

Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta

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The religious context

In the centuries after 700 A.D., we see the gradual rise to predominance within Hinduism of the sort of personalist theism found in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Purāṇas*, accompanied by a decline in the religion in which the Vedic rituals are central. This is not to say that ritual practices disappear. Rather, they are assimilated to modes of practice that are more concerned with worship of a deity conceived personally whose grace or favour is accessible to those human souls who love him (*bhakti*). From this perspective, God is thought to be concerned with the destinies of finite beings. Moreover, the cosmos is understood as creation for the sake of sentient beings rather than as a hierarchy of spheres of existence (*tattva*), through which souls may

or may not progress naturally in accordance with their *karma*, understood as an automatic mechanism. There develops a theological concept of the soul and a notion that human beings are essentially lovers, enjoyers and knowers of God. According to this sort of devotional monotheism, the person is constituted by God and the meaning and fulfilment of its life is to be found in relationship to God.

Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta is the doctrinal articulation of the theistic *Śrī Vaiṣṇava* religious tradition that still flourishes in Tamil Nādu. It is a pluralist ontology and epistemological direct realism about a complex universe whose basic constituents are kinds of property-bearing enduring substances. The term ‘*Viśiṣṭādvaita*’, frequently mistranslated as ‘qualified non-dualism’, is held by the tradition to mean ‘the integral unity of complex reality’.¹ *Vedānta* is the systematic hermeneutic of the Upaniṣads, the brief summaries of the teachings of the latter in the *Brahma-Sūtras*, and the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

The *Śrī Vaiṣṇava* tradition developed in interaction with the enthusiastic devotion (*bhakti*) towards a personally conceived deity found in the hymns of the Tamil *Ālvārs*, the temple and domestic rituals and theology of the Tantric (i.e. non-Vedic) *Pāñcarātra Āgamas*, and a reflective Vaiṣṇava *smārta* orthodoxy. The last found expression in the philosophical theologies of Nāthamuni (980–1050 A.D.), Yāmuna (c.1050–1125 A.D.) and Rāmānuja (c.1100–1170 A.D.).² Rāmānuja was a creative genius who adopted ideas from Yāmuna and an earlier commentator on the *Brahma-Sūtras* called Bodhāyana, and synthesized them with beliefs current in the tradition to articulate a realistic and pluralistic philosophical and theological system. As a practitioner of Vedānta, he related the beliefs of his tradition to the normative scriptures (*śruti* and *smṛti*) such as the Upaniṣads and *Bhagavad Gītā*, seeking to establish that those beliefs are precisely what those authorities teach.

Influential Viśiṣṭādvaitins and their works include:

Nāthamuni (980–1050 A.D.): *Nyāyatattva* (known only from quotations).

Yāmuna (1050–1125 A.D.): *Ātmasiddhi*, *Īśvarasiddhi*, *Samvitsiddhi*; *Āgamaprāmāṇyam* (on the validity of the Pañcarātra cult and its scriptures).

Rāmānuja (1100–1170 A.D.): *Śrī Bhāṣya* (commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*), *Vedārthasaṃgraha* (précis of the former); *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya*.

Paraśara Bhaṭṭa (1170–1240 A.D.): *Tattvaratnākara* (quotations from Vedānta Deśika).

Vedavyāsa (Sudarśanasuri) (1120–1300 A.D.): *Śrutaprakāśikā* (commentary on *Śrī Bhāṣya*), *Tātparyadīpikā* (commentary on *Vedārthasaṃgraha*).

Vedānta Deśika (Veṅkaṭanātha) (1270–1350 A.D.): *Tattvamuktākālāpa*, *Sarvārthasiddhi*, *Nyāyapariśuddhi*, *Nyāyasiddhāñjana*, *Tātparyacandrikā* (commentary on Rāmānuja's *Gītābhāṣya*), *Tattvaṭīkā* (commentary on *Śrī Bhāṣya*), *Pāñcarātrarakṣā*.

Śrīnivāsadāsa (1600–1650 A.D.): *Yatīndramatadīpikā*.³

The formation of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition

We have to reckon with a confluence of various trends and factors. There is the intense ecstatic devotional religion of the Tamil *Ālvār* poets, who thought of all devotees equally as servants of God. They model the soul's relationship with God upon that between human lovers, and sing of the agony of separation and the bliss of reunion.⁴ The theologians, at least in their prose works, in which they were concerned to demonstrate the concordance of their beliefs and practices with the normative religion of social and religious duty (*varṇāśramadharma*) that respects distinctions of caste, tended to suppress the ecstatic emotionalism and incipient social inclusivism of the *Ālvār* tradition. Nevertheless, they belonged to a monotheistic devotional milieu in which one is encouraged to delight in the awareness that one exists to be a servant of the divinity Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa. God is a person, a being with will, agency and purposes, upon whom one is radically dependent and in whom one may take refuge. God is a compassionate being who attracts praise and love. This entirely self-sufficient deity creates and sustains the cosmos for no purpose other than his own delight (*līlā*). He is immanent both as the inner guide, the innermost constitutive element guide (*antar-yāmin*) of persons, and also as present in the consecrated temple icon. The reconciliation of mainstream orthodoxy and devotional theism appears in the soteriologies of Yāmuna and Rāmānuja when they say that performance of the duties appropriate to one's caste and stage of life, informed by understanding of the natures of the individual and divine natures, combined with ritual worship and devotion, invites the grace of the Supreme Person.⁵ In the first verse of his *Summary of the Meaning of the Gītā*, Yāmuna says that *Nārāyaṇa*, who is the *brahman*, is only accessible by devotion (*bhakti*) that is the outcome of observance of one's social and religious duty, knowledge and dispassion.⁶

Bhakti is not just a matter of feeling. It accords with the belief that if God is the foundational cause of one's very being and everything one does is also an action of God. This does not mean that one's free actions do not flow from the will. It means that it is in virtue of its divine ensoulment or animation that the dependent soul is an *entity* in the first place.

