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A table of contents for *Indian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_ijt\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ijt_01.php)

# The Meaning of the Absolute in Sankara and Swedenborg\*

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Every religion has two organically related aspects: the textual and the contextual. The textual aspect deals with the inner beliefs of the religion: its doctrines, its myths, its imperatives. Rituals, worship, and social dimensions of a religion constitute its contextual aspect, its outer forms. The inner forms of a religion are rather a-historical, they extend beyond history, they have no relation to time, they deal with 'in the beginning', *ab initio*. But outer forms of a religion are co-terminus with its history. In other words they are the earthly manifestation of the divine dimension. They are susceptible to change.

Text and context, inner and outer forms, are organically related. The Absolute or the Transcendent, for example, permeates both the inner and outer forms of a religion, even though it is totally independent of them. A purely transcendent God has no connection with history. But both in Christianity and in Hinduism God becomes meaningful because He manifests himself through history. He reveals himself to us. Such revelation may be mythological or experiential, and at times both. For instance the acts of God in the book of Genesis or of Brahman in *Rig Veda* represent mythological revelation. But Paul's confrontation with Christ or Arjuna's dialogue with Krishna are experiential revelation. It is revelation, whether mythological or experiential which gives historical meaning to the Absolute, and the doctrinal concept of the Transcendent becomes comprehensible because of the Absolute's revelatory presence in history.<sup>1</sup>

Swedenborg and Sankara had immediate personal encounter with the Divine. They were mystics. Mystical experience has a universal quality about it, and though mystics may use diverse philosophical structures to express and explain their experiences, nevertheless the import of their philosophical message is always identical—that is, that immediate experience of the Absolute is possible.<sup>2</sup>

\* This article is part of a larger study, *Two Religions, Two Seers: Hinduism and Christianity, Sankara and Swedenborg*, which is in progress. I am indebted to the Swedenborg Foundation for financial support; to Clayton Priestnal, Thomas Spiers and Sig Synnestvedt for intellectual encouragement; and Arthur Lopatin for research assistance.

<sup>1</sup> For further discussion see Ninian Smart, *Yogi and the Devotee*, (London, 1968), Chs. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ninian Smart, 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', *Religious Studies* I, i (October 1965), 75-87.

But similarity of the message is not the whole story. Mystical experience everywhere may be the same but mystics are born and brought up in different cultural traditions. Each mystic tends to interpret his experiences in metaphors provided by his particular tradition. However wild his interpretations may seem to the traditional guardians of a society's theological tradition, these interpretations nevertheless still are variant expressions of that tradition. However much the mystic may be branded a heretic, he usually sees himself as a person expressing the basic truths of the religious tradition he inherited. If two mystics from different traditions were to meet across the boundaries of space and time, there is no guarantee that they would agree with each other about the doctrinal implications of their experiences.

For Sankara immediate spiritual experience is the fulfilment of each man's nature and at the same time the expression of the nature of the Absolute as identical with the Self. This is in accordance with the basic thrust of the Indian religio-philosophic tradition. Swedenborg, on the other hand, thought that his experiences were unique and vouchsafed him by the grace of God in order that he might begin a new stage in the history of man's relationship to God—a relation the end of which is seen as the conjunction of man and God. This is in accord with the Judeo-Christian tradition which conceives the distinction between self and God to be basic and which defines and describes divinity accordingly. Thus though Swedenborg and Sankara claimed immediate experience of the Absolute and argued that the Absolute was at once immanent and transcendent and intimately linked with the nature of the self, the fact that they participated in different religious traditions leads them to conceptualise the Absolute differently. They use comparable terms, not identical ones, and there are structural similarities between elements of their systems, but their metaphors and their philosophical rhetoric, which are expressions of their different cultural traditions, are quite different. Another similarity is that each one of them employs similar logical arguments to prove the existence of the Absolute and to describe its nature, while at the same time both Swedenborg and Sankara accord inferior status to reason than to scriptural revelation and personal encounter with the Absolute. Whatever their diversities (and we shall be discussing them shortly) both Swedenborg and Sankara have a common religious goal—intense personal experience of the Absolute—though these experiences are conceptualized differently—and they have also a common belief in the limited value of religious dialogue and philosophical reasoning. Whatever their doctrinal differences, whatever their arguments, the similarity of basic beliefs remains. In many cases diversities in arguments and conceptualization can be seen as functionally equivalent ways of expressing these beliefs within the terms of their respective cultural traditions.

Swedenborg, in keeping with the Christian tradition, maintains that the Absolute—the Lord Creator—though intimately involved in the functioning of the universe is essentially distinct from it. Being omnipotent and omniscient, which the creation is not, the Creator

is essentially other than the world. Thus Swedenborg's mysticism rests squarely on the dualistic theism characteristic of Christianity. He is no doubt aware of the immanence of the Absolute in the universe, but he conceives this immanence to be a function dependent on the transcendental nature of the Absolute. The doctrine of degrees and of correspondences describes the mechanism of immanence within a predetermined theistic context. Sankara, on the other hand, reverses this immanence-transcendence relationship. Though he is theistic, though he believes in the divine power of Lord God, *Ishvara*, though he attaches great value to worship and the state of grace, nevertheless his theism is submerged in his concept of transtheistic Absolute.

Sankara's Absolute is *Brahman*. It is not a He, that is to say that it is not a personal being. Brahman is a state in which all subject/object duality becomes nonexistent. It is pure essence, pure consciousness, a state of pure enlightenment. Brahman is truth, knowledge and infinity; being, consciousness and bliss. But man is a limited being; he cannot comprehend Pure Being in its totality. Consequently in order to affirm his limited spiritual experience, man endows Brahman with some qualities. This is called *Saguna* (with quality) *Brahman*. Personification of *Saguna Brahman* is called *Ishvara*, or God. Just as in Christianity there is an 'historical' Jesus and an 'eternal' Jesus, likewise in Sankara's system there is an 'historical' Absolute. *Ishvara* is to be worshipped, and true devotion to him leads to the state of grace. But whereas in Swedenborg being in a state of grace is the ultimate end, in Sankara the state of grace is the penultimate end. The final end is *dhyana* or inner contemplation, a state in which the 'historical' Absolute disappears, and the contemplator becomes one with Brahman. As salt dissolves in water and pervades it all, so does Brahman pervade everything. *Tat tvam asi*: 'that thou art'. You are yourself Brahman. Sankara's Absolute, therefore, is not something other than the world, it is immanent through the universe. This is not to say that Sankara is hostile to theism. Quite the contrary. The ultimate merging with the Pure Being is not possible unless the state of grace has been achieved. For the vast majority of mankind worship and the achievement of the state of grace become ends in themselves. Both Sankara and Swedenborg, then, perceive simultaneous immanence and transcendence of the Absolute in mystical experience. Any variations between the thought of Swedenborg and Sankara arise primarily as a result of the diverse cultural traditions to which they belong.

