CHAPTER II

THE METAPHYSICS OF SANKARA

It cannot be gainsaid that plurality is a necessary condition or pre-supposition of ethics. This question is not often discussed in ethical treatises, for it is always assumed that a world of plurality exists with the difference of one individual from the others. Though this difference need not be an absolute one, ethics certainly pre-supposes plurality without which the word ethics itself will have no meaning. A system of ethics which openly denies the very world of plurality cannot in any way be in harmony with ethics. Thus, the logical derivation of ethics from a theory of reality depends on its idea of the world; in other words, depends on its world-view. A world-view which preaches the utter denial of the world cannot go hand in hand with ethics. Such a problem of harmony arises in all systems of Absolute idealism which consider the world as pure illusion, for example, the Vīma-nāvāda school of Buddhism. A verse which summarises the Advaitic metaphysics says "brahma satyam jaganmithya jīvo brahmaiva nāparah" which apparently denies the world and the individual souls. Such being the case can we talk of ethics at all in the context of Sankara's metaphysics which is so uncompromising in its attitude towards the world? This will be examined.
The world-view of Sankara is often represented as pure illusionism. But unlike other systems Sankara's denial of the world is said to be two-fold, i.e., he not only denies any value or worth to this world but also denies its very reality. Thus, according to Albert Schweitzer, if the world-view is such "then ethics altogether ceases to have any importance. The only thing that remains for man to do is to see through the delusion of believing in a material world". In this context, we cannot but refer to the views of Aurobindo, the only neo-Vedantin who has systematically tried to refute Advaita. In his 'Life Divine' he seeks to establish that māyāvāda is nothing but illusionism and considers it as suicidal as scepticism. He thus concludes: "therefore we arrive at an escape of an illusory non-existent soul from an illusory non-existent bondage in an illusory non-existent world as the supreme good which that non-existent soul has to pursue". W.T. Stace in his 'Mysticism and Philosophy' also maintains that there is no possible version of monism which does not end in non-sense. Such views about Sankara's system are maintained from time to time.

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1. ITD, p. 60
2. The Life Divine, p. 47.
To appreciate Sankara's metaphysical ethics we must know what his metaphysics is. At the very outset, it must be remembered that the metaphysics of Sankara is not one of ethical origin. His world view is not ultimately ethical but metaphysical and mystical. Brahman is considered to be the absolute reality and it is on the basis of this that he understands the world. In other words, Brahman-experience is the criterion by which Sankara measures the world of plurality and not vice versa. Accordingly, the world is declared as unreal mithyā which is wrongly translated as illusion. The world-view held by Sankara is not easy to understand. It is the product of a master mind and the ultimate result of wonderful philosophical thinking. There are a number of doctrines like the conception of Nirguna Brahman, the theory of degrees of reality, the doctrine of avidyā, etc., which moulded his unique standpoint in regard to the world. Therefore a detailed study of his metaphysics is necessary to understand his world-view which in turn determines the logical place of ethics in his system.

Before we elucidate his metaphysics, let us define what is metaphysics. Scholars are divided among themselves

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4 Albert Schweitzer speaks of the possibility of building a metaphysics through ethics. Vide op. cit., p. 263, 264.
over the nature of metaphysics itself. The word metaphysics is derived from the Greek word 'meta-ta-physica' and literally, means 'after the things of nature'. It deals with questions about the kinds of things, the concept of existence, distinction between particulars and universals, the nature of relations, change, causation etc. But the general view is that it is the 'science of reality'. It is 'metaphysical' which means beyond physical or empirical or in other words, beyond what is given to sense perception.

"The sphere of metaphysics" says, R.M. Lomba, "is the sphere of 'is' though positive natural science too is said to deal with 'is' particularly in contrast with ethics which deals with an 'ought'. The 'is' of the science is the empirical fact......Metaphysics on the contrary deals with what is in the sense of what is real". It may be summed up that the business of metaphysics is to propound the nature of ultimate reality. Though a number of problems are discussed in metaphysical treatises, it is an "enquiry into the nature of reality or Being. Its fundamental question is what is Being itself? Metaphysics is interested in Being as Being. It seeks to know the nature of every

5 'Value as Pre-metaphysical', PQ, October, 1955, p.204.
thing that is, in so far as it is" Descartes compared knowledge to a tree of which metaphysics is the root.

Sankara is predominantly a metaphysician; his main concern is to find out what reality is or what is ultimately real. His philosophy aims at discovering what is ultimately true. Consistent with the view that philosophy is search for the true, Sankara seems to be always pre-occupied with truth. But it should be noted that he does not start from sense-data as modern philosophers do. He does not develop an independant philosophy like Plato or Aristotle. His aim was to explicate Sruti - the utterings of the sages who had direct experience of the highest reality. Sankara's system thus, may be rightly considered as a philosophy of religion; it is not strictly philosophical in the sense in which it is understood by contemporary philosophers of the west.

It is true that there is a general contempt for metaphysics in the West, especially after G.E. Moore who showed much respect for common sense. But the seed of this contempt was sown by Hume who said metaphysics "can contain

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7 "Philosophy, as we saw, was a search', a search for that which in the end is true" (F.H. Bradley, ETR, p. 15).

nothing but sophistry and illusion⁹. It may be because metaphysics always conflicts with common sense. The common sense always reminds us of an external world which is real where as metaphysics describes the world as unreal or less real. But the aim of metaphysics is to find out the truth of the common-sense-view of the world. Here, it is most appropriate to quote Brand Blanshard who in his 'In Defence of Metaphysics' writes, "metaphysical problems lie round us on all sides......they arise naturally in the reflection of any thoughtful man; indeed many of them are questions that a child can ask; though the most determined of metaphysicians might find it hard to answer them". How the common-sense view of the world is not tenable and how they present difficulties has been well-explained by Harold H. Titus and here, it is enough to say that metaphysics, not satisfied with the 'naïve realism' of commonsense seeks to find out the ultimate reality of the world.

Sankara's Philosophy, we have pointed out, is a philosophy of religion. But what is philosophy of religion? A Jamal Khwaja says, "its function is to defend and justify

⁹Quoted in Metaphysics, Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 332.

one's commitment to an external Authority. At times, its function is the systematic rediscovery or re-interpretation of the meaning and implications of a traditional belief system that continues to grip and fascinate the individual. Though Sankara starts from Srutis and re-interprets them, his approach may be legitimately regarded as religious; but at the same time, his entire philosophy turns round his concept of Reality which is evidently metaphysical. Therefore, his approach to philosophy is metaphysical as well.

Sankara's Starting Point

There are different philosophical methods. Hegel and Plato considered 'dialnetic method' as the right one, while for Bergson and Husserl it was intuition and phenomenological description respectively. The absolutist philosophy of Sankara takes Sruti as the basis and renders its conceptions intelligible. We find in the Upaniṣads, philosophical speculations about religion. The main purpose of religious philosophy, as we have seen, is to justify the claims of religion. But what are the claims of religion? William P. Alston sums up, "a highly developed religion presents us with a number of claims on our belief, our conduct, our attitudes

and feelings. It gives answers to questions concerning the ultimate source of things, the governing forces in the cosmos, the ultimate purpose of the universe and the place of man in their scheme. It tells us what the supreme being is like, what demands it makes on men and how man can get in touch with him. It offers a diagnosis of human ills and it lays down a way of salvation that, if followed, will provide a way to remedy these ills and satisfy man's deepest needs. The Upaniṣads too offer us a religion based on the experiences of the sages and it was Sankara who by his logic showed that there was no contradiction in the religion of the Upaniṣads and that they all point to the non-dualistic theory of Advaita.

