

# A Sophisticated Vedantic Argument

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2016-11-09

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2990>

**James** (from a previous *satsang*): If there is only *paramarthika* (non-duality), then why is there a scripture? Who says there is only *paramarthika*?

**Charles:** If there exists anything other than *paramarthika*, we have duality. With *jnana*, there is no scripture, no teacher, no taught and no teaching. See Gaudapada, *ajativada* or *Karika* 2.32 or MaU7, “*na antar prajna, na bahis prajna...*” and some of my previous citations, i.e. “Who will know another and through what?” *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10?; “In That there is no difference.” Also, *Chandogya Upanishad*.

**James:** One of the definitions of *maya* is “that which makes the impossible possible.” It is logically impossible that if reality is only non-dual existence/consciousness there could be anything else. There is, however, apparently something else. Reality is a both/and, not an either/or, owing to *maya*. *Maya* (*mithya*) enjoys a peculiar ontological status. It is not the same as the self nor is it different. It is a power (*shakti*) “in” existence awareness that creates the appearance of a world, i.e. the five elements (*panchabutras*) and sentient beings (*jivas*). If existence/consciousness did not have this power, it would not be limitless (*brahman*) as the scripture states. It is *sat-asat vilakshanam* (other than) existence (*sat*) and non-existence (*asat*). As a result of this, it does not negate non-duality. To negate the self, the world would have to be different from the self. But it isn’t different. It is the self appearing in the form of a world by the grace of *maya*. At the same time, it is one with the self, but not the same as the self, because it can be negated by inquiry. When you investigate any object – the creation being the one “object” that contains all objects – the creation resolves or “sublates” into the self, existence/consciousness. You can’t say the world is non-existent, because you can’t experience something that doesn’t exist. We experience the world every day. You can’t negate something that doesn’t exist. The proven methodology of Vedanta is *adhyaropa-apavada*, superimposition and negation. *Maya* superimposes an apparent reality other than the one reality – think snake on rope – and Vedanta negates it. If it is one with the self, there is no difference and reality is non-dual, and there is only consciousness as the scripture states. So *maya* is one with the self but different from it, just as the power of an artist to create art is not different from the artist but it is not identical with the artist.

The categorical denial of the world that has been going on since the beginning of time and which we see in Shunyata Buddhism, modern “Advaita” and elsewhere. It is based on a lack of appreciation of *maya*. Duality and non-duality are not opposites; duality is a “subset” of non-duality. Vedanta is the only means of knowledge that explains *maya* in detail for the appreciation of inquirers. Once *sat-asat vilakshanam* is understood, then we explain how *maya* works.

If you deny the world altogether, rather than negate it with *adhyaropa-apavada*, you basically shoot yourself in the foot spiritually because there is no way a *jiva* can use its free will to prepare itself for Vedanta and have its duality removed. Duality is a belief, not a fact. Beliefs are negatable, facts aren’t. You can have your own beliefs but you can’t have your own facts. The

“nothingness” people believe that there is no world, but the the fact is that there is a world. It exists, but it is not real.

A pot, for instance, is not something that you imagine; it actually holds water. But it cannot be considered to be independently real, absolutely real, because it is dependent on something else for its existence – the material out of which it is made. Therefore you cannot say it is *paramarthika satya*. Nor can you dismiss it as non-existent, because it holds water! If you say the pot is absolutely real or that it is absolutely non-existent, your very statement does not hold water. Only an existent pot can hold water, a non-existent pot cannot.

**Charles:** This is from *vyavaharika*. From *paramarthika*, there is no *vyavahara*, no pot, no water. To say *mithya* “depends” on *satya* gives an existential status to *mithya*. Because we are oriented only to *vyavahara*, we tend to bring *paramarthika* to *vyavahara*, which is incorrect. *Vyavahara* is only *satya* – there is no *mithya*. There is a subtlety here that is easy to pass over.

**James:** To say that *mithya* depends on *satya* does not give it an existential status. It gives an ontological status. Categories do not negate the set of which they are a subset.

