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OF

EDITED BY
AYON MAHARAJ

VEDĀNTA

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The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Vedānta

Edited by
Ayon Maharaj

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Introduction

The Past, Present, and Future of Scholarship on Vedānta

Ayon Maharaj

“Vedānta,” which means the “end” or “culmination” (*anta*) of the Vedas, originally denoted the Upaniṣads, the ancient Vedic texts which concern the ultimate reality, Brahman/Ātman, and the means to attain salvific knowledge (*jñāna*) of this ultimate reality.¹ The Upaniṣads declare that our true transcendental Self (Ātman) is intimately related to, or in some sense ontologically akin to, the divine reality Brahman. We are ignorant of our true nature as the divine Ātman due to our attachment to worldly pleasures, which leads us to identify with the superficial body-mind complex. Therefore, according to the Upaniṣads, we must renounce sense pleasures and worldly attachments, and engage in meditative practices, in order to break our identification with the body-mind complex and attain knowledge of our true divine nature.²

Eventually, the term “Vedānta” widened in meaning to encompass the “three pillars” (*prasthānatrayī*) of Vedānta: namely, the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, and the *Brahmasūtra*. The *Gītā* (c. 200 BCE–100 CE), perhaps the most popular and influential scripture in India’s history, embeds Upaniṣadic doctrines within a broad philosophico-theological framework that strives to harmonize the paths of *jñāna* and *bhakti* (theistic devotion) and emphasizes the spiritual value of unattached action.³ The *Brahmasūtra* (c. 300 BCE–400 CE) is a compilation of 555 highly laconic aphorisms (*sūtras*) which attempt to reconcile the various teachings of the Upaniṣads.⁴ These foundational Vedāntic scriptures, in turn, were interpreted in a variety of ways, leading eventually to the emergence of numerous competing schools or sects (*sampradāyas*) within the broader philosophical tradition of Vedānta.

Vedānta has been, without a doubt, one of the most dominant and influential traditions in the history of Indian philosophy. Indeed, the importance of Vedānta extends far beyond its pivotal role in shaping Indian intellectual life for at least a

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millennium. For many present-day Hindus, Vedānta furnishes the philosophical basis of their religious beliefs and practices. Vedānta has also had a far-reaching impact on Indian society, culture, and politics.⁵ Major nineteenth-century social and religious reformers—including Rammohun Roy, Debendranath Tagore, and Keshab Chandra Sen—justified their progressive agendas by drawing upon Vedāntic ideas. Some of the leading figures of India’s cultural renaissance, including Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore, articulated their worldviews and artistic visions on the basis of Vedānta. Twentieth-century political leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Bipin Chandra Pal, in their fight to end British rule in India, also found inspiration in Vedāntic thought. As several scholars have shown, Vedānta has even permeated Western thought and culture in various ways, especially since Swami Vivekananda first spread the message of Vedānta in America and England in the final decade of the nineteenth century (Goldberg 2010; Long 2014).

Not surprisingly, then, Vedānta has taken center stage in both past and present scholarship on Indian philosophy. This pioneering research handbook brings together sixteen chapters by leading international scholars on key topics and debates in various Vedāntic traditions. All but one of the chapters were newly commissioned for this volume.⁶ The handbook has three distinguishing features. First, while Indian and Western scholarship on Vedānta since at least the 1700s has been overwhelmingly dominated by the study of Advaita Vedānta, this collection highlights the full range of philosophies within Vedānta, including not only Advaita but also Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita, Bhedābheda, Acinymbhedābheda, and numerous modern Vedāntic configurations. Second, it emphasizes that Vedānta, far from being a static tradition, is a dynamic and still vibrant philosophy that has evolved significantly in the course of its history. Third, this handbook explores the broader significance and contemporary relevance of Vedāntic philosophy by bringing it into dialogue with other Indian philosophical traditions as well as Western philosophies.

A comprehensive history of the voluminous scholarship on Vedānta since the early centuries of the Common Era would be a valuable but immensely ambitious project spanning several books. For the modest purposes of this introduction, I will sketch in four sections a very brief—and necessarily selective—survey of some of the main trends and phases in the history of scholarship on Vedānta up to the present. This high-altitude historical survey will help us discern both continuities and discontinuities between past scholarship and contemporary approaches to Vedānta. As we will see, the entire history of Vedāntic scholarship reflects a shifting and complex dialectic between what Bradley L. Herling (2006) calls “myth” and “logos.”⁷ That is, in both Indian and Western interpretations of Vedānta, the use of rational methods of exegesis, analysis, and argumentation has tended to be intertwined with various ideologically driven agendas and myths. In the fifth and final section of this introduction, I will explain the organization and aims of this handbook.

I.1 The Emergence of Competing Vedāntic *Sampradāyas*

Scholarship on Vedānta can be said to have begun in the first few centuries of the Common Era, when early Indian thinkers established competing schools (*sampradāyas*)



of Vedānta by articulating and defending a particular systematic interpretation of the Vedāntic scriptures. Some of the earliest Vedāntins, including Bhartṛprapañca, seem to have been proponents of the Bhedābheda school, which propounds the simultaneous “difference and non-difference” between the individual soul (*jīva*) and Brahman (Nicholson 2010: 28–30). Another early Vedāntic commentator was Gauḍapāda (c. 500 CE), who composed a verse commentary on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad defending the standpoint of Advaita Vedānta. Śaṅkara (c. 700–800 CE), who belonged to the Advaitic lineage of Gauḍapāda, wrote massively influential commentaries on the entire *prasthānatrayī* and attempted to refute the Bhedābheda interpretation of Bhartṛprapañca. Meanwhile, Bhāskara, who was an approximate contemporary of Śaṅkara, defended a Bhedābheda interpretation of the *Brahmasūtra* in explicit *opposition* to Śaṅkara’s Advaitic interpretation.

Such polemical infighting among commentators within the Vedāntic fold only intensified in subsequent centuries. By the sixteenth century, numerous Vedāntic *sampradāyas* were established. Four of the most important traditional Vedāntic *sampradāyas*⁸ are as follows, with their founder(s) or earliest known exponent(s) listed in parentheses:

1. Advaita Vedānta (Gauḍapāda, Śaṅkara)
2. Viśiṣṭādvaita (or Śrīvaiṣṇava) Vedānta (Rāmānuja)
3. Mādhva (or Dvaita) Vedānta (Madhva)
4. Bhedābheda Vedānta (Bhartṛprapañca)
 - (a) Aupādhika Bhedābheda (Bhāskara)
 - (b) Svābhāvika Bhedābheda (Nimbārka)
 - (c) Acintyabhedābheda/Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism (Caitanya)
 - (d) Śuddhādvaita/Puṣṭimārga (Vallabha)

These Vedāntic *sampradāyas* diverged on a number of doctrinal points, including the nature and interrelationship of Brahman, the individual soul (*jīva*), and the universe (*jagat*); the nature of liberation (*mukti*); and the spiritual practices (*sādhana*s) necessary for attaining liberation. It should be noted that the four subschools of Bhedābheda Vedānta also differed on various points of doctrine, though they all accepted the simultaneous difference and non-difference of the *jīva* and Brahman.⁹ Exponents of different Vedāntic *sampradāyas* defended their views as the only correct ones, insisting that their *sampradāya* alone represented the one and only true Vedānta. Consequently, prior to the medieval period, Vedāntins of different *sampradāyas* did not actually see themselves as belonging to a common school or tradition known as “Vedānta” (Nicholson 2010: 3).

During the medieval period, however, all of these Vedāntic schools, in spite of their numerous doctrinal differences, were grouped under the broad label of “Vedānta” or “Uttara Mīmāṃsā” and were distinguished from other major Vedic schools of Indian philosophy, especially Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Pūrva Mīmāṃsā. Pūrva (“Earlier”) Mīmāṃsā was a philosophical school that provided both a methodology for interpreting Vedic injunctions regarding rituals and a philosophical justification for the beliefs on which ritualism was based (Chatterjee and Datta 1939: 313–40). According to this school, those who correctly perform the Vedic rituals will reap the fruits of these rituals in this earthly life as well as in heaven after the death of the body.





The Vedānta school was also known as Uttara (“Later”) Mīmāṃsā, not only because it accepted, adapted, or developed many Pūrva Mīmāṃsā doctrines but also because it went *beyond* Pūrva Mīmāṃsā by emphasizing the transiency of the fruits of Vedic ritualism and the superiority of the knowledge of Brahman, which affords eternal liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

It is well beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss all the doctrines of the various Vedāntic *sampradāyas* and their subschools. The first four chapters of this handbook provide detailed discussions, respectively, of Advaita Vedānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, Mādhva Vedānta, and Acintyabhedābheda Vedānta. Here, I will only outline very briefly the views of some of the major Vedāntic schools on six key points of doctrine.¹⁰

1.1.1 The Nature of Brahman

Advaita Vedānta is the only Vedāntic school that holds that Brahman is ultimately devoid of all attributes (*nirguṇa*). According to this school, the personal God (*īśvara*) is the same attributeless Brahman associated with the unreal “limiting adjunct” (*upādhi*) of lordship. Hence, for Advaita Vedāntins, the personal God is real from the empirical (*vyāvahārika*) standpoint but unreal from the ultimate (*pāramārthika*) standpoint.¹¹

All of the other Vedāntic schools are theistic, in that they hold that Brahman is essentially personal and endowed with attributes (*saguṇa*) such as omniscience and omnipotence. It should be noted, however, that these theistic schools of Vedānta sometimes differ in subtle ways regarding *which* precise attributes Brahman possesses. Moreover, many of these theistic Vedāntic schools—including Viśiṣṭādvaita, Mādhva Vedānta, and some Bhedābheda subschools like Acintyabhedābheda and Śuddhādvaita—conceive *saguṇa* Brahman specifically as Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa.

Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, Mādhva Vedānta, and many (but not all) schools of Bhedābheda Vedānta maintain that Brahman is *exclusively* personal. The theistic schools of Śuddhādvaita and Acintyabhedābheda are unique in accepting the impersonal (*nirguṇa*) Brahman as a real but minor aspect of the Supreme Person Kṛṣṇa Himself. According to Caitanya’s Acintyabhedābheda school, the impersonal Advaitic Brahman of the Upaniṣads is the “peripheral brilliance” (*tanubhā*) of Kṛṣṇa.¹² Similarly, Vallabha’s Śuddhādvaita holds that the “*akṣara*” Brahman contemplated by *jñānīs* is nothing more than Kṛṣṇa’s “foot” (*caraṇam*), from which the entire universe emerges.¹³ These schools thereby turn the tables on Advaita Vedānta, which ontologically privileges *nirguṇa* Brahman over the ultimately unreal *īśvara*.

1.1.2 The Ontological Status of the World

Advaita Vedānta is the only Vedāntic school which holds that the world does not exist from the ultimate standpoint. All the other Vedāntic schools take the world to be real, though some of them—such as Bhāskara’s Aupādhika Bhedābheda—consider the world to be, in some sense, *less* real than Brahman.¹⁴ Interestingly, Vallabha’s follower Giridhara was the first to designate Vallabha’s school of Bhedābheda as “Śuddhādvaita” (“pure nondualism”) in polemical contrast to what he perceived to be the *incomplete*





nondualism of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, which—he claimed—compromised the nonduality of Brahman by positing *māyā*, the source of this unreal world appearance, as a power *apart* from Brahman.¹⁵

I.1.3 The Relation Between Brahman and the World

All Vedāntic *sampradāyas* grapple in various ways with the problem of explaining how the perfect, pure, and infinite Brahman can relate to an imperfect, impure, and ever-changing world. Advaita Vedānta is unique among Vedāntic traditions in explaining Brahman's relation to the world by appealing to a dual-standpoint ontology. From the empirical standpoint, both *īśvara* and the world are real, and *īśvara* is both the material (*upādāna*) and the efficient (*nimitta*) cause of the world. However, from the ultimate standpoint, nondual Brahman alone exists, so there *is* no world and, hence, no relation whatsoever between Brahman and the (nonexistent) world. Accordingly, Advaitins subscribe to *vivartavāda*, the doctrine that the world is an illusory appearance (*vivarta*) of Brahman.

