

# Children of Light: An Enquiry into the Salvific Meaning of Knowledge

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## Abstract

*Noetical* and *ontological perfection* is the final goal of religious life, and it is associated by the various religious traditions with *salvation*. Salvation is linked to the idea-phenomenon of knowledge, a fact that covers a broad experiential, conceptual and notional area, from one culture to another. In this article, the researcher seeks to present exactly the experiential or presential aspect of what can be designated as *salvific knowledge*, as one of the capital means of attaining human becoming.

**Keywords:** knowledge, liberation, theognosia, ignorance, ascensional finality, gnosis, self, union, katharsis, duality



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## Introduction: Knowledge and Liberation

In 1963, Mircea Eliade, the famous Romanian historian of religions, late Professor at the Divinity School, University of Chicago, whose influential Indian experience is still well-known, wrote about India and its thought:

The importance that all Indian metaphysics, and even the techniques that constitute Yoga, accord to “knowledge” is easily explained if we take into consideration the causes of human suffering. The wretchedness of human life is not due to a divine punishment nor to an original sin, but to ignorance. Not any and every kind of ignorance, but only ignorance of the true nature of spirit, the ignorance that makes us confuse spirit with our psychomental experience, that makes us attribute “qualities” and predicates to the eternal and autonomous principle that is spirit – in short, a metaphysical ignorance. Hence it is natural that it should be a metaphysical knowledge which supervenes to end this ignorance. This metaphysical knowledge leads the disciple to the threshold of illumination, that is, to his true “self” (Eliade 1963: 124-137)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Mircea Eliade’s determinant contribution in the field still remained *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. Here I would like to express all my deep gratitude to Prof. Dr. Mac Linscott Ricketts, University of Chicago, an outstanding disciple and the most accurate translator of Prof. Mircea Eliade, who was so generous to make corrections and suggestions on our present text. I

These words can be applied within the context of monotheistic religions as well, because being aware of the divine principles, man is somehow placed already in the godly path of salvation. *Liberation* or *salvation* is the main goal of the religious experience in general, though this concept has different philosophical or ideological colors in different religions or religious systems of the world. But from the very ides of human civilization, humans have been preoccupied with a certain communication with what they used to see as *sacred beings* or a *Supreme Being*, the main reality, on which old myths focus, and this communication is enclosed by the very term-concept *religion*. And knowledge or the sacred knowledge – *theognosia* (knowledge of God) – is one of the central aspects in every religious act, since the contact with the divine is desired by every adherent of a certain religion. The act of *theognosia* takes the “shape” of prayer, meditation, ascetic exercise, charity, communion a.s.o. Therefore, the *eschatological meaning* of knowledge is inherent in the context of our considerations.

Knowledge could be considered the mystery of the human existence, the means of surpassing all the limitations which try to bond the being in its pure integrity. The way to *the centre* (we see, symbolically speaking, *the centre* as the culminating point of the work of personal and communitary perfection, two complementary dimensions in the spiritual life which cannot be dissociated) includes and involves an *initiatory ascent* towards becoming, that is the challenge of knowledge. To the West, philosophy very often still seems to mean rather a chaotic or skeptical search for truth or inventing principles, being permanently on a path whose destination could almost never be known. Philosophical reflection, several times hazardously dissociated from the religious one, has been a way of practicing mere intellectual abilities.

The East, for which the philosophical dimension was always solidary with the religious one, almost identical with it<sup>2</sup>, gave not only an *ontological importance* to knowledge but a mostly a *soteriological* one. The perfect philosophical and religious reflection involved the possession of the existential way with a more precise destination: touching the *Ultimate Reality*, the *Absolute*, though this reality-entity has been conceptually conceived of or viewed theistically or non-theistically. Knowledge finds its foundation in being, and being has always been connected to God or at least a different but transcendent dimension. In fact the unique solution for the attainment of man's *noetical* and *ontological* becoming is the knowledge provided by religious experience. The researcher will try to sketch a few fundamental features on this issue, with some short insights into the Hindu, Christian and Muslim religious experiences, where a true knowledge is seen as a true *orientatio*, as the famous French historian of philosophy, Henry Corbin suggested in all his *oeuvres* (Corbin 1994:44-45)<sup>3</sup>. We are going to analyze briefly below the connection between knowledge and ignorance (non-knowledge), situated in the final context of liberation perspective, as can be identified in Hindu, Christian and Muslim view.