A further factor constitutive of the *Śrī Vaiṣṇava* tradition is the non-Vedic or Tantric *Pañcarātra* system of theology and ritual, which informs the liturgies enacted in South Indian *Śrī Vaiṣṇava* temples. This tradition is probably as old as the Christian era, but it is unlikely that any of the surviving texts were composed before c.850 A.D.⁷ *Pañcarātra* is an ancient form of Viṣṇu worship.⁸ Viṣṇu is believed to pervade and sustain the cosmos, as well as underpinning stable social structures. *Pañcarātra* is believed by its adherents to derive from a no longer extant branch of the Vedic scriptures called the *Ekāyana Śākhā*. Tantric cults are monotheistic, and the *theos* here is called Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa. He is accompanied by his female partner named Śrī or Lakṣmī, who personifies the creative divine energy (*śakti*). The divinity, conceived as a person having will, agency and purposes, may be gratified by adoration and displeased by neglect and evil practices. He is a being upon whom human souls are radically dependent and in whom they may take refuge in their distress. This entirely self-sufficient deity, lacking nothing and not subject to any kind of internal or external necessity, creates the cosmos purely and simply for the sake of sport or play (*līlā*).⁹ The cosmos is the arena in which souls can be rid of the burdens of accumulated *karma* by experiencing the consequences of their previous morally significant acts. As well as constituting souls (*jīva*) as entities adapted to life in the world, the deity is also their inner guide (*antar-yāmin*) who helps them on the path of righteousness (*dharma*), understood as devotion (*bhakti*) and diligent religious practice and morality, towards salvation from the cycle of rebirth. In general, Tantric traditions promise to released souls experiences that are rather more alluring than the liberated states (*mukti*) envisaged by the orthodox. For the *Pañcarātrins*, supreme felicity consists in the adoration of God in heaven, which is of course a form of experience anticipated in the temples of this world.

Tantric traditions advertise themselves as more accessible alternatives to the mainstream traditionalist (*smārta*) path that deems itself normative. They are not normally in conflict with that path, since they often define themselves as extensions of it, both in virtue of their provision of access to supernatural powers and in the promise of exalted forms of liberation from rebirth in space and time. Nor are such cult movements on the fringes,

adhered to only by eccentrics. Indeed, it appears that Tantric sects were sometimes vehicles of upward social mobility, the vertical axis reaching even up to the royal court. Involvement with the mainstream Vedic religion is the preserve of members of the three higher castes. By contrast, the Tantric cults are far less restrictive where initiation into membership is concerned. They thus offered paths to salvation through religious discipline and devotion to god for those who were excluded by accident of birth from participating in the mainstream traditionalist religion.

Rāmānuja defends the soteriological value of the Pañcarātra in his *Śrī Bhāṣya* commentary on *Brahma-Sūtras* 2.2.42-5, insisting that it is divinely promulgated and in perfect harmony with the normative Vedic tradition. He stresses the Pañcarātra belief in the accessibility of a divinity who is well disposed towards human beings. Pañcarātra, says Rāmānuja, teaches the nature of the godhead and the proper methods of worshipping him. The doctrine is intended to ease appreciation of the sense of the Vedas which on their own are difficult to understand. And he quotes with approval the Paramasaṃhitā, one of the Pañcarātra scriptures:

I have read, Lord, the Vedas and the extensive authoritative writings based upon them. But in all these I do not discern anything that is indubitably pertinent to the attainment of the highest good by which its achievement might be reached.

The wise Lord Hari, moved by compassion for his devotees, collected the essentials in the Upaniṣads and condensed them into an easy form.

The scriptures (called Āgamas or Saṃhitās) of the cult are no ordinary compositions but are believed to be records of divine utterances.¹⁰ The literary corpus includes the liturgical forms of the daily offices owed to god by the devout, directions for the performance of rituals in the temple that is the site of the icon embodying the divinity, and guidance about the consecration of one's life to Viṣṇu. Of particular note here is the use of *mantras*, which are sonic forms of the deity. These are recited in rites of entheosis (*mantra-nyāsa*) wherein they are imaginatively infused with one's body. They are also deployed in the interests of the acquisition of extraordinary powers (*siddhis*) that are useful both to initiates who might have an interest in exercising control over others as well as to the often powerful and sometimes royal associates of the cult. But above all, according to Pañcarātra the goal of life is the glorification of the godhead. That divinity is understood to be accessible to human beings, an availability mediated not only through the consecrated icon that occupies the most sacred space in the temple, but also in the hearts of devotees as their inner guide (*antar-*

yāmin) and the soul of their souls. Such a theology is of course concordant with the enthusiastic devotional religion of the Tamil *Ālvār* poets.

Finally, there is a lineage of learned *Vaiṣṇava* teachers (*ācārya*) specializing in *Upaniṣadic* exegesis and adept in sophisticated *śāstric* traditions, *Smārta* Brahmins who take refuge in Viṣṇu as their patron deity (*iṣṭa-devatā*). Nāthamuni, Yāmuna, Rāmānuja and their successors belong to this tradition of realistic and pluralistic interpretations of the Scriptures in the face of the monism found there by the gnostic renouncers of the Advaita tradition. The Śrī Vaiṣṇavas seek to demonstrate that the *brahman* of which the Upaniṣads speak is not some unconditioned impersonal ground of being but rather the personal god Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa. Rāmānuja's sophisticated theological formulation of the *bhakti* religion in opposition to the world-renunciatory Advaitic gnostic tradition was not new.¹¹ But Advaitic monism flourished after the seminal works of Maṇḍana Miśra and Śaṅkara (fl.c.700 A.D.). They held that ordinary experience of a plurality of individual conscious and non-conscious entities is a beginningless global misconception (*anādi-avidyā*) superimposed upon an inactive and undifferentiated *brahman* characterized as non-intentional pure consciousness. On this view, the liberation of the soul from rebirth is simply the cessation of ignorance about the true nature of reality. It is the intuitive realization that one's true identity (*ātman*) is non-intentional awareness (*jñapti-mātra*) and that one is not an individual agent subject to ritual duties and transmigration. This outlook is obviously at odds with the realist tradition of *Upaniṣadic* exegesis, which sees the real cosmos as an emanation (*pariṇāma*) of the absolute Being, as the real self-differentiation of the Supreme Soul – the substrative cause of all existents. The basic *Viśiṣṭādvaitin* doctrine that the world of conscious and unconscious entities is an organic complex that is both essentially dependent upon God and intrinsically distinct from him is a development of that realistic tradition of thought.

Knowing God only from Scripture

Like all Vedāntins, Rāmānuja assumes that the truth about God can only be known from the timeless Vedic scriptures, primarily the Upaniṣads, the knowledge portion (*jñāna-kāṇḍa*) of the Vedas. Although only scriptural language, and not perception and inferences based upon it, can reveal the truth about what transcends the bounds of the senses, Rāmānuja does say [*Śrī Bhāṣya* 1.1.2] that we have natural knowledge of God as that which possesses

unsurpassable greatness, since this is the meaning of the verbal root *bṛh* from which the term ‘Brahman’ is derived. Unsurpassable greatness includes powers such as omniscience and omnipotence that are properties of that which is both the material and efficient causes of the cosmos. Further content may be added to this concept by texts such as *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1. ‘The Brahman is reality, consciousness, infinite’, which he interprets as implying three distinct properties belonging to the divinity, in contradistinction to the Advaitins who think that what appear to be predicates are names serving to differentiate the *brahman* from all else.

