



1-1-2005

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Recommended Citation

Rock, A. J. (2005). Why does the universe exist? An Advaita Vedantic perspective. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 24 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2005.24.1.69>



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Why Does the Universe Exist? An Advaita Vedantic Perspective

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Debates concerning causal explanations of the universe tend to be based on *a priori* propositions (e.g., Edwards, 1973; Smith, 1995; Swinburne, 1978). The present paper, however, addresses the metaphysical question, “Why does the universe exist?” from the perspective of a school of Hindu philosophy referred to as *advaita vedanta* and two of its *a posteriori* derived creation theories: the theory of simultaneous creation (*drishti-srishti vada*) and the theory of non-causality (*ajata vada*). Objections to *advaita vedanta* are also discussed. It is concluded that *advaita vedanta* has the potential to make a significant contribution to contemporary metaphysical debate in general and our understanding of the question, “Why does the universe exist?” in particular.

The Problem

Heidegger (1959) considered the question, “Why does the universe exist?”¹ to be the “fundamental problem of metaphysics” (p. 61). A number of scholars suggested that such a question can be answered. For example, Gilson (1941, p. 139) asserted that the cause of the universe is a “pure Act of existence” that is absolute and hence self-sufficient. In contrast, the question is frequently deemed an insoluble riddle and, thus, inherently meaningless² or simply ill-conceived. For instance, Huxley (1964, p. 108) suggested that one must learn to accept that the universe is an “irreducible mystery,” while Russell (Russell & Copelston, 1973) contended that there is no ground whatsoever for the assumption that the universe as a whole must have a cause. One particularly noteworthy argument for the meaninglessness of the question, “Why does the universe exist?” is derived from the modern logic of Wittgenstein (1981/1922) and elucidated by Koestenbaum (1962), Waisman (1967; cited in Edwards, 1973, p. 806) and others. Essentially, the argument is that “the question of why there is something and not nothing is either ill-formed or profitless, since any intelligible answer will merely invite the same question” (Blackburn, 1996, p. 40). This argu-

ment was advanced in Edwards’ (1973) influential essay “Why?”:

In any of its familiar senses, when we ask anything of x, why it happens or why it is what it is- whether x is the collapse of an army, a case of lung cancer, the theft of a jewel, or the stalling of a car - we assume that there is some set of conditions, other than x, in terms of which it can be explained. We do not know what this other thing is that is suitably related to x, but unless it is in principle possible to go beyond x, and find such another thing, the question does not make any sense. Now, if by “the universe” we mean the totality of things, then our x in “Why does the universe exist?” is so all-inclusive that it is logically impossible to find anything which could be suitably related to that whose explanations we appear to be seeking. (p. 809)

Edwards’ (1973) thesis may be summarised by Wittgenstein’s (1981/1922, p. 183) statement that, “the sense of the world must lie outside the world.” It seems rather obvious that an explanation as to why someone, for example, engages in serial murder can

only be provided by a set of conditions that exist “outside” and, thus, temporally prior to the act of serial murder (e.g., the cognitive rehearsal of violent sexual fantasies, damage to the limbic system of the brain). The explanation clearly does not exist within the definitional boundaries of serial murder as “the premeditated murder of three or more victims committed over time, in separate incidents, in a civilian context, with the murder activity being chosen by the offender” (Keeney, 1992; cited in Keeney & Heide, 1994, p. 384).

It is perhaps noteworthy that Edwards’ (1973) thesis is illustrative of an anti-metaphysical position that arguably pre-empts the answer by ruling out—on a priori grounds—the possibility of a transcendent entity that may function as a causal agent. Edwards’ (1973) argument is sound provided that his a priori definition of the universe and assumptions about knowledge are correct. Edwards’ (1973) acknowledges that if it can be convincingly argued that there exists a metaphysical entity that transcends and includes the universe; then it is possible that the question “Why does the universe exist?” can be answered, and is therefore meaningful.

