What's Philosophy After All? The Intertwined Destinies of Greek Philosophy and Indian Upaniṣadic Thinking *

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Abstract

The article highlights the similarities between ancient Greek philosophy and Indian Upaniṣadic thinking as projects of self-transformation that resort basically to rational means. The strategy adopted combines two basic sets of tools. On the one hand, we resort to elements of contemporary internal critique of 'philosophy' in the West with an emphasis on revised aspects of ancient Greek tradition. On the other, we point to peculiar features of Indian Upaniṣadic thinking in order to help locating, identifying, and recognizing possible dormant/forgotten characteristics of western philosophical projects. By doing so, we hope both traditions might emerge re-dignified in their role of leading men, through judicious rationality, to the knowledge of the ultimate Truth of beings.

Keywords: Upaniṣads; Śaṅkarācārya; Greek Philosophy; Aristotle; Vedānta

Resumen. *¿Qué es la filosofía después de todo? Los destinos entrelazados de la filosofía griega y el pensamiento upanisádico indio*

El artículo destaca las semejanzas entre la filosofía griega antigua y el pensamiento upanisádico indio como proyectos de autotrasnformación que recurren básicamente a medios racionales. La estrategia adoptada combina dos juegos de herramientas básicos. Por una parte, recurrimos a elementos de crítica interna contemporánea de la "filosofía" en occidente poniendo énfasis sobre los aspectos revisados de la antigua tradición griega. Por otra, señalamos rasgos peculiares del pensamiento upanisádico para ayudar a localizar, identificar y reconocer posibles características latentes/olvidadas de los proyectos filosóficos occidentales. Al hacer esto, esperamos que ambas tradiciones emerjan con una nueva dignidad en su papel de conducir a los hombres, a través de la recionalidad acertada, al conocimiento de la Verdad definitiva de los seres.

Palabras clave: Upaniṣads; Śaṅkarācārya; filosofía griega; Aristóteles; Vedānta.

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* Key to abbreviations of Sanskrit works cited appears at the end of article.

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I

While assessing the Indian Upaniṣadic tradition of reflexive thinking (the Upaniṣads and their related schools) *vis*-à-*vis* the western philosophical tradition, contemporary West has, for the past two centuries, moved along two basic attitudinal polarities. On one side are those whom I call the 'hardcore of philosophy'. They reject any possibility of philosophical affiliation of Indian thinking, even though acknowledging glimpses of relevant rationality. In their view, these glimpses of rationality remain submissive to religion and authority. For sure, the religious model at stake is that of a Christianity 'accused' of deferring human ultimate goals to times beyond dead and totally dependent on God's grace. In this way, Indian reflexive thinking could be levelled, at the most, with western theology. On the other side are those whom I call the 'decriers of philosophy'. Their disillusion with western philosophical rationality, whose promises to bring into the scene a humanistic self-reliant rationality as an effective substitute to a discredit Christianity remained unfulfilled, prompted them to undergo a shift of horizon: they chose to turn their hopes and expectancies towards Indian thinking tradition (and other 'oriental' traditions) as an inspirational source for pursuing what they would term 'human spiritual goals'. For them, therefore, both philosophy, as a dry and existentially irrelevant rationality, and Christianity, as a deferred and unpredictable soteriology of blind faith, had equally failed.

If, for the first, Indian Upaniṣadic rationality appeared as an exercise subservient to religious authority, for the second, it appeared as an efficient auxiliary tool for enhancing religious practices and spiritual disciplines sought to culminate, here and now, in 'transcendent experiences' often depicted in mystical slogans such as 'union with God' or 'realization of the Absolute'. In other words, for the first, Indian rationality is bad philosophy, for the second, it is good religion. As if to accentuate the mystical aura of self-reliance on effective human disciplines rather than on God's grace, the latter also resorts to metaphorical and romantic usages of the term 'philosophy' (e.g., 'oriental philosophies').

Both attitudinal polarities share in common three basic features that unfold in analytical fashion. (i) Firstly, they acknowledge Indian Upaniṣadic thinking as *a genuine tradition of reasoning* which has consciously sought to distinguish itself from ritual and morality and yet remained submissive/committed to religious soteriological goals of experiencing transcendent realities. (ii) Secondly, they conceive Indian Upaniṣadic thinking as *a rationality involved in an enterprise that blends elements of 'philosophy' and 'religion', the former being at the service of the latter*. (iii) And thirdly, they work through their discourses and polarities with *an underlying and a-critical concept of 'western philosophy'*.

