

**Love (*prīti/sneha*) as Soteriology:  
Vedānta and the “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue” of the  
*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad***

Amor (*prīti/sneha*) como Soteriologia:  
Vedānta e o “Diálogo Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī” do *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*  
*Upaniṣad*

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## ABSTRACT

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The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* stands high in the firmament of Indian philosophical-soteriological tradition. Besides its uncontroversial antiquity, going back to pre-buddhist times, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is considered by all schools of Vedānta one of the most important Upaniṣads. It embodies, as perhaps no other, the fundamental knowledge (*jñāna*) and devotional discipline (*bhakti*) that leads one to definitive Liberation (*mokṣa*) from ignorance (*avidyā*) and existential suffering (*duḥkha*). The objective of the present article is to analyse the fundamental contents of the “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue”, which adorns section 2.4.1-14 of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, and whose main theme is Love (*prīti/sneha*). The analysis will follow a comparative approach, placing face-to-face the textual hermeneutics of two of the major schools of Vedānta, viz., Advaita Vedānta (Non-Duality) and Dvaita Vedānta (Duality) - often seen, in western circles, as mutually excluding philosophical streams.

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**Keywords:** Vedānta. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. Love.

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## RESUMO

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O *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* ocupa um lugar elevado no firmamento da tradição filosófico-soteriológica indiana. Além de sua antiguidade incontroversa, que remonta aos tempos pré-budistas, o *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* é considerado por todas as escolas do Vedānta um dos Upaniṣads mais importantes. Ele incorpora, como talvez nenhum outro, o conhecimento fundamental (*jñāna*) e a disciplina devocional (*bhakti*) que conduz à Libertação definitiva (*mokṣa*) da ignorância (*avidyā*) e do sofrimento existencial (*duḥkha*). O objetivo do presente artigo é analisar os conteúdos fundamentais do “Diálogo Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī”, que adorna a seção 2.4.1-14 do *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, e cujo tema principal é o Amor (*prīti/sneha*). A análise seguirá um viés comparativo, colocando frente a frente as hermenêuticas textuais de duas das principais escolas do Vedānta, a saber, o Advaita Vedānta (Não-Dualidade) e o Dvaita Vedānta (Dualidade) - muitas vezes vistas, em círculos ocidentais, como correntes filosóficas mutuamente excludentes.

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**Palavras-chave:** Vedānta. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. Amor.

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## I

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* stands high in the firmament of Indian philosophical-soteriological tradition. Besides its uncontroversial antiquity, going back to pre-buddhist times, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is considered by all schools of Vedānta one of the most important Upaniṣads<sup>2</sup>. It embodies, as perhaps no other, the fundamental knowledge (*jñāna*) and devotional discipline (*bhakti*) that leads one to definitive Liberation (*mokṣa*) from ignorance (*avidyā*) and existential suffering (*duḥkha*).

The distinguishing mark of Vedānta tradition, in all its hermeneutical schools (*sampradāya*), “is the fundamental belief that everything in the universe has to be traced to an absolute principle which is the ultimate source and explanation, both logical and ontological, of all else. Nothing in the world is self-explained or self-explicable. Brahman [the absolute principle of the Upaniṣads] is the only self-explained reference of all.” (Sharma, 1986, p. 33) On the other hand, those same hermeneutical schools conceive differently the metaphysical dependence of the entire universe on Brahman. More specifically, the three major schools<sup>3</sup> – Advaita Vedānta (Non-Duality), Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta (Qualified Non-Duality) and Dvaita Vedānta (Duality) – developed different conceptual systems dealing with the specific nature of the bonds that bind together the subjective consciousness (*ātman*<sup>4</sup> and, more specifically, *jīvātman*) and the absolute principle of all reality (Brahman).

The school of Advaita Vedānta, whose major exponent is Śaṅkarācārya (7<sup>th</sup> AD), sustains an ultimate condition of *unicity* between *jīvātman* and Brahman. Described as a unity with no parts, Śaṅkarācārya’s unicity points to an ontological non-difference (*abheda*) between *jīvātman* and Brahman – the Supreme Consciousness (Ātman). In this context, one’s perceptual experience of a presumptive substantial duality/multiplicity (*dvaita/prapañca*) is deemed as an illusionary appearance (*māyā*). The school of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, whose major exponent is Rāmānujācārya (11<sup>th</sup> AD), sustains an ultimate condition of *unity* between *jīvātman* and Brahman. Described as a union of

<sup>2</sup> The Upaniṣads are an integral part of the sacred texts of Hinduism known as Vedas. According to tradition, the Vedas comprise a double division in terms of functionality, operability and teleology: *karmakāṇḍa*, “the section relating to action” comprising the texts of Brāhmaṇas; and *jñānakāṇḍa*, “the section relating to knowledge”, comprising the texts of the Upaniṣads. The first section relates to “religion” in the strict sense of a set of ritual practices and moral duties leading to the attainment of paradisiacal conditions *a posteriori*. The second section relates to “philosophy”, in the sense of a process of religious deepening, marked by reflective/devotional exercises of a reason committed to unveiling, here and now, the ultimate mystery of one’s existentiality. Hence, the Upaniṣads constitute the soteriological texts *par excellence* of Indian tradition. Accordingly, they are also known as *vedānta* (veda + anta [“end”]), i.e., the final, teleological, destination of the Vedas. The word *vedānta* also stands as a general designation of the various schools that carry out the teachings of the Upaniṣads.

<sup>3</sup> Besides these, three other schools of Vedānta are also traditionally listed: (i) [Simultaneous] Duality and non-Duality (*dvaitādvaita*) of Nimbarkācārya (12<sup>th</sup> AD); (ii) Pure Non-Duality (*śuddhādvaita*) of Vallabhācārya (15<sup>th</sup> AD); and (iii) Inconceivable [simultaneous] Difference and Non-Difference (*acintyābheda*) of Caitanya Mahāprabhu (15<sup>th</sup> AD).

<sup>4</sup> In this article, I will adopt the following convention with regard to the Sanskrit word *ātman*: (i) “*ātman*” stands for the individual self and therefore synonymous to *jīvātman*; and (ii) “Ātman” stands for the universal self.

intrinsic parts, Rāmānujācārya’s unity is conceived as a whole, analogous to the state of dependence between human “soul” and “body”: Brahman personified as the absolute God Viṣṇu<sup>5</sup> is the (supreme) “soul” of all beings (Ātman) and the (plurality of) *jīvātman*s are the “body”<sup>6</sup>. Finally, the school of Dvaita Vedānta, whose major exponent is Madhvācārya (13<sup>th</sup> AD), supports a *duality* between *jīvātman* and Brahman. Described as a union of distinct entities, Madhvācārya’s duality points to the existence of a plurality of ontologically distinct *jīvātman*s<sup>7</sup>, which are, at the same time, totally dependent on Brahman, personified as the absolute God Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Consciousness (Ātman).<sup>8</sup>

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* constitutes, precisely, a privileged textual sample to show converging and diverging aspects of the various soteriological paths of Vedānta (*sādhana*), all of them leading to an ultimate experience of union or togetherness (*sāyujya*).<sup>9</sup> If divergent aspects stand out prominently in their distinct hermeneutics of major instructive “great sentences” (*mahāvākyas*), such as “I am Brahman” (*aham brahmasmi*) (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1965, 1.4.10, p. 100), converging aspects stand out equally prominently in their equally distinct hermeneutics of the so-called “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue”, which adorns section 2.4.1-14 (reiterated in 4.5.1-15) of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1965, 2.4.1-14, p. 243-259).