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<sup>2</sup>Contrary to what happened in both Christianity and Islam, two religious traditions which made clear distinction between *philosophy* and *theology*. Besides, knowledge is intimately connected to the experience of a unique and personal God, as we find within the monotheistic religions (see Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin 2005:5200).

<sup>3</sup> The etymology of this beautiful word *orientatio* is so suggestive, because this word comes from the Latin *oriens*, which means East, that is, metaphorically and symbolically speaking, the light of knowledge and the true path come from the East, where the first major philosophical systems seem to have been developed.

## Hindu Thought

The central idea in the Hindu philosophic literature is that lack of proper knowledge, designated with the term *avidyā*, associated with ignorance, could endanger the human soul's condition towards the future life's perspective, by subjecting it to a long cycle of several reincarnations. *Avidyā* represents the basis and object of the spiritual illusion (*maya*), human condition in itself. In earlier literature śruti, *avidyā* used to mean a mere absence of knowledge, which could have distracted man from fulfilling his religious and moral obligations prescribed so rigorously by authority and tradition. For example, there was a deep belief that ignorance towards the funeral rites might have caused an unhappy rebirth for the dead one. Transcending this obstacle has always been a special concern for the brahmins, as the good *knowledge of the Vedas* constituted the very essence of their role in the universe's revivification and perpetuation by performing and supervising the rites, important for their lives. The necessity of an adequate knowledge and asceticism in carrying out the rites is expressed in this way:

If , without knowing this, one offers an Agnihotra, it would be as if a man were to remove the live coals and pour his libation on dead ashes (Müller 1879:91)<sup>4</sup>.

And definitely the spiritual training has an *ascensional finality*<sup>5</sup>. Later on, the meaning of sacrifice's necessity won't be perceived as a mere formal office of rites any longer, but more and more interiorised, acquiring an ascetic shade, this view having been expressed in the Āranyakas texts, as a reaction against official brahmanism. (*Non-*) *knowledge* appears as a speculative problem in the Upanishads<sup>6</sup> and the reference to it shall offer a great authority to the future orthodox visions, especially those of Advaita Vedānta (nondualist Vedānta). The upanishadic thinkers' great discovery seems to have been, according to the majority of researchers, that soul was immortal and its true being stayed outside of space and time, that its link to the material, empirical world of *samsāra*, should have been transient and somewhat illusory (Zaehner 1958:61). Certain upanishadic passages suggest that *avidyā* doesn't mean just a simple lack of necessary knowledge, but mostly an *ontological state* which shades the human mind, depriving it of liberation. Of certain persons, the wise says:

Dwelling in their ignorance's darkness, fools, imagining themselves as wise and learned, go round and round, like blind men led by the blind (Müller 1884:8).

Caught into *āvidya*, being unaware of their own ignorance, these people become like dreamers who, simply, imagine their goals already fulfilled, when actually each act which denotes ignorance chains them more and more in *samsara* (the cycle of transmigrations).

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<sup>4</sup>*Chāndogya-Upanishad*, V, 24,1.

<sup>5</sup>In this context, M. Eliade established connections with the *shamanic ecstatic techniques* (Eliade 1985:429). A difference is that, in the case of yoga phenomenon, one speaks about an *enstasis*, that is, a mere static condition, viewed as an isolation of the self.

<sup>6</sup>The term *upa-ni-shad* has a Sanskrit origin. It comprises two main meanings: sitting or secret doctrine (Deussen 1908:10-13). Usually, it refers to the philosophical treatises which form *jñānakānda*, the knowledge section, opposed to *karmakānda* section, containing ritual and ceremonial precepts, as integrative parts of the Veda. The principal idea is that of *extinguishing passion and ignorance* by apprehending the divine revelation-knowledge. Thus, the knowledge of Brahman comes through the light of Upanishads. This is the way by which the eternal bliss of Being comes to man.

## Christian, Islamic and Gnostic Aspects

The same ontological connotation we believe is involved in the negative concept of ignorance in Islam and Christianity, that is, the total ignorance towards God and the way to perfection or personal or communitary salvation. Thus, ignorance appears to be the worst sin, the most dangerous trap for a human, while the true knowledge is that which helps human being follow the divine path, this conferring the true basis of a blessed afterlife. And a very similar conception one can meet in the Christian orthodox<sup>7</sup> and heterodox branches (e.g., the Gnostic groups from early history of Christianity) and the Muslim mystical traditions, where we find *gnosis* or *theognosia*<sup>8</sup> and *'ilm* (opposite to *djahl*, ignorance) (Schacht 1986: 1133)<sup>9</sup> to mean, both of them connected to liberation or rather salvation. And the act of knowledge stays in intimate connection with that of revelation (Al-Tabarī 1990:10)<sup>10</sup>, and faith (*īmān*):

But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is gardens, beneath which rivers flow (Ali 1993:22)<sup>11</sup>.