Only the Scriptures, and not human reason, can reveal anything about the nature and existence of God. Rāmānuja [*Śrī Bhāṣya* 1.1.3] uses philosophical argument to show that argument cannot prove the existence of God. He adduces a number of considerations against the standard inferences for the existence of God, all of which rely on the general principle (*vyāpti*) that products require an intelligent maker with the appropriate capabilities. For example, although we can infer a producer from human artefacts, we have no knowledge of the ultimate origination of natural features such as mountains and oceans and their existence supplies no reason to suppose that they have one all-powerful and all-knowing maker. The philosophical inferences cite as examples the production by potters of objects such as pots that are unequivocally single whole entities. But can we really treat the cosmos as a whole as a single great big object? The complex world consists of many different types of effects and as such cannot license the inference of a single maker. Assuming that the universe can be treated as a single product, was it made at one time or at different times? We have neither observational nor purely conceptual grounds for supposing that it was made at one time. But if it is made at different times, it is also possible that it has more than one maker. In our experience, agents, however capable, are finite and embodied. All our everyday valid inferences about who produced what concern finite and embodied makers. The *brahman* is different in kind from everything else. Thus we cannot infer that it is an agent in the sense in which we understand agency.

Response to Advaita¹²

The Advaitic concepts of the Absolute as impersonal, static, consciousness, and of the non-individual soul (identical with that Absolute principle) as

utterly transcendental and detached from personal individuality, are the fruits of the mystic renouncer's contemplative experience in whose light the everyday world appears as less than fully real. But these visionary insights are problematic when it comes to explaining the genesis of the finite universe and its relation to the unconditioned reality that has nothing in common with the world. The developed Advaita tradition attributes the plural universe and our experience thereof to the operation of a positive force (*bhāva-rūpa*) called *avidyā* (as the substrative cause of the cosmos, it is obviously different from everyday notions of ignorance and misconception) which projects diversity and conceals pure being. The undifferentiated pure conscious reality falsely appears as the plural world when it is obscured by *avidyā*. *Avidyā* explains why we unenlightened beings mistakenly but inevitably think in terms of different individual entities. Causative *avidyā*, and its product, the cosmos, are indeterminable or inexpressible (*anirvacanīya*) as either real or unreal. The Viśiṣṭādvaita tradition rejects the latter claim as incoherent: if something is not real, it is unreal. If it is not unreal, it is real. If it is neither real nor unreal, it is both real and unreal. If *avidyā* is different from the *brahman*, monism is compromised. If it is the same as the *brahman* then it exists either absolutely or never. They insist that ignorance cannot be a subsistent entity with causal efficacy. It is just the absence of knowledge. Moreover, the putative causal ignorance must have a substrate. It cannot be the *brahman*, which is pure knowledge. Nor can it be the individual self which, according to Advaita, is itself the product of ignorance. Also, since the scriptures, in common with all the *pramāṇas*, belong to the sphere of *avidyā*, their capacity to reveal the truth is undermined.

The Advaitic proposition that reality is unitary and undifferentiated quickly attracted the objection that there is no means of establishing its truth (*pramāṇa*). There is already an instance of difference if the operation of the means of knowledge presupposes a duality of act and object. Rāmānuja argues that we cannot make sense of the notion that there is any sort of reality, ultimate or otherwise, that is undifferentiated and non-intentional consciousness (*nirviśeṣa-cinmātra*). He is an epistemological direct realist, holding that all cognitions are intrinsically valid (*svataḥ-prāmāṇyam*) just in virtue of their occurrence. He holds that intrinsically reflexive consciousness is always *about* something external. In addition, apprehension is always of the real (*sat-khyāti*): all perceptual cognition, even when misleading (*bhrama*), is in accordance with what is the case (*yathārtha*) independently of our thinking. There are no intrinsically false cognitions. Ultra-realism

involves minimizing or explaining away what are ordinarily viewed as perceptual errors and hallucinations. There is an ancient theory that all material things are compounded out of the same elements. When mother of pearl is mistaken for silver, we are actually detecting traces of silver in the mother of pearl. Cognitions are intrinsically formless (*nirākāra*) and assume the forms of their objects. The lack of subjective contribution eliminates perceptual distortion. It is the extra-mental environment, consisting of stable objects that endure through space and time, that is responsible for mental variety. Truth is correspondence, understood as structural isomorphism, between knowing and the known. The subject–object structure of cognition is held to be self-evident and encoded in normal language. There simply are no cognitions lacking an agent and external object.

Implicit in Rāmānuja's critique of the Advaitic tenet that authentic reality is featureless and non-intentional consciousness is an appeal to a principle upheld by the Indian dualist traditions: whatever is, is knowable and nameable. All the means of knowledge refer to entities having properties. The notion of an object without properties is unintelligible because thought and language are possible only with respect to entities identifiable by their specific characteristics (*viśeṣa*). The language of the Scriptures, like all language, is composite and relational, and its complexity mirrors that of its objects. This is a crucial point. Scripture is our only means of knowing about the transcendent. If scriptural language is complex and language is isomorphic with what it expresses, complexity must obtain at the ultimate level.

He continues with the argument that sensory perception (*pratyakṣa*), whether non-conceptual (*nirvikalpa*) or conceptual (*savikalpa*), cannot establish the existence of a non-differentiated reality. We have seen that thinkers of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsaka traditions tried to distinguish the two types of perception in various ways. The problem is difficult: to what extent can non-conceptual perception lack specificity while still referring to something? Is it possible to apprehend a 'bare particular' devoid of specific and generic features? Following Maṇḍana Miśra, Advaitin thinkers appeal to the example of non-conceptual perception in arguing that there can be pure uninterpreted experience that is the same as 'pure being' or featureless reality. The Viśiṣṭādvaitins reject the mainstream view upheld by Naiyāyikas and Mīmāṃsakas that *nirvikalpaka* perception grasps a bare reality (*vastu-mātra*) without reference to features such as names, quality, substance and generic property. Rāmānuja says that the content of *savikalpa-pratyakṣa* (conceptual

perception) is complex since it explicitly refers to that which is qualified by several categorial features (*padārtha*: i.e. *jāti*, *guṇa*, *dravya* and *kriyā*). But the object of non-conceptual perception (*nirvikalpa*) is also complex since such a prior sensational state is a condition for the comparison of already experienced differentiated entities at the subsequent conceptual stage. Non-classificatory perception is the apprehension of an entity as lacking some differentia, but not of every differentiating feature, since apprehension of the latter kind is never encountered and is in any case impossible. Every cognition arises in virtue of some differentia and is specifically verbalized in the form, ‘this is such and such a kind of thing’. The difference lies in the fact that in non-conceptual perception a complex entity, analysable in terms of the categories of substance, specific and generic properties, is cognized, but what is missing is knowledge of the recurrence (*anuvṛtti*) of those features in other entities of the same kind. In *nirvikalpa-pratyakṣa* we cognize an individual and its concrete generic structure (*jāti*, construed as *ākṛti* or *saṁsthāna*) as distinct. But since the structure has been seen in but one individual, we cannot generalize and form a concept. The key point is that since non-classificatory perception is complex and since there is a structural isomorphism between knowing and the known, it cannot yield knowledge of an undifferentiated reality. Finally, inference (*anumāna*) relies upon perceptual data and is thus incapable of revealing anything without features.

