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The Hierarchy of the Transcendentals According to *Advaita Vedānta*

Abstract

In *advaita vedānta*, the status of real existence is ascribed to the *Brahman* only. The *Brahman* is the transcendental ultimate reality and it is not possible to describe it by any attribute. The present paper will focus on the problem of values. What is the status of values according to the pure monistic system? When *advaita vedāntists* call the empirical world *sad-asad-anirvacanīya* (real-unreal-indefinable), are we entitled to speak about the existence of values? And if they are real, what does 'real' mean in this context?

All the attributes by which we describe the world can be grasped in groups. This division depends on the way in which we experience the world. One group encompasses objects experienced by the external organs, by the senses; its realm is responsible for aesthetic values. The second group leads to discrimination; its domain is ethics. The third prejudges the status of the world and advances metaphysical arguments. These three groups are arranged hierarchically. This order includes the cosmological and the soteriological model as well; thus the vision of the world in classical Indian thought appears as total harmony.

Key words

advaita, nirguna, transcendental, satyam, dharma, bonum, ananda

There are two ways of speaking of the Brahman in the *advaita-vedānta* system of philosophy. The first way is apophatic: it expresses the indefinable nature of the ultimate reality, defining the Brahman as *neti! neti!* (not this! not this!). Therefore silence epitomises the description of the Brahman.

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The second way attempts to ascribe to the Brahman the ultimate and the primordial attributes, or *guṇa*. Traditionally, advaitists speak about three primordial attitudes: *sat*, which denotes the real and truth; *cit*, which denotes the domain of consciousness and pure thought; *ānanda*, whichever denotes beauty and bliss. Together, these three *gunas* give the classical definition of *saguṇa brahman* as *saccidānanda*.

My interest is focussed on the relation between the *gunas*. If we say that the ultimate reality, for *advaita-vedānta*, encompasses the whole world, including the phenomenal level, and if we also say that in this system reality is a total unity, can we find a hierarchy in the various levels, spheres or domains? And if there is a hierarchy, how is it oriented?

Before beginning my analysis of the primordial *gunas* I would like to point out one thing. *Advaita-vedānta* is a system of philosophy; accordingly, it can be interpreted from the Western methodological point of view. But it is primarily an Indian system of philosophy, or *darśana*; this means that ultimately all considerations are soteriologically oriented and must be related to a transcendental goal. That goal is called *mokṣa*, or liberation. In that sense we can judge any phenomena in the world and any activity in terms of its bringing us as near as possible to *mokṣa*. I would like to show that because of the process of reaching *mokṣa* we can speak about a hierarchy of the *gunas*. This will be the main subject of my present considerations.

But I would like to look at these *gunas* from the Western point of view as well. Although all literal comparisons between different cultures are weak by nature, sometimes they help not only to translate but also to understand the main thesis in both contrasting cultures. Accordingly, the three primordial Vedantic *gunas* will be referred to the three cardinal transcendentals which exist in European philosophy. The cardinal transcendentals have been present since the time of Plato, for whom the idea of the Good is at the top. However, for scholastic thinkers, Truth is at the top. The scholastic scheme is closer to the Vedantic; therefore I will start by analysing the three *gunas* in that order.

If we wish to find the main difference between the European and the Indian ways of philosophising, we have to form a basic scheme or ground structure. As the ancestor of European philosophy, the Greek way of thinking, is founded on a logical scheme, so the Indian systems are founded on a philological one. Therefore it is quite natural that in India philological analysis is included in the mainstream of philosophical considerations.

I will start from an analysis of the basic words denoting the term 'truth.' In Sanskrit there is a group of terms which denote 'truth' or 'truth-

ful.' The main term is *sat*, which comes from the root *as*, to be or to exist. The word *sat* has several derivatives: *satyam*, *sattvam*, *sattā*. The word *sat* belongs to the metaphysical domain, where it denotes truthful, real existence, and to the epistemological domain, where it denotes the way we speak of existence when we want to state its reality, truthfulness or vicariousness. Thus, what exists is truthful as well; the ultimate truth, *sat*, can be ascribed only to full real existence.

