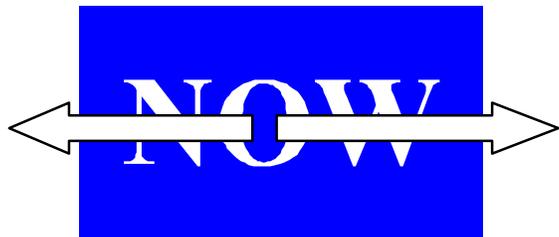


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Next Greville Street Meetings – September 27 & October 25

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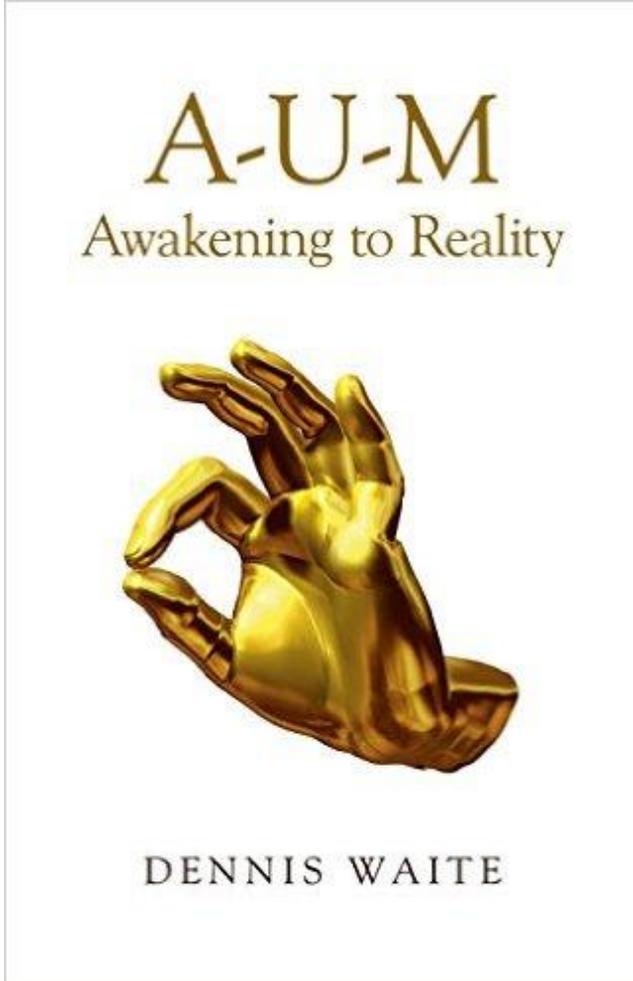
This issue has turned out to be a dialogue on Advaita. The first section is my commentary on the latest book by Dennis Waite, complete with his comments on my notes. This led to an exchange of emails which are summarised as four postscripts in the final section.

Most readers have dipped their toes into the Advaita ocean at some time in their lives and some of you are very knowledgeable. I hope you will respond with your views on the various questions covered here, which I will then include in the next issue.

I am holding a couple of contributions which will appear in October. My apologies for the delay but the Advaita dialogue has stretched this month's issue to maximum length.

A-U-M Awakening to Reality (First draft 12 September 2015)

Note that Dennis Waite's observations on my commentary follow immediately after the paragraph concerned. His comments are colour coded to match the part of my text to which he is responding.



Dennis Waite, author of *Sanskrit for Seekers*, which featured in NOWletter 175 has written another book. He thought I might like to read this latest work, *A-U-M Awakening to Reality*, and kindly sent me a copy. I told him I could not review such a detailed, comprehensive coverage of a highly specialised subject but that I'd be happy to write a personal response. This is it and I'll refer to the author throughout as DW. He explains that his aim is "to make the topics understandable to any seriously interested reader whether or not they have prior knowledge of Advaita".

The source text, the Mandukya Upanishad, of which this book is a commentary, analysis and explanation points to a wider view than commonly prevails. The book opens with a note on the question of happiness, pointing out the limitations of our everyday consensus consciousness and how we are trapped by the limitations of body and mind and generally remain in thrall to our apparent limitations which tend to point us to externals as the most promising sources of happiness.

The Mandukya Upanishad, the shortest and most profound of the Upanishads, opens with this verse:

OM, the word, is everything. All that is past , present and future is OM. And that which is beyond time is also OM.