Basing a system of revelation is sometimes criticised as dogmatic or feudastic. But this is a misunderstanding about revelation at least as understood by Sankara. śruti does not mean certain Sanskrit texts written in the good old days. It means the utterances of the sages who had intuitive knowledge of Brahman, the ultimate reality of Advaita. "We have to understand the authority of the śruti as the infallibility of the higher intuition" says P.T. Raju.


that Sankara is completely dispensing with reasoning which is an essential requisite for philosophical thinking. He accepts reason; but its scope is limited. With regard to the ultimate reality and its nature Sruti is the only authority. In fact Sankara uses his full reasoning power in all other matters. "In his criticisms of the orthodox systems like the Jainism and the Buddhism, Sankara had to depend on reason and his reasoning follows the method that implies or pre-supposes the truth of his conclusions. And his method is really nothing but the critical or transcendental method of Kant and the dialectical method of Hegel, with of course, certain differences. It is not that Sankara was incapable of developing Advaita purely based on reason; but he was of the view that since philosophy is meant to be lived, one cannot depend on reason as authority on matters concerning the ultimate reality the realization of which can be achieved only by intuition.

Thus, we see, that Sankara starts not from sense-data but from Sruti. But his philosophical enquiry itself is based on logical grounds. Those who start with the world unknowingly commit the fallacy of taking the world-appearance as the ground for asserting its reality. Sankara, to avoid

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Ibid., p. 123.
this fallacy, starts with experiences as such. Here it is not human experience as a whole that Sankara takes into account, but only the individual experience of man, for observation shows that there is nothing like 'whole experience' which can be taken as a sufficient starting point for philosophy. Sankara accordingly takes man as the centre of discussion and analyses his individual experience. This is testified to by the fact that Sankara calls his commentary on the Brahmasūtras 'Samākārikamāmsābhāṣya'. In his introduction to this bhaṣya Sankara neither speaks of Brahman nor about the reality of the world, but only of man and his experience.

The idea of the Spirit

F.H. Bradley has observed that it is really the recognition of the fact of immediate experience that leads to the solution of ultimate problems. Analysing this experience, Sankara says that there are two elements in it viz., the subject and the object i.e., the experience of 'I' and 'non I'. Every experience consists of these two elements and he calls them 'asmatpratyaya' and 'yugmatpratyaya' respectively. One


17 ETR, p. 160
is the subject, the knower, and the other is the object, the known. Of these two elements one is found to be constant while the other is found to be changing. Now, the question is which is real and which unreal. Metaphysics should aim at discovering what reality is.

According to Sankara, the substratum of the 'knower' is the spirit of ātman and it is unchangeable. "In order 13 to have an object at all, you must have a felt self before which the object comes" says Bradley. Though the knower-element in our experience is qualified, it has the basis in the self which is 'pure consciousness'. To prove the existence of this self Sankara does not resort to Sruti, for he says, "This ātman is not unknown to any one. The Scriptures do not declare the existence of the self a new; they only deny 19 the qualities attributed to it". Sankara feels that the very fact that 'I exist' is enough to prove ātman. In his introduction to B.S. he says that the self cannot be denied, for it is one's own self. "It does not come from outside; 20 it is one's own self". The self is not entirely unknown

18 Ibid., p. 166. fn.

19 "Nahi ātmanā tāvad kasyacit aprasiddho bhavati. Śāstram tu antyam pramāṇam. na tu ajñātārthaścānām upakatuvena" (SBC II-18)

20 "Atma-tvādeva ātmanāḥ nirākaraṇāsankṣepappattih. nāhyātma-gantukah kasyacit, svayam siddhatvāt. Ya eva hi nirūkarta tadeva tasya svarūpam". (BSS. II. 3-3).
because it is *asmaturatnyayya visnyna* i.e., it is an object in
the sense that it is the root of the feeling of 'I' - *asmaturatnyaya*.

Definition of Reality

But how does Sankara approach the question of reality
in his epistemological analysis? The question of reality
largely centres round the definition we give for it. The
word 'real' is used in English in a number of senses, such
for example, as 'genuine', 'natural', 'lasting' 'permanent'
or 'existing'. All these senses can be classified into two,
viz., axiological and ontological. When the word means
existing 'genuine', etc., it is ontological. But it is
also used to imply a system of values beyond the description
of mere facts, for example, 'real satisfaction' 'real pleasure'
etc.

Sankara does not apply a single method or formula as
the test of reality. There are a number of considerations
to determine the reality of an object. If we define reality
as that which exists, then the question arises as to how to
know whether an object exists or not. If we cite sense-
data as authority it amounts to admitting the validity of
sense-data without any ground. Sankara's conception of reality in
suffers from the same defect when he defines it as that which
we know by direct experience. *Real cannot also be defined as

21 C.C.C.P. p. 224.
that which is given, for in the case of an illusory experience like that of rope-snake, the snake is given; but we cannot for that reason consider it as real. When observed in light the snake is sublated by the right knowledge of the rope. Therefore real is not what is given. The idea of non-sublation in all the three times (\textit{trikāla-bandhyatva}) is not actually considered by Sankara as the only test of reality though post-Sankarites assumed and formulated the doctrine that in Advaita real is what is \textit{trikāla-bandhyatva}. If we search for the definition of real in Sankara's commentaries we will find that he accepted non-sublation as a test of reality. This does not, however, apply to objects, but to objective experiences. For example, in the case of an illusory appearance of a snake on a rope, the former disappears by the right knowledge of the rope. In such contexts Sankara will maintain that the experience of the snake was unreal and that of the rope real. He also applied 'consistency' as the test of the real. Accordingly anything that varies or changes is unreal, for there is no consistency in a changing object. In the example of the clay being transformed into objects like jar etc., the clay alone is real; for the clay as such, does not change, though its name and form are subjected to change. Sankara, thus, considered non-sublation and consistency as important criteria of reality.

It has been said that Advaitins start by analysing
experience. And the real is what is non-sublatable and consis-
tent. Now the question is what is real in our experience
when we apply these standards of reality. Of the two ele-
ments of our experience i.e., the consciousness of object
and the consciousness as subject, the former is subject to
change and variation. This is fairly explained by Sankara
himself when speaking of real and unreal he says, \( \text{yadvīṣṭa-buddhīḥ vyabhicarati tadsat yadvīṣṭa vyabhicarati tadsat} \)
Take for example, the consciousness of a pot. When the pot-
consciousness is destroyed as a result of the destruction
of the pot, only the particular vanishes, the general i.e.,
the consciousness remains in some other form i.e., the con-
sciousness of cloth etc. This instance is only to show that
objects change but awareness as such does not change. The
consciousness as such (\text{sadbuddhi}) is the reality - element
whereas the pot-consciousness (\text{ghaṭa buddhi}) is the content
element which \text{always varies}. In short, the awareness which
does not vary with its objects is real and the objects which
vary is unreal.

Here, also Sankara makes a distinction. The conscious-
ness as it is manifested in us is not real, it is always found

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\text{SBG. II - 16.}

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Richard Brooks contends that the explanation of re-
ality by 'ghaṭabuddhi' etc., is word-magic' and that one
can use expressions like blue lotus' etc., to prove that
only blue is invariant and therefore real and lotus unreal.
('The Meaning of Real in Advaita Vedanta', \text{PEW}, October,
to be related to some particular (vīśeṣa), i.e., to feel oneself as this or that. In other words, the feelings that 'I am the doer' 'I am the enjoyer' etc., do not actually pertain to the consciousness. If we analyse, it will be found that even the consciousness as the subject is qualified and that this qualification always changes. So even the awareness as it is present in ourselves is not the reality. When consciousness as subject and consciousness of object are dismissed as unreal the question arises. What is real? To this Sankara would answer that reality is neither the consciousness as subject nor the consciousness of object but 'pure consciousness'. It is this pure awareness that is termed Ātman in Advaita. Thus, when the criterion of reality is applied to our experience the Ātman alone can be termed as 'real.'

The question whether this Ātman itself becomes an object of consciousness does not arise. In that case it will require another consciousness and thus will go on ad-infinitum. But since we do not experience duality within ourselves consciousness can be only one. It is 'Svayam prakāśa' - self - luminous and conscious of itself. But to use the word 'conscious of itself' according to Sankara, is absurd, for it is

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BB. II - 3-13.
like saying 'a knife cuts itself'. Therefore the Ātman is consciousness itself and not 'conscious of' anything though ultimately it is the same as saying 'it is conscious of itself'. In short, reality is pure "consciousness involved in experience and is such that it certifies both Ātman itself and objects without being itself an object amongst other objects".

