ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF ADVAITA VEDĀNTA
AND MĀDHYAMIKA BUDDHISM

by

ERIC T. REYNOLDS
B.A., University of California, Riverside, 1969

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September 1975
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of **Religious Studies**

The University of British Columbia
2075 Wesbrook Place
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1W5

Date **September 8, 1975**
ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the relation of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta to the Mādhyamika Buddhism of Nāgārjuna. Much confusion has been generated by this problem both in traditional sources, and the work of modern scholars. The two systems of philosophy have been found unbearably opposed, and nearly identical by different scholars. The problem has two dimensions, historical and philosophical, and has focused on the issue of Mādhyamika influence in Śaṅkara's philosophy.

Historically, some scholars have felt that Mādhyamika heavily influenced Advaita because Mādhyamika was prior in time and the two schools share the doctrines of māyā, ajātivāda, and an absolute without qualities. Thus Advaita must have borrowed these doctrines from Mādhyamika. This conclusion is inadequate because it explains the doctrinal development of Advaita using only the external influence of Buddhism at the expense of internal dynamism within the Vedānta tradition.

In order to understand the nature of Buddhist influence on Advaita, two questions must be asked. First, what was the nature or make-up of early Vedānta, and second, what elements of Śaṅkara's philosophy can be found there? This procedure allows us to distinguish the elements of Śaṅkara's philosophy which have their roots in orthodox tradition from those which could be interpreted as Buddhist in origin. In answering these two questions, the conclusion was reached that early Vedānta was not a unified school or philosophy, but a matrix of 'lineages' or
traditions. Each tradition contains many different threads of philosophical, psychological, and theological doctrine. The growth of a separate school of Vedānta came out of the need to systematize this multivalent tradition. Śaṅkara in forming a systematic interpretation of the Vedānta tradition drew upon numerous teachers and texts from this matrix of doctrine and tradition. Thus, all of the major elements of Śaṅkara's philosophy can be found in early Vedānta but not forged into a systematic whole. Śaṅkara then stands in relation to the Vedānta tradition, much as Nāgārjuna does to the Mahāyāna. Both took already existing elements from their respective traditions and placed them in dynamic relationship in order to form a systematic philosophy. Śaṅkara does seem to have borrowed Buddhist method in accomplishing this systemization. Nāgārjuna's dialectic and division of scripture into passages of absolute, and empirical import were both utilized by Śaṅkara. This borrowing must be understood as one of method and not doctrine, because all of the metaphysical tenets of Śaṅkara's system can be found in early Vedānta, which makes it unnecessary to turn to Buddhism as their source. In addition, Śaṅkara's usage of terms such as māyā is quite distinct from the meaning given them in Mādhyamika, and much more atuned to his Vedāntic heritage. From these conclusions the philosophy of Śaṅkara can be viewed as the result of both internal dynamism within the Vedānta tradition, and the external influence of Buddhism.

Many investigators have noted the similarity of Advaita and Mādhyamika, and have drawn parallels between such concepts as Brahmān and śūnyatā, or advaita and advaya. Frequently only the similarities
have been pointed out, with the differences being dismissed as merely those of language. For this reason one system has often been understood through the categories of the other system. However, by viewing similar concepts in their philosophic context, parallels can be drawn which take into account both similarities and differences.

The similarity of Advaita and Madhyamika is due to the sharing of several categories; the absolute, world-as-appearance, 'two truths', and nature of error. The uniqueness of each system comes from the transformation of these categories by the 'causal metaphor' upon which each system is based. The method of T.R.V. Murti who points out the ontological orientation of Advaita and the epistemological nature of Madhyamika will be used, along with Karl Potter's analysis of causal chains as being at the root of these respective orientations. The combination of these two methods places parallel concepts within their respective philosophical context, allowing us to make a comparison of the two systems which takes into account both the similarities and the uniqueness of each system.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. MODERN SCHOLARSHIP</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. THE CONTROVERSY FROM TRADITIONAL SOURCES</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. THE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP OF MĀDHYAMIKA TO ADVAITA</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ADVAITA AND MĀDHYAMIKA: THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIONSHIP</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BIBLIOGRAPHY | 128 |
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A particular vote of thanks goes to Professor Joseph Richardson for his patience and instruction over the last three years. His constructive criticism played a major role in my academic growth and developing my ability to write. Hopefully his patience has born fruit in this thesis. Thanks also go to Dr. Keith Clifford for having helped in a similar capacity. In addition I would like to thank Professor William Nicholls and the Department of Religious Studies for their financial support.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the continuing sources of controversy in Indian philosophy, both historically and at present, has been the relation of Śaṅkara's Vedānta to the Buddhist Mahāyāna schools, particularly the Mādhyamika. This paper intends to explore the relation between the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara and the Mādhyamika philosophy of Nāgārjuna by placing both similarities and differences in their historical and philosophical context. These two philosophies have been found both 'nearly identical' and 'irreconcilable' by different scholars, and at the beginning we might say that there are no simple conclusions in this complex matter. The first part of our task is to provide a historical model which demonstrates the nature of their mutual influence, the second will combine primarily the methods of Karl Potter and T.R.V. Murti to provide a basis for understanding both the similarities and uniqueness of each philosophical system.

The relation of Buddhism to the orthodox schools of Indian thought is a difficult problem for both the historian of religion and the philosopher. The importance of this problem for understanding the growth of Indian thought is aptly stated by Poussin, "... as long as we have not ascertained the chronological relations between primitive Buddhism and the Apanishadic—Śaṅkhya theories, between the system of Nāgārjuna and that of Śaṅkara, between Dignāga and
'orthodox Nyāya', we cannot boast of even having traced the cardinal lines of the spiritual and intellectual history of India." Of these three areas which Poussin mentions it is certainly the relation of Śaṅkara to Nāgārjuna which has generated the most controversy, or perhaps more properly it is the only one which has continued from its inception to be a living issue in modern times.

Much confusion has surrounded this problem primarily because of the partisan nature of its history. Traditional commentators and modern scholars alike have perceived the relation of Advaita to Mādhyamika through their own bias. The driving force behind the problem has been its polemic nature. The first part of the paper will thus be a history of the problem in its traditional and modern forms both as basis for later discussion, and as a beginning on sorting out the confusion.

Modern scholarship has perceived the problem either through the eyes of, or in reaction to neo-Vedāntism. This twentieth century Indian movement finds its most eloquent spokesman in Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and is typified by universalism and a tendency to perceive other philosophies through the conceptual framework of Advaita. Most of the scholars whose work we will discuss share this bias in one form or another. This bias has often resulted in the reduction of Mādhyamika to Advaita categories. The method of these

---

scholars notes, but does not deal with the historical and philosophical complexity of the problem in a systematic way. Historically, external influence is often used to explain doctrinal development at the expense of internal dynamism within the particular tradition. One to one philosophical parallels are drawn which overlook the context in which similar terms like *Brahman* and *Śūnyatā* operate; profound differences are thus obscured.

Traditional history of the problem has an Advaitic and Buddhist side. From the beginning of Advaita, its similarity to Mādhyamika was noted by Vedāntic teachers of differing view. They identified Śaṅkara's teaching with Buddhism for two reasons, Śaṅkara's concept of a quality-less absolute (*nirguṇa Brahman*) and his use of *maya*. Rāmānuja and others were concerned to preserve a theistic interpretation of the absolute, and the reality of the world. Most Advaitins follow Śaṅkara in condemning Madhyamika as nihilism.

The Buddhist side of the controversy is less well-known, but can be inferred from a number of textual sources. These indirect references along with a direct reference from Bhāvaviveka demonstrate the existence of controversy between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna schools over the resemblance of Mahāyāna to Vedānta. This controversy took place, however, before the advent of Śaṅkara's Advaita, and points to a need for sorting out the various historical levels.

As an operational definition for Mādhyamika, Nāgārjuna and his two works the *MūlaMadhyamakārikās* and *Vigrahavyāvartanī* will
be used, for Advaita, Śaṅkara and his commentary on the Vedānta-Sūtras with occasional references to some of his other works. The two schools are five to six-hundred years apart. The Hinayāna comparisons of Mahāyāna with Vedānta for this reason do not deal with Śaṅkara's teaching, but with an earlier less systematic Vedānta. As Mādhyamika preceded Śaṅkara the form of the problem has always dealt with Buddhist or Mādhyamika influence on Advaita. The historical relation of Mādhyamika or Mahāyāna to the Vedānta of that period is a separate historical problem, and for this reason the historical section will be restricted to Buddhist influence on Advaita. One further problem arises from the nature of Nāgārjuna's texts. They are short and have a narrow, for our purposes, dialectical concern. Thus in making some comparisons it is necessary to appeal to longer Mahāyāna texts which deal with aspects of Mahāyāna doctrine not found in Nāgārjuna. This procedure is justifiable as Nāgārjuna is viewed by the later Mādhyamika tradition as systematizing the more extensive Prajñāpāramitā literature. The nature of the material necessitates this modification of our operational definition for Mādhyamika.

The historical problem is then to understand the nature of Buddhist influence on Advaita. In order to accomplish this, some understanding must be had of Śaṅkara's relation to the earlier Vedāntic and orthodox tradition. Early Vedānta existed as a matrix of schools, texts, and doctrine. A single systematic Vedānta philosophy did not exist. The history of Vedānta seems to be a gradual systematizing of this multivalent tradition which culminates in Śaṅkara. All of
the major elements of Śamkara's philosophy can be found in earlier orthodox tradition but are not organized as a systematic philosophy. Buddhist influence then would seem to be that of method, not of doctrine. Śamkara probably used Mādhyamika as a model in his use of dialectic, and 'two truths' to present a systematic philosophy. This interpretation allows Advaita and Mādhyamika to maintain their integrity as philosophical systems in relation to their own traditions, while allowing us to understand Buddhist influence on Advaita.

The philosophical dimension of the problem demands a method able to demonstrate both similarities and the uniqueness of each system. A shared metaphysical framework or structure is responsible for the similarities. The absolute, world-as-appearance (māyā), 'two truths', and nature of error are categories found in both systems, but these categories are radically transformed by the 'root metaphor' for causality upon which each system is based. This transformation accounts for the differences between the two systems and the corresponding ontological orientation of Advaita and the epistemological concern of Mādhyamika. Through this method each of the categories discussed can be seen as a working part of an entire system of thought. The inadequacy of drawing simple parallels found in the work of some scholars is thus overcome by placing the parallel concepts within their philosophical context.

In dealing with the historical part of the problem our method cannot be that of the rigorous historian who backs every statement with a meticulous analysis of chronology and sources.
The existing sources are inadequate in both traditions for tracing the development of many ideas with any accuracy, and the chronology for the sources we do have is uncertain at best. Thus, in a more general way we will interpret the sources that are available in order to understand the nature of the interaction between Mādhyamika and Advaita. The second part of the paper which compares the two as systems of thought will deal with Advaita and Mādhyamika as Indian philosophers do, that is, in the terms of the schools discussed. No attempt is being made to deal with them as the professional philosopher might by subjecting them to the scrutiny of western philosophical categories and analysis. The method used here is closer to the historian of religions who attempts to understand the sacred as it appears in its many historical configurations. As Mircea Eliade states, "all expression or conceptual formulation of such religious experience is imbedded in a historical context." Thus, in dealing with Advaita and Mādhyamika 'philosophically', we will compare how their respective traditions determined their expression or formulation of a similar metaphysical framework.

---

Much of the confusion over the relation of Advaita and Mādhyamika among the traditional commentators was based in the partisan nature of the dialogue. This bias has continued in a much modified form in the work of modern scholars, beginning with Radhakrishnan. Most of the energy going into sorting out this problem has been generated by Hindus trying to take account of Buddhist influence in Advaita. As we shall see, a Buddhist side to the controversy can be glimpsed, but apparently died with Buddhism in India. For both traditional commentators and modern scholars the problem has been to maintain the integrity of Advaita, while taking into account the influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Traditionally this problem, for a number of reasons, was overcome by dismissing Mādhyamika as nihilism. Mahadevan has continued this view in part. Some modern scholars on the other hand have solved this problem by assimilating Mādhyamika to Advaita. Radhakrishnan is the leading figure in what has been called neo-Vedāntism. Two principle characteristics of this Indian movement are its universalism and its tendency to understand all other philosophies, both Indian and Western, through the spectacles of Advaita.

---

3T.M.D. Mahadevan, Gauḍapāda: A Study in Early Advaita, Madras: University of Madras, 1960, p. 211.
If Radhakrishnan is taken as the main exponent of this position, the following scholarship can be understood as modifications or reactions to Radhakrishnan's viewpoint. While neo-Vedāntism is valid as an exposition of the views of twentieth century Indian intelligentsia, it is less so for understanding the relation of Advaita to Mādhyamika. Basically the problem has been the reduction of Mādhyamika to Advaita categories, through the rational of the universality of all religion and philosophy. This universality has been maintained throughout (with the exception of Mahadevan and Dasgupta) by noting that both Mādhyamika and Advaita advocate an immediate intuition of the absolute. Scholarship has advanced with the growing recognition of the integrity of both systems, rather than the reduction of one to the other. Thus in Murti we find the culmination of a somewhat haphazard trend towards freeing Mādhyamika from a Vedāntic gloss, while maintaining that "in the actual state of the absolute they may be identical. . . ."\(^4\)

In a historical context the integrity of Advaita against Buddhist influence has been upheld by appealing to the Upanisads. A modern neo-Vedāntic analogue of the traditional Indian attempt to recover rather than discover knowledge, has been the positing of the Upanisads as the 'fountainhead of all Indian philosophy'. Thus even those commentators who make a strong case for Buddhist and Māhyamika influence on Advaita, such as Bhattacharya, appeal to the

Upaniṣads as the ultimate source of both philosophies. There are partial exceptions to this trend in S.N. Dasgupta and P.T. Raju who seem willing to grant greater autonomy to the Buddhist tradition. Finally, before summarizing the views of some of the major scholars it should be pointed out that this neo-Vedāntic bias has been peculiar to the comparative study of Advaita and Mādhyamika, and has not been a problem for the study of Mādhyamika per se.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

Throughout his treatment of Buddhism Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan stresses the unity of Buddhism with the spirit of Indian religion and philosophy. In taking this position Radhakrishnan attempts to overcome the view that Buddhism and Hinduism are antagonists without common ground and establish the importance of Buddhist influence in the history of Indian thought. Radhakrishnan states "Historical Buddhism means the spread of the Upaniṣad doctrines among the peoples," or again "...we shall endeavour to show how the spirit of the Upaniṣads is the life-spring of Buddhism." Three periods of interaction are generally recognized by Radhakrishnan; early Buddhism and the Upaniṣads, the rise of the Mahāyāna, and Mahāyāna influence


on later Vedānta systems. In keeping with his views on the unity of
the two traditions, Radhakrishnan posits an end to Buddhism in India
from a re-absorption by Hinduism of the Buddhist tradition.

Early Buddhism is for Radhakrishnan the philosophy of the
Upaniṣads from a new standpoint. He notes "To develop his theory
Buddha had only to rid the Upaniṣads of their inconsistent compromises
with Vedic polytheism and religion, set aside the transcendental
aspect as indemonstrable to thought and unnecessary to morals, and
emphasize the ethical universalism of the Upaniṣads."

The differences between Buddha's doctrine of anātman and the Upaniṣadic Ātman,
are reconciled by Radhakrishnan as being only those of language and
method of analysis. The Buddha denied the possibility of an Ātman
because holding to such metaphysical concepts was at the root of
the problem of ignorance, but "Buddha is silent about the Ātman
enunciated in the Upaniṣads. He neither affirms nor denies its
existence." Radhakrishnan in discussing early Buddhism, points
to the affinity of various Buddhist doctrines with the Upaniṣads.
He identifies concepts such as nirvāṇa and mokṣa, thus making Buddha
philosophical heir to the Upaniṣads while still trying to account
for the uniqueness of Buddhism.

With the rise of the Mahāyāna there was a profound change
both in the religion and metaphysics of Buddhism. With the con-

7 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 360.

stant influx of alien people through the northwest frontier, it was necessary that Buddhism give up "the icy coldness of some forms of early Buddhism and frame . . . a religion which could appeal to the human heart."9 In this task the Mahāyāna was successful in imitating the theism of the later Upaniṣads and especially that of the Bhagavadgītā. The concept of Ādi Buddha reflects the parallel Īśvara in Hindu theology. He is the first Buddha, supreme, and eternal, bringing the world forth. The role of the celestial bodhisattvas becomes important, along with the supreme Ādi Buddha. This theistic trend leads Radhakrishnan to say, "So far as the Mahāyāna is concerned there is practically nothing to distinguish it from the religion of the Bhagavadgītā."10 Metaphysically the concept of Bhūtatathatā as an absolute eternal substratum of existence is equivalent to Brahmān of the Upaniṣads. Radhakrishnan also draws parallels between the monism of the Mahāyāna and that of the Upaniṣads, again demonstrating the integral nature of all Indian philosophy.

In the Advaita Vedānta of Gauḍapāda and Śaṁkara, Radhakrishnan finds evidence of Buddhist influence. He states "Buddhism created in the region of thought a certain atmosphere from which no mind could escape and it undoubtedly exercised a far reaching influence on Śaṁkara's mind."11 This influence is even more evident in Gauḍapāda

9Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 591.
10Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 599.
11Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 471.
who uses arguments put forth by the Vijñānavādins to demonstrate the unreality of external objects. Gauḍapāda's views on causation and the use of the idea of two levels of truth are quite similar to Nāgārjuna's work. Radhakrishnan notes the use of similar terminology by Gauḍapāda, and points out a series of philosophical parallels between Mādhyamika and Advaita. The use of 'two truths', the similarity of nīkṣguṇa-Brahman and śūnyatā, and avidyā as introducing the phenomenal universe are among these parallels. Radhakrishnan seems to think that this is the influence of method more than tenet for he states, "The Karikā of Gauḍapāda is an attempt to combine in one whole the negative logic of the Mādhyamikas with the positive idealism of the Upaniṣads." Later he notes, "There are no doubt similarities between the views of Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta, and this is not surprising in view of the fact that both these systems had for their background the Upaniṣads." 

Particularly at the time Radhakrishnan wrote his work Indian Philosophy, he did a great service in pointing out the unity of Buddhism with the rest of Indian culture, and the importance of Buddhism for understanding the history and development of Indian thought. Yet, when he finds the Upaniṣads to be the source of all subsequent philosophy in India (he almost seems a satkāryavādīn in this respect) the profound differences between Buddhism and the

\[12\text{Ibid.},\ Vol.\ 2,\ p.\ 465.\]

\[13\text{Ibid.},\ Vol.\ 2,\ p.\ 472.\]
Upanisads, or Vedānta seem lost, and the uniqueness of Buddhism as an independent structure gone. While Dr. Radhakrishnan is aware of the differences, they seem obscured by his constant theme of "the unity and continuity of Indian thought."

F. Th. Stcherbatsky

Stcherbatsky finds in Buddhism and Vedānta two "mutually indebted parties". The history of the attraction and repulsion of Vedānta and Buddhism for each other is given three phases by Stcherbatsky. The first phase finds early Buddhism opposed to the philosophy of the Upanisads. Early Buddhism finds the nature of reality to be 'discrete', split into an infinity of minute elements. The individual and physical world are an aggregate of these elements. This view is opposed to the unity posited in the Upanisads, the identity of Brahman and the Atman. The monism of the Upanisads is opposed by the radical pluralism of early Buddhism in Stcherbatsky's view.

In the second phase, "Monism took the offensive and finally established itself triumphanty in the heart of a new Buddhism." Placed in Buddhist soil, Stcherbatsky finds monism producing a variety of new systems. In Mādhyamika it received a dialectical foundation; in Asaṅga and Vasubandhu monism was established "dogmatically" and became an idealistic system. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti gave monism

---

a basis in epistemology and logic.

Stcherbatsky points out that this outburst of creativity by the Buddhists could not help but influence the later Vedāṇta. Gauḍapāda recognizes this, and directly confesses common ground between some Buddhists and his own Vedāṇta. Stcherbatsky thinks this spirit of openness is replaced by "sectarian animosity" in Śāmkara, but Mahāyāna influence is obvious in Gauḍapāda's Advaita and represents a third phase of Buddhist-Vedāṇta interaction. Buddhism was in constant interaction with its philosophical environment and "as regards Vedāṇta, it really did fall in line with it, so as to leave no substantial difference, except the difference in phrasing and terminology."\(^\text{15}\)

Stcherbatsky did not develop his position beyond this. Historically he at least notes the complexity of the problem, although he has nothing to say about the actual dynamics of the interaction. Philosophically he does not distinguish between monism and absolutism, a necessary distinction which we will take up later.