More recently, philosophers have been engaged in intricate debate over internal and external causal explanations of the universe. Swinburne (1979), for example, argued that, “if the only causes of its past states are prior states, the set of past states as a whole will have no cause and so no explanation” (p. 78). Swinburne (1979) maintained, however, that if it were such that God causes the set of past states, then an external causal explanation would be possible. In contrast, Rowe (1989) contended that whilst each past state of the universe may be causally explained by prior past states, there is no causal reason for the set of states of the universe because a set is an abstract object and is thereby precluded from entering into causal relations. Similarly, Smith (1995) concluded that “it is nomologically necessary that a beginningless universe has an internal causal explanation (be it deterministic or probabilistic) but no external causal explanation” (p. 310).

The present author suggests that a commonality exemplified by the preceding arguments pertaining to causal explanations of the universe (e.g., Edwards, 1973; Rowe, 1989; Swinburne, 1979; Smith, 1995) is that they were all formulated a priori. Consequently, there exists a lacuna in the literature with regards to an application of theories constructed a posteriori to the question, “Why does the universe exist?” Psychological research suggests that some experiential—and concep-

tual—knowledge is “state-specific” (Tart, 1972; 1998) or “state-dependent” (Fischer, 1980); that is, certain knowledge may be obtained in altered states of consciousness (ASCs) that is inaccessible during one’s ordinary or normal waking conscious. Indeed some ASCs (e.g., kevala nirvikalpa samadhi) purportedly involve experiences of, for example, the manifestation and dissolution of the universe (e.g., Maharaj, 1987a). It is arguable that such experiences may provide valuable insights into the external and internal causal mechanisms of the universe that are unobtainable a priori.

The purpose of this essay is to apply the school of Hindu philosophy referred to as *advaita vedanta* to the question “Why does the universe exist?” The present author will take the question, “Why does the universe exist?” to mean, “What is the causal explanation of the universe?”³ *Advaita vedanta* is being consulted because it consists—in part—of two creation theories that directly impinge on the preceding question. Furthermore, in contrast to modern logicians, the ontology outlined in the doctrine of *advaita vedanta* was purportedly constructed a posteriori using metaphysical knowledge acquired through ASCs (e.g., samadhi). In the *advaita* system, mystical experience is facilitated by the aspirant practicing one of four main yogas: Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, or Rajas (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1978). For these reasons, it is arguable that *advaita vedanta* is well-positioned to address the question, “Why does the universe exist?”

The present paper will commence with a brief summary of the *advaita* doctrine. Second, discussion will revolve around two creation theories associated with *advaita*: the theory of simultaneous creation (*drishti-shrishti-vada*) and the theory of non-causality (*ajata vada*). Finally, objections to the *advaita* theory will be considered.

Before proceeding, a number of qualifying statements need to be made. First, the present paper is not concerned with the epistemological status of knowledge claims made by practitioners of *advaita*. For the purpose of this essay it will be assumed that the yogi’s perceptions are veridical as opposed to delusory. Second, throughout this essay Kaufmann’s (1991) definition of the universe as “all space, along with all the matter and radiation in space” (p. 631) will be adopted as opposed to Edwards’ (1973) definition of the universe as “the totality of things” (p. 809). Kaufmann’s (1991) definition is being used on the grounds that it constitutes the orthodox view of the term “universe.” Finally, this essay does not attempt to provide a definitive answer to the question, “Why does

the universe exist?” But rather, it sets itself the far more modest task of analysing the preceding question from an *advaitic* perspective.