"There is at least one reality", observes Bergson, "which we all seize from within by intuition and not by simple analysis. It is our own person in its flowing through time, the self which endures. With no other thing can we sympathise intellectually. But one thing is sure: we sympathise with ourselves".

Brahman, the Absolute

The conception of Absolute is a unique feature of all monistic systems and Sankara accordingly develops the idea of an absolute spirit or Ātman which is also called Brahman. When it is said that Ātman alone is real, the next question is whether there can be different realities, or, in other words, whether there can be a duality within the reality itself. According to Sankara spirit is only one; there cannot be any duality in it, for dualities are found only in

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time and space. Where there is neither space nor time, there we cannot conceive of duality. Spirit is considered by all to be above time and space. If we consider spirit to be limited by time-space-causation, then it becomes material. Even the numbers such as one and two are applicable only to that which is conditioned by space. Since Ātman is essentially above these conditioning factors there cannot be any duality; it is one. It is this unconditioned spirit, one without a second and universal that Sankara calls Brahman, the Absolute. But the crux of Sankara's metaphysics is not that Brahman is indivisible, One but that Brahman is the sole reality. Everything else, the world and the individual souls are unreal - mithyā.

The Absolute, again, is conceived as nirguna - devoid of all qualifies, niskriya - devoid of all activity - and nirvikāra-devoid of all changes. Since it is nirguna it is beyond words and mind; it cannot therefore, be defined in terms of any category. It can be described only in a negative way through the process of elimination - neti neti prakriyā. That it is described in a negative way does not mean that it is a void - śūnyā. What Sankara cautions us is against identi-
fying anything finite with Brahman. To describe it as 'this' or 'that' which are associated with the idea of finitude is to affect, the infinitude of Brahman. There is nothing with which Brahman can be compared. In the SBG, Sankara goes even to the extent of saying that Brahman cannot be described even as sat or asat, being or non-being. That is, a name connotes an object by referring to its, class, action, attribute or relation. Since Brahman is above all these it cannot be described positively.

With a view to protecting the infinitude of Brahman Sankara says that even the attributes such as satya, jñāna and ananta mentioned as the nature of Brahman in the Upanisads are not meant to qualify Brahman. "They are used to make us understand the Real, by telling us what it is not, viz., that it is not non-being (asat) not what is inert and not which is related to sorrow. To define a thing is to limit it, to finalize it. The infinite and the unlimited cannot be characterised in terms of finite categories. Brahman is nirguṇa, without characteristics. Even to say that it is one is not strictly true, for the category of number is inapplicable to the Absolute. That is why Sankara calls his philosophy Advaita".

28 SBG XIII - 12
29 S.T.U. II - 1
The Absolute is essentially inactive, for action is bound up with time, but the Absolute is beyond time. Another argument is that every action is motivated by desire. No conscious being can act without desire. God being the supreme consciousness, He must have a desire befitting his status. The desire implies a want and wants always bespeak imperfection. Experience also shows that all beings who are active are impelled by some imperfection. In a perfect Being there cannot be any desire. A third argument is that since Brahman has no parts it cannot act. Activity is manifested only where there are divisions or parts. Brahman is 'niravayava' - without parts.

Some schools of thought, unlike Sankara, consider Brahman as endowed with attributes and action. For them God is an omni-present being who creates and controls the world. Christianity, Dvaita, and Viśiṣṭādvaita belong to this category. Ramanuja considers the world as eternal and God as endowed with all auspicious qualities. The Upaniṣadic passages which describe the reality as 'nirguna' he explains in a different way, i.e., nirguna means devoid of all evils or

31 niravayavam cāvikriyam, nahi niravayavam kincit vikri-yātmanakam drṣtam (SBG II - 25).

imperfections. The individual souls are different; they are not identical with the supreme being. In Christian thought also God is pure act; action is identical with the spirit. They hold that God is involved first in an act of creation. All these systems find it difficult to conceive a supreme being above action and attributes. If the ultimate reality is divorced from action, it is said that the whole ethics lose its ground and they say that it is necessary to accept an 'active God' to account for morality. But such views which consider Brahman as personal cannot maintain themselves in that position. Ramanuja's position with regard to this seems to be more religious than philosophical and J.A.B. Van Buitenen may be fully justified when he says that Ramanuja's system is "created out of the data of popular emotional religion".

Even Sankara accepts a personal God, only, it is not accepted as the ultimate reality. Personal God means an entity with attributes which are not identical with his being.


Such a conception creates a number of problems such as those of creation etc., which cannot be satisfactorily solved. The conception of God as creator necessitates the conception that He has desires like human beings and it is unworthy of a transcendental being like God. To be perfect and at the same time be in relation to the world is one of the most difficult problems of Philosophy. As a solution to this F.H. Bradley has suggested a new method, i.e., to reject the perfection of God and accept a limited God. His own view is that God is not indispensible for religion. "The doctrine", says the author, "that there cannot be religion without a personal God is to my mind certainly false". Sankara, on the other-hand feels that religion demands a God and that is the saguna brahman - Brahman considered as endowed with attributes. Only, Sankara does not accept God necessitated by religion as the ultimate reality. This is the idea behind his dual conception of Brahman - the Sagunabrahman being the God of religion and nirgunabrahman being the reality of
Philosophy.

36
ETR, Chapter on 'God and the Absolute'.

37
Ibid., p. 432 (.F.N)

38
Maxmuller, Six systems of Indian Philosophy, p.191.
In sharp contrast with Sankara, S. Radhakrishnan considers the Absolute as the ground of the universe in the sense that a "possibility of the Absolute is the logical prior of the world". And about the conception of God, he says "God is the Absolute with reference to this possibility of which he is the source and creator". If the Absolute is considered to be the ground of the world in the sense that the former is the substratum on which the latter is super-imposed, then it concurs with the Advaitic view. But this is not his view. What he means is that the world is an actual manifestation of the Absolute in time. "It is not an exhaustive nor the possible manifestation. Though it is an actual manifestation of the Absolute, it is not necessary for the Absolute. Creation is a free act". "Here, he says that the Absolute was involved in an act of creation though it was a free act. He assumes that the creation some how took place and, unable to account for the act of creation, he says that it can only be the free act of the Absolute. The problem of creation in time still remains unsolved.

39 CCCP, p. 141.

40 Ibid., p. 141.

41 Ibid., p. 141.
According to Aurobindo, Brahman is both immanent and transcendant. It is indefinable by any attributes, not because it is attributeless, but because it cannot be fully conceived and expressed by them. Brahman has all attributes and yet is beyond all these. He criticises Sankara's negation of attributes in Brahman. Such denial, according to him, limits the Absolute by denying even the freedom of self-expression and self-determination. Both Sagunabrahman and nirgunabrahman are "equal and co-existent aspects of the Eternal".

But Brahman, the Absolute, according to Sankara, cannot have aspects. It is the sole reality, self-existent, infinite and non-relational. But that it has attributes and at the same time is beyond attributes entail fresh logical difficulties. Aurobindo often speaks of the 'logic' of the infinite' as against the logic of the finite. He says that the principle of contradiction cannot be applied to the questions of ultimate reality, for such laws founded upon an observation of what is divided in space and time cannot

42 Ibid., p. 161.


44 Cf. "The Absolute cannot for me be God, because in the end the Absolute is related to nothing and there cannot be practical relation between it and the finite will" (Bradley, ETB. p. 423).
be confidently applied to the being and action of the indivisible". But how did Aurobindo come to the conclusion that the Absolute acts at all? To say that the finite logic cannot be applied to reality makes the conception of infinite impossible. On the other hand, Sankara has both Śruti and logic to support that Brahma is nirguna and niskriya. First there are passages in the Upaniṣads which evidently deny any attribute or action to reality. Secondly, Sankara would say that both aspects being mutually contradictory cannot be predicated of one and the same object. To say that a part of Brahma has attributes and the rest is beyond it, is ridiculous, for Brahma is without parts (niravailavayava) and to talk of parts in it is to accept difference in itself (Svagataabheda). Sankara seems to be more logical when he says that the Absolute is transcendental and essentially attributeless.

