

EGO, THE PROBLEM PERENNIAL OF PHILOSOPHY*

Philosophy seems to have at least one genuine problem and that, again, a perennial one — which cannot be 'resolved' by an analysis of propositions or of other forms of language. Nor can this problem be 'solved' by any branch of natural or social sciences. The problem is strictly philosophical, yet a mere philosophical understanding does not help its solution and so the problem remains a perennial problem. The case is similar to the case where the disease is correctly diagnosed and the curative medicine is prescribed but in the absence of active cooperation of the patient the treatment does not become fruitful. The patient or the sufferer has some degree of liking for the suffering to stay. This has made the solution of the problem another problem. This problem is the problem of the *ego*, untamed and distempered. Because of it, the human individual is frequently at war with himself — how else could there be repentance and remorse? The individual is also open to clash and conflict with other members of society, community, or any other social group. He is maladjusted and subject to tension and stress. Mere sermonising without understanding of the peculiar nature of the problem does not seem to help in any way. And for this understanding one has to look to philosophy.

The problem of the 'ego' is the problem of the 'I', or of the 'I-sense'. This 'I' has mistakenly been taken as a 'substantive' reality, absolutely indubitable, and also as a thinking substance, while the 'I' is merely an individuated identity-sense, the ego-sense, and its so-called indubitability is 'presuppositional' and contextual, not absolute. The 'I' is very often forgotten or shelved in the background and very rarely consciously attended to. It is lost in dreamless sleep, under a tranquilliser, and great relief follows by forgetting it or losing it. It is also a mistake to regard the 'I' as the so-called 'Self'. Of course, the 'ego' has a natural urge for building itself up as durable something, the urge for parading as the Self. But there is no individual self, nor can there be any. The individual selves are an innovation of pluralistic

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metaphysics, catering to the affective and conative urge of the ego to provide for a device for prolonging or perpetuating it even in a skeletal or ethereal form somewhere beyond its normal and natural span of existence to accord to it an existence both pre-natal and post-mortem. The ego is infatuated with itself and has the natural urge to cling to itself perpetually, and cannot get reconciled with the idea of eventual non-existence. Pluralistic metaphysics have provided several devices in fulfilment of that blind urge of the ego but such devices are all frivolous and false.

The egos may be looked upon as individuated conscious foci through which Reality is *objectively represented* in distinguishable names and forms as an unmitigated plurality. Had there not been these ego-forms, Reality, whatever may be its nature, would have been an undistinguished and indeterminate mass of pure Being-as-such (*sadeva*). The Upaniṣadic statement that in the beginning there was only one pure Being-as-such and that this 'intended' to express and experience itself in multiplicities of forms need not be *taken* as senseless or mystical, provided we do not interpose a time-sequence, a before-and-after between the original state of pure Being-as-such and its manifold and manifold manifestations through the mechanism of the plural egos, that is, its *phenomenal* 'Becoming' as 'many'. The determinate plural manifestations through the ego-centres and the Indeterminate undistinguished one may as well be taken as co-eval without the suggestion of a material difference - the former being 'mere appearance', the latter, the Reality itself. The determinate 'many' is not the product of any human manipulation. The determinate plurality and the Indeterminate absolute one-ness are provided in Reality as two 'poises'. The Indeterminate could not be known and understood as that, could not be realised as the identity and so, as the one 'Self' of the determinate plurality, were these latter not been there and were they not ultimately reducible to the former.

Although initially a *mechanism* of individuated representation, and nothing *substantive* and self-dependent, the ego when it no longer remains barely cognitive and an organ (*indriya*) through which something is objectively presented, -when it gathers up an affective and conative tone around its cognitive core, it no longer remains in the condition of a simple instrumental device, a mere

'sense', which it really is, but assumes the role of a substantive reality and grows and develops into an individual person. The 'I' (*ahampratyayin*), thereafter, begins parading as the individual 'self'.

The ego, the 'I', may be looked upon as an artefact of Reality itself, no product of human manipulation, no external imposition on Reality by you or by me. Śaṅkara did not suggest anything so absurd in his account of '*adhyāsa*' in the *Adhyāsa-bhāṣya*. As provided in nature, the ego is a mechanism for '*Self-seeking*', that is, it looks for ever new '*identities*' in a grabbing and *possessive* way. Sometimes, it seeks identity with its bare itself and regards that as its 'self', sometimes it seeks identity with the body, with the mind, with the senses, with extra-organic entities, such as, one's family, community, landed property etc. etc... But this is its centrifugal development in which it gradually loses itself in what is not-itself. There is another movement of the ego - a centripetal one. It there progressively rejects all adventitious '*identities*' previously acquired and returns back to its bare cognitive I-sense, and discovers its one real identity in the Indeterminate one from which it had issued forth as a mechanism of individuated formation.

Much confusion seems to have resulted from the philosophers adherence to the view that the 'Self' is to be a substantive reality, immutable and eternal, having a transcendental existence of some kind. This has given rise to the controversy if the self is one or many and how it is, if at all, related to the cycle of existence. Some have disputed its very existence, some others have sought to reduce it to a mere configuration of psychophysical complex. It seems that the protagonists, and opponents of the Self-theory have all confused between the 'ego' and the 'Self', and have all speculated about substantive or unsubstantial nature of the ego under the belief that what they were discussing about was the nature of the Self and not that of the ego. A re-interpretation of the concept, such as, the 'Self' seems necessary therefore. The self of a thing is that *with which it is identified*. The Self is the '*fact of identity*', real or fancied. It is also the 'value' which is realised through such identification that is, the satisfaction or fulfilment which attends on that identification. Of course, there are false selves and false values as there are false *identities*. But

this does not contradict the fact that the 'self' in any situation is the identity which seems to satisfy or fulfil even temporarily-. The one true 'Self' is that identity which fulfils absolutely, leaving nothing more to be desired. This seems to be the secret of 'Śāṅkara's understanding of the true Self as *pāramārthika sattā* that is to be a state of identity and also the supreme value, and which fulfils absolutely. If Brahman or Reality as such is regarded as *Ātman* or Self, it is because the realisation of absolute one-ness with it becomes the supreme goal. It becomes the liberation in being the liquidation of the separatist 'I'.

Two kinds of problem are associated with the ego. The ego, in its aggressive and possessing manouvre creates tension and unrest for the individual and an atmosphere of aggression and exploitation in the larger human relationships, such as, society community, and international relationships. The other problem has been a philosophical and speculative one - the ego, demanding or wishing for perpetuation beyond the span of the individual's life in the form of an eternal and immutable existence, however skeletal that may be, that is, as a transcendental individual self. Both these false senses need be corrected and the ego has to be tamed in the first case and brought to its proper sense and understanding in the second. The task is difficult, and mere sermonising does not help. That is the reason why the problem is perennial. The ego has to get over its false sense of substantivity and to awake to the sense of mere 'instrumentality' that is, of its nature as a *sense (indriya)* and not as a substance or Self. Religious mood seeking to supplant the 'I' by 'Thou' is a move in right direction although liberation in the full sense of the term can be possible in the Vedantic way only-that is, by the lapsing of determinate 'I' in the Indeterminate Tranquil in self-realisation. The 'I' is to withdraw from all other identities secured by it in course of its outgoing movement, is to get over its false sense of substantivity and is to find its *one* identity in Reality self. This is true of all ego-formations.

I

Many of our contemporaries are likely to look askance at the very caption of this paper. Philosophy, according to them, has no problem to solve. All its so-called problems are pseudo-problems which arise from misuse of language or from linguistic confusion.

