

Review Essay on *Advaita Metaphysics – A Contemporary Perspective*- by Tapti Maitra – no 18 of Contemporary Researches in Hindu Philosophy & Religion; Indian Council for Philosophical Research with DK Printworld, Delhi, 2014, pp. 165+xiii

The book under review sets out to present critical reflections on Advaita metaphysics from, as we have in the title, a contemporary perspective. 'Contemporary' can of course mean contemporaneous to the author or around her time; but one thing it cannot signify is a moment we might call the receding past: some line that does not cut into the present in quite the same way (barring the ideas that might continue to impact the current time). So we would not say of M K Gandhi that he is a 'contemporary' figure, even though we believe that his thoughts and practical ethics continue to be influential on matters of critical discussion in the present times, or that he lives on in some philosophical richness in the thoughts of his grandson, Ramu Gandhi, who we might still consider to be contemporary. However, Maitra's chosen luminaries for this rumination on Advaita metaphysics are hardly contemporary by that definition, and if they are they would not exhaust the contemporary lineage or line-up of thinkers who have taken up of the challenge of explaining Advaita metaphysics to a contemporary audience. I have in mind Eliot Deutsch, Ramachandra Gandhi himself, Anantananda Rambhachan, Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi, Bina Gupta, perhaps also Daya Krishna and J N Mohanty (as ardent critics of Advaita epistemology), and modestly the present reviewer in that company. I imagine that the ICPR in providing the fellowship for this research project possibly negotiated limiting the coverage to just the philosophers chosen here, all of whom are not living. Be that as it may, one can only address what is included and not what is excluded.

So to the more substantive points. There are three Indian philosophers whose respective attempts at interpreting Advaita metaphysics are discussed with a chapter devoted to each. The first chapter however is dedicated to what Maitra calls 'Formulation' of Śaṅkara's Advaitism, mostly based on the *adhyāsa* discussion in Śaṅkara's Introduction to his *bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtra*. There is not much in way of actual text from Śaṅkara; in all, there are about three 'statements' that are from the original. Maitra seems hell-bent on making the case of her own – though I will argue not on her own bat as such – that Śaṅkara is here onto a logical project and is not interested in representing any psychological or empirical fact (p.17) in the process of predication that propositions by their nature enact. What is being claimed is that the *adhyāsa* disquisition should be read in the manner in which Śaṅkara wishes to describe the occurrence of subject and predicate in a proposition. Due to the inherent nature of propositional knowledge, which in all cases barring one type of content (namely, assertion of non-tautological identity) is erroneous. Why so again? Because there is attempted identification of something, which could be a concept, with something which it is not or with which it shares nothing in common, such as attributes and so on.

Now I am going to be less interested at this point with the details of the 'formulation' than to say that this is already an interpretive presentation rather than giving us the text which we may read, with a number of different possibilities or nuances, that might provide a more open-ended framework with which to understand the three authors whose variedly different interpretations we are going to be presented with. It seems there is already a commitment, though not confessed (until we get to Epilogue

at the end of the book) that she favours and is heavily influenced by the position of one of the protagonists she discusses in the book; and that in fact is Ganeswar Misra. Now how does it advance the cause of a critical treatment and reflection on Śaṅkara's intent in writing this *adhyāsa* section (or indeed the whole *bhāṣya*) if we are already presented with a privileged interpretation as if there was no question about its veracity? There is a fallacy of *petition principia* : meaning it begs the question, against the charges of the adversary (the *pūrvapakṣin*). While I find some of the analyses based on the three statements (and these are not in my view the seminal premises in Śaṅkara's argument) fascinating, I am left wondering what did Śaṅkara *actually* say? Furthermore, the iteration of the Misra-nuanced reading, that in the sentences, say, "this (*idam*) is silver" , "I see silver", that '*that*' and '*I*' are logical subjects with a definite rule for their use in language in contradiction to the predicate side, which do not have such rules (despite Strawson's attempt to device M-predicates for this purpose, or the kind of work Tarski was doing getting propositions as a whole to meet the requirements of mathematical logic). Somehow '*I*' and '*that*' as indexicals are taken to be picking out a particular, and the predicate 'silver' denoting a universal: there the twain shall not meet. In phenomenology it is argued in the opposite direction: that the '*I*' is part of a transcendental subjectivity, hence only a moment of the universal, and 'silver' is particular because it is an instantiation of the class of things, like cows, that are silver. Secondly, there is a claim that 'the concept of "*I*" is used as *ahaṃ-pratyaya-viśayī* in Śaṅkara's epistemology' (p.21). This is a subject of cognitive judgments 'because there must be a referent; a statement without reference is unthinkable'. What this implies is that the referring part of the judgment is stable and consistent; while the predicative, which is purely descriptive, is unstable, inconsistent, and indeed a wrongly attributed concept.

