

The Place of Reason and Experience in Advaita Vedanta : Some Reflections

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In order to reflect upon the place of reason and experience in Advaita thought, let us first ascertain whether there is any equivalent or counterpart of reason and thought in the Indian context. Although it may appear to be a digression, all the same I will start with an exploration of what 'reason' signifies in the Western context. It seems to me that a brief discussion on the meaning, significance and usages of reason will help us determine whether there is any concept in Advaita Vedanta that is equivalent to what is generally understood by 'reason' in the Western context.

There is a long history of the concept of reason in Western thought. Although, on this occasion, it is not essential to narrate that history, it would still be useful to review some of its essential features. The questions that determine this history are: (1) Is reason itself a source of knowledge, or is its functioning limited only to being critical of such means of knowing as perception and inference? (2) Is reason merely discursive, that is to say, conceptual, or is it also at some level intuitive? If it is simply discursive, then it would be able to apply its conceptual abilities only to the data that have been received through some other means. In that case reason would be dependent upon, or at least its functioning would presuppose that some other mode of knowing is already there. On the other hand,

if reason is intuitive, then it would be able to present its own object to intuition which would make reason an autonomous mode of knowing. We can say that Plato, Descartes and Hegel ascribed to reason the ability to intuit its own object. Kant was the greatest opponent of such a conception of intuitive reason. He denied the humans the power of intellectual intuition and restricted intuition to the domain of sensuous data of objects and looked upon reason as entirely discursive and conceptual. He, however, mentions several distinctive fields within which reason operates, namely the field of political cognition, the field of practical dealing and the field of judgements of beauty and purposiveness of nature. In all these fields reason is the source of universal and necessary principles. It serves to organize the sensible intuitions, inclinations and judgements of taste and raises them to the level of scientific knowledge, conception of moral laws and judgements of beauty respectively. It is important to remember that reason by itself does not yield any intuitions. It only organizes or conceptualizes the intuitions available at the level of sensibility and, in so doing, makes universal and necessary judgements possible.

Kant called this level of reason understanding intellect, in German *verstand*, and distinguishes it from another level which he calls reason or *vernunft*, the level that breaks away from the limitations imposed by

sensible intuitions and aims at knowing the pure, unconditioned and supersensible reality. But all this critical judgement on the activity of reason and its limits is also done by reason itself. In other words, in the Kantian view, reason sits on judgement upon itself. He does not realize that once reason determines its own limits in terms of what it can and cannot achieve, it also transcends those limits. Hegel draws our attention to this point when he argues that Kantian '*Critique of Reason*' has no room for the kind of knowledge that we get from the Kantian philosophy itself so that his theory of knowledge must transcend itself and reason the possibility of knowing itself. This self-knowledge on the part of reason must be intuitive. It must also be the goal of metaphysics.

There is an additional question that philosophy deals with in modern times, namely the relation between reason and language as understood in the tradition from Plato to Hegel. Is reason completely non-linguistic as the tradition took it to be, or is it necessarily tied to language? The fact is that as rational beings we use language and this use of the language might suggest that the Aristotelian insight that human rationality is best expressed in a social and political order must be considered more seriously than the Platonic tradition made it appear.

Regarding the use of *reason* in the Western philosophical tradition, one discerns two primary usages. First, the metaphysical thesis connected with the Greek terms, *logos* and *nous* [word and mind or intellect] meaning a cosmic reason, the original unity of thought, language and being, which one comes across in Parmenides and from which the conception of reason as a faculty of human mind is derived. There is a long history of the evolution of this concept from Parmenides

through Plato, Aristotle and the Neo-Platonists.

The second use of *reason* in Western thought is closer to the Anglican linguistic convention according to which one gives reason for what one believes to be the case. This use is quite common in Anglo-Saxon philosophy. This brings me to the second part of my discourse.

It is well known that there is no word in Sanskrit which may be taken as equivalent to reason and thought, although one comes across such terms as *tarka*, *yukti*, *nyāya* or even *manana* and *vicāra*. The Indian understanding of these terms, as one finds in Shankara, does not appear to have the kind of grand metaphysical connotation that is associated with the terms, *logos* and *nous*. Indian understanding seems to be closer to the mundane activity of justifying one's beliefs by giving reasons for them. As a result many thinkers and commentators have wondered whether the concept of reason is available outside the Greek heritage.

