

Transcendent Brahman and the Problem of Ultimate Reality in Vedanta : A Phenomenological Approach

Sebastian Velassery

This paper attempts to expound the Upanishadic concept of Brahman as the problematic of Transcendent Reality in a rather different way from usual showing a leaning towards the Indian variant of the Greek Logos that is Vak or Sabda. In combining this approach, we take much inspiration from certain crucial ideas of modern European ontology of the phenomenological-existential kind. In Vedanta, transcendent knowledge is held to be entirely within human capability and the achievement of which is the union of the individual self with the Absolute. (Brahman] Hence in the Indian tradition, avidya is always to be seen from the gnosis end always presupposing gnosis. Avidya has for its object something that is unknown a priori; it refers to a knowable unknown, based on a knowledge that is transcendentally originated [through sruti, vak] which is the absolute condition of all ignorance. The unknown is Brahman itself. Rendered into the language of phenomenology, avidya may be described as the existential fact of consciousness and as the negation of metaphysical gnosis [jnana or vidya]. It suggests that avidya is confined primarily to the metaphysical realm of the knowledge of Brahman and secondarily does it apply to the sphere of cognition. But Advaita Vedanta does not assume that the sphere of cognition is independent of the metaphysical realm of knowledge. If avidya is the primordial division of knowledge from itself and if it has a universal and all pervasive structure, then the cognitions are but analogies of gnosis [vidya or jnana]. The above considerations suggest that the transcendent Brahman and its realization may be described phenomenologically as the openness of oneself to one's Self and the non-focal dimension of consciousness. There are two paradoxes here [a] Openness to one's Self is to become realized or to become everything. [b] To experience everything as the self is again equivalent to nothing- although a different sense of nothing. These difficulties could be resolved by [a] Conceiving of empirical/embodied self not as distinct from transcendental self [Brahman] but an aspect or reflection or as ideal of the embodied self. Accordingly, this paper proposes to trace the philosophical history of self qua Self in the Upanishads both cosmically as the all inclusive and unconditioned ground of the universe from which the condition emanates and acosmically as the reality of which the universe is but an appearance This is, in another words 'experience' of an empty consciousness. Consciousness is there, but the contents are gone. It is a present and future possibility wherein the self apprehends itself in its generality and in its plenitude.

An interesting paradox of our times is that while the fascination with eastern religions and philosophies has increased manifold across the world, real academic interest in the Vedanta has gradually waned. This shift away from the heart of Indian tradition may partly be an expression of our times and partly result from misunderstanding of the nature of the system. While many scholars have conceded that the Vedanta is the supreme tradition of India, they do not tend to act upon it. It may be said that of all the Eastern systems, the Vedanta has unequalled philosophical possibilities. This is true when we dwell upon the range and depth of the philosophical possibilities in the Vedanta or take into account its comprehensiveness of scope and catholicity of vision.

This paper attempts to approach the concept of Transcendent as the problematic of Absolute Reality in context of the Vedanta system of philosophy. I intend approaching the problematic of Transcendent in a rather different way from the usual by showing a definite leaning toward the Indian variant of the Greek Logos that is *Vak or Sabda*. In evolving this approach, I draw much inspiration from certain crucial ideas of modern European ontology of the phenomenological-existential kind.

THE ECLIPSE OF TRANSCENDENT IN MODERN THOUGHT

The Transcendent as an object of philosophic thought has gone under eclipse in the West. European-American disinterest in the Transcendent stems from several causes. A great mind like Immanuel Kant, while dealing with the thought about Reality, left a double-barreled legacy with regard to the question of Transcendent. Although the problematic of transcendent was a genuine problem for Kant, yet, he sought to resolve it through critical philosophy. It is well known that through criticism, Kant rejected the claimed capacity of pure reason to obtain knowledge of the real as such. It is also true that in doing so Kant hoped to pave the way for that which is ultimately Real, so to say, the eternal, to be held as the unconditional reference for moral life on the one hand, and as the object of faith, on the other. Critical philosophy and philosophical reflection were designed to be genuine means of achieving moral perfection as well as true reverence and faith. This was said to be the higher objective of Kant. In so far as what we can know and what we know theoretically are limited to mere appearances,¹ critical philosophy and future metaphysics were to serve the goals that were in harmony with the positive sciences. This ideal of theoretic philosophy i.e.; philosophy as a critique of theoretic reason Kant set up — offering a critique of experience rather than a speculative metaphysics — was directly adopted by many thinkers who came after Kant. Without going in for speculative metaphysics, the followers of Kant, on the contrary, inspired by the Kantian idea merely enquired into the presuppositions and conditions of knowledge rather than that of Being.