Advaita Vedanta: An overview

Advaita (literally non-dualism) as articulated by Sankaracharya is a doctrine of the vedantic school of Hindu philosophy (Blackburn, 1996). Vedanta refers to the philosophy of the Vedas (Shastri, 1959). Veda (from vid “to know”) may be defined as “knowledge.” It is the “name of the most ancient Sanskrit scriptures, considered to be a direct revelation from God to the mystics of the past” (Easwaran, 1986, p. 236). As previously stated, the doctrine of *advaita vedanta* was purportedly constructed a posteriori using metaphysical knowledge acquired through various ASCs facilitated by the aspirant practising one of four main yogas: Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, or Rajas (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1978). These four Yogas represent different methods aimed at erasing the ego (*ahamkara*) through selfless work, the discriminative power of the intellect (*buddhi*), devotion to a Personal God or spiritual teacher (*guru*), and meditation, respectively. Such techniques facilitate ASCs referred to as samadhi in which one has a direct experience of Absolute Reality (*Brahman*). Sri Ramana Maharshi (1985b) delineates three different grades of samadhi:

(1) *Savikalpa samadhi*. The lowest level of *samadhi* in which one is required to maintain constant effort otherwise the obscuration of *Brahman* will occur.

(2) *Kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*. The stage prior to liberation (*moksha*) characterised by effortless awareness of one’s true identity as *Brahman* and the temporary cessation of *ahamkara*. It further entails the absence of bodily awareness and an inability to perceive the sensory world. However, this state is transitory. Its conclusion is signified by the re-emergence of bodily awareness and subsequently *ahamkara*.

(3) *Sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*. The final attainment of *moksha* in which *ahamkara* is irrevocably annihilated. In this state the cessation of all subject-object duality occurs as one perceives that all is *Brahman*. (Maharshi, 1985b)

As previously stated, *advaita* postulates an Absolute principle, an Ultimate Reality referred to as *Brahman* (Aurobino, 1995; Guenon, 1981; Maharshi, 1997a). The three characteristics of *Brahman* are existence (*sat*), consciousness (*chit*) and bliss (*ananda*; Balsekar, 1982; Maharshi, 1997b). In the *advaita* doc-

trine the individual soul (*jiva*) is held to be identical with *Brahman*. This phase of *Brahman* is referred to as *Atman* (Maharshi, 1988; Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1981; Raju, 1967; Shastri, 1959).

In the *Yoga-Vasishtha* it is held that because *Brahman* is infinite it can produce no thing other than itself (Shastri, 1969). Therefore the entire universe including mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), and intelligence (*chit*) must be regarded as *Brahman* (Shastri, 1969). In the *Viveka-Chudamani*, for instance, it is stated that: “It [*Brahman*] is that one Reality which appears to our ignorance as the manifold universe of names and forms and changes” (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1978, p. 76). This thesis is echoed in the three-fold logic of Sankaracharya in which it is contended that: (a) *Brahman* is real, (b) The universe is unreal, and (c) The universe is *Brahman* (Maharshi, 1985a, p. 187). It seems a logical absurdity that the universe can be simultaneously unreal and yet identical to an entity that is real. Ramana Maharshi (1985a) clarifies this apparent contradiction, however, by suggesting that when veridically perceived as *Brahman* the universe is real, however when perceived as distinct from *Brahman* (i.e., as a collection of discrete objects experienced through the various sensory modalities in space and time) the universe is considered an illusion (*maya*). This point may be further elucidated by what is referred to as the “rope and snake” analogy. A subject enters a dimly light room and sees a coiled up piece of rope [*Brahman*] and mistakenly perceives it as a snake [the universe]. At that moment the snake appears as wholly existent to the subject whereas the rope is considered non-existent. In reality, however, the snake is an illusory substratum that has been projected onto the rope by the subject’s ignorance (Maharshi, 1985a).

It has been suggested that the universe in the orthodox sense of “all space, along with all the matter and radiation in space” (Kaufmann, 1991, p. 631) is not absolutely real. However, the universe is not absolutely non-existent either for the simple reason that it is present as a delusory perception in normal waking consciousness (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1978). Insofar as a delusion is experienced it must be accredited some degree of ontological status.

