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Paradoxes in Jīva Gosvāmī's concept of the soul, path to perfection and liberation

Introduction

In the most general sense, a paradox (from the Greek *parádoxos* 'unexpected, strange') is a statement that runs contrary to widely held beliefs, and as such seems incomprehensible. Paradox itself is part of a broader category, that of *aporia* (from the Greek *aporai* 'puzzle, difficulty'), which we could define as an insurmountable obstacle in reasoning, stemming from the inability to decide the value of arguments for and against a given notion, and thus allowing contradictory premises. In logic, a paradox is a statement that, despite valid reasoning from true premises, leads to a self-contradiction (Aduszkiewicz, 2004, p. 379). A paradox arises when correct, seemingly convincing reasoning based on indisputable premises nevertheless produces an unacceptable conclusion (Piecuch, 2011, p. 31). Matthew Bagger, whose research revolves around the religious uses of paradox, defines it as an apparently absurd statement (e.g. one that entails a self-contradiction), which we are nevertheless ready to accept as true, because it is supported by at least one form of epistemic authority we recognize (Bagger, 2007, p. 3). Reason is, obviously, one form of such authority, but so are testimony, tradition, the opinions of respected specialists and masters, even revelation or divination. Thus, paradoxes differ from run-of-the-mill absurd statements by the fact that the former have epistemic support, which lends them the necessary credibility.

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Religious discourse demonstrates a particular predilection for paradox – rather than see it as an error in reasoning or flawed logic, it usually grants it some special significance. This propensity, typical especially for mystical movements, was remarked upon by, among others, Walter T. Stace:

The entire body of the world's mystical literature warns us that there is, between mysticism and reason, some relation which is quite unique in the sense that no other body of thought or experience claims to stand in a like relation to reason. A common statement is that mysticism is above reason. In this phrase the word "above" is presumably a value word, used perhaps because the world of the mystic is thought to be divine and not merely earthly. (Stace, 1961, p. 251)

In a sense, religion grants the paradox a measure of the sacred, as it can be said to lie at the heart of most consciousness transformation techniques. It is no different in the case of Hindu religions, including one particular tradition of the *saguṇa-bhakti*,¹ represented by the Bengali mystic Chaitanya (1486–1533), which will be the focus of this essay. Reliance on the paradoxical remains one of the key characteristics of this particular school of Vaishnavism, called Bengali Vaishnavism (*Gauḍīya* in Sanskrit), due to the extensive body of inherently paradoxical mystical literature (see Katz, 2000, p. 41) on the one hand, and the fact that the doctrine underpinning the tradition has been built entirely on the ontological idea of paradoxicality on the other. Classic Hindu philosophical systems (*darśana*)² feature a number of different aporias, usually prompted by attempts to preserve the incontrovertible metaphysical notion of the non-duality of being (*sat ekam advitīyam*), while simultaneously acknowledging the universal experience of the plurality of the world (Kudelska, 2013, p. 98), which directly contradicts it. The definition of being, as outlined in the earliest Upanishads, became a starting point for all subsequent metaphysical premises devised by Indian thinkers. The notion of the paradoxicality of being, developed by the Bengali Vaishnavism school, was one of the many attempts undertaken within all of the *darśanas* to reconcile the contradiction that underpinned much of the Hindu context.

¹ *Saguṇa-bhakti* is one of two main strands of the pan-Indian *bhakti* (lit. 'participation') movement – a devotional form of worship characterized by profound spiritual and intellectual devotion to a deity, conceived in myriad ways. In the *saguṇa-bhakti* tradition, god is perceived as having specific attributes (*sa* 'with', *guṇa* 'quality'), a personified deity that the worshipper may be in love with, whereas the *nirguṇa* tradition (*nir* 'without') imagines god as an impersonal absolute.

² Because philosophy rarely entails just purely theoretical speculations in Hindu contexts, but rather exists as a method leading to immediate experience, classical *darśanas* function as philosophical and religious systems rather than philosophies *sensu stricto*. As such, all *darśanas* deal with matters of ontology (pertaining to the nature of being), epistemology (that is, how and why we "know"), as well as some psychological (the nature of the mind and its inner workings), cosmological (the structure of the universe) and soteriological (the theory of salvation/liberation) issues.

Discussing the role of paradox in the Chaitanya school, I will focus primarily on aporias pertaining to the nature of the soul, the reasons for its entanglement in the world, and the apparent contradictions in Vaishnava soteriology (those passages of the doctrine that source texts call *abhideya*- and *prayojana-tattva*),³ both of which are founded upon the main ontological paradox (*sambandha-jñāna*) – the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of god that extends beyond all logic. For the purpose of this inquiry, I will partially adapt the typology of the paradox outlined by Alessandro Graheli (Graheli, 2007b, pp. 381–422), but its main thrust will be based on the writings of Jīva Gosvāmī (ca. 1517–1608), widely believed to be the leading authority on matters of doctrine. These writings will include the Sanskrit text *Bhāgavatasandarbhā* (also known as *Ṣaṭsandarbha*)⁴ – the tradition's fundamental treatise – and its auto-commentary (*Sarvasamvādinī*), the latter featuring a bevy of remarks, penned by fellow Vedantists, on passages quoted by Gosvāmī. I will begin, however, with a brief explanation of the key concepts espoused by the school.

The ontological paradox (*acintya-bhedābheda*)

The philosophical position of Jīva Gosvāmī was formed over the course of the long ontological debate, during which representatives of the more extreme strands of the *Vedānta* attempted to determine the status of the ultimate reality – the Brahman, the souls and the world – and to solve the problem of their mutual interactions. On the one hand, proponents of absolute dualism (*dvaita/bheda*) attempted to separate god from his creation, as any entanglement of the Brahman with the world could be seen as proof of his imperfection, his “tainting”, and responsibility for both

³ The partition into three categories of deliberations is typical for the doctrine espoused by the Bengali school of Vaishnavism – used first and foremost by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, 1496–1588), as well as Rūpa (1489–1564) and Jīva Gosvāmī, it was taken almost verbatim from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (BhP, ca. 8–10th century CE). The term *sambandha* – lit. ‘relationship’ – is used here to describe the interactions of the Absolute, its power expressed in the form of souls (*jīva*) and the world (*prakṛti*). *Abhidheya*, lit. ‘what is to be expressed’ or, as a synonym of *vidheya*, ‘what is to be done’, denotes the means of achieving the aforementioned relationship. The term *prayojana*, meanwhile, literally means ‘goal’, the crowning achievement in the form of one particular type of liberation (*mukti*). This particular trichotomous arrangement was probably patterned after the classic theory of *anubandhacatuṣṭaya* – the four essential elements of the *śāstra*, a religious or scientific treatise – which was often used in Hindu poetics.

⁴ The title of this particular theological opus by Gosvāmī is a reference to a canonical text of the Gauḍīya tradition, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, from which most of the passages illustrating the respective theories will be taken. Its alternative name, *Ṣaṭsandarbha*, is, in turn, a reference to the structure of the opus – a collection of six essays/treatises on, respectively: (1) the ontology and epistemology of the Chaitanya school (*Tattvasandarbhā*, Treatise on Truth); (2) the primacy of theism over monism (*Bhagavatsandarbhā*, Treatise on God); (3) the concept of individual soul and its relation to the absolute (*Paramātmāsandarbhā*, Treatise on the Supreme Soul); (4) the specific concept of god in relation to ideas and sources already present within the Vedānta (*Kṛṣṇasandarbhā*, Treatise on Krishna); (5) the idea of devotional “participation” (*bhakti*) as the way and the goal in the Gauḍīya school (*Bhaktisandarbhā*, Treatise on Devotion); and (6) spiritual love (*prīti*) as the nature and ultimate perfection of the soul (*Prītisandarbhā*, Treatise on Soul).