It is important to keep in mind as we proceed in our investigation that in Indian thought such concepts as *vicāra*, *tarka* and *yukti* involve rational consideration of a thesis. Whether one should take them to be rational or not may be a verbal question and would be contingent upon whether one allows the historical genesis of an idea to pre-determine whether such an idea is available without that genesis. Likewise one may also ask, whether in the absence of the concept of *logos* in the Indian tradition, one is at all entitled to talk about Indian logic and, if one can do so, it implies then that some concept of reason expressed in certain kinds of intellectual activity must also be embedded there.

Leaving aside *vicāra*, *tarka*, *nyāya* and *yukti* for the time being, in Indian psychology, one finds *manas* (mind), and

buddhi (intellect), and in the *pramāna* literature, *anumāna* (inference) and *shabda* (word). These concepts have often been used to designate reason. Finally, if we take into account the three stages of the Vedantic discipline namely *shravana*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*, one might regard *manana* as equivalent to rational thinking or *vicāra* which includes giving reasons for the acceptance of the Advaita thesis and refuting all arguments which are meant to suggest that the Advaita position is impossible—*asambhāvanā buddhi nirākarana*.

Reason in Advaita Vedanta

With this in mind let us proceed to determine what is that, if any, which is equivalent to reason in Advaita Vedanta. I will do so keeping the following questions in mind: Is it *manas* or *buddhi* or both? What constitutes rational thinking in Advaita Vedanta? What is justifying beliefs by reasoning? Is reasoning the same as *anumāna* of Indian logic? Is rational thinking the same as *manana* or *vicāra*? Finally, is reasoning in the Vedanta tradition intuitive?

I will begin with the first question whether reason is *manas* or *buddhi* or both. *Manas* in Advaita Vedanta is one of the four functions of the inner sense. Āchārya Shankara points out that the inner sense which is a limiting adjunct of the Self is also variously called as *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *vijnāna* (cognition) and *citta* (memory). Mental modifications account for these functional variations. At times it is called *manas* when it assumes a modification in the form of doubting; *buddhi*, when the modification assumes the form of certainty and so on. Dharmarāja in his *Vedānta-paribhāshā* reiterates the same point. There he notes that the mental modes are of four kinds—doubt, certitude, egoism

and memory. Considering the division of the mental modes, the inner sense, although one, receives different appellations such as mind, intellect, ego sense and memory. Accordingly, it has been said that the internal instruments are *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahamkāra* and *citta* and their contents respectively are doubt, certitude, egoism and memory. These four functions, argue the Vedantins, are involved in any and every external perception. When I see an object, say a table, I am aware of it as something. That is deliberation; recall my past impressions, that is memory and identify it as a table. Finally, certainty, which gives rise to the knowledge that I know that this object is a table. These modifications of the inner sense caused by the forms of the external objects arising with the senses accounts for perception. Thus the activity of the *manas* is confined to sense perceptions. In other words, *manas* is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the production of knowledge. It is with *buddhi* possibly that we identify a cognitive activity higher than the *manas*. It is not to be understood as a sense organ or even as connected with the *antahkarana*. In his commentary on the *Katha Upanishad* which takes *buddhi* to be superior to *manas*, Shankara points out that *buddhi* is more subtle than the *manas*. He reiterates the same point in his commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*. *Buddhi* is the faculty by which one forms concepts and moral judgements and strives for knowledge of the super-sensible reality. Thus it appears that *buddhi* of Advaita Vedanta includes both the Kantian understanding and speculative reason. *Buddhi* is the faculty that forms both empirical and non-empirical concepts. Taken in this sense, *buddhi* is a more comprehensive and appropriate designation for reason. Giving reasons for a belief or justifying one's belief by reason is an

activity that is more comprehensive than simply justifying one's beliefs with the help of an inference.

