self along the path, since in its state it is not capable of finding its own way.

The *Chāndogya* also gives us an account of the details of the southern path. It leads from smoke through night, the dark fortnight, the months when the sun is moving south, to the realm of the fathers, thence to *ākāśa* and thus to the moon. Again, these are identified by Śaṃkara as deities who act as guides for the transmigrating self.

C. *Heaven and Hell.* The selves of those who follow the third path—to Yama's world, perhaps—are "reborn" almost immediately in bits of grain and other such things. They retain consciousness all the while, and the "hellish" experiences they earn—ascribed sometimes to instruments of torture controlled by Yama—are more plausibly construed as the natural concomitants of existing in such a state, considering the violent changes wrought on them as they are prepared for use in meals to be consumed by animals and human beings. These embodiments—plants, grains, etc.—being determined by the karmic residues of the selves that inhabit them, are rather quickly lived through, and the subtle-body-enclosed self may move on quickly from one "body" to various others, all the while experiencing

appropriate pains "as in a dream." When they are deserving, they in due course find their way into the food of humans and so get into the blood and semen and eventually gain a new human birth.

As for those who arrive at the moon, the Upaniṣads tell us that they become the "food of the gods," which Śaṃkara explains does not mean that they are actually eaten by the gods, but that they serve the gods. Actually, the sojourn in the moon is a period during which the meritorious residues are exhausted, and it is thus basically a happy interim. Those who have arrived there have come to experience their just rewards in heaven for ritual observances practiced in the preceding worldly life. They do so until a small amount of karmic residue remains. There is an extended discussion in the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* defending this interpretation. They are also said to take on a watery "body" that supports the organs and allows them to generate pleasant experiences.

Those traveling the northern path, or "way of the gods," proceed, as we have seen, through the sun (Āditya) to lightning. From there they are conducted to the realm of that which they have worshiped and upon which they meditate. If that thing is God, (*saguṇa*) Brahman, they will be led to the Brahmaloka. If they meditated on God under some symbolic manifestation, however, they will arrive at an appropriately different kind of heavenly place.[8]

It seems likely that Bādarāyaṇa thought that the Brahmaloka amounted to the state of liberation. Śaṃkara, though, cannot allow that one can literally "arrive at" the higher (*nirguṇa*) Brahman, since he claims that Brahman is quite unrelated to any second thing, and so he is forced here to interpret the Brahmaloka as a highest heaven, not liberation. That raises the question whether the selves who go there return to be reborn or not. The text, of course, asserts that they do not return—presumably once again speaking of liberation—and Śaṃkara is caught in a dilemma.[9] Either he must reject Bādarāyaṇa's and the Upaniṣads' teaching on the point, or else he must accept the Brahmaloka as liberation and so capitulate to the view that one can obtain liberation without knowing the nature of the highest Brahman. The solution that Śaṃkara finds is rather complex. On the one hand, he argues that the texts saying that the selves do not return from Brahmaloka mean they do not return to rebirth in this world; they do, however, return to other forms of existence, presumably on a divine plane. On the other hand, he is willing to admit that those attaining the Brahmaloka, provided they have in the meantime attained knowledge of the highest Brahman, will be liberated at the time of reabsorption (*pralaya*). *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* IV.3.10

tells us that such selves proceed, along with the god (Hiraṇyagarbha) who rules the Brahmaloka, to "the pure highest place of Viṣṇu," and that this is what is meant by "progressive liberation" (*krama-mukti*), since the highest Brahman cannot be (literally) "reached."

Maṇḍana Miśra[10] suggests still another way of resolving the dilemma. The nonreturning may be only relative : it may mean that those who go to the Brahmaloka remain there until the next reabsorption, but that after that they return to bondage in the next cyclical universe.

D. *Descent from Heaven to Earth.* For those in the moon the time eventually comes when they have exhausted their good karmic residues. At this point the watery body, which had supported the organs, etc., through their stay on the moon dissolves, and the subtle body with its remainder of bad karma begins to fall back toward the earth. It is said to descend inversely through the stages by which it ascended—through *ākāśa* to air, to smoke, into mist and cloud, and then to the earth's surface in the rain. This process does not take long, and the self loses consciousness during this period, just as one loses consciousness when falling from a tree (according to one account) or because the karmic residues that remain do not become operative again until they determine the next birth.

Having arrived in the rain, the subtle body finds its way into plants. It is not reborn in the plants, that is, it does not experience the pains of plant existence, as do those who follow the third path and who may indeed be reborn as plants and suffer the torments involved. Instead, the subtle body eventually attaches itself to a plant—as a grain of rice, say—which is ground up, cooked, eaten, and digested by an animal. Throughout all this the attached subtle bodies remain unconscious (fortunately for them). It is pointed out in the *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya*[11] that this part of the cycle is subject to multifarious accidents; a subtle body might spend a long time stuck in some inaccessible place where the rain water had carried it and then evaporated, or it may be carried along in the ecological cycle for a long time, passing through various bodies, occasionally into the ocean, back up into clouds, down again in rain, and so on.

E. *Birth.* Eventually, as was said, the subtle body finds its way into an animal's vital juices—blood, semen—and, depending on the kind of animal it is, becomes involved in the reproductive process. In the case of many animals, including humans, this means that it enters the womb in semen. The *Aitareyopaniṣadbhāṣya*[12] notes that the *jiva* is in a sense born twice—the first time in the semen when it enters the womb, the second time when it leaves the mother's body. In each case there is influence of the parent on the new gross body, through

the food eaten by the parent, which interacts with the elements in the subtle body; this is why the child when born resembles his parents, both in the fact that it is a human child that is born (and not some other species of animal) as well as in its facial and other features.

What is not well explained in this account is : what is responsible for a *jiva* destined for highborn caste status, say, getting into the bodily fluids of the right kind of parents, rather than suffering a lower birth among humans, or even among other animals ? It is perhaps not altogether speculative to suggest that this may have a good deal to do with the importance Indians place on the food they eat. The purer *jivas* find their way into purer foodstuffs (although exactly why still constitutes a mystery, it seems); then since the higher castes eat the purer foods, and so on down the natural order, it will ordinarily work out that the right *jivas* will turn up with the right parents.

In any case, the food eaten by the mother during gestation becomes transformed into the various physical and mental substances that make up the new body, as determined by the relevant aspects of the subtle body. *Taittiriyopaniṣadbhāṣyavārttika* II.181-186 spells out the details of this process, and Śaṃkara refers to it in more general terms in various places. Sureśvara also dwells, as do other authors, on the misery of the *jiva* as it lies in the womb;[13] here once again it has regained consciousness, apparently, and it develops its organs as the gross portions of its body corresponding to them grow. Although we are not explicitly told so, it would appear that this development takes place as determined by karmic residues through the mechanism of *vāsanās*. If so, it would seem that the process of maturation of a *jiva*'s karma begins again at least at the time it enters the womb, if not before. Although our texts are vague as to details, it is apparent that the Hindu's understanding of these matters must have had tremendous influence on his eating, sexual, and other habits.

An interesting story, corroborating some of the speculations indulged in above, is provided in the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* and its *Bhāṣya* by Śaṃkara and concerns Vāmadeva, who was liberated while in his mother's womb.[14] Vāmadeva is said to have realized the identity of his self with the Highest Self while in the womb, and he immediately obtained release there. The idea is that Vāmadeva was so pure and so close to enlightenment in his previous life that his liberation was accomplished before his next birth. But this suggests several things. First, something happened in the womb to Vāmadeva that led to his liberation; since this could hardly have been a hearing of the scripture or the words of a teacher, we must suppose that his purity resulted in removal of ignorance without special occasion. Second, since Vāmadeva

is said to have subsequently been born and lived through a life determined by his *prārabdhakarman*, we must assume that the determination of his length of life and his experiences, as well as of his type of birth, were in fact fixed prior to his liberation in the womb. This means, I infer, that what the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* called the "first birth," in which the subtle body enters the womb in the semen, is that point at which the operation of karmic residues through *vāsanās* is resumed, along with the *jiva*'s consciousness. Third, it suggests that the distinction between Vāmadeva's *prārabdhakarman* and his other karmic residues was already fixed prior to this "first birth", since presumably at the point of liberation all the other residues became inoperative.