In contrast to Advaita Vedānta, both Viśiṣṭādvaita and Bhedābheda subscribe to *pariṇāmavāda*, the doctrine that Brahman, or some aspect of Brahman, actually transforms into the world. Viśiṣṭādvaita and all the various schools of Bhedābheda agree that Brahman is both the efficient and material cause of the world. However, each Vedāntic school explains the precise relationship between Brahman and the world in a subtly different way. For instance, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, Brahman stands to the world as the soul (*śarīri*) to the body (*śarīra*), with the latter being entirely dependent for its continued existence on the former. According to Bhedābheda Vedānta, Brahman is both different and non-different from the world. The Śuddhādvaita subschool of Bhedābheda upholds the paradoxical doctrine of *avikṛta-pariṇāma*, the view that Brahman transforms into the world while somehow still remaining unchanged (*avikṛta*). According to Acintyābhedābheda, the world is a transformation of Kṛṣṇa's energy (*śakti*), which is both different and non-different from him.¹⁶

Mādhva Vedānta is the only theistic school of Vedānta that rejects *pariṇāmavāda*. According to Mādhva Vedāntins, there is an ontological difference (*bheda*) between Brahman and the world, and Brahman is the efficient but *not* the material cause of the world. Brahman alone is independent (*svatantra*), while the world is entirely dependent upon Brahman for its existence and preservation.

I.1.4 The Relation Between Brahman and the Individual Soul

Advaita Vedānta holds that the individual soul (*jīva*) is absolutely identical with Brahman but *appears* to be a limited entity apart from Brahman because it is associated with an unreal limiting adjunct (*upādhi*). All schools of Bhedābheda maintain that Brahman is both different *and* non-different from individual souls. Bhedābheda-vādins explain the relation between Brahman and individual souls as the relation of a whole and its parts, invoking analogies like fire and its sparks and the ocean and its waves. Interestingly, the Aupādhika Bhedābheda-vādin Bhāskara appears to come close to Śaṅkara in maintaining that the individual soul is, in its essence, identical with



Brahman but is limited and subject to suffering when it is associated with limiting adjuncts (*upādhis*). Crucially, however, while Śaṅkara takes these *upādhis* to be unreal, Bhāskara takes them to be real and, hence, holds that the individual soul is *actually* subject to suffering and bondage until its *upādhis* are removed.

In Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, individual souls, like the world, relate to Brahman as the body stands to the soul, with the former being intimately connected with, yet entirely dependent on, the latter. Mādhva Vedānta holds that individual souls are “reflections” (*pratibimbās*) of Brahman in that they depend entirely on Brahman for their existence and remain eternally different from Him.

I.1.5 The State of Salvation

Most Vedāntic schools agree that our salvation consists in attaining liberation (*mukti*) from the suffering-filled cycle of birth and death. However, followers of Acintyābheda hold that the supreme salvation is not *mukti* but *bhakti*, the supreme love of Kṛṣṇa, which nonetheless entails *mukti* as an “incidental by-product” (*tuccha-phala*) (Nelson 2004: 349). Vedāntic schools often differ on two key soteriological questions. First, what is the precise nature of salvation? Second, is it possible to attain *jīvanmukti*, the state of liberation while living?

Regarding the first question, there are only two schools of Vedānta—namely, Advaita Vedānta and Aupādhika Bhedaḥbheda—that hold that no sense of individuality remains in the liberated state. According to Advaita Vedānta, liberation consists in knowledge of our identity with nondual Brahman, which entails that our sense of being an individual—which is itself a product of ignorance—does not remain in the state of liberation. According to the Aupādhika Bhedaḥbheda of Bhāskara, Brahman becomes individual souls through *upādhis*, and since liberation consists in the total eradication of these *upādhis*, the liberated soul would be one with Brahman and no longer an individual. Again, it should be noted that the key difference between Advaita Vedānta and Aupādhika Bhedaḥbheda on this issue is that the latter, but not the former, takes *upādhis* to be real.

All the other Vedāntic schools hold that individuality remains in the liberated state. For most theistic schools of Vedānta, the highest salvation for an individual soul consists in residing eternally in a superterrestrial realm—conceived variously as *Vaikuṇṭhaloka*, *Viṣṇuloka*, or *Goloka*—with a nonphysical body, blissfully serving, and communing with, the personal God (Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa). While Mādhva Vedānta maintains that the liberated soul remains eternally distinct from God, other theistic schools of Vedānta posit a more intimate relationship between the liberated soul and God. Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedāntins, for instance, hold that the liberated soul becomes “one with God in knowledge and bliss but not in power” (Tapasyānanda 1990: 59).

We can now briefly consider the second question regarding the possibility of *jīvanmukti*. Advaita Vedānta is well known for accepting the state of *jīvanmukti*. For Advaitins, all that is necessary for liberation is knowledge of our identity with nondual Brahman, which seems to be compatible with bodily existence. Nonetheless, as Lance E. Nelson (1996) and Klara Hedling (Chapter 10 in this volume) have shown, the metaphysics of Advaita Vedānta makes it difficult, if not impossible, to accept fully the



possibility of *jīvanmukti*. Since this world and our embodied existence are a product of ignorance, the liberating knowledge of Brahman—which is tantamount to the removal of ignorance—seems to be logically incompatible with continued bodily existence. Hence, many post-Śaṅkara Advaitins hold that even the *jīvanmukta* has a “trace of ignorance” (*avidyā-leśa*), which is responsible for the *prārabdha-karma* (the *karma* that has not yet fructified) that sustains his physical body.

Non-Advaitic schools of Vedānta adopt a variety of stances toward *jīvanmukti*. For instance, Viśiṣṭādvaitins as well as followers of Nimbārka’s Svābhāvika Bhedābheda reject outright the possibility of *jīvanmukti*. Nonetheless, Viśiṣṭādvaitins do accept the possibility of attaining the high spiritual state of a *sthītaprajña* (a person of settled knowledge) while still in the body, and they maintain that complete liberation is assured for the *sthītaprajña* after death. Similarly, Madhva rejects the possibility of *jīvanmukti* but accepts the possibility of attaining the direct and immediate knowledge of God (*aparokṣa-jñāna*) while still in the body, which is a precondition for full liberation after death. The later Mādhva thinker Vyāsātīrtha complicates matters, however, by explicitly equating *aparokṣa-jñāna* with *jīvanmukti* (Sheridan 1996: 107). Meanwhile, followers of Caitanya’s Acintyābheda fully accept the possibility of *jīvanmukti*. A key source text in this tradition is Rūpa Gosvāmī’s *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.187, which defines the “*jīvanmukta*” as “one whose activities are performed with body, mind and speech in servitude to Hari” (Gosvāmin 2003: 59).

1.1.6 Scheme of Spiritual Practices

Since the various schools of Vedānta hold differing conceptions of both Brahman and salvation, they naturally differ on which spiritual practices lead to salvation and the relative priority of these practices. It is also important to note that while many Vedāntic schools use the same terms to refer to certain types of spiritual practice—especially the terms *bhakti-yoga* (the practice of devotion), *karma-yoga* (the practice of unattached action), *jñāna-yoga* (the practice of knowledge), and *dhyāna-yoga* or simply *yoga* (the practice of meditation)—these schools often characterize these practices quite differently. For instance, while Advaita Vedāntins understand *jñāna-yoga* as a practice involving reflection and meditation on Upaniṣadic statements about the identity of the individual soul with nondual Brahman, Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedāntins understand *jñāna-yoga* as the practice of meditating on one’s own eternal individual soul and discriminating between the soul and the body-mind complex.

According to Advaita Vedānta, *jñāna-yoga* is the only direct path to liberation. Nonetheless, *karma-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga* may lead *indirectly* to liberation by purifying and concentrating the mind, thereby making one eligible to practice *jñāna-yoga*, which alone leads to liberation. For Advaitins, then, *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* cannot be practiced at the same time, since they are meant for different grades of spiritual aspirant.

Other schools of Vedānta—including many Bhedābheda schools and Viśiṣṭādvaita—reject this Advaitic position, advocating a *combination* of *jñāna-yoga* and *karma-yoga* (*jñāna-karma-samuccaya*). Within the Bhedābheda tradition, there is a considerable diversity of views regarding spiritual practice. For instance, while





Bhāskara's Aupādhika Bhedābheda gives no importance at all to *bhakti-yoga*, Caitanya's Acintyabhedābheda maintains that *bhakti-yoga* is the highest spiritual practice. According to Acintyabhedābheda, *bhakti-yoga* alone leads to the highest salvation, while other practices like *jñāna-yoga* and *karma-yoga* may be helpful at a preliminary stage but are by no means necessary (Kapoor 1976: 178–9).

According to Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, the simultaneous practice of *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* in a devotional spirit eventually culminates in the spiritual realization of one's eternal soul and its utter dependence on God (*ātmāvalokanam*), which in turn makes one eligible to practice *bhakti-yoga*—that is, constant meditative recollection of God—which, by God's grace, leads directly to salvation.¹⁷

Within the Vedāntic tradition, there is also a wide range of views concerning the question of whether, and the extent to which, God's grace is necessary for salvation. Devotional schools of Vedānta like Viśiṣṭādvaita, Śuddhādvaita, Acintyabhedābheda, and Mādhva Vedānta strongly insist on the necessity of God's grace for attaining salvation. Other Vedāntic schools, such as Bhāskara's Aupādhika Bhedābheda, do not emphasize God's grace at all. While it is often assumed that Advaita Vedānta accords no importance to God's grace, Malkovsky (2001) has shown that Śaṅkara, at numerous places in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*, explicitly states that the grace of *īśvara* is necessary for liberation.

It should also be noted that Vedāntic schools are by no means monolithic, and it is often the case that different thinkers and traditions *within* a particular Vedāntic school hold differing views on a variety of issues. For instance, in medieval India, two subschools emerged within Viśiṣṭādvaita—namely, the Teṅkalai and the Vaḍagalai—which took different stands on the “grace versus works” question, with the Teṅkalai school arguing that God's grace alone is sufficient for salvation, and the Vaḍagalai school arguing that God's grace must be combined with self-effort (Mumme 1988).

I.2 Vedāntic Doxographies in Medieval India

It would be misleading to suggest that sectarian polemics among the various Vedāntic *sampradāyas* was restricted to an early period in India's history. In fact, such polemical disputation among Vedāntins has continued unabated even up to the present, especially among traditionally trained Indian pundits belonging to different Vedāntic lineages. However, during India's medieval period, a new doxographic methodology emerged within Vedāntic thought—one that played a decisive role in paving the way for modern formations of “Hinduism” and “Vedānta” as broad, syncretic worldviews encompassing and harmonizing innumerable philosophical and theological systems (Nicholson 2010: 144–65; Halbfass [1981] 1988: 349–68; Barua, Chapter 9 in this volume).

Vedāntic doxographers, instead of rejecting outright philosophical traditions other than their own, reconceived these traditions as inferior stages in elaborate hierarchical schemas culminating in their own preferred Vedāntic system. Most of these medieval Vedāntic doxographies were developed by Advaitins such as Mādhva and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. Non-Advaitic medieval doxographies include the





Viśiṣṭādvaitin Veṅkaṭanātha's *Paramatabhaṅga* (Refutation of Other Views) and the Acintyabhedābhedaśāstrin Baladeva's *Tattvadīpikā* (An Illumination of Reality).¹⁸

The Advaitin Mādhava's (1978) highly influential *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* (A Compendium of All Philosophies; c. fourteenth century) presented a hierarchical schema of sixteen philosophical schools beginning with the materialist philosophy of Cārvāka and the non-Vedic schools of Buddhism and Jainism and culminating, predictably, in Advaita Vedānta. For Mādhava, non-Advaitic schools were not so much wrong as they *approximated*, to varying degrees, the one perfect and absolutely true philosophy of Advaita. Significantly, while we might expect Mādhava to place Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta and Madhva's Dvaita Vedānta just below Advaita Vedānta, he actually placed these schools much lower in his schema, just after Jainism and before the theistic traditions of the Pāśupatas and the Śaivas. Mādhava's relegation of Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita to inferior positions suggests that he considered these schools to pose the greatest threat to Advaita Vedānta (Nicholson 2010: 160–1).