(Quoting Dayananda): “Otherwise *mithya* becomes *satya*, a reality. *Mithya* is defined as anything that has no independent existence, no basis of its own. So, by the very definition there is no such thing as *mithya* without *satya*. Even though one may say the world is *mithya*, he cannot appreciate it as such unless he appreciates *satya*. When the clay is appreciated as the truth of the pot, the pot is appreciated as *mithya*. So, only in the wake of the appreciation of *satya* does *mithya* become clear.”

**Charles:** This passage may clarify. It is not that *mithya* can be understood only through *satya* – which on some level is true. It is that, in the wake of *satya*, *mithya* wholly vanishes – there is no *mithya*.

**James:** It depends on what you mean by “vanishes.” The ostensible meaning is that it no longer exists. But the world does exist for *jnanis*. Self-knowledge does not remove the world; it only changes the status of the world. The world goes from one ontological category, i.e. real (*satya*), to another, i.e. apparently real (*mithya*). If the world vanished there would be no *jnanis*, because *jnanis* are *vyavaharika satyam*, i.e. empirically verifiable. Knowledge and ignorance are known to you, awareness, which goes to show that ignorance is not opposite to awareness. It is only opposite to knowledge. Both knowledge and ignorance are *mithya*, objects generated by *maya* in existence/consciousness.

(Quoting Dayananda): “But you know it is not so. You know there is still only one ‘you’ because you know that the reflection is *mithya*. One plus one does not make two here. Even if you stand in a house of mirrors and see infinite reflections, there is still only one ‘you.’ The only difference is all the images in the mirror are identical, but in *Isvara srsti* no two things look the same, not even two thumbs. The variety is infinite. Moreover, none of the reflections you see in the mirror is taken seriously. You cannot be detracted from or improved upon in a mirror. If you go to one *upadhi*, a concave mirror, and see yourself elongated or you go to another *upadhi*, a convex mirror, and see yourself widened, you do not get alarmed, you are

amused. Why? Because you know that it is *mithya*. If it were real, it would be a problem. Being *mithya*, there is no problem. *Mithya* undergoes changes, *satya* remains the same. That means, in the *satya vastu*, there are no changes. *Nama rupas* change, *vastu* does not. It is the cause of all of them. It is the cause that never changes. Therefore *paramatma* plus *maya* does not make two.”

**Charles:** Good, clearer still. True, you know there’s no real *mithya*, as the mirror example ably shows, but the idea of *paramatma* plus *maya* is the idea that SSS attacks. SSS argues that S does not posit an *Isvara srsti*, nor a *maya* that co-exists with *Brahman* – again, *bhavarupa* versus *abhavarupa*.

**James:** Well, let SSS think what he wants to. Vedanta posits both *Isvara* and *jiva* and negates them both. You may have an unfortunate idea about *Panchadasi* but I think you should read it with my commentaries because it is very clear on this topic.

(Quoting Dayananda): “Just as how mirage water will not moisten a parched desert, ignorance, which is *mithya*, and cannot affect what is real. There are two definitions for *mithya*. They are: “that which has its basis in something else, *adhisthana ananya* is *mithya*. Or that which cannot be defined as absolutely existent or non existent, *sad asadbhyam anirvacanaya*, is *mithya*. We cannot say that ignorance is real, because if it were *sat*, one could not remove it, *sat cot na badhyeta*; yet we see that in the wake of knowledge ignorance does disappear. Nor can we say that it does not exist, *asat*, because until knowledge removes it, it remains as something opposed to knowledge. Every question reveals its existence. It is important to understand that ignorance is not absence of knowledge. There is absence of knowledge in a pot also, but we do not say the pot is ignorant. Only the one who is capable of knowledge is now ignorant.”

**Charles:** Again, *sadasadbhyam anirvacaniya* is posited as some kind of existent.

**James:** Yes, but “some kind of existent” is not existent. *Maya* is “some kind of existent,” meaning it neither exists nor does it not exist. It doesn’t mean anything to say that the world doesn’t exist. It is not only ignorant, it is an unhelpful ignorance as far as *moksa* is concerned. The self has no quarrel with ignorance. And, as I said previously, Vedanta has no quarrel with the statement that there is only consciousness, but it provisionally accepts duality because duality is ignorance and Vedanta is a means of knowledge that removes ignorance.