the world as well as the situation of the embodied soul that inhabit it; on the other, proponents of strict monism (*advaita*) sought to connect the Brahman to the souls and the world, even going so far as to attempt to equate the three. Jīva Gosvāmī is aware of the problems stemming from both concepts, and posits that neither immanence nor complete transcendence are able to fully explain the relationship between the Brahman and the world – the infinite and the finite, the non-dual and the diverse, the immutable and the mutable. In his view, however, both perspectives are necessary, because unity is called for by reason, while autonomy is proven by experience. Only an entity that is simultaneously immanent and transcendent, wholly uniform but still containing multitudes, can be considered an infinite and limitless absolute. Gosvāmī ultimately develops his own doctrine, which he calls *acintya-bhedābheda* – ‘paradoxical difference and non-difference’.⁵

The very concept of difference and non-difference of the Brahman and the world (*bhedābheda-vāda*) is not new to Indian philosophy – its origins can be traced back to the seventh century CE, and possibly even earlier, to the oldest texts of the Vedānta, including the *Vedāntasūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa (hereafter VS, ca. 4th century CE). In the Middle Ages, *bhedābheda* was strongly linked with theism, and it had particular influence on thinkers hailing from the many different schools making up the Bhakti movement.⁶ Proponents of this particular type of ontological relationship included Bhāskara (8–9th century CE), the author of the *aupādhika-bhedābheda* (‘difference and non-difference based on limiting conditions’) doctrine,⁷ and Nimbārka (13th century CE), the author of the concept of *svābhāvika-bhedābheda* (‘natural difference and non-difference’).⁸ The earliest origins of

⁵ “Gautama-kaṇāda-jaimini-patañjali-mate tu bheda eva | śrī-rāmānuja-madvācārya-mate cety api sārvaśāstrīkī prasiddhiḥ | svamate tv acintya-bhedābheda eva acintya-śaktimayatvād iti” (Jīva Gosvāmī, 1966 [samvat 2022], p. 146). (Editor’s note: unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Sanskrit sources come from the author.) The citation is dated according to the Vikrami calendar, one of many calendar systems used in India. According to tradition, the Vikrama Samvat era began after King Vikramāditya defeated the Śakas in 57 BC. A more precise conversion of dates into the Gregorian system is quite complex, but the simplified version entails subtracting 57 years from the Vikrami date.

⁶ Representatives of theist schools built their belief systems around the concept of *bhedābheda*; as it is a form of realism – both the world and God truly exist within it. In the *advaita* philosophy, meanwhile, the existence of a personified God is accepted on some level, but he is considered a lesser and only temporarily observable aspect of an actually non-dual Brahman. Strictly dualist views, on the other hand, were not really popular with theists because they implied the impossibility of attaining unity with a divine being.

⁷ According to Bhāskara’s concept of *aupādhika-bhedābheda*, the difference between the Brahman and the world is driven by artificial limiting conditions (*upādhis*). Although as a causal force the Brahman is non-dual and formless, it still manifests itself in a variety of effects, and still underpins the diversity of the world. The Brahman evolved into the world through the process of transformation (*pariṇāma*), during which it succumbed to the limitations of matter and became individual souls. See Dasgupta, 1952, pp. 6–12.

⁸ Nimbārka named his concept *svābhāvika-bhedābheda* (‘natural difference and non-difference’) to differentiate it from notions originated by Bhāskara. Nimbārka argued that the Brahman is both different and non-different not because of limiting conditions, but because *bheda* and *abheda* characterize his essential nature (*svabhāva*). Both are real to an identical extent. See Dasgupta, 1952, pp. 429–440.

Gosvāmī's theories, however, can be found in the work of dualist (*dvaita*) Madhvācārya (13–14th century CE) and his concept of *saviśeṣabheda* ('dualism based on particularity'),⁹ which marked the first time the concept of "the supralogic" (lit. *viśeṣa* 'the difference') was utilized to reconcile the contradictions in writings dealing with the nature of the absolute.¹⁰ One of Gosvāmī's contributions also included settling the centuries-long debate on how the three categories of being, widely acknowledged by the majority of Vedantists (the absolute/*īśvara* – the souls/*cit* – material nature/*acit*) can be simultaneously different and non-different, given the reality of the world and the transcendence of god. As Gosvāmī also posits that the non-duality of being (*advaita*) is a fundamental quality of reality, he necessarily rejects the possibility that there can exist within the Brahman particularities such as *svajātīya* ('difference within the same category') and *vijātīya* ('difference across categories'). He accepts, however, the Brahman's intra-difference (*svagatabheda*) as consistent with the idea of oneness, as he believes that although the absolute is non-dual (*advaya*), there still exists within it a distinction between substance and entity, that is, between a transcendent God and his inconceivable power (*acintyaśakti*). And because it is impossible to determine whether the power (*śakti*) and the being are one and the same or not, Gosvāmī is able to skirt the problem of unity between two wholly different entities/substances that other proponents of the *bhedābheda* relation had to contend with.

⁹ Madhva's idea of *saviśeṣabheda* is rooted in the notion of the existence of a perpetual and real difference between the inanimate empirical world, the soul, conceived as a reflected splinter of the Brahman (*pratibimbāmśa*), and the Brahman (Vishnu), seen as the causal force but not the material force of all existence. The concept saw all three elements as fully realized and making up a single whole. The category of particularity introduced by Madhva (*viśeṣa*, 'individuality, specifics, attribute, singularity') is used here to explain their distinctiveness and shapes the web of their interactions (relation of similarity, relation of dependence, relation of similarity and dependence). The category *viśeṣa* (which Madhvā splits down into five separate distinctions: (1) *brahman – jīva*, (2) *brahman – jaḍa*, (3) *jīva – jīva*, (4) *jīva – jaḍa*, (5) *jaḍa – jaḍa*) enables us to identify the difference between quality and substance, and between fragment and whole, which may appear inseparable at first (although we observe no distinction between a piece of garment and its colour, we can however observe the garment's particularity, its *viśeṣa*). See Dasgupta, 1961, pp. 178–181.

¹⁰ Both early theologians (see Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, 1924, pp. 17–22) and more contemporary scholars (see Dasgupta, 1961, p. 18; Kapoor, 1976, p. 170) link Jīva Gosvāmī's concept of "inconceivability" (*acintya*) with Madhva's notion of *viśeṣa*. Both concepts were used in the same function, to reconcile the monist position with pluralism. To demonstrate the convergence of the two, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa (1720–1793) invoked Madhva's comments on BhP XI.7.51, where the latter argued that "although there is no difference between a quality and an object equipped with that quality, in the highest *īśvara* anything is possible due to the influence of inconceivable power (*acintya-śakti*). As such, this power is also capable of simultaneous *bheda* and *abheda* between God and the spiritual nature and souls themselves" (see *Madhva-bhāṣya* to BhP XI.7.51: "viśeṣasya viśiṣṭasyāpy abhedas tadvad eva tu sarvaṃ cācintya-śaktitvād yujyate paramēśvare | tacchaktyaiva tu jīveṣu cidrūpa-prakṛtāv api bhedābhedaḥ tad anyatra hyubhayaḥ api darśanāt"). Kapoor, on the other hand, argues that Madhvā's *acintyatva* pertains to the *viśeṣa*, and thus undermines the apparent difference and non-difference, whereas Chaitanya's applies to both actual *bheda* and actual *abheda*. *Saviśeṣabheda*, meanwhile, pertained only to the Brahman and his qualities, and other animate beings and their qualities. The Gauḍīya school, however, expanded the concept so that it would also apply to the interactions between the Brahman and the souls, and between the Brahman and material nature. Jīva was aware of the appropriation, as evidenced by his admission, located in the opening portions of the *Bhāgavatasandarbha*, that he follows the *Madhvabhāṣya* and the references it contains, no longer available in the original.