F. *Life.* All of this brings us to what we ordinarily call the birth of the child, the "second birth" of the *Aitareya.* It would seem from the foregoing that, viewed in karmic perspective, this is a relatively unimportant event, though for obvious reasons it is a critical occasion viewed from the perspective of human society. All the karmic processes are already under way, and have been for about nine months in the case of a normal child.

This child is, then, endowed with the three kinds of karmic residues noted earlier, that is, *prārabdha, sañcita,* and *āgamin.* The *Bhagavadgitābhāṣya*[15] likens *prārabdhakarman* to an arrow already in flight—it will continue until its energy is exhausted, unless something obstructs it. Likewise, the child as he lives through the present life will experience the ripening of the residues of his *prārabdhakarman* unless something obstructs it, such as premature death due to violence or other unnatural causes. So it is the same balance of *prārabdhakarman* that determines the length of his normal life and the type of experiences he will have during that lifetime.

The method by which karmic residues determine experience needs to be discussed, for it lies at the center of the supposed problems about the fatalistic, or at least deterministic, implications of the "law of karma." It seems to me that there is little cause for such problems in the Advaita context. The key to the puzzle, if any, lies in distinguishing karma from *vāsanā.* A *vāsanā,* as we have seen, is explained as a man's determination to aim for certain objectives of a general sort. Now these determinations are the effects of one's karmic residues—one's *vāsanās* will be purer the purer one's karma. Further, pursuing a purer determination will get one, on balance, happier experiences, whereas pursuing impure determination will get one, on balance, less happy or indeed painful experiences. It is in this sense that past actions determine future experiences. However,

this is a very loose relation. It is not, for instance, the case that a certain act *x* in a past life specifically determines a certain type of experience *y* in this life. At best, *x* generates a determination on the agent's part to pursue a life plan or style, or a specific element in one, that will lead him to do something, if nothing interferes, productive of *y*. Much may interfere. One aware of the dangers of following his instincts may perform yoga, etc., to counteract the influence of his *vāsanās*. Furthermore, the agent, aware of the relation between his life plans and his type of experience, may decide to take a certain attitude to his life as a whole. This is not an alternative life plan, but a way of looking at life plans. Thus the karmic residues must keep working themselves out—that is, a man must live some life and follow some style or plan, experiencing the appropriate results—but he may remain, as it were, aloof from involvement in the process. In this second-order attitude toward bondage lies the key to liberation.

In living one's life plan or style, however, one necessarily performs actions. The primary meaning of the word "karma" is action. There are a number of relevant kinds of actions. For example, one may divide actions into bodily (*kāyika*), vocal (*vācika*), and mental (*mānasa*) acts. Then again, one can divide actions into those which are ritual acts and those which are not. The former group can be subdivided into those which are positively enjoined (*vidhi*) and those which are proscribed (*niṣedha*). Of the positively enjoined acts there may be said to be four kinds—(1) the regular daily rites (*nityakarman*), such as the baths prescribed for a Brahmin each day; (2) the occasional rites (*naimittikakarman*), ritual observances for particular occasions, for example, those performed at a certain point in the life cycle, such as investiture, succoring the ancestors, and so forth; (3) desired acts (*kāmyakarman*), that is, those acts prescribed for one who wishes to obtain a certain result, say, increase in wealth, or heaven; (4) expiatory actions (*prāyaścitta*), acts performed to purify oneself because one has failed to do certain prescribed acts either in this life or in past lives.[16]

On Śaṃkara's view all these kinds of acts are equally capable of producing karmic residues, which in turn will condition the type of birth, length of life, and kind of experience the *jīva* will inherit in the next life. For that matter, some of a man's acts may produce residues that have their results in the same life. As we shall see, however, there is a condition the presence of which is necessary for residues to be produced by any action, and that is attachment, explained by Śaṃkara as deriving from lack of Self-knowledge.

Which karmic residues work themselves out sooner, which ones constitute the *prārabdhakarman* for a given lifetime, and which are *sañcita*, stored up for later fruition? Śaṃkara seems to think that in general the more intense and proximate residues, whether sinful or meritorious, tend to mature first, but that this general rule is subject to many exceptions because there are incompatibilities between several residues that have equal claim but only one of which can mature at a given time.

How does maturation actually come about? One performs an act in lifetime A at time *t*, and this act is supposed to have something to do with the experience the same agent has in lifetime B at time $t+n$. In *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* III.2.38-41 Śaṃkara explains the difference between the views of Jaimini and Bādarāyaṇa on this score. The Mīmāṃsā view of Jaimini is that the act produces at time *t* something called an *apūrva*, which somehow reflects the act and presages the eventual outcome; this *apūrva* constitutes in a literal manner the karmic residue and works itself out automatically in lifetime B, having been passed along with the other elements of the subtle body. Bādarāyaṇa's view, as Śaṃkara interprets it, is that (1) it is clear that the act itself cannot produce the experience in lifetime B, because an act is a short-lived event; (2) whether or not there is something like an *apūrva*, it cannot by itself produce the experience that constitutes its maturation, because it is an unintelligent thing like a piece of wood and cannot pick out the appropriate time and place for the pleasure and/or pain that constitute the experience produced. As a result, (3) the correct view must be that God arranges things so that the resulting experiences match the merit or demerit characterizing the agent's past acts. It will, I trust, be appreciated that this in no way conditions what was said above about determinism and free will. It is logically possible that A should do *x* in lifetime A, that the karmic residue should breed a *vāsanā* in lifetime B that leads him to do a *y* that is productive of great sin but immediately accompanied by pleasant experiences. Indeed, not only is it logically possible but it seems to happen all the time : why else would people do such things ! God does not ordinarily match experience to simultaneous act on the ground of the merit-value of that act but rather on the ground of the merit-value of one or more past acts.

The child grows into a young, a middle-aged, and an old person. He is constantly forming plans under the influence of those actions from his past and present lives, carrying them out through present actions that are accompanied by types of experience—a mixture of pleasure and pain—arising from situations arranged by God but

appropriately reflecting the valence of the past actions. As long as a person lacks Self-knowledge, the acts he performs will themselves breed future lives and experiences. So he arrives in due course at the end of this life, carrying with him the residues of acts in this life and previous ones, and he dies once more, eventually to be reborn again in one of the fashions we have described.

II. Liberation in Advaita

Practically all Indian philosophical systems view liberation as the highest aim of mankind, and Advaita is no exception. In terms of the account of bondage just recounted one might say that liberation consists of release from the process of birth, life, death, and transmigration. This way of viewing liberation characterizes what all systems would agree to be the final desired result of their efforts, but it does not define the specific Advaita doctrine of liberation.

The Advaita view is simple to state and devastating in its implications. Liberation is nothing more nor less than being, knowing, and experiencing one's true Self. In this disarming statement we can find the key to many of the Advaita teachings.

As the Advaitin sees it, the process of rebirth described in the preceding section is the product of our ignorance (*avidyā*). We cannot help being, knowing, and experiencing our Self; thus we are always liberated. It follows, first, that liberation does not require a positive change in us. We do not have to become something, or someone, else. Liberation is not a product; it has no beginning or end; it has no degrees. Liberation is not some other place, like heaven, that one seeks to travel to.

Other systems, viewing bondage as entirely a matter of the individual's somehow falling from grace through performing evil actions, seek to attain liberation by purifying their actions. But the mechanics of bondage will operate for them as much as for those whose actions are bad; pure acts bind as much as impure ones, the *Bhagavadgītā* reminds us.[17] One has to escape the realm of actions altogether. One may contemplate desisting from performing any actions whatever, but the *Gītā* also warns us away from that : no ordinary person can avoid acting even for a moment; refusing to act is itself a kind of action.[18]

One must, therefore, identify a necessary condition for the workings of the mechanism of bondage, something removable and in whose absence the mechanism will cease to function. That condition, says the Advaitin, is *avidyā*. It is only as long as *avidyā* operates that desires for things and ends are formed in us. Without desires the *vāsanās*,

or tendencies, will not be carried through into action, and without functioning *vāsanās* the karmic residues cannot determine birth, length of life, and experiences.

