

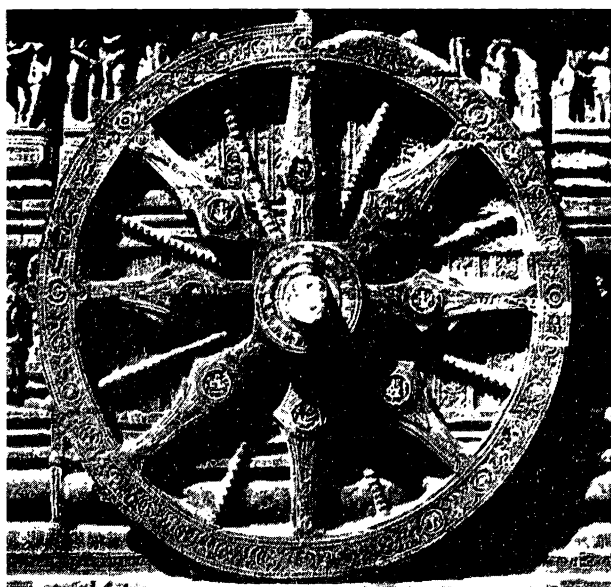
WORLD VIEW AND THEORY IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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MANOHAR

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Aho kauśalam apūrvam.
Hermeneutical wriggings about the *Īśôpaniṣad*

PAOLO MAGNONE

The *Upaniṣads* are the common repository from which the classical systems of Indian thought (with the exception of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika) draw their fundamental tenets, ending up, however, in utmost diversity. To confine ourselves to the Vedānta school, Bādarāyaṇa's attempt to summarise and homogenise their bewildering riches in the *Vedānta-sūtras* failed to succeed because of its ambiguity, which has in turn given rise to the most diverse interpretations by the *bhāṣya-kāras*, ranging from Śaṅkara's absolute monism all the way to Madhva's dualism, through various intermediate degrees of monism-cum-dualism represented by the *Bhāṣyas* of Bhāskara, Rāmānuja, Nimbārka and Vallabha.

But 'What did the *Upaniṣads* really say?' (to mimic the title format of many a popular book). Of course, the question admits of no ultimate solution. The meaning of the *Upaniṣads* does not exist as such, but manifold meanings are always there for the manifold interpreters to reach after, always on the run ahead of—or behind—them along the circuitous path of the hermeneutical circle that governs interpretation. Interpretation, as Gadamer made finally clear, can never be a direct and linear process of going and grasping the meaning that was always there, but is the result of a *Horizontverschmelzung*, or an interactive fusion between the horizon of the interpreter's pre-comprehension and the horizon of the *interpretandum*, each with its own historical situatedness. This interaction is a recursive process (the 'hermeneutical circle') which results in ever renewed pre-comprehension enabling more and more subtly attuned comprehension of the *interpretandum*.

Thus, the interpreter's world view is an inescapable precondition to his actual theoretical practice of interpretation; at the same time, it must not strait-jacket it, but it is essential to the circularity of the process that it must remain open-ended to what comes from the sphere of the datum.

Along these lines, the commentatorial practice on the *Upaniṣads* provides an excellent example of the splendours and miseries of interpretation in an Indian setting. In particular, the *Īśôpaniṣad*, on account of its extreme pithiness, is singularly suited to demonstrate the fruitful impact of the different world views of the individual masters in fostering the comprehension of specially

enigmatic passages, and at the same time the length they are willing to go to make an authoritative text square each with his own preconceived philosophico-religious outlook. In the following we are going to review a few instances of the different interpretations produced by the great *bhāṣya-kāras* of the three conflicting Vedāntic schools: Śaṅkara for the Advaita, Vedāntadeśika for the Viśiṣṭādvaita and Madhva for the Dvaita. The latter's commentary is typically very succinct, consisting of a literal gloss and a (pseudo)-scriptural quotation from some often untraceable Smṛti,¹ so that we shall usually have to resort to the sub-commentator Jayatīrtha for enlightenment.

For the sake of the subsequent analysis, in order to facilitate the reader with a ready confrontation with the original I will premise in each case the root *mantras*, with the advertence, however, that the editorial requirement to dispense with the Devanāgarī, coupled with the common practice of separating words in transliteration, is liable to introduce a *modicum* of unwarranted interpretation: as we shall see, in fact, even the actual shape of the *interpretandum* cannot be taken for granted, as commentators are apt to differ even in the ways they scan the script to isolate the individual words from the uninterrupted strings of graphemes that make up the original *scriptio continua*.

And first of all the opening stanza (ĪU 1):

*īśā vāsyam² idam sarvaṃ yat kiṃ ca jagatyām jagat /
tena tyaktena bhūñjīthā mā ḡrdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam //³*

¹ The problem with Madhva's more often than not untraceable citations is a well-known one. Cf. ROCHER (2008) for a comprehensive retrospect of the question, originating with 'Varadācārya's reference to quotations *kaiścid*, that are *svakapolakalpita* ("word of his own mouth"—P.M.), and [Vedāntadeśika's] dismissal of unnamed quotations invented by *pāpiṣṭhāḥ*' (2008: 603) (possibly but not certainly aimed at the Dvaita master); and especially with Appayadīkṣita's wholesale dismissal of Madhva's 'idiosyncratic' theories on the grounds, among others, of his quoting in support totally unknown (*atyantāprasiddha*) sources, of which he lists 29 from Śruti and 11 from Smṛti. In recent times the debate has been taken up again by MESQUITA, on the side of Madhva's critics, with his 1977 monograph, imputing to him the fabrication of untraceable sources but absolving him of the fraudulent intent, on the grounds that he bona fide believed himself an Avatāra of Viṣṇu (through the mediation of Vāyu), hence empowered, like his fellow Vyāsa, to compose scriptures for the enlightenment of the *kali-yuga* people. On the other side, SHARMA, as a staunch Madhva supporter, has tried to exonerate his master from the allegations in his 1961 monograph (revised ed. 2000), and has taken issue with MESQUITA's criticism in a 2001 paper. Most recently, MESQUITA has published a further monograph (2007) collecting a massive corpus of date in support of his conclusions.

² Madhva: *īśāvāsyam*.

