

# AIM OF THE VEDANTA: THE DESTRUCTION OF AN INNATE ERROR

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1. The fundamental thought of the Vedanta and its previous history; a glance at allied theories in the west.

In the introduction which Çankara prefixes (p. 5-23) to his Commentary on the Brahmasûtra's, he introduces us at once to the fundamental concept of the system, declaring all empirical, physical knowledge to be ignorance (Avidya), to which he opposes the metaphysics of the Vedanta, as knowledge (Vidya). Before we approach this thought in detail, let us call to mind certain truths suited to throw light on its philosophic meaning, and thereby on the Vedanta system of which they are the root.

The thought that the empirical view of nature is not able to lead us to a final solution of the being of things, meets us not only among the Indians but also in many forms in the philosophy of the west. More closely examined this thought is even the root of all metaphysics, so far as without it no metaphysics can come into being or exist. For if empirical or physical investigation were able to throw open to us the true and innermost being of nature, we should only have to continue along this path in order to come at last to an understanding of all truth; the final result would be PHYSICS (in the broader sense, as the teaching of φύσις, nature), and there would be no ground or justification for METAPHYSICS. If, therefore, the metaphysicians of ancient and modern times, dissatisfied with empirical knowledge, went on to metaphysics, this step is only to be explained by a more or less clear consciousness that all empirical investigation and knowledge amounts in the end only to a great deception grounded in the nature of our knowing faculties, to open our eyes to which is the task of metaphysics.

Thrice, so far as we know, has this knowledge reached conviction among mankind, and each time, as it appears, by a different way, according to conditions of time, national and individual character; once among the Indians, of which we are to speak, again in Greek philosophy, through Parmenides, and the third time in the modern philosophy through Kant.

What drove the Eleatic sage to proceed beyond the world as “τὸ μῆδ' ὄν” to the investigation of "the existent" seems to have been the conception, brought into prominence by his predecessor Xenophanes, of the Unity of Being, that is, the unity of nature (by him called θεός), the consequence of which Parmenides drew with unparalleled powers of abstraction, turning his back on nature, and for that reason also cutting off his return to nature.

To the same conviction came Kant by quite another way, since with German patience and thoroughness he subjected the cognitive faculties of mankind to a critical analysis, really or nominally only to examine whether these faculties be really the: fitting instruments for the investigation of transcendent objects, whereby, however, he arrived at the astonishing discovery that, amongst others, three essential elements of the world, namely, Space, Time and Causality, are nothing but three forms of perception adhering to the subject, or, if this be expressed in terms of physiology, innate functions of the brain; from this he concluded, with incontestable logic, that the world as it is extended in space and time, and knit together in all its phenomena, great and small, by the causal nexus, in this form exists only for our intellect, and is conditioned by the same; and that consequently the world reveals to us "appearances" only, and not the being of "things in themselves." What the latter are, he holds to be unknowable, regarding only external experience as the source of knowledge, so long as we are restricted to intellectual faculties like ours.

These methods of the Greek and German thinkers, admirable as they are, may seem external and cold, when we compare them with the way in which the Indians, as we may assume even in the present condition of research, reached the same concepts. Their pre-eminence will be intelligible when we consider that no people on earth took religion so seriously, none toiled on the way to salvation as they did. Their reward for this was to have got, if not the most scientific, yet the most inward and immediate expression of the deepest secret of being. How the development which led them to this goal is to be conceived in detail, we cannot yet accurately determine; it seems to us specially matter of question how the historical relation between Brahman and Atman, the two chief concepts on which Indian metaphysics grew, and which already in the Upanishad's, so far as we see, are used throughout as synonyms, is to be considered: whether the concept of Atman developed itself from that of Brahman through a mere sharpening of the subjective moment lying therein, or whether we have rather to distinguish between two streams, the one, more ecclesiastical, which raised Brahman to a principle; the other, more philosophical, which did the same for Atman, until both, closely connected in their nature, were led into a common bed. Putting aside these questions for the present, let us briefly, by a few selected examples, indicate the steps along which the Indian genius probably raised itself to the conception of the world, which we are then to set forth.

1. We have already pointed out how the Indians, setting out from the worship of personified powers of nature, recognised in that raising of the feeling above the consciousness of individual existence which occurs in prayer, that is, in the Brahman, the central force in all the forces of nature, the shaping and supporting principle of all Gods and all worlds; the word Brahman in the whole Rigveda never meaning anything else than this lifting and spiritualising power of prayer.