DW's introduction concludes:

How this single syllable word, chanted by millions in meditation, can possibly point to such astounding statements as were indicated above provides a fascinating story and may lead to the realization of one's true nature as limitless Consciousness. OM is quite literally the key to understanding 'the answer to the question of life, the universe and everything'. ...OM can be thought of as "a very specialized lens which enables us to see reality more nearly as it is than through any other philosophical-cultural lens that exists!"

The author hopes that his book will help overcome any western notions that it is merely a repetitive ritual and show that it is a profound metaphor full of the revelation of the truth about oneself and the universe. We are reminded of the opening to the Gospel of John "In the beginning was the word, etc."

Although the Mandukya Upanishad is a very short work of only 12 verses (I have attached it at the end of these notes) there are a further 215 verses of explanatory commentary attributed to Gaudapada and which form the bulk of the material in the book. The book takes the verses and the explanatory commentary, the *kArikA*-s, and analyses their content, the major elements represented in the Mandukya.

DW says, that to modern students there can be no better introduction to Vedanta philosophy... than a study of Gaudapada's verses and Shankara's commentary on the Mandukya. And I would add that there is unlikely to be a more comprehensive expression of Advaita for the Western reader than this book, comprising as it does over 400 pages of commentary, analysis of the various interpretations, a Sanskrit dictionary of key words, appendices and annotated bibliography. Having suggested that

Gaudapada is the best introduction to the Mandukya DW adds, "... not everyone thinks that the work is profound. Radhakrishnan, in his classic two-volume work 'Indian philosophy', makes the following astonishing statement":

"The general idea pervading Gaudapada's work, that bondage and liberation, the individual soul and the world, are all unreal makes the caustic critic observe that the theory which has nothing better to say than that an unreal soul is trying to escape from an unreal bondage in an unreal world to accomplish an unreal supreme good, may itself be an unreality." And he goes on to point out that: "If we have to play the game of life, we cannot do so with the conviction that the play is a show and all the prizes in it mere blanks." (Ref. 45, extract quoted in Ref. 21)

I was astonished myself, but for a different reason. I was surprised to find at the beginning of DW's book a statement that expressed so clearly my feelings about much of the contemporary Advaita teachings as presented to us by people like Tony Parsons. It also provided me with another incentive to read the book in the hope it would enlighten me as to the basis for such claims as you don't exist, I don't exist, nothing ever happened and so forth. This presentation of reality and its effect on people like me is summed up by the author in the introduction when he writes:

Needless to say, the work is not very well known in the West. Consequently, it is extremely probable that any potential reader of this book will not previously have heard of the Mandukya Upanishad at all and will therefore also be likely to view any claim to its intrinsic worth with skepticism, to say the least.

And no wonder! Here are some of the most radical ideas ever presented, yet backed by the most rigorous logical argument. You will encounter, and eventually endorse, propositions that you would previously not even have countenanced: Your waking experiences are no more real than your dreaming ones! There has never been any creation – you cannot die because you were never born! The fact that you experience separate objects proves that they are not really there!

You may be worried that conclusions such as these are based on ancient scriptures, with which you will be unfamiliar and would be very likely to

reject. This is not a problem! Gaudapada was a stickler for logic and reason. Although he does refer to scriptures, since these were the absolute authority for seekers at the time, he refuses to accept anything unless it can also be supported by our own experience and/or reason. Also, like it or not, it remains a fact that the nature of ultimate reality cannot be fathomed by reason alone. Logic requires distinctness and differentiation in order to function. Accordingly, for some aspects, the sequence has to be: find out what the scriptures say; then subject this to reason and experience. (End of Extract).

Later he adds:

These ideas will no doubt sound very strange but the intention is that they will seem obvious by the time you reach the end of the book!

I could not resist the possibility of such an outcome.

DW's statements about the standard reaction to Advaita conveniently defined my objections to what I understand Advaita to be presenting to us and, at the same time, gave me a useful tool for tackling the project. As I have undertaken to write a personal response to the book, I can take the Advaita claims I find so troublesome, as identified by DW above, and make them the headings under which I will attach my reactions and realisations about them as I read.