In the Eastern Christian *hesychast* tradition initiated by Saint Gregory Palamas (that is the *hesychast prayer*) and in the Sufi system of meditation (*dhikr*) (Gardet 1991:225), the heart is the very locus of knowledge, that is the sacred knowledge, and its place in mysticism is obvious, since the practicans have to meditate or concentrate, envisioning God or the divine light. Heart is in a way a place of meeting with God, the very spiritual or *pneumatic centre* of the human person. In both these spiritual traditions, however, the practican needs to follow the revealed principles from the Scriptures and to be guided by its spiritual master-father (Eastern Christianity) and the prophet (Islam)<sup>12</sup>. To acquire the knowledge of the sacred is to become a friend of God, and this is one of the main statements in Christianity and Islam (Ratke, O'Kane 1996:98\_sq). For Saint Gregory Palamas and many ascetic fathers of Eastern Christianity, knowledge of the divine is facilitated through the divine works or acts (*energiai*), for without communion with God there is no possible knowledge (Stăniloae 1977:415), human being remaining at a biological stage of development in the absence of the acceptance of cooperation with the divine grace which is placed within the heart of persons from the very moment of Baptism. To know God is to forget or abandon yourself when thinking of Him – this is how St Diadochos of Photiki defines knowledge (Stăniloae 1947:332). The devil is the master of ignorance and, once the gate of baptism is entered, devil is expelled out of the human heart, because from now on it is the Holy Grace which dwells in the heart. Knowing God through His acts, committing good deeds, accepting to cooperate with His grace, having strong faith and love, leads to the *sanctification* of the human being:

We need the likeness, so that we be in harmony with that union, through which deification is fulfilled. For without union, the likeness (resemblance)

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<sup>7</sup>We don't intend here to use the term "orthodoxy" in a confessional manner.

<sup>8</sup>E.g., the *hesychast* tradition of Saint Gregory Palamas, Saint Dyonisius the Areopagite or Saint Gregory of Nyssa. In our contemporary times, it is worthy to mention Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological considerations; for a discussion on his *apophaticism*, see Lösel, Jordan 2002:586-616).

<sup>9</sup>Other various terms-concepts appear in the Islamic religious discourse: *ma'rifa*, *fiqh*, *hikma* or *shu'ūr*, cf. Walker 2003:100).

<sup>10</sup>"(...) in His Revelation and the unambiguous verses of His Book, He made known to them the favour of clarity of discourse which He had bestowed on them by which He gave them pre-eminence over the dumb and inarticulate".

<sup>11</sup>The Holy Qur'an, S.II. 25.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Ritter 2003:84; Toti 2011:77-97.

does not suffice for deification. And the likeness we need is that which comes from the work and observance of the divine commandments, which is not done only by the natural imitation, but from the power of the Spirit, which comes by our holy rebirth from above and imprints itself in an ineffable way into those who were baptized. By this, those who “were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1,13), as some children recently born, can reach “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”(Eph.4,13) (Stăniloae 1977:381).

Saint John of the Cross has a very similar view on this issue, to him knowing God being His *contemplation*<sup>13</sup>, but only via the central path of love, which is the one faculty able to enlighten or exaltate the human soul:

...an infused and loving knowledge of God, which enlightens the soul and at the same time enkindles it with love, until it is raised up step by step, even unto God its creator (Gibbs 1976:534),

but, of course, without any pantheistic association.

Looking at the Gnostic literary corpus, we've noticed that it thoroughly testifies rather a *radical importance* of the act of knowledge, that is an *esoteric* one, reserved to a special category of people (Van den Broek 2006: 404-410)<sup>14</sup>, leading even to the *pantheistic* tendency of a substantial identification or ontological assimilation with God or the divine essence, viewed as the source where all souls are supposed to re-integrate, in a state of rest (Widengren 1967:43). In this regard, the traditional gnostic view is that the knower, receiving the salvific knowledge, has already gained during his very earthly life the essential of his eschatological hope, and this is really determinant for his afterlife:

For he who is ignorant until the end is a creature of oblivion, and he will vanish along with it. [...] Therefore, if one has knowledge, he is from above. If he is called, he hears, he answers, and he turns to him who is calling him, and ascends to him. And he knows in what manner he is called. Having knowledge, he does the will of the one who called him, he wishes to be pleasing to him, he receives rest. [...] He who is to have knowledge in this manner knows where he comes from and where he is going (Attridge 1985:89-91).

