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ENTITLED

Exegesis and the Quest for Textual Univalency in the Indian Philosophical Tradition: A Comparative Study of the Bhagavadgita Commentaries of Shankara and Swami A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada

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Instructor in Charge

APPROVED

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF

Prog. for the Study of Religion
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The heart of any religion is its sacred scripture. Although Hinduism draws its inspiration from countless revered texts, the heart of modern Hinduism is the Bhagavadgita (Song of the Lord). The Gita, a book of eighteen chapters, is itself an episode in the Indian epic, the Mahabharata. Its date of composition is generally placed in the second century B.C.E. (Hiriyanna 118, van Buitenen 6). At the point in the epic where the Gita begins, the prince Arjuna is about to lead his army into battle against an army composed of friends, teachers, and relatives. Arjuna is horrified by this prospect and throws down his bow, unable and unwilling to act. The Lord Krishna, in the guise of Arjuna’s charioteer, urges him to battle and throughout the eighteen chapters of the Gita instructs Arjuna in the nature of Reality, the Self, God, action, duty and their interconnections. By the end of the poem Arjuna joyfully accepts his duty as a warrior and the battle begins. The Gita has been a source of inspiration for countless others over the centuries and has been interpreted and commented on by scholars, sages, and laypeople from every part of the world.

Many thinkers have been deeply affected by their study of the Gita in modern times. American thinkers such as Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman were awed by what Thoreau described as “the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavadgita” (Prabhupada 505). Robert J. Oppenheimer

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1 Note on transliteration of Sanskrit words: Names of texts and philosophical systems will be shown in normal type and without diacritical markings. All other Sanskrit words will appear in italics. Long vowels will be designated by this mark (ā) over the vowel. The palatal and retroflex sibilants are transliterated as “sh” (śrṣrṣ) is designated by “h” ānusvāra is not depicted

2 The Bhagavadgita will be referred to as “the Gita” from this point on
began his study of the Gita while working on the Manhattan Project, and when he witnessed the first explosion of a nuclear weapon it was a line from the Bhagavadgita that came to mind. But of those inspired by the Gita none has captured more attention than Mohandas K. Gandhi. His understanding of the Gita was central to his belief in non-violence. The understanding of Hinduism that Gandhi drew from the Gita's teachings was extremely innovative. Gandhi derived a philosophy of non-violence and tolerance from the Gita, but the Gita itself culminates in Arjuna's decision to take up arms against his relatives and friends. How is such a dichotomy possible? The Gita is Krishna's attempt to make Arjuna see the necessity of fulfilling his duty and in his arguments, Krishna employs several different strands of complex philosophical speculation. The complexity of philosophical argument in the text creates diverse possibilities for interpretation of its purport. This openness to diverse interpretations springing from philosophical multivalency has made the Gita a central text in the debates between schools of thought within Hinduism at different points in time.

After the decline of Buddhism in India (c. 6th century CE), six different schools of thought emerged from within the orthodox Hindu tradition. Three of these philosophical schools derived their views from the texts of the Upanishads. For this reason their philosophy is often described as Vedanta. The chief teachers representing these schools of thought wrote commentaries on the Gita to both validate their own system and to refute the views of the other traditions, each school being able to find a basis for its system in the Gita. As stated before, the possibility for diverse

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3The term Vedanta means "end of the Vedas", and refers to the Upanishads.
philosophical arguments employed in the Gita. In fact, there are three main strands of philosophy that are intertwined in the Gita: Samkhya (dualism), Advaita (non-dualism) and Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism) (Hiriyanna 133, Redhakrishnan 1956, 13). Although these philosophies were not systematized until the fifth, ninth, and eleventh centuries C.E. respectively, all three systems find their roots in the Upanishads (800-300 B.C.E.), which the author of the Gita was certainly familiar with (many verses of the Gita have clear parallels in the Upanishads, especially the Kathopanishad).

With so many strands of thought in the text it would seem that no one system or point of view is being put forth. Arjuna himself was confused by the apparent contradictions of thought. He confronts Krishna with the difficulty in understanding his teachings in Chapter 3.

By words that seem confused, you bewilder my intelligence

Set forth one sure course by which I may attain the highest good.

The commentators from the great schools believed that it was their system that is represented in the Gita as the "one sure course." This thesis will examine the philosophies of the Gita and the viability of interpretation based on a single philosophical point of view. The Gita, as one of the three central texts of Vedantic Hinduism, has served as a constant source for the definition of Hindu belief. The Gita's historical role as the definitive text

4All verses taken from the translation of S. Radhakrishnan, unless otherwise noted.
of Hinduism makes the study of Gita interpretation of central importance for understanding the transformations of Hindu thought over time and the role of the Gita in those transformations. Arvind Sharma notes in his book *The Hindu Gita* that the study of possibilities for philosophical interpretations of the Gita centers around one key question: is the text univalent or multivalent? Every commentator has believed that it was univalent, but each also has a different perspective on what that one message of the text is. To address this question, two Gita commentaries from different schools of Vedanta will be examined and compared.

The Gita commentary of Shankara (788-820 CE) is the oldest of the existing commentaries, though in his introduction Shankara refers to commentaries written before his (Radhakrishnan 1956, 16). It is Shankara who set the text at its present 700 verses, and, as the first great systematizer and teacher of the school of Advaita Vedanta, he interprets the text as a scripture teaching non-dualism (*advaita*). A Samkhya commentary on the Gita has not come down to us. The *Samkhya Karika* of Ishvarakrishna is the earliest systemization of the Samkhya philosophy and a separate chapter will be set aside for identifying the elements of the Samkhya system found in the Gita. How the elements of Samkhya have been integrated by the other systems will also be examined. Lastly, the translation and commentary of Swami A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada will be used to represent the third view represented in the Gita, the theistic qualified non-dualism (*vishishtAdvaita*) first expounded by Ramanuja in the eleventh century CE. Prabhupada represents a twentieth century interpretation of the Gita and is significant in that his doctrine of devotional theism most closely reflects the religious beliefs and practices.
Two chapters will be devoted to the comparative study of Shankara's and Prabhupada's commentaries. The second and fourth chapters represent elements of both Advaita and Vishishtadvaita respectively. An examination of Shankara's and Prabhupada's gloss of these chapters will adequately demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of interpreting the Gita from any one point of view.

In studying these two chapters this thesis will focus on the question of identity and how each system's definition of the relationship between the individual Self and the Absolute shapes its interpretation of the Gita. It is precisely these differences in the understanding of the individual Self that create the differences in textual interpretation. It will be seen that the overlapping of the system's tenets and the ambiguity of the text also lend to the possibility for multiple interpretations.

A study of the role of the Samkhya system in the Gita is necessary before the commentaries of Shankara and Prabhupada can be examined. Samkhya exists as an independent system in the Gita, but many elements of it are incorporated into the other systems and an understanding of Samkhya in both forms is essential to understanding how it is dealt with in the commentaries of Shankara and Prabhupada. After examining Samkhya and its role in the Gita, the Gita commentary of Shankara will be discussed. His gloss of Chapters 2 and 4 will be examined along with an analysis of his approach to Samkhya thought as it appears in the Gita. The examination of Prabhupada's commentary will follow this pattern as well. In conclusion, a comparative analysis of the commentaries will be offered.
H. Samkhya and Its Place in the Bhagavadgita

A. Samkhya as a Philosophical System

The origins of Samkhya thought are uncertain, but the characteristic terminology unique to Samkhya is found in use as early as the 4th century B.C.E. in the Katha Upanishad (Eliade 52). The first systematic expression of Samkhya thought still extant is the Samkhya Karika of Ishvarakrishna, and its date of composition is usually placed around the 5th century C.E. The word samkhya means "enumerating, discriminating thought" (Horner-Williams 1199). Samkhya posits a dualist universe of matter (prakriti) and spirit (purusha) both of which are real and eternal. The discrimination that the name implies is between purusha and prakriti. Purusha, through its close association with prakriti, wrongly identifies itself with the transformations of nature. In fact, the purusha is untouched by the operations of prakriti, and the realization of this liberates the spirit from the bonds of matter. This is only a brief outline of Samkhya thought. It is necessary to examine both concepts in detail to understand how they are incorporated in the Gita.

The purusha is the spiritual monad and there is an infinite plurality of these souls, all independent of both nature and one another. According to the Samkhya Karika, "The Purusha, the soul, is a witness, free from misery, neutral, spectator and passive" (Nanikar 62). It is through its close association with the body that the purusha wrongly ascribes the attributes
of matter to itself. “It is from their association that the non-intelligent body seems intelligent and though the agency really belongs to the Gunes (the body), the indifferent one (the purusha) appears as the agent” (64)

From this association of spirit and matter “creation proceeds” (67)

Matter in its unmanifest form is known as prakriti. Prakriti is pure potentiality. Like the purusha, it is uncaused and independent. Prakriti is “one, all-pervading and eternal” (Indian Philosophy 260). It is the “unmanifested, without any specific mark, the central background of all” (261). From its association with the purusha, unmanifest prakriti becomes manifest and is transformed into the universe of multiple forms. The development of prakriti is by means of the three guṇas (Manikar 54).

These are the three constituent qualities of prakriti. Sattva is the quality of light and intelligence. Rajas is the quality of emotion, energy and activity. Tamas is the quality of darkness, apathy and lethargy. Everything in the world is a composition of the three guṇas, and all differences in the world arise from a predominance of the different guṇas (Indian Philosophy 263). In its unmanifest state, prakriti is a perfect equilibrium of the guṇas. The presence of purusha disturbs the equilibrium and process of becoming is set in motion. Why this happens is left unexplained. The transformation of prakriti that follow the disturbance of the equilibrium is carefully detailed.