However, if *avidyā* were something—like Sāṃkhya's *prakṛti*—that itself functioned through action, that is, if it were an independent and real something, different from oneself, under another's control or out of control entirely, it would not be removable by me, and release, if it occurred at all, would be accidental or at the whim of someone else. Furthermore, under those circumstances, to remove it or destroy it would require another action, which in its turn would breed residues, *vāsanās*, and desires, and the round would go on as before.

But *avidyā*, fortunately, is not something that requires action to destroy it. It is destroyed by its natural opposite, perfect knowledge (*vidyā*). Knowing is not an act and so does not breed further karmic residues. And perfect knowledge is something not under someone else's control or under no control—it is something we already have, and we will immediately recognize ourselves as having it if we only have it called to our attention under appropriate circumstances.

How it is to be called to our attention is a question leading to the main doctrines of Advaita metaphysics and epistemology. Here we are merely considering some implications of what liberation is and is not. We can now see what it is not : it is not the result of an action; it is not like arriving at a place (e.g., heaven) one has not already reached; and it is not dying or just losing consciousness (one is reborn or wakes up eventually).

Still, one may well say, "I am now bound and I want to be free, so liberation must at least be a state I'm not now in. Granted getting into that state is not like going from here to another place; yet, what *is* it like ?" Śaṃkara tells us in one place that it is like what happens to the space inside a pot when the pot breaks, that is, nothing.[19] As Gauḍapāda says, there is no liberation really.[20] Or, using another common Advaita analogy, it is like what happens to the light reflected in a dirty mirror when the mirror is cleaned.

Yet these are only analogies. What, specifically, happens to a man when he becomes liberated ? As we have seen, bondage arises because actions automatically—or with God's help—produce karmic residues, which in turn produce *vāsanās* and experiences. The condition under which this happens is *avidyā*. When *avidyā* is removed, two of the three kinds of action (karma) are rendered inoperative. The residues that have been stored up but are not stated to reach fruition in this life lose their potency; they are "burned," suggests the

etymology of the common verb used here, and like burned seed they no longer have the power to produce sprouts. As for the actions still to be performed in this life, they will no longer bind. Behavior after liberation is not action at all, since for a bit of behavior to be an action it must be done with desire for something distinguished as different from oneself, a something that one desires to obtain or avoid; when one realizes through the perfect knowledge that constitutes liberation that there are no other things, the necessary condition for action is annulled, and so no future actions can take place.

That leaves the question of the karmic residues that determine the birth, length of life, and experiences of this very lifetime during which liberation is achieved. The Advaita doctrine here is that this *prārabdhakarman* has to work itself out—it cannot be destroyed by Self-knowledge as the other two kinds of karma can; it cannot be "burned" for it has already begun to bear fruit. Thus the liberated person normally continues in bodily existence, working out his *prārabdhakarman*, and this state is known as "liberation while living," *jivanmukti*.

The *jivanmukti* state seems paradoxical. The liberated self has achieved Self-knowledge and thus no longer recognizes any distinctions; yet he moves among us, performs the necessary activities of eating, drinking, etc., that suffice to keep him alive through his allotted years. Having no desires he does not act, but he nevertheless does act insofar as he is impelled by the *vāsanās* produced by those karmic residues that are still working themselves out. Not recognizing anything as a possible object to be experienced, and not recognizing any organs through which he might experience anything, it follows that he has no experiences; yet because of the operation of *prārabdhakarman* and the *vāsanās* he is visited with objects experienced through the organs of sense.

Indeed, the *jivanmukta* or liberated person can be viewed from two perspectives : from the "higher standpoint" (*pāramārthika*) he is liberated and thus incapable of ordinary knowledge, action, and experiences, but from the "lower standpoint" (*vyāvahārika*) he is a *saṃnyāsin* or renunciate, capable of all such things. The Advaitin tends to switch back and forth between the two standpoints in describing one and the same individual.

Saṃnyāsa is generally held by Hindus to be the last of the four ideal "stages of life" (*āśrama*) and is preceded by studentship (*brahmacarya*), householdership (*gārhasthya*), and forest-dwelling (*vānaprasthya*). Whereas most Hindus view *saṃnyāsa* as an advanced spiritual state it is a peculiarity of Śaṃkara's thought that he construes this stage as

identical with liberation while living, that is, with *jīvanmukti*. This is because of his relatively uncompromising insistence on the necessity of Self-knowledge for release, coupled with his thesis that Self-knowledge necessarily renders action of any kind impossible. It is for this reason that Śaṃkara, when speaking of *saṃnyāsa*, frequently describes it in terms that seem appropriate only to the liberated person. For example, whereas other philosophers think that one may obtain liberation from any of the four "stages of life," which is sometimes cited as a sign of their tolerant moral attitude, Śaṃkara insists that one can only "become liberated" from the fourth stage. This is taken by some as a sign of relative intransigence in social morality. However, because *saṃnyāsa is* liberation—so that it is tautologous to say one must pass through it to be liberated—and because Śaṃkara insists also that one can reach *saṃnyāsa* directly from any of the other three stages, the alleged intransigence turns out to be a verbal phantasm.

For the same reasons the apparent problem about the possibility of backsliding from *saṃnyāsa* comes to nought. Having received liberation through Self-knowledge and thus passing into a state (like Yoga's *nirvikalpakasamādhi*, perhaps) in which no distinctions are recognized, one subsequently seems to come out of this state to live a life in which knowledge and actions presupposing the recognition of distinctions recommence; thus the charge of backsliding. But again the problem is semantic only. From liberation there is no backsliding : once one has realized that everything is identical with Brahman, there is no possibility of losing that realization. But the stage one reaches, that is, *saṃnyāsa*, is not a kind of *samādhi* at all, since *prārabdhakarman* is still operating. The *saṃnyāsin* does not stop behaving and experiencing, for karmic forces are still at work on him; thus *qua* behaver and experiencer he does not reach a state from which he might backslide; yet he is at the same time identical with the liberated man.

This paradoxical double-level view of the liberated man has not always been well understood by writers on Advaita.[21] A number of Western authors, as well as a few Indians, have found fault with the moral implications of Śaṃkara's position, charging it with being austerely intellectual, antinomian, and failing to reflect adequately the social virtues of love and service to mankind.

It is evident that Śaṃkara does not teach withdrawal from the world at any point along the path of spiritual progress, even at the *saṃnyāsa* or *jīvanmukta* stage. The *saṃnyāsin* is working out his karma, and although from the higher standpoint he is not "acting," this makes no difference at all from the lower standpoint, which is the only

standpoint from which questions about social mores matter. As far as the rest of us are concerned, the *saṃnyāsin is* acting—he eats, sleeps, and moves around—and, furthermore, he is doing so motivated by *vāsanās* determined by his karmic residues. What kind of *vāsanās* these are must, then, depend on what kind of residues he has stored up, which in turn must depend on the kind of acts he has performed in previous lives, or earlier in this one.

Now in order to be a true *saṃnyāsin* our individual must have Self-knowledge. But Śaṃkara is quite specific about what kind of a life one must lead before *avidyā* is removed and Self-knowledge results. He specifies four requirements for the "adept" (*adhikārin*) : (1) that he be able to tell what is eternal from what is not; (2) that he be nonattached to present and future experiences; (3) that he have acquired moral virtues such as tranquillity (*śama*), restraint (*dama*), etc., and (4) that he desire liberation. When we learn that the remaining moral virtues include faith (*śraddhā*), concentration (*samādhāna*), and forbearance (*titikṣā*) it becomes very apparent that a person must be imbued with strong positive moral inclinations when he enters the *saṃnyāsa* stage. Because he is no longer desirous of objects after entering that stage([2] above) and is no longer ignorant of what is good for him (following [1] and [4] above), it follows that there is nothing to obstruct his moral *vāsanās* from working themselves out in the natural course for optimally beneficial results. He has no evil karmic residues to spawn opposing *vāsanās*.

These remarks may help explain why the Advaitin does not admit the charges of austere intellectualism or of lack of social virtues in the *saṃnyāsin*. There is another aspect to the criticism, however, that requires further explanation. The charge is that the *saṃnyāsin* is antinomian, that is, that he is outside the obligations of social morality and thus likely to do anything at all, in particular, some harmful or antisocial thing.

