

SANKARA AS THEOLOGIAN.

BY

FRANCIS EDWARD SIMON, B.A., M.A.

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AUTHOR: Francis Edward Simon, B.A.  
M.A.

(Iona College)  
(Manhattan College)

SUPERVISOR: Professor John G. Arapura

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## ABSTRACT

It will be my intention in this essay to demonstrate that Śankara-Vedānta should be addressed primarily as theology and not as philosophy. At the very least, such reference to Śankara-Vedānta as philosophy is misleading if left unqualified--and sometimes unjustified even when qualified. I am convinced that Śankara-Vedānta can be more accurately described as theology for mainly two reasons: Śankara's starting point is revelation (śruti) and his primary concern is of a soteriological nature, viz., the desire for liberation (mumukṣutvam). These two essential characteristics of Śankara's thinking doubtlessly put some distance between his method and primary concern and those of modern, Western philosophy. I have specifically delimited the philosophical aspect of this distinction to the modern, Western era for reasons of clarity. Even by doing this, we can not come to an agreement on what is one, modern, Western philosophy, but rather only isolate some mainstream elements. However, I do think it feasible to maintain that--on the grounds of so important a set of distinctions as the respective starting points and primary concerns--we can point to differences between philosophy and theology and thereby clarify our understanding of Śankara-Vedānta.

## INTRODUCTION

It will be my intention in this essay to demonstrate that Śankara-Vedānta should be addressed primarily as theology and not as philosophy. This might seem at first glance to be a simple enough proposition; but as I will show, there has been within this century a tendency to refer to Śankara-Vedānta simply as "philosophy," while totally ignoring its theological character. At the very least, any such references are misleading if left unqualified--and sometimes unjustified even when qualified. Therefore, since a twentieth century use of the term implies a reference to the modern Western meaning of the term, I would insist that we may not describe Śankara-Vedānta as philosophy in this sense. Rather, I am convinced that it is more accurate to describe the essentials of Śankara's thinking as theological for mainly two reasons: the role of revelation in Śankara's methodology, and the primary concern of his enterprise. To state my position plainly, Śankara's starting point is revelation (śruti) and his primary concern is soteriological (mumukṣutva). These two characteristics of Śankara's thought, once demonstrated, doubtlessly put some distance between his method and primary concern and those of

modern, Western philosophy.

It must be stated with emphasis here and now that it is my intention not to deny that genuinely philosophical elements (even those of a modern type) are present in Śankara's thought, but merely to maintain that they are of secondary import for Śankara. What I wish to stress is that we must be specific about what is essential to Śankara's mode of expression. So it is for this reason that the theological meditations which issue directly from the mahāvākyas of the Upaniṣads should occupy our thoughts when discussing the primary concerns of Śankara-Vedānta. Dr. Arapura has made some penetrating remarks about this matter of Śankara's priorities.

Broadly speaking where Nirguna Brahman or Parāmātmā is spoken, and the first deductive principle of Māyā-avidyā likewise, and also certain ideas like jīvan-mukṭi which are totally and essentially consistent with these, there we can hold that Śankara is speaking the primary language of the Sacred Tautology. Where he speaks of Brahman (in terms of other vidyās) as the psychical principle, as creator, as Cause in the positive sense, as prāna, vāyu, vāk, etc., the language is of the second "systematic" elements.<sup>1</sup>

The "Sacred Tautology" is of course a reference to the distillation of the purport of the Upaniṣads, the identity of jīva and Ātman as articulated in the advaita formula: brahma satyam jagānmithyā jīvo brahmaiva nāparah (Brahman in truth exists, the universe is falsity, the jīva-self is Brahman and no other). So Śankara-Vedānta is first and foremost theology on methodological grounds, since these

truths are accessible to man only through the aid of the śruti. The secondary "systematic" elements, though being no essential part of the expression of highest truth, nevertheless find their place in the philosophical responsibility of the "system" to address itself to the various other darśanas. Therefore, my intention in this essay will be to focus on the theological meditations of Śankara so that we might gain a fresh perspective on these primary concerns of Vedānta.

It must also be stated with great emphasis that by no means do I intend to demean the stature of Śankara-Vedānta by stressing its theological character. Although I will maintain that it is misleading to describe Śankara-Vedānta as philosophy in the modern, Western sense, it has nevertheless become a most popular designation in the vocabulary of Western students as well as Indian scholars in dialogue with the West. Conversely, theology has not been a popular term, even though, as I wish to insist, it is an eminently suitable designation with which to describe the scope of the Vedānta. I think that such a lack of popularity may be explained in two ways. First, Śankara's subtle saguna-nirguna distinction reduces, in the work of most commentators, the notion of God (included within the saguna conceptual framework) to a lower realm of existence or lesser degree of truth. Second, in recent years, theology has come to be the

subject of some rather derisive assessments. The desire to understand Vedānta as philosophy and not as theology would obviously follow from the prevalence of this attitude as the former would seem to render a more exalted status than the latter. It is hoped that such an attitude has been tempered by intellectual maturity and that the authentic representation of Śankara will be valued more than the mimicry of concerns and criteria which are not essential to the Vedānta. We might take some sound advice from Martin Heidegger on this subject. In the following passage, he speaks of Christian philosophy, but I would say that the same admonition applies to those who wish to speak of a Vedānta philosophy.

A "Christian philosophy" is a round square and a misunderstanding. There is, to be sure, a thinking and questioning elaboration of the world of Christian experience, i.e. of faith. That is theology. Only epochs which no longer fully believe in the true greatness of the task of theology arrive at the disastrous notion that philosophy can help to provide a refurbished theology if not a substitute for theology, which will satisfy the needs and tastes of the time.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, how can we consider theological aspects of Vedānta if Śankara asserted that the highest Reality is pure Being, "one only, without a second" (ekameva advitīyam)? If Reality is non-dual and supra-relational, then where is there a legitimate place for God in Śankara-Vedānta? The answer to this question consists of an appreciation of the advaitic formula for liberation from bondage or finitude. Meditation (here meant in the

most general sense of dhyāna, upāsanā) and worship aimed at liberation must begin with some objective focus and saguna-Brahman (specifically Īśvara) serves just such a purpose in the religious life of man by pointing him in the right direction. M. K. V. Iyer states it thus:

"A graded course of meditative exercises is laid down in the Upaniṣads, from the gross to the subtle, from what is external to what is internal, from the material to the spiritual."<sup>3</sup> This remark does well to capture the attitude of advaita toward meditation and worship. One is always urged to "move" from "what is external to what is internal," i.e., from falsity (mithyātva) to truth (satya); but this "movement" is not possible with regard to an all-pervasive absolute like nirguna-Brahman and Śankara agrees:

. . . that Brahmā could ever be the object of any such "movement" is not reasonably sustainable; that the Highest Brahma, which is ascertained to be all-pervading and which is immanent in all and is the Self of all . . . is something towards which this movement of approach is possible is never reasonably sustainable. What has already been reached cannot again be sought to be reached.<sup>4</sup>

Śankara then speaks of the necessary role of saguna-Brahman thus:

. . . as it is only the qualified Brahma (Saguna Brahma) that has to be meditated upon, movement (of approach towards such qualified Brahma) is possible. Yet the scriptures do not ever mention any such movement with respect to the transcendent Brahma.<sup>5</sup>

So the notion of God is a necessary ingredient of

advaita since there is no other way possible to bridge the great gulf which "exists", as it were, between the finite and the infinite. It is after all the final aim of Śankara-Vedānta to bring about this spiritual conversion and in comparison to this highest priority, any and all "systematic" or metaphysical concerns pale. Due to this greatest value placed upon the desire for liberation (mumukṣatva) as well as the indispensable role which God (Īśvara) plays in it, it is concluded that we may address Śankara-Vedānta as authentically theological.

Finally, I must clarify here that ontological questions about existence and being are an essential part of the theological enterprise. However, once such ontological considerations are introduced, the reference to philosophy might again find its way into usage, and understandably so. We must always keep in mind that although I will also distinguish Śankara-Vedānta from modern philosophical concerns on the basis of its soteriological character, my major ground for distinction between the two disciplines will nevertheless be a methodological one, viz., the necessity of revelation as a starting point for Śankara. Therefore, if we might notice similarity of content on ontological grounds in both theology and philosophy, we must never lose sight of the very important methodological distinction which I hope to secure in my first chapter. Paul Tillich admirably

summarizes this similarity between the two disciplines on ontological terms:

Philosophy necessarily asks the question of reality as a whole, the question of the structure of being. Theology necessarily asks the same question, for that which concerns us ultimately must belong to reality as a whole; it must belong to being. Otherwise we could not encounter it, and it could not concern us. Of course, it can not be one being among others; then it would not concern us infinitely . . . Theology, when dealing with our ultimate concern, presupposes in every sentence the structure of being, its categories, laws, and concepts.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, I would like to make clear that when I point to a distinction between philosophy and theology, I obviously do not claim to be in possession of a general definition of each for all time. For this reason, I have specifically delimited the philosophical aspect of the distinction to the modern, Western era. Even by doing this, we can not come to an agreement on what is one, modern, Western philosophy, but rather only isolate some mainstream elements. However, I do think it feasible to maintain that--on the grounds of so important a methodological consideration as the starting point of each discipline--we can point to a distinction between the two. A clear understanding of what theology is in the West and how legitimately we may apply it to Śankara-Vedānta as a description will be demonstrated in the body of the essay.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>J. G. Arapura, "Two distinguishable sets of elements contributing to the building of Sankara's system," (unpublished paper), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Heidegger, An Introduction to Metaphysics (New York, 1961), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>M. K. V. Iyer, Advaita Vedānta (London, 1964), p. 197.

<sup>4</sup>Brahma-Sūtra-Śankara-Bhāṣya, tr. V. M. Apte (Bombay, 1960), p. 847.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 855.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. I (Chicago, 1951), pp. 20-21.

## CHAPTER I

### MODERN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY: A METHODOLOGICAL DISTINCTION

I have set out in this chapter first to arrive at an appreciation of the relationship between philosophy and theology in the modern West and then to show how the reference to Śankara-Vedānta as philosophy gives rise to confusion, and finally to arrive at an alternative description more appropriate to the concerns of the Vedānta. In attempting this, my intention is not to demonstrate that Sankara-Vedanta is in no way philosophical or has nothing to do with philosophy. Rather, my intention is two-fold: I wish to affirm that addressing Śankara-Vedānta as philosophy does not take into account the absence on the Indian scene of any such well-defined dissimilarity between philosophy and theology as has arisen in the modern West; nor does it elucidate what I have considered to be the primary concerns of Śankara, viz., his theological meditations based on the purport of the scriptures.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is impossible to understand Śankara-Vedānta as anything other than theology. When viewed as philosophy, something essential is lost. So, to the extent that Śankara insists upon the initiative from beyond by means of revelation, he is a theologian and not a philosopher in the modern sense.

It is important to note that I restrict my reservations regarding the use of the term philosophy here to the modern, critical understanding of the term. Furthermore, my objection to the use of the term philosophy stems from the modern connotation of "untheological," whereas in India, there never has been such an implication. At another time in Western, intellectual history, the use of this term might not arouse such confusion. For example, the relation between philosophy and theology was construed much differently by Aquinas. However, it must be said here that the Thomistic conception is pre-modern, as indeed is that of Śankara. So to say that there are philosophical elements present is not to say that the enterprise is philosophy in a fundamental sense. For Aquinas as well as for Śankara, faith in revelation is the aegis under which philosophical elements must take their meaning. Consequently, philosophy might be a more appropriate description of Vedānta if it were used within a Thomistic conceptual framework, i.e., that all thinking is ordained for man's seeking God. It is also well to note that when I speak of modern, Western philosophy, I mean to include here the mainstream and not the more esoteric renderings of the term. Consequently, we will mention names like Descartes, Hume and Kant; and while I would not consider Logical Positivism a classic example of mainstream Western philosophy, it is nevertheless a

characteristically twentieth century posture vis-a-vis a rational discussion of religious issues or theology and therefore must be briefly included in our survey.

To continue, I do not simply reject the use of the term philosophy in favor of the term theology with a view to reifying the opposition between these two disciplines. It is my position that there already exists enough opposition here and that this is precisely the reason for not applying the former term to Śankara-Vedānta, as I am convinced that its application generates confusion and even antipathy in certain sectors.<sup>2</sup> John Macquarrie reflects the present state of association between philosophy and theology by pointing to the changes which have characterized this evolving relationship:

In the medieval synthesis, theology was the dominant partner and philosophy tended to become her handmaid and supporter. In the great days of idealist philosophy, however, the situation was reversed and theology became just one department of the all-embracing system of thought . . . The present mood between theologians and philosophers tends to be one of suspicion and standoffishness, as each remembers the injuries which his discipline has received or is supposed to have received at the hands of the other. Both theology and philosophy are determined to maintain their autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

Assuming that it is safe to say that there has been in the modern West a divergence between the two disciplines serious enough to cause mutual "suspicion and standoffishness" at the very least, then what is the nature of the self-definition of each? Of course, a truly exhaustive answer to this question would involve a detailed study of

the relationship between philosophy and theology throughout the entire Western tradition, beginning with the Greeks. Since this is an impractical task due to limitation in time and space, I would hope that agreement can be reached regarding a more abbreviated method of arriving at a serious appreciation of the relationship between these two disciplines in the modern era. Therefore, discussion of this matter will be limited--for the most part--to developments which have taken place since the close of the middle ages.

To begin, we might cite some remarks made by Rem Edwards on the subject of our inquiry.

Traditionally, philosophy has been conceived as the attempt to formulate and justify beliefs about the most universal of fundamental features of reality, knowledge, and value, relying exclusively on the use of human intelligence. . . . In the definition of philosophy given above, it is the final phrase, "relying exclusively on human intelligence," that provides the difference between philosophy and theology: Whereas the philosopher . . . makes use of whatever methods of inquiry are generally available to unaided human intelligence, . . . the theologian relies ultimately on a faith response to a supposed revelation or to revelatory events in arriving at his conception of the uniquely religious features of reality, knowledge, and value.<sup>4</sup>

Edwards further states that philosophers and theologians "disagree on the question of how we know that the logically fundamental premises from which we deduce our conclusions are true, theologians claiming that they are revealed and philosophers insisting that even here we must rely on reason alone."<sup>5</sup> John Hick expands the scope of philosophy

in order to include experience as well as reason (or intelligence), but nevertheless advances a similar, traditional dichotomy as the one cited above. First, Hick describes the philosophical method as including essentially two ways of coming to know: "One way (stressed by empiricism) is through experience, and the other (stressed by rationalism) is through reasoning."<sup>6</sup> Then he specifies that theology is "discourse based upon revelation."<sup>7</sup> In explaining the different views of revelation, which include the traditional, "propositional" view as well as the more recent, "Heilgeschichte" view, Hick does not substantially lessen the necessary association of theology and revelation, thereby maintaining the distinction between philosophy and theology advanced earlier. Explaining the former view, he appeals to the Catholic Encyclopedia: "Revelation may be defined as the communication of some truth by God to a rational creature through means which are beyond the ordinary course of nature."<sup>8</sup> Explaining the latter view, Hick states: "It is through these writings the Scriptures that the revelatory events continue to make their impact upon mankind; and these writings . . . constitute the given basis of Christian thought."<sup>9</sup>

But how fundamental can we consider this association between theology and revelation to be and what does this really imply for our discussion about the relation between

philosophy and theology? Moreover, what do we mean by revelation here? To gain answers to these questions, let us refer again to remarks made by John Macquarrie.

This is the primary source of theology, and is also a basic category in theological thinking. . . For the present, we may notice that essential to the idea of revelation is that what we come to know through revelation has a gift-like character. If, in general terms, we say that what is disclosed in revelation is the dimension of the holy, then, in the revelatory experience, it is as if the holy "breaks in" and the movement is from beyond man toward man.<sup>10</sup>

In a more general and less traditionally Christian interpretation of the role of revelation in the religious life of man--and hence in the life of the theologian as well--Macquarrie makes some very important statements about revelation, in principle.

Revelation suggests some kind of unveiling, whereby what has hitherto been concealed from us is now opened up. This, however, would be true of all knowing . . . What is distinctive in the religious use of the word "revelation" is the thought that in this process, the initiative lies with that which is known. We do not bring it into the light or strip away what is concealing it, as we do in our researches into matters within the world, but rather that which is known comes into the light, or, better still, provides the light by which it is known and by which we know ourselves. It is as if the familiar epistemological situation gets reversed.<sup>11</sup>

Once again, the implication of these remarks is that there is a difference between the respective methods of the two disciplines under discussion. In other words, most "schools" of philosophy in the modern West would not consider revelation to be an integral part of their enterprise. By this I mean that neither the former, more

particular nor the latter, more general understanding of revelation would be acceptable to the modern philosopher as a legitimate starting point.

