THE *VEDANTA* AND WESTERN TRADITION*

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These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands,
they are not original with me.
Walt Whitman

I

There have been teachers such as Orpheus, Hermes, Buddha, Lao-tzu, and Christ, the historicity of whose human existence is doubtful, and to whom there may be accorded the higher dignity of a mythical reality. Shankara, like Plotinus, Augustine, or Eckhart, was certainly a man among men, though we know comparatively little about his life. He was of south Indian Brahman birth, flourished in the first half of the ninth century A.D., and founded a monastic order which still survives. He became a *samnyasin*, or "truly poor man," at the age of eight, as the disciple of a certain Govinda and of Govinda's own teacher Gaudapada, the author of a treatise on the Upanisads in which their essential doctrine of the non-duality of the divine Being was set forth. Shankara journeyed to Benares and wrote the famous commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* there in his twelfth year; the commentaries on the Upanisads and *Bhagavad Gita* were written later. Most of the great sage's life was spent wandering about India, teaching and taking part in controversies. He is understood to have died between the ages of thirty and forty. Such wanderings and disputations as his have always been characteristically Indian institutions; in his days, as now, Sanskrit was the lingua franca of learned men, just as for centuries Latin was the lingua franca of Western countries, and free public debate was so generally recognized that halls erected for the accommodation of peripatetic teachers and disputants were at almost every court.

The traditional metaphysics with which the name of Shankara is connected is known either as the *Vedanta*, a term which occurs in

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the Upanisads and means the "Vedas' ends," both as "latter part" and as "ultimate significance"; or as *Atmavidya*, the doctrine of the knowledge of the true "self" or "spiritual essence"; or as *Advaita*, "Non-duality," a term which, while it denies duality, makes no affirmations about the nature of unity and must not be taken to imply anything like our monisms or pantheisms. A gnosis (*jnana*) is taught in this metaphysics.

Shankara was not in any sense the founder, discoverer, or promulgator of a new religion or philosophy; his great work as an expositor consisted in a demonstration of the unity and consistency of Vedic doctrine and in an explanation of its apparent contradictions by a correlation of different formulations with the points of view implied in them. In particular, and exactly as in European Scholasticism, he distinguished between the two complementary approaches to God, which are those of the affirmative and negative theology. In the way of affirmation, or relative knowledge, qualities are predicated in the Supreme Identity by way of excellence, while in the way of negation all qualities are abstracted. The famous "No, no" of the Upanisads, which forms the basis of Shankara's method, as it did of the Buddha's, depends upon a recognition of the truth—expressed by Dante among many others—that there are things which are beyond the reach of discursive thought and which cannot be understood except by denying things of them.

Shankara's style is one of great originality and power as well as subtlety. I shall cite from his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* a passage that has the further advantage of introducing us at once to the central problem of the *Vedanta*—that of the discrimination of what is really, and not merely according to our way of thinking, "myself." "How is it," Shankara says, "that there are professors who like ordinary men maintain that 'I am so-and-so' and 'This is mine'? Listen: it is because their so-called learning consists in thinking of the body as their 'self.'" In the Commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* he enunciates in only four Sanskrit words what has remained in Indian metaphysics from first to last the consistent doctrine of the immanent Spirit within you as the only knower, agent, and transmigrant.

The metaphysical literature underlying Shankara's expositions consists essentially of the Four Vedas together with the Brahmanas and their Upanisads, all regarded as revealed, eternal, datable (as to their recension, in any case) before 500 B.C., together with the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Brahma Sutra* (datable before the beginning of the Christian

era). Of these books, the Vedas are liturgical, the Brahmanas are explanatory of the ritual, and the Upanisads are devoted to the Brahma-doctrine or *Theologia Mystia*, which is taken for granted in the liturgy and ritual. The *Brahma Sutra* is a greatly condensed compendium of Upanisad doctrine, and the *Bhagavad Gita* is an exposition adapted to the understanding of those whose primary business has to do with the active rather than the contemplative life.

For many reasons, which I shall try to explain, it will be far more difficult to expound the *Vedanta* than it would be to expound the personal views of a modern "thinker," or even such a thinker as Plato or Aristotle. Neither the modern English vernacular nor modern philosophical or psychological jargon provides us with an adequate vocabulary, nor does modern education provide us with the ideological background which would be essential for easy communication. I shall have to make use of purely symbolic, abstract, and technical language, as if I were speaking in terms of higher mathematics; you may recall that Emile Mâle speaks of Christian symbolism as a "calculus." There is this advantage: the matter to be communicated and the symbols to be employed are no more peculiarly Indian than peculiarly Greek or Islamic, Egyptian or Christian.

Metaphysics, in general, resorts to visual symbols (crosses and circles, for example) and above all to the symbolism of light and of the sun—that which, as Dante says, "no object of sense in the whole world is more worthy to be made a type of God." But I shall also have to use such technical terms as essence and substance, potentiality and act, spiration and despiration, exemplary likeness, aeviternity, form and accident. Metempsychosis must be distinguished from transmigration and both from "reincarnation." We shall have to distinguish soul from spirit. Before we can know when, if ever, it is proper to render a given Sanskrit word by our word "soul" (*anima*, *psyche*), we must have known in what manifold senses the word "soul" has been employed in the European tradition; what kind of souls can be "saved"; what kind of soul Christ requires us to "hate" if we would be his disciples; what kind of soul Eckhart refers to when he says that the soul must "put itself to death." We must know what Philo means by the "soul of the soul"; and we must ask how we can think of animals as "soulless," notwithstanding that the word "animal" means quite literally "ensouled." We must distinguish essence from existence. And I may have to coin such a word as "nowever" to express the full and original meanings of such words as "suddenly," "immediately," and "presently."