Buddhi is the first product in the evolution of prakriti. Buddhī is the principle of consciousness and intelligence. The Ahamkāra arises from Buddhī. Ahamkāra is the ego-sense, the principle of individuation or self-consciousness. It is through the Ahamkāra that the purusha falsely ascribes agency to itself. From here the manas (mind) evolves and from the
menas: the 5 organs of perception and the 5 organs of action arise. The 5 subtle and gross elements also derive from aharnkara, thus completing the evolution of the material universe from prakriti. The chart on the following page illustrates the process of evolution.

The goal of life in the Samkhya system is to free the purusha from the operations of prakriti. In its liberated state the purusha exists in a state of isolation (karma) from both prakriti and other purushas. It exists without qualities, beyond causality. It is immutable and eternal. In this respect it shares a great deal with the conception of the Self found in both the Upanishads and the Gita. In fact, there are many elements of Samkhya thought in the Gita.
Pra kn ft

Pra kn ft

(undifferentiated primal matter)

Buddhi

the suprapersonal pure consciousness which has potentiality for experience

Ahamkara

(egoity, a function appropriating the data of consciousness and wrongly assigning them to purusha)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Lormendriya (faculties of action)</th>
<th>Manas (Mind-faculty of thought)</th>
<th>5 Jhanendriya (faculties of sense)</th>
<th>5 tanmeta (the subtle, primary elements, realized as the inner, subtle counterparts of the 5 sense experiences, viz., sound, touch, color-shape, flavor and smell)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sthula-bhutani (5 gross elements, ether, air, fire, water, earth, constituting the gross body and the visible world)</td>
<td>parama-anu (subtle atoms)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 taken from Zimmer pg 327
B) The role of Samkhya in the Gita

Although the Gita refers to its own teaching as "Samkhya" on 5 different occasions, it would be wrong to think this refers to the Samkhya system as found in the Samkhya Karika. It was stated in the introduction that the Gita was written in an atmosphere of open philosophical speculation. The closed systems of thought which arose from this period were formulated centuries after the writing of the Gita and the Upanishads. The use of philosophical concepts in the Gita does not necessarily conform to the strict formulation they would later be confined by. This is the case of the use of Samkhya thought and terminology in the Gita. When the Gita and Upanishads came into existence there was no clear distinction made between Samkhya and Vedanta. The words Samkhya and Vedanta are sometimes used interchangeably by the Upanishads to denote their teachings (Tapasyananda 484). This is the case in the Gita as well. Generally, Samkhya in the Gita refers to discriminative reasoning through which one distinguishes their true, eternal Self as transcending the flux of material existence. But unlike the atheistic philosophy of the Samkhya Karika, the Gita posits a Supreme Lord (Ishavara) which is the source and controller of both spirit and matter. Chapters 2, 13 and 14 offer the clearest examples of how Samkhya thought is incorporated into the teachings of the Gita.

Chapter 2 is titled Samkhya Yoga. Although this chapter does not present the system of the Samkhya Karika, it includes many concepts that would later become unique to the Samkhya system. The first half of Chapter 2 describes an eternal Self that transcends the operations of the material
universe. It is described as unmanifest, unchanging, immutable and unthinkable. Radhakrishnan has observed of this passage that "Right through it is the purusha of the Samkhya that is described here, not the Brahman of the Upanishads" (Radhakrishnan 109). The influence of distinctively Samkhya thought is evident in the second half of Chapter 2 as well. The focus of this passage is the man with buddhi yukta. Buddhi in the Samkhya system is element of pure consciousness. According to the Samkhya system, liberation is achieved when buddhi distinguishes the purusha to be isolated from prakriti. The buddhi yukta in Chapter 2 is also described as one who has distinguished his separation from the material world through the application of buddhi.

Chapter 13 also expounds a distinctively Samkhya teaching. The opening verse of the chapter, absent from many manuscripts, immediately announces the Samkhya orientation of this chapter. It reads:

prakritim purusham caiva kshetram kshetrajam eva ca
etad veditum tuhami jaham jayam ca keshava

Prakriti and purusha, the field and the knower of the field, knowledge and the object of knowledge, these I should like to know, O Keshava.

Chapter 13 examines the Samkhya distinction between spirit and matter (purusha and prakriti). The different constituents of manifest prakriti are mentioned in verse 5. But in an addition to the Samkhya formulation, Chapter 13 posits a Supreme Lord which is the controller of all. Krishna says, "Know Me as the knower of the field in all fields" (Radhakrishnan 302). While accepting much of Samkhya's thought, the Gita never accepts the

3Shankara interprets this as a description of the Brahma of the Upanishads (pg 12-16)
atheism of the Samkhya system. Chapter 14 continues the Samkhya line of
thought by examining the 3 gunas (modes) of prekrti and their
relationship to individual personality. The examination of the nature of the
gunas actually receives more attention in the Gita than it does in the
Samkhya karika. But as in Chapter 13, “this is done from theistic point of
view, and the supremacy of Ishvara over Purusha and Prakriti is maintained
all through” (Tapasyananda 484). The Gita accepts and integrates much of
Samkhya thought into its teachings. It appears in both the Upanishadic
sense of “discriminating reason” and as it would later be systematized in
the Samkhya karika. It does this without ever accepting Samkhya’s atheism.
The elements of Samkhya thought in the Gita present exegiical challenges
to both Shankara and Prabhupada. Although both commentators would like to
read the Gita as a univalent text, the Samkhya elements are impossible to
ignore. They both find unique ways of incorporating Samkhya into their
systems. This will be seen in their glosses of Chapter 2. Shankara’s and
Prabhupada’s approaches to Samkhya thought in the Gita as a whole will be
addressed after examining each commentator’s gloss of Chapters 2 and 4.
III Shankara’s Gitabhasya

Shankara’s Gitabhasya was written around the ninth century C.E. His commentary is an attempt to show the Gita to be a scripture supporting his doctrine of non-dualism (advaita). Shankara’s Advaita doctrine has been extremely influential in Indian philosophy to the present day and his commentary on the Gita has shaped the way many scholars and commentators approach the Gita. R.C. Zaehein, in the introduction to his own commentary on the Gita, laments the extent of Shankara’s prominence as a commentator on the Gita. He speaks of modern commentators on the Gita as “conditioned by the most ancient and the most authoritative of the medieval commentaries, that of the founder of the extreme school of Vedantin non-dualism, Shankara” (Zaehein 3).

Before examining Shankara’s commentary a brief outline of his thought is necessary. As stated before, he expounded a doctrine of non-dualism, more precisely, non-duality of subject and object. Shankara postulates an ultimate reality (brahman) as the sole reality, it is eternal, unchanging, and totally without distinguishing attributes (nirguna). The non-duality of brahman, the non-reality of the world, and the non-difference of the soul from brahman - these constitute the teaching of Advaita” (Mahadevan 141). The empirical world has relative reality, but only as maya (illusion). Realization of one’s own self (atman) as being identical with the ultimate (brahman) dispels the illusion of “I” as an independent entity and the multiplicity of objects. One who realizes this identity (brahman-atman) achieves salvation in this life (jivanmukti). For Shankara, works (karma) cannot bring about salvation, they only bind us to the illusory world of cause
and effect, the cycle of death and rebirth (samsāra). According to Shankara, only through knowledge (prāna) can salvation be achieved. "While action is necessary as a means for the purification of the mind, when wisdom is attained action falls away" (Padhakrishnan 17). It is from this philosophical stance of non-dualism that Shankara approaches the Gita, and it will be seen that this approach both helps illuminate the meaning of some passages while obscuring others. His interpretation of the three chapters will be examined with attention being paid to both instances, focusing on the key concepts of the individual Self, action (karma), and the Absolute. A general assessment of his commentary will then be offered.

A. Chapter 2

1) The Individual Self

Chapter 2 is titled Samkhya Yoga, but "samkhya" here does not refer to the philosophical system. Rather, it means "enumerating thought" or "discriminating thought." At this point in the Gita, Krishna leads Arjuna through a process of sannya, a process of discriminating the real from the unreal. Arjuna's true identity from his deluded sense of identity. Shankara believes this to mean recognizing that the Self (atman) is not different from the Absolute (brahman). Shankara's Advaita exegesis hits its first difficulty with 2.12 -

\[
\text{na tv eva nām jñātava sam na tvam na nām jñānātma }
\]

\[
\text{na caiva na bhavishydmah serve vayam etah param }
\]