First, let us examine the former, more particular position<sup>12</sup> outlined by Macquarrie and why its essential character renders it incompatible with modern philosophy. This conception of revelation would include both the "propositional" and the "Heilsgeschichte" views mentioned earlier, since central to each is a real sense of gratuitousness. In the quote cited by John Hick from the Catholic Encyclopedia, we find the concept of grace to be implicitly central to its purport. The communication of truth by God is made through supernatural means--"beyond the ordinary course of nature"--to man. So man's dependence upon the grace of God for the discovery of truth is total, since there is no "ordinary" or natural means by which he can discern truth. Moreover, as Hick states, this "propositional" view also holds that further grace is necessary to be able to accept (or assent to) this communication of truth: "Thus faith is defined by the Vatican Council of 1870 as a 'supernatural virtue whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe that the things which he has revealed are true.'"<sup>13</sup>

The "Heilsgeschichte" view tones down the propositional quality and emphasizes the notion of "personal encounter" with God's activity in salvation history as

constitutive of the Judaeo-Christian religious experience. So once again, we find a sense of gratuitousness to be essential to the understanding of revelation. This sense of gratuitousness is especially apparent in this remark made by John Hick regarding the relationship between God and man according to the "Heilsgeschichte" view of revelation.

It is by his will that we exist. His purpose for us is so indelibly written into our nature that the fulfillment of this purpose is the basic condition of our own personal self-fulfillment and happiness. We are thus totally dependent upon God as the giver not only of our existence but also of our highest good. To become conscious of him is to see oneself as a created, dependent creature receiving life and well-being from a higher source. In relation to this higher Being, who has shown his nature to us as holy love, the only appropriate attitude is one of grateful worship and obedience.<sup>14</sup>

It is not difficult to infer from these traditional notions of revelation an incompatible position with philosophy from the theological perspective. However, before we proceed any further, I would like to qualify that such an understanding as outlined above does not by any means constitute the only Christian notion of revelation, but merely that it is characteristic of the mainstream of the Christian tradition. I have tried to capture a common element present in these two examples of the traditional view (i.e., "propositional" and "Heilsgeschichte") and have described this as the element of gratuitousness. What is important to note here is that although the idea of initiative "from beyond man toward him" is present as

well, the more salient feature, for our purposes,<sup>15</sup> is that of gratuitousness. So then, if this understanding of revelation--which is by our account the "primary source of theology" and the content or the event of faith--is juxtaposed with the concerns of philosophy, some conflict immediately develops.

Such a trend is evident in the following statements by Martin Luther about the role of reason in relation to faith: "This is the vice of human nature"; "Reason is a whore"; and "Reason despises faith"; and finally "Philosophy is a practical wisdom of the flesh which is hostile to God."<sup>16</sup> M. J. Charlesworth correctly interprets these somewhat extravagant remarks as reflecting Luther's fears of Pelagianism and his consequent emphasis of the absolute dependence of man upon the grace of God.

Luther's rejection of reason in matters of faith is thus principally motivated by his theological stress on the wholly gratuitous nature of God's grace, including the grace of faith, and his corresponding view of the inevitable Pelagian tendencies of human reason. Reason always tends to set itself up overweeningly as the arbiter of God's revelation so that the creature becomes the judge of the Creator. For Luther, grace does not build on nature and perfect and complete it, as it does for Aquinas; rather grace stands in for corrupt nature and supplies for its deficiencies.<sup>17</sup>

Although less vehemently--and this is characteristic of a basic difference between most modern Catholic and Protestant approaches to the problem--Aquinas nevertheless subordinates the role of philosophy to the privileged position of theology as well.<sup>18</sup> St. Thomas testifies to the

necessity of a divine revelation due to the ultimate inadequacy of reason in the task of discerning saving truth.

Hence it was necessary that for the salvation of man certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation. Even as regards those truths about God which human reason can investigate, it was necessary that man be taught by a divine revelation. For the truth about God which human reason can investigate would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors; whereas man's whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. . . It was therefore necessary that, besides the philosophical disciplines investigated by reason, there should be a sacred doctrine by way of revelation.<sup>19</sup>

Rem Edwards summarized Aquinas' position regarding the relationship between philosophy and theology and shows agreement with the implications of the above quote: "All philosophical knowledge is thus subordinated to and limited by a superior theological knowledge of those important truths which only revelation discloses."<sup>20</sup>

A logical outgrowth of this gratuitous conception of revelation--and a good example of the attitude of theologians toward philosophy in this century--is the movement which has come to be known as "crisis theology" or "neo-orthodoxy." Although it is in essential agreement with what has been stated previously, a more intense rejection--at least than that of Aquinas and of natural theology in general--of philosophical concerns is present. So not only should it be qualified that this theological position is more in line with the Reformed tradition of Luther and

Calvin, but it should also be stated that it is more compatible with the "Heilsgeschichte" view of revelation. In addition to this, it should also be mentioned that neo-orthodoxy has claimed to receive encouragement from a philosophical tradition which runs through Kant and Kierkegaard.

It is . . . within twentieth-century Protestant thought that the Kantian-Kierkegaardian account of philosophy's relations with religion has had its most important expression. Within this tradition the transcendence and "otherness" of God, and of the whole order of revelation, is dramatically stressed, while the finiteness of man and his knowledge, and the effects of sinfulness upon him, are correspondingly emphasized. Calvin's saying, finitum non capax infiniti, the finite is not capable of comprehending the infinite, exactly expresses this position. In this perspective religious belief is possible only as a freely given grace from God.<sup>21</sup>

David Hume is also included by the neo-orthodox or crisis theologians in this tradition; according to Rem Edwards, ". . . they crisis theologians are delighted by philosophical skeptics, such as Hume, who arrive at the conclusion on philosophical grounds that reason is impotent to deal constructively with divine things."<sup>22</sup> Edwards then cites some important statements made by Emil Brunner, who maintained that

between the revelation in Creation and the natural man there stands the fact of sin . . . Sin not only perverts the will, it also "obscures" the power of perceiving truth where the knowledge of God is concerned . . . These philosophical doctrines about God now confront one another in irreconcilable opposition. Above all, none of them can possibly be combined with the Christian Idea of God . . . the God of thought must differ from the God of revelation.<sup>23</sup>

Karl Barth would, of course, be in agreement with this view. Indeed, in his eagerness to establish the transcendent nature of revelation as being completely dependent upon God's grace and thereby in no way relying on the frail human faculties weakened by sin, Barth not only attacks any philosophical approach to God, but criticizes any religious approach as well. He opposes religion with revelation and maintains that the latter abolishes the former. Macquarrie states Barth's position thus: "Whereas the revelation is given by God to man, religion is said to be man's movement toward God. In religion, according to Barth, man 'takes something for himself . . . he ventures to grasp at God.'"<sup>24</sup> William Hordern describes Barth's position on this subject in the following way:

Barth distinguishes between religion and faith. Religion is man's search for God and it always results in man finding a god that he wants to find. This is not intended as a criticism of non-Christian religions only, because Christians also build religions and Barth's deepest criticisms of religion are directed at Christian religions. Jesus is the revelation that destroys religion.<sup>25</sup>

From the foregoing discussion, it can be easily understood how this traditional notion of gratuitous revelation would present serious problems to the philosopher. As we have said earlier, philosophy depends upon experience and reason as its sources of understanding. In the modern era, for many of the reasons stated above, the opposition between philosophy and theology has grown more

intense. Although it is difficult to arrive at a precise date, one can safely say that the close of the middle ages marked the beginning of this trend. European man's re-discovery of reason as an independent faculty gave rise to the concept of a secular philosophy. As Etienne Gilson says, the first mature signs of this shift are apparent in Descartes' Discourse on Method in which he there announced that he would "seek no other knowledge than that which he was able to find within himself or else in the great book of the world."<sup>26</sup> This early bifurcation between philosophy and theology was given clear expression by Descartes and so it was that a secular and independent philosophy was born. Gilson attests to this:

As the science of the supreme cause, theology remains supreme among all the other sciences; they all are judged by it and are subordinated to it. . . . As a philosopher, however, he was looking for an altogether different sort of wisdom, namely, a knowledge of truth by its first causes to be attained by natural reason alone and directed toward practical temporal ends. . . . What was new with Descartes was his actual and practical separation of philosophical wisdom and theological wisdom. Whereas Thomas Aquinas distinguished in order to unite, Descartes divided in order to separate.<sup>27</sup>

However, Descartes did not wish to oppose the two disciplines and least of all to denigrate theology or the Christian faith; he said in his Discourse on Method: "As much as anyone, I strive to gain heaven."<sup>28</sup> However, he had initiated a process that would not be reversed.

The independence of philosophy from--indeed in some senses its opposition to--theology was consummated with

the advent of thinkers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant.<sup>29</sup> In the Preface to his Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Kant says that he was first awakened from his "dogmatic slumbers" and set on the path to "critical philosophy" by the writings of Hume.<sup>30</sup> Up until this point, Kant had been occupied with "proving the existence of a being which exists with absolute necessity."<sup>31</sup> M. J. Charlesworth succinctly summarizes the impact of Hume upon the religious thinking of his day in the following way:

First, Hume rejects any use of the principle of causality "beyond the reach of human experience." Second, Hume attempts to show that irresolvable problems arise when reason tries to grapple with religious topics: "All religious systems . . . are subject to great and insuperable difficulties." Third, the notion of God as "a necessarily existing Being" is dismissed by Hume on the ground that "whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent."<sup>32</sup>

Even though Hume's attack is primarily directed against natural theology, as in this quote, we should not assume that he, as some would have us believe, did so with a view to establishing faith upon the basis of such philosophical skepticism or agnosticism. Charlesworth addresses this question directly by saying that Hume

would not have wanted religious believers to have used his position in this way so as to guarantee the autonomy of faith by making it invulnerable to rational criticism. He is, indeed, very sarcastic about those "sagacious divines" who use reason or deny reason as it suits them: "Thus skeptics in one age, dogmatists in another; whichever system best suits the purpose of these reverend gentlemen, in giving them an ascendant over mankind, they are

sure to make it their favourite principle, and established tenet."<sup>33</sup>

We now come to study the effect of Kant upon the religious situation in general and theology in particular. I would assume that it is safe to say that Kant levelled the most convincing arguments against natural theology as well as any understanding of theology as a rational, systematic account of God, his attributes, his relation to the world and the divinely ordained way of life which leads to salvation. The criticisms of Kant are much more devastating than those of Hume, if only because of the latter's pervasive skepticism and his ambiguity on the subject of religion in the Dialogues on Natural Religion.<sup>34</sup> Kant's thinking and writing are in no way ironic or indirect, but much more straightforward, even if highly abstract. Although Kant's critique against natural and systematic theology is formidable, it was not his intention to destroy the notion of religion as central to the life of men. Indeed, it can be said that Kant's thinking regarding religion was two-fold.

If we see religion within the context of speculative reason, then philosophy's task vis-a-vis religion is a purely negative or agnostic one. Its function is simply to make room for faith by delimiting the scope of speculative reason in such a way that both speculative proofs and dis-proofs of God come to be seen as illusory . . . On the other hand, within the perspective of practical reason, both the possibility and reality of God become manifest to us, and philosophy, in so far as it is concerned with the pre-suppositions or postulates of practical reason, has therefore a positive task with respect to religion.<sup>35</sup>

If we examine mainly the former aspect of Kant's thought, we will find that his revolutionary Critique of Pure Reason has been a touchstone not only in theological circles, but in those of speculative philosophy and science as well. Therefore, the bulk of modern thinking might be considered a response to and an elaboration of Kant's explication of the limits of reason and the application of this principle to the various intellectual disciplines. Essentially, the problem which Kant so brilliantly outlines is that of illegitimately extending the claims of knowledge and understanding beyond their proper province of the world of experience. Kant inseparably bound together the two faculties of sensibility and understanding, thereby drawing attention to the greatest problem facing the philosophical enterprise, viz., that of "transcendence."<sup>36</sup> Kant says in the

Critique of Pure Reason:

Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be in thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind . . . The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise.<sup>37</sup>

Kant realized that the attainment of such a union in speculative theology was impossible, since the object of theological speculation is beyond the ken of human experience. Kant again says:

• All attempts to construct a theology through purely speculative reason, by means of a transcendental procedure, are without result . . . . Through concepts

alone, it is quite impossible to advance to the discovery of new objects and supernatural beings; and it is useless to appeal to experience, which in all cases yields only appearances.<sup>38</sup>

However, it was not Kant's intention to demolish the validity of religion or to argue for the non-existence of God, but rather to save religion and God from the attacks that might be directed against them by reason. Let us once again refer to the Critique of Pure Reason.

Such critical treatment Kant says is, indeed, far from being difficult inasmuch as the same grounds which have enabled us to demonstrate the inability of human reason to maintain the existence of such a being must also suffice to prove the invalidity of all counter-assertions. For from what source could we, through a purely speculative employment of reason, derive the knowledge that there is no supreme being . . . Its objective reality cannot indeed be proved, but also cannot indeed be disproved, by merely speculative reason.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, to assume that this "salvation" of religion and God by Kant's agnosticism was well-received probably would be a mistake. The humorous remark made by Will Durant on this subject captures some of the contemporary response to Kant: "No wonder the priests of Germany protested madly against this salvation, and revenged themselves by calling their dogs Immanuel Kant."<sup>40</sup> From another perspective, Etienne Gilson sees no humor whatsoever in what Kant had accomplished and therefore distinguishes between the influences of Descartes and Kant upon theology.

If we compare it with the Kantian revolution, the Cartesian revolution hardly deserved such a name. From Thomas Aquinas to Descartes the distance is

assuredly a long one. Yet, although extremely far from each other, they are on comparable lines of thought. Between Kant and them, the line has been broken.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, remarks made by John Roth should be helpful in placing into proper perspective the effect of Kant upon the religious and theological discussion.

Kant's desire is to leave room for beliefs that are well-grounded but not finally demonstrable. Belief in the existence of God is one of the factors that Kant has in mind. The human intellect can analyze our existence as moral agents so as to move us toward a grounded faith in God that gives our lives unity and significance. Faith and knowledge are not identical spheres in Kant's view, but they complement each other. Moreover, they need never be in conflict, for our knowledge does not extend to things in themselves, and it is with this realm that faith is primarily concerned.<sup>42</sup>

Possibly the most radical attempt to reject theology and religion in the twentieth century by a philosophical school was that of Logical Positivism. Indeed, this school of thought opposed itself to many traditional forms of philosophy as well, especially those of a metaphysical kind. The Positivists began with the cogent point that there is a "significant logical difference between the notions of the truth or falsity of a proposition and the notion of the meaning of a proposition" and that "the question of meaning is logically even more fundamental than the question of truth."<sup>43</sup> Thus many traditional theological and metaphysical statements--such as "God is three persons in one"--were shown to be syntactically defective since they do "violence to the most elementary rules for combining mathematical concepts into intelligible asser-

tions."<sup>44</sup> So these statements were judged to be neither true nor false, since only meaningful assertions could be either and these are not meaningful assertions.

However, even more famous--or infamous, according to one's perspective on the subject--than this distinction between meaning and truth or falsity is the "principle of verification." Rem Edwards attempts to capture the essence of the principle in the following way:

An assertion is meaningful if and only if some sense observation would be directly or indirectly relevant to its confirmation or refutation; an assertion is meaningless if and only if no sense observation would be directly or indirectly relevant to its confirmation or refutation. To put the matter another way, we might say that, for the positivists, a meaningful statement is one for which we might collect evidence either for or against using the scientific method.<sup>45</sup>

The implication for the subject matter of theology is obvious. How are we to make "meaningful" assertions or statements about God, salvation and the immortality of the soul, since these matters are beyond the scope of the scientific method? Therefore, any such statements are judged by the Positivists to be syntactically correct, but at the same time as utter nonsense. Moreover, we must not confuse this position with that of the atheist or the agnostic. A. J. Ayer says:

It is important not to confuse this view with the view that is adopted by atheists and agnostics. For it is characteristic of an agnostic to hold that the existence of God is a possibility in which there is no good reason either to believe or disbelieve; and it is characteristic of an atheist to hold that it is at least probable that no god exists. And our view that all utterances about the nature of God are non-

sensical, so far from being identical with, or even lending any support to, either of these familiar contentions, is actually incompatible with them.<sup>46</sup>

So then, it was the intention of the Positivists to simply eliminate the subject matter of theology: "The theologian cannot claim that he still has faith in the doctrines of theology, for theology says nothing."<sup>47</sup>

It has been my intention to show in the preceding pages how philosophy and theology became distinct and at times opposing disciplines in the modern West. I do not wish to suggest that this has been an exhaustive study, even one of the modern era. Rather, my intention has been merely to focus upon typical examples of the conflict which has arisen between what I have called traditional understandings of revelation and the method of modern philosophy. This is significant for our discussion because we can point, by contrast, to the absence of any such development on the Indian scene.