One of the main derivatives of the word *sat* is the word *satyam*, which extends its semantic field. Apart from the classical senses – namely, truth, real within its field – it includes senses with axiological connotations: honest, pure, virtuous, righteous, chaste. This combination in one domain of two aspects of reality, aspects which appeal to the realms of both truthfulness and righteousness, reminds us of the ancient Greek notion of *kalokagathos*.

The word *sattva*, apart from its classical meanings, also denotes real nature, character, consciousness, and wisdom. In classical Sanskrit the most frequent use of this term belongs to the *sāṃkhya* system of philosophy and names one of the three *gunas*, which are compounds of matter, or *prakṛti*. From the point of view of yogic procedure, the *guna sattva* is responsible for the process of enlightenment and disclosure of the truth of real nature, thanks to which liberation can be gained.

We also have one more old Vedic term which applies to that notion. It is the word *ṛta* – truth, law, rule, cosmic order. It comes from the root *r*, or to go, to move, to become, and indicates in that sense a more dynamic, rather than static, dimension of the truth.

It can be also very interesting to look for the opposite of the notion of the truth, to terms denoting something untrue, false. This topic would require an additional paper, so I will only list several groups of these terms. The first group covers simple negations: *asat*, *asatya*, *anṛta*. To the second group belong *mithyā* (invertedly, contrarily, incorrectly, wrongly) and *mṛṣā* (in vain, falsely, meretriciously). The next group denotes something imaginary, artificial. Thus, we have: *kṛtrima* (made artificially, falsified, not natural) *kalpita* (made, artificial, fabricated), *kālpānika* (existing only in fancy, fictitious). Generally, all of the above terms indicate the mechanism of false appearances or something which does not really exist, something artificial, an imaginary reality.

In this context we have the term *māyā*. *Māyā* denotes empirical reality, reality which is not ultimate but which implies the appearance of incorrect knowledge leading to incorrect apprehension of the world. The

word *māyā* comes from the root *mā* (to measure, mete out, mark off). This meaning suggests some kind of structure, scheme, or mean which is using to measure one thing in opposition to another. Therefore it is the beginning of differentiation and categorisation. By appealing to the cosmological scheme and taking from it the idea that there exists only one reality (which can, of course, appear on many levels), we can see that *māyā* is not an outer measure but remains in the world and constitutes its inherent energy. *Māyā* is in the world, adhering to nature and to the structure of the world.

In the old Vedic texts *māyā* means magic, illusion, extraordinary and supernatural power; earlier, such power belonged to the demons, later, to the gods. In later times it begins to be identified with *prakṛti* (nature, matter, the principle of change and the lack of consciousness). In this context *māyā* signifies the changing, mutable world, a world devoid (by its nature) of consciousness, wisdom and the knowledge necessary to see true reality. In *advaita-vedānta*, *māyā*, first of all, is understood as energy. This energy becomes its primary *upādhi* (limitation, adjunct, anything which can be taken for or has the mere name or appearance of another thing).

In this system the term is interpreted radically as something unreal, not true, something not really existing. Then *māyā* becomes a universal aspect of individual ignorance, or *avidyā*.

All descriptions of *māyā* are given through analogy to illusory human experiences. The ultimate being of the world does not have to be stated as a theory, as it is strictly implied in the very definition of the *Brahman* itself. Śankara is very emphatic about the factual reality of the things that are mistaken for something else. *Māyā* does not simply mean denial of the world. Explicit speech about its non-existence is an indirect recognition of its phenomenal existence. It is out of the question (for *advaita*) that phenomenal reality could come into being through speech. *Māyā* will last as long as the *Brahman* can be spoken, and the world will last as long as *māyā* will last. That is why no positive language is adequate to describe the *Brahman*. This way of thinking leads to the apophatic definition of the *Brahman*, to state that by nature It is *neti, neti*.

The notion of *māyā* becomes one of the key terms in the philosophical system of *advaita*. But what does it mean that the empirical world is not simply a negation of the *Brahman*, given that the very acceptance of real existence is ascribed to the *Brahman* only? If nothing except the *Brahman* really exists, what will happen to all activities in the empirical world? Should we say that all deeds, behaviours, systems of values, etc. are not real? And

if so, what does not-real mean in that context? The notion of *māyā* helps to resolve this problem. Generally speaking, the world itself does not change; only our apprehension of the world is subject to change. One of the most acute issues in *advaita* is to find a proper mechanism to explain the transition from consciousness to awareness. When objects appear to this witnessing consciousness they are the work of *avidyā*; they are superimposed on pure consciousness, which remains unaffected by that relationship.

