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1. It is the Immutable Background-Substratum-Ground (Foundational Cause) of All Existence¹

For Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820), Nirguna Brahman is the ontological first cause, the background of existence, which differs from the Judeo-Christian doctrine of a Personal God as the cosmological and chronological first cause. Atman (which is identical with Brahman) is the substratum of existence, the underlying the unchanging and homogeneous unitary consciousness (Chit). "It is the ground upon which this manifold universe, the creation of ignorance, appears to rest. It is its own support."² Brahman-Atman abides in-Itself, as the foundational substrative and substantial cause of the world. As the one self-sufficient background (ashraya) essence from which all else proceeds, all things are rooted in Brahman while it is rooted in-Itself. As the unitary consciousness (Chit), Brahman is the knower of knowing, the seer of seeing, and the hearer of hearing. It is the pure subject that pervades all cognition and perception, revealing objects, but is Itself never comprehended as an object. "Brahman exists (1) as the Inner Self, (2) as the source of all activity of the senses and the like, (3) as the source whence arises our consciousness of existence with reference to all duality which is imaginary, (4) as Ishvara or the Lord of the universe."³

Shankara adds, “This is the meaning of the following passage, ‘You cannot see that which is the witness of vision,’ i.e. which pervades by its eternal vision the act of our ordinary vision. This latter, which is an act, is affected by the objects seen, and reveals only colour (form), but not the inner Self that pervades it. Therefore you cannot see that inner Self which is the witness of vision. Similarly, ‘You cannot hear that which is the hearer of hearing’; ‘You cannot think that which pervades thought,’ the mere function of the mind; ‘You cannot know that which pervades knowledge,’ the mere function of the intellect. This is the very nature of the thing; therefore it cannot be shown like a cow etc.”⁴ “There is no other witness but This, the Immutable; this Immutable Itself is everywhere the Witness, the subject of vision. Similarly, there is no other hearer but This; this Immutable Itself is everywhere the Hearer. There is no other thinker but This; this Immutable Itself is everywhere the Thinker, thinking through all minds. There is no other knower but This; this Immutable Itself—neither the insentient Pradhana [Primal Matter] nor anything else—is the Knower, knowing through all intellects.”⁵ “He (the Lord) alone and nothing else can be that luminous principle. It is proper to deny that they [i.e., the sun] can have any illumination even in respect of Brahman: for whatever is perceived is perceived through the light that is Brahman, but Brahman is not perceived through any other light. It being by nature self-effulgent.... Brahman reveals all others, but Brahman is not revealed by them.”⁶ “The eye and the other organs receive their powers of vision and so forth only by being inspired by the energy of Brahman; by themselves, divested of the light of the Atman that is Pure Intelligence, they are like wood or clods of earth.”⁷

Swami Vivekananda beautifully expresses the relation of Brahman-Atman to finite existence in many ways. Brahman-Atman is the: background Reality, Eternal Subject and witness, source of all knowledge and perceptions, Existence-Itself, and the archetype that is reflected onto finite existence. Previously in Chapter II it was mentioned that the Atman is our true Eternal Self, the most universal concept, and the source of the unity of apperception and self-identity. He discerned, “The background, the reality, of everyone is that same Eternal, Ever Blessed, Ever Pure, and Ever Perfect One. It is the Atman, the Soul, in the saint and the sinner, in the happy and the miserable, in the beautiful and the ugly, in men and in animals; it is the same throughout. It is the shining One. The difference is caused by the power of expression. In some It is expressed more, in others less, but this difference of expression has no effect upon the Atman.”⁸ “He is the Eternal Subject of everything, the eternal witness in the universe, your own Self.”⁹ “The light which

shines through the mind is not its own. Whose is it then? It must belong to that which has it as its own essence, and as such, can never decay or die, never become stronger or weaker; it is self-luminous, it is luminosity itself. It cannot be that the Soul [Atman] knows, it is knowledge. It cannot be that the soul has existence, but it is existence. It cannot be that the Soul is happy, it is happiness Itself. That which is happy—has borrowed its happiness; that which has knowledge has received its knowledge; and that which has relative existence has only a reflected existence. Wherever there are qualities these qualities have been reflected upon the substance, but the soul has not knowledge, existence, and blessedness as its qualities, they are the essence of the soul.”¹⁰

Vivekananda continues, “The external world is far away from the centre, and so there is no common ground in it where all the phenomena of existence can meet. At best, the external world is but one part of the whole of phenomena. There are other parts, the mental, the moral, and the intellectual--the various planes of existence--and to take up only one, and find a solution of the whole out of that one, is simply impossible. We first, therefore, want to find somewhere a centre from which, as it were, all the other planes of existence start, and standing there we should try to find a solution. That is the proposition. And where is that centre? It is within us. The ancient sages penetrated deeper and deeper until they found that in the innermost core of the human soul [Atman] is the centre of the whole universe.”¹¹ “My soul itself is a part of God. He is the eye of our eyes, the life of our life, the mind of our mind, the Soul of our soul.”¹² “It is the same Infinite Soul, which is the background of the universe, that we call God. The same Infinite Soul also is the background of the human mind which we call the human soul.”¹³ (See Chapter III, Section 10, Immanence).

Vivekananda is making the important point that in a sense Nirguna Brahman is not “wholly other.” It is the foundation of the universe and without Nirguna Brahman there would be no universe, which includes us and our mode of thinking. It is shining through the universe and maintaining its existence at every moment.

According to Professor Anukul Chandra Mukerji (1888-1968) of Allahabad University, “The Infinite [Nirguna Brahman] which has nothing outside Itself cannot seek Its support in something other than Itself; It is therefore *causa sui* or a self-maintaining principle. While all finite things are rooted in the Infinite, the latter has nothing in which it Itself may be rooted; It is, in other words, the ultimate support (ahsraya) or presupposition of all that exists.... The background or support of all relations, though something positive, falls beyond the relations, and, as such,

cannot be conditioned or supported by anything different from Itself. What is presupposed by all distinctions cannot Itself be known through distinction. It is therefore the unconditioned support of all things that are related with one another and determined by mutual relations.”¹⁴

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) pointed out that in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* it is written, “That from which these beings are born. That by which, when born, they live, That into which [at the time of dissolution] they enter, they merge—seek to know That. That is Brahman (3.1.1).” “Brahman is infinite not in the sense that it excludes the finite, but in the sense that it is the ground of all finites. It is eternal not in the sense that it something back beyond all time, as though there were two states temporal and eternal, one of which superseded the other, but that it is the timeless reality of all things in time. The Absolute is neither the infinite nor the finite, the self or its realisation, the one life or its varied expressions, but is the Real including and transcending the self and its realisation, life and its expression. It is the spiritual spring which breaks, blossoms and differentiates itself into numberless finite centres.... But the *Upanishads* nowhere say that the infinite excludes the finite. Wherever they assert that Brahman is the sole reality they are careful enough to add that the world is rooted in Brahman, and as such has a share of reality.”¹⁵ “When it is said that there is no reality outside Atman, it is meant that the Atman is the universal spirit or consciousness, including all else. When it is said that ‘a manifold universe exists external to us,’ the ‘us’ refers to the empirical individuals who are limited by mind and body, possessing local habitations and temporal settings. Surely to such beings the world is real, being set over against them. The Atman we are in search of is not the object of knowledge but the basis of all knowledge. It is the presupposition of material and spiritual worlds alike.... The different kinds of being are higher and lower manifestations of the one Absolute spirit.... Every finite object holds within itself distinctions which point beyond. While the Absolute is in all finite things and permeates them, the things differ in the degree of their permeability, in the fullness of their reflections.... The rank of the categories as higher and lower is determined by the adequacy of their expression of reality. Life is a higher category than matter. All existence is a revelation or reflection of the omnipresent higher reality to varying degrees.”¹⁶

Sushanta Sen pointed out that, “One distinctive feature of the Hindu conception of the Creator God lies in that, after creating the world, God does not stand outside but remains within it. The concept of a God residing in Heaven above

the universe and occasionally interfering with the affairs of the world at moments of crisis is quite alien to the Hindu mind. God, according to Hinduism, remains in the very bosom of the Universe, pervades and permeates the whole of it, and controls it while remaining within it. Hence God has been described in the Hindu scriptures as the inherent creator and inner controller of the world, or the Antaryamin.... though God resides within the world and pervades the whole of it, God's being is not wholly exhausted in it; God is also beyond the world. God is both immanent and transcendent in relation to the world.”¹⁷

It was written by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) that, “The intelligible world contains the ground of the world of sense and hence of its laws, the intelligible world is directly legislative for my will, which belongs wholly to the intelligible world.”¹⁸ An “appearance must be recognized as already indicating a relation to something ... in itself, that is, an object independent of sensibility.”¹⁹ “The condition of the event will be such as can be found only in the series of appearances; both it and its effect will be necessary in accordance with the law of nature. If, on the other hand, appearances are not taken, for more than they actually are; if they are viewed not as things-in-themselves, but merely as representations, connected according to empirical laws, they must themselves have grounds which are not appearances. The effects of such an intelligible cause appear, and accordingly can be determined through other appearances, but its causality is not so determined. While the effects are to be found in the series of empirical conditions, the intelligible cause, together with its causality, is outside the series. Thus the effect may be regarded as free in respect of its intelligible cause, and at the same time in respect of appearances as resulting from them according to the necessity of nature.... Regarded as the causality of a thing-in-itself, it is intelligible in its action; regarded as the causality of an appearance in the world of sense, it is sensible in its effects. We should therefore have to form both an empirical and an intellectual concept of the causality of the faculty of such a subject, and to regard both as referring to one and the same effect. This twofold manner of conceiving the faculty possessed by an object of the senses does not contradict any of the concepts which we have to form of appearances and of a possible experience. For since they are not things-in-themselves, they must rest upon a Transcendental Object which determines them as mere representations; and consequently there is nothing to prevent us from ascribing to this Transcendental Object, besides the quality in terms which it appears, a causality which is not

appearance, although its effect is to be met within appearance.”²⁰ The mind is not a blank slate, a tabula rasa but possess innate mental categories for organizing our sense impressions.

Vivekananda describes the Highest Reality subjectively as the Eternal Subject and Eternal Witness, your own Self. Conversely, we can interpret Kant’s Transcendental Object as Noumenon, the Highest Reality. Through the five senses and human intellect we perceive and conceive of only an appearance or representation of the object (Noumenon) in Its true nature, referred to as the Thing-in-Itself. Coming from the internal perspective that one Reality is an immanent subject and from the external transcendental frame of reference It is an object. As the Swami stated, “The one was the ancient Hindu mind, and the other was the ancient Greek mind. The former started by analysing the internal world. The latter started in search of that goal beyond by analysing the external world.” “The study of the Greeks was the outer infinite, while that of the Aryans was the inner infinite.”²¹ It is the Greek mind that pervaded European thought as acknowledge by Vivekananda, Martin Heidegger, and many others. Significant contributions to secular thought were also made by the Indians, Middle Easterners, Egyptians, and others.

As indicated by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) the Thing-in-Itself is both transcendent, and the immanent cause of the world as the ground of phenomenal existence. The Noumenal “Will is indivisible and is wholly present in every phenomenon, although the degrees of its objectification, the [Platonic] Ideas, are very different.” This Will is the real internal nature of a person’s being, manifesting as the human will and individuating itself into different objects. It is immanent, since it is the “inner kernel” of phenomenal existence. “The interpretation and explanation of the phenomenon, however, in relation to its inner kernel can give us information about it which does not otherwise come into consciousness. Therefore in this sense metaphysics goes beyond the phenomenon, i.e., nature, to what is concealed in or behind it, yet always regarding it only as that which appears in the phenomenon, not independently of all phenomenon. Metaphysics thus remains immanent, and does not become transcendent; for it never tears itself entirely from experience, but remains the mere interpretation and explanation thereof, as it never speaks of the Thing-in-Itself otherwise than in its relation to the phenomenon.”²²

Vivekananda did not care for Schopenhauer's use of the term "Will" to describe Ultimate Reality. "Schopenhauer makes the Will stand in the place of the Absolute. But the Absolute cannot be presented as will, for will is something changeable and phenomenal, and over the line, drawn above time, space, and causation, there is no change, no motion; it is only below the line that external motion and internal motion, called thought, begin. There can be no will on the other side, and will therefore, cannot be the cause of this universe."²³ He gives the sequence, "The Absolute [Nirguna Brahman] first becomes the mixture of knowledge, then, in the second degree, that of will.... The Buddhist analysis of everything into will is imperfect, firstly, because will is itself a compound, and secondly, because consciousness or knowledge which is a compound of the first degree, precedes it. Knowledge is action. First action, then reaction. When the mind perceives, then, as the reaction, it wills.... There is no willing without knowing. How can we desire unless we know the object of desire?"²⁴

Which comes first the Divine Intellect or the Divine Will? Vivekananda as just stated and most philosophers would probably say the Intellect. Kashmir Shaivism and Schopenhauer say the Will. On the human level you cannot have a will without first having an intellect. Can you have an intellect without a will? If yes then the intellect is prior, if no they are probably concomitant. Here we are assuming a similarity between the Divine Mind and the human mind.