Such pseudo-problems, we are told, can be fitfully 'resolved' by proper analysis of language. We are not disposed to quarrel with this view over resolution of problems which are all linguistic. The question which concerns us here is if all problems which we face in life can be resolved linguistically, or solved by the help of natural sciences. Human life is beset with problems of various kinds. All such problems, it seems, cannot be attended to in the same way, cannot all be solved in one specific way; nor can all be 'resolved' by logical analysis of statements or propositions. We are concerned here with one such problem. This problem is perennial in so far as, in spite of all that we may know about the nature and origin of this problem, mere theoretical knowledge in its regard does not, enable us to solve it,—much depends on the person himself to go all out for the solution instead of holding back. This problem, is the problem of the 'I', the person that each one knows and feels so intimately and so importantly, and around which we all build up worlds of hopes and aspirations. The 'I' in me and whatever is related to this 'I', of me, and whatever I call 'mine' and my 'own' seem to be the central and the most vital facts with me. Inclining to what is 'me' and 'mine' am agitated if anything goes against what I have known as 'my' interests, I feel elated and puffed up if everything goes well with 'me' and 'mine'. My personal needs and requirements seem not to know any bounds. I regard that as right which is gainful to 'me', and that as wrong which goes against 'me' and 'mine'. Am I not myself a problem to me and also to others? Then, again, as I am an 'I' a self-centred individual person, so are all other conscious individuals, they are other 'I'-s. As I regard myself as all-important, others regard themselves in the very same way. Our interests very often clash; there are rivalries and competitions, love and hatred, aggression and malice. Do we not have personal problems, social problems, racial problems, economic and political problems—problems international? Do they not at their very core indicate presence of some ego-factor, some claim to racial, individual or personal *preference*? How is the concept of preferential treatment, or 'preference' meaningful without reference to the ego, to the 'I' covertly, if not overtly? Can all these problems be solved linguistically or with the help of our knowledge of natural sciences? What is wanted seems to be a remodelling of human

character, a reformation of the very nature of man. But even that seems to touch only the fringe of the issue involved. What is demanded is a judicial settlement of the nature of the core-fact in every conscious individual, the 'I'. Is not this 'I' really a problem to you and me? Are we not constantly agitated for this 'I', do not all our hopes and despair, wear and woe, as a last resort, refer to this 'I' and attach themselves to it? It can be seen that it is the very nature of this 'I,' of the 'I-sense' to be more precise to create all sorts of problems. With inanimate nature there is no problem – no demand for readjustment, resettlement of issues, no questionings and no challenges. Man is the problem of this creation and what makes man the fountain-head of problems is this personal factor in him-his 'I'.

This 'I' is felt as a unity and identity. It looks as a substantive reality in so far as it remains unchanged and the same in spite of all bodily changes of the person. That 'I am' or 'I exist;' it is said, cannot be denied even when all else is denied. The 'I' thus, has created one of the knottiest of problems of metaphysics. The problem has been: if this 'I' which is immediately felt to be real and so, is empirically real, is also metaphysically real, and real transcendently, that is, real and existent independently of all its associations with the body. Then, again, this 'I' in me is the nearest and dearest to me as your 'I' is the nearest and the dearest to you. I usually take my 'I' as you also take your 'I' as the very 'Self.' We are all worried and anxious not only about the earthly prospects of these 'our selves,' that is, not only interested about various advancements of these 'selves' in this life, but are also worried and anxious about the chances of their survival after death. There have been systems of philosophical thought in this country which conceived the life as it is ordinarily lived and led as a state of bondage. Different such systems have speculated about the possibility of a free, enlightened and blissful life, or atleast of a state of peace tranquillity which this 'I,' the individual Self can have as a kind of prospect, here as also here after. The problem of a future life or of the so-called immortal life of the spirit is also frequently associated with this 'I' conceived as a metaphysical reality, adventitiously related to the body. There are other problems too and not less embarrassing. I and you and all self-conscious individuals like you and me

fall apart from one another in absolute distinction and into pockets of isolation and utmost privacy in so far as all of us have 'I'-s, which differ absolutely from one another. Is it not intriguing that although you feel towards yourself as 'I' as much as I feel towards myself as 'I' yet the same symbol, the very same kind of sense or feeling, instead of giving rise to a 'common-wealth' of individuals, gives rise to 'an each-for-him self-alone,' that is, to an unmitigated plurality? It does not become an easy matter to share equitably without sense of deprivation or exploitation all that is valued in life. It even becomes difficult to concede that others are *like* me, they also feel in the same way, enjoy or suffer as I do. So here also there are lots of problem associated with the 'I'. The same 'I' has absolutely separate, even mutually exclusive *identities*. Is it not an enigma that absolutely distinct identities remain distinct and isolated by virtue of a certain sense or feeling which apparently is atleast of the same sort. When I feel myself as 'I' you do not feel towards yourself as 'X' but as 'I' although your 'I' and my 'I' are absolutely different.

Behind all human acts and expressions an 'I',—be it your 'I' or my 'I', has to be present in order that there can be such acts or expressions. The world of our thought and action has at its foundation or basis the 'I' s— all individual and separate, determining it in some way. Without the 'I-s' there could be the world, of course, but not the one we know, not the world of *our* thought and understanding, action and reaction. The presence of the 'I'-s is not always notified. Does not the statement 'fire burns' have an invisible 'I' at its back as the Speaker? Besides the 'I', which as a personal pronoun is incorporated in thought and language, there is another metalinguistic 'I' accompanying every such action and expression. What is its role in language? It has been said that the 'I' is not only one of the basic particulars¹ but, that it is the most fundamental and foundational of all other demonstratives since all particulars, even the most elementary ones among them, are all ego-centric. Is this 'I', as the ego, any linguistic symbol or a metalinguistic presence? The type of dependence that all our linguistic symbols seem to have on the 'I' shows it up as pivotal. Is this 'I' the source of all symbolisation, itself any symbol? This may very well be doubted. If a symbol, what is it that it symbolises? The 'I' it so seems, is what an Indian philoso-

pher might call an *inner sense* (*antarendriya*), an instrumentation involving an inward unique reference to one's own individuality. Like a 'sense' (*indriya*) of that meaning it does not know itself as a separate fact but is taken for what it dwells upon at the moment. The 'I' an inward unique reference, a principle or instrumentation of self-conscious individuality, is very much unstable like a sense. It wavers and shifts from point to point, between a minimum and a maximum of a person's individuality—trans-psychic, psychic (cognitive, affective, conative), bodily, and even extra-organic individuality, such as, being a Professor, a legislator and a V.I.P. What is it that is ever common to your 'I' and my 'I'? Your 'I' and my 'I' seem to constitute *our absolute distinction*. Such being the case, how can we speak of any commonness or common factor? Yet both of us seem to understand in some way what it is to be your 'I' and my 'I'. The 'I' seems not to be so much a symbol as a *fact*,—felt, known and understood. It is for this 'I' or rather the 'I' sense that there are *plural* experiences, *plural* facts and *plural* manifestation. Has not this emergent plurality created a whole host of problems, both personal and social? Will it be very much wrong to say that the 'I' the 'I sense,'—has been the source of problems which are all real and genuine and not pseudo-problems? Then, again, the problems, which are associated with the 'I' cannot be tackled by other means, these will have to be attended to *philosophically*, that is, by way of reflective thinking at the outset. Philosophy alone can show in what way the solution, if any, lies. But, as we have expressed earlier, something more than philosophy or reflective thought will be needed if the solution is at all to be arrived at or made, and that, again, by each one for himself. This 'I' essentially an inward sense of intimate reference, when posited as an *existential* content, that is, as 'I am' may be called the Ego. This then parades as a substantial reality. Non-philosophers worry about the ways and means of its material advancement. Philosophers worry about its ultimate destiny, salvation and immortality. The Indian doctrines of bondage and liberation, we feel, may be better understood as several speculations about the ultimate nature and destiny of this 'I' parading as a pseudo-substance.

II

This problem of 'I', that is, of the ego, has not been *attempted* to be solved in one particular way in the various Indian systems.

It is also doubtful if all the systems have ever solved it, that is, if they have *all* succeeded is showing in what direction a correct and permanent solution is even *possible*—the solution itself, as we have already said, is a practical affair. Then, again, in respect of this problem, there can be no collective solution—no solution for all people together and collectively, no solution, again, by any extraneous arrangement or means, such as, by a social, economic or political planning. The problem is the individual's own, and has to be solved by the individual himself and for himself. It is associated with the individual's own existence as an individual,—the empirical person. Yet it will be quite wrong if an impression is created that this human problem which can be solved by the individual himself alone is without social significance or bearing. Society is nothing entitative, no absolute fact by itself. Society is the name for inter-relation of individuals as some have very wisely maintained.² Individual's own passions, appetites and inclinations, actions and reactions have a determining role in the maintenance of the health, the state of equilibrium of society. The social ego, at times elevated to the rank of a distinct entity,—an antecedent determining factor of the individual, is basically an accumulated functional form of stratified deposits of ego-strains through ages, originally individual in their formations. All human problems, individual and social—ethical, economic and political, thus seem to have grown up and developed in all dimensions around on one central and crucial factor and this is the ego, the 'I am so and so' (*ahamidam*) and 'mine so and so' (*mamedam*)³. What disaster, both individual and social, has not been wrought by an aggressive and self-justifying manifestation of this 'I so and so'!