## II

The main theme of the “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue” is organically interwoven with the following section, known as “Madhu Vidyā” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1965, 2.4.1-19, p. 263-280), which deals with the ontological condition of mutual interdependence of all beings, and their ultimate foundationality in the absolute

<sup>5</sup> The personification of Brahman is the main feature of all theistic currents of Hinduism. Besides Viṣṇu, the absolute personification of the followers of Vaiṣṇavism, such as Rāmānujācārya and Madhvācārya, we could also mention Śiva, the absolute personification of the followers of Śaivism; and Śakti, the absolute (feminine) personification of the followers of Śaktism.

<sup>6</sup> Besides individual sentient selves (*jīvātman*s or *cit*), Rāmānujācārya also lists insentient matter (*acit*) as the other component of the “body” of God Viṣṇu (*iśvara*).

<sup>7</sup> Besides individual sentient selves (*jīvātman*s or *cit*), Madhvācārya also lists insentient matter (*acit*) as the other categorical component of the plurality of beings totally dependent on God Viṣṇu (*iśvara*).

<sup>8</sup> “Duality” is, philosophically, more used to refer to two (or more) ontologically distinct and independent principles. I shall call it “substantive duality”. In this sense, Madhvācārya can’t be certainly classified as “dualist”, for the distinct *cit* and *acit* realities are conceived as totally dependent on Viṣṇu. As Sharma notes, neither “duality” nor its Sanskrit equivalent *dvaita*, in their primary sense, are “commensurate with the highest metaphysical ideology of Madhva’s thought, which consists in the acceptance of One Independent Transcendent-cum-Immanent Being as the source and explanation of all finite existence.” (Sharma, 1986, p. 32).

<sup>9</sup> The word could be generally translated as “union” (*sāyujya/sayuja*), though its specific form varies according to the different doctrines of the three main schools. In Advaita, see Śaṅkarācārya’s *Saundaryalaharī*: “[one attains] the condition of union/united (*sāyujya*) with [Supreme] Giriśa [Brahman]” (*giriśasāyujyapadavim*) (Śaṅkarācārya, 1937, 12, p. 72). In Dvaita, see Madhvācārya’s *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* (4.4.19): “after merging with it, [one attains] the condition of union (*sayuja*) with the Supreme Self [Viṣṇu]” (*sayujyah paramātmānam pravīśya*) (Madhvācārya in Sharma, 1986, p. 466).

Brahman. The organicity between the two sections is by all means highly appropriate. In fact, it is not enough for beings to be mutually interdependent and that such interdependence finds shelter in Brahman as their foundation and absolute principle. They should equally find therein their fundamental purpose and meaning, existentially experienced as a lasting state of immunity from suffering (*duḥkha*) and positive enjoyment of happiness in this world (*ānanda*), in the companionship of all other beings.

Such a state of definitive well-being, as well as the means that lead to it, is precisely what the *upaniṣadic* tradition terms as Love (*pṛīti/sneha*) and more specifically, as Love for the essentiality of the self, to be pursued by means of alternative paths that combine, in different weights, the disciplines of knowledge (*jnāna*) and devotion (*bhakti*): (i) the realisation of one’s ultimate non-difference from the absolute Brahman (Advaita); (ii) the realisation of one’s being an intrinsic and absolutely dependent part of the absolute and grace-giver Viṣṇu (Viśiṣṭādvaita); or (iii) the realisation of one’s being a distinct entity, totally dependent on the absolute Viṣṇu’s will and grace (Dvaita). In short, love stands as a major common feature of the main Vedānta schools’ soteriological paths.<sup>10</sup>

To analyse the fundamental contents of the “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue” and, at the same time, highlight the common aspects that percolate the various hermeneutical shades of Vedānta tradition, I chose to undertake a comparative exercise placing face-to-face the textual interpretations of Advaita Vedānta (Non-Duality) and Dvaita Vedānta (Duality) - often seen, in western circles, as mutually excluding philosophical streams. The “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue” is generally viewed in both schools as a crucial and decisive narrative, with significant impact on their doctrines (*siddhānta*). In my analysis, I will restrict myself to the commentaries (*bhāṣya*) of Śaṅkarācārya and Madhvācārya – equally known as *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya* –, the main representatives of Advaita and Dvaita, respectively. My critical appreciation will endeavour to highlight what I perceive as (i) converging procedural and teleological aspects, on the one hand; and (ii) divergent topical aspects, on the other. My whole exercise is based on three main assumptions.

The first assumption is that Śaṅkarācārya’s and Madhvācārya’s discourses are, above all, an instruction (*upadeśa*). Their doctrines (*siddhānta*), instead of discursive metaphysics in the western sense of the term, point to an ontology that transcends all linguistic formulations: the first (Advaita) on account of a condition of non-objectificability and attributeless of Brahman, the sole reality (*advīṭya*); and the second (Dvaita) on account of a condition of infinite attributefulness of a ruling theological entity, Viṣṇu, the Supreme God, on which a plurality of beings totally depend (*adhīnatva*). As *upadeśas*, Śaṅkarācārya’s and Madhvācārya’s discourses are, eventually, to be judge by their efficacy in leading one to achieve his/her intended goal, viz., the definitive Liberation (*mokṣa*) from suffering (*duḥkha*) and its ultimate cause, ignorance (*avidyā*). I tend, therefore, to contextually relativize their doctrinal

<sup>10</sup> Advaita’s path consists mainly of knowledge (*jnāna*), having devotion (*bhakti*) as supporting role; while Viśiṣṭādvaita’s and Dvaita’s paths consist mainly of devotion (*bhakti*), having knowledge (*jnāna*) as supporting role.

differences: they are, above all, two legitimate narrative systems that may be equally effective, if understood as contextual pedagogical tools, suiting distinct times and spaces, distinct psychological profiles of eligible seekers (*adhikāriṇs*), or even distinct stages of a specific path (*sādhana*).<sup>11</sup>

The second assumption is that despite doctrinal differences, Śaṅkarācārya’s and Madhvācārya’s discourses are both affirmative about the possibility of attaining Liberation (*mokṣa*) while living, here and now, lending those discourses a verifiable means to validate them. Concepts like “one who is liberated while living” (*jīvanmukta*) of Advaita, and “one who has a direct vision [of the absolute Viṣṇu]” (*aparokṣajñānin*) of Dvaita bear testimony to that possibility and are considered a distinctive characteristic of Hindu soteriological thinking, in comparison to western Christian modern dominant discourse of an otherworldly salvation. I’m aware of the fact that the equivalence between *jīvanmukti* and *aparokṣajñāna* demands further explanations, in view of the complexities of both the postulations. B. N. K. Sharma has convincingly shown the sheer appropriateness and adequacy of their equivalence and juxtaposition. (Sharma, 1986, p. 465)<sup>12</sup>

