

Nelson, Lance E. 1996. "Living Liberation in Sankara and Classical Advaita: Sharing the Holy Waiting of God." In *Living Liberation in Hindu Thought*, edited by Andrew O. Fort and Patricia Y. Mumme, 17–62. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

CHAPTER 1

Living Liberation in Śaṅkara and Classical Advaita: Sharing the Holy Waiting of God

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Introduction

I experience the non-dual [Reality as clearly] as a *bīṭa* fruit on the palm of my hand; I see my body as the cast-off skin of a snake. Though I appear as if living, my attainment of the supreme goal is incontestable.¹

In this passage, the eleventh-century Advaitin, Sarvajñātman, describes his experience of living liberation, or *jīvanmukti*. Although not all Hindus agree, most followers of Advaita (non-dualist) Vedānta accept this state as a real possibility and hold its attainment to be a primary goal of spiritual practice. The idea of living liberation suggests that an embodied human being² can live in a state somehow beyond ordinary phenomenal limitations. We shall see that the creators of the classical Advaita tradition³ were equivocal on the question of whether living liberation is total liberation. Still, there can be no doubt that this idea is among the most important and most distinctive contributions India has made to world spirituality. Adumbrated in the Upaniṣads, it found its first formal articulation in the Buddhist concept of Nirvāṇa “with residual conditions” (*saupādisesa-nibbāna*), the state enjoyed by the liberated “worthy one” (*arhat*) prior to death. In recent times modern, Western-educated Vedāntins have cited living liberation as an important argument for the superiority of the Hindu non-dualist vision over Western religion. Radhakrishnan, for example, argues that *jīvanmukti* offers the fulfillment of religious aspiration as “an experience of the present, not a prophecy of the future.”⁴ The notion suggests a bold alternative to the idea of salvation as a goal to be attained

beyond death. It holds out the prospect—intriguing to modern minds—that we need not abandon life to live its final truth.

The Hindu ideal of *jīvanmukti* is important both anthropologically and theologically. It speaks, of course, of the potential of the human, but it may also reveal something of the nature of the divine. Here, I take inspiration from one of Mircea Eliade's many discerning remarks about Indian thought. The liberated saint establishes, he tells us, "a new and paradoxical mode of being—*consciousness of freedom*, . . . which exists [otherwise] only in the Supreme Being, *Īśvara*."⁵ The parallel drawn here between the liberated sage and the divine is important, though the Advaita tradition itself does not make much of it. I wish, in this chapter, to underline the importance of this parallel. Further, I want to suggest how a hermeneutic of living liberation based on the Advaitic understanding of God can illuminate, reciprocally, both concepts: *jīvanmukti* and *Īśvara*.

A good portion of this chapter will be devoted to conceptual groundwork. I will describe in some detail Advaita's concept of liberation (*mukti*, *mokṣa*) and the assumptions that give it its particular form. I will also outline key moments in the history of the development of the non-dualist idea of living liberation. Without denying the profound significance of Advaita's thought on this subject, I will nevertheless show that, because of its deep-rooted bias against the phenomenal world, the tradition's acceptance of *jīvanmukti* is not entirely wholehearted. In particular, I will demonstrate that in Advaita neither the sage who lives liberation nor perhaps even *Īśvara* himself, who "lives" liberation on a cosmic scale, are as fully free as modern interpreters have held.

Since I confine my attention here to classical Advaita, my primary source will be Śaṅkara (eighth century), the founding teacher (*ācārya*) and foremost authority of the tradition.⁶ But I will also draw upon the work of other early Advaitins and certain later followers of Śaṅkara. Many of the latter found the concept of *jīvanmukti* problematic; some rejected it outright. The difficulties they had justifying the idea will lead us into a consideration of the relation between the saint "liberated while living" (*jīvanmukta*) and God.

About the moral dimensions of living liberation, Śaṅkara says very little. He does suggest that the *jīvanmukta* has compassion and concern for others, that he is childlike, unostentatious, retiring, and detached, and that he works for the well-being of the wider community.⁷ Otherwise, Śaṅkara simply assumes that conventional brahminical ethical standards apply here as elsewhere. Space being limited, therefore, I will ignore the ethics of *jīvanmukti* and focus on its metaphysical foundations.

Liberation in Śaṅkara's Thought

Śaṅkara defines liberation in the abstract terms of ontology. It is, he says, "absolute, unchangingly eternal, all-pervading like space, devoid of all modifications, ever content, partless, self-luminous by nature, a state in which exist neither good, evil, nor their effects, neither past, present, nor future." As such, it is no different from the supreme Reality, Brahman.⁸ Indeed, Śaṅkara tells us that liberation simply *is* Brahman.⁹ He links this abstract truth, however, with an existential counterpart, the well-known Upaniṣadic experience of Brahman as the true Self (Ātman) within each person. Liberation—identical with ultimate Being—is also the interior reality that transcends and yet supports the phenomenal individual. In Śaṅkara's words, "*mokṣa* is the true nature of the Self, like heat of fire."¹⁰

It follows from this that liberation is not something that can be brought into existence, as if it were a product of action (*sādhya*). Nor is it something that can be acquired (*anāpya*). Rather the opposite is true: it has no beginning (*anārabhya*), and it is eternal (*nitya*). Being our very Self, it is eternally accomplished (*nitya-siddha*), eternally attained (*nityāpta*).¹¹ Ontologically speaking, we are always liberated.

Gauḍapāda expresses this idea hyperbolically. From the standpoint of the highest Truth, he proclaims, there is no bondage, no seeker of liberation, and no one who is liberated.¹² His point is that we should not think of liberation as a process or as an attainment newly accomplished in time. Although it may appear otherwise, *mukti* is in truth an atemporal state that has always been ours. Vācaspati Miśra uses milder but still somewhat paradoxical language to drive the same point home: "On the removal of that [ignorance], the blissful nature, though attained [eternally], becomes attained, as if it were not attained [already]. Grief, misery, etc., though abandoned [eternally], become abandoned, as if they were not abandoned [already]."¹³

To speak of attaining liberation is, therefore, figurative—accurate only from the epistemological point of view. The human experience of bondage—our sense of not being liberated—is a problem of our not being aware of what we already have. Advaita traces this unawareness to spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*), under which the individual self (*jīva*) has been laboring for an eternity of past time. The *jīva* may, however, gain awareness of its true nature as Brahman at any moment through scripturally mediated knowledge (*jñāna*). Because ignorance is the source of our bondage, knowledge—not works, faith, or moral improvement—is the means of awakening to liberation. We are told: "Only through knowledge of Truth can liberation be realized."¹⁴ The valorization of *gnosis* is, when Śaṅkara

follows his highest vision, radical: Brahman-knowledge is the necessary and sufficient condition of *mukti*, which depends on no other factor.

From this perspective, the rise of knowledge, the destruction of ignorance, and the realization of liberation occur simultaneously. There is not the slightest delay between the cause and its final effect. He writes: "The scriptures, teaching that liberation occurs immediately upon knowledge of Brahman, deny any interval in which action is to be performed."¹⁵ Glossing *Bhagavad Gītā* (BhG) 13.30, Śaṅkara says, "When—at which time—he sees the separate state of beings abiding in the one Self, . . . then—at that very time—he attains Brahman, he becomes Brahman."¹⁶ One who realizes the Ātman, we are told, "is liberated, even without wishing for it."¹⁷

Śaṅkara insists in more than one passage that Brahman-knowledge, once attained, is completely—and permanently—effective in removing ignorance and granting liberation. He tells us that neither liberation nor the knowledge that leads to it admit any degrees or gradations:

There cannot be in knowledge any distinction characterized by superiority as opposed to inferiority, because that which is inferior is not knowledge at all, and only that which is superior is knowledge. Therefore, in knowledge there can be only the distinction of having arisen earlier as opposed to later. But in liberation itself no distinction whatever is possible.¹⁸

From this point of view liberation is an absolute state, realized either completely and permanently or not at all. There should be no need for it to be deepened, stabilized, or preserved through meditation or other yogic disciplines.¹⁹ Says Śaṅkara: "Refinement is not possible by adding anything to it, for liberation is of the nature of Brahman, whose pre-eminence cannot be added to. Nor can it be improved by removing some defect, for liberation is of the nature of Brahman, which is eternally pure."²⁰

Living Liberation

It is a fundamental premise of Advaita that the entire universe, including the body and mind associated with the *jīva*, is a phenomenal reality having its source in ignorance (*avidyā*). The question, then, arises: In what sense can ordinary experience persist after *avidyā* has been removed by knowledge? Is not the Advaitin compelled to hold that the empirical world—and the body–mind of the liberated individual as well—must vanish simultaneously with the destruction of its cause? If so, liberation would seem to entail literal and immediate disembodiment.

Śaṅkara in many instances speaks as if this were the case. "Knowl-

edge," he tells us, "arises of itself and cancels ignorance, and on account of that, this entire world of names and forms together with its inhabitants, which had been superimposed by ignorance, vanishes away like the world of a dream."²¹ Again: "In the supreme state (*paramārthāvasthā*), all empirical experience is absent (*sarva-vyavahārābhāva*)."²² Śaṅkara's disciple Sureśvara tells us that the awakened one sees nothing but the Self: *guru*, scriptures, and individual existence have vanished (*NS* 4.37).

Nevertheless, there is a strong tradition—originating in scripture and elaborated by the teachers of Advaita—that liberation is a state that can be lived in this human body. To be sure, the ancient scriptures do not use the technical term *jīvanmukti*, popular in the later tradition. Śaṅkara himself uses it once only, in the past participle form (*jīvanmukta*). He comments on *BhG* 6.27: "Having become Brahman, he is liberated while living."²³ In Śaṅkara's mind, therefore, *jīvanmukti* has not yet become a technical term. Nevertheless the concept, if not the term itself, is present in Śaṅkara and his scriptural sources—in their discussion of liberation and especially in their insistence on the radical sufficiency of knowledge to grant access to that state.²⁴

Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad (*BU*) 4.4.14, for example, declares: "Verily, even here (*ihaiva*) we may know this."²⁵ At 3.8.10, the same text states that the one who leaves this world without knowing Brahman is pitiable. Truth is attained by those who know Brahman in this world (*iha*), according to *Kena Upaniṣad* 2.5, but "great loss" accrues to those who do not so know. "He attains Brahman here (*atra brahma samaśnute*)," says *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (*Kaṭha*) 2.3.14. *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 2.1.5–6 reports that Vāmadeva realized the Self while still in his mother's womb, and the tradition knows him as having subsequently lived a productive life as the seer of the fourth book of the *Rg Veda*.²⁶

Bhagavad Gītā 5.28 tells us that the ascetic who has controlled his senses and attained identity with Brahman is eternally liberated (*sadā mukta eva*). This is possible, we read at 5.23, "prior to release from the body (*prāk śarīra-vimokṣaṇāt*)."²⁷ The text advocates the realization of Self as non-doer—a state tantamount to liberation—as a prerequisite for its ideal of detached participation in the world. The essential teaching of the *Gītā*, in fact, turns on the premise that the enlightened Self will remain free no matter how vigorously the body engages in works. Śaṅkara, in his commentary (*BhGŚ*), stresses that the sage must renounce action because of its incompatibility with *jñāna*. Nevertheless, he accepts the *Gītā*'s message that such renunciation is not merely or even necessarily physical: "[The Brahman-knower] does nothing whatever, though engaged in action, because he has realized the Self, which is actionless."²⁸ This realization is equivalent to *mukti*:

The ascetic who, . . . before undertaking action, has realized his self as Brahman, the actionless, inner Self that dwells in all, . . . acting only for the maintenance of the body, abiding in knowledge, is liberated (*mucyate*). . . . Because all his actions are burnt in the fire of knowledge, he is liberated without any obstacle (*apratibandhena mucyate eva*).²⁸

The teacher of the *Gītā* insists that work for the welfare of the world is compatible with Self-knowledge. Śaṅkara agrees (*BhGS* 3.25, 4.20).

The *Brahma Sūtra* (*BS*) at 3.4.51 teaches the possibility of attaining knowledge in this life (*aihikam*). At 4.1.13 it declares, in the spirit of the *Gītā*, that action does not cling to the realized sage. Śaṅkara indicates that this is because the knower (*jñānīn*) has realized that the Self is not the agent of action. *BS* 3.3.32 teaches that certain realized saints may do more than merely remain alive. If God has given them a special office or mission (*adhikāra*), they may retain their individuality after death and even return to earth to do good works by taking on additional bodies. In his commentary (*BSS*), Śaṅkara explains: "We see from the epics and Purāṇas that some, though knowing Brahman, attained new bodies."²⁹

Śaṅkara many times repeats this idea—that liberation is possible here, in this life. The great Vedāntic saying "That thou art," he tells us, refers to a condition of identity with Brahman that already exists. We should not interpret it to mean, "That thou wilt become after death."³⁰ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (*MuU*) 3.2.9 proclaims, "He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman."³¹ Śaṅkara comments that this occurs "in this world . . . even while alive (*loke . . . jīvaṁ eva*)." Elsewhere he teaches: "Being Brahman, they attain the bliss of Brahman—i.e., liberation—here, even while living (*iha jīvaṁ eva*)."³²

Under *BS* 1.1.4, Śaṅkara speaks of *mokṣa* as "unembodiedness" (*asa-rīratva*),³³ drawing on the Upaniṣadic notion that the Self is eternally unembodied (*asārīra*).³⁴ He explains that our identification with the body and its correlates is an adventitious superimposition that ceases upon Brahman-realization. But he by no means wants to suggest liberation requires literal disembodiment. While embodiedness is caused by false knowledge (*mithyājñāna*), the unembodiedness—and, by definition, the liberation—of the Self is an eternal reality (*asārīratvaṁ nityam*). "Therefore," he concludes, "since embodiedness is a result of a false perception, the knower (*vidvān*) is unembodied, even while living (*jīvato 'pi*)."³⁵

To support this thesis, Śaṅkara quotes *BU* 4.4.7. This is perhaps the most important proof text for the idea of living liberation. The verse declares: "He attains Brahman even here (*atra brahma samaśnute*)."³⁶ In his commentary on the Upaniṣad (*BUS*), Śaṅkara glosses this sentence: "He attains Brahman, identity with Brahman, i.e., liberation, living in this very

body. Hence liberation does not require such things as going to another place.”³⁶ The Upaniṣad continues: “As the cast-off skin of a snake lies on an anthill, dead, abandoned, even so lies this body. Then one is disembodied (*aśarīra*), immortal.”³⁷ In juxtaposition with the first part of the passage, Śaṅkara takes this as showing the attitude of complete detachment a liberated sage (*vidvān muktaḥ*) has toward his body. When the snake casts off its old skin, it no longer regards the skin as part of itself. Similarly, the consciousness of the liberated saint is no longer identified with its former physical instrument. The body, says Śaṅkara, lies “*as if dead (mr̥tam iva)*.” The Self realizes it is not, has never been, and never will be associated with any corporeal frame. It thus becomes effectively disembodied, hence liberated, even though the physical organism may continue to function.³⁸ Elsewhere Śaṅkara declares: “The embodiedness of the Self is simply a matter of non-discrimination; its disembodiedness, of discrimination.” In support, he quotes *Kaṭha* 1.2.22, “bodiless, though in bodies,” and *BhG* 13.31, “Although dwelling in a body, [the Self] neither acts nor becomes contaminated.”³⁹

From its inception, then, the Śaṅkara tradition is able to assert that the presence or absence of embodiment is not the defining feature of liberation. On this argument, the critical factor is not literal freedom from the body—that would make *jīvanmukti* impossible. What is required is rather a figurative disembodiedness, the transcendence of bodily consciousness, the destruction of the unenlightened identification with the psycho-physical organism. This the *mukta* may achieve while living.