An examination of the question “Why does the universe exist?” will now be undertaken with reference to two creation theories associated with the *advaita* doctrine: the theory of simultaneous creation (*drishti-srishti vada*) and the theory of non-causality (*ajata vada*).

The Theory of Simultaneous Creation (Drishti-srishti vada)

Sri Ramana Maharshi (1985a, p. 184) stated that, "All that you see depends on the seer. Apart from the seer, there is no seen." This *sloka* is an example of the doctrine of "simultaneous creation" (*Drishti-srishti vada*). It is suggesting that the universe comes into existence simultaneously with the emergence of the "I" thought (the seer's sense of beingness), rather than there being a gradual process of creation (i.e., the "big bang" theory). *Drishti-srishti vada* asserts that the cause of the seer's sense of beingness and hence the universe is *Brahman*⁴. Statements attesting to this thesis abound in the *advaitic* literature. For example, in Sri Sankaracharya's commentary of the *Bhagavad Gita* it is explicitly stated that *Brahman* is the cause of the universe: "The Knowable supports beings during *sthit*, the period of the sustenance of the Universe; and It devours them at *pralaya*, i.e., at the time of dissolution. It generates them at the time of *utpatti*, the origin of the Universe, just as a rope gives rise to an illusory snake" (Sastriy, 1992, p. 352). *The Vedanta-sutras of Badarayana* echo the sentiments of Sankaracharya: "From the Self (Brahman) sprang ether (Akasa, that through which we hear); from ether, air (that through which we hear and feel); from air, fire (that through which we hear, feel, and see)" (Vasu, 1979, p. 202). In a similar vein, the *Aitareya-Upanishad* holds that, "In the beginning all this was self, one only; there was nothing else blinking whatsoever. He thought 'shall I send forth worlds. He sent forth these worlds'" (Vasu, 1979, p. 202).

Although *drishti-srishti vada* postulates a metaphysical entity referred to as *Brahman* as the cause of the universe, the *nature* of this cause is held to be unknowable for two reasons. First, through Beingness the "inner organ" (*antahkarana*) comprised of intelligence (*buddhi*), ego or sense of self (*ahamkara*), and mind (*manas*) is generated (Chapple, 1990, p. 56). When the dissolution of Beingness into *Brahman* occurs during ASCs such as *samadhi*, the cessation of *buddhi*, *ahamkara*, and *manas* also takes place. It follows that if one's previously existent cognitions and mental processes are rendered non-existent at the borderline of Beingness and *Brahman* then *Brahman* is a "non-experiential state" (Maharaj, 1987a, p. 38). Nisargadatta Maharaj (1987b) delivers the following affirmation: "It is a non-attentive state. So where is the question of remembering? With Beingness attention starts later.... The borderline between Being and Non-Beingness is intellect boggling, because the intellect subsides at that precise location" (p. 3, 58).

The second reason is contained in Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj's (1987a) personal account of his experience of *drishti-srishti vada*:

In my original non-knowing state I did not know my sense of Being. But all of a sudden that Beingness was felt spontaneously; this is the first miracle. Then in a flash I observed this enormous manifest world and also my body. Later, I conceived that the entire universe has manifested in the speck of my Beingness only. (p. 37)

The salient point contained in the preceding quotation is Nisargadatta Maharaj's (1987a) reference to *Brahman* as a "non-knowing state" (p. 38). This statement requires further explanation. As Absolute subjectivity *Brahman* cannot directly experience itself as a perceptible object, for then it would cease to be the subject. Wilber (1993) illustrated this point by comparing the situation to a sword that cannot cut itself, an eye that cannot see itself, a tongue that cannot taste itself, or a finger that cannot touch its own tip. This argument is reiterated in Baladeva's commentary to the *Vedanta-sutras of Badarayana* in which he wrote, "If the Self could perceive His own properties, He could also perceive Himself; which is absurd, since one and the same thing cannot be both the agent and the object of an action" (Vasu, 1979, p. 331). This is what is meant in the *Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad* when it is stated that, "You cannot see the seer of sight, you cannot hear the hearer of sound, you cannot think the thinker of the thought, you cannot know the knower of the known" (Swami & Yeats, 1970, p. 138). If the "initial conditions" (i.e., *Brahman*) are non-experiential and hence unknowable then it is logically impossible to formulate a *complete* causal explanation of the universe if one accepts Popper's (1959) assertion that the conjunction of universal statements with initial conditions is required for a complete causal explanation.