The *Caturmatasārasamgraha* (A Synopsis of the Essence of Four Schools), composed by the Śaiva-influenced Advaita Vedāntin Appaya Dikṣita (1520–93) (Appaya Dikṣita 2000), is a unique doxographical account of four Vedāntic schools arranged hierarchically: Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Śivādvaita, and Advaita. Unlike Mādhava, Appaya viewed Vedānta as a unified philosophical tradition encompassing four major schools, which have varying degrees of truth (Duquette 2014; Pollock 2004: 769). Appaya's doxography, although much less influential than Mādhava's, is nonetheless historically significant, since it anticipated the hierarchical accounts of Vedāntic traditions presented by modern Vedāntins such as Swami Vivekananda and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan centuries later.

Medieval Vedāntic doxographies had two major historical consequences. First, these doxographies helped establish Vedānta as a dominant and influential Indian philosophical tradition by casting non-Vedāntic schools such as Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Yoga, and Sāṃkhya as inferior approximations to Vedānta. Second, as we will see shortly, since earlier generations of Western Indologists and Indian thinkers often relied heavily on Advaitic doxographies such as Mādhava's *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, these doxographies played a major role in establishing the hegemony of Advaita Vedānta in scholarship on Vedānta since the late eighteenth century (Nicholson 2010: 160–1).

I.3 1740–1890: Advaita, Monotheism, “Pantheism,” and the Beginnings of Western Indology

In the eighteenth century, scholarship on Vedānta began to evolve considerably for at least two main reasons. First, European scholars and missionaries started to study Vedāntic texts in the original Sanskrit and to translate them into Western languages. Second, many indigenous Indians—especially those belonging to the newly formed Brāhmo Samāj—drew upon Vedāntic ideas in order to reform and modernize Hinduism from within and to develop a bulwark against the increasingly strident criticisms of Christian missionaries (Halbfass [1981] 1988: 197–216; Hatcher 2008). As we will see, early interpretations of Vedānta in both India and the West reflect a





complex intertwinement of myth and logos: the increasing reliance on sophisticated historical and philological methods often went hand in hand with theological biases and ideological agendas of various sorts.

One of the earliest Western accounts of Indian philosophical systems is contained in a 1740 letter of the French Jesuit missionary Jean François Pons, which was widely read by European scholars as soon as it appeared in a volume of missionary writings in 1743 (Aimé-Martin 1843: 642–8).¹⁹ In this letter, Pons provided a synopsis of the “school of Vedānta” (*l'école de Vedāntam*) and claimed, tellingly, that “Sankrâchâry” was its “founder” (Aimé-Martin 1843: 646). He noted further that the vast majority of Brahmins and *sannyāsins* in India subscribe to Śaṅkara’s school. According to Pons, the Vedānta school maintains that “nothing exists” apart from the nondual “I or Self” (Aimé-Martin 1843: 646). He added, “The key to the salvation of the soul is contained in the words that these false sages must ceaselessly repeat with a measure of pride surpassing Lucifer’s: ‘I am the Supreme Being.— *Aham ava [eva] param Brahma*” (Aimé-Martin 1843: 646). Pons’s ideological agenda becomes evident here: by conflating the entire “school of Vedānta” with the Luciferian doctrine of Advaita Vedānta and taking it to be the metaphysical foundation of the Hindu religion as a whole, he sought to justify fledgling missionary efforts to convert Hindus to Christianity.²⁰

In 1784, the British philologist Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal, thereby inaugurating the discipline of Indology, the historico-philological study of Indian texts in the original Sanskrit (Halbfass [1981] 1988: 62–4). As we will see, however, early British interpretations of Vedānta, far from being ideologically neutral, were shaped heavily by Christian theological commitments and Advaita Vedānta.

In 1785, Charles Wilkins published the first English translation of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, claiming in his preface that the scripture upholds the monotheistic doctrine of the “unity of the Godhead” and rejects the “polytheism” of the Vedas (Wilkins 1785: 24). In 1794, Jones presented the first sustained exposition of Vedānta in English (Jones 1807: 229–52).²¹ Relying on late medieval Advaitic doxographies, Jones presented “*Védānta*” as one of the six Vedic philosophical traditions—alongside Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Pūrva Mīmāṃsā—and contrasted these traditions with “heterodox” (i.e., non-Vedic) philosophies such as Buddhism and Jainism (Jones 1807: 234–5).²² Jones mentioned that he studied the *Brahmasūtra*, along with Śaṅkara’s commentary, under the guidance of a traditional Indian pundit in the Advaitic tradition (1807: 235). Tellingly, instead of acknowledging the existence of non-Advaitic commentaries on the *Brahmasūtra*, Jones took the “incomparable” Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta to be the authoritative and right understanding of Vedānta as a whole (1807: 239). However, Jones’s supposedly Śaṅkaran understanding of Vedānta is, in fact, highly idiosyncratic. Influenced by the philosopher George Berkeley, Jones interpreted Vedānta as a theistically grounded subjective idealism. The “fundamental tenet” of Vedānta, according to Jones, is that matter “has no essence independent of mental perception, that existence and perceptibility are convertible terms, that external appearances and sensations are illusory, and would vanish into nothing, if the divine energy, which alone sustains them, were suspended but for a moment” (1807: 238–9). Venturing into comparative





philosophy, he then noted that this Vedāntic view has been defended “in the present century with great elegance” by Berkeley, who famously maintained that *esse est percipi* (Jones 1807: 239). Jones’s interpretation of Vedānta, then, was based on two highly tendentious interpretive moves. First, like Pons before him, Jones uncritically accepted Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta as the authoritative interpretation of Vedānta and did not even acknowledge alternative interpretations. Second, he (mis)interpreted Śaṅkara’s philosophy in a Berkeleyan manner as a “system wholly built on the purest devotion” (1807: 239–40)—that is, as a subjective idealist philosophy grounded in a monotheistic faith in the “supremacy of an all-creating and all-preserving spirit, infinitely wise, good, and powerful” (1807: 250).

In 1811, the Baptist missionary William Ward published a book on “the philosophical systems of the Hindoos,” which included the first English translation of the *Vedāntasāra*, a fifteenth-century text outlining the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. He claimed that the *Vedāntasāra* expresses in condensed form the Vedāntic philosophy of the *Brahmasūtra* and the *Gītā* (Ward [1820] 2009: 171). Like Pons and Jones, Ward simply conflated Vedānta with Advaita Vedānta and did not so much as mention non-Advaitic traditions of Vedānta. Ward, like Jones, also interpreted Advaita Vedānta as a subjective idealist philosophy that takes the world to be an “illusion” (Ward [1820] 2009: 183–7). However, while Jones claimed that Śaṅkara’s subjective idealist system (like Berkeley’s) is grounded in monotheism, Ward explicitly *criticized* Vedānta—by which he meant Advaita Vedānta—for conceiving the ultimate reality as a mere impersonal “abstraction” rather than as the supreme personal God (Ward [1820] 2009: xxxiii). While Ward simply may not have been aware of non-Advaitic traditions of Vedānta, his conflation of Vedānta with Advaita Vedānta also served his ideological agenda. By claiming that no Indian philosophical system accepted the supreme monotheistic God, Ward was able to justify Christian missionary efforts in India. Since the “Hindoo can have no idea that the Almighty is accessible,” Christian missionaries like Ward himself had a sacred duty to save the benighted Hindus by bringing them into the Christian fold (Ward [1820] 2009: xlvi).

In 1827, the British Sanskritist H.T. Colebrooke delivered an important and influential lecture on Vedānta at the Royal Asiatic Society. Notably, unlike Ward and Jones, Colebrooke acknowledged that there are “several sects” of Vedānta, the most prominent of which is Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta (Colebrooke 1829: 2). While Colebrooke relied on Śaṅkara’s commentary in his exposition of the *Brahmasūtra*, he also noted that there are many other commentaries in non-Advaitic traditions of Vedānta, including the commentaries of Rāmānuja, Vallabha, Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara, Madhva, Nīlakaṇṭha, and Vijñānabhikṣu (Colebrooke 1829: 7–8). Interestingly, Colebrooke, in stark contrast to Pons, Ward, and Jones, claimed that the notion that “the versatile world is an illusion (*máyá*) ... does not appear to be the doctrine of the text of the *Vedāntá*” (1829: 39). He found “nothing which countenances” subjective idealism “in the *sūtras* of VYĀSA nor in the gloss of S’ANCARA” (1829: 39). According to Colebrooke, the subjective idealist interpretation of Vedānta was a “later growth” found in the “minor commentaries” and “elementary treatises” of post-Śaṅkara Advaitins (1829: 39).²³ Colebrooke, then, was one of the first scholars not only to acknowledge non-Advaitic



traditions of Vedānta (if only in passing) but also to champion a non-illusionistic interpretation of both the *Brahmasūtra* and Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta.²⁴

Śaṅkara also loomed large in indigenous Indian expositions of Vedānta during this period as well as in contemporary Christian missionary responses to these expositions. The great Indian socioreligious reformer Rammohun Roy (c. 1774–1833) sought to reform Hinduism by clarifying its rational basis in the Vedānta of the Upaniṣads and purging Hinduism of what he perceived as its inauthentic and pernicious elements, particularly polytheism, idol worship, and rituals (Hatcher 2008: 19–32; Green 2016: 79–81). In his Bengali and English writings, Rammohun argued that the *Brahmasūtra* and the Upaniṣads propound a rational monotheism. In his *Translation of an Abridgment of the Vedant* (1816), he summarized the *Brahmasūtra* and claimed that its main purport is to establish the “unity of the Supreme Being, and that He alone is the object of propitiation and worship” (Ghose 1901: i). Rammohun also translated several Upaniṣads into English. Tellingly, in the titles of his English translations of the Upaniṣads, he indicated that he followed “the Commentary of the Celebrated Shankar-Acharya” (Ghose 1901: 85), even though his interpretations of the Upaniṣads actually deviated quite significantly from Śaṅkara's Advaitic commentaries. For Rammohun, the main aim of the Upaniṣads was to inculcate worship of the formless personal God. Hence, in implicit contrast to Śaṅkara, Rammohun maintained that the Upaniṣads affirm the reality of the world and do not teach that renunciation of the world is necessary for salvation (Killingley 1981). Recognizing the enormous intellectual and cultural prestige of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, Rammohun tacitly reinterpreted it as a world-affirming theology of monotheism. Founding the influential Brāhmo Samāj in 1828, he sought to undermine the conversion efforts of Christian missionaries in India by recasting Hinduism as an ancient Vedāntic monotheism rivaling Christianity (Halbfass [1981] 1988: 197–216).

Several charismatic individuals, including Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905), helped make the Brāhmo Samāj a formidable cultural and religious force in nineteenth-century Bengal.²⁵ Debendranath, following in Rammohun's footsteps, organized widely attended meetings for Brāhmos and propagated the monotheistic message of Vedānta through various channels (Hatcher 2008: 33–48). However, in contrast to Rammohun, Debendranath and his followers *contrasted* the monotheistic, world-affirming doctrine of the Upaniṣads with what they perceived to be Śaṅkara's world-negating philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. According to Debendranath, the true and original Vedānta of the Upaniṣads propounds a non-pantheistic monotheism, according to which we are all “servants and worshippers” of the Supreme Lord, who is the efficient but not the material cause of this very real world (Tagore [1849] 1928: 57–8).

Not surprisingly, Christian missionaries perceived Vedāntically inspired reform movements such as the Brāhmo Samāj as a major threat to their conversion efforts. In response, missionaries strived to show that the increasingly popular monotheistic interpretation of Vedānta was mistaken and newfangled. For instance, in a polemical tome published in 1839, the Protestant missionary Alexander Duff argued that Hinduism is nothing but a “stupendous system of pantheism” (Duff 1839: 37). Duff, like many of his contemporaries, understood the Vedāntic basis of Hinduism in terms of Advaita Vedānta. Accordingly, he argued that Vedānta is nothing but the blasphemous



pantheistic doctrine that we are all one with Brahman, a “frigid passionless abstraction” (Duff 1839: 63) devoid of any “moral attributes” (Duff 1839: 58). Like the missionaries Pons and Ward, Duff portrayed Vedānta as a “pantheistic” Advaitic system in part as a means of justifying Christian missionary efforts to bring Hindus into the Christian monotheistic fold.