This ego or the 'ego-sense' this 'I-feeling' is a fact of conscious existence. Nothing can be gained, it seems, by an inquiry or stipulation as to how it originated, how it came to develop, how it came to be formed. It will be more rewarding if we accept it as a given fact, even as a primary datum. To all *appearance*, it seems to exhibit a substantive core, which is evidenced by all feelings and what we call 'conscious states' falling towards it or grouping around it in an immediate way. Even if this core fact is admitted in the way of a Humean or Jamesian⁴ empiricist as nothing entitative but a kind of *branding* or 'herding mark' as-

sociated with the cerebral or neural mechanism of a living body, the fact remains that it is there, and it will be a clear case of *hysteron proteron* to argue that it is the product of the grouping or herding process.⁵ Among Indian philosophers, it was perhaps the Ārvaka materialists and the Buddhist functionalists, who ever wanted to regard it as some kind of an epiphenomenon, a pseudo-fact, an emergent product, in their bid to *causally explain* this core fact, which all others regarded as more or less fundamental.

It seems necessary to indicate initially what we mean by this core fact called the 'Ego' in order that there may not be any charge of equivocation. We can *provisionally* specify it as the 'self-feeling, the feeling as 'I', with which everybody is acquainted in an immediate way. That 'I am' or 'I exist' was once regarded by Descartes as a primary and indubitable fact, the denial of which, according to him, involves self-contradiction. We shall hereafter, try to understand what this can mean. We do not, however, share Descartes, illumination to regard this 'I am' or the indubitable 'I' as the *Self*. We would not also go for amorphously designating it as a *spiritual substance* as Descartes did. This 'I am', the 'Self-feeling', seems to be a mode of 'feeling towards', collateral with the 'other-ness'-feeling. It is a *directional* formation as the feeling of 'otherness' also is another *directional* formation. To take the help of a spatial metaphor, this 'self-feeling' is characterised by an 'inward' direction as 'the otherness feeling' is characterised by an 'outward' direction. Described otherwise, the 'Self-feeling', as an empirical datum, is a 'coming to itself' as the 'otherness'-feeling' is a 'going out beyond itself', that is, some sort of an alienation from itself, a self-losing in a new and adventitious formation characterised by the sense of an 'otherness.' As a directional formation, the feeling as 'I', however, enjoys a certain indisputable primacy since the feeling of 'otherness' as in 'Thou' (*Yuṣmat*), 'This' (*Idam*), 'That' (*Adas*) is necessarily relational to the 'I' or the 'I' feeling, which latter seems to be pivotal. It is this 'I', or the sense of 'I', which is felt as capable of standing in absolute exclusion from the 'other' (that is, in being absolutely unrelated to any other), and *not* the 'I think' (*cogito*), since 'thinking' is transitive, and has always to be 'of' something as Prof. Lindsay rightly points out.⁶ Therefore, 'I think' is a further development in associative

process and cannot stand out in complete dissociation to substantiate its claim to primacy.

Descartes' point seems to have been to trace the absolutely indubitable, and this he wanted to fix up by playfully instituting a process of doubting and possible negation. But the indubitable he was looking for could only be the *sense* of 'I am', and not the 'I think'. For, if 'thinking' is accepted and understood in the conventional meaning, such as, thinking of something, or thinking something, it is quite possible that I do not think *always*, and it can be very well debated if 'I think' always. Not only Descartes', 'I think' but even Gassendi's 'I walk' do establish (although not in so very immediate way), the indubitability of 'I am' or I exist—(which is the same as the 'I-sense' or 'I-feeling' we are speaking of) as a matter of *logical presupposition* as and when 'I think', 'I walk', 'I talk', 'I argue and' so on. Professor Ayer, then, seems to have taken Descartes' '*Cogito ergo sum*' in the right way so far⁷ but his criticism of the 'I am' or 'I exist' as a degenerate statement and not a genuine statement seems to be beside the point, since in the discovery of what may be absolutely indubitable or absolutely primary, no one looks for anything that can be a fullfledged statement unless one is seized with the foolhardiness to milk a he-goat.

But what is this 'I am' or 'I exist'—'*aham asmīti*' or '*ahamasmitā*' and what has this got to do with the 'self' which Descartes believed to be a spiritual substance? What can make this 'I am' a spiritual substance? We have already seen that the 'I think' and 'I am' are not equivalents. The fact that I cannot argue that I am *not* (*nahamasmiti*) or prove that I am *not* so long I feel that I am, does not show, as Descartes thought that it showed, that this 'I' is a thinking substance, or that to think is its inseparable quality or essential nature. What has this 'I am' or 'I exist', to do with thinking? It involves somekind of awareness no doubt, and that also in an introspective or retroactive bid, but such awareness cannot be called thinking. Thinking is always of a content distinguished from itself but the directional awareness involved in 'I am' or 'I exist' does not involve such act-content distinction. Not only that, the 'I-sense' the conscious 'being-there-ness' of 'I' does not seem to persist there *always*. Are you always aware of yourself in distinction from your surroundings? It will be a sign of mental

health if we can remain placid and tranquil and do not constantly dwell upon the feeling that 'I am'—if the feeling of 'I-there' remains subdued, or shelved to the background. Dreamless sleep, to be sure, gives us relief from the obsession of the 'I am' or 'I-being-there.' Even in all our normal transactions of day-to-day life, we seem to be either keeping the I am halfburied in the 'not-I', or distributing it among the several transactions in such a way that this 'I am' lies well-scattered, allowing its claim to indubitability to be ignored if not also to lapse. What, then, is the much talked of indubitability of 'I am' or 'I exist', or of 'I-being there'? This seems to be at best *situational*. The 'I am' is the presupposition, the essential core fact of *whatever else 'I am' in whatever else I do*. It cannot be that these later developments are there even though I am not there, and it may, again, be the case that although this or that transaction of mine is not there still I am there, and also that, I am there even when sometimes I am not conscious of myself as being there,—as in dreamless sleep. Had I not persisted in a physical sense at least, I could not reassert in the way that 'I am' after a state of swoon or dreamless sleep. But this does not certainly prove the 'I am' as a thinking or spiritual substance. It does not seem to be a substance at all.

III

It is true that much has been made of this 'I am'. This 'I am' has frequently been regarded as the 'Self' and as a substance or substantive entity. Many have speculated as to the possibility of its survival, transmigration, immortality, and what not. There have been systems of Indian philosophy which, even though not regarding this 'I' as a spiritual substance with consciousness or knowledge as any of its essential and inseparable property, have all the same, supported its claim to an absolute, eternal and all-pervasive (*Vibhu*) existence of some kind⁸. Some other systems, again, have accepted it as an individual spiritual substance with consciousness as its essential property, and knowable as the 'I' (*ahampratyayavedya*).⁹ although not itself self luminous. Again, there have been some who while relegating the 'I' to the domain of the natural and the 'objective' as a configuration of some kind (*ahamkāra*), have postulated a principle of self-luminosity transcendent of it, with which, according to these theorists, this I-formation is confused and is regarded as the apparent Self¹⁰. Śāṅkara, in his commentary

on the first *sūtra* hints at these endless controversies regarding the true nature of that which remains indubitable and unrejectable in what is commonly accepted as the individual self, the 'I am'¹¹. That Śāṅkara, or the Vedānta according to Śāṅkara's version, does not regard the 'I am', the consciousness or the feeling of being 'I' as the Self becomes quite clear when, in connection with his controversy with the Prabhākara Mimāṃsā in the context of his commentary on the fourth *sūtra*, we come across his statement *taṁ sākṣitvena pratyuktatvāt*. The self, according to this view, is *not* and *cannot be* any determinate *this*, which the 'I am' definitely is. The self is conceived as the witness (*sākṣi*), and that is witness which is just the revealer (*prakāśaka*) of all *objective* formations, and so, is their ground transcendental. The Self is unrejectable because it is presupposed in every determinate formation, such as the 'I am' and in every affirmation and denial, and not because it is one such determinate formation. Moreover, as the Vedānta shows, it is the Self itself which when grasped as itself turns out to be the ultimate rejector of all else that *appears* as the objective appearance, and as distinguished and *manifest*. We are not concerned with an elaboration of what is or what is not the vedantic view at this place. What immediately concerns us here is showing that the problem of the 'I' has been the basic problem of Indian Philosophy in so far as the Indian schools speculated about its possible survival or about our possible absolute release from its fetters and trappings. What is more, we have claimed that all our problems in conscious living are associated with this 'I', and therefore, the sense of 'I', otherwise called the *ego*, is a genuine problem of any philosophy which is not mere logomacy. We are not interested in settling how far, if at all, the 'I am', or the ego-feeling, is indubitable. We are interested in showing that this sense of 'I' is a primary fact, the core-fact around which we build up our universe as also our social order, and that solutions of all our problems, individual and social, depends on how far we are able to solve this ego-problem.