(With the history of this concept may be compared that of the Logos (Λόγος) of the fourth Gospel, which rests on a similar abstraction and hypostasis.) From the standpoint of this apprehension of the Brahman as a cosmic potency inherent in the subject, the Taittirīya-

Brahmaṇam (2, 8, 9, 6) for example, takes up a question put in the Rigveda (X, 81, 4) and answers it as follows:-

"Where was the tree and where the wood,  
 "From which the heaven and earth were shaped?  
 "Musing in mind seek that, ye wise,  
 "Whereon the bearer of them stood!" (Rigv. 10, 81, 4)  
 "The Brahman was the tree, the wood,  
 "From which the heavens and earth were shaped,  
 "Musing in mind, I say, ye wise,  
 "On Him the bearer of them stood!"

2. To this is joined the idea that Brahman is the inner- most and noblest in all the phenomena of the world; it is, as the Kathaka-Up. (5, 1-3) expresses it, changing and deepening the sense of the verse Rigv. 4, 40, 5, the sun in the firmament (hansahçucishad), the God (vasu, the good) in the atmosphere, the Hotar at the altar, the guest at the threshold of the house, it dwells everywhere, is born everywhere, but he only is free from sorrow and sure of liberation, who honours it, the unborn, unassailable spirit, in "the city with eleven doors' (the body), wherein it dwells, with the powers of life round it,-

"And in the middle sits a dwarf,  
 "Whom all the godlike Powers adore."

3. Here "in the lotus of the heart" the Brahman is now nothing else than the Atman, that is, the soul, literally "the self." We select an example from Chândogya-Up. 3, 14:

"Verily this universe is Brahman; as Tajjalân [in it be- "coming, ceasing, breathing] it is to be adored in silence.

"Spirit is its material, life its body, light its form; its decree "is truth, its self endlessness [literally æther]; all-working is "He, all-wishing, all-smelling, all-tasting 27 comprehending the "All, silent, ungrieved: this is my soul (âtman) in the inmost "heart, smaller than a grain of rice, or of barley, or of mus- "tard-seed, or of millet, or a grain of millet's kernel; this is "my soul in the inmost heart, greater than the earth, greater "than the atmosphere, greater than the heaven, greater than "these worlds. The all-working, all-wishing, all-smelling, all- "tasting, embracing-the-All, silent, ungrieved, this is my soul "in the inmost heart, this is Brahman, into him I shall enter "on departing hence. He to whom this happens, he, verily, "doubts no more!---Thus spoke Çandilya, Çândilya."

4. The last-mentioned entering into the true Self after death presupposes the consciousness of a difference between the empiric self, that is, the bodily personality, and the highest Self (paramatman), which is the Soul, that is, God. This difference is the subject of a lesson, which

Prajapati gives to Indra, Chândogya-Up. 8, 7-12, and in which he leads him up step by step to ever truer knowledge. To the question: "What is the Self?" comes as the first answer: 1) "The Self is the body, as it is reflected in the eye, in water, in a mirror." To the objection, that then the Self is also affected by the defect and dissolution of the body, follows the second explanation: 2) "The Self is the soul, as it enjoys itself in dream." To the objection that the dreaming soul, if it does not suffer, still believes itself to suffer, it is replied: 3) "When "he who has sunk to sleep has come altogether, fully, and wholly to rest, so that he beholds no dream, that is the "Self, the undying, the fearless, the Brahman." To the objection that in this condition consciousness ceases, and that it is like entering into nothing, Prajapati at last answers: 4) "Mortal, verily, O Mighty one, is this body, possessed by "death; it is the dwelling-place of that undying, bodiless Self. "The embodied is possessed by pleasure and pain, for while "he is embodied, there can be no escaping of pleasure and "pain. But pleasure and pain, do not touch the bodiless one.- "Bodiless is the wind; clouds, lightning, thunder are bodiless. "Now as these arise from the atmosphere [in which they are "bound, like the soul in the body], enter into the highest light, "and thereby appear in their own form, so also this full rest "[that is, the Soul, in deep sleep] arises from this body, enters "into the highest light and reaches its own form; that is the"highest Spirit."

In similar fashion the Taittiriya-Up. 2, 1-7 leads from the bodily self, by stripping one covering after another off it, at last to the true Self. It distinguishes: 1) the Self consisting of food; in this, as in a case, is held 2) the Self of breath, in this 3) the Self of manas, in this 4) the Self of knowledge, in this finally as innermost 5) the Self of bliss. "Verily, this is the Essence (rasa); he who reaches this "essence, is filled with bliss; for who could breathe and who "could live, if this bliss were not in space? - For he it is that "causes bliss; for when one finds peace and support in this "invisible, bodiless, unspeakable, unfathomable one, then has "he entered into peace; but if he in this also [as in the four "first] recognises a hollow, an "other," then he finds unrest; "this is the unrest of him who thinks himself wise."