God as Saṅgaṇabrahim

Thus, according to Sankara, there is nothing beside the Absolute and it is the sole Reality. But what about the world of plurality? Is it actually non-existent, an illusion or a dream? It is here that the question of vyāvahārika or empirical reality comes. The appearance of

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the world is explained by the concept of *Vyāvahārika* reality
i.e., reality of a lower degree. Accordingly, the world, and
individual souls, *God* गौ, are real empirically, while
Brahman alone is the metaphysical Reality. Thus, the
Absolute and the world are explained by Sankara by taking
two different stand-points i.e., the stand-point of the
Absolute and that of the world. The status of the world
will be discussed later; here it is mentioned to show
how God is only a postulation in Sankara vis-a-vis the
world of empirical experience, with the result that even
God has only empirical reality.

The postulation of a lower Brahman called God would
not have been necessary if Sankara's interest was purely
academic. Along with the conception of the Absolute is
his insistence that it must be realized. It is the pro-
blem x of realizing the metaphysical identity of one's self
with Brahman which necessitated with the conception of God.
The Absolute is such that it cannot even be conceived;
it is beyond the range of the mind. Such a reality cannot
be even imagined, unless we attribute some finite qualities
to it. Such attribution in the case of the highest reality
must be befitting his status. Thus, he may be considered
as the creator of the universe and endowed with all aus-
picious qualities. This is the *sagunabrahman* or God in
Advaita.

The distinction between *saguna* and *nirguna* Brahmans
(God and the Absolute) may be considered as the key-note of Sankara's metaphysics and ethics. But he does not seem to be very precise in using the word Brahman in different contexts. In certain places it is difficult to understand whether the word is used referring to Saguna brahman or nirguna brahman. But in B.S.B. he has cautioned the readers against mistaking the two Brahmans and specifies the distinction between the two. He says, "there are two kinds of Brahman referred to: one endowed with the limiting adjuncts of name, form etc., the other without limiting adjuncts. Whenever Brahman is described with attributes it is meant for worship". (Upāsana) - a statement which at once reminds us of a similar statement Samuel Alexander that "what we worship that is God".

The conception of two Brahmans may create the impression that Sankara is inconsistent. In the philosophy of Bergson we come across the same difficulty. He often speaks in dualistic terms as though there are two ultimate realities.

46 Dvīrūpam hi brahmāvagyamyaḥ namārūpavikārābhedopādhvīṣīṣṭam tadviparītame sa sarvopādhi vivekājām (B.S.B.1-1-11)

47 "Yatra yatra Vibhūtyatisayāḥ sa sa īśvara ityāpāsyatayā satya x x codyate" (BSB 1-1-2)

48 Quoted by S.N. Das, in Towards a systematic study of Vedanta, p. 176.

49 CCCP, p. 253.
which in his philosophy are mind and matter. It was later
that scholars found out that he was actually speaking from
different standpoints and that there was no real contradic-
tion in his statements. In fact his dualism was only a pro-
visional starting point. This is the case with Sankara
also. Sometimes he speaks of Sagunabrahman as though
he is the reality and at other times he describes Nirguna-
brahman as the only reality. But as in the case of Bergson,
Sankara is also speaking from different stand points - the
standpoint of the Absolute and that of the empirical reality.
It is from the empirical standpoint that Sankara accepts
the validity of God.

It is also not right to consider Saguna and Nirguna
as two aspects of the ultimate reality. Kokilaswar Sastri,
for example, considers them as immanent and transcendental
aspects of Brahman. None of these aspects can be ignored.
That is, if Brahman is accepted as saguna only the world will
be infested with false independence; if again Brahman is
accepted only as nirguna he will be cut off from the world.
And the passages where God is described as avidyākalpita
(imposed by avidyā) means that by avidyā we forget the trans-
cendent aspect of Brahman and reduce it to the particular.

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An introduction to Advaita Philosophy, University of
Calcutta, 1926, pp. 4, 5.
He, then, concludes: "But the true view of the case is that \textit{Iśvara} (God) though the creator or the cause of the world has not and does not necessarily become restricted or entirely reduced to effects (\textit{Kāryās} or \textit{vikāras}) created; but he has also a transcendental nature which remains unaffected by these. This is the true view of God". But whether God has difference in himself and how there can be two aspects etc., still remain to be accounted for. To say that both \textit{saguna} and \textit{nirguna} are aspects is tantamount to saying that there is an ultimate reality of which these two can be aspects. Then what is the nature of that reality? Sankara's position, however, is that Reality is \textit{nirguna brahman} and when we consider it from our current empirical standpoint it is \textit{saguna} for us. In other words, \textit{nirguna brahman} is the ultimate reality whereas \textit{saguna brahman} is the same reality in the world context.

Many have criticised this attitude of Sankara towards God. Two such criticisms are worth mentioning. The first is that in Advaita, God in an illusion and that with regard to its illusioriness God is comparable to the world as well as the individual souls which are also equally illusory.

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p. 43.
\item E.W. Hopkins, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 213.
\end{enumerate}
This criticism is probably based on Sankara's statements that God is 'āvidyākalpita'  
āvidyāpratyupaḥstāpita etc., terms which are themselves rather confusing. They seem to  
to assume that avidyā is mere ignorance and that when it is dispelled there can be no place for God and thus God himself turns out to be an illusion. Aurobindo similarly says that māyāvādin's concept of Īśvara is the most curious thing and that there is a 'missing link', between saguna and nirguna Brahmas. Secondly it is said that though Advaita speaks of God, it has no logical place in Advaita, and that as such it has no value. Thus R.C. Zaehner says that in monistic systems in general there is not the idea that God can himself has any value. J.N. Farquhar is of the view that Sankara was forced to admit God and he quotes this instance as a proof to show that man cannot live without a personal God. "In order to explain religion", says the author, "and to provide for the clamant needs of the human heart, there appears in the strict Vedanta beside the mighty Brahman a pale spectre the personal, but temporal and unreal Brahman".

53 Quoted by Indra Sen in PPC, p. 95.
55 CH, p. 420.
56 Ibid., p. 420.
Let us now turn to Sankara's own views on the place of God in Advaita. He has made clear in several places the distinction between two Brahmins and the rationale of such a distinction. In B.S.B. he says, "wherever Brahman is described as endowed with attributes it must be understood as God or Isvara to be worshipped. It is one and the same Brahman mentioned both as relational and non-relational, to be worshipped and known respectively". That he does not accept them as two aspects of the reality is brought out in the following statements: "the ultimate reality Brahman by itself cannot have two opposing features. We cannot accept that one and the same object is endowed with qualities like colour etc., and at the same time as devoid of such qualities, because it is contradictory. So even when characteristics are mentioned they are to be taken as attributed to nirguna Brahman. All differences are intended for worship; the purport of the Sāstra is non-difference - abheda. The description of reality as God is possible only on the empirical level. From the point of view of the Absolute there is neither God nor the world of plurality. The reality

57 BSB. 1-1-2.

58 evamekampi brahmapokṣitopādhisambandham, nirastopā
dhisambandhane upāsyatvena, jñeyatvena ca vedāntesūpadisyate" (Ibid)

59 BSB. III - 2-11.

60 'Bhedasya upāsanārthatvāt abhede tātparyam'
(BSB III - 2-12).
of God, thus, can be accepted only from the empirical standpoint. To put it in the words of Sankara himself, "God is that which is conditioned by the adjuncts of name and form produced by avidyā. In the real stage, it is shown there is no question of ruler and the ruled. In the realm of Vyāvahārika reality even Sruti accepts Isvāra". So the position of Sankara is that reality is only one i.e., nirguṇa Brahman, the Absolute and it is non-relational. But the world has a tentative sort of reality and hence it must be some how related to the highest reality. When the reality is conceived as related to this world which is a necessity for religion it is saguṇabrahman or God.