We are not disputing that what we regard as inanimate objects of nature are without this ego-sense. We do not dispute also that lower animals donot have this 'I-feeling' in the form we have. We donot dispute either that even in human beings this ego-sense or 'I-feeling' may be subject to some imperceptible process of growth

and development. Even, then, the fact remains that it is around this 'core fact' that we build up our known order *as we know it*, and conduct ourselves in it in the way we conduct ourselves, that is, act and react as individual persons in social, moral, religious and other relationships. The way this 'I', this Ego, is fostered and developed therefore, has far-reaching consequences for our individual and social life. Our happiness and misery, aspirations and frustrations, fulfilment and bankruptcy all seem to rest on how we conduct this ego, how we bear with it.

IV

The 'I am' is an *individuated formation*. By its very nature, it gives rise to a division between itself as a core fact and the rest of 'what is there'. This rest of 'what is there' becomes an other to it. This is next reacted to as its 'object'. In the process of exploring the objective, it undergoes further specification in its subjective mould. The given as 'I' and the given as 'other' undergo collateral specifications. Both the 'I' and the 'other' were an undistinguished *one* before the advent of 'I' or the Ego as an individuated formation. It is not known *when*, if ever, this division of reality into this 'I' and 'not-I' *first* started. It may as well be accepted that this division which results in cognitive, conative and affective *assessment* of the given order in terms of subject-object relationship did not *start* at all, and that it *was always there*. A reflective analysis does not go to showing an absolute beginning in time. If the given order is looked upon as the *objective whole* which has appeared there in distinction from the subjective 'I', and so *minus* the 'I', it may be an intriguing question how the 'I', a seemingly conscious fact, could have emerged from the seemingly unconscious objective. But if the given is understood as the indeterminate whole which has given rise to or has resulted in the subjective and objective formations that we know of, the point may not be so intriguing. The fact stands out that it is through the subjective formations called the egos, or the 'I-s,' that there arises a distinction in reality between the subjective and the objective series, which are all collateral and relative. As the subjective formation with the ego as its core *ramifies* itself progressively in terms of *I see, hear, taste, smell, touch, think, doubt, decide* and the whole lot of all subjective functions, the objective situation also shows a whole multitude of qualities which we classify variously as primary, secondary, tertiary and so on. In

short, the existential situation in which we find ourselves, the empirical situation in which we enjoy or suffer, the social situations in which we all interact and interplay, is a development out of 'Ego-not -ego', 'I-and the world' situation. This can be shown in another way.

The world we live in, know and feel – the world of our actions and reactions, can be understood and interpreted in another way as the world articulated in our thought and speech. The 'I', otherwise called the 'ego-sense', is a necessary presupposition as also an immanent constituent of this world articulated in thought and speech. 'I am' or 'I exist' is the minimum as also the most basic assertable in thought and speech. Russell's independent particulars, being all 'ego-centric', are in fact this 'I-centric'. The 'I' is the most fundamental among demonstratives, and when demonstrated, it necessarily takes the form 'I am'. The 'am' or 'exist' in 'I am' is not, of course, a genuine predicate. But *this creates the urge* for a genuine predicate for greater articulation, and thus leads to greater determination and specification of the 'I'. This is fulfilled when one says 'I am *this*' (*ahamidam*), or 'I am *so and so*'. Śaṅkara would take Ayer upside down. There is no real degeneracy in the indeterminate 'I' in 'I am'. The subject (I) remains more or less as *itself*, that is, as, the mere 'I'. Degeneracy, pulverisation, even progressive de-subjectivisation of the subjective 'I', starts with greater and greater determination and adventitious extension of the 'I' from its original mooring in the indeterminate focal point. From the 'I am' the passage to 'I know', 'I think', 'I see' etc. involves determination of the 'I' in term of the mind and the senses. In 'I am' as a purely directional felt awareness, we have the polar opposite of the direction involved in 'this' or 'that'. The 'I', in this taking, seems to be just a bodiless spark of subjectivity. In 'I think', 'I know', it not only becomes embodied but its body seems to grow in volume in a progressive way. There is growth in greater volume still when this 'I' passes from the purely cognitive formation to the affective and the conative. There takes place greater 'involvement', that is, greater participation in objectivity and therefore greater de-subjectivisation. In 'I am happy or miserable, I am infirm or vigorous, I am young or old, the 'I-sense' or 'I-feeling' seems to settle upon the body, mind and the senses, or 'appropriate' the physical body as the more important property of itself. In 'I desire' 'I

decide,' 'I' am the agent or doer,' we have a still fuller embodied 'I'. It thus appears that when from the level of mere ejaculatory assertion¹² of existence, such as, 'I am' or 'I exist' one passes on to the enjoying and the more self-imposing and self-advertising level of the doer or agent greater degeneracy of the erstwhile cognitive, 'I', that is, of the knower, describer, or witnessing 'I', takes place. Even a greater increase in the volume of objective knowledge is dependent on greater increase in the volume of de-subjectivisation of 'I' through greater embodiedness. With fullfledged cognitive, affective and conative growth and development, the erstwhile somewhat ethereal 'I' becomes, so to say, a 'part' of nature, although epistemically distinguished as the knower and the recorder of nature in its dual formations-both objective and subjective. Be it remembered that the ego or the 'I-sense' we speak of, is no external imposition on reality from an alien source. It is there as a peculiar mode of its self-expression an inner fixation of somekind for all that we know. The Upaniṣadic statement that Reality, one undivided existence or being *as such* (*sadeva*), desired to realise itself as 'many', may not sound either sense-less or esoteric once we accept the position that what we call the 'ego' and which we find to be *many*, and which also develops *many-wise*, were *somehow there* in Reality, catering to its need of playful self-expression in an infinite plurality of ways. This *becoming many-wise* may not be *real becoming* but only empirically or phenomenally so, or this may just be neither real nor unreal, rather an indeterminable form of self expression of Reality along side the other mode of self-expression as pure self-identity in the *one* indeterminate, boundless, and tranquil.

Tranquillity and agitation, rest and unrest, self-composedness and self-assertion, *Ātman* and *Brahman* of the Upaniṣads, are two-fold expressions or manifestations of the self-same reality. Why it is so cannot be answered. It will be an *ati-praśṅga*, not a legitimate question at all. Why is water liquid in itself and a form of life and nourishment to the vegetative and the animate? Why is there ignorance and, again, right knowledge? If the transition from *avidyā* (ignorance) to *vidyā* (enlightenment) be a fact of existence, so is a possible dissipation or distortion of truth into falsity and falsehood alongside or covering up the truth. Light has its shade, though no essential part of itself. Reality *is* and also *appears*, but

it does not appear *as it really is*, it only appears *as it appears*. There can be no over-simplification either of the fact of the existence or of the nature of what we call reality. Will reality as the tranquil be a very meaningful concept had there not been the other aspect, that is, agitation and unrest? Where will you place the latter? You can place it neither inside Reality nor outside of it. It just *hangs on*, like the Vedāntic *anirvaśanīya*. It makes the other concept meaningful and intelligible. So sings the seer of the upaniṣads—*hiraṇmayenpātreṇa satyasyāpīhitam mukham.* Tat tvam pūṣan apāvṛnu satyadharmāya dṛṣṭaye—with a golden vessel the Real's face is covered up. That do thou Pūṣan, uncover for one whose *dharma* it is to see the Real.¹³

The configuration, called 'the ego,' so peculiar to conscious persons, is the *mechanism* through which Reality seems to realise itself in *two* ways, (a) *side by side*, (from the standpoint of Reality) and also (b) *alternately* (in experience of transition from *avidyā* to *vidyā*) as many and also as the 'indivisible one'. The first mode of realisation may be metaphorically described as incidental to progressive *going out of itself* on the part of Reality in adventitious 'self-posing' in the 'many', the second as incidental to its *progressive coming back to itself* and finally, to its absolute oneness. This 'going out' and 'coming back to itself', are states of affairs which, as subsequent elaboration will show, cannot be sensibly denied as facts that *happen*, but which cannot also be causally accounted for. It is better to concede that such happens although we do not know, and cannot also explain *why* such sequences or developments take place. Much has been said and discussed about the so-called self (*ātmanā*) in philosophy. As a concept, it seems to be the one most familiar with us,—a common-place notion. Yet when we have attempted a philosophical determination of it as to what it actually stands for, we have invariably come to face a certain elusiveness in its regard, and have landed ourselves in endless controversies. Śaṅkara hints at this at the end of his commentary on the very first *Brahmasūtra*. The 'self', thus, happens to be in one way, the *most known*, in another way, the *least known*. Why so? How to meet and solve this enigma of a fact? Will it be less puzzling and more understandable if it is said that the entire course of our conscious existence, the entire manifestation of Reality in subjective-objective formations, the entire course