I should preface these comments by saying that although I am not a student of Advaita I am well disposed to the tradition and have listened to contemporary exponents of the teaching at some length and read and been impressed by Vedanta. The Bhagavad Gita in the Juan Mascaro translation, provided a number of quotations which are burned into my memory. I have also been strongly influenced by a contemporary teacher of that lineage Jiddu Krishnamurti, although his attitude to all scriptures, East and West, was to abandon them and focus on the book of life. In addition, I was lucky enough to know Douglas Harding who found a way of opening the door to showing rather than saying what is what.

Now to the headings which are:

Your waking experiences are no more real than your dreaming ones!

There has never been any creation.

You cannot die because you were never born!

The fact that you experience separate objects proves that they are not really there!

Will this book change my opinion or, more importantly perhaps, provide a perspective from which they can be affirmed?

Your waking experiences are no more real than your dreaming ones!

Advaita uses the word reality in a particular way that is not familiar to common usage. In Advaita, reality means unchanging whereas in everyday parlance reality means actually existing. For example a tree is commonly regarded as real although it will be dead in a hundred years time and rotted away in three hundred. For Advaita the changeability of this process denies the tree any reality. Advaita is dealing with the unchanging, which it labels Brahman, *Turiya*, and sometimes I.

Once this non-standard definition is understood then the apparent nonsense or absurdity of Advaita-speak becomes more intelligible. For example, where Advaita talks of the unreality of the objective world of everyday experience we now see they mean the changing world of 'objective reality'. Advaitins would not use the term objective reality of course as that would undermine the case for *turiya*, they would explain it as the world of appearances.

So I can accept the claim of this heading on their definition of reality but **I do not regard the world as illusory** and as far as actual existence is concerned there are significant differences that give weight to the waking state as being more substantial than the dreaming and I think this view is supported by [a verse of the Mandukya](#) which distinguishes between gross and subtle objects.

Dennis

Advaita does not say that the world is illusory; it says it is 'mithyA' - a world of difference!

Gaudapada examines (and refutes) the various arguments suggesting that waking is 'more substantial'.

There has never been any creation.

This is the 'nothing ever happened' business. It may well be true from the standpoint of *turiya* but as *turiya* (brahman), according to Advaita, is inaccessible to mind then **how is it possible to say anything at all about it?** There is a widely used metaphor about a pot and space. The space which surrounds and is taken up by the pot and the space within, is constant and unchanging whatever happens to the pot– space in this example being a metaphor for *turiya*. The clay and the pot itself are shown to be temporary arrangements and therefore don't meet the unchanging definition of real.

Dennis

It isn't possible to say anything about turIya. But this is not the same as saying that there has never been any creation. Gaudapada gives reasoning to convince one of this.

Nevertheless, the clay and the pot are recognised as such and demonstrate an Advaitic **acceptance of the temporary state of their being and the fact that they clearly do 'come about'**. We normally refer to this coming about as creation but this seems to be **unacceptable to Advaita** on the grounds that *turiya* being unchanging cannot therefore be source and as there is nothing but *turiya* any change at all is ruled out? This contradictory state of affairs is sometimes resolved by acknowledgement of relative or empirical reality as opposed to absolute reality, yet somehow these modification of the absolute **are regarded as illusory and/or non-existent, in some mysterious fashion.**

Dennis

The point here is that the pot is only a different name and form of the clay; nothing new has come into existence.

The world is neither illusory nor non-existent; it is name and form of brahman-turIya. Nothing mysterious.

I can see that the acceptance of creation threatens any notion of an unchanging source, it would be a contradiction in terms, an affirmation of duality; something which does

not exist appears and one thing leads to another in a chain of causality bristling with things that evolve and change.

You cannot die because you were never born!

I can see that there is an aspect of being and of human being which meets this specification. However, in my opinion, immortality cannot be referred to as yours or mine. It is the ground we share and what is pointed to in the familiar '*show me your face before you were born*'. In the case of this koan, in spite of the wording, what is being pointed to is face-free, i.e., **immortality is of the undivided not of the individual.**

Dennis

Gaudapada is not saying anything different here.

The fact that you experience separate objects proves that they are not really there!

