

THE DISCOURSE OF THE BEYOND AND NONDUALISM: REFLECTIONS ON ASTĀVAKRA ŚĀNKARA AND IBN ARABI

Muhammad Maroof Shah*

Abstract: Nondualism as presented in Aṣṭāvakra Gītā, Śānkara and Ibn Arabi implies the thesis that there is no need to invoke any notion of abstract beyond conceived in opposition to the world. The hypothesis of transcendental beyond needed to be affirmed as an object of faith and a proposition is here argued to be superfluous. Idealistic mystical philosophies of diverse traditions are not speculative ontological inquiries but fundamentally ways of looking at the world and their cognitive claims are often misrepresented with simplistic label of transcendentalism. Their primary interest is existential and psycho-spiritual and not any explanatory theory regarding this or the other world. Though explicitly upholding that the world as ordinarily experienced is not to be equated with Reality as such their view of transcendence needs to be understood in more nuanced way that appropriates much of reservations against transcendentalist thought currents today. I first quote some verses from Aṣṭāvakra Gītā that question a simplistic transcendentalist interpretation of Vedānta or Sufism and plead for seeing nondualism as an existential therapy that results in changed attitude towards everything by change in self-definition rather than a speculative metaphysical inquiry or philosophy in the modern sense of the term. The key arguments of the paper are that for achieving liberation or enlightenment we need not invoke any notion of beyond as a separate existential or conceptual category and then question, debate, relate to or be skeptical of it. Nothing needs to be done to access any proposed beyond of thought. Absolute receptivity or innocence alone is demanded and discoveries of this state can't be expressed in conceptual terms and this means that all ideological battles or appropriations of Vedāntic and Sufi "position" are suspect.

* Dr. MUHAMMAD MAROOF SHAH, Research Scholar, Sher-i-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, Kashmir. India. Email: maroof123@yahoo.com.

The most common misinterpretation of so-called idealistic philosophies including Nondualism is that they are idealistic in the sense that they posit a world (of ideas) beyond the world and thus talk of the otherworld while disprivileging this world that is ordinarily known or experienced by all. It is assumed that a world beyond this world *exists* and that is the true or real world and salvation requires believing or knowing that world and that may require escaping, negating, transcending this world. The world is opposed to reality and *episteme* to *doxa* resulting in a cleavage bridging which becomes impossible or creates other interminable problems, both moral and intellectual. The project of bridging reality and consciousness is foredoomed but countless men have been impelled to take it and this constitutes tragic lot of humans. The present paper attempts to make few related points.

1. There is no postulation of any Beyond that appearances can't in any way reveal or symbolize in Advaita Vedānta. Brahman is this world seen *sub specie eternitatis*. It is nondifferent from this world.

2. The world is not illusion in Vedānta or in any Integral tradition and is a sort of dream that needs interpretation but a real dream that has a reality of its own. The Beyond is the depth dimension of what we ordinarily call reality. Things refuse to reveal themselves fully to any rationalistic or empiricist analysis. Mystery of existence is what constitutes negative divine or what approximates to *Nirguna Brahman*. The unmanifest is unmanifest to the eye of reason or senses but it doesn't remain as unmanifest when subject object duality is transcended by means of intellectual intuition.

3. The hypothesis of the Beyond is superfluous from a perspective of realized or enlightened person as *samsāra* is identical with *nirvāṇa* or distinction between *māyā* and Brahman, self and non-self is transcended.

4. As there is no Beyond that needs to be accessed Vedānta prescribes non-doing and avoidance of practices aiming at negating the given or real or adding anything to our natural innocence. The problem is that we are not simple. We have imposed many things on us and built imaginary worlds and thus artificially alienated ourselves from reality. As we are far from our home we need to travel to reach home. And that process of travelling is what meditation, rituals and other traditional methods constitute.

5. The Beyond is neither far off abstract realm nor some state to which access needs to be made. It is what is when rightly perceived by transcending self centric vision or object directed consciousness. The

Beyond is not anything beyond what Augustine calls *what is*. It is the ground of every perception and imagination and in fact it is the true perceiver or Seer. The world is its play. There is no autonomous self. All is Brahman. The self's salvation lies in its consent to be nothing, or its acceptance to be ripped apart by reality so that there is no enlightenment or liberation seeking self left. The question of seeking a beyond is tied to the unhappy consciousness that needs another to constitute itself. Dropping all such seeking is what enlightenment or liberation consists of.

I propose to discuss the essence of Nondualism as presented as Aṣṭāvakra Gītā, Śankara and Ibn Arabi to argue the above mentioned points. I first quote a few verses from Aṣṭāvakra Gītā that question a simplistic transcendentalist interpretation of Vedānta or Sufism and plead for seeing nondualism as an existential therapy that results in changed attitude towards everything by change in self-definition rather than a speculative metaphysical inquiry or philosophy in the modern sense of the term. These statements capture the essence of Vedāntic doctrine of liberation and the rest of the paper is a commentary to elucidate these verses and thus argue the case for a notion of what may be called immanent transcendence.

The body, heaven and hell, bondage and liberation, and fear too, all this is pure imagination. What is there left to do for me whose very nature is consciousness? (2.20) who can prevent the great-soul person who has known this whole world as himself from living as he pleases? (4.4) How wonderful it is that in the limitless ocean of myself the waves of living beings arise, collide, play and disappear, according to their natures (2.25) For the yogi who has found peace, there is no distraction or one-pointedness, no higher knowledge or ignorance, no pleasure and no pain. (18.10) There is no delusion, world, meditation on That, or liberation for the pacified great soul. All these things are just the realm of imagination (18.14). The wise man, unlike the worldly man, does not see inner stillness, distraction or fault in himself, even when living like a worldly man (18.18). He by whom inner distraction is seen may put an end to it, but the noble one is not distracted. When there is nothing to achieve, what is he to do? (18.17) He who acts without being able to say why, but not because he is a fool, he is one liberated while still alive, happy and blessed. He thrives even in *samsāra* (18.26). He who is beyond mental stillness and distraction, does not desire either liberation or anything else. Recognizing that things are just constructions of the imagination, that great soul lives as God here and now (18.28). Some think that

something exists, and others that nothing does. Rare is the man who does not think either, and is thereby free from distraction (18.42). The straightforward person does whatever arrives to be done, good or bad, for his actions are like those of a child (18.49). Happy he stands, happy he sits, happy sleeps and happy he comes and goes. Happy he speaks, and happy he eats. Such is the life of a man at peace (18.59). The mind of the fool is always caught in an opinion about becoming or avoiding something, but the wise man's nature is to have no opinions about becoming and avoiding (18.63). There are no rules, dispassion, renunciation or meditation for one who is pure receptivity by nature, and admits no knowable form of being (18.71). For the wise man who is always unchanging and fearless there is neither darkness nor light nor destruction, nor anything. 18.78 There is neither heaven nor hell nor even liberation during life. In a nutshell, in the sight of the seer nothing exists at all (18.80). The wise man does not dislike samsāra or seek to know himself. Free from pleasure and impatience, he is not dead and he is not alive (18.83). The dispassionate does not praise the good or blame the wicked. Content and equal in pain and pleasure, he sees nothing that needs doing (18.82). There is neither dissolute behavior nor virtue, nor even discrimination of the truth for the sage who has reached the goal and is the very embodiment of guileless sincerity (18.92). Neither happy nor unhappy, neither detached nor attached, neither seeking liberation nor liberated, he is neither something nor nothing (18.96). Not distracted in distraction, in mental stillness not poised, in stupidity not stupid, that blessed one is not even wise in his wisdom (18.97). The seer is without thoughts even when thinking, without senses among the senses, without understanding even in understanding and without a sense of responsibility even in the ego (18.95). For me, established in my own glory, there is no religion, sensuality, possessions, philosophy, duality or even non-duality (19.2). For me established in my own glory, there is no past, future or present. There is no space or even eternity (19.3). For me established in my own glory, there is no self or non-self, no good or evil, no thought or even absence of thought (19.4). For me established in my own glory, there is no dreaming or deep sleep, no waking nor fourth state beyond them, and certainly no fear (19.5). For me established in my own glory, there is nothing far away and nothing near, nothing within or without, nothing large and nothing small (19.6) For me established in my own glory, there is no life or death, no worlds or things of the world, no distraction and no stillness of mind (19.7).