This similarity between Swedenborg and Sankara is not being contrived. To both Swedenborg and Sankara an omnipotent and omniscient Creator is the basic article of faith. It is an indication of the practical importance that Sankara accords to *Ishvara*—*Saguna Brahman* personified—that he begins his great treatise *Brahmasutra Bhasya* with a discussion of the Creator rather than of Pure Being—the *Nirguna Brahman*. *Ishvara* is both the material and the efficient cause of the world—*abhinna nimitta upadana karana*.<sup>3</sup> Swedenborg,

<sup>3</sup> BS, I.4.23 (See list of abbreviations, p. 31).

too, maintains that there must be an omnipotent and omniscient source of all existence, an entity which is at once both the material and the efficient cause of the universe. Existence cannot come out of non-existence.<sup>4</sup> In order to avoid infinite regress, the entity out of which the existent manifold was created must itself be uncreated.<sup>5</sup> The Supreme Creator is an intelligent being. And both Swedenborg and Sankara proclaim the existence of a conscious Creator. Swedenborg's scientific genius led him to a singularly detailed and intimate awareness of the many harmonies in the natural world. For him, as for Sankara, these harmonies proclaim the existence of God. To cite but one of the many beautiful and arresting passages from Swedenborg:

The visible things in the created universe testify, that Nature has produced nothing. . .but that the Divine has produced and does produce all things from himself. . . Every one may confirm himself in favour of the Divine . . . from things visible in nature, when he sees worms. . .aspire to a change of their earthly state into a kind of heavenly one, and for that purpose creep into particular places, and lay themselves as in the womb, to be born again, and there become chrysalises, aureliae, caterpillars, nymphs and butterflies.<sup>6</sup>

An equally relevant passage from Sankara might also be cited.

in the world no non-intelligent object without being guided by an intelligence brings forth from itself the products which serve to further given aims of man. For example, houses, palaces, beds, seats, pleasure gardens and the like are contrived in life by intelligent artists in due time for the purpose of obtaining pleasure and averting pain. Exactly the same it is with this whole world. For when one sees how, for example, the earth serves the end of the enjoyment of the fruit of the manifold works. . .<sup>7</sup>

The order and harmony manifest in the universe are testimony to the fact that God is the efficient cause of the universe. If He were only the efficient cause then He would have to depend on some primeval substance. Such an independent substance would diminish the Creator's omnipotence. The will of the independent substance would limit the Creator's will. Thus the Creator must be the material as well as the efficient cause of the universe; and therefore both immanent and transcendent. He must be in the world, and also above it.

It is in their investigations of human nature that some differences between Swedenborg and Sankara become apparent. To Swedenborg man's innermost nature is emotional and moral. For him man is

<sup>4</sup> *DLW*, 282-83.

<sup>5</sup> *DLW*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> *DLW*, 349, 354.

<sup>7</sup> Cited by Paul Deussen, *The System of the Vedanta*, translated by Charles Johnston (Chicago, 1912), p. 125.

defined by his capacity to love, and not by his capacity to know. Love is a quality, not, as cognition, an entity necessarily devoid of and beyond all qualities. Thus he writes:

A wise man may perceive this from the following queries: If you remove the affection which is of love, can you think anything? and can you do anything? In proportion as the affection which is of love grows cold, do not thought, speech, and action grow cold also? and in proportion as it is heated, are they not also heated. . .? No one knows what is the life of man, unless he knows that it is love.<sup>8</sup>

He further argues that if love is the life of man and life is from God, as scriptures and experience testify, then God being life itself must also be love itself:

From the uncreate, infinite, Esse Itself and Life Itself, no being can be immediately created, because the Divine is one and not divisible; but from created and finite substances. . . beings may be created. . . Since men and angels are such beings they are recipients of life. . . Now since life and love are one, as appears from what has been said above. . . it follows that the Lord being Life Itself, is Love Itself.<sup>9</sup>

The Lord is Esse (being) itself, and the divine Esse is love. But esse cannot exist apart from existence:

for Esse *is* by Existere, and not without it. Reason comprehends this, when it thinks whether there can be any Esse which does not Exist, and whether there can be any Existere but from an Esse; and as the one has place with and not without the other, it follows that they are one, but distinctly one.<sup>10</sup>

The divine existere is Wisdom because:

Love does not exist but in wisdom, nor wisdom but from Love; wherefore, when love is in wisdom then it exists. These two are such a *one*, that they may be distinguished in thought but not in act; and as they are distinguishable in thought, but not in act, therefore it is said that they are *distinctly* one.<sup>11</sup>

But the divine esse—love, and the divine existere—wisdom—cannot exist apart from a man. Swedenborg, appealing to commonsense, writes:

Think of wisdom, and suppose it out of a man; is it anything? Can you conceive of it as something aethereal, or flaming? You cannot, unless possibly as in those principles; and if in them, it must then be wisdom in a form, such as a man has; it must be in all his form,—not one thing can be wanting for wisdom to be in it: in a word, the form of wisdom is a man;

<sup>8</sup> DLW, 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> DLW, 4.

<sup>10</sup> DLW, 14.

<sup>11</sup> DLW, 14.

and as a man is the form of wisdom he is also the form of love, mercy, clemency, good, and truth, because these make one with wisdom.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, as Swedenborg puts it, 'God is very Man'! And through Love man shares in God's uniqueness.

In Sankara's thought man and Isvara are equally related to Brahman: 'I and the Father are one' would appear to Sankara as a general statement of man's relationship to the Divine. There is no qualitative difference between man's self and Isvara's Self. They are one and the same, they are identical, if there are any differences that appear they are due to level of consciousness achieved by man. The greater the difference, the lower the level of consciousness. When Christ cried out, 'Father why hast thou forsaken me?', he established himself as man *par excellence*. To Sankara, whenever man sees himself as different from Isvara—or for that matter different from lice and fungus—it is due to his ignorance. Knowledge being the antithesis of ignorance, the ultimate end of life, the elimination of all differences, can be achieved through knowledge alone. However, there can be no knowledge without devotion. If Swedenborg proclaims that God is Love, then we can say with equal force that Sankara asserts that Brahman is Knowledge.

According to Sankara what we know, we know intuitively. In order for us to know there must be a knowing subject which in itself is never an object of knowledge, but is pure knowledge itself. (Swedenborg would say: in order for us to love there must be a loving subject which in itself is never an object of love, but is pure love itself.) This knowing subject of Sankara is the Pure Self: or Brahman. It is changeless and is incapable of being comprehended by ratiocination. If it changed there would never be an entity in which true knowledge could reside and hence knowledge would be impossible. If this changeless entity were capable of being apprehended by ratiocination it would no longer be subject but would be an object. So it must be impossible to apprehend it by rational thought. This changeless entity, which is beyond all empirical categories, is Brahman.