Although this conflict between traditional understandings of revelation and the method of modern philosophy implies an unbridgeable gulf between philosophy and theology, is it possible to draw these two disciplines any closer by suggesting an alternative understanding of revelation? We must examine such a possibility since revelation, as we have learned, is the sine qua non of all theological thinking.<sup>48</sup> For example, we may not, as does Rem Edwards, lessen the opposition between philosophy and

theology by simply eliminating the category of revelation: "Philosophy and theology are closer still if by theology we mean 'God-talk' instead of 'revelation-dependent-talk.'"<sup>49</sup> Such a move by our criteria is certainly illegitimate. As stated earlier, the theological enterprise necessarily entails the notion of revelation: "This is the primary source of theology, and is also a basic category in theological thinking."<sup>50</sup> To deny this basic premise for the sake of bringing philosophy and theology into closer proximity is surely too great a contrivance. It is for this reason that I have suggested examining an alternative understanding of revelation to that which we have already studied, viz., what I have called examples of the "traditional" type.

I might now take this opportunity to clarify in what sense I am using this term revelation. I have in earlier portions of this chapter already distinguished between "propositional" and "Heilsgeschichte" interpretations of the term, but have not as yet mentioned the traditional distinction between supernatural and natural revelation. The two aforementioned interpretations are subsumed under the notion of a supernatural revelation because of the gratuitousness of God's self-disclosure and man's complete and utter dependence upon this. In both the propositional and Heilsgeschichte understandings of revelation, there is simply no other way for man to realize saving truth but through the grace of God and this gratuitous element is

considered essential to the supernatural concept. This notion of supernatural revelation is distinguished from the idea of natural revelation by Werner Bulst.

The revelation of salvation history on the other hand is a free, entirely undeserved, divine gift. This is already evident from the fact that it is bestowed at distinct moments in historical time and not simply once and for all and to all mankind. . . . The initiative rests wholly and at all times with God-- a complete reversal of the notion of revelation widely prevalent in the Gentile world, where men sought to penetrate the mysteries of the gods and of destiny by many diverse means; often quite technical means, as through the liver-divination in use among many ancient peoples, through cup-divination, etc.<sup>51</sup>

By way of distinction, we have a good idea of what we might consider natural revelation. The words "once and for all and for all mankind" tell us that such a revelation is part of God's creation of man and the world. It is often stated (or implied, as above) that God's creation--of course, we understand ex nihilo here--somehow pales in comparison to his supernatural revelation of himself in terms of an outpouring of grace. Bulst attests to this attitude.

God was free to create a world and to create as in fact he did create it. But there would have been an inner contradiction had he created the world and man in it without at the same time giving a natural revelation. Natural revelation as such, therefore, is not a gift of grace bestowed upon man over and above his human nature.<sup>52</sup>

This particular position I find to be terribly contrived and unfair with an implicit bias in favor of the supernatural understanding of revelation. On what legitimate grounds one can arrive at a conclusion like this entirely eludes me. It would seem to me that it is just as grat-

uitous a gift from God to be created from nothing as it is to be the recipient of his special revelation. According to this logic, without the special revelation, man will continue to grope for salvation by only "seeing through a glass darkly," as it were; but according to the same logic, applied otherwise, without the creation man is bereft of the condition for the possibility of his salvation; viz.; his very existence!

One more word of clarification regarding this natural-supernatural distinction is necessary. It is not unusual that commentators--as Bulst does above--juxtapose to the notion of supernatural revelation "examples" of natural revelation which are less than representative. Instead of a devout Hindu quietly doing pūja in a Calcutta temple or even a Greek philosopher of classical times meditating on the cause of the cosmos, Bulst chooses for examples the quasi-magical divinations of the Near Eastern world of the first century. Certainly the discussion is much larger than the contemporaneous and geographically proximate (to the Incarnation) considerations made mention by Bulst in this quote. Indeed, such considerations might be used to secure the unique self-articulation of the Christian faith by means of contrast with other popular magico-religious practices. However, I do think it unfair to imply that "quite technical means" of penetrating the divine mysteries have all that much to do with the notion of natural revelation when seriously examined.

So where I use the term revelation without any special qualifications, I am not choosing any one of the particular interpretations delineated above, viz., supernatural or natural, propositional or Heilsgeschichte. My point is that revelation as a concept can serve as a general, methodological consideration to distinguish between theology--which is done by theologians who do not necessarily agree on exactly what revelation is, but do agree on its necessary role in the theological enterprise--and philosophy. Gabriel Moran supports this position that revelation can be treated as a general concept which makes theology (in this case Christian theology) possible without the necessity of choosing one particular interpretation and the attendant symbol appropriate to it.

Thus revelation is light, encounter, event, word, word-event, story, history, presence, wisdom, Christ, Spirit, scripture, tradition, scripture-tradition, etc. After the profusion of images, however, the main claim still operates throughout Christian theology, namely, revelation is a special source of truth for Christians.<sup>53</sup>

Moran further states that the choice of particular interpretation that one makes will necessarily condition the very nature of the theological endeavor to follow. This in itself is another testimony to the foundational character of revelation within the theological discipline.

Revelation is a paradigm for theology in the sense that the choice of a patterned use of the word will determine the fruitfulness of the theological enquiry to follow. Revelation is not a theological concept similar to others but instead a premise for theological construction as a whole.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, Moran maintains--and I agree--that it is not only possible to seriously discuss the concept of revelation with productive results while not having in our possession the final, essential definition of what revelation is; but he also maintains that it is really impossible to arrive at such a final definition. It is just such a continual attempt to come to terms with the experience of revelation in religious traditions which, despite all the many interpretations, constitutes so creative a dimension of the human spirit.

To try to imagine, to point to, to express bodily or verbally what revelation means is bound to be a frustrating expedition that is finally doomed to failure. The magnificent thing about religious traditions is that they try and even their defeats have been worth the effort. The disastrous end of religions is to think that they possess a revelation given to them by the gods. Such a possession would short-circuit their need to cooperate with all men in understanding the whole revelational structure of the universe.<sup>55</sup>

I would maintain that the second interpretation of revelation mentioned by Macquarrie in the beginning of this chapter<sup>56</sup> is a suitable example of a concept of revelation in the general sense. If we are to focus upon the most salient features of Macquarrie's formulation, these would most probably be the element of unveiling or "unhiddenness" (what the Greeks called aletheia) and the notion of that initiative which approaches from the "other" direction towards us. Macquarrie distinguishes this way of coming to know from that of the more mundane

"researches into matters within the world."<sup>57</sup> For this reason, he specifies that this kind of knowing situation is so totally unique that it is as if "the familiar epistemological situation gets reversed."<sup>58</sup> To be sure, such a way of coming to know must be differentiated from the philosophical method of the modern West. Indeed, Heidegger believes that the entire, Western philosophical tradition has taken a wrong turn since the pre-Socratics for a similar reason.

Heraclitus and Parmenides are often contrasted, but Heidegger sees them as at one in raising the question of Being in a fundamental way. But almost immediately the question of Being began to be side-tracked, and interest moved from Being to beings. This began to happen with Plato and Aristotle and the subsequent history of Western philosophy has been one of the forgetting of Being.<sup>59</sup>

Philosophy in the West has been especially characterized by this metaphysical approach, which precisely reifies the familiar epistemological situation. Such an approach actively focuses upon "things," "entities," and "be-ings" in the world, while forgetting to passively listen or watch for Being to un-conceal itself. Quoting Heidegger, William Richardson lends support to this position.

Out of this forgottenness of Being, metaphysics is born. Nor need the forgottenness be conceived as a deficiency in the metaphysician. Rather it is inherent to metaphysics as such: "metaphysics interrogates beings as beings, it remains with beings and never returns to Being as Being . . ."<sup>60</sup>

Joseph Kockelmans agrees with this estimate as well.

According to Heidegger, the great mistake of classical metaphysics was that it tried to speak about be-ings

in a definitive way without paying attention to being itself. Anyhow, traditional metaphysics considered be-ing as be-ing; it tried to throw light on the proper character of be-ing by defining it as physis, energy, matter, spirit, will, subject, etc.<sup>61</sup>

Joan Stambaugh also attests to this description of metaphysics in Heidegger:

Thus metaphysics as the history of Being, as the history of the epochal transformations of Being, is precisely the history of the oblivion of Being. When the distinction of essence and existence arises, it is essence, whatness, which takes priority. The priority of essence over existence leads to an emphasis on beings.<sup>62</sup>

What is unique about the revelatory situation in Macquarrie's view--and distinct from the traditional, philosophical thinking--is the receptivity to the initiative of the "other." As has been pointed out, this understanding of revelation has been taken largely from Heidegger. In so doing, Macquarrie has already implicitly distinguished this understanding of revelatory experience from Western philosophy since Plato because of Heidegger's distinction of it from the latter.

The end of philosophy does not mean for Heidegger that philosophy as such has become a thing of the past, a pursuit that has outlived its meaningfulness for human nature . . . Rather, he means that philosophy as metaphysics has come to a completion which now offers the possibility of a more original way of thinking.<sup>63</sup>

But if we closely examine some remarks made by Macquarrie, we will see quite explicitly why this more original way of thinking--which necessarily includes the aforementioned understanding of revelation--is to be dis-

tinguished from the philosophical enterprise, especially that of the modern West.

After outlining various Heideggerian modes of thinking such as "calculative" and "existential," Macquarrie selects the "primordial" or "essential" mode as the one which is most important for his purposes. The two former modes are described by Macquarrie as being "subject-object" and "subject-subject" respectively, while the latter might be described as a mode of thinking "in which I would be subjected to that which is known, one in which I am transcended, mastered and, indeed, known myself."<sup>64</sup> In further describing this primordial or essential thinking, Macquarrie contrasts it to the other two types, which characterize our everyday familiar epistemological situation.

It has a meditative character which contrasts with the probing activity of calculative thinking. This primordial thinking rather waits and listens. Heidegger can even talk of it as an "occurrence of being" or as a thinking that "answers to the demands of being." This primordial thinking is . . . described as a thinking which responds to the address of being, and is explicitly compared both to the insights of religion and to those of poetry. It provides a kind of paradigm for the understanding of what is meant by "revelation," and shows where revelation is to be located in the range of man's cognitive experience.<sup>65</sup>

Macquarrie once again emphasizes that the initiative passes to that which is known.

But what is known is not another being, but rather being itself, the being which communicates itself through all the particular beings by which it is present, by which it manifests itself, and not least

through the depth of our own being, for we too are participants in being and indeed the only participants to which being opens itself, so that we not only are but we exist.<sup>66</sup>

So we have now introduced an alternative understanding of revelation and we have found once again that we can not bring into closer proximity--than that already observed in the earlier discussion of traditional understandings of revelation--the ways of knowing operative in the philosophical approach and in the revelatory experience. By extension, this does not lessen the degree of dissimilarity between philosophy and theology. As I have stated throughout this first chapter, the central rôle of revelation in theological thinking necessarily distinguishes it at least from modern philosophy. This observation is important for our considerations because the term philosophy has so often been applied to Sankara-Vedānta; and this has been done quite frequently in the very recent past. Therefore, we must be cautious about all descriptions of Sankara-Vedānta as philosophy since such descriptions neither take into account the absence of any bifurcation of philosophy and theology on the Indian scene; nor do they adequately appreciate the inherent dissimilarity--which exists in the modern West--between philosophy and theology due to the latter's reliance upon revelation as its primary source.

A particular example of the trend which I am attempting to contravene is in evidence in the following state-

ment of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

The Advaitism of Śankara is a system of great speculative daring and logical subtlety. Its austere intellectualism, its remorseless logic, which marches on indifferent to the hopes and beliefs of man, its relative freedom from theological obsessions, make it a great example of a purely philosophical scheme.<sup>67</sup>

He then proceeds:

With his . . . unswerving resolve to say neither more nor less than what could be proved, Śankara stands out as an heroic figure of the first rank in the somewhat motley crowd of the religious thinkers of medieval India. His philosophy stands forth complete, needing neither a before nor an after. It has a self-justifying wholeness characteristic of works of art. It expounds its own presuppositions, is ruled by its own end, and holds all its elements in a stable, reasoned equipoise.<sup>68</sup>

It is important to note that there is no mention<sup>o</sup>-in either of these remarks--on what has occupied so much of our time in this chapter, viz., revelation. There is of course mention made of theology, but this in a rather pejorative sense as the remarks "freedom from theological obsessions" and "the somewhat motley crowd of the religious thinkers of medieval India" would imply. Even if we consider these comments to be somewhat overstated or rhetorical, the sum and substance of what has been said nevertheless confirms my earlier observations. Radhakrishnan attempts in these comments to secure the prestige of Śankara-Vedānta by extolling it as pure philosophy, even to the extent of excluding virtually all theological elements.

As we shall see in the ensuing pages, this is neither

a legitimate way of confirming the genius of Śankara's thinking nor is it an accurate reflection of his primary concerns. Radhakrishnan later clarifies the meaning he intends by his use of the term philosophy in the following way: "Śankara presents to us the true ideal of philosophy, which is not so much knowledge as wisdom, not so much logical learning as spiritual freedom."<sup>69</sup> But whose ideal does this represent? Before such a statement can be made with confidence, much research into the matter must be done, as this first chapter illustrates. Philosophy in the West has meant different things to different generations and this statement by Radhakrishnan should be considered careless at best. However, the most important aspect of my criticism of Radhakrishnan here is that there is no mention of the crucial role played by revelation in Śankara-Vedānta. Phrases like "neither more nor less than what could be proved" and "self-justifying wholeness" could mislead the reader to think that Śankara was explicating the inner structures of a Husserlian phenomenology and definitely have very modern philosophical overtones. Śankara certainly never intended to construct a positive, scientific metaphysics; rather, reason for Śankara simply negates and never builds a system.

So we can agree with Radhakrishnan's claim: "It is impossible to read Śankara's writings, packed as they are with serious and subtle thinking, without being conscious

that one is in contact with a mind of a very fine penetration and profound spirituality."<sup>70</sup> But we must never make the facile assumption that all "serious and subtle thinking" must therefore be deemed philosophy alone. As we have already discovered, Heidegger distinguishes between philosophy and "thinking" because--in the West--the former has become almost entirely concerned with the metaphysical investigation of "beings," while growing "forgetful" of Being itself. To Heidegger, this is the great tragedy of the Western intellectual tradition and it would indeed be so judged by Śankara as well. Keeping this in mind, it will be more accurate to describe Śankara's enterprise as a remembering of or a reacquaintance with Being than as philosophy. Finally we must bear in mind that--for Heidegger as well as for Śankara--Being discloses itself through the medium of revelation; Being is never discovered as the object of a metaphysical investigation which enlists the intellectual faculties of man. Rather the initiative lies with that which is known--Being itself. Thus the theological character of Śankara-Vedānta will be confirmed once we demonstrate that the meaning of Being is secured for him through "discourse based on revelation."

As must be obvious by now, my taking exception to the facile use of the term philosophy as a description of Śankara-Vedānta proceeds not so much from the conviction that the content of philosophy and theology are necessarily

distinct as it does from the observation that the methods or approaches of these two disciplines are different. This is exactly what I intended to make explicit above by distinguishing the respective "ways of knowing" appropriate to each. We can rest assured that a "serious and subtle" mind of "fine penetration" is required for both philosophical and theological thinking; but the necessary role of revelation for the latter is the major distinguishing factor and this has strong implications vis-a-vis the question of method rather than that of content. It was an unawareness of this distinction between method and content that prompted the remark by Rem Edwards cited earlier.<sup>71</sup> Operative in this comment is the mistaken impression that the two terms God and revelation--while both crucially important--are alternative foci of the content of philosophy and theology. Rather the concept of God (or ultimate reality) constitutes the content and thereby the grounding principle of the entire enterprise which the philosopher (sometimes) and the theologian (always) wishes to initiate. This is certainly true for the Vedānta, where in his first sutra, Bādarāyana secures the context of the undertaking by declaring that we must therefore desire to know Brahman (athāto brahma-jijnāsā). How--by what method or approach--we are going to gain this knowledge is still open to question; and this question is answered in theology with the introduc-

tion of the medium of revelation. As I have tried to show throughout this first chapter, any genuine understanding of revelation can not be considered a legitimate starting point for modern philosophy. For this reason, we must distinguish between philosophy and theology not in terms of content, but on methodological grounds; and while this might seem all too obvious to be of much importance, it is nevertheless the fundamental reason for my objection to the unqualified use of the term philosophy in reference to Śankara-Vedānta.

A special example of this trend is also evident in the work of Ram Pratap Singh. In The Vedānta of Śankara, Singh very cogently separates himself from other modern commentators by interpreting Śankara's thinking as a philosophy of value. He maintains--I believe correctly--that too many modern interpreters simply mislead their readers by failing to comprehend the strict equation of reality with value in Śankara.