The individual self: Agency

The Advaitin opponents say that one’s soul or true nature (*ātman*) is inactive, impersonal consciousness without any content because it is identical with the *brahman*. Everyday first-personal experience is a mirage, concealing one’s true nature as unconditioned being and consciousness. But devotional theism requires that the self is an individual thinking, acting and feeling entity, capable of responding to God. Advaitin gnostics and Viśiṣṭādvaitin theists attach quite different meanings to the term ‘*ātman*’. Viśiṣṭādvaita maintains that we really are individual souls, enduring substantial entities that are really distinct from the bodies that they animate and which they can objectify. Souls have experiences while not being reducible to streams of experiences. Each soul has its own ineffable identity that is known only to itself. Every subject of experience enjoys a unique

sense of itself as an enduring being somehow distinguished from oneself as a physically, psychologically and socially constituted person. It is this feeling that individuates the souls, whatever their circumstances. The soul is a permanent principle of identity that underpins the synthetic unity of experience in the present and through time.¹³

Viśiṣṭādvaitins think that agency, which requires some form of embodiment, is always an accidental and not an essential feature whether the soul is bound or released. Nevertheless, embodied agency is a reality, not a misconception.¹⁴ The Viśiṣṭādvaitin philosophers propound defences of common-sense realism about the self as a persisting centre of reflexive awareness that is in contact with mind-independent realities. Embodiment is crucial in that it enables agency and sorts of experience that exhaust the accumulated *karma* of souls in bondage to rebirth.

Where contexts of theistic belief are concerned, it may sometime appear that God's universal primary causality excludes the possibility of freely chosen human actions. There may be a suggestion that God is ultimately responsible for human decisions. Rāmānuja responds that God allows us to be free and that this freedom includes the ability to make the wrong choices. The matter receives attention in both his *Vedārthasaṃgraha* (§ 89–90) and in the *Śrī Bhāṣya* commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras* (2.3.40-1), where he tries to accommodate both universal divine primary causality of everything that happens and individual moral responsibility.

Rāmānuja envisages the following objection:

It has been stated that the Supreme Being is the Inner Guide (*antar-yāmin*) of all creatures and that everything is under his governance. If this is the case, then there is no one who can be a proper subject (*adhikārin*) of the injunctions and prohibitions found in the *śāstras*. For only someone who is able to act or not act just as a result of his own decisions can be a fit subject of injunctions and prohibitions of the kind 'one should do this' and 'one should not do that'. But there is none such. From what has been said about universal divine governance, it follows that it is God who causes our actions and that he is the driver of all the activities of everyone. As the Kauśītaki Upaniṣad (3.8) puts it: 'He incites to right actions the person whom he wishes to guide upward beyond the world, and he incites to wrong actions the one whom he wishes to bring down.' Does this not mean that God is cruel because he causes us to perform good and evil actions?¹⁵

To this Rāmānuja responds:

The Supreme Being has provided conscious beings equally with all the equipment in terms of thought and action that they need for performing or

refraining from activity. To accomplish this, the deity who is the very basis of their existence and that for the sake of whose glorification they exist has entered them and exercises control *in the sense of permitting them to act*. It is the individual who thus empowered by the godhead engages in actions entirely of its own accord. Observing what is being done, the deity does not interfere. Such creation of the possibility of the performance of good and bad actions is relative to individuals [and not arbitrary]. When a person of his own accord acts in a way that is approved, God is pleased with him and enhances his virtuous disposition, thereby helping him to remain steady in virtue. But when a person is habituated to actions that are displeasing to god, God responds by giving him a bad disposition and thus drives him to perform misdeeds of his own accord.

The question is also discussed in the *Śrī Bhāṣya* (2.3.40-41). The question is whether the agency of the individual soul is autonomous and independent, or does it depend upon God? The *prima facie* reply is that personal agency is entirely self-determining for if it were dependent upon God, it would follow that scriptural mandates and prohibitions would be meaningless. This is because injunctions can only apply to someone who is capable of making their own decisions to act or not act. But surely some scriptures teach that the agency of the individual soul arises from God because they say that God causes that agency? Rāmānuja takes such scriptures to mean that the godhead, as the soul's inner guide (*antar-yāmin*), observes the soul's intentions and enables it to act by granting permission. The decisions are made by the soul, but their enactment is not possible without the permission of the godhead. So it follows that the scriptural injunctions and prohibitions do make sense since they are directed at responsible agents.

Rāmānuja illuminates the relevant sense of consent and permission here with an analogy: Take the case of two owners of a piece of land. One wishes to sell it. To do so he must obtain the agreement of the co-owner. This consent or permission is a necessary condition of the deal's going through. But the process is the result of intention and actions on the part of the partner who wants to sell the land. The other merely makes it possible. Rāmānuja's point is that God makes possible the actions of the soul, and in this sense, causes them. It does not follow that it is God who is performing the soul's actions and that consequently personal agency is a mirage. In Rāmānuja's view, from the facts that God provides us with the capacity to make decisions and that God gives us the capacity to execute decisions, it does not follow that God is causing the action in the sense of making the decision. In short, God provides the conditions that enable free decisions on our part.

Indeed, another implication of God's permitting action is that the embodied soul is thereby granted the autonomy that is denied to purely material beings whose wholly causally determined behaviour is just an expression of physical processes.¹⁶ As we said above, Rāmānuja, in common with all the Vedāntic traditions, holds that the self is not an agent by nature. It becomes an agent when subject to spatio-temporal conditions. Where activities in the sphere of *saṃsāra* are concerned, the self's activity is not due to its own nature but to its contact with material nature. When embodied and subject to space and time, the soul is in bondage to a series of natural causes and effect. God confers the sort of supernatural freedom that is required for moral responsibility. The principle of divine consent or permission means that embodied souls are free personal agents relative to their circumstances and the causes of their own acts in spite of their entanglement in matter, an entanglement that includes the decision-making process that is 'located' in the physical *buddhi* or mind, which faculty is an evolute of material nature (*prakṛti*).

If *karma*, the system of right and wrong actions, punishments and rewards is understood as an automatic mechanism, then it poses a problem for theistic schools. How is such a mechanism related to the godhead? The question was often raised with reference to the manner of God's arranging the universe at the beginning of a cosmic epoch. This is a fresh start for the cosmos, but not for individual souls who retain their karmic inheritance. When deciding the status on individuals in the new creation, does God take account of their accumulated *karma* or not? The dilemma is this: if he does assign each soul's initial status in accordance with the moral quality of its karmic inheritance, it might seem that he is bound to accept the dictates of the *karma*-mechanism. In that case, God is not omnipotent. If on the other hand, God disregards the karmic inheritance of individuals when assigning status in the new world order, he is open to charges of arbitrary partiality towards some and cruelty towards others.