A new shade of interpretative voices emerged since the second half of the 20th century. The reflected, to a large extent, the changing geopolitical, nationalist and communalist scenarios that followed the end of the World War II, the processes of decolonization and de-neocolonisation, and the post-modernist discourses. They share in common an outright rejection of prescriptive attempts to framing Indian Upaniṣadic thinking as a 'frankensteinian' combination of western categories. Among them, two alternative narratives found their way into the mainstream discourse. There are those who defend the radical uniqueness of Indian modality of thinking, unfit to be either described by '(western) philosophy' or '(western) religion'. They tend to dismiss each and every call for 'philosophical' affiliation, considering it a mental residuum of a neo-colonial subservient attitude that seeks, at all times, western legitimacy. On the other hand, they encourage the usage of Sanskrit terminology and conceptual translation when required, to nominate and describe the singular nature of Indian Upaniṣadic thinking. On the other spectrum are those who fear that a radical proposal of 'uniqueness' may end up in cultural relativism and render Indian Upaniṣadic thinking, as a contemporary continuity of ancient procedures, an inaccessible and incomprehensible human undertaking outside its cultural borders. Based on several instances of meaningful exchanges between Europe and India in ancient times and on contemporary recognition of Upaniṣadic thinking as an enterprise dealing with fundamental questions of human existence, they sense that the difficulties of the present dialogue may be related to those frozen forms of modern 'western philosophy' that, under the equivocal assumption of historical superiority, ended up eliminating within itself other and perhaps more important dimensions of rationality. In this way, they favour a sort of historical 'regression' into past occidental projects in order to reawaken dormant/forgotten features of philosophical thinking that may enable us to set up an enlarged platform of dialogue leading to mutually benefiting recognition.

The present paper is a modest attempt to contribute to that desideratum. The strategy adopted combines two basic sets of tools. On the one hand, we'll resort to elements of contemporary internal critique of 'philosophy' in the West with an emphasis on revised aspects of the Greek-Roman tradition. On the other, we'll point to peculiar features of Indian Upaniṣadic thinking in order to help locating, identifying, and recognizing possible dormant/forgotten characteristics of western philosophical projects.

II

The first set of tools is largely derived from Martin Heidegger and Pierre Hadot's reflections on the task of philosophy. Perhaps more than any other contemporary thinker, Heidegger brought to the forefront of present debate not just a particular topic or division of philosophy but the task of philosophying itself. What is, after all, philosophy? If, at times, he seems to be willing to dismiss the 'philosopher' for his role in the history of 'forgetfulness of Being', more often he is willing to rescue a deeper meaning and dignity by unravelling philosophers' destinal task of unveiling Being. To effect this rescue, Heidegger leads us back to the warehouse of meanings as embodied in the Greek philosophical tradition. What features, what contexts, what projects, did Heidegger see in Greek reflexive thinking that went somewhat underground in modern philosophy? Could it be that by purging 'western philosophy' from medieval scholasticism of a superior religion and modern historicism of Enlightenment (and its follow-ups) that render past philosophers (proto-philosophers?) mere steps towards the great synthesis of Hegel, one could expand the narrative of philosophy in the West and discover new meanings in old voices? What could, then, Greek philosophical projects reveal to us beyond their being juvenile steps of a modern adult corollary? Perusing Heidegger's exhaustive task of topically re-discovering and re-contextualizing Greek philosophy, from pre-Socratic thinkers to Aristotle, one may legitimately feel ecstatic with the possibility that philosophy in the West may, in fact, involve a much larger narrative than the narrow Enlightenment's history of 'western philosophy'. Similarly, one may feel compelled to take more seriously the Greek tradition's claims about the divinity of philosophers, about their prayers to the gods, about their self-imposed requisites for the philosophical enterprise, about their pedagogical care and, significantly, about their openness to welcome and recognize philosophers - the one-minded searchers of Being – anywhere and everywhere, be it in India, in Persia, or in Egypt.