The nineteenth-century German reception of Vedānta had two major strands which ran in parallel: first, a tendency to interpret Vedānta through the lens of “pantheism”; second, a tendency to equate Vedānta with the subjective idealism of Advaita Vedānta. Between 1785 and 1789, numerous European philosophers—including G.E. Lessing, F.H. Jacobi, and Moses Mendelssohn—became embroiled in what came to be known as the *Pantheismusstreit* (“pantheism controversy”), revolving around the question of Spinoza’s alleged pantheism and the philosophical and religious implications of pantheism more generally (Beiser 1987: 44–91). In 1808, Friedrich Schlegel published *Ueber die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians), a pioneering comparative study of Sanskrit and German, toward the end of which he discussed Indian philosophy. Schlegel, a fresh convert to Catholicism writing in the wake of the *Pantheismusstreit*, claimed that Vedānta—embodied in the doctrines of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*—is nothing but “pure pantheism” (1808: 148), a doctrine “as destructive to morality as even materialism” (1808: 152).²⁶

Friedrich Schlegel’s brother, A.W. Schlegel, soon became interested in Indian thought as well. More committed to philological rigor than his brother, A.W. Schlegel learned Sanskrit thoroughly and in 1818 was appointed chair of Indology at the University of Bonn. In 1823, A.W. Schlegel published a Latin translation of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which marked a significant hermeneutic advance from his brother’s approach. In the preface to his translation, Schlegel emphasized the need for careful and patient study of Indian textual sources and cautioned against premature attempts to determine the “spirit” of India, be it pantheistic or otherwise (Herling 2006: 157–202). Building on A.W. Schlegel’s Latin translation, the philologist and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt published a sophisticated article in 1826, in which he engaged in a technical linguistic analysis of the original Sanskrit verses of the *Gītā* and generally refrained from making the kind of value judgments to which Friedrich Schlegel and others were prone (Herling 2006: 264–78). A year later, the famous philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, who had no knowledge of Sanskrit, published a lengthy polemical critique of Humboldt’s essay on the *Gītā* and argued—in the vein of Friedrich Schlegel—that the *Gītā*, and Indian thought more generally, propounded a philosophically crude form of “pantheism” (Hegel [1827] 1970). On the basis of this caricature of Indian philosophy, Hegel felt justified in banishing Indian thought from the “history of philosophy,” which he claimed originated in Greece (1971: 121). As numerous scholars have shown, Hegel played no small role in promoting Orientalist dismissals of Indian philosophy and the subsequent neglect of Indian philosophy in Western academia.²⁷

In stark contrast to Hegel, the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer was profoundly impressed with Vedāntic thought and even incorporated elements of it into his own philosophical system, which combines subjective idealism with a metaphysics of will. Schopenhauer had no knowledge of Sanskrit, so his initial acquaintance with Vedānta was based on his reading of the *Oupnek’hat* (1802), the French Indologist





Anquetil-Duperron's Latin rendering of Prince Dara Shikoh's Persian translation of the original Sanskrit Upaniṣads. Anquetil's work was also a pioneering contribution to comparative philosophy, since he attempted to demonstrate conceptual affinities between Vedānta and the ideas of numerous Western philosophers such as Kant and Spinoza (Halbfass [1981] 1988: 64–8). Unbeknownst to Schopenhauer, the *Oupnek'hat* also contained passages from Śaṅkara's commentaries on the Upaniṣads and did not clearly distinguish Śaṅkara's text from the original Upaniṣads (App 2014: 140–1). As a result, Schopenhauer thought that the Upaniṣads themselves propounded the Advaitic doctrine of the unreality of the world. Tellingly, in the very first section of his masterpiece *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (The World as Will and Representation) (1818), Schopenhauer claims that the “basic truth” of subjective idealism—that the “world is my representation”—is the “fundamental tenet of the Vedānta philosophy,” citing as evidence the passage from William Jones's 1787 essay quoted earlier ([1818] 1969: 3–4).

Many later nineteenth-century accounts of Vedānta reflect a similar pattern of equating Vedānta with Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta and then either condemning it (like Hegel) or embracing it (like Schopenhauer). The German philosopher F.W.J. Schelling (1775–1854), in lectures delivered between 1845 and 1846, praised the Indian philosophy of “Vedānta”—by which he meant Advaita Vedānta—for its doctrine of “Maja,” according to which “the world is an illusion” (Schelling 1857: 482). At the same time, Schelling, from his Christian standpoint, faulted Vedānta for lacking a truly “positive” monotheistic conception of God's “factuality” (Halbfass [1981] 1988: 105). In *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (1882), the British scholar A.E. Gough argued, against Colebrooke, that Śaṅkara was a subjective idealist and that Śaṅkara's interpretation of the Upaniṣads is the “natural and legitimate” one (Gough 1882: viii). Referring approvingly to Hegel's dismissal of Vedānta as a crude “pantheism” (1882: 6 n1), Gough made the sweeping verdict that Western thought is far superior to Indian thought, which has “little intellectual wealth” (1882: xii).

In *Das System des Vedānta* (1883), the influential German Indologist Paul Deussen followed Gough in defending what he took to be Śaṅkara's subjective idealist interpretation of the *Brahmasūtra*. While Deussen acknowledged the existence of non-Advaitic commentaries on the *Brahmasūtra*, he admitted that he had not studied any of them because they were not available to him ([1883] 1906: 28). Nonetheless, he confidently asserted that Śaṅkara, with rare and very minor exceptions, is “nowhere in contradiction to the Sūtra's” ([1883] 1906: 28; my translation). According to Deussen, Vedānta holds that the attributeless (*nirguṇa*) Brahman is the sole reality and that “the whole world is only an illusion (*māyā*)” ([1883] 1906: 466; my translation). However, unlike Gough, Deussen followed Schopenhauer—his favorite philosopher—in embracing the subjective idealist philosophy of Vedānta and noting its affinities with Kant's philosophy ([1883] 1906: 57).

At the same time, Deussen was pioneering in his efforts to develop a rigorous historico-philological method for studying the Vedāntic scriptures. As Nicholson notes, Deussen's “attempt to establish the chronology of the different Upaniṣads was ambitious and largely successful; his periodization is accepted by scholars today, with a few modifications” (2010: 137). Moreover, instead of adopting a monolithic view





of the Upaniṣads, he traced the development of ideas from the earlier to the later Upaniṣads—a project still pursued by contemporary scholars.

In sum, then, scholarship on Vedānta between 1740 and 1890 exhibited both a strong bias toward Śaṅkara's Advaitic interpretation of Vedānta²⁸ and a complex dialectic between an incipient scholarly method aiming at rigor and objectivity and a persistent tendency to interpret Vedānta in the service of various ideological agendas. Interestingly, however, scholars defended numerous *different* interpretations of Śaṅkara's Advaita philosophy—as monotheistic and world-affirming (Roy), as realist (Colebrooke), and as subjective idealist (Pons, Jones, Gough, Deussen, among others). At the same time, the influential Brāhmo Samāj—under the leadership of Debendranath—militated *against* the prevailing tendency to conflate Vedānta with Advaita Vedānta, explicitly contrasting the monotheistic doctrine of the Upaniṣads with the nontheistic and world-denying philosophy of Advaita Vedānta.

I.4 1890 to the Present: Modern and Contemporary Trends in the Study of Vedānta

Some nineteenth-century approaches to Vedānta persisted until about the first half of the twentieth century. For instance, scholars like Deussen (1905: x, 1908), Richard Garbe (1895), and Robert E. Hume (1921) continued to defend Śaṅkara's nondual illusionistic interpretation of the Upaniṣads. Christian missionaries and writers also continued to write about Vedānta, though they tended to move away from the polemical stance of earlier Christian missionaries to a more inclusivist understanding of Vedānta as a presentiment of, and preparation for, Christianity.²⁹ Not to be outdone, some modern Vedāntins like Swami Vivekananda (CW8: 214–19) and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1927: 32) turned the tables on Christian missionaries by incorporating Christianity into their own broader Vedāntic frameworks.³⁰

Moreover, beginning in the final decade of the nineteenth century, several radically new approaches to Vedānta began to emerge. The Indologist George Thibaut's pioneering and still widely cited English translations of both Śaṅkara's and Rāmānuja's commentaries on the *Brahmasūtra* appeared in three volumes from 1890 to 1904 (Thibaut 1890, 1896, and 1904). Thibaut's remarkable 128-page introduction to his 1890 translation was one of the first attempts in the history of Vedānta scholarship to employ a sophisticated historico-philological method in order to determine the original meaning of the Upaniṣads and the *Brahmasūtra* (Thibaut 1890: ix–cxxxviii). Notably, Thibaut sided with Rāmānuja against Śaṅkara in arguing that neither the Upaniṣads nor the *Brahmasūtra* upholds Śaṅkara's Advaitic “distinction of a lower and a higher Brahman” or his doctrine of *māyā* as a “principle of illusion” (Thibaut 1890: xci, cxiii–cxxxvii).

Thibaut helped inaugurate an independent scholarly approach to the Vedāntic scriptures that has become a major strand of scholarship on Vedānta. In the wake of Thibaut, numerous scholars have attempted to discern the original meaning of the Upaniṣads,³¹ the *Gītā*,³² and the *Brahmasūtra*³³ on the basis of careful historical and





philological analysis. Notably, while interpretations of the Vedāntic scriptures prior to 1890 tended to be biased toward Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, these later scholarly studies often challenge Śaṅkara's interpretations, pointing out where he seems to read his own Advaitic views into the texts. For instance, Chapter 11 by Ayon Maharaj in Part 4 of this handbook shows how Sri Aurobindo developed an original and hermeneutically sophisticated interpretation of the Īśā Upaniṣad in explicit opposition to Śaṅkara's Advaitic interpretation.

The Indian monk Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), who delivered popular lectures on Vedānta in the United States and England between 1893 and 1901, was also pivotal in ushering in new approaches to Vedānta. Contemporary scholars have tended to assume that Vivekananda did little more than champion a modernized form of Advaita Vedānta as a kind of universal religion.³⁴ It is certainly true that Vivekananda often presented a hierarchical account of Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Advaita as progressive stages in Vedāntic thought.³⁵ This dimension of Vivekananda's thought can be seen as reviving the medieval Advaitin Appaya Dīkṣita's doxographic approach to various Vedāntic schools in *Caturmatasārasaṃgraha*.

Vivekananda's doxographic presentation of Vedānta anticipated twentieth-century Vedāntic doxographies of various sorts. For instance, as Ankur Barua notes in Chapter 9 of this handbook, Radhakrishnan (1927: 32) presented a broad Advaitic doxography that encompassed all the world religions, viewing theistic religions as valid but inferior stages toward the summit of nonduality.³⁶ By contrast, Satis Chandra Chatterjee ([1963] 1985: x) rejected the Advaitic doxographic approach in favor of a nonhierarchical presentation of the various Indian philosophies as “complementary”—and therefore equally valid—perspectives on one and the same “many-faced” Reality. In a Vivekanandan vein, Chatterjee then argued that all the classical Indian philosophies find their reconciliation in the expansive Vedāntic philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna ([1963] 1985: 77–152).

However, Advaitic doxography was only one dimension of Vivekananda's multifaceted approach to Vedānta. In fact, I will make the case that Vivekananda helped pave the way for five key developments in Vedānta scholarship from the twentieth century up to the present. First, Vivekananda, like Thibaut, called for the study of Vedāntic scriptures “from an independent and better basis than by blindly following the commentators” (CW3: 233). Indeed, he anticipated later scholars in observing that “all the great commentators . . . were at times ‘conscious liars’ in order to make the texts suit their philosophy” (CW7: 36). Adopting an “independent” hermeneutic approach, he suggested new and provocative interpretations of passages from the Upaniṣads, the *Gītā*, and the *Brahmasūtra* (Maharaj 2020).