The sacred literature of India is available to most of us only in translations made by scholars trained in linguistics rather than in metaphysics; and it has been expounded and explained—or as I should rather say, explained away—mainly by scholars provided with the assumptions of the naturalist and anthropologist, scholars whose intellectual capacities have been so much inhibited by their own powers of observation that they can no longer distinguish the reality from the appearance, the Supernal Sun of metaphysics from the physical sun of their own experience. Apart from these, Indian literature has either been studied and explained by Christian propagandists whose main concern has been to demonstrate the falsity and absurdity of the doctrines involved, or by theosophists by whom the doctrines have been caricatured with the best intentions and perhaps even worse results.

The educated man of today is, moreover, completely out of touch with those European modes of thought and those intellectual aspects of the Christian doctrine which are nearest those of the Vedic traditions. A knowledge of modern Christianity will be of little use because the fundamental sentimentality of our times has diminished what was once an intellectual doctrine to a mere morality that can hardly be distinguished from a pragmatic humanism. A European can hardly be said to be adequately prepared for the study of the *Vedanta* unless he has acquired some knowledge and understanding of at least Plato, Philo, Hermes, Plotinus, the Gospels (especially John), Dionysius, and finally Eckhart who, with the possible exception of Dante, can be regarded from an Indian point of view as the greatest of all Europeans.

The *Vedanta* is not a "philosophy" in the current sense of the word, but only as the word is used in the phrase *Philosophia Perennis*, and only if we have in mind the Hermetic "philosophy" or that "Wisdom" by whom Boethius was consoled. Modern philosophies are closed systems, employing the method of dialectics, and taking for granted that opposites are mutually exclusive. In modern philosophy things are either so or not so; in eternal philosophy this depends upon our point of view. Metaphysics is not a system, but a consistent doctrine; it is not merely concerned with conditioned and quantitative experience, but with universal possibility. It therefore considers possibilities that may be neither possibilities of manifestation nor in any sense formal, as well as ensembles of possibility that can be realized in a given world. The ultimate reality of metaphysics is a Supreme Identity in which the opposition of all contraries, even of being and not-being, is resolved;

its "worlds" and "gods" are levels of reference and symbolic entities which are neither places nor individuals but states of being realizable within you.

Philosophers have personal theories about the nature of the world; our "philosophical discipline" is primarily a study of the history of these opinions and of their historical connections. We encourage the budding philosopher to have opinions of his own on the chance that they may represent an improvement on previous theories. We do not envisage, as does the *Philosophia Perennis*, the possibility of knowing the Truth once and for all; still less do we set before us as our goal to become this truth.

The metaphysical "philosophy" is called "perennial" because of its eternity, universality, and immutability; it is Augustine's "Wisdom uncreate, the same now as it ever was and ever will be"; the religion which, as he also says, only came to be called "Christianity" after the coming of Christ. What was revealed in the beginning contains implicitly the whole truth; and so long as the tradition is transmitted without deviation, so long, in other words, as the chain of teachers and disciples remains unbroken, neither inconsistency nor error is possible. On the other hand, an understanding of the doctrine must be perpetually renewed; it is not a matter of words. That the doctrine has no history by no means excludes the possibility, or even the necessity, for a perpetual explicitation of its formulae, an adaptation of the rites originally practiced, and an application of its principles to the arts and sciences. The more humanity declines from its first self-sufficiency, the more the necessity for such an application arises. Of these explicitations and adaptations a history is possible. Thus a distinction is drawn between what was "heard" at the outset and what has been "remembered."

A deviation or heresy is only possible when the essential teaching has been in some respect misunderstood or perverted. To say, for example, that "I am a pantheist" is merely to confess that "I am not a metaphysician," just as to say that "two and two make five" would be to confess "I am not a mathematician." Within the tradition itself there cannot be any contradictory or mutually exclusive theories or dogmas. For example, what are called the "six systems of Indian philosophy" (a phrase in which only the words "six" and "Indian" are justified) are not mutually contradictory and exclusive theories. The so-called "systems" are no more or less orthodox than mathematics, chemistry, and botany which, though separate disciplines more or less scientific

amongst themselves, are not anything but branches of one "science." India, indeed, makes use of the term "branches" to denote what the Indologist misunderstands to be "sects." It is precisely because there are no "sects" within the fold of Brahmanical orthodoxy that an intolerance in the European sense has been virtually unknown in Indian history—and for the same reason, it is just as easy for me to think in terms of the Hermetic philosophy as in terms of *Vedanta*. There must be "branches" because nothing can be known except in the mode of the knower; however strongly we may realize that all roads lead to one Sun, it is equally evident that each man must choose that road which starts from the point at which he finds himself at the moment of setting out. For the same reasons, Hinduism has never been a missionary faith. It may be true that the metaphysical tradition has been better and more fully preserved in India than in Europe. If so, it only means that the Christian can learn from the *Vedanta* how to understand his own "way" better.