³ E.g. OLIVELLE(1998: 407): 'This whole world is to be dwelt in by the Lord, whatever living being there is in the world. So you should eat what has been abandoned, and do not covet anyone's wealth.'

This stanza elicits at once discordant interpretations when subjected to the pre-emptive force of the distinctive world views of the different commentators. It could not be otherwise, as it condenses the relationship between the three principles—supreme self, world and soul—whose different articulation is paramount to the respective doctrines of the three schools.

To an unbiased look (if such thing exists at all) the *Upaniṣad* would seem to lend itself more to an interpretation positing some sort of real distinction, which would suit better its theistic perspective. According to the tenets of Advaita, however, the three principles are of course but one—the Supreme Ātman—Brahman. Therefore, we may predict that it is particularly Śāṅkara who will have to strain the letter of the text in order to distil his desired meaning.

The very first word, *īśā*, instrumental of *īś* ('the Lord' or 'the divine Person'), is bent by the Advaitin Ācārya to mean the Paramātmān, the impersonal supreme self who rules (*iṣṭe*) the universe from within, as being one with the inner self of every creature (*pratyag-ātmatayā*).

But the next word is again a major stumbling block for the Advaita perspective: given that the Paramātmān is the sole reality, and the world merely illusory appearance, what could possibly be the relationship obtaining between the two, conveyed by the word *vāsyam*⁴? Not a relation of immanence, as the term would naturally seem to suggest: the real cannot abide in the unreal. Rather, according to Śāṅkara's glossing *vāsyam* with *ācchādanīyam*, the supreme self must be made to 'clothe' or 'cover' the unreal world, paradoxically veiling illusion in order to reveal the truth, hiding appearance to make reality reappear. This is in fact the gist of the simile employed by Śāṅkara to exemplify the peculiar nature of the *ācchādana* ('covering'): as a piece of fragrant sandalwood may develop an unpleasant smell owing to dampness—a smell which is not its own, and can be easily 'covered' by its own quintessential fragrance stirred up by rubbing—just in the same way the illusory appearances superimposed on the self by the necessities of empirical intercourse can (and must) be 'covered' by the realisation of his true essence which alone is supremely real.⁵ One cannot but remark that this interpretation rests on the bold oxymoron of a cover that uncovers. According to common understanding, deceit is unmasked by uncovering it, i.e. getting rid of the cover-up to pierce through to the underlying truth. But Śāṅkara here invites us not to uncover the Advaitic core of reality but rather to recover it by literally re-covering illusion, as it were, by a

⁴ *Vāsyā* can be derived as a gerundive from at least two homophonic roots (and from their causatives), hence meaning, as the case may be, 'to be indwelt, entered into, worn (as a cloth), clothed or enveloped' etc. The commentators play on this ambiguity to distil each his desired meaning.

⁵ Śāṅkara, *ĪU*₁ 4.2–5: *yathā candanāgarv-āder udakādi-sambandha-ja-kledādi-jam aupādhikam daurgandhyam tat-svarūpa-nigharṣaṇenācchādyate svena pāramārthikena gandhena tadvad eva hi svātmany adhyastam svābhāvikaṁ kartṛtva-bhokṛtvādi-lakṣaṇam jagad-dvaitarūpaṁ ... paramārtha-satyātma-bhāvanayā tyaktam syāt.*

further coating of reality. On the other hand, covering consists in placing something on top of something else: this, however, is exactly what is precluded by non-dual vision. Furthermore, what is covered is occluded by the covering, which prevents the apparition of the true form of the covered by replacing it with mere semblance. On the contrary, according to the peculiar *ācchādana* postulated by Śaṅkara, covering and covered cease to be two; the covering is the same covered that becomes uncovered or unveiled 're-vealing' itself by itself with its true form, which discloses itself occluding or covering not itself but its mere semblance.

Vedāntadeśika's and Madhva's interpretations of *īśā vāsyam* do not differ significantly⁶ in spite of their different wording: according to the former, the world 'must be pervaded' (*vyāpyam*), whereas for the latter it is 'fit to be indwelt' (*vāsa-yogyam*), by the Lord.

The third *pāda* (*tena tyaktena bhuñjīthāḥ*) is interpreted in markedly different ways by the three commentators. The most straightforward reading from a grammatical viewpoint is Vedāntadeśika's: 'by renouncing that [world], enjoy'. In everyday life what is enjoyed is the world itself; but here the Svāmin characterises 'that [world]' as an object of illusory enjoyment, which is therefore fit to be renounced when its manifold shortcomings become apparent. Since the natural object of fruition, the world, has thus been given up, the injunction *bhuñjīthāḥ* must needs be qualified 'according to the [suitability of the] meaning and the subject matter':⁷ enjoyment must be limited to that group of permissible objects of fruition which are exclusively instrumental in supporting a body serviceable for *yoga*.

Renouncement of the world is not required by Madhva, who accordingly takes *pāda* C to mean 'enjoy [by] what is given by Him [i.e. the Lord]', interpreting *tyaktena* as 'handed over' or 'devolved' rather than 'renounced', and *tena* as an agentive governing the passive past participle instead of as an instrumental agreeing with its predicate. This requires some twist of the grammar, which the subcommentator Jayatīrtha implicitly acknowledges by observing that Madhva's explanation was indeed necessary, as the passage is awkward (*durgam artham*⁸): the reference of *tena* is indeterminate,⁹ and it is not proper to say that something 'renounced' (*tyakta*) could be a means of fruition.¹⁰ Now here goes the explanation: *tena* must logically be construed to refer to *īśā* mentioned in the first *pāda*, in spite of the latter being the subordi-

⁶ Except for Madhva's peculiar reading of the phrase as compound of *īśā* and *āvāsyam*.

⁷ Vedāntadeśika, p. 4.21: [*artha-*]^a*prakaraṇābhyām sidhyati*. [^a The word *artha*, missing through some oversight, has been restored from an editorial footnote to the passage as well as from a literal citation in the translation on p. 34.19.]

⁸ Jayatīrtha, p. 6.29.

⁹ Jayatīrtha, p. 6.28: *tena iti parāmarśasya viśayo na pratiyate*.