Kant had no doubt that this method alone would ‘sever the roots of materialism, fatalism, atheism, free thinking, fanaticism and superstition.’² He argued that appearance and reality must be held apart through critical reason because unlike it, speculative reason, cherishing ‘pretensions to transcendent insights,’ transgressed the boundary between appearance and reality, thus actually getting in the way of critical reason being developed in regard to God, freedom and immortality.³

By rejecting the ‘transcendent insights’ as a possibility of reason, Kant closed the highroads of metaphysics to the problematic of ultimate reality. Accordingly, Kantian system represented an effective attempt toward a universal transcendental-philosophy, meant as strict ‘science.’ Thus the transcendent came to be no longer the problematic of ultimate reality, as the difference between appearance and reality was nullified so as to justify any such thing.

TRANSCENDENT BRAHMAN IN VEDANTA

In the modern West, while the transcendent is under eclipse as the rejection of traditional

metaphysics, transcendent continues to enjoy some currency in the oriental philosophies, especially within the Indian tradition. In considering the transcendent as the problematic of ultimate reality, Vedanta surprisingly rejects the literal meaning of the verb ‘to transcend.’ According to the Vedantins, the philology of the word ‘transcendent’ is held to be irrelevant to grasping the transcendent: the emphasis and irony here is that what is grasped is already at hand and is a definite and concrete ground. This problem is treated in a passage in Ananta’s celebrated commentary on the Brahmasutras.⁴ The question is raised as to what is to be understood by transcendent — the word used here is ‘Pra.’ Sankara provides a revolutionized meaning up against the conventional, philological one. Sankara shows that even in ordinary usage, in some cases, to transcend does not mean ‘to go beyond indefinitely;’ but ‘to reach.’⁵ To reach means to grasp entirely, just as when we speak of a student having completely learned grammar. [yatha vyakaranam tirna iti prapta ittucyate]. Here, transcendence does not mean going further beyond [na atikrantah]. To transcend is the same as to reach, to attain [apnoti or prapnoti]. The term *apnoti* with or without the prefix Pra is a verb used with a strong sense conveying the meaning of total identity of the seeker and the sought.

Such an understanding of prapnoti revolutionizes the definition of the transcendent in comparison with that to which consciousness is structurally oriented. In such an understanding, transcendent is primary and because of its pull, consciousness is structurally oriented. The ‘beyond’ in the meaning of the verb ‘to transcend’ does not remain forever elusive and indefinite but is grasped as the ground close at hand — something upon which we stand. Standing upon it, we can ponder the gulf that has separated it from consciousness, which still seeks to overcome it. The beyond is already at hand and it is what is called Brahman. This transcendent Brahman comprehends and encompasses what otherwise remains incomprehensible and un-encompassed. Let us understand this concept of Brahman as understood and interpreted by the Vedanta school of philosophy as absolute reality.

BRAHMAN AS ABSOLUTE REALITY

Absolute reality is termed in the Vedanta school of philosophy as Brahman. This word/concept occurs two hundred times in the *Rg Veda* in various case-forms and as part of compound. Just like Atman, it is also understood in various senses in the *Rg Veda*. It is derived from the root brh ‘to grow,’ or ‘to swell.’ It is frequently used in neuter gender than in masculine gender in the *Rg Veda*. Sayana has given various meanings of the word Brahman. (1) Prayer⁶ [*stotra*] (2) Food⁷ [sacrificial or ordinary] (3) Cause of the universe⁸ [*jagat karanam*] (4) Great act⁹ [*parivrdham karma*] (5) Brahmin¹⁰ (6) Body¹¹ [tradi vardhanakari sariram] (7) Great¹² [brhat]. Western scholars have also interpreted the word Brahman. They differ in their interpretations. Deriving the word from the root brh, Pott¹³ asserted that it originally signified ‘God’ and later on came to mean worshipper also. Grassman, Fick, Bargaigne, Delbruck, Deussen and Lanmann also accept this view.¹⁴ Deriving the word Brahman from the root brh — “to swell” or “to grow” — Martin Haug describes it in such terms as: that which grows or swells, that productive power in nature which manifests itself in the growth of the plants and all other creatures.¹⁵ Max