The Theory of Non-Causality (Ajata Vada)⁵

Whereas *drishti-srishti vada* is considered a relative truth (i.e., it is true from the standpoint that we are human beings attempting to achieve liberation from *maya*), *advaita* regards the theory of non-causality (*ajata vada*) as the ultimate truth. Crudely put, *ajata vada* represents a denial of the orthodox view that the universe has a cause. *Ajata vada* argues that "nothing exists except the one reality [*Brahman*]" which is eternal and unchanging (Maharshi, 1985a, p. 184). Hence, sense impressions relating to space-time, causality and discrete objects are all regarded as non-veridical perceptions that take place in the mind of the

ignorant (*ajani*). Consequently, the universe in the orthodox sense of “all space, along with all the matter and radiation in space” (Kaufmann, 1991, p. 631) does not exist. It is noteworthy, however, that *ajata vada* does affirm the reality of the universe but only when veridically perceived as an *uncaused* appearance in *Brahman*. Proponents of this theory, thus, regard the substance of the universe as being identical to *Brahman* (Maharshi, 1985a). Consequently, one is unable to address the question, “Why does the *veridically perceived* universe exist?” with reference to an external causal explanation. Furthermore, one is precluded from invoking an internal causal explanation of the universe—that is, asserting that the causes of the universe’s past states are prior past states (Smith, 1995)—on the grounds that space-time and, thus, past states and prior past states are considered delusory perceptions from an *ajata vada* perspective.

One may further enquire as to why a *delusory perception* of the universe as “all space, along with all the matter and radiation in space” (Kaufmann, 1991, p. 631) exists? However, if delusory perceptions are constituents of the universe—and the universe is an uncaused appearance in *Brahman*—then delusory perceptions are also uncaused appearances in *Brahman*. Consequently, if one accepts that the universe cannot be a candidate for causal explanation by virtue of being an uncaused appearance in *Brahman*; then the question, “Why does the universe exist?” is clearly unanswerable provided that one takes the question to mean, “What is the causal explanation of the universe?”

Objections to Advaita Vedanta

In the present author’s view there seem to be certain logical problems with various components of the *advaita* doctrine. First, if as *drishti-srishti vada* suggests *Brahman* is a non-knowing state in which one’s sense of Beingness and cognitive functioning have been extinguished, then how does one come to *know* that such a state exists? Furthermore, if the cessation of one’s long-term memory system (a cognitive function) occurs during this state, one would be unable to *recall* the experience. Yet, surprisingly, practitioners have provided phenomenological reports of this altered state in various *advaitic* texts. Even if, for the sake of argument, one’s long-term memory system was still functioning during this state, there would be nothing to recall because, if *Brahman* is non-experiential, it must be phenomenologically contentless and therefore attributeless. This raises a further question. If *Brahman* is attributeless, on what grounds are proponents of *advaita* justified in asserting that the characteristics of

Brahman are existence (*sat*), consciousness (*chit*), and bliss (*ananda*)?

Second, if *Brahman* is atemporal and therefore unable to ‘step’ down into time and space as the *ajata vada* doctrine argues, does this not place restrictions on a metaphysical entity which is supposedly unrestricted? Furthermore, if the universe is an emanation of the eternal *Brahman*, as *drishti-srishti vada* contends, and the universe is subject to space-time, logic dictates that space-time must also be enfolded in *Brahman*, existing in a state of latency. To quote Wittgenstein (1981/ 1922, p. 107), “if *p* follows from *q*, the sense of ‘*p*’ is contained in that of ‘*q*,” where *p* is the universe and *q* is *Brahman*. It is arguable that the expression of atemporality as the *manifest* content of *Brahman* does not necessarily preclude the existence of latencies such as temporality.