Here one should be aware of several mistakes in interpretation. Satchidananda Murthy, for example, takes *anumiti jnāna* or inferential knowledge to be the same as Kantian *verstand*. He also takes *arthāpatti* of Advaita Vedanta to be the equivalent of Kantian *vernunft* or speculative reason. With regard to *anumiti* it is easy to show that its function is very different from Kantian *verstand*. The Kantian *verstand* is not a faculty of inference. It is rather a faculty of judgement.

Secondly, *verstand* with its categorical framework makes the systematic organization of sense representations into the objects of nature possible and, in this sense, constitutes the phenomenal world. *Anumiti* does not have any ontological function. It is a knowledge that follows perception and justifies the belief, for example, that there is a fire on that mountain, by appealing to an already determined relation between smoke and fire and applying it to the particular case under consideration. Beliefs can also be justified in many other ways than inference. Whereas both empirical and non-empirical beliefs, just as belief in God, can be justified by *anumāna*, empirical belief can also be justified by perceptual evidence. Both kinds of beliefs, empirical and non-empirical, may also be justified by appealing to *śabda*—the former by *laukik śabda* such as the testimony of a truthful person, and the latter by appealing to the texts of *Śruti*.

Another means of justifying an empirical or non-empirical belief is by using the method of *arthāpatti* or postulation. The case of Devadutta must be eating at night because he does not eat during the day and yet grows fatter involves postulation in

support of an empirical belief. It is important to note in this context that *arthāpatti* is not the Kantian *vernunft*. Kantian *vernunft* makes use of a principle of *verstand* such as the principle of causality and extends its application beyond the limits of experience to reach the unconditioned. In this, *vernunft* goes wrong and fails to yield knowledge. It only yields illusions. But the application of *arthāpatti* can lead us from a given experienced datum to another experiential fact such as Devadutta's eating at night.

When applied to establish the falsity of the world and the identity of the *Ātman* and *Brahman*, *arthāpatti* starts from the unquestioned validity of the *Śruti* texts. This reasoning is very different from the causal argument. Nevertheless, *arthāpatti* is quite closer to the Kantian transcendental argument. Take for example, the argument that geometry is synthetic *a priori*, ie the subject matter of geometry is space. Therefore space must be *a priori* intuitions. This is a new kind of reasoning characterizing Kant's philosophical arguments and so does not fit either the *verstand* or the *vernunft*.

Similarly, one who knows Brahman becomes Brahman and that the world is false are beliefs which can be justified by the argument that one has to postulate their truth in order for some sentences of the *Śruti* to be true.

I have given some examples to show how an Advaitin might give reason for the belief, and using any or all of them would constitute rational thinking. In general, therefore, I would suggest that while *buddhi* seems to be the faculty of reason, the activity of rational thinking may be characterized as *pramānam artha parikshanam*, ie an examination of the subject matter with the help of *pramāna*. It is the entire system of the *pramānas* that encapsulates rational

thinking and not simply one single *pramāna*. One does not simply use the *pramānas* to justify one's beliefs but also uses them to critically analyse and refute the beliefs of other philosophers which also fall within the purview of rational thinking. Rational thinking is as much concerned with *svapaksha sthāpana* (justification of one's own standpoint) as with *parapakshanirākaraṇa* (refutation of the opponent's viewpoint). One uses the *pramānas* to justify one's own position as well as to refute the opponent's position in which case one shows, for example, that the opponent's position involves fallacious inference and *hetvābhāsa* and possibly also goes against the Shruti text. One must also point out that in refuting the opponent's position one goes beyond the *pramānas*.

One may use *tarka*, that is to say, a counter-factual reasoning, but *tarka* is not a *pramāna*. One may also show that the opponent's position involves self-contradiction. Thus a vicious circle goes on *ad infinitum*. Such arguments go beyond the *pramānas* in the strict sense.

Two aspects of rational thinking

The point that I am trying to make is this: Rational thinking has two aspects—positive and negative. It is not only an application of the *pramānas* but also a critique of the other positions and such a critique goes beyond the *pramānas* by showing how the position of the others involves unacceptable consequences, some of which are purely logical fallacies and other such non-logical fallacies as *anirmokshaprasamga*. On this interpretation, while *buddhi* is the faculty of reason, the activity of reasoning consists in applying the whole battery of the *pramānas* and other critical apparatus.