Now it is, to be sure, Śaṃkara's position that householders, students, and forest-dwellers are obligated to perform moral actions, whereas *saṃnyāsins* are not. But this does not mean that *saṃnyāsins* are permitted to perform immoral actions. The point is, rather, that *saṃnyāsins* cannot perform actions at all, and therefore questions of both obligation and permission are irrelevant to his status. Although Śaṃkara counts the *saṃnyāsin* the liberated man, outside the scope of *dharma*, the rest of the theory makes it impossible for him to act immorally.

It is sometimes also charged that the Advaita system fails to recognize such virtues as love of fellow man and service to mankind. It

is evident that these charges are likely to come from the point of view of Christianity or sympathizers with it, for it is in the Christian religion that these particular virtues are especially celebrated.[22] Advaita apologists have not been slow to respond.[23]

Some answers they give are not to be found in the texts we are considering. For example, to the charge that Advaita fails to give a proper place to love for one's fellow man, modern apologists sometimes answer that, because Advaita teaches that there is only one Self, and because everyone loves his own self, which is identical with the one Self, it follows that everyone loves everyone else's self.[24] That this argument is not found in early Advaita is, I believe, entirely to its credit, for the argument is quite fallacious. Just as one may believe that, say, the Evening Star rises in the evening and that the Morning Star does not rise in the evening, even though the Evening Star is identical with the Morning Star, because one does not believe they are identical, so one may love one self (one's own) and not another, even though the two are identical, because one does not identify them. Still, it may be retorted, at least the Self-knower must love his fellow man, since what he knows is precisely that his is the one Self. But that doesn't follow either. To love one's fellow man one must presumably recognize him as one's fellow, but that means to distinguish him from oneself, and for the liberated man there are no distinctions.

In fact, Śaṃkara's theory makes it impossible to raise the question of the liberated man's love for his fellow man, unless one fiddles with the senses of the words in that phrase. But it by no means follows that his is a selfish philosophy. For Advaita, and Hinduism in general, clearly endorses the view that men are expected, to the extent of their several abilities, to serve mankind with a willing nature. The kinds of acts enjoined on those in the first three "stages of life" are calculated to support the social, moral, and spiritual order, to uphold *lokasaṃgraha*, that is, the "hanging together of the world." We have seen that on Śaṃkara's theory no acts are enjoined on the *saṃnyāsin*, but by virtue of his preparatory training (the four requirements, or *adhikāras*, mentioned earlier) he will in fact behave in ways that will contribute to the same end. In his case, indeed, since he is pure and has no selfish ends of his own to pursue, one can to one's advantage consult him for advice and guidance in one's own quest, and (provided he really *is* a liberated man and not a sham *saṃnyāsin*) the theory guarantees an honest response and a helpful one to the limit of the teacher's ability to understand and sympathize with one's questions and progress. This is the Advaita justification for the Hindu theory

of the guru or spiritual adviser; the ideal guru is the liberated man. But he is not obligated to teach, for behavior on his part indicating that he expects to reap personal advantage from his teaching is evidence that he is at best not liberated and at worst a sham.

III. The Role of Action in Becoming Liberated.

Liberation, then, is not something new that one acquires; it is nothing but the very nature of one's true Self. What we call "becoming liberated" is the removal of ignorance, of *avidyā*, which hides our nature from us. The question therefore arises : what is it that constitutes the immediate cause of the removal of *avidyā*?

On this point the Advaitin, being a kind of Mīmāṃsaka, faces the defenders of Vedic orthodoxy as well as all the other Vedantins who interpret the Upaniṣads differently than he does. It is with arguments of this kind that Śaṃkara spends most of his time. And it is over this issue as well that what is perhaps the most serious breach between Maṇḍana's and Śaṃkara's Advaita is opened.

Broadly speaking, we may distinguish three kinds of position against which Śaṃkara argues.

A. *Against Pūrvamīmāṃsā.* First, there is the position of orthodox Pūrvamīmāṃsā. The Mīmāṃsaka tends to view liberation as a kind of heavenly state that one reaches by performance of pure actions. This view is evidently compatible with viewing the liberated state as a different state from one's Self-nature. It also contrasts with Advaita's view in that liberation does not feature the perfect knowledge that is an antidote to *avidyā*. The orthodox Mīmāṃsaka is thus calling by the name "liberation" something other than what Śaṃkara has in mind. Liberation of the sort Śaṃkara has in mind involves, as we have seen, the cessation of karmic results of actions through removal of the ignorance that prevents us from having knowledge of our true Self.

But the Mīmāṃsā view may be recast in a form that accepts Śaṃkara's sense of "liberation" while apparently preserving characteristic Mīmāṃsā tenets. The relevant tenets include these : (1) that the Vedas enjoin everything of human value, including liberation; (2) that it is only actions leading to future results that can be enjoined; (3) that knowing is an act; (4) that false knowing—ignorance or *avidyā*—is a result of faults (*doṣa*) in the knower or in his organs; (5) that these faults arise from moral impurity; (6) that the scriptural injunctions enjoin actions upon us that will purify present faults and preclude future ones; (7) therefore, that by performing actions as enjoined in scripture, we may remove ignorance and achieve the

Self-knowledge upon which we are enjoined to meditate, which high meditative state constitutes liberation.

There are several philosophical theses implicit in the above against which the Advaitin argues on fundamental metaphysical and epistemological grounds. Indeed, a major aspect of Advaita philosophy may be understood as providing a philosophical position supporting the rejection of most of the seven propositions just listed. Let us begin to work up to that position by considering Śaṃkara's immediate arguments against this Mīmāṃsā way of looking at liberation and the means thereto.

The Mīmāṃsā view holds that liberation is a result of actions. Śaṃkara has several general arguments against that thesis.

First, if liberation is identical with the true nature of one's Self, then it has no beginning, because the Self has no beginning. But the result of an action is something that has a beginning; it comes into existence when the act has been performed. Therefore, being without a beginning, liberation cannot be the result of an action.

Second, liberation requires the removal of *avidyā*. Therefore, the action(s) whose result constitutes liberation must be such as to remove *avidyā*. But no *action* can remove *avidyā*; the only thing that can remove *avidyā* is knowledge, and knowing is not an act.

This argument clearly needs to be bolstered by arguments showing that knowing is not an act, and that actions cannot remove ignorance. Śaṃkara argues to the first point over and over again. He contrasts acting with knowing in that the result of an action depends on the will of the agent, whereas knowledge does not. For example, to milk a cow someone must collect appropriate implements and make an effort; to know a cow (i.e., to be aware of it) no effort is required; all that is needed is the presence of the cow and appropriate organs of cognition. Furthermore, if one has false knowledge, that is, mistakes a rope for a snake, what corrects that error is the subsequent awareness that the thing is a rope; no amount of activity will correct the error unless it also produces the corrective or sublating awareness.

With regard to the second point, that actions cannot remove ignorance, Śaṃkara in more than one place points out that results of actions are of only four kinds. The result of an action may be (1) the origination (*utpatti*) of a thing, as when the potter creates a pot, or (2) the attainment (*āpti*) of a state, as when one arrives at the village, or (3) the purification (*saṃskāra*) of a thing through addition to it of meritorious features or the subtraction from it of polluting features, as in certain ritual activities, or (4) the modification (*vikāra*) of a thing involving a change in its features, for example, when one

melts ice by heating it. Now liberation, the removal of ignorance, can be none of these four things, for reasons spelled out in infinite ways within Advaita. The basic reason may be said to be that all of these four things involve differentiation between a prior causal state and a subsequent effect state and on the Advaita view liberation must be free of differentiation, being identical with the true Self, which is without beginning or end and without change of any sort.

Note also that knowing is incapable, even according to common sense, of producing an effect of any of the above four kinds. Thus knowing is not an act, since it is incapable of having results of the type actions have. Whereas acts have results, knowing has only content, or subject matter. Either that content exists or it does not. If it does exist, it did not become existent through any activity of the cognition of which it is the content. And if it does not exist (a possibility Advaita ultimately rejects, as we shall see), cognition cannot bring it into existence. Liberation is analogous to the actual entity that is the content of a cognition; indeed, it is ultimately the Advaita position that liberation is the *only* actual entity there is, namely, Brahman, that entity being in truth the real content of all awareness. These lines of development lead directly into the heart of Advaita epistemology and philosophy of language.