Second, Vivekananda challenged mainstream interpretations of key concepts in Advaita Vedānta—arguing, for instance, that the Advaitic doctrine of *māyā* should be understood not as a principle of “illusion” but as a “statement of facts—what we are and what we see around us” (CW2: 89). Taking Vivekananda's lead, numerous scholars since the twentieth century have adopted new approaches to Advaita Vedānta, often arguing against the common interpretation of Advaita as a world-negating and quietistic philosophy that leaves little scope for theistic devotion or ethical action.³⁷ Meanwhile, other scholars—including Hedling, in Chapter 10 of this handbook—have taken a





more critical stance toward Advaita Vedānta, identifying philosophical problems and aporias in fundamental Advaitic doctrines such as *avidyā* and *jīvanmukti*.³⁸

Third, Vivekananda was prescient in challenging the hegemony of Advaitic interpretations of Vedānta, reminding us that “it would be wrong to confine the word Vedānta only to one system which has arisen out of the Upanishads” (CW3: 324–5). He was one of the first to promote the in-depth philosophical study of non-Advaitic traditions of Vedānta, which has become a prominent strand in Vedānta scholarship.³⁹ Since the early twentieth century, scholars have begun to study in detail a wide range of Vedāntic traditions, including Dvaita,⁴⁰ Viśiṣṭādvaita,⁴¹ Bhedābheda,⁴² Śuddhādvaita,⁴³ Acintyābheda,⁴⁴ and Śivādvaita.⁴⁵ Numerous contributions to this handbook focus on key figures and texts in non-Advaitic traditions of Vedānta, including the chapters on the Viśiṣṭādvaitin Veṅkaṭanātha (Schmücker, Chapter 2), the Mādhva Vedāntin Vyāsātīrtha (Williams, Chapter 3), the Acintyābhedaśāstrī Jīva Gosvāmī (Gupta, Chapter 4), and the Viśiṣṭādvaitin Rāmānuja in comparison with the Acintyābhedaśāstrī Baladeva (Nicholson, Chapter 8).

Fourth, contrary to the common view that Vivekananda was essentially a follower of Śāṅkara, several recent scholars have argued that Vivekananda actually developed a sophisticated and original philosophy of “practical Vedānta”—based on the teachings of his guru Sri Ramakrishna—that differs from Śāṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta in significant respects, particularly in its emphasis on serving God in humanity and its expansive conception of God as the impersonal-personal Infinite Reality.⁴⁶ Vivekananda’s creative reconfiguration of Vedānta paved the way for the original Vedāntic syntheses of prominent twentieth-century Indian thinkers such as K.C. Bhattacharyya (1909 and 1956), Sri Aurobindo ([1940] 2005), Radhakrishnan (1932), and Rabindranath Tagore (Barua 2018). For instance, the philosopher-mystic Sri Aurobindo, who was strongly influenced by Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, developed an original Vedāntic worldview that contrasted sharply with Śāṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta, which he saw as world-denying and philosophically untenable. According to Sri Aurobindo, this world is a real manifestation of the impersonal-personal Saccidānanda, so we should not strive to escape the world but to accelerate its evolution toward the spiritual consummation of the divinization of all life.⁴⁷ The chapters in Part 2 of this handbook examine respectively the modern Vedāntic outlooks of Sri Ramakrishna (Long, Chapter 5), Sri Aurobindo (Phillips, Chapter 6), and Romain Rolland (Maharaj, Chapter 7).

Fifth, like Anquetil-Duperron before him, Vivekananda—who studied Western philosophy at Scottish Church College in Kolkata—frequently compared Vedānta with various Western views, including the philosophies of Schopenhauer, Kant, and Hegel and the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin. Even more significantly, Vivekananda was one of the first to *critique* Western thought from a Vedāntic standpoint. He argues, for instance, that Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the will has fatal flaws at the level of both ontology and soteriology that could have been avoided if Schopenhauer had adopted a consistently Vedāntic position (Maharaj 2017). Likewise, Vivekananda argues that a complete theory of the “causes of evolution” has to take into account not only Darwin’s principles of natural selection and the survival of the fittest but also the *spiritual* principle of the progressive manifestation of the inherent divinity of all creatures (CW7: 151–7).⁴⁸



Vivekananda's forays into comparative philosophy and religion as well as his Vedāntic critiques of Western theories were prescient. The twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of studies comparing Vedānta not only with Western thought but also with non-Vedāntic traditions within Indian philosophy such as Nyāya, Cārvāka, and Buddhism.⁴⁹ Most of these studies compared Advaita Vedānta with Western philosophy, theology, and religion. However, in the past few decades, scholars have significantly widened their comparative horizons, focusing on non-Advaitic traditions of Vedānta as well.⁵⁰ Three chapters of this handbook are comparative in nature, bringing Vedāntic traditions into dialogue with Jainism (Long, Chapter 5), the nondual Śaiva tradition of Pratyabhijñā (Hedling, Chapter 10), and Pūrva Mīmāṃsā (Clooney, Chapter 12) respectively.

Very recently, some scholars of Vedānta have begun to participate in a movement away from comparative philosophy and toward “cross-cultural” or “global” philosophy (Mills 2009; Ganeri 2016). Instead of simply comparing Vedānta with Western philosophy, these scholars attempt to illuminate cross-cultural philosophical problems by drawing on the conceptual resources of both Indian and Western traditions. Evan Thompson (2015), for instance, sheds new light on the self and its relation to the brain by combining the latest neuroscience research with insights from both Advaita Vedānta and Buddhism. In a similarly cross-cultural vein, Ethan Mills (2018) expands the global canon of philosophical skepticism by examining the original skeptical positions of Nāgārjuna, Śrīharṣa, and Jayarāśi. The three chapters in Part 5 of this handbook are interventions in cross-cultural philosophy, discussing Vedāntic traditions in the light of key themes in Western philosophy, including panpsychism (Vaidya, Chapter 14), mystical experience and skeptical scenarios (Mills, Chapter 15), and dream-skepticism (Chakrabarti, Chapter 16).

There are two other features of recent scholarship on Vedānta that should be mentioned. Since about the 1940s, numerous scholars have engaged in detailed historiographical and ethnographic investigations of both classical and modern Vedāntic traditions. Among the earliest historiographers were Hajime Nakamura and Paul Hacker. While Nakamura ([1950–6] 1983) was one of the first to examine the history of early Vedānta up to the *Brahmasūtra*, Hacker (1953) argued, on the basis of historical and philological evidence, that Śaṅkara's philosophical views evolved from the quasi-realist position of *Upadeśasāhasrī* to the full-blown *māyāvāda* of his later commentaries on the Vedāntic scriptures. Moreover, Hacker wrote several controversial, but highly influential, articles arguing that “Neo-Hindus” such as Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo defended Vedāntic positions that were tacitly shaped by Western values and ideals (1978: 510–608).⁵¹

Taking Hacker's lead, numerous scholars have examined how Vedānta was received, interpreted, and often critiqued by the West in the course of history, and conversely, how the self-articulations of modern Hindu figures were shaped in part through a complex process of assimilating, and critically responding to, Western ideas and values.⁵² In a similar vein, Herling (2006), Robinson (2006), Nicholson (2010), and Adluri and Bagchee (2014) have uncovered the ideological assumptions informing various Western interpretations of Vedānta.



Very recently, scholars have also begun to turn their attention to what Michael S. Allen (2017: 294) has called “Greater Vedānta”—that is, Vedāntic texts and sources beyond the canonical Sanskrit philosophical texts through which the various Vedāntic traditions have been studied and passed down. Instead of focusing exclusively on the Sanskrit scriptural commentaries of the founding *ācāryas* of different Vedāntic traditions, contemporary scholars are beginning to examine a much broader range of Vedāntic texts, including narratives, songs, and dramas as well as “vernacular” Vedāntic works composed in local languages such as Hindi, Bengali, or Tamil.⁵³ Daniel Raveh’s contribution to this handbook (Chapter 13), for instance, focuses on *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*, a classic biography of Śaṅkara not usually studied alongside his philosophical commentaries. The study of a “greater” Vedāntic corpus, which is still in a nascent stage, promises to yield deeper insight into how Vedāntic traditions have evolved in the course of history and how they have impacted local and global cultures through a wide variety of channels.

The brief history of Vedānta scholarship sketched in these sections should not be read as a simplistic narrative of progress from the interpretive benightedness of early scholars to the enlightened, ideology-free approaches of contemporary scholars. Of course, there are numerous respects in which scholarship on Vedānta *has* progressed a great deal, especially in terms of historico-philological sophistication, our vastly greater knowledge of Vedāntic textual sources, and our increasing attentiveness to the ways that various ideological commitments and prejudices have informed past interpretations of Vedānta. At the same time, we should not commit the presentist fallacy of assuming that our own contemporary scholarly methods are free from distorting prejudices or straightforwardly superior to earlier methods in every respect. Rather, as Hans-Georg Gadamer has taught us, *all* interpretations of texts—including our own—are informed by *Vorurteile* (“prejudices” or, more literally, “pre-judgments”) ([1960] 2006: 271–2). From a Gadamerian perspective, we make interpretive progress not by overcoming or eliminating all our pre-judgments—which is, in any case, an impossibility—but by becoming progressively *aware* of our own pre-judgments and by striving to distinguish the distortive pre-judgments from those that are hermeneutically fruitful. Contemporary scholars of Vedānta, therefore, would do well to turn their critical scrutiny on themselves and to historicize and interrogate their own methods.

I.5 The Structure and Aims of This Handbook

Since the philosophical tradition of Vedānta—with its many schools and subschools—is vast, no handbook of Vedānta can pretend to be truly comprehensive. Nonetheless, this handbook does strive to highlight the sophistication, depth, and complexity of a wide range of Vedāntic traditions. As this is a research handbook, each of its sixteen chapters not only provides an accessible overview of a particular figure, text, or topic within Vedānta but also makes an original and in-depth contribution to the existing scholarship. As a result, many of the chapters are somewhat longer than is typical of chapters in philosophical companions and handbooks. Since there is a separate





“Chapter Summaries” section written by the contributors themselves, I will not discuss the chapters in detail here but only explain briefly the organization and underlying rationale of the handbook.

This handbook is divided into five parts, each of which not only represents the state of the art in scholarship on particular traditions or themes within Vedānta but also points the way toward the future of Vedānta studies. The chapters in Parts 1 and 2 concern traditions in classical Vedānta and modern Vedānta respectively. This periodization into “classical” and “modern” Vedānta is meant to be taken in a very rough and strictly nonnormative sense. It is, of course, difficult—if not impossible—to demarcate precisely where “classical” Vedānta ends and “modern” Vedānta begins. At the same time, there are a number of salient differences in the language, style, methodology, and focus of earlier Vedāntins like Śāṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Vyāsatīrtha and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Vedāntins like Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo. These differences, I believe, justify at least a rough historical division into classical and modern periods of Vedānta.

Part 1 on “Classical Vedānta” spans almost a millennium, with chapters respectively on four major Vedāntic schools. Each of these four chapters first provides a brief nontechnical overview of the main doctrines of a particular Vedāntic school and then examines a key theme in that particular school in greater depth. Neil Dalal (Chapter 1) carefully examines the nature and status of the contemplative practice of *nididhyāsana* in Śāṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta. Marcus Schmücker (Chapter 2) provides an in-depth discussion of the concepts of soul and qualifying knowledge (*dharmabhūtajñāna*) in the later Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta of Veṅkaṭanātha. Michael Williams (Chapter 3) discusses the Mādhva Vedāntin Vyāsatīrtha’s analytic defense of realism in the *Nyāyāmṛta*. Finally, Ravi M. Gupta (Chapter 4) examines the philosophical and theological nuances of the concept of *acintya* in Jīva Gosvāmī’s Acintyabhedābheda Vedānta. Obviously, there are many schools and subschools of classical Vedānta that are not covered in Part 1, including the Bhedābheda schools of Nimbārka and Vallabha, the Śivādvaita school of Śrīkaṅṭha and Appaya Dīkṣita, and many others. The hope is that the in-depth discussions in Part 1 of key figures in four of the major classical Vedāntic traditions will encourage scholars to continue to work collectively toward examining the full range of classical Vedāntic traditions in all their depth, complexity, and richness.