Advaita uses many examples and analogies to explain the mechanism of this superimposition. One of the best-known is the story about 'grasping a snake in the darkness instead of a rope.' In the darkness we see something long, thin, and moving, so that our first association is with a snake. We start to behave according to that impulse: we can escape, stand still, or even try to avoid the danger. According to that impulse, we act, and our actions have their own consequences. After the discovery that the thing in question was not a snake but a rope, only then do questions arise. Where did the snake disappear to? It could not have disappeared because it was not real. But the results of our behaviour resulting from that impulse remain, and for us they were and still are real. For Indian thinkers, to resolve this riddle is to resolve the enigma of the world.

For *advaita*, the rope that is seen as a snake is the objective foundation of the illusion. Illusory experience, like normal experience, may be considered in its noetic phase. The false content seems to possess a noematic character, and, in relation to everyday experience, a character of an intermediate type, embodying a reference, but not to reality. When the false realm is negated the real one shines alone. And only the *Brahman* is pure consciousness and self-luminous. The concept of *svāprakāśa* (self-luminousness) is the fact of being conscious of being conscious, when conscious of anything. And only this is real existence and truth: *sat*. The snake did not disappear because it did not become, which means that it does not really exist: *asat*. Therefore we can speak about ultimate real existence and about related non-existence. Thus only the term existence, or *sat*, is admitted to the ultimate reality. And only this is the ultimate truth. Other attributes are founded on this main one. This means that all systems of values are founded on the metaphysical level.

The second *guna* ascribed to the *Brahman* is *cit*, the domain of consciousness and the domain of knowledge (*jñāna*, *vidyā*) as well. Knowledge understood as the act of knowledge leads to discrimination, primarily between the subject and the object. This primordial discrimination clears the way for all schemes of discrimination. I am going to show that

all such schemes are founded on ethical values, which stand between the ultimate reality, or *sat*, and the world experienced by the senses.

The first question connected with the problem of ethical values, which arises for anyone brought up within European culture, is to find an equivalent for the Latin term *bonum*. I do not think there is a single equivalent for this term in Sanskrit. Thus, I find it important to examine this problem, to answer this question and to compare *bonum* with a group of related terms.

First, I shall discuss, analogously to the considerations of metaphysical terms, various groups of words denoting the terms 'good,' 'bad,' and 'good-bad' as a pair. In Sanskrit the prefix *su*, describing some positive value, is used generally. Here we have: *su-asti* (well-being, fortune, luck, success); *su-kṛta* (good or righteous deed, meritorious act, reward, recompense, well done, made, formed or executed); *su-dharma* (good law, justice, duty); *su-carita* (well-conducted, moral, virtuous). When we look for a group denoting something that we should attain or gain we find: *hita* (put, placed, set, laid, fixed, planned, given, beneficial, convenient, suitable, benefit, advantage, profit, good); *bhadra* (blessed, auspicious, fortunate, gracious, friendly, kind, excellent, good i.e., skilful); *bhāga* (good fortune, fortunate lot, luck, destiny); *śubha* (splendid, bright, beautiful, pleasant, suitable, fit, good); *kalyāṇa* (beautiful, auspicious, illustrious, noble); *kuśāla* (right, proper, suitable); *kṣema* (giving rest or ease, security, happiness); *bhūti* (well-being, prosperity, might, power); *śreyas* (more splendid, more beautiful, more excellent, best, superior). All of these terms are related to the term 'good' with its sensual connotation. Things which are considered good for us are connected with gaining or keeping goods marked by their sensual characteristics. The sensual connotation is connected with the realm of the unmanifested world as well as with aesthetic issues.