Jīva explored the concept of power in the second volume of his treatise, the *Bhagavatsandarbha* (hereafter BgS) and his argument derives, most likely, from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (hereafter BhP), which contains a number of passages like: “You are the lord of souls (*ātmeśvara*), the powers in your possession are infinite and beyond understanding” (BhP III.33.3).¹¹ Many of them are subsequently brought up by Gosvāmī in the *Sandarbhas*. To confirm the truthfulness of the concept *śakti*, he also draws on the *Vedāntasūtra*, quoting the aphorism from II.1.30: “The Brahman has all the powers – as the sacred texts revealed”.¹² In Gosvāmī's system, the power of God is essentially limitless in terms of quantity, but in terms of quality can be split into three categories – inner power (*antarāṅgaśakti*), also called essential (*svarūpaśakti*), corresponding to transcendent reality; external, material power (*māyāśakti*), which serves as the causal and material force of creation, and liminal power (*taṭasthaśakti*), comprising all individual souls (*jīvaśakti*). The internal, conscious power and external, unconscious power are opposed to each other. Liminal power, meanwhile, may be considered neutral, as it can come into contact with either of the two realities, despite the fact that it is conscious in nature and shares its quality with God. It can be equated with God on account of their shared eternal nature, knowledge and happiness; it differs from God, however, because it lacks “inherence” (it resides in the *Paramātmān*) and is insignificant (it is a *cit-kāṇa*, a “particle of spirit”), which, in turn, curtails its capabilities (*Paramātmāsandarbha*, hereafter ParS, anu. 40–44). According to the *Sandarbhas*, all powers are *svābhāvika*,¹³ a natural and inherent attribute of God, and *acintya*,¹⁴ meaning that they are inconceivable in and of themselves, and as such remain beyond human reasoning and cognition (*atarkya*) (BgS, anu. 16). The commentary of Śrīdhara Svāmī (1378–1414)¹⁵ cited by Gosvāmī in that particular section explains the latter of the aforementioned qualities as follows:

In the material world, ‘the energies of all existent objects’ (*śaktayaḥ sarva-bhāvānām*), such as gems or mantras, are ‘inconceivable but perceptible’ (*acintya-jñāna-gocarāḥ*). The words *acintya-jñāna* refer to knowledge that confounds rationality and must be obtained by simple acceptance of the effects (*kārya-anyathā-anupapatti*). Alterna-

¹¹ BhP III.33.3: “ātmeśvaro 'tarkya-sahasra-śaktiḥ”.

¹² VS II.1.30: “sarvopetā ca taddarśanāt”.

¹³ BgS, anu. 16: “śaktestatsvābhāvika-rūpatvamāha”; English translation: “These powers are defined as inherent in the Lord”.

¹⁴ BgS, anu. 15: “tāsāmacintyatvamāha”; English translation: “These powers are described as inconceivable”.

¹⁵ Śrīdhara Svāmī is a philosopher of the *Advaita* school, highly renowned in Bengali Vaishnavism circles, and author of the oldest complete commentary for the BhP, the *Bhāvārthadīpikā*.

tively, the meaning of *acintya* (inconceivable) is that the energy of objects cannot be thought of in terms of oneness with, or difference from, them, but understood only by presumption (*arthāpatti*).¹⁶ This being the case with ordinary phenomena, then certainly inconceivable real potencies inhere in Brahman that are the cause of creation, maintenance and so forth, just as fire has inconceivable burning potency. (Jīva Gosvāmī, 2014, p. 148)¹⁷

Gosvāmī highlights the natural and paradoxical nature of God's power in order to establish the fundamental unity of the absolute, whereas determining the various distances from God's essential nature is supposed to maintain his transcendence. And thus his internal power is equivalent to his essence and interacts with him directly. The external power, the lesser of all the *śakti*, manifests this temporary, phenomenal world of matter, toward which God keeps his distance, whereas the liminal power – the souls – may connect with either matter or God. By introducing the notion of inconceivable power, Jīva Gosvāmī settled a key problem of classic *darśanas*, which pondered the transformation of the divine substance (*brahmapariṇāma*) – in his theory, the transformation took place only within the sphere of external power, leaving the essence untouched. The concept of *acintya-śakti* allows to explain how the Absolute creates the world on its own, without being tainted by it or entangling itself with it in the process. Here, it serves as both the causal and the material power of creation, but rather than create directly, it instead does so by drawing on its *bahirāṅga-śakti*.

The nature of God, called *Paramabrahman* in this instance, also comprises three aspects on a scale. In Gosvāmī's system, the *Bhagavān*, the personified God with his qualities (*saviśeṣa*), is the highest, most complete aspect of the Absolute, containing within it the remaining two. The lowest, *Brahman*, on the other hand, is conceived as the *Bhagavān*'s featureless state, a pure, homogenous consciousness (BgS, anu. 7). Between the two is the *Paramātmān*, the supreme soul, divinity immanent in living beings (*jīva*) and inanimate matter (*māyāśakti*). It is the only aspect to remain in direct contact with both the world and the souls, and as such serves as their witness (*antaryāmin*) and provides inner control. Thus, this particular form of divinity is consciousness determined by a portion of the Absolute's power (BgS, anu. 7) – external and liminal power. Introducing the *Paramātmān* aspect enabled Gosvāmī to preserve the transcendence of the two remaining aspects of the divine.

¹⁶ Here, *arthāpatti* means logical implication, that is, reasoning from circumstances.

¹⁷ BgS, anu. 16: "loke hi sarveṣāṃ bhāvānāṃ maṇimantrādīnāṃ śaktayaḥ acintya-jñāna-gocarāḥ | acintyaṃ tarkāsaḥ yaj-jñānaṃ kāryānyathānupapatti-pramāṇakaṃ tasya gocarāḥ santi | yad vā – acintyā bhinnābhinnatvādi-vikalpaiś cintayitum aśakyāḥ kevalam arthāpatti-jñāna-gocarāḥ santi".

The relationship between the Absolute conceived like this and its own powers is already paradoxical (*bheda-abheda*) in and of itself; nevertheless, the term used to clarify their interdependence further exacerbates that particular quality. The word *acintya* translates to 'inconceivable', 'incomprehensible', 'unimaginable', but Jīva Gosvāmī uses it in a very specific manner. In ParS (anu. 90), he defines it as follows: "We call inconceivable what contradicts our knowledge and logic, what we arrive at when the two are transcended".¹⁸ The definition lacks the popular term *atarkya*, "non-logical", but instead uses a custom abstract noun, *tarka-atīta-tā*, which can be translated as "state of transcending logic". This seems to imply that the meaning we are looking for is "suprarational". A similar definition can be found in Section 16 of the *Bhagavatsandarbha* (BgS), where the term is translated after the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* as *tarkāsaha*, meaning "beyond logic", but also as a noun, *acintyatva*, which is defined as *durghaṭa-ghaṭatvaṃ*, meaning "the penetration of what is difficult to penetrate".¹⁹

Thus, the term *acintya* carries two meanings in Gosvāmī's writings – it describes what is impossible to grasp with reason and also what can be "understood only by presumption (*arthāpatti*)" (BgS, anu. 16).²⁰ Thus, we can conclude that the suprarational *acintyatva* contains within itself an element of logic, but transcends it. Kapoor argues (Kapoor, 1976, p. 152) that it symbolizes "the inconceivable power (*acintya-śakti*) of God, by which the concepts of identity and difference are transcended and reconciled in a higher synthesis".

Although Gosvāmī's notions outlined above seemed to offer a clear solution to the primal problem of the nature and structure of the absolute, attempts to reconcile them with other metaphysical premises of the traditions produce all sorts of aporias, a portion of which I will explore in more detail below.

The problem of embodiment (*prakṛti-jīvayoh saṃsargaḥ*)

The first of the aforementioned aporias, all of which are necessarily stemming from Gosvāmī's ontological premises, pertains to the problem of contact between the soul and the physical world in the context of its nature, itself described in detail in the *Paramātmāsandarbha* (anu. 19) – the third volume of his treatise. In the text, the soul is characterized as: true, eternal

¹⁸ ParS, anu. 90: "yad yā ca nayena tarkaṇa virudhyate tarkātītatayā seyam apy acintyety arthaḥ".

¹⁹ BgS, anu. 16: "durghaṭa-ghaṭatvaṃ hy acintyatvaṃ; acintyaṃ tarkāsahaṃ yajjñānaṃ kāryānyathānupapatti-pramāṇakaṃ tasya gocarāḥ santi".