For me, free from the sense of dualism, there are no scriptures, no self-knowledge, no mind free from an object, no satisfaction and no freedom from desire (20.2). There is no world, no seeker for liberation, no yogi, no seer, no-one bound and no-one liberated. I remain in my own non-dual nature (20.6). For me who am forever unblemished, there is no judge, no standard, nothing to judge, and no judgement (20.8). For me who am forever actionless, there is no distraction or one-pointedness of mind, no lack of understanding, no stupidity, no joy and no sorrow (20.9). For me who am blessed and without limitation, there is no initiation or scripture, no disciple or teacher, and no goal of human existence (20.13). For me who am forever pure there is no illusion, no samsāra, no attachment or detachment, no living being and no God (20.11). There is no emanation or return, no goal, means, seeker or achievement. I remain in my own non-dual nature (20.7). For me who am always free from deliberations there is neither conventional truth nor absolute truth, no happiness and no suffering (20.10).

These statements make a few points quite clearly that could be stated in the form of three propositions:

1. For achieving liberation or enlightenment we need not invoke any notion of beyond as a separate existential or conceptual category and then question, debate, relate to or be skeptical of it.

2. Nothing needs to be done to access any proposed beyond of thought. There can be no holier than thou attitude, condemnation or absolutization of a particular ethical position. Enlightenment is transcendence of all ethical judgments; it implies 'Judge not.' Perennialist and postmodernist critiques of moralism are seconded by Vedānta.

3. Absolute receptivity or innocence alone is demanded and discoveries of this state can't be expressed in conceptual terms and this means that all ideological battles or appropriations of Vedāntic and Sufi "position" are suspect. Neither knowledge nor ignorance but complete innocence is salvation. Radical questioning of every claim of reason and experience to resist all totalizing, absolutizing claims is what is implied in Vedāntic/Sufistic rejection of discourse of Beyond. Vedānta is a mode of philosophizing that disowns philosophizing as ordinarily understood as attempt to discover truth or dissolve mystery at the heart of existence and propounds instead a psycho-spiritual shock therapy that results in absolute receptivity and what Nietzsche would call innocence of becoming.

We can adduce a number of arguments against the thesis of a Beyond

opposed to or completely transcendent to world. Firstly, it is a creation of thought and none of the creations or dualistic creations of thought are real or completely real. It is thought's limitations to invent abstractions like classes to categorize and then comprehend anything. Conceptual intellect divides, classifies and synthesizes and all these operations are necessary to its task. Thus unity of reality is thrown aboard by the very operation of conceptual intellect. Laws of logic are not the laws of nature and we are fools if we dictate terms to nature and assume it must respect our logical and linguistic schemata. Opposing appearance and reality or Māyā and Brahman or this world and other world is fallout of such an operation. Secondly, consciousness is other directed and thus caught up in the futile and tragic passion of being itself. Consciousness and reality can't coincide. Object as the other constitutes it. To look at the world is to be blind towards it. And this is what Rgveda meant when it said that "He who made it didn't know it./He who saw it, saw it vanish from his sight." Thirdly, if there were a Beyond we should be able to access it, to relate to it if it is to be considered at all as something worthy of inquiry. If we access it, it doesn't remain a beyond. When thought posits a beyond it is not truly the beyond as thought itself creates the distinction between the world and reality or this here and that there or separate realm of beyond. Fourthly, it is categorically maintained by all scriptures that the kingdom of God is within, accessible and knowing one's self is knowing reality. This means we can't situate this beyond in some otherworldly realm. If we grant theology is autology in traditionalist perspective as Ananda Coomaraswamy has tirelessly attempted to show we see the beyond of theology is then within us or in fact is our deepest subjectivity. In any case we are the beyond or we become it and that means it doesn't remain as beyond. Jīvanmukta is traditionally believed to live beyond, to breathe it. Fifthly nondualism is incompatible with any doctrine or thesis that maintains strict separation or break at any point in the structure of reality. Sixthly, it hardly needs to be argued that religion is all about participation in the sacral rhythms. Theosis is the aim of religions. Assimilation of divine attributes is the end of all esotericisms. Sanctification means participation in that which confers sanctity which is a higher or transcendent reality. Dialogue between man and God or I and Thou is possible only if beyond is accessible or experiential in some sense. Thus the notion of transcendence should not be seen as a Beyond, an ideality or abstraction that could possibly be questioned. Modern skeptical view of transcendence, though itself problematic on many accounts, nevertheless succeeds in bringing home a point that transcendence can't be taken

as an airy abstraction, inaccessible Absolute or alien will. Secular versions of transcendence can't of course supplant or substitute traditional view but we need to understand that exoteric religion has inherited a problematic view of the beyond that authentic esotericism has always sought to correct and today we need in our skeptical age reviving the traditional view while being alert to complex variety of critical positions that largely positivist or anti-metaphysical (post)modern thought takes against received interpretations. It is imperative that we clarify the notion of transcendence in Vedānta and address the concerns of skeptical thinkers who find it abstract, remote and unrelated to our other important concerns or unacceptable or unworthy of consideration for some other reasons. I shall be arguing that the construction of a category called beyond in most of philosophical appropriations of Advaita Vedānta is suspect and true notion of beyond as presented in Śankara or Aṣṭāvakra is hardly questionable.

I now discuss the problem of the beyond or transcendence in Advaita Vedānta and comment on the same from Zen point of view which also claims to be nondualistic and deriving all the conclusions from nondualistic standpoint. I wish to foreground the point that silence proposed as an answer to metaphysical/theological questions in Buddhism is also the answer proposed by Advaita Vedānta. Osho, though often undependable as a commentator on tradition or scriptures, has however lucidly and insightfully commented on Zen Buddhism and on Aṣṭāvakra Gītā. Here I refer to it to state the case against the Beyond conceived as abstraction or other inaccessible realm or accessible to some chosen souls on which grace, understood as power of capricious divine will, confers some special states or experiences.