¹⁰ Jayatīrtha, p. 6.28: *tyaktasya ca bhoga-sādhanatvam ayuktam*.

nate member of a compound¹¹ (which would usually prevent it from being directly referred to by another word). Furthermore, because this world is incapable of activity in itself—and for this very reason must be permeated by the Lord, who alone is *svatantra*, or capable of spontaneous activity—whatever we experience can only be ‘devolved’ by the Lord, and not secured by our own endeavour: therefore, *tyakta* must mean *datta*, ‘given’ by the Lord, i.e. spontaneously obtained (*yadṛcchayā labdham*).

For his part, in accordance with the strictly ascetic, world-denying stance of his Kevalādvaita, Śāṅkara bars any kind of enjoyment whatsoever for him who has the *adhikāra*, or ‘qualification’, for supreme knowledge, and for whom this first *mantra* is intended. As a consequence, his interpretation of the *pāda* cannot but be highly idiosyncratic: ‘by renouncing that [world], protect your Self’. Here his understanding of *tena tyaktena* is similar to Vedāntadeśika’s, except that he adds the logical remark that, properly speaking, something ‘renounced’ or ‘abandoned’ (as a dead son or servant), being a purely negative entity, cannot entertain any positive relationship; therefore, we should read *tyaktena* (‘renounced’) to mean *tyāgena* (‘renouncement’): for while what is renounced no longer exists, renouncement itself is a positive entity capable of affecting us. But it is what comes next, the injunction: *bhuñjīthāḥ*, ‘enjoy’, that poses a real difficulty for the Advaita master. Surprisingly enough, especially after all the fastidiousness of the foregoing elucidation, here Śāṅkara does not spend many words to smooth out the problem, just one to gloss *bhuñjīthāḥ* with *pālayethāḥ*, ‘protect yourself’; nor does Ānandagiri make up for the concision. Jayatīrtha takes issue with this explanation, remarking that the meaning ‘to protect’ is not proper for the root \sqrt{bhuj} in the middle voice (*ātmane-pāda*; according to Pāṇini I.3.66); but one modern commentator, B.K. IYER (1995: 8), is quick to exonerate Śāṅkara on the grounds that Pāṇinian rules do not apply to Vedic passages.

We now come to the two parallel triads of stanzas ĪU 9–11 and 12–14, whose enigmatic diction has given rise to widely diverging interpretations. The first triad runs as follows:

andhaṃ tamaḥ praviśanti ye ’vidyām upāsate /
tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyām ratāḥ // 9 //
anyad evāhur vidyayānyad āhur avidyayā /
iti śuśrūma dhīrāṇām ye nas tad vicacakṣire // 10 //
vidyām cāvidyām ca yas tad vedōbhayaṃ saha /
*avidyayā mṛyūṃ tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtam aśnute // 11 //*¹²

¹¹ Jayatīrtha, p. 29–30: *samāse upasarjanī-bhūtasyaṅgī śāsya buddhyā vivekenāyam paramārsah*. As noted above (n. 6), Madhva reads the first *pāda* as a *tat-puruṣa* compound (*īśa + āvāsyam*).

¹² E.g. OLIVELLE (1998: 407, 409): ‘Into blind darkness they enter, people who worship ignorance; and into still blinder darkness, people who delight in learning. It’s far different from knowledge, they say, different also from ignorance, we’re told—so have we heard

At first sight, the gist of the passage would seem to teach the inadequacy of both *avidyā* ('ignorance', literally 'non-knowledge') and *vidyā* ('knowledge') taken separately, and the ensuing necessity of their association, but the manner of expression is striking, and ascribing a positive agency to ignorance or a deluding power to knowledge are paradoxes that require an explanation.

Like Vedāntadeśika, Śaṅkara overcomes the former difficulty by understanding *avidyā* as 'other than *vidyā*',¹³ viz. *karman*, exemplified by ritual works. Even so, in conformity with his strictly monistic stance he cannot accord any positivity whatsoever to the performance of rituals, which in his view do nothing but help perpetuate attachment to the illusory world. Not recognising any value in works, Śaṅkara cannot accept in any way the doctrine of *jñāna-karma-samuccaya* ('cumulative practice of knowledge and works') as a means towards liberation—which doctrine would however seem to be taught by the passage under consideration. How does Śaṅkara acquit himself of his duty of allegiance to the Śruti without renouncing his fundamental tenet, that knowledge of the supreme Reality alone is all that is required to attain liberation? His solution is a radical one: he simply denies that the instruction here promulgated is meant for the *mumuṅṅsu*, or the 'seeker after liberation'; on the contrary, such instruction he takes to be meant for the *jijīviṣu*, the worldly-minded 'life lover', recalling the distinction previously made by *jñāna-niṣṭhā* ('stand on knowledge') and *karma-niṣṭhā* ('stand on works'), or *nivṛtti-mārga* ('path of inactivity') and *pravṛtti-mārga* ('path of activity'). According to Śaṅkara, the *Upaniṣad* under discussion does not present a uniform teaching, but contains two different sets of teachings meant for people with different *adhikāras*, or 'qualifications'. In his view, for instance, whereas the first *mantra* teaches Advaita and renouncement of actions for those entitled to supreme knowledge, the second *mantra* teaches dutiful performance of rites for those entitled to action; and to a hypothetical objector marvelling at the partition Śaṅkara reminds the opposition 'unshakeable as a mountain'¹⁴ previously established between knowledge and works.

Thus, in harmony with the aforesaid partition, he begs to take this triad (as well as the following one) as teaching *karma-mārga* ('path of works') to the worldly man, which stance has a further consequence on the interpretation of *vidyā*. By definition, the worldly man is not entitled to metaphysical knowledge; hence the *vidyā* here in question cannot possibly be *ātma-jñāna* ('knowledge of Self'), which is a prerogative of the world-renouncer, but only some kind of inferior knowledge open to any and all: namely, *devatā-jñāna*, or 'knowledge of the deities', as Śaṅkara clarifies.

from wise men, who have explained it to us. Knowledge and ignorance—a man who knows them both together, passes beyond death by ignorance, and by knowledge attains immortality'.

¹³ Śaṅkara, p. ĪU₁ 10.6: *vidyāyā anyā 'vidyā*.

¹⁴ Śaṅkara *ad* ĪU₁ 2, p. 5.9: *jñāna-karmaṇor virodham parvatavad akampyaṃ yathōktaṃ na smarasi kim*.