The Russian Semyon (Simon) Frank (1877-1950) considered Divinity [the Absolute] to be the primary ground of existence. "[Divinity] cannot be separated from the rest of reality, for its essence consists in being the ground and the source of it."²⁵ "For it is not we who by our own activity come to possess through our cognitive gaze the primordial ground and penetrate into it. Rather, it is the primordial ground itself that possesses us, penetrates into us, and reveals itself to us in this way.... On the other hand the primordial ground in general is not some 'something' but is precisely nothing but the primordial ground and primordial source of all, the creative, illuminating, and grounding potency of all. Therefore all questions concerning the 'essence' of the primordial ground can be answered only by the affirmation that the primordial ground is the absolute unity and coincidence of all opposites. The coincidence of opposites in unconditional being.... Thus, the primordial ground in its essence is something absolutely paradoxical, improbable, rationally unknowable.... The primordial ground is the principle that forms the essence of the unknowable as such. The primordial ground is the deepest primordial mystery of reality as such: a mystery which, in spite of its unattainability,

incomprehensibility, and insolvability, is nevertheless revealed with full self-evidence to the spirit that penetrates into its own depths; or rather is revealed to the spirit as self-evidence itself, as absolute Truth itself.”²⁶ “We commit once again the crude error of subordinating Divinity to a definite genus, this time to the genus of the ‘wholly other.’ The relation of Divinity to all else cannot be adequately expressed in any of the usual categorical forms, for they themselves originate from the primordial ground and their very meaning presupposes the reality of the primordial ground.... Ultimate, true absoluteness belongs only to Divinity as the primordial source or primordial ground, which alone grounds Itself and all else. But this absoluteness shines through being as such; and in some derivative manner, in some non-genuine, merely analogical sense, belongs to the latter.”²⁷ “Since Divinity cannot be subsumed under any [logical] category, cannot be referred to any ‘genus,’ it follows that Divinity cannot be subsumed under the concept of ‘the person,’ cannot be conceived as one of many possible persons. From this point of view, we can consider God not as a person but as the primordial ground or principle, that determines the very possibility of personal being.... Divinity is not a ‘derivative’ reality. It cannot, nor does it need to, transcend into a sphere of reality that is higher or deeper than it, into the reality of what is valid and valuable in itself, for Divinity is the primordial ground or primordial source of this very reality. The human person is grounded in spirit, and only in this sense is it itself spirit; whereas Divinity is spirit because spirit originates from Divinity.”²⁸

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) lived on the boundary between theology and philosophy and as much as any modern Western thinker made a conscious attempt to combine the two correlated disciplines. He discerned that, “The being of God is Being-Itself [*Ipsum Esse*]. The being of God cannot be understood as the existence of a being along side others or above others. If God is a being, he is subject to the categories of finitude, especially to space and substance.... Whenever infinite or unconditional power and meaning are attributed to the highest being, It has ceased to be a being and has become Being-Itself. Many confusions in the doctrine of God and many apologetic weaknesses could be avoided if God were understood first of all as Being-Itself or as the Ground of Being.... God is Being-Itself, not a being. On this basis a first step can be taken toward the solution of the problem which usually is discussed as the immanence and the transcendence of God. As the Power of Being, God transcends every being and also the totality of beings—the world. Being-Itself is beyond finitude and infinity; otherwise it would be conditioned by something other than Itself, and the real Power of Being would lie beyond both it

and that which conditioned it. Being-Itself infinitely transcends every finite being. There is no proportion or gradation between the finite and the infinite. There is an absolute break, an infinite 'jump.' On the other hand, everything finite participates in Being-Itself and in its infinity. Otherwise it would not have the Power of Being. It would be swallowed by nonbeing ... God is the cause of the entire structure of causes and effects, He is the substance underlying the whole process of becoming.... Since God is the Ground of Being, he is the ground of the structure of being. He is not subject to this structure; the structure is grounded in Him. He is this structure, and it is impossible to speak about Him except in terms of this structure. God must be approached cognitively through the structural elements of Being-Itself.... God as Being-Itself is the ground of the ontological structure of being without being subject to this structure Himself. He is the structure; that is, He has the power of determining the structure of everything that has being." "The nonbeing of negative theology means 'not being anything special,' being beyond every concrete predicate. This nonbeing embraces everything; it means being everything; it is Being-Itself."²⁹ Since Being-Itself is the precondition of existence and understanding it is an absolute, not in anyway relative. Being-Itself is not a being among other beings in which case He would be subjected to the structure of the whole. It is the "God above God" and the Ground upon which all beings exist.

Professor of Philosophy John Laird (1887-1947) of Aberdeen University in Scotland identified five starting points from Ultimate reality (God) to the universe and the Divine Incarnation. They are: 1) Unity-Oneness becomes multiplicity, diversity, variety. "It is quite another thing, however, to claim in the abstract, and to try to show in the abstract, that unity demands or generates multiplicity of its own proper nature.... So the 'generation' must be presumed to be logical not temporal, an inevitable or probable implication, not a sequence in time." 2) God is Being-Itself that "is prior to its determinations but generates its determinations." 3) The Perfection and Fullness of being demands an overflow. "When we start from the top, we start with perfection in the sense of maximum fullness and therefore can show that any conceivable filling, including the fullness of being embodied, is metaphysically and theologically secure." Laird links it to the Principle of Plenitude that whatever can possibly manifests does. 4) God transcends finite being as its source. Formed things have their source in the formless. Non-propertyed being can generate propertyed beings. 5) The universe and God's incarnation are said to be a Divine expression, His manifestation and theophany. In it the Unmanifest expresses Itself, becomes visible, and thus its communicated manifestations are spiritual,

mental, and physical. A theophany is a temporal and spatial manifestation of God in tangible form. They are perceptible to the external senses, which do not include divine manifestations in dreams. Many are found in the *Old Testament*, but no one saw God's actual face (Ex. 33:20).³⁰ Christ is, "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible" (Col. 1:15-16).³¹ A theophany is a temporal and spatial manifestation of God in tangible form. They are perceptible to the external senses, which do not include divine manifestations in dreams. Many are found in the *Old Testament*, but no one saw God's actual face (Ex. 33:20).

From the standpoint of the phenomenal world Nirguna Brahman-Atman, Thing-in-Itself, and Being-Itself can be viewed as being the background or as the ground of existence. Christians are more apt to think vertically, the Transcendental God as being up there or a religious philosopher like Eckhart or Tillich as being the Divine ground beneath us. Another vertical model is of a pond where the conscious mind is on the surface, below it is the subconscious, and at a deeper level is the unconscious mind. Vivekananda (and Shankara) used the word "background" rather than the Western term "ground." The term "background" is more compatible with mystical experience, that the Divine realm is within and pervades our consciousness. Jesus' made the statement, "The Kingdom of God is within you (Lk 17:21, King James)," and the Apostle Paul's pronouncement, "One God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6).

Being-Itself is first since nothing precedes It, exists on its own [aseity], is unlimited by space and time which It transcends, and is desired by humans for its own sake. Being-Itself is the source of everything material and mental. It makes something True and Good because it is True and Good in and of itself.³²

Based on the quotations in this section Ultimate Reality is the:

1) Ground of Existence (Being): Indian-substratum, underlying consciousness, foundational substantial or substrative cause, everything rooted in it. Western-primordial ground, ground of being. It sustains and supports the world.

2) Background of Existence (Being): Indian-knower of knowing, the seer of seeing, and the hearer of hearing, background Reality, Eternal Subject and Witness Self, Atman in all, it is in and through It that we see and think, through It we know everything, the Center, within us, the infinite is inherent in the finite, permeates all, and the world projected out from the center. Western-immanent cause, internal nature, behind it, shines through.

3) Transcendence: Indian-Nirguna Brahman beyond the phenomenal world. Western-Transcendental Object.

The Ground-of-Being is the ontological ground (or background) of existence. It might be conceived as Ultimate Reality; the One, Pure Act free of potentiality, the Unknowable, Being-Power-Knowledge-Goodness Itself, the uncaused First Cause, source of all, the highest virtue-value such as omnipotence, omniscience, or omnibenevolence, the supreme perfection that imperfect beings approach, the goal of human existence, and the final cause that guides natural things toward their ends. It is both the creative source of the Universe and the teleological end of all existing things.

Nirguna Brahman is the upholder of eternal things and temporal entities while they are in existence. But can a changeless Nirguna Brahman make a thing come into and go out of existence?

The three main plains (or regions) of existence are the: Physical (gross), Mental (subtle), and Spiritual (Divine). They form a vertical hierarchy (of levels) of a single substance in three different states. Each plane corresponds to a type, kind, or category of being. The Great Chain of Being proceeds from Brahman-God down to inanimate matter.

2. Nirguna Brahman's Relationship with Saguna Brahman the Personal God and Divine World

According to S. N. L. Shrivastava, "Shankara says that in the phenomenal universe, God is none the less, the highest reality, the Ruler and Controller of all things and of all living beings. Shankara conceives the phenomenal universe as a hierarchical gradation with progressively higher and higher realities according as the upadhis or limiting adjuncts [attributes] are higher and higher, till we come to God the Highest, who by virtue of being endowed with super-eminent upadhis rules over and controls living beings endowed with upadhis of a lower order³³.... Brahman or the Absolute has two Forms, the Unconditioned or the Nirguna Brahma which is bereft of all upadhis or limiting adjuncts, and the Conditioned or the Saguna Brahman [Personal God] limited by the upadhis. In this latter aspect Brahman is Ishvara or God, and as such, endowed with the Lordship of the entire creation and also with the power of granting grace to His devotees which snaps the thread of avidya [false understanding] and makes the realization of Brahman possible.... Ishvara is Brahman in Its conditioned or sopadhika aspect. It has already been

pointed out that for Shankara, Brahman has a two-fold nature, the Unconditioned and the Conditioned.... for Shankara the Absolute of philosophy and the God of religion are not two numerically and ontologically different entities. Shankara identifies the God of religion who by His grace grants salvation to the individual souls with the highest reality of the Atman.”³⁴ This point is made by Shankara, “Therefore the unconditioned Self [Atman], being beyond speech and mind, undifferentiated and one, is designated as 'Not this, not this'; when It has the limiting adjunct of the body and organs, which are characterized by ignorance, desire and work, It is called the transmigrating individual self; and when the Self has the limiting adjunct of the power of eternal and unlimited knowledge It is called the Internal Ruler and Ishvara [Personal God]. The same Self, as by nature transcendent, absolute and pure, is called the Immutable and Supreme Self.”³⁵

As Vivekananda clarified, “Are there then two Gods--the ‘Not this, not this’, the Sat-Chit-Ananda, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss of the philosopher, and this God of Love of the Bhakta? No, it is the same Sat-Chit-Ananda who is also the God of Love, the impersonal and personal in one. It has always to be understood that the Personal God worshipped by the Bhakta is not separate or different from the Brahman. All is Brahman, the One without a second; only the Brahman, as unity or absolute, is too much of an abstraction to be loved and worshipped; so the Bhakta chooses the relative aspect of Brahman, that is, Ishvara [Personal God], the supreme Ruler.... Ishvara is the highest manifestation of the Absolute Reality, or in other words, the highest possible reading of the Absolute by the human mind. Creation is eternal, and so also is Ishvara.” “The Personal God is the same Absolute seen through Maya. That Absolute under the control of nature is what is called the human soul; and that which is controlling nature is Ishvara, or the Personal God. If a man starts from here to see the sun, he will see at first a little sun; but as he proceeds he will see it bigger and bigger, until he reaches the real one. At each stage of his progress he was seeing apparently a different sun; yet we are sure it was the same sun he was seeing. So all these things are but visions of the Absolute, and as such they are true. Not one is a false vision, but we can only say they were lower stages.” “Naturally the universal Absolute must have two aspects: the one [representing the] infinite reality of all things; the other, a personal aspect, the Soul of our souls, Lord of all lords. [It is] He who creates this universe. Under [His] guidance this universe exists.”³⁶

He continues, “The sum-total of this whole universe is God Himself. Is God then matter? No, certainly not, for matter is that God perceived by the five senses; that

God as perceived through the intellect is mind; and when the spirit sees, He is seen as spirit.... The Personal God will remain, but on a better basis. He has been strengthened by the Impersonal.... But if we understand the idea of the Impersonal, then the idea of the Personal can remain there also. This universe, in its various forms, is but the various readings of the same Impersonal. When we read it with the five senses, we call it the material world.... the Personal God is the highest reading that can be attained to, of that Impersonal, by the human intellect. So that the Personal God is true as much as this chair is true, as much as this world is true, but no more. It is not absolute truth. That is to say, the Personal God is that very Impersonal God and, therefore, it is true.”³⁷ The human intellect places an epistemological limitation on the impersonal. Can we say that from an epistemological standpoint, Saguna Brahman is Nirguna Brahman as seen through the human mind? Nirguna Brahman is Brahman-in-Itself independent of the human mind, and when reflected off of a pure spiritual mind is Saguna Brahman.

An epistemological creation occurs through the intellect and senses. “The Absolute and the Infinite can become this universe only by limitation. Everything must be limited that comes through the senses, or through the mind, or through the intellect ... This Absolute (a) has become the universe (b) by coming through time, space, and causation (c). This is the central idea of Advaita. Time, space, and causation are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen, and when It is seen on the lower side, It appears as the universe. Now we at once gather from this that in the Absolute there is neither time, space, nor causation. The idea of time cannot be there, seeing that there is no mind, no thought. The idea of space cannot be there, seeing that there is no external change. What you call motion and causation cannot exist where there is only One... Whatever we do is always through Him. Now the question is: What are time, space, and causation? Advaita means nonduality; there are not two, but one. Yet we see that here is a proposition that the Absolute is manifesting Itself as many, through the veil of time, space, and causation.” “Unity is before creation, diversity is creation.”³⁸ In this sense a person’s ontology (views of reality) is determined by their epistemology (ways of knowing).

Plotinus (c. 205-70) explains how the One (Hen, equivalent to Nirguna Brahman) brings the Nous (Divine Intellect, Saguna Brahman, Ishvara) into existence. “What comes into being from the One does so without the One being moved ... It must have come to be without the One moving at all, without any inclination or act of will or any sort of activity on Its part. How did It come to be

then, and what are we to think of as surrounding the One in Its repose? It must be a *radiation* [*emanation*] from It while It remains unchanged, like the bright light of the sun which, so to speak, runs round it, springing from it continually while it remains unchanged. All things which exist, as long as they remain in being, necessarily produce from their own substances, in dependence on their present power, a surrounding reality directed to what is outside them, a kind of image of the archetypes from which it was produced: fire produces the heat which comes from it; snow does not only keep its cold inside itself.... the One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly; and Its product is less than Itself. What then must we say about the most perfect? Nothing can come from It except that which is next greatest after It. Intellect [Nous] is next to It in greatness and second to It: for Intellect sees It and needs It alone; but It has no need of Intellect ... But we say that Intellect [Nous] is an image of that Good [equivalent to the One]; for we must speak more plainly; first of all we must say that what has come into being must be in a way that Good, and retain much of It and be a likeness of It, as light is of the sun.... Intellect, certainly, by Its own means even defines Its being for Itself by the power which comes from the One, and because Its substance is a kind of single part of what belongs to the One and comes from the One, It is strengthened by the One and made perfect in substantial existence by and from It.”³⁹ “In order that Being may exist, the One is not Being, but the generator of Being. This, we may say, is the first act of generation: the One, perfect because It seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and Its superabundance makes something other than Itself.” “All the other things that exist are held together by this; for they exist by some kind of participation in Him.”⁴⁰ Nous is necessary for there to be reason and intelligibility since they are not part of the One that transcends them. Emanation is not a temporal process, but is ontological in the sense that it is always occurring.