This reminds me of Wei-Hsin's *Before I had studied Ch'an for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and rivers as rivers. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and rivers are not rivers. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and rivers once again as rivers.* We analysed and summarised this tricky business in NOWletter 158 in January 21012 and in which I was pleased to see, when I checked back, that I'd referred in my comments to the famous Shankara quotation: *The world is an illusion / Brahman alone is real / Brahman is the world* and I just stumbled on a more accessible version in "flee the Many, find the One; having found the One, embrace the Many." Advaita, or perhaps neo-Advaita, doesn't seem willing to affirm let alone embrace the many. In this context I consider the Advaita position to be stuck at stage two.

Dennis The world is NOT an illusion; it is mithyA. These are not similes. The correct quotation is: brahman is the reality; the world is mithyA; the jIva (individual soul) is not other than brahman.

You just need to understand the meaning of the term mithyA.

Perhaps Advaita is here claiming that because I don't exist as a separate entity the sense of experiencing something for myself as opposed to apprehending it as a manifestation of unfolding wholeness is a misreading of circumstance? **So what can it mean to say that separate objects are not really there unless they mean they cannot be there because they are HERE?**

Dennis

Objects ARE there but, just as the reality of the pot is clay, the reality of the ocean and the stream is water, so the reality of all objects is brahman.

OM as the key

The one thing missing from my attempts to come to grips with the message of this book is that I have ignored what the book explains is **the key to understanding Advaita, that is the application of the regular chanting of the mantra OM.** I am not a regular meditator in the conventional sense but I've followed some of the traditional meditation practices and recognise their value. It may be that following a traditional Advaita path would make me less critical as I gained a progressively better grip on the teaching.

Dennis

I believe it says somewhere in the book that regular chanting will NOT lead to understanding. (If it doesn't, it should!)

Absolute and relative Reality

My observations on the book are focused on the claim that DW makes in the introduction when he writes:

Your waking experiences are no more real than your dreaming ones! There has never been any creation – you cannot die because you were never born! The fact that you experience separate objects proves that they are not really there!

That is something of a red rag as far as I am concerned and I've probably spent far too much effort letting off steam in response to those claims. As I read I became aware of an acceptance of what is called relative reality, *mithyA* (the capitals are necessary as DW explains in the book). My everyday state of consciousness, dreaming consciousness and what **I describe as objective reality are all *mithyA***. That is, they are not non-existent as I think the red rag paragraph implies but are forms of dependent reality as opposed to the absolute reality of *turiya*. Discovering that a relative dimension of being is acknowledged helped a lot. This, however, raises another problem in **that we are told that *turiya* is inaccessible** and, consequently, nothing can be said about it and yet the whole teaching is **based on the one assumption that is made about it and that is its unchangeability**.

Dennis

*Yes. What you wrote earlier, of course, implies that you did not understand *mithyA*. It reads as if you were writing the review as you read the book, which is maybe not very fair as you cannot know what the book says until you have read it!*

*We are not told that it is inaccessible. Indeed you ARE *turiya*, so it must be accessible! We are told that you cannot speak of it because it is not objective.*

The 'assumption' is that there is a reality forming the substrate of any appearance. What is suggested is that, if something changes, it cannot have been real since it was X and is now Y. Science (particle physics and cosmology) is now making the same distinction.

Conclusion

Of the three commonly experienced states acknowledged by Advaita, waking, dreaming and deep sleep, the only one which fulfils the conditions required to meet the claims of the four headings I selected for this commentary, is that of deep sleep when awareness of the internal movement of mind and awareness of impressions of the 'outside' world disappear. **A fourth state, that of moksha, the fully awakened state**, seems to offer the

realisation of the deep-sleep condition in everyday awakesness, and although considered to be the sought for awakening of the title of the book, could equally be understood as a sort of falling asleep, becoming asleep to creation.

Dennis

moksha is not a state. You are always free. moksha is simply realizing this.