(Quoting Dayananda): “Ignorance is some ‘thing’ that is opposed to knowledge and can be destroyed by it because it cannot be dismissed as non existent, nor can it be accepted as *satya*. It is therefore something in between – *mithya*. When ignorance is *mithya*, so is its product, *samsara*. Neither of them has any reality for the self, the knower of the field (*ksetrajna*), and therefore do not in any way affect it, just as how the mirage water does not at all affect the desert with its wetness. The locus of a superimposition is not affected by what is superimposed upon it. Therefore the *ksetrajna*, which is *atma* identified as *Isvara*, is not affected by ignorance or its product at any time. It always remains the same. Because the *ksetrajna* is never affected by ignorance and its product, *Isvara*, with whom the *ksetrajna* is identified, is also not a *samsari*.”

**Charles:** Here it's actually stated "Ignorance is some 'thing'... something in between (*satya* and *mithya*)." I believe that is the issue. We can find no example of an "in-between" existent.

**James:** This statement does not stand if you understand what I have said above. Anything is possible in *maya*. That a *jiva* with its limited knowledge can find no example of an "in between" does not mean that "in between" does not exist. We don't have words for things that don't exist. In fact the *jiva* itself is "in between" because it is a mixture of *satya* and *mithya*, consciousness and matter. This is why it is confused and needs a scripture to make it clear whether it is a spiritual or a material entity. It is neither. It is both, but the material portion of *jivas* – their bodies and minds – are not in conflict with their spiritual nature, consciousness. The only conflict is in their understanding.

It may take a while to get your mind around all this. I know the view of SSS. This is my view. Unless SSS can refute this with reference to scripture, I am not interested in more discussion of this topic.

I am confident he can't because this teaching set me free and it has set many of the people I teach free. If SSS has another teaching that sets people free, God bless him. Freedom is freedom. What does the means matter?

(Quoting Dayananda): "Although we give the example of the sun not being affected by what it illumines, there is no example that is adequate to illustrate this, because the *ksetrajna* belongs to one order of reality, *satya*, and what is known, the *ksetra*, to another, *mithya*. How is *mithya* going to affect *satya*, upon which it depends for its very existence?"

The second chapter of the *Gita* begins with the discussion of *satya* and *mithya*, which Arjuna fails to comprehend. It talks about *satya*, limitless non-dual awareness, *tucha* (non-existence, "a hare's horn") and *mithya*, apparent reality. Saying that "it" is all *satya* is not helpful, even though from the *paramarthika* level it is true. Vedanta provisionally accepts duality and proceeds with the *prakriyas* on *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti*. Failure to provisionally accept duality and subsequent categorical statements of non-duality in the "teachings" – such as they are – of "Advaita," as pervaded in the West, are not effective, except as frustrating eye-catchers. They amount to denial because they don't allow for enough *mithya* for inquirers to prepare themselves to understand *satya* AND *mithya*, which is the essence of *moksa* (*brahma satyam, jagan mithya; jivo brahamaiva na parah*).

Probably 70 to 80% of the people I teach were sent to Vedanta by *Isvara* because of the glaring failure of Neo-Advaita to appreciate the importance of *mithya* and employ the *mithya* tools necessary to purify the *mithya* mind. Advaita has no room for *anta-karana suddhi*. So the statement "it is all *brahman*, the world doesn't exist" is not a teaching. Coupled with the idea that you are not the mind, it may be temporarily useful for unqualified seekers and it may be useful for highly qualified seekers who do not need *antakarana suddhi*, but for everybody else, it is not helpful.

**Charles:** Yes, merely to claim the non-existence of *vyavahara* is nonsense. Neo-Vedanta is many-limbed and in my mind without sophistication sufficient to warrant much attention. If traditional Advaita is confused about authentic teachings of Shankara and the *Upanishads*, what

to say of Neo-Vedanta?

