

## SELF AND NON-SELF: INTRODUCTION TO THE DRḠDRŚYAVIVEKA\*

If we take a piece of clay and make a jar from it and this jar one day becomes aware of itself, it will say: I am a jar.

If we break down the jar and re-knead the clay and make a statue and one day the statue becomes conscious of itself, it will say: I am a statue.

If we break down the statue and re-knead what gave origin to the jar and to the statue and make a pyramid of it and this becomes aware of itself, it will say: I am a pyramid.

But if the jar, the statue and the pyramid – spatial-temporal constructions qualified by certain forms – could really become aware of their *primordial* and *existential* unconscious substratum they would say: I am formless, homogeneous clay that takes form now as a jar, now as a statue, now as a pyramid.

Beyond every formal-structural “modification”, beyond all ego-form-quality the substratum that is pure Existence (*sat*) lives eternally.

*Sat* is that undivided essence always identical to itself which gives life-appearance to all that exists or, better still, to all that is perceived. There is no “empirical ego”, whatever condition it may belong to, which does not feel within itself, in an innate way, this eternally pulsing *presence*. This existence does not need proof, or philosophical or scientific arguments. The very existence of the ego-man (as an entity separated from the context of life) is the reflection of *sat*: Life that is not born and does not die. *Sat* is *Brahman*, the substratum of all, in that it is real Existence without change or alteration; Absolute Life, pure Being from which motion-change-cause derives.

«What does not exist cannot be brought into existence; what exists cannot cease to exist. This ultimate truth was revealed by those who saw the essence of all things».

«Know that *That*, from which all this [manifest and changing] radiated, is indestructible. No one can cause the destruction of the imperishable Being».

«It was never born, nor does it ever die. Having always been, it cannot cease to be. Non-born, permanent, imperishable, ancient, it is not killed even when the body is killed».<sup>1</sup>

Śaṅkara asks himself: What is Being? What is non-being? In his commentary to the aforementioned *sūtra*, he states that *abhāva* (non-being) is that which does not really exist, that which has no intrinsic life of its own, and no sufficient reason. This definition includes all the expressions of existence upon the perceptible plane. If we analyze every experience, we note a chain of effects which, in turn, are mere *modifications* or alterations; from this we can deduce that the objective-empirical world has only a changeable and phenomenal value.

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\* From Śaṅkara's *Drḡdrśyaviveka*, Discerning between *ātman* and *anātman*. Translation from the Sanskrit and Commentary by Raphael (Āśram Vidyā Order). Aurea Vidyā, Spring 2007.

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavadgītā*, II, 16-27-20. Translation from the Sanskrit and Commentary by Raphael. Edizioni Āśram Vidyā, Roma. (Italian edition).

The universe is only an “uninterrupted flow of images-forms”. But a modification is just an aspect more or less different from its cause; that is, it is the cause that presents itself in a new event-framework. We are unable to take in cause and effect at a single glance. We are only able to see one or the other. Empirical experience is based upon this conception of cause and effect; the perceptible shows itself as a hierarchy of these two terms, but what is now effect later may appear as cause, and a cause may prove to be an effect. Fundamentally, these two terms can be equalled, they belong to the same denominator; they are simple categories that change constantly and therefore they cannot have any absolute Reality. Beyond cause-effect-cause and so on, there is *sat*: absolute Life-Existence without cause and without effect; we might say uncaused.

According to *Vedānta*, the universal basis of Being is the *ātman* or *Brahman-nirguṇa*. Non-being or becoming is *māyā*-phenomenon, which is not “illusion” in the Western sense of the word, but a word which etymologically means “that which flows, changes every moment, which appears and disappears”.

For *Advaita Vedānta*, the universe of names and forms (cause-effect-cause and so on) is a production of *māyā*. As long as we remain within the realm of causes and effects, we are prisoners of *māyā*, that is of the principle of causality. There is only one means by which to eliminate the veil of *māyā*: that of considering cause-effect as a simple *superimposition* upon *Brahman*. When all the superimpositions disappear, then Reality will reveal itself as *sat*, Existence without change and without any transformation, and therefore without conflict. Where there is becoming there is time-space, where there is time-space there is imprisonment and limitation, and where there are these there is conflict and bewilderment.

The manifestation of *māyā* can be seen under two different lights:

– From the point of view of the absolute *Brahman*, it is devoid of any degree of reality.

– From the empirical point of view, it can be considered, as it is stated by the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, as a homogeneous unity divided into three parts; with the fourth part remaining always as transcendent and uncaused:

I. *The gross state*: it is the totality of living beings having a name and a form; it is the totality of all physical bodies as the expression of one Being: the universal Entity. It corresponds to *vaiśvānara*.

II. *The subtle state*: it is the cosmic mental state, the psychical life of universal existence. The gross state emerges from the subtle one. Man’s mind itself is an infinitesimal fraction of the cosmic Mind. There is no manifested form, at any level or in any state whatever that does not possess a portion of the cosmic Mind. This state corresponds to *taijasa* (the shining).