Perhaps the most important work that has uniquely deconstructed the Hegelian narrative is Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. (Hadot 1999) While subverting historicism as an infantile disease of modern philosophism, it opened the way for a plurality of historical contextualisations as a means to understand the intellectual projects at stake. In Gadamerian terms, it showed us that one always thinks within a tradition (Gadamer 2004: 267-382), and that traditions need not to be authoritative alien obstacles, but imperative and constitutive starting-points for reflexive thinking itself. Hadot "forced us to rethink our own modern presumptions in reading ancient texts" (Davidson 1990: 480) bringing forward a completely new realm of possibilities to think what philosophy stood for the Greco-Roman traditions. Understanding the (so-called) constitutive components

of philosophy – viz., ethics, logic, metaphysics, aesthetics, etc. – as non-dissociable parts of a unitarian project, Hadot sought to stress on that very unity of purpose rather than on the discursive 'conclusions' of the components. And what he saw, sums up Jan Aertsen, was

> that ancient philosophy had, first and foremost, an existential dimension. It was not so much a system of thought as a 'way of life', a spiritual exercise preparatory to wisdom. The philosophical way of life was closely connected with a theoretical discourse justifying and supporting the existential option." (Aertsen 1999: 385)

In other words, practical, or perhaps acting reason, had priority over representational and doctrinal discourses. The ideal of life was that of a 'philosophical life' – described exhaustively in Book X of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* – i.e., philosophical contemplation as a perfect realization of what man essentially is: intellectuality, reasoning as its best, for its 'own sake', detached from worldly objects and concerns. The rise of Christianity would change radically this scenario. "The role of philosophy, continues Aertsen, was downgraded to that of a conceptual framework to be used in theological controversies… a 'servant' of theology". (Aertsen 1999: 386) It ended up, therefore, being reduced to a mere representational/theoretical/moral discourse. Accordingly, St. Thomas Aquinas radically rejected the idea of a philosophical way to happiness, to 'the knowledge of divine things'. The scholastic expulsion of soteriological concerns from the jurisdiction of philosophy shaped, to a large extend, the modern history of the latter marked by an enduring and resentful struggle for 'emancipation' from theology. The ancient ideal of a philosophical life, of an 'ethical Aristotelianism' (Libera 1991), had gone totally underground.

The profound implications of Hadot's revision of the history of western philosophy is yet to be properly grasped. If Heidegger topical revaluation of ancient Greek philosophy has already brought to the forefront the significant strength of ´meditative thinking´ in sharp contrast with the 'calculative thinking' of modernity, his controversial 'history of forgetfulness of being' remains marred by what I call 'retrospective hegelianism' while adopting modern accounts of presumptive doctrinal Platonism and Aristotelism. Conversely, 'forgetfulness of being' would, in fact, account, first and foremost, for the obscurity that surrounds the Cartesian-Hegelian narrative of ancient philosophy and its dialectical follow-ups. Hadot, on the other hand, leaves behind altogether the prejudiced doctrinal paradigm and concentrates on the teleologies at stake. He is, therefore, able to relativise doctrines and make them subservient to pedagogies, exegeses, ethical requirements, and dialogical rather solipsistic procedures - all that articulated within rational disciplines leading one to contemplative existence and happiness. This amount to a sort of intra-post-colonial critique with retroactive effect: the European de-colonisation of its own European past. And what may represent a diachronic cleansing of European self-assumed civilizational roots, may on the other hand have synchronic consequences for the contemporary post-colonial world. If ancient Greece in no longer there, the Indians are. And Pierre Hadot´s work represents

a fresh breeze for all those seriously engaged in studying Indian Upaniṣadic thinking and its vibrant contemporary continuities from the perspective of recognizing there legitimate ways of philosophying.

Interestingly, Hadot's indirect support to those efforts seems to find echo in Heidegger's rather intriguing words in defence of an 'inevitable' dialogue between western and eastern philosophies. In his essay titled "Science and Reflection" he states:

> … every reflection upon which now is, can take its rise and thrive only if, through a dialogue with the Greek thinkers and their language, it strikes root into the ground of our historical existence. That dialogue still awaits its beginning. It is scarcely prepared for at all, and yet it itself remains for us the precondition of the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world." (Heidegger: 1977: 158)

It's rather significant that Heidegger uttered those words in the same year (1954) of the well-know dialogue with a Japanese thinker on the challenges of east-west encounters which was published under the title "A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer" (Heidegger 1971: 1-54) Could Heidegger be suggesting that one's plunging into the depths of Greek philosophical thinking, in a way that takes one beyond modern narratives, would entrust one with a suitable disposition to understand, penetrate and dialogue with Asian reflexive thinking? And why would this be the case, if not on account of an anticipation regarding the likelihood of key areas of contiguity between them? If that's a legitimate assumption, the reverse order of empowerment is to be equally admitted, i.e., plunging into the depths of Asian (Indian) Upaniṣadic thinking may entrust one with decisive indications about 'forgotten' aspects of Greek philosophical thinking. That's the role set, in this paper, for the second set of tools mentioned above.