They admit that the Vedānta of Śankara is ruled by the idea of a highest Good, a Summum Bonum, a perfection which it is the business of life to attain, and they try, in their own way, to define this Good after Śankara. But they are not able to see that this Good is not merely ethical or religious good but is identical with what the metaphysicians call the highest reality. Many of the modern interpreters of Śankara describe Śankara's Brahman in such a way that it is reduced to mere Existence in spite of their intention to the contrary. But this reduction is inevitable unless it is realized from the very beginning that reality for Śankara is nothing but value and this is the only notion of reality to be met with in Śankara.<sup>72</sup>

We might keep in abeyance the question of what Singh

could mean by merely "ethical or religious good"<sup>73</sup> and proceed to an examination of Singh's position vis-a-vis other interpretations of Śankara. The fact that Brahman is reduced to "mere Existence" in many interpretations results in all manner of confusion. Singh--just to name a few--cites the confusion of Śankara's Brahman with the Śūnya of Nagarjuna and the misunderstanding of māyā as "illusion" as typical examples of forgetting the value character of Vedāntā. Indeed Singh suggests that these mistakes are based in some kind of "existential prejudice."

If the concept of "reality" is treated as an existential concept, and not as one of value implying the notion of degrees of value, and if existence is equated with space and time and spacio-temporal objects, and if in the highest state of realization this type of reality is not to be met with, there is nothing else for the existential consciousness to say, as Thibaut does, than "the material world is no more in Brahman at the time of pralaya than during the period of its subsistence" and that it is nothing but an erroneous appearance, as unreal as the snake in the rope.<sup>74</sup>

Singh has made a very important point here--one which will be developed later in this dissertation. He states that if we forget the value character of Śankara-Vedānta, we forget with it the "instrumental or intermediary function of the universe."<sup>75</sup>

However, we must now turn to what I think is a shortcoming in Singh's very worthwhile contribution to Śankarite interpretation. Notwithstanding the valuable observations made, Singh obscures the issue by claiming that Śankara-

Vedānta must be described as philosophy. Once again, we witness the confusion between content and method. While modern philosophy and theology may both have the concept of absolute value at the very core of their meaning intention, these two disciplines will necessarily be divergent on methodological grounds. For example, if Singh wishes genuinely to capture and reflect the intended meaning of Śankara, why does he insist upon ignoring the radical import of śruti-pramāna and in its place substitute a word like "insight" as in the following remark?

This truth Brahman-Ātman is the imperishable insight of the Vedic seers. This insight is the true religion. Philosophy is a reflective activity. It did not have its birth so long as there was an inexhaustible faith in the reality of the vision. . . . The Vedic mantras represent this stage of Hindu culture. When there was a slackening of faith, the spirit of enquiry which is what is meant by philosophy had its birth and the task which it found as already assigned to it was to prepare an intellectual scheme in which these imperishable insights of the ṛṣis could be preserved and harmonized in the unity of a system.<sup>76</sup>

Is this to be understood as a deliberate attempt to distract the reader from the central role which revelation plays in the thinking of Śankara? It would certainly be less than faithful to Śankara if Singh convinced the reader that the role of śruti-pramāna for the Vedānta is one of mere insight. Rather, śruti, for Śankara, is the eternal source of saving knowledge and as such is to be revered as the most exalted pramāna.

In addition to this, I see as possibly confusing the

implication that "true religion" (the insights of the ṛṣis) involves "inexhaustible faith" and that "philosophy" (here referring to Śankara-Vedānta) somehow has no such need due to its "reflective activity" and "spirit of enquiry." Once again, this would be a serious misrepresentation of Śankara-Vedānta, since revelation is the absolute starting point for Śankara just as it was for the Vedic seers. If, however, Singh intends to distinguish between the highly imaginative, mythico-religious visions of the Vedic hymns or the abstruse, mystico-intuitive insights of the Upaniṣads and the systematic treatises which constitute the Vedānta, then I can agree that Śankara established an "intellectual scheme in which these imperishable insights of the ṛṣis could be presented and harmonized in the unity of a system."<sup>77</sup> But for what legitimate reason do we now assume that Śankara-Vedānta is philosophy simply because it is a "reflective activity" characterized by the "spirit of enquiry?" Would this not also be a good description of theology, especially since revelation looms so large in this discussion? Modern philosophers--due to the nature of what is called the "critical turn"--would not consider the theological tradition which includes Augustine and Aquinas to be philosophical for just this reason, viz., the centrality of revelation in their thinking. Yet in spite of his own parallel between Śankara and medieval, Christian thought--

which by extension brings Śankara closer to a theological tradition in itself--Singh insists upon describing the Vedānta as philosophy.<sup>78</sup>

One more example of confusion on the part of Singh is evident in the following remark:

Śankara is in acute disagreement with those modern value philosophers who insist upon drawing a sharp line of demarcation between the realm of value and that of reality and keeping them absolutely distinct. For the majority of the modern value philosophers reality and value are strangers to each other.<sup>79</sup>

It must be apparent to the reader that modern, Western philosophers have abandoned that bastion of meaning and value called revelation. This is something with which Singh has not yet come to terms in both his negative judgment of "modern value philosophers", and his confirmation of Śankara's thinking as philosophy. It is one thing to criticize interpreters of Śankara for having an existential prejudice, but it is quite another to criticize the modern philosopher for the same reason. The modern, Western philosopher possesses no other framework within which to reflect and think than that of existence. So to describe modern value philosophy as being "an irreconcilable dualism between value and reality"<sup>80</sup> is merely to restate the "fact-value" problem which so characterizes the critical turn in modern philosophy in general; and to suggest that Śankara's "philosophy of value" is a resolution of this problem is surely to miss the point of this critical turn. Singh is once again assuming that the

Śankarite enterprise--which begins with śruti-pramāṇa as its first methodological principle--can somehow (or for that matter, intends to) answer the questions posed by modern philosophy. Therefore we must at this point recognize that the criteria for disclosure of truth and meaning accepted by Śankara and modern Western philosophy are at least different enough to warrant the distinction of considering the former theological and the latter precisely philosophical.

Finally, is it fair to claim that Śankara-Vedānta is philosophy in some esoteric or even anachronistic sense? Radhakrishnan, Singh and many others consistently claim that Śankara-Vedānta is philosophy in some kind of primordial sense, i.e., prior to the perversion of the intellect by modernity. Radhakrishnan--while mentioning the qualifications required by Śankara to participate in the Vedānta enquiry--maintains that, among other things, the "philosopher" (i.e., the Vedāntin) must have a "longing for liberation (mumukṣutvam)" and a mind disposed, as St. Luke expresses it, 'for eternal life.'<sup>81</sup> Moral preparation, dedication to truth and a sense of disillusionment with the world are also mentioned here by Radhakrishnan; but how do such requirements apply in an exclusive way to philosophy? Indeed the previous description of qualifications would apply more accurately to theology as we have come to understand it in this chapter. Certain-

ly modern philosophy entails dedication to the truth and even moral preparation. To include disillusionment with the world would be at best only partially accurate; and it would be extremely tenuous to maintain that longing for eternal life is a chief aim of modern, Western philosophy. Without attributing too much import to it, I nevertheless consider it no accident that St. Luke was chosen to make explicit this last prerequisite, which is not to lessen his status at all. My argument is simply to say that the author of the Gospel of St. Luke would in no way be apologetic about being considered part of a theological rather than a philosophical tradition. I wish to suggest that Śankara would react in similar fashion.

Singh propounds a similar misunderstanding. On many occasions he defines the method and concerns of philosophy to suit his own needs so that he might apply it as an accurate description of the Vedānta. As I have pointed out above, he fails to take into consideration the fact that modern "value" philosophy does not appeal to revelation as a source of meaning and thus could never be criticized from the Śankarite premise without committing a category mistake. In addition to this, Singh maintains that Śankara did not make the same mistakes as did modern philosophy: "Śankara was in a very important sense always above the battle which has been so keenly

fought between epistemological idealism and realism in modern times."<sup>82</sup> Yet Singh insists--despite Śankara's dissimilarity with modern philosophy on these rather substantial grounds--that Śankara's thinking is to be considered philosophy and nothing else.

For Śankara it is the task of philosophy to give articulated expression to the nature of this supreme good and to point out the means which are best calculated to realize it in the conscious personal life of the individual. Philosophy, when it takes upon itself this supreme task of leading the individual directly to the vision of this good, is entitled to the name of Pāramārthavidyā. Thus conceived, philosophy is indistinguishable from religion, and the highest principles of philosophy are the same as the highest principles of religion. As for Plato, so for Śankara, the Good is the supreme object of the philosopher's study.<sup>83</sup>

Keeping in abeyance the question of whether the parallel between Śankara and Plato is a legitimate one, Singh in this remark is ignoring the entire, modern philosophical tradition by appealing to the classical Greek period. We must be more precise when using a term which has such strong reference to the modern period, especially since almost none of the modern uses of the term is applicable to the intended object of description, viz., Śankara-Vedānta. As Singh facilely dismisses epistemological idealism and realism from the concerns of the Vedānta, so does he dismiss an enormous and extremely characteristic--indeed almost definitive, for more than anything else modern philosophy consists of a turn to the subject--portion of the modern philosophical experience.

This observation has important implications for our discussion, because we can now see that even the content of Vedānta--as distinct from that of modern philosophy--is determined by Śankara's method of apprehending meaning and truth in this life, viz., the śruti and not the subjective realm of man's experience.

Indeed if Singh, Radhakrishnan and others are so critical of what philosophy has become in the modern West--i.e., secular, devoid of the concern for salvation and divorced from any appeal to revelation--then why do they insist upon using this term in reference to Śankara-Vedānta? If philosophy and theology have come to have somewhat different meanings in the modern world, I again ask why Singh, Radhakrishnan and others are so hesitant to use the latter term? As I have already stated in my Introduction, the commonly mistaken interpretation of the role of saguna-Brahman--a trend to which Singh himself is an exception--in Śankara-Vedānta is one reason for the frequent use of the term philosophy. It seems that many commentators assume that if saguna-Brahman (which includes the notion of God) is considered to be "unreal," then we can not use the term theology here and therefore must refer to Śankara's thought as philosophy. In the ensuing pages, we will learn how this misunderstanding has misled many from gaining an authentic appreciation of Śankara. The second reason for this mis-

use of the term philosophy which I have cited in my Introduction is the mistaken impression that philosophy somehow possesses a more exalted status than does theology. It would seem to me that any such opinion at this point in intellectual history--after the modern recognition of the "opacity of the fact"--would at best be naive. We have discovered in this first chapter how both philosophy and theology use the faculties of human reason, how both are systematic in their approach and even how both might deal with a similar content. The one and consistently important distinction which I have delineated through this introductory chapter lies in the methodological differences implied by their respective starting points. For modern philosophy, there is no other starting point than man's experience and for Śankara, there is none other than the śruti. Once we can in a mature sense appreciate philosophy and theology to be alternative or complementary rather than opposing disciplines of the human spirit, then and only then may we be free to study Śankara-Vedānta and accurately describe it without trepidation as theological meditations grounded in scriptural exegesis. Here, I would wish to close the first chapter with several summary remarks made by Richard De Smet in his article "Theological Method and the Vedānta."

As far as his method is concerned, Sri Śankarācārya is not an independent philosopher or pure metaphysician . . . . The term "theology" may be used to designate the genus of his science, provided it be understood correctly and applied with all due

accommodations . . . The term "Hindu theologian" may therefore be used as an equivalent for śrutivādin, uttaramīmāṃsāka, or vedāntin. Hence it is correct to say that the ācārya is "the transmitter of an authoritative sacred tradition," a phrase which should not be disfigured into "nothing else but a transmitter of a tradition like a mechanical radio-transmitter" . . . The fact that his science is theological prevents him from being original as to his starting point (the sacred text), but far from precluding originality of insight and method, it rather demands it. I may add that, to my mind the Ācārya is the most original of all Vedāntins by far.<sup>84</sup>

It is quite obvious from these comments that De Smet is mindful of the methodological distinctions between philosophy and theology to which I have pointed in this first chapter, but it is also evident that he is sensitive to the tacitly assumed superiority of philosophy in relation to theology and that he rejects any such suggestion vehemently. Finally, De Smet makes the subtle point that all theology is of relative worth, for once the goal of theology is achieved, theology itself falls away as means does when the end is achieved (a matter which will be discussed in great detail in the following chapter).

Hence brahmajijñāsā is as much a rational science as Christian theology but, like it also, it is neither independent philosophy nor a purely rational science. Both also recognize that the supreme experience can not be produced by them for it transcends reason and all its means. Yet what they do is extremely valuable for it is a progressive removal of all ignorance.<sup>85</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Introduction.

<sup>2</sup>In my introduction on p.3, I have specifically stated my reasons for why the term philosophy is so popular and the term theology is so unpopular in this regard. I would only reiterate here that it is my hope that any such mutual mistrust between philosophy and theology as well as the denigration of one by the other can be overcome for the duration of this essay.

<sup>3</sup>John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York, 1966), pp. 19-20.

<sup>4</sup>Rem B. Edwards, Reason and Revelation (New York, 1972), pp. 3-4. However it should be stated here that R. B. Edwards does not totally agree with such a facile distinction. For example, he does not accept that there must be a dichotomy between reason and revelation. Discussing the important role which the role of insight plays in the life of the philosopher, Edwards says: "It has not been their deductive rigour and acumen . . . that has made philosophers the great men of reason that they are, but rather the scope and freshness of their creative insight into the nature of things" (p. 70). Edwards then mitigates the intensity of the opposition between revelation and reason in the following way: "Revelation is special inspiration, and insight is just as special and just as much a matter of inspiration. Perhaps the dichotomy between revelation and reason has been a false one all along. The viable distinction may be that between disciplined and undisciplined rationality, and philosophers and theologians alike are capable of either" (p. 117).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>6</sup>John Hick, Philosophy of Religion (Englewood, 1963), p. 58.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 61-62.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>10</sup>Macquarrie, op. cit.; p. 6. (Cf. Hick's remark: "it is not possible for theology to go behind the scriptural data, taken in their totality" op. cit., p. 75.)

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 77. This interpretation of revelation is, of course, borrowed from Heidegger's thinking (as Macquarrie himself states). However it is particularly noteworthy that the Advaita notion of svayamprakāśa would be extremely compatible with such an interpretation of revelation. The use of the metaphor of light in this passage is similar to that of the Advaita tradition: that (tat) which we desire to know (jijñāsā) provides its own light (svaprakāśa) "by which it is known and by which we in turn know ourselves." Indeed for the Advaitin, it is also as if "the familiar epistemological situation gets reversed." This is precisely what makes the Advaitin claim so bold: something so tacitly assumed to be ultimate as the familiar epistemological structure of knowledge is transcended beyond the point of recognition. Along these lines of similarity to Advaita; we might refer to one more issue which needs clarification here: this concerns the matter of gratuitousness that Macquarrie considers to be essential to this conception of revelation. At first sight, this might appear to be in conflict with the lack of any such element in the Advaita notion of revelation. I would simply say here that the element of gratuitousness which Macquarrie considers essential to this second interpretation of revelation does not resemble the element by the same name which we find to be so characteristic of the more traditional understandings of revelation. In the more traditional understanding, the notion of gratuitousness issues from the idea that man is separated from God in terms of essence and consequently is in need of grace due to his finite condition. In the more general understanding advanced by Macquarrie, we find no such necessary separation in terms of essence, since it is Being--which subsumes all beings under its essence--that reveals itself. We might finally cite another statement by Macquarrie which is quite thought-provoking within this context: "... theological language refers ultimately to Being" (p. 116).

<sup>12</sup>By "particular," I mean here the more traditional understanding which is characteristic of the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition (and Islam as well).

<sup>13</sup>Hick, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>15</sup>i have in mind here the distinction between the two views of revelation already mentioned; viz., the more particular and the more general views.

<sup>16</sup>M. J. Charlesworth, Philosophy of Religion (London, 1972), p. 91 and footnote 17.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 91-92.

<sup>18</sup>On this matter, John Macquarrie says: "Broadly speaking, the mainstream of Christian thinking in the Fathers, in Roman Catholic theology, in Anglican theology, and also in much Protestant theology, has maintained a positive attitude toward reason and seen it as an ally of revelation. But a very influential counter-current has coursed through the Fathers and the Middle Ages, and found its most vigorous spokesmen in some of the schools of orthodox Protestant theology" (op. cit., pp. 13-14). Indeed the tradition of natural theology in Catholicism draws itself much closer to the Western, philosophical (i.e., Greek) tradition than anything in its Protestant counterpart. However what I wish to emphasize here is that even in St. Thomas we find this notion of gratuitousness to be central to the understanding of revelation, though not in a radical sense.

<sup>19</sup>Cited in Ninian Smart, ed., Historical Selections in Philosophy of Religion (New York, 1965), p. 62.