²⁰ BgS, anu. 16: "yad vā – acintyā bhinnābhinnatvādi-vikalpāś cintayitum aśakyāḥ kevalam arthāpatti-jñāna-gocarāḥ santi".

and immutable – a witness of the body's transformations, conscious and self-illuminating, with a homogenous nature, but still unique, atomic, permeating the entire body, different in every body, always pure and under the spell of illusion. Furthermore, it portrays the soul as subject to the "I" consciousness, the one that knows, acts and experiences, whose nature is consciousness and happiness. By no means, however, can it be considered a form of determination (ParS, anu. 19).²¹ In the light of that, we ought to bring up two specific issues – one is the manner of contact (and the reasons behind it) between these two fundamentally different powers, while the other is the contact's exact timeframe. The former is answered in ParS (anu. 88–89), where Gosvāmī lays out his position using a traditional approach called *pūrvapakṣa*, debating its finer points with imagined opponents. Trying to pre-empt their objections, he asks:

"How is it possible that the soul, despite having the Brahman nature, unaffected by place, time or condition either internally or externally, can still succumb to illusion (*māyā*)²² and become bewildered by it? How, despite being imbued with an inalienable power of understanding, can it still succumb to ignorance?"²³ Could it have been stripped of its intrinsic nature of knowledge (*svarūpajñāna*) and happiness (*svarūpānanda*) by acting in contradiction to the *Bhagavān* (*īśvara-vimukha-karma*) and thus bringing misfortune upon itself in the form of *kleśa* (a state of affliction)? Why did it take on a body, thus triggering an unending cycle of births and deaths that brings only misery and suffering? If God,

²¹ ParS, anu. 19: "ātmā na devo na naro na tiryak sthāvaro na ca | na deho nendriyaṃ naiva manaḥ prāṇo na nāpi dhīḥ || na jaḍo na vikārī ca jñāna-mātrātmako na ca | svasmai svayaṃ prakāśaḥ syād ekarūpaḥ svarūpa-bhāk || cetano vyāpti-ṣṭilāś ca cidānandātmakas tathā | aham arthaḥ pratikṣetraṃ bhinnō'ṇur nitya-nirmalaḥ || tathā jñātr̥tva-kart̥tva-bhokt̥tva-nija-dharmakaḥ | paramātmāika-śeṣatva-svabhāvaḥ sarvadā svataḥ || iti ||" (Jīva Gosvāmī, 1984b, p. 80); English translation: "The *ātmā* is neither divine, nor human, nor animal nor an inanimate object. It is neither flesh, nor sense, nor the living breath, nor even a thought. The *ātmā* is neither immovable and blunt [like matter], nor is it subject to transformation, nor can we say that it is simply a sum of our awarenesses. It shines with its own light, its nature uniform and common for all souls, but each is in turn granted its own unique form. The *ātmā* has its own consciousness, its nature made up of bliss and knowledge. It is also permeating [meaning that it does not take up specific space, but permeates the whole body with consciousness]. The *ātmā* is the subject of the consciousness of the 'I' [i.e. the sense of individual separateness/the referent of the 'I' pronoun], and is different in every body, its size as small as an atom's. Apart from that, it is characterized by immutable purity. [Like the *Bhagavān*] the soul is also imbued with attributes such as cognition, agency, and experience. By its intrinsic nature, it is a distinct, always indivisible, particle (remnant/product) of the Paramātmā, the Supreme Soul". See also: ParS, anu. 45–46, including BhP VII.7.19–20; BhP III.25.16–18.

²² In Vaishnavism, *māyā* is conceived differently than in Advaita Vedānta, despite being inspired by it. As part of the absolute, it is as real as its effects are. Because power is wholly dependent on the substance it derives from – it cannot exist without its source, but simultaneously cannot exist alongside the *Bhagavān*. On account of the rule of causality – whether causative or material – it pertains to soul or matter, respectively. Thus, we end up with a *nimittamāyā* (*jīva-māyā*) or a *guṇamāyā* (*upādāna-māyā*). In the first aspect, it impacts the consciousness of the *jīva*, shrouding and distracting it with ignorance (*avidyā*), or inspires it to seek liberation through knowledge (*vidyā*). In the second aspect, *māyā* either creates or modifies the material world by playing the three *guṇa*.

²³ ParS, anu. 88: "deśataḥ kālato yo 'sāv avasthātaḥ svato 'nyataḥ aviluptāvbodhātmā sa yujyetājayā katham" | (BhP III.7.5) yo'sau deśādibhir aviluptāvbodha ātmā jīvaḥ sa katham ajayāvidyayā yujyeta (...)"

in the form of the supreme soul, resides in each body alongside an individual soul, why is it only the soul that is bound by these limitations?

Responding to these theoretical objections, Gosvāmī contends that the soul could potentially succumb to ignorance only when predestined (*yogya*) to do so. However, he argues later, on account of its specific nature, such a predestination is impossible for a *jīva* (an individual soul). In the notion positing that ignorance may arise within a soul sharing its nature with the *Bhagavān*, Gosvāmī points out a glaring self-contradiction, which he then tries to clarify using a reference to the aforementioned idea of inconceivable power. In his interpretation, the *māyāśakti*, thanks to which the world is created, would, in one of its two forms, influence the soul in some incomprehensible way. This would make it a *jīvamāyā* (*nimitta*, a causal force), the power of knowledge and ignorance – a type of *māyā* that could take only the liminal power, and never the *Bhagavān* as its object (*viśaya*). By its function of ignorance, the *nimitta* binds the soul and thus forces its embodiment. The influence of a *māyā* on an already embodied soul manifests itself in components such as time (*kāla*) as triggering factor, the karman law, comprising acts undertaken by the empirical ego, destiny (*daiva*), which enables the reception of results of the said action, and nature (*svabhāva*), which usually means the *saṁskāra*, latent traces of past experiences.²⁴ Thus, the *nimittamāyā* can affect the soul in two ways: it conceals its true nature from itself (*āvaraṇa*) and acts as the source of the distraction of consciousness (*vikṣepa*) that accompanies empirical experience.²⁵ In ParS anu. 90, however, Gosvāmī seems to suggest an inverse causal relationship, quoting, among other sources, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (VI.9.35), where the soul is seen as “fallen” (*patita*) due to its contact with the *guṇa*, the three forces of material nature and function of the *upādāna-māyā*, the material cause of creation. Although this would suggest that the soul's knowledge is obscured and concealed as a result of its embodiment, the implication itself bears no answers as to the primary reason behind it. In one of his commentaries to the BhP (IV.25.20), however, Śrīdhara Svāmī, whose explanations Jīva often cites,²⁶ suggests that the transcendent soul's contact with matter happens only of

²⁴ ParS, anu. 53: “kālaḥ kṣobhakaḥ, karma nimittaṁ, tad eva phalābhimukhaṁ abhivyaktaṁ daivam, svabhāvas tat-saṁskāraḥ”; English translation: “[In the verse (BhP X.63.23)] the word *kāla* (time) applies to the ‘mover’ [the motivating factor], *karma* (action) means ‘reason’/‘motive’, the word *daiva* (fate/divine will) ought to be understood as ‘that which brings results’, while *svabhāva* (nature) is its *saṁskāra* (*saṁskāra*), the mental habit [latent trace in the mind ingrained by the repeated performance of a given action]”.

²⁵ ParS, anu. 105: “tac ca jīvasvarūpāvaraṇa-vikṣepakāritvādinā māyā-vaibhavam eva”; English translation: “The word [i.e. *kuhaka*, meaning ‘deceptive’ as used in BhP I.1.1] refers to the power of the *māyā* which conceals the true nature of the individual soul and casts it [into the material world]”.

²⁶ The citations come mostly from the *Bhāvārthadīpikā*, Śrīdhara Svāmī's commentary to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Gosvāmī draws on Svāmī's explanations so frequently, that he often omits the title in his citations, using only the phrase “meanwhile in the comments” (*tīkā ca*) to mark quoted passages.

the former's volition. Such a choice is inconceivable, unexplainable and supposedly founded solely upon human free will (*yadṛcchā*).