These matters receive attention in *Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.2.3, where the objection is countenanced that a perfect being whose purposes are ever realized could not be the creator because such a being would have neither reason nor motive to create anything. Moreover, the inequalities in creation imply that the creator is cruel. Rāmānuja responds to the first challenge that it is quite intelligible for a being that has everything that it needs to engage in play or sport. Such activity does not imply any sort of lack or deficiency. In response to the second, he says that it is only the previous deeds of the embodied souls that are responsible for the unequal arrangement of the world. This is

because God has regard to karmic inheritances when inaugurating a new cosmic epoch.

There follows an objection to the effect that if the organization of the new creation is an automatic response to the good and bad actions of souls, then there is no need of divine superintendence. Material nature will be conditioned by the good and bad actions of the souls, and will be appropriately transformed in different ways in accordance with human deserts [i.e. the conditions will be such that sentient beings may experience the fruits of their *karma*]. The response is that this objection belies ignorance of the natures of good and bad actions, something that can only be learnt from the Vedic scriptures [and is hence not a matter to be decided by humans]. Those scriptures teach that the essence of right actions is that they please the Supreme Person and that the essence of wrong actions is that they displease the godhead. The ethical value of an action consists in whether or not it is agreeable to the godhead. What is right is determined by what is good, where goodness means the same as being pleasing to God.

We see here the solution to dilemma raised by the question of God's relation to the *karma*-mechanism. Rāmānuja's tradition cuts the Gordian knot by a reinterpretation of the meaning of *karma*.¹⁷ For here, *karma* is not a self-regulating mechanism independent of the divine will and intellect. It makes no sense to treat it as something that the divinity might take notice of or not when arranging the initial distributions at creation. Rāmānuja thinks that morality is a matter of obeying divine commands. He holds that the notions of the morally good and morally bad have meaning only in relation to what God wills. Virtuous actions are by definition actions that please God. Indeed they are forms of worship. Possessing good *karma* means the same as being favoured by god. The rewards for good actions and punishments for bad ones are not automatically occurring products: rather, they are divinely willed.

Individual selves: Consciousness

The Viśiṣṭādvaitins agree with the Advaitins that consciousness is unique in that it does not require anything else to establish its existence (*svataḥ siddha*).¹⁸ But they differ from them in denying that the true self may be understood simply as consciousness. Were that the case, selves could not be individuals. Rather, reflexive and intentional consciousness is an essential

property of individual selves that are its agent and substrate. It is one's true nature that is incorrigibly revealed as the 'I' in every conscious state. Our everyday sense of selfhood is not a mistake concealing another authentic 'inner self'. Thoughts are properties that require an enduring thinking subject. That consideration is used by the Naiyāyikas as an inference for the existence of a persisting subject. But Rāmānuja and his tradition think that such an inference is superfluous because we are immediately aware of ourselves as enduring individual conscious agents. The self is not known in the same ways as objects and states of affairs in the world are known, because it is phenomenally given in direct intuition. Each of us is known to ourselves in an immediate and special way. Everyone always knows who they are.

The Self is the agent of conscious acts that illuminate objects. Conscious acts are both intentional and reflexive. The tradition defines consciousness in terms of two factors: its intentionality – its being directed towards objects other than itself – and its reflexivity or 'self-awareness'. They hold that all conscious states are intentional: they are acts on the part of a subject directed towards some object or state of affairs. But Rāmānuja resists the externalist view that experience is necessarily and not just causally dependent upon interactions with an objective environment by insisting that all conscious acts and states are always self-illuminating or intrinsically reflexive (*svayaṃ prakāśa*). That is to say, when a subject cognizes something, *simultaneously and in virtue of the same act*, he is aware of himself as cognizing that reality. Even in intentional cognitive acts that are, as it were, absorbed in the object by being fully attentive to it, there is also an element of subjective awareness.

We have seen that the Viśiṣṭādvaitins rule out the possibility of non-intentional blank awareness (*nirviśeṣa-cinmātra*). Awareness is always complex and always about something. Moreover, consciousness is in a state of flux. Were it identical with the self, it would be impossible to recognize something seen today as the same thing seen the previous day. The self is not a bundle of fleeting experiences. It is the persisting subject that has the experiences – a principle of continuity with a witness' perspective upon the states that it co-ordinates. The normal self keeps track of itself through time. It is the agent of mental acts, and its permanence as such and the momentary nature of those acts are both directly perceived. Distinctively, Viśiṣṭādvaitins think that the self both has the form of consciousness (*cid-rūpa*) and has consciousness as its quality. They say that consciousness is both substance

(*dravya*) and an attribute (*guṇa*), and its nature is to render entities susceptible of thought, speech and action. As the essential property (*svārūpa-nirūpaṇa-dharma*) of the soul, it can be considered as substance, but as discrete mental acts possessed by the self, it exists as an attribute.

The Advaitic tradition says that one's everyday feeling of personal identity (*ahaṁkāra*), the sense of oneself as an individual agent subject to religious and social duties and confronting a world of objects, is a mask concealing the identity of consciousness with the impersonal, inactive Absolute beyond differentiation. The illusion occurs when the light of consciousness is confused with the activity of the material intellect (*buddhi*). As we saw above, Rāmānuja's tradition denies that our everyday feeling of continuous personal identity is an illusion or a case of mistaken identity. It is integral to *bhakti* theism that the self that understands itself as a servant and lover of God should be the authentic self. The 'I' that thinks, intends and acts is the real self. The pronoun 'I' ultimately stands for the inner self that is itself animated by God, its inner guide and sustainer. As Nāthamuni puts it in the Nyāya-tattva, 'If "I" did not refer to the true self, there would be no interiority belonging to the soul. The interior is distinguished from the exterior by the concept "I". The aspiration "May I, having abandoned all suffering, participate freely in infinite bliss" actuates a person whose goal is liberation from rebirth (*mokṣa*). Were it thought that liberation involved the destruction of the individual, he would run away as soon as the subject of liberation was suggested.... The "I", the knowing subject, is the inner self.' In other words, if salvation through gnosis means the destruction of the person, we would have no interest in it.

The soul–body model

Rāmānuja's basic ontology is a hierarchy of three really distinct categories. At the summit there is the perfect being, the personal god Nārāyaṇa, the first cause and sovereign of the cosmos who is also immanent in individual souls as their existential support and guide. Next there are the souls themselves that are individual subjects of experience. They exist to glorify God but they are burdened by *karma* or the accumulated consequences of actions performed in past lives. Inherited *karma* is responsible for a contraction of the souls' cognitive and imaginative powers. It restricts the capacity for

moral discernment and sensibility. It brings about the misconception that one's embodied present circumstances define one's identity. Thirdly, there are the physical things populating the material environment that is the arena in which experiences are undergone. Rāmānuja's most significant contribution to Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology is his systematic elaboration of the Vaiṣṇava idea that the cosmos of souls and matter is the body of God. The notion derives from such scriptural passages as Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.7.3-23, verse 14 of which reads:

This soul of yours who is present within but is different from all beings, which all beings know not, whose body is all beings, and who guides all beings from within – he is the inner guide (*antar-yāmin*), the immortal one.