On the face of it this seems very persuasive. But there are two problems with this: 1) is this Śaṅkara's view or is it Maitra's gloss on Śaṅkara's derivative of the interpretation we will recognize in chapter four as the one that Misra champions? For example, we are told that *pūrvadr̥ṣṭa* does not mean mental image (thrown up by a prior experience, *smṛtirūpah*, yet here is not taken to be the exact case of memory), but rather 'signifies logical character'. Just what does this mean? Also, *avabhāsa*, along with *yusmad*, is understood (not as reflection or percept) but rather as the shifting and malleable predicate. Does our knowledge of the perceptual world self-erase or is really bereft of all psychological contents, that phenomenology tells us is there, and proceeds simply as one concept (x) attaching themselves to another concept (y) previously acquired? Error occurs when there is a mispredication, and there is no such thing as 'superimposition' (or transference) which we are told is the incorrect understanding of the key trope in Śaṅkara's analysis here, namely *adhyāsa* – though the actual passage dealing with this matter is not cited here (later for that under Misra). So *adhyāsa* should not be read as cementing an image (percept) with a perceptual agency (*asmat*) in the phenomenological process; rather it denotes as it were the linchpin that holds, albeit tenuously, two concepts from different parts of a sentence. This seems to me a patently narrow reading of Śaṅkara on *adhyāsa*, as I shall argue later.

Secondly, the concept '*I*' (denoted by *asmat*) is much more complicated than supposed here: the Buddhists were quite clear that '*I*' need have no particular referent as such for all terms and entities are imbued with emptiness; that a designation assumes its meaning by a process of exclusion and elimination (*apoha*) of what it

does *not* mean or signify; 'I' is just a code word in conventional language to get by in lieu of a place-holder where the real signification is on the predication side; and if you must insist on a referent, an *adhiṣṭhāna*, it will at best be a psychological construct of a mereologically persistent wobbly continuity that however has no ontological substratum as such – much less any such identification with *ātman* (described as the 'transcendental principle of all knowledge' p.25). The Buddhists (and later we shall use Kant and Sellars to raise similar objections) will argue that the indexical 'I' is not even a particular (being empty of content), that it is a contextual and hence changeable (in the Humean fashion) introjection, and is therefore not a logical subject of the propositional form. Of course, Śāṅkara was well-aware of such adversarial views to his, and even tries to counter these in the short Introduction (the *adhyāśa* discourse as it is called, for which more later when interrogating Misra).

So I am left wondering what is the purpose of the first chapter since its argument, reiterated again in the Epilogue, seems indistinguishable from Misra's own position? Being a junior contemporary, was Maitra an ardent and unrepentant student (or associate) of Misra's even after this style of analytical philosophizing went out of fashion after the death of A J Ayer (with whom Misra had gone to study in England). More on the latter shortly.

In the second chapter we are taken on a tour of the approach taken to Advaita Metaphysics by G R Malkani, a stalwart and much respected doyen of Indian philosophy, and who is celebrating something of a revival in the field in recent times – because he is important, and perhaps will outlive the other two writers on Advaita discussed in this book. Sharad Deshpande and Jay Garfield are keen to underscore Malkani's legacy to India's philosophy in the colonial-era.

While Malkani denies Advaita 'theology' to be any kind of mysticism or esoteric pursuit, he is nevertheless open to the suggestion that the truth of *advaita* philosophy is obtained through *śruti* ('revealed word') and tradition; certain Upaniṣadic texts help us in attaining *pārāmārthika* or *tattvajñāna*, for which mere concepts are not sufficient. Advaita is not as such a religion, but in so far as it has spiritual goal it can be characterized as a 'Religion of Truth', and that is the function of philosophy. Furthermore, self is not knowable by common sense but through a sort of 'mixed intuition' (p. 35) – an epistemography that involves supersensory insight and the revealed word. A disquisition follows whether the word is sufficient by itself to give the direct knowledge of the Absolute or it needs some other prop? To which the answer is that the word is necessary but is not sufficient to remove doubts, for which supplemental strategies become important. And here reason comes to the rescue when doubts overtake one.