As far as we can see Sankara is using the same logic that Swedenborg does, except that the terms he used are knowledge and Brahman, not love and God. This parallel vocabulary should become more readily understandable if we were to recall our earlier discussion. The root issue for Sankara is pure consciousness, not grace, though grace is extremely important; and the root process for Sankara is meditation, not worship, though again worship is the penultimate process. Sankara identifies man's inmost self with Brahman; Swedenborg identifies it with Divine Love and Wisdom. Swedenborg's investigation of the Absolute via an investigation of man's nature have led him to conclude the humanity of the Absolute. Sankara concludes the Absoluteness of humanity. Sankara investigates the nature of cognition and establishes it as the Self which is beyond and above all logical and empirical categories. Swedenborg's investigations are

<sup>12</sup> DLW, 286.

different. For him man's essence is not his cognitive faculty, but it is the ability to love. Life is Love: Life is from God: God being Life himself is also Love. Love and this Divine Wisdom cannot exist apart in man.

Sankara would accept all that Swedenborg has said about love and wisdom. But in order for there to be love, Sankara argues, there must be a Self which can experience love.<sup>13</sup> This Self is, therefore, both epistemologically and ontologically prior to love. In addition, as Sankara understands it, love is an object of cognition, and therefore by its very nature subject to change and decay. How can, argues Sankara when talking of the love of Isvara, love be identified with the Absolute? Swedenborg might reply that without love man would not exist. The fact that man's very being depends on love is evidence that it is not a mere disembodied quality. Rather, love is the substantial basis of life. Love and wisdom are substance and form respectively. Without these there wouldn't be anything.

It is therefore obvious that Sankara confuses the modifications of love for love itself. This is why he thinks of love as a disembodied quality, an object of perception. Love is the substantial basis on which all perception depends.<sup>14</sup> It, rather than knowledge, is epistemologically and ontologically prior. Yet, in spite of these seeming differences, there is a fundamental unity of purpose between Swedenborg's thought and Sankara's ideas, viz., that there is an indissoluble link between man and the nature of the Absolute. Whether by love or through knowledge this link has to be strengthened.

But can the Absolute be described? For Sankara the defining characteristic of the Absolute is its fundamental indescribability. The Absolute, though realizable, cannot be predicated.<sup>15</sup> While for Swedenborg, the Absolute, though fundamentally unattainable is completely describable as Love and Wisdom. The indescribability of the Absolute expresses Sankara's uncompromising monism, while the describability of the Absolute is an indicator of Swedenborg's theism. Because the Absolute is All, says Sankara, how can it be described, because any description would be a part of the Absolute. Swedenborg is able to describe the Absolute because he conceives it theistically, and basically as other than the creation. Sankara, on the other hand, cannot describe it because he conceives it to embrace creation. Consequently Sankara has to resort to hyperbolic and negative terms to describe or to at least make an attempt to delimit the Absolute. For instance Sankara says that Brahman is both existent and nonexistent;<sup>16</sup> that it is beyond name and forms, that it is beyond limiting adjuncts (*upadhis*), and hence none of the predicates which are used to describe empirical objects or qualities can be posited of it.<sup>17</sup> Something of which nothing at all can be predicated is, according to common understanding, nonexistent. If existence indicates

<sup>13</sup> Cited by V. K. Iyer, *Advaita Vedanta* (Bombay, 1964), p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> *DLW*, 40-44.

<sup>15</sup> *BS*, II.3.36.

<sup>16</sup> Sankara citing *TU*, II. 7.

<sup>17</sup> *BS*, I.4.14-15.



the being of Brahman with all the manifest names and forms, nonexistence (*asat*) indicates the being of Brahman without names and forms. The being of Brahman without names and forms is accorded the highest ontological status because it is logically prior to and necessary for the manifestation of Brahman with forms—Isvara—as well as of the empirical and phenomenal world. Sankara supports *Taittirīya Upanisad* which says that ‘before the creation of the universe was Brahman itself, which is spoken of as nonexistent’.<sup>18</sup> The use of the term nonexistent is intended not as denial of the Absolute but rather as the ‘superlative exaltation of the divine above all “something”’.<sup>19</sup> Sankara in his commentary on *Chandīyoga Upanisad* cautions against being misled by the fact that the Absolute is beyond names and forms into affirming that it is perhaps nonexistent in the conventional use of the word. He writes:

The absolutely true Brahman, being one without a second, is regarded by dull persons as nonexistent.<sup>20</sup>

It is, therefore, necessary to resort to hyperbolic or negative terms. For instance we ourselves described Brahman hyperbolically as ‘pure essence, pure consciousness, a state of pure enlightenment. . . truth, knowledge and infinite; being, consciousness and bliss’. The modifier ‘pure’ is intended to indicate that these terms are not to be used describing qualities of another entity but rather that essence, consciousness and enlightenment are themselves the being of the Absolute. Pure consciousness, for instance, is consciousness which requires no effort nor knowledge of consciousness. Pure knowledge, similarly, is knowledge beyond the knower and the known. Likewise pure bliss is not caused, it exists as the condition of Being.<sup>21</sup>

Bliss and knowledge may appear analogous to Swedenborg’s two most important terms—Love and Wisdom. Both pairs denote the Being of the Absolute; they are not descriptions of it. But in Swedenborg’s theology these two terms have a relational quality, and indicate that the Absolute is the active and creative governor of the universe. Divine Love requires the creation of other beings by God who are capable of freely and voluntarily reciprocating His love by means of worship and activities consistent with devotion to Him. This relational nature of God and men is emphasized by Swedenborg when he says:

All things in the universe were created from the Divine Love and Divine Wisdom of God-Man. The universe in its greatest and smallest parts, as well as in its first and ultimate principles, is so full of divine love and divine wisdom, that it may be said to be divine love and divine wisdom in an image. . . All created things, in themselves, are inanimate and dead; but they are animated and vivified by this, that the Divine is in them and

<sup>18</sup> *TU*, II.7.

<sup>19</sup> Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism, East and West* (New York, 1932), p. 110.

