CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The subject for this thesis arose out of a study of the book, *Transformative Philosophy*, by John Tabor.¹

In this book, Tabor makes a case for religious transformation as an important subject for study by philosophers. Till now, most metaphysicians in the West were depending on pure speculation to know the nature of reality. They ignored the valuable evidence provided by religious experience or intuition. The essence of that experience is the transformation of the subject which gives one a unique insight into reality. A metaphysics that expresses such an inward change and enlightenment is what Tabor describes as "transformative metaphysics". To explain the nature and significance of this type of metaphysics, Tabor draws upon Śaṅkara in the Indian tradition, and Fichte in the West. This is the background to the present thesis. While Tabor makes use of Advaita as an example to clarify "transformative metaphysics", the present thesis takes Advaita itself as the subject of study adopting what is called "transformative metaphysics" as the standard of interpretation. It is connected with the blossoming of a conscious awareness of the identity
of the Self with Brahman (jīva-brahma-aikya-jñāna). Transformative experience is embedded in human nature as a felt presence. It must be transformed into a conscious presence to terminate the self-alienation from truth. This is accomplished by intuiting the immanence of the transcendental Brahman in the entire gamut of the objective and the subjective phenomena of experience, through a holistic transformation in one's self-centric and narrow outlook.

Life is a series of transformation, and a flux of desires, ignoble and noble. Ordinary changes in human nature as one shifts from one aim to another cannot be called transformation, for the aims are short-lived and soon are displaced by succeeding ones. But when one aim—desire to know the Self (jīnēśā)—becomes very deep-rooted so as to expel definitively all its earlier rivals from the individual's life, and is fortified by an insight into reality, it can be hailed as a transformation. It is a tryst with truth where the individual (jīva) realises the inadequacy of a materialistic way of life and thought, and finds fulfilment in the Absolute. The ego (ahānārē) gets effaced and a sense of vastness (akhandatva) is supplanted in the individual. These blessed experiences
of the individual greatly determine one's subsequent life and life-view. New sensitivities and new relationships blossom in one's bosom. The awakening to another dimension of the Absolute (ātmanārtha) does not preclude the pragmatic worth (artha-kriyā-kāritya) of the spatio-temporal objective world (vyāvahārika-prapāńca), but only its illusory or unreal (mithyā) plurality (bheda). The diversity and discord of ordinary life are transcended and reconciled through the apprehension of the inner unity pervading the varied phenomena. Therefore, the approach towards the same "facts" of life gets radically transformed forever. Desires vanish, and a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment (kṛta-kṛtyatva) is instilled in the individual. The realised one (jñānin) rid of ignorance (avidyā) is born anew (dvija) like a bird emerging out of the shell of finitude to glide in the infinitude of Brahman.

The interpretation of liberation (moksa) in Advaita, as the individual soul's transformation into Brahman, through an elimination of ignorance, by means of intuition or a direct knowledge (aparoksa-jñāna) of Brahman, is closely connected with its theory of reality. According to Advaita, nothing new is attained in liberation.
Liberation can be discussed: (a) negatively, as freedom from the misery (duhkha) born of ignorance (duhkha-nivṛtti, avidyā-nivṛtti, avidyā-nāśa); and (b) positively, as the attainment of eternal and uncomparable bliss (niratishya-ānandavāti) or Brahman (brahma-prāpti).

