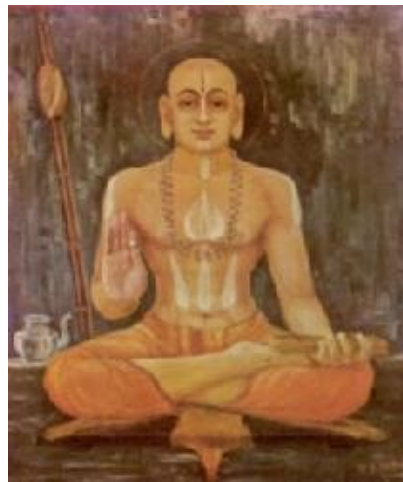


Sankara: A Review of The Unity and Divisibility of the Self by Dr. Antonio de Nicolas.

By : Sabrina Bourque

A review of the essay by Dr. Antonio de Nicolas, revolving around the Sankara, or the unity and divisibility of self. This follows some Eastern spirituality, and Dr. de Nicolas, as an expert in the field, attempts to explain his perspective on the idea.



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Sankara: A Review

The essay entitled *The Unity and Divisibility of the Self (Brahman)* by Dr. Antonio de Nicolas first explains how Eastern philosophy has been misrepresented by Western society. He asserts that because of its popularity recently, it has been diluted and taught incorrectly or not in its entirety.

To understand the whole of Indian philosophy, instead of an incorrect version, as well as the Advaita Vedanta ideology, one could start by gaining an understanding of the teachings of Ācārya Sankara Bhagavatpādyā, Adi Sankara.

According to Dr. de Nicolas, Adi Sankara's philosophy can be simplistically broken down into four main points. The first is that "Reality is One, Indivisible; let us name it *Brahman*. The world is "false." All "atomic" entities, like souls, bodies, subjects, objects, are only non-differentiated Brahman (the Real)."

This falls perfectly into the non-dualistic philosophy, in which there are no divisions. (No "two.") Everything is one. What this means, if I understand it correctly, is that since everything is relative to us in our limited ability to sense, that one thing cannot exist without another. For example, there can't be light without dark, since with dark, we would have no way to define light. Therefore, they are not opposites, but two parts of the same.

Another way of explaining it, that seemed to help for me, is that everything known to humanity can be defined as an individual, or as a part of something else. Your hand and your foot can both be defined as individual entities, or as a part of your body. Your body can be defined as a separate entity, but can also be defined as a part of a larger society. This type of relative definition can be seen in everything imaginable to man, until you get something that cannot be defined as a part of something else. This is something that is indivisible, Brahman.

Having that idea in mind, Sankara realized that language in itself is a barrier in defining anything, and impedes on an understanding. Since language is a necessary, and sometimes sole, way for an individual to express themselves, and language doesn't allow for everything to be subjective (or relative), and since everything *is* subjective (or relative,) then every time language is used to define anything, it makes it an illusion.

This can be explained by an analogy of two people, one color blind and one not, trying to define the color of a flower. The color that the color blind person sees, and has defined as "red" is not the same color that the other person sees. Both of them are limited to using the color red, which adequately defines what they see individually, but has no bearing on the actual (Real) color of the flower. There is no way to describe everything that is subjective or relative by using language.

Everything that we see, do, hear, touch, taste, and experience is subjective, based on astronomically high factors, and can't be defined in such a way that is correct for every consciousness. This is a hard concept for anyone with a mind based on logic to grasp, and it requires the mind to step outside of its normal comfort zone to try and perceive.

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In my mind, this seems to come across as a picture, like Plato's allegory of the cave. In this instance, the cave represents the small amount of sensation that a person experiences. Outside the cave represents everything a person has not experienced or sensed, and doesn't even *know* he hasn't experienced it. It is a humbling idea, like trying to envision the vastness of the Universe. We don't even know what we don't know.

This can easily be transferred over to physics, especially on the quantum scale. Before I ever read about Sankara's ideas, and before I understood Plato's allegory of the cave, I had a basic grasp of physics.

As humans, with our limited biological tools for sensation (nose, eyes, etc.,) we can only be aware of things that express themselves within our small margin of sensation. As new tools are developed that reach outside of our normal senses (measuring devices, mathematical equations) we are able to be made aware of things that are normally invisible to us. For thousands of years, humans were only aware of a very small part of the spectrum of light. When new tools were developed that could measure light waves outside of the visible spectrum, we learned about waves we didn't know about, *and we didn't know we didn't know about them.*

But by definition, "light" was what we could see using our eyes. Suddenly, anything that fell outside of that, but was still on the spectrum is also defined as "light". Both definitions of the word light need to be subjective, since different instances of light are relative to other instances of light, and for each individual. But both definitions do not leave room for relativity.

In physics, instead of using the term "One" or "Brahman" one could use the universe. Excluding the String and Loop Theories for a moment, the universe is the only word we have in physics that describes the total of "everything." The universe can only be defined as a singular, it is not a part of anything else, as there is nothing bigger of which to be a part. Trying to use words to describe the entire universe is useless, as non-subjective terms must be used, and we don't even have a way to sense everything that totals the universe. Until we can step outside of our bodies and experience the universe without the impediment of our biological tools for sensation, and our language that tries to define everything as the same, we won't even know what we don't know.

To me, that falls right in line with understanding and being aware of Brahman. While we have a minimal grasp of what "everything" is, we have no real concept, and with our limited senses, and the barrier of language, our Real understanding of everything is unattainable in our condition. Anyone who claims to understand the entirety of Brahman, or the entirety of the universe, is more unaware of his lack of knowledge than someone who knows he doesn't, and can't, understand it.

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