More light is shed on the matter by Gosvāmī's answer to the question of when the souls came into contact with matter. Gosvāmī argues that the presence of a soul in the wheel of reincarnation has no exact beginning, despite the fact that phrases such as "the discovery of true nature" might suggest otherwise. For a "fallen" soul (*baddha-jīva*), a label which would suggest an apparent loss of its former, original position, there was no state prior to its embodiment. The term *anādi* ('without origin') also refers to the lack (*an*) of an initial (*ādi*) reason for the contact between soul and matter. However, by classifying souls into those eternally liberated and eternally incarnated – which he called "without origin and always facing toward the *Bhagavān*" (*nitya/anādita-bhagavat-unmukhaḥ*) and "eternally facing away from him" (*nitya/anādita-bhagavat-parāṇmukhāḥ*), respectively – Jīva Gosvāmī ultimately makes references here to the soul's responsibility for its own situation and the reasons driving it. He even writes (*Prītisandarbhā*, hereafter PriS, anu. 1–2) that it is the turn outwards that results in the soul finding itself under the influence of "ignorance", which he finally calls *prāgabhāva* again – without a beginning, but with a potential end.²⁷ Ultimately, the intrinsic attitude toward the absolute is supposed to be driven by the *Bhagavān*'s own perfect accord (*yadṛcchayā*).

The problem of the soul's capability for liberation (*adhikāra*)

In the context of the path to liberation, one of the main aporias appearing in the *Sandarbhās* pertains to the so-called paradox of competence (*adhikāra*), expressed in the contradiction of statements pertaining to the soul's capability to undertake *bhakti* – the loving devotion understood within this particular tradition as both the ultimate form of emancipation and the method of attaining it.

As established in the ParS, a soul "eternally facing away from the *Bhagavān*" experiences the suffering of samsara and has done so since time immemorial (*anādi*). The only way to clear away this primal fault is to turn, one way or another, toward the absolute, to develop

²⁷ The question of the etiology of suffering, closely linked with the problem of embodiment, which Rūpa Gosvāmī deals with in the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* and Jīva Gosvāmī comments on in the *Durgamasaṅgamanī* and then explores in Section 129 of the *Bhaktisandarbhā*, looks fairly similar. There, the sequence of evil is outlined as follows: (1) evil without origin (*aprārabdhaphalam*), (2) accumulated sin (*kuṭa*), (3) immediate cause of evil in the form of mental disposition (*bīja*), (4) evil that bears fruit (*phalonmukha*).

a more favourable attitude toward it (*sāmmukhya*). In the *Bhaktisandarbhā* (hereafter BS), citing the BhP time again, Jīva Gosvāmī describes three possible reasons for achieving such “propitiousness”, which he views as equivalent to liberation (*mukti*). The three reasons are: knowledge (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*) and action (*karmārpaṇa*) – together known as the so-called *trikāṇḍa-yoga*. In the treatise, he calls them methods/disciplines (*sādhana*), and ties them to specific competences. Each one requires particular predispositions and leads to a different form of liberation:

For those who renounce the world and those disappointed with it, the yoga of knowledge is best, whereas to those still not discouraged, those who still strive to fulfill their desires, the path of action is prescribed. Those, however, who spontaneously embrace belief in the stories about me and [other *aṅgas* of *bhakti*], and have a mind neither overly disheartened by the world nor overly attached to it, they will find perfection in the yoga of devotion.²⁸

As far as predispositions for the *bhakti*, which culminates in liberation conceived as achieving pure love for the *Bhagavān*, faith (*śraddhā-mātra*) would serve much better than ethics, high birth stemming from the past karman, or other acts from the past (*kṛta-niyama*), including rituals and pious deeds. In the passage quoted above, the appearance of faith has been described as “*yadṛcchayā*”, meaning spontaneous, unexpected, accidental; in other words: without a clear reason. The phrase, which has already appeared in this essay twice, can also be interpreted in reference to the BhP, XI.20.8 (or XI.20.11), where it simply means “stroke of luck”. For Jīva, however, “*yadṛcchayā*” means that by some sort of arising, the auspicious appearance [of *śraddhā*] is born out the compassion of a meeting with a devotee of the Lord who is entirely free”.²⁹ To confirm his interpretation, he quotes another passage of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (BhP I.2.16), which says that contact with holy people and serving them will develop in souls a love for hearing of the *Bhagavān*. This, however, merely shifts the problem of causality, as we are given no clear answers as to what a person has done to merit the contact and what it actually is. The service, meanwhile, could be considered a qualification for receiving the aforementioned mercy; however, in this particular case, we would have to either admit that pious deeds (*sukṛti*) are actually a predisposition for *bhakti*,

²⁸ BhP XI.20.7–8: “nirviṇṇānām jñāna-yogo nyāsinām iha karmasu teṣv anirviṇṇa-cittānām karma-yogas tu kāmīnām | yadṛcchayā mat-kathādaṁ jāta-śraddhas tu yaḥ pumān na nirviṇṇo nāti-sakto bhakti-yogo 'sya siddhi-daḥ”.

²⁹ BS, anu. 171: “yadṛcchayā kenāpi paramasvatantra-bhagavadbhaktasaṅga-tatkrpājāta-maṅgalodayena”. English translation: Edelman, 2015, p. 55.

which Gosvāmī denied, or that devotion itself is, if we assume that the soul is motivated to service by some precursory faith. But then the question about the origin of faith would still remain unanswered. Edelmann (Edelmann, 2015, pp. 51–52) points out the specific interpretation of the stages along which devotion develops in the initiate depicted by Jīva in the *Durgamasaṅgamanī*.³⁰ There, he organizes faith into two types – faith the soul has prior to its meeting with a sadhu, and faith proper, a conviction produced by association. Curiously, Jīva argues that the former could also be facilitated by listening to holy persons and reading sacred scripture.

Jīva repeatedly negates the possibility that the appearance of devotion, at either stage, is the product of human effort or human qualities. He emphasizes that the *bhakti* is not something that can be achieved (*sādhya*) or generated independently. As such, it is not a goal that any specific practice can lead to (*sādhana*). In one of his commentaries to Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (hereafter BRS, I.1.11; I.1.13–15), Jīva explains that such statements should not be taken literally – instead arguing that they only mean that the *bhakti* is unattainable to those burdened with personal motivations. In remaining instances, it can theoretically be considered an effect of competence in the form of freedom from egoistic motivations. Paradoxically, the said freedom can only be attained through prior devotion (see BRS, I.1.11). Furthermore, statements such as “facing toward the *Bhagavān*” (as was the case with the reasons for embodiment) suggest active involvement of the soul in attaining *bhakti*. Similarly, “disappointment with the world”, “turning away from world”, and “avoiding objects of pleasure”, all of which were identified as potential qualifications, are products of samsaric experiences – the karman, as Gosvāmī himself argues in the opening sections of PriS. There, he also writes that the task of external power, the *māyā*, is to use suffering to encourage the soul to turn toward the *Bhagavān*, which in this case means to seek shelter within.

It seems that by precluding the soul from involvement in its own liberation, Gosvāmī seeks to preserve the transcendence and separateness of the *bhakti* conceived as the internal power of the *Bhagavān*. Because it is not an inherent quality of the soul, devotion – especially understood as *prīti*, mature love – cannot exist in either a dormant or an undeveloped form, as a seed. It is present inside it solely as potential, a nascent capacity to feel that will become active only in the wake of coming into contact with divine internal power.

³⁰ The *Durgamasaṅgamanī* is a collection of Jīva Gosvāmī's commentaries on Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*.