Under the spell of ignorance, the soul forgets its eternal (sat), conscious (cit), infinite (anante), and blissful (ānanda) nature. The deluded soul then wrongly identifies itself with the mind (anteḥ-karana), the body (deha), and the senses (indriyas), and their activities; and presumes that it is the finite knower (jñātā), doer (karta), and enjoyer (bhokta). It acts to enjoy and enjoys to act, seeking pleasure in the external objects of the world, unaware of its intrinsic infinite and blissful nature (satcidānanda-svarūpa). The causal chain consists of the following links—ignorance of the Self, perception of the world of plurality, superimposition of goodness and badness on things, desire and aversion, performance of deeds, acquisition of merit and demerit, embodied existence, suffering—in which the preceding one is the cause of the succeeding one. 2 Therefore, the soul experiences the sorrow of birth and
death, and undergoes endless transmigration (samsāra). When an inquiring and introspective soul intuits Brahman, it realises that it is different from the body, the senses, and the mind; and that it is only a witness (sākṣein) of their activities, which are erroneously ascribed to it out of ignorance. By negating ignorance, the soul discovers its real nature as the eternal and immutable Self, and reasserts its identity with Brahman. Therefore, liberation is only emancipation from ignorance, the root-cause (mūla-kāraṇa) of sorrow and rebirth. Positively speaking, liberation is the finite soul becoming one (aikya) with the infinite Brahman. But attaining Brahman is only figurative, because the soul in its essential nature is already identical with Brahman. In fact, the soul is no other than Brahman (jīvo brahmaiva na sāraḥ). Therefore, attaining Brahman is only dissociation from all that is not-Self (anātman), and abiding in one's true nature (svarūpa-avatīti). Liberation is attaining the already attained (ātmatvam nitya āptatvāt). According to Advaita, liberation is the very nature of the soul. Since there is nothing, positive or negative, which remains to be accomplished after the destruction of ignorance for the purpose of attaining liberation,
liberation is not becoming Brahman, but only being Brahman. Therefore, the soul's transformation into Brahman, or attaining Brahman, or becoming one with Brahman, is only figurative.

According to Advaita, what the rope is to the "snake", Brahman is to the world. The rope is the substratum (adhisthāna) on which the "snake" is superimposed. The superimposed "snake" (adhyaśeṣha) is only an appearance (vivarta) of the rope; for, there can be no error without a substratum (niradhisthāna-bhrama). What is superimposed or imagined (kelpita) has no reality of its own other than that of its substratum (kalpitasya adhisthānameva svarūpaśa). Similarly, all name (nāma) and form (rūpa) are mere superimpositions on the supreme substratum, Brahman. The rope at all three times—before the "snake" was perceived, while it is perceived, and after the sublation of the "snake"—remains the same without undergoing any modification. All change or transformation (parināma)—fear on seeing the "snake", the effort to run away from it or kill it, and reassurance on knowing that it is only a rope, etc. takes place only in the mind of the individual. Likewise, there is no change in Brahman, because it is immutable (kūtasatha), actionless (nīskriya), and eternal (nitya).
All change or transformation—experiencing the sorrow of bondage (bindha), striving to overcome it through spiritual practices (sadhana) enjoying the bliss of liberation (mukti), etc., takes place only in the mind of the seeker (sadhaka). The existence of the "snake" is co-terminus with its perception. It vanishes when the real nature of the rope is known. So also, bondage and the perception of physical phenomena (vyavaharika) exist only until the Self is intuited, and the noumenal Brahman (paramartha) is attained. The finite existence, limited knowledge, fleeting happiness, etc., of the soul are due to its limiting adjunct (upadhi), the mind, which is an evolute of ignorance. Liberation involves transcending the dualities (dvandhvas), and the limitations of the mind. Hence, the mind alone is responsible for one's bondage and liberation (manah eva manasye karanam bandha moksayaḥ) says the Amrtabindu-upanisad, II.

Strictly speaking, Advaita affirms that liberation is only figurative. Bondage is ultimately unreal, for had it been real (sat), it cannot be sublated (baddhyamah-satvatah na sat); and then liberation will become impossible. "It is real empirically, though there is no such thing as bondage from the transcendental point of view, from the
standpoint of Brahman, which alone is. In the same way, at the empirical level our endeavour to attain Brahman-Atman is real and genuine, though from the transcendental standpoint the problem does not arise. If there is no bondage, there can be no liberation from it either. Bondage and liberation are both ultimately illusory. Gaudāpāda in his Māndūkya-kārikā (II.32) says that there is neither the seeker nor the seer, neither bondage nor liberation, Brahman alone is. It is the highest and supreme truth, there is nothing other than it, for, it is one only without a second (ekam eva advitīyam).