Vācaspati Miśra (tenth century) states this understanding succinctly: “If being embodied were real, it could not cease during life; it is, however, caused by illusory knowledge, and that can be removed by the rise of true knowledge even during life (*jīvatāpī*).” Unembodiedness, he reminds us, is the Self’s very nature. So it is a condition impossible for the Self ever to have lost.⁴⁰

Bhāratīrtha-Vidyāraṇya (fourteenth century)⁴¹ recognizes the ultimate irrelevance to liberation of the presence or absence of the body at *Pañcadaśī* (PD) 2.103–104. He urges us there not to take *BhG* 2.72 too literally when it suggests that one attains to Brahman “at the last moment (*anta-kāle*).” Interpreting the phrase from a radical Advaitic perspective, he proclaims that the last moment is not the time of death but the point at which one realizes the truth of non-duality. For the realized saint, actual death then becomes insignificant: “Let him give up his life while healthy and seated, or diseased and rolling on the ground, or even unconscious. He is not affected by illusion in any way.”⁴² What the *mukta* has realized, and has become, remains unchanged.

Later Advaita distinguishes between living liberation and disembodied

liberation (*videhamukti*), which the liberated sage is said to attain at death. Śaṅkara does use the term “isolation” (*kaivalya*) to designate the situation that obtains after the *mukta*’s body has ceased to function. I will say more about this idea further on. But Śaṅkara does not, so far as I can determine, use the term *videhamukti*.⁴³ To the extent that one accepts the characterization of *mokṣa* given above, it is hard to see how there can be any real change after death in the essential nature of the liberation already attained during life. Any suggestion that *videhamukti* is a soteriological advance over *jīvanmukti* would weaken Advaita’s professed non-dualism, implying a more realistic conception of embodiment than the strict Advaita *gnosis*-orientation allows.⁴⁴ For one who is already liberated, Śaṅkara declares, “there is no further liberation to be accomplished.”⁴⁵ We have just seen how, from this point of view, even the embodied knower of Brahman has realized the unembodiedness of the Self. Death itself then ought to be negligible, bringing no greater freedom. Śaṅkara can wax emphatic on this idea: “For the knower who dies there is no change of condition—no state different from that experienced while living. There is just no further embodiment.”⁴⁶ Whatever change it may entail in the realm of appearance, death cannot, as long as *jñāna* has the potency Śaṅkara here ascribes to it, bring any higher degree of liberation.

Jīvanmukti: Difficult to Justify but Necessary for Salvation

Advaitins have found, however, that it is one thing to extol *jīvanmukti* but another to work out a theoretical justification for it. The difficulty, of course, is that the body, mind, and activity of the *jīvanmukta* are held to be products of *avidyā*. But *avidyā* is supposed to be destroyed by the knowledge that allows the sage to realize liberation. Living liberation is therefore a paradoxical—and, according to some, contradictory—notion. It implies the co-existence of two incompatible principles—namely, knowledge and ignorance, with the former held sufficient to completely abolish the latter.

Seeing no way out of this dilemma, some Advaitins have felt obliged to concede that *jīvanmukti* is indeed an impossibility. This is especially true of the proponents of the “one-soul theory” (*eka-jīva-vāda*). These radical non-dualists teach a kind of solipsistic idealism of only one *jīva*. Therefore, they reject the idea of *jīvanmukti* outright as pointless. Since there is only one experiencer, what would be the purpose, after it is liberated, of the continuation of body or world? The whole business vanishes instantly. This is one form of the doctrine of “immediate liberation” (*sadyomukti*), to be discussed below. Prakāśānanda (early sixteenth cen-

ture), the most well-known exponent of this way of thinking, argues extensively against the mainstream Advaitic conception of living liberation. He asserts that Vedic texts teaching *jīvanmukti* are only commendatory (*artha-vāda*). Their purpose is to inspire the aspirant to study Vedānta. He argues that the liberated preceptors of Advaita, however useful for the seeker, are in actuality false appearances. Given the absence of proof, he declares, the universal acceptance of living liberation is but blind tradition.⁴⁷

The *ekajīvanavādins'* suggestion that the teachers of Vedānta are mere fabrications of ignorance is a necessary corollary of their doctrine that there is only one *jīva*. This teaching is, however, a clear attempt to avoid the demands of a well-established Advaitic tradition, one that is embarrassing to both the *ekajīvanavādins'* solipsistic position and their teaching that only immediate, disembodied liberation is possible. Brahman knowledge, mainstream Advaitins have always agreed, can be acquired only with the aid of a teacher who has himself realized Brahman.

MuU 1.2.12 states that one desirous of knowledge should approach a teacher who is learned in the scriptures and established in Brahman (*brahma-niṣṭha*). *Kāṭha* 1.2.8 reads, following Śaṅkara: "When taught by an inferior, it cannot be truly understood. . . . Unless taught by one who has attained identity, there is no way to it."⁴⁸ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (*ChU*) 6.14.2 declares, "a person having a teacher knows (*ācāryavān puruṣo veda*)."⁴⁹ Śaṅkara suggests that, if the body falls immediately at the time of the rise of knowledge, there can be no qualified teacher, and this dictum of *śruti* would be meaningless (*ChUŚ* 6.14.2). According to *BhG* 4.34, knowledge is to be imparted by "knowers who have realized the Truth (*jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ*)."⁵⁰ Śaṅkara comments: "Only knowledge taught by those who have true knowledge is effective, no other."⁵¹ We must, says the *PD*, receive instruction from teachers who know the Truth (*ācāryāt tattva-darśināt*). Sages such as Yājñavalkya, this text reminds us, were well known for their teaching. Without the notion of *jīvanmukti*, we could not explain such actions (*PD* 1.32, 7.184). The continuity of the Advaita tradition thus depends on the existence of a lineage of realized teachers. "If the body of one who has seen the truth (*drṣṭa-tattva*) falls immediately," argues Vimuktātman (tenth century), "there will be no liberation, for there will be no preceptor and, consequently, no acquisition of knowledge."⁵²

Śaṅkara's Justifications of Living Liberation

As a Vedāntin, Śaṅkara is first and foremost an exegete of the Vedic revelation. His most important justification of living liberation consists,

therefore, in appeals to the authority of scripture. In the Upaniṣads he finds ample support for his concept of a radical *gnosis* that, once attained, is capable of granting liberation irrespective of empirical conditions. He pulls concepts and images from the texts and holds them before us as truths garnered from revelation. We have seen many examples of this strategy already, perhaps the most striking being the paradoxical metaphor of “embodied unembodiment” derived from the *BU* and the *Kaṭha*.

Śaṅkara also appeals to the evidence of post-Vedic scripture (*smṛti*). He refers especially to the *Gītā*’s teaching on the sage of steady wisdom (*sthita-prajña*), whom he regards as an example of one liberated in the body.⁵¹ But at least in one passage he seems to think the truth of embodied Brahman-knowledge is more a matter of direct apprehension than a question open to theoretical proof or disproof. In an unusual appeal to the authority of experience he declares: “It is not a subject for debate whether the knower of Brahman remains embodied for some time or not. For how can one’s knowing Brahman—felt profoundly in one’s own heart—and [simultaneous] bearing of a body be contested by another?”⁵² Here, the Advaita tradition believes, the commentator alludes to his own realization of the Absolute and his consequent state of living liberation.⁵³

Śaṅkara is most exciting intellectually when his job as an exegete allows him to follow his ontological bent. In this mode, drawing support from select Upaniṣadic passages, he speaks from the point of view of Advaitic *jñāna*. He portrays *mokṣa* as a realization that happens in time only by appearance. Brushing aside empirical limitations as irrelevant, he appears as a champion of a thoroughgoing non-dualism.

At *BS* 4.1.15, however, Śaṅkara encounters a rather different approach to the question of embodied Brahman-knowledge. The *sūtra* speaks in the more popular categories of religious morality and yogic psychology, and Śaṅkara allows it to lead him into a different kind of argument for living liberation. Instead of looking at it ontologically as an eternally accomplished reality, he now attempts to justify it from the point of view of its expression within the domain of space and time. Following the *sūtra* and associated scriptural passages, he offers an explanation in terms of the theory of *karma*. He thus entertains certain questions that, however irrelevant to the strict non-dualist *gnosis*-orientation, are important in the domain of popular religious teaching. The discussion, we shall see, leads to a more commonsense notion of embodiment than Śaṅkara otherwise allows.

The *sūtra* in question addresses a problem stemming from the teaching, found in both the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, that knowledge of the Self destroys all karmic residues. Thus *MuU* 2.2.8 declares of the knower, “His *karmas* are destroyed.” *BhG* 4.37 proclaims, “The fire of

knowledge reduces all *karmas* to ashes.”⁵⁴ The question naturally arises, How can the physical body of the knower continue if his *karma* is no more? The assumption, universal in South Asian religion by Śaṅkara’s time, is of course that physical embodiment is a karmically conditioned state. Without *karma* there can be no body. The *sūtra*’s answer to this objection is simple: “. . . only the past [merit and demerit] that has not begun to produce effects [is destroyed].”⁵⁵ The idea, as Śaṅkara explains it, is that knowledge does not destroy all *karma*. It eradicates only the *karma* that is “stored up” (*saṃcita*) as a result of actions in a past life, or in this life before the rise of knowledge. Such *karma* is as yet inactive, not having begun to bear its fruits in experience. But the situation is different for *karma* that is “commenced” (*prārabdha*), that is, *karma* that has begun to yield its results in the present life. Already active, it is not subject to the power of knowledge, and it is therefore not destroyed.⁵⁶

Despite the apparent mutual exclusivity of knowledge and *karma*, Śaṅkara concedes that there is, in one respect, a certain dependence of the former on the latter: “The rise of knowledge cannot occur without dependence on an accumulation of *karma* of which the effects have already commenced.”⁵⁷ That is to say, were it not for the *karma* that led to one’s present life—one’s meeting the preceptor, one’s study of Vedānta, and so on—one would not have attained knowledge. But once *karma* has become productive, nothing can stop it. No doubt the *mukta* may have reclaimed, through knowledge, his ontological independence of *karma*. Even so, he must continue to experience the results of the portion of his karmic store that has become active, until it is exhausted. As an arrow, once released, can only be allowed to fly until it spends its initial impetus, *prārabdha* must be permitted to run its course.⁵⁸ Another analogy given is the potter’s wheel, which continues to spin even after the potter ceases pushing it, until its momentum dissipates.⁵⁹ Thus, the body of the knower of Brahman must continue to exist until activity and experience exhaust all remaining *prārabdha-karma*, at which time physical death ensues.

Is *Jīvanmukti* Complete Liberation?

In explaining the *prārabdha-karma* theory, Śaṅkara makes a significant concession. Once we admit the continuation of *karma*, we must also accept, in some sense, a continuation of the force of *avidyā*: “Even though annulled, wrong knowledge persists for a time, . . . because of its residual impression (*saṃskāra*).”⁶⁰ The intention seems to be to create a basis for the persistence of *karma*, on the assumption that, without some lingering force of ignorance, the *prārabdha* would have no support (*avaṣṭambha*,

BSŚ 4.1.19). It would have to dissolve like the false appearance it truly is. But this doctrine is problematic, because it is not clear how it fits with Śāṅkara's teaching that knowledge destroys all ignorance, that knowledge and ignorance cannot coexist in the same individual, and that even knowledge itself as a mental state cannot persist after having accomplished its result.⁶¹ Śāṅkara attempts to circumvent this problem by speaking of the persistence of an *impression* of ignorance rather than ignorance itself. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to square this idea with Advaitic doctrine of the radical sufficiency of knowledge for uprooting ignorance without remainder.⁶² As long as the impression of ignorance and the continued activity of *karma* persist, there would seem to be the prospect of the sage's liberation being somehow limited. Elsewhere, we have seen, Śāṅkara emphatically denies the possibility of partial liberation. Is he now saying that the presence of *karma* (read: a physical body) does, after all, constitute an obstruction to the knower's freedom?

One would not expect to find the great Advaitin slighting *jñāna* in favor of *karma*. But at least in the case of *prārabdha-karma* he does. In his commentary on BU 1.4.7, to give the most remarkable example, he speaks of the "weakness of the operation of knowledge (*jñāna-pravṛtti-daurbalya*)," in comparison with that of *prārabdha*: "Because the fruition of the *karma* that has produced the body is inevitable, activity of speech, mind, and body will be necessary, even after the attainment of right knowledge. As the flight of the arrow that has been released [is stronger than any effort to arrest it], the *karma* that has already become active is stronger (*balīyas*) [than right knowledge]." In the face of this admission, Śāṅkara finds it necessary to add an uncharacteristic reference to yogic praxis. The Brahman-knower, in some cases, may need to employ methods of disciplined concentration to overcome the power of *prārabdha-karma*: "Therefore one must maintain a continuous stream of recollection of Self-knowledge by having recourse to the strength of disciplines (*sādhana*) such as renunciation and detachment."⁶³

In several of the passages in which he discusses *prārabdha*, Śāṅkara suggests something very much like the later Advaitins' concept of *videhamukti*. That is, he introduces the idea of a literally disembodied, post-mortem liberation that he appears to think of as a soteriological advance over the state enjoyed by the living Brahman-knower. Commenting on BS 3.3.32, 4.1.15, and 4.1.19, for example, Śāṅkara indicates that the knower does not achieve his final goal until after his *prārabdha* is exhausted. Only with the "fall of the body" (*śarīra-pāta*) that comes with the dissipation of karmic momentum, he says, does the knower achieve perfect "isolation" (*kaivalya*) or "rest" (*kṣema*), terms connoting complete transcendence of all empirical awareness. And only when this occurs does the knower truly "attain Brahman (*brahma sampadyate*)."⁶⁴

The scriptural source of this line of thinking is *ChU* 6.14.2: "For him the delay is only so long as he is not released, then he attains."⁶⁶ Śaṅkara cites this text frequently in support of the *prārabdha-karma* theory. On the passage itself, he comments: "[The delay is] in attaining the essence of the Self which is Being. . . . Until the fall of the body (*deha-pāta*) caused by the exhaustion of the *karma* by which the body is commenced, this is the meaning. At that very time, he attains Being."⁶⁶ From one who speaks of liberation as an absolute state, without gradations, such talk of further "attainment" is perplexing. For Śaṅkara to suggest *prārabdha-karma* as an explanation of the *mukta*'s continued embodiment is by itself not problematic. But it does raise questions when he suggests that *prārabdha* somehow limits the *mukta*'s attainment. After all, this is the master who teaches his students to proclaim boldly: "I *am* the eternally accomplished *mokṣa*."⁶⁷ If continued embodiedness itself is no hindrance to full liberation, why should the principles invoked to explain it be such? Or is embodiedness somehow a lingering imperfection after all? In this connection, compare Śaṅkara's comments on *ChU* 6.14.2, just cited, with his remarks on *BU* 4.4.6: "This knower is Brahman in this very life, though he appears to have a body, as it were. . . . Because he has no desires that obstruct his being Brahman, therefore, 'being but *Brahman* he is merged in Brahman' in this very life, not after the fall of the body (*śarīra-pāta*)."⁶⁸ Here, Śaṅkara holds to the more radical non-dualist vision we have been considering all along. The liberated sage is Brahman while living; he does not have to attain Brahman after death. How do we explain the striking contradiction between these two positions?