Muller suggests its meaning as 'propelling power' in neuter gender, it denotes hymn or prayer which originally meant 'speech or word.'¹⁶ Keith says: growth of the idea of Brahman as a suitable expression for the Absolute must have been greatly furthered by the extraordinary value attached to the prayer and to the spell. The prayer rapidly passes over to the lower rank.¹⁷

According to Sankara, Brahman is the basis [adhithana] on which the world-form appears; it is the sustaining ground of all various vikaras or modifications. It 'is the highest Self, and the Self of all, and reveals himself by dividing himself [as it were in the form of various objects] in multiple ways.'¹⁸ The whole world is the manifestation of the supreme Being.¹⁹ Brahman modifying itself into the atman or internal self of all things is the world. Since Brahman is the upadhanakarana of the world, the sruti speaks of the world as the modification of Brahman into the atman of the effect.²⁰ In creating the world; Brahman has not added anything anew from outside. Hence the resulting distinction through creation is no distinction ultimately; the world at bottom is nothing other than Brahman; the world is another form [unreal form] of Brahman.²¹ Hence the world is a self-revelation or manifestation of Brahman. In other words, Brahman reveals itself in the world in multiple forms of various objects of the world. Accordingly, duality belongs to the sphere of avidya [nescience, ignorance] and those who rise above avidya level will intuit only the non-dual Brahman. Hence, there is no infinite plus finite but the infinite appearing as the finite. Accordingly, the world and Brahman must be looked upon as non-dual; this is the comprehensive vision of the Advaita-Darsana of Sankara.

On the rational plane Sankara argues: If nothing can exist outside Brahman and if Brahman is indivisible, there should somehow a unity of all beings [viz; Brahman, jivatman and the world]. Sankara attempts to elucidate this unity-conception of all beings by means of analogies drawn from nature such as the 'universal ether and pot,' 'gold and gold ornaments,' 'clay and clay pots,' 'ocean and its waves' etc. The problem that Sankara confronts here is: How could the one, immutable, indivisible, all-pervading and all-inclusive Brahman give rise to a multiplicity of beings? How could an immaterial and non-dual Brahman bring into existence a material universe of diverse objects? According to Sankara, it is a mystery [maya]; it is indefinable [anirvacaniya]; it is the mysterious power of Brahman. We may state only this that it is a technical term Sankara employs while referring to the world. But avidya or ajnana is used more frequently than Maya. By qualifying the world as Maya, Sankara means only that in the vyavahara-stage of man, there is the world as a mysterious and indefinable thing which disappears like a magic in the higher stage called Paravidya or Brahma-jnana. For all practical purposes the world is real, but ultimately it is unreal.²²

AVIDYA: THE INDIAN LOGOS AND THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STARTING POINT

In order to achieve a preliminary understanding of the notion of avidya in Vedanta, let us compare it with the Greek approach to ignorance. For the Greeks, the logos ultimately reflected itself in man's reason. And reason is not a private faculty but a universal reality, which not only bound a being to thinking but also joined all beings together. Heraclitus' cosmic oracles, Pythagoras' mathematical insights and Parmenides' wisdom pertaining to the logic of Being gave assurance

as to this knowledge which in itself was, however, always elusive and held to be elusive. Hence the claim of attaining knowledge was shown to be nothing but opinionated sense-delusion. The difference between the two-doxa and episteme- was kept alive through dialectic, an activity made possible by the logos. Socrates, who disclaimed himself to be a knower of anything but his own ignorance, also accepted this approach.