Augustine (354-430) the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa who also lived in Rome began his analysis not with the Father, but with the Divine Substance. Whatever is stated about God is affirmed equally of each of Its three members [the Trinity]. They possess a single nature, action and will, and are identical with a single Divine Substance. They are self-subsistent and equal, identical in Substance, but differ in their internal mutual relations with each another. “Although to be the Father and to be the Son are two different things, still there is no difference in their Substance, because the names, Father and Son, do not refer to the Substance but to the relation, and the relation is no accident because it is not changeable.... But

the things in the same Trinity that are properly predicated of each person are by no means predicated of them as they are in themselves, but in their relations either to one another or to the creature; it is obvious that such things are predicated of them relatively, and not in regard to their Substance.”⁴¹

Following the reasoning of Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), “The relations by which God is referred to creatures cannot possibly be realities outside of Him.” “These relations have no real existence in God and yet are predicated of Him, it follows that they are attributed to Him solely in accordance with our manner of understanding.”⁴² “Since, therefore, God is outside the whole order of creation, and all creatures are ordered to Him, and not conversely, it is manifest that creatures are really related to God Himself; whereas in God there is no real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea.”⁴³ “For the human intellect is not able to reach a comprehension of the Divine Substance through its natural power.... Now sensible things cannot lead the human intellect to the point of seeing in them the nature of the Divine Substance.”⁴⁴ In God internal relations apply to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Given that God is simple without accidents, no relations between the Divine Substance and the creation can exist in Him. His Substance is not related to anything outside of Itself. Since the simplicity of the Divine Substance surpasses all capacities of the human intellect, the Substance of God cannot be known as He is through human reason. The Substance of God is not understood by any predicates or created likeness or effect of His actions, which He infinitely exceeds.⁴⁵

John Caputo explains Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327) the Dominican priest and German mystics religious philosophy as emphasizing “the distinction between the ‘Godhead’ (*Gottheit, divinitas*) [Nirguna Brahman] and ‘God’ (*Gott, deus*). ‘God’ [Saguna Brahman, Ishvara] refers to the Divine Being insofar as it is related to creatures and so insofar as it is named on the basis of these relationships. Hence ‘God’ is called good as the cause of the goodness of creatures, wise because of the order He has established in the universe, etc. But the ‘Godhead’ is the Divine Being insofar as it remains concealed behind all the names which are attributed to Him. The Godhead is the ‘one’ which is purer than goodness and truth, which is even prior to the Son and the Holy Spirit. The ‘one’ refers to God ... ‘there where He is in Himself, before He flows out into the Son and the Holy Spirit.... A Master has said: the one is a negation of negation.’ The Godhead is the absolute unity of the Divine Being, the negation of all multiplicity, not only of the multiplicity of creatures but even of the multiplicity of Persons in the Divine Trinity. The Godhead is the deeper

‘ground’ from out of which even the Persons of the Trinity flow. But because this ground is ‘hidden,’ it is just as much an ‘abyss.’ Eckhart also speaks of the hidden Godhead as a Divine ‘wasteland’ and as the ‘naked being’ of God. The Godhead totally transcends the power of thought to represent it. Eckhart says this is not the God of thought but God Himself as He is in Himself, ‘the Divine God,’ who cannot be reduced to the dimensions of human intelligence.”⁴⁶ In Eckhart’s own words, “God and the Godhead are as different from each other as heaven is from earth.... God works, the Godhead does not work, for It has nothing to work there is no operation in It. It has never looked for an operation. God differs from the Godhead by working and non-working.” “God [Godhead] is without name, for no one can say or understand anything of Him.... Hence if I say, ‘God is good,’ this is not true. I am good, but God is not good.... If I say further, ‘God is wise,’ this is not true, I am wiser than He. If I say also: ‘God is a being,’ this is not true; He is a being above being and a superessential negation. A master says, ‘If I had a God whom I could know, I would not think Him to be God.’ ... You must love Him as He is: neither God, nor spirit, nor person, nor image; rather the One without mixture, pure and luminous.” “If God is to look into it, it must cost Him all His Divine Names and the property of His Persons; he must leave them all outside if He is to look in there. Rather as He is the simple One, without all mode and property, so he is neither Father nor Son nor Holy Spirit in this sense, and is yet a Something which is neither this nor that.” “In the same way as the Godhead is ‘anterior’ to the three Persons [of the Trinity] according to our way of understanding, so the ‘ground’ of our soul is that which is ‘anterior’ to the faculties of the soul.... as He is the simple One, without all mode and property, so He is neither Father nor Son nor Holy Spirit in this sense.” God is a unity without distinction, transcending the distinctions of the Three Persons.⁴⁷

When Thomas Aquinas writes, “There is no real relation in God to the creatures,” he is referring to the Essence of God (Divine Substance), not to the Manifestations of God (e.g., Personal God, Divine Incarnation) in the finite world. Personal God must relate to the phenomenal world in order to create it.

In proceeding from Nirguna Brahman (Essence of God) to Saguna Brahman (Manifestation of God) there are many explanations that include: Emanation (Plotinus), Trinity (Christian), limited by Name and Form (Traditional Indian, Vivekananda), limited by space, time, and causality (Shankara, Kant, Schopenhauer, Vivekananda), Objectification and Externalization (Kashmir Shaivism), Unknowable

since It exists beyond all human categories of understanding (Kant), Vijnana- Modes-Aspects (e.g., liquid water to ice, inactive to active, formless to form) (Ramakrishna), Substance-Attributes (e.g., milk and its whiteness) (Ramakrishna), and Original-Reflection (Ramakrishna).⁴⁸

Five relationships between Nirguna and Saguna Brahman-God are:

- 1) Mayavadin- The latter is maya (strict Nondualism),
 - 2) Vijnana- They are equally real aspects or forms of one and the same impersonal-personal Reality (Sri Ramakrishna),
 - 3) Manifestation- Nirguna is the Essence of Brahman-God and Saguna the Manifestation of Brahman-God,
 - 4) Externalization- Nirguna is intrinsic (internalized) and Saguna is an extrinsic (externalized) aspect of the same Reality, and
 - 5) Objectification- Nirguna is the Eternal Subject and Saguna an object.
- The relationship is ontological (always occurring) and not chronological (not occurring and then occurring).

Nirguna Brahman (Essence of God) and Saguna Brahman (Manifestation of God) are related by such philosophical concepts as: the “that” and the “what,” essence and existence, subject and predicate, and substance and quality, as for example fire and its power to burn. As the British philosopher F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) states, for an empirical object, a “that” (existence) and a “what” (content) are inseparable and not divisible. Yet the two are conceptually distinguishable. To understand the “that,” it must be qualified by the “what.” It is not bare reality, existence without a character and content.⁴⁹ We might think of essence as internal and its manifestation as external.

The universe proceeds from Nirguna Brahman-Atman through a process of: 1) limitations of name and form, 2) limitations of space, time, and causality (finitude), 3) the Eternal Subject objectifies, 4) by reflection, and as the background of existence. The important point is that Nirguna Brahman is not “wholly other.” It is the foundation of the universe and without It there would be no universe, which includes us. For more details see the unpublished paper: Gopal Stavig, “Nirguna Brahman, Saguna Brahman and the Creation of the Universe.”

In the Christian Trinity the Father (like Nirguna Brahman) has neither been made by anyone, nor is He created or begotten; the Son (like Saguna Brahman) is from the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten; the Holy Spirit (Mahat is from the son) is from the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding forth. Yet from another standpoint the Trinity is not nondual since

it has three members. To be nondual there would have to be no difference between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke to the Father in a Semitic or a Divine language, which indicates that He changes. If the Father speaks, has gender, and a will He is not Simple.

First there is the nondual, undivided (spatially, temporally, and conceptually), simple religion. In the Brahmaloka-Heavenly Divine realm It divides into the various spiritual religions such as Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and others we are not familiar with. The earthly religions are approximations of those higher Brahmaloka-Heavenly religions. The Brahmaloka is also known as the Karanaloka (Causal world).

3. The Divine World is a Representation of Nirguna Brahman and the Thing-in-Itself

Shankara objected to the subjective idealist's views of the Yogacara-Vijnanavada Indian Buddhists that external objects do not exist independent of the human mind. He states, "It cannot be asserted that external things do not exist. Why? Because they are perceived. As a matter of fact such things as a pillar, a wall, a pot, a cloth, are perceived along with each act of cognition. And it cannot be that the very thing perceived is nonexistent."⁵⁰ S. Radhakrishnan notes, "Shankara criticizes the theory that the world has no existence except in the human mind on several grounds.... To say that things and ideas are presented together does not mean that they are one. Inseparable connection is different from identity. If all cognitions are empty of content, then the consciousness that there are no things is also empty. The comparison of waking to dream is due to a confusion. Dream experience is subjective and private, while the waking is not so. Objects of waking knowledge endure, while dream objects last only during dreams.... If from the start there were no objects, he asks, how could perception take on the form of objects? It is because objects exist that consciousness is able to take on their form. Otherwise consciousness would be free to take on any form it pleased. If it is said that our consciousness of things as external is illusory, that we see objects as if they were external, whereas in reality they are not, Shankara asks, if really there was nothing external, how can we have even an illusion of externality?"⁵¹

Concerning knowing things-in-themselves (discussed earlier by Kant) Swami Vivekananda explains, "There is first the external vibration, the word. This, carried inward by the sense currents, is the meaning. After that there comes a reactionary wave in the Chitta [Mind-stuff], which is knowledge, but the mixture of these three

makes up what we call knowledge.... It is by the practice of meditation of these three that we come to the state where these three do not mix.... You have that calm lake in you, and I pronounce a word, 'Cow'. As soon as it enters through your ears there is a wave produced in your Chitta along with it. So that wave represents the idea of the cow, the form or the meaning as we call it. The apparent cow that you know is really the wave in the mind-stuff that comes as a reaction to the internal and external sound vibrations. With the sound, the wave dies away; it can never exist without a word. You may ask how it is, when we only think of the cow, and do not hear a sound. You make that sound yourself. You are saying 'cow' faintly in your mind, and with that comes a wave. There cannot be any wave without this impulse of sound; and when it is not from outside, it is from inside, and when the sound dies, the wave dies. What remains? The result of the reaction, and that is knowledge. These three are so closely combined in our mind that we cannot separate them. When the sound comes, the senses vibrate, and the wave rises in reaction; they follow so closely upon one another that there is no discerning one from the other. When this meditation has been practiced for a long time, memory, the receptacle of all impressions, becomes purified, and we are able clearly to distinguish them from one another. This is called Nirvitarka."⁵²

Swami Vivekananda expresses the idea this way, "The Absolute has become the universe. By this is not only meant the material world, but the mental world, the spiritual world—heavens and earths, and in fact, everything that exists. Mind is the name of a change, and body the name of another change, and so on, and all these changes compose our universe. This Absolute has become the universe by coming through time, space, and causation. This is the central idea of Advaita. Time, space, and causation are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen, and when It is seen on the lower side, It appears as the universe. Now we at once gather from this that in the Absolute there is neither time, space, nor causation. The idea of time cannot be there, seeing that there is no mind, no thought. The idea of space cannot be there, seeing that there is no external change. What you call motion and causation cannot exist where there is only One." Personal God "is the highest reading of the Impersonal that can be reached by the human intellect, and what else is the universe but various readings of the Absolute?"⁵³ "These three things--time, space, and causality--are in and through every phenomena, but they are not phenomena. They are as it were the forms or moulds in which everything must be cast before it can be apprehended."⁵⁴

Vivekananda also states, if a person developed the ability to perceive electric waves or if their senses grew finer, the world would appear different to them. We all perceive the same objects, because our minds are in similar vibrational state. Nothing exists in a state of complete independence. All things in this world are “relative and correlative, the existence of one thing depending on the other.”⁵⁵ How does an object such as a clock appear as a thing-in-itself independent of the sensory apparatus used to perceive it? Is there a pure object independent of a subject? Does it appear as an idea in the Divine Mind?

The close relationship between Brahman and the world was brought out by Swami Abhedananda a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Phenomenal “existence cannot be separated from the Absolute existence. If Brahman, or the Absolute existence, be all in all, then everything that exists on the phenomenal plane is in reality Brahman, or the absolute Truth. The reality of the chair, the table, the earth, the sun, moon and stars, is the absolute existence, is divinity itself. The reality in you, in me, and in all living creatures is the same as the Absolute Reality of the universe; only, on account of names and forms, the one Reality appears to be many. As, for instance, the one substance, clay, appears through diverse names and forms in numberless varieties, such as pots, jars, bricks, etc., so the one Absolute Reality, when clothed with varying names and forms, appears to be sun, moon, stars, animals, vegetables, etc. Matter and mind, according to Vedanta, are not two separate entities, but different expressions of the one eternal substance, which is called Brahman in Vedanta and God in Christian Science.”⁵⁶

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan’s interpretation of Shankara’s insights follows, “Shankara argues that the supreme reality of Brahman is the basis of the world. If Brahman were absolutely different from the world, if the Atman were absolutely different from the states of waking, dreaming and sleeping, then the repudiation of the reality of the world or the three states cannot lead us to the attainment of truth. We shall then have to embrace nihilism and treat all teaching as purposeless.... The pluralistic universe is an error of judgment. Correction of the error means change of opinion. The rope [Nirguna Brahman], appears as a snake [phenomenal existence] ... the world of experience becomes transfigured in the intuition of Brahman. The world is not so much negated as reinterpreted.... Brahman is in the world, though not as the world. If the world of experience were illusory and unrelated to Brahman, love, wisdom, and asceticism could not prepare us for the higher life.... If we are able to penetrate to the real through this world, it is because the world of appearance bears within it traces of the eternal. If the two

are opposed, it will be difficult to regard them even in the relation of the real and the apparent. The world is not the Absolute, though based on it. What is based on the real, and is not the real Itself, can only be called the appearance or phenomenon of the real. While the world is not the essential truth of Brahman, it is its phenomenal truth.”⁵⁷

The rope-snake analogy differs from the Subjective Idealism of Yogacara-Vijnanavada Buddhism and George Berkeley, where the external world is conceived to be a projection of the human mind. For them the world exists only in the mind, and consequently a rope is unreal as an external object but has a subjective existence in the mind. In the rope-snake analogy the rope represents the Absolute, the Thing-in-Itself, the Transcendental Object. Nirguna Brahman is Ultimate Reality (Paramarthika Satta), and in the phenomenal world the subject and object of knowledge are considered to be equally relatively real.⁵⁸ In arithmetic terms: (a) rope plus (b) veil of maya = (c) snake. This equation can be transposed to: (c) snake minus (b) veil of maya = (a) rope. This means phenomenal existence minus maya gives Nirguna Brahman. The apparent snake is a misreading due to the veil of maya.

Just as Shankara rejected the Subjective Idealism of the Yogacara-Vijnanavada Indian Buddhist, so also Kant disagreed with the similar views of George Berkeley, roughly a thousand years later. Kant rejected the “dogmatic Subjective Idealism of [George] Berkeley,” since external objects are representations of actually existing things-in-themselves. In addition, “The consciousness of my existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me.... Inner experience is itself possible only mediately, and only through outer experience.”⁵⁹ For example, dreams while asleep are based on one’s prior external experiences. Space and time are phenomenally real but transcendently ideal, since they do not apply to things-in-themselves. Berkeley believed that objective experiences are projections of real subjective experience, while Shankara considered both the objective and the subjective realms to be unreal.