As we know, Indians (following *advaita* tradition) do not consider the manifested level to be the absolutely real one. Therefore, 'goodness,' by definition, cannot be something ultimate. Yet, the above-mentioned terms do not include the meaning of 'good' as something 'useful.' For this idea, they employ another group of terms: *artha* (cause, motive, reason, advantage, thing, object, object of the senses, wealth, property); *upayoga* (use, fitness, any act tending to a desired object, good conduct, observing established practices); *phala* (fruit, consequence, effect, result, retribution, gain or loss); *lābha* (obtaining, getting, attaining, gain, profit). And here we also deal with aesthetic rather than purely ethical issues.

We have some groups of terms which very often come in pairs as opposed terms: *hita-ahita*, *śubha-aśubha*, *bhadra-abhadra*. These are related

to the first group. We also have a group denoting first 'virtue' and then 'good.' This includes: *punya* (auspicious, propitious, fair, pleasant, good, right, virtuous, meritorious, pure, holy, sacred); *sukṛta*; *sucarita*; *sādhuvṛtam* (well-rounded, well-conducted, virtuous or honest man); *dharmya* (legal, legitimate, just, virtuous, righteous).

The term 'bad' is primarily connected with its opposition to 'good.' Here we have terms which are simply negations like: *asādhu*, *adharmya*, *aśubha*, *ahita*, *akuśala*. We have also the prefix *dus-*, describing something with negative value: *duṣṭa* (spoiled, corrupted, defective, faulty, wrong, false, bad, wicked, guilty); *durgati* (misfortune, distress, poverty, hell); *duṣkṛta* (wrongly or wickedly done, badly arranged, evil action, sin, guilt). The above terms are related to a situation that initially appears to be good, but which is going to be spoiled; the primary harmony or perfect order is going to be damaged. Next, we have a group of terms with an independent etymology: *pāpa* (bad, vicious, wicked, evil, wretched, vile, low); *doṣa* (fault, vice, deficiency, want, inconvenience, disadvantage, damage, harm, bad consequences); *kleśa* (pain, affliction, distress, anguish, worldly occupation, trouble). To throw something out of balance or to spoil harmony is connected with a mistake and is called 'bad.' This mistake does not come from the outside; it is just a lack of inner harmony.

All the groups under consideration refer to both *profanum* and *sacrum* stages. This division derives from the primordial cosmogonic rite. The myth of *Puruṣa* from the *Puruṣasūkta* is the earliest pattern for that rite. The world which emerged as a result of the primordial sacrifice is the cosmic order and harmony. It can suggest that ideal order is inherent to the pre-creational stage. This model shows that the world, broadly understood as the macro- and microcosmos, and all categories that govern these orders, as well as all relations between them, are of the same nature. All of them are manifestations of the one pre-entity.

In the unmanifested world there exists no absolute, independent category nor any value, moreover, their opposites are of the same nature. Action that submits to the primary order, and imitates it, is called 'good action,' or *sukṛta*. It can be judged as proper action rather than as good action because its fulfilment brings no extra reward. However, one who fails to fulfil his duty to the cosmic order is punished. That punishment is called sin, or *pāpa*.

This understanding is connected with the primordial ritual act. The primary being related to the ritual act is an ideal state: a state of harmony, deriving from sacrifice and maintained by sacrifice. Therefore the basic prescription is connected with the persistence of this state, i.e. with the re-construct-

tion of the cosmogony. When the primordial state is taken as a state of harmony and a perfect state, all acts must follow the primordial rules, for the act of seeking something new is treated as spoiling the primordial harmony. The proper celebration of the sacrifice is called *sukṛta*. When there is any mistake or deviation from a rule, the sacrifice is called *duṣkṛta*, or wrongly done.

In this context, it is quite natural to describe the term 'bad' as something connected with an omission, a mistake, incomplete action, impure thing or sin. I consider that we are justified in understanding this group of terms as denoting negative values only if we explain the etymological sources of these terms by the idea of the ritual act. Therefore 'bad' means something that spoils the primordial harmony, something that does not 'imitate' or 're-create' the cosmic order.

The pan-Indian law of *karma* generally arose out of such interpretations of the terms *sukṛta* and *duṣkṛta*. The etymology of the word *karman* comes from the same root, *kr*, as the terms denoting 'good and bad,' generally describing an act. An act, or *karman*, is not understood as an independent event. It refers to the past because it arises out of previous events, and to the future because it bears the consequences of these events. The law of *karma* transcends and, at the same time, contains the diametrically opposed values 'good and bad.' This kind of comprehension of values is characteristic for *saṃsāra*.