And the third assumption is that, notwithstanding argumentative differences, both Śaṅkarācārya and Madhvācārya agree to the principle the Vedas conform a unity of purpose (*samanvaya*)<sup>13</sup>, which could be described as the pursuance of a *religious* or *spiritual* way of life, in contrast to a *mundane* one. This principle of unity lends foundation to their understanding of the logical *sequentiality* of the whole Vedas, comprising Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads, in a gradual and ascending realisation of the two major existential goals of life: *dharma* - the initial stage comprising the performance of sacrificial rituals (*yajña*) and other moral duties - and *mokṣa* – the ultimate stage of Liberation from ignorance through knowledge (*jñāna*) or/and devotion (*bhakti*), and the realisation of happiness or bliss (*ānanda*). For Śaṅkarācārya, the initial state, also called “the path of action” (*pravṛttimārga*), ensures mental purification, whereas the ultimate stage, also called “the path of non-action” (*nivṛttimārga*), comprises primarily the disciplines of knowledge (*jñāna*) and ancillary the disciplines of devotion (*bhakti*) and meditation (*upāsanā*), and entirely deconstructs the self’s presumptive substantiality, leading one to the realisation of one’s ultimate condition of non-difference from the absolute Brahman, the Supreme Non-dual Self (Ātman). (Śaṅkarācārya, 1982, 1.1, pp. 1-2)<sup>14</sup> For Madhvācārya, on the other hand, the entire Vedas constitute a gradual revelation of Viṣṇu, the absolute Supreme God, on which every other being depends upon. The initial state (*dharma*) ensures the performance of acts of submission towards to minor deities (or Viṣṇu himself) in contexts of self-interested actions, i.e., actions that involve the subjective-egocentric expectancy of

<sup>11</sup> In this sense the word *upadeśa* is practically synonymous to *upāya* (“expedient means [of instruction]”).

<sup>12</sup> See also Daniel Sheridan’s essay “Direct Knowledge of God and Living Liberation in the Religious Thought of Madhva [Madhvācārya]” (1996, p. 91-105).

<sup>13</sup> The main source of this principle is the *Brahmasūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa, one of the foundational texts of all schools of Vedānta: “[The inquiry on Brahman] is based on the fact that [Brahman] is the main subject-matter [of all scriptures]” (*tattu samanvayāt*). (Bādarāyaṇa, 1956, 1.1.4, p. 21).

<sup>14</sup> “The two stages/paths of the religion of the Vedas, viz., the stage/path of [ritual-moral] action and the stage/path of [total] renunciation” are what sustains the order of the universe.” (*dvevidho hi vedokto dhamaḥ pravṛttilakṣaṇo nivṛttilakṣaṇśca jagataḥ sthītikāraṇam*) (Śaṅkarācārya, 1982, 1.1, pp. 1-2).

retribution; whereas the ultimate stage (*mokṣa*), comprising primarily of disciplines of devotion (*bhakti*) and ancillary of disciplines of knowledge (*jñāna*) and meditation (*upāsanā*), leads one to the direct vision of (*aparokṣajñāna/aparokṣadṛṣṭi*) and union with Viṣṇu (*sāyujya*), the Supreme God, the Supreme Self, the immanent internal ruler (*antaryāmin*) permeating all beings, and upon whom one’s existence entirely depends.<sup>15</sup>

### III

With these three basic assumptions in mind – viz., (i) doctrinal discourses as instruction (*upadeśa*); (ii) the possibility of attaining Liberation (*mokṣa*) while living, here and now; (iii) and the principle of unity of purpose (*samanvaya*) of the Vedas -, I initiate my analysis of the “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue” of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* with paragraph 1.4.5 - a synthesis of the fundamental pedagogy of Love. After announcing his earnest desire to follow the path of renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*) and the ultimate pursuance of *mokṣa*, philosopher Yājñavalkya addresses his wife and philosopher Maitreyī with the following words:

Verily, not for the sake of the husband, my dear, is [the husband] loved, but he is loved for the sake of the Self (Ātman/Brahman). Verily, not for the sake of the wife, my dear, is [the wife] loved, but she is loved for the sake of the Self (Ātman). Verily, not for the sake of the sons, my dear, are [the sons] loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self (Ātman). Verily, not for the sake of wealth, my dear, is [wealth] loved, but it is loved for the sake of the Self (Ātman). Verily, not for the sake of the *brāhmaṇas*<sup>16</sup>, my dear, are [the *brāhmaṇas*] loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self (Ātman). Verily, not for the sake of the *kṣatriyas*<sup>17</sup>, my dear, are [the *kṣatriyas*] loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self (Ātman). Verily, not for the sake of the worlds, my dear, are [the worlds] loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self (Ātman). Verily, not for the sake of the gods, my dear, are [the gods] loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self (Ātman). Verily, not for the sake of the beings, my dear, are [the beings] loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self (Ātman). Verily, not for the sake of all this [universe], my dear, is [all this universe] loved, but it is loved for the sake of the Self (Ātman). The Self, my dear Maitreyī, should be realised-should be heard of, reflected ·On and meditated upon. By the realisation of the Self, my dear, through hearing (*śravaṇa*), thinking

<sup>15</sup> “Hari [Viṣṇu] is the most supreme; and this world is capable of moving or understanding command. That Hari is indeed most independent. He is the ocean (repository) of all pervasive, imperishable infinite and eternally good qualities. Such is the saying of the Vedas as well as the teaching of Vyāsa.” (*sarvottamo hariridam tu tadājñāyaiva cettum kṣamam sa tu hariḥ paramasvatantraḥ / pūṇāvyaḥ gaṇita nityaguṇāṃavo asau ityeva vedavacanāni paroktayasca*) (Madhvācārya, 1941, 129).

<sup>16</sup> Representative of the priesthood/scholarly class.

<sup>17</sup> Representative of the ruling political class.

(*matil/manana*) and meditation (*vijñāna/nididhyāsana*), all this is known.<sup>18</sup> (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1910, 2.4.5, p. 302-303).

This extraordinary passage presents, in a nutshell, one of the greatest teachings of the entire literature of the Upaniṣads. Following Śaṅkarācārya’s and Madhvācārya’s initial remarks, the passage solemnly declares the specific soteriological instruction (*upadeśa*) that constitutes the major goal of the Upaniṣads. For Śaṅkarācārya, the Upaniṣads propound “detachment (*vairāgya*) as a means to immortality” (*amṛtatvasādhanaṃ vairāgyam*) (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, 2.4.5, p. 303). This basically involves one’s renunciation to the presumptive substantial character of objects of desire (*kāma*) in view of what constitutes, in essence, their real Being and, therefore, the real content of one’s Love - the absolute Brahman, the supreme and non-dual Self of all (*Ātmapṛīti*). For Madhvācārya, on the other hand, the Upaniṣads exhorts one to realise the ontological condition of total dependence (*adhīnatva*) of one’s wishes (*kāma*) upon the absolute Viṣṇu’s will (*icchā*).<sup>19</sup> Here, mundane wishes are ultimately prompted by Viṣṇu’s will and, as a consequence, Viṣṇu becomes himself the ultimate goal of all desires, the ultimate object of Love (*Viṣṇusneha*).