<sup>20</sup> *CU*, introduction to VIII, cited by Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> *BS*, I.1.12-19.

they in the Divine. . . All things in the created universe are the recipients of the Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom of God-Man.<sup>22</sup>

And Swedenborg goes further. In contradistinction to Sankara who maintains that Brahman is not involved in the governance of the universe, and that Brahman and the individual self are one and the same,<sup>23</sup> Swedenborg maintains a sharp distinction between Divine Love and human love, between Divine Wisdom and human wisdom. The love and wisdom that mortals can aspire to are but pale reflections of and dependent upon the plenitude of Love and Wisdom which are the Lord's and which can never be attained by any man:

Now as the Lord is divine love and divine wisdom, and these two are essentially Himself in order that He may dwell in man and give life to man, it is necessary that He should have created and formed in man receptacles and habitations for himself, one for love, another for wisdom. The will and understanding are such receptacles and habitations. . . the will of love and the understanding of wisdom. . . these two are the Lord's in man and . . . all a man's life comes thence.<sup>24</sup>

Swedenborg's terms Love and Wisdom, as we said earlier, may appear analogous to Sankara's terms, Bliss and Knowledge. But actually they are not. Sankara is categorically opposed to providing any full description of the Absolute, because, he says, it cannot be done:

Only an entity which is an object of sense knowledge can become an object of affirmative predication of the form 'it is' or an object of negative predication of the form 'it is not'. . . Reason also proves the Brahman cannot be expressed by words denoting existence (*sat*) or non-existence (*asat*). All words used by speakers for the purpose of conveying meanings and listened to by the hearers do convey their meanings through the categories of class (*jati*), action (*kriya*), attribute (*guna*), and relation (*sambandha*), and not otherwise, for no instance to the contrary is seen. Now when we say 'cow' or 'horse', we do so through the category of class; when we say 'cooks' or 'reads' we do so through the category of action; when 'white', 'black', etc., through that of relation. But Brahman has no class and hence cannot be expressed by words like existent etc.; nor has it any attributes; nor can a word denoting action express it, for it is activity. . . . Nor has it any relation, being one without a second. It stands to reason to hold that, not being an object . . . it cannot be expressed by any word whatsoever.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *DLW*, 52, 53, 55.

<sup>23</sup> *BS*, II.1.4-12.

<sup>24</sup> *DLW*, 360.

<sup>25</sup> Sankara's commentary on *Bhagavad Gita Bhasya*, XIII. 12.

Sankara realised that such logical Absolutism may not be readily understood by the common man. He therefore suggests that from time to time the Absolute may be described with adjectives, such as omniscient, omnipotent, perfect, creator, uncaused, etc. In such cases it is to be understood that the Absolute in its conditioned aspect is being described and that this conditioned aspect has lower ontological status than the unconditioned and true Absolute which is unlimited by names and forms. Though the unconditional Absolute (Nirguna Brahman) is beyond empirical relations and is transphenomenal, it is the substrate of the being of the phenomenal world. It is the condition of its coming into existence as well as of its dissolution but it is itself untouched by the coming into being or the passing from being of the existent manifold. It is necessary for the existence of the world but the world's existence is not necessary for it. Since Nirguna Brahman is the ground which sustains the world, it has the highest ontological status. It is prior to and necessary for the being both of the Creator and his creation. But this does not mean that the Absolute is numerically distinct from the existential world—the world of names and forms—or from the Absolute conceived of as omnipotent, omniscient creator.

What then is the relation between Nirguna Brahman and the phenomenal and existential world? That of reality with appearance. Sankara uses the metaphor of rope which appears at a distance to resemble a snake to illustrate the relation. The snake is not an entity that is different from the rope; rather it is an illusion, the basis of which is rope. Likewise, Nirguna Brahman and the world of names and forms (of which be it ever remembered that God is a part) are not quantitatively distinct. The Saguna Brahman (including Isvara, Lord God) and the empirical world are both fundamentally illusory. This apparent gulf between the Absolute and the world is an illusion similar to an error of perception. From the cosmic point of view the mistake consists in identifying Brahman with its creative powers.<sup>26</sup> Brahman creates but its creativity is apparent only and has no relation to its being. When we identify Brahman with its creative powers, we get Saguna Brahman, or Isvara, Lord God. This is the Lord of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Though it might seem that omniscience, omnipotence, etc. do full justice to the majesty of the Absolute, actually these adjectives are limitations which diminish it by placing it in relation to the empirical world which is illusory. The world is illusory because it is subject to change, dissolution and contradiction. Just as Self cannot be identified with the body, emotions, or intellect, likewise the Absolute cannot be identified in any way with the phenomenal world.<sup>27</sup>

The Absolute as such is essentially other than both divine creativity and its creation. 'The Nirguna Brahman is beyond all relations. . . It is therefore beyond thought. It is nonconceptual'.<sup>28</sup> But the statement that Brahman transcends thought and words is not to be inter-

<sup>26</sup> BS, II.1.13-21.

<sup>27</sup> Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

puted to mean that it is nonexistent. Sankara's doctrine has manifest affinities with the Absolutism of Bradley, and the non-predication of God suggested by the Neo-Platonists. Through Dionysius the Areopagite a line similar to Sankara's came in the Christian Church, and influenced the mystical tradition. The only way to denote the Absolute, according to Sankara, is through silence. When an acolyte went to his teacher with the request: 'Teach me, most reverend sir, the nature of Brahman', the master remained silent until the inquiry had been repeated a few times. And then the master replied: 'I teach you indeed but you do not understand: the Brahman is silence'. Even then the purist would argue that if Brahman alone is, to predicate anything of it, even silence, is to misrepresent it!

Let me reassert that the existence of the Absolute as the true reality does not entail the absolute denial of reality to the world of appearance. The apparent reality is assigned a lower ontological status—*apara vidya*—but it is not utterly denied. Sankara is not a subjective idealist. Appearances are indeed experienced, and nothing that is experienced can be wholly false:

There could be no nonexistence (of external entities) because external entities are actually perceived.<sup>29</sup>

Thus the experience we have of the empirical world, even our dreams and hallucinations, as well as our experiences of God Isvara whom we lovingly worship, are not false. In other words no one perceives merely his own perceptions. Consequently we must attribute existence to external objects because they are cognized as such. Yet these experiences are all demonstrated by Sankara's dialectic to suffer contradiction at a higher level of reality. Their existence depends upon the indescribable Brahman which is the ground of all contingent existence. Brahman is, as we have said earlier, the condition prior to and necessary for that divine Creator, who is omnipotent and omniscient, and who creates and governs the entire universe. The universe we see exists, but the existent is Brahman. Salvation lies not merely in appreciating the Lord's work in creating and governing the universe, but rather in the existentially experienced knowledge that Brahman is the only, the self-subsisting and sole-subsisting reality. In other words Brahman is at once both God and his creation, and yet at the same time neither God nor his creation. For most of us God and creation therefore have a provisional, though quite necessary, reality. Yet they are ultimately unreal because they are both dependent upon continued acceptance of the empirical world as such as real.