I subscribe to another form of enquiry which is also often greeted with strong resistance on the grounds of its apparent nonsensical claims, in my case it is that that I have no head. If my critics hang around long enough to let me demonstrate that there is a perspective from which this claim can be made and demonstrated, ridicule is sometimes replaced by understanding. I have attempted to deal with my Advaita misgivings in the same way, by trying to find a standpoint or a seeing from which these strange assertions can be affirmed. So far, without success. The Harding experiments seem to be relevant to the Advaita approach in that they offer an immediately available reversal of attention which can break the deep identification with third personhood, revealing the aware space which includes, yet remains free of, the so-called objective world, knowledge, concepts, etc. It does not deny them but is no longer bound by them, thereby providing an alternative to the 'not two' of Advaita with a 'not one not two' of certain strands of Buddhism and, I would argue, of what I mean by reality. This awareness, a two-way seeing as opposed to *single vision and Newton's sleep*, is my meditative alternative to the OM approach. I know this might fall far short of what the moksha seekers are after but 'a bird in the hand..etc.'

My reaction to Advaita, at least in its absolutist expression, is that it may be speaking 'truth' about the fundamental aspect of being but it does so at the expense of manifestation. It seems as though the discovery of one's first nature has to negate the joys and sorrows of our second nature, and the denial of creation seems to me like spitting in the eye of creation itself. So, speaking from this state of what Advaita would describe as ignorance I say that Advaita overlooks the fact that there are different levels at which truth is apprehended and to settle for one level as 'real' and deny the others is, as Radhakrishnan asserts, the essence of unreality.

Reading the Mandukya itself I find reference to the objective world of 'gross objects', recognition of the various levels I see as missing from the absolutist claims, acknowledgement of the me, (the virtual self), and of creation acknowledged in the 'sleep state which is described as source and thereby creator of all 'things'. I fail to see how anyone, relying on the Mandukya itself can arrive at a standpoint which can assert: *Your waking experiences are no more real than your dreaming ones! There has never been any creation – you cannot die because you were never born! The fact that you experience separate objects proves that they are not really there!* I must assume these claims arise from Gaudapada's interpretations of the Mandukya which are quite different from mine.

Dennis

Many treat Gaudapada's verses as part of the Upanishad itself and even those who do not regard them as having a similar status. They are backed up by both scriptural reference and reason.

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Postscript 1

On completion of these notes I thought it advisable to find out what others have to say about Advaita and I did a bit of web-crawling. Almost immediately I came upon a 2010 interview between Dennis Waite, our author, and NON-DUALITY MAGAZINE. It is quite a lengthy and specialised exchange but particularly interesting to me as Dennis seemed to be dealing with some of my objections, in particular on the matter of levels. Here is an extract:

NDM: A few days ago someone told me about a western Neo advaita teacher in India who pays impoverished young Indian boys to have sexual relations with him. In this case who is the doer/enjoyer? Is it this Neo Advaita teacher's vAsanA-s, or is it Brahman doing this? Oneness, as some neos would say.

Dennis Waite: This sort of confusion arises because of failing to differentiate 'levels' of reality. All of this 'doing' – whether working, playing, seeking, becoming enlightened,

giving time and money to charity or having sex with young boys – all takes place within vyavahAra, the transactional or worldly level. At this level, there is duality, people and objects; and all of the usual issues of society, morality and responsibility apply. Traditional advaita says that the position into which a given person is born is determined by their actions in past lives and they have to ‘work through’ the related karma. The desires they have are determined by their vAsanA-s, which again are determined by past actions and formation of habits and so on. It is said that when a given situation is presented, one may act, not act or act differently from the dictates of past habits. And this brings us onto the topic of free-will, which I don’t want to enter into or we will be here indefinitely! From the standpoint of absolute reality, of course, there are no people or objects; no time, space or causation. But you have to be very careful not to mix up the levels. Most conceptual problems in advaita result from doing precisely this. The full interview is at:

http://www.nondualitymagazine.org/nondualitymagazine.2/nonduality_magazine.denniswaite.interview.htm

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Postscript 2

I have taken Dennis's comments from the above followed with my reaction, marked AM.

DW. Comment D5. The world is neither illusory nor non-existent; it is name and form of brahman-turIya. Nothing mysterious.

AM: I can live with that but not with the explanation 'There has never been any creation'. So how is this apparent contradiction resolved? It must be that we are using different definitions of the word 'creation'. So what does Advaita mean when it claims 'There has never been any creation'?

DW. Surely, if you accept that the world is name and form of brahman, then ‘no creation’ follows automatically. There is and always has been only brahman. For the sake of appearances, you can say that different forms are manifest. The metaphor of water is helpful. Water evaporates from the ocean, falls as rain, runs as streams, rivers and waterfalls etc and returns to the ocean. Different forms (and names) but nothing is ever created; it is always only water.