5. The Self, in this sense, is, according to Chândogya-Up. 6, 2, 1 "the existent," "the One without a second," and, answering to this, Brihadaranyaka-Up. 2, 4, 5 refers and limits all investigation to the Self: "The Self, verily, o Maitreyî, must "be seen, heard, thought on, and investigated; he who sees, "hears, thinks on, and investigates the Self, has understood "all this world." "These worlds, these Gods, these beings, all "these are what the Self is." It is the point of union (ekât- yanam) for all, as the ocean for the waters, the ear for sound, the eye for forms, and so on; all outside it is as devoid of being as the sound that goes out from a musical instrument; he who has laid hold on the instrument has therewith also laid hold on the sounds that spring from it (loc. cit., 2, 4, 6-11). It is, according to Chândogya Up. 6, 1, 4, that from which all the world has come into being, as a mere transformation of it: he who knows this One, therewith knows all, "just as, oh dear "one, by a lump of clay, all that is made of clay is known; "the transformation is a matter of words, a mere name; in "reality it is only clay!"-

6. In conformity with this, the Içâ-Up. 1, 6 bids us "sink the whole world in God," that is, in

the Self:

"Who, seeking, finds all being in the Self

"For him all error fades, all sorrow ends;"

and the Kathaka-Up. (4, 10-11) warns us not to admit a multiplicity, anything different (nânâ) from the soul:

"For what is here is there, and what is there is here;

"From death to death he hastes who here another knows!

"In spirit shall ye know, here is no manifold;

"From death to death is he ensnared who difference sees."

7. It was a simple consequence of these conceptions when the Vedanta declared the empirical concept which represents to us a manifold existing outside the Self, a world of the Object existing independently of the Subject, to be a glamour (maya), an innate illusion (bhrama) resting on an illegitimate transference (adhyasa), in virtue of which we transfer the reality, which alone belongs to the subject, to the world of the object, and, conversely, the characteristics of the objective world, e. g., corporeality, to the subject, the Self, the Soul. Concerning this, let us hear Çankara himself.

2. Analysis of Çankara's Introduction (p. 5-23).

"Object (vishaya) and Subject (vishayin)", he says at the beginning of his work, "having as their province the present- 'tation of the Thou' [the not I] and the 'I,' 28 are of a nature "as opposed as darkness and light. If it is certain that the "being of the one is incompatible with the being of the other, "it follows so much the more that the qualities of the one "also do not exist in the other. Hence it follows that the "transfer (adhyasa) of the object, which has as its province "the idea of the 'Thou,' and its qualities, to the pure spiri- "tual subject, which has as its province the idea of the 'I,' "and conversely, that the transfer of the subject and its "qualities to the object, is logically false. Yet in mankind "this procedure resting on false knowledge (mithya-jñāna- "nimitta) of pairing together the true and untrue [that is, "subjective and objective] is inborn (naisargika), so that they

transfer the being and qualities of the one to the other, not "separating object and subject, although they are absolutely "different (atyanta-vivikta) and so saying, for example: This "am I,' "That is mine."

However this transference be defined, (p. 12, 1-14, 3) in any case it comes to this, that qualities of one thing appear in another, as when mother-of-pearl is taken for silver, or when two moons are seen instead of one (p. 14, 3-5). This erroneous transference of the things and relations of the objective world to the inner Soul, the Self in the strictest sense of the word, is possible because the soul also is, in a certain sense, object, namely, object of presentation to the "I," and, as our author here affirms, in no sense something transcendent, lying beyond the province of

perception (paroksham).

"This transference, thus made, the wise term IGNORANCE "(avidya), and, in contradistinction to it, they call the accurate "determination of the own nature of things" (vastu-svarûpam, of the being-in-itself of things, as we should say) "KNOWLEDGE "(vidya). If this be so, it follows that that to which a [similar, "false] transfer is thus made, is not in the slightest degree "affected by any want or excess caused thereby" (p. 16, 1-4).

The object of knowledge, the Soul, thus remains, as made clear in these words, entirely unaltered, no matter whether we rightly understand it, or not. From this we must conclude that the ground of the erroneous empirical concept is to be sought for solely in the knowing subject; in this subject the avidya, as repeatedly (p. 10, 1. 21, 7. 807, 12) asserted, is innate (naisargika); its cause is a wrong perception (it is mithya-jñāna-nimitta, p. 9, 3); its being is a wrong conception (mithya-pratyaya-rûpa, p. 21, 7);-all these expressions point to the fact that the final reason of the false empirical concept is to be sought-where, however, the Vêdanta did not seek it in the nature of our cognitive faculty. An analysis of this, as Kant undertook it, would in fact give the true scientific foundation of the Vedanta system; and it is to be hoped that the Indians, whose orthodox dogmatics, holding good still at the present day, we here set forth, will accept the teachings of the "Critique of Pure Reason," when it is brought to their knowledge, with grateful respect.