The problem of causality (*hetu*)

Although a separate issue, the etiological paradox, revolving around the reason for the emergence of *bhakti* inside the soul, is nevertheless closely linked with the one discussed above. By far, the most important quality of loving devotion is that it exists “without reason” (*ahaitukī*) and its independence. It can never be the product of practice, as that would stand in direct contradiction to its transcendent nature. It is a “self-manifesting, spontaneous flow of divine potency” (BS, anu. 139).³¹ In the light of that, can we actually identify any causal agent? Can we actually trace the reason behind its manifestation in the world? As an emanation of the essential power of the *Bhagavān*, or his internal power of happiness (*hlādinī*), to be more precise, it remains untouched by the three forces of material nature (the *guṇa*), and as such cannot be prompted by a reason stemming from the said forces. On the one hand, the appearance of this particular sort of emotion has been described as the result of a spontaneous (*yadṛcchā*) emergence of faith (*śraddhā*) within a soul. On the other, incidental encounters with devout holy persons (*sādhū-saṅga*) have also been acknowledged as a reason for the awakening of the *bhakti* (BS, anu. 179–187). In PriS (anu. 65), we read that “the specific aspect of the *Bhagavān*’s power of happiness (*hlādinīśakti*), pure bliss, is always placed in liberated *bhaktas* (worshippers) and exists there in the form of love of God (*prīti*)”.³² It is only contact with the latter, living inside the holy person, that can prompt the development of precursory faith and, consequently, embracing action that would be favourably inclined toward the *Bhagavān*. A holy person (*sādhū*), Jīva writes, is characterized by a liberty akin to that of God, therefore his desire to grant someone *bhakti* is not dependent on anything – either piousness, the qualifications of the recipient (*adhikāra*), divine plans (*daiva*), or mercy. It is rather an expression of compassion (*kṛpā*) rooted in the presence of the said *bhakti* within the mystic himself. Curiously, the passage quoted above contains both “always” and “located”, which seem to be contradictory. As a temporal category, the word *nityam* usually refers to a state without a beginning, whereas the verb (the participle *nikṣipyamānā*) suggests not only the existence of a beginning, but external causation as well. Control over the *bhakti* would ultimately lay with those capable of “location”, and thus the holy person could not disburse them freely. Thus, to some extent, the *Bhagavān* arranges the cause, eventually producing effects in the form of liberation

³¹ BS, anu. 139: “ataeva bhakteḥ śrī-bhagavat-svarūpa-śakti-bodhakatvaṃ svayam-prakāśatvaṃ āha”.

³² PriS, anu. 65: “tasyā hlādinī eva kvāpīsarvānandātiśāyinī vṛttir nityaṁ bhakta-vṛndeṣveva nikṣipyamānā bhagavat prītyākhyayā vartate”.

and engendering an inclination for the *bhakti*. Assuming, however, that this sort of mercy is the said reason, then we fall back into a logical conundrum, where devotion itself is the cause of devotion. In Sanskrit, a tautology like that is called *anavasthā*, a non-finality or the impossibility to offer an initial cause for something.

Elsewhere, Jīva Gosvāmī writes that whenever someone's samsaric bondage is coming to an end, they encounter a mystic (BS, anu. 179). Thus, the result seems to precede the cause. What it means, however, that "time has finally come" (*samprāpta-kāla*) for a soul is not exactly clear.³³ The statement might imply the emergence in a person of a desire for liberation, prompted by their experiences, or the intervention of divine will. After all, it is widely known that the *saṃsāra*, the long chain of cause and effect, is basically endless, inexhaustible.

In a later section of BS (anu. 234), Jīva Gosvāmī cites a passage from the BhP (III.29.11–12): "As the waters of the Ganges keep flowing into the ocean, so does the stream of the mind continuously flow toward me – the supreme soul residing in all beings – merely by listening to descriptions of my qualities".³⁴ Then, using the *pūrva-pakṣa* framework outlined above, he asks how the uninterrupted (*avyavahitā*) stream of the *bhakti* can be formed by the mind and the senses (*liṅga* and *sthūla-śarīra*), when that which is to be learned through the devotion lies beyond them. The course of the mind cannot lead to the qualities of the *Bhagavān* because they lie outside the reach of him as embodied soul. Furthermore, the *bhakti* must meet the non-causality condition. What, then, would be the soul's motivation for encouraging the mind to listen to descriptions of divine qualities? Gosvāmī attempts to reconcile this apparent contradiction by saying that, first, the *bhakti* is not performed by the human mind or the human senses, but the divine power of devotion, manifested in the form of service, uses them as instruments of expression. With this argument, Jīva ostensibly confirms the extraneous provenance of the *bhakti*: rather than awaken inside the initiate as a result of his actions, it is instead granted upon him

³³ Later on, in BS, anu. 179, Jīva writes that the events unfold in the order reverse to the one he has just outlined and confirmed by quoting from the BhP (X.51.53), arguing that a soul obtains the association of a holy person only when its existence in the circle of reincarnation comes to an end. In his view, the course of events in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* was reversed in order to emphasize the inevitability of the holy person's participation in the process of liberation and the immediacy of effects produced by the encounter. Such a literary device, he argues, could be considered the fourth form of a rhetorical figure (*alaṃkāra*) called *atiśayokti* (hyperbole), wherein the causal relationship is reversed, resulting in the effect of a given event being instead presented as its reason. Such a conclusion, however, seems unconvincing, especially in the light of the fact that Gosvāmī devotes the rest of the section to examining known exceptions to the said rule, while the final portion of this *anuccheda* seems to explicitly point out how the qualifications of a given embodied soul determine this primary reason underpinning the *bhakti*.

³⁴ BhP, III.29.11–12: "mad-guṇa-śruti-mātreṇa mayi sarva-guhāśaye mano-gatir avicchinṇā yathā gaṅgāmbhaso 'mbudhau | lakṣaṇaṁ bhakti-yogasya nirguṇasya hy udāhṛtaṁ ahaituky avyavahitā yā bhaktiḥ puruṣottame".

(see BS, anu. 180); second, listening of the *Bhagavān* is – like the *bhakti* in general – an end in and of itself, and does not require any additional motivation. The process is undertaken by the mind for no particular reason – spontaneously, in other words.

Discussing the paradox of causality, we ought to bring up one other problematic issue. Although, as we previously established, devotion cannot be manufactured, Gosvāmī still examines it from two completely different angles – as exercise/practice (*sādhana-bhakti*) and goal (*sādhya-bhakti*). On the one hand, he clearly situates the *bhakti* in the causal perspective (on account of the gradual attainment thereof), implying active causation on the part of the *sādhaka*; on the other, he indicates the eternal existence and immutable perfection of that emotion, which must only manifest itself within the soul. Here, Goswami points out the paradoxicality of using the terms *sādhana* and *sādhya* in reference to devotion, which, as the inner power of the absolute, does not arise from anything and cannot be only partially perfect. Thus, *sādhya* here is not supposed to mean goal as the effect generated by practice, as much as the “emanation” of something that has already existed in one form or another in the past.

It would seem, therefore, that when it comes to causality, Jīva Gosvāmī separates the ontological from the pragmatic perspective. From the former, the mercy/will of a *Bhagavān* or a person liberated while still in a material body (so-called *jīvan-mukta*) seems to be the sole *spiritus movens* for the emergence in the soul of a more favourable inclination toward the divine; from the latter, however, it is man's own effort that plays the key part. Gosvāmī allows the paradox primarily because there needs to be an element of free will in the causation of the *bhakti*, as the very idea of love is rooted in free volition. Thus, love cannot be coerced, wholly external – as that would be a logical contradiction.