Discussions of *reason* and *revelation* in

the special context of Indian thought have focused on such ideas as *tarka*, *yukti* and *nyāya*, each of which has different meanings and usages. It is indeed true that in a famous paragraph of his *Brahmasutrabhāshya*, Shankara points out the inability of reason to come to a definite conclusion. But we know that *tarka* in the logical literature, that is to say, in discussions on inference, has a specific meaning. It stands for arguments from a counter-factual premise, such as if fire were not the cause of smoke. Shankara, however, uses any kind of *tarka* for any kind of reasoning.

In Advaita *yukti* may either mean inference or postulation or *tarka*. Any of these may be taken to mean modes of reasoning and, so by extension, reason. The distinction between *tarka*, *yukti* and Shruti is not the same as that between reason and revelation. I need not here spend much time arguing for my thesis that Shruti is not revelation. What is the role of revelation here? One needs to ask such questions as 'Who revealed the Vedas to whom?' or 'When', etc? Can the idea of revelation be detached from the idea of God? Did God reveal the Vedas? Which God? Which *devatā*? Did Brahman-Ātman reveal the Upanishads? Brahman-Ātman is not a *kartā*, a doer. It is only *cit-svarupa*, of the nature of Consciousness. So the idea of revelation does not quite fit in.

The theistic commentators like Madhva have tried to maintain that the Vedas are the breath of God. That only suggests that the Vedas flow spontaneously from the being of the deity. We do not again have revelation here. In order that Shruti imparts to us that knowledge we must ascertain its meaning and, for that purpose, we must interpret the words. This is a highly discursive rational activity as the procedure of Mimāṃsā demonstrates. One, again, is not interpreting

experiences but rather words. Neither does the *apaurusheyatva* of Shruti mean that it was revealed by a divine author. It rather means that words being eternal, the Shruti has no beginning. We hardly mean to ascertain who composed the Vedas and with what intention. To regard the Shruti as a revealed text is to go beyond the mere idea of the heard text and to add to it some new ideas derived from other religious traditions.

One generally says that the Shrutis are the records of spiritual experiences of the ancient seers. I do not wish to deny that the seers or, whoever were the authors, had their spiritual experiences. Sometimes it does seem that an author is in fact talking about her/his own experiences. But most of the texts of the Vedas are not such. They are not in the first person. They talk about the deities, about nature, about the world at large. They are heard texts, heard from teachers who heard from still others which accounts for their being called *Shruti*. If experiences of some sort occasioned them, they still are texts which need to be heard now, read and interpreted with the help of the rules of interpretation, grammar, etymology, context and so on. The sentences do not express experiences. They rather express thought. No sentence expresses an experience. A sentence expresses a thought. The Shruti defines the tradition on which Hindu thinkers have to take their stand. *We are free only to interpret it*, not to *deny* it. It is the basis of all our theoretical projects. It is the basis of reason itself.

The conventional way of accepting Shruti as 'revelation' or 'authority' is totally mistaken, as it is not a revelation, either by word meaning, or by any implication of its meaning. Construing the Shruti as a revelation is imparting a semantic theological concept into the Vedic tradition. At the same time, taking the Shruti as a

pramāna is not supported by our Hindu religious traditions. But the status of the Shruti as a *pramāna* is painstakingly established by Mimāmsa and other schools of Indian philosophy through a series of rational arguments. After it is established rationally as a *pramāna* and its strength vis-à-vis other *pramānas*, we come to realize that the Shruti, as a *pramāna*, no longer violates reason. Establishing one's position by appealing to the Shruti then becomes as much rational as an appeal to inference. One is then not submitting reason to a higher criticism using a suprarational authority which is how many Indian thinkers have considered the appeal to the Shruti ought to be. But it is using the *pramānas* according to the internal strength and weaknesses of the different *pramānas* in relation to others.