According to Immanuel Kant, “What objects may be in-themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us. We know nothing but our mode of perceiving them—a mode which is peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared by every being.” “What the objects may be in-themselves would never become known to us even through the most enlightened knowledge of that which is alone given us, namely, their appearances.” “Appearances are the sole objects which can be given to us immediately, and that

in them which relates immediately to the object is called intuition. But these appearances are not things-in-themselves; they are only representations, which in turn have their object—an object which cannot itself be intuited by us, and which may, therefore, be named the non-empirical, that is, Transcendental Object.”⁶⁰ The “Transcendental Object, which is the cause of appearance ... can be thought neither as quantity nor as reality nor as substance (because these concepts always require sensible forms in which they determine an object).” Since “intellectual intuition, forms no part whatsoever of our faculty of knowledge, it follows that the employment of the categories can never extend further than to the objects of experience.... [Understanding] cannot know these Noumena through any of the categories [of human understanding], and that it must therefore think them only under the title of an unknown something.”⁶¹

Kant continues, “By transcendental idealism I mean the doctrine that appearances are to be regarded as being, one and all, representations only, not things-in-themselves and that time and space are therefore only sensible forms of our intuition, not determinations given as existing by themselves, nor conditions of objects viewed as things-in-themselves.” “For the appearances, as mere representations, are in themselves real only in perception, which perception is in fact nothing but the reality of an empirical representation, that is an appearance.”⁶² Both the outer and inner sense are representations. “The representation of myself, as the thinking subject, belongs to inner sense only, while the representations which mark extended beings belong also to outer sense. In order to arrive at the reality of outer objects I have just as little need to resort to inference as I have in regard to the reality of the object of my inner sense, that is, in regard to the reality of my thoughts. For in both cases alike the objects are nothing but representations, the immediate perception (consciousness) of which is at the same time a sufficient proof of their reality. The transcendental idealist is, therefore, an empirical realist, and allows to matter, as appearance, a reality which does not permit of being inferred, but is immediately perceived.”⁶³ “I call all knowledge transcendental if it is occupied, not with objects, but with the way that we can possibly know objects even before we experience them.”⁶⁴ Space and time do not exist outside of us, but are the subjective modes of the human intellect used to interpret external and internal data. Consequently, we experience things not as they really are in themselves (things in themselves), but according to our mode of understanding. This is a denial of Newton’s idea that space and time are real things with external empirical existence.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan contrasts the philosophy of Shankara with that of Kant, “According to Shankara, the object of intuition is not the many things-in-themselves of Kant ... Shankara avoided the error of Kant, who sought not so much the logical implications of experience as the *a priori* conditions of experience, and thus asserted the reality of an extra-empirical world of things in themselves.... While Kant believes in a plurality of things in themselves, Shankara declares that there is only one fundamental reality. In this matter Shankara is certainly more philosophical than Kant, who illegitimately imports the distinctions of the world into the region of things-in-themselves.”⁶⁵

Kant deals with the plural things-in-themselves, for example, with the same perceptual apparatus we perceive a clock or a chair, but we see them as different objects because each has a different thing-in-itself. If our perceptual apparatus changes (for example if we had microscopic eyes) we would see each object differently than we do now. If the subject or object changes so does the perception. This is different from the single Thing-in-Itself that a Vedantist equates with Nirguna Brahman-Atman. Kant thinks of the Noumenon in terms of diverse things-in-themselves because “plurality” and “differentiation” are *a priori* forms of understanding that the mind uses in interpreting the phenomenal world, but they are not part of the Noumenon as Shankara and other non-dualists realized. Another significant difference is that for Kant the Reality (Noumenon) is an object while for Vedantists as Atman it is a subject, the Eternal Subject (See: Ch. II. Atman, Sec. 3). What is the thing-in-itself of clock or chair as pure object that is independent of a subject? Obviously it is unknowable to us since it takes a subject to discern what it is. Since each is a different object they are not Nirguna Brahman.

According to Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* (I:42-43) based on the traditional commentary of Vyasa and Vachaspati it might be possible to perceive things-in-themselves through the practice of pure yogic perception. Once all mental and verbal projections (or superimpositions) are removed from the mind, the mind takes the form of the object that then expresses its real nature. The commentator on the *Yoga Sutras* tells us, in the higher process of knowing there are no real differences between the word ‘cow,’ the thing ‘cow,’ and the idea ‘cow.’ The mental construct (vikalpa) composed of word, thing, and idea is a confused identification called savitarka. In reality they are mutually exclusive, working in three different areas. The yogi meditates on the “thing as it is” independent of the word or idea. In nirvitarka samadhi there is no memory of verbal associations, no inference, empty of mental constructs of ideas heard or inferred. Then in direct

pure perception the object appears in its real nature. Because of its transparency in this samadhi, the mind does not think that “I perceive” or “I concentrate.” The mind is not aware of itself as possessing knowledge, since all of its attention is focused only on the object. It is transformed into the nature and form of the object apprehended. Vyasa describes nirvitarka samadhi as, “it takes on the nature and form of the object (padartha) itself alone, transformed, as it were, into the nature and form of the object apprehended (grahya).”⁶⁶

If there is only one Thing-In-Itself and not a separate thing-in-itself for each entity, then considered as external It is Nirguna Brahman, and experienced internally It is the Atman (the Subject-in-Itself). Brahman and Atman are one, viewed from different perspectives. With the attainment of Nirvikalpa Samadhi one merges with their higher Self, Brahman-Atman, and with Savikalpa Samadhi one enters into the Ishvara Loka (Divine World, Kingdom of Heaven), the world of the Personal God. In both cases perfect understanding and bliss are realized for eternity. Some people may think this world is a dream or an illusion. If Buddha, Shankara, or Vivekananda thought that way, then why after attaining illumination did they return to this plane of existence? Who would depart from a blissful existence to undergo the hardships of willfully returning to a dream or imaginary world in order to liberate dream or imaginary people?

Four possible yogic methods employed to reach the deeper state are: 1) Nirvitarka Samadhi described above by Vivekananda; 2) Neti neti (not this, not this) discussed in Ch. I, Section 3; 3) Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam teach God created the world from Divine ideas that became word or sound vibrations. The experience of realizing these Divine ideas would constitute knowledge of things-in-themselves before their empirical manifestation in the phenomenal world; and 4) Great yogis like Sri Ramakrishna with Divine vision seeing God everywhere and experience this world as the blissful Kingdom of Heaven. Vivekananda describes such a long-lasting experience in Ch. VI. Creation of the Phenomenal World, Section 3. The Divinity of the World.

This leaves us with the question, if Saguna Brahman is a representation of Nirguna Brahman, is the phenomenal world a representation of Saguna Brahman?

For Arthur Schopenhauer like Kant, all things have a twofold nature as phenomenal objects and as the thing-in-itself. “I admit entirely Kant's doctrine that the world of experience is mere phenomenon, and that knowledge *a priori* is valid only in reference thereto; but I add that, precisely as phenomenal appearance, it is the manifestation of that which appears, and with him I call that which appears the

thing-in-itself. Therefore, this thing-in-itself, must, express its inner nature and character in the world of experience.”⁶⁷ “Whatever the thing-in-itself may be, Kant rightly concluded that time, space, and causality could not be its properties, but could come to it only after, and in so far as, it had become representation, in other words, belonged only to its phenomenon or appearance, not to it itself.” “*A priori* knowledge, as such applies only to the knowableness of things, not to the things themselves, i.e., it is only our form of knowledge, not a property of the thing-in-itself. The thing-in-itself, as such, is free from all forms of knowledge, even the most universal, namely that of being object for the subject; in other words, it is something entirely different from the representation.”⁶⁸ “We know neither ourselves nor things as they are in themselves, but merely as they appear.” “Before Kant, it may be said, we were in time; now time is in us. In the first case, time is real and, like everything lying in time, we are consumed by it. In the second case, time is ideal; it lies within us.”⁶⁹ “The same truth, though presented quite differently, is also a principal teaching of the *Vedas* and *Puranas*, namely the doctrine of Maya by which is understood nothing but what Kant calls the phenomenon as opposed to the thing-in-itself.”⁷⁰ Arthur Schopenhauer was the first person to realize that Kant’s Transcendental Idealism could be used to interpret the *Upanishads*.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) the Austrian philosopher sought to discover “a world of essences,” “things themselves,” before they are contaminated by either the theoretical framework and categories of scientific inquiry, or the psychological assumptions of the scientist. They uncritically accept the existence of empirical facts. He attempted to accomplish this task employing the technique of Phenomenological reduction that has two mutually conditioned moments. One is epoché meaning suspension of judgment. Epoché requires bracketing the world or “Withdrawal of belief” that free the mind from the unquestioned acceptance of the everyday world as it appears to us. The second is reduction proper, an inquiring back into the forms of consciousness. Phenomenological reduction involves, questioning the foundation of and discovering the conditions for the possibility of knowledge. It examines consciousness as it is in itself, in order to determine who the “I” is whenever we say “I Am.”⁷¹ Husserl was over optimistic, his approach did not bring the desired results he hoped for. We are programmed to perceive and experience the world in a human way. Only through intense yogic practice is it possible to transcend these limitations and accomplish this task. What Husserl and

his school attempted and failed to do was accomplished by the yogis. It is not a conceptual experience as Husserl thought, but an act of yogic perception.

4. The Divine World and Heavenly Existence

Indian: “Make me immortal in that realm where happiness and transports; where joys and felicities combine, and longing wishes are fulfilled” (RV 9:113.11; cf. BG 5:21, 23; 18:37). “The real city of Brahman. In it all desires are contained. It is the Self-free from sin, free from old age, free from death, free from grief, free from hunger, free from thirst” (Ch. Up. 8:1.5; cf. 7:23; 8:7.1; Br. Up. 5:5.10; Kat. Up. 1:1.12; Svet. Up 1:8, 11; 4:11-16; Tait. Up. 2:1, 4, 9; 3:10.5). “The knower of Truth does not see death or disease or sorrow. The knower of Truth sees everything and obtains everything everywhere” (Ch. Up. 7:26.2).

New Testament: “In my Father’s house are many rooms” (Jn. 14:2). “For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17; cf. Mt. 5:12; 13:44; Lk. 6:23; 10:20; Jn. 16:22; Acts 2:25-26, 28). “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully” (1 Cor. 13:12). Heaven is a place and state of: eternal life (Mt. 25:46; Rom. 2:7; Gal. 6:8; 1 Thes. 4:17), glory and honor and peace (Rom. 2:10; 2 Cor. 4:17), knowledge and understanding (1 Cor. 13:8-12), righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8), a society of the blessed (Heb. 12:23), worship (Rev. 19:1), communion with God (Rev. 21:3), sorrowlessness (Rev. 21:4), purity (Rev. 21:27), and service (Rev. 22:3).

Liberation from decay. Indian: “He is made free from birth and death, from pain and decay: he becomes immortal” (BG 14:20). New Testament: “The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21).

Most religious scriptures do not inform us about life in the Brahmaloka and the Kingdom of Heaven. The Brahmaloka is the realm of Brahman the source of all of the Deities, and is not limited to a single Deity.

The Vedantic Perspective

Shankara affirmed that devotees who correctly worship the Personal God

(Ishvara) proceed to “the third order of Heaven (Brahmaloka)” after the death of the physical body, and undergo a process of gradual purification and illumination (kramamukti). “They no more return to this world. Those who proceed along this path of the gods do not return to this human cycle of birth and death.... But non-return stands as an accomplished fact for those from whom the darkness (of ignorance) has been completely removed as a result of their full illumination.”⁷² “The Self that is beyond sin, free from all dirt, and free from death.” “Moreover having transcended both hunger and thirst and having crossed over sorrow—being free from mental unhappiness, one rejoices; in the Divine heavenly world.”⁷³ They see Ishvara face to face and experience His bliss in the emancipated state, though there remains a sense of separateness. In the joyful beatified state, “The released soul gets all the Divine powers except that of running the universe (with its creation, continuance, and dissolution).”⁷⁴ First, there is the vision of God, then participation in God, and ultimately absolute identity with God. After living with God until the end of the cosmic cycle, the soul ultimately attains to oneness with God by merging with the transpersonal nondual Brahman. In this state there is neither subject nor object, self or world.⁷⁵ He adds, “Realize that to be [Nirguna] Brahman the attainment of which leaves nothing more to be attained, the blessedness of which leaves no other bliss to be desired, and the knowledge of which leaves nothing more to be known.... that to be Brahman which is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, which is nondual and infinite, eternal and One, and which fills all the quarters—all that is above and below and all that exists between.”⁷⁶

The founder of the Vishistadvaita (Qualified Nondualistic) School of Indian religious philosophy Ramanuja (c. 1017-1137) realized that all emancipated souls are under the complete control of the Supreme Lord, never to return to this world. In heaven they live in harmony with Brahman (God) and share and participate in His bliss, though they remain separate from Him. There is no difference in the magnitude of enjoyment experienced by each liberated soul.⁷⁷ “The Self which is free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, whose desires and thoughts spontaneously realize themselves.... Intelligence, therefore, bliss, and the other essential qualities of the soul which were obscured and contracted by karma [during earthly life], expand and thus manifest themselves when the bondage due to karma passes away and the soul approaches the highest light.” “The released soul, freed from all that hides its true nature, possesses the power of intuitively beholding the pure Brahman, but does not possess the ... ruling and controlling power over the entire world.” Brahman “allows

them to attain to that supreme bliss which consists in the direct intuition of His own true nature: and after that does not turn them back into the miseries of Samsara [birth, death, and rebirth] the released soul has freed itself from the bondage of karma, has its powers of knowledge fully developed, and has all its being in the supremely blissful intuition of the highest Brahman, it evidently cannot desire anything else nor enter any other form of activity and the idea of its returning into the Samsara therefore is altogether excluded. Nor indeed need we fear that the Supreme Lord when once having taken to Himself the devotee whom he greatly loves will turn him back into the Samsara.”⁷⁸

From Madhva (1190/1238-1276/1317) we learn, “The Shrutis [religious scriptures] speak of the great spiritual joy and enjoyment in that state.” “Old age, hunger, thirst are the afflictions of Jiva [Soul] associated with the corporeal body and influenced by ego. The Jiva in Heaven being freed from the bondage of the corporeal body is not affected by these afflictions.”⁷⁹ “Moksha [Liberation] is, by definition, a state of blessedness, free from all imperfections and bad passions of embodied existence, there is absolutely no fear of any strife or discord arising among the released, on account of their intrinsic capacities to enjoy their own distinctive bliss.” “They have always complete happiness.”⁸⁰ Spiritual bodies experience a state of supreme consciousness and bliss, which is an experience of blessedness that the human imagination can hardly comprehend. All things are totally united with and dependent on Brahman (God). In this state happiness is not something sought after, given that it is an expression of the person’s inner nature. Worship of Brahman is a blissful end in itself, not a means to another end. The liberated person is “released from bondage, by the direct vision of the Lord. And later having reached the Lord enjoys in His company the fulfillment of all his desires, to his hearts content. Reaching the Lord the Supreme light the Jnani [Knower] experiences the bliss of his true self-nature.... The jnanin, freeing himself from the mortal bodies attains his true nature as Pure Intelligence (Chid Svarupa). With that Svarupa Indriyas [pure senses], he sees, he hears, he meditates and knows all. This state is called the liberated state.”⁸¹ “The released though capable of realizing all their wishes have their sovereignty limited. They have no power to carry on the cosmic functions of the Supreme Being, such as the creation, preservation etc., of the worlds.”⁸² “Those whose bodies are [of the nature of] consciousness and bliss enjoy [liberation according to their] desire. And they lack the great power of emitting and creating the universe as well as other powers.... They are free from suffering and other [imperfections and] delight [in] pleasure

eternally [and] continually.”⁸³ Madhva mentioned one experiences the bliss of Brahman and at the same time their “true Self-nature.” They go together.