Rationalistic approach employs concepts to understand reality and has usually been too arrogant to recognize its own constructions or fictions or question itself or the tools it employs. Logic has been projected as something that gives us sufficient ground to question the very notion of transcendence. Logic and language can't, in Vedāntic/Buddhist/Sufi framework, unveil reality and must be either negatively used or thrown aboard as one progresses to final stage of enlightenment. Logical approach to Unitarianism is disqualified in principle to demand serious hearing from us and the dualisms of immanence and transcendence, inner and outer, manifest and unmanifest, this world and otherworld or beyond are its creations and need not be taken too literally or seriously and thus acknowledged or refuted. As Osho states: "A logical God, a logical universe, can't be a real universe – because logic is an imposition, it is an

invention of man. The trees don't know about it, and the stars don't know anything about it. It is only man [with his naming, labeling business of language] who imposes a certain pattern" (Osho, 1979:127). Osho also gives the reason for this imposition of patterns. He says, "All patterns are imposed out of fear. The fear is that man always wants to label things – once he has labeled a thing he feels very much at ease. Now he thinks he knows" (Osho, 1979:127). "If we have not named tree as pine tree, for instance, we would have "felt uneasy, because that is illogical, that tree beyond human language, human comprehension, is standing there as challenge" (Osho, 1979:128). "When I say life is illogical, I mean it is not nameable ... You can't pin point it ... No word will be able to express it. Lao Tzu says: Truth can't be said. The moment you say it, it becomes untrue.... Reality (is) ...beyond the comprehension of mind" (Osho, 1979:128). In postmodern terms Osho is saying that life has no signified or its signified is unknowable. Truth is not knowable pin-pointable signified. Only infinite play of signifiers – living moment by moment and living atomically – is there. No one can know the signified.

If we identify the Beyond with the Truth then scriptures have categorically denied possibility of discourse of it. The Tao that can be spoken of is not the Tao. Brahman of thought is not the real Brahman. "I say truth can't be said, never has been said, will never be said – so whatsoever I am saying can't be true" (Osho, 1979: 111). The function of Master or the Buddha is thus only to make people aware of the point that truth can't be said. That is why the Buddha remained silent on ultimate metaphysical questions. Mysticism deconstructing both phonocentrism and graphocentrism seeks that primordial silence which preceded God's speech or word, where all contradictions are resolved. For Derrida, the death of God and the deferral of presence mean that within every representative act of discourse is inaudibly audible a silence, a death, a deferral, a difference that can't be presented as such. Only silence hears it. Authentic Religion escapes being simply a textual product by emphasizing being and silence. The scripture always points beyond itself, deconstructing itself, always asking us to go beyond or transcend scripture's textual reality and find God in silence and void. Nothing has any meaning and everything is nothing save God who signifies only impossibility of all significations, of communication and *Shūnyatā*. The silence of the Buddha on fourteen metaphysical questions is *the* religious answer to all of them. Nietzsche was not quite anti-traditional in his diatribe against truth and proposal for freedom from truth. *Sat-puruṣa* as an ideal in Vedānta is not

incompatible with this skepticism regarding rationalistic metaphysical construction of truth. For Advaitins truth that is sought is not propositional or cognitive but existential, the truth of being, of 'isness', of innocence.

As nothing is to be known or discovered or attained Aṣṭāvakra proposes doing nothing. The methods of concentration or meditation are only needed as long as there is any self-created exile from our simple innocent receptive sensibility and thus ideally dispensable and could be hindrances in the real path to liberation. The notion of Beyond conjures up a complex esoteric science that shows the way to it and easily becomes elitist and then a source of oppression or unjust privileges. Priestocracy has as one of its tools exploitation of this notion.

Consideration of the problem of meaning and tragic lot of humans in Vedāntic perspective also helps to clarify the notion of beyond and its manipulation by vested interest groups. Nothing ultimately consoles and in fact the very need to get consolation for life's tragedies is a sign of bad faith or inauthenticity. The author of Ecclesiastics' outburst "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," describes Vedāntic outlook. From the Vedāntic perspective man as a situated being is doomed to ignorance, homelessness and death and his passion to be immortal, to be God is futile. There is no way of bridging consciousness and reality. Desire to mold the world according to its heart's desire is vain. Man's lot is tragic. For thought, for feeling and for desire there is answer or fulfillment.

Indian thought has often been described as transcendentalist and primary method of achieving liberation from bondage to the world of finitude or immanence is said to be a movement away from the unreal to the real, from Māyā to Brahman through transcendence, ecstasy, negation, turning within. I argue that this is extremely misleading, and it is an unwarranted philosophical (as distinguished from metaphysical one as understood by champions of Perennialist metaphysical school) approach to Vedānta which creates problems. Far from attempting to plead for taking Indian thought as enshrined in Vedānta as genuinely philosophical or arguing that Śankara is a philosopher (and Nagarjuna a logician) as many philosophers have been doing we need to acknowledge that there is no virtue in being philosophical in the sense post Aristotelian and especially post-Cartesian West has been understanding it. Philosophy, for Indians, has been a preparation for death though not aimed at death really. Indian sage isn't an equivalent of Western philosopher and he doesn't base his "position" of no position on any disputable rationalist axiom or proposition. He doesn't take recourse to any "as if" position that propounds cautiously formulated propositions

where enough room for ambiguity and uncertainty remains to warrant any interpretation. Approaching the fundamental problems of religion and philosophy from a perspective of what we can call, “the school of realization” which is to be differentiated from the twin approaches of philosophy and scholastic theology, Indian sage assigns himself the task of not only intellectually knowing but existentially realizing truth and reality. Employing metaphysical perspective¹ (which, by definition and as the Perennialist authors² point out, corresponds most closely to pure truth and is better called metaperspective or divine perspective due to its universality and comprehensiveness) instead of religious/theological which necessarily anthropomorphizes or rational philosophical approach which inevitably is limiting because of the limiting faculty it uses (reason/reflection/logic/concepts/categories), Vedāntic sages ultimately aim at moral-spiritual perfection through radical redefinition of self, freedom through the vision of truth or knowledge of things as they are (essences/*noumena* rather than science of ratiocinative arguments or mere linguistic analysis or clarification of concepts. For Śankara as for Aṣṭāvakra or Muslim sage Ibn Arabi God or Brahman is Reality, immanent and transcendent. The Real alone is, and there is no distance between us and It. We are already there in the lap of God – we have never been really away and cannot be away from It. God has never been missed. We have forgotten or fallen asleep but this doesn’t alter the fact that God is our very being, our inmost reality. Man is inwardly God and outwardly a creature according to Ibn ‘Arabî. The world is God’s visible face. The real, the obvious, that which is always with us, has been always with us, will always be with us, is God. God is the Isness of things. He is the Meaning of everything. God constitutes all-pervasive Environment (*al-Muhit* in the Quranic parlance) in which normal man lives, moves and has his being.

The distinction between transcendentalism and Unitarianism or Nondualism has often been forgotten. Śankara has been read as a transcendentalist. Anti-transcendentalist (post)modernity has really few problems with Nondualism but once we read the later in transcendentalist terms huge problems surface up. Modern skeptical thought has problematized an image of God bequeathed by dualistic thought (philosophical and theological). It has few problems against the Unitarian view. Transcendence understood as mystery of existence too is hard to deny for the unbelieving world. Science and rational thought has not stripped the veil of mystery from the universe and life.

Śankara’s understanding of transcendence can be better appreciated by

comparing it with that of Ibn Arabi, the great Moroccan Sufi metaphysician who influentially pleaded for nondualist position. For Ibn Arabi God is the only Experiencer, Knower and Actor. For Ibn Arabi we don't see but God sees and we don't hear but God listens. God is immanent in every experience. As he says:

If we gaze, it is upon Him; if we use our intelligence, it is towards Him; if we reflect, it is upon Him; if we know it is Him. For it is He, who is revealed in every face, sought in every sign, worshipped in every object of worship, and pursued in the invisible and the visible. The whole world prays to Him, prostrates itself before Him and glorifies His praise; tongues speak of Him, hearts are enraptured by love for Him, minds are bewildered in Him (Ibn Arabi, 1972-91, III: 449-50).