Unlike in the Greek philosophy, the counterpart of ignorance, namely avidya, as it manifests itself in the Vedanta may be understood in conjunction with transcendent knowledge [vidya or jnana]. In the Vedanta, transcendent knowledge is held to be entirely within human capability. The achievement of this capability is the union with the Absolute [Brahman] and that is said to be the goal of philosophy, which in the words of Sankara “is the vision of the ultimate truth wherein no distinction exists between knowledge, what is to be known and the knower.”²³ Hence in the Indian tradition, at least for the Vedantins, avidya is always to be seen from the gnosis end, and so always presupposes gnosis.

THE INDIAN LOGOS: VAK

Here the difference between the Greek/Western conception of the logos and the Indian conception of the same as Vak or Sabda comes to light. The Indian logos is two-fold: consisting of the Word [sruti] and Vak, which is the mediating gnosis and the immanent power within the self, instrumental in stirring the desire to know. The desire to know Brahman should not be considered as a mere desire for knowledge. Rather the desire to know Brahman re-structures and re-orientates the consciousness/self. This is how the knowledge of Brahman is wrested out of avidya. Further, the desire for the knowledge of Brahman causes the mind/self to be taken away from the irresolvable and helps to concentrate thought on that which alone is worthy to be known, i.e.; Brahman. In the Vedanta, thought not only remains a reflection of the light of gnosis, but also participates in the ‘darkness’ of avidya, which nevertheless, is a quest for light. But in so far as avidya potentiates the desire to know and in so far as what it potentiates is capable of being re-structured and re-oriented, avidya is not mere darkness, which is capable of being dissipated by gnosis. It was a view of this kind that we come across in *Chandogya Upanisad*:

Speech [vak], assuredly is more than name, speech verily, makes known the Rg Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajurveda, fourth, the Atharvaveda as the fourth, Legend and ancient Lore as the fifth Veda of Vedas [i.e.; the grammar], propitiation of the manes, Mathematics, Augury, Chronology, Logic, Polity, the science of the gods...Verily, if there were no speech, neither right nor wrong would be known, neither true nor false, neither good nor bad, neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Speech, indeed, makes all this known-Reverence speech. He who reverences speech as Brahman as far as speech goes, so far he has unlimited freedom.²⁴

This illustration abundantly explains that Vak is not accidental to human self. On the contrary, it is the centrality of human self. An interesting passage in *Aitareya Upanishad*, where we read about the creation of the cosmic person, begins thus: ‘He bethought himself’. Here now is the world. Let me now create world-guardians.’ Right from the waters, he drew forth and shaped a person. Upon him he brooded. When he had been brooded upon, his mouth was separated out, egg-like; from the mouth speech [vak], from speech *agni*, [fire] and this were followed by creation of other faculties and senses. The distinction to be noted here is that Vak is the first faculty the cosmic person created in Purusa. Purusa here represents a process or a state of becoming. In this process of becoming, Vak [speech] is essential to personhood, and it is the means by which Brahman/Atman manifests. It also suggests that by means of Vak, the human self articulates a highly differentiated consciousness. Man speaks his world and speaking is a creative process, for, man transforms his self from the speakables to the unspeakable where he lives in a world created and recreated continually in his lived experiences, which is, again, grounded in Vak. Thus through Vak, man creates and multiplies the possible spaces and temporal orders that make up his self in a world of non-temporal and non-spatial spheres.

The above considerations suggest that Vak or speech provides a certain way of Being in the world. It is through Vak that we articulate our human emotions and constitute our social relations. This Being aspect of Vak is described in the Upanishads in the following way. “Speech is Brahman”²⁵ [vagvai Brahmeti]; “Speech is virat”²⁶ “Speech is the world”²⁷ “It is the gods”²⁸ “It is agni”²⁹ “It is the Rg Veda”³⁰ “It is the one source of all Vedas.”³¹ These Upanisadic texts suggest that Vak [speech] adumbrates not only the speakable but the unspeakable, too. The possibility of grasping that Being [Unspeakable] takes place when speech and self enter into a unity.