Never was there a time when I was not, nor thou, nor these lords of men, nor will there ever be a time hereafter when we all shall cease to be.
Shankara glosses this passage as referring to the eternal *brahman*. Krishna, Arjuna, and the princes as embodied selves (*atman*) are identical to the eternal *brahman* and therefore also eternal (Warrier 29). But Krishna uses the first, second, and third persons separately and then says “never shall we all cease to be.” The clear meaning of the text seems to be that “we all” (*sāvya nayām*) have existed eternally as individuals and will never cease to exist as such. This seems to be an example of Shankara over-interpreting a verse, but he offers an extremely detailed glosses of verses 16 and 17 which, when read back into verse 12 seem to support his interpretation of that verse. Verses 16 and 17 run as follows—

```
ne sato vidyate bhava ne bhām vidyate satām
abhayam api drṣṭāṁ hi sa tv aṇeyos tattvadarśihum
annādi tu tat vidhau gṛṇa sāvyaḥ sam tātām
vindham aṇeyosyāḥ sye na keshat kartum arhat
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Of the non-existent there is no coming to be, of the existent there is no ceasing to be. The conclusion about these two has been perceived by the seers of truth.

Know that that by which all this is pervaded is indestructible.

Of the immutable being, no one can bring about the destruction.

Shankara identifies the non-existent with “effected states” (the world of multiple forms) on the premise that the effect cannot be separated from the cause. Therefore, “all transformations, not being cognizable apart from their causes, are unreal” (Warrier 33). *Aṣṭ* (non-existent) has been equated with *maya*. The existent (*sāt*) never ceases to be. This removes it from the realm of cause and effect where all things are subject to mutation.

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?Compare this cloka with the doctrine of Sat-kārya-vāda, Śāṅkhyakarika IX
This "immutable being" of verse 16 is further expounded in verse 17 as all-pervasive and indestructible, and it is at this point that Shankara equates \textit{brahman} with \textit{sat} (the existent). This interpretation of verse 16 and 17 is essential to Shankara's gloss of the verses that follow.

Verses 18 through 30 address the invulnerability of the eternal that is embodied in the individual Self. It is said to be incapable of action (19). "unborn, eternal, permanent--it is not slain when the body is slain."

Shankara glosses these verses as an exposition of \textit{atlman}, the embodied \textit{sat} / \textit{brahman} which he identified in verses 16 and 17, and the vocabulary of this section does lend itself to an Advaita reading if one is willing to accept Shankara's interpretation of verses 16 and 17 and extend his identification of \textit{sat} with \textit{Brahman} through the following verses. But verse 21, which is characteristic of this section, illustrates the tenuous nature of Shankara's gloss of this section. Verse 21 reads:

\begin{verbatim}
veda vinashnam nityam ya enam ajam avyayam
katham sa purushah pártha kam ghátyati hanti kam
He who knows that it is indestructable and eternal, uncreate and unchanging, how can such a person slay anyone, O Partha, or cause anyone to slay?
\end{verbatim}

In his commentary on this verse Shankara once again falls back on his standard position that one who has realized the \textit{atlman} / \textit{brahman} identity knows there is no possibility of action or inaction. He writes, "The immutability of the Self, being the same for negating all action on its part, the Lord here conveys the idea of negation of all actions by a knower of the Self. The negation of slaying has been chosen as an example" (Warrier 43).
Shankara sees the immutability of the Self established in the gloss on 16-17 as the reason the Self-knower is incapable of slaying anyone, but this interpretation really seems to go beyond the clear purport of the verse. A statement to this effect is indeed made by Krishna in Chapter 5, verse 8, but this verse does not seem to be saying that. It simply says that one who knows the Self to be invulnerable realizes that it cannot be slain when the body is slain. No identification of the individual self with brahman is necessary for this verse to be understood and the following verses back up this simpler reading. These verses do not mention the necessity of identifying with a supreme Self for the realization of invulnerability, only that there is something in us that is imperishable and transcends the experiences of the body. It seems that in attempting to carry his atman-brahman identification throughout the passage, Shankara misses a thematic transition. However, if one is willing to accept Shankara's gloss of 16-17 and apply it through the verses that follow, his reading of the text is not implausible. This entire section is more easily understood as a description of the purusha of the Samkhya system, but the ambiguity of the language employed makes an Advaita reading of the passage possible, and Shankara exploits this in his gloss. The exposition on the nature of the individual Self that began at verses 12 culminates with and is summarized in verse 30. It is also epitomizes Shankara's gloss of this section. It reads:

\[ \text{dehi nityam avadhyo 'yam tehe sarvasye bhārata} \]
\[ \text{tasmāt sarvāni bhūtāni na tvam shocitum arhasi} \]

The dweller in the body of everyone, O Bharata, is eternal and can

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See page 11 for a discussion of the role of Samkhya in this passage.
never be slain. Therefore thou shouldst not grieve for any creature.

As in the preceding verses, this verse is most easily understood as a description of the purusha of the Samkhya system. However, from Shankara's perspective of non-dualism, the indestructability of the individual embodied Self is due to its identity with brahman - the eternal, all-pervasive, immutable Reality. Shankara equates the "dweller in the body of everyone" with the ātman through a subtle play on the language of the verse. Instead of referring to the eternal as being "in the body everyone" as individuals, Shankara says, "The Self dwelling in no body may be slain. Being all pervasive, the Self present even in stationary objects like trees is indestructible" (Warner 56). By saying that it dwells in no body, Shankara ascribes the invulnerability of the embodied Self to its identity with the all-pervasive brahman. This completes the ātman-brahman equation that Shankara has developed throughout this section. Just as this verse summarizes the teachings of verses 12-30, it also epitomizes the nature of Shankara's gloss of this discourse on the Self. His reading of the verse, as of the entire section, is not unreasonable as long as one is able to accept his extrapolations, such as understanding "the body of everyone" as meaning the that the eternal is all-pervasive, "dwelling in no body". As stated before, this entire section seems closer to a Samkhya understanding of the individual Self than to Shankara's ātman. This section never clearly distinguishes between a plurality of Selves (as in the Samkhya) or one Self that becomes embodied in an apparent plurality of individuals, as in Shankara's doctrine of Advaite. It is this ambiguity that allows Shankara
to confidently interpret this passage as referring to \textit{Atman} without seriously deviating from the text. Although his extrapolations sometimes overstep the description of the Self found in this passage, his gloss of verses 16 and 17, when read into the verses that follow, lend credibility to his interpretation of the passage. Shankara's commentary finds more fertile ground for an Advaita gloss in the second half of Chapter 2.

2) \textit{Karma} (Action) and the Individual Self

At verse 79 the Gita declares that the preceding half of the chapter addressed the knowledge of Samkhya and that the rest of the chapter will deal with the knowledge of Yoga. When commenting on this verse, Shankara declares that Yoga is that which leads to the knowledge of Samkhya and that this course of action is known as Karma Yoga. Karma means "action," "works," or "discipline." Although Shankara's system does not hold that there is a personal God, Shankara does acknowledge that the immediate purpose of Karma Yoga is the worship of God through the surrendering of the results of one's actions. It is important to note that he calls this the "immediate purpose" of Karma Yoga. According to Shankara, Jh\'\'na Yoga, the Yoga of knowledge, is the only means of attaining final release from the illusory world (\textit{mâyä}). The idea of action is incompatible with Shankara's thought since he believes the existence of a subject-object duality to be an illusion. Shankara must find a way to fit the path of action (Karma Yoga) into his system, and he does this by making it a step towards enlightenment, as his gloss on verse 39 suggested. The practice of work (\textit{karma}) is for those not yet ready to try the discipline of knowledge, a way for them to
purify their minds until they reach a state where Jhāna yoga is appropriate for them. In his commentary on verse 46 he says, “therefore, before acquiring the fitness for practising the discipline of knowledge those who are called upon to work, must do such works as promote limited ends.” (Warrier 66). In his commentary on verse 51 Shankara describes how the practice of Karma Yoga relates to knowledge of Brahman. Verse 51 states:

karmajam buddhiyukté hi phalam tyaktvā manishinah
janmabandhavinirmuktah padam gac chanty anēmayaṃ

The wise who have united their intelligence, renouncing the fruit which their action yields and freed from the bonds of birth reach the sorrowless state.

Up to this point, Shankara has equated Karma Yoga merely with the renouncing of the fruits of one’s actions with the mind set on God. In his commentary on verse 51, however, he gives an alternative understanding of this section that relegates Karma Yoga to a postion inferior to the discipline of knowledge (Jhāna Yoga). According to Shankara, in the chapter from verse 49 to the end, “what is set forth is knowledge, the realization of the metaphysical Reality, consequent on the purification of the mind through Karma Yoga” (Warrier 73). In consequence, the notion of abandoning the fruits of actions is only the first step in the ultimate realization that action itself and the idea that there is an “I” that can act are both illusory (māyā). Shankara, in his commentary on verse 54, equates the “wise who have united their intelligence” with one whose wisdom is born of the experience, “I am the Supreme Brahman” (Warrier 75). Shankara has thus established the purport of this section to be the subservience of Karma Yoga to Jhāna Yoga, but do the verses that follow confirm such an interpretation?
The verses from 54 to the end of the chapter are a description of the "man of stable wisdom," whom Shankara has just equated with the *jivan mukti*, one who has attained the highest realization of the Advaita system, and the following verses demonstrate Shankara’s interpretation of this part of the chapter to be very convincing. His commentary of verses 59 and 68 clearly set forth that this "man of stable wisdom" is one who has gained an Advaita understanding of action (*karma*). Verse 59 reads:

\[ \text{vishayā vinivartante mārahārasya devinah} \]
\[ \text{resavouram rasa iyasya param drishtvā nivartate} \]