<sup>20</sup>Edwards, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>21</sup>Charlesworth, op. cit., pp. 138-139.

<sup>22</sup>Edwards, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>24</sup>Macquarrie, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>25</sup>William Hordern, A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology (New York, 1968), p. 133.

<sup>26</sup>Cited in Etienne Gilson, God and Philosophy (New Haven, 1941), pp. 74-75.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 76-77.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 77. It is important to note here that although Descartes hoped to attain an independent metaphysics, he nevertheless assumed and endeavored to show that the Christian God can be discovered through this enterprise, thus allying himself--at least in a formal

sense--with natural theology. Gilson attests to this: "The God of Descartes is an unmistakably Christian God. The common foundation for the Cartesian demonstration of the existence of such a God is the clear and distinct idea of a thinking, uncreated and independent substance, which is naturally innate within the human mind. If we investigate into the cause why such an idea exists within us, we are at once led to posit, as the only conceivable explanation for it, a being who is possessed of all the attributes which attend our own idea of him, that is, a self-existing, infinite, all-powerful, one and unique being" (pp. 80-81).

<sup>29</sup>Although I have already stated that the neo-orthodox movement of this century understood Hume and Kant to be in agreement with their estimate of natural theology, the effect of Hume and Kant upon the religious situation at the time was, needless to say, shattering. Indeed it has been historically the case since this "critical" turn in philosophy and subsequent dismissal of rational proofs for and demonstrations of the existence of God and of the Christian faith, that a defensive attitude has pervaded the relationship between philosophy and theology. So even though neo-orthodoxy might superficially claim critical philosophy to be their ally--albeit in a very indirect way--they must nevertheless hold under judgment and oppose themselves to a purely philosophical position, due to their dependence upon revelation as the source of meaning and truth. Consequently the revelationist posture of neo-orthodoxy is not ultimately compatible with a critically philosophical position, despite any of the rhetorical attempts to establish the contrary. Rem Edwards explains this problematic aspect of any such position for philosophy in the following way: "A more serious philosophical difficulty with the position of the crisis theologians is the vicious logical circularity of their argument. . . . Anyone who questions the authenticity of all claims to revelation will hardly be persuaded by such an argument. . . . The argument convinces only those who are already convinced; but it has no logical force, no matter how psychologically persuasive it might be to those who already believe. Is there any significant difference between using reason to prove that only reasoned doctrines are true and using revelation to prove that only revealed doctrines are true (Edwards, pp. 101-102).

<sup>30</sup>Cited in Charlesworth, p. 102.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-103. It should be quite obvious to the reader that these three points are mainly an attack upon natural theology.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>34</sup>Ninian Smart, p. 206.

<sup>35</sup>Charlesworth, pp. 107-108.

<sup>36</sup>Indeed, Edmund Husserl, in this century, agreed in full with this opinion: "If we look at what is so enigmatic and what, in the course of subsequent reflection on the possibility of cognition, causes embarrassment, we will find it to be the transcendence of cognition" (Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, tr. Alston & Nakhnikian, Martinus Nijhoff, 1970, p. 27).

<sup>37</sup>Cited in Charlesworth, pp. 108-109.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>40</sup>Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy (New York, 1933), p. 275.

<sup>41</sup>Gilson, p. 110.

<sup>42</sup>John Roth, Problems of Philosophy of Religion (New York, 1970), p. 126.

<sup>43</sup>Edwards, p. 106.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 108-109.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>48</sup>This statement also applies to natural theology: John Macquarrie agrees with such an assessment: "In discussing natural theology, we noted that a faith conviction has always come prior to any attempt to prove the existence of God, and . . . we have tried to push back the investigation beyond the rational arguments to the foundations of the prior faith-convictions. We have found these foundations in the revelatory experiences where man becomes aware of the presence and manifestation of holy being. It is now more than ever clear to us that the work

of reason comes after the conviction that arises out of the revelatory experience; but reason's work is none the less important for being critical rather than speculative, subsequent to the religious conviction rather than foundational for it" (Macquarrie, pp. 90-91).

<sup>49</sup>Edwards, p. 131.

<sup>50</sup>Macquarrie, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup>Werner Bulst, Revelation, tr. Bruce Vawter (New York, 1965), pp. 83-84.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>53</sup>Gabriel Moran, The Present Revelation (New York, 1972), p. 29.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>56</sup>See p.

<sup>57</sup>Macquarrie, p. 77.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>John Macquarrie, Martin Heidegger (London, 1968), p. 39. (Cf. Martin Heidegger, An Introduction to Metaphysics, New York, 1961, pp. 82-83).

<sup>60</sup>William Richardson, Heidegger (The Hague, 1963), p. 13.

<sup>61</sup>Joseph Kockelmans, Martin Heidegger (Pittsburgh, 1965), pp. 146-147.

<sup>62</sup>Joan Stambaugh, "Introduction," Martin Heidegger's The End of Philosophy (New York, 1973), p. x.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>64</sup>Macquarrie, Principles, p. 85.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid. I have in this quote removed the term "philosophical" for obvious reasons; it would obscure my intended use of the quote, i.e., to distinguish primordial thinking from philosophical thinking in the traditional sense.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

67 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II (London, 1927), p. 445.

68 Ibid., p. 446.

69 Ibid., p. 447.

70 Ibid., p. 446.

71 Edwards, p. 131.

72 Ram Pratap Singh, The Vedānta of Śankara, Vol. I (Jaipur, 1949), p. 12.

73 This is an allusion to the relatively insignificant role to which ritualistic and devotional considerations are consigned within Singh's discussion of the primary concerns of Śankara-Vedānta. However, we might note quickly here that many other considerations can be included under the rubric of religion, not the least important of which is meditating worship (upāsana) which plays a central role in the latter portions of Singh's work.

74 Singh, p. 13.

75 Ibid. I might add here that the crucial importance of the role of saguna-Brahman is by extension involved in this discussion.

76 Ibid., p. 16.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid., p. 29.

79 Ibid., p. 28.

80 Ibid.

81 Radhakrishnan, pp. 446-447.

82 Singh, p. 70.

83 Ibid., p. 100.

84 Richard De Smet, "Theological Method and the Vedānta," Oriental Thought, pp. 32-33.

85 Ibid., p. 34.

## CHAPTER II

### SRUTI AS PRE-EMINENT AMONG THE PRAMĀNAS AND ITS RELATION TO ANUBHĀVA

In my first chapter, I attempted to distinguish between modern, Western philosophy and theology on purely methodological grounds. As I have stated earlier, this discussion has important implications for the question of whether we may consider Śankara-Vedānta to be primarily more theological than philosophical. In this chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate precisely this point and in the process also clarify Śankara's theory of revelation.

In order to elucidate fully the role which revelation plays in Sankara's scheme of things, we must first gain an appreciation of the importance of śabda-pramāna and its relationship to the other pramānas. Before this can be done however, we must first discuss the pramānas in general and their implications for Śankara's theory of knowledge. Indian thought in general has developed highly sophisticated epistemological theories for the origin and nature of knowledge, but particular attention has been devoted to the identification of the proper means of attaining valid knowledge or cognition, i.e. pramāna. Valid cognition, it should be noted, must be

distinguished from cognition in general. D. M. Datta further specifies some of the attributes ascribed to pramā in the following manner:

Valid cognition . . . is generally regarded as cognition which is free from doubt (samśaya), indefiniteness (anadhyavasāya), and error (bhrama), and which, therefore, reveals things as they are (yathārtha), furnishes the basis for successful activity (samvādi-pravṛtṭy-anukūla), and is not contradicted (abādhitā) by any other experience.<sup>1</sup>

To this description of valid knowledge must be added the characteristic of novelty (anādhigata), as it is also by general agreement considered a necessary attribute of pramā.<sup>2</sup>

Turning to the appropriate sources or means of knowledge (pramānas), it must be stated at the outset that there is disagreement among different Indian schools of thought regarding the number of these pramānas. For example, the Carvākas only accept one pramāna (pratyakṣa or perception), whereas Bhāṭṭa-Mīmāṃsā and Advaita accept as many as six. But more important than number is the question of the nature of pramāna. First, it must be a special and unique source through which pramā arises. Datta concurs when he describes it as a karana of pramā, i.e., a unique, instrumental cause which produces valid cognition.<sup>3</sup> For example, regarding visual objects, the sense of sight is the only instrument (pramāna) by which the knower (pramātr) can obtain knowledge (pramā) about the knowable object (prameya). In this case, however, buddhi or antahkarana as the internal organ of perception

can not be construed as a pramāna, because it is common (not unique) to all sources of knowledge perceptual and inferential.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless one might hold that buddhi or antahkarana possesses unique quality with regard to strictly internal matters such as joy, sadness, pain, pleasure, etc. In these instances it can be classified a karana of pramā, therefore as a pramāna. Second, pramāna must be active as well as unique. In short, when a sense organ contacts a sense-datum, it acts as the instrumental cause of pramā, i.e., actively giving rise to cognition. As such, pramāna acts as the agent of an experience, since it is only through its action that a particular effect (cognition) occurs.

The three most commonly accepted pramānas--and most important for the Vedāntic discussion--are perception (pratyakṣa), inference (anumāna) and testimony (śabda). Even though Śankara accepts three more pramānas (comparison, presumption and non-cognition), we can nevertheless point to a general agreement between Śankara and other Vedāntins regarding the legitimacy of the first three pramānas as well as the position of primacy occupied by śabda-pramāna (which is equated with śruti in this scheme). Whenever we discuss valid knowledge (pramā) and the method of its attainment (pramāna) in Vedānta, it must be mentioned that all Vedāntins concur that the śruti (śabda-pramāna) contains the ultimate truth which is the final

goal of man's desire to know. This truth is held to be both uncontradictable (abādhita) and novel (anādhigatā) in character. Sruti is uncontradictable in the sense that although it may purport truth which is transcendent to the realm of human experience and reason, it never contradicts it; but at the same time it is said that the truth of the śruti is extra-empirical and therefore absolutely novel.<sup>5</sup>

Perception (pratyakṣa) consists of the internal and five external senses of direct experience. All schools of Indian thinking agree on the existence of this pramāna, as do most epistemologies in the West as well. For Śankara, perception of an object as distinct from one's self is only the first step in a process which leads to a higher consciousness in which distinction between knower and known disappear.<sup>6</sup> So with regard to the other pramānas in general, perception can be understood as the means of direct or immediate awareness, either internal or external, which (except in the case of internal perception) depends upon the sensory process. Etymologically the Sanskrit term pratyakṣa signifies the "function of any sense organ with regard to its sense-object."<sup>7</sup> Thus it is only through the external sensory process of perception that man can come to know the physical world. In such a process, the internal sense organ (antahkarana), as demonstrated earlier, can not be considered a pramāna

as it is not a unique cause of such cognition; but it can be so considered with regard to internal perception. I should also state here that Śankara makes plain the distinction between mind as subject or ego (antahkarana, buddhi) and the true Self (ātman), i.e., between knower and knowledge itself.<sup>8</sup>

Another pramāna commonly recognized by Vedānta is inference (anumāna). Most Indian schools of thought accept it as well. Inference can be said to be a distinctly human means of knowledge since it is not shared by animals as perception is. More important than this, however, is that inference is not an immediate means of knowledge because it derives from some previous knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Based upon previously known sensible facts, inference reasons beyond them. For example, we can reason fire from the perception of smoke even though fire is not visibly perceptible, but only on the condition that we are assured of the fact that smoke is always accompanied by fire. This assumption of invariable concomitance is called vyāpti.<sup>10</sup> A premise which enables inference must be both inductive as well as deductive, since the universal relation inherent in vyāpti must be based upon repeated observation, but also because the truth of inductive generalization may be tested deductively by hypothetical argument (tarka):<sup>11</sup> Literally, anumāna means "knowing after."<sup>12</sup> Thus its most important characteristic

is that it necessarily follows perception and therefore must be considered a mediate or indirect source of knowledge unlike the latter which is logically prior and immediate or direct in nature.

Śabda, the third generally accepted pramāna, has a two-fold capacity, i.e., secular and as revelation.<sup>13</sup> In relation to its function as revelation, Śankara says in his bhāṣya on the Brahma-Sūtra (II, 1, 27; II, 3, 1) that the scripture is the "only source of knowledge of the truths regarding the suprasensible."<sup>14</sup> Since perception is limited to the here and now and inference goes little further due to its dependence on the former, śabda must be our primary source concerning matters which transcend the empirical limitations of conventional human knowing. So śabda as śruti is different from all other pramānas (anādhigatā), yet must not contradict any of them (abādhita). Śankarā-Vedānta holds that although experience and reason may be sufficient in themselves to understand empirical matters, that which transcends such matters can only be known through śruti. Therefore, although experience and reason are not alone sufficient to ascertain highest knowledge, they are nevertheless expediential as śruti must make use of analogy to illuminate the otherwise unknown truth; for such truth can not be revealed to man by that which is itself unknown. But does this highest truth contained in the mahāvākyas

purport a state of consciousness which has nothing in common with the empirical world and therefore which passes beyond even the purview of the other pramāna's?

For Śankara, knowledge in the conventional sense points to an object as well as to a subject and there can be no such knowledge which excludes either of these two elements.<sup>15</sup> Thus Śankara levels criticism against the Vijnāna-vāda subjective idealism of the Buddhists.

Śankara maintains that there can be both illusory and non-illusory knowledge on the empirical level, but both must be characterized by this subject-object nature. Illusion consists, according to this view, in the objective element of the cognition being either too private or lacking in endurance beyond the subjective cognition itself. Śankara maintains that in order for knowledge to be assured of non-illusory character, it must possess a public nature by which it can be known to others. By the attribute of endurance Śankara implies that a non-illusory object of knowledge must exist before the individual cognition occurs, as well as endure after the cognition has ceased. This qualification concerning the distinction between illusory (prātibhāsa) and non-illusory (vyāvahāra) knowledge is necessary due to the general impression that when Śankara speaks of empirical knowledge he deemed all such cognition mere phantasm or hallucination. His insistence on the necessity of

subject-object relation in all knowledge distinguishes him from the Vijnāna-vāda who treated such a relation as mere fantasy. Moreover, his insistence upon the objective aspect of empirical knowledge (vyāvahāra) implies that such an object of perception exists "for me." The question of whether or not it is real (satya) is answered later in the ontological discussion (if indeed we can consider the status of anirvacanīya an answer). Karl Potter has some illuminating remarks on just this subject:

Advaita has been represented to the world as idealism, and so perhaps it is in some sense, but any good Advaitin will deny vehemently that he holds the mind capable of projecting illusions which are unreal or "have no being." . . . A false knowledge, therefore, is not a non-knowledge, since unlike a hare's horn it does occur. Nor is it a knowledge of a non-entity. Thus we must guard against confusing negation with falsity.<sup>16</sup>

So it is important, Śankara insists, that empirical knowledge is only provisionally valid, i.e., valid concerning practical truth (vyāvahāra-satya) but unable to reveal ultimate truth (paramārtha-satya). It can thus be concluded that Śankara's assessment of knowledge supplied by the pramānas--other than the highest truth suggested by the mahāvākyas--is that they possess relative rather than absolute worth as regards their truth-revealing capacity. In other words, the purpose of the pramānas for Śankara is to allow the self to transcend conventional knowledge and to permit the revelation of highest truth

which is beyond all faculties of observation, even those of the pramānas. Therefore, Śankara maintains that highest consciousness (i.e. consciousness in its pristine state and of its essential nature) is the non-differentiated and quality-less substrate of which knower, known and means of knowing are mere manifestations.

Thus Śankara draws distinction between the world as empirically known and the world as known in the highest sense, corresponding to which there is ignorance (avidyā) and knowledge (vidyā) respectively from the ultimate view. Correlatively, the pramānas, which yield truth concerning the empirical world, are from the absolute perspective under the influence of ignorance. The only pramāṇa conditionally excepted from this judgment according to Śankara is the mahāvākya of the scriptures, but even these "suggestions" of highest truth vanish in mokṣa.<sup>17</sup> So Śankara is not advocating the abandonment of the pramānas, but rather stating that their truth can only be of relative worth. The pramānas are therefore thought to be under ignorance only if their empirical or relative truth is understood as final or absolute. In fact, according to M. Hiriyana, the basis of all avidyā in the advaita understanding is merely such an erroneous assumption.<sup>18</sup> The highest truth for Śankara is the fundamental non-duality of being taught by the Śruti. Such a truth can not be known through the pramānas since it is beyond all

empirical observation. Only the śruti teaches the highest truth of Brahman being devoid of differentiations and qualities, i.e., pure being without a second. The implications of this interpretation of the scripture's teaching regarding the identity between Brahman and Ātman as well as the matter of knowledge pertaining to it are borne out in the advaita theory of māyā-avidyā. When viewed in this way, the māyā doctrine is clearly seen to be an inevitable development of Śankara's boldly literal interpretation of the mahāvākyas: prajñānam brahma-Brahman is consciousness (Aitareya Upaniṣad III, v.3); ayam ātma brahma--this Ātman is Brahman (Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣad II, v.19; Mandūkya II); aham brahmāsmi--I am Brahman (Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣad I, iv, 10); tat tvam asi--that art thou (Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI, viii, 7; ix, 4; x, 3). To once again confirm the theological character of Śankara's thinking, we can point out that his method is clearly exegetical here and not philosophical in an independent sense.

