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Advaita

Srinivasa Rao

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The book proposes a contemporary framework for critiquing Advaita and formulating its basic thesis in a more logical and convincing way. Any proper theory in philosophy and science has to follow from accepted assumptions. Hence the book begins by identifying basic presuppositions required for Advaita and determining the different cognitive possibilities arising out of them. After thus determining what is logically and conceptually possible and impossible in Advaita, the new framework is used to assess whether or not the traditionally held Advaitic concepts and theories are satisfactory and acceptable. This is done in many chapters covering discussions of the notions of not-Self (anātman), cosmic ignorance (māyā), individual ignorance (avidyā), illusoriness (mithyātva), sublation (bādhā), entities that are different from the real and the unreal (sadasadvilaksana) and so on. The book argues that all these concepts, as specifically formulated and defended in traditional Advaita for centuries after Śankara, are simply faulty and untenable both individually and as related clusters of concepts. Traditional Advaita has also defended an elaborate ontology of experiences like mistaking a rope-for a snake. It has also heavily defended the metaphysical thesis of the empirical world of our experience being a total illusion. The logical faults and conceptual inadequacies of this ontology and metaphysics are also discussed in great detail, offering absolutely new criticisms of them. Despite this almost totally negative portrayal of traditional Advaita, the book is also quite positive in showing that any belief in non-duality is still very much philosophically possible and also necessary.

Advaita Doctrine: Preliminaries

Srinivasa Rao

in Advaita: A Contemporary Critique

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This chapter gives an overview of how there was a defective stand about non-duality taken by Mandana Miśra which was corrected by Śankara, but how this corrected view itself came to be misunderstood and distorted by later followers of Śankara. The emphasis here is on how the essentially correct view of Śankara came to be misunderstood, transformed and twisted by his followers, leading to the development of a strong orthodoxy in Advaita. The chapter gives a panoramic view of the development of these orthodox ideas of post-Śankara Advaita where non-existent entities are mistakenly hypostatized and mere pedagogic narratives are treated as philosophical theories. These mistakes receive detailed and systematic criticism in the chapters that follow.

Rope-Snake Illusion

Srinivasa Rao

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Advaitins of post-Śankara period hold a strange thesis that when ropes are mistaken for snakes, there are indeed snakes there, but only illusory ones. They believe so on metaphysical grounds, disregarding the obvious facts that after realizing that it was an illusion, it is believed (1) by none that there was a snake (of any kind), and (2) that it was just the rope itself that was seen as a snake. Further, they hold that at the moment of illusion, the ignorance in the perceiver instantly creates that illusory snake. Upon dispelling of illusion, that illusory snake is sublated by correct knowledge of rope. Our experience of the world is also regarded an illusion created by cosmic ignorance (māyā) present in Brahman. This chapter is a detailed, novel refutation of this ontology of illusion, a prelude to an ensuing rejection of cosmic ontology.

The Ātman-Brahman Inquiries

Srinivasa Rao

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The inquiries into Ātman and Brahman and the declaration of their identity in the Upanisads has vital implications for Advaita which Śankara's commentators completely miss and misunderstand. While the Ātman-inquiry into the inner essence of man used a device of exclusion (like the body is not Ātman etc.), the Brahman-inquiry into the source of the universe did not use it. But yet, whatever was being excluded from Ātman (like the body, senses, mind, etc.) in the first inquiry went on being included under Brahman in the second, so that ultimately these two inquiries brought under themselves just everything existing in the universe. Therefore when their identity was discovered, non-duality emerged as the only truth. But, missing this completely, the commentators hypostatize ignorance into a beginningless "second entity" and create every possible problem within a perfect doctrine of non-duality.

On Anātman

Srinivasa Rao

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While Śankara had spoken of anātman as merely a superimposed idea, his commentators resorted to an absolutely needless hypostatization of it as a kind of positive, experienced entity in total opposition to the non-dual Self, thereby bringing into the doctrine of non-duality some serious problems besides attracting criticisms from the dualists. If the Self is the sole non-dual reality, it logically follows from it that nothing like anātman can ever exist anywhere at any time and hence any talk of its existing, being perceived, being experienced and then finally getting sublated can never make any sense. No *sadasadvilaksana* entities are ever created by *māyā* and then sublated by *Brahmānubhava*. Such creation and sublation cannot be logically and consistently asserted as true at the empirical or even at the transcendental level. The doctrine is typified ontological extravagance.