In a nutshell, the idea is that the relation between God and the world is loosely analogous to the relation between an individual soul (*jīva*) and its material body. God animates the world as the *jīva* animates its body. This is not intended as a provisional model – a fruitful way of thinking about divinity. Rather, it is the literal truth as stated by the scriptures (*śruti*) that are our only means of knowing (*pramāṇa*) about the transcendent.

The key features of the analogy are difference and dependence. Soul and body are distinct, but the body is essentially dependent upon the soul in the sense that the soul is its only *raison d'être*. But there is an even stronger kind of dependence: a given lump of matter is only constituted as a determinate corporeal entity when it is animated by a soul. So, extending the analogy into the sphere of human interests: our being bodies of God – alternatively, our being divinely animated – means that the purpose of our existence is that we might serve and glorify God, and that we only exist as entities because God has ordained it to be the case.

The soul–body model is succinctly stated in *Vedārthasaṃgraha* Section 76:

The relation between soul and body is that between existential ground (*ādhāra*) and dependent entity (*ādheya*) that is incapable of separate existence, between director and thing directed, and between principal (*śeṣī*) and subordinate (*śeṣa*). One term is called *ātman* because it is the substratum, the director and the principal. The other term is called body because it is an inseparably dependent mode (*apṛthak-siddhi-prakāra-bhūta*), a thing directed and a subordinate. Such is the relation between the individual soul and its body. Because all conscious and non-conscious entities are modes of the Supreme Soul because they are his body, all words for such beings apply in their primary senses to the Supreme Soul.

And as Rāmānuja puts it in *Śrī Bhāṣya* 1.1.1 (pp. 114–15):

The self is the sole unique substratum of the body since when it is separated from the body, the latter perishes. The self is the body's sole *raison d'être* since it exists only so that the soul may experience the fruits of its *karma*.

And again from *Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.3.18:

The *brahman* always has as its essentially dependent modes the conscious and non-conscious entities that compose its body. When that body of beings is in a super-subtle, potential condition, they cannot be designated as separate from the *brahman*. That is the *brahman*'s causal condition. When the body is in its gross condition, there is a distribution of names and forms applied to entities. That is the *brahman*'s effected condition.

The specialized definition of a body as 'any substance that a sentient being is able to control and support for its own purposes and which is entirely subordinate to that entity' (*Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.1.9) is a response to those who say that the world (let alone souls!) neither looks nor behaves like the range of items usually designated by the term 'body'. Indeed, Rāmānuja remarks that in ordinary language, the word 'body' differs from words such as 'pot', whose denotation is restricted to things of a single form, because it is applied to items of radically different character.

Rāmānuja's formulation of the relation between God and the world of finite beings in terms of the soul-body model was in part a response to two alternative ways of thinking, both of which he saw as objectionable. One was that of the Advaita Vedāntins who held that the absolute reality (the *brahman*) was undifferentiated and inactive consciousness, and that the merely apparent individual selves are identical with that. In truth, there are no individual entities of any sort, and thinking in terms of difference is a mistake. It follows that the phenomenal world about us and our experiences of ourselves as personal individuals are ultimately speaking a mirage concealing a changeless absolute totally detached from the realm of becoming. All plurality of selves and actions, thoughts and objects, results from the operation of a beginningless force that generates misconceptions (*bhāva-rūpa-avidyā*) about the true nature of reality. As Rāmānuja puts it, 'The one simple conscious reality when concealed by *avidyā* manifests (*vivartate*) the cosmos' (Veds § 35).¹⁹ To Rāmānuja's mind, Advaita denies not only the reality and value of personal individuality and experience, but also the reality of suffering and evil.

Most schools of Vedānta (that of Madhva is an exception) say that the *brahman*, or the unsurpassingly great being, is both the material (or substrative) and the efficient cause of the cosmos. They accept the *Sāṃkhya* system's *satkārya-vāda* theory of causation, which states that effects pre-exist in subtle or potential form in their material causes prior to their emergence as determinate entities with name and form. This can be interpreted as meaning that cause and effect are substantially the same, while effects are treated as different because they acquire their own additional properties and functions. Material causes were deemed to transform themselves into their effects: milk turns into yoghurt, pots and plates are made from clay, and jewellery is made from gold. The one material 'stuff' is scattered throughout the world. When this idea is applied in cosmogonic contexts to the *brahman*, the cosmos is thought of as emerging from the being or substance of that unconditioned reality. It is that being that is distributed as the cosmos. Obviously, this notion that the world and everyone in it is the self-transformation of the divinity has parallels with the idea that there is an *analogia entis* between God and the world. There is a strong ontological continuity, a shared nature, between the *brahman* and the emergent cosmos.

Advaita Vedānta accepts a version of the *satkārya-vāda* view of causation. They say if the substrative cause is undifferentiated and inactive awareness, its effects must be also. Hence, phenomenal plurality, individuality and activity are not ultimately real. Another form of Vedānta (sometimes called 'Bhedābheda-vāda') sought to defend realism against Advaitin *vivarta-vāda*. But it posed an equally serious challenge to devotional theism. This was because its pantheistic claim that the world is a real transformation (*pariṇāma*) of the substance of the *brahman* could be read as meaning that the essence of the Supreme Being and the total cosmos are one and the same. According to this view, the *brahman* becomes the cosmos and the cosmos is what the absolute has changed into. Some of these people say that the *brahman* is the all-encompassing universal Being of which all entities are instances. They believed that souls and matter emanated from the godhead, a single divine substance that transforms itself into all subjects and objects of experience. Such views were objectionable to Rāmānuja who thought that by recognizing the conversion of unconditioned reality into finite realities, they implicated divinity in imperfections including suffering and rebirth. This has the undesirable consequence that release from the series of births is impossible (*Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.3.18).

Rāmānuja describes the view of Bhāskara and his school as follows:

They say that the effected cosmos is real. The difference between the individual soul and the *brahman* is contingent [brought about by limiting conditions]. By nature, they are non-different. The duality of the *brahman* and matter is natural. Given that there are no realities other than the *brahman* and the limiting conditions (*upādhi*), and given the connection of a limiting condition with the undivided and partless *brahman*, it is the *brahman* as it is in itself that is transformed into inferior modes of being. (*Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.1.15)

Bhāskara and his followers say that the *brahman* although having every exalted quality such as freedom from evil is connected with a limiting condition so that it is bound and released, and becomes the basis of a transformation into imperfect modes of being. (*Vedārthasaṃgraha* § 8)

And in the cognate view of Rāmānuja's teacher Yādavaprakāśa:²⁰

The *brahman* is the substrative cause of the cosmos. It is hyper-essential substance that is just undifferentiated being. But it possesses all potentialities. In that condition the properties of being an experiencer, being an object of experience and being the regulator are elided.