This is all very interesting; but I find the treatment of the hard concepts of 'Absolute', 'Brahman', '*ātman*'. 'pure self', 'pure being' to be rather cursory and uninformed of the headaches generated and the immense amount of thinking that has gone into the concepts elsewhere in Indian philosophy and in part in Western philosophy as well – especially on the concept of being and its relation to self. I am thinking here of Heidegger, Sartre, and before them Nietzsche. Much of it is standard material, that Malkani derived from Bradleyian idealism (appearances all the way) coupled with Kant's view of the phenomenality of the world ; but it seems Malkani cannot let go the Advaitin commitment to there being behind the appearances a causally

unconnected or disjunctive reality called Brahman: the unchanging ground, in analogy with Kant's *noumena*. But is Brahman in Śāṅkara's metaphysics as distinct from the Upanisadic view the cause of the universe, is Brahman a *causa-sui*, root cause, creator etc? Well, it seems Malkani settles for an emanationist position: 'Brahman is sort of a primordial substance from which everything comes out'(p.41). Distinction is made between *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taḥastalakṣaṇa*; but this is more in the Upanisadic mode than in the differential nuance we find in Śāṅkara. And so while the true nature of Brahman is said to be *sat-cit-ānanda* (or these as Brahman's essential attributes), the world is not entirely an illusion, for in Malkani's own words (cited p. 45) : 'All things are made out of being, live in *being*, and go back to *being*. "Being" is their very stuff and substance. It is the only ultimate reality there is.' The rest of the chapter is an elaboration on the essential attributes of Brahman and the case that is made in the Upaniṣads for the identity of the *jīva/ātman* and Brahman. There is nothing terribly new or insightful here as far as the secondary account given here goes. If one has problems accepting the Upanisadic view one would have problems being persuaded any further by Malkani's exposition.

In the third chapter we are treated to the 'critique of Advaitism' by K. Sachidanda Murthy (as he was formally known, though we are given the short-hand throughout of K.S. Murthy). It is true as Maitra says that Murthy is 'one of the few luminaries who shine by their own light'. I had the good fortune of meeting him couple of times in India (once also when he was with UGC), and we participated in a conference together in Nairobi, Kenya on Environmental Ethics. He stuck me as being immensely knowledgeable and a witty man much to my liking. Murthy is best known for his book on *Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedānta*. It is a curious approach to arrive at an understanding of Brahman on the basis of etymology and grammar from assertions made in the Upaniṣads: from "I am" which is apparently *sarvalokapratyakṣa* which makes Brahman not unknown (*atyanta aprasiddhi abhavat*). But this is an attribution Murthy makes to Vedānta, only to question this assertion: 'How can the Vedānta sentences have their object *Brahman*, which is said to be the eternal subject?' (p.64) By a circularity, Murthy invokes Śāṅkara's answer that Vedānta informs us that Brahman is not an object (*aviṣaya*) since it is the inner self (*pratyagātma*). The Upaniṣads may suggest that Brahman is not an object-referring term like 'this' or 'that', but is the kernel of the subject that utters "I" or "I am".

The question that arises here is, how does this first-person indexical referent come to acquire a signification that takes it beyond the super-sensuous to something so "great", which as Śāṅkara reminded us, is neither 'being' ('is') nor 'non-being' ('is-not'), is without quality and is actionless, and *it cannot be spoken*. But something just got spoken or stamped in "I am" or we wouldn't be dilating on the supposed deeper significance of 'I'? Could we not leave 'I' as simply the self-referential function of the empirical ego? My identity undergirding the 'I' undergoes shifts and changes and it dies with my death or the demise of the mind-body complex: it is therefore not transcendental and eternal and makes no reference in-and-of-itself to anything like a supreme self. Neither *adhyāropa* nor *apavāda* help in any way if we continue to believe that to understand the fuller signification of 'I' – presuming there is one – we have to attend to language and not to any cognitive or even epistemological function. The division of an expression of a report from our ordinary perceptual experience into 'subject' and 'object' or *predicate* on the model of Indo-European language-form (for it

would be very different if not totally absent in Chinese, and perhaps also Swahili), as if this reductively exhausts the phenomenological contents of the experience and the attendant subjectivity involved seems rather disingenuous to me. Why could we not take the troubling utterance as simply a speech-act? I will say more on alternative approaches to understanding the *ahaṃ-pratyaya* statements when we move to G. Misra's similar reductive account.