The conclusion reached by Jiva Goswami (c. 1511-96) the Bengal Vaishnavist is that, “They attain the eternal status and supreme tranquility by the grace of God.” “They do not covet anything but the service of God “A released soul, attaining Brahman, sees through Brahman, hears through Brahman, etc.” According to Jiva Goswami (as described by Jadunath Sinha), there are five levels of Vaikuntha (Heaven) or mukti (liberation), which are eternal states not subject to rebirth on earth. 1) Salokya moksha: “The finite souls acquire fitness for serving God through the grace of God and devotion. They acquire the appropriate spiritual bodies in Vaikuntha after their disembodied release. The devotees worship God as if they were His eternal comrades. Their physical bodies are produced by the potencies of their actions (karma) and perish. But when they acquire the spiritual bodies appropriate to their specific modes of worship with devotion, they are never dissociated from these bodies because they are eternal.” 2) Sarsti moksha: “The Shruti [Scriptures] describes such moksha. ‘A released person can move from one sphere (loka) of existence to another at his will.’ ‘A released person walks, eats, plays, delights in the company of women, moves in vehicles, and lives with kinsmen without a physical body.’ ‘A released soul acquires sovereignty overall, like God, except for creating, preserving and destroying the world.’ God alone can create, preserve and destroy the world.” 3) Sarupya moksha: “A devotee constantly meditates on a particular form of God, is aboded in Him, and identified with His form in release. A disembodied released soul assumes the spiritual form of God, and acquires community of nature with Him to a certain extent. It cannot assume an entirely identical form with God because it is different from Him as a part.” 4) Samipya moksha: It “consists in proximity to God.... there is the external experience of God in samipya moksha wherein a released soul experiences Him with its eternal spiritual body of His comrade, and enjoys proximity to Him. But in salokya moksha, sarupya moksha, and sarsti moksha there is only the internal experience of God.” 5) Sayuja moksha: “consists in effecting union with God or merging in his spiritual body. The chief characteristic of this kind of release is the experience of being absorbed in the bliss of God.”⁸⁴

Srinivasa (fl. 1625) a member of the Ramanuja School of Vedanta who held ideas similar to Nimbarka (11th -13th century), describes heavenly existence. There the freed soul is minute while Brahman (God) is all pervading. “The individual soul, having approached ‘intelligence,’ i.e. Brahman who is of the form of intelligence,

becomes manifest ‘as that alone,’ i.e. in the form of intelligence alone.” “It is established that having attained the highest form of light, the individual soul becomes manifest in its own natural form endowed with the attributes of freedom from sin and so on.” The soul is autonomous except for its reliance on the will of Brahman. “As the freed soul’s power of fulfilling its desires at will becomes manifest, so it becomes ‘without another ruler,’ i.e. without any ruler except the Highest Brahman.” Moreover, it possesses the power to move to any location at will. “It has been established that the freed soul meets their relatives and so on through mere will.” “The freed soul possesses the instruments, such as the body and the rest, created by the Lord; may have, according to will, a body or not, or many bodies; and is omniscient.” “The freed soul intuits the Highest Brahman alone, ‘not subject to change,’ i.e. untouched by any change like birth and so on, free by nature from all faults, the one ocean of all auspicious qualities, and possessed of super-human powers.” It remains eternally blissful and does not return to earthly life. “The lordship of the freed soul does not consist in the activities in connection with the controlling of the universe, such as its creation and so on.” The soul is atomic, a fragment of existence that cannot create, maintain, or destroy the universe, unlike the all-pervasive Lord that is the totality of existence. Nimbarka had mentioned previously that the freed soul attains the nature and qualities of the Lord such as pure consciousness, omniscience, realizing all of its wishes, meeting with its forefathers, moving everywhere at will, and possessing several bodies simultaneously.⁸⁵

As Vivekananda signified after his passing the liberated soul meets “with another soul who is already blessed, and he guides the newcomer forward to the highest of all spheres, which is called the Brahmaloaka, the sphere of Brahma. There these souls attain to omniscience and omnipotence, become almost as powerful and all-knowing as God Himself; and they reside there forever, according to the dualists, or, according to the nondualists, they become one with the Universal at the end of the cycle.”⁸⁶ “When the Jiva goes there, there comes another Jiva, already perfect, to receive it, and takes it to another world, the highest heaven, called the Brahmaloaka, where the Jiva lives eternally, no more to be born or to die. It enjoys through eternity, and gets all sorts of powers, except the power of creation. There is only one ruler of the universe, and that is God. No one can become God; the dualists maintain that if you say you are God, it is a blasphemy. All powers except the creative come to the Jiva, and if it likes to have bodies, and work in different parts of the world, it can do so. If it orders all the gods to come

before it, if it wants its forefathers to come, they all appear at its command. Such are its powers that it never feels any more pain, and if it wants, it can live in the Brahmaloaka through all eternity. This is the highest man, who has attained the love of God, who has become perfectly unselfish, perfectly purified, who has given up all desires, and who does not want to do anything except worship and love God.”⁸⁷ Far beneath this level dwell many lower heavens, where people are able to fulfill all kinds of worldly desires. “There it enjoys happiness, so long as the effect of its good deeds endures. When the same is exhausted, it descends, and once again enters life on earth according to its desires.” Residing in these planes of existence increases the number of desires and does not lead to the highest beatitudes.⁸⁸

Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Jiva Goswami, and Srinivasa are in unanimous agreement that the liberated soul does not have the power to create, preserve, or destroy the universe. Which implies emancipated souls are not omnipotent, omnipresent, or omniscient in the universe and probably not in the Brahmaloaka to the extent the Lord is.

Concerning Nirvikalpa Samadhi Swami Saradananda (1865-1927) writes, “In that state all of the mind's thoughts become still and calm. There ‘the illumined person realizes I within himself, through samadhi, the infinite and indescribable Brahman, which is the nature of eternal knowledge and absolute bliss, without equal in the world of relative experience. It transcends all limitations and is ever free and actionless, like the boundless sky, indivisible and absolute. It is completely free from the concept of cause and effect. It is Reality, beyond imagination’ (*Vivekachudamani*).”⁸⁹

Through Its omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence, Brahman-God has created the Brahmaloaka-Kingdom of Heaven, which is the best possible of all worlds.⁹⁰

Western Explanations

Concerning gradual salvation Origen of Alexandria (c. 185-254) explains, “Rational being, growing at each successive stage, not as it grew when in this life in the flesh or body and in the soul, but increasing in mind and intelligence, advances as a mind already perfect to perfect knowledge, no longer hindered by its former carnal senses, but developing in intellectual power, ever approaching the pure/and gazing 'face to face.’”⁹¹ There are “differences of glory among those who rise ... the apostle, when he wished to describe how great were the differences among

those who rise in glory, that is, the saints, drew a comparison from the heavenly bodies, saying, ‘One glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, another glory of the stars.’”⁹² “When we have progressed so far that we are no longer flesh and bodies, and possibly not even souls, but mind and understanding come to perfection and not blinded by any cloud of disturbing passions, we shall see the rational and spiritual beings ‘face to face.’”⁹³ “When it is said that God is ‘all in all,’ it means that he is also all things in each individual person. And He will be all things in each person in such a way that everything which the rational mind, when purified from all the dregs of its vices and utterly cleared from every cloud of wickedness, can feel or understand or think will be all God and that mind will no longer be conscious of anything besides or other than God, but will think God and see God and hold God and God will be the mode and measure of its every movement; and in this way God will be all to it.”⁹⁴

In the Neo-Platonic philosophical system of Plotinus, Nous (Divine Intellect) and Noeta (Intelligible World) form an identity, constituting a world of interpenetrating spiritual beings each containing the others, organically united in a state of contemplation. In the Intelligible World [Indian Brahmaloaka], “Each part is not cut off from the whole; but the whole life of It and the whole intellect lives and thinks all together in one, and makes the part the whole and all bound in friendship with Itself, since one part is not separated from another.”⁹⁵ There a thing “has everything in Itself and sees all things in every other, so that all are everywhere and each and every one is all and the glory is unbounded; for each of them is great.... each comes only from the whole and is part and whole at once: It has the appearance of a part, but a penetrating look sees the whole in It.” For the Divine Intellect “thinking [Nous] and being [Noeta] are the same thing and knowledge of immaterial things is the same as Its object.”⁹⁶ “That [Nous] which is conscious of Itself and thinks Itself comes second, for It is conscious of Itself in order that in this actuality of consciousness It may understand Itself.” “In the Intelligible World seeing is not through another [medium], but through itself, because it is not [directed] outside.” “Intellect is not simple but many; It manifests a composition, of course an intelligible one, and already sees many things.... Intellect and being are one and the same thing; for Intellect does not apprehend objects which pre-exist It-as sense does sense-objects-but Intellect Itself is Its objects.”⁹⁷ [Nous] “has nothing lacking to Its existence. Since It is complete It has no need of anything for Its preservation and existence but is cause to other things.... It must be intellect, and wisdom in Its fullness. And It must therefore be defined and limited, and there must be nothing

to which Its power does not extend, nor must Its power be quantitatively limited; otherwise It would be defective.... But real being must be being in every way; It must therefore come having everything for existence from Itself: and It must be all things together, and all of them one.” “It is something which abides in the same in Itself and does not change at all but is always in the present, because nothing of It has passed away, nor again is there anything to come into being, but that which It is.”⁹⁸ Nous encompasses all things "as a genus does its species and a whole its parts."⁹⁹

For Neoplatonism there are two levels of Divinity, the Divine Intellect (Nous) that is completely separate from the creation, and a lower aspect (World-Soul) that interacts with the phenomenal world.¹⁰⁰ If this idea were put into the Indian perspective, the higher aspect of Saguna Brahman would be Ishvara (or Para-Ishvara) and the Divine world (Brahmaloka) being independent of the universe, and the lower aspect would be Mahat the Universal Cosmic Mind and Body that creates, maintains, and destroys the phenomenal world.

On this subject, Johannes Scotus Erigena (c. 810-77) the great religious philosopher of the Dark Ages in Europe clarified his theory of Universal Restoration, “Earthly bodies, being inferior, will be changed into heavenly bodies. Next, there is a unification of the whole sensible creature, followed by a transformation into the intelligible, so that the universal creature becomes intelligible. Finally, the universal creature shall be unified with its Creator, and shall be in Him and with Him One. And this is the end of all things visible and invisible, for all visible things shall pass into intelligibles, and all intelligibles into God Himself.”¹⁰¹ One will “pass beyond all the laws and limitations of nature and on that superessential plane be transformed into God Himself, and shall be in Him and with Him One.... and lastly, the supernatural merging of the perfectly purified souls into God Himself.”¹⁰² As an act of beatifying grace, souls will be raised to the level of wisdom and experience the beatific vision. Each soul will retain its individual identity when all things are restored in God, and space and time will disappear into the Eternal Now.¹⁰³

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) formulated that, “Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”¹⁰⁴ “Whatever is desirable in whatsoever beatitude, whether true or false, all pre-exists in a more eminent way in the Divine beatitude.”¹⁰⁵ Transcending the realm of time, “The intellect which sees the Divine Substance contemplates all things at once and not in succession.”¹⁰⁶ “In the felicity that comes from the Divine vision, every human desire is fulfilled ... through the vision of the First Truth, all that the intellect

naturally desires to know becomes known to it ... since reason will be at its peak strength, having been enlightened by the Divine light, so that it cannot swerve away from what is right.... men are raised through this vision to the highest peak of honor, because they are in a sense united with God ... the most perfect delight is found in this felicity; as much more perfect than the delight of the senses which even brute animals can enjoy, as the intellect is superior to sense power; and also as that good in which we shall take delight is greater than any sensible good, and more intimate, and more continually delightful; and also as that delight is free from all admixture of sorrow, or concern about trouble.... the blessed attain perfect sempiternity [being eternal in time] and are safe from all harm ... intellectual substances obtain true felicity, in which their desires are completely brought to rest and in which is the full sufficiency of all the goods.”¹⁰⁷ The beatific vision of the Divine Essence cannot be lost; there is nothing contrary to it to bring its end. “Now it is impossible for anyone seeing the Divine Essence to wish not to see It.... the vision of the Divine Essence fills the soul with all good things, since it unites it to the source of all goodness.... Nor again can it be withdrawn by any other agent. Because the mind that is united to God is raised above all other things, and consequently no other agent can sever the mind from that union.”¹⁰⁸

When writing about the Catholic faith, Anthony Wilhelm designated that in God’s kingdom, “We will love and be loved with an unimaginable, ever-increasing love. We will be fully possessed, continually overwhelmed by God’s beauty and goodness, and yet we will go on thirsting for more—even as we are filled to perfect contentment we yet seek and find still more and more. God will be able to totally give Himself to us. No longer shall we have to intuit or reason to Him from His works, speculate about Him, or catch fleeting, unsatisfying ‘glimpses.’ We shall see Him as He is, His very self, ‘face to face.’ Each of us will know God and be loved by Him in the most intimate way possible, in a way no one or nothing in creation is or ever will be. This will be incredible, unimaginable happiness... In this heaven-state there will be no sorrow, no pain, no hardship, no struggle or temptation of any kind. We will understand everything we have ever wanted to—the secrets of the universe, the mysteries of our faith. We will have everything we want. And we will be secure in this eternal happiness, knowing that there is no possibility of ever losing it.”¹⁰⁹

According to one study about 10% of those people who had a near-death experience (NDE), reached the state of “Entering the Light.” This realm

corresponds to a lower heaven far beneath the beatific vision, yet more joyful than any earthly experience. One woman who had a cardiac arrest described her idyllic experience this way, “Then, suddenly. I saw my mother, who had died about nine years ago.... ‘Well, we’ve been waiting for you. We’ve been expecting you. Your father’s here and we’re going to help you.’ And all I felt was a tremendous kind of happiness, of pleasure, of comfort.... And I could hear beautiful music; I can’t tell you what kind, because I never heard anything like it before.... It sounds—I could describe it as a combination of vibrations, many vibrations. The whole thing was just very good, very happy, very warm, very peaceful, very comforted, very—I’ve never known that feeling in my whole life.” Indians call this the *pitriloka*, the realm or lower heaven of our ancestors. People living there enjoying the fruits of their good deeds will eventually be reborn on earth. Another man who entered the light later revealed, “I took a trip to heaven. I saw the most beautiful lakes. Angels—they were floating around like you see seagulls. Everything was white. The most beautiful flowers. Nobody on earth ever saw the beautiful flowers that I saw there.”¹¹⁰ Lower heaven is depicted by the Native American Indians as a happy hunting ground, the Arabians as a shady oasis containing trees, and by the Nordics as a warm and sunny place.

5. Three Higher Worlds

Indian: “Make me immortal in that realm where movement is accordant to wish, in the third region, the third heaven of heavens” (RV 9:113.9). “The lowest is the Watery heaven, *Pilumati* the middle most; the third and highest, that wherein the Fathers dwell, is called *Pradyaus* [Highest Heaven]” (AV 18:2.48; cf. 4.3; 9:5.1, 8).

New Testament: “Those men took me thence, and led me up to the third heaven” (Enoch 8:1). “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up in the third heaven ... This man was caught up into Paradise” (2 Cor. 12:2-3).