One possibility is that the *prārabdha-karma* doctrine and its implication that final attainment must be postponed until the death of the body represent an exegetical compromise. Śaṅkara is interpreting texts considered ancient even in his time. Though he regards them as impersonal expressions of eternal truth, they do not necessarily reflect his post-Buddhist, non-dualist metaphysics.⁶⁹ Thus, it may have been unavoidable for Śaṅkara to make some kind of concession (or adaption) to the more realistic worldview of these texts. The language of post-liberation "attainment" (*sampatti*), in fact, occurs only in connection with *ChU* 6.14.2, from which it is derived.⁷⁰

Another possibility is that these notions, especially the idea of delay, are all articulated only from the viewpoint of empirical appearance (*vyavahāra*). From the time of Gauḍapāda, the characteristic method of Advaitic teaching has been to postulate a preliminary view and then cancel it in favor of a higher one (*adhyāropa-apavāda*). As Karl Potter reminds us, the subtleties of Advaita's "paradoxical double-level" view of reality can be applied to the *jīvanmukta* as easily as to other problems.⁷¹ Indeed, this way of approaching the question of living liberation became important in

certain texts produced by the late Śaṅkara tradition. The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (*ViCū*) and the *Aparokṣānubhūti*, for example, explicitly deny that *prārabdha-karma* has any hold on the knower who is identified with the Self. They argue that the scriptures that speak of the total destruction of ignorance by knowledge should be taken seriously. It is only to satisfy the ignorant, they assert, that *prārabdha* has been postulated as an “exoteric doctrine” (*bāhya-drṣṭi*).⁷² Modern Hindu interpreters seem to favor such a strategy. Thus R. Balasubramanian writes: “Though the knower of Brahman . . . is not bound by the aggregate of mind-sense-body and is, therefore, disembodied from his own perspective, yet from the *vyāvahārika* perspective the body which has been sublated as false continues for some time till the exhaustion of *prārabdha-karma* through experience.”⁷³ Is then the notion of the sage living out of a set of limitations imposed by his *prārabdha* a preliminary view, intended to speak to the concerns of unenlightened outside observers? It is, at least, legitimate to ask.

Although Deutsch may be overstating the case to speak of *karma* in Advaita as a “convenient fiction,” he is certainly correct when he says, “There is nothing within the state of being designated by ‘Brahman’ or ‘Ātman’ that admits of being subject to *karma*.”⁷⁴ Śaṅkara himself declares, “With the sole exception of liberation, everything else comes within the realm of ignorance.”⁷⁵ When he relativizes even scripture itself as something to be transcended in liberation,⁷⁶ how much more must he do the same for all *karma*, including *prārabdha*?

Passages can be found in Śaṅkara from which such a denial of the ultimacy of the *prārabdha-karma* doctrine would logically follow. At BSS 1.1.4, for example, he presents as the view of his opponents the idea that embodiedness is caused by merit and demerit and that, consequently, disembodiedness can come only when the body falls. Against this position, he argues that the embodiedness of the Self is merely apparent: it is caused by wrong knowledge only. Because the Self has no real relationship to the body, it cannot acquire merit and demerit. The idea that merit and demerit can cause the embodiment of the Self, he concludes, must therefore be false. In his commentary on *BhG* 18.48, Śaṅkara comes even closer to undercutting the *prārabdha-karma* doctrine. He declares that for the knower, “there can be no question of any remainder (*śeṣa*) of what was superimposed by ignorance.”⁷⁷

But it is still true that Śaṅkara never explicitly negates or relativizes the notion of *prārabdha-karma*. Indeed the suggestion at BUS 1.4.7, discussed above, that the *jīvanmukta* may have to engage in spiritual discipline to avoid being unduly influenced by *prārabdha*, would seem to preclude the notion that Śaṅkara speaks of it only from the empirical (*vyāvahārika*) point of view. If the *jīvanmukta* himself has to take cogni-

zance of *prārabdha*, and perhaps even struggle to overcome it, it cannot be merely a device to satisfy the mind of the ignorant onlooker. So we must remain open to another interpretation: that Śaṅkara understands *prārabdha* as a significant limitation, one that the knower can by no means dismiss completely. The ideas expressed in his commentaries on *ChU* 6.14.2 and *BS* 4.1.15 imply that *jīvanmukti* is a state in which one is liberated and yet somehow must still undergo a further liberation, a further attainment, at death. As J. G. Arapura suggests, Śaṅkara describes a “waiting for *mukti*” that, because it is under the sway of knowledge, can itself be considered *mukti*, yet without making the waiting pointless.⁷⁸ One thinks in this connection of *Kaṭha* 2.2.1: “Being liberated [already], he is liberated.”⁷⁹ What could this second liberation involve? What would make waiting for it meaningful for one who is already liberated? Surely it is not the promise of some change in the essential nature of the liberated state. Śaṅkara has ruled this out. The total falling away of empirical experience is the only possibility. At *BSS* 4.4.16, Śaṅkara suggests that *kaivalya* is characterized by an “absence of specific cognition” (*viśeṣa-samjñābhāva*). In this respect, he says, some have compared it with the state of deep sleep. This helps us understand what he means when, at *BSS* 3.3.32, he speaks of the *mukta*’s ultimate state as complete “cessation in isolation” (*kaivalya-nivṛtti*).

Whatever Śaṅkara’s final view might have been, and I think we have to say that we cannot be sure, it is significant that the classical Advaita tradition has clung tenaciously to the *prārabdha-karma* theory and the associated idea of a continuing force of ignorance. These notions, along with *ChU* 6.14.2 and its idea of delay, are invariably introduced in post-Śaṅkara discussions of *jīvanmukti*. Most important, these ideas are not relativized by shifts in ontological perspective—phenomenal “truth” to absolute Truth, *vyāvahārika* to *pāramārthika*—except in late, popular texts such as those already mentioned. Rather, they are taken quite seriously, as we shall now see.

Justifications of *Jīvanmukti* in Post-Śaṅkara Advaita

The majority of post-Śaṅkara Advaitins believe in the possibility of *jīvanmukti*. All but Maṇḍana Miśra (actually a contemporary of Śaṅkara) accept the theory of *prārabdha-karma* as well. They give the *prārabdha* concept little elaboration, however; most present essentially the same argument by analogy used by the great preceptor. They devote greater effort to further articulating the notion of the effect or remnant of ignorance that remains to support the operation of *prārabdha*. In general, we can

observe a concern to minimize the impact on the *jīvanmukta* of any residual element of bondage. Nevertheless, none of the classical Advaitins are willing to discount its power altogether. Indeed, we shall see that all of them understand the continuance of *prārabdha* and its support as to some degree, greater or lesser, a limitation on the fullness of *mokṣa*.

Maṇḍana Miśra in his *Brahmasiddhi* (*BSdh*) is perhaps the first of the classical Advaitins to use *jīvanmukti* as a technical term.⁸⁰ Maṇḍana is exceptional, however, and his approach differs from that of Śaṅkara and other Advaitins, in that he denies that *prārabdha-karma* can be operative in *jīvanmukti*. Going against Śaṅkara's analogy, Maṇḍana claims that the flying arrow of commenced *karma* can be stopped. Knowledge does indeed destroy all *karma*. Maṇḍana's divergence from the mainstream here seems, however, to be of little consequence. The body still continues in liberation—not from *prārabdha* itself, to be sure, but from the impressions (*saṃskāra*) of both *avidyā* and *prārabdha*. So the analogy of the continued movement of the potter's wheel serves Maṇḍana just as well as Śaṅkara. Maṇḍana refers in addition to the trembling that persists—due to the *saṃskāra* of the fear—even after one knows an apparent snake to be nothing but a rope. For Maṇḍana, the ripening of *karma* that supports *jīvanmukti* is an appearance (*vipākābhāsa*), a mere semblance (*ābhāsa-mātra*) that does not bind the liberated individual.⁸¹

Sureśvara (eighth century), in his commentary on Śaṅkara's *BUS*, explains the appearance of desires and other imperfections in the knower as having their origin in the body, which continues because of commenced *karma* (*BUBhV* 1.4.1529). In his *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* (*NS*), he makes no mention at all of *prārabdha*. He does speak, however, of the effects of ignorance (*moha-kārya*). These may continue even though ignorance itself has been completely destroyed (*vidhvastākṣhila-moho 'pi*). He echoes the illustration of the trembling that may persist even after the snake has vanished (*NS* 4.60).

Vimuktātman (tenth century) denies that *ChU* 6.14.2 teaches that the sage has to wait until death to realize Brahman. Indeed, he says, realization is possible only for the embodied. After death it is impossible. While thus emphatically accepting the doctrine of *jīvanmukti*, he has a quarrel with the belief of Śaṅkara and others that an impression (*saṃskāra*) of ignorance can exist in the absence of ignorance itself. What will support it? He therefore insists that not an impression but an actual remnant or residuum (*leśa*, *śeṣa*) of ignorance remains (*IS* 1.9). While this move from impression to remnant would seem to threaten a more serious limitation on the *mukta*'s freedom, Vimuktātman is, among the classical post-Śaṅkara Advaitins, the most unequivocal supporter of the *jīvanmukti* doctrine. He takes great pains to minimize the effect of the *avidyā-leśa* on the

mukta. The remnant of ignorance, he declares, “skillfully brings about a mere appearance of the remainder of *prārabdha* enjoyment.”⁸² The sage’s knowledge is not obstructed thereby:

There is no conflict between knowledge and the experience of *prārabdha-karma*. So the body of the knower remains until the experience of *prārabdha* is completed. Here, just as knowledge does not contradict experience [of *prārabdha*], so experience does not contradict knowledge.⁸³

Sarvajñātman (eleventh century) uses a variety of terms to designate the aftereffect of *avidyā* that supports *prārabdha*, including scent (*gandha*), shadow (*chāyā*), remnant (*leśa*), and impression (*saṃskāra*). The process of exhausting the *prārabdha-karma* that leads to the *mukta*’s final freedom (*kaivalya*) at death, he says, is sustained by a “scent of darkness” (*dhvānta-gandha*). This lingering influence of ignorance accounts for the remnant or shadow of duality (*dvaita-leśa*, *dvaita-cchāyā*) experienced by the *jīvanmukta* (ŚŚ 4.40–46). However problematic the idea of *jīvanmukti* may be, we must admit it “because it is a matter of direct awareness (*prātīh*).” “In this case,” he believes, “one’s own experience (*svānubhūti*) must be the authority.”⁸⁴

Citsukha (thirteenth century) identifies *prārabdha-karma* as the cause, in *jīvanmukti*, of a remnant (*leśa*) of *avidyā* or *māyā*. He defines this residue as a “special form (*ākāra*) of ignorance.” Anticipating the later distinction between the “projecting” and “concealing” powers of *māyā*, discussed below, Citsukha explains that ignorance, though one, has at least three forms. The first creates the illusion that the universe is real. The second causes us to take the various constituents of the empirical world seriously as having practical utility. The third is responsible only for the bare appearance (*pratibhāsa*) of the forms of objects in immediate perception. With the arising of knowledge, the first and second modes—which give rise to the sense of duality—are dissolved. But the third is not. It remains to support the empirical experience of the *mukta*. According to this author, no one should deny the possibility of *jīvanmukti* out of mere prejudice, for its truth is proclaimed in all the scriptures (*śruti-smṛti-purāṇādiṣu*).⁸⁵

Bhāratīrtha-Vidyāraṇya (fourteenth century) also argues for the continuance of the body on the basis of residual impressions. He uses the analogies of the momentum of the potter’s wheel and the fear that lingers as an aftereffect of an illusory snake. He refers as well to the scent of flowers that remains in the vase after the flowers are removed. (Other authors mention the persistence of the odor of garlic.)⁸⁶ While knowledge destroys ignorance immediately and completely, the residual impression

(*saṃskāra*) of ignorance and its products—the body and the universe—may continue for some time longer. The effects are not opposed to knowledge directly, as is their cause, ignorance. For those who have difficulty with the idea of the *saṃskāra* persisting without *avidyā*, its material cause, Bhāratīrtha is flexible. He is also willing to accept the presence in *jīvanmukti* of a remnant (*leśa*) of ignorance (VPS 1.165–166; PD 7.244). In the PD, however, he seems to think the idea of remnant unnecessary. This text argues for the possibility of an interval elapsing between the destruction of the material cause, *avidyā*, and the disappearance of its effects by reference to a doctrine from the Nyāya system. The color of an object may persist for a moment, the Naiyāyikas admit, even after the object itself has been removed from sight. But if the effect can exist without its cause for one moment, the Advaitin argues, why not for many moments?⁸⁷ The length of the interval between the destruction of ignorance and the disappearance of its effects—the *mukta*'s empirical experience—is determined by the *prārabdha-karma*.

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (sixteenth century) repeats these arguments, for both *saṃskāra* and *leśa*, complete with the analogy of the flower's scent. He also develops the view found in Citsukha that ignorance has various forms (*ākāra*). For Madhusūdana *avidyā* has two fundamental powers (*śakti*): the projective (*vikṣepa*) and the concealing (*āvaraṇa*). The former is responsible for manifesting all the forms and phenomena in creation. The latter performs the function of obscuring the unchanging Reality that underlies the whole. Knowledge, says Madhusūdana, destroys only the concealing power of *avidyā*. It leaves the creative potency of the *vikṣepa-śakti* intact to maintain the bodily activity of the *mukta*. Following Citsukha, he asserts that this projective aspect of *avidyā* itself has three aspects. Each creates a different perception of the world of duality: the first as real (*dvaita-satyatva*), the second as merely provisional (*vyāvahārika*), and the third as illusory (*prātibhāsika*). This third, most attenuated, power of ignorance constitutes an innocuous residuum (*leśa*). It does not detract from the realization of the knower, nor does it tie him to the results of his activity. Nevertheless, it remains capable of supporting the outworking of *prārabdha* until the latter is exhausted.⁸⁸

Reservations about *Jīvanmukti* in Post-Śāṅkara Advaita

Post-Śāṅkara Advaitins are thus, on the whole, anxious to find support for the idea of *jīvanmukti*. Nevertheless, most have misgivings. The radical "one-soul" theorists such as Prakāśānanda, we have seen, flatly deny the notion of living liberation. While mainstream Advaitins disagree

emphatically with this idea, their support for *jīvanmukti* is not without a measure of ambiguity.