Murthy's treatment (following Vidyāraṇya) of the meaning of the non-partite attributes of Brahman as *satyam*, *jñānam*, *anantam* is interesting, but it adds little to the vast primary and secondary literature on this. Murthy was writing much before Levinas developed Heidegger's insight into the temporality of being and the 'Being of being' into a whole new concept of 'infinity and totality', with which some comparisons would have been apposite. And unlike Murthy, Levinas would not go all the way to suggest that we might not think of the transcendental experience of the 'infinite' as being in any way 'mystical' or 'religious' – albeit, in broadly spiritual terms rather than verging on the theistic or monistic intuitions. It is every bit still phenomenological in the Heideggerean sense wherein access to any kind of *onto-theo-logos* is foreclosed, forever.

I am puzzled as to what is Murthy's critique here? He seems to want to reject Advaita monism. What is his reason? The one place where we do get an inkling is in his idiosyncratic question pertaining to 'revelation'. How can *śruti* be said to be the revelation of Brahman (meaning, revealed by and revealing Brahman)? But I believe he is setting up a straw-man and then brings it down. He begins by appealing to the religious (meaning Abrahamic) theory of revelation, wherein a force external to the world, namely God, is presupposed as the agent bearing the revelation: hence there is the necessity of a revealer. Brahman is no such revealer as the conception of the nonduality of Brahman would, on the face of it, rule this out. Brahman cannot reveal itself, is a major tenet of Murthy's critique here. Or we give up the conception of nondual Brahman. Murthy avers that a manifold world is a necessary requirement for revelation, therefore nondual Brahman is untenable.

I wish to challenge Murthy's claim that 'A revelation without a revealer and a recipient is unintelligible' (cited p.85). Moving away from Advaita for a moment, one might consider the Mīmāṃsā thesis of the *apauruṣeyatva* of *śruti*. I have written extensively defending this quaint thesis and aligning it with the postmodern discourse of authorless text. This is instructive or at least provides a heuristic, and the whole apparatus of *pramāṇavāda* is bought into the defence of the thesis. This is not the place to go into the defence here, suffice to say that were such a thesis plausible, and I believe Śaṅkara was himself not unaware of the strength of the thesis – which is reflected in the aligned or entailed hermeneutical strategy adopted in the Vedānta system from *Brahmasūtra* onwards – and hence did not need to cow-tow to the criterion that Murthy appeals to from the Semitic traditions. The *apauruṣeya* Brahman is seen as being on par with *śruti* for effecting its self-revelation in some luminous way, and that revelation is known as *śruti* in Vedānta. Language is the 'House of (this) Being' and just as poetry bursts forward in the bliss-(or sorrow-)ful experiences of a bard, so do the expressions we find in the Vedas. Of course, I do not want to claim that Brahman is the only or the supreme theme revealed in this way (for suppose that as a Mīmāṃsaka, I might be more inclined towards taking the Brāhmaṇas more than the Upaniṣads as being truer to the spirit of the Vedas, hence *śruti*); but do not believe

with Murthy that 'Brahman (God) discloses itself at different levels through the order of nature'. Even Advaitins are inclined at some point to introduce the locution of God or the Deity - as did Rāmānuja (of panentheistic kind) in his disenchantment with Śāṅkara's more Buddhist-like nondualist commitment, that creates a fissure within non-dualism, and hence compromises the philosophical integrity of Advaita. Śāṅkara might have accepted the locution of Saguṇa Brahman as the secondary definitional (*taṭastha-lakṣaṇa*) manifestation of Brahman when trying to account for the 'thereness' of the universe, but at the end of the day Brahman is to be understood by *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa* to be actionless and so cannot be the source of the perceived manifest world etc.; if pressed further he would throw up his hands and plead: 'it is *anirvacanīya*, inexplicable, an enigma. The latter admission in my estimation amounts to saying: since the world is *mithyā*(the source of false judgments, hence delusory), why do you keep asking me this question? One thing is for sure, it is not Brahman's illusion nor is the *apauruṣeya* Brahman the cause of it. Like Nāgārjuna, his 2nd century anticipatory Buddhist rival (and Hume in the West later on), he just might be trying to have us think that there can be an effect without a cause, or that effect₂ is the prior cause of effect₁ and *ad infinity*(pun intended).