On the soil of this natural Ignorance stands according to Çankara, all human knowledge, with the exception of the metaphysics of the Vedanta; thus, not only the empirical thought, that is, thought by means of the sense-organs, of common life, but also the whole ritual canon of the Veda, with its things commanded and forbidden under promise of reward and punishment in another world (p. 16, 4-17, 1).

The immediate ground on which both worldly and Vedic actions must be referred to the sphere of Ignorance, lies in this, that both are not free from the delusion (abhimāna) of seeing the "I" in the body; for neither knowledge nor action is possible unless one considers as belonging to the Self, 32 the sense-organs and the body bearing them, and the ritual part of the Veda also cannot but transfer many circumstances of the outer world erroneously to the Soul.

A further ground for the inadequacy of all empirical knowledge is, that it is only distinguished from that of animals in degree through higher evolution (vyutpatti), but is in kind similar to it, so far as, like it, it is wholly subservient to egoism, which impels us to seek for what is desired and to avoid what is not desired; and it makes no difference here whether these egoistic aims, as in the case of worldly actions, reach their realisation already in this life, or, as in the case of the works ordained by the Vedas, only in a future existence, thus presupposing a knowledge of it. Quite otherwise the Vedanta, which, on the contrary, leaves the whole sphere of desire behind, turns its back on all differences of position in outer life (even if, as we shall see, not quite consistently), and raises itself to the knowledge that the Soul is in reality not the least involved in the circle of transmigration (samsara).

For all those laws of empirical knowledge and action are valid for us only so long as we

are influenced by the Ignorance, resting on a false transference, which nature imposes on us, of which it is said in conclusion (p. 21, 7): "Thus it stands "with this beginningless, endless, innate transference, which "in its essence is a false assumption, producing all the con- "ditions of doing and enjoying [or suffering] and forming the "[natural] standpoint of all men. To remove this, the root "of the evil, and to teach the knowledge of the unity of the "soul, this is the aim of all the texts of the Vedanta."

This aim the Vedanta reaches by separating from the soul (the Self, âtman) everything that is not soul, not Self, and is only transferred thereto falsely, thus, in a word, all Upadhi's, or individualising determinations, clothed (upahitam 163, 9. 690, 5. 739, 7) in which the Brahman appears as individual soul. Such Upadhi's are: 1) all things and relations of the outer world (cf. note 29), 2) the body, consisting of the gross ele- ments, 3) the Indriya's, that is the five sense-organs and five organs of action of the body, represented as separate existences, 4) Manas, also called the inner organ (antahkaranam), the central organ for the sense-organs as well as for the organs of action, in the first place closely approaching what we call understanding, and in the latter almost synonymous with, what we call conscious will, the unified principle of conscious life, as 5) the Mukhyaprâna with its five offshoots, is the unified principle of unconscious life, subserving nutrition.

-All this, of which more in our psychological part, meta- physics cuts away, in order to retain the soul, that is, the real Self or "I," which is present as spectator (sâkshin) of all individual actions, but itself only apparently individualised by the Upadhi's, is on the contrary in reality identical with the highest godhead, and, like this, is pure spiritual nature, pure consciousness (caitanyam).

And here we touch the fundamental want of the Vedanta system, which, among other things, causes the absence of its proper morality, however near this, in its purest form, lay to its principle. 36 Rightly the Vedanta recognises, as the sole source by which we may reach true knowledge, true apprehension of being-in-itself, our own "I," but it wrongly halts at the form in which it directly appeals to our consciousness, as a knower, even after it has cut away the whole intellectual apparatus, and ascribed it to the "not I," the world of phenomena, just as it has also, very rightly, indicated as the dwelling of the highest soul, not, as Descartes did, the head (about which Brih. 2, 2 treats), but the heart.

Meanwhile, as we shall see, the spiritual (caitanyam) is, in our system, a potency which lies at the root of all motion and change in nature, which is therefore also ascribed, for example, to plants, and means thus rather the capacity of reaction to outer influences, a potency which, in its highest development, reveals itself as human intellect, as spirit.

(यह लेख पॉल ज्यूसेन की पुस्तक "The System of The Vedanta" से लिया गया है।)