For example, an inference is only a pseudo-*pramāna* if it contradicts perception, but so also if it contradicts the Shruti. There are situations in which *anumāna* will be stronger than perception; just as with regard to *dharma* and *adharma* the Shruti becomes a stronger *pramāna* than the others. In this sense, the Indian philosophical thinking is a supremely rational activity. The different levels of rational thinking correspond to the different kinds of the application of the *pramānas*. At the initial level, one only applies perception. So at the next level one applies perception aided by inference. One may proceed to apply the Shruti and also the method of postulation as a kind of transcendental argument.

My contention here is precisely that the modes of reasoning are the various *pramānas* which include *shabda* as well. What could reason be besides the modes of reasoning? The point is, though Indian thinkers do not thematize reason itself, a conception of reason is nevertheless there. Reason includes all the *pramānas*, all means

of validating beliefs, such as perception and *shabda*. To contrast reason with revelation as between mediate and immediate cognition is totally mistaken. Perceptual justification is as much rational, though immediate, as it is inferential which is mediate. *Shabda* as a *pramāna* may go through various phases culminating in an immediate awareness. When all this is understood with the Vedantic thesis of *pramānasamplava* one is led to recognize that the function of reason in all its different modes is to enable *buddhi* to cognize reality *as it is* in the long run. It is *vastutantra* and not *purushatantra*. Perception is the only *pramāna* which by itself presents its objects to immediate scene. After one leaves the domain of perception, one enters the domain of meditation. Even the rational use of the Shruti as a *pramāna* is a mediate activity, mediated by the rules of interpreting the Vedic *vākyas* as the Shruti talks about. But Vedanta also keeps the path open for all this conceptual thinking and understanding to culminate in an intuitive experience of reality. This is brought about by what is called in Vedanta *shavdajanya aparokshānubhuti*. It is final, or *carama* in the sense that, as it destroys the original ignorance, it also destroys itself. The *pramānas* then lead to an intuitive experience only at a point where they have completely fulfilled their role and thereby cease to be. This is the only point where one could speak of transcending reason not by revelation but by an intuitive experience which is the goal of all rational thinking.

One consequence of the conception of reason that I am proposing is that reason is attuned to the nature of reality, that the two, the rational and the real, are fully coordinated with one another. Furthermore, reason as cognition of the real includes within its modus operandi what is called

experience—both perceptual and higher experience—to expound reality as it is the highest rational cognition of that reality. The conflict between reason and experience is set up by the narrow reasoners or *tārkikas* who emphasize that *anubhava* is a false opposition.

Appreciating the totality

Having said all this, I must also add that a full appreciation of the nature of reason requires that we transcend the mere logical interest in the modes of reasoning right to the level of appreciating their totality. We should at the same time recognize that the *pramāna* theory defends the claims of each to be *sui generis* and irreducible. The Indian epistemologists do it with such an admirable harmony and grade them in the order of strength which may now be regarded as but reason's own reflection upon itself. The reason justifies its mode of validating beliefs about objects. The secondary level of aiming at a unified cognition of reality as a whole is through the composition of different *pramānas* by *pramāna samplava* and the tertiary level of critical self-reflection as manifested in philosophy as *pramāna* theory on the part of reason. The mere reasoner or the mere logician who revels in the theory of inference has not yet grasped the true nature of reason. He must grasp the interconnection among the *pramānas*, ie the way they depend upon each other, and also he must comprehend their relative grades. Thus reason is a structured whole whose last basis is on consciousness as the witness.

I have already noted that in my conception of reason in Advaita Vedanta *pratyaksha* is one of the *pramānas* that involves reason. In my conception, reason being the system of *pramānas* in their interconnection includes perception. The distinction between reason and experience in

that case is a distinction within reason, namely between the whole system and one of the *pramānas*. It is important to bring out the implications of this thesis. The familiar kind of experience identifies experience with the way of sensation as in the Buddhist conception of pure perception or *nirvikalpa* perception. It suggests that experience is that which reason is not. According to this conception, experience is a mere reception of what is barely given without any activity of the knowing mind. When Advaita Vedanta includes *pratyaksha* as a *pramāna* among other *pramānas*, I believe perception then cannot be a passive reception of an impression, but must involve an active role of the knowing mind. We know this is precisely the case. We know that in the Advaita theory of perception the knowing mind actually goes out and achieves an identity with the object. It is not the result of the causal action of the object upon the mind. The activity of going out of course is mediated by the sense organ involved which makes it perceptual. But the fact that there is an activity of the mind leading to the manifestation of the object only shows that even perception involves an activity of the mind and it is not simply a causal product.