of conscious events, and whatever is known to happen in one way or the other, is merely alternative ways of *looking for the 'self'*, and seemingly finding the self and deriving *satisfaction* from the thought of having found it in 'this' or 'that'? The ego is *not* the self in as much as it is not satisfying in itself, not a value. It is, on the contrary, the mechanism used in the self-searching and the self-finding. The final goal in which the ego, finds rest is the *true Self*. But the ever wavering nature of the ego, its vicarious formations in this way or that, has rendered the 'self', an originally fixed value and accomplished reality, into a 'wandering minstrel', shifting and fleeting in all directions,—now settling upon a given 'this' as its perch, then fleeing farthest away from it as if smarting from an electric shock. This has made the 'Self', which is Reality itself, and the *supreme value*, at once tranquil and restless. The ego looks for the self and finds it in 'this' or 'that' viz.,—*in itself*, as an *assumed* substantive reality and value, *in the body, in the mind, in one's near and dear ones, in the purse, in the bank-account* and so on. Then, again, the ego misses it gradually in 'this' or 'that' (*nedam, na eṣa, neti*), and looks for the self in other directions. The struggle ends only when the ego shrinks within and unto its bare 'I' and dissolves itself in its absolute oneness and identity with its ground, that is, dissolves itself in Reality from which it sprang. There is one kind of search for the self and for its own identity by the ego in the outward direction and another kind of search for its self and identity in the inward direction. This seems to have been provided by Reality itself, or in Reality, which is both tranquil and restless. As *being*, it is eternally self-accomplished, restful and tranquil; again, as *Becoming*, it is the restless looking for a temporary perch in multiplicities through the instrumentation of the ego, which itself is infinitely many.

To put the whole matter in a different way. It may not be contested if we say that the order of our conventional experience may be regarded as a system of *determinate* conscious representations, each of which is ego-centric at the core, and yet taken together, all such plural determinations and representations are believed to be only varied configurations or *assessments* of the very same fact, called reality or the world. Now, instead of regarding the relation between these ego-centric foci of individuated representations and

the world or Reality in the Leibnitzian way, that is, instead of regarding the whole or the world as *immanent* in the infinitely plural centres of individuated representations called monads and as being progressively unfolded from within them, let us regard the relation between Reality and the individuated foci of representations in the opposite way. This will, then, 'situate' all the ego-centric foci, the infinitely plural 'I'-s each characterised by a certain feeling of exclusiveness, in the constitution of Reality or the world itself, in some way, or will make them just one kind of *feature* by virtue of which reality in one kind of its self-expressions, becomes *empirically* a veritable 'many'. Cannot this facilitate understanding of the upaniṣadic statement that Reality, which is eternally self-accomplished (*pariniṣṭhita*), which is in itself, and *as itself* the Indeterminate One, also undergoes *apparent* determinations in terms of conscious personalised representation in so far as the individuated 'I'-s, the infinitely plural egos, form the foci of separate presentations the multiple 'becomings'? What oddity will be there if this development, this apparent course of becoming is expressed figuratively as: Being *as such* (*sadeva*) which is one and without a second (in so far as it is indeterminate) desired (*aikṣata*) to express itself many-wise in terms of a wide multiplicity of *names* and *forms*?¹⁴ Let us put the matter in a somewhat naive way. Had there not been these egos, these plural foci of animated and conscious expressions in Nature, could Reality be in any way represented and understood in the way we conventionally understand it, that is, as a *system of plural facts* which can be grouped and arranged collaterally as subjective and objective? Could it not be as well a non-distinguished mass, infinite and unitary, without any assignable, and therefore, any *determinate* character, could it not be what the Vedānta calls 'nirviśeṣa'? It is the presence of the egos, as centres of individuated conscious representations, which seem to make all the difference.

V

'The self-existent (*svayambhū*), so says the upaniṣad,¹⁵ "pierced 'the openings' all outward. Therefore, one looks, naturally, outward and not within one's inner-self (*antarātman*). Rarely one, having attained self-composure by shutting in the out-moving tendency, and desiring for immortality, sees the true Self face to face." The suggestion is that even the egos, the centres of indivi-

duated objective representations, *have a dual role—such as, estrangement and gradual falling off from the matrix, the point of origin, and, again, repatriation and final lapsing in the Indeterminate which is the one real identity, and therefore, the Self of the determinate and the distinguished 'many.'* Initially, or at the absolute core-point, the sense of I is not a natural villain. As already expressed, the ego as the bare sense of an unspecified felt 'I' is a form of *directional awareness* which, like the needle of a compass, points inwards towards what *is to be, but not yet so realised*, the 'one identity'. This is evidenced when the 'I' is retroactively secured and is barely cognitive, unattended by any affective tone or conative poise. Śankara would call it the '*ahampratyain*'¹⁶ that which cognises itself in term of the barely subjective form, the 'I' which has not yet grown into the '*I am*' in which case the 'I' requires a *feeling tone* in order to be posited as a 'given' reality (objectively presented or asserted). The bare 'I', we speak of here, is the abstracted form of subjectivity, the polar opposite of objectivity. The ego as the bare I, without the affective and conative tone, loses its outward direction and drive. The 'I', at this stage, instead of functioning as a core which may grow into the determinate '*I am*,' remains, so to say, *inwardly poised* towards what is to be its terminal point of absolute identity, not yet realised but in which it is eventually to lose itself — its very Self. To find its 'I', that is, its true selfhood, in the Indeterminate tranquil, is *one role* for the ego, that is, for the 'I-sense'. The *other role* is to grow into the full-fledged '*I am*' from its bare form of 'schematic' subjectivity, by acquiring an affective and conative tone as the 'fill up'. As a consequence, the 'I', which, without the affective tone and conative urge entering into 'dressing-up', was a bare sense of identity is 'steadied' as a substantivity of some sort (when the affective and the conative factors join it) and if, then, feels towards itself as a distinctly given objectivity, even as a 'self-positing' core, as it were, self-assertive and self-advertising. The minimum of this assertiveness and self-proclamation can be found in the '*I am, I exist, eh*' (*aham asmi bhoh*). This self-assertion creates the urge for further growth and development of the 'I' by assimilation of elements all adventitious, but demanded by the affective and conative factors already absorbed in its composition. The 'I' comes to be associated with and confused with the psychic, the organic, the

bodily, even with the extra-organic. Its inward direction changes into outward expansion, a gradual falling away from the matrix in search for newer 'identities' all outside and in the 'not-I's'. This is the other course of the ego that leads to progressive estrangement—a centrifugal development as distinguished from the centripetal. This is breaking away from the Indeterminate tranquil, from the *one* absolute true *identity* of the plural egos, and going all out in the looking for new and even newer 'identities' in restless commotion that is phenomenal life and existence. Both seem to obtain in Reality which is in one way the eternally tranquil and in the other way, *phenomenally* beginninglessly restless. Estrangement is a necessary counterpart of repatriation, self-losing a necessary counterpart of self-finding. Could the self be properly understood 'as that', and realised as the true self, had there been no periodic losing of it in the pseudo-Self and false identities?

Much of our reflective thinking, both conventionally philosophical and ordinary, has allowed itself to be misled by the object infatuation generated by the affective tone and the conative assertiveness of the ego with its cognitive inward-reference blurred or blunted. Under this circumstance, the ego ceases to be the mere 'identity-pointer', ceases to be the instrumentation of inward-reference, and is reared up into the apparently substantive reality, the 'I am', the apparently self-positing 'I exist'. This 'I am' or 'I exist' is thus, made into an indubitable fact in so far as it cannot be consciously denied without self-contradiction. It is to be noted however, that this indubitability of 'I am' or 'I exist', is nothing *intrinsic* to the 'I', the ego, that it is *consequential* to its having already been asserted as a reality 'given' there and posited as a substantivity and also in being the *presupposition* of what else this 'I' is or can be, and what else it *does* or can do. Its so-called self-positingness is only apparent: it is consequential to its having been posited as an apparently substantive and immutable fact. Little wonder therefore that this individual 'I' would be looked upon, even argued to be, the 'Self' in pluralistic metaphysics as it is also uncritically accepted as the 'self' by conventional thought. The bid to abstract this 'I' from the psychophysical conditions which progressively determine and specify it, and to exalt it to the status of an individual 'self', eternal and