S.K. Maitra has considered God as a relational appearance of the Absolute, i.e., Brahman is the 'svarūpa' where as God is the 'taṭastha' of the Absolute. F.H. Bradley's conception of God seems to come nearer to that of Sankara. But he argues that the question of God must be answered by an 'appeal to the religious consciousness' and that 'God is not indispensable for religion'. His ideas about God can be summarised as follows: (a) God has no

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61 Ibid., II - 1-14.
62 The Main Problems of Philosophy, pp. 146 f.
63 ETR, p. 449
64 Ibid., p. 423.
meaning outside the religious consciousness. (b) Religion is practical (c) There cannot be any practical relation between the finite will and the Absolute. (d) God, thus is a practical necessity for religion but not the ultimate reality of philosophy. "The highest reality", says the author, "so far as I see, must be super-personal. At the same time, to may many minds practical religion seems to call for the belief in God as a separate individual. And where, truly that belief is so required, I can accept it as justified and true, but only if it is supplemented by other beliefs which really contradict it". The difference between Sankara and Bradley is that where as the latter gives only a secondary place for God and religion the former recognises the religious consciousness. Only Sankara goes deep into the question of religion and tries to find out the ultimate truth of it.

Thus, for Sankara, God is not the ultimate reality, he is God only as long as the personality of the individual remains, as long as the vyāvahārika lasts. In the pāramārthika stage there is neither God nor individual souls. Till we transcended the vyāvahārika level, bound up with time, space and causation the Absolute can be worshipped only as saguna or God. That is why Vivekananda says,

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Ibii., p. 436.
"personal God is the same Absolute looked at through the haze of maya". "Personal God is the highest that can be attained to, of that impersonal, by the human intellect. So that the personal God is true, as much as this chair is true, as much as this world is true, but no more. It is not Absolute truth".

Such a conception of God makes it possible to conceive him in a number of ways. Each one, thus, understands God in his own way according to one's spiritual growth. It is in this sense comparable to that of pragmatism whose approach to God is relative. James, for example, permits the possibility of a variety of conceptions of God suiting different temperaments, relative to the respective minds. God, thus may be conceived as endowed with the power of creation or as endowed with all auspicious qualities like grace. Though this is not the metaphysical reality, this is all what the human intellect can understand of the Absolute. Sankara himself justifies the different forms of God for upāsana. At the same time he has warned that wherever the reality is mentioned with attributes and limitations (niśvarya and maryādā)

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68 CCCP, p. 237.
it is for upāsana and not a statement about reality. In such contexts God may be conceived as a limited being or as residing in places like heart etc., but it is only with reference to the limiting adjuncts which are not themselves metaphysically real.

Since God is the highest reading that man can make of the Absolute, in practical religion he is the reality. He is also the highest value for the man who wants to attain God. To express this in the language of religion, the aspirant tends to attain God who is the abode of all values such as, truth beauty and goodness. Only God is the abode of such values, for, only with him the aspirant can maintain relationship. The Absolute is non-relational and beyond all values. "The concept of Īśvara is, therefore, vital to Advaita Vedanta" says D. Pritipal, "it is vital because the existence of Īśvara arises out of the world of human experience. Īśvara does not need to have his reality shown in logical demonstration, but justifies his existence by his indispensability to carry a spiritual experience to its spiritual experience to its fulfilment".

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69 "Āīśvarya maryādā Śravaṇamapi adhyātmādhiśravātavidvibhāgāpeksam upāsanārthameva" (BSS 1-1-20)
70 "nispradeśasyaipī brahmaṇah upādhiśeṣāsambandhāt ....pradeśeṣaṃ parigraha na virudhyate" BSS 2-15
The Individual Soul

The Individual souls, Sankara holds, are metaphysically identical with Brahman. Here emphasis must be laid on the word 'metaphysically'. Without grasping this metaphysical identity some scholars jump to the conclusion that Advaita identifies man and God - a conclusion which is not, however, accepted by Sankara. Empirically the jīva is what it is, i.e., with all its limitations. But metaphysically it is identical with the Absolute.

Sankara, bases this theory of identity on certain passages of the Upaniṣads which clearly speak of the strict identity of Jīva and Brahman, such for example, as 'Thou art that'. 'I am Brahman' etc. "We cannot understand this identity but from the Śruti passages such as Tattvamasi etc". says Sankara.72 Thus, as for the conception of the Absolute, here also Śruti is the ultimate basis for proving the identity. But it may be noted that there are also Śruti passages which speak of the difference of Jīva and Brahman. The Jīva cannot be identical with Brahman and at the sometime be different from it. This idea seems to be ruling Sankara's philosophical speculations. In the context of such conflicting Śruti passages, there are only two ways in which one can explain them. One is to accept the bhedābheda school i.e., both

72 BSB. 1.1.4.
differences and non-difference are real. The other way is to accept two different standpoints and explain difference and non-difference as referring to these standpoints. Sankara accepts the second method and explains difference and non-difference by adopting the two standpoints viz., vyāvahārika and paramārthika. This, we have seen, is the basis for the conception of the two-fold Brahman also.

Thus, empirically the jīva is what it is, i.e., it is a limited being and its identity with Brahman is only a metaphysical truth and not an empirical fact. What stands in our way of realizing the identity is avidyā, which we shall explain later. Each Jīva thinks himself to be different because of the ignorance of the true nature of one's own self. The main effects of this avidyā is spoken of as the 'individual ego' i.e., the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. This identification of oneself with 'ego' is attributed to the principle of adhyāsa which literally means 'super-imposition'. Thus, on the self are imposed all kinds of attributes and actions and thus people think 'I am the door', 'I am the enjoyer' etc., though metaphysically the self neither has attributes nor is active. This superimposition is adhyāsa and the consequent experience of pain and pleasure is called samsāra.

Adhyāsa and Avidyā

Adhyāsa is a very important conception in Advaita Vedanta. Though Advaitins in general can be called māyāvādins.
this is not strictly true in the case of Sankara. He may be better styled as an adhyāsāvādin or avidyāvādin. This is seen from the fact that adhyāsa is the main topic of discussion in his famous introduction to B.S.B. Adhyāsa in a nut shell is the appearance of one object on another due to similarities etc. Though different views are held on adhyāsam all are agreed with regard to its fundamental nature i.e., it is the super-imposition of the attributes of one object on another. But how does adhyāsa function in the Jīva? The self which is pure consciousness imposes on itself the attributes of matter and thinks itself to be a limited being and consequently suffers. All sufferings are due to this identification with everything that is non-self.

Sankara, further proceeds to say that every activity of a living being is fundamentally based on this super-imposition. The basis for this assertion is the doctrine that the self by itself is pure unqualified consciousness and that therefore it cannot be associated with any action. The non-self that is attributed on the self comprise of many things such as, mind, senses, body, other belongings etc. Thus, for example, when the wife and the children are lost people think, 'I am lost', thus, super-imposing the attributes of

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73 See BSB. introduction.
outer objects on the self. The qualities of the body are super-imposed on the self when one thinks 'I am stout', 'I am lean' 'I am standing', 'I am walking' etc. Again in statements like 'I am deaf' 'I am blind' etc., one super-imposes the attributes of the senses. Similarly when people think and entertain desires they are super-imposing the qualities of the mind. "This adhyāsa", says Sankara, "which is without beginning or end, natural and unreal and which creates the sense of agency atma, is experienced by all."

The conception of adhyāsa is based on the pre-supposition that the self is unqualified pure consciousness - a pre-supposition which has Śruti as its basis. Thus, the entire activity of man is supposed to originate from this fundamental error of adhyāsa. In short "whatever may be reason, it is a fact that all experience starts and moves in an error which identifies the self with the body, the senses or the objects of the senses. All cognitive acts pre-suppose this illusory identification, for, without it the pure self can never behave as a phenomenal knower or perceiver and without such a perceiver there would be no cognitive act".

