

*Madame Blavatsky on the
Vishishtadvaita Philosophy*



First published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. IV, No. 8, May 1883, pp. 196-97.
Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (VISHISHTADVAITA PHILOSOPHY) IV pp. 422-26.

For the last three and odd years that your Journal has been in existence, there has never been any contribution presenting consistently the philosophy of the Viśishtādvaita. Originated by Sri Ramanujachārya, it stands between the two extreme philosophies, respectively known as the Advaita and the Dvaita; and accepts all those passages in the *Vedas* which are admitted by either in support of its own views. There are many points, however, in the subjoined dialogue that both a Dvaitī and an Advaitī would call into question. The authors of the dialogue promise to answer the objections of the devotees of either sect. In the case of such emergency, the readers of the Magazine and our Brothers in Theosophy, of the Madras Presidency, are referred to Sriman S. Parthasarathy Iyengar, F.T.S., residing in Triplicane, Madras.

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Catechism of the Vishishtadvaita Philosophy

[Only those questions and answers to which H.P. Blavatsky appended footnotes are included.]

What is Moksha? Enjoyment of *Brahma* (*Brahma*, *Parabrahma*, *Paramātman*, *Īśvara*, *Bhagavanta*, denote the same principle) after disseverance or disenfranchisement from all material connection.

What is the nature of *Īśvara*? It has no bad but only good qualities, it is everlasting and universal wisdom; omnipotent, having truth as its principle and final purpose. It is the universal Master, omnipresent, having for its body *chetana* (animate) and *achetana* (or inanimate) nature; and it is quite distinct from *Jīva*.

If “*Brahma*, *Parabrahma*, *Paramātma*, *Īśvara*, *Bhagavanta* denote the same principle,” and are all immutable, uncreated, indestructible, omnipotent, omnipresent; if again it has “truth as its principle and final purpose,” and if at the same time it “*has no bad but only good qualities*,” we beg to humbly enquire the origin and the existence of evil in that all-pervading and all-powerful goodness, according, to the Viśishtādvaita Philosophy.

What is the nature of *Jīva*? *Jīva* partakes of the nature of *Brahma* in wisdom; is subservient to *Brahma* and is an indivisible (spiritual) particle (monad); can neither be created nor destroyed; *per se* is changeless and has no form; and yet distinct from *Īśvara*.

The *monad* or “*Jīva*” being “distinct from *Īśvara*” and yet “changeless *per se*, uncreated and indestructible,” it must be forcibly admitted, in such a case, that there are, not only two but numberless distinct entities in our universe, that are infinite, uncreated, indestructible and immutable? If neither has created the other, then they are, to say the least, on a par, and both being infinite, we have thus two Infinites plus numberless fractions? The idea, if we understand it rightly, seems to us still less philosophical than that of the God of the Jews and Christians who, infinite and *omnipresent*, passes eternities in *creating*, out of himself, souls which, though created, become immortal, *i.e.*, eternal and, having to be present somewhere, *must* either crowd off the Omnipresent Presence or become one with it, *i.e.*, lose their individuality like a lesser absorbed by a larger flame. Again, if *Jīva* “partakes of the nature of *Brahma* in wisdom” and is also eternal, indestructible and immutable like the latter, then in what respect is it “distinct” from *Brahma*?

Are *Jīva*, *Īśvara*, *Māyā* real existences (truth or realities)? All the three are true.

This answer is incomplete, hence unsatisfactory. We would like to know in what sense is each of these three understood to have real existence?

Parabrahma has *Jīva* for his body; he has *Prakriti* for his body; *Chit* and *Achit* forming the body to the indweller, *Īśvara*, as the *primum mobile*.

And if for “*Īśvara*” we say the “One Life,” of the Buddhists, it will come to just the same thing. The “One Life” or “Parabrahma” is the *primum mobile* of every atom and is non-existent apart from it.