For Ibn Arabi God is neither absent nor on leave nor hidden as many moderns have complained. What is needed is only receptivity, a polished mirror of the heart and God will teach it. Ibn 'Arabî invites man to "direct knowledge from the most ancient place. In this way there are no real states or stations to be brought through. There is no platform of understanding to be brought about. There are no conditions to be changed or attributes to be attained. All that is required is the proper response, the request to be informed directly from the most interior place." He prayed: "Lord grants me as a gift the perfect aptitude to receive from the most holy effusion."

For Ibn Arabi, strictly speaking, men don't and can't find God rather they are found by God. Men can't give witness of God but God himself is the real witness. He finds Himself. In strictly nondualistic view God is not sought, because the seeker himself is in Him. One can only get lost in Him. And to get lost is to attain Him. Bewilderment is the highest station and attaining the station of no station is the supreme attainment. Realizing that everything is perfect this very moment (not to be understood as implying sociopolitical conservatism) or, in Buddhist (Nagarjunian) terminology, that *samsāra* is *nirvāṇa* is realizing God. Such notions as "sensible transcendental," "Ground of being" "depth of life" "mystery of things or existence" which many moderns have advocated as substitute metaphors for what used to be conventionally called the realm of beyond and seem to be given some representation in this fundamentally Unitarian view of God as Totality, as Reality.

There is something that we can't know in conceptual terms but that does not

make it a dustbin of superstitious ideas or esoteric *abracadabra*. That we can't know the First Principle conceptually should be a matter of celebration for us as it means familiarization will not kill us. It is Mystery that saves and that feeds poets and visionaries rather than (conceptual) knowledge that reduces object to a thing and thus removes sacred from the scene. The Pure Absolute or Essence (*Dhat*) in its fundamental aspect – and thus Meaning/Truth/ Presence/ Identity/ Reality *per se* – is beyond the human quest and all attempts to reach It, track it, pinpoint It, catch It in the net of language or realm of the finite or time, to conceptualize It, to imagine It, to speak about It, to affirm anything of It are doomed. Before the *Ipseity* or *Dhat* one can only be bewildered according to Ibn 'Arabî. The world is ultimately a Mystery, a Mystery of Mysteries and no rational or scientific approach could finally and completely demystify it. The world being ultimately a mystery that resists being demystified by means of conceptual intellect is what transcendence or the notion of beyond really means as Stace has explained in his *Time and Eternity* (1952). There is no humanly discoverable ultimate truth. All representations of the Real are provisional. God is ever glorified by every creature and exalted over whatever man can say about Him as Ibn Arabi keeps us reminding of the Quranic statements such as “Glory be to God the exalted.” This implies that the Real or Truth can't be appropriated in absolute terms. Man must be content to have only relative knowledge of things or God. There are countless veils on the countenance of God which though continuously being lifted can't be wholly lifted. Man can't afford to behold the naked truth. The Real has infinite aspects and can be approached from infinite contexts and thus perspectives. Man must travel ceaselessly as *Kitab-al-Isfar* attempts to argue. Ibn 'Arabî says in *Risâlat al-Anwâr*: “You should know that man has been on the journey ever since God brought him out of non-being into being.” The goal is not reached. For it is “the unspeakable, the impossible, the inconceivable, and the unattainable.” The goal is only glimpsed, sensed, and then lost. Meaning or Truth is never grasped in its fullness. It ever recedes. Truth escapes all our searching. We can have a vision of it, rather a glimpse of it through the phenomena which are *Its* symbols. This follows from the doctrine of God as Infinite and All-Possibility. God is not an object that one could somehow ever encompass or possess or grasp. Man's quest for the Absolute will have no full stop in all eternity. Life is perpetual becoming as God's infinite riches are inexhaustible and the Beauty that never ceases unveiling its infinite faces never ceases to attract its seekers to move on and on. Artists, scientists, mystics and lovers shall never be out of business. God is

continuously experienced, ever afresh in all new experiences. Rationalization, familiarization, demystification and desecralization of the world that ultimately make it inhuman, alienating and absurd and disrespectful towards the environment can't happen in the Akbarian perspective that sees the mysterious, sacred divine face in everything. Western philosophy, as Heidegger pointed out, is oblivious to the ground of being. It is not open to the sacred mystery of Being. It is not the philosopher but the poet who can show the track of the holy, to the sacred mystery of Being. Nothing in the world of known can express the Divine Darkness. All quests end in wonder. In the last analysis man knows nothing to its depth by means of senses and reason. Other modes of knowledge such as intellectual intuition give us another kind of knowledge that instead of making things comprehensible dissolves the knowing subject in the object preserving the ultimate mystery of things in the process. If to comprehend means to have discursive conceptual knowledge we comprehend nothing ultimately. All our explanations, analyses stop at a certain point. Things are as they are. Being or *wajud* in the last analysis a miracle or a scandal to reason. Man's prerogative is to contemplate and dissolve in the mystery of being. Though being is aware of itself this awareness has no analyzable or knowable structure.

Ibn 'Arabî denies originality to himself and the dubious virtue of thinking for oneself that individualistic modernism has promoted at its own peril. He says that he has written what he has been inspired and commanded to write, an assertion incomprehensible to modern philosophers. Ibn 'Arabî, like Śankara, is a commentator and not an original philosopher because he would make us aware of the non-human and participate in it and get absorbed in it. He is primarily a teacher, a Sufi Master, a guide, who leads to the revealed word, "the word that turns into reality the moment an innocent soul approaches it after its long sojourn in hell and purgatory" though the typical modern hero is adamant to remain in hell and can't allow baptism by fire to thoroughly consume him and transform him. He pleads for dialogue between the self and the world which both modern subjectivism or objectivism fail to conduct properly. Disenchantment of the world because of desecralization and consequent alienation and vulnerability to nihilism are a result of modern man's refusal to open the self towards grace emanating from revelation which is geared towards opening ordinarily closed channels of communication between the Word and man. God responds to human call only when man becomes nothing. All this means that scriptures don't instill in us a doctrine regarding the beyond that has to be accepted on faith but a method to

open up to the mystery of the sacred. The sacred is not on sale. Everyone has to individually travel the long road of de-individuation or decreation in the underworld or in purgatory to reach the royal door. The price of the Kingdom of God is very dear self. There is no teacher and no taught. The only teaching, if we can call it teaching at all, that scriptures inculcate is that we have to light unto ourselves and for this we need to die before death and abandon every hope, every desire, and every dream. This is existential challenge that the Word throws before all of us. No belief or action can save us. The Beyond is not for commoditization or sale or disputation in academic courts. The Faustian man is summoned to nothing short of death, the death of object directed consciousness, getting rid of predicating all sorts of things to the subject term I and thus required to be content with nothing. There is no belief or action that can save us. The Beyond is a sacred mystery to which access is always open but for the qualified ones only and poverty of spirit is the supreme qualification. It is doubtful if profane thinkers can have anything of great value to speak about the Beyond. And in fact they have stumbled in understanding its value and how to relate to it. They have wrongly identified or misallocated it and it is no wonder that most of them have been led to question the very possibility of redemption through death and or inexhaustible riches and beatitude that result from total unconditional submission to reality. The Beyond is either an abstraction or alien indifferent if not destructive will but rarely depth dimension of our world that we ignore only at our own peril. In fact the Beyond is what is but it is not available to everyone's gaze as it threatens to usurp one's whole illusory empire of ego and desire. The Beyond as a mere mental construct is a fiction as all mental constructions are and mere rational approach to it a blasphemy that cost man immortality but for the thoroughly decreed soul everything is of the Real and from the Real and has a message to convey if only of invitation to get dissolved in the vast Mystery that Existence is. The Beyond is not alien to us when we rightly understand what our true subjectivity consists of and what redeems us. It is nondifferent from self. It constitutes us if not looked in isolation from the world or opposed to it. Western philosophy having severed its ties with the pursuit of wisdom and substituted thought for intellection has been reduced to linguistic analysis and analysis of concepts and handmaiden of science and thus has more or less reductionist attitude towards the Mystery which Beyond is. No wonder that modern philosophy is largely oblivious of the very *raison d'être* of philosophy as traditionally conceived (which is preparation for death through intellection or