In sum, according to Śāṅkara the purport of the passage is to teach some sort of *jñāna-karma-samuccaya* o n l y for the ordinary man, as the renouncer has no use soever for *karman*. On the other hand, the ordinary man has no right to supreme *vidyā*; the passage, then, must be understood to teach that the worldly man should not indulge the practice of rituals alone for their exclusive sake, lest he should plunge into deep darkness; but he should not even be satisfied with mere theoretical knowledge of the gods gained from study of the scriptures, shunning the actual practice of rites, lest he should enter darkness even deeper. He should, instead, combine both, in order to reap their distinct fruits: by the practice of *karman* he overcomes death, i.e. by ritualised action he sublimates natural desire-impelled action binding to death and *samsāra*, and by *devatā-jñāna* he attains immortality, i.e. oneness with the *iṣṭa-devatā* ('deity of one's choice'). This latter goal, of course, in Śāṅkara's perspective can only mean relative immortality, not to be confused with the absolute and definitive immortality of final emancipation in the attainment of oneness with *brahman*.

As anticipated, Vedāntadeśika concurs with Śāṅkara in taking *avidyā* to mean *karman*, but the agreement ends here. The synthetic conception of Viśiṣṭādvaita views the world as really existing and rooted in *brahman*; accordingly, Vedāntadeśika is willing to grant actions their rightful place in so far as they are performed to fulfil one's duty¹⁵ and without attachment, in conformity with the doctrine of *niṣkāma-karman* ('desireless action') propounded in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Therefore, unlike Śāṅkara, Vedāntadeśika accepts the doctrine of *jñāna-karma-samuccaya* ('cumulative practice of knowledge and works') in some form, namely, as specified later in the text, as *viśama-samuccaya* or 'asymmetrical accumulation': that is to say, he accepts Śāṅkara's dictum that in conformity with the scriptures knowledge alone is required for liberation, but admits that such knowledge may be enhanced by the subsidiary practice of good deeds. In this view, thus, works are subservient to liberation, though not on a par with knowledge, and their 'asymmetrical association' may be recommended.¹⁶ Hence, unlike Śāṅkara, Vedāntadeśika finds no inconvenience in the passage in question, which he interprets to the effect that 'worshippers of ignorance plunging into darkness' are performers of actions for the sake of fruits, and 'devotees of knowledge plunging into darkness even deeper' are followers of knowledge alone who neglect their practical

¹⁵ Vedāntadeśika, p. 18.5: *atrāvidyā-śabdābhīhitam varṇāśrama-vihitam karma* (quoting the *bhāṣya-kārāḥ*, which the translator takes to mean 'the Commentator on the *Vedānta Sūtras* (Śrī Rāmānuja)' (IU₂: 55).

¹⁶ He further specifies the flavour of the doctrine he favours, known as *samni-patyōpakāraka*, or of the 'proximate subserviency': works perform their ancillary function indirectly, by proximate synergy in furthering knowledge by removing obstacles to it—in contradistinction to Bhāskara's favoured flavour, known as *ārād-upakāraka*, or of the 'remote subserviency': works bring about their own result directly, as an ingredient of the final global result.

duties and fail to nurture knowledge with *niṣkāma-karman* ('desireless action').

The next stanza (ĪU 10), however, does posit a problem for him. In fact, if literally translated as 'one thing [is obtained] by means of knowledge, another by means of works', it would imply the joint efficiency of both knowledge and works on an equal footing, i.e. the doctrine of *sama-samuccaya*, or 'symmetrical accumulation', which Vedāntadeśika rejects as disproved by the scriptures, which unanimously declare the competence of knowledge alone to grant liberation.¹⁷ So, it is now his turn to exhibit his hermeneutical adroitness: he contends that, according to the grammatical rule allowing transposition, here the instrumental case must be read as a replacement of the ablative, which must be supplied in order to satisfy the regimen of *anya* ('other, different'); in other words, he begs to take the couple *vidyā/avidyā* as governed by *anya*, and accordingly interprets '[the means of liberation] is different from [mere] knowledge, different from [mere] works'. It is, indeed, knowledge furthered by works, where the two, however, stand in *aṅgāṅgi-bhāva*, or in 'a relationship of subordinate and principal'.

This would only seem to postpone the difficulty to the third stanza, which again seems to unambiguously state that *vidyā* and *avidyā* are two independent means to attain two separate goals.¹⁸ But Vedāntadeśika spares no effort to show that the discreteness of the means and goals is only apparent. With respect to the means: in reality, *avidyā* is just *karman* as an *aṅga* ('subordinate') of *vidyā*,¹⁹ hence not separate but included in it; if it is mentioned as independent and equal, this is only because it must be viewed as such from the viewpoint of practice,²⁰ in so far as both the principal and the subsidiary, though essentially one, must be practised independently and equally. With respect to the goal: 'crossing death' and 'attaining immortality' both amount to the same, i.e. attainment of liberation: however, there is no redundancy in the passage,

¹⁷ According to this view, advocated by Yādavaprakāśa, knowledge and works do not entertain a relationship of principal and subsidiary, with works merely assisting knowledge in reaping the one and only fruit—immortality (i.e. deliverance). Rather, they are considered each as a distinct means in its own right, leading to a distinct goal of its own; see VARADACHARI–THATHACARYA (1975: 36). The doctrine of *sama-samuccaya* is rejected by Vedāntadeśika on scriptural grounds, on the strength of 'the number of Śrutis, Smṛtis and Sūtras clearly declaring the relationship of principal and subsidiary obtaining between knowledge and works, and the crossing of death by knowledge alone' (Vedāntadeśika, p. 18.3: *karma-jñānāyor aṅgāṅgi-bhāvaṃ vidyayāiva mṛtyu-taraṇaṃ ca vyaktaṃ pratipādayadbhiḥ śruti-smṛti-sūtra-gaṇaiḥ*). Śāṅkara, as we have seen, does not face such problems, as for him the passage is not meant for the *mumukṣu* ('seeker after liberation') in the first place.

¹⁸ As per a literal reading of the *mantra*, '[he who practices the *samuccaya* ('accumulation')] having crossed death by works, by knowledge attains immortality'.

¹⁹ Vedāntadeśika, p. 16.9: *avidyāṃ tad-aṅga-bhūta-karmātmakām*.