AM. Does it mean that the notion of a creative process is mistaken? *Yes*

AM. When you say for the sake of appearances you imply that appearances are of no significance, that differentiation can be overlooked or that perhaps even that they have no sort of existence not even co-dependent reality? I don't agree that 'it is only water' it is water manifesting as wave, whirlpool, etc.

It strikes me that I am having definition resistance again, where I use the word creation you are using the word formation. This, I feel, is where Advaita shoots itself in the foot. That is, by adopting unconventional expressions without warning the punters.

DW. On the contrary, appearances are extremely significant. For most people, they are everything. And it is not suggested that, once you realize the truth, appearance ceases to be important. Appearance will always be important to the person until his/her death. The difference for the 'enlightened' person is that it is known that he/she is not really a person at all, but brahman.

Your point about adopting terms without clear definition is true for many modern teachers. This is one of the key problems with satsang and neo teaching. It is clearly impossible to spend ages defining everything and introducing concepts when a typical session only lasts a couple of hours. Traditional teaching is a systematic unfoldment and takes place over many years.

DW. Comment D7. The world is NOT an illusion; it is mithyA. These are not similes. The correct quotation is: brahman is the reality; the world is mithyA; the jIva (individual soul) is not other than brahman.

AM: The definition you provide of *mithyA* in the book is:

— dependent reality; literally "incorrectly" or "improperly," used in the sense of "false, untrue." It is, however, more frequently used in the sense of "depending upon something else for its existence." It is ascribed to objects etc., meaning that these are not altogether unreal but not strictly real either i.e. they are our imposition of name and form upon the undifferentiated Self.

I have trouble with:

The fact that you experience separate objects proves that they are not really there!

I now understand that they are not really there as far as Advaita is concerned because their reality rests in their source not in their manifestation. Is that correct?

DW. The statement in that form was deliberately provocative to incite people to want to read it! Gaudapada uses the dream analogy. We experience objects in

the dream - see them, hold them etc and firmly believe them to be real. Yet, when we wake up, we find that they were not real and, indeed, mostly could not have been real, for various reasons that he presents. He then compares waking to dream for various reasons that he presents and suggests that the turIya-waking comparison is analogous. The section from page 73 to around 80 covers all of this. The other point is that something that exists now, but did not also exist in past and future, cannot be considered to be 'really' existent. Interestingly, the latest thinking in quantum physics is that the only reasonable definition of reality is 'invariant' (through all time).

AM. It may be a reasonable definition at the quantum level but not at my, mithyA level, the level which is tapping out this message to you. And wouldn't time itself, by definition, be mithyA, time as a measure of change?

DW. Time is indeed mithyA. Even physicists accept this; it is a relative phenomenon. We are talking 'absolute' terms, here. A mayfly lasts less than a day so that (presumably), its activity of searching out a mate etc seems to be quite a long time. In your childhood (at the time), it probably seemed an age before you would be 'grown up'. Now (perhaps) the years seem to flash by. All relative. In the context of the universe your lifetime is a mere flash. Incidentally, does the child that you were still exist? Body and mind have changed radically. (Incidentally, I only added the point about quantum physics as a passing observation because I just happen to have been reading about it. Usually, I am very 'anti' science in general. Some people find it reassuring that these concepts are not necessarily antediluvian.)

AM. I think that the widespread misunderstanding of Advaita is the result of a failure to define its terms.

DW. I totally agree!

AM. Your definition of mithyA is what I, and most people I think, would call the world, the universe, everything. With that in mind the claim that nothing exists is somewhat confronting.

DW. mithyA has no corresponding term in English; hence the necessity of using the Sanskrit term. But it is probably the most important concept in Advaita.

AM. Thanks for the feedback, I'll make sure you get a chance to check the final version of all this.

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My response to the book

Armed with the above feedback of postscript 2 I tried to summarise what I now understood to be the Advaita position in relation to the four key issues I addressed in my commentary.

1. Your waking experiences are no more real than your dreaming ones!

This relies on the definition of reality as 'that which is unchanging'. A definition specific to Advaita as far as I can tell. What the person in the street considers to be the world of everyday existence, Advaita refers to as *mithyA* and because the content of *mithyA* is ever changing the world as we apprehend it is described as unreal.