On the claim that revelation cannot be contrary to reason or that knowledge is the *natural desideratum* of reason is all a little muddled as Murthy is appealing to the Kantian idea of reason as *vernunft*, which Kant uses in moral discourse (in his Second Critique) to postulate God. Again, what kind of logic and reasoning can save even Kant's God let alone the more complex metaphysical excesses of the Brahman-postulate, is today more of historical than of philosophical worth. And Kant does that in a different context: to account for the left-overs from the moral calculation of the good deeds and bad deeds committed by an individual, a sort of theodicy of the moral universe. If Kant's use of reason from the analytics were used to critique certain of the Advaita claims – of the sort we have been examining – not much might remain to take home. So it was nice trope to use in the title of his *magnum opus* and send a signal of mild apologia, but in the end it did not work as reason's work was not completed in these tracts, or elsewhere in the field of modern Advaita theorizing.

Finally to Ganeswar Misra. First let me make a confession. My connection – and to an extent the source of my fascination – with Ganeswar Misra comes through having read for inclusion his manuscript on *Language, Reality and Analysis: Essays in Indian Philosophy*, edited with an Introduction by Prof J N Mohanty, in a series on Indian Thought. I was editor for E J Brill, Leiden; we published this in 1990. This might have been a compacted merger of the 1971 and 1976 books by Misra published in India but not widely available outside. My impression then was and is confirmed now that Misra brought back from his time with A J Ayer in England a commitment to the analytical method and style of doing philosophy, which he felt moved to apply to Śāṅkara's seemingly (as was until then and continues to be seen as being) imbued with excessive metaphysical trappings. It would be simpler to reduce Śāṅkara's philosophy within the contours of linguistic philosophy and all problems that arise from misreading him, plus the thorny questions he tackles himself, could be solved. Philosophy to him embeds the art of conceptual analysis, and should not condescend to the temptation to take it as treating of either psychological accounts or factual knowledge of things. Extending this thesis, Misra wants to show that Śāṅkara is engaged in doing conceptual analysis and not offering psychological accounts of either ordinary or extraordinary experiences. There is no metaphysical knowledge of

a transcendent reality lying behind and beyond the empirical reality to be had. So what is Śaṅkara really doing by this account?

We have touched on some aspects of Misra's project as it re-appears in the supposed formulation of the Advaita Vedānta doctrine by Maitra herself (in the prologue chapter). Both take several risks in interpreting Śaṅkara differently to how most readers of and commentators on Śaṅkara do, even if the text chosen for discussion is largely the introductory part to the *bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtra*.

Misra begins with the thesis that all empirical knowledge takes the form of a judgment, meaning a concept with a reality: thus, 'This is a \emptyset '. The function of 'this' is purely demonstrative, which directly refers to a substantive reality (yielding *svarūpalakṣaṇa*); and of \emptyset is descriptive, as a concept, cut loose from existence. A judgment thus combines two entirely heterogeneous elements, the resultant of which is neither real nor unreal, 'a non-illusory unreal reality'. Misra construes *adhyāsa* as implicating exactly this process. It has nothing to do with the much-touted 'superimposition' cliché or mistaking one entity for another in a psychological experience; rather it is the misapplication of an unreal concept in the predicate term to a reality in the subject term. It is a case verily of mispredication (in the words of another recent commentator, Bhibhuti Yadav). Consequently, as Maitra puts it for Misra, all propositional knowledge has been considered as logically erroneous, and declared as false, which Śaṅkara names as *adhyāsa*. The only valid and ideal propositional form is the identity sentence – $A = A$; or $A=B$ if both A and B are identical to C (*akhaṇḍārthavākya*) because it is devoid of any descriptive content since its purpose is purely a demonstrative one. As said earlier both 'I' and 'this' in this subject position are immune from error since they are demonstrative indexicals and have no descriptive, much less psychological or even phenomenological content for they cannot be confused with appearances which belong to the predicative side. Misra attributes his reading to a few stray statements in Vidyāraṇya, but in fact is relying on Strawson's radical distinction between the logical subject and the logical predicate.