What really stands as a remarkable feature of both the masters (*ācārya*)’ interpretations is the specific nature of the “detachment” (*vairāgya*)/“realisation of dependence” (*adhīnatva*) the Upaniṣads purportedly exhort one to. At no moment, the commentators disqualify the empirical objects<sup>20</sup> of one’s desires. The list of those objects is overwhelmingly comprehensive, right from the closest to the furthest, as regards one’s expectation of joyful interaction. From wife and children to material wealth, from the worlds of the present and the future to devotion towards (minor) gods - the totality of the one’s perceived reality comprising the objects of one’s interested actions in this world (*kāma/artha*) and in the next (*svarga*) is paraded before us in a dramatic fashion. At no moment, the ultimate legitimacy of desire is questioned, at no moment the

<sup>18</sup> *na vā are patyuh kāmāya patih priyo bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya patih priyo bhavati / na vā are jāyāyai kāmāya jāyā priyā bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya jāyā priyā bhavati / na vā are pūtrāṇaṃ kāmāya putrāḥ priyā bhavanti, ātmanastu kāmāya putrāḥ priyā bhavanti / na vā are vittasya kāmāya vittaṃ priyaṃ bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya vittaṃ priyaṃ bhavati / na vā are brahmaṇaḥ kāmāya brahma priyaṃ bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya brahma priyaṃ bhavati / na vā are kṣtrasya kāmāya kṣatram priyaṃ bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya kṣatram priyaṃ bhavati / na vā are lokānāṃ kāmāya lokāḥ priyā bhavanti, ātmanastu kāmāya lokāḥ priyā bhavanti / na vā are devānāṃ kāmāya devāḥ priyā bhavanti, ātmanastu kāmāya devāḥ priyā bhavanti / na vā are bhūtānāṃ kāmāya bhūtāni priyāni bhavanti, ātmanastu kāmāya bhūtāni priyāni bhavanti / na vā are sarvasya kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavati / ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo maitreyī, ātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyū vijñānenedaṃ sarvaṃ viditam.* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1910, 2.4.5, p. 302-3).

<sup>19</sup> “One who considers someone else as Brahman, the Supreme Self (*ātman*), and who ignores one’s dependence on the Supreme Lord [Viṣṇu] (*bhagavadadhīnatvena*), taking shelter in other locations other than [Viṣṇu], he, verily, goes to obscurity beyond these worlds. (*anyatrātmano brahma veda tadanāśritvena sthānāntare ca veda paraded parato lokalokasyāndhe tamaśi*). (Madhvācārya, 2012, 2.4.5, p. 123).

<sup>20</sup> The expression “empirical objects” should be understood differently in Advaita and Dvaita philosophies. In Advaita, where Brahman is ultimately non-objectifiable (*aviśeya*), objectness (*viśeyatva*) is synonymous to empiricity (*laukikatva*), and therefore all objects are empirical. In Dvaita, where Viṣṇu is a distinct reality, empirical objects should be distinguished from Viṣṇu as a meta-empirical object (*alaukika*).

suppression of desire is enjoined, at no moment, an escape from one’s interaction with the objects is propounded.

If empirical objects *per se* are not the target, the only left alternative is the nature of one’s relationship with them, the nature of their ultimate existential teleology, i.e., the sense in which they are deemed to be relevant entities in one’s life. A revision of sorts, entailing a shift in one’s attitude towards empirical objects, could be classified under the category of *re-signification of reality*: “detachment” (*vairāgya*)/“realisation of dependence” (*adhīnatva*) enjoined by the Upaniṣads, far from involving one’s renunciation of empirical objects (both worldly and otherworldly), points instead to one’s renunciation to an erroneous way of understanding their nature (*svarūpa*): in the case of Advaita, presumptively distinct and autarchic entities are now realised as ultimately and essentially non-different (*abheda*) from the absolute Brahman; whereas in the case of Dvaita, real distinct entities, presumptively autarchic, are now realised as ontologically dependent on the absolute Viṣṇu.

In short, for both Śāṅkarācārya and Madhvācārya, what is at stake in Yājñavalkya’s fundamental instruction is an invitation for one to cognitively *re-signify* (perceived) reality *in toto* and re-instate, from the extended canvas of all-pervading Brahman/Viṣṇu, the ultimate meaning of one’s intimate relationship with all beings as Love (*pṛīti/sneha*). Their common stand is an abiding commitment to affirm rather than to deny the world, through means of disciplines that eliminate one’s subjective adherence to phantasies that make one see things differently from what they actually are, just like in one’s recurrent experience of illusion. The fundamental passage of “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue”, cited above, ends with an important exhortation for one to pursue the soteriological methodology of *vicāra* (dialogical meditative thinking), which unfolds itself in form of three basic disciplines, viz., (i) *śravaṇa*, i.e., hearing the master’s teachings; (ii) *manana* or thinking dialogically about the contents of those teachings; and (iii) *nididhyāsana* or reiterative thinking (Śāṅkarācārya)/reiterative devotion (Madhvācārya). If in Śāṅkarācārya’s negative path<sup>21</sup>, any of the three disciplines may lead to the realisation of the non-dual Brahman; in Madhvācārya’s positive path<sup>22</sup>, the discipline of *nididhyāsana* stands high as the culminating stage of one’s direct vision of the absolute Viṣṇu.

In a schematic way, we could summarize as follows the common *diagnostical*, *therapeutical* and *teleological* dimensions of Śāṅkarācārya’s and Madhvācārya’s *vedāntic* soteriologies:

(i) [*diagnosis*] Empirical objects in general are not what the self thinks them to be, i.e., independent realities, ready to be capture and privately owned. This misperception is based on the concomitant false assumption of an independent self, whose aim is to control and manipulate them. This is the subjectivist aspect of desire (*kāma*) to be renounced, constitutive of the error (*mithyā*) about the self (*jīvātman*) and the world (*jagat*).

<sup>21</sup> See ahead.

<sup>22</sup> See ahead.



(ii) [*therapy*] Empirical objects and the self are, ultimately, dependent on a higher reality, an absolute principle which constitutes their Supreme Self (Ātman): in the case of Advaita, the absolute Brahman, a non-dual and non-theistic reality, from which all objective appearances are essentially non-different; and in the case of Dvaita, the absolute Viṣṇu, a Supreme Being, on which all other distinct beings totally depend. This is the real and transcendental aspect of desire (*icchā*) to be realised, constitutive of the truth (*satya*) about the self (*jīvātman*) and the world (*jagat*).

(iii) [*teleology*] Love for empirical objects is, ultimately, Love for the Supreme Self, be it the non-dual and non-theistic Brahman (*Brahmaprīti/Ātmaprīti*) or the theistic Viṣṇu (*Viṣṇusneha/Ātmansneha*). In other words, Love for the Supreme Self is true Love for all empirical objects sheltered in the latter.