III

The second set of tools takes us straight away to the intricacies and mysteries of Indian Upaniṣadic thinking. They stand out as silent witnesses to the intertwined destinies of Indian and Greek philosophy as if eager to set foot on a long awaited dialogue of reconciliation and mutual recognition. Among the features that seem to facilitate that bridging, the following five stand prominently. (i) Philosophy, i.e., knowledge (*jñāna*) leading to self-realisation (*mokṣa*), on the one hand, and religion, i.e., interested action (*karma*) aiming at the fulfilment of duties (*dharma*) and attainment of improved, 'paradisiacal' forms of existence (*svarga*), on the other, instead of conflictive or incommunicable territories, constitute two levels of human activity, organically integrated, where the former (i.e., philosophy) stands ultimate as the means to realize the depths of one's worldly experience

comprising the ritualism and morality of religion (*vaidika*) and the fruition immediate mundane goals (*laukika*). (ii) As a rational undertaking (*vicāra*) aiming at dispelling a constitutive human ignorance (*avidyā*) about one's nature and about the nature of reality as a whole, philosophy constitutes, at once, a cognitive (*jñāna*) as well as a soteriological project (*mokṣa*) leading one to the accomplishment of the *summo bono* of life (*ānanda*). (iii) Committed to one's realization of the ultimate meaning of life, philosophy is a self-sufficient enterprise, i.e., it is not meant for or followed by anything else; its foundational discourse, therefore, is primarily indicative, pedagogic and corrective (*upāya*) even if it may include, ancillarily, conceptual and doctrinal formulations revolving around rules of thinking (logic) and categories under which particular objects are apprehended. (iv) Philosophy as a cognitive/soteriological enterprise demands existential prerequisites (*catuḥsādhana*) such as one's detachment from all the objects and one's inner conviction about a fundamental ignorance about their nature; these prerequisites constitute, therefore, an epistemological pre-condition for the efficacy of philosophical discourse. (v) As an indicative discourse, philosophy is basically a *philosophying* as it necessarily takes the form, within the various exegetical schools (*darśana*), of a conversional dialogue (*saṃvāda*) between masters (*ācārya/guru*) and disciples (*śiṣya*) refractory to any ultimate conceptual 'conclusions' (*vikalpa*) and   always free from the possibility of historical reifications ('metaphysics') of Truth.

Indian tradition presents a plurality of philosophical schools and sub-schools. Some are associated with the *vedic/upaniṣadic* oral and textual tradition and others associated with other traditions (*āgamas/tantras*) including the Buddhist lore. Among the six schools traditionally held as belonging to the *vedic/upaniṣadic* domain (*āstikas*), the adherence to Upaniṣadic propositions varies in intensity and degree. The relationship between the different schools is one of synchronic co-existence based on a mutual understanding and respect for the multiplicity of soteriological paths they represent. The distinguishing set of specific arguments (*siddhānta*) of one school are basically meant (i) to provide convincing reasons for the neophytes to pursue their goals within that particular school and (ii) to ensure pedagogical adequacy. In their pursuance of an all-embracing knowledge (*jñāna*) that grants epistemological solidity for the psychological condition of detachment (*vairāgya*) and ensures existential bliss (*ānanda*), they tend to share among themselves a good deal of phenomenological features relating to what may be termed as ´universal conditions of appearance´, such the rules of logic (*nyāya*), grammatical categories (*vyākaraṇa*), means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), rules of textual exegesis (*mīmāṃsā*) and others.

Among them, the Vedānta school, widely known in the west through great masters such Śaṅkarācārya (approx. 8th century) and Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836-1886), present the strongest foundational linkages with the Upaniṣadic texts. It shelters in itself a plurality of six sub-schools of different hermeneutical orientations. If classified according to western criteria of doctrinal relevance instead of pedagogical adequacy, one would have

the absurdity of a philosophical school with internal subdivisions ranging from 'monism' to 'dualism'. Thus, the ultimate non-representational character of those discourses illustrate well the fact that the exegetical tradition in not a matter of submission to a doctrinal or dogmatic authority but a matter of openness to a plurality of possible 'hermeneutical existential applications' - to use a Gadamerian terminology (Gadamer 2004: 267-382) - through dialogical procedure.