So given this reading of Śaṅkara what happens to the doctrine of *śabdapramāṇa* that the systems of Vedānta have been at great pains to articulate and defend? Well, *śabdapramāṇa* is simply to be taken as the Advaitic doyen's way of giving us a theory or critique of language; and Brahman – just another place-marking term for reality as the substantive basis of language, i.e. *śabda-mūla*, no more nor less. Hence the strong statement by Misra as the 'be-all and end-all' of Śaṅkara's philosophy (1976, cited in Maitra, p.103):

Śabda and *śruti* univocally signify language and linguistic forms and nothing else.

So all one needs to do is to engage in logical analysis : that alone is the proper task and calling of a philosopher, no less in India, and indeed our very own Śaṅkara (perhaps he might want to add, Nāgarjuna also) took up this challenge –alas, until the confused paṇḍits and the their partnering Samvādins closer to our times made a potpourri out of it.

This controversial suggestion is even a departure from viewing *śabdapramāṇa* as implicating an epistemic or better epistemological thesis erected upon certain

linguistic pillars, such as syntax and semantics and semiotics, with a theory of cognition grounded in phenomenology as the bridging 'glue' between the two components: *śabda* and *pramāṇa*. Had I met Misra-ji in my travels across India having just emerged from a solid training in Oceania in Western analytical philosophy and phenomenology, and trying to fathom the said doctrine in Advaita Vedānta texts, such as the celebrated *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā*, I might have been easily persuaded (I was for a while upon reading S. S. Barlingay and K. C. Bhattacharyya and Daya Krishna). However, some time spent with *paṇḍita*-scholars, such as K. T. Pandurangi, Paṭṭabhirāma Śāstri, and Nyāya-Mīmāṃsā scholars such V. N. Jha and G V Devasthali (both in Pune), led me to consider the epistemological counter-foundation as being as important as the linguistic and logical components, and these together went some way towards a defence of the doctrine of Testimony (which was just being revisited in Western philosophy after it was debunked as an untenable metaphysical thesis some half-a-century earlier, even by Bertrand Russell). As is well-known that ensued in my seminal work, *Śabda-Pramāṇa Word and Knowledge : Testimony in Indian Philosophy* (2nd edn. Delhi: DKPrintworld 2008, originally published with a subtitle 'A Doctrine in Nyāya-Mīmāṃsā Towards a theory of *Śruti-prāmāṇya*). Maitra would have done well to consult this and such works which indirectly engages and undermines the kind of interpretation of Śāṅkara we are presented with here (and of Advaita Vedānta at large).

It is curious how Misra gets both a particular and, coming out of the analysis of it, the metaphysical truth of *oneness* as its locus (*adhiṣṭhāna*), but to which universal is always ascribed that comes out of (mis)application of the predicate expression. This is puzzling as the talk of 'oneness' is hardly an expression of a particular; and the predicate is not usually a universal (perhaps the 'cowness' designation is, though that is properly an *akṛti*, genus) but it also marks out this 'cow' in the presentification from other cows and other four-legged and tailed animals. Why Misra wishes to retain the universal on the side of the subject is because he is hard-pressed to make sense of Brahman on that end which undergirds the class concept *thatness*: thatness, 'I-ness', 'thisness', all signify as the subject-term the inherent characteristic of Brahman as non-qualified, combined with the idea of pure existence and consciousness. Eventually via identity statements such as '*tat-tvam-asi*' : 'You are That (Absolute)', '*ahambrahmāsmi*', Misra condescends to accepting the Upaniṣadic claim that we arrive at 'pure consciousness' or the *unqualified non-dual Absolute* (p.114). Reading his own work I had found Misra distancing himself from Bradley for whom both sides of the identity equation, if taken in the tautological sense, would amount to a marriage of appearances, for if one side is then by the law of the identity of indiscernible, the other side is also; unless both sides are Absolute (reality), which would go against Śāṅkara's claim of the *mithyātva* of the predicated and predicating ('superimposing') world: the work of *adhyāsa*. Misra takes Śāṅkara not to be making factual claims about the existence, the nature, self-nature or extension of self; nor is he saying that the world is an illusion, or *māyā*, or whatever: the world as it is, only that we mistakenly ascribe a universal, 'unsaturated' concept to the particular, 'saturated', designated by 'I': this is the logical and formal error. To say 'I am Ramu' is about nothing else than that 'I am I'. Śāṅkara never departs from this position of revisionary metaphysics (the logical refinement of concepts), nor falls back on 'revelation' (*śruti*) – even of the qualified Murthy variety : his task, as that of any philosopher, is purely elucidatory, and his *vairāgya* implies utter disinterest in the contents of judgment.