Welsh distinguishes two kinds of metaphysics—transcendent and immanent metaphysics—to defend metaphysics from the anti-metaphysical stance of the positivists, the analysts, and the commonsense philosophers. Advaita is neither transcendent nor immanent metaphysics exclusively, for it displays features of both of them. Advaita is transcendent metaphysics because its idealistic metaphysics upholds that Brahman transcends the physical world (jagat), that the world is unreal and an appearance of the underlying reality, Brahman, which can be known only through intuition by overcoming ignorance. Advaita is immanent metaphysics because it affirms that Brahman is in the
non-real world, i.e. it is manifested in the existential (asti), luminous (bhāti), and lovable (priyam) aspects of physical objects, and implicit in experience as pure consciousness (suddha-cit). Advaita upholds that whatever is experienced is existent, for anything that is presented to consciousness cannot be dismissed as nothing. Therefore, the object has to be accorded "some" reality, and acknowledged as something "existent". For example, the "snake" of erroneous cognition (bhrama) is an existent for one who perceives it at a particular place and at a particular time. The metaphysics of Advaita ascribes phenomenal reality (pratibhāsika-sattā) to the objects of error, and dream (svapna)-e.g. rope-snake, shell-silver, dream-lion, etc.; and empirical reality (vyāvahārika-sattā) to the objects of waking experience (jāgrat-avasthā)- e.g. table, tree, etc. According to Advaita, objects falling under the above two orders of reality are non-real (apāra-mārthika) when compared with Brahman which alone is absolutely real (pāramārthika). In so far as Advaita admits that whatever is experienced is existent, it can be characterised as radical empiricism. Its empirical epistemology and idealistic metaphysics are not incompatible with each other. Just as the rope and the "snake" cannot be perceived at one and the same time, so also the world is not both real
and illusionary simultaneously, to one and the same individual. In the words of Suresvaram, Advaita is immanent metaphysics from the cosmic (vēvāhārika, loka-draṭī) standpoint, and transcendent metaphysics from the acoomic (pāramārthika, tattva-draṭī) standpoint.

Although in their essential nature, Advaita and Platonic philosophy run closely parallel to each other, since Advaita exhibits aspects of immanent metaphysics, it becomes immune to the criticism of the anti-metaphysicians raised against the Platonic, or "other-worldly", or transcendent type of philosophy. The concept of consciousness constitutes the core of both the immanent and the transcendent metaphysical aspects of Advaita. Transformative philosophy is directly connected with the spectrum of consciousness. Therefore, like the confluence of the Yamuna, the Gāṅgā, and the Sarasvatī (trīvānī-saṅram), in the phenomenon of transformation in consciousness, there is the merger of immanent metaphysics, transcendent metaphysics, and transformative metaphysics respectively.

The aim of the thesis is to show how Advaita fully justifies the description as a transformative metaphysics. Chapter Two is a discussion about the nature and scope
of transformative experience. Chapter Three deals with the criticism and defence of metaphysics.

Chapter Four is a brief exposition of different kinds of metaphysics and Advaita as a model of transformative metaphysics. Chapter Five discusses the importance of purity (citta-suddhi) which is an important prerequisite for transformation, the ways to attain it, and its significance for the immediate experience (āpārokaśānubhūti) of Brahman. Chapter Six sets forth the practice and theory of transformation. Chapter Seven is concerned with the derivation of the import of the soul's identity with Brahman from the major texts of scripture, the maturation of mediate knowledge into immediate knowledge, and the transformation the intuitive experience of truth brings about in one's finite personality. Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. It invites the reader to experiment with truth, and enact the sublime transformation in this life itself.