#### IV

The three propositions above represent a synthesis of the common features of Śaṅkarācārya’s and Madhvācārya’s commentaries, as well as their respective soteriological paths. On the other hand, those communalities co-exist with clear divergent topical aspects, which reflect their distinct doctrines (*siddhāntas*), understood as instructional narratives (*upadeśa*) adjusted to specific pedagogical contexts. Accordingly, I would term Śaṅkarācārya’s hermeneutical variant a *negative path*, as it fundamentally consists of a rational process (*vicāra*) of strict error elimination (*nivartakatva*), after which nothing positive needs to be done for the absolute Brahman, the sole reality, to shine forth. In other words, Śaṅkarācārya’s cognitive process of detachment is the sole activity to be undertaken. On the other hand, I would term Madhvācārya’s hermeneutical variant a *positive path*, as it combines a similar rational process of error elimination leading a positive knowledge about Viṣṇu, followed by a positive final mystical journey of devotional contemplation (*aparokṣajñāna*) and union with (*sāyujya*) the absolute Viṣṇu, an event that depends fundamentally on a concomitant transcendent act of grace (*prasāda*) by the latter. In other words, Madhvācārya’s cognitive process of detachment is to be followed by a positive “attachment” towards an extraordinary being (the absolute God Viṣṇu), a transcendent-immanent entity. Let us see how those differences transpire in both commentators’ narratives.

Śaṅkarācārya initiates his comments with seemingly disqualifying remarks towards the worldly and otherworldly objects of desire, exhorting one to develop *vairāgya* or renunciatory detachment towards them. At the same time, he postulates that the ultimate goal of all one’s feelings towards empirical objects is nothing but the Love for the absolute Brahman, the non-dual Self.<sup>23</sup> Understandably, he is reacting to

<sup>23</sup> “In order to exhort one into renunciation, [Yājñavalkya’s words] aim at creating in one a sentiment of detachment towards the wife, husband, children, etc.. (...) It’s a well-known fact that the Supreme Self (Ātman/Brahman) alone is dear, not any other thing.” (*jāyāpatiputrādibhyo virāgamutpādayati tatsamnyāsāya (...) tasmāt lokaprasiddhametat ātmaiva priyaḥ nānyaḥ*). (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, p. 303-304).

Maitreyī’s anxiety, born out of her strong suspicion about the impossibility of overcoming suffering and attaining ever-lasting bliss and immortality (*amṛtatva*), through the acquisition of empirical objects of desire. In Śaṅkarācārya’s view, Maitreyī perfectly matches Yājñavalkya’s disposition to renounced worldly dealings, marked by one’s relationship with the objects based on self-interest and manipulative ownership. They are both ready to embark on a definitive search for self-knowledge, with the fundamental question in mind: what is actually needed for one to achieve immortality (*amṛtatva*)?<sup>24</sup> What follows are Yājñavalkya’s words of instruction that fit adequately a common condition of “renunciation” (*saṃnyāsin*).

Sliding along the flow of the narrative, Śaṅkarācārya’s hermeneutics takes a turn to unveil the real content of one’s required detachment: instead of the objects themselves, what actually has to be renounced to, are the recurrent errors that mar one’s perception about them. In doing so, he prompts a re-visitation of one’s mundane experience, exhorting one to realize the wider ontological canvas that conditions the phenomenological appearance of the self (*jīvātman*) and other empirical objects. Instead of discrete and independent, they are both revealed as insubstantial entities, essentially grounded and ultimately non-different (*abheda*) from the non-dual (*advaita*) absolute Brahman. In line with his interpretation of the “great sentence” (*mahāvākya*) “I am Brahma” (*aham brahmāsmi*) (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1910, 1.4.10, p. 121), that occurs in the preceding chapter of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Śaṅkarācārya exhorts one to undertake a cognitive re-signification (*jñāna*) of one’s quotidian experiences and realize the organic articulation that prevails therein, between one’s desire for worldly and otherworldly empirical objects (*kāma*) and one’s amorous instinctual impulse (*pṛīti*) towards the absolute Brahman, the foundational consciousness of all (*Ātman*): the former is ancillary (*gauṇa*) to the latter (*mukhya*), in the sense that the former is effectively meaningful as long as it ultimately leads to the realization of the latter.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, more than just a circumstantial aspiration, Love for the Supreme Self/Brahman (*Ātmapṛīti/Brahmapṛīti*), even when forgotten or neglected, represents an ever-present condition underscoring one’s desirability towards empirical objects. Once the latter’s insubstantiality is realized, immediately ceases one’s intercourse with them as privatized ownership. In other words, Love for Ātman/Brahman is compassionate love for all insubstantial appearances, on account of a final recognition of the ultimate non-difference between subject and object, the self and the others.

Śaṅkarācārya’s comments on a cryptical and decisive passage at the end of the “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue” is unequivocal about his stand in support of the principle according to which one’s embracing Brahman is tantamount to one’s embracing the world. In 2.4.12, Yājñavalkya declares, to Maitreyī’s disbelief and

<sup>24</sup> “Then, Maitreyī said: ‘What shall I do with that which will not make me immortal? Tell me, Sir, of that alone which you know (as the only means of immortality)?’ (*sā hovāca maitreyī yenāham nāmṛtā syā kimaham tena kuryāa yadeva bhagavānveda tadeva me bruhīti*) (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1910, 2.4.3, p. 300).

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore, one’s love for the objects is secondary, because they contribute to the Love for the Supreme Self (*Ātmapṛīti*). And one’s love for the Supreme Self alone is primary.” (*tasmāt ātmapṛītisā dhanatvāt gauṇī anyatra pṛītiḥ ātmanyeva mukyā*) (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, 2.4.5, p. 304)

dismay, that, “when attaining [Liberation (*mokṣa*)], one’s condition of consciousness is absent” (*na pretya saṁjñā asti*). (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1910, 2.4.12, p. 314). A few sentences before, however, Yājñavalkya had evoked the analogy of a lump of salt (equivalent to Brahman) spreading over the multiplicity of water drops (equivalent to the world) - all of them tasting inevitably salty -, in order to suggest one’s experience of Brahman realization. The plain awareness of the salt (Brahman), present everywhere, is described by Yājñavalkya as a condition of “pure consciousness” (*vijñāna*). How, then, to reconcile a condition of “absence of consciousness” with a condition of “pure consciousness”?

In his comments, Śaṅkarācārya rejects any possibility of interpreting Yājñavalkya’s statement as either implying a state of absolute absence of consciousness or a state of contentless consciousness – generally associated with deep sleep (*suṣupti*). He states, unequivocally, that Yājñavalkya’s intention is to deny “objective consciousness” in Liberation (*mokṣa*), which, instead of a condition of formless or contentless consciousness, involves the absence of objective consciousness made up of reified/substantial identifications, i.e., made up of ontologically “separate identities” (*paricchinna sat*). He says: “In such a state, one has no longer objective consciousness. (*nāsti viśeṣasaṁjñā*) (...) No more is there such particular consciousness as ‘I so and so am the son of so and so; this is my land and wealth; I am happy or miserable’.” (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, 2.4.12, p. 317)<sup>26</sup> Therefore, in Śaṅkarācārya’s view, Yājñavalkya does not reject consciousness *per se*. On the contrary, while rejecting the ontological reification of each and every specific content of consciousness, he exalts a state of pure consciousness (*vijñāna*), i.e., a state where consciousness is always free from attachments to whatever content/form it may take.