But what if the 'I' so central in this identity analysis did not sink down to the realms or portals of the Absolute (whether construed as particular or universal), and that it remains very much a *vyāvahārika* metonym for whatever cognitive function and thus, through an act of apperception, claims a set of experiences to be its own and not of another identity? Even in regard to the stability and particularity of 'I' in recurrent expressions there is no guarantee (as in the case of the person suddenly impacted by amnesia). Furthermore, what would the upshot be if we bring in a quandary posed by the so-called 'brain-in-the-vat' experiment that the recently passed-on Hilary Putnam had advanced? This is how the thought experiment proceeds. On a particular day, owing to a certain motor-vehicle and a climbing expedition accident occurring separately, the brains of the two subjects got dispelled from their still alive bodies; in the ICU-and the operating theatre during an attempt to re-attach the brains to their respective bodies a mishap happened and the brains got switched unbeknown to the surgeons; shortly, one of the bodies stopped breathing, and became a non-living corpse. Hence, the one brain that remained was placed in the vat (and kept alive by artificial means), while the other brain was successfully attached to the body. Now the brain in the vat did not recognize his supposed spouse who called in the next morning ('No, I am not John, you are mistaken about my identity'). While the discharged patient (who identified himself as 'Joe') with the brain reimplanted to his body, was sent back to his home, but where no one recognized him by looking at his outward appearance. He kept insisting 'I am Joe, your son, Mummy and Daddy; your brother, oh sister Andrea', and so forth. Given this complete botch-up of the brain implant, what is the reality that is being signified when both the subjects in question are using 'I' and neither is being recognized for the reality they are supposed to embody or represent by dint of their self-identification, at least in the empirical plane? Do we really want to say that, regardless of this mix-up, in the *laukikavyavahārika* plane the true referents of the respective 'I's in both cases (i.e. in the utterances, albeit in the reverse) have not changed (they each remain the same to the speaker concerned, though only mistaken by external perceivers, but not in the self-reflexive domains), or that in the *alaukika* (nonconventional universe of discourse), the real referent of the 'I's in both cases is the one and same: the oneness of reality or the Absolute that is called by the name 'ātman' or, what is same, 'Brahman'? This is really stretching the fangs of ontology a little further than would be warranted even under strict linguistic and logical analyses.

Finally on the reading of *adhyāsa* that is counter to Misra's and the analysis of 'I', the first-person semantic index, I would like to present the following so that the next work on 'Advaita Vedānta – a contemporary perspective' is not a rehearse of the same by-now rather outdated viewpoint as we have in this book without due criticism (not just opaque 'critique'), or that it would bring in contemporary works closer to our times or to the future ahead of us. For, even the analytic style of philosophizing that Misra engaged in (or whatever modes of philosophizing are used by Malkani and Murthy) has changed considerably since their times, with the addition of Continental philosophy, hermeneutics, cross-cultural philosophy, feminist and critical thinking. The terrain of philosophy is not quite what it was in their times.

To lay out some correctives, I am going to draw liberally from my chapter 'On Śaṅkara's Attempted Reconciliation of 'You' and 'I' ' in my *Horizons of the Self in Hindu Thought* (Delhi: DKPrintworld, 2015; the page references below are to this text).

I wish to suggest that in a sense, yes, Śāṅkara is arguing against the coupling of the object (*viṣayi*) and the subject (*viṣayin*) because their nature is 'as contrary as light is to darkness'. Accordingly, the *adhyāsa* (read, transference) of the object, represented by 'you' (*yuṣmatpratyayagocara*), and of its properties, on the subject, represented by 'I' (*asmatpratyayagocara*), and whose nature is consciousness (*cidātmaka*) – as well as the converse – the subject and the properties on the object, can only be said to be false (*mithyā iti bhavitumuktam*). The transference indeed makes a mockery of identity; so he opines that the identification of self with non-self is an erroneous disposition as it is caused by ignorance (*avidyā*). For the transference to take place there has to be at least one substrate, and that is the 'inner' (*pratyak*)self which is non-objective and only reflexively given in the concept 'I'.