In order to highlight the exact nature of the Advaita theory of perception, I would like to contrast it with another theory of perception according to which perception is not a mere experience but also involves reason. This is the Kantian variety of the theory in which perception involves both a passive reception of data and an active conceptualization of those data. Without the latter they would be only sensation but no perception.

The Advaita theory does not amount to dividing perception into two components, but rather asserts that perception involves the activity of identification with the object

as one cognitive process without making use of the Kantian idea of bringing data under concepts. It is this unitary cognitive process which in one aspect is purely sensuous and accordingly may be called empirical, yet in another aspect involves identification with the object and may be called rational. That explains why I prefer to say that the perception as a whole involves reason. No *pramāna* that involves justifying a belief can be a mere passive reflection.

By bringing experience itself under the scope of reason, a familiar opposition between empiricism and rationalism is being called into question. Reason, being by its very nature attuned to reality, any knowledge of reality of whatever kind is a rational activity. In a certain sense this notion of reason and its relation to experience comes close to the Hegelian idea that perception is not opposed to reason, rather the beginning of rational thinking. What begins with perception is confirmed by inference and substantiated by *shabda*. Knowledge from *shabda* involves an interpretation of the meaning, specially in the case of *lakshanā*, where the direct meaning does not work as in the case of understanding the *mahāvākyas* of the Upanishads. Further reflection on the meaning of these *vākyas* would lead to *aparoksha anubhuti* called *Brahmānubhava*.

Culmination of reasoning

Again, in this case one should resist the immediate temptation to set up an opposition between this *anubhava* as a pure experience and all rational activity of thought and reflection. On the other hand, this *Brahmānubhava* may be regarded as the culminating achievement of reason very much like the Hegelian knowledge of the absolute. Thus reason is a developing process that begins with sensory perception

and develops through *anumāna* and all other *pramānas* and eventually passing through *shravana*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* to *Brahmānubhava*. Thought would then achieve its fundamental identity with reality.

In including the Shruti as a component of the total structure of a reason, I am in fact opposing an understanding that the Shruti opposes reasoning in that it is a revelation or a suprarational authority. I believe this conventional understanding of English writers of Indian philosophy is mistaken. It blocks a deeper understanding of the nature of philosophical activity in Indian thought. What we learn from this is that those who oppose thought and reality, reason and experience, start with a narrowly defined conception of both. What I have suggested is that Advaita Vedanta does not have this narrowly defined concepts. Rather we have an account of the cognitive process which begins with the conjecture and culminates in *Brahmānubhava* and the whole process may be called reason at both ends.

In what sense *Brahmānubhava* can be called an experience? Since the word *anubhava* is there, it might appear unquestionable that it is an experience. An experience of Brahman, or perhaps better still, of the identity of Ātman and Brahman. To answer this question I will make use of a distinction which modern German philosophers have made between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. Though both mean experience, there lies a very important difference. Hence the question—is *Brahmānubhava* an *Erfahrung* or *Erlebnis*? *Erfahrung* of an object, it is intentional. When I perceive the St. Louis arch on the river from my hotel window, I have an *Erfahrung* of it. But in as much as perceiving is something I live through and is a part of the flow of my consciousness, the perceiving itself is an *Erlebnis*. Thus *Erfahrung* is of an object

and, accordingly, implies a distinction between the subject and the object, ie one who experiences and that which is experienced. In the Advaita view, this distinction certainly does not characterize the highest experience—*Brahmānubhava*. Is it then an *Erlebnis*?