This is the contextual background to understand Yājñavalkya’s final remarks in 2.4.14, usually misinterpreted again as propounding Liberation as a state of sheer “unconsciousness”, or a state of non-perception.<sup>27</sup> He says: “When there is duality (*dvaita*), as it were, one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one speaks something, one thinks something, one knows something. But when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Supreme Self (*Ātman*), then what should one smell, and through what, what should one see, and through what, what should one hear, and through what, what should one speak, and through what, what should one think, and through what, what should one know, and through what?” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1910, 2.4.14, p. 319). Śaṅkarācārya’s hermeneutics is twofold: (i) the self’s non-perception of other entities; (ii) and the self’s non-perception of Brahman. Firstly, he interprets Yājñavalkya rejection of duality (*dvaita*) as rejection of “substantive duality” - where things are conceived as existing ontologically different and independent one from another. Accordingly, the state of non-perception refers only to the non-perception of something substantially different from the self, and not an absolute non-

<sup>26</sup> *nāsti viśeṣasaṁjñeti ahamasau amuṣya putraḥ mamedam kṣatram dhanam sukhī duḥkhīti*. (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, 2.4.12, p. 317).

<sup>27</sup> This passage and Śaṅkarācārya’s interpretation is often misunderstood as propounding a state of non-awareness of world, wherein the latter is seen as an illusion (*māyā*), this being the ontological condition of *advaita*. But, in fact, what really stands as illusion or *māyā* for Śaṅkarācārya is not the world *per se*, but the recurrent error of conceiving it as substantial multiplicity.

perception. Secondly, there is, in fact, in regard to Brahman, an absolute sense of non-perception. However, all we have here is a non-perception that enables all perceptions. As the unifying platform of all acts of consciousness, bringing co-existentially subjects and objects, Brahman can never be itself an object of perception. Accordingly, the non-perception of Brahman ratifies the positive character of all acts of perception, ensuring reality to the world. Paraphrasing the concluding statement of the *upaniṣadic* section, Śaṅkarācārya states: “Therefore, through what instrument should one know the knower owing to which *this universe is known (idam sarvam vijānāti)?*”. (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, 2.4.12, p. 322)<sup>28</sup>

In the middle of his arguments, commenting on the unifying goal of all analogies employed in the *upaniṣadic* section (2.4.7-11), suggesting the unity of all things in Brahman, Śaṅkarācārya declares what I consider to be the definitive clarification of principle stated above – “embracing Brahman is tantamount to embracing the world”. He states: “if a thing cannot be perceived apart from something else, the latter is the essence of the former”. (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, 2.4.7, p. 306)<sup>29</sup> or, in other words, the latter (Brahman) *is non-different* from the former (world). One’s recurrent attitude of substantializing/reifying the world of insubstantial entities, otherwise described as the error of the objectification of Brahman, is, therefore, the main eliminative target of Advaita Vedānta’s rational methodology of meditative thinking (*vicāra*). Its three disciplines – hearing (*śravaṇa*), thinking (*manana*) and reiterative thinking (*nididhyāsana*) - are conceived by Śaṅkarācārya as consisting of the same process of error elimination, this being all that is required for the metalinguistic truth of the non-dual Brahman/Ātman to shine forth and pacify, once for all, each and every existential desire.

## V

The framework of Madhvācārya’s commentary is significantly different from Śaṅkarācārya’s. On account of a pluralist ontology where the self (*jīvātman*), (inanimate) matter (*acit*) and the Supreme Self (Brahman/Viṣṇu) conform the categorical triad of ontological reality, a cognitive-filled process of error elimination – the ignorant forgetfulness of one’s ontological dependence on Viṣṇu – is not enough for one to achieve Liberation (*mokṣa*). Different from Advaita where the error of reifying the absolute non-dual reality, Brahman, is never productive of real results – just like the integrity of the rope is never affected during the illusionary perception of a snake<sup>30</sup>-, the ignorance to be dispelled in the case of Dvaita leaves behind real and positive marks,

<sup>28</sup> *tasmāt yena idam sarvam vijānāti tam vijñātāram tena karaṇena.* (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, 2.4.12, p. 322)

<sup>29</sup> *yatsvrupavyatirekena agrahanam yasya, tasya tadatmanam eva loke dr̥stam.* (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, 2.4.7, p. 306).

<sup>30</sup> A standard analogy used in Vedānta philosophy to highlight the ignorance of conceiving the absolute Brahman/Viṣṇu as an object (Advaita) or as an empirical object (Dvaita). It evokes a situation of one’s mistaking a twisted rope for a snake, in view of defective light conditions. As a consequence of this positive ignorance (*avidyā*), one undergoes suffering. Advaita resorts to this analogy to specially highlight its doctrinal peculiarities: the fact that Reality as such (rope) is never affected by the self’s illusion (snake), and that the self is actually never apart from the Reality.

viz., a real distancing and shattered relationship between the self and Viṣṇu, the Supreme Self, upon which the former entirely depends. As such, the cognitive process (*jñāna*) should be followed by the self's active disposition to render service (*sevā*) and devotion (*bhakti*) to Viṣṇu, so as to be worth of the latter's compassion and grace (*prasāda*), and finally achieve direct contemplative encounter (*aparokṣajñāna*) and mystical union with him (*sāyujya*).

Right from the beginning, Madhvācārya's commentary is firmly committed to reveal Viṣṇu as the ultimate destination of all worldly and otherworldly Love, by stressing repeatedly on the total dependence (*adhīnatva*) of all beings upon him, notwithstanding the latter's distinct ontological existence. The Supreme Self (Ātman) that stands behind as the implicit and higher goal of all human desires is, therefore, none other but the absolute Viṣṇu: “Ātman [Brahman] is [the Supreme God] Viṣṇu” (*Ātman Nārāyaṇaḥ* [Viṣṇu]). (Madhvācārya, 2012, 2.4.5, p. 122). As a consequence, one's renunciatory detachment from empirical objects is not conceived as an absolute detachment, in view of the latter's status as distinct ontological entities. What actually one has to relinquish in one's desire, is the presumptive thinking that it (desire) exists as an absolute determination of the self, and that it is directed towards objects of independent existence. Accordingly, one's act of recognizing the absolute dependence of the self upon Viṣṇu, entrusts those desires with full meaning, as they stand legitimized as being prompted by Viṣṇu's will. The immanent presence of Viṣṇu as the inner ruler (*antaryāmin*) and Supreme Self (Ātman) of all entities, and, in particular, his special role of inner prompter of one's desires, implies Viṣṇu's willingness to be loved through one's love to all empirical objects. In other words, one's subjective attachment to empirical objects is ratified as real and effective, as long as it stands resignified as one's ontological disposition towards Viṣṇu, the meta-empirical absolute Being.

In short, while stressing on the ontological difference between empirical objects and the absolute Viṣṇu, the controller and protector of all beings (*antaryāmin*), Madhvācārya's commentary establishes an organic and indissociable link between one's desire for the former – i.e., worldly and otherworldly objects - and the fundamental love for Viṣṇu. The argument is doublefold. First, the immanent presence of Viṣṇu in all beings is what actually attracts one towards the objects. Second, one's attraction towards the objects (*kāma*) is only possible on account of Viṣṇu's major will (*icchā*). In other words, Viṣṇu's will prompting one's desires is essentially a means of his own self-revelation as the Supreme Self (Ātman).<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, one's forgetfulness of this condition is the root-cause of one's failure to fully satisfy one's desires, as it restricts one's attraction to privately conceived objects, i.e., objects of my desire alone, instead of objects of Viṣṇu's will as well. In short, to re-signify desire is, for Madhvācārya, to bring it under the umbrella of Viṣṇu's will, by developing a higher Love for Viṣṇu

<sup>31</sup> “The husband does not become dear to his wife by his choice, but as desired by Viṣṇu alone he becomes dear to his wife. (...) Since [Viṣṇu] is the primary objective of all [desires], the importance of the desire for the Supreme Lord [Viṣṇu] is highlighted. (*patirjāyāpriyo naiva svecchayā tu bhaviṣyati / viṣṇoricchābalenaiva syam ca svapriyobhavet* (...)) *prādhānyādīdam sarvam viditam sarvakāraṇtvācca sarvapṛādhānyam bhagvataḥ*). (Madhvācārya, 2012, 2.4.13-4 & 2.4.5, p. 126 & 123).