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74 BSB. Introduction.

75 S.N. Dasgupta, op.cit., p. 435.
The word *avidya*, though literally means 'ignorance' is used in Advaita in a technical sense. It means 'ignorance of the true nature of one's self.' But as the word signifies its conception is not as a negative entity. It is a positive entity and is the cause of the entire *vyāvahārika* experience of the soul. In other words, it may be considered as the cause of *adhyāsa*. But in B.S.B. Sankara even identifies *avidya* with *adhyāsa*, i.e., super-imposition itself is *avidya*. "This *adhyāsa* as explained above, the wise consider as *avidya* and the knowledge distinguishing them as *vidyā*" says Sankara. *Avidya* thus, is a positive factor in our day-to-day experience, though taken by itself, it is not a metaphysical reality like Brahman.

When *avidya* is accepted as a principle explaining the phenomenal experience of the *jīva*, the question may naturally arise. What is the locus of *avidya*? Brahman is the only reality. Everything else - the individual souls and the world - is unreal. And *avidya* is the principle that explains the phenomenal experience. Therefore, philosophically the question of its actual locus must be discussed.

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76 The concept of *avidya* is very old. In different systems, it takes various names such as 'nāmarūpa', 'māya' avyakta, tama, sakti, ākāśa etc. *Avidya* is mainly treated in the *Advaitasādhi* of Madhusūdanasararasyātī. Its definition as treated in the Advaitic tradition is this: "*Avidya* is that which being anādi is positively existent but sublated by knowledge" (vide, Dr. Sengupta, B.K. 'An examination of *Avidya*, Some fundamentals in the Metaphysical History of Advaita', Proceedings & Transactions of the All India Oriental Conference, Gauhati, 1966, p. 247).

77 B.S.B. Introduction.
Of the three subject matters of philosophy viz., God, the souls and the world, Advaita ultimately reduces them to one, the Absolute. Therefore, naturally one may be inclined to think that Brahman is the abode of avidya. But Brahman cannot be its locus, for it is the fulness of knowledge, there is no place for avidya. Nor can the jīva be its locus, for it is identical with Brahman. The world also cannot be the locus for the simple reason that it is insentient; ignorance can be associated only with conscious beings. Such being the case what would be the locus of avidya?

Sankara faces this problem in his commentary of the 13th chapter of the B.G. The spirit does not undergo changes, nor does it pass through many stages; it is 'nirāvayava', without parts. And since avidya itself is not a metaphysically real entity, it cannot exist in the realm of pure spirit. So evidently it is not Brahman that is the locus of avidya. It must be the individual souls. But how and why the jīvas became subjected to avidya is not properly answered by Sankara. In the relevant context he maintains that to ask whose is this avidya is to beg the question, for when the man with his avidya is present it is clear to whom avidya belongs. Avidya, thus, is a clear fact in our experience. Moreover he holds that the question of avidya is

78 “Avidyā kasya drṣyate iti prāśnaḥ nirarthakah. Katham? drṣyate cet avidyā tadvantamapi paśyasi. Na ca tadvati upa-labhyaṁe sā kasya iti praśno yuktah” (SBG. XIII-2)
a matter of individual concern and that the man who wants to get rid of it must make the effort.\textsuperscript{79} The man who asks the question has avidyā; let him get rid of it — this seems to be Sankara's attitude. Here, he advises us to be practical-minded and says that instead of searching for the locus of avidyā one must try to get rid of it.

The World

As in the case of the individual souls, the reality of the world is also a disputed question. Is the world real or unreal? If it is not ultimately real what sort of reality does it have? Brahman alone is real, for only it exists beyond time and space. The world is found to be time-space-causation-bound. So what sort of existence does it have from the Advaitic point of view?

The Advaitins do not start with the assumption that the world is existing. It is treated as an 'appearance'. So strictly speaking the enquiry in Advaita is not about the reality of the world', but about what is presented to us by sense-perception. The world always appears 'to' the individual souls, i.e., if the individual souls were not existing there would not have been this 'appearance'. There is no such thing as 'independant appearance'; appearance is always 'to' somebody.

\textsuperscript{79} 'Yasya avidyā sā tām pariharsyati' (Ibid).
Since the appearance of the world is in time and space, it is conditional; and here the conditioning factor is avidya. That is, the world appears as long as avidya prevails in the individuals' souls. By avidya one mistakes Brahman for this world. When avidya is dispelled and one realizes one's identity with Brahman, the question of the reality of the world does not arise.

Our knowledge of the world indeed is limited to its appearance i.e., we know only what appears to us. It cannot be called real for it is sublated by the knowledge of Brahman. It cannot also be considered as non-being, for it is a reality in our day-to-day experience. This is why Sankara holds that the nature of the world is per se unknowable and therefore indefinable. Apart from the sense-data we have no proof to show that the world has an independent existence. The validity of sense-data is not absolute. In our own experience it is found to be variable; for example, in the case of illusory experience. Sense-data cannot be, thus, relied upon as a perfect source of valid knowledge. The nature of the world, according to Sankara, is understandable and this characteristic of the world he expresses in terms like māyā, anirvacanīya (indefinable), sadasadvilāksana (which cannot be described either as either existing or non-existing) etc.

There is no doctrine of Sankara which has been as much subjected to criticism as his doctrine regarding the world. His world-view is often misunderstood. Most of the scholars
until recently took him to be an idealist. Their contention is that in Advaita, the world exists so long as one does not realize Brahman; when the realization comes the world disappears. Therefore the world does not truly exist even at the present time. If the world were something which disappears when Brahman is realized, the appearance we now perceive must be an illusion. The Advaitins explain the world by māyā and it is considered as anādi, beginningless. Thus, their conclusion is that even Advaitins are forced to accept some kind of duality in the end. R.C. Zehrner, argues that māyāvada is impossible to be established and that Advaitins cannot explain dualism in the end. That is, if māyā is accepted anywhere as a fact, either metaphysically or empirically duality becomes unavoidable and thus, Sankara's effort to explain away the world by saying that it is māyā is nothing but distortion of words.

But Sankara himself does not seem to be very keen on using the word māyā. The words avidyā and mithyā are more often used than māyā. The postulation of the Absolute on one side and the experience of a world on the other make it necessary that there should exist a relationship between the two. But it has been said that the Absolute is non-relational,

80 Mysticism Sacred and Profane, pp. 133, 134.
for metaphysically there is nothing by the side of Brahman. Therefore, logically, the world cannot have a relation with it. Therefore it is necessary to explain the world in some other way. This is what Sankara did. His attitude towards the world is that the world somehow appears due to adhyāśa and its relation to the Absolute is simply indefinable. This attitude is expressed by the term mayā. The question of the relation of the finite world to the infinite Brahman also does not arise, for metaphysically the world does not exist. World is not an ultimate reality; its reality is conditional and this condition is the absence of Brahman-knowledge.

How to reconcile spirit and matter? This is the problem which necessitated the conception of mayā. But while Sankara reconciles by denying the latter, it is claimed that Aurobindo integrates them. He calls his system 'realistic Advaita'. "Sankara's wordless inactive self" says Aurobindo "and his mayā of many names and forms are equally desperate and irreconcilable entities; their rigid antagonism can terminate only by the dissolution of the multitudous illusion into the sole truth of an eternal silence". According to him reconciliation of spirit and matter must be effected not by negating either of these two but by integrating them. "True


reconciliation" says Aurobindo, "proceeds always by a mutual
comprehension leading to some sort of oneness". He includes
even the world and gives it a place in the 'whole'. But such
a reconciliation gives rise to two problems viz., the how and
why of this universe. In Aurobindo, the how of the world
is sought to be explained by the same old creation-theory
and to account for this creation by the infinite he propounds
'ātman'. When we ask for the logic of the 'ātman'
we are told of the 'logic of the infinite'. He says, "if
we insist on applying finite logic to the infinite, the
omni-present reality will escape us and we shall grasp
instead an abstract shadow".