These, then, are the major reasons Śaṃkara adduces against identifying liberation as the result of an act. That does not silence all opponents, however, for there are other ways of thinking of the relations among knowing, acting, and liberation.

B. *Against Bhedābhedavāda.* According to a second account, achieving liberation involves both action and knowledge, a combined path of the two (*jñānakarmasamuccaya*). Versions of the combined-path view were held, scholars believe, by certain pre-Śaṃkara Vedāntins such as Bhartṛprapañca, whose works are now for the most part lost, by the writer whom Śaṃkara identifies as the "Vṛttikāra" in his *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya*, by Bhāskara, a near-contemporary of Śaṃkara's and by others who espoused some version of Bhedābhedavāda.

According to the combined-path thesis the way to liberation involves the achievement of Self-knowledge followed by the practice of nonattached action. The virtue of the theory, it would seem, is that it promises to account properly for the central place of Self-knowledge in gaining liberation while maintaining throughout the authority of scriptural passages enjoining observance of prescribed acts and avoidance of proscribed ones. That is, on the combined-path view it is not necessary to make the Self-knower out to be beyond the scope of morality altogether. The antinomian aspects of the

doctrine that liberation is gained solely by knowledge are one extreme to be avoided, and equally to be avoided is the other extreme, that, as the Mīmāṃsaka holds, liberation is the result of action. Although agreeing that knowing is not an act, the combined-path theorist maintains that the liberation-seeker must meditate on the passages in scripture identifying the self with Brahman and that such meditation properly performed, though not an action, will remove the conditions of bondage. However, the conditions of proper meditation involve faithful observance of religious ritual; the seeker must continue to perform prescribed actions while he is securing his understanding of the Self, and specifically, even after he has achieved the understanding of his self-identity with Brahman he must continue to observe the scriptural prescriptions as he works off the remaining karma accreted from previous actions.

As we have seen, Śaṃkara agrees that prior to the achievement of Self-knowledge the seeker must satisfy high moral requirements, so that observance of scriptural injunctions is insisted on up to this point by both parties. Śaṃkara parts company with the combined-path view over the latter's insistence on observance of scriptural injunctions *after* liberation—on Śaṃkara's interpretation, when one has arrived at the stage of the *saṃnyāsin*.

Śaṃkara's reasoning is clear and simple, given his presuppositions. The knowledge that occasions liberation—that is, that removes *avidyā*—is the realization that all distinctions are unreal, nonexistent from the highest standpoint. But any action can only proceed on the basis of the assumption of a difference between agent and action, action and result. Precisely because the liberated self is one who no longer recognizes any such distinctions, it follows that one who knows his Self cannot perform any action at all, whether enjoined by scripture or otherwise. By the same token, as Śaṃkara sees it, the notion that scripture enjoins actions upon the Self-knower must necessarily be mistaken. It is only the unenlightened who are subject to obligations to perform actions; it is a type of category-mistake to suppose that a liberated man—a *saṃnyāsin*—is obliged to do anything, for that would be to suppose that the liberated man is aware of differences between himself and other things.

In short, it is Śaṃkara's view that Self-knowledge and action are entirely incompatible—the conditions for the presence of one constitute the conditions for the absence of the other. Of course, prior to gaining Self-knowledge, the seeker practises action combined with meditation; but, once true knowledge is gained, no further action is possible.

C. *Against Maṇḍana Miśra's Type of Advaita.* There is a third position to consider, arising within the Advaita system itself. Maṇḍana Miśra does not accept the thesis of the incompatibility between Self-knowledge and action. Maṇḍana's position seems to be as follows. Knowledge in general requires a distinction between a knower, an instrument of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), and a content or object known. If Śaṃkara persists in his view the result will be that Self-knowledge is not knowledge, since the required distinction is precluded by hypothesis. Further, consider an empirical case of achieving valid knowledge when previously there had been error. For example, consider the well-known example of seeing two moons because of double vision. When one comes to know, through a trustworthy authority, that there are not two moons, but only one, the illusion of two moons does not automatically cease. Thus, a false appearance continues to exist even after valid knowledge has been achieved. Likewise, in the case of Self-knowledge, the false appearance of diversity continues to exist even after one has learned that there is only the one Self. To rid oneself of the false appearance of diversity which remains even after realization of the truth, meditation of a certain kind is required and indeed enjoined by scripture, a meditation that inculcates the vision of unity over and over until the traces of past karma either mature and wither away or else are somehow rendered inoperative. Now to be sure it is the meditations that accomplish the exhausting or anesthetizing of *prārabdhakarman*, but the meditation should also be accompanied by ritual action (*nityakarman*), as we are told by the Vedas. Through a combination of meditation and action, then, traces of two kinds are dealt with—mental traces that would otherwise produce error, and moral traces that would otherwise lead a person into further sins. Just as one who has been confused by his double vision and been told truly that there is only one moon may nevertheless slip back into his confusedly seeing two moons because his affliction leads him to forget the truth, so the Self-knower may backslide into bondage because the operation of the traces of past acts leads him to forget what he has learned.

In this way, although liberation is not an effect of action or of knowledge (since true knowledge does not have its content, reality, as its effect), still the eradication of the karmic traces remaining after realization is an effect and requires causal conditions. These conditions, according to Maṇḍana, include as a major factor meditation, and as accessory factors ritual acts of prescribed sorts.

Thus Maṇḍana provides a third position contrasting with Śaṃkara's, a more subtle challenge perhaps, but still diverging plainly

from Śaṃkara's teachings. Both Śaṃkara's pupils Sureśvara and Padmapāda appear to be aware of Maṇḍana's views and rush to their teacher's defense.

Sureśvara points out that if the cessation of bondage depends on causal factors like meditation and action, it cannot be deemed necessarily everlasting once attained, for whatever is subject to dependence on causal conditions is noneternal. Even the authority of the Vedas is not sufficient to assure the eternality of liberation thus conceived.

Padmapāda's treatment of Maṇḍana is quite extensive.[25] In addition to Sureśvara's objection, Padmapāda raises some difficult questions for Maṇḍana with regard to how meditation accompanied by action can produce the direct realization of reality (Brahman) that constitutes the final state of liberation.

Although neither Sureśvara nor Padmapāda specifically allude to it, Maṇḍana at one point challenges himself to explain how any set of causal conditions can remove *avidyā* completely without leaving anything else foreign to the Self in its place. After all, the challenge goes, causes are always found to have effects that are something different from those causes and that in turn are potential factors in other causal nexuses; thus meditation cum actions can never completely expunge from reality (the Self) all foreign conditions, and liberation will never be achieved. Maṇḍana answers himself by citing the analogy of the *kaṭaka*-nut, or soap-nut, which was understood to have the remarkable ability, when thrown into dirty water, of clearing away all the dirt in the water and itself as well. This appears to be an attempt at answering the major thrust of the kind of criticism aimed at Maṇḍana by Sureśvara and Padmapāda.

It will be evident that three positions, the Mīmāṃsaka, the Bhedābhedavādin, and that of Maṇḍana, all of which try to find a place for action in the path to liberation, are largely motivated by sentiments of Brahmanical orthodoxy. All three views have at least this in common : they assume that the Vedic passages that apparently enjoin continued performance of ritual actions (the *nityakarmans*) are to be respected and applied in all stages of life, specifically including the stage of *saṃnyāsa*. Now that stage is interpre ed by Śaṃkara as being identical with the stage of Self-realization, that is of liberation, or *jivanmukti*, an identification that proponents of the three other positions may not accept. "Even supposing the *saṃnyāsin* is a liberated person," we may imagine the three opponents saying, "still the Vedas clearly enjoin actions upon him."