²⁰ Vedāntadeśika, p. 16.10: *aṅgāṅginor anuṣṭeyatva-sāmyāt*.

and the apparent duplicity is justified, in so far as the first expression (*mṛtyuṃ tīrtvā*, ‘having crossed death’) lays stress on the destruction of obstacles²¹ in the form of natural action leading to rebirth (and ‘redeath’), whereas the second expression (*amṛtam aśnute*, ‘attains immortality’) lays stress on the final achievement ensuing from such destruction of obstacles.²²

On the face of it, Madhva would seem the most scrupulous of the three commentators in that he provisionally adheres to the literal meaning of the terms involved, taking both *vidyā* and *avidyā* at their face value, as ‘[meta-physical] knowledge’ and ‘ignorance’ to start with; but the net result is an even more liberal amount of unwarranted speculation in the overall interpretation of the passage.²³ The keystone is in the instrumentals in the second and third stanzas, seemingly specifying *vidyā* and *avidyā* as different means to different fruits. Now, it is implicit in the instrumental case that the instrumentality thereby expressed should be carried out by way of position (as contrasted to negation) of the relevant term.²⁴ For example, when we say that ‘the house was burnt by fire’, we obviously mean ‘by kindling a fire’ (or something of the sort), and it would be preposterous to suppose that we should mean ‘by quenching a fire’; this, however, is exactly how Madhva begs us to understand the instrumental of *avidyā* in the passage being considered. In fact, like his fellows, Madhva is unable to find any value in ignorance as such, let alone the capability of producing positive fruits. Therefore, he boldly proceeds to turn the instrumental of *avidyā* inside out, so to speak, by simply postulating the ellipsis of a negative term: *avidyayā*, according to him, must stand for *avidyā-nindayā*, hence means not ‘through ignorance’ but ‘through the blame of ignorance’! To be precise, Madhva does not produce this amazing piece of sleight of hand in explicit terms, for he confines himself to alleging an untraced Smṛti passage to support his claim, as he is wont to do in similar circumstances. But this is what the commentator Jayatīrtha makes of it.²⁵ For his part, the sub-commentator Vādirāja is well aware of the venturesome nature of such interpretation, and tries his best to defend it with a fourfold argument.²⁶

²¹ Vedāntadeśika, p. 17.8–9: *mṛtyuṃ tīrtvēty asyōpāya^a-virodhi-taraṇa-paratvāt*.

[^a Sc.: *mokṣōpāya-^o*.]

²² Vedāntadeśika, p. 17.9: *amṛtam aśnuta iti prāpti-virodhi-nivṛtti-lābhōkteḥ*.

²³ As Jayatīrtha (*ad* ĪU₃ 9, p. 21.10–12) summarises the argument: *yathāvat paramātma-jñānam mokṣa-sāadhanam ity uktam. na kevalam tat. kiṃ nāma. anyathā-jñāna-nindā-samu<c> citam evēty etad-artha-pratipādakaṃ ādya-mantra-trayam*—‘Right knowledge of the supreme self has been said to be the means for deliverance—but not just that. What then, pray? It must be associated with censure of false knowledge: this is the purport of the first triad’.

²⁴ Of course, this is but a particular case of the general ‘positivity’ of language.

²⁵ Jayatīrtha *ad* ĪU₃ 10, p. 22.8: *avidyayā anyathā-jñāna-nindayā ca iti yāvat*.

²⁶ Vādirāja *ad* ĪU₃ 10, p. 22.12–16: *avidyayā anyathā-jñāna-nindayā ity atra avidyayā mokṣāka-deśa-prāpter asambhavāt avidyā-nindanasya prāk-prastutatvāc ca yathā-śruta-vidyāvīdyayoh bhinna-phalatvasya sarva-sammatatvenāvaktavyakatvac^a cāvidyayā mṛtyuṃ tīrtvā iti mokṣāka-deśa-rūpa-phalasya vakṣyamānatvac ca nindayā iti padam adhyāhṛtya*

This notion of *avidyā* as something instrumental to liberation not through its application but through its rejection reflects back on the interpretation of the first stanza. Here there is no question for Madhva of the feasibility of *jñāna-karma-samuccaya*, as was the case with Śaṅkara and Vedāntadeśika, since he does not share their interpretation of *avidyā* as works, whether to be cumulated or not with knowledge. In what respect is, then, *vidyā* by itself inadequate, and ‘leading to even deeper darkness’ than *avidyā*? Because although those who resort to *avidyā*, here in its rightful meaning as ‘false knowledge’—or, through the lenses of Madhva’s theistic perspective, worship of other (false) gods (*anyathôpāsana*)—are bound for darkness, they do not fare better who just pay allegiance to *vidyā* or ‘true knowledge’ (*sc.* knowledge of the true God) with out at the same time rebutting *avidyā*.

Indeed, Madhva’s peculiarly sectarian and proselytising stance is clearly evinced by the probably made-up Smṛti he adduces by way of running commentary to the three stanzas, to the effect that, although the worshippers of any god but Viṣṇu may plunge into darkness, even deeper darkness awaits those Vaiṣṇava devotees who refrain from denouncing misbelievers. *Vidyā* and *avidyā* (in the aforesaid negative sense) should be practised jointly, because each is capable of producing its distinctive fruit. As Jayatīrtha clarifies, *vidyā* and *avidyā* are *upalakṣaṇas* (‘implicit designations’) for ‘adherence to God’s true essence’, and, respectively, ‘due condemnation of false knowledge’:²⁷ by the latter one crosses over ignorance and sorrow expressed by the word ‘death’, while by the former one attains knowledge and happiness conveyed by the word ‘immortality’.

Even more difficult for the three commentators proves the interpretation of the second triad, running thus:

andham tamaḥ praviśanti ye ’sambhūti m upāsate /
tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u sambhūtyām ratāḥ // 12 //
anyad evāhuḥ sambhavād anyad āhur asambhavāt /
iti śuśrūma dhīrāṇām ye nas tad vicacakṣire // 13 //
sambhūtim²⁸ ca vināsam ca yas tad vedôbhayam saha /

vyākhyātam iti bhāvaḥ.—‘By ignorance, i.e. by censuring false knowledge: here the commentator has supplied the word “by censuring” by way of explanation, because [1] ignorance as such cannot possibly be a partial factor for the attainment of deliverance; [2] the blame of ignorance has been mentioned previously [and therefore it cannot be implicitly praised here]; [3] as per the current notion of knowledge and ignorance, it would be pointless to declare their fruits to be different, this being a matter of common agreement; and, finally, because [4] in the next verse ignorance will actually be mentioned as a partial factor of deliverance [which by itself it cannot possibly be, as said previously]’.