The whole question of māyāvāda which accounts for the
world cannot be grasped thoroughly unless we understand the
implications of his absolutist metaphysics. We have seen
how Sankara has developed the idea of the Absolute and how
also he considered it to be the only reality. Now, where is
plurality to be accommodated? If plurality is not real, how
to account for its appearance? This was a problem to all
absolutist philosophers.

Vyāvahārika Reality.

Sankara solves this problem by accepting degrees of

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33 Ibid., p. 39.

34 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 43.
reAlity as Bradley did and it is this doctrine which explains the status of the world in Advaita. The doctrine of degrees of reality solves the question of plurality at the same time keeping non-dualism intact.

In B.S.B. we often come across two words, viz., 'पारामर्थिकावस्था' and 'vyāvahārikāvasthā' (metaphysical stage and empirical stage respectively). These two refers to two different realms of reality. There is also a third realm of reality called 'pratibhāsīka' which is found in illusory experiences. Thus in B.S.B. one can notice two lines of thought, i.e., one from the point of view of empirical reality and the other from the point of view of metaphysical reality. Thus even illusory appearance has some reality; vyāvahārika is more real, while para-mārthika alone is the ultimate reality.

In B.S.B. there are two kinds of world-views. One describes the world as the creation of Brahman which is based on Srṣīṣrūtis i.e., the Upaniṣadic passages dealing with creation. This is from the empirical point of view. Accordingly the world has been created by saguna-brahman without undergoing any change in himself. For this reason, the created world is not different from God - 'कारणत् कार्यस्य ananyatvam'. Since God cannot have any desire he has created sportively. But such Śruti passages dealing with creation

85 B.S.B. II-1-16.
86 Paramesvarasya līlavat kevālayam. (B.S.B. II-1-33)
do not actually refer to its metaphysical truth. \textit{Sruti} teaches creation only by way of 'concessions to man's faculty of understanding'. Sankara himself says that such descriptions are intended not for teaching creation; their purport is Brahman, for nobody can attain mokṣa by the description of creation.

There is yet another world-view which speaks of the metaphysical truth of the world. Accordingly the world is not metaphysically real; it has only an empirical reality. It is real only as long as one has not realized Brahman. Thus the world is rightly described as \textit{mithyā, māya, nāmarūpa}, or as \textit{avidyā kalpita} (superimposed by \textit{avidyā}).

Sankara does not accept the world as ultimately real, for it gets sublated by \textit{Brahmajñāna}. His conception of the world's reality, thus, is based on the most important presuppositions of Advaita Vedanta viz., (1) the pre-supposition that our present experience of the world will be sublated by \textit{Brahmajñāna}; (2) that \textit{Brahmajñāna} itself is unsublatable. Sankara's conception of the world can be understood only on the basis of these two pre-suppositions which have \textit{Sruti} as \textit{the basis} the basis.

That it gets sublated at the time of \textit{Brahmajñāna} does not mean that it is non-existent even at the present. 

\textsuperscript{37} The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads, p. 185.  
\textsuperscript{38} B.S.B. I-4-14.
In B.S.B. Sankara says "we cannot say that the objects outside are non-existent, for they are experienced. The external objects like pillar, pot, cloth etc., are experienced. Such experienced objects cannot be simple void". Thus the world cannot be dismissed as unreal. In other words, it cannot be described either as real or as non-real-sadasadvilaksana. It is anirvacaniya - which cannot be expressed either as real or unreal. When Sankara uses the word māyā it does not refer to the illusory nature of the world. The world is liable to be sublated. The Brahman-realization completely removes the idea of the world in such a way that the question of its existence does not arise, let alone its reality. Its appearance at the present stage is due to the ignorance of Brahman - avidyā and its effect adhyāsa.

Māyā is sometimes explained as a sign of inexplicability when there is a contradiction. Here it is said that the contradiction is between the experience of the world and that of Brahman. But there is no real contradiction. It may be noted that even Advaitins maintain the law of contradiction. Brahman and the world are not given in one and the same experience. When the world is experienced, the world alone is there; there is no contradicting experience. When Brahman is realized Brahman alone is true. The world is totally cancelled out as untrue. Then, where is the contradiction? Even in the rope-snake-appearance, there is no

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39 Ibid., II - 228.
contradiction. The unreality of the snake is understood not by applying the law of contradiction. The snake was real as long as it was perceived. But when the rope is perceived the snake is totally cancelled and sublated; only then the snake is recognised to have been unreal. This is the case with the world also. Now the world appears; it is real. But Brahmanāna is one which cancels the reality of the world-experience. And at this stage the question whether this world exists or not does not arise.

That the question of the world at the time of Brahman-realization does not arise may appear to be an evasion of the problem. But this is a problem presented by empirical logic and is not found in the realm of genuine spiritual experience. Experience is something which supercedes logic. This does not mean that experience is illogical. Just as we do not apply logic to an object clearly perceived, we cannot apply logic to Brahman experience—an experience of non-duality. It is in this context that the famous verse of the Mūṇḍakaopaniṣad becomes intelligible i.e., 'Brahman-vision cancels all doubts and destroys all past karmas'.

We have already mentioned that the word real can be used both in the ontological and axiological senses. Many think that Sankara has used the equivalents of the words real

90 MU. II-2-9.
and unreal only in the ontological sense. But when he refers to the world it is often used in the axiological sense. In fact Sankara has no real interest in discussing the ontological status of the world. This will be clear from an analysis of his statements found in his introduction to B.S.B. where occurs the much-talked about-words mithyā and avidyā.

What does the word mithyā really mean? The word has a number of meanings of which one is 'alternate'. Advaitins use the word in this sense and means 'improperly', 'incorrectly'. Thus the correct translation of the word mithyā is 'mistaken'. "Such a translation" says Richard Brooks, "would bring out more clearly Advaitins claim that the judgements we normally make about the world, on the basis of our sense perception of it are mistaken. Certainly if reality is unitary, then the plurality of the world cannot be real; we must be misperceiving the world and then misjudging it on the basis of our ignorance of the truth of the matter".

But what is that to which Sankara applies this word? In the context where he uses the word for the first time, it does not refer to the world. Speaking about the mutual superimposition of spirit and matter, he says that adhyāsa is

92 Ibid., p. 336.
mithya i.e., our ordinary experience is adhyāsa and therefore 'mistaken' - mithya. The world 'is' or 'is not' this is not his main concern; he is out to establish that the ordinary happenings of the world where the self feels 'this is mine' etc., is due to a mistake. The word mithya is again used when he says that the entire vyāvahāra of the jīva is due to mithya-jñāna false knowledge. In both these contexts the word does not refer to the illusory nature of the world.

Some scholars resort to the word avidya to prove that Sankara was an illusionist. They literally translate the word as ignorance and complain that when avidya is dispelled, the world also disappears, in the sense that it gets totally destroyed. But this charge is also baseless, for Sankara does not use the word avidya exclusively to refer to the unreality of the universe. In his introduction to B.S.B. avidya is used as a synonym of adhyāsa. Accordingly avidya does not refer to the existence or non-existence of the world but to the mistaking of the world to be Atman.

The world again is not a non-entity, for Sankara has refuted the śūnyavāda school of Buddhism in B.S.B. It is not also mere 'subjective cognitions'; in that case his refutation of the vijñānavāda school of Buddhism would become unin-

93 B.S.B. Introduction.
94 BSB. Introduction.
95 BSB. Introduction.
96 BSB. Introduction. II-2-31.
telligible. Therefore, the world is empirically real if we mean by real anything that is not non-existent and non-subjective.

Most of the critics who charge Advaita with illusionism do not define illusion philosophically. Much of the noise made on this issue will subside if we define precisely what is illusion. The term illusion is used by philosophers to cover certain phenomena which can be classified as follows:

- There are 'illusions proper' when the percipient is deceived in identifying the objects, for example the optical illusions of double images, multi-shapes etc. There are illusions due to relativity of perception. The same water may be cool to one person and warm to another. They are not 'illusions proper' because they depend on the relativity of perception.
- There is a third variety of illusion called 'hallucination' which is perceived when there are neither objects nor anything like those objects. Dreams are included in this category.
- Even a superficial reader of Sankara knows that none of these meanings of illusion is meant by him by words such as māyā and mithyā.