Take away the *chit* and *achit*, the *gunas*, *etc.*, and *Īśvara* will be nowhere.

What is *Karma*? *Īśvara*’s ordination or will.

In such case the Viśishtādvaita philosophy either teaches that man is irresponsible and that a devotee of that sect can no more avert or change his fate than the Christian Predestinarian, or that he can do so by praying and trying to propitiate *Īśvara*? In the first case *Īśvara* becomes an unjust tyrant, in the second — a fickle deity capable of being entreated and of changing his mind.

What does *Īśvara* ordain? “Thou be’st happy,” “thou be’st unhappy,” and so on.

Why does *Īśvara* so will? On account of the good and bad acts of *Jīva*:

But since *Karma* is “*Īśvara*’s ordination or will,” how can *Jīva* be made responsible for its acts? *Īśvara* creating or willing the *Karma* of each man, and then punishing him for its badness, reminds us of the Lord God of *Israel* who creates man ignorant, allowing not a hair of his head to fall without his will, and then when man sins through ignorance and the temptation of God’s creature — the Serpent, he is eternally damned for it. We suspect the Viśishtādvaita philosophy of being as full of incomprehensible mysteries which *Īśvara* “has not so ordained” that they should be questioned — as missionary Christianity itself. Questions and answers from Nos. 24 to 27

are entirely incomprehensible to our limited conceptions. First of all we are told that the conditional existence of *Jīva* is “through its eternal companionship with *Achit*,” a state due to *Karma*, i.e. *Īśvara*’s “ordination or will”; and yet further on it is said “*Īśvara* so wills on account of the good and bad acts of *Jīva*.” These two propositions seem to us to be entirely irreconcilable. What “good or bad acts” *Jīva* had to do, and in what state of existence it was before *Īśvara* ordained or willed it into its conditional existence, and whether even those acts were not due to *Īśvara*’s “ordination,” are questions still clouded with a perfect mystery. We hope, however, that our Brother, the *Boris de Zirkoff* of the above Catechism, will clear our doubts upon these delicate points.

Since *Jīva* is subservient to *Īśvara* and *Jīva* is able only to do that which he is ordered to do, how can *Īśvara* punish him? And how does *Īśvara* point out, by means of *Śāstras* (Laws or Institutes) what is good and what bad, to subordinate *Jīva*? *Īśvara* gives to *Jīva* organs (body), etc., free will, and capability of knowledge, and a code explaining what must be avoided. *Jīva* is dependent, but has still enough independence given him to execute the work entrusted into his hands. *Īśvara* deals out reward or punishment accordingly as *Jīva* uses the functions he is endowed with, in conformity with *Śāstras* or not. (Consider the consequences of the use or abuse of power with which the king invests his premier.)

Precisely as in the Christian Catechism. Hence the latter as much as the former, to the strictly philosophical mind, are — unphilosophical and illogical. For either man is endowed with free will and then his *Karma* is his own creation and not at all the “ordination or will” of *Īśvara*, or he is irresponsible and both reward and punishment become useless and unjust.

Īśvara being omnipresent, what is the meaning of *Moksha*-attainment in other *Lokas*? As soon as full-wisdom (*Brahmājñāna*) is obtained, i.e., the state of complete illumination, *Jīva* shakes off his *Sthūla śarīra*; being blessed by *Īśvara* dwelling in his heart, it goes in *Sūkshma śarīra* to *Aprākṛita Loka* (non-material world); and dropping *Sūkshma śarīra* becomes *Mukta* (emancipated).

“Emancipated” then from *Īśvara* also? Since “*Īśvara* is dwelling in his heart and that the heart forms a portion of *Sthūla śarīra* which he has to shake off before he becomes emancipated and enters into the non-material world, there is every reason to believe that *Īśvara* is ‘shaken off’ at the same time as *Sūkshma śarīra*, and with all the rest?” A true *Vedāntin* would say that *Īśvara* or *Brahmā* is “*Parabrahman* plus *MĀYĀ* (or ignorance).”