But is the world and empirical experience within its fabric really real? The phenomenal world and empirical experience *appear* as real because of the knowledge provided by our intellect and by our senses, which distinguish between the knower and the known, I and Thou, Man and God. From the point of view of the Absolute, God and the empirical world, as much as dreams and hallucinations are unreal in a higher sense. In fact they are diverse appearances of the One reality—Brahman—and are produced by the fact that we

<sup>29</sup> BS, II.2.28.

identify ourselves with our limiting adjuncts—the intellect, the senses and the emotions. But these faculties are not essential to the self. Like filters on a lens they colour our knowledge, and like a prism they break up the unity, the single pure light of reality. One must therefore rise above the lower level of reality. Once man realizes Brahman, realizes that the Absolute is all, he effectively becomes Brahman, and so overcomes the antitheses and contradictions which seem to exist in the empirical world.

In Swedenborg the hierarchy of Lord, Spiritual Sun, Spiritual World, Man and Natural World is an eternal and immutable structure created by the Absolute in order to realize the goals of creation. Man, in Swedenborg's system, can never hope to rise to the highest level of reality because it is contrary to his nature to do so. Man may come face to face with God, but he cannot become the Absolute. According to Swedenborg man is created in the divine image by God out of inert matter and depends for his very life on the influx of Divine Love and Divine Wisdom from the Spiritual Sun. He is thus a recipient of life itself and all the faculties of life from God. As such he is wholly other than and a creature of God. Even his free will to choose to do good or evil is part of the divine plan which requires that the reciprocation by man of Divine Love be the product of his free choice. Swedenborg's conception of the Absolute therefore implies an irreducible dualism, because he maintains a radical distinction between God and his creation. God is the sole creator of the universe—spiritual Sun, angels, devils, the planets, men, animals, plants, rocks, etc. Creation is, therefore, real; it is not merely an appearance; and this creation implies differentiation. What is created is different from and has lower ontological status than the Creator.

Man's inmost essence is love and wisdom. But he receives this love and wisdom from God as His creature. They are not inherent in man himself; they are received. Love and wisdom must by their nature be reciprocal because Love is the *Esse* of God and Wisdom His *Existere*:

the Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom cannot but be and exist in other beings or existences created from itself. It is an essential of love, not to love itself, but to love others, and to be joined to them by love; it is also an essential of love to be loved by others, for thereby conjunction is effected. The essence of all love consists in conjunction.<sup>30</sup>

it is evident, that the divine love cannot but be and exist in other beings or existences, whom it loves, and by whom it is beloved; for when such a quality exists in all love it must needs exist in the greatest degree, that is, infinitely, in love itself. .<sup>31</sup>

But the other beings whom God loves and who love God can themselves have nothing of the divine in them. If they did, the divine love would not be there, rather it would be self love. Swedenborg says of self love:

<sup>30</sup> *DLW*, 47.

<sup>31</sup> *DLW*, 48.

For what is it for a man to love himself alone, and not anyone out of himself, by whom he may be beloved again? This is rather dissolution than conjunction: the conjunction of love arises from reciprocation, and reciprocation does not exist in self alone. . .<sup>32</sup>

Therefore God cannot be loved by other beings in whom there is anything of the infinite, or anything of the 'essence and life of love', that is to say, anything divine. For in that case Divine Love would be self love which is not true love. Let us quote from Swedenborg again:

for if there were anything of infinite, or of the essence and life of love in itself, that is, anything of divine, in them, then He would not be beloved by others, but He would love Himself; for infinite, or the Divine, is one. If this existed in others, it would be itself, and God would be self love, whereof not the least is possible in Him; for this is totally opposite to divine essence.<sup>33</sup>

It is therefore necessary that this reciprocal love take place between the Divine and other beings in whom there is 'nothing of the self-existent Divine'. In order for this to occur there must be beings and entities created from the Divine in whom there is nothing of the Divine itself. The fact that such beings are created by the Divine is proof that there is in the Divine the infinite wisdom to shape such beings.

Therefore the universe as a totality, and all the separate elements in it were created by the Absolute and have nothing of the Divine in them except by influx from the Divine:

for nothing whatever in the created universe is a substance and form in itself, nor life in itself, nor love and wisdom in itself. . .but all is from God, who is Man. . .<sup>34</sup>

In other words the created universe cannot be identified with God:

although God created the universe and all things therein from Himself, still there is nothing at all in the created universe, which is God.<sup>35</sup>

The closest Swedenborg comes to identifying the Absolute with the universe is the statement that:

The end of creation, which is that all things may return to the Creator, and that there may be conjunction, exists in its ultimates.<sup>36</sup>

But there are two major differences between this statement and San-kara's philosophy. Swedenborg would maintain that the potentiality

<sup>32</sup> *DLW*, 48.

<sup>33</sup> *DLW*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> *DLW*, 52.

<sup>35</sup> *DLW*, 283.

<sup>36</sup> *DLW*, 167.

of a conjunction of creator and creation is intrinsic in the nature of the creation. But this is a potentiality only. But for Sankara the reconciliation of the creator and creation is not merely a potential to be realized at some future date but is possible right now. All that it depends on is our rending of the veils of ignorance which keep us from perceiving the unity of existence. Secondly, the term conjunction implies that there are actually two separate entities: Creator and creation, which will come together. This is dualism. Sankara, on the other hand maintains that the problem is not one of conjunction but of realization of union. For him there neither were nor are two separate orders of reality which need to come together. The Absolute in Swedenborg projects itself in eschatological and teleological form which expresses his basis theism. In Sankara, the Absolute is conceived of non-dualistically as the totality of being.

We have said earlier that there is in Sankara the concept of Saguna Brahman, or Isvara, or the Lord. Let us now examine how Saguna Brahman, to be referred to as Isvara in the following discussion, compares to the concept of God in Swedenborg.

Isvara is a totally intellectual concept. It is an intellectual concept because it is the nature of the intellect to attribute predicates to a subject, to distinguish between subject and object, matter and form, substance and attributes. Thus when we attempt to know the Absolute by rational process we know it by means of its attributes—eternal, omniscient, omnipotent creator of the universe and its governor. It is the entity which created the universe, and thereby established the distinction between the creator and the created. This type of religious consciousness can be termed consciousness of the Absolute as opposed to Absolute consciousness. Isvara is the analogue of Lord God. He created the material of which the world is made from himself and shaped it into the empirical universe which we experience. Thus he is both the material and the efficient cause of the universe. He is also its governor who regulates its moral order. From time to time he enters into the world as a human being in order to restore the moral balance.

#### Isvara in the *Bhagvad Gita*:

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age.<sup>37</sup>

Isvara is, then, that aspect of the Absolute in which there is continuity between

the values discerned in God and the values discernible and realizable in human life. God in his perfection is the ultimate source of all values whatsoever which derive from him.<sup>38</sup>

It should therefore be obvious that the similarities between Swedenborg's concept of God and Sankara's concept of Isvara are very significant. The concept of Isvara admits of the distinction between

<sup>37</sup> *Bhagvad Gita*, Ch. IV, Verse 8 (Radhakrishnan translation).