Perhaps one of the most outstanding examples of a non-doctrinal discourse, which combines reasoning as (i) a rigorous logical discourse and as (ii) a direct means of self-realization (*mokṣa*) grounded on knowledge of totality (*jñāna*) and detachment (*vairāgya*), is contemporary author Swami Satchidanandendra Saraswati's *advaita vedānta* ('non-duality') as presented in his Sanskrit magum opus *Vedānta Prakriyā Pratyabhijñā* (*The Method of the Vedānta*) (Saraswati VPP). Elaborating on Śaṅkarācārya's postulation of the Upaniṣads as 'secret knowledge' or 'secret instruction' (*rahasya-upadeśa*), Satchidanandendra Saraswati posits a sort of apophatic mystagogy that seeks to reinstate Upaniṣadic thinking (*adhyāropa-apavāda*) as a rigorous rational discipline understood as (i) a 'devise of imagination' (*kalpita-upāya*) acceptable only on account of its results, viz., (ii) self-realisation (*anubhūti/mokṣa*). This follows necessarily from the *advaitic* ('non-dual') character of Reality – linguistically referred to through the words ā*tman*, when the unicist character of subject-ness is to be stressed, or *brahman*, when the unicist character of 'object-ness' is to be stressed – and its non-conceptualisable nature. Accordingly, Satchidanandendra Saraswati sustains that Śaṅkarācārya's words are essentially words of instruction having no positive epistemological relevance *per se*. Any attempt at extracting from them a metaphysics, a cosmology, a psychology or any other form of speculative philosophy is doomed to represent a dangerous misunderstanding.

The word *upaniṣad* is described by Śaṅkarācārya, in the beginning of most of his commentaries on the Upaniṣads, as a 'secret knowledge' or 'secret instruction'   (*rahasya*) whose efficacy lies in its power to destroy the ignorance that conceals the real nature of ā*tman*. In his words, the Upaniṣads' secret instructions "entirely remove this relative world together with its cause (*avidyā*)». (Śaṅkarācārya BUB: I.i.1) Its operationality could be compared to a therapeutic intervention, a kind of medicine, which, instead of positively producing health - the natural state of the patient -, acts only by removing the cause of disease. This idea is superbly expressed in *Aitareya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* where Śaṅkarācārya retells a story traditionally held by the knowers of ā*tman* which presents the process to be followed in enlightening one about ā*tman*. A man having committed a sin was told by someone: "You are no man". Believing in such a statement he approached another man and asked: "Who am I?" Understanding the ignorance that had taken possession of this man, the other man decided to instruct him by means of a gradual process. He showed him he was not a motionless thing, and so on. Then, he concluded: "You are not a no-man", thus remaining in silence. To emphasize the limits of the teaching up to this stage,

Śaṅkarācārya adds: «How can he, who does not understand to be a man when told 'you are not a non-man ‹, understand himself to be a man even when told ‹you are a man›?». (Śaṅkarācārya AUB: IV.i.1)

The pure negative character of the Upaniṣads, magnificently illustrated by story above, is summed up in the following maxim: "The validity of the scriptures is derived from their negation of positive qualities of the self" (*nivartakatva*). (Śaṅkarācārya MUB: II.32) In other words, the Upaniṣads are called a *pramāṇa* ('means of knowledge') not because they reveal ā*tman* but because they remove the natural misconceptions about its nature. This task can be further explained by means of detailing the threefold meaning of the adjective *nivartaka* ('negation') when applied to characterize the Upaniṣads. It comprehends (i) the epistemological foundations of the Upaniṣads as a soteriological discourse *(śruti)*; (ii) the nature and operationality of reasoning; and (iii) its pedagogical implications.

The idea of a mere process of removal of natural misconceptions is in perfect agreement with the Upaniṣadic nature of ā*tman* ('non-dual', i.e., the 'sole reality'). In fact, (i) the notion of radical unicity (*advaita*) renders impossible a positive revelation by words. The three kinds of differences which make a thing amenable for denotation by words – viz., internal difference (*svagatabheda*), external difference from objects of the same class (*svaj*ā*tīya*) and external difference from objects of different classes (*vijātīya*) – are absent in ā*tman*. And (b) the notion of self-evidence implying ever-presence makes such type of positive revelation something unnecessary. The only thing that separates man from knowledge is the fundamental ignorance (*avidy*ā), «just as when a mother-of-pearl appears through mistake as a piece of silver, the non-apprehension of the former, although it is *being perceived all the while* is merely due to the obstruction of the false impression (of the remembered silver)". (Śaṅkarācārya BUB: I, iv, 7) Thus, realization – similar to a recollection - reflects only the *removal of that obstruction.* It's precisely on account of this role of immediate subordination to the ever-present unitarian experience (*anubhava*) that Śaṅkarācārya calls the Upaniṣadic *reasoning* as *soteriological reasoning* (*anugṛhita tarka*), the ancillary 'limb of *anubhava*' (*anubhava-aṅga*). (Śaṅkarācārya BSB: II, i, 6) «The nearest equivalent in the English language, says S. Iyer, may be Pure Reason or, better still, the Vedāntic Reason». (Iyer 1955: 390)