We have seen Śaṃkara's response to this : because the Self-knower does not recognize any distinctions he is not subject to any

injunctions, and so, whatever the appearances, those Vedic injunctions cannot be addressed to him. Śaṃkara nevertheless appreciates the pious motivations of the other positions. From their point of view he is advising them that at a certain stage in life one can stop performing religious rites. All their religious training runs counter to the implications of that, for orthodoxy counsels them that only by regular performance of prescribed acts and avoidance of prohibited ones can a person maintain whatever merit he may have earned; without such ritual action he will surely quickly gather demerit and subside once again into the lower sections of the great chain of Being.

To allay these moral and religious scruples Śaṃkara offers some words of counsel and comfort. The orthodox believer accepts the Mīmāṃsā distinction between *nitya-*, *naimittika-* and *kāmyakarmans*[26] and takes it very seriously. His notion is that, although the last two kinds of acts are undertaken for specific purposes, so that they involve attachment and so may plausibly be supposed to be improper for a *saṃnyāsin* to perform, still the regular (*nitya*) rites—the *agnihotra*, or daily fire-sacrifice, and the like—are to be performed as a matter of duty and not in order to achieve any specific results. Thus these particular regular acts can incur no sinful results and involve no attachment, and the orthodox Hindu assumes they should continue to be performed as long as life persists. Śaṃkara points out in response that, first, a certain type of act, for example, the *agnihotra*, is not *nitya* or *kāmya* by nature. Rather, a particular ritual act is *kāmya* if it is performed in order to gain a particular result, whereas it is *nitya* if it is performed out of a natural desire to avoid evil. So it is not that the Vedas enjoin on everyone the performance of a specific set of actions.

Second, the desire to avoid evil, however natural, is a desire; thus in an ultimate sense *nitya* and *kāmya* acts are essentially on the same footing, and there is no consistent way of maintaining that performance of one is essential for the *saṃnyāsin* whereas performance of the other is not.

As a result, there is no specific act omission of which by the Self-knower will incur sin, and the Vedas when properly understood do not imply anything to the contrary. Scripture does not enjoin any ritual action on the *saṃnyāsin*. But that raises the general question: how *does* a *saṃnyāsin* behave?

IV. Stages of Life, and the Role of Yoga.

We have been discussing the place of ritual action in the achievement of liberation. Nonattached action is one of a number of kinds

of discipline, or yoga, spoken of regularly in Indian thought, and one may at this point raise the question whether any of these kinds of discipline other than the gaining of Self-knowledge (*jñānayoga*) has a place in the proper path.

The arguments Śaṃkara adduces against a combined-path view apply equally against the supposition that any kind of activity whatsoever is possible in the state of *saṃnyāsa*, since the *saṃnyāsin* has realized the nondifference of everything else from his Self. The fact remains, of course, that many of the texts on which Śaṃkara chooses to comment speak in ways that *prima facie* run against his view.

In his comments on the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Brahmasūtras*, for example, as well as on several Upaniṣadic passages, Śaṃkara carefully distinguishes alternative assumptions from his own.

Whenever he can Śaṃkara interprets references to "yoga" as referring to *jñānayoga*. He has no special problem, for instance, interpreting Gauḍapāda's *asparśayoga* as the discipline of Self-knowledge. Other passages cause more trouble. For example, in the opening stanza of Book Five of the *Bhagavadgītā* Arjuna asks which is better, *saṃnyāsa* or *yoga*? Clearly here the terms cannot be synonymous. Śaṃkara explains that Arjuna is of course not aware that *saṃnyāsa* is identical with Self-knowledge. Indeed, Lord Kṛṣṇa here recommends yoga over *saṃnyāsa*, which seems to contradict Śaṃkara's doctrine. In this context, however, *saṃnyāsa* means (according to Śaṃkara) Patañjali's kind of yoga, that is, renunciation without Self-knowledge, so Śaṃkara's doctrine is unaffected. Patañjali's yoga, involving action, cannot be practised by Śaṃkara's *saṃnyāsin*; Kṛṣṇa's teaching is meant for householders such as Arjuna.

Although standard Indian tradition speaks of four stages of life—studentship, householdership, forest-dwelling, and renunciation—Śaṃkara, without rejecting this classification, provides at one point[27] what he would take to be a more accurate division between (1) householders who respect scriptural injunctions, (2) ascetics who have renounced the world but do not have Self-knowledge, (3) "lifelong students," who study, teach, and practise penance throughout their lives without raising a family, and (4) the true *saṃnyāsin*, the one who "rests in Brahman," that is, the Self-knower. The point of this passage is to indicate why *saṃnyāsa* is the only stage of life from which one can gain liberation; it is so, we can see, because Śaṃkara has defined it so that it is identical with liberation.

3

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

I. Exegetics

In the previous chapter we saw that there are three main alternative views about the role of action in gaining liberation and that Śaṃkara distinguishes his own position from all of them. The argumentation over these points consumes a large proportion of classical Advaita literature, and it may not be altogether evident to the casual reader why this is so. One must remember that Vedānta is first and foremost a kind of Mīmāṃsā or exegesis, and thus it functions, in the classical way of looking at these things, primarily to interpret the true meaning of the Vedic scriptures. It follows that the fundamental application of Advaita comes in connection with an assessment of the role scripture plays in achieving liberation.

The three alternative positions receive extended discussion as possible lines of scriptural interpretation. And it is the implications of some of the arguments developed in defending Śaṃkara's practically motivated exegetical views that lead him to characteristic theses in epistemology, philosophy of language, metaphysics, and philosophy of religion. Most English-language expositions of Advaita, having a Western audience in mind, reverse this order and make the Advaita theory appear more abstract and impractical than it was intended to be. In this introductory essay I am trying to develop Advaita theory in a fashion more nearly reflecting the order of the Advaitin's practical concerns.

The Vedic corpus, including ritual formulae (*saṃhitā*), directions for sacrifice (*brāhmaṇa*), and *upaniṣads*, may be viewed as having two distinguishable sections, one dealing with actions (*karmakāṇḍa*), the other with knowledge (*jñānakāṇḍa*). Broadly speaking, this distinction separates those passages in scripture that are related to ritual actions, as in sacrifice, from other passages that state the

nature of Brahman, the Self. These sections do not necessarily occur in separate places in the scripture : although the Upaniṣads feature passages of the second kind, the other parts of the Vedas feature passages of the first kind. A basic question of scriptural exegesis is : what is the relation between these two sections ?

There are, logically speaking, three possible relationships : (1) the *karmakāṇḍa* is primary, the *jñānakāṇḍa* subsidiary; (2) the two sections have equal weight; (3) the *jñānakāṇḍa* is primary, the *karmakāṇḍa* subsidiary. The three alternative views considered in the previous chapter concerning the role of action in liberation in fact correspond closely to the above-listed three positions on the present question. It is Pūrvamīmāṃsā that takes position (1), Bhedābhedavāda that takes position (2), and meditation-theory of Maṇḍana's sort that takes position (3).

A. *Critique of Niyogavāda.* The exegetical tradition of Pūrvamīmāṃsā, which is of hoary antiquity, promulgates the view that the primary purpose of scripture is to provide advice to men as to how to achieve the ultimate human purpose (*puruṣārtha*). It does this by issuing injunctions as to how a man should act. By performing *nityakarmans* and avoiding *kāmya-* and *niṣiddhakarmans*[1] a man can purify himself and become eligible to attain prosperity of various sorts culminating in heavenly bliss. Originally, it seems apparent, heaven was the highest human goal recognized in this tradition; liberation as a further goal came to prominence after the basic traditional stance had been established. Later Mīmāṃsakas tailored the tradition to suit the new development by taking the view that liberation constitutes a further goal to be obtained by action, if only the action of meditation. Thus the view came to be that scripture's primary function is to ordain actions, including meditation, leading to the highest human goals. As a result, the orthodox Mīmāṃsā view claims that *all* of scripture is governed by an overriding injunctive mood—whatever is said in scripture must be tied to the context of some injunction to act. If such a method of understanding scripture is not practiced, the Mīmāṃsā argues, the anomaly will follow that at least some of scripture will not be valid since it will not lead us to the highest human end. Scripture's validity depends on its relevance to matters lying beyond the sphere of ordinary experience; the other means of knowledge cannot operate successfully there, and if scripture's function were confined to this world it would have no specific role to perform and thus would not be valid. Its proper role, then, concerns future lives and goals.