The objects of sense turn away from the embodied soul who abstains from feeding on them but the taste for them remains. Even the taste turns away when the Supreme is seen.

Karma Yoga does not deny the existence of a subject-object relationship, it simply urges one to give up the attachment to the results of one’s objective actions. This tells us that the objective world holds no interest at all for one who has seen the Supreme and Shankara equates this with the realization "aham eva tat" - "I am verily that," the realization that *brahman* is the sole reality and that the ideas of subject and object are illusory. This is the base from which the man of wisdom acts. Shankara’s interpretation seems to be in keeping with the purport of the verse, but verse 61 offers a challenge to Shankara’s identification of the Supreme (*param*) with *brahman* as the basis for the actions of the wise man. Verse 61 reads:

\[ \text{lāni sārvāni samaṇaya yuktā āsīta mātiparān} \]
\[ \text{vashe hi yasya nditīyāni tasya prajñā pratishthitā} \]
Having brought all (the senses) under control, he should remain firm in 
yoga intent on Me, for he, whose senses are under control, his 
wisdom is firmly set.

This verse seems to say that one should regard Krishna as the Supreme. Shankara, however, believes the implication of this verse to be that Arjuna should act thinking, "I am not different from Vasudeva (Krishna)" (Warrier 61). Although this does not initially seem to be the sense of the verse, placing the verse in the context of the verses before and after makes Shankara's interpretation more plausible than it might seem at first. The fact that this is the only mention of acting intent of Krishna (as the Supreme) in this section is also to the benefit of Shankara's gloss. In this case, Shankara's glossing over of the equation of Krishna with Supreme could be justified by reading the verse in the context of the section. The closing verses of the chapter and Shankara's gloss of them lends his interpretation of this section a great deal of credibility.

Verse 68 states that only when one's senses are withdrawn from their respective objects is one's wisdom stable, and Shankara's gloss adds that for one who has gained this into the true nature of objects "all works cease, since nescience, their cause, has been sublated" (Warrier 66). It is the senses which, according to Shankara, create the illusion of an "I" separate from brahman. The implication the gloss being that Karma Yoga, the discipline of action/works, is inferior, since the idea of subject - object, which makes actions possible, is really an illusion. If nothing else, the two final verses of the chapter seem to justify Shankara's interpretation that the discipline of action is taught to be inferior in this passage. It reads.
He who abandons all desires and acts free from longing, without any sense of "mine" or "I", he attains to peace.

Commenting on the first verse, Shankara notes that in the previous verses objects have been renounced. Now in this verse the idea of subjectivity is also refuted. This idea that both the sense of object and subject are to be rejected is the central doctrine of Advaita and this verse for Shankara this verse firmly establishes that salvation only occurs through knowledge, the knowledge of non-duality between subject and object. Therefore, the discipline of action is relegated to a position of inferiority. The final verse of the chapter provides the last element Shankara needs to maintain the credibility of his Advaita reading of this section.

This is the status of Brahman, Arjuna; attaining it, none gets deluded. Abiding in it, at least at the hour of death, one gains super-consciousness in Brahman.

This, the final verse of the chapter, tells us the state of the man of wisdom who has renounced the perception of the duality of subject and object, and according to Shankara, establishes the superiority of the discipline of knowledge over that of action. Commenting on this verse he says, "It is the status of Brahman, won after renouncing all works ... in the final stage of one's life, one achieves super-consciousness in Brahman. It

*The translation for this verse was taken from the translation of Dr. A.G. Warrier*
goes without saying that he who renounces works right from the station of celibacy and remains anchored in Brahman throughout his life attains Brahmic super-consciousness" (Warrier 91). Shankara's interpretation of this section is considerably more convincing than his gloss of the first half of the chapter. His commentary flows in a clear progression of thought (excepting the problem of verse 61) and the culminating verse of the chapter makes Shankara's Advaita reading of this section seem to be the most plausible approach to the passage. Although he is successful in maintaining the superiority of knowledge over action in this section, in commenting on Chapter 4, Shankara fails to recognize an important thematic transition in the text when attempting to read Advaita doctrine throughout the Gita.

B. Chapter 4

1) God

Chapter four is entitled Jñāna Yoga, the Discipline of Wisdom. R.C. Zaehner notes in his commentary, "What precisely is understood as 'wisdom' is left unsaid, and the chapter is therefore not very appropriately named Jñāna-yoga, the 'Yoga of Wisdom'" (Zaehner 180). It does not seem necessary to discard the title of the chapter, as Zaehner suggests, but it is important to note that this chapter does not put forth a system of Jñāna Yoga as Shankara would understand the term. Indeed, this chapter actually contains the Gita's first extended discourse on bhakti, devotion to a personal God as a means of salvation. Shankara's does not acknowledge this important thematic shift in his desire to read the Gita as an entirely
Advaita text. His gloss of the entire chapter is unconvincing and, unlike his gloss of Chapter 2, tends to obscure the purport of the text rather than illuminate. Shankara states in his introduction that chapters two and three set forth the discipline of knowledge and that this is the teaching which Krishna seeks to communicate in the Gita as a whole. Shankara sees chapter four as a sort of eulogy on the discipline of knowledge (Jñāna yoga) with "reference to the line of teachers through whom it has been handed down to posterity" (Warrier 134). It is true that a line of transmission is put forth but, as shall be seen, the role of Krishna takes on new dimensions in this chapter and the primacy of Jñāna yoga as a means of salvation is called into question.

Shankara's gloss of chapter 4 employs subtle argumentation that is made possible by his definition of the term māyā. Although Shankara's system of Advaita posits a changeless Absolute Reality without qualities, he does grant that the changing world of name and form (māyā) is only illusory from the point of view of the Absolute. His ability to acknowledge the (limited) reality of name and form allows him to explain away verses that at first might seem at odds with his system of thought. This is the case in Chapter Four. From the very beginning of the chapter a clear transition of thought has taken place. Krishna is no longer giving a discourse on an abstract Absolute. He is now speaking of himself in the first person, as a divine incarnation. Verses 1 through 3 describe how, from the beginning of time, Krishna has imparted the teaching of the Gita through a hierarchical line of transmission. Arjuna stops Krishna at this point and asks how it is possible that he has been imparting this knowledge from the beginning. Up
to this point, Shankara has not made a significant comment on the text. Verse 6, part of Krishna’s reply to Arjuna’s question, is where the first exegesical challenge to Shankara’s gloss of the chapter begins. It is here that Krishna begins referring to himself as a transcendent being, the creator of the world. Shankara tries to relegate Krishna’s status as Supreme Being to the realm of *māyā*. Shankara strains the text to do this, and verse 9 demonstrates his interpretation of the text from an Advaita perspective as clearly inadequate in its approach to theistic passages of the Gita. Verse 9 reads

\[
\text{Janma karma ka me divyam evam ya setu tattvatah.}
\]

\[
\text{Tvaktā deham punar janma mātir maṁ eti so 'arjuna.}
\]

He who knows thus in its true nature My divine birth and works,

Is not born again, when he leaves his body but comes to Me. O Arjuna.

Having established himself as the transcendent creator and protector of the world, Krishna now states that by knowing his identity in its true essence (*tattvatah*) one is released from the cycle of death and rebirth (*samsāra*). This may at first seem like a theistic statement that is completely in keeping with Prabhupada’s system of Vishishtādvaita. Shankara, however, is unable to recognize the person of Krishna as the transcendent Absolute, and he plays upon the word *tattvatah* (*true essence*) to place this verse in an Advaita perspective. He interprets Krishna as saying whoever knows his works as having only the nature of appearance (*māyāriṣṭam*) is not reborn. By putting these words in Krishna’s mouth Shankara attempts to deny the reality of Krishna as the Absolute Being.

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10See his commentary on this verse.
relegating his works as a divine Being to the realm of illusion (mâyā).

Shankara also reinterprets “He comes to Me” to mean “He is liberated”, thereby trying to imply an Advaita release over the more theistic conception of salvation implicit in the verse. In both cases Shankara subtly manipulates the language of the passage. This is Shankara’s strategy throughout the chapter. *Brahman* is the one Absolute, the knowledge of which is the only means for ultimate salvation. Whenever Shankara is confronted with a passage or verse like 49 he relegates salvation through devotion to a personal God to the realm of maya. Verse 10 finds Shankara going unreasonably beyond the text in his need to keep theistic salvation subordinate to the ultimate liberation achieved by the knowers of unqualified *brahman*. It reads:

*vitarāgyabhayaśradhā manmayā mām upāshrītah*  
*bahavā jhānatapasā pūtā medhāvam āgatāḥ*  
Delivered from passion, fear and anger, absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me, many purified by the austerity of wisdom, have attained to My state of being.

Glossing this verse, Shankara picks out one word, narrowly defines it, and makes the verse revolve around it. Shankara picks out the word *jhānatapasā* - “by the austerity of wisdom” and interprets the verse as describing the Jhāna Yoga which was described in Chapter 2. He states that “The qualifying expression, ‘through the austerity of knowledge’, points to the fact that these emancipated men need no austerity other than knowledge” (Warrier 140). While it is true that *bhakti*, devotion to a personal God is not being described, the “austerity of knowledge” does not
culminate in a realization of unity with unqualified brahman which is the soteriological aim of Shankara's Advaita system. Shankara reads "absorbed in Me" as "those who are knowers of Brahman" and it is clear that he has deviated from the verse to keep a consistent Advaita reading through this chapter.

After this verse there follows a long discourse on the nature of action in relation to one that is absorbed in Krishna, having obtained his state of being. It is reminiscent of the discussion of action and knowledge in Chapter 2, but here the emphasis is clearly on action performed with the knowledge of Krishna as the supreme Being. Verse 35 at the end of Chapter 4 summarizes the content of the chapter and makes the preeminence of Krishna in the teachings of this chapter obvious. In summarizing the chapter's teachings, the verse also displays the inadequacy of Shankara's gloss of the entire chapter. The verse reads:

yaj mātva na punar mohem evamo yasyaś ca bandave

gena bhūtāś aśeṣhena acaśeṣyasyāṁś ca mahā tāṁ

When thou hast known it, thou shall not fall again into this confusion, O Pandava, for by this thou shalt see all existences without exception in the Self, then in Me.

This is a key verse in the transformation of the concept of liberation in the Gita. Chapter 2 culminated with a soteriology based on "the fixed, still state of Brahman... God is only a convenient object on which to fix one's contemplative intellect" (Zaehner 196). Shankara would like to keep the concept of a personal God relegated to the status of "convenient object" and has tried to accomplish this throughout his gloss of Chapter 4. Despite
Shankara's efforts, the weakness of his assertion that Chapter 4 puts forth an Advaita doctrine is obvious upon reaching this verse and his commentary on it. Shankara glosses the verse as "you will behold all beings, from the creator down to stocks and stones, directly in the inner Self (ātman)". The idea is that Arjuna will realise the identity of Self and God." (Warrier 174) Shankara equates the use of the word ātman with the ātman = brahman formulation of his Advaita system, despite the fact that Krishna has taught identification with him in his personal form as the source of absolute salvation throughout the chapter. The redeeming knowledge of verse 35 is the knowledge of Krishna's supremacy and the unity of all existences, which in turn have their source in Krishna. Shankara's attempt to relegate the role of the personal God to the status of māyā is not very convincing in this case and the weakness of his gloss is characteristic of his handeling of the entire chapter.

Whereas Shankara's gloss of Chapter 2 displayed his skill at elucidating difficult and obtuse passages, Chapter 4 illuminates the problems that arise when a commentator is determined to find only one philosophical point of view put forth throughout a text. Convinced that the Gita must be consistent in its presentation of Advaita doctrine, Shankara fails to see that there has been a thematic transition within the text. At the beginning of his gloss of the chapter he states that Chapter 4 is a recapitulation of the jhāna teachings of Chapter 2. Shankara's definition of jhāna is limited to its Advaita sense; knowledge of brahman as the sole, changeless, Absolute Reality. Although Krishna's descriptions of himself are similar to Shankara's conception of brahman, Shankara fails to realize that a

11 See Prabhupada for details on the theological implications of this verse, pg 44.
different sort of redeeming knowledge (jñāna) has been introduced, intent on reading his conception of jñāna into the text. With the introduction of theistic doctrines of salvation in Chapter 4, a thematic transition occurs in the text that Shankara struggles to fit within the framework of his philosophical system. The exegetical acrobatics that Shankara must employ to extract an Advaita meaning from the text testify to the weakness of his interpretation.

Although the preceding examination of Shankara's glosses on selected verses from Chapters 2 and 4 provides only a limited perspective on Shankara's Gita commentary, it does display the strengths and weaknesses of his Gitabhashya as a whole. By regarding Jñāna Yoga and Advaita doctrine as the central teaching of the Gita, Shankara has gone beyond the text while it is true that Advaita doctrine and Jñāna Yoga are preeminent in several passages of the Gita, Jñāna Yoga is only one of several approaches to salvation presented in the Gita. To present it as the only path to salvation both deviates from the spirit of the Gita, which teaches the equality of all Yogas, and causes Shankara to often deviate from the text to create the philosophical consistency he believes to be in the Gita. It should be noted that Shankara does acknowledge theism as the essence (sāraññā) of the Gita in his gloss of Chapter 12, verse 55. Theism does have a place in Advaita, but it cannot be granted preeminence to Shankara's monism and it is in the theistic passages of the Gita that Shankara's gloss tends to deviate from both the letter and the spirit of the Gita.

It is a point of debate among scholars whether Shankara believed he was reading a text presenting Advaita doctrine or tried to create a consistently
Advaita text out of an obviously multivalent one. A position somewhere in between these two seems more likely. What one scholar observed in Shankara's interpretation of the Veda can easily be applied to his reading of the Gita. He wrote, "Since he started with the presumption that the Veda is meant for teaching Advaita, and that only passages inculcating this are important, he found Advaita in the Veda" (Murty 332). Shankara found Advaita in the Gita and not without foundation. But in finding Advaita he sometimes obscures many other important facets of its message in his eagerness to uphold the superiority of Advaita.

C) Shankara's Approach to Samkhya in the Gita

Shankara's first comment on Samkhya in the Gita comes when, in verse 39 of Chapter 2, the teaching of the preceding verses is referred to as "Samkhya." Shankara, in keeping with all commentators on the Gita, believes "Samkhya" is used here in the Upanishadic sense as the "discrimination of metaphysical reality" (Warrier 62). Other passages offer Shankara to address elements of Samkhya thought as it is set forth in the _Samkhya Karika_. Shankara accepts most aspects of Samkhya: Chapter 13 verse 5 lists the 24 principles (tattva) of manifest prakriti as they are described in the _Samkhya Karika_. Shankara accepts the Samkhya description of the evolution of prakriti. He also accepts the theory of the gunas (constituents) of prakriti. He rejects Samkhya's atheism and its explanation for the cause of the evolution of prakriti. He says, "Prakriti is God's causal power to produce transformations, it is _mâyâ_ whose essence is the three constituents. This power gives rise to the transformations and

\[12\text{See page 9.}\]
gunas " (Warrier 443). Shankara accepts Samkhya's description of the phenomenal world, but only with the addition of a God which controls its transformations. However, the validity of both Samkhya theory and a personal God is limited to *māyā*. For Shankara, the ultimate realization is that both the world of multiple forms and the God which controls it are illusions. Verse 30 of Chapter 13 summarizes Shankara's position. It reads:

\[ \text{yadd bhūtāpratībhāvān eva sthaṁ anupasyati} \]

\[ \text{tata eva ca viśāram brahma sampadyate tada} \]

When one sees that the manifold state of beings is centered in the One and from just that it spreads out, then he attains Brahman.
IV. The Gita Commentary of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada is famous as the founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, better known as the Hare Krishna movement in the United States. The Gita is the central text of this movement and Prabhupada’s English translation of, and commentary on the Gita is worthy of study for several reasons. The Krishna Consciousness movement, with Prabhupada’s Gita as the main vehicle of dissemination, represents the first Hindu evangelical outreach to non-Indians. Also, while the esoteric nature of Shankara’s Advaita philosophy restricts its influence to intellectual circles, the devotional theism expressed in Prabhupada’s Gita translation and commentary is representative of the belief of the majority of modern Hindus. Whereas most scholars focus on the philosophical complexities of the text, Prabhupada approaches the Gita as a devout believer in the soteriological message of the Gita, as he perceives it.

Prabhupada is unique among modern commentators in that he believes the person of Krishna to be the focus of the entire Gita, and he criticizes others for ignoring Krishna in their commentaries. “Generally the so-called scholars... without perfect knowledge of Krishna, try to banish or kill Krishna when writing commentary on Bhagavadgita” (Prabhupada xx). According to Prabhupada, those who do not acknowledge Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead when commenting on the Gita have committed “the greatest offence” He labels such scholars “mundane wranglers” who “have taken advantage of Bhagavadgita to push forward their demonic propensities and mislead people regarding right understanding” (xxi). Prabhupada believes that the teachings of the Krishna consciousness
movement that he started in the United States can be traced through
disciplic succession to Krishna himself. Historically, Prabhupada’s
devotional theism is based on two intertwined lines of thought, one
philosophical and one religious.

The doctrine of Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism) is the
philosophical point of view from which Prabhupada interprets the Gita.
Vishishtadvaita was formulated by Ramanuja in the 12th century CE and
like the Samkhya and Advaita systems, Vishishtadvaita is considered to be
“Vedanta”. Ramanuja, like Shankara, was concerned with the nature of
Atman, and how individuals stand in relation to Brahman. Ramanuja
maintained that Saguna Brahman (Brahman with distinguishing qualities)
holds the position of ultimate reality, and that the Nirguna Brahman
(without distinguishing qualities) of Shankara’s Advaita system is inferior
and subordinate to it. Saguna Brahman is the personal God that was
subordinated to Maya in Shankara’s system. Ramanuja divides the universe
into spirit (jiva) and matter (prakriti), and his conception of these and
follows the Samkhya formulation outlined earlier (pg 6-7). According to
Ramanuja, there exists a plurality of eternal individual souls (jivas) and
the material universe (prakriti). These two “constitute the ‘body’ of the
Lord. The Lord – God – is the ‘soul’ or ‘self’ of this body. God is the
eternal center of both the active universe of matter and the totality of
immortal and timeless ‘spirits’ or ‘selves’” (Zaehner 9). Or as Prabhupada
puts it, “The position of the Supreme Lord is that of supreme consciousness.
The jivas, or the living entities, being parts and parcels of the Supreme
Lord, are also conscious” (Prabhupada 10). Individual souls are dependent on
God and salvation is achieved through the realization of this dependency and
devotion (bhakti) to God. This is the philosophical framework of
Prabhupada’s belief system.

Devotion to Krishna as “Supreme Personality of Godhead” comes to
Prabhupada from the Caitanya Movement and is the second component of his
thought. The Caitanya movement originated in Bengal in the sixteenth century,
and it named after its founder Sri Caitanya. According to Caitanya, the
soul, transmigrating from one body to another, is only as many manifestations of Krishna (Bhattacharyya 1990). Caitanya held
that “an individual being is his true essence; an eternal attendant or
servant of Krishna” (193). Devoting oneself entirely to the love and service
of Krishna is the function of life. When one is devoted entirely to Krishna,
one is no longer attached to actions performed in this world. Through the
grace of Krishna his devotees are released from the realm of transmigratory
existence (samsāra) to serve Krishna in Vrindavana— the infinite, all
pervading, supra-material, and blissful abode of Krishna (Bhattacharyya