Chandradhar Sharma

Chandradhar Sharma seems aware of the philosophical differences between Buddhism and Vedāṇta, but he views these "only as different stages in the development of the same central thought which starts with the Upaniṣads, finds its indirect support in Buddha, its elaboration

\(^{15}\text{Ibid., p. 21.}\)
in Mahāyāna Buddhism, its open revival in Gaudapāda, which reaches its zenith in Śāṅkara and culminates in the post-Śāṅkarites. While he tends to see Buddhism through the eyes of a Vedāntin, Sharma is aware of the importance and influence of Buddhism.

Buddha's philosophy was in a sense based on the Upanisādās, Sharma thinks, but was misunderstood by the Hinayānists who took no-soul and momentariness to be the 'corner-stone of Buddhism'. The misinterpretation of the Hinayānists was rejected by the Mahāyāna schools. Nāgārjuna systematized the doctrines of the prajñāpāramitā literature in his śūnyavāda philosophy. This brought Buddhism closer to the Vedāntic ideal. The contribution of Vijnānavāda was the view of ultimate reality as pure consciousness, a view only hinted at in Mādhyamika. From here, however, Sharma finds Buddhism diverging into the philosophy of Dignāga, which interpreted pure consciousness as momentary. Gauḍapāda openly acknowledges his debt to Buddhism, representing for Sharma the best in Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, while serving Vedānta. Sharma openly admits the influence of the Mahāyāna on Śāṅkara through Gauḍapāda.

The method Sharma uses is to draw philosophical parallels between Vedāntic and Mahāyāna concepts. He does note differences between say Brahman and śūnya. "śūnya is used in a double sense. It means Brahman as well as māyā." However he understands Buddhist ideas as reflections of Vedāntic concepts, and thus distorts many ideas.

---

17 Ibid., p. 320.
of the Buddhist concepts. An understanding of Madhyamika as an integral and unique system is lost, with its epistemological categories tending to become ontological through a Vedāntic gloss. Even though somewhat biased in this way, Sharma seems to have an appreciation of the positive value of the Buddhist systems, and avoids the error of Dasgupta and others in calling Madhyamika nihilism.

T.M.P. Mahadevan

T.M.P. Mahadevan in his book Gaudapāda: A Study in Early Advaita spends about 40 pages on Gaudapāda's relationship to Buddhism. Most of this portion of his book is spent refuting Bhattacharya's work, and establishing the integrity of Gaudapāda as a Vedāntist. In Mahadevan's view there are significant differences between Advaita and Mahāyāna Buddhism, and these differences are carefully brought out by Gaudapāda.

Mahadevan begins by noting the interrelationship of Buddhism and the Brahmanical tradition at all levels. Buddhism borrowed from the Upaniṣads and in turn influenced developing Vedānta, and eminent scholars of each school passed back and forth between the two traditions. Like Murti, Mahadevan notes the complexity of the Buddhist schools and quotes M. Hiriyana "... we have, so to speak, philosophy repeated twice over in India--once in the several Hindu systems and
again in the different schools of Buddhism." Similarity between
Buddhist and Hindu versions of Idealism is then inevitable.

Several points are made by Mahadevan to distinguish Advaita
from Mahāyāna Buddhism. First, Advaita developed from the Upaniṣads,
and not from Buddhist ideas. Second, although there are similarities,
the Advaitic conclusions differ from those of the Buddhist schools.
The absolute in Advaita is Brahmā or Paramātman. Mahadevan states that
in Vijnānāvāda it is a series of momentary ideas, and Madhyamika
represents philosophical nihilism as opposed to vulgar nihilism.19

While correct in distinguishing Advaita from both Madhyamika
and Vijnānāvāda, Mahadevan errs in his interpretation of Madhyamika.
Nāgārjuna's philosophy is absolutism, not nihilism. He is correct,
however, in distinguishing the manner in which Vijnānāvāda and Advaita
establish their absolutism.

Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya

Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya in his translation and annotation
of Gaudapāda's Kārikās 20 has emphasized the influence of Mahāyāna

18 T.M.P. Mahadevan, Gaudapada: A Study in Early Advaita,

19 See Mahadevan, p. 211 for this interpretation.

20 V. Bhattacharya, The Agamasāstra of Gaudapāda, Calcutta,
University of Calcutta, 1943.
Buddhism on Gauḍapāda. This work is the most comprehensive and detailed attempt to demonstrate the influence of Buddhism on Gauḍapāda. Bhattacharya's views have generated several refutations. 21

Bhattacharya thinks Gauḍapāda is a Vedāntin, although heavily influenced by Buddhist thought. Gauḍapāda's Vedānta is idealism, and he advocates a Vijñānavāda theory based on the Upanisads but influenced by Buddhism. Thus according to Bhattacharya there are "two schools of Vijñānavāda, (1) Vedāntists headed by Gauḍapāda and (2) Buddhists with Maitreya at the head." 22 Both schools are interpreted by Bhattacharya as holding that the external world is the product or transformation of mind. The Advaitic māyā and Vijñānavadin vāsanā may be regarded as equivalent. Ajaṭīvāda is the highest truth in Gauḍapāda, this doctrine is taken straight over from the Mādhyamika according to Bhattacharya. This interpretation of Gauḍapāda is not in conflict with the Upanisadic background of Vedānta, because according to Bhattacharya Buddhism itself stems from the Upanisadic tradition. The similarity of Vedānta and Buddhism is thus accountable to this common background.

Bhattacharya's work is useful for the extensive research he has done on Buddhist influence in Gauḍapāda. However, the Vedāntic use of Ajaṭīvāda is quite different from that in Mādhyamika, and the Vedāntic analysis of the unreality of the external world is


22 V. Bhattacharya, The Āgama Śāstra of Gaudapāda, p. cxxxii.
different from that of Vijñānavāda. These differences will be demonstrated in later discussion of the philosophical relation of Advaita and Mādhyamika.

P.T. Raju

P.T. Raju restricts his discussion of Buddhism and Vedānta specifically to the relation between Mādhyamika and Advaita. He notes the variety of opinions on the subject, and after some thought finds "that the indebtedness of the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara to Mahāyāna Buddhism is greater than what has usually been supposed." Raju discusses principally the concept of māyā to demonstrate this indebtedness of Advaita, but also includes jñānamārga or the way of knowledge. Raju also points out that the ideas of Brahmaṇ and śūnyatā are not equivalent.

The method adopted by Raju is straightforward, "to show who developed the concept first." Thus whichever school developed a concept first can be considered the source of the doctrine. Raju, however, qualifies this by pointing out that he means here developed doctrine and not the raw material. For example, although the word māyā is used in the Vedas, the Vedas are not the source of the

---

24Ibid., p. 25.
Buddhist doctrine of *mâyā* as it is found in the Mādhyamika school. The concept of *mâyā* is part of the general philosophical background in India, and as such is part of the "raw material" which all the systems drew upon.

In Raju's view it was the Mahāyāna Buddhists, particularly the Mādhyamika, who first made systematic use of *mâyā* is a central philosophical concept. He finds three interrelated usages to the word, that *mâyā* is like a dream, that it is non-existence, and the use of the four-cornered negation to describe it. All of these uses he traces in Buddhist literature prior to their use in Advaita, and thus concludes in favour of Buddhist influence.

Raju's position and method raise several problems. First, as Raju himself notes, Advaita and Mādhyamika mean different things in their use of *mâyā*. The Advaitic use of the term is much more atuned to the *Upanisads*, which would seem to argue against understanding 'Buddhist influence' as the origin of the use of *mâyā* in Advaita. The historical method employed by Raju would thus seem to have its difficulties, because it oversimplifies the historical interaction between the Vedānta and Buddhist traditions.

---

25It neither exists, doesn't exist, nor both, nor neither.
Surendranath Dasgupta

According to Dasgupta the study of the Buddhist schools is of paramount importance for understanding Indian philosophy, for they provided much of the stimulus for growth and development in the orthodox schools. While there has been much influence between the two, Dasgupta seems to regard them as distinct traditions. Unlike Radhakrishnan, he does not emphasize the unity of Buddhism with the Upaniṣads, but rather their differing views on the nature of the self. The meaning of ignorance (avidyā) has quite a different meaning in each tradition, in the Upaniṣads it is ignorance of the Ātman and in Buddhism ignorance of the four noble truths: sorrow (duḥkha), its origination, cessation, and the path to release.

Dasgupta notes the probability of Upaniṣadic influence in the philosophy of Aśvaghoṣa, but adds "Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika doctrines which eclipsed the profound philosophy of Aśvaghoṣa seem to be more faithful to the original Buddhist creed." The Prajñānāramitā literature and Nāgārjuna's systemization of it are then primarily for Dasgupta the result of internal development. He interprets the śānta of Mādhyamika as pure non-being, and Mādhyamika as nihilism.

Even though he interprets Mādhyamika as nihilistic, Dasgupta sees a profound influence on Advaita, "... Śāmkara's philosophy is largely a compound of Vijnānavāda and Śūnyavāda Buddhism with the

26. Recent scholarship now points to the possibility that Aśvaghoṣa's Awakening of Faith was composed in China, and brought to India by Hsuan-Tsang.

Upaniṣad notion of the permanance of the self-superadded. He finds this particularly true of Gauḍapāda, Śaṅkara's philosophical progenitor. The dialectic of Vedānta was for the most part borrowed from Nāgārjuna, and Śaṅkara's Brahma is very like the Śūnya of Nāgārjuna, as being and pure non-being are difficult to distinguish as categories.

Although he unfortunately misinterprets Nāgārjuna as a nihilist, Dasgupta's account of the relation between Buddhism and Vedānta is straightforward. He stresses the importance of Buddhism for understanding the development of Vedānta both as an influence in the philosophical climate, and a source of doctrine. Like Raju he seems to use the 'whoever developed the doctrine first method', but unlike Radhakrishnan emphasizes the development of Buddhism as one of inner dynamism relatively independent of the Upaniṣads.

T.R.V. Murti

Murti in understanding the relation of Buddhism to Vedānta strikes a middle path between those who see a single unified tradition, and those who find no relation at all between Buddhism and Vedānta. The view of Radhakrishnan and those who find a single unified tradition, and the view of those who lean toward finding complete Buddhist autonomy, are both over-simplifications in Murti's analysis.

Murti states,

... the truth lies somewhere in the middle ... Hinduism and Buddhism belong to the same genius; they differ as species. ... Without basic affinity they would have been completely sundered from each other; without differences they could not have vitalized and enriched each other.29

This method is used by Murti in dealing with Buddhist-Vedānta interaction at any stage, since it is necessary to be alive to both affinities and differences between the two systems. Murti also points out the necessity of understanding Buddhism not as a single system, but as a matrix of systems.

Wishing to preserve both affinities and differences, Murti is careful to explain just what he means by influence. He notes that in the relation between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta scholars have both denied influence, or asserted that texts were bodily incorporated from one system into the other. Again Murti tries to steer a middle course, he states,

Again, great religions do not bodily borrow from others. They gradually, and in their own way, assimilate from other modes of thought elements that can be organically woven into their own fabric of thought.30


30 Ibid., p. 305.
Influence then means opposition as well as acceptance, and also the stimulus which causes a system to modify and revise its thought according to the needs of the time. Each system holds to its basic principles, and developments must be in accord with them. The development of either Mādhyamika or Advaita must be understood then as a combination of internal dynamism and external influence.

Murti's treatment of the problem of Buddhism and Vedānta has definite advantages over those previously discussed. Primarily, as Murti himself notes, it allows us to preserve the uniqueness of each system, while noting its affinities with opposing systems. His method also allows us to preserve the historical complexity of the problem. The fruitfulness of this approach will become more apparent when we deal with the philosophical and historical relationship of Mādhyamika and Advaita.

The problem of the relation of Advaita to Mādhyamika has two dimensions in the work of these scholars; one is historical, the other philosophical. The two often become blurred and separate methods are needed for each dimension. Historically most of the scholars rely on various versions of Raju's view,

... the method I adopt is a common one: to show who developed the concept first. If two rival schools have the same doctrine and were often entering into controversy, then the school that started later must have taken over the doctrine from the school that started earlier.31

31 P.T. Raju, "Buddhism and Vedānta," Indo-Asian Culture, 6, July 1959, p. 25.
This method is of course necessary to a certain extent, but does not do justice to the complexity of the historical process. To paraphrase Dr. Leon Hurvitz "One set of doctrine as formulated may pre-suppose another set of doctrine as formulated earlier in chronological time, but this says nothing about origins." The history of one school cannot be traced in the texts of another. This holds particularly true for Advaita where no Vedântic texts remain from the Upaniṣadic period down to Gauḍapāda with the exception of Bādarāyana’s Sūtras. Both Mādhyamika and Advaita must be understood in relation to the development of their respective traditions. Historically, a model must be found which takes into account internal development and external influence. The nature of Buddhist influence must be carefully defined so that the resulting question of whether Advaita borrowed method or doctrine may be asked.

The philosophical method used by most of the above scholars draws philosophical parallels between the two schools. The similarity of Brahmā and śūnyatā is often noted, along with the common doctrines of 'maya' and 'two truths'. Poussin writes

... that Śaṅkara is indebted to Nāgārjuna. may be true, but I object that we really know little or nothing about the history of Vedānta, and that conclusions based on philosophical parallels are by no means definitive.33

32 In seminar.
33 Louis de la Vallée Poussin, "Vedānta and Buddhism," p. 129.
The process of drawing philosophical parallels is again necessary, but not sufficient. Generally these parallels have been based only on similarities which has led to an identification or equivalence of terms such as Brahman and śūnyatā. There are, however, profound differences between the two terms. The corrective in this case is not merely to note differences as well as similarities, but to place both in their philosophical context. Having done this, conceptual and structural similarity or difference can be viewed as a result of the functioning of Advaita and Mādhyamika as total systems. Before developing these historical and philosophical models it would be useful to present the traditional Buddhist and Advaita controversy over this problem.
CHAPTER 3
THE CONTROVERSY FROM TRADITIONAL SOURCES

From its inception Advaita seems to have been involved in controversy over its relation to Buddhism. The followers of the Advaita tradition hold that Buddhism was driven out of India by Śamkara. The Hindu opponents of Śamkara accuse him of the wholesale importation of Buddhist doctrine into Vedānta. Clearly, the accusation of "hidden-Buddhist" (pracohana-Buddha) against the Advaitins is a polemical device. To be identified with the nāstikas or unorthodox who reject the Veda was tantamount to philosophical dismissal. A similar device was used by the Hīnayāna Buddhists against their Mahāyāna opponents who were accused of being 'Vedāntins'. The Buddhist side of the controversy will be taken up somewhat later.

The reaction to Śamkara and his philosophy seems to have had its basis both in doctrine and social factors. Philosophically the opponents to Śamkara were concerned to preserve the reality of the world, and to attribute personality to the absolute. Thus Śamkara's doctrines of māya as world-illusion and nirguṇa-Brahman as quality-less absolute were the focus of debate. Socially, Śamkara's founding of the daśabhūmika order of monks, and his insistence that the four aśramas were unnecessary set him apart from much of Hindu orthodoxy.

The philosophical reaction can be seen in a variety of texts and teachers. In the Pādma Purāṇa, Īśvara declares to Pārvatī
"The theory of māyā is a false doctrine, a disguised form of Buddhism; I, myself, O goddess, propounded this theory in the Kaliyuga in the form of a Brahmin." and again Śiva states "that great system, the māyā theory, is not supported by the Veda, though it contains the truths of the Veda." The Vedānta philosopher Bhāskara who holds the theory of identity and difference (bheda-bheda) connects Śaṅkara with the Mahāyāna Buddhists. Bhāskara lived only two generations after Śaṅkara which points to the Advaita-Buddhist controversy beginning soon after Śaṅkara's death. While Bhāskara does not mention Śaṅkara or Advaita by name, he leaves no doubt as to whom he refers. Bhāskara takes issue with the theory of māyā and connects those who propound it with Mahāyāna Buddhism. Various arguments are put forth by Bhāskara against māyā and its indescribability (anirvacanīya).

Throughout its history the main opponents of the Viśiṣṭādvaita school seem to have been the followers of Śaṅkara. Evidence for this can be seen in the works Yāmunācārya, Rāmānuja, and Venkatanātha. (Vedānta Deśika). Yāmuṇa was the teacher of Rāmānuja's teacher Mahāpurṇa and has the traditional dates of 918-1038 A.D. Yāmuṇa in his Siddhitrayam compares the Buddhist to the Māyāvādin, the first say
Although the pure intelligence is free from differences, it is understood, by people whose view is troubled, as multiple; object of knowledge, subject of knowledge, knowledge.

The second say --

The pure reality is not the cause of the development [of names and forms, of the intellectual contingencies], because it ceases not to be [what it is, pure]: therefore, it is Illusion who is the mother of this distinction, knower, knowable.37

The writings of Rāmānuja contain extensive refutations of Śaṅkara. Rāmānuja argues against the nirguṇa Brahman and māyā theories of Śaṅkara. Knowledge in Rāmānuja's view involves distinctions, so that there is no undifferentiated pure consciousness. Śaṅkara's distinction of a higher Brahman and a lower illusory Brahman is thus denied. The Self for Rāmānuja is the eternal substratum of consciousness and not of the nature of pure consciousness itself. Rāmānuja states

Your assertion that . . . pure Bliss to constitute the essential nature of Brahman is already disposed of by the refutation of the view that knowledge (consciousness) constitutes the essential nature of Brahman; Brahman being in reality the substrate only of knowledge.38

For Rāmānuja, Śaṅkara is also wrong in finding the world unreal, and based on pure consciousness. "Nor is it true that . . . only non-


38 G. Thibaut, Vedānta-Sūtras with Ramanuja's Commentary, Oxford: Clarendon Dr., 1904, p. 84. See pages 78-86 on this topic.
differenced consciousness is real and everything else unreal.\(^{39}\) Rāmānuja states that to hold such a doctrine is to hold the Mādhyamika doctrine of the universal nothingness. If the avidyā or māyā which obscures Brahman is unreal (it is not real by the Advaitins own admission), "that would involve the acceptance of the Mādhyamika doctrine, viz. of a general void."\(^{40}\) This brief paragraph certainly doesn't do justice to Ramanuja's arguments, but it points to the central differences, and Rāmānuja's attempt to connect Advaita with Buddhist doctrine.

An interesting continuation of Rāmānuja's attempts to refute Advaita is the Satadusani text of Venkaṭanātha. This text presents sixty-six arguments against Advaita, again dealing mostly with the concepts of nirguna Brahman, māyā, and non-difference. Venkaṭa also includes as refutations: in the sixty-fourth argument the marks and garb of the Śāmkara monks are found inappropriate; in the sixty-second the barring of śūdras from Vedānta study is mentioned.\(^{40}\) The strength of the reaction to the Śāmkara school seems a testimony to its growing influence.

The Nimbārka school of Vedānta raises objections to Advaita over the same issues that the Rāmānuja school disagrees with. The Nimbārka Vedānta is a form of Bhedabheda or advaitadvaita and concerned with maintaining differences and the reality of the world. Of note

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 86; 106.

here is the *Paripakṣagirirvajra* of Mādhava Mukunda which is concerned to demonstrate the error of Advaitic views.

Vijñānabhaṭṭa in his philosophy attempts to reconcile Vedānta with Sāṁkhyā, but also to view all of the astika systems as a coherent whole. The only real opponents are then the nāstika Buddhists. In this connection Vijnānabhikṣu states

There is not a single *Brahmasūtra* in which our bondage is declared to be due to mere ignorance. As to the novel theory of *maya* propounded by some persons calling themselves Vedāntists, it is only a species of the subjective idealism (of the Buddhists). That theory is not a tenet of the Vedānta.41

The Advaitins are thus in effect called nāstikas.42

The philosopher Madhva was born in 1197 A.D. and accused Śāṅkara and Advaita of teaching Śūnyavāda Buddhism disguised as Vedānta.43 The dislike of Madhva for Śāṅkara and his philosophy seems to have been extraordinary, his whole purpose was the refutation of Śāṅkara. Madhva refers to the Advaitins as 'deceitful demons' who play in the darkness of ignorance.44 The followers of Śāṅkara are described as people who burn down monasteries, destroy cattle, and kill women and children. Śāṅkara used to convert followers by magic arts.45


44 Ibid., p. 372.

The polemic against Advaita was carried on by Madhva's followers, who were in constant controversy with the Advaitins of their time.

If we look at the traditional conflict between the śrāmanas and brāhmaṇas, we can also see the term 'hidden-Buddhist' in a social context. The Buddhists were part of the great non-vedic ascetic tradition of India. This tradition included the Buddhists, Jains, Ājīvikas and of course overlapped with the silent munīs who were part of the early orthodox tradition. The conflict can not be understood simply as vedic and non-vedic. Rather the conflict was with the traditional Brāhmaṇa insistence that the Karma-kanda (prescribed-action) section of the Veda be fulfilled. The four stages of life (āsramas) and the various types of ritual assigned to the four classes (varṇas) were all necessary in the eyes of the orthodox Brahmin priest. According to Wayman this non-vedic ascetic tradition was incorporated into orthodox Hinduism with the worship of Śiva. Śaṅkara is well-known for his worship of Śiva. Thus we can see in the accusation of 'hidden Buddhist', a rejection of Śaṅkara's monastic system where the seeker need no longer concern himself with Karma-kanda and can retire from the world.