In this context, it is very interesting to examine how the term *sukṛta* describes man. (The best example may be found in the *Upanishads*, especially in the *Aitareya*.) After subsequent manifestations of the primary being, out of the face of the primordial man arise entities which are treated as divinities. They are called at the same time *devatā* (divinities) and *indriya* (senses). Thus, their sensual character with all its consequences is pointed out here. The self, or *ātman*, marks the divinities with thirst and hunger, which is connected with *kāma*, the main impulse of these entities toward action in the manifested world.

As long as an individual exists in the realm of the manifested world, he is submitted to the nature of *kāma*, desire, and he experiences the world through the senses. Therefore, the most common reception of the external world would be translated into aesthetic categories. And what at the beginning meant: 'I like it, I do not like it' or 'it is good for me (or not)' begins to be treated according to the absolute categories: 'it is generally good' or 'it is generally bad.'

From the *Aitareya* we know that only man can comprehend all created worlds. Man is called *sukṛta*. This is the same term used for the properly

celebrated sacrifice, which imitates the primary cosmogonic myth; man imitates by himself all the manifested worlds. The term *sukṛta* does not refer to the pre-creative stage but to the first stage or hypostasis of the manifested world.

All the terms under discussion appear as relative categories and they are secondarily absolutised from aesthetic values. But classical Indian thought assumed the intention to attain the ultimate ethical model as the postulated ideal of action. This is obviously connected with assuming the model in which full reality and perfection can be ascribed only to the unconditioned, primordial world.

As is widely known, the goal of that method is to leave *saṃsāra*, i.e., to attain *mokṣa*. Therefore, the beginning and the end, which are presented in the *Upanishad*, show two oppositely oriented goals. One is connected with maintaining the world by means of sacrifice; the second is aimed at liberation, or escape from the world of *karman* and *saṃsāra* by means of *yoga*. The above goals are marked by the two principal ethical values. The choice between them is responsible for remaining within *saṃsāra* or with attaining *mokṣa*.

The good is one thing, the gratifying is quite another; their goals are different, both bind a man.

Good things await him who picks the good; by choosing the gratifying, one misses one's goal.

Both the good and the gratifying present themselves to a man;

The wise assess them, note their difference; and choose the good over the gratifying;

But the fool chooses the gratifying rather than what is beneficial. (*Kaṭha* 2.1–2)

The above fragment confirms all our considerations on the subject of 'good and bad.' From the linguistic analysis and by appealing to the model of the world marked by the cosmogonic rite, we come to the conclusion that it is very difficult to speak about absolute values in the ethical aspect. And here also, although the description is related to the opposition 'good and bad,' the choice is not simply judged as 'good' or 'bad.' This is connected with absolute goodness, i.e., *mokṣa*, which is called *śreyas*. The term *śreyas* denotes the most splendid, most beautiful, the highest good, fortune, the state of happiness, sometimes connected with the possession of many goods. A similar state is designated elsewhere in the *Upanishads* places by the terms *sukha* (happiness) or even *ānanda* (bliss). Keeping in mind that Sanskrit terms from the first *Vedic* texts denote the goal and the

way to attain that goal simultaneously, we see that the choice of the realm of one value is connected with the aim, i.e. with *mokṣa*.

The description of the polarisation of the two ways or two models of life, symbolised by the terms *śreyas* and *preyas*, recalls the Stoic understanding of wisdom. The fragment of *Kaṭha* discussed above shows that in the *Upanishads*, as well as among the Stoics, we cannot speak of gradations of good or of wisdom. Someone is totally wise or not wise at all. He is wise who knows – that is, who knows the real nature of reality and of the world. Through this knowledge he can attain *mokṣa*. It takes a great deal of time and requires a great deal of work, but the result is immediate. And if the equation *jñāna = mokṣa* is true, it means that wisdom cannot be graded. Wisdom is attributed to somebody who possesses complete knowledge. Action plays a secondary role. What is meant by a secondary role has been a point of discussion among Indian philosophers and theologians. However, an ultimate solution has not yet been found.