Finally, if the subject is unable to experience itself as a perceptible object and if from an *advaitic* standpoint everything is the subject (i.e., *Brahman*) then one should be unable to experience a delusory perception of the universe as “all space, along with all the matter and radiation in space” (Kaufmann, 1991, p. 631) for it too must ultimately be *Brahman*. If $a = b$, and *a* is imperceptible, then, obviously, *b* is also imperceptible.

Modes of Knowing and Category Errors

Extrapolating from St. Bonaventure, Wilber (1996) explicated three modes of knowing: “the *eye of flesh*, by which we perceive the external world of space, time, and objects; the *eye of reason*, by which we attain a knowledge of philosophy, logic, and the mind itself; and the *eye of contemplation*, by which we arise to a knowledge of transcendent realities” (p. 3). It is arguable that modern logicians commit a category error by using rationalism rather than a *posteriori* knowledge of transcendent realities to address the *metaphysical* question, “Why does the universe exist?” To utilise Wilber’s (1996) terminology, it is an example of confusing two different modes of knowing: the *eye of reason* with the *eye of contemplation*. As Wilber (1996) stated, “Reason cannot grasp the essence of absolute reality, and when it tries, it generates only dualistic incompatibilities” (p. 19). Furthermore, *logical* problems associated with *advaita vedanta* are also based on a category error. One may recall that the term “*advaita*” translates as “nondual.” Wilber (1996) argued that if one attempts to translate

nondual Reality into dualistic reason, then you will create two opposites where there are in fact none, and therefore each of these opposites can

be rationally argued with equal plausibility—and that, to return to Kant, shows why reason only generates paradox when it tries to grasp God or the Absolute (p. 19).

Consequently, an advocate of the *advaita* doctrine may argue that the aforementioned logical problems are the result of a misguided attempt to use mind to transcend mind, that is, employing the human intellect for the purpose of reasoning about a metaphysical entity constitutes a category error.

Conclusion

It was argued there exists a lacuna in the literature with regards to an application of theories constructed *a posteriori* to the question, “Why does the universe exist?” The present author suggests that, in contrast to modern logicians, the ontology outlined in the doctrine of *advaita vedanta* was purportedly constructed *a posteriori* using metaphysical knowledge acquired through ASCs (e.g., *samadhi*). It was further contended that experiential knowledge of the manifestation and dissolution of the universe is accessible during certain ASCs associated with *advaita vedanta* (e.g., *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*), but not during ordinary or normal waking conscious—and is thus “state specific” (Tart, 1972; 1998) or “state dependent” (Fischer, 1980). It was suggested that such experiences might provide valuable insights into the external and internal causal mechanisms of the universe that are unobtainable *a priori*.

Two *a posteriori* derived creation theories associated with *advaita vedanta* (e.g., the theory of simultaneous creation and the theory of non-causality) were subsequently applied to the question, “Why does the universe exist?” It was argued that, from the standpoint of *drishti-srishti vada*, the question “Why does the universe exist?” is unanswerable because: (1) The human intellect is annihilated at the precise location at which the universe dissolves into its purported cause (a metaphysical entity referred to as *Brahman*). (2) As Absolute Subject-ivity, *Brahman* cannot be rendered an object of conscious awareness and thus experienced. Consequently, a complete causal explanation of the universe cannot be formulated on the grounds that the “initial conditions” (i.e., *Brahman*) are unknowable. Extrapolating from the theory of *ajata vada*, the question, “Why does the universe exist?” may not be addressed via a causal explanation because: (1) the universe in the orthodox sense of “all space, along with all the matter and radiation in space” (Kaufmann, 1991, p. 631) is held to be a delusory perception; and (2)

when veridically perceived the universe is an uncaused appearance in *Brahman*.