It being so, the Upaniṣadic reasoning presents an extraordinary epistemological relevance. Its unique negative role is not to be followed by any positive one for it deals with an entity which is not 'absolutely not known before' (*anādigata*); as a consequence, this expression should be understood in the connotative sense of 'not known before because it was forgotten'. Consequently, the Upaniṣadic reasoning constitutes itself the core and the soul of the *sādhana* ('path') for the accomplishment of *mokṣa* ('self-realisation'), the supreme *puruṣārtha* ('goals of life'). This is in perfect agreement with the fact that the cognition/knowledge (*jñāna)* and the acquisition (*lābha*) of ā*tman* are one and the same event. It is on account of this fact only, that the word *jñāna* is often used, secondarily,

to refer to the Upaniṣadic cluster of propositions. It is "knowledge, says Śaṅkarācārya, because of its connection with the idea of leading to *brahman* (ātman)". (Śaṅkarācārya KUB: I.i.1)

Considering the above, the Upaniṣadic propositions should conform themselves, operationally, to a continuous process of reasoning without a single instance of ultimate valid conceptualization (concerning the entity to be known). Thus, we can affirm that *the Upaniṣads are essentially the means leading one to the realization of ātman and phenomenically the revelation of an uninterrupted current of thought which ends in, or rather, whose conclusion is silence (mauna)*, this being the only acceptable 'conclusion' for an entity like ātman. Accordingly, says Satchidanandendra Saraswati, such a project of continuous reasoning is set forth by the sentence "The ātman should be seen, heard, reflected and mediated upon". (BU: II.iv. 5) The procedural unity of these three basic disciplines - viz., *śravaṇa* (*hearing*), *manana* (*reflecting*) and *nididhyāsana* (*meditating)* - is designated by Śaṅkarācārya as *vicāra* or *vicāra-tarka*, the characteristic *thinking* of the Upaniṣads, and the most direct means for the realization of ātman (*avagatyartha-sādhana*). (Śaṅkarācārya BSB: I.i.4)

What is, then, the status of the formal contents of the Upaniṣadic propositions? Since they have no epistemological validity *per se*, they must deal only with the different manifestations of the single and constitutive error (*avidyā*) concerning ātman – *viz.,* the error of 'objectification' (*viṣayīkṛta*); but not merely by naming it in accordance with conventional empirical denotations, but basically by means of a dynamic and gradual process of eliminating the plurality of its manifestations. This process is made, either, by means of conventional particle of negation (*na*, 'not') or, more prominently and efficiently, by means of successive superimpositions of its positive manifestations. Thus, the matter of consideration *par excellence* of the Upaniṣadic thinking is, in a very unique sense, the totality of the cognitive mental states (*jñāna-vṛttis)* which constitutes the source of all worldly action (*vyavahāra*). Yet, they are worth consideration on account only of their general character of 'being a mental state' or 'the object-ness of the objects' and not on account of their specific marks of this or that particular object. Although the latter aspect may be indicative of the former, these two perspectives conform to two distinct regions of human experience: the Upaniṣadic region, on the one hand, and the empirical region – comprising *vaidika* (religious ritualism and morality) and *laukika* (mundane affairs) subdivisions -, on the other. The passage from an empirical concern, devoted to particular objects, to the suspicion of their being particular manifestations of a universal error – the objective-ness - requires a radical change of teleological perspective or, in other words, of *puruṣārtha* ('goals of life') to be attained. This confers on the doctrine of *catuḥsādhana* and its four existential pre-requisites for carrying out the Upaniṣadic thinking – especially *viveka* ('the discrimination between eternal and non-eternal entities') and *vairāgya* ('detachment from all objects of this and other worlds') – the character of real epistemological requisites.