Several among those who accept *jīvanmukti* seem to do so as one possible theory rather than as a final position. That is, they are not willing to rule out the prospect that the rise of knowledge may entail total, instantaneous transcendence of empirical form. Arguments for this possibility, which they know as “immediate liberation” (*sadyomukti*), cannot, they believe, be completely dismissed.

Maṇḍana, for example, cites *MuU* 2.2.8. This verse, we have seen, suggests that knowledge destroys all *karmas* (note the plural) without remainder. Maṇḍana sees that this passage is difficult to reconcile with the concept of *prārabdha-karma* and that it compels consideration of the *sadyomukti* position. Some might rightly object, Maṇḍana notes, that the notion of immediate liberation negates the traditional ideal of the sage of “steady wisdom” (*sthita-prajña*), extolled at *BhG* 2.54–71. And indeed, Maṇḍana himself is willing to tolerate this outcome. He concedes that such an individual might not be a fully liberated sage (*siddha*) after all, but only an advanced aspirant (*sādhaka*).⁸⁹

Sureśvara in his *Naishkarmyasiddhi* presents a similar treatment of the *sadyomukti-jīvanmukti* question. He begins by teaching that right knowledge once and for all destroys all ignorance and all becoming (*akṣiṇaṁ bhavam*) without remainder (*NS* 4.57). On this view, there is “no ignorance left unconsumed.”⁹⁰ He then goes on to admit what he calls “another traditional teaching” (*aparāsa sāmpradāyikāḥ*, *NS* 4.60). This, as explained above, is the possibility of a lingering “effect of ignorance.” Jñānottama (twelfth century), in his comments on this passage, explains the first view as the “immediate liberation” position (*sadyomukti-pakṣa*) and the second as the doctrine of living liberation (*jīvanmukti-pakṣa*).

Sarvajñātman repeats this pattern. Prior to his discussion of *jīvanmukti*, he presents as a valid alternative the view that the rise of knowledge brings all empirical existence to an immediate end. In support, he marshals an array of arguments for *sadyomukti* that were later more fully developed by Prakāśānanda (*SS* 4.38–39). The rise of knowledge instantly destroys the entirety of ignorance and all its products. Passages of scripture describing *jīvanmuktas* are therefore merely for inspiration. Fully enlightened teachers cannot exist; they must be fabricated by ignorance (*avidyā-parikalpita*, *SS* 2.225, 227, 233).

Unlike the above three teachers, Prakāśātman (tenth century) is firm on the possibility of *jīvanmukti*. It must be accepted, he tells us, because there are numerous scriptural references to paradigmatic sages such as Vyāsa. Nevertheless, his treatment shows us just how limited the post-Śaṅkara Advaitin’s conception of *jīvanmukti* can become. Despite his un-

mistakable affirmation of the state, Prakāśātman willingly describes certain ways in which living liberation is flawed. Most striking is his account of the unsteadiness of the *mukta*'s experience. One cannot, he believes, be aware of the world and one's identity with Brahman at the same time. Only when one is in meditative enstasiṣ (*samādhi*) can one enjoy oneness with the Self. At other times, however, the knower slips into dualistic awareness (*dvaita-darśana*) because of the continued activity of his bodily *karma*, which remains as a defect (*doṣa*) to cloud his vision.⁹¹

Both Citsukha and Bhāratīrtha continue this theme. For Citsukha, *prārabdha* is to be taken seriously as a "potent" (*prabala*) force that functions as an obstruction (*pratibandha*) to the power of knowledge. The remnant of *avidyā* that it forces upon the *mukta* is transcended only through meditative enstasiṣ or death:

In the case of the *jīvanmukta*, a remnant of *māyā* is not destroyed. Though it disappears in the state of *samādhi*, at other times it remains as the cause of the appearance (*ābhāsa*) of the world and the body. When the enjoyment of the fruits of the *prārabdha-karma* comes to an end, it ceases.⁹²

Bhāratīrtha describes the continuance of the residual impression of ignorance as a defect (*doṣa*) and *prārabdha-karma* as an obstacle (*pratibandhaka*). The final *mokṣa* is not attained until the *prārabdha* is exhausted and the body falls (VPS 1.165–166). Meanwhile, by the force of this *karma*, the Brahman-knower is subject to desires and may even sometimes lapse into doubts (PD 6.263, 7.245–246). This is not surprising, for Bhāratīrtha, like his predecessors just mentioned, believes that awareness of unity and the perception of multiplicity cannot coexist:

One should not think it possible for the *jīvanmukta* to have the experience of the oneness of the Self (*ātmaikyānubhava*) and the cognition of duality (*dvaita-darśana*), which are mutually contradictory, at the same time. For we do not assert their simultaneity, but rather that they arise and are overpowered in succession.⁹³

The experience of non-duality thus being unstable, any activity on the *jīvanmukta*'s part is interpreted as a sign that he has fallen into dualistic awareness. Even the minimal daily round permitted a *saṃnyāsī* is suspect: "The activity of going about for alms," we are told, "is caused by the defect of *prārabdha*."⁹⁴ This understanding leads Bhāratīrtha to conceive an unusual argument in support of the standard Advaitic view that the renouncer ought not participate in Vedic rites. Such rituals must conform

to fixed schedules, he reminds us. Once begun they must be brought to their proper conclusion. But the functioning of the karmic obstruction that would allow the *mukta* to participate in activity is unpredictable. Even when it manifests itself, it is unsteady: "For the knower of Reality, the emergence (*udbhāva*) of the defect caused by commenced *karma* is not fixed as to place and time, and it is not possible for it to continue long enough for him to complete any [ritual] performance that he has undertaken."⁹⁵

Underlying such discussions is the implication that the *jīvanmukta* is better off—somehow more fully liberated—when in *samādhi* than when aware of body and world. This is confirmed by Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, who describes with approval a scheme from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* that admits three degrees in the attainment of *jīvanmukti*. At the highest level, the *mukta* enters a state of *samādhi* so deeply absorbing that he can neither rouse himself nor be roused by others. He has no cognition of difference whatever (*sarvathā bheda-darśanābhāva*). Rather, he is constantly and completely identified with the Self (*sarvadā tanmaya*). Others, then, must take care of his bodily needs. Having attained total disengagement from the world, he abides always in a state of unalloyed supreme bliss. He then merits the title "most excellent knower of Brahman."⁹⁶

Given such praise of world-oblivion, it is not too surprising to find Madhusūdana devaluing *jīvanmukti* as "mere liberation" (*mukti-mātra*), in comparison to the "supreme liberation" (*parama-mukti*) attained when one breathes one's last breath. As desirable as *jīvanmukti* may be, it is not the same as the final state. There is, Madhusūdana claims, a greater manifestation of bliss in the final mental mode (*vr̥tti*) that leads to *parama-mukti* than in that which grants *jīvanmukti*. This is because the latter is contaminated by the projective power of ignorance maintained by *prā-rabdha*, while the former is not.⁹⁷

Commenting on Madhusūdana, Brahmānanda Sarasvatī (early eighteenth century) is perhaps as doubtful as one can be about living liberation without denying it altogether. He argues that the persistence of ignorance in the form of a *saṃskāra* in *jīvanmukti* makes any talk of the cessation of ignorance in that state only figurative. True liberation (*mukhyo mokṣaḥ*) can only be disembodied, post-mortem liberation, because ignorance truly ceases only at the time of death.⁹⁸

What are we to make of the reservations expressed by these writers? Although they disagree on details, all concur that any continued embodiment is somehow, whether through impression or remnant, a product of ignorance. They agree, furthermore, that this ignorance constitutes in some sense a limitation of the liberated state. Indeed, they harbor strong doubts that perfect knowledge can coexist with any form of empirical

awareness. Some scholars, we have seen, argue that Advaita offers a sophisticated "two-level" approach to this problem, inclusive of both *pāramārthika* and *vyāvahārika* perspectives. However, orthodox post-Śaṅkara Advaitins do not use this strategy. Maṇḍana wonders whether any embodied person can be more than an advanced *sādhaka*. Prakāśātman and Bhāratitīrtha hold that one cannot have non-dual awareness and empirical consciousness at the same time. Even Śaṅkara suggests that yogic praxis might be necessary to counter the effects of *prārabdha*. So it is not a question of, as modern interpreters would have it, both complete *mukti* from the liberated sage's *pāramārthika* perspective and karmically limited *mukti* from that of the ignorant observer. On the contrary, for these writers, the dominant figures of post-Śaṅkara Advaita, it must be either one or the other.⁹⁹

In short, despite the generally vociferous defense of the possibility, and indeed the necessity, of *jīvanmukti* offered by the post-Śaṅkara Advaitins, the idea remains problematic for them. Although eminently desirable, living liberation is finally a limited state. The classical Advaita tradition stays wedded to the theory of karmic obstruction derived from *ChU* 6.14.2 and *BS* 4.1.15. The *jīvanmukta* must wait, looking forward to a final *kai-valya* or, in the later tradition, *videhamukti*. Advaita never finds a way of fully appropriating for the liberated sage the vision of a seemingly embodied yet fully liberated Brahman-knowledge that Śaṅkara articulates when he is in his ontological mode. The master's scholastic followers allow themselves to fall into what could easily be described as an excessively realistic interpretation of *avidyā*, *karma*, and embodiedness. Despite protestations to the contrary, Advaita winds up with a vision of *jīvanmukti* that is not all that different from the Sāṃkhya position, that is, a waiting for the passing away of the world with a view to eternal, absolute "isolation" in spirit.¹⁰⁰ The tradition thus loses sight of and even seems to qualify its most central doctrine: that knowledge has the radical power to neutralize ignorance and bondage irrespective of embodiedness or the lack thereof. Śaṅkara himself was, for the most part, much bolder than his followers on this point. Nevertheless, he himself introduces the weaker trend of thought in his discussion of *prārabdha*. He is thus to some extent responsible for the history of compromise that surrounds Advaita's thinking on living liberation and karmic limitation.

Īśvara as Paradigm for Living Liberation

It is both curious and revealing that the proponents of Advaita have never explored to any significant extent one avenue of thought that might have helped them toward a more adequate conceptualization of living lib-

eration. At the very heart of their tradition lies a paradigm that affirms dramatically the combination of knowledge, liberation, and continued empirical consciousness that the ideal of *jīvanmukti* seems to entail. As Eliade has suggested, it is the idea of Īśvara.

The Lord creates, maintains, and destroys the entire cosmic display. He serves as the underlying and directing cause of the infinite number of karmic forces—*prārabdha* and otherwise—that are playing themselves out in his vast universe (*BSS* 2.1.34). He causes beings to be bound in *samsāra*, directs them to act in accord with their *karma*, and effects their release by his grace (*BSS* 2.3.41–42). Yet all the while the Lord remains unaffected by the suffering and the defects of the individual souls (*BSS* 2.3.46). He is, in Śaṅkara's words, "eternally free of ignorance" (*nitya-nivṛttāvidya*, *BSS* 3.2.9). In the midst of his ceaseless cosmic activity he is "eternally pure, enlightened, and liberated" (*nitya-suddha-buddha-mukta*, *BhGS* 1.1). Far from being the victim of *avidyā*, Īśvara is its wielder, the controller of *māyā* (*māyāvin*, *māyā-niyantr*),¹⁰¹ projecting the world in mere play.

There is thus one paradigmatic instance of the coexistence of perfect knowledge and perfect liberation with awareness of, and activity in, the world. But recall Eliade's suggestion that the *jīvanmukta* attains a similar divine and paradoxical mode of being. Does the logic of Advaita not, in fact, move the liberated sage toward a posture of freedom identical to Īśvara's? Sarvajñātman tells us that the Lord is different from the transmigrating *jīva* in at least three respects: He is free of ignorance, free of ego-sense (*ahamkṛti*), and ever liberated (*SS* 2.175–188). But are not these qualities—freedom from ignorance, ego, and bondage—precisely the characteristics of the *mukta*, as defined by Śaṅkara? To be sure, the liberated sage may have realized his freedom only lately, in time. In that sense, the liberation of the *jīva* is not eternal. Once attained, however, *mokṣa* is beyond time. This Śaṅkara emphasizes repeatedly.

Leaving aside for the moment limitations the liberated sage may suffer due to his *prārabdha-karma* and any associated trace of ignorance, it is not difficult to find in Śaṅkara suggestions of the ultimate identity of *jīva* and Īśvara. "To assume the otherness of *jīva* and Īśvara is not proper," he says. "*Jīva* is not other than Īśvara, but its knowledge and lordship are obscured by its conjunction with the body."¹⁰² Again: "The distinction between *jīva* and the Supreme Lord is based on wrong knowledge alone, not on reality itself."¹⁰³ Elsewhere, Śaṅkara speaks of "the false idea of difference between Īśvara and the transmigrating self, caused by non-discrimination, which results in the latter's connection with limiting adjuncts such as the body."¹⁰⁴ Twice in the *Upadeśasāhasrī* Śaṅkara declares, "I am Īśvara."¹⁰⁵

Despite these and other suggestive passages, post-Śaṅkara Advaita

never seriously explores the idea of the identity of the liberated sage and Īśvara. The theme of the sage's oneness with God is developed only in the thought of Appayya Dīkṣita (sixteenth century), an Advaitin who was deeply influenced by Śaivism. Appayya writes that the attainment of liberation, even in its literally disembodied form, involves, not the realization of oneness with the transcendent Brahman, but rather identity with Īśvara. This is a consequence of his preferred theory of relation of *jīva* and Īśvara. For Appayya, the Lord is Brahman itself, but appearing as the original (*bimba*) of which the *jīva* is a reflection (*pratibimba*). *Mukti* is the merger of the reflection (*jīva*) in its original, which in this view is Īśvara, not the pure Absolute. Appayya therefore understands liberation as the attainment of Lordship (*īśvaratva*), i.e., conscious identity with the personal God. It is not, or not yet, the realization of complete identity with the transpersonal Brahman. As long as other reflections—other *jīvas*—continue to exist, the Lord also must continue to exist as their *bimba*, and there can be no final merger in the Absolute for the souls that have attained identity with him.¹⁰⁶

Advaitins have not generally accepted Appayya's theory.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Advaita does recognize that the localized psycho-physical individuality of each *jīva* is always at the same time a part of the cosmic adjunct (*upādhī*) of Īśvara.¹⁰⁸ It must follow, then, that the *jīvanmukta* enjoys this connection with the Lord also, at least as long as his individuality endures. The difference is that the *mukta*'s connection is manifest, unobscured by ego. The logic of Advaita requires that, with the attainment of liberation, the sage's false identification with the mind-body complex must vanish. Having realized his nature as *Ātman*, the *mukta* should have completely withdrawn from connection with empirical limitations, like—says the Chāndogya Upaniṣad—the snake who has shed its skin. What appears to be his own activity ought now to be completely surrendered to, and governed by, Īśvara.¹⁰⁹ Thus, Madhusūdana proclaims that the *jīvanmukta*'s "life and breath are directed by the Supreme Lord."¹¹⁰ Strictly speaking, of course, the analogy of the snake and its skin would be inaccurate here. There should properly be no more snake at all, because the liberated Brahman-knower ought to have ceased to exist as an individual ego-center. Nothing should remain but the primordial reality: on one hand, the unbounded pure consciousness of Brahman, abiding timelessly as the Self of all; on the other, Īśvara's cosmic activity. And there is no reason why the latter should not continue to include the *jīvanmukta*'s former individuality, together with its karmic momentum, its actions, and perhaps even its desires and doubts.