In the light of the above considerations, we have to look for a description of the realm of *preyas*, which is placed in opposition to the term *śreyas*. The realm of *śreyas* is univocally good and homogenous; it is the return to the source, to the state of ultimate harmony. The realm of the *preyas* is the realm of action, of gradation. The term *preyas* is the comparative of the adjective *priya* (liked, favourite, wanted, own, dear). Thus, the realm of *preyas* denotes something nicer or dearer, in the sensual and volitional context. The choices of somebody who belongs to the realm of *preyas* are motivated by feelings and desires: *kāma*. And *kāma* is the basic motive on which sinking into *saṃsāra* depends. Thus, once again we see that all categories constituting the manifested level of the world have merely relative values.

From the analysis of terms appealing to the ethical domain, the conclusion is derived that all values contrasting with the ultimate level appear to be related. The aim of every activity is ultimately submitted to transcending the phenomenal world and reaching the level which is above all valuations and discriminations. Ethical values are closest to the absolute domain and they stand between two dimensions of reality: the absolute and the sensual world. The analysis of these terms revealed that ethical values can be interpreted as the transfer of aesthetic values in the moral dimension.

The classical Indian model appears from one side as a nonlinear, dynamic system in which every part remains in a restored relationship with the whole, but from the other side that system is 'built' as a hierarchy in which the external, unobtrusive levels and dimensions are transcended by higher ones. The

cosmological and cosmogonic apprehensions of the world of phenomena and aesthetic theories are founded through understanding the complex of the body, nerves, and psychological reactions and of focussing attention on the moment of experience leading to liberation from discrimination. Most important, in the context of this idea, is to stress the interdependence of conditions, interactions and relations between the whole and the parts. Every part expresses the whole (as in a hologram). In such a system there is no place for any dichotomy or polarisation into binary oppositions such as: animated/unanimated, limited/ unlimited, nature/man, physical/spiritual, *sacrum/profanum*. However, we have seen that, apart from treating the world as a whole, we can speak about the transcendence of particular levels and transfers of one system of values to a higher dimension. Therefore we can speak about a hierarchy. The way up starts from the realm experienced by the senses, which can be judged according to aesthetic categories.

Let us start with a short philological analysis of terms denoting the aesthetic domain. These terms appeal to the third *guna* ascribed to the *Brahman*, to *ānanda*, which denotes the state of bliss or happiness and refers to the state in which the ultimate reality is experienced. In *advaita* the absolute is above any discrimination, so it should be essentially identified with primordial attributes. But to experience something, to feel happy in some state, is still an act and every act is due to discrimination, even if very subtle. We have seen that the same could be said about the domain of *cit – jñāna*. But when we consider this *guna* within the European scholastic frame, we have the transcendental, Beauty, which does not denote our reception of the absolute but rather its primordial attribute.

So let us look at terms denoting 'beautiful.' In Sanskrit some of the terms used to describe beauty are: *cāru*, *sundara*, *rucira*, *sudṛśya*, *śobhara*, *rūpavān*, *rūpī*, *surūpa*, *manorama*, *manojña*, *sumukha*, *sādhu*, *śriyukta*. Among these terms we can discriminate two groups. The terms: *rūpavān*, *rūpī*, *surūpa* denote beauty as possessing a form (*rūpa*), as something external which can refer us to the material dimension. The term *surūpa* extends that interpretation and suggests that the form is good and proper (*su*). In this context beauty is that which possesses the proper form. It is a kind of denotation of an aesthetic object. To these groups we can add also the following terms: *manorama*, *manojña*, *sumukha*. These notions refer to the relation between the subject and the object of aesthetic experience.

We have also other terms. The word *sundara* probably comes from: *su-nara* and denotes simply 'the good, proper man.' It harmonises with the term *sādhu* (goodness, virtue; later, a person on a very high, spiritual

level). This is an example of a situation where the same terms appeal to the sensual, aesthetic and ethical levels.

The terms *śobhana* and *śrīyukta* denote clear, luminous, brilliant. Among the categories used in Indian aesthetics, they describe pure sattvic experience.