immutable, appears to be unwarranted by facts. The 'I' is an individuated determinate *formation*, made into a substantive entity by the various associative processes and the feeling-tone peculiar to the ego. Initially, it is a *natural* formation with an out-moving and a retroactive inmoving direction—flexible (increasing or diminishing) and unstable. It cannot be imagined to survive as an immutable substance when every condition determining it into an individual focus or an individual person has fallen off, or has been withdrawn. That this ego actually parades as a substantive fact and therefore, as an individual 'self' in being posited as an inexorable fact in 'I am' or 'I exist', is not doubted. The vedānta admits as much. The issue of dispute is if this 'parading' makes it, or justifies its claim to be, the 'Self'. The 'self' of a thing is its one *fixed* identity. There seems to be nothing absolutely fixed in the ego—always looking for the realisation of its 'I' and 'Identity' in the objective 'this' or 'that' restlessly till it finally realises the one true identity in Reality itself from which it had sprung. There are systems, both Indian and Western, which take the Self, the individual self, as something lying handy and ready-made in some unknown habitat in order to be grafted on the psycho-physical complex from outside. The Sāṅkhya account of an ego, developing out of a self-active *materia prima* in individual form in being externally illuminated by an *individual* focus of pure consciousness, begs the whole issue. The fallacy of mutual implication, otherwise, called *anyonyāśraya* seems to be lurking there in their conception of an individual focus of pure consciousness and an individuated form of the configuration of three essences (*guṇa*)—*Sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* in certain proportions. The Nyāya - Vaiśeṣika or the Jain account of all-pervasive individual selves, without or with conscious capacities or powers, lying handy to be associated with the psycho-physical stuff, being guided by the law of *Karma*, does not also seem to be free from logical difficulties. The Buddhistic account, short of its doctrine of absolute momentariness, and with its doctrine of the five *skandhas* somewhat reformed with the admission of the ego as the core factor attracting and assimilating the *skandhas*, seems to be nearer the truth, provided the entire panorama is not regarded as *rootless*, and also as confined within the human cycle. In what follows, we shall try to show why the 'Self' cannot be regarded as plural and

why it is that the 'I' or the 'I am' has got nothing to do with the 'Self'.

Notwithstanding the fact that the 'I am' cannot be consciously denied, since such denial, as an act, will require the 'I' to be there as the 'denier' and the operator of the process, it is not a fact that the 'I' remains forever asserted, or in the focus of consciousness. Can it be disputed that the 'I' is very often shelved to the background in the normal avocation of life, and is even thrown into complete oblivion in dreamless sleep, in trance, or under a tranquilliser, and that such a condition brings in great relief? Is the consciousness of the 'I' always invigorating and stimulant and not at times as oppressive an irritant as was the old man of the island in the tale of Sindbad, the sailor? Now, if the 'I', or 'I am', can be at times subdued or forgotten, what specious plea can be there for regarding it as a conscious substance, the so-called 'Self' of philosophical thought?¹⁷ There seems to be another reason why the 'I', or 'I am', should not be confused with anything self-dependent and self-shining as is the 'Self' frequently regarded in philosophy. That which is the 'content' of affirmation, that is, is cogitated as a content (*visaya*), appears in introspective awareness and disappears in dreamless sleep or when not consciously attended to, grows in volume with associative processes and shrinks without them, can be nothing self-accomplished or self-contained. Even when retroactively extended as an 'identity-pointer', a bare form of subjectivity, -the bare 'I', it remains an *individuated* 'schema' negatively related to objectivity from which it has been abstracted, and so not as a pure subjectivity (an improbable concept) but as a subjectivity objectively *given* or displayed. The urge for regarding this 'I' of 'I am' as an eternal and imperishable substance, independent of birth, growth and decay, seems to proceed from the very same infatuation and craving which create conditions for the dimensional increase and extension of the 'I' even here and in this life. Naturally enough, the 'I' in you or me *longs* for continuing for all time and remains inconsolable if it is told that it is just a configuration mutable and non-substantial and not an eternal substance as it is. That the 'I' is a substantial reality is as much a delusion as is the feeling that the ego is a spiritual self-substance the individual self.

Much has been said and discussed about the 'Self' in philosophy, particularly in the Indian philosophical tradition. A brief clarification may not be out of place before we proceed further with the ego-problem. Let us put somewhat bluntly that the 'Self' is no problem of philosophy. All the problem that we have is associated with the ego, and with our confusion of the ego with the Self. To generate this confusion, to work for greater and still greater confusion with the Self, is the very nature of the ego, and the ego could not be what it is if it could not generate this confusion. So Śaṅkara regards this as a perpetual super imposition (*naisargika adhyasa*). This *adhyāsa* is there as a fact of nature and of human existence, and is *not* the product of any manipulation by a human agent, *ab extra*. The verbal form, the etymological sense of the word *adhyasa*, is misleading and so the word is not to be literally taken to mean a state of super imposition from without. The word '*adhyāsa*' is a figurative putting of a state of *avidyā* or confusion which *was* there already, and *has* been detected or got over – it is the *post-mortem* figurative putting of a state of illusion when the illusion has already been exposed. It is with the ego, parading as the Self, that there is the beginning of all problems for philosophy and life. But what does the expression 'Self' really stand for, that is, what meaning *should* we attach to it?

Although it may sound strange it is very much true that philosophers like the commoners have very often defined the 'self' in terms of the ego, that is, in term of what the ego is *passionately desired to be*—substantive reality, eternal and imperishable, a transcendental duplicate of the 'I am', so close to all of us. This is fantastic. In ascertaining what the 'Self' (not soul) can mean we need not start with any *a priori* definition, with no arbitrary stipulation either. When we say that 'something' is the very 'Self' of something else, all that we seem to mean is that 'self' of X is *that* with which X can be absolutely identified, to which X can be absolutely reduced', with sense of *complete fulfilment* and *satisfaction*. The Self is the 'Itself' of X, it is that which X *really is*, and that X is *really that* is vouchsafed by the *sense of absolute fulfilment*. This criterion is not our innovation, this is Śaṅkara's own. Thus he says '*tattvamasīyukte na kincidānyādakaṅksyamasti* nothing further desirable, no further expectancy remains to be

fulfilled when identity of 'Tat' and Tam is realised¹⁸. Vacaspati echoes the same sense when he puts in 'tadavagateḥ' sarvottaratvāt—an understanding in that way contains all the answers and further questioning is *ip so facto* precluded¹⁹. Mind is rested there, no more wavering, no further shifting from point to point, no more agitation; no further search. All doubts are cleared and removed, all strivings cease, the goal is reached and the harbour entered. Some may be disposed to take Śaṅkara's 'ākāṅkṣyam' in this context to mean only syntactical expectancy and not also the sense of absolute fulfilment and absolute satisfaction. Such uncertainty and theoretical quibble will vanish once we try to follow the intended significance of Śaṅkara's definition of reality as 'pāramārthika'. Śaṅkara's reality is the Absolute Self. This Self is that which secures for the phenomenal individual absolute fulfilment, the supreme end of life (*pāramārtha*), the supreme value. Thus the Self is defined in terms of absolute identity and the supreme value. In fact, this value criterion (*phalaprāpti* or *phalāvagama*) becomes the differentia for Śaṅkara's espousal of *vivartavāda* instead of *pariṇamavāda*²⁰.

It can be seen that we can significantly speak of a 'Self' in the context of, and in respect of, ego-formation only. We do not for instance, speak of the 'Self' of a piece of a brick or of an umbrella. The notion of the 'Self' is conventionally associated with the ego because with the ego it is always confused. The Self of the ego is that to which the ego may be finally brought down and rested, in which it discovers its *absolute identity*. This cannot be achieved by keeping the ego floating, by pampering it in different ways, by following its lead and moving away from the centre. The self, in any significant discourse, is that which becomes the resting-ground in which something finds its *absolute identity*. If we leave off hypostatisation of any form, such is the meaning of the concept 'Self'. The Self is not the 'I'—the expressive assertive dominant, the aggressive ego, which posits itself as a fact in opposition to countless other facts. The ego is here the *estranged*-a formation with lost identity, posing to form, or find a new identity of its own. But as has already been said, this deviation from the centre in search of new identities is only one posture of the ego—the link fact. The other posture is when the ego, the 'I', gradually withdraws from such new and

assumed identities and discovers its one and absolutely fixed identity in Reality,—the centre from which it flew off in its centrifugal movement. The ego, we attempted to show, is capable of both the feats - in gradually breaking away from its one identity, absolute and true, in Reality, its Self, and again, gradually linking itself up with it by a progressive withdrawal from the adventitious identities it looked for and *seemed* to have found. The ego is thus an expert actor in the Paradise Lost and the Paradise Regained.