Prior to the emergence of the cosmos, the substrative cause albeit self-luminous rests like one asleep, all experiential variety having ceased. At creation, just as the substance clay acquires the forms of pots and plates and the water of the ocean becomes foam, waves and bubbles, so the substrative cause constitutes itself in tripartite form whose parts are: subjects of experience, objects of experience and the director. The properties of being subjects of experience, objects of experience and the director as well as the virtues and defects attendant upon them are distributed as the cosmos. They are one in being, just as pots and plates etc. are constituted by clay. It is just the substance, simple undifferentiated being, that underlies all the different states and conditions. In this sense, the world is not different from the *brahman*. (*Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.1.15)

Rāmānuja says that it follows from the Advaitin view that 'The *brahman* itself is deluded by beginningless *avidyā*. It follows from one version of the emanationist view (that of Bhāskara) that the reality of the limiting condition (*upādhi*) applied to the *brahman* is that the *brahman* itself is in a state of bondage to space, time and rebirth. It follows from the other version (that of Yādavaprakāśa) that because the *brahman* is transformed under manifold aspects, it experiences the unpleasant fruits of action (i.e. is subject to *karma*). Furthermore, God cannot be identified simply as undifferentiated being for two reasons. In the first place, pure being is admitted to be but one aspect of the godhead, and in the second place, all being is differentiated. In terms of the opponent's formulation, the divinity is but one of three aspects of the substrative

cause. It follows that the divinity is part of the whole that is undifferentiated being and hence subordinate to that whole' (*Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.1.15).

One of the reasons why Rāmānuja developed the three-level ontology (God, souls and material things) was to counter the claims of such *pariṇāma-vādins* and *vivarta-vādins*. He insists that entities at each of the three levels of the hierarchy are essentially distinct and that there is no substantial intermingling of the properties of being the sovereign, being subjects of experience and being objects of experience. He replaced the *brahma-pariṇāma* theory, which sees the world as a transformation of the divine substance, with the *brahma-śarīra-pariṇāma* theory. According to the latter, the cosmos is what happens when the body of the *brahman*, 'containing' all souls and material things in potential forms, moves from its causal to its effected condition. The occurrence of the cosmos is a reality, a real transformation initiated by and continuous with the divinity, but change and imperfection occurs in the sphere proper to the conscious and non-conscious entities that are essentially dependent modes in that they constitute the body of the *brahman*. The transcendent divine essence is unsullied by involvement in finite conditions, albeit ones of its own making. The divine perfection is preserved. The soul-body model may be viewed as panentheistic. It is a theology which seeks to accommodate divine transcendence, the qualitative otherness and infinite perfection of the deity, and divine immanence in the world. The *brahman* is 'in' the world as that which sustains and pervades it. This total pervasiveness underlines its otherness from the finite. The soul-body model also articulates the belief that God is the innermost constitutive element (*antar-yāmin*) in man. Since soul and body are intimately related as well as categorically distinct, the idea holds together immanence and transcendence. Just as the body is existentially dependent upon its animating self, so the individual selves are utterly dependent upon the Supreme Being. The categorical difference between self and body means that when the *brahman* is regarded as the self of his body or the cosmos of souls and matter, he is untouched by imperfection.

The individual self being related to the Supreme Being as Its body, its properties do not affect the godhead any more than infancy, youth and other features of the material body touch the individual soul. (*Śrī Bhāṣya* 1.1.13)

Being free from evil is of course an aspect of the divine perfection. The precise sense is that the godhead is free from *karma*: a mode of being that is the preserve of the Supreme Being and released souls. This expresses

divine transcendence, the total otherness of the creator's essence from the world process. Individual selves are, however, bound by the consequences of their *karma*, which is responsible for a contraction of their innate cognitive and imaginative powers. It is not a constraint upon agency, because the souls are agents only when embodied and subject to space and time in modes appropriate to their *karmas*. Since they are not agents by nature, such limits are not limitations. Furthermore, the godhead has arranged the diversity of creation in accordance with the different *karmas* of individual souls (*Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.1.35).

The soul–body model and the interpretation of scripture²¹

‘Since everything forms the body of the Supreme Person, he is directly signified by every word.’ The soul–body model enables Rāmānuja to interpret many scriptural statements that had been treated as favourable to Advaitic monism in a theistic way. Rāmānuja has a semantic principle that the signification of words for essentially dependent modal entities (e.g. bodies) extends to the mode-possessor.²² Whenever something is essentially in an attributive relation to something else (this includes the relations between qualities, generic properties (*sāmānya*, *ākṛti*) and the individual substances (*dravya*) to which they belong as well as that between souls and bodies), the terms for the attributes may also signify the possessor. God has created the expressive power (*vācaka-śakti*) of words together with the entities which they signify. Any self is a mode of the *brahman* since it is included in the *brahman*'s body. Human bodies are modes of their souls. Words for bodies signify in their primary senses both the sentient entities that animate their respective bodies and God *qua* the inner controller and guide (*antar-yāmin*) of the self. God's immanence as the soul of each embodied soul is the basis of the literal reference of some scriptural passages to him.

It is in the field of scriptural exegesis that the soul–body model comes into its own.²³ The interpretation of coreferential (*samānādhikaraṇa*) statements such as ‘*Tat tvam asi*’ (‘That thou art’ expressing a relation between the self and the *brahman*) and ‘*Satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ Brahma*’ (‘The Brahman is reality, consciousness, infinite’: *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1) is central to Vedāntic theology. *Samānādhikaraṇa* means the co-occurrence of two or more items, for example an individual substance and its property,

in the same locus or substrate. In grammatical usage, it is 'the reference to a single object by several terms having different grounds for their application'. Such constructions appear in scriptures expressing the relationship between God and the world, and God and the self, or in the case of '*Satyam jñānam anantaṁ Brahma*' as saying something about the divine nature.