<sup>38</sup> Radhakrishnan's comments on *BS*, p. 126.

worshipper and the object of worship which is the essence of theism. Isvara, like the Judeo-Christian God, is an object of religious devotion and of pious acts.

However, in positing two aspects of the Absolute, Sankara must relate them to each other. He does so by maintaining that Saguna and Nirguna Brahman are not different entities but are rather different aspects of the same entity. Brahman is One: but he appears differently according to the manner he is realized by imperfect individuals. Intellect and emotions require the dualism of self and the other, I and Thou, and God and Man, while intuition provides immediate perception of the unity of self and Being. Intellect and emotion are thus inferior modes of apprehension because they are dependent upon the standpoint of the individual which is by its nature limited. This form of knowledge is called *avidya*—relative experience or nescience—as opposed to *vidya*—immediate true experience. The intellect and emotions artificially cut up the unity of being into numerous arbitrary segments, but intuition results in the immediate apprehension of the unity of the Being.

Brahman has a twofold nature, the one as conditioned by limiting adjuncts of names and forms Saguna Brahman, Isvara and the other as shorn of all limiting adjuncts (Nirguna Brahman) . . . The texts of sruti speak of the two forms of Brahman, the one the object of *vidya*, and the other the object of *avidya*. In the event of Brahman being conditioned by *avidya* all practical activity involving the distinction between the devotee and object of devotion is possible. In the state of *avidya*, the various kinds of devotion are possible, some aiming at prosperity, others at gradual liberation (*karma mukti*), and others still at the increase of *karmas* (*karma samadhi*). Differences in the limiting adjuncts make them different from one another. Although the different forms of *upasana* (religious discipline) have the same supreme spirit as the object of their devotion, yet they all yield different results in accordance with their *gunas* or comparative merits . . . Although the same Atman (Self) dwells in the heart of all things movable and unmovable, yet there is in the different beings a graded revelation of the glory and power of the Immutable Eternal Atman in accordance with the graded levels of *chittal* (wisdom) which constitute the differing limiting adjuncts on the different beings.<sup>39</sup>

In other words just as light when seen through a prism appears as seven distinct colors, and as the source of the existence of the seven colors is not the prism but the one colorless light, so in the prism of *avidya* the one and only Being which is Brahman is diffracted into Isvara, individual, soul and world. The prism of *avidya* dissolves the primeval unity. The mystery of the world is that the One—the Brahman—becomes the many. It is therefore no wonder that Swedenborg and Sankara view the process of creation somewhat differently.

<sup>39</sup> *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, XIII, 12, cited by S. N. L. Shrivastava, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.



For both men the Absolute is indeed the Creator of the Universe. For Swedenborg this creation is purposeful and comprehensible. It is for a future reconciliation of God, man and nature. For Sankara the creation is intrinsically contingent. Brahman can have no motive for creation because this would contradict his absolute self sufficiency.<sup>40</sup> But would not creation without motive be chaos? Can the Omniscient One create at random, like a thoughtless man, without motive? The way out of this dilemma is the assertion that just as a prince who has no unfulfilled desires undertakes to do something without motive, purely for sport and pastime, so Brahman creates the world (of Isvara, divinities, human beings, and matter) as sport. According to Sankara the activity of the Lord may be supposed to be mere sport (*hila*), proceeding from his own nature, without any reference to any purpose.<sup>41</sup> Another metaphor used to render creation comprehensible is breathing. Just as breathing occurs automatically, without motive or desire, so the Absolute created the universe without motive, because the Absolute, like Pure Bliss, is Pure Creativity.<sup>42</sup>

For Swedenborg, God's creation of the universe was not play, not without motive. God, as mentioned earlier, created the universe out of his love and wisdom in order that his divine love would be returned by beings who had nothing of the divine in them:

reciprocation of love must have place between God and other beings or existences in whom there is nothing of the self existent Divine.<sup>43</sup>

In other words the universe was created in order that the creation may achieve conjunction with its creator.<sup>44</sup> In Swedenborg, therefore, creation has an essential historical dimension which is lacking in Sankara. This historical dimension expresses itself in a dialectical process in which the Lord reveals Himself in the empirical world as human (assumes the third degree by the Assumption of the Human, in Swedenborg's language) in order to spiritualize the natural world and thereby create the conditions for conjunction of the celestial and natural worlds. Writes Swedenborg:

The Lord from eternity . . . put on this third degree by the assumption of the Human in the world, because He could not enter into this degree but by a nature similar to the human nature; therefore only by conception from his Divine, and by nativity from a virgin; for thus He could put off nature, which in itself is dead, and yet a receptacle of the Divine, and put on the Divine. This is meant by the Lord's two states in the world, of exinaniation and glorification.<sup>45</sup>

The correspondence of the macrocosm with the microcosm and the idea that the Absolute is both the material and the efficient cause

<sup>40</sup> *BS*, II.1.32.

<sup>41</sup> *BS*, II.1.33.

<sup>42</sup> Radhakrishnan's commentary on *BS*, II.1.33, pp. 362-63.

<sup>43</sup> *DLW*, 49.

<sup>44</sup> *DLW*, 167.

<sup>45</sup> *DLW*, 234.

of the universe are expressions of the basic perception of the mystic that the divine is at once immanent in and transcends the world. Both Swedenborg and Sankara express these ideas, but the precise formulation which each gives to them varies as a result of the theism of the former and the monism of the latter.

The correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm is a basic structural element in Swedenborg's thought and expresses the fact that the universe as a whole and in its parts is created in the Divine image according to a system of graded levels of ontological proximity to the Divine-in-itself. All the created entities are in the image of God whose essence—love and wisdom—is Human. Therefore the fact that the universe and man are formally alike is because both are created by God in his Human image:

the created universe is an image representative of God-Man, and that it is his love and wisdom which in the universe are manifested in an image: not that the created universe is God-man but that it is from him. . . what is from thence, as having nothing about it which is in itself, is created and finite, and this represents the image of Him from whom it is and exists.<sup>46</sup>

And Swedenborg re-emphasizes that the created universe as a totality and each element in it are an image of God from God without a personality of its own:

the created universe is not God but from God; and being from God, His image is in it, as the image of man in a mirror, in which indeed the man appears, but still there is nothing of the man in it.<sup>47</sup>

It is by means of the correspondences between God and the universe as a whole and each separate element in it that the latter are able to receive the influx of divine love and wisdom which give them life and motion:

Few know what representations are, and what are correspondences, nor can any one know what they are, unless he knows that there is a spiritual world, and this distinct from the natural world, for between things spiritual and things natural are given correspondences, and the things which exist from things spiritual in things natural, are representations; they are called correspondences because they correspond, and representations because they represent.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, nothing is ever given in the created world which has not correspondence with the things existing in the spiritual world, and which does not thus in its own manner, represent something in the Lord's kingdom; thence is the existence and subsistence of all things. If man knew how these things are he would never attribute all things to nature as is usually done.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *DLW*, 52.