Clearly the *a posteriori* perspective used in the present paper may be applied to other metaphysical “problems” (e.g., personal identity, the mind-body “problem,” time). For instance, the injunctions used by practitioners of *advaita vedanta* (e.g., Karma, Jnana, Bhakti and Rajas yogas) are, in essence, methods of self-inquiry (Maharshi, 1988) that are held to provide experiential knowledge regarding, for example, the nature of personal identity. Furthermore, during the various grades of *samadhi*, one experiences alterations in the “inner organ” (*antahkarana*) comprised of intelligence (*buddhi*), ego or sense of self (*ahamkara*), and mind (*manas*) and also one’s bodily awareness that may provide insight into the mind-body problem. One may also experience *Brahman* as the eternal and unchanging reality (Maharshi, 1985), thereby facilitating the recognition that sensory impressions relating to time and causality are non-veridical perceptions that take place in the mind of the ignorant (*ajani*). Consequently, the present author suggests that *a posteriori* derived philosophical systems such as *advaita vedanta* have the potential to make a significant contribution to contemporary metaphysical debate in general and our understanding of the question, “Why does the universe exist?” in particular.

Author Note

The author would like to thank Stanley Krippner and Peter Baynes for valuable suggestions and comments.

End Notes

1. The question “Why does the universe exist?” may be differentiated from the question “How did the universe come into being?” on the grounds that, whilst the former is a metaphysical question, the latter is a scientific cosmological question.

2. Wittgenstein (1981/ 1922) wrote that “for an answer which cannot be expressed the question too cannot be expressed. *The riddle* does not exist. If a question can be put at all, then it *can* also be answered.” (p. 187)

3. Popper (1959) asserted that:

To give a causal explanation of an event means to deduce a statement which describes it, using as premises of the deduction one or more *universal laws*, together with certain singular statements, the *initial conditions*...We have thus two different

kinds of statement, both of which are necessary ingredients of a complete causal explanation. They are (1) *universal statements*, i.e. hypotheses of the character of natural laws, and (2) *singular statements*, which apply to the specific event in question and which I call 'initial conditions.' It is from universal statements in conjunction with initial conditions that we *deduce* the singular statement, 'This thread will break'...The initial conditions describe what is usually called the 'cause' of the event in question (pp. 59-60).

4. Interestingly, the vast majority of mystical philosophies assert that a metaphysical entity of some kind is the cause of the universe. For example, in the writings of the Kabbalah in regard to the mystical philosophy of Jerusalem, it is held that in the beginning there is only the "Root of all Roots," the "Great Reality," the "Indifferent Unity," *En-Sof* (Scholem, 1961, p. 12) from which emanate the ten seifrot (literally rays) which constitute the physical universe (Hoffman, 1980; Idel, 1988; Matt, 1996; Scholem, 1961, 1969). Similarly, Mahayana Buddhism postulates a Transcendental Reality, the One-Mind, which is the "Outbreather and Inbreather of infinite universes throughout the endlessness of duration" (Evan-Wentz, 1954, p. 1). One may also find in the literature pertaining to *Taoism* (Chinese mysticism) the assertion that universe was created by a Nameless principle sometimes referred to as the *tao*: "It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang" (Huxley, 1985, p. 44).

An important question is whether all of these various mystical philosophies are referring to the same metaphysical entity or whether, for example, *Brahman* and *En-sof* are qualitatively distinct. For an excellent discussion of this ontological issue, see Katz (1978) and Franklin (1990).

5. Many aspects of the *ajata-vada* doctrine have already been alluded to in a previous section of this essay entitled "*Avaita Vedanta: An Overview.*" Therefore my comments in this section shall be necessarily brief.

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