[^a The original incorrectly reads °*āvaktavyaktatvāc* through dittography.]

²⁷ Jayatīrtha *ad* ĪU₃ 11, p. 22.29–30: *vidyā-padam īśvarayâthâtmyasya avidyā-padam ca anyathâ-jñāna-nindyatvasya upalakṣaṇam*.

²⁸ Śaṅkara: (a)*sambhūtim*.

*vināśena mṛtyum tīrtvā sambhūtyāmṛtam*²⁹ *āsnute* // 14 //³⁰

At first sight, this triad appears to duplicate the structure of the previous one, literally reproducing it word for word but for the substitution of the pair of opposites *vidyā/avidyā* with the new pair *sambhūti* ('origination') / *asambhūti* ('non-origination'). A couple of discrepancies, however, do exist: apart from the ablatives (*sambhavād/asambhavād*) in the place of the instrumentals (*vidyayā/avidyayā*) in stanza 13, the most conspicuous difference is the looseness in the designation of the new pair of opposites, which are termed in turn *sambhūti* ('origination') / *asambhūti* ('non-origination'), *sambhava* ('becoming') / *asambhava* ('non-becoming') and (on the face of it) *sambhūti* ('origination') / *vināśa* ('destruction').

Vedāntadeśika and Madhva, for their part, do not make much of such discrepancies, assuming an obvious correspondence between the two triads. Such correspondence, however, does not suit Śāṅkara, whose interpretation totally disrupts the parallelism with the help of sophisticated arguments which elicit Jayatīrtha's caustic remark alluded to in the title of this paper.

To start with, there is no agreement among the three commentators on the meaning of *sambhūti* and *asambhūti*.³¹ Śāṅkara takes *asambhūti* to mean the 'ingenerate' which is the cause of generated effects, i.e. the unmanifest Nature (*prakṛti*); and *sambhūti* to mean the 'generated', i.e. the effect-*brahman* (i.e. the creator god Brahmā) in the form of the 'golden germ' of creation (*hiranya-garbhā*). As was the case with the former triad, Śāṅkara considers this triad also as meant for the worldly man, who is directed to meditate both on Nature and on Brahmā to reap the respective fruits. The fruit ensuing from meditation on Brahmā is the attainment of *siddhis* or 'supernatural powers'³², as Śāṅkara

²⁹ Śāṅkara: *tīrtvāsambhūtyāmṛtam*.

³⁰ E.g. OLIVELLE (1998: 409): 'Into blind darkness they enter, people who worship non-becoming; and into still blinder darkness, people who delight in becoming. It's far different from coming-into-being, they say, different also from not coming-into-being, we're told—so have we heard from wise men, who have explained it all to us. The becoming and the destruction—a man who knows them both together, passes beyond death by the destruction, and by the becoming attains immortality'

³¹ Other commentators are also at variance as to the meaning of the terms. According to Uvaṭa (p. 55.4 ff.), *asambhūti* means 'non-(re)birth' after death (*mṛtasya sataḥ punaḥ sambhavo nāsti*), and Lokāyatikas (materialists) are targeted as zealots of this doctrine; Mahīdhara (p. 55.16 ff.) concurs, but identifies partisans of *asambhūti* as Bauddhas. On the other hand, both identify *sambhūti* as *ātman* and censure its exclusive devotees (Uvaṭa, p. 55.10 ff.; Mahīdhara, p. 55.18 ff.) for their intellectual pride (Uvaṭa, p. 55.11: *sva-buddhim adbhūtām vibhāvayantaḥ*—'fancying their own mind very smart'; Mahīdhara, p. 55.19: *sva-buddhi-lāghavam ajānānāḥ*—'not realising the triviality of their mind') which leads them to regard *jñāna-kāṇḍa* ('[Vedic] department of knowledge') alone, neglecting *karma-kāṇḍa* ('[Vedic] department of ritual works').

³² *Siddhis* or *vibhūti*s are traditionally reckoned as eight, but their identification is not uniform. The nine candidates include: *aṇiman* ('parvification'), *mahiman* ('magnification'),

specifies further on. The fruit of meditation on Nature consists in the condition of *prakṛti-laya* ('merged into Nature'), described by the subcommentator Ānandagiri as an unconscious state akin to deep sleep, a sort of mock isolation desirable on account of the absence of pain inherent in *sāmsāra*.³³

Now, the problem arises how to make this interpretation of *sambhūti* ('origination') and *asambhūti* ('non-origination') square with stanza 14, which states the fruits of *sambhūti* and *vināśa* ('destruction'). Since *sambhūti* is expressly brought up by name, the inference lies near at hand that *vināśa* should be a replacement for *asambhūti*, as indeed understood by the other commentators. The stanza would therefore connect meditation on *asambhūti* with crossing over death, and meditation on *sambhūti* with attaining immortality. But this is unacceptable for Śāṅkara, who identifies, as we have seen, *sambhūti* with Brahṁā: the god cannot grant immortality, but only the *siddhis* ('supernatural powers'), which can but help overcome death consisting in powerlessness and finitude. On the other hand, since *asambhūti* has been identified with Nature, meditation on it can truly be said to grant the sort of immortality consisting in absorption in the unmanifest ground of being. So, according to

laghiman ('levitation'), *gariman* ('gravitation'), *prāpti* ('extensibility'), *prākāmya* ('unhindered will'), *iśitva* ('supremacy') *vaśitva* ('subjugation'), *kāmāvasāyitva/satya-saṁkalpatva* ('self-realising wish'). They are hinted at in *sūtra* 45 of the *Vibhūti-pāda* of the *Yoga-sūtra* (YS 4), but there are discrepancies among the lists given by different commentators. Vyāsa (YBh 4.45) with Vācaspatimīśra (TVai 4.45), Vijñānabhikṣu (YV 4.45) and Bhāvāgaṇeśa (YSP 4.45) omits *gariman*, Rāmānanda (YSMP 4.45) and Sadāśivendra (YSuK 4.45) reduce *satya-saṁkalpatva/kāmāvasāyitva* to *prākāmya*, while Nāgojībhaṭṭa (YSVṛ 4.45) apparently reduces it to *vaśitva*. *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* 11.15.4–5 (cit. in YV 4.45) likewise has a list without *gariman*. As for Bhoja (YRM 4.45), according to some editions he actually lists all nine, but since the disagreement with the traditional number of eight is inadmissible, the variant reading of Jīvananda Vidyāsagara's edition (YS₃) should probably be accepted, omitting *prāpti* but subsuming its content under *prākāmya*. Cf. MAGNONE (1991: 131 f.).