In a way, both the centrifugal and the centripetal 'careers' and courses of the ego have 'formally' the same object. This is seeking for what would be its 'identity', its 'self', the looked-for 'value'. The ego is thus a 'Self-looking' mechanism. In its centrifugal development, this 'identity', this 'Self' and value, the ego *seems* to discover in new formations - in what is other than its true Self. The 'I am' posits the 'I', the 'Self-sense' as an objectivity, an existential core,—its 'being-there-ness' remaining indistinguishable from its assertability. In this formation—in the 'I am' or 'I exist', we have an individuated subject which is also an object to itself. The bid for becoming an other (is this the becoming an 'other' *apparently*, the subject becoming an object *apparently*, as Śaṅkara would say?) is incipient with this formation. Does not this development, *empirically*, show how an *avisaya* (that which is never presented as a determinate 'this' as itself) can pose into a formation which is *visayi-visaya*, a subject being also given as a content (object) to itself in course of the formation 'I am', 'I exist'? This situation, such as, 'I am' creates the urge for the objectively presented 'I', to look for new and additional 'identity' outside its bare 'positedness', its bare assertability. The 'assertiveness' couched in 'am' of the 'I am' thus, on the next, specifies itself in forms, such as, 'that which sees, hears, tastes, smells, touches, thinks, feels, decides, craves, acts, achieves, enjoys, suffers and infinite other varieties of mental and physical functions. The situation now grows into: That which thinks, feels, wills etc., that is, the self-cognitive and the self-assertive 'I' *dose* exist - 'I' think, so *I am, cogito ergo sum*'. To put otherwise, the self-assertive, self-conscious 'I', exists as a Self-dependent fact in so far as it cannot meaningfully assert its non-existence, cannot think of itself as non-existing (*nāhamasmīti*). Not only this 'I' grows into the thinking, feeling, and

willing 'thing'—the *empirical person*. In order that execution of these functions may be possible and their collateral 'ends' all realised, Reality, so to say, yields itself phenomenally to divisions and specifications in terms of empirical subjects and 'given' objects, all standing on equal footing. That all these formations,—the varied objects and the equally varied collateral subjective modes of their realisation, are aery nothing can be nobody's contention, not also of the Vedānta. What the Vedānta would insist is that all these varied and many-wise determinations—these plural 'posings', all emanate from the self-same matrix through the ego-formations which are by their very nature individuated, and so, plural, but which are, nevertheless, all *concentric*, that is, issue forth from the very same nucleus, and are, again capable of shrinking back and disappearing into the self-same core. This 'going out' off the matrix—the Indeterminate one, seeking new and newer identities is one form of career and course of the ego—restless and unsatiated. The other course is characterised by the progressive withdrawal, leaving off and negating, one after another the several identities, previously established and admitted—'*neti, neti*', and finally, being restored to and being reconciled with, its *one true identity* in the Indeterminate tranquil. In whichever of these two courses one regards, the 'self' is everywhere the '*identity*' and value looked-for and the 'true self' is the one absolute identity and value in which the ego loses its distinction and is rested. This is the Reality itself, because this identity, when realised, perfectly satisfies and absolutely fulfils (*pāramārthika*). The Bṛhadāraṇyaka statement that it is for the self (*Ātamā*) alone that anything becomes dear (*priya*), and therefore, satisfying, stands true. The meaning is not however, that one's husband, wife, son, daughter, landed property, bank balance etc. are one's very 'self'. The meaning is that it is in so far as one *identifies* oneself with any or all of these together; and in proportion the sense of identity with these that one comes to develop one hold, any of these or all of these dear (*priya*) to oneself. The self is thus the sense of identity with something that one realises, and the value as satisfaction or fulfilment which results from that realisation—although this identity and value secured may be either true or false. How does the aberration of securing a false identity and fake value take place?

We have already observed that unless it is joined by an adventitious affective and conative tone, the ego as the bareform of subjectivity does not mature into the 'I am', and is not 'given' to itself as an objective content. In its *barely* cognitive posture, the 'I' has the role of a spectator, a witness of an objective situation such as 'the hill there is high and covered with green'. The 'I', at this stage, merely registers an *objectively given* situation, not even as *given to itself*. It remains in the background and without *participation* in any form in the objective situation, also without any 'appropriation' or 'owning' of what is given there. Although, 'I see' may be a significant part of the objective presentation 'the hill out there is high and green', and the situation may as well be expressed as 'the hill out there is high and green as I see it (related to me as the knower)', the clause giving or showing the subjective participation or involvement remains very often inarticulated. We have already pointed out that the alleged self-luminosity of consciousness has got nothing to do with the 'I', the ego, and that the retroactively or reflectively secured 'I' is nothing self-luminous. It is as much 'given' as its polar opposite the objective 'this' or 'that' although it is secured as a form of subjectivity and is 'given' in introspection. There is, of course, one special privilege enjoyed by the 'I'. It does not always need to be 'given' either in the objective mode or in the subjective mode; and as the spectator in its barely cognitive form, it may stay in the background in a more or less uninvolved and detached way. But as and when the affective and the conative component of the ego joins the barely cognitive 'I', the spectator turns into an active or passive participant in the objective situation and gradually becomes an integral part of it. The 'I' *empathetically* becomes one with the 'not-I'. Infatuation, appetite and the craving for appropriation and 'owning' all combine together to change the cognitive 'I-this' (*ahamidam*) into the possessive 'mine this' (*Mamedam*). From 'I see', 'I hear', 'I feel' etc., 'to my senses', 'my body', 'my house', 'my family', becomes the course of morbid development of the ego. This morbidity has been summed up by Śaṅkara in two basic patterns of conventional human behaviour (*naisargika lokavyavahāra*) — individual and social, in his (*ahamidam*) and '*mamedam*'. Śaṅkara's meaning may, perhaps, be elaborated in the following manner. The 'I am' which is the minimum self-assertion of the ego may be expanded next into 'I am

this’, thereafter, into ‘I am a bodied being – I am lean, dark-complexioned, a brahmin, an old man, an able writer, a master-mind, the wisest among all fools, the monarch of all I survey etc., The ‘owning’ and the possessive ‘I’ which dotes on its newly acquired *identities* (Self) may react in the following way :- my body, my person, my family, my reputation, my property, my social group and community, my political party, my country and state—all these are sacred and inviolable and are without blemishes of any kind (like Caesar’s wife). All such morbid developments which are harbinger of anxiety, unrest, tension and strife can be attributed to an ill-managed and untamed ego. Which problems, personal or social, are not due to egotism, pray ?

VI

Two types of problem have arisen from this morbid development of the ego, or the feeling of I. These are (a) the problems which are all of a *practical* nature and affect man’s personal life and social relations, and (b) the problems which are of a *theoretical* nature and have given impetus to the various philosophical and non-philosophical speculations regarding the pre-natal and post-mortem state of being of the individual self, as a distinct entity—spiritual or quasi-spiritual. In our previous analysis, we have attempted to show that the *entitative view of the self* rests on wrong premises. The bid for becoming a given, determinate and so individuated *entity*, self-assertive, self-positing, and self-justifying, is intrinsic to the ego. The Self, on the other hand, is *nothing entitative*; it is a functional concept signifying an *identity-experience and the value realised as a measure of fulfilment* in consequence of such experience. Not that this makes the Self an unreality and the entitative formation, the objectively presented ‘I,’ or the ego, an absolute reality. Although the two concepts Reality and the Self—*Brahman* and *Atman*, are frequently interchanged in the Vedanta context, the two are not equivalent expressions. So, the question of reality or unreality is not automatically involved in something being regarded as the Self, since this means only something being (rightly or wrongly) *identified* with something else leading to some form of satiety or fulfilment. The view we have sought to maintain is that there is nothing called the individual self, although the individuated formation, which is an ego-

formation, may look upon itself as a *self-satisfying end*, and so, as the *Self*, may also look upon the body, the mind, the senses, even extra-organic entities like one's wife, child landed property etc., as the self, feeling towards each of these, or towards all of these together, a sense of identity and inseparableness. The individual, or the individuated form, has a 'self' to be sure, and a true one as that. But this is the Reality itself, from which the individuated, the determinate form, the ego or 'I', emanated as a conscious focus. The individual, which is a configuration of the ego, has to discover this its true 'Self', the true identity in Reality itself. That is, in the Indeterminate one, and in this consists its liberation, which means being rid of itself as a egoistic formation, the Self-projective 'I'. The 'I' is to find its identity in the Indeterminate one, and this realisation of identity may be as much a conscious process and is the I's (ego's) realisation of identity with the body, the mind, and say, with one's bank-account.