The philosopher expects to prove his points. For the metaphysician it suffices to show that a supposedly false doctrine involves a contradiction of first principles. For example, a philosopher who argues for an immortality of the soul endeavors to discover proofs of the survival of personality; for the metaphysician it suffices to remember that "the first beginning must be the same as the last end"—from which it follows that a soul, understood to have been created in time, cannot but end in time. The metaphysician can no more be convinced by any so-called "proof of the survival of personality" than a physicist could be convinced of the possibility of a perpetual motion machine by any so-called proof. Furthermore, metaphysics deals for the most part with matters which cannot be publicly proved, but can only be demonstrated, i.e., made intelligible by analogy, and which even when verified in personal experience can only be stated in terms of symbol and myth. At the same time, faith is made relatively easy by the infallible logic of the texts themselves—which is their beauty and their attractive power. Let us remember the Christian definition of faith: "assent to a credible proposition." One must believe in order to understand, and understand in order to believe. These are not successive, however, but simultaneous acts of the mind. In other words, there can be no knowledge of anything to which the will refuses its consent, or love of anything that has not been known.

Metaphysics differs still further from philosophy in having a purely practical purpose. It is no more a pursuit of truth for truth's sake than

are the related arts a pursuit of art for art's sake, or related conduct the pursuit of morality for the sake of morality. There is indeed a quest, but the seeker already knows, so far as this can be stated in words, what it is that he is in search of; the quest is achieved only when he himself has become the object of his search. Neither verbal knowledge nor a merely formal assent nor impeccable conduct is of any more than indispensable dispositive value—means to an end.

Taken in their materiality, as "literature," the texts and symbols are inevitably misunderstood by those who are not themselves in quest. Without exception, the metaphysical terms and symbols are the technical terms of the chase. They are never literary ornaments, and as Malinowski has so well said in another connection, "Technical language, in matters of practical pursuit, acquires its meaning only through personal participation in this type of pursuit." That is why, the Indian feels, the Vedantic texts have been only verbally and grammatically and never really understood by European scholars, whose methods of study are avowedly objective and noncommittal. The *Vedanta* can be known only to the extent that it has been lived. The Indian, therefore, cannot trust a teacher whose doctrine is not directly reflected in his very being. Here is something very far removed from the modern European concept of scholarship.

We must add, for the sake of those who entertain romantic notions of the "mysterious East," that the *Vedanta* has nothing to do with magic or with the exercise of occult powers. It is true that the efficacy of magical procedure and the actuality of occult powers are taken for granted in India. But the magic is regarded as an applied science of the basest kind; and while occult powers, such as that of operation "at a distance," are incidentally acquired in the course of contemplative practice, the use of them—unless under the most exceptional circumstances—is regarded as a dangerous deviation from the path.

Nor is the *Vedanta* a kind of psychology or Yoga a sort of therapeutics except quite accidentally. Physical and moral health are prerequisites to spiritual progress. A psychological analysis is employed only to break down our fond belief in the unity and immateriality of the "soul," and with a view to a better distinguishing of the spirit from what is not the spirit but only a temporary psycho-physical manifestation of one of the most limited of its modalities. Whoever, like Jung, insists upon translating the essentials of Indian or Chinese metaphysics into a psychology is merely distorting the meaning of the texts. Modern

psychology has, from an Indian point of view, about the same values that attach to spiritualism and magic and other "superstitions." Finally, I must point out that the metaphysics, the *Vedanta*, is not a form of mysticism, except in the sense that with Dionysius we can speak of a *Theologia Mystica*. What is ordinarily meant by "mysticism" involves a passive receptivity—"we must be able to let things happen in the psyche" is Jung's way of putting it (and in this statement he proclaims himself a "mystic"). But metaphysics repudiates the psyche altogether. The words of Christ, that "No man can be my disciple who hateth not his own soul," have been voiced again and again by every Indian guru; and so far from involving passivity, contemplative practice involves an activity that is commonly compared to the blazing of a fire at a temperature so high as to show neither flickering nor smoke. The pilgrim is called a "toiler," and the characteristic refrain of the pilgrim song is "keep on going, keep on going." The "Way" of the Vedantist is above all an activity.

II

The *Vedanta* takes for granted an omniscience independent of any source of knowledge external to itself, and a beatitude independent of any external source of pleasure. In saying "That art thou," the *Vedanta* affirms that man is possessed of, and is himself, "that one thing which when it is known, all things are known" and "for the sake of which alone all things are dear." It affirms that man is unaware of this hidden treasure within himself because he has inherited an ignorance that inheres in the very nature of the psycho-physical vehicle which he mistakenly identifies with himself. The purpose of all teaching is to dissipate this ignorance; when the darkness has been pierced nothing remains but the Gnosis of the Light. The technique of education is, therefore, always formally destructive and iconoclastic; it is not the conveyance of information but the education of a latent knowledge.

The "great dictum" of the Upanisads is, "That art thou." "That" is here, of course, *Atman* or Spirit, *Sanctus Spiritus*, Greek *pneuma*, Arabic *ruh*, Hebrew *ruah*, Egyptian *Amon*, Chinese *ch'i; Atman* is spiritual essence, impartite, whether transcendent or immanent; and however many and various the directions to which it may extend or from which it may withdraw, it is unmoved mover in both intransitive and transitive senses. It lends itself to all modalities of being but never itself becomes anyone or anything. That than which all else is a

vexation—That art thou. "That," in other words, is the *Brahman*, or God in the general sense of Logos or Being, considered as the universal source of all Being—expanding, manifesting, and productive, font of all things, all of which are "in" him as the finite in the infinite, though not a "part" of him, since the infinite has no parts.