In Śaṅkara's philosophy knowledge alone gives release. However, for the more traditional Brāhmaṇa Vedāntins it was a combination of works or duty and knowledge or works-devotion-knowledge which gives release. Venkaṭanātha in his Satadūsani, third objection, argues

---

in favour of *jnana-Karma-samuccaya* over Śaṅkara's view that a wise man has no duties. As Śaṅkara puts it, "Work leads to purification of the mind, not to perception of the reality. The realization of truth is brought about by discrimination and not in the least by ten millions of acts."48

Before looking at this controversy in Buddhist sources, it will be helpful to survey what the Advaitins had to say about Mādhyamika Buddhism. The topic of Gauḍapāda and Buddhism is a difficult one, which we will take up later in more detail. Gauḍapāda does not mention Mādhyamika by name, but he seems open to Buddhism and was apparently aware of Mādhyamika texts. He certainly agrees with the Mādhyamika on the doctrine of *ajātivāda*, although he understands it in a Vedāntic and not a Buddhist sense. Poussin notes similarity between some lines of Gauḍapāda and Nāgārjuna. *Gauḍapāda Karika* IV, 7 - "prakṛter anyathābhāvo na-kathām aid bhaviṣyati"— is quite similar to the following from Madhyamika XV, 8 -- "prakṛter anyathābhāvo na hi jātupapadyate."49

Śaṅkara on the other hand dismisses Śūnyavāda as mere nihilism and not worthy of serious consideration. He states

---


49 Louis de la Vallée Poussin, "Buddhism and Vedānta," p. 37. See also *Gaudapāda-Karikā* IV, 5 as a possible reference to Madhyamika.
The third variety of Buddha doctrine, viz. that everything is empty (i.e. that absolutely nothing exists), is contradicted by all means of right knowledge, and therefore, requires no special refutation. For this apparent world, whose existence is guaranteed by all the means of knowledge, cannot be denied, unless some one should find out some new truth (based on which he could impugn its existence)—for a general principle is proved by the absence of contrary instances.

The comment that the everyday world cannot be dismissed unless there is a higher reality is the only real criticism Šāmkara makes of Mādhyamika. If Mādhyamika were nihilism, he would no doubt be correct. Šāmkara's analysis of the Mādhyamika has generally been followed by most of the Advaita tradition, but there are exceptions who note the value, or closeness of Mādhyamika thought to their own.

The similarity of some Mādhyamika tenets to those of Advaita was not lost on Vācaspati. He terms the Śūnyavāda as the Buddhists of advanced thought (prakṛṣṭamati), the Sarvāstivāda realists those of inferior thought (hīnāmati) and the Viśṇavādins those of middle ability (madhyama). Vimuktātmā while following Šāmkara in interpreting Mādhyamika as nihilism, admits that if by asat he means māyā and not mere negation then his position is similar to that of Šāmkara.

---


the Vedāntin.  

Sadānanda states that if the Śūnyavādins mean by śūnya the reality which is beyond the intellect then the Mādyamika has accepted the Vedānta. Some of the Advaitins, like Śrī Harṣa, note that Advaita holds consciousness to be pure, eternal, and real, while the Mādhyamikin finds even consciousness to be unreal. The two schools are otherwise similar in Śrī Harṣa's view.

Most of the controversy generated by the relation of Advaita to Mādhyamika stems from accusations of 'crypto-Buddhist' against Advaita. There is, however, a less well-known and less visible Buddhist side to the controversy, seemingly generated by analogous accusations of 'crypto-Vedāntin' against the Mahāyāna schools. The Buddhist side of the controversy is known only from Mahāyāna sources, but the similarity of some of their doctrines to Vedānta, or Upaniṣadic sources is easily observed. It is difficult to determine when this controversy may have begun, but certainly by the early centuries A.D. from references found in the Lānкavatāra and Mahāpārīnirvāṇa Sūtra. The 'absolutism' and 'theism' of the Mahāyāna although Buddhist, were easily understood in a Vedāntic sense by their Hīnayāna opponents. The authors of the Lānкavatāra, the philosopher Bhāvaviveka, and others were aware of this similarity and were usually careful to emphasize the differences between Vedānta and their own views.

---


53 C. Sharma, A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy, p. 316.


55 C. Sharma, A Critical History of Indian Philosophy, p. 321.
Hinayāna objections would seem to center on the general similarity of some Mahāyāna theory to the theism and Ātman doctrines of the Upaniṣads. Little is known of Vedānta in this period, and it is consequently not possible to pinpoint references to any particular school of Vedānta. The Mahāyāna choice of terms was syncretic at times, facilitating this identification by the Hinayāniṣṭas. Thus we read in the Lankāvatāra that the Tathāgata is known among his "hundred thousand times three asamkhyeya's" of names as "... Buddha, as Rishi, as Bull-king, as Brahma, as Vishnu, as Īśvara, as original source (pradhāna), ... as soma, as the Sun, as Rāma, as Vyāsa, as Śuka, as Indra, ... ."56 Several of the Mahāyāna sūtras use the word Brahman to describe the highest reality. Although its use is only occasional, this term would make it easy to understand Mahāyāna in a Vedāntic sense. Again from the Lankāvatāra-Sūtra, "The [mind as] norm is the abode of self-nature which has nothing to do with a world of causation; of this norm which is perfect existence and the highest Brahma, I speak."57 Several other Mahāyāna sūtras have been pointed out by Chandradhar Sharma as containing similar usages of Brahman as absolute reality, among these are the Aṣṭasāhasrīkā, Ś. atasāhasrīkā, Lalitavistara, and the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka.58 The Yogācāra philosopher Asanga states that in the fourth meditation, one ever dwells

57 Ibid., p. 132.
in the blissful Brahman.\(^{59}\) Bhāvaviveka finds that if properly understood Brahman is equal to Dharmakāya or nirvāṇa. He states,

Nothing and in no way is anything born from, or manifested by, it. There is none here, who either endures or perishes (283): This is the great Brahman, which cannot be grasped by the (god) Brahmā. \(\ldots\) \(^{60}\)

In his commentary from the Tarkajvala on this verse Bhavya states that Brahman has two meanings, one as lord of beings, the other as having gone beyond suffering (nirvāṇa), which "is to be understood here only in the latter sense."\(^{61}\) He continues, "(284) [It is this] which the learned seers, like Ārya Avalokitesvara, Ārya Maitreya, and others adore by the method of non-adoration."\(^{62}\)

Similar passages could be gleaned from Mahāyāna literature in reference to the idea of great or pure self, and the Yogācāra doctrine of pure consciousness (Vijñaptimatrā or cittamatrā) would be perhaps easiest of all to interpret in a Vedāntic sense. One passage from which it is possible to infer this controversy occurs in the Lankāvatāra, where the Buddha speaks of the tathāgata-garbha theory. "\ldots Now the blessed one makes mention of the Tathāgata-garbha in the sūtras, and verily it is described by you as by nature bright and pure \ldots to be eternal, permanent, auspicious, and unchangeable. Is not this Tathāgata-


\(^{60}\) V.V. Gokhale, trans. with comments, "Masters of Buddhism Adore the Brahman Through Non-Adoration," (Bhavya, Mahāyamakarhdaya, III), Indo-Iranian Journal 5, No. 4, 1962, p. 274.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 274. Gokhale translates the commentary from the Tarkajvala on the last two verses concerning Brahman.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 274.
garbha taught by the Blessed One the same as the ego-substance taught by the philosophers?" The Buddha then discriminates his theory from the Ātmān theory of the philosophers. "No Mahāmati, my Tathāgata-garbha is not the same as the ego taught by the philosophers; ... it is emptiness, reality-limit. Nirvāṇa, being unborn, unqualified, and devoid of will-habit." The Tathāgata's teach this doctrine to make "the ignorant cast aside their fear when they listen to the doctrine of egolessness." In effect the Buddha says this is only a provisional doctrine.

Another passage which is found in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-Sūtra explains the similarity of doctrine between Mahāyāna and the 'heretics' as the theft of Buddhist theories. "At the time, the papujas burnt out all the sūtras with a great fire. Then, there were unburnt fragments, which all Brahmins stole away and, collecting these here and there, added to their own texts. Because of this, all petty bodhisattvas, when there is as yet no Buddha, generally believe in the words of Brahmins." 63

The only direct reference to this controversy comes from Bhava-viveka in his Madhyamakahrdaya, Chapter IV on views of the śrāvakas or Hinayānists. "The Mahāyāna cannot represent the teaching of the Buddha, either because it is not included among the sūtrāntas ... or because it teaches the heretic paths of salvation, thus being

---


63 Kosho Yamamoto, trans., Mahāparinirvāṇa-Sūtra, Vol. II, Oyama, Ono-ku, Ube City, Yamaguchi-Ken, Japan: Published by the Karinbunko, 1974. This is a Mahāyāna text, not the Mahāparinirvāṇa of the Hinayāna schools. Southern version, Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō, Vol. 12, p. 716c.
similar to the Vedānta system." Bhavya notes in his Tarkajvāla that the Vedāntins and Mahāyānists share bathing in rivers, fasting, and incantations as methods for destroying sin, but argues that the Buddha still taught Mahāyāna as some similarity is not enough to prove the Hīnayāna case. He concludes that "whatever is well said in the Vedānta is all taught by the Buddha." 

Another source of information, although Hindu, which refers to the relation of Buddhism and Vedānta is the short drama Mattavilāsa-prāhasana. This farce dates from the seventh century A.D., and was written by the Pallava King Mahendravikramavarman I of Kañcī. A Buddhist monk is unjustly accused of stealing the alms-bowl of a Kapālika, who proposes that the Buddhist monk should salute Kharapaṭa, who teaches Corasāstra or theft, instead of the Buddha. The Kapālika, then adds that the Buddha though, had been a great hand at theft himself as the Piṭakas or Kośas were made from the Vedānta and Mahābhārata. While this work doesn't refer directly to controversy between the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna over the latter's similarity to Vedānta, it does demonstrate awareness of this kind of issue at the popular level.

The Mahāyāna criticisms of Vedānta philosophy deal primarily with pre-Śamkara Vedānta. By the time of Śamkara, Buddhism was on the wane in India and for this reason there is very little direct reference to Advaita in Mahāyāna literature. Kamalaśīla does mention


65 Ibid., p. 180.
Advaitadārśana, but it is not certain that even this reference is to the philosophy of Śaṅkara. At least some of the Buddhist philosophers were willing to admit that the Vedānta of their time was at least partially correct. This view has already been pointed out in Bhāvaviveka, and Santiraksita adds that the error in Vedānta is small.\textsuperscript{67} The Buddhists, like their Advaitin counterparts, were always careful to point out the differences between the two schools.

\textsuperscript{67}See C. Sharma, \textit{A Critical History of Indian Philosophy}, p. 324.
CHAPTER 4

THE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP OF MĀDHYAMIKĀ TO ADVAITA

One of the difficulties in determining the historical relationship of Advaita Vedānta and Mādhyaṃkī Buddhism has been the lack of material on early Vedānta. Between the _Vedānta-Sūtras_ of Bādarāyaṇa and Śaṅkara's commentary on them, no texts have survived important to our problem with the exception of Bhartṛhari's work. However, some attempt must be made to understand Śaṅkara's relation to early Vedānta if we are to understand the nature of Buddhist influence on Advaita. A basis must be established for distinguishing which elements are Vedāntic, from those which could be interpreted as Buddhist. Two areas of investigation are necessary; first, to understand the nature or make-up of early Vedānta, and second, to see which elements of Śaṅkara's philosophy can be found there. From this investigation we have concluded that early Vedānta does not exist as a single unitary philosophy, rather it is a matrix of different 'speculations' or theories about reality and is found in numerous texts and teachers. All of the major elements of Śaṅkara's teaching can be found in these orthodox texts. Śaṅkara then stands to the Vedāntic tradition much as Nāgārjuna does to the Mahāyāna tradition. Both philosophers took already existing elements from their respective traditions and put them in dynamic relationship to form a systematic philosophy. Buddhist influence does exist in Advaita. Buddhism was an important
factor in forming the Indian philosophical climate; in response to this philosophical environment Śaṅkara drew upon Buddhist method in systematizing Vedānta. These conclusions will be drawn out as we proceed.

If the Upaniṣads are to be taken as 'the fountainhead of all Indian philosophy' as Radhakrishnan and other scholars have claimed, it is not in the sense of a unified Upaniṣadic philosophy that this statement is true. Rather it is because all of the various concerns of Indian philosophy are found there in seed form, and these same concerns are reflected in the later developed philosophical schools. There are several important points about the nature of the Upaniṣadic tradition for understanding the growth of these seeds into systematic Vedānta.

The history and nature of Vedānta revolve around the problem of Śruti, revelation, or scriptural authority. The Veda which contains the fundamentals of knowledge, is given or revealed at the outset of creation. It is the task of the generations that follow to maintain this knowledge. Indian philosophy is always then conceived as a "gradual recovery, not discovery of knowledge." The development of the Vedic tradition grew out the need to maintain this knowledge. The texts of the orthodox tradition from the Brāhmaṇas down to Śaṅkara developed in this light. The teachers of the Vedānta tradition have had for this reason little use for works which purport to be original.

---

A common device to discredit an opponent in debate was to accuse him of holding doctrines not found in the *Veda*, or not in accord with its teaching. Much Vedānta literature has for this reason been concerned with exegesis of texts, as any point of interpretation must be shown consonant with the *Veda*.

Since Vedānta constantly tries to 'recover' or maintain that original knowledge, there is an emphasis on *Vedic* tradition. This tradition has been preserved principally through two overlapping institutions, the Brahmin family, and the *guru*-pupil relationship. Both are conceived as an ancestral 'lineage' stretching back to the *Vedic* seers. This idea of tradition as lineage can be seen in the Holy tradition of Advaita where the first half from Nārāyaṇa to Śuka is an ancestral father-son relationship, and the second half from Śuka to the disciples of Śāṅkara a *guru* to pupil relationship. Ideally the tradition embodies the direct realization (*mośka*) of the truths found in the *Vedic* texts.

The *Vedic* hymns were originally handed down in families or clans, usually father to son. Many of the Brahmin families specialized in a particular *Veda*, accumulating specific Brāhmaṇas, Āranyakas, and *Upaṇiṣads* as an extension of the original collection of hymns. Traditionally it was not until Vyāsa that a *Rgveda* can be spoken of, rather than different recensions of *Rgvedic* hymns existing among various clans and families. The same type of situation seems to have

---

69 The idea of *gotra* or lineage is used in Buddhism to describe the attainment of Buddhahood as belonging to the *gotra* of the *tathāgatagarbha*.
existed for the other three Vedas. While great teachers gained large followings and were highly influential, Vedānta as a social institution was centered in numerous clans or 'lineages'. Even though these different branches of the Vedic tradition had much in common, the mere fact of their plurality made difficult the formation of a systematic philosophy.

In addition to these 'lineages', the responsibility for maintaining Vedic wisdom fell to the guru or 'spiritual preceptor'. The guru embodies the tradition, without him its knowledge, both intellectual and spiritual, would have become lost. He is not merely prior in time, but an ancestor worthy of veneration. For this reason his views do not become out-of-date, but are preserved. The main texts of Vedānta, the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad-Gītā, and Brahma-Sūtras are treated similarly, they act as 'guru' to the various commentaries which have been written on them. These texts have been meticulously transmitted from teacher to pupil in an unbroken oral tradition. While this tradition has been amazingly accurate, it is still highly vulnerable. Along with uncertainty about complete accuracy, it must have been quite easy for a teacher to emphasize or bend a particular point and so impress his students that the original interpretation was lost. Earlier we noted the reverence given to śruti. This reverence, coupled with the oral tradition, made the orthodox tradition extremely conservative and the development of a systematic Vedānta difficult. The emphasis was on understanding the basic texts, not on systematic commentaries which interpreted them. The interpretations were for this
reason more fluid, being suited to the needs of a particular time, student, or philosophical context. This orientation may have been partly responsible for the loss of pre-Saṅkara commentaries on the Brahma-Sūtras.

From the above discussion we can begin to see that early Vedānta was not a unified system, but a matrix of systems. A large number of texts are revered by the orthodox tradition as 'revealed'. Vedānta is based on the Jñāna-Kānd (knowledge) section of the Veda, and is thus concerned primarily with the Upaniṣads. To the thirteen major Upaniṣads are added the Bhagavad-Gītā and the Brahma-Sūtras. In these three sources there is a disparate array of metaphysical, theological, and psychological doctrine. It was possible to build a system of thought on any one Upaniṣad, or particular element in the Upaniṣads. While the other orthodox schools started with a single source, e.g. the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtras, Vedānta began with three sources. This gave the Brahma-Sūtras somewhat less authority as a definitive text than the sūtras of the other schools, and left Vedānta more open than the other systems. Thus from a strictly historical point of view it is not possible to determine whether a particular interpretation represents more faithfully the Brahma-Sūtras, since each interpretation may represent a trend of thought from the time the Upaniṣads were composed. Vedānta then, like Buddhism, covers a range of schools.

Even within a single Upaniṣad the ideas do not represent a systematic philosophy or interpretation of reality. Each Upaniṣad
is concerned with the development and interpretation of a number of
traditional 'metaphors' coming down from the Vedic hymns. Brahman,
Ātman, Puruṣa, Prāṇa, and Īśvara are among these. The Upaniṣads
consist of a series of 'speculations' which in many ways represent a
transition between the 'mythical' thought structure of the Vedic hymns and the later intellectual or philosophic systems. Partly under
pressure from the Buddhists, orthodox scholars felt a need of a clear
perception of their own philosophy and began to develop diverse but
more systematic theories of interpretation.

In the early period, Vedānta was neither a unified school or
philosophy, but a matrix of traditions sharing a common concern with
the nature of reality. This conclusion is supported by the number
of Vedic 'lineages' out of which Vedānta grew, and the variety of
metaphysical, psychological, and theological doctrines found in the
Upaniṣads: Vedānta as a separate school of philosophy grew out of
a need to systematically interpret this multivalent tradition. Śaṅkara
then in constructing his philosophy must have drawn upon a number of
texts, generated by several traditions, containing many different
threads of philosophical and psychological speculation. For this
reason the elements of Śaṅkara's philosophy will be found in a variety
of teachers and texts and not in a single school; although there may
have been small pre-Gauḍapāda schools which bore great similarity to
Śaṅkara's philosophy.

70 Using this term in an Eliadian sense.
Various elements of Śaṅkara's philosophy can be found in the pre-Gauḍapāda teachers of Vedānta. Although they may not have interpreted these elements in precisely the same manner as Śaṅkara, their philosophy offered a model for Śaṅkara to draw upon. In the Brahma-sūtras the names of pre-Bādarāyana Vedāntins are mentioned: Jaimini, Asmarathya, Bādari, Audiulomi, Kāsaṅkṛtsna, Kāṛṣṇājini, and Ātreya. With the exception of Jaimini unfortunately little is known of them.

Kāsaṅkṛtsna's view of the relation of the self to Brahman is quoted with approval by Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara says, "In the opinion of the teacher Kāsaṅkṛtsna the non-modified highest-Lord himself is the individual soul, not anything else." The Ātman and the Paramātman are considered non-different in Śaṅkara's interpretation of Kāsaṅkṛtsna's view. Rāmānuja also approves of Kāsaṅkṛtsna, however, and Nakamura feels that Kāsaṅkṛtsna represents an early thinker of the Bhedābheda school. Nevertheless, there would seem to be some basis for thinking that Kāsaṅkṛtsna held that the Ātman and Paramātman were non-different or identical as does Śaṅkara. Bādāri is another old Vedāntin approved of by Śaṅkara, primarily because he makes a distinction between a

---

71 Brahma-sūtra I, 2, 28; I, 3, 31; I, 4, 18; VI, 4, 2; 18; 40; IV, 3, 12; IV, 4, 5; 11.
72 I, 2, 29; I, 4, 20. 73 I, 2, 30; III, 1, 11; IV, 3, 7; IV, 4, 10.
74 I, 4, 21; III, 4, 45; IV, 4, 6.
75 I, 4, 22. 76 III, 1, 9.
77 III, 4, 44.
78 G. Thibaut, Vedānta-sūtras of Bādarāyana with the Commentary by Śaṅkara I, 4, 22, p. 279.
higher and lower Brahman, or Brahman as cause and Brahman as effect. (IV, 3, 7). This distinction corresponds to the nirguna and saguna Brahman of Śaṅkara. Rāmānuja agrees with this interpretation and identifies the lower Brahman with Hiranyagarbha. One point to be noted about these early teachers of Vedānta is the apparent lack of distinction between the ritual and Vedānta schools found in later literature.