III. *The causal state*: it contains within itself, at a virtual level, all the infinite expressions of universal Life. Here, everything is at the potential state. It corresponds to *prājña*.

These three are also compared to the conditions of waking, dreaming and deep sleep which is the state where awareness retires into the potential state.

The *Fourth* can be described only by the use of negatives, as: Non-Born; Non-Being in that pure Being; Non-Manifest; Unconditioned; Uncaused; also Infinite, and Absolute. It is not the “known”, nor is it what the mind imagines as the unknown, it is not a “state” either. It corresponds to *Turiya* and can be reached by *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. From the point of view of the Absolute, as we have already said, manifestation has no reality.

The above-mentioned *Upaniṣad* says:

«The first quarter (*pāda*) is *vaiśvānara*, whose sphere (of action) is the waking state; it is conscious of external objects, has seven limbs and nineteen mouths; it experiences gross (material) objects».

«The second quarter (*pāda*) is *taijasa* (the luminous) whose sphere of action is the dream state; consciousness here is interiorized. It has seven limbs and nineteen mouths and experiences the subtle objects».

«This is the state of deep sleep where the sleeper no longer enjoys any object or dreams any dream. The third quarter (*pāda*) is *prājña*, whose sphere of action is, in fact, deep sleep; here all things remain undifferentiated; in truth it is a unity of pure consciousness. (In *prājña*), there is fullness of happiness and (the sleeper) truly tastes this happiness. It is the cognitive condition (of the other two states)».

«The Sages believe that the Fourth – which has no knowledge of either the internal (subjective) world or the external (objective) world, nor of both of them at the same time, and which, ultimately, is not (even) a unity of integral consciousness, as it is neither conscious nor non-conscious – is *adr̥ṣṭa*: invisible, *avyavahārya*: non-acting, *agrāhya*: incomprehensible, *alakṣaṇa*: undefinable, *acintya*: unthinkable, *avyapadeśya*: indescribable; it is the only *pratyayasāra*: the essence of self-knowledge, without any trace of manifestation, fullness of peace and beatitude without duality: it is the *ātman* and as such it must be known».<sup>2</sup>

«With three-quarters of Myself I manifest myself» state the Sacred Indian Scriptures, «but if all these things proceed from Me, I am not these things»; they are simple shadows-lights projected upon the screen of the Infinite. Beyond all chemical compounds, nitrogen, water, hydrogen, iron, and so on – shadows thrown upon a fragment of time-space – there exists only undifferentiated electrical substance always equal to itself. Thus, if a plane is composed of lines, these are composed of points and the point, although without dimensions, is the basic aspect of all manifested forms. *Sat* is Reality, the ultimate Reality; it is pure, uncontaminated Life, in the unqualified, a-formal state.

Śaṅkara [throughout his Teaching] invites us to discern (*viveka*) between Real and non-real, between *ātman* (Self) and *anātman*<sup>3</sup> (non-Self), between Infinite and finite, between Life and death. Man’s greatest conflicts stem from his attachment to and his identification with the *anātman*, with the finite, with the unreal, in other words with

<sup>2</sup> *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* with the *kārikā* of Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara’s Commentary: I, III, IV, V, VII. Edizioni Āśram Vidyā, Roma. (Italian edition). See also, Gauḍapāda, *Maṇḍūkyakārikā*: I, III, IV, V, VII. Translation from the Sanskrit, and Commentary, by Raphael. Aurea Vidyā, New York.

<sup>3</sup> *Ahaṅkāra*, the sense of ego.

death. Knowledge leads to the recognition of *a-sat* (false existence) and the discovery of *sat* (True Existence).

*Sat* includes *cit*, absolute Intelligence. As *sat* is not just a quality, but the very essence of all that is, thus *cit*, further than being a quality, is a consubstantiality of *sat*.

This intelligence, with existence, constitutes the sole basis of every life-form; it is the support of all relative knowledge and it is by it that we can acquire consciousness of the objective world, of the subjective world and of the Entity in itself. If this intelligible light were to fail, perception itself would cease to function. This light, which reveals everything, is not revealed because it cannot be considered an object of knowledge. The Absolute can never be considered an object of perception because this would imply duality. The Absolute simply is. Light-Consciousness-Intelligence is, we can say, an *a priori* principle of our very existence (as phenomenal aspect), because the mind does not produce it but it is in fact revealed through what men call mind. How can thought-mind, which is cause-time-space, grasp what is without cause, time or space?

We should remember that the human mind is not the only medium of «The Light that reveals all»; every atom of the Universe, we have seen, reveals Intelligence as principle, at different levels.

It is above all through *cit* that the *Vedānta* pursues Brahmanic Realization. *Advaita* is *practical* metaphysics which must be experimented in the world of becoming. This metaphysical pathway, utilizing in man the reflection of *cit*, as *viveka* (discernment, intellectual super-conscious intuition), realizes brahmanic Identity in a concrete way. The life -substratum, which never undergoes change, is *sat*; the mode through which *sat* manifests itself is *cit*; the intrinsic vibration that permeates *sat* and *cit* is *ānanda*, absolute Completeness-Beatitude.