The method of elimination of the different manifestations of the fundamental error constitutes a kind of linguistic game, where each and every sentence of the Upaniṣads is epistemologically relevant *not on account of what it intrinsically refers to but on account of what it implicitly negates.* (Saraswati VPP: 3.21) This constitutes, as Satchidanandendra Saraswati emphasises, the purportful character of the Upaniṣads as a unique linguistic dealing, where words bearing conventional meanings are 'forced' to convey unconventional ones. We will refer to four usual examples given by Śaṅkarācārya of how to recognise this unconventional epistemological relevance. Firstly, sentences about creation (*sṛṣṭi-vākya*) are helpful in denying the idea of an independent existence of the world from ā*tman*. Accordingly, though empirically purporting to describe the origin of the world, they assume from an Upaniṣadic perspective the basic role of suggesting the sole reality of the cause. (Saraswati VPP: 3.33-36) Secondly, texts which appear to posit ā*tman* as the experiencer of different states – viz., awaking, dream and deep sleep states (*avasth*ā-*traya*) – are also peculiarly instructive. For example, the identification of ā*tman* with the experiencer of dream state (*sapn*ā-*avasth*ā) is helpful in removing the idea that the subject is subservient to the objects, as it seems to occur in worldly dealings of the waking state «on account of the intercourse between subject and object through sense-contact». (Śaṅkarācārya BSB: III.ii.4) But the idea that the dream state has itself any type of ontological status is subsequently denied by conferring on the Upaniṣadic words describing it, a purely metaphorical sense (*nimittam*ā*tra*). (Saraswati VPP: 3.40) Thirdly, in the case of negative sentences (in Sanskrit) like "*Brahman* is knowledge, truth and infinite" (TU: II.i.1) Śaṅkarācārya accepts their relevance as long as they help us to negate worldly attributes, but "they are not resorted to from their intrinsic point-of-view». For, in fact, «*Brahman* (Ātman) is spoken of as unknown (inexpressible) to those who know it well". (Śaṅkarācārya KeUB: I.i) Finally the word ā*tman* itself is peculiarly interpreted by Śaṅkarācārya. He says:

> The word ā*tman* which is primarily used in the world of duality to denote the individual soul as distinct from the body it possesses, is here resorted to in order to *indicate the entity that remains after the rejection* of the body and other (non-) selves, which, ultimately, can never be referred to by any form of denomination. The word ā*tman* is used here to reveal what is really inexpressible by words (*avācya*)". (Śaṅkarācārya CUB: VIII.i.3)

The cluster of Upaniṣadic sentences constitutes the substratum of an experience of communication or dialogue between the master (ā*cārya*) and the disciple (*śiṣya*) who fulfils the required pre-requisites. This being so, a specific set of Upaniṣadic sentences employed by the master with the purport of enlightening the disciple, may be denominated as a 'system of instructions' or a teaching (*upadeśa*). The arguments themselves are called 'instructions' or ā*deśas*. This word is explained by Śaṅkarācārya as that which

is "inculcated, which is available only from the scriptures and a teacher". (Śaṅkarācārya CUB: VI.i.2)

Though among the totality of the Upaniṣadic instructions different arrangements may be possible so as to stress particular aspects relevant to the 'state of ignorance' of particular aspirants (*adhikārī-bheda*), the idea of a *pedagogical system corresponds to a unitary structure* which is characterized by the application of the method of progressive negation of wrong notions about totality, which are seen to be universally recurrent as natural misconceptions. This is at the root of the methodological unity of the Upaniṣads. Thus, while in the empirical realm, the objectifiability of the subject-matter is the identity card of a particular science, in the Upaniṣadic realm, *the method of reasoning (vicāra-tarka) assumes itself the presumptive role of an identity card of that which in itself has no expressible identity (ātman).* The disregard for this peculiarity is probably responsible for the misunderstanding of Ātma-vidyā (the 'Science of Ātman') as (or as including) a 'doctrine' or 'conceptual metaphysics'. In other words, the Upaniṣads are said to reveal ātman not because they constitute a re-presentational (partial or otherwise) discourse about it, but because they lead directly to its realisation. Besides, a pedagogical system of instruction is as much internally consistent and necessary as any doctrinal system in the case of empirical sciences. But there is also a basic difference: while in the latter the different argumentative steps are partial knowledge of the subject-matter, in the case of Ātma-vidyā they constitute exclusively indicatory guides of negative character, as explained before.

This leads to the idea that the status of the instructional language of the Upaniṣads is equally unsubstantial as any other phenomenal entity. A process of instruction by means of something which is ultimately non-real is designated by Śaṅkarācārya as a 'device of imagination' (*kalpita-upāya*); it constitutes nothing more than another mental process. (Śaṅkarācārya CUB: I.i.1) The difference between this and other imaginative devices consists only in the fact that the Upaniṣadic device is one by means of which the root of imagination itself (*vikalpa*) is completely destroyed. For this reason only, the Upaniṣads are called the 'last pramāṇa' (*antya-pramāṇa*). (Śaṅkarācārya BSB: II.i.14) It being so, sentences of oneness (*mahāvākya*) such as 'You are That" (CU VI.viii.7) or 'I am *Brahman (Ātman)*' (BU I.iv.10) though leading to immediate liberation, are ultimately false because they are language and so products of ignorance. Still, this does not amount to any absurdity because "one can be liberated by hearing a falsehood, just as one can be killed by being frightened by an illusory snake". (Śaṅkarācārya BSB: II.i.14) «This point is that one may be fogged to an improved awareness by something in the realm from which he is escaping, as something violent happening in one›s dream may cause one to awaken». (Potter 1981: 54) Therefore, says Satchidanandendra Saraswati, there is no rule that requires that all the necessary conditions producing a result must be as real as the result. (Saraswati VPP: 2.24) This follows closely the statement of the Upaniṣads which declare their own vacuity for liberated men: "there (in *mokṣa*) the Vedas are no more the Vedas". (BU IV.iii.22)