After the Brahma-Sūtras the names of several Vedāntins have come down to us of whom we know little with the exception of Bhartṛhari. The name of Dravidaśāra is claimed as a source of doctrine by both Advaita and Viśistadvaita traditions. Ānandagiri mentions two places where Śaṅkara relied on Dravidaśāra, and in commentaries on Sarvaśānta’s Āṇkṣépaśāntara a certain Bhāṣyakāra is identified as Dravidaśāra. However, Yāmunācārya in his Siddhānta refers to commentator known as Dravidaśāra, who is also referred to by Rāmānuja.  

Bhartṛprapāṇca is another early Vedāntin none of whose works are extant. From what it is possible to reconstruct of his philosophy he taught Bhedabhedavāda. One element of his philosophy which finds a reflection in Śaṅkara is the doctrine of a higher and lower Brahman. The lower Brahman is, however, a real transformation in Bhartṛprapāṇca, not an apparent one as in Śaṅkara. There are other marked difference between Śaṅkara and Bhartṛprapāṇca.

Bhartṛhari supposedly lived in the late sixth century and has left us his Vākyapadīya. Although primarily a grammarian,

80 See M. Hiriyana, "Bhartṛprapāṇca: An Old Vedāntin," Indian Antiquary LIII, 1923, pp. 77-86.
Bhartrhari's philosophy of *Sabda brahman* resembles that of Śaṅkara in two important respects. He is an Advaitin and holds the world to be an apparent (*vivarta*) transformation of *Brahman*. Bhartrhari states, "The *Brahman* who is without beginning or end, whose very essence is the Word, who is the cause of the manifested phonemes, who appears as the objects, from whom the creation of the world proceeds," and again "who has been taught as the one appearing as many due to the multiplicity of his powers, who, though not different from his powers, seems to be so." In Bhartrhari the power that effects this appearance is time (*Kālasakti*) rather than *māyā* as in Advaita. There is evidence from the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim I-tsing that Bhartrhari may have spent some time as a Buddhist. The Vedāntin Brahmadatta is mentioned by both Suresvara and Yāmunācārya. While he differed from Śaṅkara on several major points he seems to have held a form of monism. The distinction between Ātman and *Brahman* is *māyā* although release for Brahmadatta did not occur until death.

While there are no texts from the Vedāntic tradition surviving between Bādarāyana and Śaṅkara, by inspecting references from Jain, Buddhist, and other orthodox traditions it is possible to chart somewhat further the nature and complexion of Vedānta in this period. The

---

81 K.A. Subramania, *The Vākyapadiya of Bhartrhari with the Vyrtti* Ch. 1, Poona: pub. by S.M. Kartre for Deccan College, Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1965, verse 1, p. 1.

82 Ibid., verse 2, p. 4.


84 Much of the information in this section comes from a series of articles on Early Vedānta by Hajime Nakamura. These articles are portions in English of his Japanese work, *Shoki no Vedānta Tetsugaku* (continued over)
picture drawn generally agrees with the information gleaned from the little known of pre- and post-Bādarāyana Vedānta teachers. Originally there were several Upaniṣadic philosophies rather than a single, systematic philosophy. In both Jain and Buddhist literature the term Vedānta is fairly late, coming in the sixth century. Before this period the term Vedavādin is used. Thus the separate emphasis which we find in Śāṅkara on the Upaniṣads as jñāna-kānda seems to have emerged fairly late, along with the coalesing of Vedānta as a separate school. Although there is an awareness of Upaniṣadic doctrines in early Buddhist and Jain literature, the Upaniṣads like Vedānta are not mentioned by name. This trend holds true for orthodox literature as well. All three of these sources are aware of specific Upaniṣadic doctrines, but seem to consider them part of general Brahmanism, and not a separate school. This is not to say that 'Vedānta' did not exist in this period, but merely that it had not differentiated itself as a social force from general orthodoxy. The growth of systematic philosophy in Vedānta seems to have come with the rise of Vedānta as a distinct school. Thus the texts of this earlier period contain most of the major elements of Śāṅkara's thought, not yet forged into a systematic whole.

The basic theme of Vedānta, the identity of Brahmā and Ātman, is referred to in various forms both in heterodox and orthodox literature. In early Jain literature a passage is found which resembles

closely a statement of the *Upaniṣadic* sage Uddālaka (*Chāndogya Up. 6.1.4*). "As what was originally one clod of dirt appears in various shapes; in the same manner consciousness takes various forms and appears as the entire world." The Jain authors were familiar with and criticized the concept of an all-pervading *Atman* and the use of *Puruṣa* in the same context.

In early Buddhist literature there is no reference to *Brahman* (neuter) as absolute, but only to *Brahma* (masculine) the creator God. The principle of absolute consciousness is however mentioned in a debate between the Buddha and *Brahma*. The Buddha does not defeat this view by polemics but by supernatural powers. Early Buddhist literature enumerates sixty-two types of *Ātma* theory which are refuted as heretical. Reference is made in the *Buddhacarita* of Āśvaghōsa to the teaching of the sage Ārāda. The supreme *Brahma*, without attribute, unchanging, and eternal is part of his teaching. In a text attributed to Āryadeva, the *Sastra by the Bodhisattva [Ārya-]* Deva on the *Explanation of Nirvāṇa by [Twenty] Heretical and Hinayāna [Teachers]* Mentioned in the *Laṅka [-avaṭāra]-Sūtra*, some of the doctrines held by *Upaniṣadic* thinkers are examined and rejected. The concepts of *Brahman* and *Ātman* are not mentioned however, and neither is the school of *Vedānta*.

---


An important and useful text for the history of Indian philosophy is the *Madhyamakahrdaya* of Bhāvaviveka with his own commentary the *Tarkajvālā*. Not only does this text have a chapter on Vedānta, but he separates his treatment of it from that of Mīmāṃsā. Thus by the sixth century Vedānta was a system in its own right already differentiated from Vedic ritualism. One interesting facet is the presentation of *Brahman*, *Ātman*, and *Puruṣa* as interchangeable concepts. An attempt was being made to systemize the varied Vedāntic teachings. In addition the distinction found in Śaṅkara between the individual self (*jīva*) and the supreme self (*Paramātman*) was taught in this Vedānta. The example used to illustrate this point is that of ether pervading different clay vessels. There is no mention of *māyāvāda* in connection with Vedānta in any of these Buddhist and Jain scriptures, until after Śaṅkara.

From the texts of the other orthodox schools, similar passages on the monistic metaphysics of *Upaniṣadic* philosophy can be found. An additional point which is found in Śaṅkara is reflected in the *Vaiśeṣika-Sūtras*. In III, 2, 1-8 the view of the opponent is that the self is known only through scripture. In Śaṅkara, *mokṣa* comes from an intuition of the truth of scripture, particularly the *mahāvākyas*.

---

The doctrine of *māyā* in Advaita Vedānta has been the principle cause of accusations of 'crypto-Buddhist'. *Māyā* is one of the key terms of Indian thought and is used in many different philosophies. The question would seem to be whether or not we can find roots of the particular Advaitic usage elsewhere and previous to Mādhyamika. The answer is yes. In both early Buddhist and Jain literature there is reference to a school which holds a doctrine very similar to *ajātvāda*.

In the *Samyutta Nikāya* we find,

> The following opinion has occurred to some philosophers: -- the winds do not blow, the waters of rivers do not flow; pregnant women do not bear children; the sun and moon do not rise and set; they stand firm, as stable as a pillar.89

In the Jain text *Sūryagādānga* I.12.7 this view is that of the *Akriyavādins*. According to two Sarvāstivāda scholars, Vasumitra and Bhadanta, this view is held by those who postulate a minute and eternal Ātman. Thus, even in ancient times there seems to have been a school which denied change and causation as real in the absolute sense. As the Jain passage puts it, "... the whole world is in actuality determined as false."

*Māyā* is a multivalent term and is used often to describe the power of God to create, which when viewed by the individual deludes. This second sense which is prominent in Advaita is given in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

---

89 *Samyutta Nikāya* (Book XXIV, Ch. I), III, 203. Cited in H. Nakamura "Upaniṣadic Tradition and the Early School of Vedānta as Noticed in Buddhist Scripture," p. 79.
"Verily, this divine illusion of mine, made up of the (three) qualities (of Nature) is difficult to cross over; those who take refuge in me alone, cross over this illusion." The sense of Śaṁkara's usage of the term mayā is to be found here and in various other Hindu texts, but not its systematic application as a philosophical concept. Although from the above passages found in Buddhist and Jain literature, there may have been a small school holding a very similar view to Śaṁkaras. Also, as already noted the philosopher-grammerian Bhartṛhari held that the world was an apparent (vivarta) and thus illusory transformation of Brahman.

Another basic element of Śaṁkara's philosophy is the idea of two levels of both Brahman and knowledge. The idea of two Brahman's has already been traced back to the pre-Brahma-Sūtra philosopher Badari. The idea of a higher (para) and lower (apara) knowledge occurs in the Añirbudhmasyaśamhitā, a Pāñcarātra text of the fourth century A.D. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa refers to both two fold knowledge and two Brahman. This last text may have influenced Śaṁkara as he quotes the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in his Gītā and Chāndogya Upaniṣad commentaries. A higher and lower knowledge is also taught in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (I, 4-5). These texts would seem to contain the roots of Śaṁkara's doctrine of 'two truths'.

Early Vedānta was then a matrix of different texts and traditions, without a unified interpretation. There are several

Upaniṣadic speculations about the nature of the universe, rather than a single philosophy. The traditional oral method of preserving Vedic wisdom among several 'lineages' or clans reinforces this picture of a matrix of differing but interwoven threads. The growth of the school of Vedānta, was the attempt to provide a systemic understanding of the body of scriptures which make up the tradition. Early Vedānta being a matrix in which are imbedded the 'gems' of Upaniṣadic wisdom, Śaṅkara's philosophy will be found reflected in varied sources, texts and teachers.

Thus, most of the major elements of Śaṅkara's philosophy can be found in pre-Śaṅkara orthodoxy, making it unnecessary to assume that Buddhist doctrine was the source. Brahman as quality-less (nirguna) absolute, the non-difference of Ātman and Brahman, the world as mayā, a higher and lower knowledge, a higher and lower Brahman, revelation or knowledge as the means to release (mokṣa), are all found in pre-Śaṅkara Vedānta, but not put into dynamic relationship to form a systematic philosophy. Śaṅkara took these different elements and integrated them in order to form a systematic foundation for understanding scripture. This view does not necessarily deny Buddhist influence, but points out the need to define clearly its meaning. Buddhist influence in Advaita would seem to come through Gaudapāda, Śaṅkara's philosophical progenitor, who was familiar with and drew upon Buddhist sources. Gaudapāda's relation to Buddhism would seem pivotal for understanding the nature of Buddhist influence.

According to Advaita tradition Gaudapāda was the teacher of Govindapāda, Śaṅkara's teacher. Like many other Indian philosophers, little is known of Gaudapāda's life and what remains to
us are his philosophical writings. Several works have been attributed to Gaudapāda, none of which can be identified with certainty as Gaudapāda's with the exception of the Āgamaśāstra. This work, known also as the Gaudapāda-Kārikā or Maṇḍukya-Kārikā, is an exposition of the Maṇḍukya-Upaniṣad. The Kārikā is divided into four parts of which only the first is a commentary on the Upaniṣad, the remaining chapters constitute an independent treatise. The commentary attributed to Śaṅkara on the Maṇḍukya-Kārikā has assured its importance.

The apparent openness of Gaudapāda to Mahāyāna Buddhism has led to a variety of opinions on their relation. Generally these opinions follow one of two lines, either Gaudapāda borrowed Buddhist doctrine or he merely used Buddhist terminology and method thinking that they tallied with Vedānta. Dasgupta states "... there is sufficient evidence in his Kārikās for thinking that he was possibly himself a Buddhist, and considered that the teachings of the Upaniṣads tallied with those of the Buddha."92 V. Bhattacharya thinks that Gaudapāda has advocated and used Buddhist doctrine throughout his Kārikā.93 The other line of thought is typified by T.M.P. Mahadevan who admits that Buddhist terms and dialectic are used but Gaudapāda's purpose in using them, "is not to commend Buddhism to his followers, but to establish the conclusions of Vedānta. ..."94

93 V. Bhattacharya, The Āgamaśāstra of Gaudapāda, p. liv.
Evidence for Buddhist influence in Gaudapāda is of three types: doctrine, method, and terminology. Various doctrines show similarity with Buddhist counterparts. Gaudapāda is thought to have borrowed from Mādhyamika the doctrine of ājātivāda, or non-origination. Bhattacharya points to Nāgārjuna as the source of this doctrine and to the fact that as a philosophical correlate of māyāvāda, ājātivāda has often been objected to by Hindu opponents of Advaita. Gaudapāda seems to openly admit the correctness of this Mādhyamika view. He states "We approve the Ājāti or non-creation declared by them. We do not quarrel with them. Now, hear from us (the ultimate reality) which is free from all disputations." The doctrine of two truths is common to Vedānta, Mādhyamika, and Vijñānavāda. Bhattacharya thinks that Śaṅkara accepted this view from the Buddhists via Gaudapāda as the Buddhists were prior in time. Two illustrations which Gaudapāda uses to prove the unreality of the world, the city of gandharvas and magic-elephant (māya-hastin), are both found in Buddhist literature. The title of the fourth prakārana, the Alatasanti, takes its name from the simile of the fire-brand-circle which is commonly found in

95 See Mūlamadhyamaka Kārikā, XXI, 13, trans. by F. Streng, in Emptiness, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967. All further references to the Madhyamaka-Kārikās will be to Streng's translation.

96 Gaudapāda Kārikā IV, 5 from Nikhilananda, Swami. Trans. The Māndukyopaniṣad with Gaudapāda's Kārikā and Śaṅkara's Commentary, 5th ed., Mysore: Śrī Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1968. All further references will be to this edition.

97 V. Bhattacharya, Agamaśāstra of Gaudapāda, p. 163.
Buddhist literature. The term *Asparsayoga* which Gaudapāda uses to describe the path to realization, Bhattacharya connects with Buddhist usage. *Asparsayoga* is derived from *sparśa vihara* found in Buddhist Sanskrit literature, which Sthiramati explains as established in *sukha* or ease, comfort. Various other ideas in Gaudapāda are pointed out by Bhattacharya as having Buddhist analogues but the above is a representative sample.

The method of dialectical analysis used by Gaudapāda would seem to come from the works of Nāgārjuna. Gaudapāda is both aware of the 'tetralemma' and uses reason or dialectic to destroy the notion of causality. Gaudapāda uses the 'tetralemma' in this verse, "Childish persons verily cover it (fail to know it) by predicting of it such attributes as existence, non-existence, existence and non-existence, and absolute non-existence, derived respectively from their notion of change, immovability, combination of both and absolute negation." One of the principle ideas of the *Karikās* is *ajātivāda*. Gaudapāda meticulously attempts to destroy the notion of causality, and establish the non-origination of world as *māyā*. In IV, 40 he uses dialectic to do this, "The unreal cannot have the unreal as its cause, nor can the real be produced from the unreal. The real cannot be the cause of the real. And it is much more impossible for the real to be the cause of

---


99 'tetralemma' is a term coined by Richard Robinson to describe the four-pronged dialectical process (*prasanga*) which Nāgārjuna uses to refute all categories about reality. See R. Robinson *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967, p. 57.

100 *Gaudapāda-Kārikā* IV, 83. See also IV, 84, p. 286.
the unreal." In IV, 84 he refers to the 'tetralemma' with the Mādhyamika term catuṣkoṭi (for Kotyaś catasrah).

Bhattacharya has compiled a list of words which he feels are used "originally or mainly in Buddhist works." Most of these terms are found in the fourth, or Ātatasanti prakaraṇa, and while some may be disputed, others do seem primarily Buddhist in usage. Dharma in the sense of an 'entity' is Buddhist and is used several times in the fourth prakaraṇa. Śāmkara interprets dharma to mean jīva, and while this may be warrented in some places, its usage seems unmistakably Buddhist in others. Gaudapāda also uses the word Buddha to describe the wise, or enlightened. He states, "The mind, thus freed from attachment (to all external objects) and undistracted (by fresh objects) attains to its state of immutability. Being actually realized by the wise (buddhānām), it is undifferentiated, birthless and non-dual."

Another aspect of similar terminology is the apparent closeness of some of Gaudapāda's Kārikās to Buddhist scripture. This closeness has been pointed out by Poussin, Bhattacharya, and J. Majumdar to passages found in Nāgarjuna, the Lankāvatāra-Sūtra, and the Aṣṭasāhasrikā-Prajñāparamitā. As already pointed out, Poussin cites these two similar lines, from Gaudapāda-kārikā IV, 7 "prakṛter anyathābhāvo na Kathan cid bhavisyati" and from MulaMadhyamakakārikās XV, 8 "prakṛter anyathābhāvo na hi jātipapadyate." While most of the passages

---

101 Gaudapāda-Kārikā IV, 40, p. 252. See also IV, 11-19.
102 V. Bhattacharya, The Agamaśāstra of Gaudapāda Index VII.
103 See Gaudapāda-Kārikā IV, 1,6,8,10,21,33,39,40,53,54,58,59, 60,81,82,91,92,93,96,98,99.
104 Ibid., IV, 19,42,80,88,98,99.
105 Ibid., IV, 80, p. 284.
compared by these scholars rest more on similarity of ideas than exact wording, it is nevertheless clear that Gauḍapāda knew and drew upon Buddhist scripture.

From the above discussion we can see that Gauḍapāda was influenced by Buddhism, but it is difficult to determine in what sense. The situation is further complicated by the disputed nature of the text. Some have felt that the fourth prakāraṇa where Buddhist influence is so predominant is not part of the original text. Others have argued that the commentary was written not by Śaṅkara, but by a later author. Gauḍapāda does seem open to, and willing to recognize the similarity and usefulness of some Buddhist doctrine. Gauḍapāda states,

\[\text{as non-duality is the ultimate reality, therefore duality is said to be its effect (Kāryā or bheda).} \]

\[\text{The dualists perceive duality either way. (i.e. both in the absolute and in phenomena). Therefore the non-dual position does not conflict with the dualists position. 107} \]

This verse is taken with IV, 5 which has already been quoted, points out Gauḍapāda's willingness to see his own knowledge or view of the absolute reflected in other doctrines. Reality is after all a non-dual unity. His attitude seems very similar to that of Bhāvaviveka who admitted that Vedānta had much good in it. This attitude does not mean Gauḍapāda thought his philosophy equivalent to Mahāyāna Buddhism. He states at the end of the fourth prakāraṇa, ". . .

106 Louis de la Vallée, "Buddhism and Vedānta," p. 137. See Bibliography for the series of articles by Jnanendralal Majumdar on Gauḍapāda and Buddhism.

107 Gauḍapāda-Kāriki III, 18, pp. 164-65 also III, 17.
This is not the view of the Buddha," and thus differentiates his own view from that of the Buddhists. While Gaudapāda uses terms common to Buddhism, his usage is unmistakable Vedantic. Thus there are similarities, but also distinct differences in meaning between the Mādhyamika and Vedānta use of ajātivāda for example. To understand the nature of Mahāyāna influence on Gauḍapāda and Vedānta requires a method which explains both the obvious similarities found here and yet maintains the basic Vedānta orientation of Gauḍapāda.

From reading the Āgamaśāstra of Gauḍapāda we can see the influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Gauḍapāda was willing to perceive the truths of his own philosophy in Buddhism, and draw upon Buddhist method and scripture. While Śaṅkara does not seem to have drawn upon Buddhist scripture to elucidate his philosophy, there is no doubt that he inherited from Gauḍapāda much of his method in establishing Vedāntic doctrine. Two reasons stand against understanding this as the wholesale importation of Buddhist doctrine. First, all the major tenets of Vedānta metaphysics exist within the pre-Śaṅkara orthodox tradition. Second, doctrines which appear to be philosophical parallels are in fact used in a uniquely Vedāntic or Buddhist manner within their respective philosophies. These two reasons militate against understanding 'influence' in the sense of origins.

108Ibid., IV, 99, "... naitad buddhena bhāsitam. ..."
109This view is the traditional interpretation, and has been disputed by some scholars who point out that the passage may be a reference to the Buddha's silence as his only true doctrine.
Both from looking at Gauḍapāda's text and understanding Śaṅkara's relation to early Vedānta, Buddhist influence in Vedānta can be understood as a borrowing of method. Much like the Mādhyamika philosophers, Gauḍapāda uses dialectic to destroy the notions of causality and the reality of the world. He was concerned to demonstrate the truth of scripture through the use of reason.