In drawing out the implications of śruti passages which teach that Brahman is pure, non-differentiated "being without a second" (Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI, ii, 1-2), Śankara developed the māyā-avidyā theory with almost predictable, logical foreknowledge. Since according to the Upaniṣads, there is no reality other than Brahman and because Brahman is eternally released, all other characteristics of existence which stand contrary to this can

not be regarded as real in an absolute sense, i.e., not in the same sense as Brahman. That is to say that all the samsāric elements of existence (suffering, ignorance, bondage) are, strictly speaking, not real or only provisionally so. Such reasoning is actually more representative of Śankara's clearly theological method than any set forth by an interpreter of Śankara who wishes to attribute to him more philosophical tendencies. So the origin of the māyā doctrine consists of a logical necessity once Brahman is posited by means of śruti. Therefore māyā must not be considered to be a metaphysical conclusion arrived at after an independent investigation with no reliance on any other sources of knowledge than the human faculties of reason and experience. Thus we describe māyā as an epistemological device only because of its role in man's effort to make the unspeakable and unthinkable truth speakable and thinkable. J. G. Arapura confirms this view by saying that "māyā is the quest for making discourse possible with respect to Brahman which is indiscoursable."<sup>19</sup> It also remains to be said that Śankara arrives at the sense of identity which is the hallmark of his thinking on the basis of an exegetical rule of interpretation. This rule, called akhandārtha, finds its paradigm case for interpretation in the "tat tvam asi" formula of the Chāndogya Upanisad. What is important to note about all this discussion is the theological nature of Śankara's enterprise as delineated above. I maintain this position because of

the primary role played by śruti in Śankara's thinking.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that Śankara-Vedānta is for all of the above reasons an irrational and murky mysticism. On the contrary, Śankara in no way disregards an appeal to reason and experience in his exegetical task. In his attempts to explicate different theological issues, he constantly uses, for pedagogical purposes, examples from everyday experience (such as defining adhyāsa by means of mother-of-pearl's appearance as silver or the rope's appearance as a snake). Regarding the meaning of śruti, Śankara appeals to tarka (reason) as a necessary aid to the understanding of scripture: "When there is a discrepancy in the meaning of the śruti, the real meaning can only be ascertained after a refutation of the apparent sense and by a careful determining of the import of the sentences which involves a process of reasoning."<sup>20</sup>

So śruti passages which apparently contradict the consensus of reason and experience are constantly cited by Śankara as teaching the highest truth, but only with the aid of interpretation. Therefore, even though his sophisticated, exegetical distinction between exoteric (aparā) and esoteric (parā) knowledge as well as the primacy of position accorded to śruti does not unconditionally confirm the testimony of the conventional pramānas (here understood mainly as pratyakṣa and anumāna), conventional

knowledge and their means are nevertheless expediential to the quest for highest truth. Śankara, as a result, shows a comprehensive capacity (which other Vedāntins may be said to lack) for accommodating the equivocal and even sometimes contradictory aphorisms of the Upaniṣads. George Thibaut agrees with such an estimate.

Śankara's method thus enables him in a certain way to do justice to different stages of historical development, to recognize clearly existing differences which other systematizers are intent on obliterating. And there has yet to be made a further and more important admission in favor of his system. It is not only more pliable, more capable of amalgamating heterogeneous material than other systems, but its fundamental doctrines are in greater harmony with the essential teaching of the Upaniṣads than those of other Vedāntic systems.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Śankara's greatest preference was for passages which evoke an acute awareness of the limitations of the cognitive faculties of man, such as reasoning and perception. Ātman represents the highest Self because knowledge of it transcends the knowledge which can be garnered by the pramānas. By knowing Ātman, one knows everything that is to be known and desired to be known; and it is this unity underlying the appearance of multiplicity which is for Śankara the primary teaching of the śruti. Such truth can never be arrived at by reason and experience, but necessitates a revelation from beyond the realm of man's faculties.

Texts proclaiming the unity of the world or the oneness of the individual soul and the external world with the Brahman have a peculiar fascination for him. Thus the passages, "This soul is Brahman"

(Ayam ātma Brahma), "Verily all this is Brāhman" (Sarvam khālvidam Brahma), "Here there is no multiplicity" (Neh nanāsti kincana), "That thou art" (Tat tvam asi) etc., are of frequent occurrence in his commentaries. In particular, the texts declaring, in one way or another, that "by knowing Brahman everything else can be known," have great metaphysical significance for Śankara.<sup>22</sup>

So although Śankara affords a place for the conventional pramānas in their validity regarding empirical matters and even their auxiliary role in the interpretation of śruti, he ultimately must admit that highest truth is discontinuous with the testimony of these pramānas and can only be revealed to man by the scriptures. N. K. Devaraja presents this same position in the following remark:

The work of the pramānas is done as soon as they have brought about a direct self-vision on the part of the embodied soul. The pramānas fulfill themselves by generating knowledge which involves their negation or annulment : . . . All the pramānas play their part in bringing about the final intuition, and if Śankara is at moments inclined to assign a higher place to śruti, it is probably because he feels that the utterances of the Upaniṣads, being vital poetic records of spiritual experience, can induce that intuition earlier than the mere negative operations of the logical understanding.<sup>23</sup>

Before we proceed to discuss the role of this final intuition (anubhava); we must clarify the sense in which we can consider śruti to be translatable as the term "revelation." As I have stated earlier, in mokṣa, even the mahāvākyas fall away. So we can safely say that śruti points us in the right direction towards the recovery of the true Self, but never pretends to define it as object. This is why--even though considered to be pramānic in so far as it

is śabda in the sacred sense of the term--śruti is elevated to a special position above the other pramānas and is therefore thought to be the primary source of highest truth within our empirical experience. Śruti is the primary starting point for Śankara-Vedānta simply because it teaches us to resist the pramanic tendency to make that which is our desire to know (jijnāsā) the object of our knowledge (jneya).<sup>24</sup> Since Brahman can never be the object of any knowledge whatsoever--being of the nature of pure knowledge itself--no pramāna, not even śabda itself, will suffice as a means of knowing Brahman as object. Yet despite this apparent equality in the sense of an inability to reveal Brahman fully, there is in Śankara's writing a special position accorded to śruti above all other pramānas and his reasoning is clear.

Brahma not being an object of sense, it has no relation with the sense organs. Sense-organs by their very nature have sense-objects for their province while Brahma is not their province . . . Nor can Brahma, though it is determined to be of the nature of an already established entity, be an object of direct perception, because it is not possible to comprehend, except by means of the Shāstra, that the Self is Brahma, as conveyed by the Scriptural passage--"That thou art" (Chhān. 6,8,7).<sup>25</sup>

Since all inferential reasoning is ultimately dependent upon what can be perceived through the senses,<sup>26</sup> then anumāna will be of no greater use than pratyakṣa to that one who desires to know Brahman: "For the knowledge of Brahma is effected by the determination (brought about) by the consideration of the meaning of the Vedānta

passages, and not by the other means of right knowledge such as inference, etc."<sup>27</sup>

It is now time to clarify this relationship between śruti and the other pramānas more specifically.<sup>28</sup> In this process we will also gain a greater appreciation of what Śankara meant by the use of this term śruti and in what sense we might understand it as revelation. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the following passage from Śankara's Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya regarding the paramount place of śruti among the pramānas, but also concerning the subtle distinction between himself and the dogmatic position of the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā.

It is not that the Scriptures alone are the right means of knowledge of Brahma, as in the case about the right knowledge of religious duty, but the Scriptures, as also intuitional experience, so far as is possible, constitute the authoritative or valid means of right knowledge, because the knowledge of Brahma culminates in the realization of Brahma, and has an already existing entity as its object. In the case of religious action there is no expectation of intuitional experience and the Scriptures alone are the authoritative means of its right knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

This is one of the most specific statements made anywhere by Śankara regarding the methodology inherent within his theory of revelation; and I might add that, by our criteria established in the first chapter; it is clearly theological, while yet being non-dogmatic. We will see in the following pages how this dual movement in Śankara's thinking--the necessity of śruti rendering it theological and the possibility of anubhava securing its non-dogmatic

character--distinguishes his theory of revelation from all other positions on the Indian scene.

The necessary role of the Scriptures (that which we might safely call revelation in the general, theological sense) is now clear. The privileged position of śruti is emphasized not to the exclusion of other means of knowledge; rather, perception and inference are provisionally appropriated by Śankara. As I stated earlier, it is the tendency of the pramānas to make what we wish to know the object of our knowledge. In this respect, the pramānas are concerned with the "things" of this empirical world and so treat the proposition of Brahman-knowledge in similar fashion. It is in this sense of knowing Brahman as object (jneya) that all pramānas are thought to be on equal footing for Śankara, i.e., the equality of a penultimate approach. So we read of Śankara citing examples regarding gaining knowledge of Brahman in contrast to that of dharma, wherein room is made for pramānas other than śruti (śabda-pramāna). Once again, Śankara is attempting to distinguish between his position and the dogmatism of the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā.

But Brahma is of the nature of an actually established entity and with regard to such an established thing, like the earth, etc., there is scope for other means of proof . . . Reasoning which establishes invisible entities, on the ground of their similarity to a thing which is visible, is nearer to experience than the Scriptures which convey their meaning in a traditional dogmatic manner (like an Ipse dixit) and they are further removed from experience . . . The Scriptures by enjoining thus--"(The Ātma) should be seen and cogitated upon" i.e., by enjoining cogita-

tion in addition to hearing, show that here, reasoning also should be welcomed with respect (as a means).<sup>30</sup>

What is Śankara trying to say here? Of course, he is separating himself from the dogmatism of Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā. However, he still attributes to śruti that special place among all empirical ways of knowing. His reasoning is simple; the novel message which śruti can alone present to man transcends the scope of the other pramānas: "Brahman not being an object of sense, it has no relation with the sense organs . . . Brahman is not in their province."<sup>31</sup> Does such reasoning irrevocably contradict the other passages wherein Śankara maintains that Brahman is an "already established entity" and therefore can be known with the aid of other means of knowledge? This apparent incompatibility is resolved by examining Śankara's comments on II,1,6: ". . . mere empty reasoning cannot justify its own help (to the understanding of Brahma) on some such pretext. It is only such reasoning as is in consonance with the Scriptures that can be resorted to as a subordinate auxiliary to experience."<sup>32</sup> This position was also expressed in that most important passage cited earlier (footnote 29).

All this discussion notwithstanding, the primacy of śruti is still maintained. Again, the reason is clear: śruti is the only one of the pramānas which, while having one foot solidly within the empirical realm of language

and discourse, has the other foot vanishing into the infinite realm of highest truth. So when highest truth is realized in the experience of anubhava, the śruti itself does indeed vanish. Returning to the discussion of the two characteristics of valid knowledge (pramā)-- non-contradictability (abhādita) and novelty (anādhigatā)-- Śankara's obvious predilection towards the latter also conditions his attitude regarding the primacy of śruti. Even though perception and inference can reveal empirically novel states of affairs, they are powerless to reveal the transcendent and novel truth of truths (satyasya satyam). Only śruti can accomplish this; and as we will see, although it is the primary starting point, even śruti can not reveal Brahman completely. However, in this clearly methodological consideration of the primacy of śruti, the theological character of Śankara's thinking is made most clear.

Thus śruti, due to its dual character (being of this world and yet beyond) does teach us to resist the pramānic tendency to make what we wish to know the object of our knowledge. In so doing, the circle is completed, since this preconditions us for the final step in Śankara's theory of revelation.

the Śāstra has concern merely for the removal of difference imagined through nescience and it does not purport to propound Brahma as being an object objectively, thus- This is Brahma. What then does it propound? It propounds Brahma as not being an object (of sense), but as being the Universal Self

and thereby removes the distinction between objects to be known, the knower, and the act of knowing, etc., as imagined through nescience.<sup>33</sup>

This final step is anubhava (immediate experience). We can now put into proper perspective that most important passage in I,1,2. It is here that Śankara's doctrine of revelation is worked out with amazing conciseness, since it is in this quote that he accounts for the place of inference (anumāna), the Scriptures (śruti) and immediate experience (anubhava) in his thinking. So we note here a new relation among reason, scripture and experience, at least new for Śankara's time--and I might add, most noteworthy for our time as well.

Thus the acceptance of scriptural authority in Advaita Vedānta is by no means denial of reason. Truth is not irrational. . . . Reason is the key that unlocks the scriptural truths and paves the way to their intuitive perception. According to Nondualistic philosophers, revelation, reason and realization form the triple means to the full knowledge of Brahman. Thus revelation is supported by reason and verified by the seer's immediate apprehension or mystical awareness.<sup>34</sup>

Anubhava, as the ultimate goal of the entire Vedānta is only accessible through śruti in the sense that only it (śruti) can open the door to anubhava. We must therefore agree that śruti is the primary source or starting point for the Vedānta and that it opens to us the possibility of an integrative experience which verifies--in a post facto fashion--the truth of truths (satyasya satyam) contained within revelation. So in this way Śankara secures for himself the ultimate claim of novel truth

afforded by a revelationist position. Yet he does not succumb to the temptation of adopting an exclusivistic dogmatism, this being accomplished by appeal to an experience which verifies this truth from within one's own self. All this is, of course, tempered by Śankara's insistence upon the necessary role of reasoning.

But the revealed texts do not yield their true meanings without the aid of reason. Though subsidiary to scriptural revelation reason is indispensable to the realization of Truth. According to Vedānta, revelation (śruti), reason (yukti), and realization (anubhūti) must harmonize to carry full conviction to the seeker. . . . So says Śankara, "Realizing thyself as the Self of all by means of the śruti, reasoning and thy own experience, do away with what is superimposed on thee even when the least shade of it appears."<sup>35</sup>

Here we must be precise as to what kind of reasoning Śankara is talking about. Devaraja attempts to specify this sense by distinguishing between tarka and anumāna.

Tarka in its conventional sense of hypothetical argument usually operated without reference to experience. It was natural, therefore, that it should sometimes lead to conclusions that defied empirical verification and which were wholly speculative in character. Śankara, who was anxious to assert nothing which could not be supported either by experience or by Scripture, was very sceptical with regard to the utility of this sort of reasoning. But he was not a disbeliever in the efficacy of anumāna or inference, for this latter depended upon experience itself for its operation.<sup>36</sup>

This unique understanding of the relationship among inference (or reason in general), scripture and experience forges a new position which refutes the relativism of the Buddhists while not hardening this position into the dogmatism of the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā. It is certainly Śankara's

intention to show the former point implicitly and the latter point explicitly in that most important passage from I,1,2.

For the knowledge of Brahma is effected by the determination (brought about) by the consideration of the meaning of the Vedānta passages, and not by other means of right knowledge such as inference etc. . . . but It is not that the Scriptures alone are the means of the right knowledge of Brahma, as in the case about the right knowledge of religious duty . . . .<sup>36</sup>

The most important aspect of the role played by anubhava in Śankara's theory of revelation is its utter inalienability from the essential Self. I believe it safe to say that it is one of the crowning achievements of Śankara's thinking that he deemed the intuitive experience of anubhava to be so necessary to his doctrine of revelation. Stated implicitly in the Upaniṣads,<sup>37</sup> Śankara expands this notion of the self-luminosity (svayamprakāśa) of the Ātman and makes it the very foundation of his theory of revelation. At this point, it is important to note that it is the role this self-luminosity concept in Śankara's thinking that refutes any accusations of dogmatism. However, it would also be a mistake to infer from this statement that Śankara-Vedānta--because it is not dogmatic--is therefore not theological, and thereby philosophical. This is precisely the problem I have been attempting to overcome, viz., that not all theology must needs be naively and stubbornly dogmatic. The necessary role of revelation in Śankara's thinking renders

it theology, but theology of a highly rational and non-dogmatic type. This can be said because of the possibility of a post facto verification of the content of revelation by the inalienable experience of which Śankara speaks; viz., anubhava. We must nevertheless not lose sight of the issue that Śankara-Vedānta is first and foremost theology, even though it is capable of discourse with independent philosophical systems on subjects which concern both disciplines. Richard De Smet confirms this opinion in the following way:

When discussing the opinions on his own subject of nāstika, i.e., of people who reject his infallible śabda, the Vedānta teacher or the Christian theologian will naturally use those pramānas only which they accept, but even then his argumentation will only be for the sake of corroborating the scriptural assertions, not for proving them independently of his infallible authority.<sup>38</sup>

The question now arises, if anubhava refers to such a trans-empirical realm, how can we attribute the term "experience" to it? We obviously do not mean experience in the sense of "worldly" or "sensuous experience" since we have already clarified that the import of the śruti (which leads us to the arising of anubhava) is extra-empirical. So anubhava does not belong to this empirical world, but only to the Ātman. Śankara clarifies the relationship between anubhava and other types of experience in the following way:

Even though the Self which is to be realized does not consist of any parts as such, still the nature of consisting of such parts as are characterized by a  
ce, objects

of sense, and the property of reacting to pleasure and pain, is superimposed on it . . . 39.