(*Viṣṇusneha*)<sup>32</sup>, which is itself the culmination of one’s devotion (*bhakti*) towards him. Instead of prompting dislike or indifference towards empirical objects, this supreme Love for Viṣṇu grants one fully knowledge about them, and renders one’s interaction with them an experience of joy, compassion, and brotherhood<sup>33</sup>.

Towards the end of his commentary and as a response to Yājñavalkya’s cryptical and enigmatic words stating, on the one hand, the “absence of consciousness” (*na samjñāsti*) and, on the other, the condition of “pure consciousness” (*vijñāna*) in Liberation (*mokṣa*) (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1910, 2.4.12, p. 314), Madhvācārya takes quite a different stand *vis-à-vis* Śaṅkarācārya. If the latter looks at the analogy of the salt (dissolved in each and every drop of water) as an indicative pointer to the ultimate non-difference between the salt (Brahman) and the various drops of water (world), Madhvācārya looks at the same analogy as an indicative pointer to the absolute dependence (*adhīnatva*) of the various drops (world) to the salt (Viṣṇu), within an ontological framework of their being two distinct entities. To reconcile, under this ontological framework, the state of pure consciousness, on the one hand, with that of absence of consciousness, on the other, Madhvācārya states initially that one’s condition of pure consciousness in Liberation (*mokṣa*) is unquestionably a state of full awareness of each and every thing, in equal terms to that of Viṣṇu himself, and as such, incompatible with a state of negative ignorance (non-knowledge), i.e., a state bereft of sense perception.<sup>34</sup> The “absence of consciousness”, which is co-extensive with such fundamental state of “pure consciousness”, has therefore to properly qualified. Madhvācārya defines it as the absence of a (self-conceived) autonomous consciousness, which means, affirmatively, the plain awareness of one’s absolute dependence upon Viṣṇu or, in his own words, the plain awareness of “being similar [in knowledge and bliss] to Brahman [Viṣṇu], without, however, having dominion over the worlds (*adhipatya*)” (Madhvācārya, 2012, 2.4.13-4, p. 126)<sup>35</sup>.

In short, according to Madhvācārya, the (liberated) self has knowledge and bliss but no dominium or, in other words, he/she has knowledge and bliss in midst of an absolute dependence (*adhīnatva*) upon the grace-giver (*prasāda*) Viṣṇu. This is the contextual background to understand Yājñavalkya’s final remarks in 2.4.14, usually misinterpreted, as noted above, as propounding Liberation as a state of sheer “unconsciousness”, or a state of non-perception. If Yājñavalkya’s rejection of “substantive duality” (*dvaita*) is perfectly compatible with Madhvācārya’s “duality with

<sup>32</sup> This is described by Madhvācārya with the following words: “Devotion is defined as the highest Love (*sneha*), preceded by a profound awareness of the [Viṣṇu’s] majesty”. (*māhātmyajñānapūrvastu sudṛḍhaḥ sarvato dhikāḥ sneho bhaktirīti proktaḥ*). (Madhvācārya, 1941, 1.85).

<sup>33</sup> “Being fundamentally enlightened by the knowledge granted by Hari [Viṣṇu], one becomes wise of everything. (...) Therefore, all the liberated ones (*mukta*) would ever be under the protection (*vaśa*) of Viṣṇu, enjoying all the desired wishes” (*prādhānyena harerjñānāt sarvam viditavad bhavet [...] tasmāt viṣṇorvaśe sarve yathestham upabhogināḥ*). (Madhvācārya, 2012, 2.4.13-4, p. 126-7).

<sup>34</sup> “If there be no consciousness of the liberated one about smell and the rest, and also the mutual [awareness] of the supreme Lord’s own *form*, or of one’s own form, then who would desire such deliverance in ignorance? (*yadi muktasya vijñānam gandhādiviṣaye na cet tathaiva bhagavadrūpe svarūpe parasparam evamajñānarūpam tām muktī ko nāma vānchatī?*)”. (Madhvācārya, 2012, 2.4.13-4, p. 127).

<sup>35</sup> *sarve te brahmaṇastulyā adhipatyam na caiva hi*. (Madhvācārya, 2012, 2.4.13-4, p. 126).

absolute dependence”, the specific nuances of such compatibility are to be construed in accordance with concept of “absolute dependence” (*adhīnatva*) (of the self and matter upon Viṣṇu). On the one hand, Yājñavalkya’s rejection of “one smelling/seeing/hearing/speaking/thinking/knowing something”. (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1910, 2.4.12, p. 314) would be qualified as a pertinent rejection of “one smelling/seeing/hearing/speaking/thinking/knowing something (wrongly) conceived as independent, i.e., as existing independently of Viṣṇu”; and, on the other, when all beings are realised as totally dependent on Viṣṇu, there could be, as stated by Yājñavalkya, no perception of anything, in the sense of “anything (wrongly) conceived as independent, i.e., as existing independently of Viṣṇu”.

Madhvācārya’s *positive path*, as I termed above, posits a synergy between the cognitive recognition (*jñāna*) of Viṣṇu’s as the Self of all (Ātman) and the concomitant and decisive mystical path of devotion (*bhakti*), leading to the final re-union through Viṣṇu’s grace. Different from Śaṅkarācārya’s position, the disciplines prescribed in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1910, 2.4.5, p. 302-3) as constitutive of the soteriological path known as *vicāra* (dialogical meditative thinking), are considered by Madhvācārya as operationally distinct, particular in regard to hearing (*śravaṇa*) and thinking (*manana*), on the one hand, and reiterative devotion (*nididhyāsana*), on the other: the first two are subsidiary, inasmuch as they ensure the intellectual exercise leading one to a positive knowledge about Viṣṇu; the last one (*nididhyāsana*) follows suit with a process of profound devotional meditation (*bhakti*), leading to one’s direct experience of Viṣṇu (*aparokṣajñāna*), wherein the self finally shares Viṣṇu’s infinite attributes. (Sharma, 1986, p. 400-1).

## VI

Our critical exercise, bringing face-to-face Śaṅkarācārya and Madhvācārya’s comments on the “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue” of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.4.5), sought to highlight, on the one hand, Advaita and Dvaita schools of Vedānta’s common stand on the unity of purpose of Vedic tradition as a whole and, above all, their common ultimate commitment to frame their distinct soteriological methodologies (*sādhana*) as effective variants of a pedagogy of Love (*pṛīti/sneha*). Their common exhortation (i) to one’s renunciation/detachment from the objects of the world and, concomitantly, (ii) to one’s amorous focus on an absolute principle (Brahman/Viṣṇu) which is the ultimate source/explanation, both logical and ontological, of everything else, is fundamentally committed to bring us closer to those same objects, by eliminating one’s misconceptions about them and ascertaining their true meaning. This amounts to a re-signification of one’s worldly interactions and relationships and the development of a sense of Love, filled with responsibility and compassion, as the definitive means to overcome suffering (*duḥkha*).