In discussing early Vedānta its nature was shown to be pluralistic, or that of a matrix of systems. The emergence of distinct schools of Vedānta came out of attempts to systematize this matrix of text and tradition. Thus, Śaṅkara drew out of the orthodox tradition the major elements of his philosophy as a systematic exposition of Vedic scripture. In accomplishing this he must have been influenced by Buddhist method. The specific philosophical tool which renders Advaita and Mādhyamika so similar is the doctrine of 'two truths'. Śaṅkara may have been influenced by the Mādhyamika use of this method in organizing an understanding of scripture and tradition as a whole. Śaṅkara thus divides scripture into those of lower (apara) and higher (para) import, enabling him to relate apparently different doctrines. These two Buddhist methods were assimilated by Advaita Vedāntins into the fabric of their own philosophy, the use of dialectic and the use of 'two truths' to organize disparate doctrine and scripture. Although the idea of a higher and lower knowledge is found in pre-Mādhyamika sources, it is not used as a method of structuring a systematic philosophy.
Māhāyana Buddhism was an important factor in the Indian philosophical environment, much of its impact on Advaita being due to this role. Orthodox Brahminism must have had a similar influence on the rise of Mahāyāna. The popular debates in which the various religious and philosophical schools took part, constantly forced these systems, "to modify, revise or even reaffirm their doctrines." Without vital differences each tradition could not have provoked this influence, yet without much common ground the dialogue never would have taken place. Murti makes the apt comment that they belong to the same genus but differ as species.

The basic pre-suppositions of the Buddhist and Vedāntic traditions are diametrically opposed. Buddhism affirms an-ātman, and Vedānta the transcendental Ātman. These differing orientations make impossible straight borrowing of doctrine. The changes which led to the formation of Mahāyāna and Advaita were the product of both internal dynamism within each tradition, and the influence of the philosophical and historical environment in which these changes took place. Any change which resulted from the interaction of these two processes must be true to the basic metaphysical pre-suppositions of each system, and the new elements or formulations gradually assimilated and transformed by the Buddhist or Vedāntic fabric of thought. This fundamental opposition between Mādhyamika and Advaita in their method of analyzing reality radically transforms any apparent similarity of


111 Ibid., p. 301.
doctrine (e.g. *māyā*). The key to understanding this transformation is the 'root metaphor' for causation upon which their respective analysis is based. This point brings us from the historical problem of Mādhyamika influence on Advaita to the problem of their philosophical relationship.
CHAPTER 5

ADVAITA AND MĀDHYAAMIKA: THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIONSHIP

The philosophical relation of Advaita to Mādhyamika has been an area of controversy at least equal to that of their historical relationship. As we noted, modern scholars have agreed as little on the relation of these two schools as their traditional predecessors. One school of thought finds Mādhyamika and Advaita 'nearly identical', with differences being merely a question of emphasis and background. Dasgupta, Stcherbatsky, Radhakrishnan, Smart and C. Sharma all subscribe to various versions of this view. On the other hand Murti declares, "I hold a contrary view altogether: that in spite of superficial similarities in form and terminology, the differences between them are deep and pervasive."\textsuperscript{112} Also included in this second category are those who insist on characterizing Mādhyamika as nihilism, or those Buddhist partisans who might characterize Vedānta as infected by views which cling to 'self' or 'substance complexes'. A structure is obviously needed before a beginning can be made on sorting out this problem, and again we might reiterate that there are no simple conclusions in this complex matter. However, by combining primarily the methods of Karl Potter\textsuperscript{113} and T.R.V. Murti,\textsuperscript{114} a basis can be laid


\textsuperscript{113}Karl Potter, Presuppositions of India's Philosophies, Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972, (1963).

for understanding both the similarities and uniqueness of each system.

The similarity of Mādhyamika and Advaita stems from a shared metaphysical framework or structure. The uniqueness of each system rests on the transformation of this structure by the 'root metaphor' for causality upon which the system is based. Thus, the method used here will be to deleniate several categories within this shared framework, namely, the absolute, world as māyā, two truths, nature of error, and demonstrate how quite distinct meanings are postulated for these categories based primarily on their analysis of the nature of causation. Many early investigators were content to draw simple parallels. While necessary to a certain extent, this procedure often reduced one system to the other. Frequently, each system has been understood through the categories of the other, as in the case of the Buddhist term advaya which has frequently been glossed as equivalent to the Vedāntic advaita. Each category or term must be seen as a working part of an entire system of thought, enabling us to draw parallels which demonstrate both uniqueness and similarity.

Both Mādhyamika and Advaita are absolutisms; ultimate reality is transcendent, free of empirical qualification and the phenomenal world as māyā is non-dual (advaita or advaya) from reality. Absolutism means here not only a unitary reality, but a particular means of establishing that unity. All dualism or plurality is denied, "not by positive arguements, but by the negation of appearance."\textsuperscript{115} This

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., p. 13.
method distinguishes Advaita from the earlier Upaniṣads which establish unity through affirmation and thus should called monism and not advaita. Monism affirms the identity of absolute and world, absolutism negates the difference between absolute and world-appearance. In agreeing on the status of absolute reality and the world, both systems use the idea of 'levels of truth' to analyze the relation between reality and appearance.

Within this common framework of absolutism and method, Mādhyamika and Advaita differ on theories of causation, the self, the nature of error, and their use of negation or dialectic. These differences in turn appropriately modify each system's understanding of the shared metaphysical framework. As philosophies or conceptual systems, Advaita and Mādhyamika are neither identical nor equivalent, but in that each system is didactic in function, their differences may be reconciled in an immediate intuition of reality (prajñā or Brahmajñāna).

While Mādhyamika and Advaita seem to make similar decisions about the relationship of reality to the world, each school is founded on a radically different tradition of analyzing reality. Mircea Eliade in writing of the task of the historian of religions states;

He applies himself to deciphering in the temporally and historically concrete the destined course of experiences that arise from an irresistible human desire to transcend time and history. All authentic religious experience implies a desperate effort to disclose the foundation of things, the ultimate reality. But all expression or conceptual formulation of such religious experience is imbedded in a historical context. Consequently, these expressions and formulations become 'historical documents'. . . .

In the case of Mādhyamika and Advaita, their respective Buddhist and orthodox traditions represent this historical context. Tradition here does not mean merely inheriting the general intellectual history of Indian philosophy, but also must be taken in the sense of 'lineage' which was discussed earlier. Thus, both philosophies view their own efforts as an attempt to 'recover' or systematically interpret the original teachings of either the Buddha or the Vedas.

Śaṅkara bases his philosophy on the Ātman tradition of the Upaniṣads. Reality is pure being, with change and particularity being mere appearances of the underlying Brahman or Ātman. Śaṅkara is concerned with interpreting Śruti and puts forth his philosophy as the most consistent formulation of the doctrine presented there. According to Śaṅkara this interpretation is not contradicted by reason and experience, but is reinforced by them. Śaṅkara begins by positing an underlying unity, cosmic ground, or 'unsubstantial' substance. As Śaṅkara puts it, "That all-knowing, all-powerful Brahman, which is the cause of the origin, subsistence, and dissolution of the world, is known from the Vedānta part of the scripture." 117 Buddhism on the other hand begins with a denial of the self, or any 'substance view of reality'. By analyzing the world and self as a continuum of momentary entities, without own-being (svabhāva), concepts such a soul, substance, universal, were found to have no objective referents.

117 G. Thibaut, trans., Vedānta-Sūtras of Bādarāyana with the Commentary by Śaṅkara, Vol. I, 1,4, p.22.
Words can only refer to other words. For the Buddhist, it is in fact belief in such entities as a permanent self which leads to suffering. The most radical use of this analysis is found in Mādhyamika where all possible entities and terms are śūnya or empty. Included in this analysis were the Hinayāna concepts of dharma, skandhas and other aggregate groups. Mādhyamika and Advaita represent in some ways the most consistent formulation of their respective traditions, as will be seen in discussing causation.

This disparity in their conception of reality and scriptural tradition again points to similarity of method, and not of metaphysical tenet. Their philosophical opposition would seem to reinforce the conclusions reached about their historical relationship. Thus, the transition from the earlier monism of the Upaniṣads to the absolutism of Advaita was produced both by the internal dynamism of the Vedāntic tradition, and the external influence of Buddhist absolutism, the Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda. Certainly the same type of conclusion must be reached for the rise of Mahāyāna absolutism out of the earlier radical pluralism of the Hinayāna schools. Despite mutual influence, it is this fundamental opposition in their analysis of reality which is central to understanding their philosophical relationship. Advaita analyses reality as Being, Mādhyamika as becoming. Their differing views on causation are the key to understanding this opposition.

---

In his book *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, Karl Potter puts forth several models toward "a fresh classification of philosophical systems." His discussion of the relation of causal chains to speculative philosophy is very useful in comparing Advaita and Mādhyamika. Potter assumes "that the problem of causation is paramount in Indian thought. The various ontologies are introduced as a way of showing the continuity of these chains." The importance of causation has also been noted by Ingalls and by Murti who states "This is the central problem in Indian philosophy. The concept of causality a system advocates exhibits the logic of the entire system."

The supreme value in Indian philosophy and religion is freedom or mokṣa. With the exception of the materialist school (Cārvāka) and the fatalists (Ajīvikas), the attainment of this goal is the focus of philosophy. Freedom means that one's self and relationships with the world are perceived in their absolute nature. The mind is free from the grasping and restrictions of ignorance, and free to act spontaneously in meeting the needs of every situation. Indian philosophy at this point asks two questions; what is the nature of the world that life can be navigated toward freedom, and how is it to be accomplished. Potter calls the two respectively speculative and path philosophy.

---


120 Daniel Ingalls, "Śaṅkara's Arguments Against the Buddhists," *Philosophy East and West*, III, No. 4, pp. 304-305.

They are closely intertwined and any decision about either will have profound effects on the other. The concern of speculative philosophy is in demonstrating the possibility and conditions of freedom. It must overcome both doubts about the possibility of complete freedom, and doubts about one's capacity to effect this possibility. Speculative philosophy then maps the relations between events such that man can enter as causal agent and influence his destiny; the causal relation must be weak enough to permit the effectiveness of man's action, and yet strong enough that events show a predictable order, thus providing a basis for attaining freedom. If the causal sequence of events is too weak we fall into chaos and skepticism that order exists, and if too strong we fall into fatalism about man's ability to control the course of events that influence him.

Perhaps the two principal causal chains in Indian philosophy, and the two with which we are concerned, are the Buddhist chain of dependent origination (pratityasamutpada) and the evolutionary scheme of the Sāmkhya school. The Buddhist chain consists of twelve links each of which gives rise to the next link. The chain begins with ignorance (avidya) which in turn causes Karmic accumulation or predispositions (samskaras), consciousness (vijnana), names and forms (namarapa), the six sense-bases (sad-ayatana), contact (sparâa), sensation (vedana), thirst or craving (tâna), clinging (upadâna), becoming (bhava), birth (jâti), and old age-death (jarâ-mârana). Old-age and death again leads to ignorance. The chain attempts to account for the condition of human life as suffering, and points to
the way out of suffering through breaking the chain at the two weak links, ignorance and craving. With wisdom (prajña) combatting ignorance, and non-attachment overcoming craving, man attains freedom.

There has been no time when this chain did not operate for each of us, and it will continue to operate until it is broken at one of the weak links. The chain is strong enough to order events, yet weak enough to allow man to influence it at the two weak points.

The other chain with which we are concerned is the evolutionary scheme of Sāmkhya. Various versions and parts of this scheme are found throughout orthodox literature, but the classical form is that given it by Īśvarakṛṣṇa. This scheme is both metaphysical and psychological as it tries to explain the existence of the manifest world and man's condition of ignorance. Two basic entities are postulated, numerous souls or selves (puruṣa) and material nature (prakṛti). By virtue of their mere existence the puruṣa's produce in the unmanifest prakṛti a series of material modifications proceeding from intellect (buddhi) to the gross elements which combine to produce the material objects of our world. The weak link in Īśvarakṛṣṇa's scheme is the relation between the puruṣas and prakṛti which can be broken. A very similar scheme is used by some of the Vedāntic philosophers with the important difference that they postulate a single origin of selves and world in Brahman. The Buddhist and Sāmkhya causal chains differ in two respects. First the Sāmkhya chain has a cosmological dimension which the Buddhist chain lacks. Second, the various modifications of prakṛti are considered to pre-
exist in the unmanifest state of prakṛti, being thus unlike the Buddhist chain in which each link merely leads to the arising of the next link. These differences give rise to opposing models for explaining the relation between the elements of the causal chain.

The causal models with which Advaita and Mādhyamika begin are exactly opposite. The basic 'root metaphor' for causation in Advaita is satkāryavāda, in Mādhyamika it is asatkāryavāda. Satkāryavāda begins by postulating a unity, asatkāryavāda by postulating diversity. While neither Advaita or Mādhyamika adhere to these causal models in a literal sense, their analysis of causation and reality is patterned after the logic which the models exhibit. While Potter assumes that "the various ontologies are introduced as a way of showing the continuity of these chains," it must be pointed out that the causal models probably were themselves based on the differing views about the nature of the self in Buddhism and Vedānta.

Satkāryavāda takes the view that the effect pre-exists in the cause. An unmanifest unity is postulated out of which the manifest world of plurality proceeds. In Sāṁkhya this unity is the material prakṛti. From prakṛti (primordial matter) issues mahat (buddhi, the great principle), from this issues āhārīkāra (I-principle); from which proceed the set of sixteen; from five of this set of sixteen proceed the five elementary substances."122 In the Mundaka Upaniṣad

---

the imperishable Brahman is the cause of all effects "As, from a well-blazing fire, sparks/By the thousand issue forth of like form/So from the imperishable, my friend, beings manifold/are produced, and thither also go." A metaphor which is commonly used by satkāryavādīs to illustrate their theory is that of milk and curds. Milk is the source or cause of curds; they are essentially the same material. In the curds milk is transformed into a solid state, but it still retains its essential nature as milk. If the potential for curds did not already exist in the milk it could not be produced. You cannot, on this model, get curds from water. Satkāryavādīs also reason that if this were not the situation, i.e. the effect pre-existing in the cause, then you could produce curds from water. In addition, the effect cannot be considered distinct from the cause because you can bring different or distinct entities into contact with each other, an impossibility in the case of milk and curds. These arguments are summed up by Īśvarakṛṣṇa in his ninth Kārika

The effect is existent; (1) because what is non-existent cannot be produced; (2) Because there is a definite relation of the cause with the effect; (3) Because all is not possible; (4) Because the efficient can do only that for which it is efficient; (5) Because the effect is of the same essence as the cause."124


While these arguments are from the Sāṃkhya school, their logic can be turned to suit the purpose of any of the satkāryavādins.

Several varieties of this theory exist in Indian philosophy, but they can be divided into two groups. There are those who believe the transformation is actual, and those who find this transformation apparent. Īśvarakṛṣṇa, Bhārtṛprapañca, and Rāmānuja represent the former (parinamavāda) with the various Advaitin philosophers holding to the latter (vivartavāda). In moving from the dualism of Sāṃkhya to the non-dualism of Advaita the logic of satkāryavāda pushes toward unification and epistemology.\footnote{Speaking here of philosophical relationships and not a historical movement from Sāṃkhya to the Vedānta systems. However, it was the Sāṃkhya which was important in developing the logic of satkāryavāda.} One of the main difficulties in the Sāṃkhya position arises from the attempt to explain how puruṣa and prakṛti enter into relationship. While all of the various components of the physical and mental worlds are derived from the primordial unity of an unmanifest prakṛti, there still remains the 'irritating dualism' of prakṛti and puruṣa. For most of the Satkāryavādins this problem was overcome by postulating Brahmam as the ultimate source of both individual souls (jīvas) and the material world. Ignorance or the condition of man's bondage in Sāṃkhya comes from the confusion of prakṛti as the puruṣa. As these two entities are in reality distinct, freedom consists in discriminating (viveka) between the two. The type of effort needed to break the causal chain is an act of knowledge.

The qualified non-dualism (Viśiṣṭādvaita) of Rāmānuja and the identity and difference (Bhedābhedavāda) philosophies of Bhāskara...
and Bhartṛprapañca represent an intermediate positions between Sāṅkhya and Advaita in the movement toward unification and epistemology. The world and souls are the effect of Brahman, but they are a real transformation of Brahman. Since the world is a real transformation our actions within it are real, and room is thus left for devotion and action as an effective means of breaking the causal chain and attaining freedom. These philosophers try to resist the movement toward making freedom a totally epistemological question, in order to preserve the importance of religious and caste duties, as well as devotion to God. The difficulty for these philosophers comes in demonstrating how the world can have contradictory properties, i.e. identity with Brahman and difference from Brahman, both of which are equally real. This view is not completely opposed to Advaita, but rather as Sarvajñatman points out "parināmavāda leads to vivartavāda which is only a step ahead of it."126

The Advaitins hold to satkāryavāda also, but theirs is a particular version called vivartavāda. The effect pre-exists in the cause but unlike parināmavāda it is considered illusory. The world (jagat) and souls (jīvas) are only apparent transformations of the underlying unity, Brahman. In Advaita the trend toward unification reaches its logical conclusion with the denial of any reality to difference and plurality. Unlike Rāmānuja or the Bhedābhedāvādins

who try to solve the problem by postulating contradictory opposites, Advaita carries the tendency towards epistemology to its logical conclusion, and makes freedom an act of supreme knowledge. The weak link in the causal chain is still the relation between unity (Brahman) and the world or plurality. The knowledge which overcomes ignorance negates the existence of difference or plurality, which are then perceived as having only illusory existence. Plurality, difference, the world, have real separate existence only in the perceptions of the deluded, they are in fact the very stuff of ignorance. With the dawn of knowledge they are perceived in their true nature as unmanifest Brahman, and thus become an 'illusory' super-imposition (adhyāsa) on Brahman. Again, knowledge is the negation of difference. The result of this tendency to 'epistemologize' is that concepts such as avidyā become identified with māyā and are forced to do double duty both as epistemological and metaphysical concepts.

What the Advaita philosopher has done is to push the satkārtyavāda causal chain to belief in ajātivāda, or no-causation when taken in an absolute sense. Freedom comes with the collapsing of the causal chain, which is in fact not a map of the world, but one of our own ignorance as it postulates difference and plurality. Knowledge reveals unity so absolute that causation no longer makes sense. Causation as an explanation of relations between illusory effects can itself only be illusory. For the Advaitin ajātivāda represents the final result of satkārtyavāda's tendency to unify the world.

Potter at this point divides Advaitins into leap philosophers and progress philosophers, leap philosophers being those who
who believe in *ajātivāda*. Progress philosophers are those who believe they can map the causal relation such that man gradually attains freedom. Leap philosophers deny the efficiency of such attempts. While this is a necessary distinction, in Advaita the difference between leap and progress philosophers is one of degree. Most Advaitins would agree to *ajātivāda* if introduced in the context of absolute truth (*paramārtha-satya*). As Śaṅkara states in discussing creation "And, finally we must remember that the scriptural doctrine of creation does not refer to the highest reality; it refers to the apparent world only, . . ." Robinson agrees in part and points out that Nāgarjuna (Potter's leap philosopher par excellence) accepts the idea of progress on the *samvāti* or empirical level. Robinson cites *Ratnāvali* Chapter 5, verses 40 to 61 to this effect.  

Gauḍapāda in his *kārikās* repeatedly denies the reality of causation or origination (*jāti* literally 'birth'), "No jīva is ever born. There does not exist any cause which can produce it. This is the highest truth that nothing is ever born." From the


130 Gauḍapāda-*kārika* III, 48.
absolute standpoint knowledge reveals this, "... Established in the Ātman, knowledge attains to the state of birthlessness and sameness, that is to say, changelessness." The world is considered an effect of Brahmān, "As non-duality is the ultimate reality, therefore duality is said to be its effect (Kārya or Bheda). ..." but it is only an illusory effect, "That which is ever-existent appears to pass into birth through illusion (māya) and not from the standpoint of reality." Šāṅkara develops and expands on these statements in his commentary, and the implications of these quotations will be drawn out in discussing the doctrine of two truths. The important point is to remember that Advaita affirms ajātivāda as a means of demonstrating the nature of the underlying substratum of existence, Brahmān.

All Buddhist philosophies follow the opposite view of causation, asatkāryavāda, which holds that the effect does not pre-exist in the cause. To quote Potter again "the satkāryavādin tends to unify the ultimate stuff of the universe, the asatkāryavādin. multiplies the number of basic entities which enter as relata into the causal relation." One criticism the asatkāryavādin makes of the satkāryavādin theory of causation is that it is simply not

---

131 Gaudapāda-Kārika III, 38.
132 Gaudapāda-Kārika III, 18.
133 Gaudapāda-Kārika III, 27.
134 K. Potter, Presuppositions . . ., p. 111.
sufficient. To say that an effect comes into being because of a single material or immaterial cause is to oversimplify the nature of causation. To make curds out of milk requires a multitude of conditions other than just milk. Time, warmth, a pot, cow, person are all necessary at some point in the production of curds. Each of the conditions required to produce that particular effect require themselves a series of conditions in order that they are produced. Thus, there is an infinite regress of cause and effect, but it is not of the 'vicious' type. The vicious type involves a whole splitting into constituent parts to explain the nature of the whole, for example the self can't be split into two parts in order to perceive itself, as this would require a further division to perceive that division, to infinity. Rather, the example of harmless infinite regress is that of seed, sprout, tree, seed going back in an infinite series. There is no contradiction in this case, at least to the Indian philosopher.