The unity of self and Vak is veiled by avidya. It is an experienced and existential phenomenon because it is essentially consciousness confronting and engaging itself under the conditions of the assumptions of absolute knowledge, without which it cannot be what it is. Understood in this way, avidya seems to be the fundamental phenomenological starting point from which Maya emerges as the explanatory principle supported by perception and inference. If it is a fact of consciousness, maya appears to be a postulate drawing its substance from avidya and its *raison d’être* from paradoxically expressed aspect of ontological reality, Brahman. Sankara, in the quest for an experiential description of Maya has taken recourse to avidya.³² Sankara, therefore, treats both the terms synonymously. These considerations suggest that avidya is a positive privation or absence of absolute knowledge and implicitly a quest for the absolute. The positive character of avidya, argues Madhusudhana Saraswati, is revealed by the intuitive knowledge of saksin [the witnessing self] which is described as pure consciousness reflected on the *vrtti* [mode] of avidya.³³ Avidya has for its object something that is unknown, a priori; it refers to a knowable unknown, based on a knowledge that is transcendentally originated [through *sruti*, vak] which then becomes the absolute condition of all ignorance. The unknown is Brahman itself. Rendered into the language of phenomenology, avidya may be described as the existential fact of consciousness and as the negation of metaphysical gnosis [jnana or vidya]. It suggests

that avidya is confined primarily to the metaphysical realm of the knowledge of Brahman and secondarily it does apply to the sphere of cognition. But advaita Vedanta does not assume that the sphere of cognition is independent of the metaphysical realm of knowledge. If avidya is the primordial division of knowledge from itself and if it has a universal and all pervasive structure, then the question is: what is it that the cognitions are analogies of? The answer is gnosis [vidya or jnana].

The ancient seer's concern was the divine word, called Aksara, the imperishable syllable, or udgitha, the exalted song, or just AUM. He was not concerned, in a practical way, with naming things for informative comprehension. For knowing the real names of things and their nature, he became one with them. Each thing has a divine name, which is the vibration of the divine word sound that is its guiding power. Such words were mantras whose sound and meaning corresponded. Such mantras were the result of deep contemplation on the being of things in the state of pure perception, free of fear and desire and they let the cosmos fill with the Being [Brahman]. That is why the Upanisadic philosopher understands 'the essence of language' to be Vak, sabda — Brahman [or sphota], the vimarsa [sphuratta] of god etc. It again suggests that the word 'logos' or Vak is eternal and non-temporal.

These considerations obviate the necessity to regard that Vak is a transpersonal unity which, instead of being a product of man, can condition him. The transpersonal aspect of Vak [language, speech] is illustrated by the fact that it is a revelation. As revelation, it becomes the center from which man's recovery through thought and act is made possible. Accordingly, Vak binds the human and the divine rather than polarize them. Language purifies the thought and act as it is said: "Verily, that which purifies here [i.e.; the mind] is the sacrifice, for the moving along, purifies all this. And because moving along, he purifies all this, he is the sacrifice, of that mind and speech are the ways."³⁴ When the Upanishads testify to Reality in utterances like "Whence words return along with the mind, not attaining it,"³⁵ it is the inadequacy of human language that is clearly implied. But they also envisaged the possibility of expressing the Absolute [Brahman] but, negatively, the algebra of which is neti, neti [not this, not this].³⁶ Negative statements are used not only for the description of the absolute but for an apprehension, suggestion and pointedness of that Self.

TRANSCENDENT BRAHMAN AND THE CONCEPT OF BEING [SAT]

A discerning study of Advait literature brings home the truth that the pursuit of Being was undertaken in the form of two dominant inquiries centered around; [a] the problem of the meaning of linguistic expressions and statements and [b] the problem of the real, of being [satya] versus the false [mithya]. The concepts sat [being] and asat [non-being] appear many a time in the minor and major Upanishads. Following the clue of Nasadiya Sukta, perhaps we may say that the concept of ASAT is mentioned prior to Sat [Non-being to being]. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* declares, "In the beginning, this was just non-being; from it being was born. It made itself atman, wherefore, it is called well made."³⁷ The apriori nature of being to non-being occurs clearly for the first time in the *Chandogya Upanishad*:

In the beginning, my dear, this was being itself, one only without a second. Some say that in the beginning this was just non-being, one only without a second; from that non-being, being was born. [But] how, indeed, could it be so? Said he, how could being arise from non-being? [On the contrary], my dear, this was in the beginning being itself, one only without a second.³⁸