For the most part, I shall use the word *Atman* hereafter. While this *Atman*, as that which blows and enlightens, is primarily "Spirit," because it is this divine Eros that is the quickening essence in all things and thus their real being, the word *Atman* is also used reflexively to mean "self"—either "oneself" in whatever sense, however gross, the notion may be entertained, or with reference to the spiritual self or person (which is the only knowing subject and essence of all things, and must be distinguished from the affected and contingent "I" that is a compound of the body and of all that we mean by "soul" when we speak of a "psychology"). Two very different "selves" are thus involved, and it has been the custom of translators, accordingly, to render *Atman* as "self," printed either with a small or with a capital s according to the context. The same distinction is drawn, for example, by St. Bernard between what is my "property" (*proprium*) and what is my very being (*esse*). An alternative Indian formulation distinguishes the "knower of the field"—viz. the Spirit as the only knowing subject in all things and the same in all—from the "field," or body-and-soul as defined above (taken together with the pastures of the senses and embracing therefore all things that can be considered objectively). The *Atman* or *Brahman* itself cannot be thus considered: "How couldst thou know the knower of knowing?"—or in other words, how can the first cause of all things be one of them?

The *Atman* is impartite, but it is apparently divided and identified into variety by the differing forms of its vehicles, mouse or man, just as space within a jar is apparently signate and distinguishable from space without it. In this sense it can be said that "he is one as he is in himself but many as he is in his children," and that "participating himself, he fills these worlds." But this is only in the sense that light fills space while it remains itself without discontinuity; the distinction of things from one another thus depending not on differences in the light but on differences in reflecting power. When the jar is shattered, when the vessel of life is unmade, we realize that what was apparently delimited had no boundaries and that "life" was a meaning not to be confused with "living." To say that the *Atman* is thus at once participated and impartible, "undivided amongst divided things," without local position

and at the same time everywhere, is another way of stating what we are more familiar with as the doctrine of Total Presence.

At the same time, every one of these apparent definitions of the Spirit represents the actuality in time of one of its indefinitely numerous possibilities of formal manifestation. The existence of the apparition begins at birth and ends at death; it can never be repeated. Nothing of Shankara survives but a bequest. Therefore though we can speak of him as still a living power in the world, the man has become a memory. On the other hand, for the gnostic Spirit, the Knower of the field, the Knower of all births, there can never at any time cease to be an immediate knowledge of each and every one of its modalities, a knowledge without before or after (relative to the appearance or disappearance of Shankara from the field of our experience). It follows that where knowledge and being, nature and essence are one and the same, Shankara's being has no beginning and can never cease. In other words, there is a sense in which we can properly speak of "my spirit" and "my person" as well as of "the Spirit" and "the Person," notwithstanding that Spirit and Person are a perfectly simple substance without composition. I shall return to the meaning of "immortality" later, but for the present I want to use what has just been said to explain what was meant by a nonsectarian distinction of points of view. For, whereas the Western student of "philosophy" thinks of *Samkhya* and *Vedanta* as two incompatible "systems," because the former is concerned with the liberation of a plurality of Persons and the latter with the liberty of an inconnumerable Person, no such antinomy is apparent to the Hindu. This can be explained by pointing out that in the Christian texts, "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus" and "Whoever is joined unto the Lord is one spirit," the plurals "ye" and "whoever" represent the *Samkhya* and the singular "one" the *Vedanta* point of view.

The validity of our consciousness of being, apart from any question of being So-and-so by name or by registrable characters, is accordingly taken for granted. This must not be confused with the argument, "Cogito ergo sum." That "I" feel or "I" think is no proof that "I" am; for we can say with the Vedantist and Buddhist that this is merely a conceit, that "feelings are felt" and "thoughts are thought," and that all this is a part of the "field" of which the spirit is the surveyor, just as we look at a picture which is in one sense a part of us though we are not in any sense a part of it. The question is posed accordingly: "Who art thou?" "What is that self to which we should resort?" We recognize

that "self" can have more than one meaning when we speak of an "internal conflict"; when we say that "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"; or when we say, with the *Bhagavad Gita*, that "the Spirit is at war with whatever is not the Spirit."

Am "I" the spirit or the flesh? (We must always remember that in metaphysics the "flesh" includes all the aesthetic and recognitive faculties of the "soul.") We may be asked to consider our reflection in a mirror, and may understand that there we see "ourself"; if we are somewhat less naive, we may be asked to consider the image of the psyche as reflected in the mirror of the mind and may understand that this is what "I" am; or if still better advised, we may come to understand that we are none of these things—that they exist because we are, rather than that we exist inasmuch as they are. The *Vedanta* affirms that "I" in my essence am as little, or only as much, affected by all these things as an author-playwright is affected by the sight of what is suffered or enjoyed by those who move on the stage—the stage, in this case, of "life" (in other words, the "field" or "pasture" as distinguished from its aquiline surveyor, the Universal Man). The whole problem of man's last end, liberation, beatitude, or deification is accordingly one of finding "oneself" no longer in "this man" but in the Universal Man, the *forma humanitatis*, who is independent of all orders of time and has neither beginning nor end.