The Buddhist then multiplies the number of conditions required to produce a particular effect. The doctrines of skandhas, āyatanas, dhātus, dharmas, pratītyasamutpāda and hetupratiyāya are all concerned in some measure with diversifying what is taken to be real. The self (ātman), ego, individual as self-existent-entity, is the assumed unity which the Buddhists are trying to diversify in order to allow for the exercise of human effort in attaining freedom. There is no objective entity which corresponds to the idea of self. Upon inspection the individual finds nothing but a series of
relations between consciousness, feeling, the outer world, predispositions, perception (the skandhas). The continuity of these relations gives rise to the illusory idea of a substratum or unity which people refer as the 'self'. Existence is then an unending stream of relations or 'becoming', the perception of which through the eye of prajña gives rise to freedom.

The major problem for the satkāryavādin is "roughly that the relation be posits between cause and effect is too strong." If the world pre-exists in a universal cause, then man's situation is pre-ordained and effort on the part of man can not affect this situation. In avoiding this fatalistic attitude, many satkāryavādins made freedom an epistemological act. An early Buddhist poem complains about man's 'condition', and a theistic version of this danger in satkāryavāda. "He who has eyes can see the sickening sight;/Why does not Brahmā set his creatures right?/If his wide power no limits can restrain,/Why is his hand so rarely spread to bless?/Why are his creatures all condemned to pain?/Why does he not to all give happiness? . . . ." In rejecting this causal model, and adopting asatkāryavāda to provide a means to freedom, the Buddhist runs the danger of "fragmenting the universe so thoroughly that his efforts become unavailing because the relation between them and effects is too weak, affording no guarantee that those efforts will succeed."

---

135 Ibid., p. 110.


137 K. Potter, Presuppositions . . . , p. 111.
The *asatkāryavādin* multiplies the necessary conditions in the causal chain in order to make room for the exercise of human effort and the attainment of freedom, but he must avoid making the links in the causal chain of events too weak or he will end in chaos. This danger brings with it one of the major philosophical problems of Buddhism; how is continuity in the individual, the external world, and the process of transmigration to be explained?

While belief in transmigration may seem somewhat anomalous to many westerners, for the Indian philosopher to question belief in it, is to question the moral nature of the universe. It is an integral part of all Indian 'maps' of freedom, and was denied only by the Ājīvikas and Cārvākas who denied the possibility of freedom. Very simply, the law of karma and transmigration states that the fruits of one's action, both good and bad, are returned over a period of several lifetimes. The transmigration of the individual is used to account for the differing fates of men which are in accord with the quality of their past lives. Thus, to deny transmigration was to deny not only responsibility for one's present condition, but also the possibility of meaningful human effort which might lead to freedom. While the *satkāryavādin* believes in the self (*Ātman*) as the enjoyer of the fruits of past and present action, the Buddhist denies the self and must formulate an understanding of karma and transmigration with no entity to transmigrate or enjoy the fruits of its action.

Various models were put forth by Buddhist philosophers to show that human effort mattered and affected man's condition. These
models kept the causal chain from collapsing into skepticism. One school, the Pudgalavādins, put forth the idea of a pudgala or person. This 'person' represented a kind contingent self which although not ultimately real still transmigrated from lifetime to lifetime. This idea was, however, rejected by most of the Buddhist schools. The metaphor used in early Buddhist literature is that of a flame passing from candle to candle. The five aggregates are continually changing in this life, "at every moment we are born and die, but we continue." When the physical body dies the energies which made up the functioning of the individual do not stop, but continue to become another lifetime, just as the flame passing from candle to candle is neither the same nor different. One thought-moment conditions the next thought-moment not only during this life, but from one life to the next. In this manner the Buddhist tries to overcome the danger of making the causal chain too weak and yet uphold his view of the constituent nature of the self. The Buddhist schools varied considerably about the nature and status of the constituent elements which make up the self and the endless series of point-instants (ksanika). In the differences on this topic the tendency of asatkāryavāda to diversify can be seen pushing towards the conclusions of Mādhyamika.

The Buddhist philosopher assumes that there are no persisting substances. The world is in fact momentary and made up of a series of point-instants (Ksana-Bhaṅga-vāda). The status of these

point-instants or the elements which make them up varies among three basic positions within the Buddhist schools; these positions are typified by the Sarvāstivāda, Viññānavāda, and Madhyamika. The position of the Hīnayāna and early Buddhist schools culminates in the Sarvāstivāda abhidharma which is now found chiefly in the Abhidharma-kosa of Vasubandhu. The dharmas have proliferated to seventy-five and are taken to be real. They are the really-existing elements which constitute the nature of individual becoming, and have been given an almost ontological status. The Viññānavāda school removes the substantiality which the Sarvāstivāda gives the elements of the causal chain and makes them a merely mental phenomenon. In the metaphor of the wheel of fire (ālātacakra) the momentary flashes of fire which constitute the illusory circle are merely mental events having no externality. For Nāgārjuna the dharmas are equally as illusory as any 'substance' which appears to make up the world. The world is pratītya-samutpāda or completely interdependent to Nāgārjuna. As this interdependence is complete, causation cannot be taken to depend on dharmas which are real or mental. If dharmas were in fact real or mental (dependent on consciousness as in Viññānavāda) they would have self-existence (svabhāva), but there is no positive entity which does not depend on something else. Complete interdependence must be considered to mean that the dharmas are essentially empty in their nature along with all other conditioned phenomena. 139 Nāgārjuna

139 These three positions did not develop historically in this sequence.
states "If an element (dharma) occurs which is neither real nor non-real nor both real and non-real, how can there be a cause which is effective in this situation?" Thus there is no-thing which has the power inherent in it to cause another thing or event to arise. "Never are any existing things found to originate/From themselves, from something else, from both, or from no cause." The logic of asatkāryavāda is to diversify, to deny substance, and thus to allow man an act of knowledge (prajñā) which frees him from the notion of self. Nāgārjuna extends this logic both to the tools of analysis (dharmas, skandhas, etc.) and the world itself. Causality collapses; Nāgārjuna has driven the logic asatkāryavāda to its final conclusion, and propounds as Advaita does non-causation or ajātivāda.

The meaning of ajātivāda is interwoven with Nāgārjuna's interpretation of nirvāṇa, śūnyatā, and pratītyasamutpāda. There are three principal aspects to it, a denial of causation and origination, movement, and any substance which can have originated. They are not three distinct categories, and Nāgārjuna uses his dialectic to demolish them as aspects of ajātivāda. These aspects are shown to be self-contradictory from the paramārtha standpoint, and thus non-existent. Nāgārjuna states of causation "If there is no causal source, there is nothing to be produced nor cause-in-general (Karaṇa)./ Then neither do the producing action, the person producing, nor the

---


141 MMK I, p. 1.
instrument of production (Karana) exist."\textsuperscript{142} If causation or production is a self-contradictory concept, then movement or the process of change must also be. "That-which-already-gone-to (gatam) is not that which is 'being gone to' (gamyate); more so, 'that which is not yet gone to' (agatam) is certainly not that 'being gone to'. Also; the 'present going to' (gamyamana) without 'that which is already gone to and 'that which is not yet gone to' is not 'being gone to' (gamyate)."\textsuperscript{143} From this argument it must follow that if no production exists, and no movement through which something might be produced exists, then any entity must be non-produced and illusory. नागार्जुना pointedly states, "Those who perceive self-existence and other-existence, and an existent thing and a non-existent thing, Do not perceive the true nature of the Buddha's teaching."\textsuperscript{144}

Advaita and Madhyamika share the doctrine of अजातिवाद. Freedom is an act of knowledge in Madhyamika; again as it is in Advaita. With the development of knowledge (prajñā) the individual is able to discriminate between appearance and reality and perceive the world as emptiness (śūnyatā) and interdependent (pratītyaśūnyatā). This insight reveals the world as non-originated and non-caused. Unlike Advaita, Nāgārjuna's use of अजातिवाद is the result of the trend towards analyzing the real as diverse which is found in असत्कार्यावाद.

\textsuperscript{142} MMK VIII, 4.
\textsuperscript{143} MMK II, 1.
\textsuperscript{144} MMK XV, 6.
This brief discussion of causation in Advaita and Madhyamika while certainly not doing justice to the subtleties of either system, allows two things in comparing these systems. First, Advaita and Madhyamika both hold to \textit{ajātvāda}, but give different meanings to this theory. \textit{Ajātvāda} is the ultimate unification for Advaita; the world is non-caused because it is ultimately one. Nagarjuna holds to non-causation because the world is so diverse as to be unintelligible as caused. Here is a case where one axiom takes on different meanings when placed in different systems of thought. To overlook the context in which each philosopher uses this term and postulate simple equivalence would distort the distinctive use of \textit{ajātvāda} in each philosophical system. Because of this difference there must have appeared to Śaṅkara and his followers almost no similarity between Advaita and Madhyamika. Śaṅkara does not begin by denying causation and "reality of the work-a-day world, he was forced into this position in order to explain the unchanging and eternal and universal Brahma."\textsuperscript{145} Nagarjuna begins with a denial of causality and reality of the world, he found "no composites no wholes in the world, only constituents, and these particles existing for an atom of time."\textsuperscript{146} As Ingalls points out it is no wonder that Śaṅkara, given his position, understands Madhyamika as nihilism. Any similarity between the two schools must have seemed rather superficial to the adherents of either school, based as they were on radically different traditions.

\textsuperscript{145} Daniel H.H. Ingalls, "Śaṅkara's Arguments Against the Buddhists," \textit{Philosophy East and West}, III, No. 4, 1954, p. 304.

\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 305.
of analyzing reality. This discussion of the importance of causation for understanding the structure of Advaita and Mādhyamika can also be used to predict the relation between their similarities and differences.

The difference in causation between Mādhyamika and Advaita can be characterized in several ways. In Advaita attributes depend on the substance, or the many on the one. Mādhyamika being based on asatkāryavāda finds substance dependent on the attributes, or the one dependent on the many. As a result the problem for Advaita comes in the area of diversity, for Mādhyamika in the area of unity. Interestingly enough, these areas are historically precisely where Advaita and Mādhyamika have been criticized by philosophers of a more realistic turn. The Mādhyamikins were accused of nihilism and holding a no-reality doctrine both by orthodox Hindus and other Buddhist philosophers. They were taken to have made the links in the causal chain too weak; things caused themselves, the world could not be acted upon through human effort and thus there was no freedom which could be attained. They had in the eyes of their opponents fallen into skepticism. Advaitins on the other hand were criticized for being illusionists and relegating the world to a mere shadow. Their opponents felt they had made the causal chain too strong and had fallen into fatalism. Since the world was illusory and super-imposed on the ground of Brahman no room was left for the exercise of human effort because illusory effort can not affect an illusory world. Both Mādhyamika and Advaita were careful to point out that these accusations were untrue and took recourse to the doctrine of two truths. The
problems experienced here come about from the manner in which they used their causal chains. Their use of different causal models also influenced their conceptualization of the nature of the absolute, ignorance and error, and the knowledge which removes ignorance.

Freedom in both Mādhyamika and Advaita is an act of knowledge which reveals the real. The pre-dominant metaphor to communicate the nature of the real for Advaita is Ḍrahmān; for Mādhyamika it is śūnyatā. As both philosophies are absolutisms, these two concepts have often been taken as nearly identical. Chandradhar Sharma states, "śūnyatā is used in a double sense. It means māyā as well as Ḍrahmān." Radhakrishnan also states in reference to Nāgārjuna, "He describes his Sūnyatā almost in the very words in which the nirguṇa Ḍrahmān is characterized in the Upaniṣads." Sharma and Radhakrishnan are probably right in identifying both philosophies as absolutism, but despite similarities Ḍrahmān and śūnyatā must be carefully differentiated. As a concept Ḍrahmān is both ontological and cosmological, while śūnyatā is essentially epistemological. Śūnyatā and Ḍrahmān do occupy similar roles in that they both function as limiters. Ḍrahmān is the pivot around which all Advaita philosophy revolves; it is the nature of Ḍrahmān which defines the system. Ḍrahmān defines or limits because it stands outside the system. Śūnyatā plays a similar role in Mādhyamika but it does not stand outside the system.


and cannot because it is not ontological. Robinson states,

Like other Indian limiter concepts, emptiness is reflexive; it applies to itself as well as to others. It is self-validating, and so provides an epistemological foundation even though it does not constitute a cosmological first principle.  

Although both principles, Brahman and Śūnyatā, function as limiters in that they define the philosophical system they operate in they are not equivalent. These two concepts in fact analyze or portray the real in quite different manners. A short description of these two terms would be useful before comparing them.

Brahman is both the ground on which and the source through which the world appears. Śaṅkara defines it as follows,

That omniscient, omnipotent cause from which proceed the origin, subsistence, and dissolution of this world—which world is differentiated by names and forms, contains many agents and enjoyers, is the abode of the fruits of actions, these fruits having their definite places, times, and causes, and the nature of whose arrangement cannot even be conceived by the mind,—that cause, we say is Brahman.  

Brahman is without difference or plurality, "For all passages whose aim is to represent the nature of Brahman... teach that it is free from all difference." Brahman is "one, without a second." The entire manifold world, "with its objects of enjoyment, enjoyers, and so on has no existence apart from Brahman."  

---

149 R. Robinson, Classical Indian Philosophy, pp. 205-6.  
150 G. Thibout, trans., Vedānta-Sūtras of Bādarāyana... Vol. I, I, 1, 2, p. 16.  
unitary principle of pure being in which all subject-object distinctions are dissolved. Any and all positive characterizations of Brahman must not be thought of as limiting Brahman, for it is nirguna or without attributes. Śaṅkara in his commentary on the famous "Neti, Neti" passage in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upanisad states,

How through these two terms 'Not this, Not this' is it sought to describe the Truth of truth? By the elimination of all differences due to limiting adjuncts, the words refer to some thing that has no distinguishing mark such as name, or form, or action, or heterogenity, or species, or qualities. Words denote things through one or other of them. But Brahman has none of these distinguishing marks. Hence it cannot be described. . . .

Although Brahman is undifferentiated pure being, one of its principle 'characteristics' is creativity. Through Brahman all purality and creation comes to exist, even if illusory in an absolute sense.

"Brahman has been defined as that from which there proceed the organization, sustentation, and retraction of this world," and again Śaṅkara states "Brahman is to be acknowledged as the material cause as well as the operative cause. . . ." Śaṅkara distinguishes between nirguna Brahman and saguna Brahman, Brahman without and with


qualities. *Sāguna Brahman* is the absolute objectified and is invested with infinite creativity.

Brahman is apprehended under two forms; in the first place as qualified by limiting conditions owing to the multi-formity of the evolutions of name and form (i.e. multi-formity of the created world); in the second place as being the opposite of this, i.e. free from all limiting conditions whatever.157

The qualified or *sāguna Brahman* is identified with the Lord (Īsvara) who brings about creation through the power of māyā. "So the Lord also who is all-present, the Self of all, all-knowing and all-powerful may, although himself unmoving, move the universe. . . ." which he creates by means of "the fact of the Lord being fictitiously connected with māyā, which consists of name and form presented by Nescience."158

Knowledge or freedom is made possible because of the complete identity of *Brahman* with the self (*Ātman*). The *Ātman* is beyond space, time, and thought which are all characteristic of the manifest world. This unity can be represented only by absolute silence. This is communicated by Śaṅkara in the story of Bāhva questioning Vāshkalin about *Brahman*. "He said to him, 'Learn *Brahman*, O friend', and became silent. Then, on a second and third question, he replied, 'I am teaching you indeed, but you do not understand. 'Silent is that Self!"159

---

Freedom is attained when the apparent difference between Brahman and the Self is removed, "He who knows that supreme Brahma becomes very Brahma." The individual might characterize this knowledge as sacchidananda, or pure being (sat)—the ontological ground on which existence rests, pure awareness (chit)—which witnesses and illumines all activity and existence, and bliss (ananda)—the submerging of all individual partial values in absolute value. Knowledge and freedom then consist of the realization of the identity of Brahman with the Atman, self and world are perceived in their absolute nature.

From this discussion of Brahman the application of Potter's model becomes clear. Satkāryavādins declare the one to be more real than the many, and thus unify the nature of the real. Brahman is the prime example in Indian philosophy of this unifying tendency. The causal chain of satkāryavāda also predicts or demands that Brahman be understood as ontological and cosmological. Since effects are understood as pre-existing in the cause, the world and individual selves (jīvas) must be understood as resting on or dependent on a ground of existence. Brahman as pure being is both this 'ground', and a first cause of creation. The relation between Brahman and the world will be discussed in more detail later.


Brahman is fairly straightforward as an intellectual concept. Śūnyatā is not so easily understood. The storm of controversy which has raged over Mādhyamika, invariably focuses on the meaning of Śūnyatā. Thus the Vijnānnavādins thought Nāgārjuna carried Śūnyatā to an extreme position, and the Mādhyamikas were dismissed as nihilists by Śāmkara. However, by relating Śūnyatā to asatkāryavāda, Śūnyatā can be seen as essentially an epistemological concept which tries to avoid the opposite ontological categories of eternalism and nihilism.

As previously stated, asatkāryavāda holds that the effect does not pre-exist in the cause. The one is dependent on the many, and the real is conceived of as plural. Asatkāryavāda diversifies the nature of reality and breaks down substance into parts, as it is the appearance of substance which obscures our vision of reality. This "root metaphor" for causality necessarily solves the problem of freedom in an act of knowledge which finds substance empty (śunya). Śūnyatā is thus epistemological, and is used by Nāgārjuna, as was already pointed out, to demolish the causal chain on which it is based.

Śūnyatā is a radical denial of substance or essence (svabhava) as having any reality. Unlike the philosophies which he attacks, Nāgārjuna tries to deny the possibility of having any ontology, whether it be positive or negative. "'It is' is a notion of eternity. 'It is not' is a nihilistic view. Therefore, one who is wise does not have recourse to 'being' or 'non-being'."¹⁶² Nāgārjuna

¹⁶² MMK, 15, 10, p. 200.
therefore not only denies the possibility of an eternal unity or self, but demonstrates that the dharmas of the Sarvāstivādins and Vaibhāṣikas are empty. Nāgārjuna redefines here one of the basic categories of Buddhist thought.

Knowledge of the dharmas or factors-of-existence was quite important in early Buddhism because it was this knowledge which allowed man to penetrate into the process of becoming (samsāra or pratītyasamutpāda) and attain release. Nāgārjuna does not deny the Abhidharma framework altogether, but relegates it to the level of conventional (samvṛti) truth. Many of the earlier schools understood dharmas as non-substantial essences (bhāva), which existed only for an instant. The dharmas preserved their identity in spite of their impermanence or momentary character. The Hinayāna monk spent considerable effort studying the characteristics and interrelationships of the dharmas which were taken to be real existing entities even though non-substantial. However, in the Mahāyāna tradition both parts and whole are taken to be empty, and the dharmas as real constituent elements were rejected. So it says in the Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā, "He should contemplate form, etc., as empty. But he should contemplate that with an undisturbed series of thoughts in such a way that, when he contemplates the fact that 'form, etc., is empty', he does not regard that true nature of dharmas (i.e. emptiness) as something which, as a result of its own true nature (i.e. emptiness) is a real entity."\textsuperscript{163} or again

\textsuperscript{163}E. Conze, trans., Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā, Calcutta: Published by the Asiatic Society, 1958, p. 143.
"if he considers them with the conviction that all dharmas are fabricated by thought construction, unborn, not come forth, not come, not gone. . . ." 164

Nāgārjuna's contribution was the systematic destruction of these categories by demonstrating their self-contradictory nature. The three groups of dharmas that Nāgārjuna deals with are the āyatanas, skandhas, and dhatus. The original intent of the āyatanas was to provide an understanding of the cognitive process which did not require a self or agent. The āyatanas consist of the six senses, sight, touch, hearing, smell, taste, and mind and their corresponding sense fields which when taken together produce cognition. Nāgārjuna points out that this scheme is an inadequate answer to the problem of cognition. "Certainly vision does not in any way see its own self. Now if it does not see its own self, how can it possibly see something else." 165 Nāgārjuna argues that the notion of a 'seer', the 'faculty of vision' and 'what is seen' are all interdependent concepts and from the absolute standpoint are unintelligible. The independent reality of the skandhas is also denied. Originally the intent of the skandhas was to give an account of mental and physical phenomena without recourse to the idea of a self (atman). Nāgārjuna denies the independent reality of the skandhas by demonstrating the impossibility of causal relations among them. The form of his arguments can

164 Ibid., p. 52.
165 MMK, III, 2, p. 187.
166 See MMK, III, 1-6, p. 187.
be seen in the first verses of Chapter four, "(1) Visable form (rupa) is not perceived without the basic cause of visable form (rupakarana); 
Likewise the basic cause of visable form does not appear without the visable form./(2) If the visable form existed apart from its basic cause, it would logically follow that visable form is without cause; 
But there is nothing any where [arising] without cause." Nagarjuna thus demonstrates the interdependence of the skandhas which can not therefore be taken as existing independently. The dhatus next receive Nagarjuna's attention. Traditionally they were considered the 'irreducible elements' which are the ultimate components of existence. Against the dhatus Nagarjuna uses the argument of inter­dependence between the dhatu and its defining characteristic. He states "Space (akasa) does not exist at all before the defining characteristic of space (akasalaksana)./If it would exist before the defining characteristic, then one must falsely conclude that there would be something without a defining characteristic." Nagarjuna's argument here is difficult, he certainly does not mean that the object, space, has objective existence because we define or name it. Rather it seems to be a rejection of our ability to grasp the true nature of space through a defining characteristic which is neither the same nor different from space. "Therefore space is neither an existing thing nor a non-existing thing." The dhatus can not be under-

168 MMK, V, 1, p. 188.
169 MMK, V, 7, p. 188.
stood as really existing antities, they are in their true nature empty. The Hinayāna schools held the doctrine of nairatmya or soullessness, the Mahāyāna extended this lack of substance to the dharmas and held dharmairatmya or the emptiness of both self and dharmas. This position was systematically developed by Nāgārjuna as part of his re-interpretation of pratītyasamutpāda.