Therefore, considering that Upaniṣadic propositions are instructions (ādeśa) – i.e., a deliberate device to deal effectively with the manifestations of the fundamental error in order to enlighten the aspirants to knowledge - it can be said that the less epistemological validity *per se* it has, the greater epistemological validity it has with regard to ātman. In other words, *the pedagogical dimension of a sentence is the peculiar epistemological dimension of the Upaniṣadic teaching.* While empirical judgments imply the ascertainment of a particular entity by means of separating it from all other things, an instructional sentence aims at restoring the original unity of all things in ātman by pointing to the locus of a manifestation of the fundamental error (*avidy*ā). In other words, *a judgement is a disjunctive result, while an instruction is the conjunctive (all-inclusive) result of an analytic process of reasoning.* Therefore, when the instruction is taken as an empirical judgment (or as a denotative statement), it not only constitutes an erroneous knowledge of ātman but the instructional dimension of the sentence (the implicit negation) is equally lost.

Śaṅkarācārya's words summing up the meaning of Upaniṣadic thinking (*vicāra*) as a 'secret method of instruction' or 'apophatic mystagogy', is found in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bh*āṣya while explaining the well-known Upaniṣadic maxim that describes the nature of its epistemic procedural role: "not this, not that" (*neti, neti*). (BU II, iii, 6) *Neti, neti* presents in a nutshell the negating/eliminating method of the Upaniṣads technically described by Satchidanandendra Saraswati as "the method of false attribution and subsequent retraction" (*adhyāropa-apavāda*). (Saraswati VPP: 3, 18-21) According to it, an instructional process constitutes a systematic succession of superimposition of attributes (*adhyāropa*) – meant to negate pre-existent reified notions – followed by retractions (*apavāda*) of those same superimpositions before stated. In Śaṅkarācārya's words:

> Just as, in order to explain the nature of numbers from one up to a hundred, thousand, billions, a man superimposes them on certain lines (digits), calling one of them one, another ten, another hundred, yet another thousand, and so on, and in so doing he only expounds the nature of numbers but he never says that the numbers are the lines; or just as in order to teach the alphabet, he has recourse to a combination of leaf, ink, lines, etc., and through them explains the nature of the letters, but he never says that the letters are the leaf, ink, lines, etc., similarly in this exposition the one entity *brahman*, has been inculcated through various means such as the projection (of the universe). Again, to eliminate the differences created by those imagined means the truth has been summed up as 'Not this, not that' " (Śaṅkarācārya BUB: IV, iv, 25)

IV

In short, conferring a philosophical status to Indian Upaniṣadic thinking – as a discourse of originality, rigor and cognition – could, finally, be just the necessary consequence of a careful and consistent ascertainment of those likely areas of contiguity with Greek philosophy – a Greek philosophy that, following Heidegger and Hadot´s 'dissident' intervention, seems eager to reinstate forgotten dimensions and, in the process, embrace the (Indian) Other as a brother in arms in the pursuance of the noblest human endeavour. That would, finally, be tantamount to a lasting and radical revision of what philosophy is all about.

Key to Abbreviations of Sanskrit Works

AUB – *Aitareya-Upaniṣad-Bh*ā*ṣya*
BSB – *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya*
BU – *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad*
BUB - *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad-Bhāṣya*
CU- *Ch*ā*ndogya-Upaniṣad*
CUB - *Ch*ā*ndogya-Upaniṣad-Bhāṣya*
KUB – *Katha-Upaniṣad-Bhāṣya*
KeUB – *Kena-Upaniṣad-Bhāṣya*
MUB – *Mā*ṇ*ḍ*ū*kya-Upaniṣad-Bhāṣya*
VPP – *Ved*ā*nta-Prakriy*ā*-Praty*ā*bhij*ñ*ā*

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