Those of us, who are familiar with the Advaita concept of perception, however, know that consciousness is limited by the inner sense and seeing the form of the object is called a *vritti*. The function of a *vritti* is to reveal the object by removing the veil of ignorance. A *vritti* that is directed toward an object is manifested by the witness Consciousness or *Sākshi Chaitanya*. One might argue that both the *vritti* and the *sākshi* of Advaita are *Erlebnis*. As I perceive the yonder tree, the perception is an *Erfahrung*, but the act of so perceiving is directly manifested to me by my witness Consciousness and my witness Consciousness itself is also self-manifesting. Thus the *Erlebnis* is attached to an *Erfahrung*. In the absence of a *vritti*, there is no *Erlebnis*. Pure Consciousness or *Shuddhacaitanya* of Advaita Vedanta which is of the nature of Ātman or Brahman functions as a witness Consciousness only in the context of an *Erfahrung*. Thus we begin to find out that the two forms of experience, *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, depend on each other. Without *Erlebnis*, there would be no *Erfahrung*, without *Erfahrung* there would be no *Erlebnis*. If this is true, it implies that *Brahmānubhava* is not an *Erlebnis* either because that experience by definition involves the dissolution of the subject-object distinction.

In what sense then *Brahmānubhava* is an experience? There is not much that one can say about it. Nevertheless, I will try to draw attention to several features of it. In the first place, with the dissolution of the sense

of 'I' *Brahmānubhava* cannot have the linguistic form that I am experiencing Brahman. It is not meant to be a subjective cognition of an objective reality. When the cognition of Brahman or of the identity of Ātman-Brahman arises, it is still a *vritti* and this *vritti* leads to the dissolution of primal notions after which Brahman manifests Itself. *Brahmānubhava* then, at its culmination, is not a person's cognition of Brahman but Brahman fully unconcealed. To call it an experience is to introduce into that phenomenon a tinge of subjectivity which has already been dissolved. But the point that I am trying to make here has been very powerfully made by Heidegger when he warned against taking *being* as an experience. However much one refines the term 'experience', it unavoidably has that tinge of subjectivity. That nevertheless means a paradox that an Advaitin must face. *Brahmānubhava* must be of someone. If it is of one *maharshi*, then it is not mine. When a wise person attains *moksha* or realizes Brahman, his ignorance is dissolved, but not the ignorance of others. With the total dissolution of mundaneness an Advaitin has great difficulty in explaining his/her experience to others. In a very strong way *Brahmānubhava* is an *Erlebnis* of someone.

If *Brahmānubhava* is construed as an experience of the identity of Ātman and Brahman, then we encounter another aspect of the problem. The problem concerns the nature of identity and, also the question, under what circumstances one asserts an identity or even an experience of identity. The attendant problems are well known in Western philosophy. Can we assert that two different things are identical? Or is it the case that the same thing is identical with itself? In so far as a statement of identity presupposes the prior appearance of difference which is now being negated, that

assertion of identity must be an accomplishment of *reason* rather than being a consequence of the thing manifesting itself.

A rational examination by the various *pramānas* including the *smṛiti* may lead one to the negation of seeming differences between Ātman and Brahman and establish an identity between what seemed to be different at first. Compare the case of the morning star and the evening star. But this recovery of identity first of all requires a rational examination by the *pramānas* or the activity of the reasoning, and secondly, it does not totally eliminate all appearances of difference. Some sense of difference still persists. The star perceived in the morning and the star perceived in the evening are still different phenomena. Devadutta seen in Pataliputra ten years ago and Devadutta seen here now in Varanasi in spite of their identity now discovered, still present undesirable phenomenal differences. The question, then, that must be asked is if *Brahmānubhava* is an *anubhava* of that identity of Ātman and Brahman, can this identity be asserted after the complete dissolution of the phenomenal differences?

The point that I am trying to make is as follows: In this concept of experiencing an identity, there is inevitably already a trace of the already superceded experience of difference and the rational critique of that difference. It cannot be a case of pure experience of identity. Again, we confront a problem in a different way, following a different route that the Advaitic experience and reason mutually implicate each other. Both the terms 'experience' and 'reason' are unavoidably tinged with subjectivity.

To sum up, I emphasize that *Advaita Vedanta* is a *supremely rational discourse*.

This rationality is not exhausted by the
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