Since self and dharmas in their absolute nature lack svabhāva and are empty, śūnyatā is identified by Nāgārjuna as the true meaning of pratītyasamutpāda. Nāgārjuna states "(18) The 'originating' dependently we call 'emptiness',/This apprehension, i.e., taking into account [all other things], is the understanding of the middle way./ (19) Since there is no dharma whatever originating independently,/ No dharma whatever exists which is not empty." Originally pratītyasamutpāda had been used to express the reasons for man's suffering (duḥkha) and his continued existence on the wheel of rebirth (samsāra). The links between the elements of the twelve-fold chain were considered real and their interrelationship a causal sequence with no beginning. A simple cause and effect process was not meant, but rather a mutually conditioned co-arising. From his position of ajātivāda or no-origination, Nāgārjuna attacks the notion of causality in refuting the Hinayanists interpretation of pratītyasamutpāda. Nāgārjuna regards the Hinayāna conception of causality as true from

170 MMK, XXIV, 18, 19, p. 213.
the conventional (saṃsvṛti) standpoint but not from the absolute (paramārtha) viewpoint. The earlier view was helpful in demonstrating the absence of self, but it obscured the truth of dharma-nairatmya. By demonstrating the interdependence of cause and effect, Nāgārjuna denies the self-existence of any entity. "Fire does not exist in relation to kindling; and fire does not exist unrelated to kindling..." Though this and other arguments against the notion of causation, Nāgārjuna prepares the way for his identification of pratītyasamutpāda with emptiness.

Pratītyasamutpāda is the total interdependence of all phenomena. All phenomena, dharmaś, and causation lack self-existence because they arise in dependent co-origination and all things arise co-dependently because they are empty of self-existence. To perceive the truth of pratītyasamutpāda is to perceive the truth of emptiness. Because the world is totally interdependent and empty, Nāgārjuna likens it to māyā. "Desires, actions, bodies, producers, and products/Are like a fairy castle, resembling a mirage, a dream."173

The question then arises—is the nature of reality a mere nothingness? Nāgārjuna answers with an emphatic no!174 While the world, selves, and even the Buddha may have emptiness as their nature,

171 MMK, I, 1, p. 222.
172 MMK, X, 12, p. 195.
173 MMK, XVII, 33, p. 203.
174 See MMK, XV, 10, p. 200 already quoted.
this emptiness is only realized from an absolute standpoint (paramārtha satya). To realize nirvāṇa is to perceive the truth of śūnyatā, thus to Nāgārjuna's way of thinking, without the emptiness of all things freedom would not be possible." When 'emptiness 'works', then everything in existence 'works'. If emptiness does not 'work', then all existence does not 'work'." If the world was eternal the causal relation (to return to Potter's model) would be too strong to allow freedom, if non-eternal it would be too weak. Śūnyatā is the middle path which avoids both these extreme views, but is not itself a viewpoint. "Emptiness is proclaimed by the victorious one as the refutation of all viewpoints; But those who hold 'emptiness' as a viewpoint--[the true perceivers] have called those 'incurable' (asādhyya).  

Śūnyatā exists as a radical critique of conceptual categories which by definition posit the self-existence (svabhāva) of things or real relations (causality) among them. The insight of prajñā dissolves these conceptual categories by realizing the emptiness of all conditioned phenomena. For this reason Śūnyatā cannot be taken as another view, as this would only impose another mental fabrication (vikalpa) on reality. Śūnyatā is itself empty (śūnya-śūnyatā). Robinson's comments in Early Madhyamika are pertinent here, "Emptiness is not a term outside the expressional system, but is simply the key term within it. Those who would hypostatize emptiness are confusing the symbol system with the fact system. No metaphysical fact whatever can be established

175 MMK, XXIV, 14, p. 213.
176 MMK, XIII, 8, p. 198.
from the facts of language." It is precisely because सून्यता exists within the 'symbol system' that it can function as a prescriptive for man's ignorance. नागर्जुन states, "Just as a magically formed phantom could deny a phantom created by its own magic, just so would be that negation." सून्यता is an empty term used to point out the emptiness of all other terms.

The difficulty here is that paramārtha or the absolute nature of reality cannot be communicated in words. The inherent duality of language makes it inapplicable to the transcendent nature of the paramārtha standpoint. We have seen that the asatkāryavādin has trouble explaining the apparent lack of unity in his philosophy. The Mādhyamika philosophers inherited this problem in full force and were often termed nihilists. Having negated the idea of an ontological ground, and having collapsed the diverse reality of the Hīnayānists, how are they to indicate the nature of the absolute without falling into either of these categories? Thus in spite of the fact that words can never apply to paramārtha in an absolute sense, the Mādhyamikas have never denied the usefulness of language to indicate the nature of the problem and the path to freedom.

Three different methods are used to indicate the nature of the absolute. Negation is used to deny the possibility of any attribute to the absolute which is beyond words.

---


"'Not caused by something else', 'peaceful', 'not elaborated by discursive thought',/ 'Indeterminate', 'undifferentiated': such are the characteristics of the reality (tattva)." Secondly, opposite qualities or attributes are ascribed to it, or rejected. Thus Nāgārjuna states. "All things prevail for him for whom emptiness prevails;/Nothing whatever prevails for him for whom emptiness prevails." Paramārtha may be identified with both svabhāva and śūnyatā as another example. The last method identifies śūnyatā with any one of a number of metaphors. Tattva, dharma, tathā, pratītyasamutpāda, bodhi and others are all used in this manner. This last technique should not be understood as an ontologizing of śūnyatā, but rather an identification almost forced on Mādhyamika by the logic of their position in order to deny the false view of nihilism. These metaphors when identified with śūnyatā have, however, led many scholars to emphasize the similarity of Advaita and Mādhyamika.

In considering both the Advaita and Mādhyamika view of the absolute, substantial differences have been demonstrated. They grow out of an opposed tradition on the nature of the self and causation. These two differences lead Advaita to conceive the absolute as an ontological ground and cosmological first principle, and Mādhyamika to analyze the real in an epistemological manner, denying ontology. This view of the relation between Advaita and Mādhyamika parallels that of T.R.V.

179 MMK, XVIII, 9.
180 F. Streng, Trans., Vigraha-vārvānti, verse 70 in Emptiness . . .
Murti who juxtaposes ontology and epistemology to point out differences between these two systems. Murti further states, "It is my contention that there could not be acceptance of any doctrinal content by either side from the other as each had a totally different background of traditions and conception of reality." The implication is that similarities are of technique and not tenet. While probably historically true, the problem is not so clear-cut philosophically, and we have already noted the use, admittedly rare, of Vedāntic metaphors in Mahāyāna (not necessarily Nāgārjuna here). The line between technique and tenet is easily blurred. Even Murti seems to waver, "they differ ... possibly with regard to that entity with which they identify the absolute. In the actual state of the absolute they may be identical." Murti seems to imply here that the differences are a question of conceptual or linguistic usage. Certainly it is difficult to conceive of two absolutes, and thus there has been a corresponding tendency among scholars to identify one of these systems with the other. Note Sharma again, "śūnya ... means māyā as well as Brahman," and Murti, "śūnyatā represents the form of all absolutism."

There are similarities in the Advaita and Mādhyamika conceptions of the absolute. Both conceive the absolute as being transcendent, beyond language, and any empirical qualification. The relation of the

---

182 T.R.V. Murti, Samvrti and Paramārtha. ..., p. 10
184 C. Sharma, A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy, p. 320.
absolute to the world is non-dual (advaita and advaya) in both systems, and constitutes the reality which the samvrti world of appearance obscures. However, advaya and advaita have different meanings. Advaita refers to the non-dual relation between the underlying substratum of Brahman and the apparent differences of world and souls (jīvas). Advaya is perhaps better translated as non-two and represents steering a middle path between the two extreme views of eternalism and nihilism. They are structured by the ontological or epistemological orientation of the system in which they operate. Freedom in both systems is the direct realization of this 'non-dual' relation, or as Nāgārjuna puts it, 'There is nothing whatever which differentiates samsāra from nirvāna; and there is nothing whatever which differentiates nirvāna from samsāra.'

As soon as Brahman is indicated in this way, knowledge arising of itself discards Nescience, and this whole world of names and forms, which had been hiding Brahman from us, melts away like the imagery of a dream.

In this state essence and existence may be said to coincide. The difference between appearance and reality gives rise to a theory of two truths in both philosophies. This theory is used to point out the nature of the negation of a world which has only illusory status (māyā).

---

186 MMK, XXV, 19, p. 217.

187 G. Thibant, trans., Vedānta-Sūtras . . ., III, 2, 21, p. 163.
The attributes of *śūnyatā* and *Brahman* are very similar, although *Brahman* is also considered one and eternal. This difference however is "largely verbal inasmuch as everlasting manifested duration and numerical oneness are not intended in either case." 188

Murti is right in finding that Advaita and Mādhyamika differ in their approach to the absolute, one being ontological, the other epistemological; but this difference cannot extend to the absolute itself. The difference between epistemology and ontology presupposes distinctions between the knower, act of knowing, and object known, that are necessarily overcome in the transcendent realm of the absolute. Such distinctions belong to the world of empirical truth (*samvrtisatya*). 189

On the level of *paramārtha* to change our perception is to change the objects themselves. There can be no dichotomy between being and knowing for freedom to be possible. For this reason Mādhyamika finds it necessary to identify emptiness with reality (*tattva*) or 'things as they really are' (*tathatā*), and Advaita dissolves the knowing faculty in *Brahman*. "He who knows *Brahman* becomes *Brahman,*" 190 as Śaṅkara states.

Murti suggests a model which is of some help. A circle has many radii which approach the center from different directions, yet all arrive at the same center or goal. 191 Differences are absorbed or


190 G. Thibant, trans., *Vedānta-Sūtras ...* Vol. 1, I, 1,4, p. 31.

dissolved in the realization of ultimate reality. To extrapolate from
the Buddha's metaphor, no matter what kind of raft you have, it is
left behind once you reach the other shore. Yet the radii are quite
distinct, and must be seen as such. This model allows us to take
into account differences in the philosophies, and their resulting views
of the path to release.

While this model is useful in comparing Madhyamika and Advaita,
it cannot be loosely extended to all systems of Indian philosophy. Some
schools had quite different conceptions of freedom, particularly those
of a more realist turn, e.g. Sāmkhya, Hīnayāna etc. Nāgārjuna and
Śaṅkara did not 'push' the logic of their causal models to final
conclusions merely out of a need to be philosophically consistent, but
rather to demonstrate a vision of freedom more complete than their
dualist opponents. Advaita and Madhyamika make similar decisions
about the nature of reality which are then mapped out in terms of their
respective traditions. Both schools expended much energy refuting
dualist or more realistic schools, precisely because all conceptions of
freedom are not equivalent.

Advaita and Madhyamika are both absolutisms and introduce a
distinction between appearance and reality, or the world and its
absolute nature. The world is an 'illusion' for this reason and is
considered māyā by both systems. Māyā indicates a "no-mans land of
ontology," a realm of existence which exists contingently but not
absolutely. For this reason both Śaṅkara and Nāgārjuna describe its

---

nature as being neither real nor unreal. However, their use of the term mahāyāna differs radically as to its source and nature. The term has a complex history, and only the major differences between Advaita and Madhyamika can be indicated here.  

The term mahāyāna has a long history in Indian thought, being found as a key term in the Indian world-outlook from the time of the Vedas down to the present. For this reason a variety of interpretations exist, not all of which are necessarily in accord with the Vedāntic and Mahāyāna Buddhist view of the world-as-illusion. There exists, however, a core meaning which is developed in a variety of ways depending on the context. Jan Gonda paraphrases this meaning, "incomprehensible wisdom and power enabling its possessor, or being able itself, to create, devise, contrive, effect, or do something."  

Mayā is translated with difficulty because of its multivalence of "ideas and connotations." It has "an aspect on the side of the māyin--(the wielder), viz. his power, and an aspect on the side of the spectator, viz. the incomprehensibility of this power. Further there is the power itself, the process of wielding it and the result." All of these varied meanings are covered by the same term. The first aspect referring to the possessor of māyā is expressed in this verse from the Gītā, "Tho unborn, tho My self is eternal./ Tho Lord of Beings,/Resorting to My own material

193 Especially true for Advaita where controversy continued for centuries over the nature and locus (aśraya) of māyā.


195 Ibid., p. 171.
nature \( (prakṛti) \)/I come into being by My own mysterious power \( (māyā) \)."\(^{196}\)

This wonderful power when viewed by the spectator is 'wonderful, incomprehensible', and has the power to delude. The *Maitri Upaniṣad* says of this condition in the individual, "like one bitten by a great snake--bitten by objects of sense; like gross darkness--the darkness of passion; like jugglery \((indrajāla)\)--consisting of illusion \( (māyā-maya) \); like a dream-falsely apparent; like the pith of a banana-tree--unsubstantial; like an actor--in temporary dress; like a painted scene--falsely delighting the mind."\(^{197}\) Both of these aspects exist in Mādhyamika and Advaita, but adapted to their philosophical structures.

Advaita proposes God as the source or wielder of \( māyā \); creation is the projection \((srṣṭi)\) of \( māyā \), or the phenomenal world by the creator. This projection takes place on the ground of \( nirguṇa Brahman \). God \((Īśvara)\) is called \( saguṇa Brahman \) or Brahman-with-qualities which places him with one foot in the absolute, and the other in the phenomenal world as a link between the two. The arising of the finite out of the infinite is accountable to the wonderful power of the Lord's \( māyā \). This view is in keeping with the *satkāryavāda* causal model, which posits a primal unity out of which all effects or particulars arise.

Śamkara states, "Sometimes it is spoken of as \( Māyā \), illusion; so for instance [Sve. Up. IV, 10], ;Know then Prakṛti is \( Māyā \), and the great Lord he who is affected with \( māyā \). For \( Māyā \) is properly called undeveloped or non-manifested since it cannot be defined either as that


\(^{197}\)R. Hume, Trans., *Maitri Upanisad IV, 2* in *The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads*. 
which is or that which is not."\textsuperscript{198}

While this first aspect of \textit{māyā} might be termed its positive side, the negative side is found in its power to delude. In Advaita \textit{avidyā} is often identified with \textit{māyā}, much as \textit{Ātman} is with \textit{Brahman}. The exact nature of the relation between the two is rather elusive, but \textit{avidyā} seems to be an individual epistemological correlate of the cosmological \textit{māyā}. Both account for the perception of plurality which covers and obscures the unity of \textit{Brahman}, but in different frames of reference. "For that causal potentiality is of the nature Nescience."\textsuperscript{199}

Because of its nature as \textit{māyā}, creation is only an apparent (\textit{vivarta}) transformation of \textit{Brahman}. The world is ultimately unreal and false (\textit{jagan mithyā}). Śāṅkara does not mean by this falseness, that the world is a complete non-entity. He is a realist as far as our everyday experience goes, and for some later Advaitins \textit{māyā} becomes almost a real, positive substance. The status of the world as \textit{māyā} will be further developed in discussing the doctrine of two truths.

The \textit{Tathāgata} in Mahāyāna plays a somewhat similar role to \textit{Īśvara} in Vedānta, in that both are bridges between the absolute and phenomenal worlds. Like \textit{Īśvara} or \textit{saguna Brahman} the \textit{Tathāgata} is conceived of as possessing \textit{māyā}, through which the tathāgata descends or projects himself into the world in order to save all beings.\textsuperscript{200}


\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., Vol. 1, I, 4, 3, p. 243.

\textsuperscript{200} See Jan Gonda, \textit{Continuity and Change in Indian Religion}, p. 177.
The Tathāgata, however, does not create, sustain or have the other cosmological functions of Isvara in Vedānta. The relation of mayā to Isvara and the Tathāgata is in keeping with the general ontological and epistemological orientations of the two schools.

Mayā is also used in Buddhism as synonym for man's confusion or ignorance. In early Buddhism mayā referred to the delusive power of illusion by which the self appears as a separate reality. Nāgārjuna extends this illusive power to the phenomenal world as well. In Mādhyamika the world is mayā because it is empty (śūnyā), and equal to pratītyasamutpāda. The arising of phenomena in dependent co-origination is the cause of everything, with one phantom following another.

Nāgārjuna states, "(32) Just so the 'one who forms' is himself being formed magically; and the act performed by him/Is like a magical form being formed by another magical form./(33) Desires, actions, bodies, producers, and products/Are like a fairy castle, resembling a mirage, a dream." If a Vedāntist were to ask if it was not Isvara that produced the first phantom, the Mādhyamika philosopher would reply that the metaphor breaks down at this point. Again the causal chain applies, as Nāgārjuna's interpretation of the nature of mayā results from the ultimate diversity (pratītyasamutpāda and śūnyatā) of existence. Like Advaita, Mādhyamika does not deny the existence of the world, but carefully defines its status as mayā by recourse to the doctrine of 'two truths'.

201 MMK, XVII, 32, 33, p. 203.
The central philosophical tool by which both Mādhyamika and Advaita analyze the relationship between reality and appearance (māyā) is the doctrine of two truths. The importance of this doctrine cannot be underestimated; or in the words of Nāgārjuna,

(8) The teachings by the Buddhas of the dharma has recourse to two truths: The world ensensed truth and the truth which is the highest sense. (9) Those who do not know the distribution (vibhāgam) of the two kinds of truth. Do not know the profound 'point' (tattva) in the teaching of the Buddha.202

Advaita and Mādhyamika seem to agree on the nature of samvṛti and paramārtha when taken individually, but they disagree on the nature of the relationship between the two. The method of analysis which each system uses would again seem to be related to the causal model which they use. Before going into these differences discussion of common ground would be helpful.

Paramārtha and samvṛti or vyāvahārīka, do not have two different realms to which they apply. If this situation were true there would be two equally real worlds. In fact there is only one truth, the paramārthasatya, which is obscured by our perception of an 'everyday world'. The paramārtha when realized removes this 'covering' from our perception. Advaita and Mādhyamika agree that it is this knowledge alone which gives man access to freedom. While paramārtha is only revealed by the removing of samvṛti, this doesn't mean we can

202 MMK, XXIV, 8, 9.
dispense with *samvrti*. We must retain the everyday world if we are to consider *paramartha*. *Samvrti* is the means to the absolute end of *paramartha*.

As the basis for man's realization of the absolute, the status of *vyavahārika* cannot be a complete negation. Both Advaitins and Mādhyamikins "must endow empirical unreality with more being than nothing, and less being than" the absolute. For this reason both Nāgārjuna and Śāṅkara describe the world of *samvrti* or *vyavahārika* as being neither real or unreal. Nāgārjuna comments,

> In 'The Instruction of Kātyāyana' both 'it is' and 'it is not' are opposed/By the Glorious One, who has ascertained the meaning of 'existent' and 'non-existent'.

and Śāṅkara again states "For *Māyā* is properly called undeveloped or non-manifested since it cannot be defined either as that which is or that which is not." If the world were absolutely real, both philosophers would be dualists, if unreal there would be no basis for attaining freedom. Both identify the *samvrti* world as *māyā* or appearance, which is, to use Śāṅkara's term, *anirvacaniya* or indescribable.