Such, at any rate, is the vision of liberation that enables the *Bhagavad Gītā*—and the Advaita tradition itself when it follows its deepest

insight—to show God as exemplar for the liberated sage. Again, I follow Eliade:

It could be said that the essence of the doctrine revealed by Kṛṣṇa is contained in the formula: “Understand Me and imitate Me!” For everything that he reveals regarding his own Being and his “behavior” in the cosmos and in history is to serve as model and example for Arjuna.¹¹¹

Consider the way in which the third chapter of the *Gītā* draws together our understanding of God and the *mukta*. In verses 20–26, Kṛṣṇa invites us to reflect on the parallels between his mode of action as God and that of the liberated sage. He holds up his cosmic activity as paradigmatic: “I have, O Pārtha, in the three worlds nothing whatever I must do, nothing unattained that must be attained. Yet I continue in action.”¹¹² Kṛṣṇa advises knowers (*vidvān*) to remain involved in the world in the same manner he does: to follow his divine example.

In his comments on *BhG* 3.25, Śaṅkara makes the equation of the Lord’s mode of activity and that of the sage even more explicit. Glossing the text, Śaṅkara assumes the voice of Kṛṣṇa. We hear God, eternally liberated, speaking to those who have become liberated in time. The Lord speaks to them fraternally, as if they were almost his equals, teaching them how to live their new mode of existence in the way he always has: “Like Me (*aḥam iva*), if you or others are knowers of the Self and are [thus] conscious of having attained all that is to be attained, you must continue to work for the benefit of others, even though there is no necessity for you to do so.” Introducing verse 26, he continues: “For Me or any other knower of the Self desirous of effecting the welfare of the world, there is no action to be done but that which is for the welfare of the world.”¹¹³ Here a few small words—“Like Me,” “For Me or any other knower”—are invested with profound implications. Śaṅkara’s Kṛṣṇa brings the *jīvanmukta* and Īśvara very close indeed.

This homology between the activity of God and that of the knower emerges most clearly in Śaṅkara’s comments on *BhG* 2.11. There he writes that we cannot understand the activity of the knower of Brahman in any ordinary way. Only the divine paradigm is adequate. “The action of the knower, being similarly free from ego and the desire for results, is like the action that Lord Vāsudeva [Kṛṣṇa] performed in fulfillment of his duties as a warrior.”¹¹⁴

The reference in this passage to the earthly activity of Kṛṣṇa reminds us of the concept of *avatāra*, or divine incarnation. Śaṅkara uses it here to throw light on the activity of the *mukta*. If the Lord and his cosmic activity are paradigmatic in a general way, then the concept of his particular

embodiment as *avatāra* may be a singularly instructive special case. Again we turn to Śaṅkara:

The Blessed Lord . . . controlling his own *māyā*, . . . appears (*lakṣyate*), to work the welfare of the world, as if possessed of a body (*dehavān iva*), as if born (*jāta iva*), though in reality he is unborn, imperishable, the Lord of all beings, in nature eternally pure, free, and liberated.¹¹⁵

The Lord, again, is eternally liberated (*nitya-mukta*) and completely in control of *māyā*. Even when he—embodied as the *avatāra*—seems to be in *māyā*'s grip, it is only “as if” (*iva*). In reality he is above the appearance. But if the *jīvanmukta* has realized a state homologous with Īśvara, his embodiment ought to be qualified with a similar “as if.” Śaṅkara bears this out: “The knower is Brahman in this very life, though he appears as if possessed of a body (*dehavān iva lakṣyate*).”¹¹⁶ Note carefully the language used in both passages—one describing the *avatāra*'s mode of being, the other that of the *jīvanmukta*. It is identical. The passage from Sarvajñātman at the beginning of this chapter further confirms that, like the embodiment of the *avatāra*, the *mukta*'s is deceptive: “I appear as if living (*jīvanm iva*).” When Śaṅkara holds up the activity of Kṛṣṇa as a model for the life of the *jīvanmukta*, then, it is not merely for inspiration. With the exception, of course, of the Lord's power to control the universal *māyā*,¹¹⁷ the liberated sage is called to—and has a real potential for—an authentic realization of the divine mode of being.

Even Īśvara Suffers Limitation

But what about *prārabdha-karma* and the trace of ignorance that is invoked to support it? Do not these elements of living liberation—which have no claim on the Lord's experience—cause the homology between the *jīvanmukta* and Īśvara to break down? Perhaps. But before the parallel is abandoned, let us see if we can extend it a bit further. Perhaps it will help us to gain insight into the limitations of living liberation as well.

Again using Īśvara as the paradigm, consider Śaṅkara's view that “the Supreme Lord neither identifies with a body nor imagines pain to be his own.” It is this lack of false identification, we are told, that allows Īśvara to be free from the sufferings and other defects of the individual souls (*BSS* 2.3.46). But, if such lack of empirical identification is the condition of the Lord's freedom, it is—the tradition asserts—a qualification possessed by the *mukta* as well. The latter, then, should enjoy a similar benefit. Why must the liberated sage be limited by the karmic momentum that governs

his psycho-physical apparatus? No doubt, *prārabdha-karma* determines the activities and potentials of his empirical adjuncts. But no Advaitin would suggest that this could impinge on his transcendent identity as Self. The *mukta* has homologized himself to the divine by shifting his identity to the transcendent. He ought no longer to be limited in his true being by anything that conditions his empirical personhood.

Suppose, on the other hand, we admit what many Advaitins seem to fear: that *prārabdha-karma* does somehow limit the *jīvanmukta's* freedom. Even so, it need not necessarily upset the homology between the liberated sage and God. On the contrary, it could further confirm its heuristic power. Reversing the paradigm, we can look at Īśvara in light of the *jīvanmukti* doctrine. This move, though unconventional, is perhaps even more illuminating. It forces us to remember something typically forgotten: Īśvara himself is not without constraint. Indeed, it may be that he suffers from limitations similar to those faced by the *jīvanmukta*.

Śaṅkara, for example, is clear that the possibilities of the Lord's activity are limited by *karma*, in this case by the *karma* of his creatures. The Lord must, when acting to direct the destinies of *jīvas*, take their karmic limitations into consideration. Otherwise, he would be accused of injustice (BSS 2.1.34). Do such considerations bind him? If not, why should the *mukta* who has realized his identity with the infinite be bound by having to take the *prārabdha-karma* of his particular psycho-physical being into account when expressing himself empirically?

Again, if the *jīvanmukta* is limited by a remnant of ignorance, we must remember that there is a sense in which Īśvara too is limited—even constituted—by ignorance. On this Śaṅkara writes:

Like space conforming to adjuncts such as pots and jars, the Lord conforms to adjuncts of name and form created by ignorance. . . . The Lord's being a Lord, his omniscience and his omnipotence, all depend on limitations caused by adjuncts which are products of ignorance.¹¹⁸

Īśvara is thus by definition Brahman limited by *avidyā*.¹¹⁹ His existence as the Lord consists in his interaction with ignorance in the form of a cosmic *upādhi*, shot through and through with the endless *karmas* of countless beings. For this reason, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is willing to suggest that the Lord is conditioned in a way that the soul that has attained complete liberation is not. Both Īśvara and the *mukta* are, he tells us, free of "unknowing" (*ajñātvā*). They are thus fully aware of their nature as Brahman. But the Lord, unlike the *mukta*, remains defined by the ignorance that is the cause of the world (*jagan-nidānam ajñānam*).¹²⁰

We move, therefore, toward understanding Īśvara as a kind of eternal

jīvanmukta of cosmic dimensions. Is the Lord not, like the *jīvanmukta*, liberated but somehow not yet fully liberated? The Brahman-knowing sage waits for the final *kaivalya* that consists in absolute release from the body and mind that occasion his limited "soulhood" (*jīvatva*). Is Īśvara likewise waiting, so to say, for his own *kaivalya*? Is he waiting, as in Appayya's model, for all *jīvas* to be liberated so he can have his final rest, his cosmic *kṣema*? Is he anticipating his own *parama-mukti* or *videhamukti*, his own final liberation from the karmically conditioned adjuncts that constitute his "Godhood" (*īśvaratva*) and thus limit his true nature as Brahman? If so, his waiting will be endless, because the universe is, by definition, endless. So in this sense, at least, his limitation will be all that much greater than that of the *jīvanmukta*.¹²¹

Conclusion

The doctrine of *jīvanmukti* has emerged as a cornerstone of modern Advaitic faith. One reason, of course, is the intrinsic interest of the concept itself: it has a power and an attraction that is undeniable. Who would not be fascinated by the notion of living the infinite within the boundaries of the finite? But the *jīvanmukti* ideal is also significant for historical reasons, namely, that it has an important place in the Hindu counterattack against the nineteenth century Western critique of Hinduism. In the face of accusations that Hinduism is a backward and idolatrous faith (frequently based on misinformation, missionary bias, or even willful distortion), modern Advaitins have naturally retaliated, marshalling arguments for the superiority of their own religious vision. To this purpose, they have often, as in the remark by Radhakrishnan quoted at the beginning of this chapter, invoked the idea of living liberation. Contrasting their ideals with conventional religious understandings that promise true freedom only after death, modern Advaitins celebrate the possibility of complete spiritual emancipation while still living.

I recognize and am quick to honor this valorization of *jīvanmukti* as a legitimate expression of modern Hindu faith and experience. Nevertheless, my research leads me to the conviction that the living liberation offered by the classical Advaita tradition¹²² is rather more limited than modern advocates would like to admit. No doubt Śaṅkara and other Advaitins present strong arguments for *jīvanmukti* when writing in their strictly ontological mode. These arguments have been presented above, and I hope I have succeeded in conveying their full force. They are taken, with ample justification, as the authentic Advaitin position by contemporary interpreters. Still, careful study shows that the classical writers fail to commit them-

selves fully to their own highest vision of living liberation. This fact has been obscured by the tendency of neo-Vedāntins to ignore the compromises the classical tradition makes on the question of *prārabdha-karma*.

Advaita, it should be remembered, was formulated by and for a narrow spiritual elite of male Brahmins, primarily *saṃnyāsins*, who alone were believed qualified to fully appropriate its import. Its authors and propagators saw themselves as standing at the pinnacle of a long transmigratory climb, ready at last to abandon *samsāra* without looking back.¹²³ It was never intended to be a philosophy for the general public, let alone an answer to the concerns of historically-oriented Western moralists. Despite their differences, all the major authors of the tradition were world-renouncers, and all share the assumption that *any* experience of the world is somehow, whether through impression (*saṃskāra*) or actual remnant (*leśa*), based on ignorance. If awareness of the world continues, we are told, it is caused by a defect (*doṣa*), occasioned by an obstruction (*prati-bandhaka*). The implication is that the ideal state is one in which there is no empirical experience, of the world or anything else. As long as *prārabdha-karma* continues, of course, this is not possible. In *kaivalya*, however, the liberated consciousness attains complete disjunction from the world: mind, body, and nature. This, and not *jīvanmukti*, is the ultimate aim of classical Advaita. As in Sāṃkhya, from which Śaṅkara borrows the term *kaivalya*, the Advaitin *saṃnyāsīn* thinks of his final goal under the metaphor of absolute isolation. He yearns for freedom in disembodiment (*videhatā*). The intense detachment generated by Brahman-knowledge allows for a figurative disembodiment in life, even while the body lingers under the influence of its karmic momentum. This is, unmistakably, a state of immense religious significance, as I have tried to show. But the fact that the *jīvanmukta*'s continued bodily awareness must be supported by a lingering trace of ignorance points to a still higher goal. As Bhāratīrtha tells us, the liberated sage whose *karma* causes him to undergo further empirical experience suffers like one undergoing forced labor (*viṣṭi-grhīta-vat*).¹²⁴ Literal disembodiment at death—*kaivalya* or *videhamukti*—is the preferred state.

We should be under no illusions that classical Advaita celebrates the state of living liberation as one in which the *mukta* has "non-dual perception" of the world as Brahman.¹²⁵ I have already shown that Prakāśātman, Bhāratīrtha, and others believe that the *jīvanmukta* only truly overcomes duality when in the introversion of *samādhi*. Śaṅkara himself, where he does speak of the *mukta*'s continued empirical experience, uses the analogy of a person with an eye defect. Persons with double vision, he suggests, may continue to see two moons even though they know better. Knowledge of the true situation does not cause the second moon to disap-

pear. The false appearance remains, but is known to be a malignant intrusion.¹²⁶ Vācaspati uses a similar disease model to explain the experience of the *jīvanmukta*. Although knowers of Brahman may continue to engage in empirical activity, they do not perceive the world as identical with the Absolute: "For example, even though knowing for certain that sugar is sweet, persons afflicted by a disorder of the bile continue to experience a bitter taste. [We know this] because having tasted [sugar], they spit it out, and then discard it."¹²⁷ In both examples, the Advaitin compares the *mukta*'s empirical experience to a perception known to be false, but introduced regrettably by an illness.

Sarvajñātman, to be sure, speaks of seeing duality in liberation as if it were a "wondrous painting" (*citram iva*, ŚŚ 4.54). And Bhāratīrtha likens the *jīvanmukta*'s experience of the world to witnessing a "magic show" (*indra jāla*, PD 7.180), possibly here intending a positive connotation. But most metaphors in the texts of classical Advaita speak clearly of the sage's distaste for continued empirical awareness. Maṇḍana speaks of the *jīvanmukta* as one who experiences his body as a mere shadow (*chāyā-mātra*, BSdh 3). Sarvajñātman goes on to declare, "I see the universe as if it were a burnt rope . . . and my body as the cast-off skin of a snake."¹²⁸ Other Advaitins say the world appears to them like a burnt cloth. Though it may retain its shape, it is ineffectual (SLS 4). Bhāratīrtha himself declares that phenomenality, if it remains in liberation, is like a dead rat, a corpse, a knife rendered blunt (PD 7.279–282). Empirical existence for the *jīvanmukta* is, then, a magical phantasm at best. But it is one that is ontologically hollow, exhausted, a mere husk or shadow. It is experienced as a remote, inexplicable other trespassing in the self-luminous fullness of the Self. The *jīvanmukta* waits for its disappearance.

Given our homology between the liberated sage and Īśvara, we are pushed inexorably toward the question of how God himself experiences the world. The question is intriguing. It is also, no doubt, presumptuous. Whether for this reason or not, Hindu scripture gives hardly a hint as to its resolution, and Advaita itself is silent.¹²⁹ But perhaps some suggestion of an answer can be drawn from our homology, proceeding now from the *jīvanmukta*'s end. If the sage in living liberation has, as the tradition claims, shifted his identification to the transcendent, we can strictly no longer talk of his experience at all, since his individuality has evaporated. We must speak rather of the experience of Īśvara through the particular medium that used to constitute the *mukta*'s body-mind. That is to say, descriptions of the experience of the *jīvanmukta* should be read as descriptions of the experience of God through a particular psycho-physical apparatus.