2. There has never been any creation.

Creation is an ever changing story, consequently it cannot be 'real'. However, Brahman, the unchanging, manifests as appearance and form. So, Advaita replaces the familiar meaning of creation with the words 'appearing' and 'formation'. But as far as I can tell, Advaita does not say there has never been any formation so I remain uncertain on this point. Appearance is what I earlier described as 'coming about', another way of saying 'creation'.

3. You cannot die because you were never born!

Immortality cannot be referred to as yours or mine. It is the ground we share and what is pointed to in the familiar '*show me your face before you were born*'. In the case of this koan, in spite of the wording, what is being pointed to is face-free, i.e., immortality is of the undivided not of the individual, DW advises that Advaita agrees with this interpretation.

4. The fact that you experience separate objects proves that they are not really there!

This is a combination of statements 1 and 2 relying on Advaitic definitions of the words 'reality' and 'creation'. It is pointing to the interpretation of events as separated into an experiencer of objects of experience and the objects themselves, neither of which are real in Advaitic terms. However, it is not difficult to see that, from the perspective of awareness, the observer is the observed, the experiencer the experienced. Presumably, it is only the appearances of what we call objects that can be affirmed.

Most of my difficulties were resolved when I grasped the difference between what I understood to be the meaning of certain words and the meaning they carry for Advaita.

I think there is excessive reliance on scriptural authority and conceptual analysis in much of what I read or hear about Advaita whilst, at the same time, many of its most revered and oft-quoted sages seem to be pointing to the immediacy of realisation; eternity now.

Many years ago I was persuaded by Carl Jung that realisation is best delivered by finding freedom within one's own cultural tradition, mine is bristling with examples and I end with a bit of Anglo-Celtic 'Advaita':

From everlasting He those joys did need,
 And all those joys proceed 20
 From Him eternally.
 From everlasting His felicity
 Complete and perfect was,
 Whose bosom is the glass,
 Wherein we all things everlasting see. 25
 His name is Now, His Nature is For-ever:
 None can His creatures from their Maker sever.

From The Anticipation by Traherne

(For the word NOW read Brahman and you have a neat, 17th century combination of East, West and headlessness)

This reminded me of James Charlton's book which we covered in NOWletter 168, *Non-dualism in Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Traherne: a Theopoetic Reflection*. James' interest in Ramana allowed him to bring the two strands together. For example:

Charlton points to the difference between Ramana's absolute non-duality and the moderate dualism of Eckhart, Julian and Traherne but in view of Ramana's acceptance of a manifest order I think that it is not so much a matter of difference in what is intended by what they say about non-duality but more a question of focus or which level of the spectrum is under consideration.
<http://www.capacity.org/now/Nowletter%20168.pdf>

After writing all this I discovered an essay by Jeff Foster, *The birth and death of fundamentalism in nonduality and Advaita teachings*, which covers many of the matters under our review. In dealing with some of the issues raised in these notes he describes himself as a former radical Advaita teacher. Link:

<http://www.lifewithoutacentre.com/writings/the-birth-and-death-of-fundamentalism-in-nonduality-and-advaita-teachings/>

Here are two extracts:

...And so what is seen these days is this: *nonduality is not a rejection of duality, but a celebration of it* – such a total celebration, that one cannot even use the words ‘nonduality’ and ‘duality’ as separate from each other. No-one and someone are actually one – they were never two. If ‘there is no-one’ is the crucifixion, then ‘there appears to be someone’ is the resurrection. The crucifixion *needs* the resurrection to complete itself. And so radical Advaita is only partially true – until it completes itself with its reflection. Then it’s all over.

... True freedom is not about escaping from the personal into the impersonal – it is to be found right at the heart of even the most intimately personal human experience. And so what a relief it is, to be a living, breathing, human being again, to allow life to express itself as this human name and form, as this beautifully *personal* human experience, and to *know* that it is none other than the impersonal dancing, playing, celebrating itself in every moment. I thank the teachers of radical Advaita for singing their song, and I respectfully break with their tradition once and for all – for all traditions are limited, and the song of life cannot be contained. Fundamentalism cannot stand; love will destroy everything in the end.