noetic vision and perfection of virtues). As Ibn Arabi has noted, the faculty of reason which is peculiar to man and which is taken as the mark of his superiority to other creatures if not under the tuition of intellection and revelation weaves around him an opaque veil which develops into an “ego” which hinders man from knowing the Absolute. Other creatures including minerals – this might come as a shock to modern ears – know their Creator – they are being-in-itself as Sartre would say and thus have no questions or problems – through natural intuition (*khashf*) or through an immediate evidential knowledge (*idah burhan*) but man is “shackled by Reason and Thinking or is in the pillory of Belief” (Qtd. in Izatsu, 1966: 234).

Does Vedānta demand we need to perceive something to qualify as *jñānī*? Does it require from us the experience of a particular state called Samadhi as a qualification for liberation? Does it demand a secret adventure into the higher worlds or states of consciousness as a prerequisite for entering into the *Kingdom of Go* or final beatitude? I think the answer to all these questions is no. The only thing that is clearly needed from us is receptivity or passivity towards the real which in turn demands transcendence of egoistic attachments or possessive mentality or object directed consciousness and thus sense of agency or doership. When one achieves such innocence all distinctions dissolve, Māyā becomes Brahman, subject becomes object or knowing becomes being. The duality of appearance and reality or world and the Beyond gets transcended and we land in what Rumi calls “placeless place” or “trackless track” and just are in pristine repose of being with all hopes, dreams, aspirations, objects coming to naught. Our little world gets rounded off with a sleep, with a death of our choosing so that there can be no new death as future or re-birth has no meaning now, for a supremely innocent self that is content to be nothing, to drop off from the temporality of rounds of rebirths. Again, we have seen that we are not invited into explorations in the unknown through torturing the body or the mind but only to let ourselves be usurped by ever new revelation of the real without imposing any demand from our side. As the pure subject term I comes to rest in itself rejecting the temptation to project outwards, rejecting the need to posit, possess and move towards objects, the world there, This becomes That or Aham Brahmāsmi is realized.

Who is qualified to be *Veda-vid* or realize of knowledge? Attention to this question will further illuminate the logic of the Beyond in Advaita Vedānta or Śankara and show that hankering for the greener pastures of the Beyond is a

disqualification. One must consent to be nothing. Humility is the royal road but as long as one thinks that one is going to *achieve* something for the self by means of humility one is deluded. I again quote Gupta:

Jñāna means *samatvatam*, equality between the manifest and the unmanifest, between bondage and release, between Samadhi and mundane life, between God the world. Brahman is not an object to be attained to. It is only *samatā*, equality. You attain the world and the abyss; you lose the world and the abyss. When their attainment and loss become one for you, then you become Brahman. Then alone are you free (Gupta, 1991: 94).

Man must not seek eternity or immortality supposed to be in the Beyond. One must look alike at the mortal life and the immortal bliss to attain real immortality. One must consent to be thoroughly impoverished and thus relinquish everything, worldly or heavenly and this demands death before dying, a prescription for travelers on the path that we find advocated across traditions. “For the already dead alone there is no more death. He who seeks the eternal, the abysses, will not escape death” (Gupta, 1991: 95). “The reality that is sought in the reality as *yajña*, as mortality. Man is to live as mortal, as the constant giver, and die as the giver. To die constantly and to die for ever as consciousness of death is immortality. That is the truth that the Upaniṣad prays for. Transcendentalism leaves us with an unhappy consciousness to accomplish something, to move from the world to the Beyond by various means. “For the seer of oneness, of *samatvam*, sameness, and for the seer of sameness there remains no desire to fulfill, no action to do, no destination to arrive at, no purpose to accomplish. He is a *kṛtakāryata*, one who has done all that was to be done (Gupta, 1991: 102). Aṣṭāvakra is emphatic on the point that he has no purpose to accomplish and no unfinished job. Vedānta pleads for transcending the dualism of *stasis* and *ekstasis*. *Ekstasis* is always haunted by what it leaves behind. The world of the inert and the active, earth and the middle region. Search for transcendence is not the search for unknown, for a reality that is accessible to a few only. As Gupta explains both known and unknown must be discarded, both knowledge and ignorance must be transcended as they are opposites and not one. It is only in absolute receptivity or innocence that one is truly available for reality to find it, to usurp it. And this alone constitutes salvation for Upaniṣads and Śāṅkara.

The question is in relation to what does what is the world designated as

unreal or less real. The simple answer is the World as experienced by the enlightened and called Brahman. Since experience of “transcendence” is also an experience in the world and experiencing it entitles one to judge other experiences it should be clear that there is no such thing as positing an abstraction, a world of forms beyond the experiencing subject.

The thesis of the abstract Beyond in Vedāntic or Sufi nondualistic context is superfluous from another point of view which states that the Self is the knowness of the known, the eye of the eye, and the ear of the ear. There can be no possibility of doubt entertainable with respect to God according to the Quran. Now when we say the Beyond one thinks of something that could possibly be questioned. However if Brahman can't be doubted when understood as the essence of everything, as depredicated reality or isness how do we understand the difference between faith and disbelief? Again the question loses its significance in all transcending Totality of Nonduality. There is no distinction between knowledge and ignorance; the very distinction is a product of ignorance. As Ramakishna has stated: “There is another state in which God reveals to His devotee that Brahman is beyond both and knowledge and ignorance. Who so sees Me, transcends speech and silence.” Nietzsche has stated the same thesis more penetratingly by asserting the need of freedom from slavery of truth and liberation from the need to get liberated. These points could be further elaborated and clarified by explicating what precisely is meant by enlightenment or knowledge of Brahman. The following description explains the statements from Aṣṭāvakra Gītā ‘Experiencing God or deliverance for Nondualism is not a goal in future, a search for some metaphysical abstraction, a super terrestrial Being out there, a vision of something, an experience as distinct from other “ordinary” experiences, a secret journey or adventure into the higher realms or the next world’. It is simply “attention without distraction” as Simone Weil said. It is a way of looking at things through the eyes rather than with the eyes, a vision that is participatory. The vision that is not egocentric but simply a pure witnessing, a pure observance where no desire is projected into the observed, a perception unhindered by conceptual construction of the mind or desires is experiencing God. It isn't achieved; it happens. Rather it is. It is not a cognitive encounter with the objects, this worldly or otherworldly. The mystic is extraordinarily ordinary person. Enlightenment is dropping of all seeking, all future oriented enterprises. It is simply to be as one is in pristine innocence. It is just to be oneself without all conditionings. Experiencing God is experiencing