³³ Ānandagiri *ad* ĪU₁ 14, p. 13.18–19: *sāmsāri-duḥkhānubhavābhāvena ca suṣuptivat prakṛti-layasya puruṣeṇārthyamānatāpy upapadyate. Prakṛti-layas* ('merged into Nature') are mentioned also in YS 1.19 (together with *videhas*, or 'incorporeal') as a class of beings experiencing a sort of spontaneous non-cognitive enstasis (*asamprajñāta-samādhi*), which, however, is inferior to the corresponding condition acquired through *yoga* in that it only yields temporary results and not ultimate *mokṣa*. According to Vyāsa, *prakṛti-layas* are those 'whose mind together with its object has dissolved into Nature, so that they experience a sort of isolation, until they come back by the compulsion of their [still unaccomplished] object' (*prakṛti-layāḥ sādḥikare [= acaritārthe (Vācaspatimīśra)] cetasi prakṛti-line kaivalya-padam ivānubhavanti yāvan na punar āvarttate 'dhikāra-vaśac cittam*). Vācaspatimīśra (TVai 1.19) expands explaining that *prakṛti-layas*, having identified with *prakṛti* or its intermediate evolutes, have their internal organ permeated with the corresponding unconscious habits (*vāsanā*), and dissolve into them after the fall of the body. However, their object (i.e. the attainment of discriminative knowledge) being unfulfilled, they are again differentiated by the force of their unaccomplished task, much in the same way as dried-up frogs metamorphosed into lumps of clay revive again with their former frog body when sprinkled with rain; cf. MAGNONE (1991: 39 f.).

his own preconception, Śāṅkara would rather have the stanza say quite the reverse of what it actually does—and he accordingly proceeds to turn it the other way round: i.e. *sambhūti* must be metamorphosed into *asambhūti*, and *vināśa*, contrary to all plausibility, must be the same as *sambhūti*. The latter part is not difficult: as *hiraṇya-garbha* ('golden germ' of creation) had previously been termed *sambhūti*³⁴ in so far as generated, just so is he now termed *vināśa*³⁵ in so far as destructible; he is, in fact, *apara-brahman* ('lower Brahman') or *kārya-brahman* ('effect-Brahman'), hence, as an effect, liable to both generation and destruction. The former part, however, poses more of a problem: how to turn the two occurrences of *sambhūti* into *asambhūti*? *Sandhi* comes in handy for the second occurrence: because word boundaries need not be acknowledged in the script, *tīrtvā sambhūtyā* can conveniently be read as *tīrtvāsambhūtyā*, i.e. a conflation of *tīrtvā* and *asambhūtyā*. The first occurrence, though, is more resilient to possible manipulations, being the very first word of the stanza; but here Śāṅkara performs a veritable *coup de théâtre*, apparently bringing to bear the *guṇa* vowel of the ending of the previous stanza to postulate an *avagraha* of privative 'a' in the next one.³⁶ Of course, rules of external *sandhi* do not normally obtain across major metrical boundaries, and so it is not surprising that the *dvaitin* Jayatīrtha should sarcastically applaud the hermeneutical exploit as a specimen of *apūrva-vyākaraṇa-kausāla* ('unprecedented grammatical skill').³⁷

³⁴ Śāṅkara *ad* ĪU₁ 12, p. 12.3–5: *sambhavanam sambhūtiḥ sā yasya kāryasya sā sambhūtiḥ. ... bahutaram iva tamaḥ praviśanti ya u sambhūtyām kārya-brahmaṇi hiraṇya-garbhākhye ratāḥ.*

³⁵ Śāṅkara *ad* ĪU₁ 14, p. 12.12–13.4: *vināśena vināśo dharmo yasya kāryasya sa tena dharminābhedhenōcyate vināśa iti. tena tad-upāsanena ... hiraṇya-garbhōpāsanena hy aṇimādi-prāptiḥ phalam.*

³⁶ Śāṅkara *ad* ĪU₁ 14, p. 13.5–6: *sambhūtiṃ ca vināśam cēty atrāvarṇa-lopena nirdeśo draṣṭavyaḥ. prakṛti-laya-phala-śruty-anurodhāt.*—'[In the chunk] *sambhūtiṃ ca vināśam* has the reference must be understood with the elision of an *a*, in compliance with what has been heard as the fruit of absorption into Nature.' Once again, IYER (1995: 36 f.) goes out of his way to justify Śāṅkara, adducing arguments in support of his explanation from other commentators as well as his own to the effect that: (1) by the rule that *utpattimad vastu vināśi avāśyam* ('what is originated must needs be perishable'), *vināśa* must mean *sambhūti*, hence *sambhūti* must be read as *asambhūti* to avoid repetition; (2) elision of *a* is permissible according to the rule *prṣṭōdarādīni yathōpadiṣṭam* (A 6.3.109) allowing the elision and mutation of letters in vedic usage; (3) by Jaimini's rule *samdigdhe tu (samdigdheṣu* is the original reading, which however IYER (1995) quotes as *samdigdhe tu*) *vākya-śeṣāt* (MS 1.4.29: 'In case of doubt, the meaning should be gathered from the context.')

—in this case, the traditional doctrine about *prakṛtilayas* and their reward. His final verdict is: 'Śrī Śāṅkarācārya's interpretation of the *mantras* gives the correct purport of the *mantra* and is in perfect agreement with the *sāstras* [!]'.