The world of *samvrti* owes its existence to primal ignorance. The differences in the nature and source of this ignorance between

---


204 MMK, XV, 7, p. 200.

Mādhyamika and Advaita are much the same as noted in our discussion of māyā. As ignorance and māyā are often used synonymously in both systems this discussion need not be repeated. Both systems do agree that samvṛti obscures or hides the true nature of things. Samvṛti does not mean phenomena as such, but our perception of objects as self-existent entities. In Advaita this self-existence refers to perception of the world as separate from Brahman, in Mādhyamika the perception of svabhāva in what is really phenomenal becoming (pratītyasamutpāda). It means for both the world infested with duality. Samvṛti thus includes the entire world of language and intellect which depend on a duality of language and its object or knower and known. Samvṛti is simply the world of everyday knowledge, life, business, language, desires and activity. While empirically valid it is dissolved with the dawning of knowledge in paramārthasatya.

From the standpoint of paramārtha, reality is respectively śūnyatā or Brahman, thus we can apply the previous descriptions of these two terms to paramārtha. Only paramārtha is capable of making sense of the world, samvṛti as ignorance is not. Questions such as, What is samvṛti? Whose is it? Are from the paramārtha standpoint unaskable because only emptiness or Brahman has status as reality; and from the samvṛti view ignorance cannot illumine ignorance. It is important here to remember that paramārtha is co-terminus with samvṛti. Nāgārjuna states, “The extreme limit (koṭi) of nirvāṇa is also the

---

206 Some post-Śaṅkara Advaitins differentiated the two, and it is perhaps best to understand the two terms as overlapping rather than identical.
112

extreme limit of existence-in-flux (samsāra); there is not the slightest bit of difference between these two." When we said that knowledge of paramārtha is transcendent, we do not mean that it is 'wholly other' or transcendent in Rudolph Otto's sense of the word. Rather, paramārtha is transcendent because it is beyond the limitations of the world perceived empirically, as samvṛti.

Paramārtha in each system is calm, blissful, "How, then, will . . . the tetralemma apply to bliss (śānta)" and "the bliss of Brahmān is . . . absolutely supreme," beyond thought, "If I would make any proposition whatever, then by that I would have a logical error;/But I do not make a proposition; therefore I am not in error," and Śamkara, "Brahmān has none of these distinguishing marks, hence it cannot be described. . . ." and without plurality.

The doctrine of two truths is at the very heart of what Murti has called absolutism as opposed to monism. Paramārtha is established by negating samvṛti. The samvṛti, being neither real nor unreal, cannot be called identical with the real; it can only be non-different. Madhyamika uses advayavāda to explain this negation, and Advaita as its name states advaitavāda.

---

207 MMK, XXV, 20, p. 207.
209 G. Thibaut, trans., Vedānta-Sūtras . . . , 1, 15, p. 67.
210 F. Streng, trans., Vigrahavyāvartani, verse 29 in Emptiness, p. 224.
211 Swāmī Mādhavananda, trans., The Brhadārāngaka Upanād . . . II, 3, 6, p. 354.
The manner of formulating negation differs between Madhyamika and Advaita. This difference is in accord with their epistemological and ontological orientations. Vedānta actually uses three levels of truth, pratibhasika, vyāvahārika, and paramārtha in negating appearance. Pratibhasika represents the completely illusory, as opposed to the empirical unreality of vyāvahārika. The relation between these two levels is then extended to the relation between vyāvahārika and paramārtha. The most well-known analogy used to illustrate this relation is that of the 'rope and the snake'. Pratibhasika occurs when one is "simply mistaken about what one is relating with (mainly to the extent that it is incapable of responding to one in the manner assumed)." The rope, taken to be a snake in the twilight, does not have the attributes of a snake in reality. The existence of the snake is illusory. Pratibhasika is a personal illusion; hallucinations and dreams are included in it, as well as faulty cognition. The super-imposition (adhyāsa) of the snake upon the rope is sublated (bādha) when upon closer examination the 'snake' is found to be a rope. The pratibhasika is sublated by the vyāvahārika.

Two key terms of Śaṅkara's philosophy are used here, adhyāsa and bādha, both of which are extended by analogy from the above relation to that between vyāvahārika and paramārtha. Adhyāsa in a sense represents the mechanics of avidyā, "But what are we to understand by the term 'super-imposition'--The apparent presentation, in:

the form of remembrance, to consciousness of something previously observed, in some other thing." Thus the memory of a snake was superimposed on the rope, and caused the snake to be perceived again. Robinson notes that the use of *adhyāsa* here is very similar to its synonyms in Mādhyamika, *adhyāropa* and *samāropa*. While to an unknown extent this usage may represent Buddhist influence, *adhyāsa* seems to be another pan-philosophical concept which occurs in numerous contexts. A similar definition with memory as a cardinal factor is found in Vyāsa's commentary on the *Yoga-Sūtras*. Note here that the Advaitic usage of super-imposition requires a ground for the snake to be super-imposed upon. In a like manner *māyā* or *vyāvahārika* is super-imposed upon the ultimate *Brahman*. The *vyāvahārika* which sublates the *pratibhāsīka*, is in turn sublated by *paramārtha*. However, the *vyāvahārika* is an *illusion*, as opposed to the delusion of the *pratibhāsīka*. *Vyāvahārika* is public, and empirical as opposed to the individual nature of *pratibhāsīka*. *Bādha* or sublation is "the mental process whereby one disvalues some previously appraised object or content of consciousness because of its being contradicted by a new experience." In the case of the snake, it was sublated when a new experience revealed it to be a rope. Sublation can exist in many contexts in the empirical world.

---

The process of learning can be characterized in this manner, where knowledge is constantly modified by new practical, intellectual, or spiritual experience. The super-imposition of māyā, or vyāvahārika, on the ground of Brahman is sublated when the individual attains Brahmajñāna.

For as long as something else remains a desire is possible; but there is nothing else which could be desired in addition to the absolute unity of Brahman. . . . there is no other kind of knowledge by which it could be sublated.218

Brahman is considered the ultimate ground because it cannot be sublated by any other experience and because knowledge of Brahman illumines all other experience. Adhyāśa is equated with ignorance by Śaṅkara, bādha is the act of removing that ignorance.

There is an interesting Indian folk-tale which humorously illustrates the dangers of misunderstanding the status of vyāvahārika and māyā. It seems that a student of a local religious teacher and knower of reality was wandering down the road one day, thinking to himself, "I am that, all this is that, the world is false etc." Down the road came a runaway elephant with a driver on top shouting for all to get out of the way. Well, the student continued to think, "The elephant and I are non-different, how should I be afraid of my own self?" Needless to say he was run down, and somewhat bruised and perplexed returned to ask his teacher what he had done wrong. The

217 Elliot Deutsch, Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction, p. 15.

218 G. Thibaut, trans., Vedānta-Sūtras . . ., II, 1, 14, p. 326.
teacher answered "And why didn't you listen to God in the form of the elephant driver telling you to get out of the way?" The moral being that the unity of Brahman with perception of the world as maya has validity only when directly realized, not when based on thought or mood-making.

The relation posited here between reality and appearance is in keeping with the ontological framework of Advaita. The emphasis is on the thing known; when that object is universal and devoid of difference (bheda), then freedom is attained. The 'this' in the phrase 'this is a snake' is the real. When the snake is seen as non-different from the 'this' (Brahman), then freedom is gained. The nature of error in Advaita is in the perception of difference.

Vijnanavada presents an interesting contrast with Advaita. Instead of false super-imposition on a real ground, the error for Vijnanavada lies in thinking that ideas or objects are independent of consciousness. In the phrase 'this is a snake' the 'snake' is real as an idea, but its supposed externality to consciousness as 'this' is unreal. An object if objectified is falsely constructed (parikalpita); consciousness is the real constructor of an unreal object. Vijnanavada, although an absolutism like Advaita and Madhyamika, posits the nature of error to be the objectification of experience.

Both Advaita and Vijnānavāda start with a real which serves as a ground for illusion, and using an empirical illusion, extend it to the world illusion. Mādhyamika avoids positing an ultimate ground, and begins directly with analysis of the world illusion, although they too recognize a false samvṛti (mithyā samvṛti). Many elements which are included in the Advaita analysis—God, souls, creation, the locus of māyā—are problems which don't exist for the Mādhyamika philosopher due to the epistemological framework of his philosophy. When Mādhyamika negates samvṛti, it negates the conceptualist tendency. The absolute represents the extinction of all views (dṛṣṭi), while samvṛti is the "total and persistent conflict of reason." Nāgārjuna remarks,

When the domain of thought has been dissipated, 'that which can be stated' is dissipated. Those things which are unoriginated and not terminated, like nirvāṇa, constitute the Truth (dharmatā).

The Mādhyamikin takes the existing views and philosophies and the worlds which they construct, to be the nature of error. No view can characterize the real, and for this reason opposing theories such as eternalism and nihilism are rejected by Nāgārjuna as inapplicable. This points again to an important difference between Mādhyamika and Advaita which we have already noted. Non-duality (aadvaya) is the absence of extreme or opposing views in Mādhyamika, which is the basis of the non-difference

---

220 Ibid., p. 218.

221 MMK, XVIII, 7, p. 204.
of samvrti and paramārtha standpoints. In Advaita non-duality is lack of difference in a universal entity. To return to the phrase "this is a snake", in Mādhyamika both terms are empty, in Advaita one term is the basis for the other.

In Advaita and Mādhyamika the nature of error on which samvrti is based has been found to be quite different. This difference brings out a further distinction in the use of negation and dialectic. For the Mādhyamika philosopher dialectic or negation is philosophy. Dialectic in Mādhyamika attempts the refutation of all views through reductio ad absurdum (prasānga) arguments which point out the self-contradictory nature of all 'views' of reality. Advaita uses negation (neti, neti) to refute the error of difference or plurality which hides the substratum of the real. This difference holds even though Advaitin philosophers use the 'tetralemma' and prasānga method which was highly influenced by if not borrowed from Buddhist works. Brahmān is realized through negating false attributes super-imposed upon it. Both Advaita and Mādhyamika agree that intellect or logic has only negative value in correcting this condition.

One further use of the doctrine of two truths was the division by both the Mādhyamikins and Advaitins of their textual traditions into nītartha, those textual passages which are of ultimate import, and neyārtha those which are of everyday (vyāvahārika) import. The neyārtha passages deal with means, path philosophy, the reality of creation, or the skandhas, dharmas, etc. They are of secondary import. The nītartha are concerned with the ultimate goal, the transcendent realm of the absolute, Brahmān or sūngatā. The Advaitic
terms for this are usually *para* and *apara*. The use of two truths in this manner allows both systems to synthesize many doctrines and grant a limited or empirical validity to the teachings of even their opponents.

From the above discussion we can see that the categories which Advaita and Mādhyamika share, the absolute, world-as-Śūnyatā, two truths, causation (*ajñātivāda*), and nature of error are transformed by the philosophical context in which they are placed. Similar categories or terms have actually quite distinct meanings within each system. Any philosophical parallel must take into account this distinctiveness as well as any similarity. The key to understanding this transformation lies in the epistemological orientation of Mādhyamika, and the ontological orientation of Advaita which are in turn the result of the 'causal metaphor' upon which each system is based. From this we can also see that the respective criticisms Śaṅkara and Nāgārjuna might make of each other's philosophy do not really apply. As Mādhyamikins affirm no positive reality which is the ground of all existence, Śaṅkara from his ontological position naturally accused them of being nihilists. From the epistemological framework of Mādhyamika the positing of a doctrine like Śaṅkara's obscures the nature of the absolute, because all concepts such as self (*Ātman*) and *Brahman* are infected with the idea of self-existence (*svabhāva*). However, *svabhāva* cannot apply to the Advaita

---

222Our discussion of the nature of error in both systems has been limited to its structural aspects which are dependent on the differing orientations of each system. A full treatment of the problem of error would require a separate study.
The concepts of Atman and Brahman which are self-luminous (svaprakāśa) and non-arisen. As the inapplicability of these criticisms points out there can be no easy identification of concepts between the two systems.

---

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In summary, Advaita and Mādhyamika demonstrate a complex relationship, both historically and philosophically. It would overlook this complexity to come to a single conclusion, such that they are 'nearly identical' or 'irreconciliable'. Several fruitful possibilities have been suggested for understanding their relationship.

The first of these lies in the area of the historical relationship of Advaita to Mādhyamika. The specific problem has been the nature of Mādhyamika influence on Advaita, and whether Advaita borrowed the methods of analysis which Nāgārjuna developed several centuries earlier, or borrowed wholesale Mādhyamika doctrine. The conclusion reached was that Śaṅkara made use of Mādhyamika method in forming his systematic philosophy, but did not make use of Mādhyamika doctrine. This influence does not seem to have been direct, but "seems to have come to him through his teachers and through the general intellectual climate of the times." 224

In order to determine the nature of Buddhist influence it was first necessary to examine the nature of early Vedānta, and Śaṅkara's relationship to it. Early Vedānta must be understood as

224 Richard Robinson, Classical Indian Philosophy, p. 218.
a matrix of systems, and not a unitary philosophy. The Vedic tradition was handed down in a number of schools (śākhā), which contain many different texts. These texts in turn contain a number of 'speculations' which are developed to describe reality. While Vedānta certainly existed in the period of Bādarāyāna, it had not yet differentiated itself from general orthodoxy. Vedānta as a separate philosophy seems to have arisen from the need to systemitize these early 'speculations'. All of the major elements of Śaṅkara's philosophy can be found in these early 'speculations', but are scattered through numerous sources. Śaṅkara took these already existing elements within the orthodox tradition and placed them in dynamic relationship to form a systematic interpretation of the Vedānta texts.

The nature of Buddhist influence must be understood as that of method rather than doctrine for two reasons. First, all the major tenets of Śaṅkara's thought can be found in pre-Gauḍapāda orthodox texts, and second, parallel concepts are actually used quite differently within the two traditions. Through Gauḍapāda Śaṅkara seems to have inherited the Madhyamika dialectic, and uses this method to help establish the truths of the śruti texts. Further, Śaṅkara was probably influenced by the Madhyamika use of 'two truths' to divide scriptural passages into those of absolute and those of empirical import. He was thus aided by Madhyamika method in forging a systematic interpretation of Vedānta.

Madhyamika and Advaita are based on opposing traditions of analyzing reality. The Buddhists hold to the doctrine of non-self
(an-atman), and Vedānta to the 'transcendental' self. This disparity made outright borrowing of metaphysical tenet impossible from either side. Rather, those elements were selected which could be assimilated and transformed thus making them an integral part of the already existing metaphysical framework. This process of interaction was the result of the internal dynamism of each tradition in constant relation with the historical and philosophical environment. The manner in which each tradition transformed or adapted philosophical categories to their basic structure has formed the basis of our analysis of their philosophical relationship.

The similarity of the two systems comes from a shared metaphysical framework or structure, consisting of several categories; the absolute, world-as-māyā, two truths, and nature of error. These categories are transformed by the causal metaphor which each philosophy used to 'map' out the nature of the universe and the path to freedom. This method enables us to draw parallels based on seeing these categories as part of an entire philosophical system. Both systems are absolutisms. Reality is free of empirical qualification and transcendent. The world-as-māyā is non-different from reality which is realized when this appearance is negated. Advaita and Madhyamika differ on theories of causation, the self, and nature of error; these differences modify their respective understanding of reality.

In mapping out relations among the above categories both philosophies are concerned to demonstrate that man can enter into events as causal agent and attain freedom. In order for man's efforts to count, the causal relations between events must be neither too strong
nor too weak. If the causal relation is too strong man's efforts fail because he cannot affect the pre-ordained nature of things, if too weak his efforts fail because there is no order among events. The two primary causal chains in Indian philosophy are the evolutionary scheme of the Sāṁkhya school and the Buddhist 'chain of dependent origination' (pratītyasamutpāda). The Sāṁkhya scheme is based on satkāryavāda which means that the effect pre-exists in the cause. The Buddhist chain holds that the effect does not pre-exist in the cause and is termed asatkāryavāda.

The logic of the causal models is exhibited in the entire philosophy. The tendency of satkāryavāda is to unify the universe. In Advaita, Brahman represents this premordial unity. Reality is so unified that change or causation becomes unintelligable, and thus Advaita holds the theory of the apparent transformation (vivartavāda) of Brahman. Asatkāryavāda on the other hand diversifies the real. One cause is not adequate to form a particular effect, therefore asatkāryavāda multiplies the number of conditions required to produce an effect. Mādhyamika pushes this tendency to diversify the real to its logical conclusion, and holds ajātivāda because the phenomenal universe is so diversified as to be unintelligable as caused. Advaita avoids making the causal relation too strong, by making freedom an act of knowledge which negate appearances. In its use of asatkāryavāda Mādhyamika avoids making ajātivāda or no-causation too weak, by making freedom an act of knowledge which negates all views (drṣṭi). Both philosophies hold the doctrine of ajātivāda,
but for opposite reasons, Advaita because of the ultimate unity of reality, Mādhyamika because of its ultimate diversity. This difference results in the ontological orientation of Advaita, and the epistemological orientation of Mādhyamika.

Advaita is ontological. Reality is pure being, consciousness, and bliss. Brahman is the ultimate ground, and cosmological source of the world. The other categories discussed are transformed by this ontological stance. Maya is the super-imposition of apparent creation on the ground of Brahman. In the doctrine of two truths, paramārtha is the absolute realm of Brahman, vyāvahārika is the empirical world which is sublated by the truth of Brahman. The nature of error through which the phenomenal world appears as real is the perception of difference or plurality when in fact there are no differences in the unity of Brahman.

Mādhyamika places these same categories in an epistemological framework. The Buddhist tradition began by breaking down the concept of self into a constituent entity. The error which bound man was the perception of eternal substance and permanence where none actually existed. Nāgārjuna extended this lack of self-existence (svabhāva) to the dharmas which the Hīnayāna schools used to analyze the self and world. Self, world, and dharmas all arise in dependent co-origination (pratītyasamutpāda) and are thus empty (śūnya). With the realization of emptiness, the absolute nature of 'things as they really are' (tathatā) is revealed. The nature of error in Mādhyamika consists in holding views such that the world is either eternal or non-eternal.
In 'two truths' the everyday (samvrti) world exists because people cling to these views. As the conditioned phenomena of the world in reality lack self-existence (svabhava) Nāgārjuna characterizes them as māyā. The paramātha standpoint is attained when all 'views' are removed, and the emptiness of all things is realized.

The differences between the two schools can be easily summarized by pointing out the meaning of advaita as opposed to advaya. Advaita refers to the non-dual nature of Brahman and its apparent creation; Advaya to the 'non-twoness' of Šūnyatā which is the middle path between the extreme views of eternalism and nihilism. This example serves to demonstrate the transformation which 'similar' categories undergo where placed in different historical contexts. In this case the two terms, along with the other catagories discussed, are transformed by the orthodox Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The categories are thus seen as part of an integral system of philosophy, overcoming the inadequacies of some earlier methods which tended to overlook the profound differences between these categories or terms. Thus by using the method of T.R.V. Murti who points out the ontological and epistemological framework of Advaita and Mādhyamika, and Karl Potter's analysis of causation as the reason for these differing orientations we have been able to take into account both the similarities and the uniqueness of each system.

The philosophical and conceptual differences between the two systems are substantial, but the question must still be asked, "are these differences based only in linguistic and historical
convention, on views which disappear in the realization of the absolute?"
Certainly it would seem to be here that universalism becomes appropriate
but the answer would seem to rest as much on the pre-dispositions of
the questioner as on an analysis of the two systems. Murti's model
of the circle whose differing radii have the same center as goal is
useful here. While the philosophies differ markedly, the goal of
immediate intuition of the absolute is similar. Again, this model
must be used with reservation as all Indian philosophies, e.g. Sāmkhya,
of 'realization' do not characterize freedom in the same manner.

Certainly there are many problems for further research here.
Having made this type of basic comparison which utilizes similarities
viewed as part of an organic system, it becomes possible to ask
further questions about the nature of wisdom (prajñā) and its attain-
ment. For example a comparative study might be done of the nature
of error in each school, which in Mādhyamika is the tendency to
'conceptualize', and in Advaita the perception of 'difference'. The
difference between the two concepts may be negligible, but could
have implications for man's attempt to attain freedom. A comparative
study of Advaita and Mādhyamika in the very least broadens our under-
standing of both philosophies by placing in sharp relief the conceptual
framework of one system against the other.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Translations of Texts and Commentaries


Yamamoto, Kosho trans. Mahāparinirvāna-Sūtra. 3 vols., Oyama, Ono-Ku, Ube City, Yamaguchi-Ken, Japan: Published by the Karinbunko, 1974.

B. Books and Articles Consulted


Malkani, G.R. "Buddhism and Vedānta," Aryan Path. 18, No. 8-10, August-October, 1947.


______. "The Buddhist 'Not this, Not this;'", *Philosophy East and West*. pp. 99-114.