Therefore, he enjoys an *instant salvation* or a spontaneous one, like, parallellically speaking, in the Buddhist *nirvana*<sup>15</sup>. *Knowledge* and *salvation* are parts of a quite *nontemporal process*, a transhistorical, transcategorical and transempirical one. So we should not be surprised that Gnosticism has been influenced by Buddhism (Conze 1967:152) or Hinduism. To learn and to possess this sacred knowledge, that is a *presential* knowledge, is to possess the *light*, and this is a universal symbol for the enlightened ones and we find this meaning from the ancient spiritual movements (e.g. old Jewish ascetic groups like the *Essenes*, the *Gnostics* of the first Christian centuries,

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<sup>13</sup> *Contemplatio* is associated with *theoria* from the Greek spiritual semantic area.

<sup>14</sup> Knowledge is an ambivalent phenomenon, meaning that in all kinds of religions one can discover both an esoteric and an exoteric aspect of knowledge.

<sup>15</sup> Their doctrine of knowledge and salvation is directly dependent on their dualist convictions, however. Cf. Rudolph 1987:171.

Zoroastrian orthodox and esoteric circles<sup>16</sup> a.s.o.) to the modern and contemporary esoteric groups. In this case, the words of the great Oriental mystic and philosopher Suhrawardī are so vivid:

... So the soul, spiritual in essence, when it submits itself to the action of the Light, and clothes itself in the robe of the rising dawn, also produces the effect and action of the Light by itself. (...) The enlightened ones, the Perfect ones, whose love attaches itself to what is free from all evil, these come about through the spiritual action of the Light, because they themselves are the children of the Light (Corbin 1968:43)<sup>17</sup>.

### Upanishads, Shankara and Buddhism

The Upanishadic view is that, in order to avoid the ill-fated consequences produced by non-knowledge or, in a better form, *nescience* (Bilimoria 2005:710), a distinction has to be made from *vidyā*, so that the one who shall know both of them shall cross death through *avidyā* and reach immortality through *vidyā*. This conception, recognizing that ignorance is not sufficient in itself and doesn't culminate directly in *moksha* (the soul's state of liberation)<sup>18</sup>, relevates its value and, in the same time, its connection with *vidyā* towards the attainment of immortality. The next statement places both types of knowledge in the nature of the Supreme being (Brahman):

In the imperishable, supreme and infinite Brahman, the two, knowledge and ignorance, are hidden. Ignorance is perishable; knowledge is immortal indeed. He who masters both knowledge and ignorance is another (Müller 1884:255)<sup>19</sup>.

The one (Brahman) is another as a transcendental being, surpassing (non)knowledge, being himself at the same time the source of knowledge. Behind of all things and phenomena there exists a unity which transcends the present multiplicity of the physical world. This unity and order lives even beyond and above all deities (*devas*). It is really Brahman, the supreme conscience which works in creation and maintains the world in its being. It supports the whole structure of the universe living unsupported. Therefore, from the fragment above follows so clearly the paradoxical aspect of the Hindu epistemology and its tendency towards a negative or apophatic (Biardeau 1959:82-91) speculative theology (*apavāda*) which is going to signify for Śāṅkara a step of man's self-achievement (Bordaş 2000:23; Zaehner 1958:75)<sup>20</sup>. The Upanishadic event signifies the very point in which the negative descriptions concerning the attributes of Brahman acquire their highest expression. The decisive affirmation for the true comprehension of the Ultimate – *neti, neti*: "*it is neither this, nor the other*" – goes without saying. This emphasizes world's illusory condition, whose deluding power comes from the senses.

<sup>16</sup>In Zoroastrianism, there emerged an esoteric movement, *Ilm-i Khshnoom* ("the path of spiritual satisfaction"), inspired by the Theosophical Society founded by H. Olcott and H. P. Blavatsky, in 1879, when the Society entered India. See Hinnells 1997:68. Within Orthodox Zoroastrianism, one can attain salvation respecting the three main principles of good words, good actions and good thoughts.

<sup>17</sup>Suhrawardī qualified this knowledge as *presential* (Corbin 1968:40), while in Christian mystical experience we meet a parallel color as *experiential*.

<sup>18</sup>For the Indian philosophico-religious thought, *moksha*, as liberation from the samsaric universe, was the final und fundamental goal yet before the upanishadic or Buddhist period; cf. Tatu 2008:415-421.