³⁷ Jayatīrtha *ad* ĪU₃ 14, p. 25.9–10: *akāra-lopena sambhūtir avyākṛtam ity apūrvam vyākaraṇa-kausālam ity āstām.*—'As to [the submission that] the word *sambhūti* means the **Uninvolved** [i.e. Nature] through loss of an *a*, here is [a specimen of] unprecedented grammatical skill—and so let it remain'.

Madhva's explanation of the triad, however, is no less idiosyncratic, beginning from his interpretation of the meaning of the couple *sambhūti/asambhūti*. Actually, even for this triad, as for the foregoing, his gloss consists in one long running quotation from the *Kūrma-purāṇa*, presumably forged, as is so often the case with Madhva's quotes, since the passage cannot be traced in the published text. Jayatīrtha explicates Madhva's intent to the effect that *sambhūti* means 'creator' by metonymy (i.e. as the cause of *sambhūti* or 'creation') whereas *asambhūti*, as is plain to see, by the same token must mean 'un-creator'³⁸! The stanza, therefore, threatens darkness and more darkness for those who do not acknowledge Viṣṇu as creator, or one-sidedly recognise him as creator only, whereas he is both creator and destroyer.³⁹ The knowledge of Viṣṇu's true nature is not confined to the need of avoiding negative consequences, it also yields positive fruits: by the knowledge of Viṣṇu as destroyer one destroys the bonds to the body (and so crosses death), whereas by the knowledge of him as creator of all good things one attains immortality in the form of sameness and identity with Viṣṇu, which not even the liberated can enjoy.

Vedāntadeśika puts forward still another interpretation of the couple *sambhūti/asambhūti*. The former he takes to mean 'communion' (i.e., literally, 'being together') with *brahman*, on the strength of scriptural passages. This choice, however, leaves him in an awkward position when it comes to understanding the latter member of the couple. As he remarks himself, it would not be proper to understand *asambhūti* in an obvious way, as either prior or subsequent non-existence of *sambhūti* (i.e. as its not yet/no longer being there respectively before/after its achievement), because how could the absence of *sambhūti*—a means towards immortality—conceivably represent in itself a means for crossing death (as said in the third strophe of the triad)⁴⁰? Therefore, here is the solution advanced by the Svāmin: the word *asambhūti*, while excluding *sambhūti*, must mean something that, although not (yet) communion, is proximate to it as its precondition in the form of removal of obstacles: this is the meaning that is

³⁸ Jayatīrtha *ad* ĪU₃ 12, p. 23.20: *asambhūtim jagat-sṛṣṭer akartāram*, with the subcommentator's gloss: *na vidyate sambhūtir yasmād* (Vādirāja *ad loc.*).

³⁹ Madhva *ad* ĪU₃ 12, p. 23.12–15:

(...) *evam sṛṣṭi-kartṛtvam nāngī-kurvanti ye hareḥ /
te 'pi yanti tamo ghoram tathā samhāra-kartṛtām //
nāngī-kurvanti te 'py evam tasmāt sarva-guṇātmakam /
sarva-kartāram iśēsam sarva-samhāra-kārakam //*

Here the root expression *ye 'sambhūtim upāsate* is boldly taken as tantamount to *ye [harim] sambhūtim nōpāsate*.

⁴⁰ Vedāntadeśika *ad* ĪU₂ 12, p. 19.9–10: *na cātrāsambhūti-śabdena sambhūter anutpattir vināśo vā pratipādyah. amṛta-prāpti-hetutayōktāyāḥ sambhūteh prāg-abhāvasya pradhvam-sasya vā mṛtyu-taraṇa-hetutvena vaktum ayuktatvāt.*

gathered by the subsequent substitution of the word *vināśa* for *asambhūti*⁴¹, as well as for want of a better interpretation.

The foregoing review, albeit cursory, may perhaps suffice to give a fair idea of some of the sophisticated hermeneutical strategies devised by the three commentators—i.e. Śāṅkara, Vedāntadeśika and Madhva—to justify their vastly different interpretations. And so, in the end, ‘What did the *Upaniṣad* really say’ has proved once again a hopeless question, like the squaring of the (hermeneutical) circle. In any case, whatever it did say, in the original setting of master and disciple, when the sacred power of the Word (*brahman*) was called upon ‘to sustain them both, to nourish them both, so that their joint effort might be fruitful, and their study might be bright’ (to paraphrase the auspicious invocation that would inaugurate their meetings)⁴²—and most of all, when the inordinate quibbling of the commentators was not yet there to spoil the truth of the Word (*mā vidviṣāvahai!*)⁴³—alas, is no longer for us to grasp. Which, incidentally, may retrospectively justify the ancient Indian aversion for committing the Word to the written leaf, where it would be helplessly exposed to the vagaries of both haters and (misguided?) well-wishers—the same aversion that was shared by Plato, when he wrote about the *logoi* that once written down ‘go about everywhere, among the knowledgeable and the ignorant alike, and if faulted or treated unfairly must appeal to their father for help, because, left to their own devices, they can neither defend nor support themselves...’⁴⁴

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- ĪU = *Īśōpaniṣad [Īśā-vāsyōpaniṣad]*. (1) S. Subrahmanyashastry (ed.): *Śrīśāṅkarācārya-viracitam upaniṣad-bhāṣyam śrīmad-ānandagiry-ācārya-kṛta-ṭīkayā kaṭha-māṇḍukya-taittirīya-bhāṣyāṇām prasi-*

⁴¹ Vedāntadeśika ad ĪU₂ 12, p. 19.6–8: *tām [sambhūtim] paryudasyann ayam asambhūtiśabdaḥ tad-āsanna-pratibandha-vināśam abhidhatte. sambhūtim ca vināśam ca ity api hy anantaram ucyate.*

⁴² *saha nāv avatu. saha nau bhunaktu. saha vīryam karavāvahai. tejasvi nāv adhītam astu*—so prays the *sānti-mantra* of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajur-veda*, which would be recited before every session of study of the *Upaniṣads*.

⁴³ *Sānti-mantra* of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajur-veda*. Literally ‘let us not be hostile to each other’, but interpreted by some in the given context as ‘let us not entertain conflicting views’.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus* 275e (somewhat abridged and adapted).

- ddhācāryāntara-ṭikābhiḥ saṭika-taittirīya-vārtikena ca samā-
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