**James:** Obviously you and I have a different understanding of traditional Vedanta.

**Charles:** Indeed, the issue is not even Pujya Swamiji (Dayananda), as he has inherited the tradition of the Bhamati and Vivarana.

**James:** This is not true. “His teaching,” which is not “his” teaching, is *Upanishadic*. The Bhamati and Vivarana are “schools” of thought. Vedanta is a *pramana*, not a school of thought. These schools are merely differences of opinion about *pratibimba vada*, the reflection teaching, which is just a sophisticated and subtle presentation of *satya* and *mithya*. The *jnanis* who discussed *pratibimba vada* were traditionalists, i.e. they accepted the *Upanishads* as the means of knowledge for the self. They were basically bored people who enjoyed spitting hairs. You really need to read *Inquiry into Existence*. I cannot reproduce the arguments here. I am too busy. I am only interested in *moksa*. You don’t need fancy semblance-theory arguments for *moksa*. You only need to know the difference between *satya* and *mithya* and apply this knowledge (*jnanabyasa*, i.e. *viveka*) to your mind on a moment-to-moment basis until you are doubt-free about your identity as non-dual, actionless, ordinary, unborn, ever-present, always-experienced, unconcerned existence/awareness.

**Charles:** Swamiji (Dayananda) to his credit has acknowledged and corrected certain mistaken ideas, such as meditation and mysticism, as *pramana*. Both the Bhamati and Vivarana schools pay mere lip service to Shankara, and in fact blatantly misinterpret him. It is the words of these schools that have been handed down to us, and particularly the Bhamati that Ramanuja and other theists attack, not Shankara’s actual thought.

**James:** They weren’t handed down to me. I got pure Vedanta from Chinmaya and Dayananda. Both were traditional *rishis*.

**Charles:** This I have studied through reliable secondary sources, as I have no personal familiarity with the texts of the Bhamati and Vivarana (though *Panchadasi*, which I have read long ago, follows the Vivarana school)...

**James:** No, it doesn’t. Vidyananda had a slightly different take on it. You can learn about it in *Inquiry into Existence*.

**Charles:** ...and could hardly voice an opinion myself. However, SSS is not alone in his redactions. His views have been supported by Hacker, Mayeda, Alston, Ramachandra Rao and many other traditional *pundits*.

I read Sundari’s exposition. *Pratibhasika* is not a concept of Shankara’s, *maya* is not a *shakti bhavarupa*, and “you get to enjoy everything in life the fullest, knowing it’s all you” is the mistaken

outcome of taking *maya* to be an existent *shakti*. For the *jnani*, there is no *maya*, no *mithya*, nothing to enjoy and no knower.

**James:** Words don't exist for things that don't exist. *Maya* is *shakti*. It exists; it just isn't real.

I don't think you appreciate the fact that we don't "follow" anybody. Any *prakriya* that removes ignorance is fine with us. If somebody from the jungles of Borneo comes up with an analysis that destroys duality, it is quite fine. We are only into truth, not the purveyors of truth. For instance, here is version of the location-of-objects teaching by one of my disciples, Ted Schmidt:

"Can you say it belongs to Yoga or Vedanta, *dwaita*, *advaita*, *visishadwaita* or anyone else? No. It is just a pure *prakriya*, revealed by *Isvara*. Remember, the first *guru* is *Isvara*. *Isvara* revealed the *sruti*. After *Isvara* everyone is just a link downline in the tradition. Shankara himself said he was a link in the *parampara*, not to mention lesser mortals. Traditional Vedanta means that *Isvara* in the form of the *sruti* is the teacher. A teacher is someone who has been taught the whole means of knowledge, not someone who interprets the means of knowledge to suit his or her fancy. A means of knowledge is by definition impersonal, like the eyes. The eyes don't belong to me or to you. They are *Isvara*, impersonal principles. Vedanta is an impersonal means of knowledge and its methodology is impersonal. You don't even need to be a *jnani* to wield the means of knowledge effectively and remove ignorance. You only need to operate the *pramana* skillfully. This is my experience. Shankara said the same thing. It is just common sense."

As I said, the perfect teaching is the teaching that removes ignorance of the nature of reality.

~ Much love, James