1990). This is the soteriology that Prabhupada upholds, which he claims to
have received in a line of disciplic succession from Shri Caitanya himself
(Prabhuapada 34).

The Gita scholar Arvind Sharma has observed that the one common
denominator among Gita commentators, ancient and modern, is the
conviction “That he is offering the correct interpretation of a great
religious text, obfuscated by lesser and smaller minds” (Sharma 41).
Prabhupada is not an exception. He returns to this point repeatedly in the
introduction to his translation of the Gita. Prabhupada believes that his
understanding of the Gita is the only correct understanding of the text since
It has been received by him through a line of disciplic succession that originated with Krishna, the very source of the Gita. Prabhupada's commentary is also unique in that he believes his translation and commentary on the Gita involves no personal interpretation. He says: "We must accept Bhagavadgita without interpretation, without deletion and without our own whimsical participation in the matter" (Prabhupada 15). Since, from Prabhupada's perspective, his understanding of the Gita comes directly from Krishna, he believes his presentation of the Gita to be a "pure" presentation of the text. Despite this, it will be seen that his commentary on the Gita contains, as does any textual translation and commentary, a great deal of both interpretation and a certain amount of "whimsical participation." The same verses that were used to examine Shankara's commentary will be reconsidered from Prabhupada's perspective. This is an effective means of comparing the two commentaries as the verses that Shankara obscures, Prabhupada tends to illuminate and vice versa. Additional verses will be examined only when they are central to understanding Prabhupada's interpretation of a passage. His own English translation of the verses will be quoted along with the Sanskrit text. Quite often his choice of an English equivalent for a Sanskrit word is just as revealing as his commentary on the verse.

A. Chapter 2

1) The Individual Self

The reader of Prabhupada's translation of Chapter 2 is immediately

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13This belief will be explored in more detail when examining Prabhupada's commentary on Chapter 4.
confronted with an example of the kind of "whimsical participation" that Prabhupada denounces in the introduction to his translation. The title of the chapter is *Samkhya Yoga*. This translates into English as "The Discipline of Reason" or "The Discipline of Discriminating Thought". Prabhupada has the title of this chapter as "Contents of the Gita Summarized" (Prabhupada 77). This is an obvious corruption of the text, and one that does not serve any clear philosophical or theological purpose. This is a surprising display of "whimsical participation" in the text from a translator so concerned with accuracy, if only in a small point about wording of sentence, whereas Shankara used commentary to extend the meaning of an Advaita text. Prabhupada is able to use both translation and commentary to build the Gita into a text exposing "theism, Counter-productive".

We turn to Prabhupada at verse 2.12, a verse that was somewhat problematic for Shankara, but quite nicely into Prabhupada's system. His translation reads:

\[
na tada nam rata na jama na tve me vardhane
na caiva na bhavishyemonya va jatam etah param
\]

Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these things, nor in the future shall any of us cease to be.

While Shankara had to do exegetical acrobatics to pull an Advaita interpretation from this verse, Prabhupada's system affirms the eternal existence of both God and a plurality of individual souls. Although no extrapolation is necessary for this verse to conform to Prabhupada's thought, his interpretation goes past the text to further his own doctrine. He affirms that the verse asserts a plurality of eternal spiritual entities.
and then finds something more: "The Lord says clearly that He is eternally the maintainer of the individual living entities both in their conditioned and in their liberated situations" (Prabhupada 89). This is the central tenet of Vishisntadvaita, Prabhupada's philosophical base. This idea is put forth in Chapter 4 verse 35, but does not appear in this verse and Prabhupada does not explain how he derived this interpretation from the verse. Excepting this doctrinal addition, his interpretation of the verse is correct in its identification of a plurality of spiritual entities.

Prabhupada's gloss of this verse also highlights an important part of his commentary, his vehement refutations of Shankara's Gitabhashya. Prabhupada refers to Shankara as the Naya-darśana. He attacks Shankara's interpretation that the individuality referred to is only material. He asserts that, "spiritual individuality is understood by those who are devotees of the Lord". He goes on to say:

"The Bhagavadgita can be understood only by devotees. The Naya explanation of the Gita is a most misleading presentation of the whole truth. Lord Caitanya has forbidden us to read commentaries made by the Naya-advaita and warns that one who takes to such an understanding of the Naya-advaita philosophy loses all power to understand the real mystery of the Gita" (Prabhupada 99).

It is interesting to note that Shankara would acknowledge Prabhupada's interpretation of the Gita as valid, from the perspective of Naya. Prabhupada, however, can accommodate no position other than his own. A weakness when approaching a multivalent text like the Gita.

14Sanskrit "One who affirms the illusory nature of the world". Traditionally applied to Advaitins and Buddhists.
Prabhupada continues to develop the doctrine of spiritual plurality in his gloss of verse 16 and 17. The verses and his translation read:

\[ \text{na seva vidyate bhava na bhāva vidyate setah} \]
\[ \text{abhaya aprisate itiś tv eṣāya śatvādārśita} \]

Those who are seers of the truth have concluded that of the non-existent [the material body] there is no endurance and of the eternal [the soul] there is no change. This they have concluded by studying the nature of both.

Prabhupada interprets these verses as a description of the eternal Self introduced in verse 12. Although not explicitly stated, Verse 12 implies that the eternal Absolute exists as a plurality of souls. Prabhupada rejected Shankara's position that this plurality is illusory, and uses his gloss of these verses to solidify his position. Prabhupada's interpretation of this verse hinges on both his identification of \( \text{sa} \) as the individual soul as well as the Supreme Soul and \( \text{bhāva} \) as change. The non-existent \( \text{asattva} \) is identified with the material body and it is said to have no "endurance" \( \text{bhāva} \). This translation makes the verse conform to his belief in an eternal soul that is untouched by the operations of the material universe. Although his identification of \( \text{sa} \) with the individual soul is questionable, the description of the embodied Self in the preceding verses is ambiguous enough to make it possible. His translation of \( \text{bhāva} \) as "endurance" is unusual. The most common senses of the word are "becoming,
being, existing” (Monier-Williams 754) Prabhupada cannot say that matter has no being or existence, without losing doctrinal consistency. *Swa* can have the meaning of “endurance”, but this is a far less common usage of the word. Prabhupada is seriously straining the text to maintain his interpretation of the eternal Self. Just as in Shankara’s gloss, verse 17 is central to establishing the nature of the Self. Verse 17 reads:

\[ \textit{teno servem Wom totem, that by which all this is pervaded} \]

Prabhupada has maintained that the eternal Self exists in a plurality of individual souls, not the all-pervasive Brahman that Shankara upholds. Somehow Prabhupada translates *saranam idam* as “the entire body”. He states that the atomic soul influences and pervades the body as consciousness. “This current of the spirit soul is felt all over the body as consciousness” (Prabhupada 97). *Kena sarvam idam talam*, “that by which all this is pervaded” is a common phrase in the Gita and is a central theme in the later Upanishads. As in the Upanishads, this phrase clearly refers to Brahman. Although it is necessary for Prabhupada to interpret *saranam idam* as the body to maintain the integrity of his gloss, he does not offer an explanation for his interpretation. His gloss of the entire chapter up to this point is now called into question. If the eternal in verse 17 is the all-pervasive Brahman, and the indestructible Self of the preceding verses is to be identified with Brahman, the plurality of individual souls is called into question. Prabhupada’s gloss of verse 17 was the key to maintaining
his claim to the plurality of eternal souls. Since Prabhupada identifies Krishna with Brahman, he could have interpreted this verse as referring to the souls identity with and dependence on Krishna. It is disappointing that he resorts to corrupting the text rather than exegesis to justify his interpretation of the verse.

Verses 18 through 30 address the invulnerability of the eternal embodied in the individual Self. Although his reasoning and exegesis has been weak, Prabhupada holds that the text to this point upholds a plurality of individual souls. The verses from 18 to 30 offer Prabhupada a chance to strengthen his gloss of the section as a whole. His commentary on these verses consists largely of explaining how the soul's eternal, immutability is due to its identity with Krishna. "Quantitatively, the small atomic fragmental part of the Supreme Spirit (Krishna) is one with the Supreme" (Prabhupada 10:1). Prabhupada is not offering an interpretation of the text as it is the text up to this point has not equated the Self's invulnerability with identification with Krishna. Prabhupada's gloss is given without supplying a textual basis for his interpretation. He attempts to place every verse within the framework of "Krishna Consciousness" without any acknowledgement of a verses context. Prabhupada's gloss of verse 21 is a good example of this approach to the text. It reads

vedā vināśhitam | niyam ya ānam asam avyayam
katham sa purushah pārtha kam ghātayati hanti kom
O Partha, how can such a person who knows that the soul is indestructible, eternal, unborn and immutable kill anyone or cause

15R.C. Zaehner suggests this possibility by referring to verse 8: 22 and 9. 4
Shankara interpreted this verse as further proof that the Self’s immutability is derived from its identity with brahman. In commenting on this verse Prabhupada does not offer an explanation for the soul’s immutable, eternal nature. He seems to think this was firmly established in his gloss of the preceding verses. Instead, he explains the nature of violence from the perspective of Krishna Consciousness. He says: "Arjuna should follow the instruction, knowing well that such violence, committed in the act of fighting for Krishna is not violence at all." Prabhupada (1973). This is a clear over-interpretation of the verse. The meaning of the verse is simply that when a man understands the invulnerable nature of the Self he knows that he cannot slay, since the Self of the victim is indestructible (Sharma 44).

Verse 30 is the culmination of this passage on the nature of the Self. It reads:

> dehitam avadho vam bhava savasya bhore
> tasmadd eva ca iti maha bhagavan mantra

A descendant of Bharata, he who dwells in the body can never be slain.