<sup>47</sup> *DLW*, 59.

<sup>48</sup> *AC*, 2987.

<sup>49</sup> *AC*, 2999.

Swedenborg thus comes very close to the concept of avidya in Sankara. The universe mirrors the Lord and is alive and evolving in so far as it is a reflection of the Divine Love and Wisdom. It is by means of correspondences between the elements in the micro-macro-cosm and the Divine Love and Wisdom that the latter are able to reside in the created universe and so animate and vivify it. For example, in relation to man, there are correspondences between Divine Love, human will, bodily heat, the heart and the blood. There are also correspondences of the Divine Wisdom, human understanding, light, the lungs, and breath. The degree to which man has received Divine Love and Wisdom can be judged not only by evaluating man's will and understanding, but also by studying the corresponding functions—breath and blood, heart and lungs.<sup>50</sup>

Sankara describes the Absolute as the infinitely small indweller within the individual and the infinitely large pervader of the universe. The Absolute is breath, and the light beyond heaven, and within the heart. These correspondences between the breath and light and the Absolute are similar to the correspondences Swedenborg makes between the Divine Wisdom, light and breath. It is interesting to note that Sankara, like Swedenborg identifies the Absolute with the sun, especially its light,<sup>51</sup> and also with breath.<sup>52</sup> He does not, however, identify it with solar heat of the heart and blood as Swedenborg does. Expressed schematically, Swedenborg makes the following correspondences:

1. God—love and wisdom
2. Love—will, heat, heart, blood
3. Wisdom—understanding, light, lungs, breath

And Sankara's correspondences are:

1. Absolute—sun, knowledge
2. Knowledge—light, breath

We can thus see that whereas on the concept of wisdom and knowledge Swedenborg and Sankara come very close, the concept of love is almost conspicuously absent in Sankara. This is largely because Sankara's mysticism has epistemological and cognitional character, whereas Swedenborg's mysticism is emotional and ethical.

We can therefore say that while both Swedenborg and Sankara exemplify the tendency of the mystics to find in the relations between microcosm and macrocosm an expression of the pervasiveness of the Absolute, the range of correspondences and the interpretation each gives to them varies according to the different types of mysticism each represents. Swedenborg's doctrine of degrees is structured according to the premise that man as well as the entire universe is a recipient of both love and wisdom. Thus correspondences in Swedenborg's thought express his theism. In Sankara's thought, however, 'knowledge' is a transphenomenal term; it transcends both the Creator

<sup>50</sup> *DLW*, 371-90.

<sup>51</sup> Radhakrishnan's commentary on *BS*, I.1.20, citing *CU*, I.6.

<sup>52</sup> *BS*, I.1.28.

and the creation. At the same time it is the essence of each. Whereas in Swedenborg's system, wisdom emanates from the Absolute; in Sankara's theology, wisdom is indeed the Absolute.

Let us probe further the role of the Absolute as both the material and the efficient cause of the universe. We have very briefly mentioned earlier that both Swedenborg and Sankara see eye to eye on this question except that Swedenborg sees a dualism between the Creator and the creation whereas Sankara after temporarily positing this dualistic relationship advances further to an Absolutism which is non-dualistic. Both argue that the universe is not created from nothing because nothing can come from nothing. And Swedenborg asserts that since the universe

is an image of God, and therefore full of God, it could not be created but in God from God: for God is *Esse* itself, and that which is must exist from an *Esse*: to create what does exist from nothing, which does not exist, is an absolute contradiction.<sup>53</sup>

This *Esse* is material. But the divine Creator is also efficient, because he shapes the universe as a whole and each individual identity in it in such a fashion that each may, according to its nature, receive the influx of Divine Love and Wisdom.<sup>54</sup> Sankara arrives at a similar position. Using the authority of the *sruti*, the Indian philosopher declares that the world comes into being from the Brahman; that it subsists in Brahman and is destroyed in it. But what of Brahman as the efficient cause? In ordinary phenomenal life the effect, for instance a pot, is not different from its material cause, namely clay.<sup>55</sup> But the effect is different from the efficient cause, the potter. In the creation of the universe, however, no other efficient cause is possible than Brahman because if there were another entity which was the efficient cause then the dictum that knowledge of everything comes from knowledge of Brahman would become self-contradictory—whence there would be another entity which would have to be known in addition to Brahman. Sankara refutes the objection that Brahman cannot be the cause of the universe because the two are different in nature: the Absolute is pure, unchanging, and beyond empirical categories; the universe is temporary, contingent, and the continent of empirical categories. Sankara argues that just as non-intelligent hair and nails proceed from intelligent beings like men and scorpions, and just as intelligent beings like beetles proceed from nonintelligent cow dung, so the universe, though different in nature, can proceed from Brahman.<sup>56</sup> If Brahman, on the other hand, were just the efficient cause it would have to depend on some primeval matter possessing equal ontological status. Furthermore this matter would have resistance and so would limit the Absolute's ability to freely

<sup>53</sup> DLW, 55.

<sup>54</sup> DLW, 65-66.

<sup>55</sup> *Chandogya Upanisad*, VI.1.4-8 (Nikhilananda translation).

<sup>56</sup> BS, II.1.6.

fashion the world, causing the omnipotence of the Absolute to be negated.

A corollary of the doctrine that the Absolute is both the material and the efficient cause of the universe is the doctrine of the identity of cause and effect. Swedenborg's doctrine of degrees, which is a major structural element of his thought, presupposes the identity of the Creator as cause of the universe with the universe as a whole and in its parts, which is the effect. The clearest statement of the doctrine of degrees is contained in the following passage:

That the end of Creation, which is, that all things may return to the Creator, and that there may be conjunction, exists in its ultimates. It may be expedient to speak first concerning ends. There are three things which follow in order; these are called the first end, the middle end, and the ultimate end; and they are also called end, cause, and effect. These three must needs be in everything, in order that it may be anything . . . an end without a cause and an effect cannot exist: so neither can a cause exist without the end from which it proceeds, and the effect in which it is (manifested): nor can an effect exist alone, without a cause and an end. This may be comprehended if it be considered that an end without, or separate from, an effect, has no existence, and is a mere term: for an end, to be actual, must be terminated, and it is terminated in its effect, in which it is first called an end, because it is an end. The agent or efficient appears indeed to exist by itself; but this is an appearance arising from the fact of its being in its effect: if it be separated from the effect, it disappears in a moment. Hence, it is evident, that these three, end, cause, and effect, must exist in everything, to make it anything.<sup>57</sup>

Divine Love and Wisdom, as the being of God, are the ends of the universe. Inasmuch as the end is all in the cause and all in the effect, this is equivalent to saying that there is identity between the Creator as end and creation as effect.<sup>58</sup> Writes Swedenborg:

From these considerations it may be clearly seen, that from the Divine, which is substance in itself, or the only and sole substance, all and everything that is created exists; thus that God is all in all in the universe.<sup>59</sup>

But though God as cause (or end, in Swedenborg's usage) is identical with the universe of effects, this identity is really the expression of a potentiality which is to be realized in the future. Cause and effect are logically and metaphysically identical but not in practice so. This is because the being of God, which is Love and Wisdom, entails that He create beings in whom there is nothing of the self-existent divine in order to reciprocate His love, and act according to His wisdom. Reciprocation is the condition for the actualization of the unity and it

<sup>57</sup> *DLW*, 167.