It is well-known that the different systems of Indian Philosophy have speculated on the nature and means of liberation. Is not this liberation meant for being a looked-for goal for the individual himself,—his supreme end, as far as the Indian systems are concerned? How, then, can this much desired liberation be realised? It seems that for this realisation the ego is to be tamed and trained and put into the reverse direction to realise its true identity in Reality itself. No negative approach can be fruitful. By its very nature, the ego is 'self-seeking', it is the mechanism which goes all out in search of new and ever new 'identities', whatever may be these 'identities' and values. It is really difficult either to control or to pacify it by sermonising about its utter nullity and essential voidness. It may be true that its substantivity as also its claim to be a 'Self' in itself, eternal and imperishable, is an ignorant make-believe. It may also be that its quest in the outer direction for ever new identities and values cannot bring in any final satisfaction or real fulfilment. But without the prospect or promise of an absolute fulfilment and supreme value lying handy for realisation in some other direction, it becomes impracticable, even impossible, to make a peaceful settlement with the ego without giving rise to qualms and unrest,—without a sense of deprivation. Self-mortification, forced austerities, maiming or afflicting the body, seem to be rather crude and 'heroic' methods for bringing

the ego to what would be its requisite 'temper' and state of correction. The 'salvation' of the ego, and therefore, of the individual, seems entirely to depend on the ego itself. An external measure either has no relevance or cannot be fruitful.

The ego can as well develop within itself a new sense of belonging. Instead of inculcating and nursing up the sense that the world belongs to the individual to administer and regulate it as he pleases, the individual may as well inculcate and develop the sense that he himself is only a *part* of the world and that his health and well-being consist in working out a peaceful adjustment with the world at large. Unfortunately, the line dividing the right attitude from the wrong attitude remains blurred and is never well-defined. Discovery of one's own identity, one's own self, in all others may work in two radically different ways. There may be the 'possessive', the grabbing way, in which by seeking to 'appropriate' all as parts of one's own being, an individual may lose his proper identity, and so, his proper self in the not-self. The other way is: regarding all persons including one's own self as 'expressions' of a larger Self. This is discovering a larger reality beyond one's own individual consciousness and developing a sense of belonging to that larger whole, instead of enlarging the bounds of one's own ego to envelop and engulf whatever is there. This is the way advised by all non-sectarian religion.

VII

It may be asked: do we have any factual basis, any theoretic warrant, for this sense of belonging to a larger whole, instead of the belief that we ourselves are all the realities and values that matter? The difference between these two attitudes seems to boil down to the fact that in the former we take an *instrumental* view of the ego, while in the other case we take a *substantive* view of it. It may be a fact that I am one of the centres, or conscious foci, through which Reality is objectively represented in its varied names and forms,—that the type of assessment and valuation I make in respect of these plural manifestations in course of my conventional experience and behaviour are partly, even wholly, due to me. But is it not also a fact that I am not the only centre or conscious focus of such objective representations, that there are, as there can be, infinite number of other centres and foci like myself? Along with this

realisation there is another. It is that our conscious life does not start with the consciousness of ourselves as distinct facts and as independent or substantive realities. Such consciousness develops retroactively and at a much later stage of mental development, when, as we have already seen, the 'I am' becomes the presupposition of all things that I assert or deny, and also the one indubitable fact which I cannot doubt or deny without self-contradiction. This then shows that what was *originally* a mere 'sense' or instrumentation, the ego, is subsequently made into a substantive fact and reality the polar opposite of any given objectivity, and in contradiction with this latter. The division of reality into the subjective and objective series is also not original but is attained retrospectively. This retrospective development into many subjects and many objects seems to be a certain natural phase or 'poise' of Reality itself. It is this phase which the Upaniṣads *metaphorically* put as, 'one Indeterminate pure Being-as-such' intended to become 'many'. In this, there is an artful or playful self-alienation, since the egos' turning into substantive realities as themselves can only be *apparent*, not real. But such arrangement obtains in *rerum natura* in some way, and it will be a mistake to suppose that all these egoistic and ego-centric developments reared up by false sense of identity and of self-fulfilment is just a kind of 'original sin' committed by the human individuals themselves, and that, for this, they themselves are responsible. There can be no doubt that the individuals all suffer or enjoy on account of them, and that these sufferings are all true and none fancied. But it may sound strange, even absurd, although it is true that the sense of personal responsibility is as much delusive as is the sense of substantive individuality, that is, the idea of an individual Self, immutable and eternal. Even though no substantive reality, not any enduring Self-substance, no absurdity seems to be involved in the idea of the ego's parading as a self-compact, self-dependent reality, in its 'wishing passionately' for an existence, both post-natal and post-mortem. Nor has the Hindu idea of transmigration or 'rolling on' in the circular process called *samsāra* has any natural link with the idea of an individual self, transcendental and eternal. The theoretic purpose which the pluralists achieve by means of the idea of *real* plural individual selves may as well be achieved by the idea that such plural individual selves are all fancied, and are

out-growths' of the infatuous affective tone and the self-advertising and grabbing conative urge of the ego. Much mischief in philosophical thinking seems to have been done by the traditional taking of the concept of the self to stand for an immutable substance, self-shining, self-conscious, and self-dependent. This has created the problem whether the Self, as thus conceived, is one or many - if one, how is that one substantive self related to the plural facts of the world, if many, how are the plural selves related to one another and to the real order as a whole? No permanent or tangible solutions appear to have been reached in respect of such tricky problems. All squabbles and vain wranglings on this point, we feel, may be avoided *with ease* if we opt to a 'functional, interpretation' of the concept as we have already proposed. The 'Self' is that with which 'identity' is sought with the expectation of utmost fulfilment. There are pseudo-selves and pseudo-values, since the ego, in its outer drive, goes in search for varied 'identities' and varied fulfilments. But the one true self for the ego, and for all the egos, is the Indeterminate Reality, the tranquil, from which the egos have all issued forth, since it is in the discovery of this identity alone that there is fulfilment in the absolute sense - *Pāramārthika*.

The Vedānta seems to have indicated the right direction in the solution of this perennial problem. It has advised leaving off the entire burden of moral responsibility, of merit and demerit, of pain and pleasure, at the door-step of the ego, which ignorantly assumes the role of a free agent, the architect of one's own destiny, instead of looking upon itself as a mere instrumentation in the enactment of the melo-drama, otherwise called the world-play of Reality-in whatever name you call it. The Geetā seems to corroborate the very same truth-vision when it declares 'The providence has not provided for agentship, free-actions and the relation between such actions and their merited consequences. The events all follow up their natural courses but it is the false sense of 'appropriation' and 'owning', the false sense of one's own personal commitment and involvement, which gives rise to the delusion of one's own merit and demerit and brings in all tension and stress.'²¹ These are words of wisdom. But even when the disease is diagnosed and the remedy, the one sure and unfailing is prescribed, very much still depends on active co-operation of the patient

I. P. Q.—3

in the treatment. It is not so easy to get over the ego's own distemper and behavioural disorder. It is not for nothing that saints and poet-philosophers look for divine grace, even if it be for strengthening one's own conviction and truth-vision :

“ Lower me down, my haughty head under the very dust of thy feet,

Break down all my resistance and impetuosity and drown all my sense of pride and self-importance in a flood of tears. Trying all my life to magnify my ego arduously I have bound myself to the fetters of my false self and have wronged myself most of all. Now cover up my 'I' by thy all-pervasive presence and May Thy will reign supreme in my life and Thine peace and Tranquility be mine ”.

(A rough rendering of Tagore)

Bajra Kabati Road,
Cuttack - 753 012
Orissa

S. K. CHATTOPADHYAYA

NOTES

- (1) Cf. Russell An Enquiry into Meaning and Truth : Ch. 7.
- (2) Cf. Maclver - Community.
- (3) Cf. Śāṅkara's - opening sentence in the Adhyāsabhāṣya.
- (4) Cf. James - The Principles of Psychology
- (5) Cf. Śāṅkarabhāṣya 2. 2.19
- (6) See his Introduction to Descartes' Discourse on Method and Meditation (Everyman's Library Series)
- (7) Ayer - The Problem of knowledge ch. 2.
- (8) This seems to be the Nyāya-vaiśeṣika view.
- (9) The Prābhākara school of Mimāṃsā as presented and reviewed by Śāṅkara B. S. B. 1. 1. 4.
- (10) The Sāṅkhya view.
- (11) It is a gross mistake to hold that Śāṅkarite conception takes ' I ' as the Self. Cf. ' Atmā sa bhokturyapare B. S. B. 1. 1. 1.

- (12) Cf. Ayer – The Problem of Knowledge : ch. 2.
- (13) Īśa. U. 15, Maitri 6.35, Brhad 5,15,1
- (14) Chandogya 6,2., Taittiriya 2.6., Aitereya 1.1.
- (15) Kaṭha Ch. 2., Valli 1.
- (16) See Adhyāsabhāṣya - Concluding section Evamahampratyayinam.....
prātyagatmahi adhyāsyā.....'
- (17) Cf. Descartes' view
- (18) B. S. B. 2.1.14.,
- (19) Bhāmati 2.1.14, (20) B. S. B. 2.1.27.
- (21) Geetā Ch. V : śloka 15