Therefore you need not grieve for any living being.

Prabhupada’s gloss of this verse is a summary of his interpretation of the chapter up to this point, and does not actually deal with this verse. This is a common characteristic of his commentary. Prabhupada often comments on how an idea fits into his belief system without justifying that doctrine on the basis of the text. His gloss of verse 30 states that Krishna
has established the immortality of the soul and the temporality of the
material body in the preceding verses. Three verses are central to
establishing this doctrine from the text. Prabhupada takes verse 12 to
establish a plurality of eternal souls. This seems to be the implication of
the verse, but the exact nature of the eternal Self is still ambiguous. Verse
16 and 17 are the key to understanding the nature of the Self as it is
presented in this passage. Prabhupada's attempt to establish his doctrine of
a plurality of eternal individual souls in his gloss of these verses is
dependent on questionable interpretations of key words and a corruption of
the text in the case of verse 17. Closer adherence to the text will be
necessary for Prabhupada's interpretation of the second half of Chapter 2 to
be convincing.

2) Karma (Action) and the Individual Self

Starting with verse 39, a new theme is introduced in the text. The
relationship of actions (karma) to the Self is described with the focus on
how a proper understanding of this relationship leads to salvation. Verse 39
declares that the rest of the chapter addresses the yoga (discipline) by
which one is freed from the bondage of actions. Although the verse does not
specify a particular type of Yoga, Prabhupada states that the yoga set forth
in this chapter is Bhakti Yoga. Bhakti Yoga (Discipline of Devotion) is the
renunciation of the results of actions through devotion to Krishna.
Shankara interpreted this passage as upholding the superiority of Jñana Yoga
over all others and the illusory nature of action. Prabhupada's goal in
glossing this chapter is just the opposite. Prabhupada holds that actions are
real and only through the practice of Bhakti Yoga can one be freed through
their bonds. He interprets the second half of Chapter 2 as presenting this doctrine. Verse 51 seems to support this interpretation. It reads:

**karnejam buddhiyukta in bhalam lyaktvam manishinah**

**janmadandhavirniruttam pedem gacchanty anamayam**

By thus engaging in devotional service to the Lord, great sages or devotees free themselves from the results of work in the material world. In this way they become free from the cycle of birth and death and attain the state beyond all miseries (by going back to Godhead).

This verse conforms easily to Prabhupada's understanding of action without any deviation from the text. Prabhupada is not satisfied with this and makes several additions to the text that are without foundation. The phrase **buddhiyakta** has been translated into English in a variety of ways: **buddhi** generally translated as intelligence or wisdom. **yakta** is derived from the verb root **yuj** and means to yoke or to unite. **Buddhi** is also the root that the word **yoga** is derived from. In his gloss of verse 39 Prabhupada equates the term **buddhi-yoga** with Bhakti Yoga (since all yogas culminate in Bhakti Yoga). Even though the phrase used here is **buddhi-yukta**, Prabhupada translates it as “engaging in devotional service.” Prabhupada has clearly over-interpreted the verse. It simply says that renouncing the fruits of one’s actions leads to the soul’s release from transmigration. The method for renouncing the fruits of one’s actions is not yet stated. Although devotional service to Krishna (Bhakti Yoga) will be mentioned as a means of salvation later in the Gita, it is not introduced in this verse. Prabhupada could have interpreted this verse successfully without introducing the phrase “By engaging in devotional service.” This is another example of
tendency to add phrases to a verse when his interpretation of the verse could stand without them.

The verses from 54 to the end of the chapter describes the relevance of action to a "man of stable wisdom" (śīlātā trayāṇaḥ). Here, as in verse 51, Prabhupada offers an unacceptable translation for a Sanskrit term that has major doctrinal implications: Śīlātā trayāṇaḥ cannot be translated much differently than "man of stable wisdom." Prabhupada translates this term as "one who is situated in fixed Krishna consciousness" (Prabhupada 14.2). This interpretation of the term may make sense from Prabhupada's perspective, but it has no basis in the text. There is only one verse that lends credibility to Prabhupada's interpretation of the passage. Verse 51 reads:

śānti śānti samaye yajate ātha mahāprapitām

verse 51

One who restrains his senses, keeping them under full control, and fixes his consciousness upon He, is known as a man of steady intelligence.

This verse is the linchpin of Prabhupada's interpretation of the second half of Chapter 2. When this verse is read back into the preceding verses, it would justify his interpretations of verses 39 and 51 (though not his translation). For the first time in the text the man of stable wisdom is equated with one fixed on Krishna. The verse is clear on this. Does this verse justify interpreting the entire passage as presenting a doctrine of devotional service? Prabhupada must successfully read this verse into the verses that follow for his gloss of the passage to maintain credibility.

Prabhupada's uses his translation of verse 64 to strengthen his Bhakti
Yoga interpretation of the verse. Excepting verse 61, there are no other verses to provide an explicit 'Bhakti' statement. The verse continues the description of the man of stable wisdom, and Prabhupada tries to reaffirm his equation of the man of stable wisdom with the man 'engaged in devotional service'. The verse reads:

Dut a person free from all attachment and a person able to control one sense through regulative principles of freedom can obtain the complete mercy of the Lord.

Prabhupada uses the translation of one word to transform this neutral verse into a verse conforming to the doctrine of Bhakti Yoga. The word 'prasād' has been translated alternatively as 'purity of spirit' (Radhanathswami 126), 'cain serenity' (Zaehner 154) and 'state of serenity' (van Buitenen 51). 'Prasād' can mean favour or kindness shown by a person of authority to someone of lesser status and this interpretation of 'prasād' is essential to Prabhupada's gloss. The mercy of the Lord is what the practitioner of Bhakti Yoga seeks. It is only through the grace of God that the devotee can be released from transmigration. Although this is a possible interpretation of the word, the verse is more easily understood as stating that non-attachment to the sensual world results in peace of mind (Zaehner 154). The verses that follow point towards this interpretation and modern scholarship supports this interpretation of 'prasād' as well.

Verse 72 is the end of the chapter and describes the ultimate goal of the man of stable wisdom that is no longer attached to his actions in the
objective world. Prabhupada's gloss of this verse provides a good illustration of the problem: with his interpretation of the passage as a whole. Verse 17 reads

That is the way of the spiritual and godly life, after attaining which a man is not bewildered. If one is thus situated even at the hour of death, one can enter the kingdom of God.

Prabhupada's interpretation of *brahmanirvāṇa* is the key to his gloss of the verse. *Brahman* refers to Absolute Reality. *Nirvāṇa* is a Buddhist term that means the cessation of phenomenal existence, the cessation of all sensation. The use of these words in conjunction originates with this verse of the Gita (Zahner 159). B.P. Zahner has noted in his Gita commentary that this entire passage has a "Buddhist ambience" and the use of a Buddhist term at the end of the chapter is not surprising. The Buddhist understanding of *Nirvāṇa* must be taken into consideration to understand the verse. This would point towards B.P. Zahner's understanding of the verse and the passage as a whole. By cultivating a detachment from the phenomenal world one "comes to realize the eternal 'sameness', that is, the unvarying presence of timeless Being in and behind all that comes to be and passes away" (Zahner 159). Although Prabhupada acknowledges *Nirvāṇa* as a Buddhist term, he rejects the Buddhist understanding of the word. He translates *brahmanirvāṇa* as "the kingdom of God". This interpretation of the word once again places the passage into a Bhakti Yoga framework. Prabhupada believes reaching *brahmanirvāṇa* means entrance into a spiritual kingdom where one is "engaged in the transcendental loving service..."
of the Lord" (Prabhupada 161). But unless one accepts Prabhupada's interpretation of prasāda in verse 64, nothing in the preceding verses points to this understanding of brahmavāda.

Prabhupada's gloss of Chapter 2 cannot be considered convincing. The verses that are central to his interpretation of the chapter as being in harmony with his system have been examined. In almost every case his interpretation of those verses disregard the context in which they occur. His gloss is also weakened by its dependence on the dubious interpretation of certain key terms. Overall, Prabhupada's interpretation of the chapter comes across as being forced on the text rather than being drawn from it. Chapter 4, however, is more conducive to an interpretation from Prabhupada's perspective of Krishna consciousness.

B. Chapter 4

1) God

Although Chapter 4 is entitled "Jñāna Yoga". The term Jñāna Yoga is usually used in reference to Shankara's Advaita system. But it was shown that Shankara's Advaita doctrines are difficult to reconcile with the contents of this chapter. The content of Chapter 4 is largely theistic in outlook and Prabhupada does not need to resort to violations of the text to interpret the chapter (as he did in Chapter 2).

Prabhupada's commentary on the first three verses of this chapter are essential to understanding why he believes his presentation of the text
represents the only "true" understanding of the Gita. Verse 1 states that the Gita has been handed down to humanity through a line of transmission. He believes the Gita can only be properly understood by receiving through this line of transmission. He says, "The mundane wranglers may speculate on the Gita in their own ways, but that is not Bhagavadgita as it is. Therefore, Bhagavadgita has to be accepted as it is, from the disciplic succession." (Prabhupada 217). Prabhupada believes that he is the present representative of the line of disciplic succession that began with Krishna. It is important to note that Prabhupada's belief that his interpretation of the Gita is the only valid one is not based on pride, but on his interpretation of the first 3 verses of Chapter 4. More will be said about this claim to validity when the nature of commentary in general is discussed in the Conclusion.

At verse 4 Arjuna asks how it is possible that Krishna could have taught the Gita since the beginning of time. Krishna begins to describe his transcendent nature providing material that Prabhupada can interpret to his satisfaction without distorting the text. Verse 9 provides Prabhupada with the perfect material for establishing Krishna as the "Supreme Personality of Godhead." Verse 9 reads:

janma karma ca me divya evam evam yo vetti tattvatah

tyaktvā deham punar janma nāti mām eti so 'rjuna