The Advaitins' use of the term 'Sat' [real] is centered around the idea of what is unsublatable or unsublated in the past, present and future. [Trikala-abadhya or trikala- abadhita] Sometimes Sat is defined slightly differently as that which is experienceable, stable, permanent and lasting. In Gitabhasya, Sankara states that awareness [buddhi] which does not alter with its object is sat [real] and that which does vary with its object is asat [unreal].³⁹ Again in Brahmasutra bhasya, Sankara affirms that the object of right knowledge remains constant.⁴⁰ In other words, what is constant amid all various changes is sat; and what is variable in all changes or the perpetually changing and succeeding forms is asat.⁴¹

Sankara does not quite consistently use Asat or unreal. He uses it in three different senses: [a] Sat to everything other than Brahman,⁴² [b] For the commonly perceived world, like dreams, hallucinations, illusions such as rope-snake etc, [c] Synonymous with 'non-experienceable' or 'tucche' giving as illustrations like hare's horn, sky flower, barren woman's son, etc. For the last named instances, Sankara denotes the term atyanta-asat [utterly unreal]. Thus, for Sankara, sat and asat are to be gathered from the context in which he uses these terms. But for him, Paramartha-satyam or Satyasya satyam is always Brahman.

BRAHMAN AND THE QUESTION OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN THE UPANISHADS

The substance of Self-knowledge in the Upanishads is that the individual self [jivatman] and the universal self [paramatman] – Brahman — are identical. Its dialectics is expressed by Sankara in the following words: "As long as the knowledge of the Self which is to be sought after has not arisen, so long the self is a knower, but the same knower will turn out to be the Self sought after, free from all evil and blemish.⁴³ [Anvestyatma-vijnanat pak pramatrtvam atmanah, anvistah syat pramataiva papama — dosadi varjitah]. Sankara, in his bhasyas, teaches us that the meaning of 'Self' is concealed in the truth of identity, which according to him, is the essential import of the Upanisadic passages. Even when there is no express declaration of identity, it is implicitly there. Sankara argues that even the description 'not this, not this' [neti, neti] declares this identity of self with Self. [jivatman with paramatman] This is plausible because identity is conceptually and formally defined as the total absence of any relations and relations imply separateness. Separateness is determined by species, quality and distinguishing marks. To negate such things is identity. Hence Sankara argues "the purpose implicit in all cosmogonies merely buttresses the sole purpose of knowing the oneness of the Self. [Srstyadi-vakyanam atmaikatva-darsanartha- paratva -upapattih].⁴⁴

The identity thesis of Sankara is based on the principle of Brahman or paramatman as the infinite plenitude of Being, and as the only ground for Being to be no longer chained to beings or to a particular being. The first step in overcoming duality is to let the sense of the self in atman replace the sense of the self and universal spirit as separate beings. In this way, Self is apprehended as both the sought after and the seeker. So let me repeat Sankara's statement: "As long as the knowledge of the Self, which is to be sought after has not arisen, so long the self is a knower, but the same self will turn out to be the Self sought after."⁴⁵

The truth of self-knowledge can, theoretically speaking, be reached by understanding ordinary consciousness and what it really conceals. There are a number of positive suggestions in the Upanishads themselves, which Sankara picks up. For example: "Analysis of four states of consciousness in *Mandukya*; describing the five sheaths of matter, life, mind, intellect and bliss,⁴⁶ direction of progressive self-reflection like repeatedly looking into a mirror,⁴⁷ analysis of the structures of desires.⁴⁸ The last named is particularly interesting because Self-knowledge is described as the desire to know what is hidden within the inner space within 'the small lotus flower' which resides in the city of Brahman [Brahma-pura], ie; purusa, that is, man.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

In the foregoing sections, we have sought to explore and explicate the Upanisadic doctrine of Brahman as the problematic of Absolute Reality. What follows now is a step in this journey of evaluating that self qua Self as the meaning of human engagement and as the unificatory principle of all divergent manifestations. Let us not try to define the term self for the present moment. Instead, let us assume that in a remarkably penetrating sense, each of us is aware of himself/herself as a being in the world, as a self for which experience is coherent and possible. As *Aitareya Upanishad* postulates:

...self is the one whereby one sees, or whereby one hears, or whereby one smells odors, or whereby one articulates speech or whereby one discriminates the sweet and the unsweet; that which is heart [hrdaya] and mind [manas] – that is consciousness [samjna]. Perception [ajnana], discrimination [vijnana], intelligence [prajnana], wisdom [medhas], insight [drsti] steadfastness [drti], thought [mati], thoughtfulness [manisa], impulse [juti], memory [smrti], conception [samkalpa], purpose [kratu], life [asu], desire [kama], will [vasa]. All these, indeed, are appellations of intelligence.⁴⁹

It may be noted here that the image of man projected in the Upanishads is that of a self whose reality is grounded in consciousness, which is said to have a directional force sustaining the entire range of perceptual and non-perceptual experience. In a remarkable passage in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* this idea of the self is depicted very powerfully "... when the sun

has set, Yajnavalkya, and the moon has set and the fire has gone out and speech has stopped, what light does a person have here? The self indeed is his light, said he, for, with the self indeed as light, one moves about, does one's work and returns."⁵⁰ Individual and action, choice and situation, transcendent and the immanent, doxa and episteme, gnosis and thought are closely bound to each other not only in their implications but also in their fundamental structure. To quote G.F. McLean, "[this] identity or analogy of rational structures of mind and of reality follow from both having been mediated through the same identical divine logos."⁵¹ Therefore, the approach to the self-knowledge requires something of a movement, a development and an odyssey of reconstruction. It is only fair, then, to indicate the general itinerary.

Stating openly, we proposed to trace the philosophical history of self qua Self in the Upanishads "both cosmically as the all inclusive, unconditioned ground of the universe from which the condition emanates and acosmically, as the reality of which the universe is but an appearance."⁵² This imperishable principle is called the unqualified one and thus Yajnavalkya says... "Across this imperishable, O Gargi, is space woven, warp and woof."⁵³ In a noteworthy passage in *Brh Upanisad*, it is stated: "the self is performing a piece of supernatural magic in appearing as many. He became corresponding in form to every form. This is to be looked upon as a form of him..."⁵⁴ Accordingly, this "self should be looked upon as a unity in diversified forms and names."⁵⁵ *Katha Upanishad* solves this apparent conflict between the one and the many in the following way: "As the one wind has entered the world and becomes corresponding in form to every form, so the one inner soul [Self] of all things is corresponding in form to every form and yet is outside."⁵⁶

The above considerations suggest that the transcendent Brahman and its realization may be described phenomenologically as the openness of oneself to one's Self and the non-focal dimension of consciousness. In our experiences of the world/objects-mental and physical — the objects become the focal point of our consciousness, whereas in the question of the self, it is that which we are non-focally aware of at certain moments of life. There are two paradoxes here: [a] Openness to one's Self is to become realized or to become everything, [b] To experience everything as the self is again equivalent to nothing — although a different sense of nothing. These difficulties could be resolved by [a] Conceiving of jivatman [empirical/embodied self] not as distinct from transcendental self [Brahman] but an aspect or reflection of that Self, as an ideal of the embodied self. Yajnavalkya to Maitreyi express such a view in the following way: "For where there is duality [dvaita] as it were [iva] there one sees another; there one smells another; there one hears another; there one thinks of another; there one understands another; where, verily, everything has become just one's own self, there whereby and whom would one smell..."⁵⁷

This is, in another words, 'experience' of an empty consciousness. Consciousness is there, but the contents are gone. It is a present and future possibility, wherein the self apprehends itself in its generality and in its plenitude. Placing man in the stream of self-consciousness and defining him/her as 'not this, not this' takes us to that realm where Uddalaka Aruni repeated nine times to

Svetaketu “That art Thou,”⁵⁸ for instruction in which ‘Saunaka the great householder came to Angiras,’⁵⁹ that which Narada knew not though he knew eighteen books and sciences and for the lack of knowledge of which he was sorrowing;⁶⁰ that for complete instruction in which Indra remained with Prajapati as a pupil for 101 years,⁶¹ that supreme object is Brahman, this Atman, this self, the ground of oneself.