One might imagine that God's experience of his cosmos would be a

glorious vision of non-duality, shining with the radiance of the Absolute. But if we take the experience of the *jīvanmukta* as our guide—as we must, since there is no other evidence—we can only be disappointed. We have no grounds for assuming anything more interesting than the sage's perception of the world as a shadowland of *misperception*. But perhaps it is precisely here that our homology is most revealing. Put simply, it serves to remind us of and highlight Advaita's deep metaphysical bias against the world. Why do we find in the orthodox Śaṅkara tradition no vibrant celebration of non-dual experience of, and unity with, the cosmos—at least on Īśvara's part, if not the *jīvanmukta*'s? Why do we have to look elsewhere for this spirit of final world reclamation, to Tantric non-dualism, as in Ramakrishna or Kashmir Śaivism, or to Mahāyāna Buddhism? Because in the end the Advaita tradition fails to present a true non-dualism of world and Absolute—as many would like to understand the term today.¹³⁰ It is rather an acosmic monism. It achieves its non-duality not inclusively but exclusively. Empirical reality is admitted in a provisional way, but in the end it is cast out of the Absolute, out of existence. From the highest (*pāramārthika*) perspective, the world is simply not there. This being the case, how can Īśvara's participation in the world *not* limit him, and in ways that closely parallel the *jīvanmukta*'s experience?

Both the *jīvanmukta* and Īśvara abide in a state that is intermediate between bondage and final Advaitic liberation. For both there is a "consciousness of freedom," as Eliade puts it, and a direct apprehension of immortality. But for both this awareness is combined with a persistent element of bondage. Both God and the *jīvanmukta* remain, once again, liberated yet in a critical sense waiting to be liberated. Still, the value of this waiting ought not be gainsaid. Because it is already free in great measure, it is holy. That Īśvara's waiting is paradoxically both timeless and eternal invests it with a profundity that is incalculable. The *jīvanmukta* is privileged to share a portion of this holy waiting of God, before attaining the final freedom that lies utterly beyond phenomenality.

Abbreviations

- AS *Advaitasiddhi of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī*. Edited by N. S. Ananta Krishna Sastri. Parimal Sanskrit Series, no. 7. Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1982.
- Bhā *The Bhāmatī of Vācaspati on Śaṅkara's Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya*. Edited and translated by S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri and C. Kunhan Raja. Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1933. (All translations cited are my own.)

- BhG** *Bhagavad Gītā*. See **BhGS**.
- BhGS** *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā with the Commentaries Śrīmat-Śaṅkarabhāṣya with Ānandagiri, Nilakaṇṭhī, Bhāṣyotkar-ṣāḍipikā of Dhanapati, Śrīdhari, Gītārthasaṃgraha of Abhinavaguptācārya, and Gūḍhārthadīpikā of Madhusūdana*. Edited by Wasudev Laxman Sāstrī Paṇṣīkar. 2d ed. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1978.
- BSdh** *Brahmasiddhi by Acharya Maṇḍanamīśra*. Edited by S. Kuppuswami Sastri. Sri Garib Das Oriental Series, no. 16. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1984; reprint, Madras Government Oriental Series, no. 4. Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, 1937.
- BS** Bādarāyaṇa. *Brahma Sūtra*. See **BSS**.
- BSS** *Brahmasūtra with Śaṅkarabhāṣya. Works of Śaṅkara in Original Sanskrit*, vol. 3. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985.
- BU** *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. See **BUS**.
- BUS** *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad with Śaṅkarabhāṣya*. Edited by Kāśīnātha Śāstrī Āgāṣe. Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, no. 15. Poona: Ānandāśrama, 1953.
- BUBhV** *Shri Sureshvarācārya's Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣyavārtikam*. Edited by Shri S. Subrahmanya Shastri. Advaita Ratna Manjusha, nos. 23 and 30. Mt. Abu: Mahesh Research Institute, 1982, 1990.
- ChU** *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. See **TPUŚ**.
- ChUŚ** *Chāndogya Upaniṣad with Śaṅkara's Bhāṣya*. See **TPUŚ**.
- IS** *Iṣṭasiddhi of Vimuktātman*. Edited by P. K. Sundaram. Madras: Swadharma Swaarajya Sangha, 1980.
- Kāṭha** *Kāṭha Upaniṣad*. See **TPUŚ**.
- MāU** *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*. See **TPUŚ**.
- MāK** Gauḍapāda. *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*. See **TPUŚ**.
- MāUKŚ** *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad with Gauḍapāda's Kārikā and Śaṅkara's Bhāṣya*. See **TPUŚ**.
- MuU** *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. See **TPUŚ**.
- MuUŚ** *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad with Śaṅkara's Bhāṣya*. See **TPUŚ**.
- NS** *The Naiṣhkarmya-Siddhi [Naiṣhkarmyasiddhi] of Sureśvarācārya with the Chandrikā of Jñānottama*. Edited by G. A. Jacob. 2d ed. Bombay: Government Central Book Depot, 1906.
- PD** *Pañcadaśī of Śrī Vidyāranya Swāmī*. Edited and translated by Swami Swahananda. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1975. (All translations cited are my own.)

- PPV *The Pañcapādikā of Śrī Padmapādācārya with the Pañcapādikāvivarāṇa of Śrī Prakāśātman*. Edited by S. Śrīrāma Śāstrī and S. R. Krishnamurthi Śāstrī. Madras Government Oriental Series, no. 155. Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, 1958.
- SLS *Siddhāntaleśasamgraha of Appayya Dīkṣita*. Edited by S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri. Vol. 2. Madras: University of Madras, 1937.
- SS *Samkṣepaśārīrika of Sarvajñātman*. Edited and translated by N. Veezhinathan. Madras: University of Madras, 1985. (All translations cited are my own.)
- SSSS *Sanḥṣepaśārīrika by Sarvajñātma-muni with a Gloss Called Sarasāṅgraha [by Madhusūdana Sarasvatī]*. Edited by Bhau Sastri Vajhe. Kashi Sanskrit Series, no. 18. Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1924.
- TP *Tattvapradīpikā of Citsukha*. Edited by Kāshinath Shāstrī. Bombay: Nirnayasāgar Press, 1915.
- TPUŚ *Ten Principal Upanishads with Śāṅkarabhāṣya. Works of Śāṅkara in the Original Sanskrit*, vol. 1. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.
- UpSā *Upadeshsāhasrī [Upadeśasāhasrī] of Śrī Samkarācārya: A Thousand Teachings*. Edited and translated by Swami Jagadananda. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1961. (All translations cited are my own.)
- ViCū *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of [?] Śrī Śāṅkarācārya*. Edited and translated by Swāmī Mādhavānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1982. (All translations cited are my own.)
- VPBh *Vedāntaparibhāṣā of Dharmarāja Adhvarin*. Edited and translated by S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri. Adyar, Madras: The Adyar Library, 1942.
- VPS *The Vivaraṇaprameyasāṅgraha of Bhāratīrītha*. Edited by S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri and Saileswar Sen. Andhra University Series, no. 25. Waltair: Āndhraviśvakalāpariṣad, 1941.
- VS *Vedāntasāra of Sadānanda*. Edited and translated by Swami Nikhilananda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978.

Notes

1. *advaitam* apy anubhavāmi kara-stha-bilva-tulyaṃ śarīraṃ ahi-nirvlayanīva vikṣe / evaṃ ca jīvanam iva pratibhāsamānaṃ niḥśreyasādhigamaṇaṃ ca mama prasiddham (SŚ 4.55). On the identification of the body with the skin of a snake, see the discussion of *BU* 4.4.7, below.

2. I must point out that only Śaṅkara taught that liberation could, with rare exceptions, be attained only by world-renouncing monks (*saṃnyāsins*). For him and other conservative Advaitins, moreover, monkhood was open only to male Brahmins. The obvious result is that the orthodox Advaita tradition was accessible only to a narrow male elite. (See Lance Nelson, "Theism for the Masses, Non-Dualism for the Monastic Elite: A Fresh Look at Śaṅkara's Trans-Theistic Spirituality," in *The Struggle Over the Past: Fundamentalism in the Modern World*, ed. William Shea [Latham, MD: University Press of America, 1993].) I strive to use non-sexist language in this chapter as much as possible. However, it would be a misrepresentation in this context to use such gender inclusive pronominal constructions as "he or she" when referring to the liberated sage, who must here be a *saṃnyāsīn*.

3. By "classical" or "orthodox" Advaita, I mean that represented in works of Śaṅkara, his disciples Sureśvara and Padmapāda, and the elite, conservative, scholastic *saṃnyāsīn* tradition that follows them. This chapter focuses almost entirely on this tradition, from Śaṅkara through Madhusūdana Sarasvatī and his disciples. I therefore exclude from detailed consideration—in addition to the views of modern "neo-Vedāntins"—such texts as the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and the *Aṣṭāvakra-gītā*, which teach an *advaita* more idealistic than Śaṅkara's, and popular Advaitic manuals that have been influenced by them. I also exclude the many so-called minor works of Śaṅkara. Almost all of these are late, of doubtful authorship, and strongly influenced by the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, yogic teachings, Tantrism, or combinations thereof. (See Note 6, below.) This means that I do not intend to deal here with the concept of *jīvanmukti* as it appears in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, or with works such as the *Jīvanmuktivivēka*, which are heavily dependent on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. It is worth noting, however, that the notion of *jīvanmukti* as a particularized ideal may well have originated outside of the orthodox Advaita tradition in the popular ascetic traditions that produced these texts. See J. G. Arapura, "The Question as to the Jīvanmukti 'Ideal,'" in *Hermeneutical Essays on Vedāntic Topics* (Delhi: Motilal Banarśidass, 1986), 124–134.

4. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953), 118.

5. Mircea Eliade, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*, 2d ed., Bollingen Series LVI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 100.

6. Following the majority of modern scholars, I define Śaṅkara as the author of the major commentaries bearing his name (on the *BS*, the *BhG*, the major *Upaniṣads*, and the *MāK*) and the one original work that can safely be attributed to

him, the *UpSā*. I do not take into account the many other works (such as the popular *ViCū*) that are reverently—but we now think mistakenly—ascribed to Śaṅkara. See Karl H. Potter, ed., *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, Vol. III: *Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṅkara and His Pupils* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 115–116, 294–295, 320; also Sengaku Mayeda, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadeśasāhasrī of Śaṅkara* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1979), 6. On Śaṅkara's dates, see Potter, 14–15, 116; Mayeda, 3.

7. parānugraha, loka-saṃgraha (*BhGS* 3.25, 4.20). See also *UpSā* (metrical portion) 2.1.6; *BSS* 3.4.50. For more on the ethical implications of *jīvanmukti*, see Andrew O. Fort, "Knowing Brahman While Embodied: Śaṅkara on Jīvanmukti," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 19 (December 1991): 371–373, 380, and 387–388, n. 44.

8. idam tu pāramārthikaṃ, kūṭastha-nityaṃ, vyomavat sarva-vyāpi sarva-vikriyā-rahitaṃ nitya-triptaṃ niravayaṃ svayaṃ-jyotiḥ-svabhāvaṃ / yatra dharma-dharmau saha kāryeṇa kāla-trayaṃ ca nopāvartate / tad etad āśarīratvaṃ mokṣākhyam / . . . atas tad brahma yasyeyaṃ jijñāsā prastutā (*BSS* 1.1.4, p. 14). Compare *BSS* 2.1.14: "Liberation is unchangingly eternal (kūṭastha-nityatvān mokṣasya)."

9. brahma-bhāvaś ca mokṣaḥ (*BSS* 1.1.4, p. 17).

10. nityaś ca mokṣaḥ . . . agny-uṣṇa-vad ātmanaḥ svabhāvaḥ (*BUS* 4.4.6).

11. *BSS* 1.1.4, pp. 14, 16; 3.4.52; *BUS* 4.4.6.

12. na baddho na ca sādhaḥ / na mumukṣur na vai mukta ity eṣā paramartha-tā (*MāK* 2.32).

13. tan-nivṛttau prāptam apy ānanda-rūpaṃ aprāptam iva prāptam bhavati; tyaktam api śoka-duḥkhādy atyaktam iva tyaktam bhavati (*Bhā* on 1.1.4, p. 156).

14. kevalād eva tattva-jñānān mokṣa-prāptiḥ (*BhGS* 2.20).

15. śrutayo brahma-vidyānantaraṃ mokṣaṃ darśayanty madhye kāryāntaraṃ vārayanti (*BSS* 1.1.4, p. 15). Compare:

In everyday life a form is revealed as soon as the light reaches the observer's eye. Similarly, ignorance of the Self disappears the very moment knowledge arises."

yathā loka draṣṭuś cakṣuṣa ālokena samyogo yat kālas tat kāla eva rūpābhivyaktiḥ / evaṃ ātma-viśayaṃ vijñānaṃ yat kālaṃ tat kāla eva tad-viśayājñāna-tirobhāvaḥ syāt (*BUS* 1.4.10).

Precisely at the time right knowledge arises, its result—being the Self of all—is realized.

samyag-darśana-kālam eva tat-phalaṃ sarvātmatvaṃ darśayati (BSS 3.3.32).

16. yadā yasmin kāle bhūta-prthag-bhāvaṃ . . . ekasmin ātmani sthitam ekasthaṃ anupaśyati . . . brahma saṃpadyate brahmaiva bhavati tadā (BhGS 13.30). Anandagiri, Śaṅkara's earliest commentator, glosses:

Liberation is exactly simultaneous with the rise of knowledge.

jñāna-samāna-kālaiva muktiḥ (*Ānandagirivyākhyā* on BhGS 13.30).

17. jñānaṃ . . . ātmany eva bhaved yasya sa necchann api mucyate (*UpSā* [metrical portion] 2.4.5).

18. na ca tasyām apy utkarṣa-nikarṣātmako 'tisaya upapadyate nikrṣṭāyā vid-yātvābhāvād utkrṣṭaiva hi vidyā bhavati / tasmāt tasyām cirācirotpatti-rūpo 'tisayo bhavan bhavet / na tu muktau kaścid atisaya-saṃbhavo 'sti (BSS 3.4.52).

19. I will show below that Śaṅkara and his followers retreat from this bold *gnosis*-orientation. Andrew Fort will describe in some detail in Chapter Five how Vidyāraṇya diverges from it.

20. saṃskāraḥ . . . na tāvad guṇādhānena saṃbhavati, anādheyātisaya-brahma-svarūpatvān mokṣasya / nāpi doṣāpanayanena, nitya-śuddha-brahma-sva-rūpatvān mokṣasya (BSS 1.1.4, p. 17).

21. vidyā svayam evotpadyate tayā cāvidyā bādhyate / tataś cāvidyādhyastah saloko 'yaṃ nāma-rūpa-prapañcaḥ svapna-prapañca-vat praviliyate (BSS 3.2.21).