One who knows the transcendental nature of My appearance and activities does not, upon leaving the body, take his birth again in this material world, but attains My eternal abode.

As usual, Prabhupada reads more into the verse than the text allows but his interpretation of the verse is solid. He says, "The devotee, simply by
understanding the transcendental nature of the Lord, attains to the abode of the Lord after ending this body” (Prabhupada 231). Prabhupada goes beyond the text, however, when he says that the verse implies that the realization of the impersonal _sarga-brahman _is inferior to an understanding of Krishna as the Absolute.

Verse 10 represents the essence of Prabhupada's beliefs and he elaborates extensively on it. Prabhupada still finds it necessary to violate the text to derive more out of the verse than the text allows. Verse 10 reads

>vitaragabhaya krode manmaya mām upākṛṣṇaṁ

bhava jñānapārā pita madhāvam āgatāṁ

Being freed from attachment, fear and anger, being fully absorbed in Me and taking refuge in Me, many persons in the past became purified by knowledge of Me—and thus they all attained transcendental love for Me.

This verse is a simple statement of the doctrine of Bhakti. Through detachment from material existence and devotion to Krishna, one gains access to his mode of being ( _madhāvam _). Why Prabhupada translates _madhāvam _as “transcendental love” is a mystery. He offers no explanation for it and the text espouses his system without this strange interpretation of the phrase. Since this verse so clearly supports his doctrine of Bhakti, one would think he would take the opportunity to show how this verse justifies his position. Instead he spends almost his entire commentary on the verse detailing the inferiority of all other approaches to the Supreme. Prabhupada offers this summary of the verse's purport as “by the slow process of devotional service... one can attain the highest stage, being
reed from all material attachment" (Prabhupada 234) Saying that 
Krishna's mode of being is the highest stage of realization is Prabhupada's 
only substantial break with the text of the verse. This statement is made 
later in 7.24, but it is not made in the context of this verse 
Prabhupada finally exploits the full possibilities of the text in his gloss 
of verse 18. It reads 

\[
\text{ye rasam samarambhah krsanakala-vartitah} \\
\text{pnhagnicayadhakarmam tam dhun panditam bahuhr}
\]

One who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction is intelligent 
among men, and he is in the transcendental position, although engaged 
in all sorts of activities.

Verse 10 established that performing actions intent on Krishna leads to 
release from transmigratory existence. Prabhupada effectively uses that 
idea to gloss verse 18. He says, "A person acting in Krishna consciousness 
is naturally free from the bonds of karma. His activities are all performed 
for Krishna; therefore he does not enjoy or suffer any of the effects of 
work" (Prabhupada 245). By reading verse 10 into verse 18 Prabhupada 
produces a convincing interpretation of an ambiguous verse.

Verse 35 represents the culmination of Krishna's self-aggrandizing 
statements and represents one of the central tenets of Prabhupada's system. 
The verse reads 

\[
\text{yai jñātvā na punar moham evam yasyaśt bhūtān pāndave} \\
\text{yena bhūtān aśrātvena drakṣhyoṣya śūnyatāḥ ato mayi}
\]

Having obtained real knowledge from a self-realized soul, you will 
ever fall again into such illusion, for by this knowledge you will see
that all living beings are but part of the Supreme, or, in other words, that they are Mine.

Although his translation is peculiar, it captures the essence of the verse.

Prabhupada is correct in interpreting the purport of the verse as "all living beings are parts and parcels of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Shri Krishna. Liberation means to be situated in one's constitutional position as an eternal servitor of Krishna" (Prabhupada 264). With his gloss of this verse Prabhupada convincingly ties the various statements of the chapter together. Given material more conducive to his thought, Prabhupada offers a consistent and illuminating interpretation of Chapter 4.

C) Prabhupada's Approach to Samkhya Elements in the Gita

Prabhupada, like Shankara, makes his first comment on Samkhya thought when the term appears in Chapter 2, verse 39. Also, in keeping with other commentators, Prabhupada agrees that Samkhya here means "analytical description of body and soul" (Prabhupada 123). Then Prabhupada offers an interpretation of Samkhya and its role in the Gita which is unlike any other given by modern commentators.

Prabhupada is correct in saying that "One should not, therefore, misunderstand that the samkhya-yoga mentioned herein has any connection with the atheistic Samkhya". He is mistaken, however, when he goes on to say, "Nor did that philosophy have any influence during that time; nor would Lord Krishna care to mention such godless philosophical speculations, the unintelligent claim that the atheistic samkhya-yoga is referred to in the Bhagavadgita" (Prabhupada 124 - 5). Although Samkhya was not a
distinct school of philosophy when the Gita was written. Its main tenets and terminology were widely known when the Gita was written. The writer of the Gita was influenced by Samkhya thought, despite Prabhupada's statements to the contrary. Excepting Prabhupada, commentators both Western and Indian acknowledge Samkhya's presence in the Gita (Zaehner 139), (Radhakrishnan 109), (van Buitenen 22) and (Tapasyananda 482). As it is hard to totally ignore the presence of Samkhya thought in the Gita, Prabhupada claims there are really 11 Samkhya systems.

It was seen in the examination of Prabhupada's commentary that his overriding exegetical concern was depicting the Gita as a document promoting Krishna consciousness. The implication being that all teachings in the Gita originated with Krishna and revolve around devotion to Krishna. Rather than acknowledge that the Samkhya in the Gita represents the same tradition which was later systematized in the Samkhya karika, Prabhupada claims that atheistic Samkhya is a degraded form of a philosophy which originated with Krishna. It is this "true" Samkhya that is taught in the Gita. Prabhupada claims that terms like prakriti, purusha, satya, rajas and tamas, which are normally associated with classical Samkhya, were in fact first taught by Krishna. He says, "Long before the impostor Kapila's Samkhya, the Samkhya philosophy was expounded in the Shrimad- Bhagavatam by the true Lord Kapila, the incarnation of Lord Krishna" (Prabhupada 124). The historical development of Samkhya thought is obscure. Few scholars, if any, would agree that it originated in the Bhagavata. A more likely scenario is that "the Bhagavata creed, quite early in its history, made use of it [Samkhya] to furnish itself with an appropriate
metaphysical base” (Hiriyanna 131).

In summary, Prabhupada is correct to assert that the purely atheistic Samkhya of the Samkhya karika does not appear in the Gita. When Samkhya concepts and terminology are employed it is always qualified with theistic statements. Prabhupada’s claim that Samkhya developed from the Bhagavata literature is totally without foundation. Samkhya thought is discussed in that literature but modern scholarship recognizes that its development began long before the Bhagavata was composed (Zimmer 262).

Prabhupada’s approach to Samkhya in the Gita is characteristic of his entire interpretation of the entire text. His desire to create both a Krishna centered history of Samkhya and a Krishna centered Gita, while necessary for maintaining doctrinal consistency, lead Prabhupada to make unreasonable and often outrageous claims. Although Prabhupada’s commentary illuminates many elements in the Gita’s teachings, his inability to accommodate different philosophical perspectives is always his greatest weakness.

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16As in Gita 13.27- Samem sarveshu bhuteshu tishthe na parameshvaram vinashyate avinasyantam yah pasubhi so pasyati.
V. Conclusion

Shankara and Prabhupada both interpret the Gita with the goal of harmonizing its seemingly multivalent teachings. Shankara interprets the Gita as upholding the supremacy of an Absolute devoid of distinguishing qualities (advaita), while Prabhupada takes the opposite philosophical stance in interpreting the Gita as teaching that the ultimate form of the Absolute does have distinguishing qualities (viveka-prakásha). Which interpretation is closer to the actual intention of the Gita will always be a point of scholarly debate that must remain unresolved. But if a comparative evaluation of the effectiveness of the two commentators is to be given, it must be said that Shankara renders the most convincing interpretation of the Gita.

While Shankara maintains the ultimate teaching of the Gita to be Advaita, he acknowledges that the text is theistic in its general outlook. Shankara's doctrine of ātman provides him with an openness to textual multivalence that Prabhupada lacks. Shankara is able to accept that, at certain points in the text, the Gita introduces elements of Samkhya or Vishishtadvaita teaching. For Shankara these are valid teachings, from his perspective of ātman. He believes the Gita to teach that these other systems are useful for understanding the world of ātman, but that the ultimate realization is the Advaita teaching of ātman brahman. One can disagree with Shankara's interpretation of the text. It must be recognized, however, that this approach to the text allows Shankara to acknowledge the presence of divergent philosophical elements in the Gita while presenting the Gita as an Advaita text. He can interpret the Gita as an ultimately univalent text, while still recognizing the variety of philosophical perspectives offered in
Prabhupada’s is not philosophically equipped to accommodate perspectives that are divergent from his own. Prabhupada believes devotional service to Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead to be the only teaching present in the Gita. It was seen in examining his commentary that the possibility of textual multivalency is totally unacceptable to Prabhupada. Whereas Shankara’s approach to the Gita is one of inclusiveness, Prabhupada’s doctrinal inflexibility leads him to write an exclusive approach to the text.

Although his interpretation of the Gita as ultimately theistic may be closer to the spirit of the text than Shankara’s interpretation, his inability to accept the presence of multiple philosophical perspectives leads Prabhupada to misrepresent and obfuscate the text. Prabhupada must deny textual multivalency to maintain doctrinal univalency. Shankara’s gloss upholds textual univalency while simultaneously affirming its multivalency.

Although both commentators strive for the same goal of textual univalency, Shankara is closer to the spirit of the both the Hindu world view and the Indian conception of philosophy. The Indian word for philosophy is *parshana*. It is derived from the Sanskrit verb root which means “to see.” *Parshana* means “way of seeing” or “point of view.” Unlike Prabhupada, Shankara’s Gita commentary affirms the Indian understanding of philosophy which acknowledges that whenever a philosophical attempt is made to describe the nature of reality, one’s perception of the truth depends entirely on one’s *parshana*.
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