Now a few words about the terms denoting something ugly, unsightly, hideous. Here we have: *kurūpa*, *aparūpa*, *virūpa*, *rūpahina*, *kadākāra*, *kut-sitākāra*, *durdarśana*. The first group appeals, analogously to the words denoting beauty, to the presented, phenomenal reality, to the domain of matter. But here they mean some kind of deprivation, lack of something, rejection. The term *durdarśana* can be translated as bad conduct, bad view, or bad opinion.

Without going into detailed philological analysis, we can say that terms denoting beauty and ugliness refer to an object of experience and to the state deriving from that experience as well. Even these terms can refer to a dynamic situation which, from the dimension that has been experienced as the presented level, should lead to a much more primordial level. This harmonises with the classical Indian view that the phenomenal dimension of the world is subordinated to the unconditioned level. The manner of action and of conduct in the empirical world depends on the level of knowledge of reality.

Now we should focus on aesthetic values only. The quality of aesthetic experience depends on the quality of our choices. One of the domains of our choices is initiated by the sense of taste. I think that it may be interesting to analyse particular terms denoting something tasty or not-tasty in the context of our considerations of beauty and ugliness. All our above considerations have concluded that primary aesthetic subjective categories became absolutised, and thus the categories of beauty and ugliness fall into the categories of good and bad. Let us look at the notion of taste, which is one of the motives for some kind of aesthetic experience and which can lead to the categories of beauty and ugliness.

In Sanskrit something tasty (generally: good, proper taste) is denoted by the terms: *rasika*, *sarasa*, *surasa*. Something not-tasty is *arasika*, *arasajña*. Thus, the main term denoting taste is *rasa*. The term *rasa* has a few other meanings as well. *Rasa* is something fluid, that is, the sap of a tree in the context 'essence of a tree.'

Now, take the bees, son. They prepare the honey by gathering nectar (*rasa*) from a variety of trees and reducing that nectar to a homogeneous whole. In that state the nectar from each different tree is not able to differentiate: 'I am the nectar of that tree', and 'I am the nectar of this tree'. In exactly the same way, son, when all

these creatures merge into the existent, they are not aware that: 'We are merging into the existent'. No matter what they are in the world – whether a tiger, a lion, a wolf, a boar, a worm, a moth, a gnat, or a mosquito – they all merge into that. The finest essence here – that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is truth, that is the self (*ātman*). And that's how you are, Śvetaketu. (*Chāndogya* 6.9)

This is a very important passage in the Indian tradition. For the first time there appears the famous formula *tattvamasi* which indicates the identity of the principle of the macrocosmos, *Brahman*, and the principle of the microcosmos, *ātman*. In this *Upanishad*, *rasa* is compared to taste, to nectar. The impression of particular tastes is secondary. In reality there exists one taste only, the ultimate one. This example exemplifies the thesis that ultimately only the one *ātman* exists and particular souls are something secondary, conditioned, therefore not real in the absolute sense. And due to the experience of the world through particular rasas, by differentiating between particular rasas and clinging to them, we go deeper and deeper into *sāṃsāra*.

The term *rasa* also denotes marrow; in ancient India marrow was identified with the principle of man in his physical aspect. *Rasa* is also mercury, quicksilver, the alchemic stone. It was a symbol of the principle and the secret of life. Therefore it was associated with semen – in mythology, with Śiva's semen.

Then he said to them: 'You who know this self here, the one common to all men, as somehow distinct – you eat food. But when someone venerates this self here, the one common to all men, as measuring the size of a span and as beyond all measure, he eats food within all the worlds, all the beings, and all the selves. Now, of this self here, the one common to all men – the brightly shining is the head; the dazzling is the eye; what follows diverse paths is the breath; the ample is the trunk; the earth is the feet; the sacrificial enclosure is the stomach; the sacred grass is the body hair; the householder's fire is the heart; the southern fire is the mind; and the offertorial fire is the mouth. (*Chāndogya* 5.18)

There are certain considerations concerning the Agni-Vaiśvanara who is identified with *ātman*. There, a problem of identity appears between the whole and the parts. The ritual act is celebrated for the benefit of every particular part. Every particular rite is consummated and tested to prove if it is *priya* (good, nice, gratifying). Let us recall how important a role the term *priya* plays in the context of ethical values.