Part 2 on “Modern Vedānta” contains three chapters on innovative Vedāntins of the modern period. Jeffery D. Long (Chapter 5) sheds new light on the harmonizing Vedāntic philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna by examining it from the perspective of the Jain doctrine of *anekānta*. Stephen Phillips (Chapter 6) reconstructs Sri Aurobindo’s metaphysical argument for reincarnation in *The Life Divine* and finds the basis of Sri Aurobindo’s argument in his novel psychology of a “psychic being.” Ayon Maharaj (Chapter 7) discusses the French writer Romain Rolland’s fascinating early twentieth-century debate about mystical experience with Sigmund Freud, in which Rolland explicitly draws upon the Vedāntic ideas of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. It is worth noting two points about this section of the handbook. First, there are countless other modern Vedāntins that could have been discussed in this section, including Swaminarayan (1781–1830), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975),





Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977), Saccidānandendra Sarasvatī (1880–1975), Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), and Mātā Amṛtānandamayī Devī (b. 1953). As with Part 1, Part 2 should be seen as paving the way for future scholarly work on the vast landscape of modern Vedāntic thought. Second, each chapter in Part 2 consciously resists the still common tendency to label modern Vedāntin thinkers as “Neo-Vedāntins.” Recently, a number of scholars have argued that the catch-all label “Neo-Vedānta” is misleading at best and pernicious at worst, not only because it fails to capture the nuances of the specific philosophical views of modern Vedāntins but also because it is indelibly colored by Paul Hacker’s polemical use of the term (Hatcher 2004; Madaio 2018; Maharaj 2018: 45–50; Nicholson 2020; Long, Chapter 5 in this volume). According to Hacker (1995: 251), “Neo-Vedāntins” like Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo clothed what are essentially Western principles and values in superficially Indian garb in order to promote Indian nationalism. Militating against Hacker’s thesis, each chapter in Part 2 strives to demonstrate the depth and sophistication of the thought of modern Vedāntins, highlighting their efforts to draw upon the resources of indigenous Indian traditions.

Part 3 of the handbook contains three chapters on “Key Themes, Concepts, and Debates in Vedānta.” The chapters by Nicholson (Chapter 8) and Barua (Chapter 9) examine how key themes and concepts have been discussed and debated across multiple Vedāntic traditions. Nicholson compares the differing approaches to *karma*, freedom, and devotion in the *Brahmasūtra* commentaries of the Advaitin Śaṅkara, the Viśiṣṭādvaitin Rāmānuja, and the Acintyabhedābhedavādin Baladeva. Barua examines a variety of approaches to doctrinal and religious diversity in a vast range of classical and modern Vedāntic traditions. Klara Hedling (Chapter 10) discusses embodied liberation (*jīvanmukti*) and the ontological status of the world in the two nondual Indian traditions of Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā. The aim of Part 3 is to encourage scholars of Vedānta to explore further the rich diversity of views on various themes and concepts not only *within* a particular Vedāntic school, but also across different Vedāntic schools, and across Vedāntic and non-Vedāntic philosophical traditions.

Part 4, “Hermeneutic Investigations,” has three chapters which pay careful attention to the nuances and challenges involved in reading and interpreting various texts in the Vedāntic tradition. Of the three texts comprising the *prasthānatrayī*, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* has received by far the most scholarly attention. To begin to redress this imbalance, the chapters by Ayon Maharaj and Francis X. Clooney focus on the two other textual “pillars” of Vedānta. Maharaj (Chapter 11) closely examines Sri Aurobindo’s unique interpretation of the Īśā Upaniṣad, while Clooney (Chapter 12) discusses the hermeneutic and stylistic nuances of Bhāratīrtha’s *Vaiyāsikanyāyamālā*, a virtuosic summation of the *Brahmasūtra* from the standpoint of Advaita Vedānta. Daniel Raveh adopts a fresh approach to Śaṅkara’s Advaita by examining it through the narrative lens of *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*, the famous medieval biography of Śaṅkara. These chapters remind us of the centrality of textual interpretation in Vedānta and pave the way for further hermeneutic work on the dizzying array of Vedāntic texts in a wide variety of genres, including scriptural commentaries, independent philosophical treatises, plays, poems, biographies, and songs.



Part 5, “Cross-Cultural Explorations,” has three chapters which engage Vedāntic ideas from global philosophical perspectives. Anand Jayprakash Vaidya (Chapter 14) demonstrates the relevance of the Vedāntic views of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Sri Ramakrishna to contemporary debates about consciousness and panpsychism in analytic philosophy of mind. Ethan Mills (Chapter 15) argues that the Advaitin thinker Śrīharṣa’s somewhat surprising appeal to nondual mystical experience is best understood as a “skeptical scenario” in the contemporary analytic sense. Finally, Arindam Chakrabarti (Chapter 16) examines from a cross-cultural standpoint the themes of dream, *māyā*, and love in the Vedāntic thought of Śaṅkara, Vivekananda, and K.C. Bhattacharyya. These chapters should encourage philosophically minded scholars of Vedānta to venture beyond mere philosophical comparison and to adopt a more cosmopolitan method that aims to address philosophical problems by drawing upon the conceptual resources of both Vedāntic and global traditions.

The sixteen chapters of this handbook interact, and sometimes overlap, with each other in fruitful and interesting ways. To aid the reader in drawing connections among the chapters, each contributor has referred to themes and arguments in other chapters wherever they deemed appropriate. An attentive reader of the handbook will notice certain recurring themes in the handbook, three of which I will note here. First, apart from Dalal’s and Raveh’s chapters on Śaṅkara, almost all the other chapters also engage, to a certain extent, the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara and his followers, often as a philosophical foil against which various thinkers—including Rāmānuja, Veṅkaṭanātha, Vyāsātīrtha, Jīva Gosvāmī, Baladeva, Abhinavagupta, Sri Ramakrishna, and Sri Aurobindo—developed their own positions. Second, numerous chapters examine different approaches to the ontological status of the world and its relationship to the ultimate reality, with Advaitins like Śaṅkara and Śrīharṣa denying the ultimate reality of the world and other thinkers, both classical and modern, defending the reality and divinity of the world. Third, besides Long’s chapter on Sri Ramakrishna, parts of numerous other chapters also discuss Sri Ramakrishna’s views on issues like the problem of evil (Nicholson, Chapter 8), religious pluralism (Barua, Chapter 9), consciousness (Vaidya, Chapter 14), and the world (Chakrabarti, Chapter 16). Several chapters also discuss Sri Ramakrishna’s influence on other thinkers—namely, Vivekananda (Chakrabarti, Chapter 16), Rolland (Maharaj, Chapter 7), and Sri Aurobindo (Maharaj, Chapter 11). The recurring presence of Sri Ramakrishna at various points in this handbook, though not planned, is nonetheless serendipitous, since it highlights one of the many ways that contributors have sought to bring classical and modern Vedāntic figures into productive dialogue.

The future of Vedānta scholarship looks bright, and it is our hope that this research handbook will serve as a resource and guide for both scholars and students interested in exploring the riches of one of India’s most important philosophical traditions.

Abbreviation

CW Vivekananda, Swami ([1957–97] 2006–7), *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda: Mayavati Memorial Edition*, 9 vols. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama.



Notes

- 1 For attempts to date the Upaniṣads, see Chapter 2 of Cohen (2018) and Nakamura ([1950–6] 1983: 9–44).
- 2 See Witz (1998: 196–207) for a helpful discussion of the various meditative practices taught in the Upaniṣads—namely, *upāsanās*, *vidyās*, and *dhyāna*.
- 3 Malinar (2007: 15) suggests 100 CE as the approximate date of composition of the *Gītā*, though other scholars suggest date ranges extending into one or two centuries BCE.
- 4 See Nakamura ([1950–6] 1983: 435–6) for an approximate dating of the *Brahmasūtra*.
- 5 For in-depth discussions of the impact of Vedānta in India, see Nakamura ([1950–6] 1983: 1–4), Halbfass (1988), Hatcher (2008), and Nicholson (2010).
- 6 Chapter 7 (Maharaj’s essay on Romain Rolland) is a revision of a previously published article.
- 7 Herling builds on Lincoln (1999), which first developed this dialectic between myth and logos.
- 8 One of the schools I do not discuss here (for lack of space) is the Śivādvaīta Vedānta of figures like Śrīkaṅṭha and Appaya Dīkṣita. Scholars have only recently begun to examine this school. See, for instance, Duquette (2014 and forthcoming).
- 9 For a helpful overview of Bhedābheda Vedānta and its various subschools, see Nicholson (n.d.).
- 10 For the ensuing doctrinal overview of various Vedāntic schools, I have relied primarily on Srinivasachari (1934), Sharma (1962), Kapoor (1976), Lipner (1986), and Tapasyānanda (1990).
- 11 For Śaṅkara’s views on *īśvara*, see his commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.14.
- 12 See *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.3.
- 13 See Vallabha’s *Prakāśa* autocommentary on verses 98 and 102 of the second chapter (“Sarvanirṇayaprakaraṇam”) of his *Tattvārthadīpanibandha*.
- 14 For discussion of this point, see Nicholson (n.d.).
- 15 See verse 28 of Giridharā’s (2000) *Śuddhādvaitamārtandaḥ*. It is not widely known that Vallabha himself never used the term “*śuddhādvaita*,” preferring instead to refer to his school as “Brahmavāda.”
- 16 For details, see Gupta’s contribution to this volume (Chapter 4).
- 17 For a helpful discussion of the Viśiṣṭādvaitic approach to spiritual practice, see Lipner (1986: 99–119).
- 18 Nicholson (2010: 39–66) provides an illuminating discussion of the Bhedābheda-vādin Vijñānabhikṣu’s doxographic method.
- 19 Pons’s letter is discussed in App (2014: 125–6) and Rocher and Rocher (2012: 188). As Halbfass ([1981] 1988: 39–42) notes, an even earlier account of Vedānta is contained in the Jesuit missionary Roberto De Nobili’s Latin treatise *Informatio de quibusdam moribus nationis indicæ* (1613), where he summarizes Śaṅkara’s, Rāmānuja’s, and Madhva’s sects of Vedānta.
- 20 See also Halbfass ([1981] 1988: 44–53) on the early Jesuit reception of Vedānta.
- 21 As Halbfass ([1981] 1988: 63) notes, Jones also published the first English translation of an Upaniṣad—namely, the Īśā Upaniṣad—in 1799 (Jones 1799: 423–5).
- 22 See Nicholson (2010: 166–84).
- 23 Colebrooke may have had in mind, among others, Prakāśānanda (*fl.* 1505), who defended a subjective idealist form of Advaita Vedānta in his book *Vedāntasiddhāntamuktāvalī*.