This argument from scripture's role as a *pramāṇa* is only one line of

argumentation put forth by the Mīmāṃsaka. Another important line is grammatical. Some sentences in the Vedas are grammatically injunctive : their verbs appear in the optative mood (*liṅ*, in technical Indian grammatical terminology). Other sentences do not have verbs in the optative mood, but the Mīmāṃsā proposes to construe such sentences as ancillary to injunctions, as what are technically called *arthavāda*. *Arthavāda* sentences do, indeed, provide information rather than enjoin, but they are nevertheless subsidiary to injunctions, since the information they provide relates in every case to future events and things that are to be produced or achieved by actions of the sort enjoined in the injunctions. This might not seem to us the most evident way of analyzing the meaning of declarative sentences, but the Mīmāṃsaka has additional arguments with which he bolsters his position. Prominent among these is an argument stemming from a theory about the acquisition of language. Children learn the meanings of words from their roles in injunctions, so it is argued. A child hears his grandfather order his father, "Bring the cow !" and sees his father leading the cow in. Later, he hears his grandfather order his father, "Bring the horse !" and, observing his father bringing a different animal in, draws the correct conclusion that "cow" means the first and "horse" the second kind of animal. Generalizing, and treating declarative sentences as a special kind of word or phrase, the Mīmāṃsaka concludes that understanding of information-disseminating segments of language presupposes a context of injunctions.

The refutation of these views is carried on at some length by Śaṃkara, notably in the commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. It is, however, Sureśvara who provides the most generous treatment. The discussion is elaborate and is carried on through technical terminology that is not easy for an outsider to understand. Among these technical terms, we may note one of the most important.

There are various terms for injunctions,[2] but Sureśvara frequently uses the term *niyoga* to connote the notion of injunctive force. Thus a *niyogavādin* is someone who believes that enjoining is the primary function of scriptural sentences. *Niyoga* can also be used to designate, by extension, the optative mood, or *liṅ*—since it is the regular sign of *niyoga*—as well as the expected result (*kārya*) of the action enjoined, the thing-to-be-done—since an expected result is a regular concomitant and unique sign of injunctive force.[3]

The reader is directed to the summaries for a review of the many arguments developed by Śaṃkara and Sureśvara against the *niyogavādin*.[4] Here we shall be content to note a few aspects of these arguments that influence other developments in Śaṃkara's system.

As we have seen, one of Śaṃkara's major arguments against this sort of theory stems from the thesis that liberation, unlike heaven, is not a thing to be achieved. Thus it cannot properly be enjoined as something *to be* achieved. The *niyogavādin* may seek to turn this point to his advantage : scripture does not enjoin us to become liberated, but it does enjoin us to do things that will put us in a position from which we can become liberated. Śaṃkara's argument, however, is deeper than that : the point is, for him, that liberation is not in any way a future state or goal; rather, it is something that exists in the present, always has existed, and always will exist. The Mīmāṃsaka seeks to make the declarative statements in the *jñānakāṇḍa* subsidiary to the injunctive ones on the ground that scripture can only speak of entities to be known in the future. Śaṃkara insists that the main entity of which the *jñānakāṇḍa* speaks, that is, Brahman, is now existent and so cannot in any way be made out to be subsidiary to action.

The Mīmāṃsaka feels that this undercuts scriptural claim to authority, for to be a *pramāṇa* scripture must make known something that other *pramāṇas* cannot, and the only such things the Mīmāṃsaka envisages are events and things in future time. Śaṃkara's answer to this is that the Self is not made known by the other *pramāṇas* and that the sentences in the *jñānakāṇḍa* have a function in preparing the way for Self-knowledge. Thus the *karmakāṇḍa* does, as the Mīmāṃsaka suggests, make known future states that result from action, and the *jñānakāṇḍa* helps make known the Self : in both cases scripture's content is previously unknown and thus scriptural passages of both sorts are authoritative.

B. *The Combined-path View.* Other Vedānta philosophers agree that both the *karmakāṇḍa* and the *jñānakāṇḍa* are authoritative; in their view both kinds of passage in combination conduce to liberation. Sureśvara at one point implicitly classifies all such combined-path views into three varieties, according to whether such a view makes actions superior to knowledge or knowledge superior to action or whether it accords them equal status.

A view that might fall into the first class is that known as *kāmavilayavāda*,[5] which postulates that the primary path to liberation involves destruction of desires. The means to this is through fulfilling all one's desires, after which one gains a divine state from which liberation will follow automatically, for all that obstructs Self-knowledge is one's desires. Thus knowledge and action are both required, but action is primary. Sureśvara's response to this is to point out that no one can ever succeed in fulfilling all his desires; the so-called "law of karma" guarantees that every activity that fulfils one's desire will

breed more desires. Only by abandoning actions can one hope to destroy the influence of desires.

A combined-path view that makes knowledge superior to action is known as *prapañcavilayavāda.*[6] On this view the *karmakāṇḍa* injunctions are subsidiary to superior injunctions found in the *jñānakāṇḍa.* These latter injunctions—to know the Self, etc.—are superior to the *karmakāṇḍa* injunctions addressed to those who desire heaven—that they should sacrifice, etc.—for what these *karmakāṇḍa* injunctions do is tell us how to destroy worldly actions. Such destruction of all worldly activity requires the eventual removal of difference; indeed, the various *karmakāṇḍa* injunctions—*nitya, kāmya,* etc.—are intended to remove some part of the notion of difference whose ultimate and complete removal is enjoined in the *jñānakāṇḍa.* Sureśvara's answer here is to point out that the *karmakāṇḍa* enjoins action, not dissolution of action, on us in order that we may gain heaven, a different state from liberation, so that the attempted compromise is inconsistent with the texts. Furthermore, he adds, the world involving its myriad distinctions cannot be destroyed by actions, which merely breed more distinctions; only by destroying the cause of such notions of difference can the world be destroyed, and the cause is *avidyā.* Activity cannot destroy *avidyā*; only knowledge can.

The third possibility, which is the one most commonly associated with the term "combined-path view" (*jñānakarmasamuccayavāda*), is that the *karmakāṇḍa* and *jñānakāṇḍa* have equal roles in constituting the path to liberation. This is the view that was apparently propounded by Bhartṛprapañca, and Śaṃkara invokes considerable argumentation in dealing with it. This view, like the previous one, finds both the *karmakāṇḍa* and the *jñānakāṇḍa* to be comprised of injunctions, injunctions in the former to act and in the latter to meditate. As Hiriyanna[7] understands Bhartṛprapañca, the view distinguishes two stages on the path, corresponding to heaven and liberation respectively. The path to the first stage lies in the performance of the *nityakarmans* as enjoined in the *karmakāṇḍa* while meditating on God in the form of Sūtra or Hiraṇyagarbha, which Bhartṛprapañca views as a lower form of Brahman. By this combination of methods, one will then achieve *apavarga* or escape from *saṃsāra,* which is a necessary stage on the way to, but not identical with, liberation. The self that has gained this stage is not yet liberated precisely because *avidyā* has not yet been eliminated. To eliminate *avidyā,* another combination of action and knowledge is required—the "knowledge" this time involving meditation upon the higher Brahman itself, with which one in due course achieves identity, this identity constituting liberation.

Śaṃkara is unhappy with this account for several reasons. First, the notion that Brahman has a lower nature suggests that Brahman is not completely free from difference; Bhartṛprapañca's view is termed *bhedābhedavāda*, "identity-in-difference-ism" for this reason. Śaṃkara thinks the notion of Brahman both containing difference and being free from it is a fudge—plainly inconsistent. Second, he professes not to understand the second part of Bhartṛprapañca's story. Either the self who has gained *apavarga* is ready to hear the great sentences such as "that art thou" and be immediately liberated as a result, which would imply that he has given up all notions of difference, or he is not ready because he still recognizes distinctions among things. If the former, since he recognizes no distinctions he cannot act and need not meditate; liberation will arise from hearing the scriptural sentences alone. If the latter, if he is not ready, he can act and he can try to meditate as much as he pleases, but he will never be liberated as long as ignorance—his recognition of difference—continues. Thus Śaṃkara's conclusion is that Bhartṛprapañca's solution makes the worst of the various other solutions.