Reality as a whole is more than a simple sum of all the parts. Every element connected with a given domain of activity is necessary and struc-

turally integrated into the whole scheme. It is some kind of repetition of *Puruṣasākta*. This fragment indicates the theory, very common in Indian thought, that everything is very deeply founded in the world of biology and the organism. The picture of the world is connected with the earthly impression of the body and the mind. Let us quote:

Appearance and taste, smell and sounds, touches and sexual acts –
That by which one experiences these, by the same one understands –
what then is here left behind? (*Kaṭha* 4.3)

Even in the smallest phenomena of reality, every part of the world reflects the whole, as in a hologram. The touch of what is unconditioned can be recognised on every level, at every moment, but if its transformation was to be stable it had to be transformed and transcendent on all levels, starting from the very material and ending in the subtle mist. Thus, in such a picture of the world understood as a total harmony, for the sake of soteriology, there must be some hierarchy, some linear order. The following *Upanishad* helps us to find that order:

The separate nature of the senses; their rise and fall as they come separately into being –
When a wise man knows this, he does not grieve.
Higher than the senses is the mind; higher than the mind is the essence;
Higher than the essence is the immense self; higher than the immense is the unmanifest.
Higher than the unmanifest is the person, pervading all and without any marks.
Knowing him, a man is freed, and attains immortality. (*Kaṭha* 6.6–8)

Knowledge begins from sensual experience. All Indian philosophical systems put perception, or *pratyakṣa*, as the first among many sources and means of knowledge. *Pratyakṣa* denotes, exactly, what is before the eyes, or *prati-akṣ*. Therefore it can refer to sensual knowledge. The same is true of *advaita*, although its ultimate reality is above any discussion and transcends the phenomenal world. Then, how to combine the sensual and the transcendental understanding of the act of knowledge?

Generally speaking, we can say that the mechanism for knowing an object always remains the same; even the principle of the object remains the same, but, thanks to the more subtle act of knowledge, we more and more subtly penetrate the nature of the object. Thus, by looking in a linear order, we grasp and recognise a particular thing, starting with sensual experience and moving step by step to more subtle levels. This sensual aes-

thetic experience (*rasa*) refers to the most fundamental and to the most sensual form of reality as well.

Rasa is aesthetic experience; it is emotion which is cause and effect as well. Emotion is the state and *rasa* is the quality of that state. I believe that this is the key to understanding the typology of many *rasas*.

Know the self as a rider in a chariot, and the body, as simply the chariot.
 Know the intellect as the charioteer, and the mind, as simply the reins.
 The senses, they say, are the horses, and the sense objects are the paths around them;
 He who is linked to the body (*ātman*), senses and mind, the wise proclaim as the
 one who enjoys.
 When a man lacks understanding, and his mind is never controlled,
 His senses do not obey him, as bad horses, a charioteer.
 But when a man has understanding, is mindful and always pure;
 He does reach that final step, from which he is not reborn again. (*Kaṭha* 3.3–8)

The senses are the fundamental components of action. Without the senses the act of knowledge does not exist, just as a chariot does not move without horses. The senses initiate every process of knowledge. Primary energy, by its nature, above everything, creating all forms, entered a domain which can be evaluated in aesthetic categories as well.

When we place any element in a cosmological scheme, on one hand we give it a higher value because it is universal (every part influences the whole in a distinctive manner), but on the other hand we deprive it of its personal, individual, creative character. All activities, understood ideally, should have not a creative but a re-creative character. The same is true of aesthetic experience; it derives from the individual level and, by transcending particular levels of the recognising subject, it reaches the supra-individual state. Thus the subsequent steps of knowing an object move toward the state of reality, which is beyond any description.

From the ultimate point of view all values appear relative. Is there any sense in this context in speaking about any values, making any differentiations? Is there any sense in speaking about good and bad things, about beautiful and ugly objects? Our considerations lead us to the conclusion that even though all values appear relative, they are still indispensable. The process of valuation enables us to prepare norms of action; in turn, these norms indicate which kind of action and which kind of experience serve the aim of reaching the ultimate goal. So aesthetic and ethical values delineate the passage between what is given in sensual experience and the ultimate undifferentiated reality.

All English quotations from the *Upanishads* are taken from Patrick Olivelle's translation, *The Upaniṣads*.

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