world with open eyes, the eyes unburdened by the past memories or future dreams. It is like looking at the world with fresh eyes of the child. It is to experience the world without experiencer. It is pure experiencing where experiencer and experienced have dissolved as distinct entities. It is pure knowing as distinguished from ordinary knowledge that presupposes the subject-object or knower-known duality. It is seeing with a still mind. Meditation helps to achieve such a cleansing of perception: a still mind, a vision without ego. It is simply seeing things as they are and not as they appear to manipulating analytical desiring mind. It is pure seeing or better witnessing. It is not seeing the Beyond but a state of receptivity to other, a state that allows the other to destroy you, to possess you so that you are no longer there to worry about the problem of the immediate and the ultimate or immanence and transcendence or the Beyond. It is what traditions call as seeing through God's eyes or disinterested seeing. Borrowing a phrase "choiceless awareness" from J. Krishnamurti, Osho says, "When you don't choose things are as they are that is suchness – that is *tathatā*" (Osho, 1979:153). It means prelinguistic witnessing of phenomena. Suchness can't be thus deconstructed. The following statement reminds one of Wittgenstein while deconstructing all grounds to be grounded in the indubitable ground of suchness.

For Vedic seers nothing is so common place as experiencing Brahman; indeed only Brahman is and all experiencing is of Brahman. This implies that Brahman is not a being among other beings but the very ground of being. God is a percept rather than a concept as Ibn Arabi said. God, in the Unitarian Sufistic perspective as identical with Brahman, is the essence of existence. He is Existence in its totality. God constitutes all pervasive Environment (*al-Muhit* in the Quranic parlance) that normal man lives moves and has his being in Him. Adam saw God, the essences before the Fall as the fog of passions and desires had not blurred his vision. Things are metaphysically transparent; only we need to possess the right view as the Buddha said. God is there so close and in fact the light that sees as Ghazali said. God is the Light of the world. If we see without blinkers, without the lenses of conceptual intellect we see God and nothing but God. Seeing through eyes rather than with eyes and thus bridging subject-object duality is seeing God. Mystical discipline is simply for cleansing the perception. From a Unitarian perspective we are ever in God's presence, ever breathing the fragrance of the Beloved. God in His immanence is the whole world of perception, the positivity of manifestation. This is the metaphysical meaning of phenomenon

of Muhammad and his status as a messenger in Sufi metaphysics. The Son of Christian theology amounts to the same thing. The Father (Essence) is known through the Son. Metaphysically speaking to live truly is to live in God as God is Life, the Larger Life. The life of love is the life divine. God is love and for Osho one could well say that love is God. The experience of love, of beauty, of goodness – all are experiences of God and for a gnostic all experiences are experiences of God. The finite can't be outside the Divine Infinitude. So the world is necessarily in God or God's visible Face. As the Quran says God is both the Manifest (form) and the Hidden (essence). Experiencing God is experiencing life in its full splendor. Life, understood in all its depths and heights, is the only God for all religions as C. R. Jain has argued in his provocative study on comparative religions titled *Key of Knowledge*. Life, larger or higher life, life divine, the life of Spirit, the life of Love, is indeed the promise of all religions and mysticisms. Evelyn Underhill's classical presentation of mystical viewpoint also foregrounds this point. Moksha, Beatific vision, nirvāṇa—all are symbols of richer or larger life. So nothing is simpler or more accessible than the experience of God. To quote Osho's observations those make the debate on the cognitive status of religious experience and God-talk quite superfluous. "Creation is the visible God. He is green in the trees and red in the roses and gold in the rays of the sun. He is silver in the surface of a lake when the moon is mirrored. He is laughter, he is tears. He is this life in its totality" (Osho, 2000:52). "He is the breeze that comes and plays with your hair, and he is in the sunrays dancing on your face, and he is in the lake (Osho, 2000:71). Such expressions have been universally used by mystics and most characteristically by the Sufis. This is seeing God as Indwelling Life, the immanent God. Christian mystics, for whom Christ is Divine Life Itself, see His active Spirit in the ecstatic and abounding life of the world. To quote Evelyn Underhill: "In the rapturous vitality of the birds, in their splendid glancing flight: in the swelling of buds and the sacrificial beauty of the flowers: in the great and solemn rhythms of the sea – there is somewhat of Bethlehem in all these things, somewhat too of Calvary in their self-giving pains." (Underhill, 1961:116). All this is not meant to write off transcendence and locate in immanence but to point out that Brahman, as far as experientible, is the ground or presupposition of every experience. Transcendence could be understood as something given but elusive like the metaphysical I or our deepest subjectivity, as dark depth of existence that escapes all gaze of reason or senses, as mystery of phenomena, as inexhaustible riches of meaning possibly realizable

or hidden in every experience, as sheer givenness of things that refuse to be penetrated by a subject or objectified, as unseen seer or unheard hearer posited in every experience of seeing or hearing, as something that stands before us, within us and beyond us to make possible delimitation of a perceiving finite subject and object, as present moment that refuses all attempts to be located, as unconditional love, arresting beauty, indefinable goodness and superabundant joy that we can experience albeit only momentarily by most people and quest for perfection, essences and something similar.

There is a meaning of beyond that denotes something utterly unknowable because that demands total deconstruction of self and in fact nothing short of dying in life. Godhead is Beyond-Being, Nothing and nothing can be said about it. Reason, senses must be left far behind when we talk of this. This is something with which anti-transcendentalist modern thought is quite uncomfortable but if we wish to remain loyal to tradition we need not compromise it or somehow secularize it. The Beyond is non-human reality and humanism can't comprehend or accept it. Perhaps Stace, in *Time and Eternity*, while commenting on Whitehead's famous characterization of religion in his *Science and the Modern World* presents representative mystical position. Stace writes: "Religion seeks the infinite and the infinite by definition is impossible, unattainable. It is by definition that which can never be reached."

Religion seeks the light. But it is not a light which can be found at any place or time. It is not somewhere. It is the light which is nowhere. It is the light which never was on sea or land. Never was, Never will be, even in the infinite stretches of future time. The light is nonexistent – yet it is the great light which lightens the world. Religion is the desire to break away from being and existence altogether, to get beyond Existence into that nothingness where the great light is. It is the desire to be utterly free from the fetters of being. For every being is a fetter Existence is a fetter. To be is to be tied to what you are. Religion is the hunger for the non-being which yet is. Religion is that hunger which no existence past, present or future, no actual existence and no possible existence, in this world or any other world, on the earth or above the clouds and stars, material or mental or spiritual, can ever satisfy. For whatever is or could be will have the curse on it of *thisness* or *thatness*. (Stace, 1952: 34).

What needs to be done according to Vedānta to reach Brahman? Surrender of the self, submission to the cosmic will or Divine will or Tao, actionless action (*wu wei*) or detached action without consideration for the fruits of it, charity,

compassion, transcendence of mind or thought which is the principle of duality. As a result of all of these one finds life as “a mystery to be lived rather than a problem to be solved”—a superabundant joy and bliss to be enjoyed rather than questioned. One needs to be vulnerable, open to the Real, the non-self, the other, the cosmos or *what is*, to appropriate one modern mystic’s phrase. It is to be thoroughly decreed as Simone Weil would have it. It is intelligence which saves and intellectual intuition that needs to be actualized for one’s felicity. Experiencing divinity is not a cognitive encounter with the objects, this worldly or otherworldly as ordinary cognizing subject is no longer there when the Real sees itself through the mirror of cognizing subject. God alone is the witness, the knower and God is perceived by God alone. Just as there is no true being but God, so also there is no true finder or experiencer but God and nothing truly found or experienced but God for Ibn ‘Arabî. The Real, the *what is*, is before every construction of it by means of conceptual thought, and it is after everything, every thinkable and imaginable entity has disappeared. He says in *The Kernel of the Kernel*: “He is able to show His Being either within or without; that which is in the image of everything, that which is understandable in every intellect, the meaning that is in every heart, the thing heard in every ear, the eye that sees in every eye, is Him. ...If He is manifest in this face he is also looking from the other.”