Swami Vivekananda outlines three levels of higher worlds, the Lunar sphere, Electric sphere, and the *Brahmaloka*. “All these spheres or layers of the universe are only so many varying products of *Akasha* [Matter] and *Prana* [Force]. That is to say, the lowest or most condensed is the Solar sphere, consisting of the visible universe, in which *Prana* appears as physical force, and *Akasha* as sensible matter. The next is called the Lunar sphere [lower heaven], which surrounds the Solar sphere. This is not the moon at all, but the habitation of the gods, that is to say,

Prana appears in it as psychic forces, and Akasha as Tanmatras or fine particles. Beyond this is the Electric sphere, that is to say, a condition in which the Prana is almost inseparable from Akasha, and you can hardly tell whether Electricity is force or matter. Next is the Brahmaloaka, where there is neither Prana nor Akasha, but both are merged in the mind-stuff, the primal energy. And here—there being neither Prana nor Akasha—the Jiva contemplates the whole universe as Samashti or the sum total of Mahat or mind. This appears as a Purusha, an abstract universal Soul, yet not the Absolute, for still there is multiplicity. From this the Jiva finds at last that Unity which is the end.”¹¹¹ “The highest heaven, called the Brahmaloaka, where the Jiva lives eternally, no more to be born or to die. It enjoys through eternity.”¹¹²

The older Jewish apocalyptic knew of three heavens: of meteors, of stars, and of God. “Those men took me thence, and led me up to the third heaven” (Enoch 8:1). Some Jewish Christian texts such as the *Testament of Levi* (3:1-4) retained the three-heaven concept. In the *New Testament* the Apostle Paul wrote, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up in the third heaven ... I know that this man was caught up into Paradise” (2 Cor. 12:2-3).¹¹³

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-95) a Bishop from Asia Minor considered the First Heaven to be “on the frontier between the human and the incorporeal natures.” By purification and illumination the soul ascends to the Second Heaven and becomes a “son of light” when the “image of God” is restored. As his interpreter I. P. Sheldon-Williams explains it, “The only creature who is not confined to one side or other of the First Heaven which separates the sensible from the intelligible world is man. As animal he belongs to the one, as rational soul to the other. Therefore he is a ‘borderline case’ and a means of transition from the one to the other.... Man was first created in the Second Heaven and therefore as an intelligible and incorporeal being. But since he was made in the image and likeness of God, differing from his Prototype only as the created differs from the uncreated, he is not only intelligible but also one.... [Eventually] like St. Paul, she is now rapt into the Third Heaven in super-intelligible unification.... The restored image, as perfect man, has become one with Christ the Perfect Man, but not one with Christ as God, for God is absolutely transcendent.” In the words of Gregory, “When the soul has become simple, unified and Godlike, she cleaves to this only true and desirable Beloved by the living *energeia* of Love.” The soul “is transformed into that of which the apprehension and discovery are eternal processes.” “The beauty (of the Beatific Vision) reveals itself with ever-increasing clarity, the Divine majesty exceeds more and more as the

soul advances, and the perpetual discovery of new delights in the transcendent realm makes each seen the beginning of a fresh ascent.”¹¹⁴

In addition, the Indian *Vishnu Purana* (II, 7) describes each of the seven heavenly spheres (lokas), and 2 Enoch 3-20 (c. 35-50 A.D.) an early Jewish and/or Christian apocalyptic book gives a detailed account of the nature of the seven heavens. For both of them there are three lower and four higher spiritual heavens. A hierarchy of seven heavens of increasing glory is listed in the Jewish Christian *Testimony of the Twelve Patriarchs*. It is possible that this idea was diffused among the ancient Indians, Iranians, and Babylonians; and then passed on to the Jewish and non-Jewish Christians like Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria.¹¹⁵

6. Relationship of Brahman-Atman and the Absolute to the Universe

The renowned Advaita (Nondualistic) Vedantic philosopher Shankara emphasized that Nirguna Brahman is the Unmoved Mover, self-existent, self-caused (svabhava), conceived through Itself, and is without beginning or end. Since Brahman is infinite and one without a second, there is nothing outside of It that could be Its cause. Not being the effect of something else and having no temporal origin (asambhava), nothing precedes Brahman. There is nothing greater than Brahman that could bring It into existence. Just as clay does not originate from a particular pot or jar, so also Brahman who is the most universal being cannot originate from something particular. “Nor can Brahman be derived from a particular form of Existence, as that goes against common experience; for particulars are seen to emerge from the general, as pot etc. from clay, but not the general from the particulars.... Unless a primary material [first] cause is admitted, it will end in an infinite regress. And whatever is understood to be the primary cause will itself be our Brahman [God].” A finite entity cannot be the efficient cause of itself, given that it would have to be prior to itself to produce itself.¹¹⁶ “That omniscient and omnipotent source must be Brahman from which occur the birth, continuance, and dissolution of this universe that is manifested through name and form.” “It is established that Brahman—conscious, one, and without a second—becomes the cause of the universe through a transformation [parinama-vada] that need no extraneous help as in the case of milk [transforming into curd] etc., or of gods and others, without any external help.”¹¹⁷ “The effect is the universe, diversified as space etc. and the cause is the Supreme Brahman. In reality it is known that the effect has ... non-existence in isolation from that cause.... As the spaces within

pots or jars are non-different from the cosmic space ... even so it is to be understood that this diverse phenomenal world of experience, things experienced, and so on, has no existence apart from Brahman.” “Brahman, however is possessed of the fullest power, and It has not to depend on anything else for imparting excellence (to that power).... Even though Brahman is one, it is possible for it, by virtue of the possession of diverse powers, to be transformed variously on the analogy of milk [transforming into curd].”¹¹⁸ Brahman spontaneously generates all things like a spider sends forth its web, light sends forth its splendor, and fire sends forth sparks.¹¹⁹

Swami Vivekananda explained the existence of finite existence from infinite existence using the concept of projection [Srishti]. “We must remember the definition of this world of ours; it is only the Infinite Existence [Brahman] projected into the plane of consciousness. A little of the Infinite is projected into consciousness, and that we call our world. So there is an Infinite beyond; and religion has to deal with both—with the little lump we call our world, and with the Infinite beyond.... part of the Infinite which has come into the plane of consciousness, got itself caught, as it were, in the plane of consciousness, in the cage of time, space, and causation.” “We are all projected from one common centre, which is God. The highest as well as the lowest life God ever projected will come back to the Father of all lives. ‘From whom all beings are projected, in whom all live, and unto whom they all return; that is God.’” “But fortunately we must inquire into the beyond. This present, this expressed, is only one part of that unexpressed. The sense universe is, as it were, only one portion, one bit of that infinite spiritual universe projected into the plane of sense consciousness. How can this little bit of projection be explained, be understood, without knowing that which is beyond? It is said of Socrates that one day while lecturing at Athens, he met a Brahmin who had traveled into Greece, and Socrates told the Brahmin that the greatest study for mankind is man. The Brahmin sharply retorted: ‘How can you know man until you know God?’ This God, this eternally Unknowable, or Absolute, or Infinite, or without name—you may call Him by what name you like—is the rationale, the only explanation, the *raison d’être* of that which is known and knowable, this present life.”¹²⁰

The commentator A. E. Affifi reveals, “According to Ibn al-‘Arabi [1165-1240, born in Muslim Spain there is only One Reality in existence. This Reality we view from two different angles, now calling it *Haqq* (the Real) when we regard it as the

Essence of all phenomena; and now *Khalq* when we regard it as the phenomena manifesting that Essence. *Haqq* and *Khalq*: Reality and Appearance; the One and the Many are only names for two subjective aspects of one Reality; it is a real unity but empirical diversity. This Reality is God. ‘If you regard Him through Him, Ibn al-‘Arabi says (i.e. if you regard the Essence from the point of view of the Essence), ‘then He regards Himself through Himself, which is the state of unity; but if you regard Him through yourself (i.e. from your point of view as a form) then the unity vanishes’.... ‘Unity has no other meaning than two (or more) things being actually identical but conceptually distinguishable the one from the other; so in one sense the one is the other; in another, it is not.’ ‘Multiplicity is due to different points of view, not to actual division in the One Essence (*‘Ayn*).’”¹²¹ Ibn al-‘Arabi made this observation, “God is what is sensed and the world is what is inferred. Believers and illuminated people see Him in this world. For those, who are outside this group, God is the inferred and the world is the observed.... God is the reality of the ears, eyes, hands, feet and tongue, i.e., He is the reality of all bodily and spiritual senses of His creature.”¹²²

Mulla Sadra’s (c. 1572-1640) was an Iranian who taught “the unity of being” (*wahdat al-wujud*) religious philosophy under the influence of Ibn al’Arabi’s teachings. His ideas like Ibn al-‘Arabi’s were quite prominent in Muslim India and are supported today by some religious philosophers in Pakistan. He taught that God the Absolute Being, the ground of all that exists is the One that beyond the range of discursive thought and due to Its simplicity of having no parts is indefinable. While Absolute Being is the principle of unity, essence or quiddity (the inherent nature of something) is the principle of difference. There is a Gradation of Being, things are graded in intensity in a scale of perfection and God is the highest existence. Physical being is of a lesser intensity of the Higher Reality than mental being. The only independent being is the Absolute Being, while all other things are relational possessing “being-in-another.” All things are Its manifestations, subsist and are sustained by It, and consequently there is diversity within unity.¹²³

The philosophy of the early Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) based on his book *Bruno* (1802), is critically reviewed by Frederick Copleston, S.J. (1907-94) the British Jesuit, “In attempting to describe the relation between the finite [world] and the infinite Schelling is in a very difficult position. On the one hand there can be nothing outside the Absolute. For it is in infinite reality and must contain all reality within itself. Hence it cannot be the external cause of the universe. ‘The absolute identity is not the cause of the universe but the universe itself. For everything

which exists is the absolute identity itself. And the universe is everything which is.' On the other hand, if the Absolute is pure identity, all distinctions must be outside it. 'Quantitative difference is possible only outside the absolute totality.' Hence finite things must be external to the Absolute. Schelling cannot say that the Absolute somehow proceeds outside Itself. For he maintains that, 'the fundamental error of all philosophy is the proposition that the absolute identity has really gone out of Itself'.... Hence he is forced to say that it is only from the point of view of empirical consciousness that there is a distinction between subject and object and that there are subsistent finite things." Concerning Schelling's view Werner Beierwaltes adds, "The Absolute has not relinquished its absoluteness through the coming forth of the finite: it has not turned into difference. In spite of the 'separated,' or 'different' existence of the finite, and in spite of the world as its contrasting image which has become real, the Absolute has remained what it is: pure identity, Indifference. The separated, which as finite stands in a relation of relative difference to the infinite, has certainly the ground of its unity in the absolute Identity itself, from which it has separated itself. Thus the Absolute is present in everything, yet not 'entirely,' not as Itself. It is the immanent ground of the return of the finite into the One." Schelling mentions, "It does not go forth beyond Itself, but it is unchangeably Itself and does not deviate from Itself."¹²⁴

F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) taught the Doctrine of Degrees of Reality, which is an attempt to arrange aspects of existence in a scale in which the position of each is determined by the relative degree of certain qualities it possesses. He writes, "We saw, in our last chapter, the genuine meaning of degrees in reality and truth. That is more perfect which is separated from perfection by a smaller interval. And the interval is measured by the amount of rearrangement and of addition required in order to turn an appearance into Reality. We found, again, that our one principle has a double aspect, as it meets two opposite defects in phenomena. For an element is lower as being either more narrow or less harmonious. And we perceived, further, how and why these two defects are essentially connected. Passing now to goodness, we must content ourselves by observing in general that the same principle holds. The satisfaction which is more true and more real, is better. And we measure, here again, by the double aspect of extension and harmony." "Truth must exhibit the mark of internal harmony, or, again, the mark of expansion and all-inclusiveness." "There will be no truth which is entirely true, just as there will be no error which is totally false. With all alike, if taken strictly, it will be a question of amount, and will be a matter of more or less." "You may measure the reality of

anything by the relative amount of transformation, which would follow if its defects were made good. The more an appearance, in being corrected, is transmuted and destroyed, the less reality can such an appearance contain; or, to put it otherwise, the less genuinely does it represent the Real.” “The Absolute, considered as such, has of course no degrees; for it is perfect, and there can be no more or less in perfection. Such predicates belong to, and have a meaning only in the world of appearance.”¹²⁵ Hence, appearances are not unreal non-entities but are partially real to varying degrees depending how close they are to the original.

The American Ken Wilber (b. 1949) has produced a great deal of valuable and original material showing the link between Asian and Western philosophical psychology. He indicates, “It isn't that a part of the Absolute is present in every thing—as in pantheism—for that is to introduce a boundary within the infinite, assigning to each thing a different piece of the infinite pie. Rather, the entire Absolute is completely and wholly present at every point of space and time, for the simple reason that you can't have a different infinite at each point.... the Absolute can be entirely present at every point of space only if It is Itself spaceless.... [It] is rather pointless, spaceless, dimensionless—not one among many but one without a second. In just this fashion, the whole of the infinite can be present at all points of space, for being itself spaceless, it does not contend with space and so is free to utterly embrace it, just as water, being shapeless and formless, can fill containers of all shapes and forms. And since the infinite is present in its entirety at every point of space, all of the infinite is fully present right here.”¹²⁶

Eric Lott tells us, “The *Upanishads* had used a variety of myths and metaphors to express this idea that Brahman is the one source of all. He is the one lump of clay from which a variety of vessels are made; the metal from which various instruments are made; the fire from which sparks fly off; the spider emitting and withdrawing its web; the waves of the sea from which foam is stirred up; the One who, desiring a second, made himself into an embracing man and woman, from whom all beings derived; the one egg, by the splitting of which heaven and earth emerged; the one Self whose body this universe is. In all these pictures of creation the general intention is to show how Brahman 'in the beginning was one only, one without a second,' and from this one Being all finite beings have derived.”¹²⁷

There are a number of reasons for believing that Nirguna Brahman, the Absolute, and Thing-in-Itself are related to finite existence. 1) The fact that Nirvikalpa Samadhi has been attained by the greatest spiritual souls while living in a human body means that there is some connection between the Absolute and

Relative realms of existence. There must be a bridge that connects them. If Nirguna Brahman were “wholly other” it could not be realized by a person living in a physical body. We are always intimately related to Brahman that is present everywhere, though consciously we may not be aware of it. Since the highest spiritual souls like Ramakrishna and Vivekananda realized Brahman, this means that Its nature is more like them than other people.

2) From the internal standpoint, Brahman is the Atman our Absolute Essential Self, the Eternal Subject, the Witness-Self (Saksin) and the Indwelling Inner Guide and Ruler (Antaryamin). We would not be able to think if Atman-Brahman (Vivekananda) or the Noumenon (Kant, Schopenhauer) were not the background existence of our mind.

3) Brahman is the background support (ashraya) and substratum from which the creation proceeds, and is the ontological principle of unity. It is the supporting or constituent cause of the universe.

4) Though Brahman precedes causation, from our standpoint, It is the first cause and we are Its effects. Without Nirguna Brahman the phenomenal world would immediately become nonexistent.

5) Nirguna Brahman (Essence of God) manifests as the Personal God (Saguna Brahman-Ishvara) since that they are ultimately related.