Sankara has his own views of illusions. He accepts illusory experiences which are called 'pratibhāsika' by later Advaitins. He includes the appearance of a snake on a coiled

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97 SSB II -2-23.

98 Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, pp. 130, 131.
rope, pearl-silver dreams of all kinds etc., in illusion. It is interesting to note that he gives some reality even to illusory appearance, for taken by its own standard it has some truth. In this respect he is one with Bradley who says "At each stage is involved the principle of that which is higher, and every stage (it is therefore true) is already inconsistent. But on the other hand, taken for itself and measured by its own ideas, every level has truth. It meets, we may say, its own claims, and it proves false only when tried by that which is already beyond it". We have to accept the validity of every experience until it gets sublated by an over-riding experience. Each by its own standard is real, but when compared to an over-riding experience becomes unreal or untrue.

Sankara, it is true, sometimes compares the world with dreams, mirage-water, rope-snake etc. But, here, the comparison does not imply that they are identical in nature. Sankara himself has cautioned against this when he says, "there is no rule that there must be complete similarity between an example and the nature of the object to be proved by the example". Here comparison is used only with reference to the sublative character of both experiences. That the world is

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99 Appearance and Reality, p. 431.

100 na hi drṣṭānta dārṣṭāntikayoḥ atyantasaṃyena bha-vitavyamiti niyamoti. (B.S.B. I-2-21)
not a dream is also testified to by Sankara's own words. "The world proved by all pramāṇas cannot be denied unless one realizes the higher principle". But dream is regarded by him as pure illusion, for he says that in the dream the rules of space, time, and causality are not followed. In B.S.B. II-2-29 (Vaidharmyāt ca na svamādīvat) he actually distinguished the dream state and the waking experience and shows the world's relative reality: "The waking experience cannot be like dream experience, for there is difference between them. They have non-sublative and sub-lative characters respectively. The objects of the dream-experience get sublated in waking state......the objects of the waking state is not sublated". Thus, illusions like rope-snake etc., and dream experience, all are unreal. But the world is unreal not in the sense in which the dream is unreal. It is real as long as Brahman is not realized.

Sankara, thus, may be said to have considered three degrees of reality viz., prāṇitvāsika, vyāvahārika and pāramārthika. The world has vyāvahārika reality, whereas only Brahman has pāramārthika reality. Here, a problem may be raised; a real must be always real. That is, an object cannot

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101 Naḥyayam sarvapramāṇa prasidho lokavyāvahāranyatattvamanadhigamyā sākyate apahnotum. (B.S.B. II-2-31)

102 Desākālanimittasampattirabādhaśca......taśmād māyāmatram svamān dasaṇam (B.S.B. III-2-3).
be either real or unreal; there is no intermediary stage between the two. The distinction between real and unreal is logically absolute. It does not admit of degrees, i.e., to talk of real, less real, still less real etc., is absurd from the logical point of view. Then how does Sankara accept degrees of reality. It is here that one of the major misunderstanding about Advaita is removed. It is the fact that axiology is involved in Sankara's usage of the word real and unreal (satya and mithyā). The word 'sat' is used by Sankara both in the axiological and ontological senses. But in the context of the degrees of reality he uses it only in the axiological sense. Similarly the word mithyā is also axiological i.e., the idea of value or worth is involved in it. We have already seen that the statement like 'real pleasure' 'real peace' etc., involves a system of values; they are not merely statement of facts. Thus when the world is said to be unreal it refers to its value rather than to its actual existence. The world has no reality for one who has a realized Brahman; it has value only for the unrealized. In other words, the world has only a practical reality which means that it has value till Brahman is realized. And this characteristic of the world is implied by the term vyāvahārika.

If the conception of the world as vyāvahārika is axiological the question still remains: what is the ontological status of the world? It is here that the question of māyā comes in. In Advaita only Brahman has ontological status;
the world is an appearance and therefore sad-asad-vilaksana—which cannot be described either as existing or non-existing. This nature of the world is explained by māyā.

To say that plurality is an appearance is not equivalent to saying that it is illusion. Sankara considers the world as appearance in the Bradlean sense of the term. In his 'Appearance and Reality' Bradley defines appearance and distinguishes it from all kinds of illusionism. "And hence for us", says the author, "anything which comes short when compared with reality gets the names of appearance. But we do not suggest that the thing always itself is an appearance". Sankara like Bradley accepts the world as appearance. But the former is an adhyāsāvādin i.e., he holds that the world appears only to those who indulge in adhyāsa. The 'being' of the world is identical with Brahman i.e., the sattā of the world is identical with the sattā of Brahman. Thus, we may have to agree with Bradley who said, "the doctrine of degrees in reality and truth is the fundamental answer to our problem. Everything is essential, and yet one thing is worthless in comparison with others. Nothing is perfect as such, and yet everything in some degree contains a vital

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Appearance and Reality, p. 430.
function of perfection. ......... Hence appearance is error .......
but not every error is illusion". While Bradley does not
negate the world Sankara does; but this negation is only
from the standpoint of the Absolute.

But the erux of the monistic philosophy lies in its
solution to the problem: how vyan\vaharika reality is related
to paramarthika reality. Here Advaitins hold that there can-
not be any actual relation between these two. They are not
something happening in time. The whole of vyan\vaharika is
bound up with time where as paramarthika is above time.
Richard Brooks writes that the lines delimiting the levels
of reality must be very sharp; otherwise Advaitins cannot
explain the world. And, this sharp line according to him
is shown in Gaudapada's writings where he says that Brahma-
jnana is sakrdvibhata-sudden illumination. But the funda-
mental conception here seems to be that there is no actual
continuity between vyan\vaharika and paramarthika stages, for
continuity is only in time and paramarthika is beyond time.
The phrases we use, such as 'until Brahmajnana comes' till
moksa', etc., are used for convenience. They are used
only with reference to the vyan\vaharika stage. Actually
moksa does not happen in time; it suddenly strikes the aspirant.

104
Ibid., p. 431.

105
0p.cit. p. 397.
In this context, it is most appropriate to quote Haridas Chandhuri who, speaking about maya which explains the vyavaharika reality, says, "There have been critics of mayavada in the past, there are critics at present, and there will be critics in the future; but still mayavada is sure to survive. It has its own peculiar stand point and frame work of fundamental assumptions. All refutations, therefore, quite naturally appear to it as external, and consequently as inspired by a greater or lesser degree of understanding of its own real position."

It has been usual for the defenders as well as the critics of Sankara to present vyavaharika reality merely as something which accounts for the phenomenal experience. It certainly explains the phenomenal experience. But it seems that Sankara has accepted this mainly to emphasise the need for religion and ethics. A system which is moksha-oriented cannot but emphasise the importance of the means to be followed to achieve its goal. Vyavaharika in short, is the justification for religion and ethics in Advaita.

Sankara's metaphysics, thus, may be summarised as follows: Brahman is the only ultimate Reality and the in-
dividual souls are metaphysically identical with it. The
material world has no ontological status; its 'being' is
Brahman. The appearance of the world cannot be defined
either as existing or as non-existing. But the appearance is
always 'to' somebody: here it is to the individual souls
and it is due to avidya—the ontological ignorance of the
true nature of Brahman. The main effect of avidya is
adhyasa—avidya may be even identified with the latter.
The fact of super-imposition of the not-self on the self
and vice versa is adhyasa. Avidya or adhyasa is not an expla-
nation of the origin of the souls and the world etc., but rather
explains the present phenomenal experience. The world-appearance is not an illusion; it is mithya—an expression which
has axiological implications. The doctrine of the degrees
of reality solves the problem of plurality without affecting
the absoluteness of Brahman. The concept of vyavaharika
explaining the phenomenal experience is as vital to Advaita
Vedanta as the conception of nirguna Brahman.