- 24 For further details on Colebrooke, see Rocher and Rocher (2012).
- 25 Another highly influential later Brāhmo figure, whom I do not have the space to discuss here, is Keshab Chandra Sen (1838–84). For a detailed treatment, see Stevens (2018).
- 26 For discussion, see Herling (2006: 117–56) and Halbfass ([1981] 1988: 74–8).
- 27 For discussions of Hegel’s reception of Indian thought, see Halbfass ([1981] 1988: 84–99), Bernasconi (2003), Herling (2006: 203–54), and Rathore and Mohapatra (2017).
- 28 For a thorough discussion of the sociohistorical context in which Advaitic scholarship began to flourish in early modern India, see Minkowski (2011).
- 29 See, for instance, Slater (1897) and Urquhart (1928). See further references in Halbfass ([1981] 1988: 51–2).
- 30 For discussions of modern Vedāntic responses to Christianity, see Paradkar (1969), Halbfass ([1981] 1988: 52–3), and Coward (1987).
- 31 See, for instance, Aurobindo ([1920] 2012: 3–98, [1924] 2011: 3–91), Radhakrishnan (1923: 106–220), Thieme (1965), Richard H. Jones (1981), Clooney (1994), Cohen (2018), and Maharaj’s contribution in Chapter 11 of this volume.
- 32 See Aurobindo ([1922–8] 1997), Mainkar (1969), Zaehner (1969), Minor (1982), Malinar (2007), and Maharaj (2015).
- 33 See Dasgupta (1922: 36–46), Modi (1943–56), Nakamura ([1950–6] 1983: 404–532), Ghate (1981), Adams (1993), and Maharaj (2020).
- 34 For reductive views of Vivekananda, see Frazier (2015: 2) and Neevel (1976: 54–5).
- 35 See, for instance, CW1: 393–404. For non-Śāṅkaran interpretations of Vivekananda’s “ladder theory,” see Maharaj (2020) and the section on Vivekananda in Barua’s contribution to this handbook (Chapter 9).
- 36 See also Deussen (1908), who not only translated into German Mādhava’s *Sarvadarśanasāṅgraha* but also explicitly concurred with Mādhava that Advaita Vedānta is the pinnacle of Indian philosophical thought (191).
- 37 See Radhakrishnan (1926: 445–658), Hacker (1978: 59–292), Malkovsky (2001), and De Smet (2013). See also Dalal (Chapter 1, this volume) and Raveh (Chapter 13, this volume).
- 38 See Chapter 10 by Hedling in this handbook as well as Aurobindo ([1940] 2005: 20–8, 428–98), Ingalls (1953), Das (1954), Nelson (1996), Framarin (2009), and Rao (2011).
- 39 For more comprehensive bibliographies of the scholarship on various Vedāntic traditions, see Karl Potter’s online bibliography (<https://faculty.washington.edu/kpotter>).
- 40 See, for instance, Glasenapp (1923), Sharma (1960–1), Mesquita (1997), Sarma (2005), McCrea (2015), Williams (2017 and Chapter 3 in present volume).
- 41 Srinivasachari (1928), Lipner (1986), Bartley (2002), Freschi (2015), and Schmücker (Chapter 2 in this volume).
- 42 See Srinivasachari (1934) and Nicholson (2010: 24–66).
- 43 Glasenapp (1934) and Narain (2006).
- 44 Elkman (1986), Gupta (2007, Chapter 4 of this volume), Edelmann (2012), and Okita (2014).
- 45 Duquette (2014) and McCrea (2014).
- 46 See Rambachan (1994), Chatterjee (1995), Dasgupta (1999), and Maharaj (2019).
- 47 See Phillips’s (Chapter 6) and Maharaj’s (Chapters 7 and 11) contributions to this volume.





- 48 For a helpful discussion of Vivekananda's views on evolution, see Brown (2012: 131–54).
- 49 See Deussen (1917), Raju (1937), Radhakrishnan and Raju (1960), Clooney (1993), Gupta (1998), and Mills (2018).
- 50 See, for instance, Barua (2009), Edelman (2012), and Clooney (2013).
- 51 For an English translation of these articles, see Hacker (1995).
- 52 See Halbfass ([1981] 1988), King (1999: 118–42), Hatcher (2008), and Nicholson (2010).
- 53 See Dobe (2015: 182–222), Allen (2017), Steinschneider (2017), and Raveh's contribution to this volume (Chapter 13).

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Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 Contemplating Nonduality: The Method of *Nididhyāsana* in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta

Neil Dalal

The threefold process of listening (*śravaṇa*), logical reflection (*manana*), and contemplation (*nididhyāsana*) is central to Advaita Vedānta's method of learning, and designed to lead the Advaitin toward liberating knowledge; however, relatively little is known about the contemplative method of *nididhyāsana*. This chapter explores the structures and practices of *nididhyāsana*. It analyzes how Śaṅkara, the eighth-century systematizer of Advaita Vedānta, grounded *nididhyāsana* in a method of language and a particular trajectory of philosophical inquiry. The study isolates several elements of continuity as well as subtle differences in Śaṅkara's understanding of *nididhyāsana* practices, as reflected in his interpretations of key passages in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad and the *Bhagavad-Gītā* as well as in his own *Upadeśasāhasrī*. These case studies show that *nididhyāsana* is fundamentally different from meditation practices of controlling the mind or other contemplative practices that presuppose a dichotomy of theory and practice. They further demonstrate that an accurate reading of Śaṅkara cannot attribute any independent epistemological function to *nididhyāsana* wholly separate from Upaniṣadic study.

Chapter 2 Soul and Qualifying Knowledge (*Dharmabhūtajñāna*) in the Later Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta of Veṅkaṭanātha

Marcus Schmücker

Through an examination of the Sanskrit and Maṇipravāḷa works of Veṅkaṭanātha (1269–1368), a famous representative of the tradition of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta after Rāmānuja, this chapter shows how Veṅkaṭanātha develops a cognitive model that tries to mediate between the eternal individual self (*jīvātman*) and the changeable world by means of a knowledge called “qualifying knowledge” (*dharmabhūtajñāna*). The ontological and temporal dimensions of this mediating qualifying knowledge, which



is an attribute of the self, are explained in a series of steps and with the help of some examples. After describing the concepts of substance (*dravya*) and state (*avasthā*), the author explains in what sense the individual self (*ātman*) is an eternal substance (*dravya*) and how it is related to its outwardly directed knowledge (*dharmabhūtajñāna*), which is also defined as a substance, albeit as a qualifying substance of the basic individual self (*ātman*). Presupposing this basic ontology and having highlighted the interdependence of these two substances, the author demonstrates how, for Veṅkaṭanātha, the self is able to reflect diachronically on its own states as they happened in the past, or on possible states in the future. Accordingly, Veṅkaṭanātha argues that knowledge of unawareness during sleep is merely knowledge of a particular state of being unaware—that is, knowledge of the “prior absence” (*prāgabhāva*) of knowledge. The final section examines Veṅkaṭanātha’s account of why, and how, God Himself has the same kind of knowledge (namely, *dharmabhūtajñāna*) as the individual soul.

Chapter 3 Vyāsātīrtha’s *Nyāyāmṛta*: An Analytic Defense of Realism in Mādhva Vedānta

Michael Williams

This chapter focuses on the thought of the sixteenth-century Mādhva Vedānta philosopher Vyāsātīrtha. In his highly influential work, the *Nyāyāmṛta*, Vyāsātīrtha defended the reality of the world of everyday experience against the nondualistic (Advaita) stream of Vedānta philosophy. So far as Vyāsātīrtha is concerned, the world of our everyday experience is real; our perceptions reveal to us a pluralistic world of objects that truly exist, and neither metaphysical inferences nor scripture have the power to contradict these perceptions. In this chapter, the author provides an analysis of Vyāsātīrtha’s treatment of the central Vedāntic concept of “existence” (*sattva*), based on his own translations of the *Nyāyāmṛta*. This part of the *Nyāyāmṛta* shows Vyāsātīrtha at work as an analytic thinker, developing an original theory of existence and nonexistence that can provide a robust challenge to the thesis of the Advaita Vedāntins that the world of our everyday perceptions is simply an illusion.

Chapter 4 Accomplishing the Impossible: Jīva Gosvāmī and the Concept of *Acintya* in Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedānta

Ravi M. Gupta

This chapter traces the concept of *acintya*, inconceivability, through the writings of Jīva Gosvāmī (c. 1517–1608), an early expositor of Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedānta. After outlining the life and work of Jīva Gosvāmī as well as the foundational tenets of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, the author argues that *acintya* is used in two related ways: to describe the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and His energies (*śakti*) as well as to describe



Kṛṣṇa's confounding activities (*līlā*). The former usage serves to resolve the tension in scriptural statements that alternately affirm difference (*bheda*) and nondifference (*abheda*) between God and the world, while the latter usage of *acintya* has the effect of deepening the devotee's wonder and devotion for the Lord. The chapter also discusses debates surrounding the concept of *acintya* and distinguishes it from the Advaita notion of *anirvacanīya*.

Chapter 5 Sri Ramakrishna's Philosophy of Anekānta Vedānta

Jeffery D. Long

This chapter aims to shed new light on the Vedāntic worldview of the Bengali mystic Sri Ramakrishna (1836–86). The author argues that the central features of Sri Ramakrishna's Vedānta are its worldview pluralism (*dharmā-samanvaya*) and its rootedness in direct experience (*anubhava*) of the nature of ultimate reality. As a thoroughly pluralistic philosophy, Sri Ramakrishna's thought could be designated with the term *Anekānta* (or pluralistic) *Vedānta*. The use of the term *anekānta* to designate this philosophy should bring to mind, for those familiar with classical Indian thought, the Jain position of *anekāntavāda*: that is, the Jain doctrine of the complex (literally, “non-one-sided”) nature of existence. The use of this term here is *not* intended to suggest either that Sri Ramakrishna was influenced directly by Jainism, or that his philosophy amounts, substantively, to a traditional Jain view of reality. Jainism affirms a pluralistic realism—“pluralism” here referring not to the diversity of worldviews, but to the *ontological* claim that reality consists of a variety of diverse types of entity. There is, in fact, no evidence, at least of which this author is aware, that Sri Ramakrishna engaged deeply with Jain thought; and Sri Ramakrishna's worldview, while certainly having affinities with that of Jainism, is also different enough from the view of this tradition so as not to be confused or conflated with it. The use of the term *anekānta*, though, *is* intended to draw attention to affinities between Sri Ramakrishna's pluralism and a similar stance developed by Jain thinkers throughout the centuries: a stance highlighted by modern Jain thinkers (and other modern Indian philosophers, like Bimal Krishna Matilal) who have advanced the idea that *anekāntavāda* amounts to an expression of “intellectual *ahimsā*,” that is, of nonviolence applied to the realm of philosophical discourse.

Chapter 6 Sri Aurobindo's Psychology of a “Psychic Being” in Support of a Metaphysical Argument for Reincarnation

Stephen Phillips

This chapter argues that in *The Life Divine* (1940), the philosopher-mystic Sri Aurobindo puts forth a novel argument for reincarnation, an argument not countenanced in the classical Indian schools. The argument supplements a claim



found in the *Yogasūtra* and elsewhere which Sri Aurobindo endorses—namely, that through yogic practice one can develop the power (*siddhi*) to remember past lives. The argument also depends on yogic or mystic experience to warrant its first and most important premise, but overall the reasoning is highly abstract. The premises are: first, Brahman the Absolute is *saccidānanda*, “Existence-Consciousness-Bliss”—which is supposed to be a mystical claim backed up by Sri Aurobindo’s own special experience along with that of Upaniṣadic rishis, other yogins and yoginis, and so on; second, if Brahman is *saccidānanda*, our world has to be meaningful; third, if there is no individual survival of death, then our world cannot be meaningful; and fourth and finally, reincarnation is the best mechanism for individual survival such that a theory of reincarnation is better than any other candidate (four of which are surveyed). This chapter scrutinizes these premises as well as other ideas surrounding Sri Aurobindo’s conclusion that rebirth is real, especially the notion of a “psychic being,” that is, of a developing, reincarnating individual soul. The author expounds the occult psychology proposed by Sri Aurobindo, detailing its resonances with tantric and Vedāntic views. The chapter opens with a summary of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and the importance of the concept of the psychic being, and closes with the argument summarized and evaluated.

Chapter 7 Debating Freud on the Oceanic Feeling: Romain Rolland’s Vedāntic Critique of Psychoanalysis and His Call for a “New Science of the Mind”

Ayon Maharaj

This chapter examines the largely neglected Vedāntic dimension of the thought of the celebrated French writer Romain Rolland (1866–1944) by focusing on his fascinating epistolary debate with Sigmund Freud concerning the nature and value of mystical experience. In a 1927 letter, the French writer Romain Rolland asked Freud to analyze the “oceanic feeling,” a religious feeling of oneness with the entire universe. I will argue that Rolland’s intentions in introducing the oceanic feeling to Freud were much more complex, multifaceted, and critical than most scholars have acknowledged. To this end, I will examine Rolland’s views on mysticism and psychoanalysis in his book-length biographies of the Indian saints Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, which he wrote just after he mentioned the oceanic feeling to Freud in 1927. I will argue that Rolland’s primary intentions in appealing to the oceanic feeling in his 1927 letter to Freud—intentions less evident in his letters to Freud than in his biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda—were to challenge the fundamental assumptions of psychoanalysis from a Vedāntic perspective and to confront Freud with a mystical “science of the mind” that he felt was more rigorous and comprehensive than Freud’s psychoanalytic science.