Some of the ideas concerned with “*creatio ex nihilo*” (creation from nothing) given by the Christians can be applied to the origin of finite existence that ontologically (not chronologically) begins with Nirguna Brahman. In both cases: 1) Apart from Nirguna Brahman, there are no pre-existing materials out of which to create a universe or impose a limitation on Its creativeness. 2) Nirguna Brahman is absolutely changeless and non-material, and therefore does not transform into or create a universe out of Its own substance. 3) Nirguna Brahman is totally unique, transcending the laws of nature, and is not bound by these laws to produce finite existence in any particular way. Thus, the notion that “something cannot be made out of nothing” does not apply to the origin of the finite universe from Nirguna Brahman. 4) Without Nirguna Brahman the universe could not exist for even a moment, and would immediately be reduced to absolute nothingness. 5) There is an absolute distinction between Nirguna Brahman and the universe. Of course there are differences between the Indian and the Classical Christian theism. Nirguna Brahman (unlike the Christian God) is without ideas, speech, substance, or force from which to create the universe.

Creation from Brahman is ontological not cosmological or chronological since it is perpetually ongoing at each instance of time. We might think of ontological creation as vertical at one moment in time, and chronological as horizontal over time. Like the Kantian Noumena, Brahman exists beyond not only space and time, and also transcends all of the conceptual and perceptual categories of the human mind. Thus, the mode of ontological creation of finite existence is unknowable by the human intellect. From its effects, we know that Brahman the Absolute maintains the existence of the universe at every instant of time.

Johannes Scotus Erigena (c. 810-77) the Irish religious philosopher denotes the transcendent God the Divine Essence as *nihil*, nothing. This is because God’s nature remains ontologically prior to all being, essence, conceptual categories, and division of nature and hence to the conditions necessary for knowledge and understanding. God subsists in a primordial unity and fullness which, from the limited perspective of the human intellect and languages, can be adequately described as *nihil*, nothing. It is ineffable, incomprehensible, inaccessible, and unknowable.¹²⁸

World creation is a process of limitation (the unlimited becomes limited), the first member becomes the second: the Infinite becomes finite, eternal the temporal, changeless the changing, undivided the divided, the one the many, unity the plural, independent the dependent, omnipresent the localized, free the bound (law and

causation), and the perfect the imperfect. These limitations occur both externally as objects in the outer world (material forms), and internally as concepts within the mind (mental forms). Kanada, Aristotle (e.g., existence is composed of substance, quantity, quality, relations), and Kant's conceptual categories are limiting adjuncts or projections of the mind that prevent us from experiencing the original Reality.

Due to the limitations of the finite human mind, paradoxes arise when attempting to understand such things as how the infinite could create a finite world. Consequently, on this subject a paradox free solution may never be obtained by the human mind. This knowledge is known only to the omniscient Divine Mind. In Nirvikalpa Samadhi which is beyond even the Divine Mind, this question would never arise.

According to the various theories of creation, some believe that the Absolute-Infinite differentiates itself. Some favor projection; others objectification where the subject becomes or transforms into the object, externalization where the inner becomes or transforms into the outer, or grossification where the subtle becomes the gross. Mayavadins hold the universe as we know it results through viewing the Infinite through the lens of maya, which can be defined as name and form (see Sect. 7); or space, time, and causality; or the conceptual categories of the human mind such as those given by Aristotle above.

Saguna Brahman (Ishvara) is defined as "Brahman with attributes or qualities." Could it not be defined as "Brahman as attributes or qualities." Attributes are not something that exists separate from, but are Saguna Brahman (God). For example, Saguna Brahman does not participate in truthfulness, but as the *Bible* says God is Truth.

Brahman-God is the creator of evolution, DNA, and other scientific phenomena and works through them to maintain the workings of the universe. The more extreme idea is that Brahman-God transformed into every concrete and abstract thing in the universe which includes evolutions, DNA, etc. and is identical with them. It is possible that one aspect of Brahman-God works through the laws of nature that It has created and another aspects bypasses these laws and acts directly as in the case of miracles.

7. Categories of Theoretical Concepts

A system of categories represents the most fundamental, highest, and broadest genera of entities providing an inventory of all things. They answer the

metaphysical questions, “What is there?” Classification is placing ideas, objects, people, etc. into categories based on their similarities. Categories are discrete entities characterized by a set of essential features that are shared by their members. It allows us to organize and differentiate concepts to make them more understandable. The categories are the broadest and most general characteristics in terms of which everything must be understood in order for it to be an object, concept, or a theory of empirical knowledge. All physical and mental entities and events are subsumed under them. They should be as mutually exclusive as possible each focusing in on a different aspect of an entity, and exhaustive in applying to as many things as possible. In setting up the categories, parsimony is the goal, to select from the vast number of words in a dictionary a very limited number of the most universal terms that have the greatest scope.¹²⁹

From Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) the great Greek philosopher’s realistic perspective, the categories comprise both the way we think about things (conceptual modes of mental representation), and the ways in which things actually exist (empirical modes of being in the world). Due to the correspondence theory of knowledge every attempt is made to make concepts compatible with reality. His ten categories of predication are: Substance, Quantity, Quality, Relation, Place (Where), Time (When), Position, State (Condition), Action (Doing), and Being acted upon. Some philosophers consider the first four as primary categories and the last six as secondary categories. For Aristotle, substance the fundamental category is the subject and the other nine categories are its predicates. They deal with “what a thing is” at the most abstract level. Some commentators consider the last six categories to fall under the category of relation, thus reducing the number of categories to the first four.¹³⁰ Aristotle derived his list of categories by distinguishing the different questions that can be asked about something. For example, the question ‘how much,’ is answered by a quantity.

Prashastapada (550-600) defined Primary Substance as: the initial category since all other categories depend on it for their existence; existing prior to all qualities; a substratum with a self-sufficient independent existence, subsisting apart from qualities and not dependent for its existence on anything else; the substratum where qualities and motion inhere; an identity that persists through change; the material cause and potential existence of all composite things; and the producer of lesser substances similar to thread being the cause of the cloth.¹³¹

Aristotle’s realistic view of the categories is in contrast to Immanuel Kant’s idealistic epistemology where, “They are not real things which exist outside us and

apart from our minds. What are they then? They are the ‘forms’ in which we perceive and conceive things.... they are the forms which we impose on things by virtue of the structure of our own minds.”¹³² Nevertheless, though Kant’s categories exist prior to experience, they can only be known through a critical analysis of experience.

The Vaishesika School of philosophy sought to discover fundamental categories (Padartha) that classify both all knowable entities, and the logical constructs. Much of the following is found in the *Vaishesika Sutras* of Kanada (c. 6th/2nd Century B.C.). His two-layer system is unique in that first there is the general term followed by the subcategories. They are:

A. Empirical Categories (Artha) that can be perceived possessing a real objective existence:

1) Substance (Dravya, 9): Earth (Solid), Water (Liquid), Fire (Heat-Luminous), Air (Gaseous), Ether (Ethereic), Time, Space, Self-Soul, Mind.

2) Quality that belong to the substance (Guṇa, 24): Smell, Taste, Color, Touch, Sound/ Number, Size, Separateness, Conjunction, Disjunction, Remoteness, Proximity; Pleasure, Pain, Desire, Aversion, Volition, Knowledge/ Heaviness, Fluidity, Viscidity/ Faculty, Merit, Demerit.

3) Action-Motion that belong to the substance (Karma, 5): Upward, Downward, Contraction, Expansion, Locomotion.

B. Logical Categories (Budhyapekṣam) of intellectual discrimination:

4) Generality (Samanya) a property found common to many substances.

5) Particularity (Viśeṣa, Innumerable) by which we perceive one substance different from another.

6) Inherence (Samavaya) a necessary, eternal, inseparable, unperceived, internal relation between: Substance and Quality, Substance and Activity, Particular and Generality, Substance and Particularity, Whole and Parts. In each case the latter inheres in the former as a part inheres in a whole.

C. Later Addition:

7) Nonexistence (Abhava): prior, annihilative, reciprocal, and absolute. Quality and Action-Motion cannot exist without a substance, which (in agreement with Aristotle) is the substratum of the other categories. Substance exists and possesses qualities that are confined to individuals and are permanent (Quality) or transitory (Action). The three logical categories are types of relations.¹³³

Classification is basic to all fields of knowledge in reducing data to manageable proportions and in moving toward a systematic understanding of a subject matter. These systems should be objective, non-provincial, and deal with essential elements of the subject. The universe is composed of Akasha (matter, substance) and Prana (energy). Energy working on matter-substance produces form that has the characteristics of quantity, quality, relations, and action. A tentative and limited (subject to revision) sample classification of the categories of existence and understanding follows. Action is added to Aristotle's four main categories. Quantity and Relations that are already part of the Vaishesika list are added to their first three categories. In addition the important Vaishesika innovation of classifying the categories into subcategories of more than one level is employed. A substance is fundamental in the ontological hierarchy since other entities depend on it, and its accidental properties can change but not its essential properties that constitute its nature.

Conceptual analysis is indirect, mediated by thought based on abstract reasoning. Conversely, a perceptual experience based on sensory input is direct and immediate. It is used in science to collect data. Conceptual scrutiny is used to decide what perceptual data should be sought after, what practical applications should be employed to accomplish the task, and how to interpret, analyze and synthesize the findings in order to develop a theory that adequately explains the data.

A concept is a general notion, an idea or a mental picture of a group or class of objects formed by combining all their characteristics. It involves generalization from particulars. Concepts are used to describe and explain objects, events, or processes. Conceptual analysis is used to clarify, explain, define, and give meaning to concepts. The process involves decomposing or breaking down a concept into its constituent parts to its different types. Determining how the concept is differentiated from and related to other things or classes of things. Finding what other propositions are consistent and inconsistent with the concept. Discovering how it is causally related to other concepts as an antecedent and a consequence. Distinguishing what is necessary to a concept from that which is contingently associated with it. Comparing it with its contraries. Deciding how it applies to different situations and what are the different uses of the concept.¹³⁴ The following classification system can be used to analyze concepts, particularly the Relations section.

1) Substance¹³⁵: a. Philosophical--Body-Mind-Spirit (First two Descartes), Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (Advaita Vedanta), Extension-Thought (Spinoza), Gross-Subtle-Causal (Indian), Intellect-Ego-Senses (Yoga); Matter-Form (Aristotle), Matter-Mind (Traditional philosophy), Monism-Pluralism, Name-Form (Shankara), Realism-Idealism
 b. Scientific--Matter-Energy (Physics), Space-Time (Kant, Einstein), Wave-Particle (Quantum Physics), etc.

2) Quantity: a. Discrete--Numbers, Many-Few, All-Some
 b. Continuous--Density, Duration (Time), Size, Velocity, Weight
 c. Statistical--Confidence Interval, Correlation, Percentage, Probability, Rate of Change, Regression, etc.

3) Quality: a. Primary--solidarity, extension, figure, motion, rest, number (John Locke)¹³⁶
 b. Sensible--What we Feel (Touch), Hear (Sound), See (Color), Smell (Scent), Taste (Flavor)
 c. Virtues (Values)--Beauty, Diligence, Fortitude, Generosity, Goodness, Happiness Humility, Justice, Kindness, Love, Prudence (Wisdom), Temperance, Truth, etc.

4) Relation: a. Change--Being-Becoming, Cause-Effect, Immutable-Mutable, Potential-Actual; Rest-Motion, Static-Dynamic, Unmanifest-Manifest; Creation-Destruction, Expand-Contract, Progress-Retrogress; Beginning-Middle-End
 b. Range of generality--Genus-Species-Individual, One-Many, Collective-Individual, Substance-Form, Universal-Particular, Whole-Part, Big-Small; Bottom-Up, General-Specific, Greater-Lesser (Degrees), Perfect-Imperfect, Primary-Secondary, Top-Down
 c. Range of accord--Agreement-Disagreement, Homogenous-Heterogeneous, Independent-Dependent, Integration-Disintegration, Similarity-Difference, Simple-Complex, Undivided-Divided, Unity-Diversity: two modes of same entity (e.g., water-ice), Active-Passive, Background-Foreground, True-False
 d. Static--Abstract-Concrete, Continuous-Discrete, Free-Determined, Internal-External,

Necessary-Contingent, Subject-Object, Subject-Predicate, Substance-Attribute, That-What, Theoretical-Practical

e. Metaphysical--Absolute-Relative, Archetype-Ectype (Copy), Essence-Existence, Eternal-Temporal, Infinite-Finite, Original-Image, Original-Reflection, Reality-Appearance, Subtle-Gross, Transcendent-Immanent;

A priori-A posteriori, Actuality-Potentiality, Analytic-Synthetic, Real-Ideal

f. Temporal--Before-After, Past-Present-Future

g. Spatial--North-South-East-West, Right-Left, Up-Down, Above-Below

h. Logical--Antecedent-Consequent, Premise-Conclusion, etc.

i. Psychological--Attraction-Aversion, Conscious-Subconscious-Unconscious, Extrovert-Introvert, Manic-Depressive, Pleasure-Pain, etc.

5) Action: a. Types--Aesthetic, Cognitive, Feeling-Emotional, Moral, Perceptive, Physical, Psychological, Social, Volitional

b. Creation of universe--Emanation, Ex Nihilo, Objectification, Projection, Transformation

c. Characteristics--Function, Goal, Plan, Purpose, Vocation

d. Polar Opposites--Create-Destroy, Dominate-Submissive, Give-Receive, Praise-Criticize

An object is described by its properties and its relation to other objects. An object may be a physical entity or a mental entity (abstract object) such as properties, propositions, laws, or relations. One is located in physical and the other in mental space. A physical object such as a house is described by its properties of color, size, material, etc. and its relations such as “on a hill,” “larger than other homes,” etc. An abstract mental object such as Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity is explained by its characteristics and its relation to other theories. A subject is an observer and a physical object is the thing observed. A subject is a thinker and an idea if the entity analyzed. Substances underlie and are distinct from their properties (such as quality and quantity) and their relations. Defining properties more broadly it includes the notion of relations. What is the relationship between a substance and its properties, are they independent of each other and in what way? Substances are never experienced directly, but through their properties. Does the substance exist in another realm?¹³⁷

According to Relationalism things are known by their relation to other things. In every area of knowledge according to relational theory we understand a thing or

a system by the properties of the entity relative to other characteristics. For example, in physics we understand an empirical physical system of the positions and other properties of objects relative to other objects. Conceptually we know the meaning of a word in a sentence relative to the other words that compose it.¹³⁸

Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) the German logician suggested that all ideas are compounded from a small number of simple ideas that form the “Alphabet of Human Thought.” The idea is to remove the verbiage from each idea and reduce it down to its core meaning. Thought construction involves a hierarchy of combining these basic core elemental ideas (conceptual atoms) into more complex ones. This is a type of conceptual reductionism that considers a complex system to be the sum of its parts.¹³⁹ Of course there is only analogical relationship between combining letters of an alphabet into words and simple ideas into more complex ones. The basic categories listed above are useful for that purpose. This process can be reversed applying structural reductionism, the widely practiced scientific strategy of studying wholes by breaking them up into their constituent parts.