<sup>19</sup> *Śvetāśvatara-Upanisad*, V, 1.

<sup>20</sup>For Śāṅkara, Brahman is identical with every human soul.

And a similar reflection concerning the senses, especially the sense-organs, wanders Buddhist tradition, e.g. Moksākaragupta's considerations:

When it is said that the means of valid knowledge is true knowledge, things such as sense-organs which are by nature insentient are by implication (sāmarthyāt) denied to be the means of valid knowledge, because they are incapable of ascertaining [the object]. Determining operation (paricchedakatva) is the function of a knower (bodhriva), and this is innate only in knowledge. How then can it be the nature of such things as sense-organs which are by nature deprived of consciousness? (Kajiyama 1998:28).

Or Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*:

One examines the body in its proper and general characteristics, as well as sensation, mind and constitutive elements of existence (dharmas). [Their] own being is their proper characteristic. But the general characteristic is the non-eternity of produced [things], the fact that [everything that is] connected with the four afflictions is suffering, and the fact that all things are empty and not the self (Coşeru 2009:253).

Having knowledge of Brahman and knowing that he is unique, the whole phenomenal existence is transcended, all oppositions become abolished, neither the good deeds nor the bad ones interfere any more and the self-perfected one enters the uncreated world of Brahman, from which there is no way to return. This world seems to have neither beginning nor end.

In the post-vedic period, the term-concept *avidyā* comes to mean not a mere absence of knowledge concerning the realization of a good social and religious state any longer, but holding the meaning of an illusory power, spiritually and intellectually speaking, having a negative, omnipresent and cosmic character. So that *avidyā* shall become the concept of the *Advaita Vedānta* system of thought, which developed during the 8th century A.D. Śāṅkara, the principal thinker of Advaita (considered by many western scholars the most important orthodox representative of the fundamental trifold corpus of scriptures formed by the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gītā and Brahma Sūtra) (Lorenzen 2005:8104-8106) thought that all forms of knowledge are based on *distinctions* (e.g., between subject and object, man and world, ātman and Brahman) as *avidyā* and illusory. Briefly, the supposed knowledge which doesn't aim at *the union of the individual soul with Brahman* was, from a spiritual point of view, nonsense and nescience. One may say that the foundation of human, empirical knowledge is ignorance, its object is also ignorance and it is pure illusion that follows too.

The concept of Brahman as nondeterminate being, without attributes (*nirguna brahman*) and the one of the non-distinction between ātman and Brahman, yet identifiable in the Upanishads, has been well developed thanks to Śāṅkara. The unity *ātman-Brahman* as a basic concern for Śāṅkara's reflection shows him as an accurate metaphysicist, in the real meaning, suitable to the Indian context, keeping in mind the individual's salvation from the painful and transmigratory existence. To him, the fatal mistake committed by some people was that of identifying the *self* with the *body* or mind, which was supposed to lead irreversibly to ignorance. This fact follows from his words:

When one's knowledge of one's identity with the Self becomes as firm as the belief of (another) man that he is a human being, that knowledge will liberate him even against his will! (Potter 1998:231)<sup>21</sup>.

A first source of this ignorance is confusing the *empirical* dimension to the *ultimate Real*, as happens with the materialism or secularization phenomenon nowadays, by which man only believes, in his self-sufficiency, that **he** is enough, leaving aside the real spiritual preoccupation. Salvation or perdition is to happen *hic et nunc*, without any connection to the beyond at all. *Moksha* becomes accessible to those who have special spiritual training and possessing the ability of concentrating intensely, meditating upon the meaning of the upanishadic texts. This is the way of the people who have given up the world, abandoning themselves, and are ready to follow the discipline (*yoga*) or the way of knowledge (*jñāna*). Śāṅkara sustained the existence of an inner entity within the human being – that is the *self* related to Brahman. From the error of those who identified the self with the body or psychic results all human problems' source, *avidyā*, and, hence, rebirth and future death. Samsāra and the worldly griefs become, therefore, the lack of knowledge's consequence. Without self-conscience, man would be deprived of liberation. Nevertheless, paradoxically, reintegration in Brahman doesn't mean anything else but a dissolution of the individual self into the infinite ocean of the Supreme Conscience, in a continuous process of depersonalization:

As the flowing rivers disappear in the ocean, losing their name (*nāman*) and their form (*rūpa*), thus the wise man, freed from name and form, goes to Purusha [the divine Person], the greater (*para*) than the great, the divine (*divya*) one (Müller 1884:41)<sup>22</sup>.