Chapter 8 Making Space for God: *Karma*, Freedom, and Devotion in the *Brahmasūtra* Commentaries of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Baladeva

Andrew J. Nicholson

This chapter examines the portrayal of God (*īśvara*) and God's relation to *karma* in the *Brahmasūtra* (BS) and in the commentaries by Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa. BS 2.1.33 famously asserts in response to an objection from an anti-theist that God's creation is just play (*līlā*), a spontaneous activity that lacks any objective beyond itself. However, BS 2.1.34 states that God is dependent (*sāpekṣa*) on *karma*. This seems to be a contradiction. How can a spontaneous and free activity be restricted by *karma*? How can God be dependent on something outside of Himself? Does this mean that the God of Vedānta is not omnipotent? Though Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja approach this aporia only indirectly, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa (eighteenth century CE) explicitly attempts to reconcile the tension between these two *sūtras*. He goes well beyond earlier Vedānta commentators' portrayal of God's activity by arguing that God does at times disregard worshippers' karmic histories, and that in fact His willingness to disregard *karma* should be considered a virtue, not a defect.



Chapter 9 Vedāntic Approaches to Religious Diversity: Grounding the Many Divinities in the Unity of Brahman



Ankur Barua

A central preoccupation of Vedāntic thought is the interrogation of competing systems of metaphysics and epistemology which are, in turn, pivoted around soteriological concerns. Vedāntic worldviews, across their divergent formulations, point to the indivisible reality in and beyond worldly multiplicity, and therefore the question of the location of the doxastic others—what we might today label religious others—becomes vitally significant. In premodern Vedāntic schools, a variety of standpoints were developed to subsume doctrinal rivals within one's own exegetical universe. Thus, foundational figures such as Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and others, and broader devotional traditions such as Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism, developed a range of exegetical-conceptual tools through which they sought to encompass rival standpoints from within the perspective of their own Vedāntic system. Some influential figures associated with Hindu modernity have creatively reworked these classical materials to articulate their distinctive visions of the transcendental significance of the religious traditions of humanity. Thus the modernist reconfigurations of figures such as Swami Vivekananda, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and others represent Hinduism, conceived through Vedāntic prisms, variously as the quintessence of human spirituality, an embodiment



of universal moral values, or as a pointer to the transcendental source of all religions. The author's study of these conceptual maneuvers indicates certain deep continuities between the "traditional" and the "modern," as well as some marked shifts over the *longue durée* of Hindu religious history.

Chapter 10 Nondual Philosophies in Dialogue: The World and Embodied Liberation in Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā

Klara Hedling

This chapter provides a comparative study of the doctrine of *jīvanmukti* (embodied liberation) in Advaita Vedānta and the Pratyabhijñā system of the nondual Śaivism of Kashmir. It argues that since Advaitins take the world to be an illusory manifestation (*vivarta*) of Brahman, the notion of *jīvanmukti* appears to be a logical contradiction. Neither Śāṅkara nor the post-Śāṅkara Advaitins were entirely successful in resolving the contradiction and, as a result, they struggled to uphold a coherent doctrine of *jīvanmukti*. The Pratyabhijñā philosophers, on the other hand, regard the world as a real manifestation (*ābhāsa*) of Consciousness. Hence, their metaphysical framework fully supports the notion of *jīvanmukti* both as a logical possibility and as the highest goal. In the Pratyabhijñā, we find a logical justification of *jīvanmukti* that is grounded in the ontology of the world. Nonetheless, there are also certain aspects of the Pratyabhijñā doctrine that stand in apparent tension with the view that *jīvanmukti* is the highest goal.

Chapter 11 Seeing Oneness Everywhere: Sri Aurobindo's Mystico-Immanent Interpretation of the Īśā Upaniṣad

Ayon Maharaj

This chapter examines the Bengali philosopher-mystic Sri Aurobindo's highly original and sophisticated commentary on the Īśā Upaniṣad—which was first published in 1924—and brings him into dialogue with both traditional and modern commentators. Militating against the reductive view that he simply read his own mystical experiences into the Īśā Upaniṣad, the author argues that Sri Aurobindo consciously strove to avoid eisegesis by adopting a "hermeneutics of mystical immanence." According to Sri Aurobindo, the fundamental principle of the Īśā Upaniṣad is the reconciliation of opposites. This chapter makes the case that Sri Aurobindo's distinctive reading of the Īśā Upaniṣad in the light of this principle provides new ways of resolving numerous interpretive puzzles and difficulties that have preoccupied commentators for centuries. Drawing on the hermeneutic insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Francis X. Clooney, the author demonstrates that Sri Aurobindo combines a traditional commitment to the transformative power of scripture with a historico-philological method



avored by recent scholars. On this basis, the author contends that Sri Aurobindo's unduly neglected commentary on the Īśā Upaniṣad deserves a prominent place in contemporary scholarly discussions.

Chapter 12 On the Style of Vedānta: Reading Bhāratīrtha's *Vaiyāsikanyāyamālā* in Light of Mādhava's *Jaiminīyanyāyamālā*

Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

The *Vaiyāsikanyāyamālā* of Bhāratīrtha (fourteenth century) is a manual in the Advaita Vedānta tradition, distinguished stylistically by its great succinctness and by its commitment to the summation of each *adhikaraṇa* of the entire *Brahmasūtra* (BS), adding nothing extraneous to the set of *adhikaraṇas* first proposed by the *sūtrakāra* Bādarāyaṇa. It thus articulates a version of Advaita realized only by way of close attention to the 192 *adhikaraṇas* of BS, rather than by way of generalizations on Ātman and Brahman, *avidyā* and *māyā*, and so on. As a scholastic treatise, the *Vaiyāsikanyāyamālā* presents a clear mode of study of the Vedānta, commendable by virtue of its fidelity to the structure of BS and to case-reasoning as a distinctive form of Vedānta thinking. Yet it also suffers the possible drawbacks of a narrowness of focus and a refusal both to generalize its tenets and to return directly to the Upaniṣads, the ostensible original source of Advaita. Brilliant as a small treatise, it therefore also raises large questions about what ought to be counted as "real Advaita." The chapter compares this distillation of BS with the *Jaiminīyanyāyamālā* of Mādhavācārya (also fourteenth century, possibly a bit later than Bhāratīrtha), which similarly distills the 900 *adhikaraṇas* of Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*. Through this comparison, we take note of the different ways in which *dharma* and Brahman, two very different objects of study, are nevertheless studied by treatises of the same style.

Chapter 13 *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*: A Narrative Interpretation of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta

Daniel Raveh

This chapter rereads and rethinks the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* (SDV), a premodern hagiography of Śaṅkara written in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. The author focuses on two pivotal episodes of the SDV, the episode of Śaṅkara in the king's body (and the debate with Maṇḍana and Ubhaya-bhāratī that precedes it), and Śaṅkara's poignant encounter with an "untouchable" *caṇḍāla* on a narrow lane leading to the river *Gaṅgā*. Both episodes raise questions about identity and identification, embodiment and dis embodiment, borders and border-crossing, knowledge of body and body of knowledge. The author reads these episodes opposite Śaṅkara's own texts, namely the *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* and his commentaries on several Upaniṣads and the



Bhagavad-Gītā, thereby creating a dialogue between two Śaṅkaras, the philosopher-commentator and his namesake, the protagonist of the hagiography. The first episode, the author argues, elucidates the intriguing concept of *jñāna-niṣṭhā*—“steadfastness in knowledge,” or more literally “being within knowledge,” which occurs in Śaṅkara’s commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. The second episode, i.e., the *caṇḍāla* episode, adds a social dimension to Śaṅkara’s metaphysical notion of advaita. The author’s analysis draws on the writings of contemporary theorists Daya Krishna and Mukund Lath.

Chapter 14 A New Debate on Consciousness: Bringing Classical and Modern Vedānta into Dialogue with Contemporary Analytic Panpsychism

Anand Jayprakash Vaidya

One of the most salient questions in cross-cultural philosophy concerns the nature of consciousness: What is consciousness and where does it come from? This chapter examines panpsychism, a theory that maintains that everything is consciousness. Panpsychism is an old view of consciousness that can be found in both Western and Eastern philosophy. Recently the position has gained new attention within Western analytic philosophy. The author’s goal is to draw Western analytic philosophy into conversation with three Vedāntic traditions: Advaita Vedānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, and Sri Ramakrishna’s Vijñāna Vedānta. It is argued that contemporary work in analytic philosophy focusing on panpsychism can benefit from engaging with Indian philosophy, and vice versa. In particular, by drawing these two traditions into conversation, the author articulates a new debate about the nature of consciousness. The new debate focuses on the question: Which illusion, if any, should we accept? On the one hand, one can hold that the self is real, but that consciousness is an illusion. On the other hand, one can hold that the self is an illusion, but that consciousness is real.

Chapter 15 Mystical Experience as a Skeptical Scenario: Śrīharṣa’s Skeptical Advaita in the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā*

Ethan Mills

Noting that the Advaita Vedānta philosopher Śrīharṣa (c. twelfth century CE) has been read as a skeptic, this chapter focuses on one of his distinctive contributions, particularly concerning the relation between his mysticism and his skepticism. In his philosophical masterpiece the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā*, Śrīharṣa refers to his own mystical experiences of nondualism, which fit William James’s characterization of mystical states as ineffable and having a noetic quality (i.e., they seem to be states of knowledge). Śrīharṣa’s experiences also possess another characteristic often attributed to mystical experience: a feeling of oneness. But his appeal to these experiences



does not form any part of a philosophical argument in favor of dogmatism about nondualist metaphysics. Nor does Śrīharṣa straightforwardly accept scripture (*śruti*) as a means of knowledge. Rather, the author argues that for Śrīharṣa, the *possibility* of nondual mystical experiences functions as a skeptical scenario meant to dislodge confidence in one's everyday metaphysical assumptions. Much like skeptical scenarios in contemporary Western epistemology involving dreaming, computer simulation, or brains-in-vats, Śrīharṣa's point is that the possibility of nondualism leads us to question the ultimate truth of everyday dualistic beliefs. Śrīharṣa's work became an impetus for Navya Nyāya and it remains a source of philosophical treasures that can still enrich us.

Chapter 16 Dream and Love at the Edge of Wisdom: A Contemporary Cross-Cultural Remapping of Vedānta

Arindam Chakrabarti

Could each of us, a self with a sense of individual identity and free will, actually be illusory, a no-one? Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) thought that our sense of individual selfhood is riddled with contradictions and is the root of our suffering. He praised Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* because it imaginatively disrupts our smug "scientific"/"practical" confidence in the reality of the external world. This chapter unpacks the Advaita Vedāntic concept of *māyā* that primarily applies to the contents of dreams, hallucinations, and illusions. We rehearse the classical Indian metaphysical debate between (Buddhist) anti-realists and realists around the ineliminable possibility that any current waking experience is actually part of a dream, if not my dream, possibly the dream of a collective mind or God. Śaṅkara's refutation of Buddhist idealism makes his position compatible with empirical realism. We then analyze Vivekananda's and K.C. Bhattacharyya's (1875–1949) totally different, but equally modern and original, approaches to the concept of *māyā*. Moving from metaphysics to ethics, the chapter ends by discussing Sri Ramakrishna's and Vivekananda's philosophically complex notion of selfless love (*prema*) as the only way out of the "prison-house" of *māyā*, tracing the roots of this notion to the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. The enlightened living liberated person, instead of denigrating or dismissing the world as unreal, may end up loving—even worshipping—the world of plurality as a real manifestation of God, just as Sri Ramakrishna's "*vijñāni*" does.