The problem of spiritual form (*svarūpa*)

The shape a soul takes in the wake of attaining liberation will be the last issue I take a closer look at here. Although it is used by the Gosvāmīs, the breakdown into *ātmān* (the emancipated soul) and *jīva* (the embodied soul) cannot be applied to similar divisions present in other strains of Indian thought. The *Sandarbhās* teach that the likelihood of the soul existing in a “pure” state is negligible. Following its liberation and death – in that order – it is transported onto the divine plane, where it takes on its pure spiritual body (*akarmārabdha/avyaya-śarīra*), similar in capacity and function to that of the material (*sthūla-śarīra*) and subtle body (*sūkṣma-śarīra*). This begets the question of whether the *ātmān* is in any way

changed in the process despite being described as immutable, and whether its spiritual form is external relative to the *ātman* characterized in Section 19 of ParS.³⁵ In the context of the relationship between the Brahman and the world (between spirit and matter), Vedānta philosophers usually mention two types of transformations: (1) *vikāra*, which resembles the transformation of milk into yoghurt, and (2) *pariṇāma*, often illustrated with the image of raw gold being made into golden jewellery. The former, then, pertains to the nature of the object, while the latter pertains to its form. Jīva Gosvāmī, in turn, argues that the soul is subject to neither of the two. In the opening section of PriS, he explains that emancipation involves the attainment of the soul's original form – the *svarūpa*, perfect in and of itself and requiring no additional elements. Traditionally, it is believed to have eight specific qualities, all of which are mentioned already in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.³⁶ On the other hand, he declares that the term *svarūpa* cannot be taken to mean only the freedom from suffering imposed by material nature. Something, then, is appended in the process.³⁷

According to Sections 10–12 of PriS, the soul is supposed to receive a specific luminous/perfected body (*jyotī-rūpa/siddha-deha*), resembling one of the many forms of God.³⁸ It is granted by the *Bhagavān*, by the power of his mercy, and as such is extraneous, at least to some extent.³⁹ However, some theologians associated with Bengali Vaishnavism do not necessarily agree with such a view. In his commentary to VS (IV.4.1), Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa writes that the luminous form is not *āgantuka*, meaning “new/added”, but rather already present in the soul.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Gosvāmī tries to argue that although the *svarūpa* is not a product of

³⁵ For ParS, anu. 19, see note 21 above. See also: ParS, anu. 45–46.

³⁶ *Chāndogyaupaniṣad* VIII.7.3. The attributes identified in the Upanishad include freedom from sin, age, death, sorrow, hunger, as well as sincerity of emotion and intention.

³⁷ In this context, it might be particularly interesting to take a closer look at Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's reflections on whether it is necessary for the soul to adopt a spiritual body (*divya-vigraha*). In one of his commentaries on the Badarayana's *Vedāntasūtra* (IV.4.12), he acknowledges, reconciling two contradictory positions, that after attaining liberation the soul does not have to adopt any sort of body, but may take whatever spiritual form if it so wishes. See *Govinda-bhāṣya* IV.4.10–12.

³⁸ PriS, anu. 10: “*vaikuṇṭhasya mūrtir iva mūrtir yeṣām ity uktam*”. English translation: see note 41 below.

³⁹ Although, according to Jīva, it was the *Bhagavān* who granted the spiritual body to the initiate, in some later strains of Bengali Vaishnavism the role was taken over by the guru. Alongside the development of *mañjarī-sādhana*, the practice of imitating the *mañjarī*, emerged the tradition of *siddha-praṇālī-dīkṣā* (lit. ‘chain of the faultless’), that is, the initiation into the specifically defined *rāgānuga-bhakti* by revealing to the aspiring initiate the eleven qualities of its eternal, perfected spiritual form. The elements revealed in the course of the initiation include: type of connection to the divine, age, name, form, group, attire (or attributes), instructions (signs), residence, specific form of service, leading *sakhī*, specialty.

⁴⁰ The question of spiritual form is explored by Baladeva in his commentaries to VS IV.4.1–3 and IV.4.10–12. His deliberations revolve primarily around the *śruti* texts, including the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VIII.12.3: “*evam evaiṣa samprasādo 'smāt śarīrāt samutthāya param jyotir upasampadya svena rūpeṇābhiniṣpadyate sa uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ*”; English translation: “In the same way, the joyful self arises from the body and, attaining the light of the Cosmic Self, appears in his own form. This is the *Paramātmā*, the Cosmic Self” (Śaṅkarācārya & Lokeśvarānanda, 1998, p. 783). In response to the question whether the spiritual form attained by the *jīva* is different from itself or not, he declares that it must be the original form of the soul, as indicated by the phrasing used in the Upanishad (*svena rūpeṇa*). See *Govinda-bhāṣya* IV.4.1: “*sveneti*

the soul, it nevertheless cannot be considered wholly extraneous. While this particular form is expected to “manifest itself” (*udaya*) in the *jīva*, that does not necessarily mean that it has already existed within it in some dormant form, as that would lead to additional problems of a philosophical nature (PriS, anu. 11–12). Nevertheless, some difficulties ensue, as many presume that the soul is the *Bhagavān*'s liminal power (*taṭastha-śakti*) and can never, not even in the wake of liberation, attain the status of internal power, whereas the luminous body was described even by Jīva himself as part of the *antarāṅga-śakti*, the essential power. It is therefore impossible for it to become wholly one with the soul.

This, in turn, raises the question whether this “adoption of a body” implies ontological unity or merely an association of the soul with a specific physical form, as it happens in the physical reality. Gosvāmī seeks to provide an answer by declaring that the form is essentially emotional in nature (*bhāva-svarūpa*). This means that the soul “soaks up” the emotions, which, although extrinsic, are not experienced as such due to the “character of the substance”. Nevertheless, the *siddha-deha* has also been described as eternal, without beginning or end, and thus cannot be created *ad hoc* to fit the needs of a particular soul. How, then, does it function in transcendent reality prior to its blending with the soul and how exactly is it allocated? The answer to this particular question differs significantly from the description provided above, purporting that it does indeed reside there (*varante*) in a dormant form, waiting to be assigned to a particular *jīva* (PriS, anu. 10).⁴¹ Gosvāmī argues that there is an infinite number of such bodies, just like there is an overwhelming multitude of souls and their various moods (PriS, anu. 11).⁴² It does not seem, therefore,

svarūpaviśeṣaṇādityarthaḥ | āgantukarūpaparigrahe 'narthakaṃ tat syāt'; English translation: “Here (VS IV.4.1), the word *svena* means ‘by separation/manifestation in its own form’. If the soul were to adopt an additional (i.e. new) form (a spiritual body), using the word *svena* would be pointless.”

⁴¹ PriS, anu. 10: “(...) *vasanti yatra puruṣāḥ sarve vaikuṇṭha-mūrtayaḥ | ye' nimitta-nimittena dharmenārādhayan harim ||* [BhP III.15.14] *nimittam phalam na tan-nimittam pravartakam yasmin tena niṣkāmenety arthaḥ | dharmena bhāgavatākhyena | vaikuṇṭhasya bhagavato jyotir-aṃśa-bhūtā vaikuṇṭha-loka-śobhā-rūpā yā anantānmūrtayas tatra varante | tāsām ekayā saha muktasyaikasya mūrtiḥ bhagavatā kriyata iti vaikuṇṭhasya mūrtir iva mūrtir yeṣām ity uktam*”; English translation: “Every person in the Vaikuṇṭha [the spiritual heaven, the abode of Vishnu] and worshipping Hari with a faith devoid of personal motivations will be granted a heavenly form [identical to Vishnu's]’ (BhP III.15.14). [In the verse,] the word *nimitta* refers to ‘fruit/effect’, while *animitta* means ‘lack of reason’. Together, *animitta-nimitta(-dharma)* means ‘a religious act devoid of any desire to accomplish personal aims’. The word *dharma* refers to the religion of the Vaishnavas. The word *vaikuṇṭha*, on the other hand, refers to Vishnu. [*Vaikuṇṭha-mūrtayaḥ* means that] there exists there [in *Vaikuṇṭha*] an infinite number of heavenly forms/Vishnu's bodies, each one weaved from particles of [his spiritual] luminescence and in such a shape as to represent the splendor of *Vaikuṇṭha*. Each of these forms can then be granted by Vishnu to one liberated person. This is the meaning behind a ‘form identical to Vishnu's’ from Śrīdhara Svāmī's commentary [to the quoted passage]”. See Śrīdhara Svāmī's commentary on BhP (III.15.14) cited by Gosvāmī and commentary penned by H. Śāstrī to the above-quoted section of PriS (Śāstrī in Jīva Gosvāmī, 1986b, p. 100).