22. BSS 2.1.14. Compare the following:

When the [five] elements, manifested with the form of effects, causes, and objects, being the cause of the Self's becoming an individual self, are dissolved by the knowledge of Brahman that arises from the instructions imparted by the teacher and the scriptures, they disappear. Immediately upon their disappearance, this individual selfhood also dissolves, like the foam and bubbles created by waves. For example, when their causes such as water or red-colored lac are removed, the reflections of the sun and moon [in the water, and the red color reflected in] crystal, etc., disappear. Only the [sun,] moon, etc., themselves remain, as they are in reality. In the same way, [when the world disappears with the rise of knowledge,] pure Intelligence—infinite, unbounded, pellucid—[alone] remains.

tāni yadā kārya-karaṇa-viśayākāra-pariṇatāni bhūtāni ātmano viśeṣātma-khilya-hetu-bhūtāni śāstrācāryopadeśena brahma-vidyayā nadi-samudra-vat pravilāpitāni vinaśyanti / salila-phema-budbudādi-vat tesu vinaśyatsv anv evaiṣa viśeṣātma-khilya-bhāvo vinaśyati / yathodakālaktakādi-hetv-

apanaye sūrya-candra-sphaṭikādi-pratibimbo vinaśyati candrādi svarūpaṃ
eva paramārthato vyavathiṣṭhate / tadvat prajñānam anantam apāraṃ
svacchaṃ vyavathiṣṭhate (*BUS* 2.4.12).

23. brahma-bhūtaṃ jīvanmuktaṃ (*BhGS* 6.27).

24. Arapura 1986: 125–131. See Note 3.

25. ihaiva santo 'tha vidmas tad vayam.

26. See also *BU* 4.4.7; *MuU* 2.1.10. On Vāmadeva, see *BSS* 3.4.51, *SS* 3.349–350, *PD* 9.35.

27. karmaṇy abhipravṛto 'pi niṣkriyātma-darśana-sampannatvān naiva kiṃcit karoti saḥ (*BhGS* 4.20).

28. yaḥ . . . prāḡ eva karmārambhād brahmaṇi sarvāntare pratyag-ātmani niṣkriye saṃjātāma-darśanaḥ saḥ . . . śarīra-yātrā-mātra-ceṣṭo yatir jñāna-niṣṭho mucyate . . . jñānāgni-dagdha-sarva-karmatvād apratibandhena mucyate eva (*BhGS* 4.21).

29. brahma-vidāṃ api keṣāṃcid itihāsa-purāṇayor dehāntarotpatti-darśanāt (*BSS* 3.3.32).

30. na hi 'tat tvam asi' ity asya vākyasyārthas tat tvam mṛto bhaviṣyasīty evaṃ pariṇetuṃ śakyah (*BSS* 3.3.32).

31. brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati.

32. brahmaṇi nirvṛtiṃ mokṣam iha jīvaṃ eva brahma-bhūtaḥ san adhigacchati prāpnoti (*BhGS* 5.24). See also Śaṅkara's remarks on *Kaṭha* 2.2.1.

33. mokṣākhyam aśarīratvaṃ nityaṃ iti siddham (*BSS* 1.1.1, p. 14).

34. *Maitri Upaniṣad* 4.6, for example, speaks of "the supreme, the immortal, the bodiless (*aśarīra*) Brahman" (brahmaṇaḥ . . . parasyāmṛtasyāśarīrasya). I will refer to *Kaṭha* 1.2.22 and *BhG* 13.31 in the text of this chapter below.

35. tasmān mithyā-pratyaya-nimittavāt saśarīratvasya siddhaṃ jīvato 'pi viduṣo 'śarīratvaṃ (*BSS* 1.1.4, p. 22).

36. atrāsminn eva śarīre vartamāno brahma samaśnute brahma-bhāvaṃ mokṣaṃ pratipadyat ity arthaḥ / ato mokṣo na deśāntara-gamanādy apekṣate (*BUS* 4.4.7).

37. tad yathāhi-nirivayani valmīke mṛtā pratyastā śayita, evam evedaṃ śarīraṃ śete, athāyam aśarīro 'mṛtaḥ.

38. *BUS* 4.4.7. Compare *ViCū* 547–550.

39. tathā vivekāviveka-mātreṇaivātmano 'śarīratvaṃ saśarīratvaṃ ca, mantra-varṇāt "aśarīraṃ śarīreṣu" [*Kaṭha* 1.2.22] iti, "śarīra-stho 'pi kaunteya na karoti na lipyate" [*BhG* 13.31] iti (*BSS* 1.3.19).

40. yadi vāstavaṃ śaśarīratvaṃ bhavet, na jīvatas tan nivarteta; mithyā-jñāna-nimittam tu tat; tac cotpanna-tattva-jñānena jīvatapi śakyaṃ nivartayitum / yat punar aśarīratvaṃ tad asya svabhāva iti na śakyaṃ nivartayitum, svabhāva-hānena bhāva-vināśa-prasaṅgād ity āha—nityam aśarīratvaṃ iti (*Bhā* on 1.1.4, p. 233).

41. A number of influential works, including the *Vivaraṇaprameyasamgraha* (*VPS*), the *Pañcadaśī* (*PD*), and the *Jīvanmuktiviveka*, are traditionally attributed to a writer named Vidyāranya. But the identity of this Vidyāranya—and indeed whether or not he was a single individual—has been a matter of scholarly dispute. Of the various discussions of this issue, Mahadevan's remains the most satisfactory. While I believe that more research is necessary before a final verdict can be rendered, I am willing for purposes of this discussion to accept Mahadevan's conclusion that the *VPS* and the *PD* were written by the same author. This important post-Śaṅkara Advaitin was known sometimes as Bhāratitīrtha, sometimes by the additional appellation Vidyāranya ("Forest of Wisdom"), and sometimes by both names together. Mādhava-Vidyāranya, the author of the *Jīvanmuktiviveka* and other works, appears to be a different individual. In order to avoid confusion, I will speak of the author of the *VPS* and the *PD* as Bhāratitīrtha. See T. M. P. Mahadevan, *The Philosophy of Advaita* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1969), 1–8, and the same author's *The Pañcadaśī of Bhāratitīrtha-Vidyāranya: An Interpretive Exposition*, Madras University Philosophical Series, no. 13 (Madras: University of Madras, 1969), xiv–xv.

42. niroga upaviṣṭo vā rugno vā viluṭhan bhuvi / mūrchito vā tyajatv eṣa prāṇan bhrāntir na sarvathā (*PD* 2.106). Compare *ViCū* 556.

43. It is not listed in T. M. P. Mahadevan, ed., *Word Index to the Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya of Śaṅkara*, 2 pts. (Madras: University of Madras, 1973). Nor is it to be found in Francis X. D'Sa, ed., *Word-Index to Śaṅkara's Gītābhāṣya* (Pune: Institute for the Study of Religion, 1985). My sense is that the term *videhamukti* becomes prominent in Advaita only under the influence of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*.

44. See S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri's comments in *VPBh*, p. 217, and his article "Jīvanmukti," in *Collected Papers of Professor S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri*, ed. T. M. P. Mahadevan (Madras: University of Madras, 1961), 246; see also Debabrata Sinha, "On Immortality and Death—Notes in a Vedāntic Perspective" in *Perspectives on Vedānta: Essays in Honor of Professor P. T. Raju*, ed. S. S. Rama Rao Pappu (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 176.

Similar reservations must be expressed, for similar reasons, regarding the post-Śaṅkara Advaitins' distinction between living liberation and immediate liberation (*sadyomukti*). For Śaṅkara *sadyomukti* does not mean, as it often does in later Advaita, instant and literal disembodiment. He uses it in contrast with the term *kramamukti*, which describes the gradual "liberation by stages" attained by worshippers of the conditioned (*saguṇa*) Brahman. See *BhGS* 5.23–28, 8.23–27; *BSS* 1.1.11, 1.3.13, 4.3–4.

45. na tasya mokṣo 'nyaḥ kartavyo 'sti (*BhGŚ* 5.28).

46. na hi viduṣo mṛtasya bhāvāntarāpatir jīvato 'nyo bhāvo dehāntara-pratīsaṃdhanābhāva-mātreṇaiva (*BUS* 4.4.6). Compare the teaching of the modern sage, Ramana Maharshi: "There are no stages in Realization or *Mukti*. There are no degrees of Liberation. So there cannot be one stage of Liberation with the body and another when the body has been shed. The Realized Man knows . . . that nothing, neither his body nor anything else, exists but for the Self. To such a one what difference could the presence or absence of a body make?" (Arthur Osborne, ed., *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words* [New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978], 193).

47. *Vedāntasiddhāntamuktāvalī* 26 (*Vedāntasiddhāntamuktāvalī of Prakāśānanda*, edited and translated by Arthur Venis, Gokuldas Sanskrit Series, no. 4 [Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1975], 137–143).

48. na nareṇāvareṇa prokta eṣa suvijñeyah . . . ananya-prokte gatiḥ atra nāsti.

49. ye samyag-darśinas tair upadiṣṭaṃ jñānaṃ kārya-kṣemaṃ bhavati netarat (*BhGŚ* 4.34). See also *UpSā* (metrical portion) 2.1.3, 6; 2.2.45.

50. drṣṭa-tattvasya cet tadaiva śarīraṃ patet, tadā ācāryābhāvād vidyālabhān mokṣābhāvaḥ (*IS* 1.9).

51. *BSS* 4.1.15. See *BhG* 2.54–71.

52. api ca naivātra vivaditavyaṃ brahma-vidā kaṃcit-kālaṃ śarīraṃ dhriyate na vā dhriyate iti / kathaṃ hy ekasya sva-hṛdaya-pratyayaṃ brahma-vedanaṃ deha-dhāraṇaṃ cāpareṇa pratikṣeptuṃ śakyeta (*BSS* 4.1.15).

53. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (Bombay: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), p. 381, n. 2.

54. kṣīyante cāsyā karmāṇi (*MuU* 2.2.8); jñānāgniḥ sarva-karmāṇi bhasmasāt kurute (*BhG* 4.37).

55. anārabdha-kārye eva tu purve (*BS* 4.1.15).

56. See *BSS* 4.1.15 and *ChUŚ* 6.14.2. The later Advaita tradition teaches the formula of three kinds of *karma*: (1) *saṃcita*, "accumulated" *karma* that has not yet begun to bear fruit, (2) *prārabdha*, "commenced" *karma*, or that portion of the *saṃcita* that has been activated and has begun to produce effects, leading to one's present birth and playing itself out in the experiences of this life, and (3) *āgāmī*, "coming" *karma* being earned in this life to yield, unless cut short by knowledge, results in the future. The latter is also called *saṃciyamāna* (being accumulated) and *kriyamāna* (being performed). It, like *saṃcita*, is destroyed by Brahman-knowledge, after which the knower accumulates no more *karma*, even though he acts under the influence of *prārabdha*.

57. na tāvad anāśrityārabdha-kāryaṃ karmāśayaṃ jñānotpattir upapadyate (BSS 4.1.15).

58. BSS 3.3.32, ChUŚ 6.14.2, BUŚ 1.4.10, BhGS 13.23.

59. BSS 4.1.15. Compare *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* 67.

60. bādhitam api tu mithyājñānaṃ . . . saṃskāra-vaśāt kaṃcit-kālam anuvartata eva (BSS 4.1.15).

61. BUŚ 3.5.1; MāUKŚ on MāU 7.

62. It has more than once been pointed out that the flying arrow and the spinning potter's wheel are unstoppable because they are (on the level of discourse intended in the example) real entities with real momentum. But *prārabdha karma* and the body it supports are (according to Advaita) unreal fabrications, products of ignorance. In making such comparisons, Śaṅkara is giving *prārabdha* a reality that, according to his own ontology, it does not deserve. See Fort 1991: 377–378. (See Note 7).

63. yadyapy evaṃśarīrārabdhakasya karmaṇo niyata-phalāt vāt samyag-jñāna-prāptav api avaśyam bhāvinī pravṛttir vān-manah-kāyānām / labdha-vṛtteḥ karmaṇo baliyastvāt / mukteṣvādi-pravṛtti-vat / tena pakṣe prāptaṃ jñāna-pravṛtti-daurbalyam / tasmāt tyāga-vairāgyādi-sādhana-balāvalambena ātma-vijñāna-smṛti-sanatir niyantavyā bhavati (BUŚ 1.4.7).

64. BS 3.3.32; 4.1.15; 4.1.19. I am grateful to Professor Fort for alerting me to the significance of the language in these passages.

65. tasya tāvad eva ciraṃ yāvan na vimokṣye 'tha sampatsya iti.

66. sad-ātma-svarūpa-sampatter iti vākya-śeṣaḥ . . . yena karmaṇā śarīram ārabdhaṃ tasyopabhogena kṣayād deha-pāto yāvad ity arthaḥ / atha tadaiva sat sampatsye sampatsyata (ChUŚ 6.14.2).

67. siddho mokṣo 'ham (UpSā [metrical portion] 2.18.209). See also vs. 2.18.206, 211, 214.

68. kiṃtu vidvān sa ihaiva brahma yadyapi dehavān iva lakṣyate sa brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti / yasmān na hi tasyābrahmatva-pariccheda-hetavaḥ kāmāḥ santi tasmād ihaiva brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti na śarīra-pātottara-kālam (BUŚ 4.4.6).

69. The Upaniṣads and the BS do not always express the radical non-dualism that Śaṅkara espouses. The texts provide ample instances of an earlier, pre-Advaitic outlook that is more realistic than he as a non-dualist would wish to embrace. Most to the point, we often find in these primary sources—especially in the ChU—an inclination toward the commonsense idea of liberation as a post-mortem, heavenly state to which the soul, leaving the body behind, has to travel (see ChU 8.1.6; 8.2.1–10; 8.4.1–3; 8.12.3, and so forth). Bādarāyaṇa, the author of the BS, seems

to have been fond of the *ChU*, and it is likely that he thought of liberation as a heavenly state (see *BS* 4.4).

70. One of the great difficulties in interpreting Śaṅkara is that we almost always, except in the *UpSā*, see him as a commentator constrained by the texts rather than as the author of independent treatises. The degree to which he is so constrained is not always easy to determine.

71. Potter 1981: 35. (See Note 6.)

72. *ViCū* 453–463, *Aparokṣānubhūti* 90–97 (Swami Vimuktananda, ed. and trans., *Aparokṣānubhūti or Self-Realization of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977]); see also *VS* 219. These texts are late, and with the exception of the *VS*, their authorship is highly dubious. While their probing of the *prārabdha* doctrine ought not for these reasons to be dismissed out of hand, they do belong to a more popular strand of the Advaita tradition than we are considering here. See Potter 1981: 320, 335, 560, reference in Note 6.

73. *The Naiṣkarmyasiddhi of Sureśvara* (Madras: University of Madras, 1988), 384. Satchidānandendra Sarasvatī expresses a similar view (*The Method of the Vedānta*, trans. A. J. Alston [London: Kegan Paul, 1989], 819). Compare Ramana Maharshi: “For those who ask it is said that a Realized Man with a body is a *jīvan-mukta* and that he attains *videhamukti* when he sheds the body, but this difference exists only for the onlooker, not for him. His state is the same before shedding the body and after” (Osborne 1978: 192). (See Note 46).

74. Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1969), pp. 69, 73.

75. mokṣam ekaṃ varjayitvā anyasyāvidyā-viṣayatvāt (*BUS* 4.5.15).

76. See *MāUKS* 4.73.

77. avidyādhyāropitasya śeṣānupapatteḥ (*BhGS* 18.48).

78. Arapura 1986: 130. (See Note 3.)

79. vimuktaś ca vimucyate.

80. He says: “This state is celebrated as ‘living liberation’” (sā ceyam avasthā jīvanmuktir iti giyate, *BSdh* 3, p. 132). It seems from the tone of this remark that others were using the term prior to Maṇḍana. Who exactly this might have been is an interesting question.

81. *BSdh* 3, pp. 131–133.

82. prārabdha-bhoga-śeṣābhāsa-mātra-sampādana-paṭiyo ’jñāna-śeṣaḥ (*IS* 1.9).

83. vidyā-prārabdha-bhogayor avirodhitvam / ata ā prārabdha-bhoga-kṣayāt vidvac charīram api tiṣṭhaty eva / tatra yathā vidyā bhogaṃ na bādhathe, tathā bhogo ’pi na vidyām bādhathe (*IS* 1.9).

84. pratīteh / . . . tasmin arthe svānubhūtiḥ pramāṇam (SS' 4.43). This is a reference to Śaṅkara's commentary on *BS* 4.1.15, discussed above, which by Sarva-jñātman's time had become the authoritative basis for the *saṃskāra* theory.

85. *TP* 4, pp. 385, 388.

86. *SLS* 4.

87. *PD* 6.54–56; Madhusūdana Sarasvatī uses this argument at *AS* 4.

88. *AS* 4, pp. 890–892; *SSSS* 4.40–46. Compare: *SS'* 1.20; *PD* 4.12, 6.26, 6.33; *SLS* 4; *VPBh* 9.54.

89. *BSdh* 3, p. 130.

90. na . . . adagdham . . . ajñānam asti (*NS* 4.58).

91. The complete text:

[It might be objected:] How, pray, can you assert that the intuition of Brahman and the experience of duality exist simultaneously? But we do not say [that they exist] simultaneously! Sometimes, there is the experience of the oneness of the unconditioned Self. At others, there is the experience of duality, caused by the defect created by the commenced *karma*.

nanu brahmātmānubhava-dvaita-darśanayoḥ kutaḥ sāhityam ucyate? / na vayaṃ sāhityaṃ brūmaḥ / kadācid asamprajñātātmaikatva-darśanaṃ kadācid ārabdha-karmopasthāpita-doṣa-nimitta-dvaita-darśanaṃ ceti (*PPV*, p. 786).

But compare Śaṅkara:

There is no possibility that, after being uprooted by the realization of unity, the perception of duality (*dvaita-vijñāna*) could arise again.

na hy ekatva-vijñānenonmathitasya dvaita-vijñānasya punaḥ saṃbhavo 'sti (*BSS'* 1.1.4, p. 11).

92. mājā-leśo jīvanmuktasyānivr̥ttaḥ samādhy-avastāyāṃ tirohito 'nyadā de-hābhāsa-jagad-ābhāsa-hetutayānuvartate / prārabdha-karma-phalopabhogāvasāne tu nivartate (*TP* 4, p. 386).

93. na caivaṃ jīvanmuktasyātmāikyānubhava-dvaita-darśanayoḥ viruddhayoḥ sāhityaṃ prasajyeta iti mantavyam / na hi vayaṃ tayoḥ yaugapadyaṃ brūmaḥ, kiṃ tu paryāyeṇodbhāvābhāvau (*VPS* 9.32).

94. *bhikṣāṭanādi-pravṛttis tu ārabdha-karma-doṣa-mūlā* (VPS 9.32).

95. *tattva-darśinas tu ārabdha-karma-nimitta-doṣodbhavasya deśa-kāla-niyamābhāvena prārabdhānuṣṭhāna-samāpti-paryantam avasthānāyogāt* (VPS 9.32).

96. *brahma-vid-variṣṭha* (*Gūḍhārthadīpikā* on *BhGŚ* 3.18). This scheme is also given in *Jīvanmuktiviveka* 4 (S. Subrahmanya Sastri and T. R. Srinivasa Ayyangar, eds., *Jīvanmuktiviveka of Vidyāraṇya* [Adyar, Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Center, 1978], 135–137).

97. AS 4, p. 885.

98. *Gauḍabrahmānādī* (*Laghucandrikā*) on AS 1, p. 3.

99. I find a hint of the two-level approach at PD 7.258–259. But this passage seems incompatible with the views (see above) of VPS 9.31–32 and other passages in the PD itself (for example, 6.263 and 7.245–246).

100. See *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* 66–68.

101. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.10; *BŚŚ* 2.1.33; *SŚSS* 2.181.

102. *na hy anyatvaṃ jīvasyeśvarād upapadyate . . . ananya eveśvarāj jīvaḥ saṃdeha-yogāt tirohita-jñānaiśvārya bhavati* (*BŚŚ* 3.2.6).

103. *mithyā-jñāna-kṛta eva jīva-parameśvarayor bhedo na vastu-kṛtaḥ* (*BŚŚ* 1.3.19).

104. *dehādi-saṃghātopādhi-saṃbandhāviveka-kṛteśvara-saṃsāri-bheda-mithyā-buddhiḥ* (*BŚŚ* 1.1.5). Compare:

[Scripture] aims to establish, by removing its transmigratory condition, that the transmigrating soul has *Īśvara* as its Self.

saṃsāriṇaḥ saṃsāritvāpoheneśvarātmatvaṃ pratipādayiṣitam (*BŚŚ* 4.1.3).

The real nature of the embodied being is none other than the Supreme Lord; its embodiment is created by limiting adjuncts.

pārameśvaram eva hi śārīrasya pāramārthikaṃ svarūpam / upādhi-kṛtaṃ tu śārīratvam (*BŚŚ* 3.4.8).

105. *īśvaro 'smi; aham īśvaraḥ* (*UpSā* [metrical portion] 2.3.1, 2.10.8). Śaṅkara allows the latter expression also at *BŚŚ* 4.1.3.

106. For this reason, Appayya held that the ultimate salvation of any one soul could not be attained until all *jīvas* were liberated (which would mean that all *pratibimbās* would be destroyed) and the universe finally dissolved along with its Lord. Hence this teaching is referred to as the doctrine of *sarva-mukti* ("universal

salvation"). See *SLS* 4, pp. 111–115. The difficulty with this doctrine is that, since the universe is eternal and *jīvas* are infinite in number, such a universal liberation can never occur.

107. Perhaps because Appayya's Śaiva-influenced model of *Īśvaratva* disallows the idea of a post-mortem *kaivalya*, which—I am arguing—is the real goal of classical Advaita.

108. See *BU* 3.7; *BhG* 3.27–28, 5.8–9.

109. See *BU* 4.4.7, *BhG* 5.10 and 18.61, and Śaṅkara's comments.

110. *parameśvara-prerita-prāṇa-vāyu-vaśāt* (*Gūḍhārthadīpikā* on *BhGŚ* 3.18).

111. Eliade 1969: 155. (See Note 5.)

112. *na me pārthāsti kartavyam triṣu lokeṣu kiṃcana / nānavāptam avāptavyam varta eva ca karmaṇi* (*BhG* 3.22).

113. *yadi punar aham iva tvam kṛtārtha-buddhir ātma-vid anyo vā tasyāpy ātmanaḥ kartavyābhāve 'pi parānugraha eva kartavyaḥ . . . evam lokasaṃgrahaṃ cikīrṣor mamātmavido na kartavyam asti anyasya vā lokasaṃgrahaṃ muktṛvā tatas tasyātmavida idam upadiśyate* (*BhGŚ* 3.24, 26).

114. *yathā bhagavato vāsudevasya kṣātra-karma-ceṣṭitaṃ . . . tadvat phalābhi-sandhy-ahamkārahāvasya tulyatvād viduṣaḥ* (*BhGŚ* 2.11).

115. *sa ca bhagavān jñānaśvarya-śakti-bala-vīrya-tejorhiḥ sadā saṃpannas triḡuṇātmikāṃ vaiṣṇaviṃ svāṃ māyāṃ mūla-prakṛtiṃ vaśikṛtyājo 'vyayo bhūtānāṃ īśvaro nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāvo 'pi san sva-māyayā dehavān iva jāta iva lokānugrahaṃ kurvan lakṣyate* (*BhGŚ* 1.1).

116. *vidvān sa ihaiva brahma yadyapi dehavān iva lakṣyate* (*BUŚ* 4.4.6). No doubt the Advaitin must hold that all cases of embodiment are, strictly speaking, only apparent. But the liberated sage is distinctive in that, like *Īśvara*, he is *aware* of the "as if" nature of his embodiment.

117. See *BŚŚ* 4.4.17, though on Śaṅkara's interpretation this text applies to those who have attained *brahmaloka* through worship of the *saḡuṇa* Brahman.

118. *evam avidyā-kṛta-nāma-rūpopādhy-anurodhīśvaro bhavati, vyomeva ghaṭa-karakādy-upādhy-anurodhi / . . . tad evam avidyātmakopādhi-paricchedāpek-ṣaṃ eveśvarasyeśvaratvaṃ sarvajñatvaṃ sarvaśaktitvaṃ ca* (*BŚŚ* 2.1.14). At *BŚŚ* 4.4.19, Śaṅkara tells us that there are two forms of the Lord, the *saḡuṇa* and the *nirguṇa*. He characterizes the latter as "an eternally liberated form of the Supreme Lord (*nitya-muktaṃ pārameśvaraṃ rūpaṃ*).” Does this mean that the *saḡuṇa* form is *not* eternally liberated? The later tradition, at any rate, tends to reduce *Īśvara* to the conditioned, *saḡuṇa* aspect only. See the following note.

119. In the interest of preserving the absolute transcendence of Brahman, many later Advaitins tend to consign Īśvara to the realm of phenomenality. Thus they define Īśvara as Brahman reflected in, or even constructed by, *māyā*. For example, read *PD* 6.212: "Īśvara and *jīva* are created by *māyā* (īśvara-jīvakau māyāyā kalpitau)." See also *SS* 3.277; *PD* 1.16; 3.37; 6.155; 8.61–64, 68; *SLS* 1, pp. 13–17; *VS* 37–38.

120. The full text reads:

Although there is no question of He [Himself] being in ignorance (*ajñātva*), there is, even in Īśvara, the ignorance that is the cause of the world. In the *mukta*, this does not exist. This is the difference.

asty eveśvare 'pi jagan-nidānam ajñānaṃ tathāpi na tasyājñātvam ity uk-tam / mukte tu tad api nāstīti viśeṣaḥ (*SSSS* 2.181).

Sarvajñātman suggests further that, when the Lord assumes embodiment as an *avatāra*, the Lord may possess ego-sense (*ahamkāra*) and may even voluntarily subject himself to ignorance for a limited period of time, as in the case of Lord Rāma, who experienced anxiety and grief after the abduction of Sītā, his queen (*SS* 2.179, 2.182).

121. Prof. Veezhinathan sees in certain verses of the *SS* an interesting application of the doctrine of the two powers of *avidyā*, the projective (*vikṣepa*) and the concealing (*āvaraṇa*). Īśvara, we are told, though he experiences the world appearance as created by the *vikṣepa-śakti*, is not subject to the influence of *āvaraṇa*. This explains why he never loses awareness of his identity with Brahman, why he is never taken in by his own phenomenal magic (*SS*, p. 110). This application of the theory of the two powers of *avidyā* to Īśvara is, in fact, to be found in the text only implicitly (see *SS* 2.165, 168, 175, 183–186). I have not been able to find it stated explicitly anywhere in the classical literature. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy because it is the very device that, we have seen, Madhusūdana and others use to explain the limited mode of being of the *jīvanmukta*. The same model, then, is used to explain the experience of both Īśvara and the *jīvanmukta*.

122. See Note 3 above.

123. See Note 2 above. Consider also, in this light, the import of *ViCū* 2:

For all beings, birth as a human is difficult to obtain. Next [in order of difficulty] is birth as a male; following that, as a Brahmin. Even more [rare] is devotion to the path of the Vedas. Following this, come knowledge [of the scriptures], discrimination between Self and not-Self, direct realization, and abiding in the Self which is Brahman. Liberation is not to be obtained except through the merits earned by millions of lives of good deeds.

jantūnām nara-janma durlabham ataḥ puṁstvaṁ tato vipratā tasmād
vaidika-dharma-mārga-paratā vidvattvaṁ asmāt param / ātmānātma-
vivecanaṁ svanubhavo brahmātmanā saṁsthitir muktir no śata-janma-
koṭi-sukṛtaiḥ puṇyair vinā labhyate.

124. PD 7.143. Compare the attitude of Nisargadatta Maharaj, a highly regarded modern exponent of Advaitic realization: "For a *jnani*, what benefit of any kind can he expect by existing in the world even one more minute? So the only thing that would be nice is for the (vital) breath to leave quietly and not make a fuss" (Robert Powell, ed., *The Ultimate Medicine: As Prescribed by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* [San Diego, CA: Blue Dove Press, 1994], 128).

125. The experience of the world as Absolute is an important theme in later Tantric Advaita and especially in Kashmir Śaivism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. The idea that Śaṅkara's Advaita envisions "non-dual perception" of the world as identical with the Absolute has been suggested (for example, by David Loy, *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988], chap. 2). I find it difficult to support. See my "Reverence for Nature or the Irrelevance of Nature? Advaita Vedānta and Ecological Concern," *Journal of Dharma* 16 (July-Sept. 1991): 282–301.

126. BSŚ 4.1.15. But compare:

The knower, once ignorance is dispelled by knowledge, is able to give up action entirely, for there can be no question of any remnant of what was superimposed by ignorance. For, when the disease causing double vision is cured, no remnant of the two-moons superimposed by the diseased eye can remain.

vidvāṁs tu punar vidyayā 'vidyāyām nivṛttāyām śaknoty evāśeṣataḥ karma
parityaktum avidyādhyaṛopitasya śeṣānupapatteḥ / na hi taimirika-dṛṣṭi-
yādhyāropitasya dvi-candrādes timirāpagame 'pi śeṣo 'vatiṣṭhate (*BhGS*
18.48).

127. yathā guḍasya mādhyura-viniścaye 'pi pittopahatendriyānām tikta-
tāvabhāsanuvṛttiḥ, āśvādyā thūtkṛtya tyāgāt (*Bhā* on 1.1.1, p. 80).

128. paśyāmi dagdha-raśanām iva ca prapañcam . . . śarīram ahi-nirvlayanīva
vikṣe (SS 4.54–55). Compare BU 4.4.7.

129. The idea of Īśvara's omniscience (*sarvajñatva*) is stated (for example, at *MuU* 1.9), but it is hardly developed.

130. See Loy 1988, chap. 1, reference above in Note 123.