

Advaita - A short sketch of the philosophy of Non-dualism.

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Among the various schools of philosophical thought including Dvaita and Nyaya schools, one of the most developed schools of thought in India is that of the Advaita philosophy or non-dualism. The basic tenets of this school of thought is that the Universe is a manifestation of the Absolute Universal Consciousness, that there is one god or one Immaterial Sentient Existence and everything else including the universe flows from it i.e. is a part of that composite whole termed as the Brahman. It is often referred to as that which has neither any beginning nor any end; neither is born nor dies and is the formless as well as has infinite forms. Something that is not dependent on time, space or the principles of causation. This is the essence of this world – the ancient sages propounded this equivalence of mass-energy concept much earlier to the papers on special relativity by Einstein. Other concepts such as wave-particle duality also can be seen as formal mathematical concepts of the Universe similar to those projected in Advaita Vedanta. These were reexamined and explained in an understandable format by Sankara; consolidated from the Upanishads, the Gita and other sutras. From this follows the true goal of life which is to unite and merge with that supreme consciousness.

Brahman is the Absolute Consciousness which has willed to create the multifarious world and that Maya, that cosmic illusion hides the Only reality and as a result the 'One' appears as the manifold. From the primal energy store has everything evolved - all of this nature termed as Prakriti and the Purusha in the less generic dualistic Samkhya tradition; while Advaita says that the 'Consciousness' is the only truth and everything else including nature follows from it based on the 'Will' to manifest.

The process of evolution or the formation of this material Universe is through transformation of Energy and Matter. Just like the human body is a cover or an envelope for the human soul; similarly there is the Universe and the Universal soul - the Brahman. This oneness of the whole is what basic morality and ethics is all about. What else is morality - why should you not harm or kill or maim one another; essentially because that which you are harming is essentially you in another form, only a different appearance.

It is all from the same source but appears in a variety of forms. As a parable is often referred to - the sun is one but if seen in different jars of water, appears to be several suns, even though there is actually only one. Jnana Yoga also elucidates the same that the process is a cycle of evolution and involution - wherein it is oscillatory and the one whole disintegrates and degenerates into

the many and the many again coalesces and forms the one absolute truth or state.

The various Vedas and Puranas capture these subtle yet profound concepts, each Jeevatma or organism consists of individual soul or Atman and is a microcosm of the Brahman - the universal soul. The idea would be to attain the knowledge of that supreme Brahman and this is possible only through purity of the mind and the body. All false feelings of hatred, jealousy, cruelty and other such negative feelings come out of this false feeling of I – and all the sacred books whether of any religion basically tends to point us towards the real self, the step towards self-realization. It is of course very difficult to realize the Brahman, being limited in this body and mind and thus we need to transcend this body-mind complex, and that is why the path of devotion is recommended in order to grasp the worldly form or Saguna (with attributes; of Sattwa, Raja and Tamas) Brahman; as Nirguna Brahman is almost the highest order to attain; just as the child needs to first go to the nursery and then primary, secondary and finally the university, it is recommended to reach the highest truth or Nirguna Brahman we have to go through the easier path, the various forms of gods and goddesses.

However the ultimate goal of Advaita, is to go beyond name and form and the multifarious thoughts and objects and the subatomic particles that are constituents of these; and hence to understand or comprehend the underlying infinite and immaterial substratum that these subatomic particles depend on for their causative existence. This substratum is like an infinite, unending screen, from which emerge the subatomic particles which can merge, combine and create various other forms and shapes. In order to do this the only method is deep meditation, where we need to start grasping the different levels of matter and energy progressively going into Savikalpa (with form) Samadhi where you perceive the mind stuff and thoughts in their subtlest form and then the Nirvikalpa (formless) Samadhi where all duality is wiped out, where the meditator perceives the underlying substratum – at this level the observer ego (meditator) and the subject merge; so this experience can never be described.

Advaita seems to be the right antidote for current times – a sure answer for the world of disharmony and bloodshed that we see today. It teaches that each human being or for that matter any organism is actually that eternal existence, absolute knowledge and eternal bliss personified; with infinite potential and that the underlying basis for all beings is the same.

This is purely from my understanding and reading of the philosophy - any errors, may please be pointed out and corrections/suggestions are welcome.