Because of the fact that in this existence there is nothing but Brahman, from which all other so-called existences are derived the question for Vedānta, is not whether the Beyond is or where and how to find It but, how can we remove the veils, that prevent us from seeing or knowing It? If Brahman is both the subjective and the objective pole of reality It is revealed in all experiences every moment and for everyone and not just to a select few in the so-called religious experience which is Jamesian construct uncritically accepted by many modern philosophers of religion. God is the name of 'that which is.' He is not something within-ness, he himself is that which is. He does not possess existence; rather the very existence is in him. Essence and existence are one for Him. The following words of Osho express nondualist view almost perfectly:

"Does God exist?" you ask. it is not at all proper to ask a question like this because you don't even know what the word "God" means. "God" means "whole". The whole of existence itself is God. God is not a separate entity. He is not some individual, some power. What exists is God. And even this is not

the proper way to say it. It is more accurate to say that existence itself is God. Even in saying "God exists" there is redundancy.

Questioning the existence of God is questioning the existence of existence. The existence of all other things is obvious, but this is not the case with God. And this is because he is existence himself. The power, the energy that exists in all things may also be apparent, but this is not so with God. He himself is that power. There is no beyond to be sought and seeking which should be life's goal. In strictly nondualistic view of Vedānta and Ibn Arabi He is not sought, because the seeker himself is in Him. One can only get lost in Him. And to get lost is to attain Him. Bewilderment is the highest station and attaining the station of no station is the supreme attainment. Realizing that everything is perfect this very moment or, in Buddhist (Nagarjunian) terminology, that *samsāra* is *nirvāṇa* is realizing God. Śankara equates Brahman with Reality and sees the world as ordinarily experienced as consisting of dream though not a sheer illusion, a symbol which needs to be interpreted, an exterior aspect of the larger and fundamental inward or hidden reality Ibn Arabi calls *Al-Haqq*, which is his designation for the Absolute. It implies that the modern unbelieving world that only thinks rather than sees with the heart and believes that transcendence is an illusion as it takes sensory world to be *the* world or the only world which should concern us is simply blind or extremely myopic and guilty of idolatry.

Modern discourse in the philosophy of religion and mysticism has focused mostly on mystical realization and criticized it on various accounts. In fact the very category of mystical experience is a modern invention as has been pointed out by many scholars including Adnan Aslan (Adnan, 2003). There is no such thing as mysticism in the East as Guenon has provocatively remarked (Guenon, 2000). Śankara's, like Ibn 'Arabi's position, is metaphysical instead of mystical and this accommodates most of criticisms of modernity and postmodernity on mysticism. Ibn Arabi puts the thesis of metaphysical realization³, which also helps to answer theological critiques on transcendence of servant-Lord polarity in him thus, "The final end and ultimate return of the Gnostics ... is that the Real is identical with them, while they don't exist." It is through the metaphysical realization that one realizes that the Self withdraws from the "servant-Lord" polarity and resides in its own transpersonal being. The subject-object dichotomy is transcended by virtue of pure intellect or Spirit, which is identical with the divine Essence" (Qaisar, 2002:133).

If Beyond as a separate realm were the focus of traditional scriptures there would hardly be such a reverential attitude towards the environment in them. Virgin nature would not be God's sign and its study a study of God's behaviour. Appropriation of pantheistic elements, of panpsychism and postulation of living or conscious nature that follows from the thesis of self as *All* also imply a rejection of absolutized transcendence. The ancient Greeks possessed a Cosmology similar to that of other Aryan people of antiquity. The elements, and nature itself were inhabited by the Gods and matter was alive with spirit, Western dualism of nature and Supernature being absent. It was only "with the gradual increase in decadence of the Greek Olympians religion more and more the substance of nature itself became divorced from its spiritual significance" (Nasr, 1968: 54). For ancients in general "Nature violate is at once a vestige of the earthly paradise and a prefiguration of the heavenly paradise as Schuon points out in his *Light on the Ancient World* (Nasr, 1968: 43). In the Far East we see in the Chinese tradition, especially in Taoism and also in Neo-Confucianism, a devotion to Nature and a comprehension of its metaphysical significance which has nothing in common with the burden theory. This same reverential attitude towards nature, together with a strong sense of symbolism is to found in Japan also, Shintoism having strongly fortified this attitude. Taoism has great triad of Heaven, Man and Earth. Heaven representing the Spirit or Essence, Earth the substance and Man synthesis of both and mediator between them, himself partaking of the dual nature of Heaven and Earth. Perfect Man's position is symbolized in the trigrams of which upper line represents Heaven, the lower Earth, with Man in the middle. Man is thus link between Nature and Reality, Time and Eternity. Where is the escapist or neutralizing attitude towards 'burden' of Manifestation⁴ as consistent transcendentalists would have it. Nasr also traces the theme of relying upon nature in the task of spiritual realization in Hindu tradition and says that it is carried to its full conclusion in the practices connected with Tantra Yoga. He elaborates: "in Tantrism the *Shakti* or feminine principle becomes the incarnation of all forces and power in the Universe, and through the use of this very power, as if riding upon the waves of the sea, the Yogi seeks to pass beyond nature and the ocean of cosmic manifestation. In Tantrism there is an elaborate correspondence between man and the Cosmos, the spinal column itself being called the Meru of the human body. The Universe is the 'body of the lord' and by dying and burying himself in its bosom, in the arms of nature as the Divine Mother, the Yogi finds his deliverance.... Tantrism in its connection with

Alchemy presents a most profound symbolic interpretation of nature (Nasr, 1968: 92). Existence of various traditional sciences such as Islamic Science, Chinese Science, Hindu Science, all of which were directly inspired by religion shows religion far from alienating man from environment does exactly the opposite job of inspiring contemplation and study of it which makes civilization as well as God consciousness possible. The thrust of these observations is that the [Beyond of traditions is accessible and its traces are everywhere. Vedāntic position must be compatible with traditional picture as averred by perennialists. In fact, one can easily show, that far from being an illusionist, Śankara respectfully treats the world of manifestation as real and nondifferent from Brahman and does not denigrate it in the name of otherworldly ideality.

Lest it be thought that Śankara or Ibn Arabi or Zen of which Osho speaks has no problems with transcendence denying desacralizing and demystifying atheism and materialism, it needs to be noted that he sees the world as ordinarily experienced as consisting of dream though not a sheer illusion, a symbol that needs to be interpreted, an exterior aspect of the larger and fundamental inward or hidden reality called Brahman. It implies that the modern unbelieving world that only thinks rather than sees with the heart and believes that transcendence is an illusion as it takes sensory world to be *the* world or the only world which should concern us is simply blind or extremely myopic and guilty of idolatry. However atheism nevertheless partly affirms God in His immanent mode because the world that senses experience is the mirror and the symbol of God. It is dogmatic in its veto against the discoveries of more adventurous spirits of saints and prophets which discover God as real, in fact more real than themselves. In fact traditions equate God with Reality. God as the Self is in fact accessible to all though not conceptually or discursively. To know oneself, to know what it means to be human, to properly affirm "I" is what amounts to knowing God as Ibn Arabi tirelessly keeps alluding to a tradition he attributes to the Prophet that states that knowing oneself one knows God.