In fact, this whole realm of earthly experience--which we might call the fiction of jīva-hood--is ultimately seen as a self-delusion when paired alongside the self-disclosing experience of Brahman-knowledge or Ātman-realization. Śankara agrees.

The person who has realized Brahma understands, that he himself is Brahma, which has the nature of never being an experiencer or an agent during all the three divisions of time (viz., the past, present or future), contrary to the preconceived (wrong) notion of being an experiencer or agent, and a person who has realized Brahma knows that he never was such experiencer or agent before, nor is he so at present, nor will he ever be so at some future time. 40

So in terms of discussing the role of anubhava, it is such a foundational concept in Śankara's theory of revelation that it might even be considered the beginning of the whole revelation process. Since śruti--at least to the extent that it is rooted in the realm of the empirical by virtue of its discursive constitution--is ultimately left behind with all other experiences of the world, anubhava then must be considered its own beginning. This point can not be over-emphasized, but neither can the point that until such realization of anubhava arises, the world of men is in radical need of the guiding light provided by the śruti (an issue that will be taken up in the next chapter). As stated earlier, we must always be conscious of this dual movement in Śankara's thinking: the necessity of śruti as

the only proper starting point for Vedānta methodology and the immediate, unitive experience of anubhava which is its own beginning and end, thus transcending the entire methodological discussion. Satprakashananda summarizes this subtle point in the following manner:

The seeker's intuitive experience (aparōkṣānubhūti or sakṣātkāra) or anubhava is the final proof or demonstration of the fundamental facts--that his very self is identical with Brahman, that Brahman is the sole reality, and that abiding in Brahman is liberation (mokṣa). It corroborates the truths revealed by the śruti, but does not constitute a separate means of knowledge with regard to them. According to the Vedānta the śruti is the only independent means to the knowledge of Brahman. The seeker's immediate awareness of the self as Brahman is invariably dependent on the śruti text. It is the hearing of the mahāvākya sided by reasoning and meditation that leads to realization of Brahman, which is the end of knowledge and not its means (pramāna). Therefore, the Vedic testimony is the primary means to knowledge of Brahman, mediate or immediate.<sup>41</sup>

This particular remark is very illuminating not only because it confirms the method of Śankara-Vedānta as theological, but also because it introduces in an explicit way what we have already been discussing implicitly, i.e., the tripartite structure of Śankara's theory of revelation (viz., śruti, anumāna and anubhava) to which we might compare a correlative framework in Śankara's discussion of sādhana procedure (viz., śravaṇa, manana and nididhyāsana).

Finally, let us examine the paradoxical relation

Brahman can never be known as object and the knowledge which is gained from the śruti is always of or about something, as is the nature of all discourse. Satchidananda Murty states the difficulty thus while paraphrasing Sriharṣa: "The statement that the Veda gives knowledge is only empirically true. Brahman can not be known by anything but itself, because Brahman is the self-luminous consciousness."<sup>42</sup> Murty then makes a general statement about this issue from the perspective of Advaita.

In general, we might summarize the Advaita Vedānta position by saying that nothing correct can be said about Brahman, because anything that can be said pre-supposes "difference" and "multiplicity." Any statement about Brahman can only indicate (lakṣyānte) or hint at, and it would not be able to do so if it were not wrong. So all the things that may be said in order to make one cognise his identity with Brahman are found to be meaningless (arthahīna); when the final truth is realized.<sup>43</sup>

Thus we are forced to the conclusion that even the most exalted source of Brahman-knowledge (viz., the mahāvākyas) does not give us direct knowledge of the highest Reality.

However, if śruti does not yield to us a positive knowledge of Brahman, it does effectively negate the provisional reality (māyā) of jīva-hood and all its attendant features, such as the world and multiplicity, subjectivity and objectivity (cf. footnote 29). Murty explains Sankara's position on the subject thus:

Sankara is of the opinion that the knowledge arising from sentences such as "That Thou art," "All this is but the Self," etc., suffices to remove the awareness

of entities other than Brahman. As these sentences have no reference to anything else beyond expounding the true nature of the Self, they immediately lead to the realization of Ātman. As soon as the knowledge of Ātman arises as a result of hearing the mahāvākya, it necessarily destroys all the previous false notions.<sup>44</sup>

We do not now have the time or the space to delineate the different doctrines of the post-Śankara teachers of Advaita regarding the cause of anubhava. In order to alleviate the necessity for such a discussion, let it suffice to say that Śankara makes a convincing argument while stating that the non-dual character of the scriptural utterances persuades one to consider the mahāvākyas the sufficient and sole cause for the arising of anubhava. No matter how much of a discussion is made about works, performance of rites, meditation and any other activities of the mind, all of the aforementioned depend upon the self-deluded notions of duality and multiplicity and therefore must assume a secondary position to śruti as a means to Brahman-realization.

According to him, Śankara, the Upaniṣads do not speak of anything other than the knowledge of the identity of the self and Brahman as a means to the attainment of liberation. He also affirms that Brahman-knowledge leads to the highest end of man without the help of any auxiliary means. There is incongruity between this knowledge, which obliterates all action with its factors and results, and ignorance, on which is based the notion of difference, and without which rites, meditation, etc., cannot be performed.<sup>45</sup>

One final statement by Murty should clarify this relationship between śruti and anubhava once and for all:

"To sum up, according to Śankara, anubhava is the assured conviction, the clear undoubted awareness that one is Brahman, which is generated by the Vedānta Vākyas."46

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>D. M. Datta, "Epistemological Methods in Indian Philosophy," The Indian Mind, ed. Charles Moore (Honolulu, 1967), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Datta, The Six Ways of Knowing (Calcutta, 1960), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>M. Hiriyana, Outlines of Indian Philosophy (London, 1932), p. 180.

<sup>6</sup>Datta, "Epistemological Methods," p. 124.

<sup>7</sup>Swami Satprakashanānda, Methods of Knowledge (London, 1964), p. 35.

<sup>8</sup>Datta, Six Ways, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>10</sup>Datta, "Epistemological Methods," p. 125.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Satprakashananda, p. 142.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Hiriyana, pp. 180, 349.

<sup>16</sup>Karl Potter, Presuppositions of India's Philosophies (New Delhi, 1965), p. 220.

<sup>17</sup>Hiriyana, p. 359. (It is well to note that so will theology vanish at this point.)

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>19</sup>J. G. Arapura, "Māyā and Discourse on Brahman," Two Views of Truth. Edited by Mervin Sprung, Utrecht, 1972.

<sup>20</sup>Brahma-Sūtra-Śankara-Bhāṣya II,1,2 (cited in N. K. Devaraja, An Introduction to Śankara's Theory of Knowledge, Delhi, 1962, p. 46).

<sup>21</sup>George Thibaut, "Introduction," The Vedānta Sūtras (with commentary of Śankara), (Delhi, 1962), p. cxxiv.

<sup>22</sup>Devaraja, pp. 50-51.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>24</sup>This characteristic is of course in addition to its revelatory capacity, but is nevertheless of great importance.

<sup>25</sup>V. M. Apte (tr.), Brahma-Sūtra-Śankara-Bhāṣya (Bombay, 1960), pp. 12, 16.

<sup>26</sup>Satprakashananda, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup>Apte, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup>While doing so, it is well to remember that modern Western philosophy depends precisely upon perception and inference and not on revelation as does theology.

<sup>29</sup>Apte, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 283-284.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>34</sup>Satprakashananda, p. 216.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>36</sup>Apte, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup>Paul Hacker, "Cit and Nous, or the Concept of Spirit in Advaita Vedanta and in Neoplatonism," (unpublished paper), p. 3. "At a very early time, probably in the first half of the last millenium before Christ, at the latest one or two centuries earlier than 500 B.C., one of those thinkers whose speculations were handed down in the Upanisads, conceived a thought that, in my opinion, belongs to the greatest achievements in philosophy, both Eastern and Western. The clearest formulation of this thought is recorded at Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upanisad 3:4:2, but

similar passages recur in four passages of the second, third, and fourth books of the same Upanisad 2:4:14; 3:7:23; 3:8:11; 4:5:15). This formulation reads (with a slight abbreviation): "You cannot see him who sees vision . . . you cannot know him who knows knowledge" (na dr̥ster draṣṭāram pāṣyeh . . . na vijñāter vijñātāram vijñānyah) . . . That which makes knowledge possible-- knowledge of all kinds, sensorial perception as well as mental insight and discursive thinking--the principle which makes this possible cannot naturally be grasped or comprehended by that of which it is the very basis of existence."

<sup>38</sup>Richard De Smet, "Theological Method and Vedānta," Oriental Thought, 4.1-2, 1960, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup>Apte, p. 781.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 802.

<sup>41</sup>Satprakashananda, p. 258.

<sup>42</sup>Murty, Revelation and Reason (Delhi, 1974), p. 102.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

### CHAPTER III

#### GOD AND SOTERIOLOGY IN ŚANKARA-VEDĀNTA

One of the often used arguments against Śankara-Vedānta being considered theology involves the concept that God can not be admitted ultimate ontological status in this system. Therefore--since all theology is discourse about God--Śankara-Vedānta can not be considered theological. God (Īśvara)--included within the saguna-Brahman conceptual framework--must not be deemed absolutely real since only the nirguna conception of Brahman is admitted absolute reality (paramārtha-satya). This relation between the empirical (vyāvahāra) status of saguna-Brahman and the absolute (paramārtha) status of nirguna-Brahman implies a derogation of the former and an exaltation of the latter. The logic of this argument is quite clear: if we are seekers of truth in the Vedāntic enterprise, why concern ourselves with something pen-ultimately real such as God? It is from such thinking that the expressions "higher" and "lower" Brahman issue. I wish to take exception to this kind of reasoning in order that Śankara-Vedānta might be authentically understood as theology. I hope to achieve this end by lessening the impact of such terms as higher and lower and then

consequently by diminishing the fictional opposition imagined between these two aspects of Brahman.

Before we attempt this, I wish to point out that at the beginning of this chapter, I have alluded to a tacit assumption which has beclouded the entire discussion of whether Śankara-Vedānta can be considered theology. It has been assumed by many that the monotheistic notion of a personal God conceived as the highest reality is a necessary prerequisite of theological thinking. Indeed, resolution of whether this position is valid would supply more than enough material for a thesis project in itself; but I have attempted to elucidate a more fundamental issue in my first two chapters. I have pointed out that methodological considerations must first be examined before we can even entertain discussing a more general, conceptual question like "can non-monotheistic belief systems be considered theological?" What has been discovered in the process is that centering the question around discourse about God or "God-talk" in fact muddles the discussion of whether Śankara-Vedānta is theology by further blurring the distinction between philosophy and theology. Rem B. Edwards is a good example of this tendency, as unwittingly as he might have done so.<sup>1</sup> The methodological consideration that revelation is the starting point for all theological thinking is much more helpful to us because we can clearly see such a pre-

requisite satisfied in Śankara-Vedānta. Once this point is made clear, we are no longer burdened with the question of whether Śankara-Vedānta might be addressed as theology, rather we might now inquire about some of the primary theological meditations of Śankara. So we shift our focus somewhat from that of the first two chapters, i.e., from methodological considerations to questions of content. I mean by content here mainly two issues: the place of God in Śankara-Vedānta and soteriology as the altogether primary concern of Śankara.

Let us first consider the role of God in Śankara's thinking. It is proper to consider the qualified (saguna) Brahman to be the supremely expediential aid to men in their quest for salvation. Meditation aimed at liberation must begin with some objective focus and saguna-Brahman (more specifically Īśvara) serves just such a purpose by pointing men in the right direction.

According to Śankara the essence of religion is meditation or upasana. He defines it as the process of concentrating the mind on some resting place or support recognized by sastra and generating a series of like-thoughts without the interruption of anything contrary to the series. A graded course of meditative exercises is laid down in the Upanishads, from the gross to the subtle, from what is external to what is internal, from the material to the spiritual.<sup>2</sup>

This remark does well to capture the basic attitude of Śankara-Vedānta towards meditation and worship. One is always urged to move from what is external to what is internal, i.e., from falsity (mithyā) to truth (satya);

but this "movement" is not possible with regard to nirguna-Brahman. Śankara concurs.

. . . that Brahma could ever be the object of any such "movement" is not reasonably sustainable; that the highest Brahma, which is ascertained to be all-pervading and which is immanent in all and is the Self of all . . . is something towards which this movement of approach is possible is never reasonably sustainable. What has already been reached cannot again be sought to be reached.<sup>3</sup>

Śankara then speaks of the role of saguna-Brahman thus:

. . . as it is only the qualified Brahma (Saguna Brahma) that has to be meditated upon, movement (of approach towards such qualified Brahma) is possible. Yet the Scriptures do not ever mention any such movement with respect to the transcendent Brahma.<sup>4</sup>

Śankara-Vedānta extolls such "movement" towards spiritual transcendence, but the method suggested for attaining this goal is always important. Just as Śankara-Vedānta uses the tools of logic, language and representational thought in order to transcend their bounds, so too does it regard all forms of religious meditation and worship, i.e., as essentially metaphorical or symbolic and suggestive of greater truth. It is not that nirguna-Brahman is excluded from the theological investigation. Rather nirguna-Brahman--as the very ground of all theology and the reason for the theological enterprise in the first place--renders theology metaphorical once its fullness is realized.

However, even though saguna-Brahman is not admitted absolute, ontological status in Śankara's system, it would

be a grave mistake to underestimate its importance for Śankara. Looked at existentially, how is man to relate to parā-Brahman? After all, before the advent of parā-vidyā, the distinction between jīva and Īśvara is radically important. Through worship of and meditation upon Īśvara, men become aware of their finite surroundings and take up the task of working towards liberation. Such an intuition of self-transcendence is personified in Īśvara as the ideal of love and knowledge.

In religious experience personal encounter is as real as the encounter of subject and object in cognitive experience . . . While Brahman is the trans-personal ground and abyss of everything personal, Īśvara is the personal God . . . In the concept of Īśvara the Absolute is brought into close relationship with the world. There is continuity between the values discerned in God and the values discernible and realisable in human life. God in his perfection is the ultimate source of all values whatsoever which derive from him.<sup>5</sup>

It is a simple matter of man's inability to digest the nameless, formless absolute of nirguna-Brahman. So what is important here is that Śankara considers saguna-Brahman necessary for devotion and meditation to be a fruitful exercise. This is clear from the following quotes: ". . . instruction is given about Brahma as having the distinction of names and forms for the purpose of meditation."<sup>6</sup> While discussing the attributes of Brahman such as size, parts and other adjuncts, Śankara explains the meaning thus:

(It is meant) for the sake of comprehension by intelligence (Buddhi) i.e. for meditation (Upāsanā),

that is all. How ever otherwise, can comprehension by intelligence, of Brahma as having four feet, eight hoofs and sixteen parts, be made steady in Brahma (during the meditation on Brahma)?<sup>7</sup>

Therefore we may regard the saguna-Brahman as the religious aspect of the Advaitic formulation, since man is led out of suffering to salvation thereby; and who among us would dare to dismiss religion as an unimportant concern of the Vedānta.

It is also unfortunate that in intra-Vedāntic debates, when the saguna and nirguna aspects have been drawn into juxtaposition, the opposition between these two facets of Brahman has always been accented: the saguna is often deemed "personal" and the nirguna "impersonal." I would submit that such discussions lead nowhere but to misunderstanding and misrepresentation of positions. It may have served some pedagogical purpose for those involved in the particular debate, but this opposition must be minimized if we are to attempt a mature understanding of Śankara-Vedānta. In the final analysis, we can say only that Brahman is neither personal nor impersonal (neti, neti). Indeed transpersonal or superpersonal might be more suggestive. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that aparā-Brahman does not lead us astray from the parā-Brahman by delusion and deception. Rather Īśvara is the face of Brahman turned towards the world, leading men home to the recovery of the hidden Self. Therefore, for man, saguna-Brahman is

the point of transaction with nirguna-Brahman.