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Postscript 3—A final word from Dennis

Dear Alan, If I may be permitted to add my own postscript (!):

Interesting, but I fear that Jeff seems to be trying to compromise the truth of Advaita with the desires of most seekers today to live a fulfilling and happy life. Advaita is really for those who have come to appreciate that life is a diversion and is ultimately empty. mumukshutva - the driving desire for liberation - is one of the key prerequisites for this study; it is the wish to escape forever from the wheel (treadmill) of saMsAra.

Just a brief comment on your first point, if I may: "What the person in the street considers to be the world of everyday existence, Advaita refers to as mithyA and because the content of mithyA is ever changing the world as we apprehend it is described as unreal." The world is NOT described as unreal; it is described as mithyA. These are not the same (hence the need for the Sanskrit). Indeed, it would be better to say that the world IS real; it is just that the reality of the world is brahman or Consciousness.

Also, you cannot say that effectively, if there is 'appearance', we could call it 'creation'. Creation MEANS that there is a creator. In Advaita, there is Ishvara who maintains the laws and Brahma, who brings the world into existence and closes it down at the end of a cycle. But all of this is 'pseudo-explanation' for the empirical realm. In reality, Ishvara, the world, Brahma, and everything else is mithyA. Best wishes, Dennis

Incidentally, Alan, there are three extracts from the book that your readers could look at:

Waking World is also Unreal - <http://www.advaita-vision.org/waking-world-is-also-unreal/>

chin mudra (the hand symbol) - <http://www.advaita-vision.org/chin-mudra/>

Creation According to Reason - <http://www.advaita-vision.org/creation-according-to-reason/>

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The Mandukya Upanishad

1. All that is past, present and future is OM. And, whatever is beyond the three periods of time, that too is only OM.
 2. Absolutely everything is brahman. This Atman is brahman and has four aspects.
 3. The first aspect of the Self is vaishvAnara. This is the waking state in which one's awareness is turned outwards to the external world. vaishvAnara has seven parts and experiences the universe via 19 interfaces.
 4. The second aspect of the Self is taijasa. This is the dream state in which one's awareness is turned inwards. taijasa has seven parts and experiences the dream world via 19 interfaces.
 5. The third aspect of the Self is prAj~na. This is the deep-sleep state in which one neither desires anything nor sees any dream. Everything is undifferentiated; simply blissful Consciousness alone, gateway to the other two cognitive states.
 6. The macrocosmic deep-sleep state is the Lord of everything, omniscient; Ishvara, the source of everything; indeed the source and final resting place of all beings.
 7. This (consciousness) is known as the 'fourth'. (It is) neither (the knower of) the internal (world), nor the external. Neither (is it the knower of) both. (And it is) not (just) a 'mass' of consciousness. (It is) not consciousness (in the empirical sense of conscious 'of') nor (is it) unconsciousness. (It is) imperceptible, transaction-less, not 'graspable', un-inferable, unthinkable, and indescribable. (It is) the essential 'I'-experience. (It is) the negation of the experience of all plurality of the universe. (It is) pure, tranquility, and non-dual. This is the Self. This is to be understood.
 8. This Atma can be equated to OM. The aspects of the Self are the parts of OM and the parts of OM are the aspects. The letters constituting OM are 'a', 'u' and 'm'.
 9. The letter 'a', the first mAtra of OM, is vaishvAnara, the waking state, because both are first in their respective series and have the characteristic of all-pervasiveness. Whoever knows this will fulfill all their desires and be the foremost in their field of endeavor.
 10. The letter u, the second mAtra of OM, is taijasa, the dream state, because both are regarded as superior and also are in the middle of their respective series. Whoever knows this will become superior in knowledge and accepted by all. All members of his family will be j~nAnI-s.
 11. The letter m, the third mAtra of OM, is prAj~na, the deep-sleep state because both have the characteristic of a measure and are as though absorbed into the final part. Whoever knows this will be able to assimilate and comprehend everything.
 12. The fourth aspect of OM is silence. It is transcendental, without any worldly existence, blissful and non-dual; it is the Self. Whoever knows this realizes his oneness with the Self. Whoever knows this.
- (Dennis Waite. This last bit is repeated to emphasize the supreme importance of this pursuit and to leave the reader with this thought as the last statement of the Upanishad. Many of the translations and commentaries omit the repetition for some reason.)

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