C. *Meditation Theory* (*Prasaṃkhyānavāda*). A final way of reconciling the two parts of scripture will be to make the *jñānakāṇḍa* superior to the *karmakāṇḍa*. This is in fact the view that Advaita takes. However, there is more than one way of interpreting that common Advaita doctrine, and it is over the interpretation of this point that Maṇḍana Miśra and Śaṃkara seem most notably to part company. The view that Maṇḍana espouses was in all likelihood not original with him, however, for Śaṃkara considers it in the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* in a manner that suggests he is not merely setting aside the vagaries of a contemporary upstart.

The attitude of meditation theory toward our present problem is that the *karmakāṇḍa* passages are indeed subsidiary to the *jñānakāṇḍa* ones, but that both sections are partly injunctive in function, the Upaniṣadic passages enjoining meditation and informing us what we should meditate on, the *karmakāṇḍa* passages enjoining actions and informing us of their results. However, the emphasis is different in the two sections : in the *karmakāṇḍa* the emphasis is on injunctions, and the informative material is subsidiary as explanatory (*arthavāda*), whereas in the *jñānakāṇḍa* the statements about Brahman and the Self are primary and do not depend on injunctions for their sense, although there is implied an injunction on us to meditate on the things these statements make known to us. Thus the Vedas as a whole enjoin us to do two things—to perform prescribed acts and to meditate on Brahman—and they give us the information necessary for us to

successfully follow these commands; it remains true, though, that the supreme message of the Vedas is found in the Upaniṣadic passages that tell us of the identity of the Self with Brahman.

This interpretation avoids many of the most glaring deficiencies of the Mīmāṃsā and Bhedābheda theories. Notably, it is apparently consistent with Advaita's penchant for monism; Maṇḍana is an even more damaging critic of difference than Śaṃkara. Yet Maṇḍana's view is not acceptable to Śaṃkara and his school. The major difficulty with it is that the meditation that is made out to be the practical point of the *jñānakāṇḍa* has no possible function. The argument here is much the same as the one just mentioned as used against Bhartṛprapañca : if the aspiring self is eligible to hear the great sentences; ignorance will be removed immediately thereby; if he isn't ready, meditation won't help. Meditation, if enjoinable, is an action, and actions both presuppose and foster differences. Śaṃkara charges that the meditation theorist misconstrues the famous passage in scripture that advises us to "hear, think, and reflect" (*śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana*); thinking and reflecting are not acts, and thus this passage cannot properly be construed as an injunction, at least in the same sense as passages advising sacrifice are. Another way of making this point is by reminding us that liberation is not a result and so cannot be "reached" by any activity, even meditation. Of course, this is not to say that meditation doesn't play a role in Śaṃkara's philosophy, only that it plays the same subordinate role that actions in general do.

D. *Śaṃkara's Positive Account.* These, then, are the rival views on the subject and Śaṃkara's reasons for rejecting them. How then does Śaṃkara think the two sections are related ? Śaṃkara's basic point is that the two sections are addressed to two entirely distinct classes of people. The *karmakāṇḍa* consists of injunctions to act; it presupposes in those it enjoins a recognition of themselves as agents wielding ritual and other objects in a variety of ways in order to achieve various sorts of results. Since liberation is not a result to be achieved, since the true Self is not an agent, there is no way in which these injunctions can be construed as relating to liberation, except in the indirect way of specifying how one should purify himself in order to become eligible for Self-knowledge. On the other hand, the *jñānakāṇḍa* consists, not of injunctions, but of declarations of fact, statements whose subject matter exists already, that is, Brahman, or the Self. These statements are addressed to a person who has become eligible to hear them by virtue of his moral purity, intelligence, and spiritual motivations. Since the statements' whole point is to imply

that there are no differences in reality, they can only be comprehended by one who is just on the verge of appreciating the truth that Brahman, the true Self, is without distinctions.

As a result, the two sections of the Vedas really have no logical relation to each other, which is to say that there is no possibility of applying some common exegetical method to them collectively. In particular, one cannot apply Mīmāṃsaka methods of exegesis to the *jñānakāṇḍa*. Yet that does not in any way impugn the Mīmāṃsā method as applied to the *karmakāṇḍa*, provided no implications are drawn that affect the *jñānakāṇḍa*. Insofar as meditation theory tries to do this it too is defective.

Scripture is authoritative throughout, but again its authority has to be understood with respect to distinct subject matters for the two sections. What the *karmakāṇḍa* enjoins about actions is valid; what the *jñānakāṇḍa* states about Brahman is likewise valid. Both kinds of passages tell us something we did not know before and could not know otherwise, the injunctions telling us what actions to perform for what future results, the statements telling us truths about a reality that is not available to the other *pramāṇas*. The function of both kinds of passages is to make something known (*jñāpaka*), not to produce activity (*kāraka*). If hearing any passage, injunctive or declarative, prompts one to act in some way it must be because one desires something, so that it is the desire that does the prompting. But, though both kinds of passages make something known, the things they make known are entirely different.

Yet there *is* a sense in which the *jñānakāṇḍa* is primary and the *karmakāṇḍa* subsidiary, and that is evident from the above. Assuming that the common purpose of scripture is to tell us how to achieve the ultimate human purpose or goal, and assuming that it is agreed that that ultimate purpose is liberation, which Śaṃkara equates with true knowledge of the Self, then it is clear that the *jñānakāṇḍa*'s subject matter pertains to that ultimate purpose in a way that the *karmakāṇḍa* does not. By hearing "that art thou" and other passages from the *jñānakāṇḍa*, one, if properly prepared, rediscovers his true Self, thus gaining liberating Self-knowledge; this result is not possible from hearing passages from the *karmakāṇḍa*. This is not to say, of course, that passages of either kind cannot be misused or misconstrued; the point is that the *karmakāṇḍa*, whether properly or improperly construed, cannot make the Self known, whereas the *jñānakāṇḍa*, when properly construed by an eligible person, can.

II. Theory of Meaning.

All of this brings us to consider how the sentences of the *jñānakāṇḍa* are to be construed. False views of the nature of language and meaning obscure an adept's ability to understand the real meaning of sentences that could make the Self known to him; part of becoming "eligible" for Self-knowledge involves adopting a correct view about language.

Śaṃkara's overall view of language is ambivalent. He is, on the one hand, suspicious of language—it is the instrument of ignorance, breeding mental constructions that distort reality by hiding our true Self from us and distracting us to consider other things.[8] But on the other hand, he finds the mechanism of liberation ultimately in an act that requires speech. Although even the great sentences of the Upaniṣads (*mahāvākyas*) are ultimately false, says Śaṃkara, because they are language and so the products of ignorance, still one can be liberated by hearing a falsehood, just as one can be killed by being frightened by an illusory snake.

Maṇḍana appears to have resolved this ambivalence by endorsing Bhartṛhari's thesis that Brahman is language (*śabdādvaita*). His thesis appears to be that Brahman is consciousness, that consciousness is the power of speech, and so the conclusion follows that Brahman is of the nature of speech; the whole universe is a manifestation (*vivarta*) of speech. It is through words that we are able to discriminate and identify the contents of our ideas, which is to say the objects of our world. Maṇḍana adduces a striking series of arguments for this conclusion.

With such a basis for a positive attitude toward language it is perhaps not surprising that Maṇḍana develops the view we sketched earlier, on which it is possible to approach Brahman positively through meditation. By contrast, Śaṃkara and Sureśvara emphasize the impossibility of using language directly to designate reality. Although hearing a *mahāvākya* is the occasion for the liberating knowledge, that knowledge is a direct intuition (*anubhava*) free from the taint of words or any of the other means of ordinary knowing; what one learns is no positive description of reality. No reflective consideration is possible after Self-knowledge, for there is no discriminate content to reflect upon. The last word on this, from the viewpoint of Śaṃkara's school, is that Brahman is "not this, not this" (*neti neti*).

Nevertheless, Śaṃkara's position is that one cannot be liberated merely by hearing a "great sentence" without understanding what the sentence means. One may wrongly think that the words that