Furthermore, we must be careful so as not to strictly identify saguna-Brahman with Īśvara alone. Īśvara is the personal Lord of the devotee's worship as well as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the cosmos. As already stated above, to characterize the saguna aspect as personal only is a mistake, since personality is not the only quality which inheres in the conception of saguna-Brahman. Also, even though Īśvara might be considered the personification of love and knowledge, this notion of "personality" must be understood to transcend the image of the Lord held by the devotee. There is some sense of the transpersonal in the following remark about saguna-Brahman by Śāṅkarā: "Just as the qualified Brahma is spoken of as one to whom all actions and all desires belong, it is also possible to describe it as the Self of all."<sup>8</sup> So there is more to the notion of saguna-Brahman than just personality and for this reason it can not be simplistically opposed to nirguna-Brahman by invocation of the personal-impersonal polarity. Indeed an appreciation of the subtleties of this discussion reminds us that it would also be unfair to characterize (as so much Advaitin polemics has) the theistic Vedānta as only personalistic, thereby implying a lack of transcendence. Although the highest Reality is conceived by Rāmānuja and Madhva to be qualified by attributes

(saguna) and "personally" related to the individual soul (jīvatman), Brahman nevertheless transcends human comprehension and relationships as humanly constituted for the theist as well. In some sense we might also say that Ramānuja and Madhva admit super-personality of Brahman (as in the concept of antaryāmin or the "inner ruler" of the Upanisads), the distinction between them and Advaita being that they always insist that Brahman is qualified by attributes. Śankara himself eschews any attempts to draw opposition between the two aspects of the one Reality in the following passage: we must be careful never to posit too great a distance between saguna and nirguna for there is only one Brahman.

The use of the word Brahma is not contradictory, by reason of its nearness to the Highest (transcendent) Brahma, because it is firmly established, that, in fact it is the Highest Brahma itself, which, when it is in contact with pure limiting adjuncts (such as intellect etc.), is described as having the qualities of an effect, such as having the mind as its structure etc., for the purpose of meditation, and is described as the Lower qualified Brahma.<sup>9</sup>

What is of interest for us in the foregoing discussion is that despite the derogatory implications of the common translation of the term vyāvahāra as "empirical" (and by extension "lower"), it is nevertheless in no other region than that of the vyāyahārika that the religious experience takes place and has meaning for Śankara. This presentation of the vyāyahārika dimension of Śankara's ontology must strike us as having a much more existential nuance than does the more usual understanding implied by

the translations cited above. Yet in spite of the merits of such an explication of the religious elements present in Sankara's thinking, we inevitably encounter statements like the following made by interpreters of Advaita.

There is only one reality from the transcendental point of view. For purposes of worship various names and forms are superimposed on it . . . All this is quite necessary from the standpoint of ordinary men, though the true advaitin has the feeling all the time that he is sinning against his light by doing all this.<sup>10</sup>

Radhakrishnan quotes the Kalpā-taru:

The demonstration of Brahman as with attributes is out of compassion for those dull-witted persons who have not the capacity to intuit the Supreme Brahman without attributes; having thereby directed their minds to the pursuit of the Brahman with attributes, Brahman devoid of all duality directly manifests itself.<sup>11</sup>

Even though the Kalpā-taru admits that "highest" Brahman will manifest itself through the directing of one's mind to the "lower" Brahman, there is still a derogation of the latter. But from what we have seen thus far, Sankara considers saguna-Brahman to be necessary for all those who wish to realize highest truth, whether by meditation or worship. I also submit that such remarks are offensive especially to the theistic perspective. Īśvara is not only the object of dull-witted men's worship, but also the revealer of the śruti and therefore the supreme guru to all men, dull-witted or otherwise. As such, Īśvara imparts highest truth (paramārthasatya)

and to the extent that Śankara expounds the need for revelation (which has been clearly demonstrated earlier), to that same extent does he support the radical human need for religion and is he a theologian.

A. C. Mukerji understands this particular issue with great penetration and articulates the inner dynamic with simple clarity in the following remark:

Thus the non-dual Reality, though it is nothing less than the ens realissimum, is, for us the ens absolute indeterminatum. How then is it possible to bridge over this great chasm between the finite and the infinite, and thus to bring about that spiritual conversion, which, as we have said above, is the final aim of the advaita philosophy? The answer is given in the advaita method of gradually training the finite faculties through successive stages of approximation to what is yet beyond their scope.<sup>12</sup>

Mukerji places the role of God squarely in the middle of this issue.

Hence I am inclined to believe, the key to a right estimate of the place of God in the advaita philosophy, as also of a number of problems, lies in its classification of experience into different levels of perfection, the most important of these being the vyāvahārika and the pāramārthika levels of experience.<sup>13</sup>

Now we find ourselves deeply ensconced within the logic of Śankara-Vedānta and here we must be careful to appreciate the subtleties. Merely to translate the aparā-parā, vyāvahāra-paramārtha and saguna-nirguna formulae in terms of "lower-higher" or "false-real" conceptual polarities does not do justice to Śankara's very delicate reasoning. The most salient problem created by such dichotomous thinking is the lack of appreciation of the complementarity

of these categories. The aparā is no different reality than the parā (since there is only one reality according to advaita logic), merely being the same reality with varying degrees of superimposition added. However, another dangerous misunderstanding would be to assume from this reasoning that the aparā and parā categories refer to the same reality structure as they present themselves on the face of it, i.e., aparā is unreal and parā is real. So we may not translate "jagan mithyā" simply as the "world is falsity" without great qualification; this is precisely the great subtlety of Śankara's anirvacanīya category! A. C. Mukerji is again helpful regarding this matter.

. . . the vedānta categories are always relative to definite stages or levels of experience, the most important of which, as suggested above, are the levels of discursive and non-discursive experience. The great chasm existing between these two types of experience ought to indicate clearly the danger of applying in the same sense the categories of reality and unreality, or of existence and non-existence, to the facts of different levels; this would be a serious misapplication of the categories beyond their legitimate sphere.<sup>14</sup>

So if we say that the world is false when compared to Brahman, we do not mean that the world is false for us in the empirical experience. Of course the latter is a serious, but nevertheless typical, misunderstanding of Śankara's theory of māyā. To ignore the obvious conclusion that there are gradations of validity or reality attributed to different experiences within the empirical

world is a corollary of this misunderstanding. For it is only because of the waking experience that we can judge the dream to be false; and it is only because of our awareness of the rope that we can determine the unreality of the snake. As Mukerji says, "No philosophical thought can seriously ignore this essential correlativity of the finite categories."<sup>15</sup> Once these considerations are taken into account, the place of God in Śankara's thinking can be more genuinely ascertained. Mukerji agrees.

Such a God is as real as the individual centres of experience, or, as the world of our common experience, our moral strivings and aspirations, our happiness and misery. Neither He nor these minds and material things are mere illusions. The fact that they are absolutely non-existent from the standpoint of a higher experience does not militate against their genuine reality for our experience as it is now.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, men--presently engaged in the religious journey of spiritual progress--are not yet in possession of that absolute awareness of the highest reality which would render things of this world only provisionally real. So the discipline by which this final experience is realized must not be dismissed as a mere fiction, but rather included as a necessary constituent of the entire discussion; and God is the focal point of this discipline in Śankara's thinking.

That is, if the Real is self-revealed at the final stage of Absolute Experience, such a stage cannot by any means be reached through a mere imaginary discipline; hence the reality of the higher experience implies the reality of the lower stages, quite as much as the real completed structure implies the reality of the scaffolding. God, therefore, has

the fullest measure of reality in the advaita system; nay, a real God is an indispensable postulate of the advaita method of spiritual realization.<sup>17</sup>

The question now arises whether such a conception of God is one of mere pragmatic necessity. To admit an affirmative answer to this question certainly would compromise the status of God in our discussion once again. Before we look more closely at this matter though, I would like to make one point clear about such a question. If we are to use the word "pragmatic" here, surely this is a contrived usage which almost renders itself meaningless upon close examination. I say this because the word "pragmatic," in its strict usage, refers to things of this empirical world and not to matters of the world-beyond. Obviously the rationale behind using this term issues from the idea that we gain or attain or realize something not yet actualized by means of (emphasizing the instrumental syntax here) the role of God. However, whenever we speak in such highly soteriologically charged language, the word "pragmatic" seems hardly appropriate. We might substitute the word "religious" here; but this would defuse the original impact of the question, since we could never seriously describe the notion of religious necessity as "mere," given the overtones of existential emergency which are implied by the term religious. So, even though the question of whether God is a "mere, pragmatic necessity" is somewhat a

begging thereof we will nevertheless endeavor to answer the question on its own terms.

The most important point to be made in refuting this description of God as only a pragmatic necessity consists of an appreciation of the different levels of experience according to Śankara.

A determinate God, as I have tried to emphasize above, is not a mere fiction, much less can the individual<sup>2</sup> centre of experience which is the logical presupposition of every fact and fiction be itself reduced to a fiction. If it is admitted that "God is an indispensable postulate of the thinking man," and that God and man are like the "prototype and the reflection," what follows from this admission is, not only that both the prototype and the reflection disappear with the disappearance of the reflecting medium, but also that God is real while the medium is there.<sup>18</sup>

So we must not assume--because the medium of spiritual progress is not viewed as ultimately real from some transcendental perspective (i.e., that of the mukta)--that the whole medium is to be dismissed as a fiction from our perspective of the world, which might be described as an existential one. If we might correctly refer to the religious pilgrimage from suffering to salvation as existential, then we must never allow it to be deemed a mere fiction, regardless of what ontological status is placed upon it. To do so would certainly be to misunderstand Śankara's attitude towards religion in general and the concept of God in particular. This now brings us to the final consideration of this chapter, viz., the notion of salvation in Śankara's scheme of

of things. However, before we move on to this discussion, one last point must be made clear about the foregoing inquiry.

Why is there a necessity for this religious notion of God in Śankara's thinking at all? If we return to the passages from Śankara's Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya cited above, then we can find the answer to this question.

. . . that Brahma could ever be the object of such "movement" is not reasonably sustainable; that the highest Brahma . . . is something towards which this movement of approach is possible is never reasonably sustainable . . . as it is only the qualified Brahma (Saguna Brahma) that has to be meditated upon, movement (of approach towards such qualified Brahma) is possible. Yet the Scriptures do not ever mention any such movement with respect to the transcendent Brahma.<sup>19</sup>

With these remarks Śankara is offering his solution to the perennial problem posed by the position which states that ultimate reality is ultra-relational and non-differentiated while all thought (and experience) is necessarily relational and differentiated. This is not a dilemma which has been attempted solution by Śankara alone, but has been a problem for thinking men of all ages, both Eastern and Western. The key concept for Śankara is the role played by superimposition in his theory of different levels of experience. For the last time, A. C. Mukerji can be of help to us on this matter of the ultra-relational reality not being conceivable by relational thought.

Yet, logical thought, according to it, being an indispensable stage in the entire process of realising the ultra-relational Absolute, the unthinkable has to be brought under the conditions of thought by means of attributing to it what really cannot belong to it; this, as is well known, is the necessity of superimposition. The Brahman, though absolutely distinction-less, is to be conceived as that to which belongs, as it were, the germ of all distinctions; and this may then be conceived as māyā, śakti or prakṛti of the omniscient Lord. Thus, superimposition, which is but another name for accommodation to the conditions of discursive thought, occupies a prominent place in the advaita method of stimulating thought to go beyond itself.<sup>20</sup>

We now come to the final consideration of this chapter, viz., the soteriological overtones of Śāṅkara-Vedānta. The need for salvation (mokṣa) is always pre-eminent in the work of Śāṅkara and it is no accident either that the author of the Brahma-Sūtra used the desiderative tense (jijnāsā) in the first sūtra, thus charging the following meditation with theological urgency and soteriological significance. Krishna Sivaraman has made some remarks concerning this issue.

The question of the meaning of Being, that is what "inquiry into the nature of Brahman" means, is not the metaphysical question of Being, a detached speculative question which one can take up or lay aside at pleasure . . . We begin by asking about ourselves and it was the confrontation with the primordial "error" or nothingness at the root of our very existence that opens our eyes to the being which contrasts with nothing. It is an existential issue in the precise sense that it is asked by someone for whom being is an issue.<sup>21</sup>

Whenever Śāṅkara discusses the way to overcome this "primordial error," he always points to the necessary role of the śruti. Śāṅkara describes this role in no uncertain

terms in the following quote as he maintains that it is pre-eminent among the pramānas:

This entity (Brahma) devoid of any form as it is, is neither perceptible by any direct (ocular) means-of-proof, nor is it perceptible by inference etc., as there is absence of any indicative mark about it (i.e. Brahma). Like religious duty, it (Brahma) is understandable from the Scripture alone.<sup>22</sup>

It is interesting to note that although revelation (specifically understood as śruti or Veda) is a theological issue, we have rarely encountered this subject as delineated above when Advaita theology is discussed. Usually the notion of the personality of God and/or the lack of it is the central focus of any such analysis. Perhaps this is a serious misinterpretation of theology in general and of Advaita in particular, if only because of the incompleteness of this characterization, i.e., that theology is "God-talk" and nothing more. As pointed out above, the notion of God is present in Advaita, but far too often the serious consideration of it is impaired by the attendant condition: "only if ye be dull-witted." Even though śruti shares the same ontological status (vyāvahārika) as Īśvara, we never find an interpreter of Advaita attaching such a condition to the consideration of the role played by the śruti in Śankara-Vedānta. Yet not only is Īśvara revealer of the śruti and therefore supreme guru, but the notion of revelation itself has strongly soteriological--and therefore theological--

overtones. Śruti is admitted by all Advaitins to be the starting point of our inquiry into Brahman, and although Brahman is never considered to be the object of scriptural knowledge (even by Śankara), śruti is nevertheless exalted as the sine qua non of the Vedāntic enterprise. Even if the above quote by Śankara might be termed "ultra-orthodox" (as Devaraja describes it<sup>23</sup>); it is still a fair representation of the Advaita position regarding the primacy of śabda-pramāna (i.e., śruti). However, we must be careful here not to draw the Vedānta of Śankara too close to the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā. Indeed Śankara clearly distinguishes himself from the dogmatism implied by the Mīmāṃsā position that highest truth is known exclusively through the vidhis of the Veda.

It is not that the Scriptures alone are the means of the right knowledge of Brahma, as is the case about the right knowledge of duty, but the scriptures, as also intuitional experience, so far as is possible, constitute the authoritative or valid means of right knowledge, because the knowledge of Brahma culminates in the realization of Brahma, and has an already existing entity as its object. In the case of religious action there is no expectation of intuitional experience and the Scriptures alone are the authoritative means of its right knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

As was made clear in the previous chapter, Śankara maintains the possibility of a post facto verification of śruti by experience, while, as stated above, no such possibility is maintained by Mīmāṃsā.

Finally my intention in this essay has not been to establish some ultra-orthodox, exclusivistic position of

a special revelation being present only in the Veda and in no other eminent text; this would pose enormous theological and philosophical problems itself. Rather it is to do primarily two things: first to juxtapose the roles played by saguna-Brahman and the śruti in the Advaita of Śankara and second, as a consequence of this, to show that Advaita can be considered theology in a real sense. Of course, the one condition under which both saguna-Brahman and śruti must be subsumed--indeed also must all existence as we know it--is not that they are only approached by the dull-witted, but that they too are under the influence of māyā-avidyā, i.e., Śankara's theory of superimposition as outlined above. Surely even the most theistic systems would not admit the possibility of theology once the state of "fallenness" or finitude is overcome; for it is exactly the purpose of theology to show the way to salvation by means of some systematic method (exegetical or metaphysical). Once this purpose is fulfilled, the efficacy of theology exhausts itself for Dvaitin, Viśiṣṭ-ādvaitin and Advaitin alike; but this is the only qualification acceptable and surely, after the foregoing discussion, it is hoped that such a qualification in no way compromises the exalted status that theology must be granted.<sup>25</sup>

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Cf. p. 107 of this paper. I say "unwittingly" here because it was Edwards' intention to draw philosophy and theology closer together and not to distinguish them, as has been my intention.

<sup>2</sup>M. K. V. Iyer, Advaita Vedānta (London, 1964), p. 197.

<sup>3</sup>Sankara, Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya, tr. V. M. Apte (Bombay, 1960), p. 847.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 855.

<sup>5</sup>Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, The Brahma-Sūtra (London, 1960), p. 126.

<sup>6</sup>Apte, p. 856.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 610.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.; p. 847.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 844.

<sup>10</sup>Iyer, p. 200.

<sup>11</sup>Radhakrishnan, p. 127.

<sup>12</sup>A. C. Mukerji, "The Place of God in Advaita," Philosophical Quarterly, 1934, Vol. 10, p. 263.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>19</sup>Apte, pp. 847, 855.

<sup>20</sup>Mukerji, p. 271.

<sup>21</sup>Krishna Sivaraman, "Some Reflections on Advaita,"  
(unpublished paper), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup>Apte, p. 289.

<sup>23</sup>N. K. Devaraja, Introduction to Śankara's Theory  
of Knowledge (Delhi, 1972), p. 66.

<sup>24</sup>Apte, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. p. 52 of this paper.

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