The “Shock-Proof,” “Evidence-Proof,” “Argument-Proof” World of Sāṃpradāyika Scholarship of Indian Philosophy

Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Daniel Raveh (eds)

in *Contrary Thinking: Selected Essays of Daya Krishna*

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In this chapter, Daya Krishna reflects on samvāda, a dialogic encounter, what he himself often referred to in English as “discussion and debate.” Krishna responds to critics who commented on his paper in which he questions the dominance of Advaita Vedānta in the first millennium CE. Krishna notes that there is hardly any textual evidence of Advaita between the appearance of the Brahmasūtra and Śankara, and even several hundred years after the famous ācārya. Krishna's contention is that the Brahmasūtra has had little or no impact for years following its composition and hence that later Advaita “invented” and continues to “invent” its continuous hegemony from the early Upanisads onwards. In doing so, the Advaitins twist the narrative of Indian philosophy, occluding the dominance of Buddhism until the destruction of Nālandā in the twelfth century. Krishna also addresses the notion of adhyāsa.

Can the Analysis of Adhyāsa Ever Lead to an Advaitic Conclusion?

Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Daniel Raveh (eds)

in *Contrary Thinking: Selected Essays of Daya Krishna*

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In this chapter, Daya Krishna reflects on adhyāsa in relation to Advaita Vedānta. That something is taken as something else cannot be a sign of unreality of either, and yet this has been the ground of the rejection of the reality of the nonself by Advaitins since Śankara wrote his famous bhāṣya on the Brahmasūtra and described the identification of the self with the nonself as the foundational adhyāsa on which all other erroneous cognitions are based. Krishna revisits issues surrounding samvāda and offers a close (counter) reading of Śankara's introduction to his Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya.

Reflections on an Alleged Anecdote in Śaṅkara's Life

Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Daniel Raveh (eds)

in *Contrary Thinking: Selected Essays of Daya Krishna*

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In this chapter, Daya Krishna reflects on the debate between Śaṅkara and Mandana Miśra. The condition of the debate was that whoever was defeated would adopt the āśrama of the other. In other words, if Śaṅkara were to be defeated, he would become a householder, and if he were to win, Mandana Miśra would become a samnyāsin. Śaṅkara won and went on to also beat Mandana Miśra's wife in another debate, even when the latter took the discussion to realms of love and sex about which Śaṅkara, being a celibate from birth, knew nothing at all. Krishna considers the implications of the debate for knowledge.

A. C. Mukerji, "Absolute Consciousness" (1938)

Nalini Bhushan and Jay L. Garfield

in *Indian Philosophy in English: From Renaissance to Independence*

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This chapter presents Anukul Chandra Mukerji's 1938 essay, "Absolute Consciousness," part of his book *The Nature of Self* (1933). Mukerji was a scholar of Western and Indian philosophy and specialized in epistemology, with a special interest in idealism and the problem of self-knowledge. Aside from *The Nature of Self*, he authored *Self Thought and Reality* (1938). In "Absolute Consciousness," Mukerji uses the insights of British neo-Hegelians, such as E. Caird and T. H. Greene, to gain insight into Śaṅkara's account of absolute consciousness. He postulates an unchanging, unobjectifiable, immediate, consciousness to explain the poorest type of knowledge and the facts of experience and to resolve some of the difficulties that have been repeatedly pointed out by the critics of modern absolutism which, in many respects, is an unconscious exposition of the advaita doctrine.

A. C. Mukerji, “Śaṅkara’s Theory of Consciousness” (1937)

Nalini Bhushan and Jay L. Garfield

in *Indian Philosophy in English: From Renaissance to Independence*

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Item type: chapter

This chapter presents Anukul Chandra Mukerji's 1937 essay, “Śaṅkara's Theory of Consciousness,” in which he defends Śaṅkara's account of consciousness as an exposition of Advaita Vedānta. Mukerji was a scholar of Western and Indian philosophy and specialized in epistemology, with a special interest in idealism and the problem of self-knowledge. He published two books during his life, *The Nature of Self* (1933) and *Self Thought and Reality* (1938). In his essay, Mukerji expounds on Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Praśnopanisad* and his classification of the principal theories of consciousness, each of which had its enthusiastic exponents in the history of Indian speculation.