How do you know all this is true? From *Śāstras*.

What is *Śāstra*? The Sacred Scriptures called “*Veda*” which is *Anadi* (had no beginning), *Apurusheya* (non-human), *Nitya* (unaffected by past, present, or future), and *Nirdosha* (pure).

That is just what is denied by most of the Pandits who are not *Viśishtādvaitins*. The *Śāstras* can be regarded identical with the *Vedas* as little as the many hundreds of conflicting commentaries upon the Gospels by the so-called Christian Fathers are identical with the Christianity of Christ. The *Śāstras* are the repository of the many

individual opinions of fallible men. And the fact alone that they do conflict in their endless and various interpretations with each other, prove that they must also conflict with the subject they comment upon. Hence — that they are distinct from, and not in the least identical with, the *Vedas*.

For various reasons we are unable to print, along with the above translation, its Sanskrit text. It may be reserved for future use and portions of it published as occasion may require, to answer the possible objections that may be brought forward by our *Advaitī* and *Dvaitī* brothers. In our humble opinion, since there cannot be but one and only Truth, the thousand and one interpretations by different sectarians of the same and one thing are simply the outward and evanescent appearances or aspects of that which is too dazzling (or perchance too dark and too profound) for mortal eye to correctly distinguish and describe. As already remarked by us in *Isis Unveiled*¹ the multitudinous creeds and faiths have all been derived from one primitive source. TRUTH standing as the one white ray of light, it is decomposed by the prism into various and eye-deceiving colours of the solar spectrum. Combined, the aggregate of all those endless human interpretations shoots and offshoots — represent one eternal truth; separate, they are but shades of human error and the signs of human blindness and imperfection. However, all such publications are useful, since they fill the arena of discussion with new combatants and that truth can be reached at but after the explosion of innumerable errors. We invite our *Dvaitī* and *Advaitī* Brothers to answer.

Footnotes to “Vishishtadvaita Philosophy”

First published in *The Theosophist* Vol. IV, No. 9, June 1883, p. 228. Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (FOOTNOTES TO “VISHISHTADVAITA PHILOSOPHY”) IV pp. 535-37.

[The translator of the Catechism on the Viśiṣṭādvaita Philosophy writes that he is not responsible for the opinions expressed in the original Sanskrit text. He briefly answers the objections raised from a hurried explanation given him by the authors of the text. The paragraphs on which H.P. Blavatsky comments are reprinted:]

Parabrahm being an All-pervading principle, itself being the All, is still considered as a separate substance from *Jīvan*, although the former contains the latter, in the same manner that we talk of a part as separate from the whole of which it is a part.

We cannot conceive of an “*All-pervading whole*,” being separate from its part. The idea put forward by our learned brother is of course the theistic, but not very philosophical doctrine which teaches the relation of man to God as that between father and child.

A part is therefore of the same nature as the whole, yet its distinguishing qualification is the fact of its being a part, *viz.*, the individualization, and dependence on the whole. In this way is *Jīvan* considered in relation with, and distinct from, *Parabrahm*.

Would it not be better and far more philosophical to resort, in such a case, to the oft-repeated simile of the ocean? If we suppose, for a moment, infinity to be a vast and an *all-pervading* ocean, we can conceive of the individual existence of each of the

¹ Vol. II, p. 639

drops composing that sea. All are alike *in essence*, but their *manifestations* may and do differ according to their surrounding conditions. In the same manner, all human *individualities*, although alike in nature yet differ in *manifestations* according to the vehicles and the conditions through which they have to act. The *Yogi*, therefore, so far elevates his other principles, or let us call them vehicles, if preferred, as to facilitate the manifestation of his individuality in its original nature.

My own inference is that Advaita and this coincide, the former considering that *Jīvan* is *Parabrahm*, modified by the latter into “*Jīvan* is a part only of *Parabrahm*.”