This is the end of the individual existence.

The Upanishadic period thoroughly proved the preoccupation of Indian thinkers for the fundamental dilemmas of existence and their genius in matters of metaphysical speculation. To them, there is a clear interdependence link between the doctrine of *karman* (deed, act), *samsāra* (soul's transmigrations cycle), as a logic and necessary consequence of the deeds, and *moksha*, the self's liberation (Levine 2001:117; Radhakrishnan 1959:352). All these three form the characteristic formula of the Indian philosophico-religious reflection, a visible fact from the following paragraph:

There goes he who acts together with his deed (*karman*)/Where his sign, his thought is caught/Solving the act/Which he commits here on earth/From that world he returns again/To this world, in action. So much for the one who desires. But as to the one who does not desire, without desire, freed from desire, with his desire fulfilled, with his desire in the self (*ātman*), his vital spirits (*prana*) do not leave him, being Brahman himself, he goes to Brahman (Müller 1884:176)<sup>23</sup>.

Man becomes what he acts and this is true in all systems of religion. If his desire is the self, then he shall share the liberation in Brahman, becoming consubstantial with him, in a mystic dissolution. Giving up desire means giving up any negative element and able to

<sup>21</sup> Śāṅkara, *Upadeśasāhasrī*, II.4.3-5.

<sup>22</sup> *Mundaka-Upanisad*, III, 2, 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Bṛihadāranyaka-Upanisad*, IV, 4, 6.

bond man more and more in the transmigration chaos. Jñāna-marga brings together with itself the possibility of attaining a fabulous knowledge which surpasses the world and the individual's condition.

### **Final Considerations**

Man lives or moves between science and nescience, knowledge and ignorance, between *is* and *ought* (Krüger 2006:37). This duality is one of the main features of human life. It depends on man's choice for the good way or the evil one. The question of knowledge and the necessary means by which he can gain access to this, in order to establish an harmonious connection with the indefinite being, is essential for discovering the dialectics of any religious-philosophical system. If we refer to the different religious experiences, then we have to mention, that the central idea which pervades them is Divinity as object and ontological source of the perfect knowledge. Thus, on the one hand, *ignorance* comprises a negative meaning. On the other hand, one can notice a positive meaning thanks to man's ability of becoming aware of the fact that mere empirical knowledge could stop or shade the discovery of the sacred, as is viewed by different religions or systems of faith. From this point of view, there are conceptual similarities between Śāṅkara (who developed the upanishadic concept in his commentaries) and Plato, Parmenides, Immanuel Kant or even Eastern Christian or Muslim (especially Sufistic) considerations. In a word, the sensual world is pure illusion (*māyā*), only a *phenomenon*, but not the *noumen*, the *reason* or *rationality* which resides at its foundation, in itself, or *das Ding-an-Sich*, as Kant would say.

As a concluding remark, we can be sure that the epistemic element is conspicuous in religious faiths. Moreover, it is an integral part of the *soteriological* process. The true knowledge implies a deep transformation of the individual. We can speak of *knowledge* as *the power* of mastering all the aspects of the existence in an eternal perspective, a knowledge extremely important for liberation as a final goal. Self-knowledge demands a psycho-somatic *katharsis*, accessible by asceticism and meditation only, when we look at the Upanishads, which were considered, without being analyzed through a mere traditional or scholastic perspective, as treatises of metaphysics, mystique or philosophy, to be based on a *magic philosophy* (Pensa 1972:114), on the superspatial and supertemporal abilities of the human self. But, from a transcendental perspective, we have to distinguish, beyond the simple abstract research of knowledge, the obvious divine calling of this knowledge, able to satisfy any desire, opening man's certainty of controlling his own destiny, enabling him to surpass the *dualitude of this existence*. As we see in the human *de-conditioning*, one of the main desires (Tatu 2011:29), but a fact which acquires different colors from a faith to another, then we can see a common level in the structure of religious knowing, that is religions share with humanity some common values-acts, such as: charity, goodness, love towards others (fellows), reciprocal acceptance and respect, and this is really a reasonable path to be followed further in the ecumenical dialogue. In fact, this is a special problem of deeds, by which time and space, could be conquered, pain and ignorance could be defeated, and, on a *phenomenological plane*, this is valid in all the great religions. This implies a passing from reason to finality. Apart from the pure psychological, logical connotation of the act-phenomenon of knowing, this is a natural and nascent faculty of the mind which directs it towards salvation.

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