In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (III, VI, 1) we read:

«In truth these living creatures were born of Beatitude, it is through Beatitude that, having come into existence, they stay alive, it is to Beatitude that they will all return».

The irresistible motion that gives rise to, sustains and, in time and space, transcends all forms of manifested life, is constituted of *ānanda*. This cannot be revealed totally until differentiation is transcended.

The reflections of *ānanda* in the incarnated *jīva* are those sensorial pleasures that go from sex to the refined pleasure of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic things. There is no manifest atom that does not move and tend towards the state of happiness. By an act of love man is born to life, by an act of love he sacrifices himself, by an act of love the sun and the other stars move. The individual acts, urged by the universal force of “pleasure”. Passions are an altered form of this innate beatific nature. Passion is enjoyment, sentiment is gratification of pleasure; even intellectual research is the fruit of pleasure, of satisfaction. However, sensory enjoyment, of any dimension whatever, is not *ānanda*, but a simple distorted reflection. Thus, intelligence-instinct, whether mineral, vegetable, animal or human, is not brahmanic *cit*, just as the weak lunar gleam is not the blinding light of the sun. The entire world of names and forms emerges from the urge of *ānanda*, is preserved by *ānanda*, is transformed and destroyed by a pure act of Fulfillment. Realization itself is born of *ānanda*. For love of the beloved, the

mystic-*bhakta* transcends the relative; for love of truth, *jñāni* finds *sat* within himself – Brahmanic Existence without parts; for love of the one Life, the incarnated *jīva* abandons the forms by dying to itself. Death [of the ego], therefore, is the effect of an act of love towards great homogeneous Life. Death is Liberation.

The more we tend towards egoistic and material enjoyment the more *ānanda* is obscured and remains latent; the more we reach up to attain the supra-individual condition, sublimating sensory desire, the source of all conflict, the more commanding *ānanda* emerges. We can say that *sat* and *cit* are expressed more than *ānanda*. According to the classical *Vedānta*, reality has five characteristics: *sat*, *cit*, *ānanda*, *nāma* (name) and *rūpa* (form). We perceive names and forms by means of the *vṛttis* of the internal organ or *antaḥkaraṇa*. Of the presence of *sat* and *cit* we have intuitive certainty while *ānanda* is accessible only to those whose minds are permeated by pure *sattva*. Therefore, happiness cannot manifest itself except in pure thinking and can be obscured more easily than *sat* and *cit*, thus we can discover it only after strict asceticism (*sādhanā*). Realization, which is the ultimate aim of manifested life, is achieved by eliminating all traces of *rajas* and *tamas* (extroverted desire and material inertia). When the mental state, free from *rajas* and *tamas*, is raised up to its *sattvic* vibratory state, it produces only thought in harmony with the *ānanda* sheath. Reality thus presents itself under a perspective which is enormously dilated; this state of being finally identifies with supreme Happiness. Let us remember that *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* belong to the sphere of the absolute *Brahman* and therefore cannot be considered as qualifications, attributes, conditions or causes except from the empirical point of view.

*Ānanda* represents an innate, natural modality of pure Beatitude and absolute Fullness of *Brahman*. Pleasure-pain, good-evil, anxiety and anguish are qualities belonging to becoming, to the jar-ego (man-ego), statue-ego, and so on. Cause-effect-cause and so on, mean birth-death-birth, endless and conflictual. Where can we find *pax profunda*? Where the placid serenity of the pacified heart? It is not to be found in the ebb and flow of the world of names and forms, certainly not in the continual modification of consciousness, nor in continuous research, nor in gratifying the egoistic phantom, but simply in the Substratum that is always identical to itself and which is *ānanda-Brahman*. Pacified are those who have recovered their formless “original” condition; they unveil *ānanda*: absolute Beatitude and serenity. To say absolute *sat*-Existence means to say *ānanda*-Beatitude. These terms are not separate, they are two expressions of a sole essence. On the other hand, Absolute Existence cannot but contain within itself Beatitude-Fullness. Sensory happiness is the qualification of a state of momentary adhesion, participation, approval and so on. But *ānanda* is not a state of mind or consciousness, just as Life is not a state of mind or of perception. Life *is*. *Ānanda is*. We can only grasp a mere reflection of such a possibility if we think of a being devoid of all desire because totally gratified. This being, we can say, is pacified; no desire-thought-wave disturbs him, he remains in his fullness and in his beatified condition of being. Wanting nothing, possessing all. In the *Pañcadaśī* we read: «The nature of the indivisible being is represented by supreme Beatitude».

If sensory happiness is the outcome of objectual (gross or subtle) satisfaction, *ānanda* is the Beatitude that is born of its own existence, of its intrinsic nature. In the former case there is duality, in the second unity and completeness.

«I am *sat-cit-ānanda*, independent, self-resplendent, free from duality...»  
(*Dṛgdr̥śyaviveka*: 25)

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