⁴² PriS, anu. 11: “*yā tanuḥ śrī-bhagavatā dātum pratijñātā, tāṃ bhāgavatīm bhagavad-aṃśa-jyotir-aṃśa-rūpām śuddhām prakṛti-sparśa-sūnyām tanuṃ prati śrī-bhagavataiva mayi prayujyamāne nīyamāne ārabdham yat karma tan-nirvāṇam*

that the problem of the “original” or “final” form of the soul has been in any way definitively solved by these arguments. This notion is further corroborated by the fact that later on, some theologians associated with the Chaitanya School continued to contend that the spiritual form must be somehow inherent in the *ātman*.⁴³ Much controversy around the problem of the spiritual form arose, over the years, in relation to a verse from Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (BRS I.2.295),⁴⁴ wherein he cryptically outlined his concept of the perfected body (*siddha-rūpa*). The two interpretations of the *siddha-rūpa* that are considered mainstream today among the adherents of the Gauḍīya tradition are the product of that particular debate. One contends that the eternal spiritual form, inherent in the *jīva* (see Haberman, 2001, pp. 116–121),⁴⁵ is either revealed to the initiate or the initiate himself is tasked with recognizing it. The other, meanwhile, proposes the notion of the guru assigning the initiate an appropriate luminous body, eternally residing in the divine abode (see Haberman, 2001, pp. 121–122).

To recapitulate, Jīva Gosvāmī's particular philosophy of the paradox has its roots in the orthodox nature of Bengali Vaishnavism, itself stemming from the embrace of sacred scriptures (the Vedas, in a broad sense) as the only source of certain knowledge (*pramāṇa*). These texts, however, feature not just descriptions of transcendence, but also of immanence of the absolute, the total unity and the multitude of being. Proponents of individual strains

samāptam yasya sa pāñcabhautiko nyapatad iti | prāktana-liṅga-śarīra-bhaṅgo'pi lakṣitaḥ | tādṛśa-bhagavan-niṣṭhe prārabdha-karma-paryantam eva tat-sthiteḥ”; English translation: “With the words: ‘You will reject this imperfect lesser world and will go to the spiritual plane, where you will remain my personal companion’ (BhP I.6.24), Vishnu promised (Nārada) a divine body (*bhāgavatīm tanum*), that is, one in the form of a particle of God's light and pure (*śuddham*), meaning free from unwanted influence of matter. The phrase ‘the body given to me by God’ (*tanum prayujyamāṇe mayi*) refers to the body that will be granted/acquired after the accumulated karman is extinguished and the five-element body disintegrates. This also implies the dissolution/destruction of the existing subtle body (*liṅga-śarīra*) as this sort of belief in the *Bhagavān* [as described in BhP I.6.24] annihilates the already manifested (*prārabdha*) fruit of the actions (*karman*) of the person situated within God”.

⁴³ The group of Chaitanya School theologians who held a different view of the origin and nature of the perfected body than Jīva Gosvāmī included the aforementioned Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, as well as Rūpa Kavirāj (17th century), who was eventually branded a heretic and whose inquiries developed Rūpa Gosvāmī's concepts of *sādhaka* and *siddha-deha*. See Haberman, 2001, pp. 98–106. Arguments suggesting that the spiritual body is somehow generated by the *sādhaka* or its attendant *bhakti* can be found in many Vaishnava writings, including Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura's *Premabhakticandrikā* (54–55), where the author claimed that the body which the *sādhaka* contemplates in the course of meditation is actually his spiritual body (*siddha-deha*), still in development.

⁴⁴ BRS I.2.295: “sevā sādhakarūpeṇa siddharūpeṇa cātra hi tadbhāvalipsunā kāryā vrajalokānusārataḥ”; English translation: “Whoever desires to attain one of the emotional states that the denizens of Braj are renowned for, ought to commit both their practitioner's body (*sādhakarūpa*) and their perfected body (*siddharūpa*) into a manner of service that emulates them”. Here, *sādhakarūpa* is the physical body of the practising initiate, whereas the *siddharūpa* is the “visualized” body, which Jīva defines in his commentary as the internally created body, used by the *sādhaka* to perform whatever service Krishna may desire of him (*antaścintitābhiśṭa-tat-sevopayogi-deha*).

⁴⁵ An example of the inherent theory can be found, among other places, in the biography of Rāmadāsa Bābājī (Kapoor, 1982, pp. 114–115).

of the Vedānta attempted to reconcile these contradictions in myriad ways, including putting some writings above others in terms of significance. Gosvāmī, on the other hand, put forth the notion of *acintya-bhedābheda*, which merged both perspectives through the idea of “inconceivability”. The goal of this essay was to demonstrate that even though it solves some fundamental ontological issues, adopting such a precept nevertheless generates new aporias, which are typically resolved by drawing on the *acintyatva*. In the context of the problems of embodiment, qualification and causality, the usage of phrasing expressing the impossibility of retracing the precise causal relationship seems a consequence of adopting the said doctrine. The phrases, including “without a beginning”, “eternal”, “for no reason”, “incidentally”, “on account of mercy”, “by chance”, “in an inconceivable manner” or “by a stroke of luck” could be used to explain otherwise unexplainable phenomena (O’Flaherty, 1980, p. 19).

Translated by Jan Szelągiewicz

Abbreviations

BgS	– <i>Bhagavatsandarbha</i>
BhP	– <i>Bhāgavatapurāṇa</i>
BRS	– <i>Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu</i>
BS	– <i>Bhaktisandarbha</i>
ParS	– <i>Paramātmāsandarbha</i>
PriS	– <i>Prītisandarbha</i>
VS	– <i>Vedāntasūtra</i>

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Paradoksy w Dźiwy Goswamina koncepcji duszy, drogi do doskonałości oraz wyzwolenia

Przedmiotem artykułu jest rola i znaczenie paradoksów w myśli filozoficznej i mistyce teologa wisznuizmu bengalskiego – Dźiwy Goswamina (XVI w.). Sytuuje on swój system w obrębie szkoły wedanty, w której główną kategorią odróżniającą jej nurty i decydującą o ich specyfice jest relacja pomiędzy absolutem a światem zjawiskowym i człowiekiem. U Goswamina będzie to relacja jednoczesnej tożsamości i odrębności (*bhedābheda*) powyższych kategorii, dookreślona słowem *acintya* – „niedostępna rozumowi” – co dodatkowo uwydatnia ten ontologiczny paradoks. Chociaż doktrynalnie najistotniejszy, nie jest to jednak jedyny paradoks w myśli Goswamina. Poprzez przyjęcie tej nadrzędnej tezy metafizycznej powstało bowiem wiele innych aporii, między innymi dotyczących natury duszy, problemu wcielenia, a także koncepcji *bhakti* (nabożnego oddania dla bóstwa) oraz wyzwolenia (*mukti*), które następnie Goswamin stara się rozwiązać w swoim najważniejszym traktacie filozoficznym – *Szatsandarbhśze*.

Słowa kluczowe:

filozofia indyjska; paradoks; wisznuizm bengalski; Dźiwa Goswamin (1517–1608)

Paradoxes in Jīva Gosvāmī's concept of the soul, path to perfection and liberation

This article is devoted to the role and significance of paradoxes in the philosophical thought and mysticism of the sixteenth-century Bengali Vaishnava theologian Jīva Gosvāmī. He situates his system within the Vedānta school, where the main category distinguishing its branches and deciding on their specific character is the relation between the Absolute, the phenomenal world and the human being. In Gosvāmī's school, this relation involves identity and distinctness (*bhedābheda*) of those categories at the same time, referred to by the word *acintya* ("inaccessible to reason"), which further stresses this ontological paradox. Although doctrinally the most important, it is not the only paradox in Gosvāmī's thought. Adopting this core metaphysical thesis engendered many other aporias, including those concerning the nature of the soul, the concept of *bhakti* (loving devotion to a deity) and the idea of liberation (*mukti*), which Gosvāmī then attempts to solve in his most important philosophical treatise – *Śaṭsandarbha*.

Keywords:

Indian philosophy; paradox; Bengali Vaishnavism (*gauḍīya*); Jīva Gosvāmī (1517–1608)

Note:

This is a translation of the original article entitled "Paradoksy w Dźiwy Goswamina koncepcji duszy, drogi do doskonałości oraz wyzwolenia", which was published in *Adeptus*, issue 13, 2019.

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