Vedāntins believe that the language of revealed *śruti* is our only means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) about transcendent reality. We have no cognitive access to God independently of the infallible and authorless scriptural authorities. Rāmānuja is a realist holding that there is an isomorphism between knowledge and the known. There is also a structural isomorphism between scriptural statements and the reality of which they speak. It is not just the meanings of words that are informative. Grammatical constructions reflect the nature of reality. There is a sense in which a thinker's theory of meaning determines their metaphysics. Advaitins emphasize the singularity of reference and construe coreferential constructions as identity statements conveying an impartite essence (*akhaṇḍārtha*). This usually involves attributing non-literal senses (*lakṣaṇā-artha*) to the co-ordinated words, and this is recognized as an exegetical weakness. Rāmānuja's tradition maintains that the grounds for the application are differences belonging to what is signified. Co-referentiality is thus the reference to a complex reality by words expressing its different features. Rāmānuja says that it expresses a single entity qualified by its essentially dependent modes. He interprets co-referential statements about God and features of creation as expressive of the soul-body relation. In the case of '*Tat tvam asi*' ('That thou art'), the Advaitins attribute an extraordinary sense to each term: 'that' stands for the impersonal Absolute, and 'thou' has to be purged of its everyday connotations of individual personality so that it may signify the inner self that is identical with the *brahman*. The statement expresses the identity of the two. But according to the Viśiṣṭādvaita exegesis, the 'that' stands for the creator God, the inner guide of the soul, of whom all entities are modes since they form his body. 'Thou' stands for an individual self, an essentially dependent mode of God. '*Tat*' denotes the Highest Self, which is the cause of the universe, whose purposes are ever-actualized (*satya-saṃkalpa*), who possesses every exalted quality and who is devoid of every trace of imperfection. '*Tvam*' denotes the same *brahman* embodied by the individual self, along with the body of the latter. The grammatical co-ordination conveys the unity (not identity) of the two. The coreferential terms apply in their primary senses.

Let us conclude with some of Rāmānuja's own words:

People unlearned in Vedānta do not see that all objects and all individual souls participate in the nature of the Brahman. They think that the referential scope of all words is restricted to the entities that they usually signify that are in fact only part of their meanings. Once they have learnt about the Vedānta passages, they understand that all words signify the Brahman who constitutes his various modes since everything participates in the Brahman in so far as he is the Inner Controller and that everything is created by him. (Vedārthasaṃgraha, p. 21)

The body may be thought of in co-ordination with the Self in that it is the essential nature of bodies to exist in an attributive relation with selves since they would not exist independently of them. This is comparable to the relation between generic properties such as cowness and their individual instances. (*Gītā Bhāṣya* 13.1)

We have interpreted the manifold scriptural statements consistently with each other and without sacrificing their literal senses. The Scriptures saying that the Brahman does not change retain their primary senses by rejecting transformations of its essential nature. The Scriptures saying that it is without qualities are established as denying undesirable ones. Denials of diversity are preserved because they assert that the Brahman has everything as its modes in that he is the soul of all because all conscious and non-conscious things are entities only because they are embodied modes of the one Brahman. Passages saying that the Lord is different from his modes and has all perfections may be taken at their face value. Statements that he is pure consciousness and bliss are taken literally because they convey a self-luminous reality having blissful awareness as an essential property. Statements of unity are well established because the coreferential constructions in their primary senses express a soul-body relation.

Is the overall purport of the Upaniṣads difference or non-difference or difference-cum-non-difference? It is all three. Non-difference is established because the one Brahman has everything as its modes because he is embodied by everything. Difference-cum-non-difference (*bhedābheda*) is established because the *one* Brahman exists as multiplicity having conscious and non-conscious entities as his modes. Difference is established because non-conscious entities, conscious entities and the Lord differ in respect of their essential natures and activities and are not intermingled. (Vedārthasaṃgraha, pp. 84–5)

Further reading

The *Śrī Bhāṣya* is translated in Thibaut (1904) and the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* in van Buitenen (1956). The commentary on the *Gītā* has an English précis in van Buitenen (1953).

Svāmī Ādidevānanda's edition and translation of the *Yatindra matadīpikā* is a useful primary source.

There is a classic monograph by Carman (1974), which can be supplemented by Lipner (1986) and Bartley (2002).

For God as the 'inner-controller', see Oberhammer (1998).

For the devotional religious context, see Hardy (1983).

For Pañcarātra, Schrader (1973) is still the standard work. There is interesting material in Sanderson (2001). See also Sanjukta Gupta (2000), *Lakṣmī Tantra*.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Does Rāmānuja have a pantheistic *vision* of the world as the body of God, or is the notion better understood as an exegetical device?
2. Why is Rāmānuja so resolute in his opposition to Advaita?

Notes

1. The compound word resolves as *viśiṣṭasya-advaita*, meaning 'unity of something complex'.
2. For Yāmuna, see Neevel (1977). For Rāmānuja, see Lipner (1986) and Bartley (2002).
3. The chronology proposed here works back from Vedānta Deśika.
4. See Hardy (1983).
5. *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, p. 3.
6. van Buitenen (1953), pp. 179–82.
7. Sanderson (2009) pp. 58–70 and Sanderson (2001)(historyx).
8. The earliest references are in the *Mahābhārata*, dating to the two or three centuries prior to the Common Era. See Schrader (1916).
9. See Śrī Bhāṣya 2.1.33.

10. The most revered are the *Sātvata-āgama*, the *Jayākhya-saṃhitā* and the *Pauṣkara-saṃhitā*.
11. In *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, pp. 92–3, he gives a long list of earlier teachers belonging to the Vedāntic tradition of Upaniṣadic exegesis who taught that *bhakti* alone, expressed in action and involving profound understanding, is the path to god.
12. See also Bartley (2011) for more about theistic reactions to Advaitin metaphysics.
13. Bartley (2002), pp. 48–64.
14. Lipner (1986), Ch. 4.
15. *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, p. 89.
16. Śrī Bhāṣya 2.3.33.
17. See also the Pāñcarātra scripture *Lakṣmī Tantra* 3.32-7 (Gupta 2000):
‘O Goddess, born of the milky ocean, if you distribute pleasure and pain having regard to *karma*, what has become of your complete freedom?
Reply: Karma is my instrument when I am creating. The dependence of an agent upon an instrument does not impede his autonomy. Do not look for a reason: [creation] is just for playfulness (*līlā*).’ The notion that creation is divine play enjoys currency in all the Tantric traditions.
18. For more, see Bartley (2002), pp. 49–64 and Lipner (1986), Ch. 3.
19. *Pariṇāma* says the world is a modification of a basic reality and that the substrative cause and its effects are equally real. *Vivarta* names a process wherein less than fully real effects emerge from a real substrative cause. See Vedānta Paribhāṣā Section 85.
20. Oberhammer (1997).
21. For a more detailed treatment, see Bartley (2002), Ch. 4.
22. Because the body is a mode of the embodied entity and because the meanings of words for modes extend to the mode-possessor, there is the principle that the meanings of words signifying bodies extend to what is embodied. Whenever we think, ‘This is such and such’, the mode is understood as the aspect that is ‘such and such’. It is logical that the mode culminates in the mode-possessor since it depends upon that entity and its being apprehended depends upon that entity. Thus, a word signifying a mode extends to the possessor (*Śrī Bhāṣya* 1.1.13).
23. Because all conscious and non-conscious entities are modes of the Supreme Soul in that they are his body, all words for such beings apply in their primary senses to the Supreme Soul (*Vedārthasaṃgraha*, p. 75).

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