This identity of self qua Self is already with humans. Our efforts to know it, which is what metaphysics is, is no more than clarifying this supreme truth to ourselves or more appropriately, removing the veil of darkness [avidya] that obscures our outlook and perception. The same Logos, which reveals gnosis itself the nature of the disposition of ultimate reality to us, also directs our thinking of it. This is the ground of absolute certainty and all other certainties are but a flash of it. Adopting the phenomenological method to see the structure of the self and to comprehend its becoming/being and any degree of success attained in this task may be taken as a vindication of the approach adopted in this paper.

NOTES

1. Kant, Immanuel. (1965) *Critique of Pure Reason*: trans: by Norman Kemp (New York: St.Martin’s Press), p.29.
2. Ibid. p.32.
3. Ibid. p.29.
4. Sankara’s *Commentary on the BrahmaSutras*, 3.2.31-37.
5. Ibid. 3.2.32
6. Narakari, H.G. *Atman in the pre-Upanisadic Vedic Literature* (Madras, 1944) P.23.
7. Rg Veda;1.10.4;11 41.18;111.8.2;1V.22.1.
8. Ibid.; 111.29.15;X.114.8.
9. Ibid.; 1.105.2.
10. Ibid.; V111.35.16.
11. Ibid. 1X.67.23.
12. Ibid. 1X.71.1
13. Narakari, H.G. op.cit; p.25
14. Narakari, H.G. Introduction to the Aitareya Brahmana, p. 4.
15. Ibid. p.26.
16. Maxmuller, System of the Vedanta, p.49.
17. A.B. Keith, ‘The Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upanishads’ (Massachussets, 1925), pp. 445-46.
18. BrahmaSutra Bhasya, 2.2.42. Also cfr Chand.up.7.26.2.

19. Ibid. 2.2.43.
20. Ibid. 1.4.26; Taitt.2.6.
21. Devanandan, P.D. 'The Concept of Maya' (London, 1950), p. 102.
22. Ibid. p.102.
23. Sankara's Commentary on the Mandukya Karika, 4.1.
24. Chand; 7.2.1.
25. Brh; 4.1.2.
26. Chand; 1.13.2.
27. Brh; 1.5.4.
28. Chand; 1.5.6.
29. Ibid. 3.13.3.
30. Ibid.1.7.1. And Brh; 1.5.5.
31. Brh; 2.4.11.
32. Avidya laksana anadirmaya. Sankara Bhasya on Mandukya Karika, 3.36.
33. Kim ca kevala cinmatram na saksi kim tu avidyavrttyupahitam, Advaita Siddhi, p.545.
34. Brh; 4.4.22.
35. Taitt; 2.4.1.
36. Brh; 4.4.22.
37. Taitt; 2.7.1.
38. Chand; 6.2.1-2.
39. Sankara, Gitabhasya; 2.16.
40. BrahmaSutraBhasya; 2.1.11. In Taittiriya Upanisad Bhasya, Sankara calls Asat by the name amrtam and defines it as 'yad rupena yan niscitam tad rupam vyabharati amrtam ityucate'.
41. Sometimes Sat is defined by Indian Philosophers as that which possesses practical efficacy (Artha-Kriya-Kariva) and in this sense, the world is Sat but in contrast to Brahman, the world is Asat.
42. Sankara's Gita Bhasya; 2.16.
43. Commentary on BrahmaSutra; 1.1.4.
44. Commentary on Brh; 1.4.7.
45. Sankara's Commentary on BrahmaSutra; 1.1.4
46. Taitt; 2.1.1-2.5.1.
47. Chand; 8.7.1.-8.12.6.
48. Chand; 8.1.1-8.4.3.
49. Ait; 5.1.2. Also refer Katha; 4.3.

50. Brh; 4.3.1-6
51. G.F. McLean, *Tradition and Contemporary Life*, "Hermeneutics of Perennial Wisdom and Social Change" (Radhakrishnan Institute of Advanced Study in Philosophy, Univ. of Madras, 1986), p. 72.
52. Ibid. p.73.
53. Brh; 3.8.11.
54. Ibid; 2.5.19.
55. Katha; 5.10;Brh; 1.6.3.
56. Ibid. 5.10.
57. Brh; 2.4.14.
58. Chand; 6.8.16.
59. Mund; 1.1.3.
60. Chand; 7.1.1-2
61. Ibid.