To conclude we can say that Vedānta is transcendence centric if we understand by it the emphasis on need to transcend linguistic or conceptual cobwebs, individualizing ego, seeing with the eyes (as distinguished from seeing through the eyes), objects posited by the desiring, feeling and knowing self and thus all mental constructions or superimpositions we put on the real. However all these points don't mean that some abstract mythic beyond that can be appropriated in the service of priestocracy, gurudom or mystification from

pseudoscientific quarters.

Notes

1. In the Perennialist perspective metaphysic constitutes an intuitive, or in other words immediate knowledge, as opposed to the discursive or mediate knowledge which belongs to the rational order. (Most protagonists as well as critics of concept of religious experience hardly leave this rational order in their discourse. “Intellectual intuition is even more immediate than sensory intuition, being beyond the distinction between subject and object which the latter allows to subsist” (Qaisar, 2002: 168). Subject and object are here identified competently and this complete identification is not an attribute of any inferior or non-metaphysical type of knowledge. A consequence of this is that knowing and being are fundamentally one or two inseparable aspects of a single reality. Knowing and being are indistinguishable in the sphere where all is “without duality” (Qaisar, 2002: 169). From such a perspective the various “theories of knowledge” with metaphysical pretensions which occupy such an important place in modern Western philosophy (which dominate everything in case of Kant) are purposeless. The debate over cognitivity of religious experience similarly appears purposeless in the metaphysical perspective. As Guenon says such theories arise from an attitude of mind that originated in the Cartesian dualism and is shared by almost all modern philosophers. This attitude consists in artificially opposing knowing and being. This is antithesis of true metaphysic. The identity of knowing and being is not merely dogmatically affirmed but realized as well in the integral metaphysic. (Qaisar, 2002: 170) The theory and meditational and other practices are a means or aids to such a realization. It need not and could not be certified or verified by other means, other persons or any kind of tests. Of course these considerations appear strange to Western people. Mystical realization is only partial and rather distant approximation or analogy of metaphysical realization (Qaisar, 2002: 172). The very fact that such realization is of a purely religious character shows that it is confined entirely to the individual domain; mystical states are in no sense supra-individual, since they only imply a more or less indefinite extension of purely individual possibilities. Realization of this kind cannot have a universal or metaphysical bearing, and it always remains subject to the influence of individual elements, chiefly of a sentimental order. This realization is also always fragmentary and rarely controlled and doesn’t presuppose any theoretical preparation (Qaisar, 2002: 173). Metaphysical realization is common to all Oriental thought and “mysticism.”

2. The traditionalist Perennialist perspective began to be enunciated in the West at the

beginning of the twentieth century by the French metaphysician Rene Guenon, although its precepts are considered to be timeless and to be found in all authentic traditions. It is also known as Perennialism, the Perennial Philosophy, or *Sophia Perennis*, or *Religio Perennis* or sometimes simply referred to as the traditionalist or metaphysical school. The term *Philosophia Perennis* goes back to the Renaissance, while the Hindu expression *Sanatana Dharma*, Eternal Doctrine – and the Islamic expression the *javidani khird* or *al-hikmat al-khalidah* has precisely the same signification. The other important figures of the Traditionalist School were the German Sufi metaphysician Frithjof Schuon and the Ceylonese art historian A. K. Coomaraswamy. *Philosophia perennis* pertains to a knowledge which has always been and will always be and which is of universal character both in the sense of existing among peoples of different climes and epochs and of dealing with universal principles. This knowledge which is available to the intellect (which in the traditionalist perspective is a supra-individual faculty distinct from reason though the latter is its reflection on the mental plane) is, moreover, contained in the heart of all religions or traditions. At the heart of the *philosophia perennis* “lies pure metaphysics, if this later term is understood as the science of Ultimate Reality, as a *scientia sacra* not to be confused with the subject bearing the name metaphysics in post-medieval Western philosophy” (Nasr, 1993: 54). Revelation and intellection are the twin sources of metaphysical knowledge. Traditional metaphysics finds its fullest expression in the Hindu doctrines. The phenomena of religion, theology and mysticism is a falling from the intellectual purity of the doctrine, though religion has also been seen as an existential formulation of metaphysics rather than falling away from it.

3. Understanding the notion of metaphysical realization is central to the debate on religious experience from the Eastern and Sufi “mystical” or metaphysical perspective. A few remarks are in order in this connection. In the act of metaphysical realization individual domain is altogether left out. There is no room for feeling and sentimentalism. The mind or everything that contributes to a separative distinctive selfhood or subjecthood has to be transcended completely in order to experience the divine in the fullest sense of the term in the Eastern context. In fact as Guenon has provocatively remarked there is no such thing as mysticism and religious experience in the modern sense of the term in the East. Here we must point out, from the Perennialist (more precisely the Guenonian reading of it) point of view the difference between religion and metaphysics. As Guenon points out the metaphysical point of view is purely intellectual while as in the religious or theological point of view the presence of a sentimental element affects the doctrine itself, which doesn’t allow of it complete objectivity. The emotional element nowhere plays a bigger part than in the “mystical” form of religious thought. Contrary to the prevalent opinion he

declares that mysticism, from the very fact that it is inconceivable apart from the religious point of view, is quite unknown in the East (Guenon, 2000: 124). The influence of sentimental element obviously impairs the intellectual purity of the doctrine. This falling away from the standpoint of metaphysical thought occurred generally and extensively in the Western world because there feeling was stronger than intelligence and this has reached its climax in modern times (Guenon, 2000: 125). Modern theistic appropriations of mystical experience by choosing to remain at the level of theology and not cognizing the metaphysical point of view (that brilliantly and convincingly appropriates such apparently divergent varieties of mystical and metaphysical realization as that of Buddhism and Christianity) cannot claim total truth as theology itself cannot do so. And it is not always possible to fully translate metaphysical doctrines in terms of theological dogmas. Only one example will suffice here. The immediate metaphysical truth "Being exists" gives rise to another proposition when expressed in the religious or theological mode "God exists." But as Guenon says the two statements would not be strictly equivalent except on the double condition of conceiving God as Universal Being, which is far from always being the case in fact (Tillich comes close to holding this view of God), and of identifying existence with pure Being or what the Sufis call *Zat* or Essence which is metaphysically inexact. The endless controversies connected with the famous ontological argument are a product of misunderstanding of the implications of the two formulae just cited. It is the inadequate or faulty metaphysical background which contributes a lot to controversies on either side of the debate on religious experience in modern discourses of philosophy of religion. Unlike purely metaphysical conceptions theological conceptions are not beyond the reach of individual variations. Those who discuss such matters as the "proofs of God's existence," should first of all make sure that in using the same word "God" they really are intending to express an identical conception. However this is hardly the case usually, and we see altogether different languages being used.

Anti-metaphysical anthropomorphism comes to the fore in this realm of individual variations (Guenon, 2000: 128-29).

4. Burden theory is attributed by Krishnamurti to all traditional religions according to which the world of manifestation is a burden and needs to be bypassed/escaped from in order to achieve salvation. He has repeated this theme in many lectures without bothering to examine the evidence for the view from primary sources.

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