Conceive that the "field" is the round or circus of the world, that the throne of the Spectator, the Universal Man, is central and elevated, and that his aquiline glance at all times embraces the whole of the field (equally before and after the enactment of any particular event) in such a manner that from his point of view all events are always going on. We are to transfer our consciousness of being, from our position in the field where the games are going on, to the pavilion in which the Spectator, on whom the whole performance depends, is seated at ease.

Conceive that the right lines of vision by which the Spectator is linked to each separated performer, and along which each performer might look upward (inward) to the Spectator if only his powers of vision sufficed, are lines of force, or the strings by which the puppet-master moves the puppets for himself (who is the whole audience). Each of the performing puppets is convinced of its own independent existence and of itself as one amongst others, which it sees in its own immediate environment and which it distinguishes by name, appearance, and

behavior. The Spectator does not, and cannot, see the performers as they see themselves, imperfectly, but he knows the being of each one of them as it really is—that is to say, not merely as effective in a given local position, but simultaneously at every point along the line of visual force by which the puppet is connected with himself, and primarily at that point at which all lines converge and where the being of all things coincides with being in itself. There the being of the puppet subsists as an eternal reason in the eternal intellect—otherwise called the Supernal Sun, the Light of lights, Spirit and Truth.

Suppose now that the Spectator goes to sleep: when he closes his eyes the universe disappears, to reappear only when he opens them again. The opening of eyes ("Let there be light") is called in religion the act of creation, but in metaphysics it is called manifestation, utterance, or spiration (to shine, to utter, and to blow being one and the same thing *in divinis*); the closing of eyes is called in religion the "end of the world," but in metaphysics it is called concealment, silence, or despiration. For us, then, there is an alternation or evolution and involution. But for the central Spectator there is no succession of events. He is always awake and always asleep; unlike the sailor who sometimes sits and thinks and sometimes does not think, our Spectator sits and thinks, and does not think, nowever.

A picture has been drawn of the cosmos and its overseeing "Eye." I have only omitted to say that the field is divided by concentric fences which may conveniently, although not necessarily, be thought of as twenty-one in number. The Spectator is thus at the twenty-first remove from the outermost fence by which our present environment is defined. Each player's or groundling's performance is confined to the possibilities that are represented by the space between two fences. There he is born and there he dies. Let us consider this born being, So-and-so, as he is in himself and as he believes himself to be—"an animal, reasoning and mortal; that I know, and that I confess myself to be," as Boethius expresses it. So-and-so does not conceive that he can move to and fro in time as he will, but knows that he is getting older every day, whether he likes it or not. On the other hand, he does conceive that in some other respects he can do what he likes, so far as this is not prevented by his environment—for example, by a stone wall, or a policeman, or contemporary mores. He does not realize that this environment of which he is a part, and from which he cannot except himself, is a causally determined environment; that it does what it does because of what has been done. He does not realize that he is

what he is and does what he does because others before him have been what they were and have done what they did, and all this without any conceivable beginning. He is quite literally a creature of circumstances, an automaton, whose behavior could have been foreseen and wholly explained by an adequate knowledge of past causes, now represented by the nature of things—his own nature included. This is the well-known doctrine of *karma*, a doctrine of inherent fatality, which is stated as follows by the *Bhagavad Gita*, XVIII.20, "Bound by the working (*karma*) of a nature that is born in thee and is thine own, even that which thou desirest not to do thou doest willy-nilly." So-and-so is nothing but one link in a causal chain of which we cannot imagine a beginning or an end. There is nothing here that the most pronounced determinist can disagree with. The metaphysician—who is not, like the determinist, a "nothing-morist" (*nastika*)—merely points out at this stage that only the working of life, the manner of its perpetuation, can thus be causally explained; that the existence of a chain of causes presumes the logically prior possibility of this existence—in other words, presumes a first cause which cannot be thought of as one amongst other mediate causes, whether in place or time.

To return to our automaton, let us consider what takes place at its death. The composite being is unmade into the cosmos; there is nothing whatever that can survive as a consciousness of being So-and-so. The elements of the psycho-physical entity are broken up and handed on to others as a bequest. This is, indeed, a process that has been going on throughout our So-and-so's life, and one that can be most clearly followed in propagation, repeatedly described in the Indian tradition as the "rebirth of the father in and as the son." So-and-so lives in his direct and indirect descendants. This is the so-called Indian doctrine of "reincarnation"; it is the same as the Greek doctrine of metasomatosis and metempsychosis; it is the Christian doctrine of our preexistence in Adam "according to bodily substance and seminal virtue"; and it is the modern doctrine of the "recurrence of ancestral characters." Only the fact of such a transmission of psycho-physical characters can make intelligible what is called in religion our inheritance of original sin, in metaphysics our inheritance of ignorance, and by the philosopher our congenital capacity for knowing in terms of subject and object. It is only when we are convinced that nothing happens by chance that the idea of a Providence becomes intelligible.