So Leibniz proposed a universal language composed of symbols that would stand for concepts or ideas. This language is accompanied by logical rules used in human reasoning to combine these symbols in a meaningful way. Ideally this language will mirror the processes of intelligible human reasoning if all human concepts are perfectly represented. The complex or derivative concepts are composed of and reducible to simpler concepts.¹⁴⁰

If the creation of the universe is based on a logical process of the Divine Mind, then the categories are part of this procedure. Creation of the universe occurs when the Divine Mind conceives of the categories through a logical process and subdivides them into various types of entities. For example, quantity is subdivided into density, duration, size, velocity, and weight. The logical concepts are materialized becoming concrete entities that follow a causal process. The categories have extension occupying subtle space that vibrate at a level that is not perceivable to us. They become concrete objects when the level of vibration is lessened. As Vivekananda wrote, “It is not that some forces are physical, and some mental; the physical forces are but the gross manifestations of the fine forces, just as the physical world is but the gross manifestation of the fine world.” “The external world is but the gross form of the internal, or subtle. The finer is always the cause, the grosser the effect. So the external world is the effect, the internal the cause. In the same way external forces are simply the grosser parts, of which the internal forces are the finer.”¹⁴¹

One might think of the categories as a “Theory of Everything,” since they apply to all entities. Yet, it must be cautioned that the categories are a classification system of the forms or patterns of existence, but do not specify the relationship between the particular objects or events that falls under them. Categories such as substance, quality, quantity, and relations refer to a myriad of possible things, but do not tell us how that reality operates.

8. Categories of Phenomenal Existence

In Shankara’s system phenomenal existence is limited by name (nama) the internal aspect of the form, and form (rupa) the external aspect of the name. “Nothing but Brahman, can be different from name and form, since the whole of creation consists of a manifestation of name and form.” Phenomenal existence is due to, “limiting adjuncts constituted by the diversities in the universe which is a modification of name and form.” The form of eternal material substance continually changes, just as clay can be molded into many forms with different names, yet remains as clay.¹⁴² The mind in its activities “has to depend on particular space, time, and cause.”¹⁴³ “Remembrance, recognition and so on, are subject to mental impressions dependent on place [space], time, and cause,” while Nirvicara Samadhi is “free from particularization of location [space], time, cause, and experience.”¹⁴⁴ He also points out that the categories of genus, act, quality, and relation do not apply to Nirguna Brahman.¹⁴⁵ Along this line Shankara wrote, “That omniscient and omnipotent source must be Brahman from which occur the birth, continuance, and dissolution of this universe that is manifested through name and form.”¹⁴⁶

For Swami Vivekananda the basic categories are “name and form,” and the three main names and mental forms are “space, time, and causation.” “We see God as the universe, because we have to look through time, space, and causation. It is time, space, and causation that make this differentiation apparently, but not really. This is a very bold theory indeed. Now this theory ought to be explained a little more clearly. It does not mean idealism in the sense in which it is generally understood. It does not say that this universe does not exist; it exists, but at the same time it is not what we take it for.” “What we call nature is not the substance, unchanging and indestructible. Nature is time, space and causation. Nature is name and form. Nature is Maya. Maya means name and form, into which everything is

cast. Maya is not real. We could not destroy it or change it if it were real. The substance is the noumenon, Maya is phenomena. There is the real 'me' which nothing can destroy, and there is the phenomenal 'me' which is continually changing and disappearing. The fact is everything existing has two aspects. One is Noumenal, unchanging and indestructible; the other is phenomenal, changing and destructible. Man in his true nature is substance [Noumenon], soul, spirit [Atman]. This soul, this spirit, never changes, is never destroyed; but it appears to be clothed with a form and to have a name associated with it. This form and name are not immutable or indestructible; they continually change and are destroyed."¹⁴⁷ "So this whole universe is that one Unit Existence; name and form have created all these various differences.... name and form, or, as it has been called in Europe, 'time, space, and causality'-is out of this one Infinite Existence showing us the manifoldness of the universe; in substance, this universe is one."¹⁴⁸

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) reduced the phenomenal world to two entities matter and form of which all objects are composed (hylomorphism). Shankara and Vivekananda consider form to be the source of individuation, that which differentiates one kind of object from another. As for example, form distinguishes a gold bracelet from a gold ring. It is matter (in this case gold) that creates their similarity. During the Middle Ages in Europe, they debated whether matter or form is the source of individuation. Things composed of the same kind of matter are differentiated by form (e.g., two separate people), and things of the same form by differing matter (e.g., a wood and metal table of the same shape). As Aquinas writes, "Matter is made finite by form inasmuch as matter, before it receives its form, is in potentiality to many forms; but on receiving a form, it is terminated by that one. Again, form is made finite by matter inasmuch as form, considered by itself, is common to many; but when received in matter, the form is determined to this one particular thing."¹⁴⁹ So many Indian and Western philosophers place emphasis on "form" as a basic category of individuation. There are innumerable types of forms including those of physical objects, ideas, emotions, words, etc. Objects are also differentiated if they are two separate pieces of matter, even if they are composed of the same kind of matter and have the same form. For example, two rings of identical material and form are differentiated because they occupy different spatial locations. So individuation occurs if two objects are made of different materials, have different forms, or are spatially apart. To differentiate between things, forms distinguish between different sights (spatial, color), smells

(odor), tastes, sensual feelings (touch), hearings (sound), emotional feelings, and ideas (thought forms). Within each of these seven areas different forms emerge.

According to the principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles first worked by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibnitz, there cannot be two distinct objects or entities that have all of their properties in common. In the strict sense physical object identity requires not only that they be made of the exact same type of material and form, and have the same response to each of the five senses; but also occupy the same location in space and in time. Is where an entity is located an attribute, a relation, or something else?

For Aristotle, Substantial Form of substance is the essential properties that matter needs in order to be the kind of substance that it is, while Accidental Forms are non-essential properties that if lost or changed will not alter the kind of substance. If Socrates gained some weight that is an accidental change but when he was born or passed away that was a substantial change. Prime matter is the principle of physicality and has the potency to being activated by immaterial, eternal, and unchangeable substantial forms into a particular kind of physical entity such as a human, a dog, etc. Because matter has this potency change is possible and without it for an alteration to occur matter would have to be destroyed and then recreated.¹⁵⁰

On space and time Immanuel Kant indicated, “But we are here speaking only of an appearance in space and time, which are not determinations of things-in-themselves but only of our sensibility. Accordingly, that which is in space and time is an appearance; it is not anything in itself but consists merely of representations, which, if not given in us—that is to say, in perception—are nowhere to be met with.”¹⁵¹ “Space is essentially one; the manifold in it, and therefore the general concept of spaces, depends solely on [the introduction of] limitations.... every determinate magnitude of time is possible only through limitations of a single time that underlies it.”¹⁵²

Immanuel Kant looked upon the categories as part of our own mental structure, consisting of a set of *a priori* concepts by which we interpret the world around us. Space and time are *a priori* forms of intuition that synthesize sense experience into perceptions. They are synthesized by twelve categories of understanding, creating our conception of a phenomenal world. “Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought.” The four most important categories are: quality, quantity, relation, and modality. They are the “original pure concepts of synthesis that the understanding

contains within itself *a priori*. Indeed it is because it contains these concepts that is called pure understanding; for by them alone can it understand anything.”¹⁵³ “The categories are not, as regards their origin, grounded in sensibility, like the forms of intuition, space and time; and they seem, therefore, to allow of an application extending beyond all objects of the senses. As a matter of fact they are nothing but forms of thought, which contain the merely logical faculty of uniting *a priori* in one consciousness the manifold given in intuition.” “Understanding is not limited through sensibility, on the contrary, it itself limits sensibility.... the pure concepts of understanding can never admit of transcendental but always only of empirical employment, and the principles of pure understanding can apply only to objects of the senses.” “Intellectual intuition, forms no part whatsoever of our faculty of knowledge, it follows that the employment of the categories can never extend further than to the objects of experience.”¹⁵⁴

Jadunath Sinha (1892-1979) articulated, “The vikalpas or kalpanas of the Buddhists may be compared with the forms and categories of Kant, which are neither valid nor illusory—which are ‘empirically real’ but ‘transcendentally ideal.’ The Buddhists hold with Kant that the categories are not imbedded in reality, but that they are purely subjective forms of perception [and conception], which are superimposed upon indeterminate and unqualified objects. They are not in the framework of nature, but in the framework of our mind. They are not real but ideal. The Buddhists,... however, do not distinguish, like Kant, between the forms of sensibility and the categories of existence and understanding. They regard the five categories of genus, quality, action, name, and substance as forms of perception [and conceptualization] having no foundation in reality. They have no metaphysical validity. Moreover, the vikalpas of the Buddhists are mental constructs or abstractions, while the forms and categories of Kant are purely of *a priori* origin.”¹⁵⁵

Arthur Schopenhauer explains, “The categories were the most universal concepts under which all things, however different, must be subsumed, and through which, therefore, everything existing would be ultimately thought. This is just why Kant conceived them as the *forms* of all thinking.”¹⁵⁶ His translator E. F. J. Payne notes, “Of the twelve Kantian categories, Schopenhauer rejects eleven as redundant, and retains only the category of causality. He then discusses the *a priori* nature of time, space, and causality, and shows that they are essentially the three innate functions of our intellect, inasmuch as they enter inevitably and inseparably into the framework of all possible experience, and are, in fact, the prerequisite of all

knowledge of this.” Schopenhauer explains his views this way, “We started neither from the object nor from the subject, but from the representation, which contains and presupposes them both; for the division into object and subject is the first, universal, and essential form of the representation. We therefore first considered this form as such; then the other forms subordinate to it, namely time, space, and causality.”¹⁵⁷

The categories of space, time, and causality and Aristotle’s four causes are to some extent related to the following six basic questions: space (where), time (when), causation (how), material and formal cause (what), efficient cause (who), and the final cause (why). In this sense the four causes are explanations. These six basic questions are used in information gathering, explaining an event, and problem solving. Each of these six questions involves a limitation, for example ‘where’ means the event is located in one place and not another, and ‘when’ implies it occurred at one time and not another. Because there is space we ask where and because of time we ask when.

The idea of four causes originated with Aristotle. The Material Cause is that out of which a physical thing is made. It is experienced by the five senses. “The Formal Cause tells us what a thing is, that any thing is determined by the definition, form, pattern, essence [nature], whole, synthesis, or archetype.” The Efficient Cause is the living or nonliving agent or agency that brings about the particular event or state of affairs. “The Final Cause is that for the sake of which a thing exists or is done, including both purposeful and instrumental actions and activities. The final cause or telos is the purpose or end that something is supposed to serve.” For human, psychologically it involves volition, need, or motivation that give purpose to behavior. If the act is performed by an insect, it does not involve deliberation, intention, consciousness, or intelligence as we understand it.¹⁵⁸ For an idea, the four causes are: material (thought), formal (nature of the idea), efficient (person that is thinking), and final (what it explains).

References

¹ The Absolute as defined in this chapter is beyond the intellect. This is not the Absolute Idealism of G. Hegel that is identified with mind and the intellect.

² VC, p. 88; #257.

³ BGC, 13.12.

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- ⁴ BRU, 3.4.2.
- ⁵ BRU, 3.8.11.
- ⁶ BSB, I.3.22.
- ⁷ BRU, IV.4.18.
- ⁸ CW, II:168.
- ⁹ CW, II:82.
- ¹⁰ CW, II:216.
- ¹¹ CW, II:157.
- ¹² CW, VI:52.
- ¹³ CW, II:431.
- ¹⁴ CHI, III, pp. 479, 483-84, 490
- ¹⁵ Radhakrishnan, I, pp. 173, 190.
- ¹⁶ Radhakrishnan, I, pp. 194, 199-200. The Absolute here is Nirguna Brahman not the sum total of finite existence.
- ¹⁷ *Concepts of the Ultimate*, ed. Linda Tessier (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989, pp. 92, 94.
- ¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. Lewis Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 72-73.
- ¹⁹ CPR A252.
- ²⁰ CPR, A537-38; cf., A109.
- ²¹ CW, III:184-85, 434.
- ²² WWR, I, p. 155; II, p. 183.
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- ²⁴ CW, VIII:362-63. For an excellent detailed report on the subject see Web: <https://philpapers.org/archive/MAHSVV.pdf> Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic Critique of Schopenhauer's Doctrine Of The Will
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- ³⁴ S. N. L. Shrivastava, *Samkara and Bradley* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968), pp. 13, 122-23. Concerning Saguna Brahman-Personal God "It" implies both He and She.
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- ³⁶ CW, III:37; V:300; VI:51; cf., V:266.
- ³⁷ CW, I:375, 377-78.
- ³⁸ CW, II:99, 130, 135; IV:372.
- ³⁹ Enneads, V, 1.6-7.
- ⁴⁰ Enneads, V, 2.1; VI, 8.21; G. Stavig, "Plotinus and Indian Philosophy," BRMIC (Aug. 2002), pp. 313-18; (Sept. 2002), pp. 360-64. For the S. MacKenna translation see, Web: classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.html
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- ⁴² CG, II, 13.
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- ⁴⁴ CG, I, 3.
- ⁴⁵ ST, I, 28.1, 4; For another translation see, Web: www.newadvent.org/summa/1.htm; Copleston, II, pp. 363-64.
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- ⁴⁸ GSR, pp. 634-36.
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- ⁵³ CW, II:130, 337.
- ⁵⁴ CW, VIII:247.
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- ⁵⁸ Runes, pp. 136-39, 217, 303.
- ⁵⁹ CPR, A276-77.
- ⁶⁰ CPR, Sections A42-43, 109, 288.
- ⁶¹ CPR, Sections B308, 312; cf. Gopal Stavig, "Shankara, Kant and Schopenhauer," *Darshana International* 39 (Oct. 1999), pp. 17-35; G. Stavig, "Shankara, Kant and Schopenhauer on Reality and Phenomenality," *VK* 90 (Feb. 2003), pp. 62-67.
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⁹² FP, II, 10:2.

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⁹⁴ FP, III, 6:3. Catholic non-saints include Origen, Pseudo-Dionysus, Erigena, Eckhart, Ruysbroeck, and Brother Lawrence. They are not listed as saints because they taught doctrines that were not considered to be orthodox, being outside of the conceptual boundaries of Church Doctrine.

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⁹⁶ Enneads, V, 8.4; 9.5.

⁹⁷ Enneads, III, 9.9; V, 3.8; V, 4.2.

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¹¹⁷ BSB, I.1.2; II.1.26.

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- ¹⁵³ CPR, A51=B7; A80=B106.
- ¹⁵⁴ CPR, A247=B305-06; B303, 308, 312.
- ¹⁵⁵ Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Psychology* (3 vols.; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), III, p. 52.
- ¹⁵⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (hereafter WWR) (New York: Dover Publications, 1819, 1969), I, p. 477.
- ¹⁵⁷ WWR, I, pp. vi, 25.
- ¹⁵⁸ Web: psychology.wikia.org/wiki/Causality; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_causes; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Ws