<sup>58</sup> *DLW*, 168-171.

<sup>59</sup> *DLW*, 198.

entails the creation by God of beings who must be distinct from God and endowed with free will. Swedenborg writes:

The universal end, which is the end of all things in creation, is, that there may be an eternal conjunction of the Creator with the created universe; and this is impossible unless there be subjects, in which His Divine may be as in Himself, consequently in which it may dwell and remain; which subjects, in order that they may be His habitations and mansions, must be recipients of His love and wisdom as from themselves; consequently they must be such as to elevate themselves to the Creator as from themselves, and join themselves with Him: without this reciprocation no conjunction can be effected. These subjects are men who can elevate and join themselves, as from themselves . . . By this conjunction the Lord is present in every work created from Himself; for every created thing is finally for the sake of man . . .<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, though there is identity between God as material cause and the creation, this identity, to be complete, must be realized as such by creation. It must know and act according to the truth that the Divine is Love and Wisdom and that these are the self-subsisting and sole-subsisting substance and form. This realization depends most especially on man who performs the function of mediating between the natural and spiritual worlds. In order to do this, man has to realize, as if from himself, the nature of the Absolute and his relation to it. He must, in other words, understand how and why God is both immanent in and transcends the universe, and act according to the implications of these truths. That is why Swedenborg stresses the importance of an understanding of the propositions that:

- . . . the Divine fills all spaces of the universe without space. . .
- . . . the Divine is in all time without time . . .
- . . . the Divine in the greatest and the least things is the same.<sup>61</sup>

Sankara's discussion of the identity of cause and effect is less sophisticated. He begins by saying that the empirical world exists in the same relation to the Absolute as does a clay jar to the clay. That is to say that the empirical world is merely a collection of new names, originating in speech, for the same substance. The empirical world has no reality of its own; the truth of the universe is that it is just Brahman. The entire body of effects, which is the world, has no existence apart from Brahman. This is why the statement that knowledge of Brahman entails knowledge of the world is pure truth. Since the Absolute is the self-subsisting and the sole-subsisting reality, the cause and its effect are identical. Sankara relies on metaphors to support his arguments. A cloth is no more than the threads which are its cause. Cloth is the effect, threads are the cause. The effect which is posterior in time can have its being only in the cause prior to its actual beginning. Undoubtedly Sankara has a concept of

<sup>60</sup> *DLW*, 170.

<sup>61</sup> *DLW*, 69, 73, 77.

causality which is far too broad if it is taken literally. It should rather be seen as a metaphor used to delineate the simultaneous immanence and transcendence of the Absolute. A scholar of Sankara is therefore right in stating:

However natural it may be to mankind to conceive the relationship between Being-in-itself and the phenomenal world from the point of view of causality, and so to regard God as cause and the world as effect,—nevertheless this view is false. For causality, which has its root in the organization of our intellect, and nowhere else, is the bond which binds all phenomena of the phenomenal world together, but it does not bind the phenomenal world with that which manifests itself through it. For between Being-in-itself and the phenomenal world there is no causality but identity: the world is the Thing-in-itself as it displays itself in the forms of our intellect.<sup>62</sup>

That the argument of identity of cause and effect is essentially metaphorical is obvious by the fact that examples rather than deductive arguments are used to prove this metaphysics. It is argued, for example, that if the effect were nonexistent in the cause, it should be possible to make yogurt from clay or milk from jars. Only because the effect is contained in the cause is it necessary to use milk to make yogurt and clay to make jars. Whatever the metaphors, however, and their limitations, Sankara does make it clear that as long as we perceive the dualism of cause and effect, the cause is not only logically prior but ontologically higher:

In spite of the non-difference of cause and effect, the effect has its self in the cause but not the cause in the effect . . . the effect and its qualities are mere appearances due to ignorance and so do not affect the cause in any way either during dissolution or subsistence of the world in Brahman even as a magician is not affected by the illusions he creates for others or a person is not affected by the illusion of his dream.<sup>63</sup>

Consequently it needs to be reasserted that Brahman 'the cause' is alone real; 'an effect' is merely a name made current by speech.<sup>64</sup> Thus Sankara, even as he argues that the Creator (as cause) is identical with the universe (the effect), he is concerned to maintain the priority of the cause over the effect; transcendence over immanence, and in this manner he comes as close as one can be to the position of Swedenborg. The only difference remains that in Swedenborg's thought the realization of the identity between cause and effect is projected into the future while in Sankara the realization can occur at any time the individual is capable of realizing the Absolute sufficiency of Brahman. In a limited sense Swedenborg does not insist as strongly on the identity between the Absolute and the world as does Sankara. This is because in Swedenborg's theology the nature of the Absolute

<sup>62</sup> Deussen, commenting on *BS*, II.1.18, pp. 255-56.

<sup>63</sup> Radhakrishnan commenting on *BS*, II.1.9.

<sup>64</sup> *BS*, II.1.18.

—Love and Wisdom—compels that the difference between the Divine and creation appear real in order that reciprocation may occur. The identity between God and man depends on the will of man to fully reciprocate the Divine Love. For Sankara the end of creation is not conjunction in the future, but the realization of unity here and now. Whatever the 'time' limit, whatever their other differences, Swedenborg and Sankara, they are not saying contradictory things about the Absolute. Their thought is not identical, yet both of them start with the common idealistic interpretation of life, that is, that a spiritual Absolute is immanent in and transcends the universe of which it is both the material and the efficient cause.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

AC: *Arcana Coelestia*.

BS: *Brahma Sutra* (Radhakrishnan edition).

CU: *Chandogya Upanisad* in *The Upanisads*, v. 4. translated with introductions and notes based on the commentary of Sankaracharya by Swami Nikhilanand.

DLW: *The Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom*.

TU: *Taittiriya Upanisad* in *The Upanisads*, v. 4. *op. cit.*