Need I say that this is not a doctrine of reincarnation? Need I say that no doctrine of reincarnation, according to which the very being

and person of a man who has once lived on earth and is now deceased will be reborn of another terrestrial mother, has ever been taught in India, even in Buddhism—or for that matter in the Neoplatonic or any other orthodox tradition? As definitely in the Brahmanas as in the Old Testament, it is stated that those who have once departed from this world have departed forever, and are not to be seen again amongst the living. From the Indian as from the Platonic point of view, all change is a dying. We die and are reborn daily and hourly, and death "when the time comes" is only a special case. I do not say that a belief in reincarnation has never been entertained in India. I do say that such a belief can only have resulted from a popular misinterpretation of the symbolic language of the texts; that the belief of modern scholars and theosophists is the result of an equally naive and uninformed interpretation of texts. If you ask how such a mistake could have arisen I shall ask you to consider the following statements of Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas: that we were in Adam "according to bodily substance and seminal virtue"; "the human body preexisted in the previous works in their causal virtues"; "God does not govern the world directly, but also by means of mediate causes, and were this not so, the world would have been deprived of the perfection of causality"; "As a mother is pregnant with the unborn offspring, so the world itself is pregnant with the causes of unborn things"; "Fate lies in the created causes themselves." If these had been texts extracted from the Upanisads or Buddhism, would you not have seen in them not merely what is really there, the doctrine of *karma*, but also a doctrine of "reincarnation"?

By "reincarnation" we mean a rebirth here of the very being and person of the deceased. We affirm that this is an impossibility, for good and sufficient metaphysical reasons. The main consideration is this: that inasmuch as the cosmos embraces an indefinite range of possibilities, all of which must be realized in an equally indefinite duration, the present universe will have run its course when all its potentialities have been reduced to act—just as each human life has run its course when all its possibilities have been exhausted. The end of an aeviternity will have been reached without any room for any repetition of events or any recurrence of past conditions. Temporal succession implies a succession of different things. History repeats itself in types, but cannot repeat itself in any particular. We can speak of a "migration" of "genes" and call this a rebirth of types, but this reincarnation of So-and-so's character must be distinguished from the "transmigration" of So-and-so's veritable person.

Such are the life and death of the reasoning and mortal animal So-and-so. But when Boethius confesses that he is just this animal, Wisdom replies that this man, So-and-so, has forgotten who he is. It is at this point that we part company with the "nothing-morist," or "materialist" and "sentimentalist" (I bracket these two words because "matter" is what is "sensed"). Bear in mind the Christian definition of man as "body, soul, and spirit." The *Vedanta* asserts that the only veritable being of the man is spiritual, and that this being of his is not "in" So-and-so or in any "part" of him but is only reflected in him. It asserts, in other words, that this being is not in the plane of or in any way limited by So-and-so's field, but extends from this field to its center, regardless of the fences that it penetrates. What takes place at death, then, over and above the unmaking of So-and-so, is a withdrawal of the spirit from the phenomenal vehicle of which it had been the "life." We speak, accordingly, with strictest accuracy when we refer to death as a "giving up of the ghost" or say that So-and-so "expires." I need, I feel sure, remind you only in parenthesis that this "ghost" is not a spirit in the Spiritualist's sense, not a "surviving personality," but a purely intellectual principle such as ideas are made of; "ghost" is "spirit" in the sense that the Holy Ghost is *Sanctus Spiritus*. So then, at death, the dust returns to dust and the spirit to its source.

It follows that the death of So-and-so involves two possibilities, which are approximately those implied by the familiar expressions "saved" or "lost." Either So-and-so's consciousness of being has been self-centered and must perish with himself, or it has been centered in the spirit and departs with it. It is the spirit, as the Vedantic texts express it, that "remains over" when body and soul are unmade. We begin to see now what is meant by the great commandment, "Know thyself." Supposing that our consciousness of being has been centered in the spirit, we can say that the more completely we have already "become what we are," or "awakened," before the dissolution of the body, the nearer to the center of the field will be our next appearance or "rebirth." Our consciousness of being goes nowhere at death where it is not already.

Later on we shall consider the case of one whose consciousness of being has already awakened beyond the last of our twenty-one fences or levels of reference and for whom there remains only a twenty-second passage. For the present let us consider only the first step. If we have taken this step before we die—if we have been to some degree living "in the spirit" and not merely as reasoning animals—we shall,

when the body and soul are unmade into the cosmos, have crossed over the first of the fences or circumferences that lie between ourselves and the central Spectator of all things, the Supernal Sun, Spirit and Truth. We shall have come into being in a new environment where, for example, there may still be a duration but not in our present sense a passage of time. We shall not have taken with us any of the psycho-physical apparatus in which a sensitive memory could inhere. Only the "intellectual virtues" survive. This is not the survival of a "personality" (that was a property bequeathed when we departed); it is the continued being of the very person of So-and-so, no longer encumbered by the grossest of So-and-so's former definitions. We shall have crossed over without interruption of consciousness of being.

In this way, by a succession of deaths and rebirths, all of the fences may be crossed. The pathway that we follow will be that of the spiritual ray or radius that links us with the central Sun. It is the only bridge that spans the river of life dividing the hither from the farther shore. The word "bridge" is used advisedly, for this is the "causeway sharper than a razor's edge," the Cinvat bridge of the Avesta, the "brig of dread," familiar to the folklorist, which none but a solar hero can pass; it is a far-flung bridge of light and consubstantial with its source. The Veda expresses it "Himself the Bridge"—a description corresponding to the Christian "I am the Way." You will have divined already that the passage of this bridge constitutes, by stages that are defined by its points of intersection with our twenty-one circumferences, what is properly called a transmigration or progressive regeneration. Every step of this way has been marked by a death to a former "self" and a consequent and immediate "rebirth" as "another man." I must interpolate here that this exposition has inevitably been oversimplified. Two directions of motion, one circumferential and determinate, the other centripetal and free, have been distinguished; but I have not made it clear that their resultant can be properly indicated only by a spiral.