Much has been said about Love as an impossible teleology of Advaita Vedānta, on account of its positing a non-dual Reality, the absolute Brahman. On the other hand, much also has been said about the frail and precarious condition of Love in Dvaita Vedānta, on account of its positing two entities ontologically distinct – Brahman as

Viṣṇu and the self (*jīvātman*). To understand the fallacy of both contentions, one has to bear in mind the contextual character that shapes Indian religious-philosophical tradition and its various soteriological paths. The uniqueness of a particular school lies in its adequacy to specific times, spaces and psychological profiles of seekers. What is seen as primary to one, may be secondary to another, and vice-versa. The claim of truthfulness by a particular school is not ultimately motivated by the desire to refute other schools, but by the need to persuade potential seekers about the contextual efficacy of its method.

Accordingly, Śaṅkarācārya’s stress on radical non-duality (*advaita*) and Madhvācārya’s stress on radical duality (*dvaita*) could both be accepted as contextually legitimate. Śaṅkarācārya’s position lays emphasis on the need to eliminate one’s deep rooted tendency to generate objective reifications of Brahman, the constitutive principle of all reality. However, far from a declaration of non-existence, Śaṅkarācārya’s declaration of the unsubstantiality of the world (*avastutva*) represents, instead, a reiteration of its very existence as essentially anchored in Brahman or, in his terminology, as ultimately non-different from (the non-dual) Brahman. In other words, Śaṅkarācārya’s critique does not target the appearance of duality as such, but what we may call “substantial duality” and its false assumption of things as existing ontologically independently from one another. On the other hand, assuming Madhvācārya’s duality as effectively non-substantial, in view of the ontological absolute dependence (*adhīnatva*) of empirical entities upon Viṣṇu, Śaṅkarācārya’s critical description of the former’s unique postulation of dependence – a sort of non-dual scent imbedded in duality – could be framed as follows: “if a thing [*jīvātman*] cannot be perceived apart from something else [Viṣṇu], the latter is the essence (*Ātman*) of the former” (Śaṅkarācārya, 1910, 2.4.7, p. 306) or, more specifically, the latter is non-different (*abheda*) from the former.

Considering the above, I can’t see any fundamental contradiction in Śaṅkarācārya’s positing Love for Ātman (*Ātmaprīti*) as the fundamental condition of Liberation (*mokṣa*). While classifying one’s subjectivistic desire for empirical objects as secondary (*gauṇa*) and one’s spontaneous love for Ātman as primary (*mūkhyā*), Śaṅkarācārya is neither positing different categories of (substantive) entities, nor declaring the (secondary) objects of desire as illusions. What he really means is that the Love for Ātman is the ontological platform of one’s love for worldly and otherworldly objects. In other words, the Love for Ātman not only affirms but also purifies one’s desire for empirical objects, by revealing their ever-present communion with the self. This is known as “true love”, i.e., a genuine love for all manifest entities (*maītri*), which constitutes an essential mark of a liberated self (*jīvanmukta*).

On the other hand, the contextual legitimacy of Madhvācārya’s duality (*dvaita*) is derived from the need to prevent the postulation of an ontological principle of unity marred by what could be termed as “the trap of the one”, whereby non-duality is wrongly conceived as one single (objective) reality that renders the plurality of one’s worldly and otherworldly experience as non-existent or illusory. This implies a doctrinal emphasis on a pluralist ontology, which includes empirical entities - including the multiple selves – and a meta-empirical supreme principle, Viṣṇu, whose absoluteness



is characterised by its being, at once, the inner controller (*antaryāmin*) and the personified transcendent and immanent principle upon whom all other beings entirely depend (*ādhipatya*). On the other hand, considering Śaṅkarācārya’s non-duality (*advaita*) as effectively free from “the trap of the one” and its assumption of a non-existent or illusionary world, Madhvācārya’s critical description of the former’s unique postulation of non-duality – a sort of dual scent imbedded in non-duality – could be framed as follows: the postulation of an ultimate “non-difference” (*abheda*) between empirical objects and the meta-empirical and meta-objective absolute Brahman is indicative of an absolute dependence of the former upon the latter, represented by Viṣṇu’s sovereign will.

Considering the above, I can’t see any fundamental contradiction in Madhvācārya’s positing Love for Viṣṇu (*Viṣṇusneha*) as the fundamental condition of Liberation (*mokṣa*). If his positing of an ontological distinction between the self and Viṣṇu could, *prima facie*, render the former’s re-union with latter a frail and precarious condition, his major additional postulation of the self’s ontological condition of absolute dependence upon Viṣṇu, made effective through the latter’s attribute of inner controller of all (*antaryāmin*), renders that same re-union, to be achieved through profound devotion (*bhakti*), a definitive and vital resumption of the self’s fundamental original condition, viz., his/her experience of direct vision of the absolute Viṣṇu (*aparokṣajñāna*) and of brotherhood with other empirical entities. In other words, one’s Love for Viṣṇu is the source itself of one’s purified love, devotion and compassion, for all empirical entities.

## VII

Love (*pṛīti/sneha*) stands as paramount in both Śaṅkarācārya’s and Madhvācārya’s commentaries on the “Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue” of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. This fully conforms, in my opinion, to the meaning of “true love”, present in several religious, philosophical, literary and artistic traditions, eastern as well as western<sup>36</sup>. Notwithstanding modern western emphasis on a subjective disposition, within the larger framework of a pluralistic ontology of individualism, true Love has been widely conceived, over the centuries, as involving both individual distinctions as well as an ontological platform of fundamental unity of all things. In other words, if on the one hand a “soft” (unsubstantial/dependent) duality of intervening terms is a requisite, true love, as a sustainable condition, demands an ever-present platform of unity. Love is, therefore, both a means and the natural destiny of all things. Again, being a natural and spontaneous disposition of all things, it demands ultimately no (subjective) reasons to flourish: it dawns from one’s spontaneity of being (*svataḥ*). In other words, one’s subjective reasons to love are not themselves the productive cause of Love, but a favoring factor for one to fulfill one’s nature and destiny.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Plato’s *Symposium* (1989) on the theme of Love (*eros*).

In short, the notions of “non-difference” (*abheda*) and “non-duality” (*advaita*) of Advaita Vedānta and the notions of “absolute dependence” (*adhīnatva*) and “inner controller” (*antaryāmin*) of Dvaita Vedānta are the doctrinal marks of each school that point to the ontological fundamentality of Love (*prīti/sneha*) in one’s existence. They are the backbone of a soteriological path leading to the ontological re-union of all things: Brahman as the essence of all insubstantial beings; and Viṣṇu as the Supreme Ruler of all substantial beings. Their pedagogy of love, meant to initiate beings into a supreme form of Love, described as Love for Brahman [Ātman] and Love for Viṣṇu [Ātman], respectively, constitutes, essentially, a means of perfecting one’s Love for all beings. In other words, spirituality stands as the essence itself of one’s mundanity.

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