Now the problem with this analysis. Why, however, is it so difficult to suppose, as the Śūnyavāda adversary in the staged *saṃvāda* asks, that delusions can be without substrates, such as *kesonñka* (a bright spot inside the finger-stimulated eyelids)? Using the ubiquitous nacre-silver analogy, why not say this: *śūnyasyaśuktyātmanā, vivartamānasyarajatarūpeṇavivarthatā*(p.77) : nothingness first appears as nacre; then nacre is perceived as silver; the concept of silver here is the result of a mistaken transference (of properties of silverness, splendor, etc), which is *asat*(in both theories), onto nacre, which is *śūnya*, that is to say, the inexistent empty substrate if one has to have one, and so is nothingness (emptiness) itself. One is reminded here of the holographic effect whereby multiple images are projected onto empty space which children take to be real objects, or persons, such as Donald Duck, Donald Trump, Michael Jackson's personal owl (as shown in Disneyland's theatres). But Śāṅkara is circumspect here as this might entail sacrificing the substrate which is ultimately needed for his absolute principle on the bottomless altar of nothingness, or put it another way, for the real referent of the 'I' concept; *sat* has to be rescued at any cost (*ātmanāmāhmkāraspadam; pratyagātma*); and he uses the 'I' to ground being and starve off *asat*, the groundlessness of being, or non-being. But still what is the source of the *sat* and what grounds it? Might it not be turtles all the way down? He could not countenance that defeat in argument, and so suggests that it is less prolix to assume that the process is indeterminate (*anirvacanīyatā*). If Śāṅkara holds this view then it is a case of disanalogy and he should not have invoked it in the first place.

Finally, to the question do we really know the self if our only mode of self-awareness is through the falsely identified non-self (this body, this name, as being mine, even if mixed up in the ICU with another's body)? Śāṅkara's short answer is that no-one doubts one's own self; he gives the classic argument, in regard to the indubitability, self-certainty, of the reality of 'I', for no-one thinks without self-contradiction "I am not". Descartes centuries later tried out a similar argument; but there are equivalent logical flaws in both arguments: a premise is missing that establishes that an essential self-consciousness is needed for the sufficient 'pre-reflective' remainder of the *cogito* or *ahampratyaya*. It could as well be a walking, talking, drinking, loving, willing, singing, suffering self as the subjective pole of self-constituting consciousness but which is only ever so in constant encounter with the world. Or as Ricoeur and Levinas have pointed out, the self is constituted in the face of the other; there is no pristine, primordial or pre-reflective self prior to that other-generated constituting moment. We could also appeal to the Humean doubt of unity and continuity of the self-same self.

Besides, as Strawson has shown, the notion of the individual embeds much more than just the body, or the mind, for personal subjectivity is conceivably much wider in scope, with interactive aspects, self-narratives, past histories and memories, future trajectories, than the traditional thinking, mind-body, self-other dualism has supposed it to be. Also, agency involving rational choice, as Derek Parfit has shown, requires no conception of a continuing re-identifiable substrate, much less a substance of any sortal kind.

Last but not least, adverting to the question of unity of self, Kant presented us with a brilliant and unsurpassable account of the unity of apperception for which an empirical concept answers to the *a priori* reflection on what is the subject of thinking. A unifying factor is *presupposed* in perception rather than accounting for synthetic unity of apperception, and there is, furthermore, no direct experience of oneself as substance. Kant would not allow us to speculate on the real nature of the *idea* given to us in reflecting on the nature of mental activity. Wilfred Sellars sums up Kant's argument succinctly, and adds his own gloss on it; I end here with this summary as a reminder to not take Śaṅkara where he would not go, or even if he dared to we must remain vigilant and critical from our logical and discursive standpoint at some distance :

1. the I is a being of unknown species which thinks;
2. the I doesn't simply 'have thoughts'; *it thinks* – but in knowing *that* it thinks, and *what* thinks, we are not knowing what sort of being it is;
3. the I must have a nature – what it is we cannot know, though we *can* know that it is not material substance.

Sellars wryly comments:

[N]evertheless, although the I as an object of experience is not material substance, Kant insists.. that *as noumenon* the I may be the same being as that which appears to us as our bodies (*ibid* . 90 for source).

The project therefore is fraught if one believes one sees behind and beyond the eye of the 'I' if not some universal then a particular portending inexplicably toward the Absolute, whose essential characteristics are taken to be *sat-cit-ānanda*, or, *satyam-jñānam-anantam*, or a formulaic mix of both.

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