But the time has come to break down the spatial and temporal materialism of our picture of the cosmos and of man's pilgrimage from its circumference to its center and heart. All of the states of being, all of the So-and-sos that we have thought of as coming into being on superimposed levels of reference, are within you, awaiting recognition: all of the deaths and rebirths involved are supernatural—that is, not "against Nature" but extrinsic to the particular possibilities of the given state of being from which the transmigration is thought of as taking place.

Nor is any time element involved. Rather, since temporal vicissitudes play no part in the life of the spirit, the journey can be made in part or in its entirety, whether before the event of natural death, at death, or thereafter. The Spectator's pavilion is the Kingdom of Heaven that is within you, viz. in the "heart" (in all Oriental and ancient traditions not only the seat of the will but of the pure intellect, the place where the marriage of Heaven and Earth is consummated); it is there only that the Spectator can himself be seen by the contemplative—whose glance is inverted, and who thus retraces the path of the Ray that links the eye without to the Eye within, the breath of life with the Gale of the Spirit.

We can now, perhaps, better understand all that is meant by the poignant words of the Vedic requiem, "The Sun receive thine eye, the Gale thy spirit" and can recognize their equivalent in "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," or in Eckhart's "Eye wherewith I see God, that is the same eye wherewith God sees in me; my eye and God's eye, that is one eye and one vision and one knowing and one love," or St. Paul's "shall be one spirit." The traditional texts are emphatic. We find, for example, in the Upanisads the statement that whoever worships, thinking of the deity as other than himself, is little better than an animal. This attitude is reflected in the proverbial saying, "To worship God you must have become God"—which is also the meaning of the words, to "worship in spirit and in truth." We are brought back to the great saying, "That art thou," and have now a better idea, though a far from perfect understanding (because the last step remains to be taken), of what "That" may be. We can now see how traditional doctrines (distinguishing the outer from the inner, the worldly from the other-worldly man, the automaton from the immortal spirit), while they admit and even insist upon the fact that So-and-so is nothing but a link in an endless causal chain, can nevertheless affirm that the chains can be broken and death defeated without respect to time: that this may happen, therefore, as well here and now as at the moment of departure or after death.

We have not even yet, however, reached what is from the point of view of metaphysics defined as man's last end. In speaking of an end of the road, we have so far thought only of a crossing of all the twenty-one barriers and of a final vision of the Supernal Sun, the Truth itself; of reaching the Spectator's very pavilion; of being in heaven face to face with the manifested Eye. This is, in fact, the conception of man's last end as envisaged by religion. It is an aeviternal beatitude reached

at the "Top of the Tree," at the "Summit of contingent being"; it is a salvation from all the temporal vicissitudes of the field that has been left behind us. But it is a heaven in which each one of the saved is still one amongst others, and other than the Sun of Men and Light of lights himself (these are Vedic as well as Christian expressions); a heaven that, like the Greek Elysium, is apart from time but not without duration; a resting place but not a final home (as it was not our ultimate source, which was in the nonbeing of the Godhead). It remains for us to pass through the Sun and reach the Empyrean "home" of the Father. "No man cometh to the Father save *through* me." We have passed through the opened doorways of initiation and contemplation; we have moved, through a process of a progressive self-naughting, from the outermost to the innermost court of our being, and can see no way by which to continue—although we know that behind this image of the Truth, by which we have been enlightened, there is a somewhat that is not in any likeness, and although we know that behind this face of God that shines upon the world there is another and more awful side of him that is not man-regarding but altogether self-intent—an aspect that neither knows nor loves anything whatever external to itself. It is our own conception of Truth and Goodness that prevents our seeing Him who is neither good nor true in any sense of ours. The only way on lies directly *through* all that we had thought we had begun to understand: if we are to find our way in, the image of "ourselves" that we still entertain—in however exalted a manner—and that of the Truth and Goodness that we have "imagined" *per excellentiam*, must be shattered by one and the same blow. "It is more necessary that the soul lose God than that she lose creatures . . . the soul honors God most in being quit of God . . . it remains for her to be somewhat that he is not . . . to die to all the activity denoted by the divine nature if she is to enter the divine nature where God is altogether idle . . . she forfeits her very self, and going her own way, seeks God no more" (Eckhart). In other words, we must be one with the Spectator, both when his eyes are open and when they are shut. If we are not, what will become of us when he sleeps? All that we have learned through the affirmative theology must be complemented and fulfilled by an Unknowing, the *Docta Ignorantia* of Christian theologians, Eckhart's *Agnosia*. It is for this reason that such men as Shankara and Dionysius have so strongly insisted upon the *via remotionis*, and not because a positive concept of Truth or Goodness was any less dear to them than it could be to us. Shankara's personal practice, indeed, is said to have been devotional—even while

he prayed for pardon because he had worshipped God by name, who has no name. For such as these there was literally nothing dear that they were not ready to leave.