We believe not. A true esoteric Vedāntic Advaitī would say: *Aham eva Parambrahm*, “I am also Parabrahm.” In its external manifestation *Jīvan* may be regarded as a distinct individuality — the latter a *māyā*; in its essence or nature *Jīvan* is — *Parabrahm*, the consciousness of the *paramātma* manifesting through, and existing solely in, the aggregated *Jīvans* viewed collectively. A creek in the shore of the ocean is one, so long only as the land it stretches upon is not redeemed. Forced back, its water becomes the ocean.

Considered in this manner, there is one Infinite, made up of numberless infinites.

We are at a loss to know what our learned brother can mean by *Jīvan* being “dependent” on the whole, unless “inseparable from” is meant. If the whole is “*all-pervading*” and “infinite,” all its parts must be indivisibly linked together. The idea of separation involves the possibility of a vacuum — a portion of space or time where the *whole* is supposed to be absent from some given point. Hence the absurdity of speaking of the parts of one Infinite being also infinite. To illustrate geometrically, suppose there is an infinite line, which has neither a beginning nor end. Its parts cannot also be infinite, for when you say “parts,” they must have a beginning and end; or, in other words, they must be finite, either at one or the other end, which is as evident a fallacy as to speak of an *immortal* soul which was at some time *created* — thus implying a beginning to that which, if the word has any sense, is eternal.

Jīva, *Īśvara* and *Māyā* are considered to be *real*, all the three in this light, *i.e.*, as long as anything has existence, it is real or true, although that existence may not last forever. The Advaitī says that only that which is immutable is true, and all things temporary and liable to change are illusionary; whereas the *Viśishtadvaitī* says that as immutability is real in the eternity, so mutability is also real for the time being, and so long as there is no change. My own inference is that all the difficulty here lies in the words, but that the idea is one.

We would like our learned brother to point out to us one thing in the whole universe, from the sun and stars, down to man and the smallest atom, that is not undergoing some change, whether visible or invisible, at every smallest fraction of time. Is it “man’s *personal* individuality” — that which the Buddhists call *attavāda* — “*delusion of self*” — that is a *reality* elsewhere than in our own *Māyā*?

Jīvan is said to be dependent and independent, in the same sense that a minister, a *dewan*, is independent in exercising authority, and dependent on his king for the bestowal of that authority.¹

The comparison of the king and the *dewan* is meaningless with reference to the subject illustrated. The power of conferring authority is a finite attribute, inapplicable to infinity. A better explanation of the contradiction is therefore necessary, and we trust our brother will get it from his inspirers.

A subtile distinction is made between *Īśvara's* will and *Jīva's* Karma; *Īśvara's* will or Karma being the ever-active state of the whole — the *Parabrahm*.

This is indeed a “*subtile* distinction.” How can *Parabrahm* be “the ever-active state of the whole” when the only attribute — an absolutely negative one — of *Parabrahm* is passivity, unconsciousness, *etc.*? And how can *Parabrahm* the *one* principle, the universal Essence or the TOTALITY, be only a “state of the WHOLE” when it is itself the WHOLE, and when even the Vedāntic *Dvaitis* assert that *Īśvara* is but a mere manifestation of, and secondary to, *Parabrahm* which is the “all-Pervading” TOTAL?

I perfectly agree with the Editor in saying that truth stands as the one white ray of light decomposed into several colours in the spectrum; and I add that the one white ray is true as well as the decomposed colours. This is the Theosophic view.

Not quite so, we are afraid. The eye-deceiving colours of the spectrum being dismembered and only illusionary reflections of the *one* and *only* ray — *cannot be true*. At best they rest upon a substratum of truth for which one has often to dig too deeply to ever hope to reach it without the help of the esoteric key.



¹ [Cf. Nārada Bhakti Sutra No. 32. Full text in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series. — ED. PHIL.]