Let us enunciate the Christian doctrine first in order the better to understand the Indian. The words of Christ are these: that "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall pass in and out." It is not enough to have reached the door; we must be admitted. But there is a price of admission. "He that would save his soul, let him lose it." Of man's two selves, the two *Atman*s of our Indian texts, the self that was known by name as So-and-so must have put itself to death if the other is to be freed of all encumbrances—is to be "free as the Godhead in its nonexistence."

In the Vedantic texts it is likewise the Sun of men and Light of lights that is called the doorway of the worlds and the keeper of the gate. Whoever has come thus far is put to the test. He is told in the first place that he may enter according to the balance of good or evil he may have done. If he understands he will answer, "Thou canst not ask me that; thou knowest that whatever 'I' may have done was not of 'my' doing, but of thine." This is the Truth; and it is beyond the power of the Guardian of the Gate, who is himself the Truth, to deny himself. Or he may be asked the question, "Who art thou?" If he answers by his own or by a family name he is literally dragged away by the factors of time; but if he answers, "I am the Light, thyself, and come to thee as such," the Keeper responds with the words of welcome, "Who thou art, that am I; and who I am, thou art; come in." It should be clear, indeed, that there can be no return to God of anyone who still is anyone, for as our texts express it, "He has not come from anywhere or become anyone."

In the same way, Eckhart, basing his words on the logos, "If any man hate not father and mother, . . . yea and his own soul also, he cannot be my disciple," says that "so long as thou knowest who thy father and thy mother have been in time, thou art not dead with the real death"; and in the same way, Rumi, Eckhart's peer in Islam, attributes to the Keeper of the Gate the words, "Whoever enters saying 'I am so and so,' I smite in the face." We cannot, in fact, offer any better definition of the Vedic scriptures than St. Paul's "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, extending even unto the sundering of soul from spirit": "Quid est ergo, quod debet homo inquirere in hac vita? Hoc est ut sciat ipsum." "Si ignoras te, egredere!"

The last and most difficult problem arises when we ask: what is the state of the being that has thus been freed from itself and has returned to its source? It is more than obvious that a psychological explanation is out of the question. It is, in fact, just at this point that we can best confess with our texts, "He who is most sure that he understands, most assuredly misunderstands." What can be said of the *Brahman*—that "He is, by that alone can He be apprehended"—can as well be said of whoever has become the *Brahman*. It cannot be said *what* this is, because it is not any "what." A being who is "freed in this life" (Rumi's "dead man walking") is "in the world, but not of it."

We can, nevertheless, approach the problem through a consideration of the terms in which the Perfected are spoken of. They are called either Rays of the Sun, or Blasts of the Spirit, or Movers-at-Will. It is also said that they are fitted for embodiment in the manifested worlds: that is to say, fitted to participate in the life of the Spirit, whether it moves or remains at rest. It is a Spirit which bloweth as it will. All of these expressions correspond to Christ's "shall pass in and out, and shall find pasture." Or we can compare it with the pawn in a game of chess. When the pawn has crossed over from the hither to the farther side it is transformed. It becomes a minister and is called a mover-at-will, even in the vernacular. Dead to its former self, it is no longer confined to particular motions or positions, but can go in and out, at will, from the place where its transformation was effected. And this freedom to move at will is another aspect of the state of the Perfected, but a thing beyond the conception of those who are still mere pawns. It may be observed, too, that the erstwhile pawn, ever in danger of an inevitable death on its journey across the board, is at liberty after its transformation either to sacrifice itself or to escape from danger. In strictly Indian terms, its former motion was a crossing, its regenerate motion a descent.

The question of "annihilation," so solemnly discussed by Western scholars, does not arise. The word has no meaning in metaphysics, which knows only of the non-duality of permutation and sameness, multiplicity and unity. Whatever has been an eternal reason or idea or name of an individual manifestation can never cease to be such; the content of eternity cannot be changed. Therefore, as the *Bhagavad Gita* expresses it, "Never have I not been, and never hast thou not been."

The relation, in identity, of the "That" and the "thou" in the logos "That art thou" is stated in the *Vedanta* either by such designations as

"Ray of the Sun" (implying filiation), or in the formula *bhedabheda* (of which the literal meaning is "distinction without difference"). The relation is expressed by the simile of lovers, so closely embraced that there is no longer any consciousness of "a within or a without," and by the corresponding Vaishnava equation, "each is both." It can be seen also in Plato's conception of the unification of the inner and the outer man; in the Christian doctrine of membership in the mystical body of Christ; in St. Paul's "whoever is joined unto the Lord is one spirit"; and in Eckhart's admirable formula "fused but not confused."

I have endeavored to make it clear that Shankara's so-called "philosophy" is not an "enquiry" but an "explicitation"; that ultimate Truth is not, for the Vedantist, or for any traditionalist, a something that remains to be discovered but a something that remains to be understood by Everyman, who must do the work for himself. I have accordingly tried to explain just what it was that Shankara understood in such texts as *Atharva Veda* X.8.44: "Without any want, contemplative, immortal, self-originated, sufficed with a quintessence, lacking in naught whatever: he who knoweth that constant, ageless, and ever-youthful Spirit, knoweth indeed him-Self, and feareth not to die."

The Vedanta and Western Tradition by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

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